

the 1950s as a "simpler" time. This is quite a strange belief. With the Korean War and McCarthy at one end, Little Rock in the middle, and *Spunkie* and Berlin at the other end, and the very real threat of nuclear war throughout, the 1950s was actually a time of intense anxiety and foreboding. A widely read book published in the 1950s was entitled *The Age of Anxiety*. In the 1950s, they looked back nostalgically at an earlier America, just as we look back nostalgically at the 1950s.

American culture is the manic combination of exultant hubris and profound gloom. The net result is a sense of confidence constantly undermined by the fear that we may be drowned by melting ice caps caused by global warming or smitten dead by a wrathful God for gay marriage, both outcomes being our personal responsibility. American mood swings make it hard to develop a real sense of the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century. But the fact is that the United States is stunningly powerful. It may be that it is heading for a catastrophe, but it is hard to see one when you look at the basic facts.

Let's consider some illuminating figures. Americans constitute about 4 percent of the world's population but produce about 26 percent of all goods and services. In 2007 U.S. gross domestic product was about \$14 trillion, compared to the world's GDP of \$54 trillion—about 26 percent of the world's economic activity takes place in the United States. The next largest economy in the world is Japan's, with a GDP of about \$4.4 trillion—about a third the size of ours. The American economy is so huge that it is larger than the economies of the next four countries combined: Japan, Germany, China, and the United Kingdom.

Many people point at the declining auto and steel industries, which a generation ago were the mainstays of the American economy, as examples of a current deindustrialization of the United States. Certainly, a lot of industry has moved overseas. That has left the United States with industrial production of only \$2.8 trillion (in 2006): the largest in the world, more than twice the size of the next largest industrial power, Japan, and larger than Japan's and China's industries combined.

There is talk of oil shortages, which certainly seem to exist and will undoubtedly increase. However, it is important to realize that the United States produced 8.3 million barrels of oil every day in 2006. Compare that with

9.7 million for Russia and 10.7 million for Saudi Arabia. U.S. oil production is 85 percent that of Saudi Arabia. The United States produces more oil than Iran, Kuwait, or the United Arab Emirates. Imports of oil into the country are vast, but given its industrial production, that's understandable. Comparing natural gas production in 2006, Russia was in first place with 22.4 trillion cubic feet and the United States was second with 18.7 trillion cubic feet. U.S. natural gas production is greater than that of the next five producers combined. In other words, although there is great concern that the United States is wholly dependent on foreign energy, it is actually one of the world's largest energy producers.

Given the vast size of the American economy, it is interesting to note that the United States is still underpopulated by global standards. Measured in inhabitants per square kilometer, the world's average population density is 49. Japan's is 338, Germany's is 230, and America's is only 31. If we exclude Alaska, which is largely uninhabitable, U.S. population density rises to 34. Compared to Japan or Germany, or the rest of Europe, the United States is hugely underpopulated. Even when we simply compare population in proportion to arable land—land that is suitable for agriculture—America has five times as much land per person as Asia, almost twice as much as Europe, and three times as much as the global average. An economy consists of land, labor, and capital. In the case of the United States, these numbers show that the nation can still grow—it has plenty of room to increase all three.

There are many answers to the question of why the U.S. economy is so powerful, but the simplest answer is military power. The United States completely dominates a continent that is invulnerable to invasion and occupation and in which its military overwhelms those of its neighbors. Virtually every other industrial power in the world has experienced devastating warfare in the twentieth century. The United States waged war, but America itself never experienced it. Military power and geographical reality created an economic reality. Other countries have lost time recovering from wars. The United States has not. It has actually grown because of them.

Consider this simple fact that I'll be returning to many times. The United States Navy controls all of the oceans of the world. Whether it's a junk in the South China Sea, a dhow off the African coast, a tanker in the

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