

ANTI-AMERICANISMS IN FRANCE

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France is undoubtedly the first response that comes to mind when asked which country in Europe is the most anti-American. Between taking the lead of the anti-globalization movement in the late 1990s and taking the lead of the anti-war in Iraq camp in 2003, France confirmed its image as the “oldest enemy” among America’s friends.¹ Even before the days of De Gaulle and Chirac, it seems that France has always been at the forefront of anti-American animosity—whether through eighteenth-century theories about the degeneration of species in the New World or through 1950s denunciations of the Coca-Colonization of the Old World.² The American public certainly returns the favor, from pouring French wine onto the street to renaming fries and toast, and France has become the favorite bogeyman of conservative shows and provided material for countless late-night comedians’ jokes.³

Surprisingly, however, polling data reveals that France is not drastically more anti-American than other European countries—even less so on a variety of dimensions. The French do stand out in their criticism of US unilateral leadership in world affairs and in their willingness to build an independent Europe able to compete with the United States if needed.⁴ But their overall feelings towards the US were not dramatically different from those of other European countries in 2004.⁵ Neither was their assessment of the primary motives driving American foreign policy, and US Middle East policy in particular.⁶ Furthermore, despite what seems like growing gaps in their societal values (especially regarding religion), French and American public opinions agree on the big threats facing their societies, and they still share enough values to cooperate on international problems. Most paradoxically, given France’s international grandstanding on cultural issues, the French like American popular culture as much as the Germans, and even more than the Italians.⁷

Why do the French appear as incorrigible anti-Americans? Why is France singled out as a bastion of systematic opposition to US policies? Anti-Ameri-

canism can be defined as an unfavorable predisposition towards the United States, which leads individuals to interpret American actions through pre-existing views and negative stereotypes, irrespectively of the facts. It is based on a belief that there is something fundamentally wrong at the essence of what is America. This unfavorable predisposition manifests itself in beliefs, attitudes and rhetoric, which may or may not affect political behavior. Is France, according to this definition, anti-American? It is difficult in practice to distinguish between genuine anti-Americanism (disposition) and genuine criticism of the United States (opinion). It is partly because of this definitional ambiguity that France appears more anti-American than its European partners. While it is not clear that the French have a stronger negative predisposition against the US, they do have stronger opinions about America for at least three main reasons: the deep reservoir of anti-American arguments accumulated over the centuries; the simultaneous coexistence of a variety of types of anti-Americanism; and the costless ways in which anti-Americanism has been used for political benefit. This article explores each of these three features in turn, before discussing briefly the consequences of French anti-Americanism on world politics.

The Long Sedimentation of Anti-American Arguments

The first reason explaining why French anti-Americanism stands out is that France is the country with the deepest, most sedimented reservoir of anti-American arguments. French anti-Americanism is as old, if not older, as the country of the United States itself. Its long genealogy has been well documented over the years, best and most recently by Philippe Roger, who argues that its building blocs were constructed not only before Gaullism but even before the 1930s.⁸ Anti-Americanism in France seems to have proceeded in cycles triggered, though not exclusively, by conflicts in the Franco-American relationship. In spite of the heterogeneity of its sources and manifestations, what may explain the longevity of French anti-Americanism is the fact that, over time, the public discourse built up a rich repertoire of anti-American arguments, ready to be used with minimal adaptation to the new context.

French Anti-Americanism as Old as America Itself

Each period in the long Franco-American relationship saw the development of a new set of anti-American arguments, which over time accumulated into a vast repertoire. As a result, each time the occasion of criticizing the US would arise in France, either for external or for internal reasons, opinion-makers could use these arguments and adapt them to the current situation. Following is a rapid sketch of the marking moments in the history of French anti-Americanism.

French animosity towards America (and vice-versa) first built up during the time when France was an American power and, in particular, during the French and Indian Wars—on-and-off between 1689 and 1760.⁹ This is also the period when “enlightened” French intellectuals such as Buffon and Voltaire resorted to science to prove the inferiority of the New World—evidenced by the smallness of the American flora and fauna (dogs that do not bark, animal species that have become degenerate, venomous plants, etc.).¹⁰ Many French cultural prejudices about America, as well as national contempt, were born during this “pre-history” of Franco-American relations.

In spite of the mythology of Lafayette and the rosy Franco-American relationship during the Revolutionary war of independence, the sedimentation of anti-American arguments in the French intellectual and political discourse continued during this period—untrustworthiness, provincialism, individualism, egoism. American passiveness during the French Revolution and neutrality after revolutionary France had declared war on England, as well as the 1798-1800 “Quasi War” and the Louisiana Purchase comforted this image of a self-serving, hypocritical American nation.

After a period of relative indifference of French intellectuals to America (with the notable exception of Tocqueville and later Baudelaire), the public discourse focused passionately on the United States during the Civil War—even though none of France’s vital interests seemed to be at stake. The twin disasters of a French government that had silently bet on victory of the South and of the end of France’s disastrous Mexican adventure contributed to forging the next layer of anti-Americanism, made of accusations of materialism and primacy of economic interests, as well as resentment for the nascent formidable power of the United States.

The next wave of anti-American rhetoric entered the French political discourse after World War I, in a period of French disappointment in the United States over its postwar isolationism and perceived biased indifference to France in the matter of war debts and reparations. A major layer of the French anti-American apparatus was added at that time, when French intellectuals and other visitors to the United States, first among them George Duhamel with his bestseller *America the Menace*, conveyed the sense not only that America’s consumer and profit-oriented culture was unappealing in itself, but that it threatened to spread to France and affect its own traditions negatively.¹¹

The word “anti-Americanism” entered the French language in 1948, and by the early 1950s it had become a commonplace concept in French political discourse.¹² The twin critique articulated during the Cold War period on opposite sides of the political spectrum—both by Left Bank, communist intellectuals and later by General de Gaulle and his followers—focused on the domineering presence of the United States, which needed to be countered, either culturally or politically. If anything, the Vietnam War reinforced this image of the US as an imperialistic, expansionist, out-of-control superpower representing a threat to world order.

By the end of the Cold War, therefore, French rhetoric had accumulated a variety of anti-American arguments, some building on views articulated in an earlier historical period, others rooted in previous discourse but adapted to modern conditions.

The Recent Deteriorating Image of the US in France

These arguments came back to the fore when French anti-Americanism arose again in the 1990s. According to the extensive survey data recently examined by Richard Kuisel, it appears clearly that the deterioration of the image of the US in France preceded the Franco-American clash over Iraq—even though it skyrocketed after 2002.¹³ Upon close scrutiny, many of the criticisms of the US offered by France in the past few years barely qualify as anti-Americanism. Does disapproving of the American precipitation to intervene in Iraq or being skeptical of whether the outcome of the Iraqi elections was good automatically make one anti-American? However, many of the French tropes of anti-Americanism developed throughout the centuries resurfaced in the denunciation of the American “hypermower” that culminated with Franco-American crisis over Iraq.

Despite the widespread demonstrations of anti-Americanism throughout Western Europe in the 1980s over issues such as the American missiles, the Reagan era represented a “veritable peak in philoamericanism” in France.¹⁴ Surprisingly in retrospect, in 1984 more French (44%) than Germans or British declared themselves pro-American. In a 1988 survey, the French men and women polled rated “power,” “dynamism,” “wealth,” and “liberty” as the words they most commonly associated with the US. In their majority, they thought that America set a good example for political institutions, the media and free enterprise. In spite of some early opposition to the 1991 invasion of Iraq and France’s participation in the coalition, the Gulf War represented the apex of pro-Americanism in France in the postwar period.

A new cycle of anti-Americanism started in the early 1990s, and by the end of the Clinton administration, French confidence in the US had already been seriously eroded. In 1996, the French polled said that “violence,” “power,” “inequalities,” and “racism” first came to their mind when describing America. This new layer in the already well sedimented French anti-Americanism centered around a critique of American hypocrisy, both domestically and internationally.

Domestically, French intellectuals denounced the contradictions between the values righteously defended by American politicians and the violent reality of American society—homicide rates at least four times higher than in France; the number and easy availability of guns; the existence of the death penalty; the high degree of prison incarceration; rampant racism against the African-American community; and the failures to provide basic public goods, such as universal health care and basic public education.

Internationally, the French anti-American critique that emerged during the 1990s centered not only on hypocrisy, but also on the increasingly unilateral actions of the United States, whose international power was now unchecked as a result of the end of the Cold War. The image of the US became one of a domineering ally, unbearable to France because it was increasingly acting as a triumphant, self-centered, hegemonic superpower. This impression started in the commercial sphere, where the US used force and threat to open up the European market for audio-visual products and for hormone-treated beef—thereby unleashing legions of public protesters, such as world-famous sheep farmer José Bové.¹⁵ Congress also heavy-handedly passed laws designed to sanction foreign companies doing business in Cuba and Iran, which the Europeans interpreted as amounting to passing US laws on a global scale. In France the denunciation of these hypocritical, unilateral American actions became enmeshed in a virulent French critique of globalization often equated with Americanization.¹⁶ The impression of unilateralist drift was further reinforced by Transatlantic differences over NATO; European integration; the environment; the International Criminal Court; the selection of leaders in international organizations; disagreements over the handling of “rogue states,” in particular Iraq; and the US rejection of the Nuclear Test Ban treaty.¹⁷ It is then that French foreign minister Hubert Vedrine coined the word “hyperpower” to capture the French vision of the US always acting as an unrestrained superpower, always imposing its will, whatever the dispute.¹⁸

The growing French fears of American unilateralism were confirmed as soon as the Bush administration came into office—some of its first moves being the rejection of the Kyoto Treaty, the withdrawal from disarmament agreements, and the refusal to recognize the International Criminal Court. After the initial sympathy expressed to the American people after September 11 and the decision to support the US in Afghanistan, France started to drift apart rapidly from the views of the American administration on Iraq, especially after the passage of UN resolution 1441 in November 2002, the collapse of French efforts to avoid the war in early 2003, and the simultaneous outpouring of Francophobia in the US. Since then, anti-Americanism in France has been steadily high and politically consensual, rooted once again not only in the facts of the moment but in the deep reservoir of anti-American arguments accumulated over three centuries.

Finally, the traditional distinction made by the French between the United States as a collective entity and the Americans as private citizens is waning. Indeed, international resentment towards the foreign policy of the Bush administration seems to be spilling over onto the American people as well. A November 2004 IPSOS poll conducted after the American presidential election shows that half of the French surveyed now hold an unfavorable view of Americans.¹⁹ The reelection of George W. Bush, which showed to the world that a majority of Americans indeed approve of the foreign and domestic policies of his administration, seems to have narrowed the gap between more neg-

ative perceptions of American policy actions and more positive perceptions of American individual citizens.

Types of Anti-Americanisms in Contemporary France

The second reason why French anti-Americanism usually stands out is because of the simultaneous coexistence of a variety of types of anti-Americanism, giving the impression that everyone in France holds negative views of the United States in all dimensions of politics and society. French anti-Americanism is indeed quite heterogeneous, so much so that it would be more correct to refer to “anti-Americanisms.” And, yes, the list of French grievances towards the US is long and varied. But these grievances are not simultaneously shared by all French men and women, thereby explaining some paradoxes—such as individuals appearing both pro- and anti-American at once. In the following typology, inspired by the one recently developed by Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane,²⁰ I distinguish among seven types of anti-Americanism(s) found in contemporary France. These types are not mutually exclusive, as one individual or group may feed his/her anti-Americanism from several sources simultaneously. Neither do they suggest that an individual sharing one type of anti-American arguments can necessarily be classified as “anti-American.” One can be anti-American on some dimensions, but not on others. After all, several of these arguments are even articulated in the United States by Americans.

1) “Sovereignist” Anti-Americanism

Anti-Americanism in France is often associated with Gaullism. (“Souverainisme” is indeed a French term coined to designate those concerned with the primacy of national sovereignty.) The foreign policy of General de Gaulle made a lasting impression on France, as indicated by many surveys showing that the French have often led the way in Europe in disapproving of American foreign policy. On the right as on the left, many politicians have insisted on the importance of not losing control over the country’s sovereignty and destiny, even if this means getting in the way of the United States.

This anti-Americanism is rooted in a sensitive national ego and in a national bitterness over the loss of great power status. Indeed, this critique of the US as a domineering, self-interested nation that uses its immense power to establish global hegemony may stem as much from a genuine concern over its consequences on world peace as it does from envy and resentment. The result is a predisposition towards a fear of American power, only reinforced by a series of unilateral US actions since the end of the cold war. The policy result is a series of foreign policy actions designed to quell the excessive power of the US—from insistence on building a common foreign and security policy in Europe, to an open challenge to American policy at the United Nations.

2) *Legacy Anti-Americanism*

A related type of anti-Americanism comes from the legacy of a sometimes tense Franco-American history. Resentment of the US, built up over decades if not centuries, transpires episodically into a critique of the self-centeredness of America. The individuals articulating this critique focus on the half-empty glass of Franco-American relations: American isolationism during World War II until Pearl Harbor, a US administration that recognized Vichy France until 1942, the heavy bombardments that accompanied the Normandy invasion and the liberation of France from the Nazis, the American "treason" in Dien Bien Phu and later Suez, and so on.

A particularly vivid legacy of anti-Americanism in France comes from the cold war period, the ideological divisions of which left a lasting imprint on French views of America. In the countries where Communist parties were a non-negligible political force (such as France and Italy), the US was often presented as the embodiment of what the Left was against: an imperialistic, capitalist, profit-oriented society. From the Rosenbergs to the Bay of Pigs, from McCarthyism to the Vietnam War, the United States with its actions indeed provided its critics with plenty of ammunition. Even though the cold war has now been over for fifteen years and communism has lost its appeal in France, the repertoire of anti-American thought developed over several decades of cold war politics has become engrained in the vocabulary and the mentality of many French intellectuals, some of whom are still alive and active today.

Whether coming from the left or from the right, "legacy anti-Americanism" manifests itself as a predisposition towards believing that what the US did in the past, in addition to what the US does today, suggests that it is a partner that cannot be trusted. As a result, France needs to take its national security into its own hands instead of being at the mercy of the vagaries of American foreign policy—meaning, for instance, building an independent European security policy.

3) *Liberal Anti-Americanism*

Like many other Europeans, the French also offer a "liberal" critique of America as not living up to its ideals. The charge, made by those who share America's ideals but not its actions, is one of hypocrisy. As a result of this hypocrisy, the United States becomes a danger to the very cause that it pretends to be promoting. For instance, the US posits itself as a champion of free trade, but does not hesitate to impose tariffs on steel or provide tax loopholes to its companies to give them a competitive edge. Similarly, the US preaches environmental conservation and aid to international development, but its policies speak otherwise. American politicians have emphatically denounced Saddam Hussein's regime, while other dictators and nuclear powers go free, and successive American administrations have turned a blind eye on the human rights violations of many of US allies in the Middle East. Another example of American hypocrisy, often used in Europe especially by the Left, is the United

States' unconditional support for Israel at the detriment of the Palestinian people, the American media's unbalanced representation of pain and suffering, and the US's biased insistence on respect of some United Nations resolutions and not others—charges all leveled with increasing frequency under the Bush administration. In short, if the US does not do what it preaches, then it should either be held accountable or not be trusted. Note that this is the anti-American critique that leads many American observers to judge France as incorrigibly anti-Semitic.

4) *Elitist Anti-Americanism*

Driven mostly by cultural arguments, instead of policy actions, the oldest and most visible form of anti-Americanism in France has been a patronizing elitist critique of America. This is the anti-Americanism with the longest history and greatest virulence in France. The haughty anti-American discourse of French intellectuals, first propagated by the Lumières in the eighteenth century, looked down on the New World, not only because of the paucity of its historical richness and tradition, but also because of the lack of education and taste of its citizens. To a large extent, this negative discourse against the United States has been, at various points in time, a rhetoric produced in order to positively construct French identity. As James Ceaser writes, "according to the French analyst Jean-Francois Revel, 'If you remove anti-Americanism, nothing remains of French political thought today, either on the left or on the right.' Revel might just as well have said the same thing about German political thought or the thought of almost any Western European country, where anti-Americanism reigns as the lingua franca of the intellectual class."²¹

Survey data, as well as consumption patterns, suggest a large discrepancy in contemporary France between elites and the rest of the nation in their relationship to American culture. France is the country in Europe where McDonald's, with its more than one thousand outlets, is the most profitable, and Hollywood blockbusters have no problem making it to the top of the box-office. The same distinction between elites and masses is found, to a lesser extent, in other Western European countries. What distinguishes France in this respect is the particular role of intellectuals in society. As a result of this special role, this constant elitist contempt towards American culture bleeds into the popular psyche, and the feeling of French superiority over the United States is well engrained, even by those who have wholeheartedly adopted American popular culture.

5) *Nostalgic Anti-Americanism*

A related, though different type of anti-Americanism in Europe can be labeled "nostalgic," for it is caused by a longing for things past and a resistance to change. Unlike "elitist" anti-Americanism, the negative sentiments about American culture and society are, in this case, shared by individuals from all walks of life, united in their beliefs that their country used to be a better place

before the United States (and its figleaf, globalization) transformed it, dehumanized it, and cut it off from its traditional roots. The current complaints in France about how McDonald's has eliminated traditional bistros recalls complaints in the 1950s about the "coca-colonization" of France at the expense of traditional wines, themselves reminiscent of earlier complaints about the deleterious effects of American mass-production on French traditions.²² These complaints are not particular to France—Belgian, Dutch and Austrian politicians, for instance, have (sometimes successfully) mobilized support by claiming that national traditions were under attack by the joint forces of modernization, globalization, and Americanization.

Nevertheless, "nostalgic" anti-Americanism has particular resonance in France where it also feeds on a reluctance to accept the international decline of the French language to the benefit of English as the global *lingua franca*. This is a defensive anti-Americanism, one that calls for protectionist actions and proactive policies—from the EU-wide policy of "cultural exception" to preserve homegrown cultural production unable to compete with Hollywood, to rules about preserving the French language from the invasion of American words and the worldwide promotion of "Francophonie."

6) Social Anti-Americanism

One of the most prevalent and widespread denunciations of America in France focuses on the social order and values in the United States. This social critique has four main components, each reflecting deep national differences over the definition of a good society—equal and protective for the Europeans, offering opportunity and risk for the Americans.

First, America is often portrayed as a fundamentally unequal society. The absence of universal healthcare, the weakness of social protection, the lack of good public education, and the numerous policies favoring the rich over the poor are further evidence for the Europeans of the superiority of their model of society over American capitalism and liberalism run amok. If anything, the latest budget proposed by the second Bush administration further reinforces these views. Second, the French like to indict America as a violent and hypocritical society—one where abortion is a highly divisive issue but where guns and crime are rampant and where the state condones and conduct violence through the death penalty. Third, some in France reproach America for being a multicultural society and, as a result, offering an alternative to the traditional French republican model based on assimilation, integration, and equality (at least in theory). Finally, many in Europe disapprove of the excessive religiosity of American society. This is particularly true in France, which observes a strict separation between politics and religion—and where an overwhelming majority claims that it is not necessary to believe in God to be moral. Interestingly, all of these social indictments of America come more from an idealized vision of what France should be (just, equal, caring, prejudice-free) than from what it really is.

7) Radical Muslim Anti-Americanism

Finally, the most recent type of anti-Americanism in France comes from some Muslims who partake in the “clash of civilizations” idea. Over the years, some disenfranchised youths of North African origin have become religiously radicalized, in a society in which they have not “integrated.” They consider the United States as the Great Satan, whose goal it is to lead the Western world in destroying Islam, and they believe in Jihad against an American nation involved in a crusade against Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine. Of all the anti-Americanisms found in France, this is the only one that calls for actual violence against the United States and the American people.

An interesting cleavage appears between these seven different types of anti-American arguments. While the first three blame the US for what it does, the next four lambaste the US for what it is. That European societies would nurture simultaneously seven different types of anti-Americanism(s) does not imply that, to paraphrase *Le Monde's* Colombani, “we are all anti-Americans.” For all these manifestations of anti-Americanism, there are also countless manifestations of pro-Americanism: in the world of business (which admires and imports many American methods of management); in the world of higher education (which envies and aspires to American-style universities); in the world of entertainment (which emulates some aspects of American popular culture and lionizes many American artists); and even in the world of food (where French restaurateurs relish the working conditions of their American counterparts, whose professional teams consistently win international competitions).

Roles and Costs of Anti-Americanism in France

The third reason why France has long appeared as incorrigibly anti-American is because of the costless ways in which anti-Americanism has been used for political benefit. Anti-Americanism has been able to perdure and propagate in France because it has performed some useful political functions on both sides of the Atlantic. It has also been able to thrive because the costs associated with using anti-Americanism in France have been far smaller than the benefits derived from anti-American rhetoric. Hostile predispositions to the US become significant when they are mobilized by political entrepreneurs for their own purposes. Anti-Americanism can be mobilized as a political resource to support many different policy agendas. Indeed, French anti-Americanism has often been as much about France as it has been about America. This section highlights four main roles of anti-Americanism—identity-building, policy legitimation, scapegoating, and rallying focal point—and it explores the political costs and benefits of using anti-Americanism.

Identity-Building

Over time, anti-Americanism seems to have fulfilled a structural role by helping to create a national and European identity. Anti-Americanism can serve a useful purpose by redefining national identity by contrast to the perceived American “model”: for instance, at a time when France is challenged by the reality of its Muslim identity and struggles to update its guiding principles over the separation of church and state, the French critique of the failures and hypocrisies of American multiculturalism reflect back on the idealized French republican model based on assimilation, integration, and equality. The same is true of the economic and social model: policies such as the 35-hour workweek have been elaborated against widely criticized American practices, partly in order to reinforce the distinctiveness of the French identity against the backdrop of a globalized, converging, capitalist world.

The idealized (and demonized) American model is also used as a reflection against which to define European identity—an elusive concept over many centuries. It is in this sense that anti-Americanism has such an important role to play in the contemporary period: it can create, by negative refraction, a European identity where none existed. At a time when Europe is building itself politically as a cohesive entity through European integration, anti-Americanism can serve as one of the “glues” that can bind together very disparate entities—whether in the realms of internal or external policies.

As Andrei Markovits argues: “Identity, modernity, and attitudes toward power are three key expressions in the analysis of European anti-Americanism. Nobody knows what it means to be a European. It is unclear what Greeks and Swedes have in common. But one important characteristic they share is their not being American. ... No identity has ever emerged without an important counter-identity. Anti-Americanism thus enables the Europeans to create a hitherto missing European identity that must emerge if the European project is to succeed. This functional dimension of anti-Americanism is a key reason why among the two core proponents and protagonists of the European project—the French and Germans, though not only them—anti-Americanism has become such a central part of political discourse.”²³

Anti-Americanism has been able to fulfill this identity-building role because its benefits have typically far outweighed its costs. Appearing patriotic in defending national specificities is more beneficial politically than highlighting the deficiencies of the national model and blowing the whistle on the disastrous path this model might be taking the country. As for the costs, they may be bad for society in the long run, since these repeated appeals to anti-American arguments prevent a true redefinition of the national model, but they are nil in political terms.

Policy Legitimation

Anti-Americanism can also play an important role by legitimizing (and delegitimizing) specific policies. Political entrepreneurs are particularly apt at resorting to anti-Americanism to try to lend legitimacy to status quo policies. In order to ensure the absence of reform, politicians can highlight the similarities between the proposed reformist policy and the American model, in the hope that anti-American sentiments will trigger opposition to the reform. For instance, when French politicians discuss implementing affirmative action (anathema to the French model of integration and equality), opponents of the reform immediately invoke the American model to ensure rejection of the new policy. Another example can be found with the recent controversy over gay marriage—an issue that was not on the agenda in France, where civil unions for homosexual couples have existed since 1999, until politicians close to the anti-globalization movement put it on in reaction to the backlash over gay unions in the United States. Similarly, Jean-Francois Revel, one of the few anti-anti-American intellectuals in France, has argued that “the principal function of anti-Americanism has always been, and still is, to discredit liberalism by discrediting its supreme incarnation.”²⁴

It is worth noting that this legitimizing-delegitimizing function of anti-Americanism is also being used in the United States. American political entrepreneurs can exploit the specter of anti-Americanism abroad to further their own political agenda. The recent example of the French position on the invasion of Iraq highlights this delegitimizing function: by portraying the French as incorrigible anti-Americans, the pro-war politicians were able to delegitimize what could otherwise have passed as a valid criticism of US policy. Given the portrayed anti-American nature of the messenger, nobody could actually legitimately listen to the nature of the message.

Scapegoating

Another political function of anti-Americanism is to enable national politicians to scapegoat the United States. In borrowing from the available reservoir of anti-American sentiments, French politicians can make unpopular policies by blaming them instead on the US. This scapegoating shifts the blame and exonerates them of wrongdoing. Globalization has often been used similarly in the late 1990s as a bogeyman—readily available to be blamed for unpopular structural reforms.²⁵ The US (often synonymous with American multinational companies) becomes the villain who forces industrial restructurations, outsourcing, and the whittling down of the state down the throats of unwilling French men and women.

As Revel controversially writes, “the fundamental role of anti-Americanism in Europe in general, and particularly among those on the Left, is to



absolve themselves of their own moral failings and intellectual errors by heaping them onto the monster scapegoat, the United States of America. For stupidity and bloodshed to vanish from Europe, the US must be identified as the singular threat to democracy (contrary to every lesson of actual history)."²⁶

Here again, the benefits of tapping into the anti-American repertoire for this purpose outweigh the costs. Politicians derive benefits from accomplishing policy reform without incurring too many political costs. Such scapegoating does entail some costs, however, since the public may believe that it does not really matter whom they elect since all policymakers are subjected to the same restricted margin of maneuver as a result of Americanization and globalization. But overall the benefits of scapegoating the United States are more direct than its political costs.

Rallying Focal Point

Finally, political entrepreneurs can mobilize anti-Americanism as a focal point around which to rally their troops. When domestic support is failing, an appeal to anti-American sentiments can reinvigorate support, since anti-Americanism is one of the few ideologies that can unite broadly across the French political spectrum. One can indeed interpret the firm stance taken by President Chirac on Iraq in early 2003 as an attempt to "wag the dog" and stir the public focus away from domestic trouble by instead mobilizing on this consensual issue.

Nevertheless, there are limits to the use made of anti-Americanism for political gain. In contemporary France, the image of the United States is not really a divisive cleavage. On the contrary, it is used more for establishing consensus than for fostering divisions and controversies. A well-timed, well-delivered anti-American critique can serve to rally support for one's own agenda. Because of its consensual nature, however, it is difficult for political leaders exploit popular concerns about America for domestic political gain relatively to their opponents.

Indeed, in spite of its reputation in the US as a fierce bastion of anti-Americanism, few political parties actually embrace openly anti-American stances. When they do, it is only one of the multiple components of anti-Americanism, not all of them in their entirety. Because of the legacy of the cold war, the French Communist Party has always employed a radical "social" anti-Americanist discourse, focusing mainly on anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist arguments. Far-left, Trotskyist parties, such as Lutte Ouvrière, criticize the domestic and foreign policies of successive American administrations, but make a point in siding with the American working class. The Socialist Party openly displays some "social" and "liberal" anti-Americanism, often blurred with a critique of globalization, and it has borrowed some "sovereignist" anti-American rhetoric from the Gaullist period, but anti-Americanism is not one of its fundamental

ideological characteristics. The center-right UDF (influenced by Catholicism) is maybe the least anti-American party, even though it too uses arguments rooted in “social” and “liberal” anti-Americanism. Because of its Gaullist heritage, the UMP of Jacques Chirac also displays some anti-American traits, mostly of the “nostalgic,” “social,” and “sovereignist” types, but is the closest to the US on the economy. As for the far-right National Front, it is paradoxically anti-American on many dimensions (“nostalgic,” “social,” “legacy,” and “sovereignist”), but is among French parties the most ardent supporter of the foreign policy of the Bush administration. Indeed, the highest favorable views of Bush in France come from supporters of the National Front.²⁷ As for radical Muslim anti-Americanism, it has so far not been channeled through any political party.

Finally, one specific feature explaining why French politicians have overall incurred so few costs in using anti-Americanism, compared to their European counterparts, has been the particular geopolitical situation of France in the 20th century. During the cold war, France was not subject to the same geopolitical constraints as Germany, for instance. Because of their lesser dependence on the US for their security and economic well-being, because of the country being a nuclear power, and because of the status of France in the United Nations, French policymakers were able to use anti-American arguments without much fear of retribution. Similarly, the end of the cold war had a different impact on France than on other European countries, leading it to look for a new “niche” in international politics—found partly in the anti-globalization movement and in the insistence on the recourse to multilateral institutions.

Conclusion

Anti-Americanism spans the whole political spectrum in France, from the far-left Trotskyist parties to the far-right National Front. Yet in spite of its history and the existence of a vast reservoir of anti-American arguments, it would be unfair to characterize France as a wholesale anti-American nation. To be sure, an irreducible fraction of French public opinion is viscerally anti-American and exhibits a dispositional bias toward interpreting negatively the actions of the United States, regardless of reality. These are the people whose phobic hatred of the US made a bestseller out of Thierry Meyssan’s *L’Effroyable Impos-ture*, a book that argued that no plane crashed into the Pentagon on 9/11.²⁸ And Al Qaeda is finding fertile ground among French Muslim extremists, with France boasting the largest number of citizens from a Western nation caught and killed in Iraq.

Nevertheless, in their majority, the French are no more anti-American than many of their European partners, including the Germans and the Italians. The puzzle of why French anti-Americanism stands out can be explained by the longevity of the Franco-American history and the vast reservoir of anti-



American arguments accumulated throughout the centuries, the simultaneous coexistence of a variety of types of anti-Americanism, and the costless ways in which anti-Americanism has been used for political benefit. Whereas anti-Americanism has been able to perdure in France because it is relatively costless, it does not mean that it has no consequences. On the contrary, French anti-Americanism can have multiple implications—for France itself, for Europe, and for international relations.

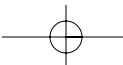
The line between reasoned disagreement and prejudicial anti-Americanism is often blurry. Some discourse and behavior may appear anti-American when in fact it is a good-faith disagreement over specific American policy actions. One can oppose the American intervention in Iraq, defend social spending in France, root for a strong monetary policy for the euro, defend the cultural exception for audio-visual policy, and still not be anti-American. But as this article has shown, such views are often cast as anti-Americanism in France for purposes of political exploitation.



Notes



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1. This is the title of a biased diatribe against France published in the wake of the Franco-American conflict on Iraq: John Miller and Mark Molesky, *Our Oldest Enemy: A History of America's Disastrous Relationship with France* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).
 2. Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
 3. The website www.miquelon.org indeed keeps a list of many of these jokes in order to document the discriminatory campaign against France in the American media.
 4. See, for instance, the “Transatlantic Trends 2004” survey published by the German Marshall Fund.
 5. The “Thermometer readings” established by the GMF survey to measure nations’ feelings towards the US put France in the middle at 51degrees, with Spain (42 degrees) and the United Kingdom (62 degrees) as the extremes. In the 2005 Pew report “Global Opinion: The Spread of Anti-Americanism Trends 2005,” France stood only at a one percentage point difference with Germany, with 37 percent of favorability ratings for the US.
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6. See the 2005 Pew report, "Global Opinion: The Spread of Anti-Americanism Trends 2005," 111-112.
7. The 2005 Pew report, "Global Opinion: The Spread of Anti-Americanism Trends 2005," 115.
8. Philippe Roger, *L'Ennemi américain: Généalogie de l'antiaméricanisme français* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).
9. Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *France and the United States from the Beginnings to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
10. Roger, *L'Ennemi américain*.
11. Georges Duhamel, *America the Menace: Scenes from the Life of the Future*, trans. Charles Miner Thompson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1931); Kuisel, *Seducing the French*.
12. Roger, *L'Ennemi américain*.
13. Richard Kuisel, "What Do the French Think of Us? The Deteriorating Image of the United States, 2000-2004," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 22, 3 (Spring 2004): 91-119.
14. Ibid.
15. Sophie Meunier, "The French Exception," *Foreign Affairs* 79, 4 (2000).
16. Philip Gordon and Sophie Meunier, *The French Challenge: Adapting to Globalization*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).
17. Pierre Melandri and Justin Vaisse, *L'Empire du milieu: Les Etats-Unis et le monde depuis la fin de la guerre froide* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2001).
18. Even if the French word "hyperpuissance" did not have the pejorative connotations associated with the term "hyper" in English—hyper meaning only the next size up from "super." Hubert Vedrine with Dominique Moïsi, *France in an Age of Globalization*, trans. Philip H. Gordon (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).
19. Globus International Affairs Poll, AO-IPSOS, Conducted November 19-27, 2004.
20. Peter J. Katzenstein and Robert O. Keohane, "Types and Sources of Anti-Americanism: A Framework for Analysis," Paper presented at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, November 13, 2004.
21. James Ceaser, "The Philosophical Origins of Anti-Americanism in Europe," in *Understanding Anti-Americanism: Its Origins and Impact at Home and Abroad*, ed. Paul Hollander (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004).
22. Kuisel, *Seducing the French*.
23. Cited in Andrei Markovits, "European Anti-Americanism and Anti-Semitism: Similarities and Differences," and interview with Markovits, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, No. 16, 1 January 2004.
24. Jean-Francois Revel, *Anti-Americanism*, trans. Diarmid Cammell (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003).
25. Gordon and Meunier, *The French Challenge*.
26. Jean-Francois Revel, "Europe's Anti-American Obsession," *The American Enterprise* Online.
27. Claire Tréan, "Une forte majorité attend de John Kerry un tournant en Irak," *Le Monde*, October 15, 2004.
28. Thierry Meyssan, *L'Effroyable Imposture: 11 septembre 2001* (Chatou: Carnot, 2002).