



**Alexander Stephan, ed.** *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, Diplomacy, and Anti-Americanism after 1945*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007. 444 pp. \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-84545-486-9.



**Reviewed by** Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht (University of Cologne)

**Published on** H-GAGCS (November, 2009)

**Commissioned by** Thomas Adam (The University of Texas at Arlington)

## The European Habitus: “Excuse Me, I am not Convinced”

It is difficult today to imagine a world without Americanization and rampant anti-Americanism. And it is even more difficult to imagine a world where this fact has not worried at least some segment of American society.[1] This is, by no means, a contemporary issue. In the 1950s, U.S. intellectuals, public figures, and diplomats agreed that the United States needed to sell the American way of life abroad. They worried over what they perceived as their worsening reputation in a world of new nations, new rulers, and new weapons. Journalists and academic observers, in particular, published widely on how negatively people the world over interpreted the United States and what could be done to reverse the situation. “America is the greatest advertising country in the world,” journalist Peter Grothe complained in 1958. “Yet when it comes to the most important advertising campaign of all—that of advertising ourselves and the democratic way of life—we run a poor second to the Communists.”[2] Sociologists urged policymakers to use books, movies, and information programs as tools to familiarize people the world over with American history, politics, and enter-

tainment. If we just did a better job to explain our foreign policy to others, the subtext ran, if we appointed or delegated nicer people to represent the nation abroad, or if we changed our foreign policy altogether, the world would love Americans as much as they loved themselves.[3]

That viewpoint still seems popular among observers in and outside of the ivory tower today. U.S. intellectuals, like Juan Cole, an esteemed expert of the Middle East and South Asia, continue to juggle public opinion polls and argue that even in Europe “it’s the foreign policy, stupid,” that accounts for European antipathies against the United States.[4] One cannot help being reminded of those 1950s U.S. liberals who were hoping for prettier faces, friendlier messages, and perhaps a better foreign policy on the U.S. desk in the international arena. Within the past fifty years, the view from Washington (or Boston or Chicago or Michigan) has not changed very much.

While there is a certain diversity of authors in the English-language world, it is striking to what an extent the debate continues to be dominated by “senders” rather

than “recipients,” by U.S. scholars looking out rather than experts working in one or the other country—not numerically but ideologically.[5] And since for experts in international relations it is typically far more difficult to develop an understanding of local culture and continental diversity than to argue along the lines of international politics, the U.S. perspective often stresses politics (sometimes coupled with economic policy) over culture, dismissing the latter as a mere side effect in the global scheme of events. Part of the problem may be language barriers: many foreign accounts do not get published in English. Moreover, general knowledge of Americanization, often tinged by current affairs and routinely unstable surveys, does not automatically generate an inside view of influences and receptions in a target region: one group’s anti-Americanism often starkly differs from that of another country. And when the debate comes to Europe, we find many individual studies but hardly any synthesis.

Alexander Stephan set out to change all this. A scholar of German studies at the Ohio State University by training, Stephan asked experts from and of eleven countries East and West of the former Iron Curtain to reflect on the “Americanization” of their respective country by considering specifically four fields: First, what role did the U.S. government, notably U.S. cultural diplomacy, play? Second and third, how do authors assess the development of high culture and mass entertainment during the period in question? Finally, what role did and does anti-Americanism play—how did people in target countries react to the influx of U.S. politics and culture? This set of questions implies that in the postwar world Americanization and anti-Americanism were closely interconnected, a fact often overlooked by American scholars. Second, they point to the conviction that politics as well as high and popular culture must be considered in tandem, again a constellation often neglected by scholars of postwar Europe who tend to focus on either one or the other but rarely both. The core of the book is subdivided in four parts, following roughly but not always geographical lines: The “Big Three” (France, Great Britain, and Germany, “losers of the American century” [p. 8]); Sweden, Denmark, and Austria (small countries though it is hard to find a common denominator here); countries behind the Iron Curtain (USSR/Russia and Poland); and southern Europe (Italy, Greece, and Spain).

In the essay dedicated to Great Britain, Hugh Wilford argues, not surprisingly, that England may be regarded as a rather tame case of Americanization and anti-Americanism. Thanks to historical and cultural ties, dur-

ing the cold war the British felt much less called on to resist American influences and politics than their continental neighbors have done in the past. Indeed, it may be Great Britain’s proximity to and skepticism toward continental Europe that has contributed to the country’s affinity for North America and its role as a transmitter of U.S. culture and ideas to Europe. At the same time, Wilford points to the British openness to other cultural trends as well, such as Indian, Pakistani, and Caribbean music since the 1980s and 90s.

France, as Richard Golsan describes it, provides a stark contrast to Great Britain and a highly contradictory position in and of itself. Despite all historical political ties as well as several wartime alliances, French people have traditionally exhibited strong cultural anti-Americanism, even and particularly when political relations were amiable. French politicians, like Charles de Gaulle, exhibited little interest in American life and history and consistently pursued a policy of political, military, and cultural distance. If leaders supported U.S. foreign policy, this did not necessarily reflect French public opinion. On the one hand, France’s minister of defense resigned when François Mitterand backed the Gulf War. On the other hand, for all the quotas imposed on language and film imports, the presence of Disneyland, and such U.S. franchises as Pizza Hut, McDonald’s, and other chain stores leave no doubt about the appeal of American consumer culture to individual French people. Golsan’s verdict on the French scene, then, is adamant. Even if U.S. foreign policy changed, even if U.S. leaders presented a more likeable face to their French allies, anti-Americanism would not disappear: “Anti-américanisme is a constant in postwar France... inextricably linked to the processes of economic and cultural Americanization ... inspired as much by myths and distortions as it is by realities” (p. 66).

Germany probably constitutes the most investigated case, thanks to the long presence of American troops and politics on German soil and the evident and profound influence of U.S. consumer goods since 1945. The subject of numerous cultural and information programs throughout the cold war, Germans were subjected to a thorough process of Americanization during the cold war complete with highbrow programs, mass entertainment, and the country’s integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Indeed, Stephan talks about a process of “self-Americanization” that replaced the process of active Americanization of German culture in the early 1960s (p. 78). Yet, as he shows, diplomatic disenfranchisement led to the Federal Republic’s timely commit-

ment to European integration. Moreover, West Germans exhibited profound and early political protest deriving from earlier forms of cultural anti-Americanization both on the political level—from the Easter Marches in the 1950s to recent demonstrations against the Gulf War—as well as on the cultural level: “Both in the educated middle class and among German intellectuals, deeply rooted prejudices closed minds to cultural expressions from the United States, on the grounds that they were poor copies of European originals or that they compromised the standards of high culture by their commercialism” (p. 75). Even the postwar protest generations on both sides of the Atlantic have been drifting apart since the 1970s: while in the United States, yuppies (and their children, one might add), observed passively the power politics of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, their German counterparts marched straight into party politics (witness the rise of Gerhard Schröder, Joschka Fischer, and others). Germany today has “an attractive form of culture in which high and popular culture nourish each other, state support and the free market exist side by side, and much of the population have learned to compose their own cultural program, depending on their needs and education, from the wide range of entertainment, knowledge, and information on offer” (p. 87).

The book then turns to the lesser-known cases of European interaction with American culture and politics. Section 2 lumps together various central and northern European countries. Sweden, as Dag Blanck tells us, experienced a much lighter form of anti-American criticism than its neighbors. Sweden did not play a large role in the conceptualization of the Marshall Plan and remained a nonaligned country, following the country’s tradition to stay outside of the major military conflicts for the last 150 years. Consequently, “questions of Swedish dependence on or subservience to the U.S. never have played a very prominent role in the Swedish public debate” (p. 110). Like the rest of continental Europe, Swedes have long looked down on U.S. culture for the familiar reasons. For all the Nobel Prizes given to U.S. writers and all the U.S. influences on the Swedish educational system, Swedish politicians and intellectuals displayed the usual continental fervor to limit the influence of American mass culture. Blanck concludes that cultural anti-Americanism has framed political protests, that the latter focused principally on the Vietnam War, and that the historical perspective is key to anti-Americanism in Europe: The “Anti-American discourse transcends the immediate context in which the U.S. is being discussed, making it possible for individual participants in the conversations

about America to be part of a longer negative (or positive) discussion” (p. 103).

Next-door Denmark, in contrast, was liberated, in 1945, by the British, not by the Americans. This fact, authors Nils Arne Sorensen and Klaus Petersen argue, is key to Denmark’s relationship to America. For the last fifty years, the country has been more receptive to British than to American influences. For English teachers at Danish schools, English meant British, not American, culture. Britain has always been Denmark’s “local great power,” both as a trading partner as well as a cultural model (p. 116). However, in the early cold war, the United States worked hard to win over Danish hearts. Once the country joined the Marshall Plan, Denmark received the most per capita aid (\$278 million), became part of the Western alliance, and joined NATO, in 1949. Popular culture has been very receptive to U.S. influences, notably in the sector of Cable TV and music. While Danes once protested fiercely against the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War, for the larger part of the cold war anti-Americanism in Denmark was and is clearly limited to cultural complaints against U.S. commercial culture and did not even exhibit much of a political twist during the war against Iraq, in 2003-2004.

Like the Germans, G nter Bischof shows, Austrians welcomed American soldiers in 1945 as liberators rather than as occupiers who stayed on for a number of years. And like Germany, Austria found itself divided (though not perpetually), and subjected to a program of denazification, democratization, and reeducation. Unlike Germany (but very much like Sweden), the country remained neutral during the cold war but open to American influences. Bischof stresses the importance of people exchange and contacts, ranging from the tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers who entered the country in 1945 to the formalized student and expert programs spanning several decades of the cold war. To many Austrians traveling to the United States, an exchange fellowship to the United States involved more than an informational trip—it often changed their lives and, not surprisingly, infused them with a more positive interpretation of the United States. All of this, Bischof asserts, did not challenge Austrians’ preference for European culture including classical music, though U.S. musicals appear to have done better than modern classical music. “The American cultural ‘blitz’ was short-lived and elites retained the upper hand” (p. 171). Bischof wonders to what extent Americanization is the proper word to describe what happened to U.S. influences in Austria. In closing (and in line with many other authors in the volume), he points out that in times

of political crises, “cultural” *traditional* stereotypes about the United States (“America”) resurface and can be politically instrumentalized quickly. They have always been there—Americanization after World War II has not managed to wipe them out” (p. 173).

*The Americanization of Europe* then turns to two countries behind the former Iron Curtain. In the Soviet Union, Marsha Siefert detects a clash between the mesmerizing images of Fordism as a model for future socialist societies in the 1920s and anti-American propaganda of the cold war period. Soviet officials ranted against American influences and the evils of capitalism since the 1930s but suspended these criticisms both during the wartime alliance in World War Two and the 1950s “thaw.” Soviet citizens, by tradition skeptical against any form of propaganda, were confused by the antipathetic images circulated in public media and what many perceived as fascinating, promising messages dispersed by Western media and covert channels. Pop singers enjoyed high appeal in the Soviet Union while officials branded Donna Summer for eroticism, Tina Turner for sexual display, Julio Iglesias for neofascism, and Van Halen for anti-Soviet propaganda. Cultural competition in the fields of music and ballet only heightened the confusion: Siefert detects a curious if not even contradictory note in the official propaganda battle between East and West when both governments staffed highbrow tournaments and exchanges with artists who were often trained behind the Iron Curtain. As world-famous violinist Isaac Stern commented: “We send them our Jewish violinists from Odessa, and they send us their Jewish violinists from Odessa” (p. 193). The author continually underlines the collision between reception and rejection of American cultural and political influences, even and particularly among young people. Whatever Americanization there is in today’s Russia, Siefert concludes, it always has and always will clash with the “Russian idea,” a vision of Russia as a distinct, independent non-Western country with a rich cultural and historical heritage that is a prerequisite for its future welfare.

In their essay on Poland, Andrzej Antoszek and Kate Delaney show that Eastern Bloc countries provide by no means identical samples. Though closely monitored by the USSR, since the mid-1950s Poles have been very open to Western cultural impulses, importing artists, journals, and magazines. Polish emigration has consistently served to tie the United States and Poland together. Soviets interested in Western affairs often learned Polish to get access to information and cultural trends censored in the USSR but available in Poland. As a result, “Poland

served as both a translator and transmitter of American culture, making American works accessible to others in the Eastern bloc” (p. 224). Moreover, in “good times,” appropriations of American cultural products had primarily an “aesthetic” character, while in bad times they served to oppose the regime (p. 234). Not surprisingly then, Poles consistently experienced a mix of openness and restriction: For example, in 1975, Warsaw saw the major American Bicentennial Exhibition “The World of Franklin and Jefferson” but the year before, censors in the city turned down students’ application for a production of Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl*. Poland was the first former Warsaw Pact country to join NATO (in 1999), but at the same time Poles continue to contest American culture and politics, then and now. As the authors point out, like in many other countries Polish anti-Americanism often serves as a “reaction against modernity,” blaming the United States for everything from economic depression to drugs, crime, and moral decay (p. 243).

The final section looks at various south European countries. David Ellwood’s essay reflects on the modernization of Italy: Where, he asks, does one “locate the American challenge in the rise to global status of the land of pizza, pasta, and cappuccino, of Armani and Benetton, of Alfa Romeo and Ferrari, of Fo, Eco, Benigni, and all the other miraculous products of the world’s sixth-largest industrial power?” (p. 253). A keen insider of the field, Ellwood stresses that Italian scholars have long rejected the “Americanization” thesis in favor of an argument about the “selective adaptation or appropriation of the American inspiration” (p. 254). In Italy, the arrival of American troops, in 1945, whom locals—like in Germany and Austria—viewed more as liberators than as occupiers, marked the beginning of American influence in Italy. But to Ellwood, the key period for the consideration of American culture in Italy is the decade from 1967 to 1977, after reconstruction and before the “reconsideration of the postwar settlement” when both the Right and the Left agreed to accept “limited sovereignty and constant supervision” by the United States (p. 255). In those crucial years, Italians shattered the American myth, created a counterculture, and eventually learned to understand the distinction between antagonism against and alternative to the U.S. model. Today, Italians dangle between appropriation and dismissal with doubters continuously complaining about the U.S. inspired tyranny of the market, privatization of social services, and the cultural downside of capitalism.

Looking at Greece, Konstantina Botsiou finds that Americanization and anti-Americanism both derived

from the country's dependence on the United States during the cold war as well as its deep roots in Slavic culture. Since World War Two, Greeks continuously blame America and U.S. interventionism for everything that seems to have gone wrong in postwar Greece, from civil war and the Cyprus question to commercialism, consumerism, and materialism among young people. Many Greeks never forgave the United States for backing the military dictatorship between 1967 and 1974, a dictatorship that, in turn, supported the influx of American TV programs into Greece. Americans tried to counter Greek anti-Americanism with a series of cultural, information, and exchange programs. But their message collided with Greeks' preference for the "unpretentious' man of the land," traditional gender role, age-based authoritarianism, and a Slavic-communist enemy image (p. 283). Like elsewhere in Europe, Europeanization led young Greeks, in particular, to deviate from the trans-Atlantic alliance and lobby instead for a "Third World neutralism" (p. 298).

Last but not least, Dorothy Noyes investigates "Spanish American Dreams" under the telling title "Waiting for Mr. Marshall." The key date in Spanish-American relations, to her, is not 1945 or 1989 but 1898 when Spain lost the last tidbit of its once formidable empire to the United States: Spaniards still like to point out that they may not be a world power but they do have a world language. In other words, Spain's relationship with Latin America has continued to frame its relation with the United States. Equally important, within the cold-war European context, Spain constitutes an exception in so many ways: Spain did not participate in World War Two, the United States was not interested in creating a democracy here, and Francisco Franco seemed to take care of anticommunism on the Iberian Peninsula. Hence, Spain was no target for U.S. cultural diplomacy. Americanization arrived in Spain via informal levels, most notably in the form of tourism and foreign investment. Spain's special relationship with the United States, the fact that it did not participate in the Marshall Plan nor in the European Community and that "Americanization" was blessed by governments from Franco to Jose Maria Aznar, meant that Spanish "consumer society preceded political liberalization" (p. 330). While there is much anti-American criticism in Spain along the usual lines (materialism, etc.), it is often buffered by the conviction that Spain, too, is a great cultural power (witness the appeal of Spanish food and film stars like Antonio Banderas and Penelope Cruz) as well as a market model preferring "undemanding cultural products: 'cultural light'" (p. 330).

The book derives its particular quality from the fact

that all contributors either come from, live in, or have extensive expertise studying the country they are presenting. Each author brings a deep political and cultural understanding of their subject to the table and each purposely avoids the American gaze or "the view from Washington" that so often marks U.S. analyses of Americanization and anti-Americanism abroad. But the real merit of this book, unpretentiously outlined by Stephan in the introduction, is that it provides a fine survey of the similarities and differences in the European response to American politics, culture, and economic influences: Germany, France, and Great Britain all count among the losers of the presumed "American Century." Poland, Sweden, and Greece both have large "migr" communities in the United States. In Spain and Sweden, 1945 did not mark the turning point as it did in Italy, Austria, and Germany, where locals welcomed U.S. troops toward the end of the war as liberators rather than occupiers and were therefore more receptive to American goods. Austria and Sweden, in turn, remained politically neutral but culturally open to American goods. Greece and Spain both experienced a dictatorship supported or at least tolerated by the United States. Stephan also points to the significance of certain topics across Europe: the erosion of boundaries between high and popular culture; the opposition from both conservatives and the European Left; the anti-Americanism of the churches; the protest movements; and the fact that U.S. culture has not evolved into a dominant culture in any European country. And the fact that while state censorship and a shortage of funds prevented all countries behind the Iron Curtain from direct exposure to American cultural products, those limitations vanished with the end of the cold war.

In the final section, Dutch scholar Rob Kroes offers another example of his typically sophisticated insights. The influence of American ideas and culture, and the public and intellectual discourse that comes with it, he argues, has great promise for Europeans. Instead of posing a constant challenge to European identity, it may eventually do exactly the opposite. U.S. perceptions may eventually deliver the new European vision in the sense that they inform the latter about their shared identities, preferences, and their multifaceted cosmopolitanism. Post-cold war Europe could "offer a model to the worlds ... of a civil and democratic order far more tempting than the imposition of democracy through preemptive military invasion.... If there is a neo-Wilsonian promise, it is held by the new Europe" (p. 358).

This is a great book. Instead of simplifying the topic or getting lost in details, it presents a logical structure

and a strong argument nuanced by local peculiarities. The Congress of Cultural Freedom's success, for example, differed widely. In Denmark, the local branch made no effort to behave as it enjoyed any American influence—it looked like a private club, displayed a different name, distanced itself from the American organization with no regard to the latter's mission, and even enjoyed relative economic independence. But it is the discreet collective argument that makes this a strong book: Taken together, the essays argue that the history of Americanization and anti-Americanism after World War Two need to be viewed within a broader historical context. Some even preface their comments with historical details from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nearly all agree that the cultural perceptions often frame or take precedence over politics and that fascination and rejection are often joined at the hip (e.g., Bischof, Golsan, Sorensen, Petersen, Blanck, Antoszek, Delaney, Ellwood, and Botsiou). Politics are important to our understanding of Americanization and anti-Americanism but a change in policy will not do away with anti-Americanism.

Today, edited volumes are facing tough times. Who, many review editors reason, is going to read a collection of essays that presumably did not make it into a top journal in the field? But such reservations often let us forget the promise of this literary genre. At best, an edited volume turns its reader overnight into an international expert in the field. Stephan's volume on the Americanization of as well as anti-Americanism in Europe since World War Two is such a book. Some readers may squabble with the fact that Eastern Europe could have been more visible in the volume, that the GDR does not enjoy a sufficient amount of prominence when juxtaposed with West Germany. But these are minor points. Rarely do editors succeed in assembling such a distinguished and, at the same time, international and multicultural group thinking and writing about the same broad constellation of historical facts.

Stephan passed away in May 2009, but he left us with much to think about and one big question: Where might our thinking go from here? One of the insights emerging from a collective reading of these essays is that in contrast to U.S. influences and relations in other parts of the world, the European-American circuit does not reveal a major racist but, instead, a latent class component along the lines of Pierre Bourdieu's *Habitus*.<sup>[6]</sup> While Americans are hated in Asia and Latin America for their racist attitude toward the locals, for whatever reasons Europeans feel a priori more advanced and cultivated. For all the Americanization there is, they are the ones to look down on Americans, and unlike in

Asia and Latin America, this European arrogance bothers U.S. observers tremendously. Perhaps this is the reason why the academic analysis of Americanization and anti-Americanism has caused more than one culture clash on both sides of the Atlantic. While U.S. leaders along with many intellectuals continue to hope that a change in U.S. diplomacy will do away with anti-Americanism in the world, their European counterparts are shaking their heads in disbelief: the German Federal Center for Political Education, for one, a branch of the German government, recently commissioned a full issue on the cultural framework of anti-Americanism in Europe with an estimated publication of eighty thousand copies for free distribution among students at high schools, universities, and adult education centers. "European 'anti-Americanism' is primarily a cultural phenomenon that often blossoms in a particular political climate," Ludwig Watzal stated in his editorial. "The German criticism on the Bush administration's policy was not 'anti-Americanism' but the expression of worry about a reckless policy." Or as Joschka Fischer once replied to Donald Rumsfeld when the latter claimed all diplomatic options in Iraq had been exhausted: "Excuse me, I am not convinced."<sup>[7]</sup>

#### Notes

[1]. Max Paul Friedman, "Anti-Americanism and U.S. Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 32, no. 4 (September 2008): 497-514.

[2]. Peter Grothe, *To Win the Minds of Men: The Story of the Communist Propaganda in East Germany* (Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1958), 234.

[3]. I have fleshed out these ideas a bit more in "Shame on US? Cultural Transfer, Academics, and the Cold War—A Critical Review," *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 465-494.

[4]. Juan Cole, "Anti-Americanism: It's the Policies," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 4 (October 2006): 1129.

[5]. Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, "'Always Blame the Americans': Anti-Americanism in Europe in the Twentieth Century," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 4 (October 2006): 1067-1091.

[6]. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

[7]. "Westliche Wertegemeinschaft?" *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 5-6 (January 28, 2008): 2.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

[/~gagcs/](#)

**Citation:** Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht. Review of Stephan, Alexander, ed., *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, Diplomacy, and Anti-Americanism after 1945*. H-GAGCS, H-Net Reviews. November, 2009.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=25063>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.