

HATING AMERICA
A History

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AN EXPLICABLE UNPOPULARITY

Back to the days of Franklin and Jefferson, Americans have always cared deeply about their international image. “A nation whose citizens seek popularity more than any other kind of success [finds] it . . . galling (and inexplicable) [to be] so extensively unpopular.”¹ Thus wrote the French writer Jacques Barzun in his popular 1965 book about America.

Even Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Russian writer who had his own withering and angry criticisms of American society, noted in 1978 how hurtful and apparently inexplicable anti-Americanism could seem. “The United States has shown itself to be the most magnanimous, the most generous country in the world. . . . And what do we hear in reply? Reproaches, curses. American cultural centers are burned, and the representatives of the Third World [are eager] to vote against the United States.”²

In general, there have been two distinct American responses to this supposedly paradoxical hatred of America. Most commonly, there is a sense of anger and annoyance coupled with curiosity. How could people

be so antagonistic to a country of such decent intentions and frequent successes? How can the good side of America at home and the positive things it has done internationally be so ignored? This must arise from hostility to America's basic values such as democracy, free enterprise, and liberty.

The alternative view is that the hatred is deserved, a result of bad American policies. For this group, the criticisms are generally accurate, though perhaps exaggerated. Indeed, much of the ammunition for contemporary anti-Americanism—so clearly visible in European bookstores and publications—comes from the statements and writings of U.S. citizens who dislike many aspects of their own country.

Consequently, the debate over anti-Americanism's meaning and what to do about it has been structured between these two conceptions. In the former case, the response has been to fight (with words or other means) those who attack America while trying to explain the country's case better. The contrary position is that changing U.S. policies will inevitably dissipate antagonism. While both arguments have many valid things to say, this values-versus-policy debate is ultimately sterile, simultaneously marked by extreme partisanship and the omission of far too many factors that better explain anti-Americanism.

Neither school of thought pays serious attention to the structural and political uses of anti-Americanism or to its historical development. The United States has been hated neither solely because of its nature nor due to its deeds. To begin with, both American policy and values must be interpreted by others. Why do some put the most negative possible light on these things? In other words, anti-Americans may deride policies and values in ways that so distort them as to transform both into made-up stereotypes and monsters. The opposition, then, is not to the American values and policies that actually exist but to the stupid or evil things they appear as in these caricatures.

If the problem is American policies, then why has anti-Americanism been so continuous over time, repeating the same false claims in dramatically different circumstances? If the problem is American values, then why is it that those supporting relatively similar values, notably in Europe, are often the most hostile? The story of anti-Americanism recounted in this book raises many other points, showing that neither of these two largely ahistorical approaches accounts for the facts.

If there is any central factor explaining the power, durability, and

multiple variations of anti-Americanism, it is one that has existed going back to the birth of the United States and even earlier: America has always been perceived as a unique society that provides a potential role model for others and is a likely candidate to be the globe's dominant force in political, economic, social, and cultural terms.

Were this not true, anti-Americanism would have been unnecessary or at least thoroughly unimportant. If the United States was just another country, one's attitude toward it mattered little and that nation required no special attention. But if America represented a different way of life and a system that might prove the basis for the world's future, that was a matter of the greatest importance that demanded the most intense scrutiny and passion.

There were three ways that anti-Americans thought the United States would become the main force to shape human civilization and how others lived; these go back as far as 1750, long before the word "globalization" was ever invented:

First, the United States would seem so attractive to foreign observers due to its innovations and success that others would copy it.

Second, American culture, technology, products, and ideas would spread actively throughout the world so as to become everywhere pervasive.

Third, U.S. military and economic power would dominate other countries directly, an idea that was strongly in evidence in anti-American thinking before the United States had much influence on the international scene.

Despite the differing emphases of various individuals, movements, and countries, these three factors were virtually always present. By the twenty-first century, they seemed omnipresent. The long-held prophecy of America's centrality to the world's future seemed to be coming true. On this point, the European and Middle East perspectives are surprisingly close. In 2004, the percentage of those believing that the United States sent forces into Iraq in order to dominate the world was 53 percent in France, 47 percent in Germany, 55 percent in Pakistan, 60 percent in Morocco, and 61 percent in Jordan.³

Only this belief in the idea that America presented a unique threefold threat to the world can explain why anti-Americanism became a consistently important idea in history when there was never any coherent doctrine of anti-Britishism, anti-Frenchism, anti-Russianism, or anti-

Germanism. These other countries had actively sought global hegemony, aggressively exported their cultures, built empires, started wars, and killed people around the planet. Yet no one felt the need to write thousands of books and articles to try to decipher their inner nature as a unique phenomenon. No political movements developed for which antagonism to these individual states was a central principle. No bodies of thought or ideologies were required to prove why one of these specific nations embodied a dangerous or perverted nature.⁴

In contrast, through the decades, as new schools of thought and issues succeeded one another, political leaders, cultural figures, and intellectuals had to adopt a view of America in line with their principles and consistent with what they wanted to do in their own countries. These groups then tried to persuade a wider audience to endorse their negative view of what America was offering and their own program for doing better than that.

Many other issues, of course, were also involved, though they often revolved around this central proposition. But anti-Americanism has been at its height when and where it was a useful political tool wielded by those whose interests were different or antagonistic to those of the United States. Thus, anti-American doctrine has historically been most powerful when sponsored by dictatorial regimes—Communist, fascist, Arab nationalist, and Islamist alike—which not only have a more or less rigorous state control of ideas and institutions but also are dominated by an ideology that saw itself as an alternative and rival to what the United States did and represented.

One problem for the school that says that anti-Americanism is merely a response to policy is that the attributes of American society and U.S. policy were often distorted—frequently, willfully so—out of all relationship to reality. Ignorance and honest misunderstanding were part of this picture but so was the deliberate manipulation of antagonistic groups pursuing their own interests.

Such an approach allowed these ruling elites in ideologically based dictatorships to deny that their country's real main enemy was their own governments. Instead, they were able to incite their people demagogically to support the regime in a supposed life-and-death struggle with U.S. imperialism. They argued that underdevelopment was not a result of their own mistakes or policies, nor was any major domestic change needed. Once the heavy hand of American imperialism was removed,

rapid progress would be easy. In the meantime, anyone advocating liberal reforms, democracy, or human rights could be accused of acting as U.S. agents and subverting the nation's self-defense.

Anti-Americanism, then, is often a reflection on the nature of anti-Americans themselves—their worldview, deeds, and goals. They, not the United States, are often seekers of world conquest, apologists for dictatorship, distorters of truth, haters of the other, enemies of freedom, those holding onto privilege in their own societies, and defenders of a cultural elitism that serves their interests.

If one views the United States as irredeemably hostile and evil, anything it does will simply be interpreted within that context. Specific U.S. policies, whatever objection to them existed on their own merits, were merely symptoms of that country's aggressive intent, growing power, difference from one's own nation's worldview, and inferior nature.

In the late 1940s, Sayyid Qutb, a key architect of Islamism and Middle Eastern anti-Americanism, wrote of a U.S. intention to destroy Islam through spiritual and cultural colonialism. Any appearance to the contrary was merely intended to confuse Muslims about "the true nature of the struggle" and to extinguish "the flame of belief in their hearts. . . . The Believers must not be deceived, and must understand that this is a trick."⁵ A half-century later, in justifying the September 11 attacks, the Saudi cleric Hammoud al-'Uqla al-Shu'aybi explained, "America is an [infidel] state that is totally against Islam and Muslims."⁶

The determination to find in America what is inferior and disliked is one revealing sign of anti-Americanism. It came into play whenever a given U.S. policy, for whatever reasons, became controversial. For example, did Europeans or Arabs oppose the United States over war with Iraq because they believed the action was an attempt to steal oil, enslave Muslims, and take over the world? Or did they think that America simply misunderstood the best manner to deal with the challenges presented by Saddam Hussein's regime and there were better ways to do so? These were both arguments against the war in Iraq, but the first is anti-American and the second is not.

But just as the policy-oriented school of explaining anti-Americanism has its problems, so does the values-determinant one. After all, the question remains why certain specific aspects of America are selected for disdain even by those who support a given concept—say, democracy—in general.

The dictatorships that sponsor anti-Americanism may hold values far from those of the United States, but the democracies of Western Europe are not so different from American society in many ways. Are, for example, French values really so profoundly different from those of the United States? Certainly, the basic concepts of democracy were often questioned in the nineteenth century, but this has not been true for a long time in Western societies at least.

The answer is found in the specific ways, often details, in which American characteristics represent unwelcome potential trends for other countries. Anti-Americanism arose, then, because even when characteristic American practices or institutions were shared by others, the United States was accused of going too far or in the wrong direction. It was the uniquely American adaptations of common Western ways that drew antagonism. In this sense, the United States is not hated because it is democratic but because American democracy is said to be too extreme or lacking the balance of a properly sophisticated elite. America is not reviled due to its "free-enterprise" economy but from a conviction that it has a dictatorial and soulless system with a culture considered to be junk-ridden and anti-intellectual. These claims may be wrong or right, exaggerated or distorted, but the aspects of America most often defined as negative are those the complainant wants to avoid in his own country.

Another part of the answer is that the main critique against America reflects an overall distaste for the general direction of societal evolution over the last two centuries. The key aspects include an unchecked democracy with the less educated masses having too much power, the loss of authority by the intellectual and cultural elite, workers made conservative by material privileges, the male/female balance out of whack, too rapid change and too little respect for tradition, a propensity to violence, an obsession with gadgets, a domination of machinery and technology, plus much more. As a result, in the contemporary world, modernization, globalization, industrialization, and Westernization are often just used as alternate names for Americanization.

At the same time, the real or supposed features of the critique can vary widely, sometimes even coming from opposite directions. As an American journalist put it:

Fanatical Muslims despise America because it's all lapdancing and gay porn; the secular Europeans despise America because it's

all born-again Christians hung up on abortion. . . . America is also too isolationist, except when it's too imperialist. And even its imperialism is too vulgar and arriviste to appeal to real imperialists. . . . To the mullahs, America is the Great Satan, a wily seducer; to the Gaullists, America is the Great Cretin, a culture so self-evidently moronic that only stump-toothed inbred Appalachian lardbutts could possibly fall for it. . . . Too Christian, too Godless, too isolationist, too imperialist, too seductive, too cretinous.⁷

This is no exaggeration. Polls show, for example, that to secular Europeans, America is a religious country (78 percent of the French in one survey), while to Muslims, America is an atheistic land (only 10 percent of Jordanians thought it religious).⁸ The bottom line for one determined to be anti-American is that whatever you don't like, that is what the United States represents.

Ironically, anti-Americanism actually subverted the kind of accurate and critical evaluation that would benefit both the United States and others. Confronted by so much distortion and hatred, Americans facing systematic hostility were more likely to disregard criticism as bias rather than as suggestions for improvement. Anti-Americans use that ideology to defend their own system's worst shortcomings rather than to improve their own societies. In addition, a doctrine of generally dismissing American ideas, institutions, or policies also made it harder for foreigners to pick and choose rationally what was worth copying, adapting, or rejecting from the United States.

Paradoxically, this situation also helps explain why those formerly engaged in the most direct, real conflict with the United States were often not very anti-American. From their own experience, they had learned that conflict with America was costly, that conciliation was advantageous, and that a stereotype of U.S. permanent hostility was not accurate. In Latin America, only Mexico's anti-Americanism could be said to be motivated by direct conflicts, and the same applies for most of Europe (except possibly Greece) and the Middle East as well (except possibly Iran). In Africa, which wanted more Americanization, the sins of slavery and U.S. foreign policy had no impact.

Vietnam is not a hotbed of anti-Americanism, and neither is Panama, Nicaragua, or Chile. The U.S. defeat of Germany and Japan did not make them anti-American. Japan, after losing a devastating war with America,

having two atomic bombs dropped on civilian targets and enduring an occupation (which includes the presence of American troops today, more than a half-century later), did not dwell on resentment. Instead, it absorbed huge elements of American politics and culture very effectively, reinforcing its own identity as it adapted to the modern world. But the most consistently anti-American country in Western Europe is France, the only major state there with which the United States has never fought a war.

In contrast, there was a great deal of continuity in anti-Americanism as an idea held by certain groups in specific places. The United States did pose a challenge to the world, an alternative model of society—long before its foreign policy was of any importance or its culture threatened to swamp the earth. And whenever people disliked any American policy or innovation, they had a 200-year-old anti-American framework within which to fit and magnify their criticism.

Indeed, there is a strong link between nineteenth-century anti-Americans and those of the two centuries that followed. America has always been detested as the prophet, herald, and exemplar of modernism, democracy, and mass culture. It was—as the founders of anti-Americanism and each succeeding generation put it—the greatest threat to the existing order in modern world history. The criticisms of romantics and aristocrats were magnified and made systematic by fascists and Communists, nationalists and traditionalists who did everything possible to discredit America as their strategic and allegedly civilizational rival.

Beginning in the early 1800s, the United States was ridiculed as a place where culture was nonexistent, money was king, democracy was a farce, and the unwashed masses ruled. Even then, before the United States had done anything on the world stage, there was tremendous fear that it would transform the world by its example. By the 1880s, this picture was sharpened considerably. The United States represented the forces of mass production, an assault on tradition, capitalism and advertising, the destruction of the individual, and the downfall of cultural standards. Especially after the U.S. victory over Spain in 1898, increasing attention was given to the idea that the United States was not only a role model but also a power developing the ability to force itself on others, conquer foreign lands, and even one day rule the whole world.

Being universally loved, Americans would constantly rediscover, was not such an easy goal to attain. A year after violent attacks on Vice

President Richard Nixon during a tour of Latin America, George Allen, director of the U.S. Information Agency, tried to explain these trends by drawing on his agency's extensive public opinion polling abroad:

We continue to act like adolescents. We boast about richness, our bigness and our strength. We talk about our tall buildings, our motor cars and our incomes. Nations, like people, who boast can expect others to cheer when they fail. . . . There is considerable concern in many quarters lest they be swamped by American "cultural imperialism," by a way of life characterized by Coca-Cola, cowboys and comics. . . . If American tourists must chew gum they should be told at least to chew it as inconspicuously as possible.⁹

The central issue, however, was not how Americans chewed gum, but the fact that throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union, Third World radical movements, and extreme left-wing Europeans saw the United States as the main enemy. In turn, Cold War battles led the United States into actions that greatly increased the scope of its international involvements that led to criticism, especially in Latin America. Antagonism to the United States was most often triggered by objections to its support for a given government, usually—sometimes accurately—described as a corrupt, unpopular dictatorship, or its opposition to a movement it identified as pro-Communist.

But the audience for anti-American slogans, especially in Europe, was limited since most people opposed Communism, viewed the United States as a protector against it, and often considered anti-Americanism as propaganda from those favoring not only America's enemies but their own as well. Some intellectuals were frustrated by the trampling of non-Communist democratic forces in the battle, though others were more tolerant of misdeeds taking place in the context of a life-and-death struggle with totalitarian forces.

When the Cold War ended, however, the USSR vanished but its anti-American case was globalized. America, the victor and sole remaining superpower, could credibly be considered capable of world conquest. The new situation intensified all the factors that led to a historic fear, hatred, and resentment of America. The publishing magnate Henry Luce had called the twentieth century the "American century." Yet it seemed likely that the twenty-first would better merit that title. Those who liked or hated this idea could at least agree that it would be an era

of U.S. primacy as the globe's principal power, role model, and cultural influence.

In addition, new developments in technology and business methods—satellite television, the Internet, global franchising—also increased the immediacy of its cultural influence, making U.S. power more visible to everyone on a daily basis down to their very choice of television watching or dining.

While the United States was riding high, however, it was a moment of psychological vulnerability for Europeans and Muslims. The former were going through the difficult transition from national identities to European integration in order to fulfill an age-old dream of peace, harmony, and prosperity. It was clear that a broader European identity could be built faster and stronger if Europeans as a group set themselves apart from the United States by conceptual distinction and rivalry. In that way, inter-European quarrels would be avoided, unity augmented, and hostility directed outward. After all, this was always xenophobia's great appeal: everyone united against the outsider as the best way to ensure internal social harmony.

Public opinion polls reflected the fact that anti-Americanism became, to an almost unprecedented extent, a sentiment held by the masses, even majorities, in many countries. In the opening years of the twenty-first century, it had become nothing less than a fad or fashion, a new conventional wisdom—though how transitory was not clear. And this was true not only for the left but also in nationalist and conservative circles. "Above all," observed the German publisher Mathias Döpfner, anti-Americanism has become taken for granted, the accepted premise "of intelligent conversation."¹⁰ A British journalist wrote, "These days you cannot say anything too bad about the Yanks and not be believed."¹¹

The new look for anti-Americanism was a synthesis of ideas from each faction. From conservatives, it took a sense of superiority over the populist America of the antitraditional, secularized mass society and the democracy of grubby buffoons, which went back to the aristocratic anti-Americanism of the nineteenth century. From the left, anti-Americanism provided a new mechanism for trying to extend European influence to the world, proposing that Third World countries see Europe as a counterbalance to America. A conservative like French President Jacques Chirac could thus mount a nationalist foreign policy that would appeal to the European and Third World left, while French leftists would be

reconciled with capitalism and bourgeois patriotism that, since they were made in Europe, were far better than the American version.

Similarly, the Muslim and especially Arab worlds were also in need of a new worldview. Increasingly aware that they were behind the West and not catching up, the dictatorial regimes were unable to win victories or solve problems. As a result, rulers who wanted to remain in power, intellectuals marketing their failed ideology, and Muslim clerics fearful of secularist trends all found it easy and advantageous to blame the United States. The cause of all their problems was not their own deficient systems and the bad choices they had made but rather American interference and enmity.

On one hand, there was a fair degree of consensus—especially outside the Middle East—that the best type of society, economy, and culture resembled America at least in general terms. On the other hand, those dissatisfied with the contemporary world and horrified by its apparent direction saw America as the ultimate threat jeopardizing their beloved way of life. Those favoring the status quo denounced the United States as a force for subversive change; those who wanted to transform their societies attacked the United States as a defender of the existing order. Both could join in seeing that country as the problem, simultaneously the source of reactionary paralysis and dangerous innovations.

The far left in particular needed a new ideology. Marxism had failed to create utopia where it ruled or to inspire revolution elsewhere. Even socialism was a dead issue in Europe and Latin America. No one could credibly continue to argue that humanity's problem was a class system and the solution was a proletarian revolution or state ownership of the economy. Making America rather than capitalism the villain that one was fighting seemed an admirable solution for this dead end.

For the extreme left, as well as Arab nationalists or Islamists, this new approach revitalized their failed ideologies and broadened their appeal. Around criticism of America, entire countries could unite, bringing left and right into a new nationalist consensus. French capitalists and workers, ultraconservatives with radical ideologues, traditionalists as well as anarchists, and patriots as well as self-proclaimed internationalists would all be in the same camp. "Progressive" human rights activists could march in defense of Third World dictators; Islamists and pan-Arab nationalists could join hands. Those who persecuted revolutionary Islamists at home could justify Usama bin Ladin's deeds.

In the process, too, many of them did not hesitate to revitalize anti-Semitism, another idea that had the power to unite people of widely disparate political views. That oldest xenophobic prejudice of all had been linked to anti-Americanism in the nineteenth century and again in fascist as well as later Soviet propaganda. As Bernard Wasserstein explains, both biases bring together disparate groups to vent “a hatred of the successful,” are “fueled by envy and frustration,” and attribute all problems to one main source, which is striving “to control and exploit humanity” in a “monstrous conspiracy.”¹²

Indeed, the whole apparatus of anti-Semitism was borrowed to systematize anti-Americanism: the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was matched by materials “proving” that America sought world conquest, accusations that Jews performed ritual murder were modernized by tales of American genocide and homicide, medieval accusations that Jews had poisoned wells to cause plagues became a modern-day U.S. responsibility for the destruction of the environment, and the alleged Jewish murder of God was transmogrified into a supposed U.S.-led crusade to destroy Islam.

Some European and most Middle Eastern anti-Americans attributed the Bush administration’s doings to a Jewish-Israeli cabal that was the true ruler of the United States.¹³ In Germany, neo-Nazis and radical leftists wearing *kaffiyas* marched together in anti-American demonstrations and chanted the same slogans against globalization and waving the same Hizballah flags. Horst Mahler, leader of a right-wing party and former member of the far-left Baader-Meinhoff gang, said on September 12, 2001, that the attacks “on Washington and New York mark the end of the American century, the end of global capitalism, and also the end of the Jehovah cult and of Mammonism.”¹⁴

In the context of all these developments, a growing group of people were prepared to see September 11 not merely as a terrorist act but also as a revolutionary deed against those responsible for the unjust global system. As Lee Harris wrote in evaluating this new ideology, “Here, for the first time, the world had witnessed the oppressed finally striking a blow against the oppressor . . . the dawn of a new revolutionary era.”¹⁵

Many rationalizations could be made for this new reading of history. In Russia, the revolutionaries had betrayed the masses, but in the United States the left could accuse the masses of being traitors to their revolutionary duty. Accepting that there would be no proletarian uprising, and that no economic collapse would force them to rebel, left two pos-

sible conclusions. If cultural hypnotism and material bribery had persuaded the masses to accept the unjust American system, then the United States, possessing such power, was a terrible monster that might create a global anti-utopia that would put the same stable and prosperous but soulless and banal system into effect everywhere. But if, instead, the American people as a whole were now a willing partner in the system because they benefited from it, this meant they were an equally guilty accomplice of imperialism and thus the enemy of everyone else in the world.

Although few were aware of it, this new doctrine for the far left, Arab nationalists, and Islamists had a long gestation in anti-American history as well as through certain developments in German philosophy, French postmodernist utopianism, and Third World political economy.¹⁶ Ironically, this doctrine's first part goes back to the "Frankfurt school," the gentlest, most open-minded of Marxists who rejected Stalinism. While they had little direct interest in America, their basic idea fit well with the classic anti-American argument that it was the epitome of a soulless machine society, buying off workers by useless gadgets and mental manipulation. Marx believed that progress would inevitably bring closer the day of revolution and a just socialist society. In contrast, the new view suggested that progress was an enemy that increased humanity's alienation and made it harder to attain the promised land of utopian communism.

Herbert Marcuse, one of this group's members who emigrated to America, developed the theory of "repressive tolerance" as an explanation for that country's success and the absence of proletarian revolution. He claimed that by discouraging people from wanting to overthrow it, the very openness and opportunity that bourgeois democracy offered was a form of oppression. Giving people rising living standards—the opposite of what Marx had predicted—was destroying them spiritually. The more freedom people had, the worse off they were. The true enemy, then, was not capitalism's failure but rather its success. Clearly, that conclusion pointed to America as the most dangerous society in the world.

The second layer came from French critical theory. Michel Foucault and other radical thinkers claimed that most intellectuals and cultural figures had participated in the cynical manipulations of ruling classes to keep down poor and repressed groups. Marxists had focused on the capitalists' monopoly of economic power; postmodernists pointed to their monopoly over information production. This set the stage for the

argument that the main front of the U.S. threat, and where it must be fought, was over the invasion of its culture and ideas.

The third part of this doctrine was Third World political economy, which contributed the concept that underdevelopment was an artificial disaster created by the United States. America had become rich by making the rest of the world poor. It was not just responsible for exploiting the Third World but had actually stopped its progress. The United States was responsible for all the regimes that made people's lives miserable.

If these beliefs about the pernicious, powerful effect of America were true, then anti-Americanism was indeed the world's most important issue. It was vital to defend oneself against the American peril and to make a better future possible for humanity by defeating it. This worldview quickly replaced Marxism as the far left's ideology and simultaneously became a way to revitalize the nationalist or Islamist right. The enemy was American domination, not capitalist rule per se, and the battle against it must be waged by all people of other nations, not merely workers and peasants. This struggle requires an alliance of anti-American forces ranging from European intellectuals to Middle Eastern dictators.

At the same time, though, the new doctrine also provided a way to preserve traditional patriotic loyalty to one's own state as well, in a way that did not threaten continental unity. European countries could cooperate among themselves while at the same time could continue competing one on one with the United States in the battle for global cultural, political, and economic influence. Such a notion, however, had far less appeal in Britain or Germany than it did in France, for France was the only one of this trio that was not only the historic headquarters for European anti-Americanism but also saw itself both as the leader of Europe as a whole and as a better world leader than the United States.¹⁷

As Denis Lacorne wrote,

The competing universalist pretensions of their two revolutions, the particular arrogance of the French intelligentsia, and the contempt of the American political class for neo-Gaullist posturing will ensure that France and the United States remain rivals. This rivalry can only be asymmetrical: we French would like to civilize the world, but we are instead being globalized by the United States, even as our "civilization" is rejected by our European neighbors as excessively Francocentric.¹⁸

Jealousy is a potent force here, focusing the anger, resentment, and disbelief of people for whom nothing was going right against those who seemed to prosper so effortlessly. European intellectuals and artists had the added pain of knowing that their American counterparts have far larger audiences, resources, and income. The British historian Paul Johnson explained that the envy for “American wealth, power, success . . . [was] made all the more poisonous because of a fearful European conviction that America’s strength is rising while Europe’s is falling.”¹⁹

This former attitude is most pronounced among intellectuals and cultural figures, always the main group promoting anti-Americanism. “Scratch an anti-American in Europe,” said Denis MacShane, Britain’s minister for Europe, “and very often all he wants is a guest professorship at Harvard, or to have an article published in the *New York Times*.”²⁰ A left-wing British journalist confessed, “Everybody in our business here wonders whether he didn’t make the mistake of a lifetime by not moving to the United States when he was 22.”²¹ Revel points out that “the news that America has accomplished something is the signal for us to say that that accomplishment is worthless.”²²

Even worse was the fear that the model of a society so anti-intellectual would catch on.²³ European political leaders may have honest disagreements and differing interests with America or even use anti-Americanism to whip up support occasionally. But it is the intellectual sector far more than the politicians who feel frightened, angry, and highly motivated. Anti-Americanism has been a class ideology for intellectuals just as surely as capitalism was that of the bourgeoisie. In terms of variety and living standards, American products and methods benefited British, French, and German consumers, but in cultural terms they threatened the monopoly over the market that had always been the main asset of the local intellectual and cultural elite.

Blaming things on America rationalizes their situation. In that case, the critics of mass society were not snobs protecting their interests but rather progressives and patriots. Instead of ridiculing British soap operas or greasy fish and chips, they could decry imported American equivalents—especially since workers who vote for the Labour Party consume American junk culture more than do wealthy people who vote Conservative. It thus becomes possible to assert that the masses are not fools without good taste but rather victims of inferior imported American products and values. Not only does this avoid a clash between elite and

masses, but it also gives hope that the people might be won to better things if they are persuaded to reject the true, foreign culprit.

In this connection, too, anti-Americans can always fall back on the powerful myth of a “popular” elite culture, the same logical fallacy used for 200 years. The pretense is that being “French” for everyone—including all that country’s workers and peasants—means consuming classical culture and eating haute cuisine. The tastes of the average American, who is presumably a Texas cowboy or Arkansas hillbilly, are compared to those of the top 1 percent of the European elite and predictably found less intellectually oriented and culturally sophisticated. If like would be compared to like, the average European’s cultural level is probably close to that of his or her American counterpart, while the intellectual elites in both places probably also have similar preferences.

All in all, this battle over cultural control seems reminiscent of the nineteenth-century struggle between the aristocracy and its client intelligentsia against the rising business/manufacturing class. The former favored the handmade, higher quality work of artisans against the lower quality, cheaper, factory-produced goods that would raise the masses’ living standards but purportedly lower society’s overall tone. Today seems like a new round in this competition, which thus brings a revival of the old aristocratic-romantic cultural critique of America.

The real problem, however, was not the quality of American exports, which varied greatly, but the fact that they competed with all aspects of the local intelligentsia’s work—books, movies, music—as a threat to success and commercial survival. Anti-Americanism was a way out for those fearing that they would lose any war of choice with American products, values, ideas, or institutions.

Worst of all was the fact that America is a place where intellectuals have a lower status and less exalted public role. Rather than being seen as respected minds given deference as representing humanity’s highest impulses and greatest consciousness, they were viewed as a bunch of nerds who couldn’t get dates. If Europe became more like America, the status of intellectuals there would take a nosedive.

No wonder European intellectuals shuddered and denounced such a place. Many of them had once turned to anticapitalism and now embraced anti-Americanism out of disappointment with what liberty had brought. Once the masses had more freedom and money, they were eager to satisfy material hungers and chase after cheap thrills. Relatively few

wanted to be like the intellectuals or spend their time pursuing the “finer things of life.”

As Arthur Koestler pointed out in 1951, this was merely the process of free choice at work:

I loathe processed bread in cellophane, processed towns of cement and glass, and the Bible processed as a comic-strip; I loathe crooners and swooners, quizzes and fizzes . . . the Organization Man and *Reader's Digest*. But who coerced us into buying all this? The United States do not rule Europe as the British ruled India; they waged no Opium War to force their revolting “Coke” down our throats. Europe bought the whole package because Europe wanted it.²⁴

Still, this situation was profoundly disillusioning to all those who had hoped for something better. If the masses truly wanted this stuff, there would be no utopia in the future but merely a growing surfeit of material goods and pleasures keyed to the lowest human lusts. Would one have to be resigned to the fact that this was human nature and thus inevitable, or could it be that some system was deliberately making people frivolous and foolish, buying things they did not need and watching sports or situation comedies rather than devoting their time to the latest philosophy book or art exhibit?

Yet this was precisely the portrait of the United States drawn by nineteenth-century European anti-American stereotypes, long before Americans invented or mastered the arts of mass production, advertising, marketing, franchising, and packaging. If the problem was merely coming from the American model that was being exported, there was still hope that it might be rejected and that a better alternative was possible than a lowest-common-denominator culture based on junk and base desires.

In their hearts, though, the European intelligentsia feared it impossible to win the battle, at least not by fighting fairly. “I don’t think,” explained the British writer Ian Jack, “there will be many people queuing up to heap their [American-made] clothes (or books) on bonfires” to reverse the flow of influence.²⁵

It almost seemed as if America discovered some strange subliminal secret about mesmerizing the masses. American civilization is considered to be so potent that it has the alleged ability to take over people’s brains

and make them want to boogie. The pull of its music, films, and gadgets seemed irresistible, rendering everyone helpless to fight their attraction. Even the intellectuals could not trust themselves to resist. The Swiss philosopher Jeanne Hersch put it this way:

The Americans make us uneasy because, without wishing us ill, they put things before us for taking . . . so convenient that we accept them, finding perhaps that they satisfy our fundamental temptations. Masses of American products are imposed upon us by artificial means, especially where films are concerned. . . . Even when we can make a choice between products, we are influenced by a sort of force within ourselves, which we fear because it is indeterminate and indefinable.²⁶

This is precisely what the ancestors of contemporary European anti-Americans feared as early as the 1830s. No wonder many in the Middle East think America has made a pact with the devil.

Yet the myth of a steadily advancing cultural imperialism is as misplaced as that of the conspiratorial designs of American political imperialism. Moreover, the battle to avoid being swamped by the worst of American culture—even within the United States itself—is far from unwinnable. Some, like Japan, adjust successfully through a combination of borrowing, adapting, and preserving their own tradition.

Of course, not only was the quality of American life and culture consistently underestimated—by pointing at the worst rather than the best—but so was the system's most enduring characteristic: its ability to improve itself and fix its problems. One of the main ways this happened was the fact—ignored by anti-Americans—that American culture and society were always ready to borrow from others.

Ironically, this willingness to import ideas included an eagerness by many Americans to seize on the trendiest forms of anti-Americanism produced by Europe and the Middle East. What could be more ironic than the fact that a postmodernist, America-faulting theory that the United States was taking over the world culturally and intellectually—invented mainly in France and the Middle East—gained hegemony among much of the American intelligentsia? What more graphic proof could there be of the multidirectional reality of cultural influences?²⁷

Equally, America imported many other cultural products, goods, and ideas from other countries, or had them available on its own soil

through large immigrant communities. To give a simple example, if people in European countries want to eat “American” food, they may go to a McDonald’s, but if people in America want to eat French or Italian food, they have a choice of many thousands of such restaurants all owned by Americans.²⁸ Americans also listen to British popular music and watch British television shows, drink French wines and eat French cheeses, and buy Japanese electronic goods and cars, yet the United States is also a major producer of music, television shows, wine, and high technology, without living in fear of a foreign psychological takeover.

Another basis for anti-Americanism had been an additional double standard, the contrast between the ways in which U.S. and European foreign policies are portrayed. For centuries, Britain and France ruled the world, seizing colonies and massacring “natives” while, then and later, unapologetically imposing their distinctive ideas and institutions on Third World victims. In the twentieth century, the USSR played a similar role.

Despite these facts, there was never any phenomenon of anti-Britishism, anti-Frenchism, or anti-Russianism (as contrasted with anti-Communism). A distinction was always made between policy and state, state and society. Third World insurgents against British and French rule usually arose from among those who had most absorbed and accepted their ideas and cultures. The terrible French brutality in Indochina and Algeria is barely a memory in those countries, while Paris’s continuing interventions in Africa to install new regimes and prop up dictators are not held to discredit it as a flawed state or society. Even Germany is forgiven for plunging the world into two wars and engaging in genocide. Meanwhile, though, the United States continues to be chastised for far more distant historic actions—its treatment of Native Americans, slavery, and ancient interventions in Latin America—which supposedly reveal its true imperialist and brutal essence.

While, of course, pro-American thinking in European countries often exceeded the contrary view, this, too, became a factor that stoked anti-Americanism. The more some people advocated copying, borrowing, or buying from America, the more others were horrified by this prospect. The real secret of the debate over America is that it was usually about what people should do within their own countries. Many people in the most anti-American places, like France or the Arab world, saw no contradiction between an acerbic view of America and admiring it as a

society with a high living standard or good educational system. What they didn't like was the possibility that America's example or power might change their own lives or societies to an extent or in a direction that they did not want.

These arguments were so passionate because people were choosing what to accept or reject for themselves. Was copying particular features from America a road toward happiness or disaster, destroying one's identity or attaining a better life? If the stakes were not so close to home, what happened in America itself would have been an issue of only academic interest, like economic reform in Argentina or cultural trends in Zimbabwe. No one would get so heated, angry, and disputatious about something so remote from home.

Ironically but inevitably, the ones born in other lands who best knew America and were most favorable toward that country were those who had chosen to immigrate to the United States. For them, America was a land of opportunity, despite the setbacks and disillusionment that life there sometimes gave them. Gradually, they transmitted these positive impressions to those left behind, for example among relatives and home villages in Italy and Ireland. Over time, there may be a similar effect from those who have migrated most recently from Latin America, South and East Asia, and Africa.

But the main anti-Americanism-producing countries are less influenced by such factors. Mass emigration from Germany and Britain ended long ago. France never produced many immigrants to the United States, and perhaps the lack of such personal links and the lack of a sense of contributing to the shaping of America has been a significant factor for that country's general miscomprehension of it. The same problem applies to Arab and Muslim states from which few immigrants came until very recently and for whom the assimilation process has just begun.

What are some of the particular American traits that have produced so much misunderstanding and derision? First, there is an idealism bordering on enlightened altruism. In a cynical world, it nonetheless remains true that the United States is a country that wants to do good.

To Americans—and, yes, even American leaders—the idea of spreading democracy and proving that they are genuinely helping others is a major factor in foreign policy. Based on their own national experiences, Americans believe that improving peoples' lives is the key to stability and see gaining their goodwill as the route to peace and success. Once the

small number of villains in another nation—Kosovo or Somalia, Iraq or Afghanistan—are killed or captured, they believe, the silent majority would prefer moderation. The American politicians' task is to persuade the public that they can do all these things. This was how the United States was to be made secure after September 11, 2001.

Second, Americans passionately embrace a powerful optimism. They expect that goodness will triumph, the world will improve, and everything will turn out right in the end. This is a progression that follows the pattern of their national experience. They did not learn that idea from seeing so many happy endings in Hollywood movies; rather, it was this trait that forced directors to meet the audience's demand for them.

Such optimism allows and encourages Americans to undertake great actions and tremendous risks. Often, they brush aside the endless advice that something cannot be done. Naturally, this led to mistakes and costly losses but hardly ever led to any real or lasting disaster. And U.S. history has repeatedly shown that this attitude succeeds in the end, producing stunning successes.

Third, the United States has a pragmatic, problem-solving mentality. Rather than muddling through or living with difficulties, Americans want to resolve them. In this search for solutions, ideology does not enchain Americans. And yet here, too, when failure does take place, there is a willingness to change assumptions and methods. Every time in U.S. history when there have been problems that anti-Americans defined as implicit in the country's nature—slavery and later racism, the need to develop culture and education in the early nineteenth century, and the uncontrolled capitalism of the late nineteenth century, for example—America has altered itself to solve them.

Finally, there must be mentioned a reluctance to engage in foreign entanglements. While it is easy to exaggerate an American preference for isolationism, there is no country in the world less interested in empire or world conquest. This was the tendency of the United States after the Cold War's end, when American foreign policy became focused on a series of humanitarian missions in places like Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo. But September 11, 2001, like the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, forced Americans into a very different era against their preferences.

Whatever America's faults, its unique characteristics point to one important conclusion that runs in the opposite direction from what anti-

Americans claim: this is not a country that wants to rule the world. And yet such a claim is the mantra of anti-Americanism.

Thus, to cite one example among millions, France's respected *Le Monde Diplomatique* published articles purveying conspiracy theories that identified globalization as an American attempt at world conquest, making the United States at least as bad as Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia and worse than bin Ladin. The real axis of evil is said to be a U.S.-dominated economic system, an ideological "dictatorship" of American media and think tanks, and a post-September 11 military offensive that treats Europeans as "vassals" that are ordered "to kneel in supplication [as] the United States aspires to exercise absolute political power." Those taken prisoner in Afghanistan while fighting for bin Ladin and imprisoned in the "cages" of Guantánamo are examples of what the United States intends to do to Europeans who defy its imperial will.²⁹

What is actually taking place, suggested Robert Kagan in his essay "Power and Weakness," is merely a division of labor between Europe and America.³⁰ Since America was now protecting Europe from the world's disruptive forces, Europe was then free to emphasize its high morality and opposition to using force because the United States dealt with threats that Europe did not have to confront.

Kagan explained, "Europe is turning away from power . . . into a self-contained world of laws and rules and transnational negotiation and cooperation. It is entering a post-historical paradise of peace and relative prosperity." The United States is left to deal with "the anarchic Hobbesian world where international laws and rules are unreliable and where true security, the defense and promotion of a liberal order still depend on the possession and use of military might." Thus, the Europeans could stereotype America as enjoying that role due to its "culture of death" and warlike temperament that was "the natural product of a violent society where every man has a gun and the death penalty reigns."³¹

European critics claimed that Americans see the world divided between good and evil, while Europeans perceive a more complex picture. Americans favor coercion by force; Europeans prefer persuasion through benefits. Thus, Europeans consider themselves more "tolerant, patient, peaceful and attuned to international law and economic attempts to encourage cooperation." Kagan suggests that the different roles are not a result of national character but of Europe's "retreat from responsibility"

in the world, leaving the task of maintaining international order and dealing with dangerous threats to the United States. Yet far from being a recent development, these basic European stereotypes of America—as being violent, materialistic, morally simplistic, unsophisticated, too quick to act, and too wedded to change—are identical with its traditional anti-American themes going back to the early nineteenth century at a time when Europe was pleased to rule the globe and made no apologies for doing so.

At any rate, today Kagan points out that this European vision of America is a misleading image. For example, the portrayal of America as aggressive and unilateralist is contradicted by U.S. eagerness for Europe to take the lead in such crises as Bosnia and Kosovo. Only European failure to act decisively forced the United States to do so itself, since only American leadership could turn official European unity into actual cooperation. The attempt to prove that America was systematically driving for control and disregarding European feelings also ignored much evidence that belied its claims: the U.S. effort to build a wide coalition in the 1991 war against Iraq; its patient cooperation with other states in the decade-long UN sanctions program on Iraq; its long, strenuous work to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict; its support for European unification; its sensitive handling of the USSR's dismantlement; and a dozen other matters. Even in the Iraq War, which seemed to fulfill all the nightmares about the United States dragging Europe into crisis, the U.S.-led coalition included support from Britain, Spain, Italy, and many central European countries, as well as from Germany's main opposition party.

Finally, of course, the most extreme anti-American exaggeration was that the United States might use its power against the Europeans themselves. The ultimate fear was not that the United States had bad policies but that it had bad intentions.

September 11 and the subsequent events were the first tests of the enhanced new anti-American doctrine. There was nothing intrinsically anti-American in opposition to or criticism of any specific U.S. policy, for example, the war on Iraq. The issue was not whether individuals or countries rejected what the United States wanted but whether in doing so they used anti-American stereotypes, distorted U.S. motives or actions, or tried to raise hatred against the United States itself. The anti-American interpretation was that this crisis provided additional proof that the

United States sought world conquest and behaved badly because of deep-seated, chronic shortcomings in American society.

This assumption was held to be equally true in Europe and the Middle East, as well as elsewhere in the world. Once set alight, anti-Americanism became a fad spread by the very technological innovations supposedly abetting American-dominated globalism. Suddenly, Japan's former prime minister Yasuhiro Nakasone demanded that the United States "renounce an arrogance that makes them behave as though they are the masters of the universe."³² In China, a poll showed that 30 percent thought the United States was responsible for the SARS epidemic there.³³ And in 2004, Islamic leaders in three northern Nigerian states blocked critical polio inoculations for children, denouncing them as a U.S. plot to spread AIDS or infertility among Muslims.³⁴

Incredibly, by adopting his false ideas, this reaction gave victory to a terrorist who had attacked America and murdered almost 3,000 people. Of course, most said, this was a regrettable crime. Many Europeans sympathized with the United States; others supported it even regarding the war in Iraq. Yet suddenly bin Ladin's basic concept of what was going on in the world was accepted by a significant European minority and by a majority in the Middle East.

The fact that George W. Bush was a conservative made him a far more credible target for being labeled by the left as a mad emperor bent on world domination. The fact that he had no intellectual pretensions, to say the least, fueled the intellectuals' contempt. The fact that he launched a war on Iraq without first obtaining world support was taken as proof of accusations already being fostered. Many Americans agreed with the most critical assessments of foreigners at a time when domestic partisan passions had been raised to a high level.

In short, Bush's personality and policies seemed to fulfill precisely the role that the anti-Americans were predicting and warning against. Signs of the new situation were already visible during Clinton's terms, the time during which the September 11 attacks were being planned, after all. But, combined with the post-Cold War situation of American power, the evolution of anti-Americanism itself, and September 11, the Bush era made for a critical mass that made anti-Americanism an explosive global phenomenon. The terms of abuse for Bush (a stupid cowboy, religious fanatic) and the United States (ignorant, brutal, arrogant, violent, erratic) were all from the classical texts. Whether or not this U.S. policy was wise

or foolish, necessary or not—an issue completely outside the scope of this book—it neatly fit into existing hostile assumptions and some groups' interest in spreading them, guaranteeing that there would be a heightened anti-Americanism in response.

If these factors had not been in place, anti-Americanism would still have been a significant yet less noticeable and endemic factor. But the fact that U.S. positions fit with the preconceptions of an anti-Americanism that was ripe for rapid expansion, does not mean that its view and analysis are accurate. Anti-Americanism is not reinvented each time there is a president or policy others do not like. Thus, while criticisms of the United States or its leaders can be quite valid, anti-Americanism itself is based on a false, irrational case.

Over the course of history, there have been many variations of it ranging from the humorous and frivolous all the way to the murderous and dangerous. At a 1974 world food conference in Rome, Senator Daniel Moynihan recalled, "The scene grew orgiastic as speakers competed in their denunciation of the country that had called the conference, mostly to discuss giving away its own wheat."³⁵ Almost thirty years later, in the Gaza Strip, a U.S. government convoy was deliberately ambushed by Palestinian terrorists and three Americans killed as its passengers traveled to interview Palestinian candidates for Fulbright scholarships to study in the United States.

Certainly, anti-Americanism's overall impact should not be overstated. For much of its history, it was a curiosity found in the writings of travelers and novelists. There was almost always a pro-American side and anti-Americanism usually was just talk, with little effect on events. But after becoming systematized and augmented during the Cold War's battle of ideas, anti-Americanism's concepts finally took global center stage at the outset of the twenty-first century. In an age whose main symbol and shaping influence has become September 11, the lethality of such ideas is all too evident.

Certainly, any doctrine of such power and durability has a basis in reality. But anti-Americanism was a mixture of two different aspects of reality, drawing both from the nature and behavior of the United States itself and that of its critics. In the end, anti-Americanism was a response to the phenomenon of America itself, precisely because of that country's uniqueness and innovation, the success it has achieved, and the challenge it poses to all alternative ideologies or existing societies.