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Barry Rubin, Judith Colp Rubin. *Hating America: A History.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. xviii + 307 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-516773-3; $21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-530649-1.

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Don't Hate Me Because I'm Beautiful

This book traces a history of anti-Americanism from the founding of the United States to reaction to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The authors previously have published studies of Arab politics and anti-Americanism in the Middle East, including a biography of Yasir Arafat. Barry Rubin is the editor of the *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, and Judith Colp Rubin is a journalist with Middle East experience.

"Anti-Americanism" here means criticism of the United States by foreigners on the basis that the United States is inevitably evil; criticism that greatly exaggerates the country's shortcomings; criticism that deliberately misrepresents the United States for self-serving purposes; or criticism that falsely portrays American society, policies, or goals as ridiculous or malevolent. The book perceptively shows that anti-Americanism, until recently, has been the vocation of foreign intellectuals, rather than a belief shared by "the masses," so that the direct effect of anti-Americanism on other countries' policies and actions against the United States is uncertain. (Although current events in places like Palestine, Lebanon, and Venezuela, where democratic processes are producing regimes openly hostile to the United States, stand to clarify this relationship.)

The book's central and most problematic argument is that anti-Americanism has arisen consistently out of unwarranted fears among peoples, of different world regions, about American culture and politics over the last two and one-half centuries. In the eighteenth century Europeans, especially French intellectuals (France appears the most persistent haven of anti-Americanism in the world), feared that anyone who lived in the United States would degenerate because of the natural environment. In the first part of the nineteenth century, anti-Americanism shifted to fear of American democratic institutions, by which elites lost privilege, and high culture allegedly became impossible. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Latin Americans joined Europeans in fear of American mass culture and industrialization, the impact of which was beginning to expand far beyond U.S. borders. In the first part of the twentieth century, fascists and communists made anti-Americanism state policy, as a basis for justifying rapid reorganization of their societies along racial collectivized class lines. After World War II, the Middle East joined Latin America and Europe in deciding that predictions of American domination had become reality. In its broad time span and survey of different locations, the book is more comprehensive than studies focused on specific countries or contemporary history.[1]

Hating America deserves credit for clarifying the fact that recent expressions of hatred for the United States in the Middle East are hardly a new phenomenon. It is strangely reassuring that foreigners, nearly around the world, have both feared American influence and predicted American downfall for over two hundred years now. But the book overly minimizes the role of U.S. actions, especially beginning in the twentieth century, in fostering such anti-Americanism. For example, the book interprets the impact of U.S. military interventions on anti-Americanism by observing that anti-Americanism has not taken root strongly in countries that have experienced direct military conflict with the United States. Anti-Americanism has been less pronounced, that is, in Britain, Germany, Mexico, Japan, and Vietnam (all of which, since 1776, have fought with the United States) than in France, Russia, Venezuela, Syria, and Indonesia. (The book does not discuss the existence or strength of Chinese and Indian anti-Americanisms, surely important questions.) By meeting the United States on the battlefield, the authors argue, other countries "learned that conflict with America was costly, that conciliation was advantageous, and that a stereotype of U.S. permanent hostility was not accurate" (p. 132). The consequences of this experience were that defeated foreigners could better "pick and choose rationally what was worth copy-

ing, adapting, or rejecting from the United States," thus weakening anti-Americanism (pp. 225-226). This interpretation is novel, but a more reasonable explanation is that American interaction with certain countries, precipitated by military conflict, led to the planting and growth of American financial investment and cultural ways in those countries. The interpretation also is a bit distressing; presumably, the authors, even if inadvertently, do not mean to imply that war serves as a prescription for solving anti-Americanism.

On the other hand, as the authors accurately point out, national leaders in Latin America and the Middle East have blamed American domination for the failure of their regions to develop economically, attributing all sorts of domestic or environmental problems to American machinations. Mexican leaders attributed student revolts to CIA manipulation, and drought to the United States stealing rain (pp. 120-121). Egyptian journalists blamed the crash of an Egypt Air passenger plane on an American effort to embarrass Egypt, and accused the United States of poisoning food it air-dropped to Afghan civilians (pp. 171, 180). Many foreign media sources, not only in developing countries, alleged the attacks on September 11 were the work of American and Israeli operatives. Today there may be little difference between anti-Americanism and wild conspiracy-mongering.

But, again, in its critique of such scapegoating, *Hating America* fails to show an understanding of the impact in other countries of known U.S. actions against developing nations or their peoples. The authors, for example, characterize as anti-Americanism a charge by a British newspaper in 2002 that the United States is imperialistic because it, at the time, was contemplating war with Iraq, and has practiced assassination of certain foreign leaders, experimented with biological weapons, and tortured captured foreigners (pp. 211-212). All of these charges are valid. But for the authors, one or even several examples of distasteful American behavior do not constitute a basis for condemnation of American civilization or lament about American domination. This is fair, but they thus miss the point that, given waxing American international power, negative incidents (not terribly significant to U.S. security, much less to most American citizens) may have a legitimately dramatic and memorable impact in weaker countries. The Rubins imply that it is up to others to better understand virtuous American qualities so that anti-Americanism may dissipate. Surely they are at most half right: do we as Americans not have a responsibility to understand American strengths as well as the unique harm of which our country is capable, and others' perception of American influence, more sophisticatedly as well?

Likewise, the authors attribute much of the sustenance of anti-Americanism to other countries' jealousy of uniquely favorable American qualities. The book states, but does not demonstrate or cite supporting literature, that these qualities are first, "an idealism, bordering on enlightened altruism." Americans believe "that improving peoples' lives" provides the route to peace and success. Second, Americans possess "a powerful optimism" or expectation that "everything will turn out right in the end." As such, Americans often "brush aside the endless advice that something cannot be done." Third, Americans are characterized by "a pragmatic, problem-solving mentality." Rather than "muddling through" difficulties, Americans wish to resolve them. Finally, Americans prefer not to engage in foreign entanglement. There "is no country in the world less interested in empire or world conquest" (pp. 238-239). For example, foreigners "failed to understand that American policies in the Civil War, Cold War, [and] 2003 Iraq War were motivated in large part … by moral considerations beyond realpolitik" (p. 48).

The idea that the United States is unique in world history, of course, is traditional, going back to J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur's *Letters of an American Farmer* (1782), and developed subsequently by Alexis by Tocqueville and Frederick Jackson Turner, as well as progressive and liberal-consensus historians and American apologists until the 1970s. Since then, however, historians have questioned this portrayal, because it tends to portray the United States not only as "exceptional," but morally superior to other countries because of such "exceptionalism"; because the portrayal discounts evidence that the United States actually conforms to international patterns in some ways; and because of evidence that the diversity of people in the United States, and U.S. foreign relations, do not share such a harmonized value system or history. Meanwhile, most modern scholarship in U.S. foreign relations has attributed U.S. diplomatic and military actions to service of Americans' national interests, not primarily fulfillment of high moral principle. Again, Americans' preconceptions of unique American greatness have probably contributed at least something to the development of anti-Americanism over time, but this is not addressed in *Hating America*.[2]

The book then ultimately provides only part of the story of the historical development of anti-Americanism, because it excessively attributes anti-Americanism to others and their uninformed, "irrational" misinterpretations of American virtue, and minimizes the significance

of Americans' actions that may warrant not only criticism but suspicion of our country's policies or attitudes. More searching studies, such as those of Julia Sweig and Paul Hollander, are worthwhile to understand the formation and implications of this important topic.[3]

Notes

[1]. Alan McPherson, *Yankee No! Anti-Americanism in U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Philippe Roger, *L'Ennemi Américain: Généalogie de l'antiaméricanisme français* (Paris: Seuil, 2002); and Andrew Kohut, *America against the World: How We Are Different and Why We Are Disliked* (New York: Times Books, 2006).

[2]. See, as an introduction, Ian Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History,"*American Historical Review* 96 (1991), pp. 1031-55; Byron Shafer, ed., *Is America Different?: A New Look at American Exceptionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Michael Ignatieff, ed., *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Warren Cohen, ed., *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[3]. Julia Sweig, *Friendly Fire: Losing Friends and Making Enemies in the Anti-American Century* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006); and Paul Hollander, *Anti-Americanism: Rational and Irrational* (Somerset, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1995). See also Paul Hollander, ed., *Understanding Anti-Americanism: Its Origins and Impact at Home and Abroad* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004).

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