

## **Publications**

### **Response to Sophie Meunier, "Anti-Americanisms in France"**

**by Catherine Guisan**

**April 4, 2005**

Dear Professor Meunier,

Many thanks for your interesting and thoughtful article on "Anti-Americanisms in France." I found your definition of anti-Americanism, as "an unfavorable predisposition toward the United States, which leads individuals to interpret American actions through negative stereotypes," very helpful. (But should we add collective actors/governments to individuals?) With your typology of "seven, non-mutually exclusive types of French anti-Americanism," this definition brings needed analytic clarity to a field of study where scholars can fall all too easily in the trap of their own stereotyping.

In the spirit of "bridging a wider Atlantic," I would like to offer a few comments. You point out that the "image of the French being all anti-American is not supported by the data." It seems to me that the challenge in researching anti-Americanism (French or otherwise) lies in the difficulty to disaggregate the negative predispositions that replace thought with stereotyping from the legitimate expression of disagreements on matters of substantive importance. Philippe Roger's work (Roger 2002), which you cite, demonstrates that critical debates between the United States and France have been going on for a very long time. But should French critics of the American war-debt policy after World War I or of American intervention in Vietnam be construed as "anti-American"? Or should American critics of the French policy of "cultural exception" be labeled as "anti-French"? Just before leaving his post as U.S. ambassador to Greece (2001–2004), Thomas J. Miller said: "It is really important for any American diplomat, in fact any American, to look very carefully at what we call 'anti-Americanism' and really ask a couple of critical questions. If someone doesn't like an administration's policy, is that 'anti-American'? I don't necessarily think so. . . . That's what democracy is all about" (Vickers 2005).

But you suggest that some French critics of the U.S. willingly identified themselves as anti-American after World War II. The 2003 war in Iraq, along with the U.S. rejections of the Kyoto Protocol and of the International Criminal Court, has since fed into a new wave of "consensual" anti-Americanism in France, which you say is rooted "in the deep reservoir of anti-American arguments accumulated over three centuries." If we have to go back that far, let us not forget Alexis de Tocqueville, Raymond Aron, and other French admirers of America — and of course you mention Jean-François Revel, a leading anti-anti-American intellectual in France today. This is why I wonder whether the improvement in this contentious relationship in the 1980s was so "paradoxical." After all, the Reagan policy toward the Soviet Union, in President Reagan's second term, elicited wide support in Europe; despite a strong internal debate in France regarding the pros and cons of German reunification, France and the U.S. eventually stood together on this issue. President Mitterrand was also supportive of the U.S. during the first Gulf War. And, of course, General de Gaulle offered staunch support to the U.S. during the Cuban missile crisis. The enthusiastic French participation — from all strata of society — in the 2004

celebrations of the Normandy landing certainly does not comfort the view that French citizens do not feel gratitude for the U.S. intervention during WWII and for the Marshall Plan.

Your article mentions pernicious effects on France itself of anti-Americanism, which becomes a convenient tool for the French to avoid dealing with their own issues, from the challenges of globalization to the fractures in French identity. This is an important point. Could the same be argued about the recent wave of American Francophobia? For instance, accusations of a “French ambush” at the UN Security Council helped obfuscate an important public debate in the U.S. whether the U.S. should wait, as the French requested, for the weapons inspectors to complete their work in Iraq. At the same time, the French translation of Robert Kagan’s book *Of Paradise and Power* came out in Paris (Kagan 2003). Kagan was widely interviewed in quality French media and his argument portrayed fairly. Could we imagine the same happening in the U.S., with an intelligent French book that openly challenges assumptions of U.S. foreign policy, being widely aired amid a crisis? Perhaps.

During the last presidential election in the U.S. and since, many American citizens have protested against being labeled “unpatriotic” or “immoral” for opposing their country’s domestic and international agendas. The same latitude should be given foreign critiques, as Ambassador Miller argues. The French, like so many others, are affected by American policies. Timothy Garton Ash asks the key question: “American writers should ... distinguish between legitimate, informed European criticism of the Bush administration and anti-Americanism, or between legitimate, informed European criticism of the Sharon government and anti-Semitism. The difficult question in each case, one on which knowledgeable people may reasonably disagree, is: Where is the dividing line?” (Garton Ash 2003). I look forward to reading the results of your collective project with Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane on the causes and consequences of anti-Americanism; you will undoubtedly offer some useful thoughts on how to walk the very fine line between legitimate criticism and emotional stereotyping.

For Anne-Marie Autissier, the editor of *CultureEurope*, the transatlantic relationship would improve if the U.S. could shed its *angélisme*, this strong desire to portray itself as only good. Autissier argues that the Europeans have taken on the shadow side of their history (especially the Holocaust), while the Americans must do more to integrate the history of slavery and the forced deportation and extermination of Native Americans in their political tradition. The extent to which Europeans have taken on the burden of their history is a highly debatable point, but Hannah Arendt is surely right in thinking that the work of “self-understanding” is a ceaseless process. In that case the best that Europeans (with the French) and Americans can do is to emulate one another in the tough work of self-consciousness. The French and the Americans share the aspiration to embody a universal model of public virtue. These two wealthy and privileged political societies have proved that they can do a lot of good (and quite a bit of harm too) in the world. The launching of the European Coal and Steel Community owes much to creative French-American teamwork. Recently France and the U.S. collaborated toward ending Syrian military presence in Lebanon. If they could focus on tackling other transnational challenges together, mutual stereotyping might at last lose some of its charm.

Thanks again for your very interesting article.

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