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Not Just a Friendly Disagreement *Anti-Americanism as Obsession*

For a brief moment after the fall of the Berlin wall, anti-Americanism seemed to have disappeared, especially in Germany, where decades of American foreign policy—the airlift, Kennedy in Berlin, Reagan’s call to tear down the wall—culminated in a clear victory. In fact, that triumph cast a glow far beyond Germany as well. The Soviet Union, the overriding opponent in one of the defining conflicts of the last century, had been defeated. America and the values of liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism were the undisputed winners. The Left, the traditional locus of most anti-Americanism, was in disarray. The only remaining opponents were on the far Right, isolated European ideologues of anti-American anticapitalism.

Yet the moment was brief, ending quickly with the onset of the 1991 Gulf war, which elicited a widespread peace movement, notably in Germany, which treated the American-led international coalition against Iraq as an expression of a malicious imperialist design, rather than as a response to the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait.¹ Although it was indeed a new historical

1. See Russell A. Berman, “The Gulf War and Cultural Theory in the United States and Germany: Nationhood, Popularity and Yellow Ribbons,” in Berman, *Cultural Studies of Modern Germany: History, Representation, and Nationhood* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 175–200.

epoch—the cold war had ended, and with it the Soviet inspiration for anti-American propaganda—an anti-American political subculture continued to flourish. In fact, that hostility grew throughout the course of the decade, providing the defining framework for European debates around an ever-shifting set of topical concerns: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the anxieties regarding globalization, international economic relations, and the efforts to develop an international agenda for ecological concerns, which came to be associated with the negotiations in Kyoto. No matter how the specific topic migrated, a discursive framework remained constant, always casting America as the fundamental source of discord. This analytic predisposition was nowhere more common than in Germany. While the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, produced a momentary solidarity effect with the United States, they did not significantly mitigate the anti-Americanism that grew widespread in the Western European public.

In fact, it was precisely that vigorous anti-American subculture that made Germany such a hospitable venue for Mohammed Atta and his terrorist partners as they prepared for the attacks on Washington, D.C., and New York. Yet, far from recognizing the European responsibility for having nurtured, harbored, and funded terrorists and terrorist networks, anti-Americans turn matters on their head, grotesquely blaming the United States for 9/11. For anti-Americans, especially in Europe, the United States is always guilty, even when it is the victim. Logic ceases to matter, allowing for mutually exclusive accusations. For example, while some anti-Americans suggest that terrorists carried out 9/11 in response to the alleged provocations of American foreign policy (suggesting that the attacks were a necessary consequence of U.S. policy), others insinuate

that it was the Americans themselves who had engaged in a secret plot to attack the Pentagon and the World Trade Center in order to gain political advantage by acting as agents provocateurs. This conspiracy theory proposition is of course outrageous, but—like most extremist propositions—it is ultimately undisprovable to those who enjoy indulging in such fantasies and who are always willing to believe the worst and most macabre claims about the U.S. government. However, the former position, interpreting the attacks as a plausible response to American foreign policy, is equally obnoxious because it is intended as an implicit justification for terror. As will be discussed later, there may well be a relationship between the attacks—standing now as the supreme expression of anti-Americanism—and aspects of U.S. policy, but in a very different sense from the anti-American claim that U.S. policy is the ultimate cause. For now, however, suffice it to say that anti-Americanism has become an important factor in contemporary political life, in Germany and elsewhere in Europe—despite the end of Communism and despite the scope of the terrorist threat. Hence the urgency of posing the question: Where does anti-Americanism come from?

It is a frequent misunderstanding to treat the term “anti-Americanism” as a designation for any opposition to a particular policy of the U.S. government or to the influence of American society and culture. If that broad definition were to apply, then reasonable critics of policy matters or cultural influence would fit the bill. Such an expansive definition renders the term useless. Not every opponent of American tax policy, for example, or every critic of American films is necessarily “anti-American.” Anti-Americanism has nothing to do with friendly disputes or reasonable disagreements. Instead, as French author Jean-Fran-

çois Revel has put it, it is an “obsession.”² Anti-Americanism is indicated precisely when reasoned argument gives way to sweeping generalizations and hostile innuendo, and the obsessive thought structures of prejudice and stereotype prevail. Although a particular policy dispute may serve as a pretext, anti-Americanism is driven by a deeper and more expansive fixation on an image or idea of America, burdened with multiple negative associations that extend far beyond a bone of contention about any particular policy.

If a European dislikes jazz, that does not make him anti-American. It is only a matter of musical taste. However, if the dislike is embedded in a racist dismissal of African-Americans, then it does become a matter of anti-Americanism: prejudicial obsession has displaced a possible musical discussion. Similar distinctions apply in foreign policy matters. Criticism of American policy in Iraq is, in and of itself, not anti-American, but when—as was the case in Germany—that criticism is accompanied by a general dismissal of “American conditions,” one has to recognize that anti-Americanism has come into play. A useful test is refutability: in a policy debate on Iraq, one can imagine attempting to rebut critics who present a specific rationale, but it is impossible to mount a meaningfully argued reply to irrational prejudice.

Anti-Americanism functions like a prejudice, magnifying the power and presence of its presumed opponent, turning it into a ubiquitous threat. The empirical superiority of American military power, for example, is transformed by the anti-American imagination into a fantasy of infinite omnipotence: there is no evil in the world that cannot be blamed on American action, if

2. Jean-François Revel, *L'obsession anti-américaine: Son fonctionnement, ses causes, ses conséquences* (Paris: Plon, 2002).

only because the one superpower did not choose to stop it. Why should American humanitarian motives be believed in any single case if Americans have failed to pursue them in all possible cases? Because America is assumed to have unlimited power, it can be given unlimited blame. Any event in the world can therefore be attributed to the machinations of American conspiracy.

This structure of thinking is comparable to other political fantasies. At the height of the cold war, the core supporters of Joseph McCarthy interpreted all the events around them in terms of an allegedly perfectly functioning Communist conspiracy. Antisemites, similarly, have always been able to imagine an ineluctable network of Jewish power. As a paranoid fantasy, anti-Americanism is cut from the same cloth. Instead of facing up to the detailed complexity of reality, it can only see Washington's hand controlling every conflict. The point is not that the United States is weak—on the contrary, it is indisputably the one superpower—but the United States is not, indeed can never be, as infinitely strong as the anti-American true believer imagines. This disjunction between American reality and the anti-American fantasy is symptomatic. The character of prejudice is such that it ultimately has very little to do with the reality of its object. Yet while the discourse of anti-Americanism has little to do with American reality, it does reveal the character and mentality of anti-American Europe.

This leads to the central claim in this chapter: anti-Americanism is not a response to American policies, American influence, or any broader process of "Americanization." The anti-American may of course point to an allegedly ubiquitous American presence in order to legitimate a hostile response: because American power is allegedly unlimited, America must be opposed everywhere. Yet this insinuated causality is ultimately not plausible. Anti-Americanism has a secret life of its own. It

cannot be correlated to specific instances of American presence: hence the proposition that anti-Americanism is largely independent of American policy or presence (or Americanization). Anti-Americanism is not a rational response to American action; rather, the fantasy of infinite American presence is a product of the anti-American's heated imagination.

The assertion that anti-Americanism is not the effect for which American action was the cause can be demonstrated in several ways. Although anti-Americanism is surely only a minority position in all national populations, one can find evidence of anti-Americanism in many different settings: in countries with histories of a considerable American presence (like Germany) as well as in countries with very different histories of involvement with the United States (like France). Yet since a comparable (if not fully identical) anti-Americanism colors political culture in those two countries, then clearly the history of occupation and Americanization in Germany—a history that France does not share—is not a pertinent variable. Western European anti-Americanism takes place in countries with very different degrees of Americanization and therefore very different experiences of American reality. The fact that anti-Americanism can appear in countries whose encounters with the United States have been radically different from each other shows that anti-Americanism is not the function of a real-world experience of the United States or of American behavior. Far from a reasonable response to real-world situations, it is a political fantasy, an irrational, ideological view of the world that spreads largely independently of any objective contact with the United States or its culture.

With regard to Germany, the key country in the process of European unification, three further observations bolster the claim that anti-Americanism is not explicable as an effect of American action. First, to the extent that American policy serves

as a pretext for anti-Americanism, a curiously selective vision applies. Currently, at least, German anti-Americanism refers to American foreign policy, particularly in Iraq, but then it is surely odd that the elements of American foreign policy most relevant to Germany—such as the support for German unification, against the implicit resistance of France and England—have dropped out of the discussion.³ If anti-Americanism were genuinely a response to American policies, then one would expect that American policy toward Germany would also figure in the German discussion, and not merely American policy toward Iraq. Of course, one can assume that an underlying resentment of German unification and nostalgia for the Communist regime of East Germany may fuel some of the anti-Americanism, at least in the circles of the former Communist Party (the PDS). In this case, the paradox of German anti-Americanism would be no paradox at all but merely a lingering effect of the cold war. Yet although there is surely an element of this Communist effect in the post-Communist world, it is only part of the larger phenomenon, which requires a more comprehensive account: German anti-Americanism includes a Communist element but clearly extends far beyond the Communist camp and cannot be adequately explained as a desire to resurrect the East German regime. In any case, the fact that it is American foreign policy that is under attack, whereas American foreign policy in relation to Germany is excluded from the discussion, demonstrates that anti-Americanism does not represent a rational response to policy. On the contrary, it is about fantasy and ideology: anti-Americanism, while taking the United States as a pretext, in fact

3. Philip Zelikow and Condoleezza Rice, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

expresses some other displaced anger. It is evidently not American actions that elicit the hostile sentiment.

Second, the lack of a causal connection between American presence and anti-Americanism is evidenced in Germany insofar as anti-Americanism has increased precisely as the American military presence in Germany has decreased, in the wake of unification. The willingness of leading German public figures to engage in hostile characterizations of the United States is greater, even though there are fewer Americans around and there is presumably less American influence. When American troops were at full strength, no German Chancellor would have campaigned with anti-American rhetoric, and no German minister would have compared an American president to Hitler. It is hard to avoid the speculation that a certain German nationalist rhetoric only became possible once American troop size declined. Now that American troops are no longer necessary to face down the Soviet military in Central Europe, there is less reason to refrain from making political capital out of anti-American rhetoric.

Yet it is not even necessary to make the strong case: greater anti-Americanism in the context of less American presence. To show the lack of a causal relationship between American action and anti-American sentiment, it is sufficient to point out that the enormous reduction of American troop size has simply not led to a corollary reduction in anti-Americanism. For example, during the "peace movement" of the 1980s involving the NATO double-track decision and the stationing of the Pershing missiles, much to-do was made of presumed restrictions imposed on West German sovereignty because of the postwar power relations and the dependence on the United States. A certain hostility to America followed, or was imagined to follow, from that situation; it was argued that the post-1945 limitation on West

German sovereignty imposed by the victorious United States was grounds for anti-American feeling. With the unification of Germany, that restriction on German sovereignty disappeared; nonetheless, a similar hostility continues to be directed at the United States. Thus the claim made during the 1980s that anti-Americanism was due to the perceived restriction of German sovereignty by American power on the basis of post-Second World War arrangements is obviously not tenable. Even though Germany regained its full sovereignty and the alleged grounds for anti-American sentiment disappeared, anti-Americanism continued to thrive. This is further evidence that German anti-Americanism has nothing to do with these aspects of German-American relations. Indeed anti-Americanism appears to be independent of the real character of these relations altogether. It is this lack of connection to reality that makes it a matter of ideology. Yet ideologies and fantasies can have very real impact on the substance of politics.

It is, however, a third observation that clinches the argument, demonstrating the independence of anti-Americanism from American actions. Not only is anti-Americanism found in contexts where no significant Americanization (or occupation) has taken place; not only does anti-Americanism evidently post-date the decline of an American presence in Germany; but in fact, anti-Americanism long predates the post-Second World War occupation and anything that might properly be described as Americanization. Anti-Americanism is not a response to particular actions or deeds but a cultural mentality that, emerging long before the rise of American power in the early twentieth century, is a reaction against the very presence of America in the world. The European discovery of the new world upset the traditional European worldview, with Europe self-confidently at the center. Indeed, ever since the so-called first contact of Euro-

pean travelers with the inhabitants of the new world, Europeans have expressed anxieties regarding the brute nature, the presumed absence of history, and an undifferentiated homogeneity imputed to the western hemisphere.⁴ These are precisely the standard tropes of anti-Americanism, an ideology with a long past, replete with stereotypes that are regularly recycled in new historical circumstances.

A German discourse of anti-Americanism became prominent, at the latest, in the early nineteenth century as romantic authors like the poet Nikolaus Lenau increasingly described the United States in pejorative terms, associated with their negative judgments on both its capitalism and its democracy. In contrast, the towering German author of the age, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, repeatedly expressed admiration for the young American republic. His opposition to the romantic antimodern reaction indicates the initial phase of a positive German attraction to America and the values of modernity associated with the American Revolution.⁵ The deep, competing currents of pro-American and anti-American perspectives in German culture, in other words, are quite old, which underscores why German anti-Americanism cannot be explained away as a friendly policy dispute or even as a response to aspects of the role the United States has played in Germany in the twentieth century. The terms of the anti-American discourse have been in circulation at least since the romantic early nineteenth century. Thus, it is not anything that the United States does to Germany, no recognizable Americanization, that elicits anti-Americanism. It is rather the

4. See Suzanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Pre-colonial Germany, 1770–1870* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 18–42.

5. Dan Diner, *America in the Eyes of the Germans: An Essay on Anti-Americanism*, trans. Allison Brown (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1996), 37.

mere fact of the presence, in the world, of a society defined in terms of capitalism and democracy that scandalizes sectors of German and old European society. It is not an intrusive imposition of America's democratic capitalism that provokes the protests but the mere temptation that it represents.

This formulation, however, sheds a new light on the causation problem. To say that anti-Americanism is not caused by American policies and actions means two things: it is not a result of specific American actions or cultural transfers, and it is not primarily a response to the projection of a specifically American identity, national interest, and so on. However if anti-Americanism is decoupled from real policies and actions, it does not follow that it has nothing to do with real experience. On the contrary, anti-Americanism does indeed represent a response to genuine forces of historical change. What is at stake, however, is not the remaking of the world in the image of America—a possible working definition of “Americanization”—against which anti-Americans believe they offer resistance, but rather the historical development in modernity toward democratic capitalism, which during the twentieth century has transpired disproportionately through American power and influence. Anti-Americanism is, fundamentally, the rhetoric of opposition to this global historical process of political and economic emancipation. Pretending to oppose American power, anti-Americanism is in fact the ideology of opposition to the democratization of politics and the liberalization of markets.

It is in the nature of such political rhetoric that little value is placed on consistency. Like other obsessive ideologies, anti-Americanism is internally heterogeneous, and it draws on multiple cultural-historical currents. One can however distinguish heuristically among different registers of anti-Americanism, in particular the following three:

1. *Predemocratic anti-Americanism* expresses an aristocratic (or imitatively aristocratic) disdain for the life of democracy, deemed too ordinary, banal, and lacking in quality. America is taken to represent the driving force of modernization as trivialization; nostalgia for the golden age of a premodern world therefore turns into anti-Americanism. Although these attitudes may have resonated among the members of the traditional aristocracy, it is not that tiny social group that is important. Rather this version of anti-Americanism has turned into a widespread hostility particularly in cultural sectors. It has migrated largely into the arts, generating, for example, the notion of America as lacking in high culture. Anti-Americanism contrasts the allegedly low quality of American mass culture (Hollywood cinema) with presumably higher standards of quality in Europe; or more generally, it reduces the world to a simple opposition between American quantity and European quality.
2. *Communist anti-Americanism* emerged from the ideological apparatus of the Communist movement during the nearly seventy-five years between the Bolshevik seizure of power and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The global struggle between Russian interests, masked as Communist, and the democratic agenda of the free world under U.S. leadership structured much political and intellectual life for most of the past century. In the battle with twentieth-century totalitarianism, the United States sometimes entered into unholy alliances with undemocratic regimes; such is the complexity of politics. Just as the United States entered into a strategic alliance with Stalin to defeat Hitler, it had to back undemocratic regimes in the cold war struggle against Soviet power. Moreover, it should surprise no one that foreign policies,

like any government-generated practice, sometimes become internally inconsistent. The point is that inconsistencies such as these became targets for Communist propaganda and were taken as evidence of Western hypocrisy. Yet with the collapse of the Soviet empire, American foreign policy is gradually returning to its core values and to the predisposition to support governments that are democratic or moving toward democratization.⁶ (Marx himself largely admired the dynamism of American capitalism and democracy and did not participate in the anti-Americanism that came to be the hallmark of Communist ideology in the twentieth century.)⁷ Although the opening of the Berlin wall and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet empire has meant the real collapse of the apparatus of Communist propaganda, the discourse of Communist anti-Americanism remains in effect, particularly but not only in former Communist circles. Where pre-democratic anti-Americanism typically turns into the cultural criticism of the United States, Communist anti-Americanism still focuses especially on foreign policy disputes from the cold war era: Vietnam, Cuba, Chile, Grenada, and so forth.

3. *Postdemocratic anti-Americanism* involves current complaints that the United States remains reluctant to surrender elements of its sovereignty in order to transfer them to international bodies. Advocates of forms of international governance oppose the American insistence on national independence as a precondition for the democratic expression of popular will. Whatever the standing of international governance bodies may be, they are in any case not elected

6. *The National Security Strategy of the United States*, September 2002, preface, n.p. (p. iii), <http://whitehouse.gov>.

7. Diner, *America in the Eyes of the Germans*, 46.

institutions. At best, one might say that they are institutions set up through treaties by several states; yet not only are many of those states barely democratic, if at all, but the very presumption that a state would significantly subordinate itself to the will of others in institutions with no external control runs counter to liberal democratic expectations. In addition, the prominence of nongovernmental organizations in contemporary international debate highlights a sensitive distinction between democratic sovereignty and private advocacy. Postdemocratic anti-Americanism involves the assertion of the will of the experts, organized in partisan advocacy associations, over the will of the people as expressed in electoral processes.

These three types of anti-Americanism can overlap and coexist within the same material. In fact, one finds all three variants in the German responses to September 11, which have been documented in a volume edited by the journalist Henryk Broder: a collection of revealing statements by German writers, intellectuals, and politicians. Because anti-Americanism is a cultural phenomenon, expressing historical predispositions, political fantasies, and irrational ideologies, it is appropriate that so much of the evidence derives from the cultural sector. This is particularly true for predemocratic anti-Americanism, typically associated with the aesthetic attitude of cultural elitism. This attitude is characterized by a typically strained effort to maintain composure and to foreground a cool, even cold, attitude, to suggest that the terrorist attacks were, ultimately, not very important. Representatives of this version of anti-Americanism attempt to demonstrate how they are simply too important to be concerned with the suffering of the day, the significance of which they denigrate. The goal of predemocratic anti-Ameri-

canism is to demonstrate a lack of concern, belying the myth of universal solidarity with victims. A good example is found in the comments of the award-winning and bestselling German author Martin Walser on his experience of September 11:

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, 1961 [sic], 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.⁸

Walser’s point is to demonstrate a studied lack of sympathy by hiding behind aestheticism as an aristocratic posture. It is the work of art that counts, and not the count of the victims. The point is not the appropriateness of having proceeded with the reading on September 11 but Walser’s dismissing the conflict as a humorous matter of American intrusiveness. For Walser, the importance of his literature obviously and unquestionably overshadows any interest in the human suffering of the attacks. The popular philosopher Peter Sloterdijk similarly dismisses the scope of the tragedy. With an *en passant* reference to the “catastrophe landscape” of the twentieth century, he diminishes September 11 to a “barely noticeable, minor accident”⁹ Similarly, during the first weeks after the attack, when one thought the

8. Cited in Henryk M. Broder, *Kein Krieg, Nirgends: Die Deutschen und der Terror* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 2002), 93. The correct date for the Kennedy assassination is November 22, 1963.

9. *Ibid.*, 10.

body count was considerably higher, a columnist of the *taz*, a popular left-of-center newspaper, eagerly trivialized the event: “as regrettable as the death of seven thousand people in New York may be, measured against what is taking place elsewhere in the world, it is in comparison just a bagatelle.”¹⁰ In all these examples, the scope of the American dead is denied through the appeal to something always greater: an easy rhetorical trick.

Aside from revealing a lack of human sympathy, this pseudo-aristocratic contempt for American suffering strikes one as political misery. Desperate to diminish the importance of September 11, these commentators blind themselves to the enormous political consequences of the attacks, especially the transformed relationship of the United States to the world. Not only do they remain untouched by the human loss; their ideology prevents them from recognizing that September 11 would most likely change American foreign policy profoundly, for it was hardly a trivial matter when the policy of preemptive attacks was subsequently adopted. The more German opinion makers minimized September 11, the more they contributed to the minimization of Germany’s standing in future foreign policy arrangements, as became clear later in the context of the Iraq war. Yet this reduction in the importance of Germany is a consequence of a consistently wrong arithmetic in parts of the German public sphere: fifty dead in Jenin—the site of a pitched battle between the Israeli army and Palestinian terrorists in the spring of 2002—was denounced as a “massacre,” while even seven thousand American dead would have been counted as a “bagatelle.”

Communist anti-Americanism, the second variant, recycles motifs from cold war propaganda and redirects them, once

10. *Ibid.*, 123.

again, toward the United States. While predemocratic, cultural anti-Americanism treats human suffering dismissively, Communist anti-Americanism denounces suffering but blames it exclusively on the United States and world capitalism. For example, a Party of Democratic Socialism leaflet distributed in Hamburg commented on the September 11 attacks with the slogan “What goes around comes around.”¹¹ In other words, the terrorists were justified in repaying like with like, meaning that the Americans got what they deserved. More notoriously, another aspect of Communist vocabulary reappeared as well: the pathos of the anti-Hitler rhetoric, turned against the United States—in particular against George W. Bush. What the German minister of justice, Herta Daübler-Gmelin, said in her equation of Bush and Hitler was in fact not at all exceptional; one can encounter similar remarks frequently in Germany. A noteworthy instance involved a large banner held up during the demonstrations against Bush in Berlin in May 2002, with pictures of Hitler pointing to the burning Reichstag and of Bush in front of the crumbling World Trade Center. To make the identification complete, they share the same cartoon bubble of speech:

This attack means that our nation must set out on a long march to war and forget the debilitating trust in civil liberties! But do not fear, my people, for this just fight will only add to our glory!! And although this attack seems to be made to order to make you forget my disputed seizure of power and to pave the way for blind obedience to my orders, I want to have you believe that my security forces had nothing to do with it. Thank you very much. See you later in Poland or Iraq, and then around the world!!¹²

11. “So was kommt von so was.” Ibid., 200.

12. *The Times of London*, May 23, 2002, p. 17.

The poster tells us little about Bush and Hitler but a good deal about the political culture that could tolerate this sort of distorted representation. For starters, of course, in a classic Communist manner, the antisemitic character of Hitler's rhetoric and National Socialism is simply expunged. In addition, the conspiracy theory innuendo that American security forces carried out the September 11 attack is clear. More generally, the equation of the legal systems in Nazi Germany and contemporary America is striking: either it means that the contemporary, post-Communist Germans imagine that Nazi Germany was basically like the United States, and therefore not all that bad; or it implies a grossly distorted view of the United States and the standing of civil liberties. Yet we know that the German justice minister herself had described the American legal system as "lousy." Thus Communist imagery structures anti-Americanism in two ways: in its denunciation of the historical American defense of democracy against Soviet expansion and in its characterization of capitalism, and especially the most developed capitalist society, the United States, as fascist through the association with Hitler.

Although the predemocratic and Communist variants of anti-Americanism represent residues of obsolete political formations—no matter how these ideologies retain a contemporary afterlife—postdemocratic anti-Americanism, the third model, reflects an emerging divide: on the one hand, the widespread predisposition, perhaps more in Germany than elsewhere, to shift decision making to supranational and therefore undemocratic units—the European Union, the United Nations, an international court—and on the other, the American insistence on the priority of national sovereignty as an expression of popular will. The process of sovereignty transfer corresponds both to the larger political and economic pressure toward globalization and, simultaneously, to the logic of bureaucratization: it is one

more way to allow the deferral and dispersion of decision making. The fact that Germany buys into this process of sovereignty transfer with special enthusiasm reflects its own ambivalent relationship to its particularly catastrophic national past and its impaired self-esteem (although there is plenty of willingness to engage in symbolic self-assertion as long as the opponent is the United States).¹³ Because Germany, in order to overcome its past, is eager to shift decision making responsibility to a supranational structure, it expects all other nations to similarly renounce their national independence and dissolve into international, ultimately global, governance structures.

In the responses to September 11, this postdemocratic perspective emerged in expressions of concern that U.S. policy inappropriately responds to domestic constituencies. The (surely not incorrect) perception that American foreign policy takes the opinion of the American electorate into account is the bone of contention. In other words, there is an underlying assumption in parts of the anti-American European public that policy, and in particular foreign policy, ought to be decoupled from democratic political discussion and decision making (i.e., diminishing the domestic public sphere). Because foreign policy has international ramifications, it should, so the strange-but-true argument goes, be separated from domestic democratic will formation and, presumably, be shifted to international governance structures shielded from local political sentiment. Apparently, American politicians should listen less to voters and more to nongovernmental organizations. Thus the influential public intellectual and cultural critic Klaus Theweleit wrote: "It is fre-

13. Cf. Tom W. Smith and Lars Jarkko, "National Pride in Cross-National Perspective," paper of the National Opinion Research Center (University of Chicago, April 2001), <http://www.issp.org/paper.htm>.

quently overlooked that Bush could only win the elections with votes from the Bible Belt, the votes of fundamentalist Americans, religious fanatics. . . . And then Bush does not understand when armed religious fanatics come back from other parts of the world.”¹⁴

Leaving aside the bizarre analogy of culturally conservative Christians to armed terrorists, one notes Theweleit’s implicit objection to the notion that this particular group, perhaps any particular group, should be able to participate in the electoral process. Does he mean that Christian voters should be disenfranchised? Yet if one assumes that fundamentalist Christians do indeed have the right to vote—a right that Theweleit seems to dispute—then one cannot object to the possibility that their votes might have consequences with political influence. The same objection recurs even more frequently with regard to the Jewish vote, evident in the tedious German paranoia regarding a “Jewish lobby” somehow mysteriously steering American foreign policy.¹⁵ It is this antisemitic content that regularly lurks behind the standard complaint that U.S. Middle East policy is the function of domestic political concerns.

Yet the notion that domestic politics ought to be excluded from foreign policy can mean nothing else than decoupling foreign policy formation from the democratic process. The logical conclusion would entail separating foreign policy from democratic government and relocating it in an independent foundation of objective experts: an absurd option, to be sure—but not that far from various proposals for international governance. In any case, given this European suspicion of the U.S. system as

14. Broder, *Kein Krieg, Nirgends*, 186.

15. William Safire, “The German Problem,” *New York Times*, September 19, 2002, A35.

excessively democratic because of its propensity to respond to domestic politics, it is only consistent that much European public opinion does not proceed from a basic solidarity with democratic states, particularly in the Middle East. In contrast, one of the important successes of current U.S. policy has been the ability to focus international attention on the urgency of democratization throughout that region.¹⁶

These three types of anti-Americanism may overlap and intermingle. Moreover they take on specific colorations in different national contexts. French anti-Americanism is more commonly marked by a cultural denigration of America; hence, for example, Jean Baudrillard's celebration of the September 11 terrorists as noble savages, living authentically, in contrast to what he chose to refer to dismissively the "banality" of American life.¹⁷ (This material is discussed more closely in chapter 5). Meanwhile the geopolitical element in French discourse is typically more oriented toward inventing space for France to imagine remaining among the key global players, in contrast to German provincialism, eager to defer to Europe or the U.N.¹⁸ In Germany, too, one can find cultural criticism and allegations about the low quality of American culture. Communist-inspired accounts of twentieth-century history are more common in Germany than in France (part of the East German legacy). More frequently, however, German anti-Americanism is haunted by

16. On the urgency of democratic reform in the Arab world, cf. Claire Nullis, "Report: Arab Economies Need Reform," *Washington Times*, September 8, 2002, regarding "Arab World Competitiveness Report" of the World Economic Forum.

17. Jean Baudrillard, "The Spirit of Terrorism," trans. Kathy Ackerman, *Telos* 121 (Fall 2001), 138; cf. Alain Minc, "Terrorism of the Spirit," trans. Kathy Ackerman, *Telos* 121 (Fall 2001), 143–45; and more generally, Philippe Roger, *L'ennemi américain: Généalogie de l'antiaméricanisme français* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

18. Regarding provincialism, cf. Karl Heinz Bohrer, "Provinzialismus (II): ein Psychogramm," *Merkur* 45, no. 3 (March 1991), 255–61.

the anxieties of German national history: the desperate need to relativize the Nazi past by imagining that the United States, Israel, or both are equally criminal. Hence the long history of denouncing America's "everyday fascism" and—in the 9/11 discussions—the constant parallels suggested between the Allied bombings in the Second World War and the air war in Afghanistan: both, so the analogic argument goes, are wrong. In other words, lingering resentment about the U.S. role in the Second World War contaminates the German judgment on current foreign policy. Evidence of current American wrongdoing seems to provide Germans an absolution for their own past.

What then is the source of anti-Americanism? The first part of the answer is negative: anti-Americanism is not the result of specific processes of cultural or institutional transfer that could be construed to entail an "Americanization." Yet this does not mean that anti-Americanism is nothing more than a free-floating discourse, with no relationship to real historical processes. On the contrary—and this is the second part of the answer—anti-Americanism is, fundamentally, an expression of hostility to societies of democratic capitalism. This dynamic sort of social formation involves a set of institutions that developed particularly through the history of Western culture and its values, and it has flourished especially in the United States, which has defended this model in the hot and cold wars of the twentieth century. Yet democratic capitalism and its associated values are not narrowly American or even exclusively Western. On the contrary, as a social model, it exercises enormous attraction for populations around the world, one result of which is immigration, as well as the remarkable ability of immigrant groups to integrate with the U.S. polity quickly. Against cultural relativists, it is important to assert that democracy is not a parochial artifact of American culture but rather an objective potential of

humanity, even if the United States has become its primary, if sometimes reluctant, vehicle.

Anti-Americanism is therefore not a response to specific policies or actions. It is not about the spread of jazz or youth culture; nor is it, fundamentally, about the bombing of Dresden, the proliferation of McDonald's franchises in Paris, or even the sanctions on Iraq, although each of these might be taken as a pretext and each, one can add, might well be debated on its own terms. Anti-Americanism, instead, involves a global judgment, an enormous stereotype, driven by fears regarding democracy and capitalism. The fact that the American model exercises such a magnetic attraction globally exacerbates the anxieties among those who do not emigrate and especially among national cultural elites, who resent their compatriots' opting for an American life-course. But this process, again, is not about the narrow assertion of American national interest or the particular contents of American culture. Nor is the key issue immigration, although the universal attraction of America—to peoples from very different cultural backgrounds—is quite telling and proof of the universal character of the specific set of values. The point is that the principles objectified in the American Revolution—products, to be sure, of particular cultural traditions—have proven to have universal appeal because they speak to basic aspects of the human condition everywhere. "Here or nowhere is America," spoke Goethe's Lothario in the novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. By this he meant that the political and social revolution of democracy, initiated in the American Revolution, ought to be pursued in Germany, and not primarily through German emigration to the United States.¹⁹ For Goethe, the structure of

19. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Goethes Werke*, ed. Erich Trunz (Hamburg: Christian Wegner Verlag, 1962), VII, 431.

emancipation—democratic government and free markets—modeled in the United States was worthy of emulation elsewhere. It is that potential of freedom in human history that anti-Americanism resists.