FLYING BACK ACROSS the Atlantic in the comfortable safety of a Constellation airplane, I tried to summarize the thousands of impressions I had gained of America in the three wonderful months which had taken me from the East Coast to the Rocky Mountains, from New England to the cotton fields of the South.

Certainly it was not "America" as signified to most Europeans by the New York skyline. No, it was the people who had made that "American" impression on me. And the more I thought about it, the more the feeling persisted that I had just left a youth rally and was about to enter a gathering of adult, even somewhat old, people.

I was not the only one who was struck with this idea. Our group represented 12 countries from three continents all around the globe, but there was unanimous agreement that we had met a nation much younger than our own, and that not merely in a historical sense.

A "rugged individualist," as he boasts, the American has much more confidence in himself than the German, or the European in general. No matter how well-to-do his parents, an American teen-ager considers it his greatest experience to earn by selling newspapers, running errands or working in a factory during the summer school recess.

"That's a real job, you see," a high school youngster in Boston said when I asked him how he liked selling newspapers from five to nine six evenings a week. A real job — and to prove that he meant it, he added: "I'll be on the other side at Park Street station next week, mister. You can find me there at the subway exit." At 12, he obviously already had a firm concept of public relations.

This young boy had found the two elements which I think are the basic components of American life: opportunity and competition. For his age he certainly proved that he understood their meaning. This in itself is already a striking difference to Europe, but it is apt to become more marked as the boy grows up. He will pick the business he feels offers him the best prospects. He will not hesitate to change jobs when he realizes his initial judgment was wrong. And he will consider it an asset, rather than a waste of time, to have some firsthand experience in several lines within his area of interest.

BY CONTRAST, HOW do we stand in Europe? We have standard patterns of training for every imaginable trade or profession, with no maximum, but minimum, time requirements for each step along the well-trodden path that is known to every German as his Laufbahn (career). Providing neither much risk nor much opportunity, it leads him from apprenticeship to retirement, and once he has started on one, he cannot change it for another without risking the suspicion that he was a failure.

Similarly, the American approach to competition is almost inconceivable to the European. The publisher of a suburban newspaper with no competition in its distribution area told us that newspaper rationing boards during the war were made up of representatives of the industry. But, unlike the attitude in many European countries, that did not mean a freeze on new publications. This publisher had seen a competitive paper spring up in his town during the war, but he did not object to a fair newspaper allocation for the new competitor, though paper was short and all others had to cut their own quotes.

"I know it is hard to explain to foreigners," he said, "but it simply does not work that way here. We are so used to competition that we have to have it." And journalists in the group representing six countries shook their heads, showing that they found it hard to believe. Here again, I think, it is the self-confidence — an attribute Europe has lost — which makes the American rise up and meet competition rather than try to escape it.

Another result of this spirit is the absence of "class consciousness." Of course, the American worker has a higher standard of living, and his problems, even if he is laid off temporarily, are never as pressing, for instance, as those of a German worker. Yet I found that a distinction between "possessing" and "non-possessing" classes

At the distribution center of the Ford Motor Co. in Denver, Colo., the USIE librarian-journalist group posed with company officials: (seated, left to right) Dr. Klothilde Harb, manager, US Information Center, Linz, Austria; Miss Christa Duchow, secretary-librarian, Public Relations Division, Office of Public Affairs, HICOG, Frankfurt, Germany; Miss Hildburg Franke, librarian, US Information Center, Hanover, Germany; Mrs. Rachel di Stefano, librarian, US Information Center, Tunis, Tunisia; Mrs. Mom Chao Kanchanechatra Stiksvasti, librarian, US Information Center, Bangkok, Thailand; Dinh-Le-Ngoan, press officer, US Information Service, Saigon, Indo-China; Dr. Liselotte Kupka, women's affairs editor, US Feature Service, Information Services Division, Office of Public Affairs, HICOG, Bad Nauheim, Germany; Mr. Saliger, author of this article. Standing in front of a photograph of the Ford plant in Detroit are officials of the distribution center and (second from left) Ross Brown, administrative assistant to the governor of Colorado and sponsor of the group's tour of Denver.
problem is to take as many degrees as possible in a minimum of time.

There again, what a difference to the rigid European system of education! Thousands of Americans leave college every year after gaining their first degree to go into business. Some of them return after a few years, many do not. But very often men return to the campus years after graduation, and after they have worked themselves up to high positions, to take a course in a special field they find necessary in their work. A university in America is a source of knowledge upon which anybody is welcome to draw, not a mere training institution. Obviously, this entails much stronger ties between the university and the community, between government and industry, and a more businesslike atmosphere on the campus.

As the American people represent the strength of youth, they likewise embody its free unaffectedness. The American meets a stranger with a surprising amount of natural confidence and is immediately inclined to consider him an honest and trustworthy man. He makes friends in no time. The first two weeks in the States we Europeans were often embarrassed by the friendliness with which people met us and were ready to help us. We soon gave up our initial prejudice that these people had been selected to meet visiting foreigners. Confidence is the rule in public life.

Newspapers merely place a stack of papers and a coin box at every street corner, and nobody would take a paper without first dropping a nickel in the box. Most stores accept personal checks at face value. Banks or credit corporations often grant loans against signature only, and all that in a country where no one is required to register with the police and carry identification. I could continue this list almost endlessly; it was an inexhaustible source of amazement to me. To the American, it is natural, part of the public life he has helped to shape.

He does help shape it, indeed. Whatever burdens the United States may have to shoulder due to its present leadership role in world affairs, I am sure millions of its citizens will be ready and eager to bear their part and will discharge their public functions with the same devotion and energy with which they pursue their professional careers. I was the guest of several civic organizations and I admire the idealism of these people whose only aim seems to be a constant improvement of their public life. To that end they spare no expense and effort.

THIS IS WHAT I MEAN when I say America is a nation of youth: people there push ahead, progress is vital to them. Vigor, strength, self-confidence, idealism, all attributes we found so abundantly there, they are inherent to youth.

There has been a good deal of exchange of persons and experience since 1945 between the United States and Europe, particularly Germany. We have adopted American technical processes and certain forms of democratic community life and government. But that is not enough. If Germany and Europe are to witness a revival, I think we will have to start where the boom of American success began: with the people.

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