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*European Anti-Americanism: What's New?*



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# European Anti-Americanism: What's New?

Rob Kroes

“Nous sommes tous américains.” We are all Americans. Such was the rallying cry of the French newspaper *Le Monde*'s editor-in-chief, Jean-Marie Colombani, published two days after the terrorist attack against symbols of America's power. He went on to say: “We are all New Yorkers, as surely as John Kennedy declared himself, in 1962 in Berlin, to be a Berliner.” If that was one historical resonance that Colombani himself called forth for his readers, there is an even older use of this rhetorical call to solidarity that may come to mind. It is Jefferson's call for unity after America's first taste of two-party strife. Leading opposition forces to victory in the presidential election of 1800, he assured Americans that “We are all Federalists, we are all Republicans,” urging his audience to rise above the differences that many at the time feared might divide the young nation against itself. There would clearly be no need for such a ringing rhetorical call if there were not at the same time an acute sense of difference and division. Similarly in the case of Colombani's timely expression of solidarity with an ally singled out for vengeful attack, solely because it, more than any of its allies, had come to represent the global challenge posed by a shared Western way of life. An attack against America was therefore an attack against common values held dear by all who live by standards of democracy and the type of open society that it implies. But as in Jefferson's case, the rhetorical urgency of the call for solidarity suggests a sense of difference and divisions now to be transcended, or at least temporarily to be shunted aside. This sense of difference had always been there during the years of the Cold War, but was contained by the threat of a common enemy. With the end of the Cold War, though, the need for a reorientation of strategic thinking was felt on both sides of the Atlantic that, if anything, only sharpened differences and divisions.

Undeniably many changes that occurred during the 1990s are direct consequences of the end of the Cold War. To mention just a few of the obvious examples, the expansion of the European Union and of NATO into areas under the sway of the Soviet Union during the Cold War are attempts at reconfiguring the world that

were clearly occasioned by the Soviet Union's collapse. Similarly, the Balkan wars of the 1990s or Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait would likely not have occurred in the absence of the breakdown of an international balance of power and ideology and of patterns of clientism, typical of the Cold-War world. Most dramatically, perhaps, trans-Atlantic tensions, never absent during the Cold War but contained by the imperative of a joint defense against the Soviet bloc, now appear as clashing visions of the post-Cold War new world order. The words—"New World Order"—were coined by George Bush the elder, at the time of the first Gulf War, when briefly it seemed as if the framework of international institutions, centering on the United Nations, could finally come into its own. But the world has moved a long way away from those early hopes and visions. And we may well be asking ourselves the question whether the terrorist attack on symbols of American power on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, may not have been a greater sea change than the end of the Cold War. Or was it merely the catalyst that led America to implement a foreign policy approach that had been in the making since the early 1990s? If so, and it seems likely it is, America's current foreign policy is clearly a response to its unique position of the one hegemon in a unipolar world, intent on safeguarding that position. A group of neo-conservative foreign-policy analysts took their cue from a White Paper produced in 1992 at the behest of William Cheney, then Secretary of Defense, entitled "The New American Century." In 1997 they coalesced around the Project for a New American Century and founded a think-tank under that name. Their thinking hardened around a view of American foreign policy, centering on military strength. Now, in the current Bush administration, they are in a position to implement their views. Parallel to this gestation of a foreign-policy view, in American society throughout the 1990s national rituals such as the Super Bowl increasingly blended the appeal of mass spectator sports with displays of military prowess and martial vigor.<sup>1</sup> It may herald a militarization of the public spirit, propagated through the mass media. To some it is eerily reminiscent of earlier such public stagings, as at the time of the 1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany. It may have readied the American public's mind for the later curtailment of democratic rights through the Patriot Act and the emergence of a

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1 On this topic see Jaap Kooijman, "Bombs Bursting in Air: The Gulf War, 9/11, and the Super Bowl Performances of 'The Star-Spangled Banner' by Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey," in: Ruud Janssens and Rob Kroes, eds., *Post-Cold War Europe, Post-Cold War America* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2004), 178-94.

national security state at the hands of the current Bush administration. In a recent article American philosopher Richard Rorty warned Europeans that institutional changes made in the name of the war on terrorism could bring about the end of the rule of law in both the U.S. and Europe. Remarkably, he forgot to mention that many of these changes had already come to the United States, without much public debate or resistance.<sup>2</sup>

Much as the entire world may have changed in the wake of the Cold War, my focus shall be on the particular ways these changes have affected Europe and the United States, internally as well as in their trans-Atlantic relation. An important aspect is the way Europeans and Americans have begun to redefine each other, in response to a creeping alienation that has affected public opinion and public discourse on both sides of the Atlantic. If increasingly each side appears to the other as “Other,” as more alien than at any point during the Cold War, the construction of this perspective is not entirely new. It draws on older repertoires of anti-Americanism in Europe, or of anti-Europeanism in the United States, as illustrated by Secretary Rumsfeld’s snide reference to “old Europe.” Yet there may be a new, and more ominous, ring to these revived repertoires. They may also strike responsive chords among people who previously thought they were free from such adversarial sentiments.

In what follows I wish to explore this new resonance. It is partly a personal account, an attempt at introspection, tracing emotional and affective shifts in the way I perceive and experience America. Let me begin with a necessary proviso. Recently, in a piece in the French newspaper *Le Monde*,<sup>3</sup> Alfred Grosser reminded us that one need not be anti-American for opposing America’s foreign policy, nor an anti-Semite or anti-Zionist for taking Israeli government policy to task. He is not the first to make the point, nor will he be the last. The point bears making time and time again. Too often the cry of anti-Americanism or anti-Semitism is used as a cheap debating trick to silence voices of unwelcome criticism. Like Grosser I have studied forms of anti-Americanism for years, trying to understand what triggers it, trying to understand the logic of its inner structure, while looking at it from a rather Olympian height. More often than not the subject had

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2 Richard Rorty, “Post-Democracy,” *London Review of Books* (1 April 2004). In a spirited response, as yet unpublished, Tomas Mastnak, currently a fellow at the International Center for Advanced Studies at New York University took Rorty to task for ignoring recent trends in the United States.

3 Alfred Grosser, “Les hors-la-loi,” *Le monde*, Friday, 18 April 2003. (reprinted in *Le monde, Sélection hebdomadaire*, (no. 2842, 26 April 2003) p.8.

seemed more meaningfully connected to the non-American settings where it appeared than to America itself. But like Grosser I now feel the need to make a point that had for so long seemed obvious. He and I and many others now feel a stronger urge to take our distance from the directions that American foreign policy is taking, and ironically are now confronting the charge that we have become anti-American. A topic of intellectual and scholarly interest has now assumed the poignancy of a private dilemma. Grosser and I and others know we have not turned anti-American, while having become critical of the turn American policies have taken. We are now facing the question of when a stance critical of specific American policies becomes anti-American. For that shift to occur, more is needed than disagreement, however vehement. Anti-Americanism typically proceeds from specific areas of disagreement to larger frameworks of rejection, seeing particular policies or particular events as typical of a more general image of America. Anti-Americanism in that sense is mostly reductionist, seeing only the simplicity of the cowboy and Texas provincialism in President George W. Bush's response to terrorism, or the expansionist thrust of American capitalism in Bush's Middle-East policies. And so on, and so forth. Entire repertoires of stereotyped Americas can be conjured up to account for any contemporary trans-Atlantic disagreements.

To the extent that for people like Grosser and me the topic of anti-Americanism has come home to roost, the following section illustrates the before-and-after quality of my involvement with the topic. It is in part a personal account of my attempts to keep my feelings of alienation and anger over recent trends in America's foreign policy from alienating me from America more generally. It is the report of a balancing act.

I happened to be in the United States on the dismal day of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. I had flown in from Washington DC to Logan Airport in Boston the previous evening, hours before knife-wielding terrorists highjacked civilian airplanes taking off from Logan. I stood transfixed in front of the television screen, impotently watching the second plane crash into the second of Manhattan's Twin Towers, then seeing them implode—almost in slow motion, as I remember it. A year later I was back in the United States, watching how Americans remembered the events of the year before in a moving, simple ceremony. The list of names was being read of all those who lost their lives in the

towering inferno of the World Trade Center. Their names appropriately reflect what the words *World Trade Center* conjure up; they are names of people from all over the world, from Africa, the Middle East, the Far East, the Pacific, Latin America, Europe, and of course North America—people of many cultures and many religions. Again the whole world was watching, and I suddenly realized that something remarkable was happening. The American mass media recorded an event staged by Americans. Americans powerfully re-appropriated a place where a year ago international terrorism was in charge. They literally turned the site into a *lieu de mémoire*. They were in the words of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, read again on this occasion, consecrating the place. They imbued it with the sense and meaning of a typically American scripture. It is the language that, for over two centuries, has defined America’s purpose and mission in the ringing words of freedom and democracy.

I borrow the words “American scripture” from Michael Ignatieff. He used them in a piece he wrote for a special issue of *Granta*.<sup>4</sup> He is one of twenty-four writers from various parts of the world who contributed to a section entitled “What We Think of America.” Ignatieff describes American scripture as “the treasure house of language, at once sacred and profane, to renew the faith of the only country on earth (...) whose citizenship is an act of faith, the only country whose promises to itself continue to command the faith of people like me, who are not its citizens.” Ignatieff is a Canadian. He describes a faith and an affinity with American hopes and dreams that many non-Americans share. Yet, if it was the point of *Granta*’s editors to explore the question of “Why others hate us, Americans,” Ignatieff’s view is not of much help. In the outside world after 9/11, as *Granta*’s editor, Ian Jack, reminds us, there was a wide-spread feeling that “Americans had it coming to them”, that it was “good that Americans now know what it’s like to be vulnerable.” For people who share such views American scripture deconstructs into hypocrisy and willful deceit. They may well see their views confirmed now that America is engaged in an occupation of Iraq, advertised as an intervention to bring democracy to that country, while in fact engaging in acts that may well be war crimes in terms of international treaties that count the U.S. among its co-signatories.

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4 Michael Ignatieff, “What we think of America,” *Granta*, 77 (Spring 2002), 47-50.

There are many signs in the recent past of people's views of America shifting in the direction of disenchantment and disillusionment. Sure enough, there were fine moments when President Bush rose to the occasion and used the hallowed words of American scripture to make it clear to the world and his fellow-Americans what terrorism had truly attacked. The terrorists' aim had been more than symbols of American power and prowess. It had been the very values of freedom and democracy that America sees as its foundation. These were moments when the president literally seemed to rise above himself. But it was never long before he showed a face of America that had already worried many long-time friends and allies during Bush's first year in office.

Even before September 11th, the Bush administration had signaled its retreat from the internationalism that had consistently inspired U.S. foreign policy since World War II, if not before. Ever since Woodrow Wilson American scripture had also come to imply the vision of a world order that would forever transcend the lawlessness of international relations. Many of the international organizations that now serve to regulate inter-state relations and give legitimacy to international actions bear a markedly American imprint, and spring from American ideals and initiatives. President Bush Sr., in spite of his avowed aversion to the "vision thing," nevertheless deemed it essential to speak of a New World Order when at the end of the Cold War Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait seemed to signal a relapse into a state of international lawlessness. Bush Jr. takes a narrower, national-interest view of America's place in the world. In an un-abashed unilateralism he has moved United States foreign policy away from high-minded idealism and the arena of international treaty obligations. He is actively undermining the fledgling International Criminal Court in The Hague, rather than taking a leadership role in making it work. He displays a consistent unwillingness to play by rules internationally agreed and to abide by decisions reached by international bodies that the United States itself has helped set up. He squarely places the United States above or outside the reach of international law, seeing himself as the sole and final arbiter of America's national interest.

After September 11th this outlook has only hardened. The overriding view of international relations in terms of the war against terrorism has led the United States to ride roughshod over its own Constitutional protection of civil rights as well as over

international treaty obligations under the Convention of Geneva in the ways it handles individuals, US citizens among them, suspected of links to terrorist networks. Seeing anti-terrorism as the one way to define who is with America or against it, president Bush takes forms of state terrorism, whether in Russia against the Chechens, or in Israel against the Palestinians, as so many justified anti-terrorist efforts. He gives them his full support. He calls Sharon a “man of peace” and has pre-empted future negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis by supporting strategic Israeli positions regarding the Palestinians’ rights of return under international law, or Israeli settlement of occupied Palestinian land, which is against international law. If Europeans beg to differ and wish to take a more balanced view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Bush administration and many op-ed voices in the United States blame European anti-Semitism.

This latter area is probably the one where the dramatic, if not tragic, drifting apart of America and Europe comes out most starkly. It testifies to a slow separation of the terms of public debate. Thus, to give an example, in England the chief rabbi, Jonathan Sacks,<sup>5</sup> said that many of the things Israel did to the Palestinians flew in the face of the values of Judaism. “(They) make me feel very uncomfortable as a Jew.” He had always believed, he said, that Israel “must give back all the land (taken in 1967) for the sake of peace.” Peaceniks in Israel, like Amos Oz, take similar views. Even more remarkably, in the wake of the recent rampage of the Israeli army in the Gaza strip that left 1600 Palestinians homeless, Tommy Lapid, the justice minister and the only Holocaust survivor in the Israeli government, declared that the house demolitions were inhumane. As the *Guardian Weekly* quoted him, he said: “The demolition of houses in Rafah must stop. It is not humane, not Jewish, and causes us grave damage in the world. At the end of the day, they will kick us out of the United Nations, try those responsible in the international court in The Hague, and no one will want to speak to us.”<sup>6</sup> Many in Europe, Jews and non-Jews alike, would agree. And they have the chance to do so, because Israeli voices like Lapid’s are being aired in the European press. Leading quality newspapers, in France, in England, in Germany, as well as in other European countries, do what top-notch journalism is all about: to write contemporary history as it unfolds, with all its welcome and unwelcome sides. Leading journalists as well as

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5 See the interview in the *Guardian* on August 27th, 2003.

6 *Guardian Weekly*, May 28-June 3, 2004, p. 7.

editorial writers are not loath to say the unwelcome things and confront their readers with all the tragic complexity of life in the Middle East.

Yet it would be hard to hear similar views expressed in the United States other than in the U.S. equivalent of the Soviet Samizdat voice of dissent: an equivalent that avails itself of the Internet for the spirited exchange of dissenting views. In the public realm there is a closing of ranks, among American Jews, the religious right, opinion leaders, and Washington political circles, behind the view that everything Israel does to the Palestinians is done in legitimate self-defense against acts of terrorism. Yet, clearly, if America's overriding foreign-policy concern is the war against terrorism, one element tragically lacking in public policy statements of its Middle-East policy is the attempt to look at themselves through the eyes of Arabs, or more particularly Palestinians. A conflation seems to have occurred between Israel's national interest and that of the United States, as in the case of Richard Perle, foreign policy guru in Washington government circles, who did not see any conflict of interest (personal or national) in drafting policy documents for Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party in Israel in 1997. Both countries, at the official level, share a definition of the situation that blinkers them to rival views more openly discussed in Europe.

Among the pieces in *Granta* is one by a Palestinian writer, Raja Shehadeh. He reminds the reader that "today there are more Ramallah people in the US than in Ramallah. Before 1967 that was how most Palestinians related to America—via the good things about the country that they heard from their migrant friends and relations. After 1967, America entered our life in a different way." The author goes on to say that the Israeli occupation policy of expropriating Arab land to build Jewish settlements and roads to connect them, while deploying soldiers to protect settlers, would never have been possible without "American largesse." But American assistance, Shehadeh continues, did not stop at the funding of ideologically motivated programs. In a personal vignette, more telling than any newspaper reports, Shehadeh writes: "Last July my cousin was at a wedding reception in a hotel on the southern outskirts of Ramallah when an F16 fighter jet dropped a hundred-pound bomb on a nearby building. Everything had been quiet. There had not been any warning of an imminent air attack. ... Something happened to my cousin that evening. ... He felt he had died and was surprised afterwards to find he was still alive. ... He did not hate America. He studied there. ... Yet when I

asked him what he thought of the country he indicated that he dismissed it as a lackey of Israel, giving it unlimited assistance and never censoring its use of US weaponry against innocent civilians.” The author concludes with these words: “Most Americans may never know why my cousin turned his back on their country. But in America the parts are larger than the whole. It is still possible that the optimism, energy and opposition of Americans in their diversity may yet turn the tide and make America listen.”

The current Bush administration, with its pre-emptive strategy of taking out opponents before they can harm the US at home or abroad, in much the same way that Israeli fighter jets assassinate alleged Palestinian terrorists, in their cars, homes, and backyards, without bothering about due process or collateral damage, is not an America that one may hope “to make listen.” Who is not for Bush is against him. Well, so be it. Many Europeans have chosen not to be bullied into sharing the Bush administration’s view of the world. They may not command as many divisions as Bush, they surely can handle the “divisions” that Bush—the man who in the 2000 election campaign had portrayed himself as a uniter, not a divider—has inflicted on the Atlantic community, if not on Europe itself.

If there is division now in the way that many Europeans “read” the events in the Middle East compared to Americans, it is surely a matter of different exposure to the daily news, which in Europe is presented less selectively, and in a less biased way. Even today, a full year after President Bush declared the Iraqi mission “accomplished,” many American reporters in Iraq voluntarily embed themselves for their own safety in U.S. Marine encampments. As one correspondent, Pamela Constable of *The Washington Post*, described her experience: “I quickly became part of an all-American military microcosm.”<sup>7</sup> As Michael Massing argues in a piece in *The New York Review of Books*, if US news organizations truly want to get inside events in Iraq, there’s a clear step they could take: incorporating more reporting and footage from international news organizations. Arabic-language TV stations have a wide presence on the ground. European outlets like the BBC, the *Guardian*, *The Financial Times*, *The Independent*, and *Le Monde* have Arabic-speaking correspondents with close knowledge of the Middle East. Reuters, The Associated press, and Agence France-Presse have many correspondents stationed in places where US organizations do not. As Michael Massing

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7 The quotation is by Michael Massing, “Unfit to Print?” *New York Review of Books*, LI (11) June 24, 2004, p. 8.

writes in conclusion of his piece: “In the current climate, of course, any use of Arab or European material—no matter how thoroughly edited and checked—could elicit charges of liberalism and anti-Americanism. The question for American journalists is whether they really want to know what the Iraqis themselves, in all their complexity, are thinking and feeling.”<sup>8</sup> It is a charge against a blinkered and parochial American journalism that is more generally made in European attempts at fathoming the depths of the divide between American and European public discourse.<sup>9</sup> A free press, as the highly regarded author and war correspondent Philip Knightley noted in *Index on Censorship*, would not reduce the post-September 11 debate to “abuse, incitement, personal attacks, inflammatory accusation and intimidation until many a commentator and intellectual, the very people whose voices we want to hear, have been cowed into silence.”<sup>10</sup> Or driven underground, we might add, into the American Internet form of Samizdat dissent.

But there may also be a deeper force at work. Tellingly, the Guardian referred to Tommy Lapid as the sole Holocaust survivor in the current Israeli government. If World War II memories may have resurfaced in his reading of the Gaza events, something similar may be at work on a more general scale among European audiences. Photographs from Palestine or Iraq may well bring back memories of German retaliatory action against villages in Europe, they may also bring back remembered photographs of World War II atrocities used so powerfully in the education of Europeans regarding the enormity of Nazi rule. They trigger a submerged reservoir that Europeans do not share with Americans. Yet this basic difference need not drive the two sides of the Atlantic apart. When Europeans saw their tragic history repeat itself in the 1990’s Balkan Wars, in the end united action under NATO auspices put an end to the atrocities perpetrated there. Americans and Europeans in the end could share a

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8 Idem, p. 10.

9 See, e.g., the chapter “America and the World as America,” in: Ziauddin Sardar and Meryll Wyn Davies, *Why Do People Hate America?* (Cambridge: ICON Books, 2002) Similar best-selling indictments, in languages other than English, of America’s recent course in world politics and the failure of the American press to take an independent and critical position, are e.g., Hans Leyendecker, *Die Lügen des Weissen Hauses: Warum Amerika einen Neuanfang braucht* [The Lies of the White House: Why America Needs a New Start] (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2004), Karel van Wolferen, *De ondergang van een wereldorde* [The Demise of a World Order] (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Contact, 2003), or Denise Artaud, *L’Amérique des néoconservateurs: L’Empire a-t-il un avenir?* (Paris: Editions Ellipses, 2004).

10 Philip Knightley, “Losing Friends and Influencing People,” *Index on Censorship*, January 2002, 31 (1), pp. 146-55.

reading in terms of crimes against humanity. Precisely such a shared reading of events in the Middle East and their implications for foreign policy seems to be lacking. A widely shared sense of outrage among Europeans, fed by the daily exposure to pictures and news reports from the Middle East, translates into impotent anger at an American Middle-East policy seen as lacking balance and fairness.

There has been a resurgence of open anti-Americanism in Europe and elsewhere in the world. Not least in the Middle East, the area that has brought us Osama Bin Laden and his paranoid hatred of America, and of the West more generally. But if he can still conflate the two—America *and* the West—why can't we? If Raja Shehadeh still holds hopes of an America that one can make listen, why don't we? Let us face it: We are all Americans, but sometimes it is hard to see the Americans we hold dear in the Americans that hold sway. Those are the dangerous moments when clashing policy views may assume the contours of deeper, more fundamental differences—when difference translates into incompatibility, and the face of just one president may seem to reflect an America that has changed its face more permanently and fundamentally.

What different kind of face could that be? As some see it, it may have begun to show the effects of long-term cultural trends that increasingly set America apart from Europe. According to the *World Values Survey*, a long-term survey research project of the University of Michigan, the over-all picture is ambivalent.<sup>11</sup> America consistently scores as high as or higher than European countries when it comes to values to do with political or economic freedoms. Americans and Europeans share ideas of democracy and freedom and have a common interest in defending those ideas. But the Michigan project also looked at a different set of values and ranks countries along a conceptual axis ranging from traditionalism to secularism. Traditionalism comprises those views that give central place to religion, family, and country. At the other end we find the secular-rational values that emphasize individual choice in matters of life style and individual emancipation from older frameworks of affiliation such as the church or the fatherland. America's position on this scale is exceptional among Western countries. It leans much more strongly towards the traditionalist end of the scale than European countries (with the exception of Ireland). Americans are the most patriotic of Western nations: 72% claim to be “very proud” of their country, thus putting themselves

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11 Ronald L. Inglehart, ed., *Human Values and Social Change: Findings from the World Values Surveys* (International Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology, 89).

alongside such countries as India and Turkey. Religion—according to the survey the single most important gauge of traditionalism—positions Americans closer to Nigerians and Turks than to Swedes or Germans. And the differences with North-Western European countries have, if anything, only increased. Since the first survey, in 1981, America has grown more traditional, Europe less. Yet in terms of the other set of values, those of democracy and freedom, they have moved in tandem.

From these survey data America appears as a country of a cultural ambivalence all its own, in an evolving ideosyncratic symbiosis of traditionalism and modernism. The historical dynamics of this symbiosis, with the growing influence of traditionalism, may well have contributed to the mutual alienation between Europe and America. Public discourse on either side of the Atlantic is losing its shared terms of reference. America's political establishment has long been the safe haven of a secular, Enlightenment world view which it shared with political elites in Europe. Slowly but surely, however, traditionalism has made inroads into America's centers of policy-making. Of the two main political parties, the Republican Party has targeted its political strategy toward the incorporation of the traditionalist segment among the electorate. The strategy is two-pronged. Contemporary traditionalism has thrived on the ongoing culture war against anything connected to the life style revolution of the 1960s. Its anti-modernism may remind us of an earlier high water mark of traditionalism in the 1920s, forever epitomized in the anti-Darwinian Scopes (or "monkey") trial. At the time it may have seemed like traditionalism's last hurrah. Yet with great organizational acumen it has made a remarkable come-back, waging a cultural war on the forces of moral relativism and libertarianism unleashed in the 1960s. Having gotten its act together politically it offers itself as a tempting electoral bloc to the Republican Party. Yet the Republican Party is not solely the passive recipient of such support. It has chosen actively to play on the cultural fears of the traditionalists, posturing as the champion of all those who see gay marriage, abortion, divorce and more such moral issues as defining the political agenda, while casting the Democrats as representing moral depravity.

If we can discern two different Americas—the one modern and secular, the other centered on traditional values—they seem to coincide with one or the other of the two main parties. America seems to be split down the middle, with its two halves cohabiting

in delicate balance. Visiting Europeans, journalists and diplomats among them, cannot fail to notice the wide-spread alienation from the Bush administration precisely based on a cultural rift as outlined here. This view has become common coinage in press commentaries, in *Le Monde* in France, in *The Guardian* in England, in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* in Germany, to name just three of the more influential, opinion-forming newspapers in Europe.

Affiliating with the urbane and modern America, as many Europeans are wont to do, they may tend to exaggerate the “moral issues” divide as the single most important determining factor in the Republican Party’s electoral strength. However, exit poll and public opinion data may well suggest that fear of a different sort has assured Bush’s re-election.<sup>12</sup> Against the backdrop of the war on terror, keeping its ugly face from the general public, yet cynically manipulating alarm stages, casting Bush as the decisive war leader while painting the opponent as a flip-flopper, the Republican Party’s electoral strategy has successfully managed to rally those voting on their fears behind it. There is an Orwellian *1984* quality about this, with ongoing low-level warfare and scare-mongering preparing a population to surrender their democratic freedoms.

The highly partisan nature of such recent trends may remind Europeans that anti-Americanism is not the point. We may believe we recognize a generic Americanism in any particular American behavior, be it cultural or political. Yet the range of such behavior is simply too wide—ranging in culture from the sublime to the vulgar, and in politics from high-minded internationalism to narrow nationalism—to warrant any across-the-board rejection. Anti-Americanism, if we choose to retain the term at all, should be seen as a weak and ambivalent complex of anti-feelings. It does not apply but selectively, never extending to a total rejection of both forms of Americanism: the cultural and the political. Thus we can have either of two separate outcomes; an anti-Americanism rejecting cultural trends which are seen as typically American, while allowing of admiration for America’s energy, innovation, prowess, and optimism, or an anti-Americanism in reverse, rejecting an American political creed that for all its missionary zeal is perceived as imperialist and oppressive, while admiring American culture, from its high-brow to its pop varieties. These opposed directions in the critical thrust of anti-Americanism often go hand in hand with opposed positions on the

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<sup>12</sup> Ira Chernus, [http://www.tomdispatch.com/index.mhtml?pid=2068\\_](http://www.tomdispatch.com/index.mhtml?pid=2068_)

political spectrum. The cultural anti-Americanism of those rising in defense of Europe's cultural identities is typically on the conservative right wing, whereas the political anti-Americanism of the Cold War and the war in Vietnam typically occurred on the left. Undoubtedly the drastic change in America's position on the world stage since World War II has contributed to this double somersault. Since that war America has appeared in a radically different guise, as much more of a potent force in every-day life in Europe and the larger world than ever before.

As we all know, there is a long history that illustrates Europe's long and abiding affinity with America's daring leap into an age of modernity. It shared America's fascination with the political modernity of republicanism, of democracy and egalitarianism, with the economic modernity of progress in a capitalist vein, and with an existential modernity that saw Man, with a capital M and in the gender-free sense of the word, as the agent of history, the molder of his social life as well as of his own individual identity and destiny. It was after all a Frenchman, Crèvecoeur, who on the eve of American independence pondered the question of "What, then, is the American, this new Man." A long line of European observers have, in lasting fascination, commented on this American venture, seeing it as a trajectory akin to their own hopes and dreams for Europe.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, French immigrants in the United States, in order to legitimize their claims for ethnic specificity, have always emphasized the historical nexus of French and American political ideals, elevating Lafayette alongside George Washington to equal iconic status.<sup>14</sup>

But as we also know, there is an equally long history of a French, and more generally European, awareness of American culture taking directions that were seen as a threat to European ways of life and views of culture. Whether it was Tocqueville's more sociological intuition of an egalitarian society breeding cultural homogeneity and conformism, or later views that sought the explanation in the economic logic of a free and unfettered market, the fear was of an erosion of the European cultural landscape, of European standards of taste and cultural value. As I have argued elsewhere, the French were not alone in harboring such fears,<sup>15</sup> but they have been more consistently adamant

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13 I may refer the reader to my survey of such French views of American modernity. See Rob Kroes, *Them and Us: Questions of Citizenship in a Globalizing World* (University of Illinois Press, 2000), chapter 9.

14 See, e.g., Annick Fouquier, *Le rêve californien: Migrants français sur la côte Pacifique (XVIIIe-XXe siècles)*. (Paris, 1999).

15 See my *If You've Seen One, You've Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture*. (University

in making the case for a defense of their national identity against a threatening process of Americanization. The very word is a French coinage. It was Baudelaire who, on the occasion of the 1855 *Exposition Universelle de Paris*, spoke of modern man, set on a course of technical materialism, as “tellement américanisé ... qu’il a perdu la notion des différences qui caractérisent les phénomènes du monde physique et du monde moral, du naturel et du surnaturel.”<sup>16</sup> The Goncourt brothers’ *Journal*, from the time of the second exposition in 1867, refers to “L’exposition universelle, le dernier coup à ce qui est l’américanisation de la France.”<sup>17</sup> As these critics saw it, industrial progress ushered in an era where quantity would replace quality and where a mass culture feeding on standardization would erode established taste hierarchies. There are echoes of Tocqueville here, yet the eroding factor is no longer the egalitarian logic of mass democracy but the logic of industrial progress. In both cases, however, whatever the precise link and evaluating angle, America had become the metonym for unfettered modernity, like a Prometheus unbound.

These longer lines of anti-Americanism, cultural and political, are alive and well today. And often the two blend into one. Whenever Europeans, particularly young ones dressed in blue jeans and T-shirts, rise in protest against American interventions on the world stage, they go out and smash the windows of a nearby McDonald’s (and there is always a McDonald’s nearby). As an icon of America’s global presence, it represents in the eyes of protesters America’s cultural imperialism, but it serves equally well as an emblem of political imperialism. The protest is facile and inarticulate, yet it serves to make a point against American power seen as overbearing and unresponsive. But how about the recent surge of anti-Europeanism in the United States?

Given Europe’s daring post-World War II venture in the construction of a European Union, inventing proto-federalist forms in the search for a supra-national Europe, how do we account for the recent resurgence of anti-Europeanism in the United States? Having promoted and supported this European evolution for many decades, why have so many American opinion leaders now turned anti-European? In the vitriolic vituperation that has recently set the tone of trans-Atlantic exchanges leading American

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of Illinois Press, 1996)

16 Quoted in: D. Lacorne, J Rupnik, and M.F. Toinet, eds., *L’Amérique dans les têtes* (Paris, 1986), 61.

17 Quoted in *ibid.*, 62.

voices discard as the “Old Europe” those countries that criticize the drift of American foreign policy, while hailing other countries as the “New Europe” that are willing to follow in America’s footsteps. Robert Kagan contributed to this rising anti-Europeanism in the United States when he paraphrased the dictum that men are from Mars, women from Venus. As he chose to present the two poles, Americans now are the new Martians, while Europeans are the new Venutians. Never mind the gendering implied in his view that Europeans are collectively engaged in a feminine endeavor when they pursue the new, transnational and cosmopolitan Europe. He does make an astute point, though, when he describes the European quest as Kantian, as an endeavor to create a transnational space where laws and civility rule. As Kagan sees it, though, the Europeans are so self-immersed that they are forgetful of a larger world that is Hobbesian, not Kantian, and is a threat to them as much as to the United States. To the extent that Europeans still involve themselves in the larger world they tend to emphasize peace-keeping operations rather than pre-emptive military strikes.<sup>18</sup>

Kagan and many others tend to forget that it has taken the United States about a hundred years to find and test its institutional forms and build a nation of Americans from people flooding to its shores from all over the world. It could only have done so while turning its back to the world, in self-chosen isolationism, under the protective umbrella of a Pax Britannica. Europe has had only some forty years to turn its gaze inward when it engaged in shaping the contours of a new Europe. During those years it enjoyed in its turn the protection of an umbrella, provided this time by the Pax Americana. This constellation came to an end along with the Cold War. Yet only then could the European construction fully come into its own, conceiving of the new Europe on the scale of the entire continent. It is a tremendous challenge and Europe needs time to cope with it. If it succeeds it may well serve as a model to the world, a rival to the American ideal of transnationalism, of constituting a nation of nations. If they are rival models, they are at the same time of one kind. They are variations on larger ideals inspiring the idea of Western civilization and find their roots in truly European formative moments in history, in the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment. Larry Siedentop places the formative moment even earlier in time, coinciding with the rise of a Christian view of the universal equality of mankind vis-à-

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003)

vis God. As he presents it, the formative moment consisted in universalizing a religious view that in Judaism was still highly particularist, claiming an exceptionalist relation between God and the people of Israel.<sup>19</sup> This shared heritage inspired the first trans-Atlantic readings of what the terrorist attack of 9/11 signified. It was seen as an onslaught on the core values of a shared civilization. How ironic, if not tragic, then, that before long the United States and Europe parted ways in finding the proper response to the new threat of international terrorism.

As for the United States, the first signs of its farewell to internationalism in foreign policy—to its Wilsonianism, if you wish—and to its pioneering role in designing the institutional and legal framework for peaceful inter-state relations in the world, had, as I pointed out before, actually preceded 9/11. No longer does the Bush administration conceive of the United States as the *primus inter pares*, setting the guidelines for collective action while seeking legitimacy for action through treaties and United Nations resolutions. As the one hegemon on the world stage it now feels free to pursue its national interest through policies that one can only describe as unilateralist. It may seem like a throwback to the time of nation state sovereignty, a stage of history that Europe is struggling to transcend. Unspectacular and cumbersome as the European project may seem, it is already rich in achievement. It has brought together long-time enemies like Germany and France, it has admitted as democratic member states nations that quite recently knew fascist dictatorships, like Italy, Spain, and Portugal, or that were under the heel of military dictators, like Greece. It recently admitted nations that had lived under Communist rule since World War II. Turkey, a long-time member of NATO and since 1949 a member of the Council of Europe and subscriber to the European Convention on Human Rights, is now busy getting its house in democratic order so as to qualify for membership of the European Union.

If the European project is successful—and this means the inclusion of Turkey—Europe, I strongly believe, would offer a model to the world, particularly the world of Islam or for that matter the state of Israel, of a civil and democratic order, multi-national and multi-cultural, far more tempting than the version of democracy brought under American auspices through pre-emptive military invasion. Those in support of what the United States are pursuing in Iraq, blithely call it a neo-Wilsonianism. I beg to differ. If

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19 Larry Siedentop, *Democracy in Europe* (London: Penguin Books, 2000) 190, 195, 198.

there is a neo-Wilsonian promise, it is held by the new Europe, not the current Bush administration.

In the European repertoire of the cultural critique of America, one observation may have gained in poignancy. Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre in France, or Oswald Spengler in Germany, have been among those who noted an absence in America of the European sense of the tragic. In the blithe meliorism of the American project to bring democracy to the Middle East, what is lacking is the awareness that the active pursuit of good ends may well result in achieving its opposite. As in classic Greek tragedy, the Gods may strike with blindness those they wish to destroy. In the case of America's forward defense of democracy in Iraq, though, the blindness may be self-inflicted, as if its leaders were in a pathological state of denial. When the shocking pictures of systematic humiliation of Iraqi prisoners entered the public realm, President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld dismissed the acts as un-American. If this is what Americans did, it is not what Americans would do. America is inherently good.<sup>20</sup> Among many others, Romano Prodi, president of the European Commission in Brussels, begged to differ. Never one to mince words, he affirmed that the Iraq tortures were war crimes, which, for him, made it difficult to see the American presence in Iraq as a peace mission. Others, of a subtler cast of mind, expressed similar views. Thus, in an interview in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on the occasion of his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday,<sup>21</sup> German philosopher Jürgen Habermas testified to his disillusionment and disenchantment with the current U.S. administration and its standard bearers. The experience was all the more painful since, as he acknowledged, he could not have come into his own as a philosopher of public space and democratic debate without the impact of America's pluralist liberalism and its philosophy of pragmatism. Ever since he was sixteen, his political ideas had been nourished by the American enlightenment ideals, thanks to a sensible reeducation policy in the postwar years of American occupation in Germany. But now, in a recent book on the divided West, he has this to say: "Let us not delude ourselves: The normative

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20 I am paraphrasing the comic Rob Corddry on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*: "It's our principles that matter, our inspiring, abstract notions. Remember: Just because torturing prisoners is something we did, doesn't mean it's something we *would* do." Quoted by Mark Danner in his "The Logic of Torture," *The New York Review of Books*, LI (11) June 24, 2004, p. 74.

21 *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 138 (18 June, 2004): 15.

authority of America lies in shatters.”<sup>22</sup> The official manipulation of public opinion and the rampant patriotic conformism he said he would not have deemed possible in the liberal America that he envisions.

Let me return to the editor-in-chief of *Le Monde*, Jean-Marie Colombani. Like Habermas his feelings about America have followed a curve from affiliation all the way to alienation, only in a shorter time span. In a May, 2004, editorial entitled “Are We All Un-American?”,<sup>23</sup> he comments on Rumsfeld’s facile dismissal of the Abu Ghraib abominations as un-American. If this implies a definition of true Americanism, it is one that Colombani refuses to share. As Colombani put it: “In the wake of September 11, we all felt ourselves to be Americans. Donald Rumsfeld would make us all un-American.” I tend to agree. If the Bush administration shows us the face of a self-righteous, arrogant, and unbridled Americanism, it is an Americanism that I oppose.

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22 J. Habermas, *Der gespaltete Westen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2004). The quotation is from the interview in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

23 *Le Monde Sélection Hebdomadaire*, 22 May, 2004. The French caption reads: “Tous non-américains?”