

Max Paul Friedman, *Rethinking Anti-Americanism: The History of an Exceptional Concept in American Foreign Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, xiv + 359 pp., £21.99 pbk, ISBN 9780521683425.

Max Paul Friedman must have been seriously annoyed by the way the term ‘anti-Americanism’ is used in the scholarly literature and in public debates in government and the media. While anti-Americanism ‘is variously defined as an ideology, a cultural prejudice, a form of resistance, a threat, or as opposition to democracy, the rejection of modernity, or neurotic envy of American success’ (5), Friedman sees it first and foremost as a myth which serves a purpose in debates about American foreign policy. The practical-political use of the term has been regularly neglected in the scholarly literature, Friedman maintains, and this oversight has distorted many studies which deal with the phenomenon. He does not deny that ‘anti-American sentiment’ exists, but he wants the term ‘anti-Americanism’ reserved for specific, clearly defined views and positions. In accordance with the majority of scholars who have tried to define anti-Americanism, he sees two elements as necessary to turn mere criticism of the U.S. into genuine anti-Americanism: ‘particularized hostility’ towards the U.S., and a ‘generalized hatred’ of American society. Such a strict definition has important consequences: ‘If we accept this definition [...] there will be few portraits left hanging on the walls of the rogues’ gallery’ (6).

Hence, Friedman’s study does not deal with ‘obsessive anti-Americanism among foreigners’ – which he deems a ‘marginal position’ – but focuses on the ‘obsession with anti-Americanism among some Americans’ (17). Instead of attempting to write a

comprehensive, global history of anti-Americanism, Friedman concentrates on Western Europe and Latin America as the 'two regions long understood as the most vital areas of U.S. interest' (13). His real concern are the 'anti-anti-Americans', i.e. those authors who brush aside any criticism of the U.S. by denouncing as 'anti-American' anyone who does not agree with American policies, or raises concerns about social, political and economic developments in the U.S.. To counter such views, Friedman has written a history of the very term 'anti-Americanism' and its uses; his methodology is informed by scholars of the Cambridge school of political thought, and the German historian Reinhart Koselleck, champion of the history of 'basic concepts' (*Grundbegriffe*). From this perspective, anti-Americanism appears less as a problem of foreigners who pathologically hate the U.S., envy American success and fight democracy and modernity, but as a key ingredient of American national mythology. According to Friedman, 'anti-Americanism' serves to stabilize the idea of American exceptionalism: 'a belief in anti-Americanism as the motor behind foreign opposition is the logical corollary to that exceptionalist stance' (7).

Friedman begins his study in the eighteenth century, where he has discovered the first uses of the terms 'anti-American' and 'anti-Americanism' in domestic American debates, and follows their continued use to slander opponents of U.S. policies into the twentieth century. By the mid-twentieth century the terms had become a 'club wielded to silence the left with charges of disloyalty against domestic critics on the one hand, and with the ascription of irrationality to uncooperative foreigners on the other' (14). The heyday of the concept of 'anti-Americanism' was the era of the Cold War, when it became of central importance in the global conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Then, 'the confluence of academic investigation, scientific

polling, and government investment in public diplomacy helped to push anti-Americanism to the forefront of Cold War concerns, even as the basic conceptual weakness of the term went largely unnoticed' (15). In the 1950s and 1960s, when McCarthyism, race relations and the civil rights movement were of pivotal concern to most observers of American society, the characterization of critical voices as 'anti-American' became increasingly absurd, Friedman explains, since most observers were not 'infected' by anti-Americanism, but simply judged the U.S. by its own standards and were expecting to see the 'democratic promise' of American society fulfilled.

In a central chapter on French anti-Americanism in the 1960s, Friedman argues that President Charles de Gaulle was not, contrary to common views, driven by a profound anti-American sentiment but simply dared to speak out publicly against American policy in Vietnam, after his earlier warnings over the escalation of the war in Southeast Asia had been ignored. The seemingly 'anti-American' French provided the best advice to the American government, while 'pro-American' allies such as the United Kingdom and West Germany, by failing to do so, 'helped American policy makers to do great damage to the United States'. Tempted by the convenient pseudo-argument of 'anti-Americanism', Friedman argues, the U.S. administration missed an opportunity to reconsider alternatives to escalating the war in Vietnam and became guilty of 'one of the worst foreign policy failures in U.S. history' (16).

Similarly, in a chapter on 'Anti-Americanism in the Age of Protest', Friedman takes issue with the characterization of the 'mass anti-war movements' in Europe of the 1960s and the 1980s as 'anti-American'. Here he follows scholars who have argued that student activists and protestors' attitudes towards the U.S. were not simply 'anti-

American' but deeply ambivalent. While criticism of the Vietnam war, and later on of the deployment of nuclear missiles, drew tens of thousands of European youth to the streets, the protestors 'were the most culturally and politically Americanized generations in history', adopted American traditions of civil disobedience and American styles of dress, and embraced American popular culture wholeheartedly (16-7).

Occasionally, Friedman might have exaggerated his general argument and explained away genuine European and Latin American anti-Americanism. Still, his overall account is convincing; Friedman is able to produce evidence even for the most controversial claims he makes. He has produced an outstanding piece of work that no scholar of 'anti-Americanism' will be able to ignore; original and thought provoking, this is a revisionist study in the best meaning of the term.

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