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Richard Pells. *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II*. New York: Basic Books, 1997. xviii +444 S. \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-465-00164-4.

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“Europeans have been exposed more than anyone else,” Pells rightly asserts, “to the full force of America’s economic, political, and cultural power in the twentieth century.” His own sojourns in Europe convinced him that, even with all this force of influence, whether transmitted by Washington or Hollywood, the values and behavioral patterns of most people in Europe were not significantly altered. Accordingly, he argues that the “Americanization” of Europe is a “myth” and that, instead, Europeans have adapted American culture to their own needs and tastes.

He begins his examination with the ascendancy of the United States following World War I, which had left it the only Western country with the resources for the large-scale production of a potentially international cultural force such as films. By the mid-20s, consequently, 60 to 95 percent (varying by country) of films shown in Europe were American. This resulted in part from the great number of European filmmakers that had been attracted by the opportunities of Hollywood. But of course it was Hitler who did the most to shift the balance of cultural powers from one side of the Atlantic to the other by instigating the great talent exodus from Europe. Here, Pells traces the importance of foundations, notably the Rockefeller Foundation, in facilitating this great cultural migration. (As he is careful to remind us, not nearly enough was done because the State Department objected; the only reason it let Jews and Marxists onto, say, the New School faculty was their expertise on Germany.)

Thanks to Hitler, too, Germany came to experience American influence most directly and powerfully after World War II because of the occupation. This enables

Pells to use it as a model of both how a country could adapt as well as resist American culture. The Americans failed, for example, to reform its school system along more “democratic” lines. They did give permission (and money) to create a new university, but it was the Berliners themselves who wanted their new Free University to model democratic education for the rest of Germany. The FU went on to establish the foremost American Studies program in Europe, another area he covers admirably, pointing out that the Germans were most eager to learn about America because it allowed them to forget the past and get on with their lives. Not surprisingly, this great familiarity with the United States and the Free University’s democratic character made its students leaders in the uprisings against American foreign policies in the 1960s.

Perhaps this means that at least those German students had fully adopted the democratic principles the United States had tried to instill in the school system earlier so that they had become more American than the Americans who were certainly deviating from their democratic principles in these policies. As an example of thorough Americanization, Pells cites the *Spiegel*, whose cover indeed mirrors that of *Time*, but I’d cite it on precisely the other side of his argument: A peek beyond the *Spiegel*’s cover makes it clear that *Time*-ly conciseness does not in the remotest characterize the former’s familiarly German exhaustiveness.

To win the Cold War for the American way, the United States not only implemented the Marshall Plan and fielded Fulbright scholars but also funneled funds to conservative German parties via the CIA. Much more effectively, though, it utilized another mass medium,

beaming out numerous radio programs with western news and music. The Communists jammed the news but, if they had understood popular culture, they would have jammed the music, because that ultimately had a vastly more potent impact on the young.

“Transatlantic misunderstandings,” American and European, are richly illustrated through the writings of Mary McCarthy on Italy and Simone de Beauvoir on America, one as misperceived as the other, and through the experiences of the more middle-class folks who began to “do” Europe in increasing numbers with the advent of commercial jet travel in 1958. Americans in Europe understandably hung out with other Americans, so they did not get much European culture, while at the same time, they yearned for American amenities (convenient bathrooms beat out any cathedral, as Edmund Wilson put it). It is unlikely, though, that they yearned for a half-dozen types of lettuce in their supermarkets back home; those are available in the Austin, Texas where Prof. Pells teaches today, but in the early 1960s, before the “Europeanization” of America really set in, iceberg was it in Texas.

The Europeans seemed to find it even more important to represent differences as disparagement. It was, after all, galling, particularly to the French, to know that their country did not signify as much in “world” affairs as it once had. The French were even more galled by U.S. favoritism to Germany—which the latter reciprocated by remaining the most reliably pro-American country in Europe till the mid-60s. More generally, the Europeans could pick on us because, in the Cold War, the United States was “family,” as Pells nicely observes—which the Soviet Union certainly was not.

Contrary to these elitist disparagers, Europe’s “lower classes” always relished things American. This penchant worried self-appointed guardians of culture; they might have been worried, too, because the mass consumerism propelled by the United States helped to some extent to level class distinctions, even in Britain. Through the spread of English, of movies, and, increasingly, television, mass culture in fact has become America’s second-most lucrative export. Nowadays 90 percent of the films shown in Europe are American, and, in the wake of *Bonanza* and *Dallas*, *Baywatch* has achieved the greatest international popularity of any TV show. Ironically, those cultural doyens claimed mass culture to be a danger to democracy, but their opposition to it reflected chiefly their anti-democratic efforts to preserve their own diminishing authority. Youth culture solved that problem:

European youth sponged up American culture because more of them knew English, and it enabled them to set themselves off more “democratically” against their more authoritarian parents.

Pells aptly illustrates how we might get a sense of the European perspective: Imagine if you could only see German films, hear only French music, and read only Italian books. On the other hand, there is certainly no danger of that since the United States has become significantly Europeanized. The “New Left” came from England, “cultural criticism” from France, and the “long march through the institutions” from Germany’s Rudi Dutschke, though much of these influences were grounded in work such as that of C. Wright Mills, Michael Harrington, and John Kenneth Galbraith. And we’ve certainly all witnessed the veritable explosion of European exports that have entered our everyday lives—from gourmet goodies and bistros to clothes and cars.

Likewise illustrating this actual cross-fertilization is the fact that American companies had to adapt to their European customers—McDonald’s and Disney were able to “conquer” Europe only once they offered beer and wine in their respective establishments. On the other hand, such famous American institutions as RCA Records and Random House are now owned by Bertelsmann of Germany and Magnavox by Dutch Phillips, to name just a couple. What’s really been happening, instead of an Americanization of Europe and a Europeanization of America, is a globalization of Western culture that Pells sketches in his concluding chapter. Given his previous argument about European countries’ reassertion of their identities, Pells should not, however, find it paradoxical that, in the face of this wholesale Westernization, there’s a resurgence of nationalisms. Even though Americans drink cappuccino and chablis while Italians and French drink Coke—and so does everyone else—we all still want our distinctive identities. We want it all—all the goods of mass consumption the world has to offer plus our individuality (which indeed is expressed through our choices of goodies from this global marketbasket). That is one reasonably safe conclusion. Another is that when it comes to cultural influences the Hollywoods are more powerful than the Washingtons.

Pells has trenchantly synthesized a wealth of research and reporting. *Not Like Us* covers its subject from the artifacts of the most exclusive elite culture to those of the crassest commercialism of *Alltagskultur*. Both erudite and entertaining, Pells offers a rich read to anyone at all interested in the politics and business of culture.

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