

Weekend: Books

Hating the powerful focus on european anti-americanism

DIANE N. LABROSSE

Freelance

815 words

12 May 2007

[Montreal Gazette](#)

Final

J7

English

Copyright © 2007 Montreal Gazette

UNCOUTH NATION: WHY EUROPE DISLIKES AMERICA

By Andrei S. Markovits

Princeton University Press, 263 pages, \$29.50

Spurred by the Bush administration's 2003 invasion of Iraq, global anti-Americanism has reached an unprecedented level. In *Uncouth Nation: Why Europe Dislikes America*, Andrei S. Markovits explains why anti-Americanism has become the "lingua franca" of most of the nations of western Europe.

Markovits, who is the Karl W. Deutsch collegiate professor of comparative politics and German studies at the University of Michigan, argues that the crescendo of post-9/11 European anti-Americanism has deep roots that can be traced back to at least 1776. Borrowing the German journalist-scholar Josef Joffe's Mr. Big formulation, Markovits explains 20th-century anti-Americanism as a predictable reaction to the overwhelming power of the United States and the concurrent weakening of the major states of western Europe after two catastrophic world wars and the Cold War. This reaction to the "eight-hundred pound gorilla in the room" (or "hyperpuissance," in the words of former French foreign minister Hubert Vedrine) will be familiar to Canadian readers.

A prominent feature of the European anti-American impulse is the threat of the complete Americanization of all aspects of European life: economics, culture, sport, education, law and media. The wave of protests that swept Europe on Feb. 15, 2003, in anticipation of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, is evidence, according to Markovits, of the unifying and potentially inexhaustible power of western European anti-Americanism that can be used by politicians for the purpose of creating a common European identity.

What primarily concerns Markovits, and what drove him to write the book, is his perception that anti-Americanism has recently taken on a particularly xenophobic and racist cast. In his opinion, the political left in the United States and Europe now expresses an anti-Zionism that frequently morphs into anti-Semitism (here it must be pointed out that Markovits does not de facto equate criticism of Israeli policies with anti-Semitism). This relates directly to Markovits's most controversial chapter, on the confluence of anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism in western Europe.

He argues that anti-Semitism, the traditional preserve of the political far right in Europe, is now acceptable to the political left because western Europeans have come to perceive the United States and Israel as sharing common *modi operandi* in terms of foreign policy and the manner in which they use their power. In other words, the United States and Israel are seen to be behaving in the manner of pre-1945 bellicose European states, and both are described in terms that recall traditional European anti-Semitism. According to Markovits, the twin hatreds of millennial,

genocidal anti-Semitism and the more recent and less lethal anti-Americanism have thus become shared positions of both the far right and left, as well as a broad spectrum of the European public and its elites.

Uncouth Nation is part scholarly survey and part impassioned cri de coeur. Scholars will have some concerns with its sweeping generalizations.

The book focuses on Old Europe - primarily Germany and Britain and most of western Europe - but deliberately excludes the countries of eastern Europe, since most of those nations, which suffered decades of Soviet occupation after 1945, obviously took a radically and necessarily different view of the United States.

Markovits interprets the genuine and widespread outpouring of support and sympathy for the United States after the attacks of 9/11 as a transitory and suspect phenomenon; even Jean-Marie Colombani's *Nous sommes tous Américains* article in *Le Monde*, on Sept. 13, 2001, is viewed through the lens of Colombani's later criticism of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Authors of nuanced investigations of America, from Alexis de Tocqueville to Bernard-Henri Levy, receive scant attention. More problematic is the serious underplaying of the vastly divergent histories of the states of western Europe, especially Britain, France and Germany.

Nonetheless, Markovits's analysis and discussion of post-1991 and particularly post-9/11 European anti-Americanism is convincing and disturbing. The end of the Soviet empire meant that the United States was no longer needed as protector of western Europe, and the Bush administration's foreign and domestic policies since the beginning of 2003 have resulted in a tidal wave of global hostility and derision. *Uncouth Nation* admirably fulfills the mandate of the new Public Square series published by **Princeton University Press**, which produces scholarly political books that are intended to foster public discussion and debate.

Diane N. Labrosse, the managing editor of *H-Diplo* and the National Security Archive's *H-Diplo* Fellow, has taught at Concordia and McGill universities.

Colour Photo: **PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS** / Andrei S. Markovits is a professor of comparative politics and German studies at the University of Michigan. ;