

# *Uncouth Nation: Why Europe Dislikes America*

Andrei Markovits

**Editor's Note:** We are pleased to make available extracts from Andrei Markovits' *Uncouth Nation: Why Europe Dislikes America* (Princeton University Press, 2007). This book has been acclaimed on both sides of the Atlantic. Joschka Fischer, former Foreign Minister of Germany, has praised its 'deep insights into anti-Americanism in Europe today' while Michael Walzer has summed up its achievement thus: 'Andrei Markovits does three things in this excellent book: he provides an account of the historical and contemporary forms of European anti-Americanism (and of its close relative, anti-Semitism); he analyzes the roots and causes of this phenomenon; and, best of all, he gives us a running critique of the frequent silliness and malice of the anti-Americans and of their role in fashioning a certain kind, which is not the best possible kind, of pan-European politics.'

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## Preface (extract)

(...) Lastly, there is yet another personal dimension informing this book and project. It pertains to my life-long affinity with the democratic left in Europe and the United States.

There can be no doubt that anti-Americanism has become a kind of litmus test for progressive thinking and identity in Europe and the world (including the United States itself). Just as any self-respecting progressive and leftist in Europe or America, regardless of which political shade, simply had to be on the side of the Spanish Republic in the 1930s, anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism have become the requisite proof of possessing a progressive conviction today. In making this comparison I am not trying to equate the morality of these two tests of progressive character – on the contrary. The high moral legitimacy that support for the Spanish Republic enjoyed on the part of the European and American Left at that time is something that in my view neither anti-Zionism nor anti-Americanism can claim. This example of the interwar-era Spanish Republic merely serves to illustrate the

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similarly potent and almost universal mobilizing power of anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism for today's Left. In the 1930s it was impossible to be regarded as any kind of leftist without having supported the Spanish Republic (with the exception – briefly and after the fact – of those Stalinists during the Hitler-Stalin pact who toed the Comintern line chastising anti-Franco activists as 'premature antifascists'); today it is hard to be accepted as a leftist by other leftists without anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism. Over the last 35 years, a steady anti-Americanism and an uncompromising anti-Zionism which surely not always but most definitely occasionally borders on the anti-Semitic, have become key characteristics that both divide and determine political identity absolutely. They are 'wedge issues' – clear articles of faith or 'deal breakers' – whose importance overshadows, and even negates, many related components of the 'clusters' that characterize such an identity. I can explain this using myself as an illustration: I am an advocate of affirmative action in all realms of public life; a supporter for decades of numerous civil rights organizations, who is in favor of complete equality for women and discriminated ethnic groups, especially blacks, in the United States; I am an opponent of the death penalty; I favor legally recognized marriages for gays and lesbians; I support the right of all women to complete and exclusive autonomy over their bodies, in other words, the right to an abortion; I support unrestricted stem cell research, an issue on which the European Left incidentally shares views that are far closer to those of the much-hated George W. Bush than they are to mine; I favor the Kyoto Climate Protocol and the International Criminal Court, the Ottawa Conventions on the ban of land mines and the International Biological Weapons Convention; I do not want prayers in public schools and oppose charter schools; I favor strict gun control laws and – as an animal rights activist – oppose hunting for sport; I have always supported trade unions in their difficult struggles, always favor increases in the minimum wage, have never broken a strike or crossed a picket line, even when I did not agree with the striking union's demands; I welcome the legalization of marijuana, advocate a more just and socially conscious health care system, desire progressive taxation and a much greater role for the public sector in economic matters; I am a decisive opponent of subsidies for rich American (and European) farmers, deride the exclusivity and price gouging of the pharmaceutical industry, oppose the trafficking in women and the exploitation of children, and am appalled by the erosion of civil liberties in the United States as well as by the shameful situation in Guantanamo and the outrageous abuses in Abu Ghraib prison. I have been a committed supporter of American and German labor, and have been a student and partial, if often critical, admirer of European social democracy and its Green offspring.

In terms of the Israeli – Palestinian conflict, I have always supported the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state and have held views that have been akin to the Israeli peace camp's. I have regularly condemned and opposed certain measures of American foreign policy, regardless of which party needed to be held responsible (whether the Vietnam policy of Democrat Lyndon B. Johnson or the Iraq policy of Republican George W. Bush), and I have therefore – as should be obvious from the above list – positioned myself quite clearly on the left side of the political spectrum in America (and Europe as well). Yet I am increasingly avoided by leftists on both sides of the Atlantic owing solely to the two wedge issues mentioned above. As a reaction against this, I find myself having withdrawn from the established American and European lefts in whose presence I feel increasingly misplaced. I am not writing this to elicit sympathy for my increasing political marginalization but rather to make a point of how central anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism have become to virtually all lefts on both sides of the Atlantic – and beyond.

### Introduction

Any trip to Europe confirms what the surveys have been finding: The aversion to America is becoming greater, louder, more determined. [1] It is unifying West Europeans more than any other political emotion – with the exception of a common hostility toward Israel. In today's West Europe these two closely related antipathies and resentments are now considered proper etiquette. They are present in polite company and acceptable in the discourse of the political classes. They constitute common fare among West Europe's cultural and media elites, but also throughout society itself from London to Athens and from Stockholm to Rome, even if European politicians visiting Washington or European professors at international conferences about anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism are adamant about denying or sugar-coating this reality.

There can be no doubt that many disastrous and irresponsible policies by the Bush administrations, as well as their haughty demeanour and arrogant tone, have contributed massively to this unprecedented vocal animosity on the part of Europeans toward Americans and America. George W. Bush and his administrations' policies have made America into the most hated country of all time. Indeed, they bear responsibility for having created a situation in which anti-Americanism has mutated into a sort of global antinomy, a mutually shared language of opposition to and resistance against the real and perceived ills of modernity that are now inextricably identified solely with America. I have been travelling back and forth

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with considerable frequency between the United States and Europe since 1960, and I cannot recall a time like the present, when such a vehement aversion to everything American has been articulated in Europe. 'There has probably never been a time when America was held in such low esteem on this side of the Atlantic' wrote the distinguished British Political Scientist Anthony King in *The Daily Telegraph* on July 3, 2006, summarizing a survey that revealed a new nadir in the British view of America. No West European country is exempt from this phenomenon – not a single social class, no age group or profession, nor either gender. But this aversion and antipathy reaches much deeper and wider than the frequently evoked 'anti-Bushism.' Indeed, I perceive this virulent, Europe-wide, and global 'anti-Bushism' as the glaring tip of a massive anti-American iceberg.

Anti-Americanism has been promoted to the status of West Europe's *lingua franca*. Even at the height of the Vietnam War, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and during the dispute over NATO's 'Dual Track' decision (to station Pershing and cruise missiles primarily in Germany but in other West European countries as well while negotiating with the Soviet Union over arms reduction), things were different. Each event met with a European public that was divided concerning its position toward America: In addition to those who reacted with opposition and protest, there were strong forces in almost all European countries who expressed appreciation and understanding. In France, arguably Europe's leader over the past fifteen years in most matters related to antipathy toward America, the prospect of stationing American medium-range missiles, especially if they were on German soil, even met with the massive approval of the Left in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This distinguished the French Left, arguably among the most ardently anti-American protagonists anywhere in contemporary Europe, from all of its European counterparts. That America's image was far from hunky dory in the Europe of the mid-1980s but still far exceeded its nadir reached since 9/11 and the Iraq War is attested to by the following passage from a Pew Survey:

The numbers paint a depressing picture. Just a quarter of the French approve of U.S. policies, and the situation is only slightly better in Japan and Germany. Majorities in many countries say America's strong military presence actually increases the chances for war. And most people believe America's global influence is expanding. The latest survey on America's tarnished global image? No, those numbers come from a poll conducted by *Newsweek* . . . in 1983. The United States has been down this road before, struggling with a battered image and drawing little in the way of support even from close allies. But for a variety of reasons, this time it is different:

the anti-Americanism runs broader and deeper than ever before. And it's getting worse. [2]

To be sure, as this study will be careful to delineate, opposition to U.S. policies in no way connotes anti-Americanism. But even in the allegedly halcyon days of pre-1990 West European–American relations, a palpable antipathy to things American on the part of European elites accompanied opposition to policies.

However, the climate between then and now has changed fundamentally. The fact that European elites – particularly conservative ones – have consistently been anti-American since 1776 is one of this book's central themes. But as of October 2001, six to eight weeks after 9/11 and just before the impending American war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, a massive Europe-wide resentment of America commenced that reached well beyond American policies, American politics, and the American government and proliferated in virtually all segments of Western Europe's publics. From grandmothers who vote for the archconservative Bavarian CSU to thirty-year-old socialist PASOK activists in Greece, from Finnish Social Democrats to French Gaullists, from globalization opponents to business managers – all are joining in the ever louder chorus of the anti-Americans. The 'European street' has been more hostile to America than ever before. For the first time, anti-Americanism has entered the European mainstream. [3] If anti-Americanism has been part of the condition humaine in Europe for at least two centuries, it has been since 9/11 that the rise of a hitherto unprecedented, wholly voluntary, and uncoordinated conformity in Western European public opinion regarding America and American politics occurred. I would go so far as to characterize the public voice and mood in these countries as *gleichgeschaltet*, comprising a rare but powerful discursive and emotive congruence and conformity among all actors in state and society. What rendered this *Gleichschaltung* so different from those that accompany most dictatorships was its completely voluntary, thus democratic, nature. Especially leading up to and during the Iraq War, there appeared an almost perfect concordance among a vast majority of European public opinion, the European 'street' by way of the largest demonstrations in European history, the media, most political parties, and many – if certainly not all – European governments. Western Europe spoke loudly and passionately with a unified voice that one rarely, if ever, encountered in such openly contested pluralist democracies.

The Bush administrations' policies have catapulted global and West European anti-Americanism into overdrive. But to understand this 'overdrive,' we need to analyze

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the conditions under which this kind of shift into high gear could occur. This book is intended to make such a contribution. Its aim is to show that the West Europeans' unconditional rejection of and legitimate outrage over abusive and irresponsible American policies – not to mention massive human rights violations a` la Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, secret CIA cells, and others of such ilk – rest on a substantial sediment of hatred toward, disdain for, and resentment of America that has a long tradition in Europe and has flourished apart from these or any policies.

Here, in short, is the book's overall argument: Ambivalence, antipathy, and resentment toward and about the United States have comprised an important component of European culture since the American Revolution at the latest, thus way before America became the world's 'Mr. Big' – the proverbial eight-hundred-pound gorilla – and a credible rival to Europe's main powers, particularly Britain and France. In recent years, following the end of the Cold War and particularly after 9/11, ambivalence in some quarters has given way to outright antipathy and unambiguous hostility. Animosity toward the United States migrated from the periphery and disrespected fringes of European politics and became a respectable part of the European mainstream. These negative sentiments and views have been driven not only – or even primarily – by what the United States does, but rather by an animus against what Europeans have believed that America is. Anti-Americanism has been a core element, indeed at times a dominant one, among European elites for centuries. The presidency of George W. Bush, the American response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and Bush's unilateral decision to commence the war against Iraq all led to a dramatic increase in hostility to the United States in Europe's 'respectable' opinion. Moreover, for the first time since World War II, long-standing elite resentments against the United States fused with popular sentiments to create a kind of political and cultural perfect storm: Short-term crises brought long-standing antipathies to the surface. While the politics, style, and discourse of the Bush administrations – and of George W. Bush as a person – have undoubtedly exacerbated anti-American sentiment among Europeans and fostered a heretofore unmatched degree of unity between elite and mass opinion in Europe, they are not anti-Americanism's cause. Indeed, a change to a center-left administration in Washington, led by a Democratic president, would not bring about its abatement, let alone disappearance.

Chapter 1 features my definition and conceptualization of anti-Americanism. In particular, I argue that anti-Americanism constitutes a particular prejudice

that renders it not only acceptable but indeed commendable in the context of an otherwise welcome development in a discourse that favours the weak.

Chapter 2 presents some historical features of European anti-Americanism in order to demonstrate that all of its present components have been alive and well in Europe's intellectual discourse since the late eighteenth century. In particular, this chapter highlights how integral and ubiquitous the anti-American tropes about Americans' alleged venality, mediocrity, uncouthness, lack of culture, and above all inauthenticity have been to European elite opinion for well over two hundred years.

Chapter 3 features a bevy of examples from many walks of life that highlight the pervasive and quotidian nature of anti-American discourse among European publics. I have collected all my examples from areas outside of what one would conventionally associate with politics precisely to demonstrate that the European animus against things American has little to do with the politics and policies of the Bush administration – or any other administration, for that matter – and is alive and well in realms that *prima facie* have few connections to politics. I consider many examples from diverse topics, such as language, sports, work, higher education, the media, health, law and the judicial system, and miscellaneous items (the presence of Halloween, for instance) in seven West European countries to demonstrate that the antipathy toward America and things American reaches much beyond politics and the discourse of one or two countries alone. By analyzing a bevy of newspaper and magazine articles from the 1990s, I hope to demonstrate that the presence and passion of anti-American discourse among Europeans much preceded the administrations of George W. Bush. The West European media report almost nothing that they associate with America in a neutral, matter-of-fact manner. Most things engender a palpable tone of irritation, derision, annoyance, dismissal. Terms such as 'Americanization' and its equivalents – 'American conditions,' for example – have in the meantime assumed an exclusively pejorative connotation in present European discourse. They have become a *Schimpfwort*, a derogatory term for anything that one wants to discredit and stigmatize even if the issue at hand might have little to do with the real existing America or its conditions.

To show that these *prima facie* innocuous put-downs of American things (so what if one dislikes the alleged 'Americanization' of cricket, of political correctness, of spelling, of antismoking laws, of family life, of business practices) do cumulatively constitute a palpably negative whole, I then proceed to summarize in chapter 4 the

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findings of some key surveys of the recent past that leave no doubt that a majority of Europeans have come to dislike America, if not with massive passion, then surely with a tangible opinion that matters politically.

Anti-Semitism is the subject of chapter 5. Rather than viewing this chapter as an in-depth analysis of anti-Semitism in contemporary Western Europe, I devote attention to this phenomenon solely because anti-Semitism has consistently been such an integral part of anti-Americanism and because the virulence in the hostility to Israel cannot be understood without the presence of anti-Americanism and hostility to the United States. Thus, I see my presentation of anti-Semitism and anti-Israelism as a subset of my larger discussion of anti-Americanism. Anti-Semitism's connection to anti-Americanism appears to be empirically forceful and compelling if conceptually far from necessary or stringent. The same pertains to the relation between anti-Semitism and opposition to Israeli policies, even Israel's existence as a state. While opposition to Israeli policies and to Israel's existence are in and of themselves far from being anti-Semitic in any conceptually stringent manner, both do in reality – and despite protests to the contrary – often include anti-Semitic tropes and moments. These, in turn accompany anti-Americanism. In this syndrome, Israel, due to its association with the United States, is *eo ipso* perceived by its European critics as powerful, with both being mere extensions of one another. Being an American ally and also powerful in its own right renders Israel an obvious target on the part of most European critics who oppose both power in general and American power in particular. But there must be something else at work here as well, because America has many other powerful allies that never receive anywhere near the hostile scrutiny that Israel confronts on a daily basis. No European academic has attempted to boycott British – or for that matter Spanish or French – universities because Britain, Spain, and France are American allies that happen to be very powerful and can easily be construed – certainly from the logic of the sanctity of national liberation that has been so central to the Left since the late 1960s – to occupy foreign land in Ulster, the Basque Country, or Corsica, respectively. So it is not only because Israel is an American ally and powerful that it has so massively irked European elites and publics for decades. Clearly, the fact that Israel is primarily a Jewish state, combined with Europe's deeply problematic and unresolved history with Jews, plays a central role in this singularly difficult relationship. Since this issue invariably accompanies European anti-Americanism and Europe's irritations with America, it had to be considered in this book.



In chapter 6, I conclude my study by arguing that Europe's anti-Americanism has become an essential ingredient in – perhaps even a key mobilizing agent for – the inevitable formation of a common European identity, which I have always longed for and continue to support vigorously, though I would have preferred to witness a different agency in its creation. Anti-Americanism, I argue, has already commenced to forge a concrete, emotionally experienced – as opposed to intellectually constructed – European identity in which Swedes and Greeks, Finns and Italians are helped to experience their still-frail emotive commonality not as 'anti-Americans' but as Europeans, which at this stage constitutes one sole thing: that they are 'non-Americans.' Anti-Americanism will serve as a useful mobilizing agent to create awareness in Europe for that continent's new role as a growing power bloc in explicit contrast to and keen competition with the United States, not only among Europeans but also around the globe. Anti-Americanism has already begun to help create a unified European voice in global politics and will continue to be of fine service to Europe's growing power in a new global constellation of forces in which an increasingly assertive Europe will join an equally assertive China to challenge the United States on every issue that it possibly can. Thus, I argue, for the first time in anti-Americanism's two-century existence among Europe's elites – hitherto particularly pronounced among its cultural and conservative representatives – anti-Americanism has now assumed a 'functional' role of mobilization and in politics. It now matters because it might in fact affect things. Or to use the language of the social sciences: Anti-Americanism in Europe has begun to mutate from the world of having been almost exclusively a 'dependent variable' to becoming an 'independent' one as well.

Two important qualifications need mention as this introduction's closing thoughts. First, anti-Americanism in Europe has always been accompanied by an equally discernable pro-Americanism, which, though less apparent these days, has far from disappeared. From America's 'discovery' by Europeans, it has consistently embodied for them simultaneous opposites: heaven and hell; a desired panacea and a despised abomination; utopia and dystopia; dream and nightmare. Surely, any analysis of Europe's relations with America, or a comprehensive assessment of how Europeans viewed America over the past 250 years, would necessarily have to include pro-Americanism alongside anti-Americanism. But that is not my project here. I am not weighting European anti-Americanism vs. European pro-Americanism in this book. Of course there were eras in European history during which it could easily be argued that pro-American sentiments outweighed anti-American ones. But even during these times – such as after World War II and during the height of the

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Cold War – anti-Americanism never disappeared from European discourse and sentiment. This book is not about the history of European-American relations, nor is it an account of how Europeans perceived America over time. Instead, it focuses solely on the very real phenomenon of the persistence and current accentuation of an antipathy that – I believe, as have others – is worthy of an expose' all its own. While any analysis of the relation between Gentiles and Jews would, by necessity, have to include philo-Semitism alongside anti-Semitism, I believe that the study of the latter all its own is valid. The same pertains to racism. Surely, any solid treatise of relations between or among different ethnic groups or races necessitates a presentation of all aspects of these relations, both positive and negative. However, a study solely of the negative and pejorative – i.e., racism – remains valid in and of itself. The same pertains to a study of anti-Americanism.

Second, this book deals exclusively with the countries of 'Old Europe,' featuring Germany and Britain in particular, with France accorded solid attention as well, and complemented with examples from Spain, Italy, Austria, and Portugal (as well as Greece in chapter 5). Obviously, the Scandinavian and Benelux countries would have been worthy of consideration, but a cursory acquaintance with their views of America allows me to believe that the results presented here would not have been noticeably different. This would not have been the case with Ireland's inclusion since a strong pro-American sentiment continues to prevail on the levels of both elite and mass opinion in that country. However, the book's most serious shortcoming in my view is its complete exclusion of Eastern Europe because all indications point to the strong fact that my findings there – in terms of both the present and the past – would have been diametrically opposite to the ones I encountered in the western half of the continent. In addition to purely pedestrian reasons for this omission, which pertain to my ignorance of any East European language beyond Hungarian and Romanian, and lack of temporal and monetary resources, one methodologically sound argument might at least partially justify this restricted presentation of Europe: Eastern Europeans' overwhelmingly positive views of America stem largely from their having perceived the United States as their sole ally against the much-despised Soviet Union. Thus, for this study, the comparability of contemporary anti-Americanism in France, Germany, and Britain is much more conceptually stringent and theoretically compelling than it would be with Poland, Hungary, and Romania thrown into the mix since all the countries considered in this study have furnished, in a political, economic, cultural, and – except Austria – military alliance with the United States, what was once known as 'the West.' [4]

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### Notes

- [1] By using the term 'America' and 'American' throughout this study to denote the political entity of 'The United States of America,' I beg the indulgence of all readers who reside north or south of the respective borders of the United States and are thus, of course, 'American' though not citizens of the United States. I am using the concepts 'America' and 'American' not in their wider and more accurate geographic meaning but in their much more commonly used manner as representing one country, the United States of America. But particularly in a work on 'anti-Americanism,' I feel justified in doing so since the term itself has always applied 'exclusively' to the United States and not to Canada or Mexico or any other nation in the New World. Many who complain bitterly that the United States has unjustifiably appropriated the label of America have nonetheless gladly allowed that anti-Americanism should refer only to the United States.' James W. Ceaser, 'A Genealogy of Anti-Americanism,' *The Public Interest*, Summer 2003, pp. 3 – 18. Nobody in Europe, with the exception of German speakers, refers to U.S. citizens regularly as 'U.S.-Americans' or has routinely added the qualifier 'US' to virtually anything American; not even the French talk about 'EU-Américains.' I will address this particular German neologism when discussing concrete examples of recent anti-Americanism in Germany later in this book.
- [2] The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 'Anti-Americanism: Causes and Characteristics,' *The Pew Global Attitudes Project* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2003), p. 1.
- [3] Glenn Frankel, 'Sneers from Across the Atlantic: Anti-Americanism Moves to W. Europe's Political Mainstream,' *Washington Post*, February 11, 2003.
- [4] Austria's entire post-World War II existence has been anchored in its bloc-free neutrality, which means that the country has explicitly not entered into any official political and military alliance with the United States. Still, there can be no question that by dint of its strong cultural ties to Germany and Western Europe, and – above all – by virtue of its capitalist economic structure, Austria's neutrality was equidistant from East and West in name only. The realities on the ground placed Austria squarely in the camp of the West and thus the Europe closer to the United States than to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.