

## On Anti-Americanism in Europe

By Josef Joffe\*

Most Europeans will argue that anti-Americanism does not exist and that the revulsion, which has swept Western Europe (not Eastern Europe) is not anti-Americanism, but anti-Bushism.

Anti-Bushism is an undeniable fact of European life, as it is a fact of American life - read the opinion pages of the New York Times to get a daily whiff of it. Anti-Americanism must also be distinguished from "policy anti-Americanism," that is opposition to particular American policies.

To attack particular policies - say, the refusal to sign on to Kyoto, the Complete Test Ban or the Landmine Ban - is NOT anti-American. These issues are amenable to rational discourse. To say "I hate what you do" is not the same as saying "I hate YOU." Whether the U.S. defied international law by going to war against Iraq may be true or false. It is certainly not "anti-American."

What, then, is the real thing, as opposed to "policy anti-Americanism" or "anti-Bushism?"

There is a simple test. Any form of "anti-ism" (be it anti-Americanism, anti-Semitism, racism) must satisfy the following conditions:

1. Stereotypization, that is statements of the type: "this is what they are all like");
2. Denigration (the ascription of moral or cultural inferiority to the target group);
3. Omnipotence (e.g., "they control the media, the economy, the world");
4. Conspiracy ("this is what they want to do to us -- sully racial purity or destroy our traditional and better ways");
5. Obsession.

This fifth element has also been emphasized by Russell Berman, and it is quite apropos. An obsession is the compulsive recurrence of ideas and images to the exclusion of others. They spring to mind immediately and leave no room for alternative explanations. Anti-Semites and anti-Americans think about their target groups all the time, and as they do so, they endow them with extraordinary powers and evil intentions.

Above all, the obsessive mindset does not allow passage for contradictory evidence. And so anti-ism becomes unfalsifiable. A classic European indictment of America is its lack of high culture. If you counter

with "Stanford" and "Harvard", the response is: "Yes, but these universities are for the rich only." If you then note that 60 percent of all students get some kind of financial aid, they will argue that this is how U.S. capitalism co-opts the best and the brightest of the lower classes. If you retort that more kids in an American age cohort go to university than in Europe, they will fire back: "But the vast majority of U.S. universities is worthless." If you point to the disproportionate number of American Nobel Prize winners, they will say: "But these are mostly foreigners."

This is the general structure of an anti-American discourse: It is a ballet of shifting grounds and unfalsifiable denigration.

In other words, it is not the facts that create anti-ism, but anti-ism that creates and selects its own facts. So much for definitions. Now to the second issue: the roots. Whither anti-Americanism? I would offer three answers.

One is American power. Unlike Jews and Blacks, America is truly powerful. It is present everywhere. It calls the shots, bends the rules and uses its power, especially military power, quite liberally. This instills fear in the lesser denizens of the planet and triggers feelings of inferiority. One way to deal with inferiority is by way of compensation. Hence, the posture of moral superiority Europeans like to assume vis-à-vis America, for instance: "They have the clout, but we have the culture. They throw their weight around, we submit to international institutions, we are virtuous citizens of the world, they are the biggest rogue state of them all."

A second root of anti-Americanism, noted since the beginnings of the Republic, is America as steamroller of global modernization. America forces the rest to adapt and to compete, thus attacking traditional power and status structures. Naturally, the Europeans don't like this, and so they will rail against unbridled capitalism, rootlessness and social injustice as they hold up their superior ways. This is the oldest trop in the history of anti-Americanism; it has re-emerged with a vengeance in this age of rampant globalization, which is conflated with pernicious capitalism, which is, in turn, identified with America.

A third root of anti-Americanism is seduction. While so many hate America, even more imitate America. The world eats, drinks, dresses, listens, dances and watches American. Even the French are now celebrating Halloween. And while the French occasionally burn down a McDonald's, there are about a thousand of these fast-foot eateries all over France. Starbucks has opened in Rome and Vienna, the two coffee capitals of the world. Half the store signs on High Street in Hamburg are English. English, or more accurately, "Bad English" (with an American accent, of course) is the world's fastest growing language.

So, America is enormously seductive, but you don't have to be a Freudian to know that we hate both the seducer and ourselves for succumbing to him. This is the curse of American "soft power" -- the more it pervades the world, the less the world likes it.

So power, modernity and seduction are, in my book, the three main roots of anti-Americanism. The rest of the world hates America for what it is, and for what it is forcing the rest to become. And that is one of the oldest stories in the world. Great powers are emulated, resented or hated -- they are never loved.

In conclusion: Is there any relationship between anti-Bushism and anti-Americanism? I think there is because the rhetoric and the actions of the first Bush administration added fuel to the pre-existing fire. So my policy advice would be this: The powerful need not throw their weight around. Once you have the biggest stick in the world, why not speak softly? Don't flaunt it. Seek leadership, but remember that the school yard bully is never elected class president.

Given the three enduring roots of anti-Americanism - power, modernity and seduction - anti-Americanism will not disappear from this world. It is a constant. But its edge can be blunted by enveloping great strength in self-restraint. The best advice to America was expressed by Uncle Ben in the blockbuster Spider-Man: "Remember, with great power comes great responsibility." Responsibility is what translates enormous strength into consent and even legitimacy.

\* Publisher, DIE ZEIT (Hamburg); Visiting Professor, Stanford University.

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