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**I Thought we Were Friends:
America's Role in European Anti-Americanism**

The Cold War forced people to choose sides. Nations, and the individuals who comprised them, faced tremendous pressure to align themselves with either the United States of America or the Soviet Union. The stakes were high: crucial economic and military incentives were available to those who made the “right” decision. But the pressure was not totally one-sided. Just as the rebuilding European countries depended on the U.S or the U.S.S.R, the conflict between the two new superpowers made them equally dependent on the Europeans. The resulting war for the hearts and minds of Europe differentiated itself from traditional political alliance-building by the increased role of cultural and intellectual competition. America boasted of its political freedom and cultural sophistication abroad while persecuting communism at home. Unfortunately for American foreign relations, the hypocrisy of its alleged moral superiority and its covert machinations to support loyal intellectuals prompted many European intellectuals to embrace anti-Americanism. Bigger factors in engendering anti-Americanism, however, were the increasing global stature of the United States and a fear of the Americanization of European cultures.

American exceptionalism has been a characteristic of the United States' identity since the colonial era; the “city on a hill” that sought to create a community in God's image was an implicit rebuke of European society. American policy-makers in Europe after WWII continued the tradition of belief in American superiority. The heavy-handed persecution of dissent led by

Senator McCarthy during the Second Red Scare (1949-1960), however, undermined American efforts at moral leadership in Europe. In April of 1953 Secretary of State John Foster Dulles authorized the removal of allegedly subversive books from government buildings overseas. Embassy officials, “in their frenzy,” burned eleven books.¹ Abstract expressionist painting was also victimized by McCarthy’s panicked search for anything “un-American.” Unable to recognize the potential of abstract expressionism to serve as a cultural resource in the war against communism, in 1947 State Department cancelled an overseas exhibition of truly avant-garde artwork. These acts of were appalling for a continent still reeling from memories of Nazi authoritarianism. In the end, America’s over-zealous and narrow-minded advocacy of its cultural heritage disenchanted many Europeans. This same unsophisticated approach hindered the intellectual competition with Marxists and communist-sympathizers.

The transformation of the Fulbright program during the cold war serves as a good example of how American foreign policy influenced cultural and intellectual exchange—for the worse. Originated in 1946 by Senator Fulbright, the program was a non-political “promotion of international good will through the exchange of students in the fields of education, culture, and science.”² With the passage of the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 and later with the Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961, the State Department transformed the Fulbright program into another tool for the indoctrination of foreign scholars with American values. Another pertinent example of governmental manipulation of intellectual exchange is the conflict between the Soviet-sponsored Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace in 1949 and the CIA-subsidized Congress for Cultural Freedom in 1950. Both conferences attracted luminaries of world renown—Albert

¹ Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 81

² *Ibid.*, 59

Einstein, Charlie Chaplin, and Thomas Mann supporting the Soviets, and Sidney Hook, Bertrand Russell, and Karl Jaspers supporting the U.S.A. Because the United States presented its philosophical and political foundations as ‘of the people’ and without need of state sponsorship, the *New York Times*’ 1966 disclosure of the CIA’s role in the Congress for Cultural Freedom served to further tarnish the image of America in Europe. With time it was learned that many pro-U.S magazines like the London-based *Encounter* were also subsidized by the CIA. It was becoming possible to believe that the only intellectuals who supported the United States were ones who had been bought.

The concurrence of rising anti-Americanism with the Cold War lends credence to the idea that American anti-communism created hatred for the United States in Europe, but the existence of anti-Americanism both before and after the Cold War forces us to look for other explanations. In the 1920’s European intellectuals had already begun to reject America. Influential essays such as “Why I reject America,” by Menno ter Braak and “America the Menace: Scenes from the Life of the Future,” by Georges Duhamel exemplify pre-WWII anti-Americanism. These authors were concerned with the problems that seemed endemic to the United States: urbanization, the grip of finance capitalism, the monotony of assembly lines, racial strife, the omnipresence of advertising and the mass media.”³ Additionally, they were fearful of America’s increasing influence on European culture, which was seen most dramatically in the rise of Hollywood films. This fear of “Americanization” through cultural imports led many European countries to impose quotas on the importation of Hollywood films by the end of the 1920’s. It is clear, therefore, that anti-Americanism had taken root much earlier than the Cold War.

³ Ibid., 20

Anti-Americanism, as mentioned earlier, continued to exist after the fall of the Berlin wall as well. Led by French president Charles DeGaulle, European leaders expressed their resistance to America during the GATT negotiations of 1993. Although the purpose of the treaty was to open trade between participating nations, European politicians insisted on limiting the importation of audiovisual products from the U.S. This resistance was only the latest manifestation of anti-Americanism, and its similarity to the film quotas of the 1920's illuminates the duration of this perspective. Another, more extreme, example of post Cold War anti-Americanism is the French 1994 law that banned the use of "three thousand English phrases from all commercial and governmental publications, radio and television broadcasts, and advertisements, whenever a French term—any French term, however cumbersome and infelicitous—was available."⁴ This draconian measure demonstrates the desperation of French leadership to preserve French culture, and proves that anti-Americanism is a phenomena that transcends the Cold War era.

If Cold War politics don't sufficiently explain anti-Americanism, then what does? For one, the growing disparity of power between the United States and European nations. Economic aid programs like the Marshall plan were welcomed by most, but they served as a humiliating reminder of who was in charge in the post WWII era. Luigi Barzani argued that it was embarrassing "that the 'once proud nations' of Europe now had to 'beg for their living, survival, and safety.'"⁵ This new dependence was made clear during the Suez crisis of 1956. By accepting Eisenhower's ultimatum regarding an invasion of Egypt, both England and France—

⁴ Ibid., 272

⁵ Ibid., 158

the European elite—were forced to compromise their sovereignty to satisfy American foreign policy. Faced with the new reality of American economic and military superiority, anti-Americanism grew as an attempt to maintain national pride by belittling American culture. When American culture began to dominate overseas as well, the ambivalence towards America's role in Europe was replaced by a growing insistence on European independence.

At the start of the twentieth century American business began to invest in Europe. This trend rose dramatically after the end of WWI, as large corporations like Ford, Kodak, and General Motors penetrated the markets. It was during this time that New York supplanted London as the financial center of the world. After WWII American investments rose to the tens of billions and hundreds of corporations set up shop across Europe. This deluge of American products led many to believe their countries were being Americanized by material goods. The omnipresence of American culture in Europe created childhoods filled with Superman, Elvis Presley, and Coca Cola. An Italian being interviewed confessed “American mass culture did not even feel like an import, so deeply imbedded were its conventions and formulas in the consciousness and daily experience of young Europeans.”⁶ It was the fear that Europe would become too American that gave strength to the anti-Americanism of the twentieth century.

American anti-communism during the Cold War, a reversal of power positions between the United States and Europe after WWII, and the fear of “Americanization” were three factors in the creation of the anti-American perspective. To these, we must add the influence of Soviet propaganda, an important factor that lies outside the scope of this article. This article sought to clarify the complex causes of hatred or resentment towards the United States, but it is necessary,

⁶ Ibid., 205

before concluding this examination of anti-Americanism, to complicate the matter somewhat. First, the class division in Europe with regards to America must be addressed. Because anti-Americanism has consistently been a perspective of the European elite, perhaps it must be looked at as something different than one continent's rejection of another. The new analysis would move away from grand narratives of values and identity to emphasize the contest for power among the elite. Second, and to conclude, anti-Americanism can be seen not as resistance to America per se, but as resistance to the modernity which America represented. Critics of the Americanization of Europe did not recognize "that the transformations taking place in Europe were part of a trend prevalent in every industrialized nation."⁷ As the relationship across the Atlantic is examined from increasing angles it becomes far too complex to be defined by the politics of the Cold War.

⁷ Ibid., 202