



Alexander Stephan. *Americanization and Anti-Americanism: The German Encounter With American Culture After 1945.* Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2004. 256 S. \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57181-673-3.



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Between Attraction and Rejection

Anti-Americanism and Americanization are problematic terms, since they mean so many different things to so many people. Americanization, in particular, is difficult to define, because it concerns political ideas and values (liberal democracy), socioeconomic models (mass production; free market capitalism), and, of course, culture (commercialized mass culture). To complicate things further, Americanization debates in Europe sometimes have little to do with American realities and can be seen more as self-reflexive discussions in which America serves as an almost fictional “other.” Anti-Americanism is similarly difficult to pin down. When does criticism of U.S. foreign policy, for example, amount to anti-Americanism? What criteria can we use? To some, the overwhelmingly negative reaction in Germany to the U.S. intervention in Iraq represents a clear case of anti-Americanism, while others prefer to label it “counter-Americanism” or “anti-Bushism.” This volume, edited by Alexander Stephan (Ohio State University) presents the many different views of both concepts and in the process adds a few new ones. The subtitle of the volume is a little misleading. Instead of presenting particularly German points of view, many of the fifteen contributions

deal with general European-American encounters. Second, several essays are more concerned with political and ideological issues than with “culture.” This is not altogether surprising since they were written in early 2003 at the height of the trans-Atlantic Iraq controversy.

Americanization and Anti-Americanism starts off with a curious essay by Russell A. Berman (Stanford University). Berman tries to explain the causes of anti-Americanism in Germany in highly polemic tones that distort the situation and discredit his conclusions. Berman ignores virtually all existing scholarship on the subject and invents new categories that are unconvincing. His first claim is that “Anti-Americanism is not a response to Americanization” (p. 15). This may indeed be true in some cases, but by making his claim absolute, Berman renders it ridiculous. There exist countless examples of anti-Americanism in reaction to different forms of Americanization: from Fordism to comic books, from Hollywood to fast food. The problem lies with Berman’s understanding of the term Americanization. He seems to think that Americanization always implies an American presence or agency; that it is something “that the

United States does to Germany” (p. 17). This is not the case and several of the other essays could have enlightened Berman on this point. Winfried Fluck’s (Freie Universität Berlin) contribution on “Americanization as Self-Americanization,” for example, makes clear that the scholarly consensus has long moved beyond naïve theories of cultural imperialism that underestimated the ability of audiences to choose and “reappropriate” cultural material and, indeed, to “self-Americanize.” Americanization is not something that has to be forced on foreign peoples; often it is the result of a genuine attraction. The reason for Berman’s flawed argument, then, is not so much ignorance. Rather, it stems from his desire to prove his second claim: that anti-Americanism has little or nothing to do with America. Anti-Americanism, in his view, is “fundamentally an expression of hostility to societies of democratic capitalism” (p. 22). Again, this may apply to some cases or forms of anti-Americanism, but as a general definition it is surely insufficient.

After making his second sweeping claim, Berman posits three main categories of anti-Americanism. He identifies a “predemocratic,” a “communist,” and a “post-democratic” variant. But instead of trying to ground these categories in historical fact, Berman uses only a few examples of German reactions to September 11, almost all taken from Henryk Broder’s *Kein Krieg, Nirgends: Die Deutschen und der Terror*, to substantiate his hypothesis. To show what he means by “pre-democratic” anti-Americanism, for example, he quotes from an interview with German author Martin Walser in which Walser describes how he decided to continue a public reading on September 11, 2001 despite the terrorist attacks.[1] Berman interprets Walser’s statement as “a studied lack of sympathy hiding behind aestheticism as an aristocratic posture” (p. 19). Apart from the fact that this is a rather far-fetched interpretation, it does little to help the reader understand the meaning of “predemocratic anti-Americanism.” Berman, in the end, seems more interested in labelling every manifestation of anti-Americanism as anti-democratic or anti-capitalist than in trying to understand the phenomenon. In the process he does not attempt to hide his contempt for the European Union, which he calls “nondemocratic,” or for Germany, making the absurd accusation that “lingering resentment about the U.S. role in World War II contaminates the German judgment on current foreign policy” (p. 23). Berman’s ill-tempered essay is perhaps permissible as a form of neoconservative punditry, but it should have no place in an academic volume such as the one under review.

Fortunately, the other essays in *Americanization and Anti-Americanism* have more to contribute to our understanding of the European-American encounter. Michael Ermarth (Dartmouth College) argues that in explaining the concerns of many Germans about the direction of American foreign policy coupled with their ambivalence about the American way of life we might be served better by the concept of “counter-Americanism” than anti-Americanism. He traces counter-Americanism back to the occupation years and the early phase of the Federal Republic, when in German Social Democratic and liberal Christian Democratic circles “worries about the excessive tendencies of an immoderate, Americanized way of life” led to the concept of a humane European “third way” (p. 35). It is important to note that proponents of this third way (Ermarth mentions, among others, Wilhelm Röpke, Walter Eucken, Alfred Weber, and Alexander Stow) did not reject liberal democracy or American power in Europe. To call them anti-American, Ermarth argues, would therefore be a “clumsy misnomer” (p. 35). He also shows that their ideas were even to some extent supported by American officials: “a degree of counter-Americanism was recognized as a potential force for positive reconstruction” (p. 39). Volker Berghahn (Columbia University) makes a similar point in his essay “Awkward Relations: American Perceptions of Europe, European Perceptions of America.” He argues that at the beginning of the Cold War “West Europeans increasingly came to accept the United States as the power that had emerged as the hegemon in the West in economic, military and political terms” (p. 243). Crucially, however, this acceptance did not extend to the field of cultural and social values and models. In this context Berghahn points to the European “superiority complex,” a notion he developed at length in his book on Shepard Stone and the Cultural Cold War.[2] A younger generation of Europeans, however, coming of age in the 1950s and heavily influenced by the liberating character of the emerging rock ‘n’ roll and beat culture, left the cultural high ground and increasingly accepted a “much broader definition of culture” (p. 245). Berghahn concludes that over the following decades in a complex process of blending and adaptation a striking amount of “American elements have been absorbed into [European] society and culture” (p. 246). Hence it would be wrong to attribute the current trans-Atlantic friction to “a rejection of American society and culture” (p. 246). In Berghahn’s opinion, the term “anti-Bushism” is therefore far more appropriate than anti-Americanism. He argues that the awkward relations between Europe and the United States will last as long as the U.S. strategic doctrine of pre-emption, made public in

September, 2002, will remain in place.

Richard Pells (University of Texas) makes his by now familiar argument about the “reciprocal relationship between American and European culture.” But he does so with elegance and erudition. Moreover, since in the public forum Americanization is still largely defined as American cultural imperialism, Pells’ point is worth repeating. He argues that American culture has been successful on a global scale, not only because of the large home market and the English language, but because it has adapted and “repackaged” so many foreign ideas and influences. Moreover, since the American public is so heterogeneous, American producers have always been especially adept at creating “messages, images, and story lines that had a broad multicultural appeal” (p. 193). According to Pells, American culture is cosmopolitan rather than imperialistic, and he makes a convincing case indeed providing the reader with multiple examples of European-American cross-fertilization in film, literature and architecture.

Most of the other essays in *Americanization and Anti-Americanism* are case studies by well-known experts in the field. Bernd Greiner (Hamburg Institute for Social Research and University of Hamburg) argues in “Saigon, Nuremberg, and the West” that “German images of America” during the Vietnam War more than anything else “provide a stepping stone to decipher the psychological dimension of German postwar history” (p. 54). In a long and detailed essay Kaspar Maase (University of Tübingen) analyzes how the German broadcasting system has struggled with the notions of high and low culture and how in the end the wishes of the public have led to the self-Americanization of radio and television. Heide Fehrenbach (Northern Illinois University) provides a contribution on the so-called *Mischlingskinder*, or black “occupation children,” in the Federal Republic. It is a well-researched and interesting essay, but some of the broader claims Fehrenbach makes seem a little excessive. In her concluding remarks Fehrenbach states that “the intense focus on interracial fraternization and reproduction in occupied Germany suggests the central importance of race for evaluating interactions with ‘America’ abroad.” And in the same paragraph: “German understandings of the *content* of ‘democratization’ ... were conditioned by the implicitly racialized *context* within which it was delivered” (p. 120). The issue of *Mischlingskinder* offers us some interesting insights into the Federal Republic’s social policies and the German and American discourse on racism, but the material presented in Fehrenbach’s essay does not justify such a far-reaching conclusion.

No fewer than three essays are exclusively concerned with film and television. David Bathrick (Cornell University) deals with what he calls, the “cinematic Americanization of the Holocaust in Germany.” Taking several American productions—from the army film material made after the liberation of the concentration camps in 1945 to the NBC miniseries *Holocaust* and the Hollywood version of *The Diary of Anne Frank*—Bathrick addresses the question how these American productions have changed or influenced the way Germans remember the Holocaust. Sabine Hake (University of Texas at Austin) carefully analyzes the politically motivated but socio-culturally constructed and “highly gendered” anti-Americanism of the East-German DEFA studio Berlin films. Thomas Elsaesser (University of Amsterdam), finally, contributes an excellent overview of the German encounter with Hollywood since 1945, although he sometimes risks losing his reader by his use of an overly elaborate jargon.

The final two essays in *Americanization and Anti-Americanism* were written by two diplomats with extensive experience in European-American Relations. Karsten Voigt, the coordinator of German-American cooperation at the German Federal Foreign Ministry, draws on Joseph Nye’s concept of “Soft Power” to express his concern about the excessive American reliance on military power alone. “For Germans,” Voigt explains, “multilateralism is a must, while for the United States, it presents one of many options” (p. 256). Bowman H. Miller, director of European Analysis in the U.S. State Department, shares Voigt’s concern, although he does not explicitly say so. In a level-headed essay Miller emphasizes that there are still many basic interests and values that bind Germany and America together. It would be a grave mistake, however, to ignore the differences “in attitudes toward the role of the state, the appropriate uses of power, the interpretation and experience of threats, social and criminal justice practices, and international governance and sovereignty” (p. 258). A true representative of his profession, Miller argues that only “diligent diplomacy” and “new avenues of cooperation” can “bridge a widening transatlantic divide” (p. 261).

All in all *Americanization and Anti-Americanism* is a welcome contribution to the growing literature on the European-American encounter and a must for specialists in the field. Despite its shortcomings, the volume presents us with many promising ideas and possibilities for future research.

Notes

[1]. This is the full quotation from the Walser interview: "I had to give a reading in Bamberg [on Sept. 11]. I asked myself whether it would really be appropriate to read from a novel called *The Life of Love*, but the organizer said we should proceed in any case. And then I gave into a whim and said [to the audience]: "The Americans are getting in my way again." The audience was irritated, so I explained that the premiere of my play *Larger than Life Mr. Krott* was scheduled for November 21 1963, but it

was cancelled due to the Kennedy assassination. Then I gave my reading, and afterwards two listeners said to me: "You helped us forget today's events." That was a wonderful experience for me as an author" (pp. 18-19).

[2]. Volker R. Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe: Shepard Stone between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

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