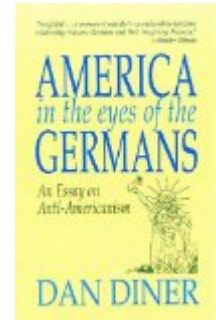


Dan Diner. *America in the Eyes of the Germans: An Essay on Anti-Americanism.* Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1996. xviii + 170 pp. \$44.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-55876-104-9.



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"The Americans are really the only nation on earth that I view instinctively with a deep hatred--like a false, voracious, sanctimonious, shameless beast of prey that deceives with every expression and in reality only snaps around looking for food for its insatiable, dollar lusting belly like an alligator." Thus wrote the "geopolitician" and professor of geography at the University of Munich, Karl Haushofer, in 1921 (p. 65). That Haushofer served as the teacher of Rudolf Hess and as an influence on early National Socialism is well known. What is less known is that such sentiments as Haushofer's had been widespread among the middle class and intelligentsia in Germany for many decades, and were not solely the result of America's entry into World War I and its role in Germany's defeat. Dan Diner's important, concise, and highly readable book sketches in several connected essays the development of anti-Americanism as an ideology from the late eighteenth century to the aftermath of the Gulf War of 1991.

It was the Gulf War itself that spurred Diner. He appears to have been amazed at the variety and sophistication of the arguments he heard in

Germany against the United States as it pushed Germany to assist in the struggle against Iraq. He set out to find the roots and antecedents for all he was hearing and ultimately produced not so much a book about how all Germans, or even most Germans, see America (as is disingenuously implied by the English title), but a book about how those with opinions *biased against* America have expressed themselves over the past 200 or more years. When Diner is finished, those who were not intimately familiar with the topic prior to reading his book will be astounded by the depth and history of anti-Americanism in Germany. Indeed, Diner views European anti-Americanism as being at its most profound and troubling precisely in Germany, the country that on the surface appears, to him and many others, the most Americanized in all Europe.

The book moves chronologically; after the introduction, it first shows Romanticism as the "main workshop for lasting anti-American images and metaphors" (p. 31). Heinrich Heine, the Young Germany movement, and others "created an arsenal of anti-American stereotypes" (p. 41). Heine

himself lampooned America as a place "where the most repulsive of all tyrants, the populace, hold vulgar sway" (p. 38). In the period running up to the First World War, surface animosity toward Britain and France, Diner argues, was stronger than any hostility for America. That war, however, would change much. The United States, the nation that was, to the ideologically anti-American, "culturally and socially ... a lower class artificially raised to a nation" (p. 51), made the difference in the outcome of the war. Germans found it vastly more humiliating to come up short in battle against an inferior America as compared to their long-running European rivals.

During Weimar, when American business and industrial practices, along with American culture, made inroads into Germany, the stage was being set for an even more virulent intellectual anti-Americanism. As Germany's masses became more and more receptive to what they viewed as the blessings of American popular culture, intellectuals became steadily more scandalized at how "blind efficiency," "forced conformity," and "unbridled business enthusiasm" reigned (p. 70). Adolf Hitler, whose political life began at the inception of the Weimar Republic, embodied this paradox of German anti-Americanism precisely: his "fascination with technology" (p. 85) was tied with a loathing for all that comes with it. His drastic and ultimately fatal misunderstanding and underestimation of America mirrored well the same mistakes that had been committed by Germany's leaders in World War I.

The final chapter makes the fascinating point that today's German anti-Americanists have pushed an "exonerating projection" of Nazism onto America (p. 128). That is, they now associate all the evil characteristics of Nazism not with their own past, but with the America that today serves as a continuing oppressor. "The projection onto America of images and metaphors of evil that history had reserved for Nazism marked the dawn of a new dimension of anti-Americanism"

(p. 130). Nothing better illustrates the projection than the slogan Diner says swept Germany and serves as the title of his last chapter: "USA-SA-SS."

Almost to the very end, the book seems prepared to disappoint on one level. Diner rarely judges or weighs the statements and sentiments of those whose anti-Americanism he is describing. For most of the book, he is content with a mere description of biases, rather than a more typically scholarly engagement with his sources. Just as one example, he mentions and then leaves unchallenged one Nazi's assertion that Eleanor Roosevelt's mother was either Jewish or half-Jewish; we are either to regard such assertions as patently absurd, irrelevant, or not worthy of Diner's time to explore further (p. 100). Then in the book's last pages, in a flurry of judgments, he finally does repeated battle with the delusions behind much of the anti-Americanism he has just described. He paints the anti-Americanists in damning colors, as creators of an abstract "moral heaven" from which they look down upon a sullied world (p. 143). So while Diner's ultimate sympathies and judgment are not in doubt once this fine book has been read all the way through, for most of the book readers are on their own if they wish to evaluate the validity and impact of the biases. Still, it is an enjoyable solitary journey.

(This book is translated from the original, *Verkehrte Welten: Antiamerikanismus in Deutschland—ein historischer Essay*)

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