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Reviewed by **Mary Ann Heiss**, Kent State University

Max Paul Friedman's timely and thought-provoking 2008 Bernath Lecture, "Anti-Americanism and U.S. Foreign Relations" is at heart less about anti-American thoughts, words, or deeds and those who think, say, or do them (although the essay deals to some extent with all of those things), than about the consequences of American policymakers' assumptions that any international criticism of U.S. foreign policy is ipso facto a reflection of deep-seeded, visceral, and uncompromising anti-Americanism. Friedman assails this assumption on two grounds. The first, to which he devotes only scant attention, is that true, unrelenting anti-Americanism is extremely rare and should never be confused with simple criticism of or honest opposition to American policy. The second, to which he devotes much more attention and through which he makes the essay's primary point, is that seeing foreign criticism as stemming from simple hatred of America blinded American policymakers during the Cold War (and since) to the shortcomings, weaknesses, and downright dangers of U.S. adventurism abroad and prevented them from considering alternatives to heavy-handed and costly interventions.

To prove this contention, Friedman marshals examples that range widely from international assessments of U.S. intervention in Guatemala, the Bay of Pigs (a lamentably short discursion), and escalation in Vietnam, with a primary focus on France. Throughout he makes admirable use of source material—primary as well as secondary—in French, German, and Spanish. In the end, he asserts that a knee-jerk tendency to dismiss less-than-positive critiques of U.S. foreign policy from abroad as unfounded and irrational redounded negatively on the United States and prevented U.S. policymakers from comprehending the impact of their policy decisions on other nations. It also did a disservice to foreign critics who were seeking merely to hold the United States to the high principles it supposedly espoused and wanted others to emulate. In the "if you're not with us you're against us" environment that has gripped official Washington for much of

the nation's history and that unquestionably has been dominant since World War II, it was not considered possible to brook foreign criticism or even question the nation's foreign policy decisions, even though, as Friedman ably demonstrates, it certainly should have been.

Friedman credits various factors and ideas with fostering the mindset that created and sustained American equation of foreign criticism with anti-Americanism, most prominently the centuries—old claim of American exceptionalism. Exalted and glorified by some, lamented or denounced by others, but always lurking beneath the surface, whether for good or for ill, a smug, self-congratulatory sense of American uniqueness—and unique rightness—has long occupied a prominent place in analyses of U.S. foreign relations. For Friedman, its effects have been nothing less than disastrous. Convinced of the righteousness of the American cause, and of the universal goodness of American values such as “freedom and modernization” (505), “American exceptionalists” successfully demonized the nation's foreign critics as “irrational,” “illegitimate,” and “not worth taking seriously” (499). Who, after all, except the irrational, could oppose the good things America had to offer the world? And once the nation's critics were established as irrational, it was logical to deem their criticism as being irrational—and easily dismissible—as well. (To me, this seems akin to the twisted logic that gripped George F. Kennan's “long telegram” and the containment doctrine it spawned: because the Soviets were considered irrational and incapable of being reasoned with, it was not necessary to treat them as rational actors or try to reason with them.) Friedman's discussion of American exceptionalism as applied to foreign relations is an interesting and well-documented exploration of one of the underlying assumptions of the nation's internationalism, a phenomenon that even now carries a great deal of weight in the shaping and justification of U.S. foreign policy. And it is unquestionably a phenomenon that Friedman finds troubling and counterproductive.

In addition to exposing the fallacy that foreign criticism of U.S. foreign policy can be attributed to anti-American sentiment, Friedman also makes abundantly clear that the true source of foreign criticism of U.S. foreign policy lies with U.S. policy choices themselves as well as with their consequences. Few people or groups, he convincingly argues, hate America “just because.” In fact, aside from “some party-line Communists during the Cold War and some radical Islamists today” (499), whose views of America were and are unalterably negative, “in surveys taken throughout the post-World War II period, positive views of the United States outranked negative views in nearly every year until 2003” (498). The year 2003 as the beginning of the end of positive international assessments of the United States is telling, marking as it does the U.S.-led invasion/occupation of Iraq, an operation vilified around the world save in those nations that for their own reasons joined the “Coalition of the Willing.”¹ Even during the Vietnam War and the renewed Cold War tensions that characterized the first term of Ronald

¹ For President George W. Bush's first use of this phrase in the Iraq context, see <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/europe/11/20/prague.bush.nato/> (accessed 1 September 2008).

Reagan's presidency, episodes generally considered to be low-points for U.S. prestige around the world, international opinion was still largely pro-American, although not to the same degree as at other times. All that changed in 2003, when the nation seemingly set itself on a course that was at odds with its principles. What Friedman's research into the ebb and flow of foreign opinion regarding the United States demonstrates to all who are willing to listen is that the nation itself is responsible for what the rest of the world thinks of it. Anti-Americanists, in other words, like terrorists, aren't born they're made—largely by American foreign policy choices. Or, to put it still another way, the United States must be prepared to reap what it sows and not cavalierly wave off foreign criticism as nothing more than a reflection of others' dislike of America or pique at the nation's wealth and prosperity.

Friedman's essay is not an easy or pleasant read. In fact, in spots it's nothing less than extremely depressing, recounting as it does missed opportunities for U.S. foreign policymakers to have heeded prescient international warnings about the potential costs of the nation's foreign policies, costs that did indeed materialize and that still drain the nation's resources and capital even today. Yet it is also a well-timed plea for rational consideration of where the United States is heading, and at what present and future cost. The nation's "sudden and pronounced shift to unabashed unilateralism, preventive war, indefinite detention without trial, and defense of torture" (513) has every reason to give the rest of the world pause. That it has should be seen as affirming the basic decency of those who have had the courage to stand up and speak out. American citizens themselves should be deeply troubled by these developments as well; that some apparently are not raises questions and concerns beyond the scope of either Friedman's essay or this commentary.

Among the foreign critics of American foreign policy that Friedman quotes is the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, who in 1964 admonished Americans: "Don't be provincial. Try to understand the diversity of the world" (504). This was certainly good advice in 1964, as the nation escalated its involvement in Vietnam, though regrettably it went unheeded. As Friedman explains, it also initially went undelivered, as Fuentes' entry into the United States was delayed over concerns about his perceived anti-Americanism. But Fuentes' advice is also relevant today. If American policymakers are to avoid alienating the bulk of the world's population, a population that grows increasingly important for the implementation of American foreign policy goals by the day, they must eschew a simplistic and wrong-headed equation of foreign criticism of the nation's policy choices with relentless hatred of America and seek instead to understand why it is that people in other countries are in fact critical. Listening, not dismissing, and being willing to act upon what is said, would seem to be the better part of valor that's been lamentably—read, disastrously—missing from much of the nation's recent foreign policy. The greatest contribution of Friedman's essay is to lay bare this dangerous trend, and to offer up a prescription for setting the nation on the proper course. "After all," he concludes, the nation's "best ideals . . . remain widely shared around the world" (514). All that remains is to ensure that the nation's deeds match them.

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