

## U.S. dream described as vision gone astray

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Questioning the American dream is a sure way to raise hackles in the United States.

It also confirmed Jeremy Rifkin's reputation as one of America's more provocative thinkers.

A professor at the University of Pennsylvania's famed Wharton School, Rifkin also is founder and president of the non-profit Foundation on Economic Trends in Washington and the author of 17 books on the impact of scientific and technological change on the economy, workforce, society and environment.

The European Dream: How Europe's Vision of the Future Is Quietly Eclipsing The American Dream is the title of his latest book. Predictably, it's made waves.

"The neo-conservatives didn't like it, which is no big surprise," Rifkin noted in a telephone interview this week.

His premise, to be expanded upon during one of his presentations at the Conference de Montreal, is that the European dream, which places greater value on connectedness and quality of life and less on individual wealth accumulation, better suits the particular challenges of today's globalizing society.

He notes that many European nations have longer life spans and greater literacy than the U.S., smaller disparities between rich and poor and far less poverty and crime. They emphasize social and human rights, in contrast to the U.S. where property rights are privileged.

The wealth imbalance between the continents that still favours America is a bit of a mirage, since it has been built largely on exploding consumer debt since the late 1980s, Rifkin said. "We've mortgaged our children's future and depleted family savings in this country."

In Europe, there's more nurturing of the individual and less of a sink-or-swim attitude, though questions remain about whether it can successfully integrate Islam, he said.

Rifkin said his knowledge of Canada leads him to think most of this country leans more toward the European dream than the American one.

"Before I wrote (the book), I'd never seen a single article deconstructing the American dream, suggesting it might be a 19th-century vision that doesn't fit today's world," Rifkin said. "The fact there is (a dream) different from ours is a real shock in this country. I don't say we don't have a lot of pluses, but the minuses are rarely talked about.

"The European dream is the first I know of in history where there are human beings

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trying to create a global consciousness for a global world."

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Jeremy Rifkin speaks at the plenary session Governance and Development: the Challenges of Multiculturalism on Monday at 2:30.

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