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There's nothing new about anti-Americanism

By BOGDAN KIPLING

THEY LOVE to hate George W. Bush, though not America or Americans. That's what they say in the United States, and maybe in Canada, too. They loved Bill Clinton, the golden boy with the golden smile, and his biting of the lower lip when instant sorrow was called for.

Then George W. Bush came and spoiled it all. They comfort themselves that he wasn't elected. He was imposed on the American people by the Supreme Court, putty in his hands even before he could grip the levers of power.

President Bush is widely hated, as countless public opinion polls have shown. But abhorring him doesn't nearly explain the dislike of America, as an essay titled "Western Europe's America Problem," in the Chronicle of Higher Education, illuminates.

It is good that Andrei S. Markovits, professor of comparative politics and German studies at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, decided to publish this adaptation from his soon-to-be-published book, *Uncouth Nation: Why Europe Dislikes America* (Princeton University Press).

Mr. Markovits unveils right at the opening what this is all about – the huge misconception, implied or actually believed around the world, that anti-Americanism is something new. He uses a subtle example to demonstrate that it is the opposite: a malignant growth as old as the hills.

Nearly half a century ago, when he and his father arrived in the United States from Romania by way of Vienna, he writes, neither of them spoke a word of English. But the New York families who gave them shelter all spoke some German. "What impressed me no end and will always remain with me," he goes on, "was how all those people adored my Viennese-accented German."

For business reasons, he relates, his father had to return to Vienna, where he enrolled Andrei in the Theresianische Akademie. The reception the young boy received in that exclusive school was revealing – not because of his origin in Europe's disdained eastern areas, "but by virtue of having become a quasi American," he writes.

"From the get-go until my graduation, many years later, I was always admonished by my English teachers, in their heavily accented, Viennese-inflected English, not to speak this abomination of an 'American dialect' or 'American slang,' and never to use 'American spelling,' with its simplifications that testified prima facie to the uncultured and simpleton nature of Americans."

Any transgressions he committed, be it cheating in class or playing soccer in hallways, he relates, was met with this admonition: "Markovits, we are not in the Wild West, we are not in Texas. Behave yourself."

Here, Mr. Markovits makes a wry comment that is priceless in its brevity and pointedness: "Viennese-accented German, wonderful; American-accented English, awful. The pattern still pertains nearly 50 years later."

Aversion to America, Mr. Markovits writes, is becoming greater, louder, more determined. "It is unifying Western Europeans more than any other political emotion – with the exception of a common hostility toward Israel." These closely related resentments, he says, are now acceptable in polite company and in the discourse of political elites.

But Mr. Markovits doesn't let the Bush administration off the hook, either. He speaks of its "disastrous and irresponsible policies, haughty demeanor and arrogant tone." He says the Bush administration "bears responsibility" for a situation in which anti-Americanism has "mutated into a sort of global antinomy." He says "real and perceived ills of modernity (are) now inextricably identified with America."

That is a heavy rap. But the deeper truth Mr. Markovits digs out is more disturbing. The "anti-Bushism," he says, is the "glaring tip of a massive anti-American iceberg."

Only 20-odd years ago, vehement protests against medium-range American missiles rattled Germany and Britain. NATO and President Ronald Reagan decided to place the nuclear-armed missiles in Europe as a deterrent to similar Soviet missiles.

The protests were seen as Western Europe's ultimate rejection of the United States. Yet when a few members of Congress started demanding that Mr. Reagan take the hint and leave Europe to its fate, Bonn, London and Paris pleaded for assurances that the protective umbrella of American power would remain in place.

There is no Soviet threat now, and Europe should feel safe. But I doubt that it does. Mr. Markovits is right about the current anti-Americanism and even more right in refocusing on its old, deep pre-Bush roots.

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