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Dear Colleague:

University College, Oxford, has just sent me its magazine, which shows on its cover the photograph of an American flag fluttering on top of the main tower, in honor of the college's most famous Old Member, W. J. Clinton. There you have it--the American imperium powerfully symbolized in the heart of establishment Britain. Cecil Rhodes's dream has come true. The special relationship between the United States and England continues to hold. Someone with a Waspish name, someone who is a Rhodes Scholar and a Fellow of Univ, is now the caesar of the world.

Can you imagine an American President who is a graduate of the Sorbonne? Or, if he had graduated there, is it conceivable that the French would fly an American flag in his honor on top of its most prestigious institution?

A good question, if I may say so, but I am not sure of the answer. Interestingly enough, Clinton himself displays the ideals and values of both England and France. He is a Federalist--a partisan of England, Newton, and religion, when he stresses the "unum" in E Pluribus Unum and drapes it in a language filled with New England piety. (See the Presidential Proclamation for Thanksgiving, which ends with the flourish, "in the Year of Our Lord, nineteen hundred and ninety-three!") However, he is, in some other ways, even more a Republican and a Jeffersonian (viz., his middle name). Remember the intellectual-political debate between Federalists and Jeffersonians at the turn of the nineteenth century. Federalists love Newton, mathematics and astronomy, all of which obviously exemplify the orderliness and glory of a universe made by that great artisan God. Federalists accuse Jefferson and Jeffersonians of whoring after French rationalism, which is Godless. Moreover, French science is not real science: it focuses on the weird and the exceptional rather than on what things have in common, and it rejoices in nature's infinite richness and heterogeneity, rather than in its orderliness. French science, to Federalists, is a game for amateurs. Anyone can be a naturalist and find an unusual pistil somewhere, but it takes discipline to learn mathematics and behold the splendor of the heavens. These academic differences carry over into the political sphere. What does it take to be a real scientist translates into, What does it take to be a citizen? If a certain amount of preparation is necessary--say, learning something about the country's abstract ideals as embodied in its famous verbal monuments--the result is a certain commonality; if no preparation is necessary, the result is a heterogeneity that reflects the heterogeneity of nature-and-humankind itself. Good luck, Bill, for your sake and ours.

Best wishes,

*J. F.*