Thomas G. Palaima
REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR

Redeeming the image of Americans abroad

A new report from the Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project is positive about the United States. Of those who could express an opinion, 84 percent have a positive image of the United States, down from 50 percent seven years ago. Anti-American sentiment here (60 percent) puts Spain on a par with Germany, France and Kuwait. Sixty-three percent of Spaniards approved of the war on terror in 2003. Only 20 percent do today.

Only an ostrich would ignore such figures. J. William Fulbright was no ostrich, nor was he an academic with his head in the clouds. Elected to the House of Representatives in 1942, he knew after World War II that some­thing had to be done to deter nations from resorting to armed conflict. One answer was the Fulbright program es­ tablished in 1946 to foster understand­ ing between peoples through academic exchanges.

From 1959 to 1974, Fulbright served as chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, setting U.S. poli­ cy in tense Cold War trouble spots. As a conservative Democrat from Arkan­ sas, he sponsored the Gulf of Tonkin resolution in 1964 that gave President Johnson war powers in Vietnam.

Fortunately, there was no opprobri­ um attached then to elected officials examining issues thoroughly and modifying their positions accordingly. Fulbright held hearings that got the facts from our government about how and why we were fighting in Vietnam. The facts made him a "flip-flopper." He became a strong critic of the war.

One would think that, given our low standing in world opinion, support for the Fulbright program would be high among congressional and presidential priorities. This is not the case.

In Spain, for example, the U.S. gov­ ernment allocation to the annual Ful­ bright grantee: Greece (1979-80), Austria (1992-93), and now Spain. Meanwhile today's El Pais has a long article about the Pew Research Center's analysis of the precipi­ tious decline in United States' positive opin­ ion about the United States in many for­ eign countries since 2000. In Spain, only 34 percent have a positive image of the United States, down from 50 percent seven years ago. Anti-American sentiment here (60 percent) puts Spain on a par with Germany, France and Kuwait. Sixty-three percent of Spaniards approved of the war on terror in 2003. Only 20 percent do today.

Price postponed medical school for a year. He wanted to find out about the scientific and cultural priorities of an­ other country. His Spanish colleagues talked at first about another researcher: one student Fulbrighter, Richard Price, a medical researcher, is baffled at how our government spends our money. He notes our federal govern­ ment spends almost twenty times more on defense than it does on the National Institutes of Health (NIH). NIH appropriations were cut this year to $26.8 billion.

Funding for Fulbright-Hays doctoral dissertation research abroad has stayed at $4.4 million the past three years, despite the weakening dollar and the panic when an Arab got on a bus in panic when an Arab got on a backpack. Price's mature toler­ ance has helped erase this image of unthinking "ugly Americanism.

Another Fulbrighter, Naomi Mol­ land, came to Madrid from teaching English to the children of immigrants, or "the shoeshine people." She noticed that despite talk about "the immigration problem" in Spain, programs emphasizing multicultural­ alism are conspicuously absent. But as in our country, immigrant families face problems of assimilation. They know little about the laws of their new country. His Spanish colleagues talk at first about another researcher: his Spanish colleagues talked at first about another researcher: the immigration problem? in Spain, programs emphasizing multicultural­ alism are conspicuously absent. But as in our country, immigrant families face problems of assimilation. They know little about the laws of their new country. Even children from other Spanish-speaking countries are bewildered by the Spanish spoken in Madrid. The sensitivities Moland developed in her work stateside have helped her identify problems and as­sist the families.

If you want to feel optimistic about the future of our country, think about the Fulbright ideals and the many young Americans who are working hard to achieve them.

Palaima is a classics professor at the Uni­ ver­ sity of Texas. This is the seventh and last in a series of columns from Spain.