

ANTI-AMERICANISM: WHY DO THEY HATE US

By Stanley A. Levine

Before I began my research on this topic, I asked Charles Shepard to send me a copy of his paper on American Exceptionalism. That paper began with Charles fishing with his grandfather on the Kennebec River in Maine. I have been to the Kennebec River. My paper begins in Molodechno, located on the banks of the Usha River in Belarus (White Russia). I never fished there with my grandfather; in fact I have never been there. It is the place where my father was born, in 1907, when its population was less than 2000.

I have chosen to begin my paper in Molodechno because this paper is about journeys: My father's journey to America and what he experienced in the 20th century, and America's journey on the world stage during that same century.

Israel Bailine (you know him as Irving Berlin) was also born in Belarus 173 miles southeast of Molodechno on May 11, 1888, which is one day short of 50 years before my birthday on May 10, 1938. Part of America's journey took place during my life in the twentieth century and in this century as well.

My father was born before electricity, automobiles, radio, airplanes and before the first big war that shaped America's place in the world. He left Molodechno because World War I had started and the retreating Russian Army took over the town. He travelled with his mother, two brothers and a sister. Because the Russians were conscripting teenagers, the family fled in boxcars across Russia and Siberia, and stopped in Harbin, Manchuria, thence to Korea and Japan, sailing from Kobi, Japan, stopping briefly in Honolulu and then landing on Angel Island, off the shore of San Francisco in 1917. They then travelled by railroad across America to New Haven, Connecticut, where he grew up. He was 9 years old.

My father's journey as an immigrant is important because it helped form my view of America that necessarily affects what I am writing in this paper.

I spoke of my father's journey, so let me be clear about my own as well. I was never a beatnik or a hippie; but some of my best friends were hippies. I have no views that are wildly left of center. I proudly served my country as a member of the Air National Guard for over seven years. I did not join the protests over the Viet Nam War. I love my country. I stand up and sing the Star Spangled Banner at all public events, and I react viscerally when I see mobs of people burning the American flag. To me that flag represents a

place where my family came to find a better way of life. My mother's family arrived in America just prior to the middle of the nineteenth century; before the Civil War. Only in America could my father's son become a judge 82 years after he arrived here as an immigrant. So my family history is the source of my pro-American bias, if you will, on the subject of this paper.

A look back into history is instructive. We often talk today about the decline of Western Europe as a source of power in the world. Yet, as Zybigniew Brzezinski points out in his book, Strategic Vision, "Before Our Country Was Founded, Portugal and Spain conquered and colonized South America while Britain and France did the same in North America. Eventual political independence from Europe by both Americas was then followed by large-scale European migration into the Western Hemisphere." Indeed, this country, once it achieved its independence from England was infused by its welcoming vast numbers of immigrants, like my father, who came to America seeking a better way of life; which most of them found. Brzezinski sums up world history in the nineteenth and twentieth century as follows:

"Their transoceanic rivalry (Great Britain and France) for colonial possessions expanded during the nineteenth century into a contest for supremacy over Europe itself, before turning early in the twentieth century into a joint alliance

against a rising European power that non-coincidentally also entered the global colonial competition-Germany. From the consequent two world wars, Europe emerged devastated, divided and demoralized. Indeed, after 1945, a vast Eurasian land power, the Soviet Union, victoriously ensconced in Europe's geographic middle, seemed poised---like the Mongol Empire, some seven hundred years earlier---to sweep even further westward.

Meanwhile, across the North Atlantic, the United States spent the nineteenth century developing its industrial and military capabilities in felicitous geographic isolation from the devastation continental and imperial rivalries of Europe. Its interventions in the two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century were decisive in preventing the preponderance of German power in Europe, and it did so while shielded from the unprecedented destruction and carnage of those conflicts. Moreover, America's viable economic and geopolitical position at the end of World War II hoisted upon it a novel status...one of global prominence. As a result, the subsequent American-Soviet Cold War precipitated the emergence of redefined cross-Atlantic West, one dependent on and therefore dominated by the United States of America."

Brzezinski observed that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt "made no secret of his conviction that the U.S. commitment to the liberation of Europe during World War II did not include the restoration of the colonial empires of Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, or Portugal."

As he further observes:

"However, Roosevelt's highly principled opposition to colonialism did not prevent him from pursuing an acquisitive

U.S. policy determined to gain a lucrative position in the key oil-producing Middle Eastern countries. In 1943, Roosevelt not so subtly told Britain's ambassador to the United States, Lord Halifax, while pointing at a map of the Middle East, that 'Persian Oil is yours. We share the oil of Iraq and Kuwait. As for Saudi Arabian oil, it is ours.' So began America's subsequently painful political involvement in that region."

Finally, as Brzezinski states:

"By 1991, following the disintegration both of the Soviet Bloc and then the Soviet Union itself, the United States was left standing as the only global superpower. Not only the twentieth but even the twenty-first century then seemed to be American Centuries."

In those few paragraphs, I have covered 84 years of my father's life and 53 years of my own. America was more than a superpower in the closing years of the twentieth century. It was a cultural superpower as well and its movies, its books, its fashions, its music, and the lifestyle of its citizens had become globally iconic. A lot of young people all over the world sought to emulate and embrace "being American." So America was in 1991 and in many ways in 2013, a generation later, at least as cultural superpower, so it is.

So what is Anti-Americanism? It is, at its essence, a hatred for America. It is a belief that Americanism (our country's media, values, and world

dominance) is destroying existing cultures and existing traditional ways of life. There is nothing rational about these beliefs or the stated reasons for them. This strong hatred of America is so common in countries of the Middle East that its adherents express hostility, hatred and physical violence to Americans throughout the world.

To be sure, in our country's relations with Middle East countries, we have often backed the very dictators that are overthrown by their countrymen, the Shah of Iran, Mubarak, and even Gaddafi. We also backed Saddam Hussein in his country's war with Iran.

When large numbers of a country's citizens are materially and economically deprived, and when they lack basic rights of freedom we enjoy, the dictators who control their countries effectively blame America for what their citizens do not have. And our size and global power makes America a convenient scapegoat.

I do not mean to imply by what I have said so far that Anti-Americanism is the sole province of people in the Middle East. It has been expressed by Canadian liberals, French intellectuals, citizens of other European countries,

and by some of our fellow citizens themselves, e.g. Michael Moore, and Reverend Wright, the President's former minister.

One of the great aspects of freedom in this country is that we all enjoy freedom of speech and assembly and to protest wars, racism, inequality and any other policies of our government that we do not like. This is not a right that all peoples everywhere in the world enjoy, and in many ways those people envy us our freedoms and our material possessions that they themselves do not have.

In "Anti-Americanism: a Clinical Study" Bernard Chazelle, an American from Princeton, notes that multiple Google hits on Anti-Americanism equates to "a living testament to U.S. exceptionalism." He quotes a British historian that "Anti-Americanism is the prevailing disease of intellectuals today."

Chavelle notes "Being ground zero for sophisticated, unifying and reflexive anti-Americanism, France provides a glimpse of the disease at its most distinctive." But he notes further, "Trudging through its affliction, however, France has remained rather fond of America. Noting that a May of 2000 poll revealed that only 10 percent of French citizens dislike the U.S., he

concludes “French anti-Americanism is mostly an elite sport.” While fond of Americans, over 80 percent of them viscerally reject US lifestyles and customs. He notes, “realistically that just as English is the world’s most slaughtered language, American culture is the most trivialized.”

In an article examining the history of Anti-Americanism, Brendon O’Connor, an Australian argues that “Anti-Americanism is not a comprehensive or coherent belief system or ideology, but rather a series of criticisms regarding America that have haphazardly been labeled anti-Americanism.” And that “Another conceptual problem is that an aversion to America often coexists within a nation or an individual, with an embracing of America.”

He lists the four phases of anti-Americanism being started with its founding as a European settlement to the end of World War II, when it was “largely culturally-oriented criticism premised on European superiority and American inferiority.” The second phase until the end of the Cold War was “more politically and ideologically-oriented.” After the end of the Cold war, “saw a greater emphasis on the ill effects of American capitalism and Americanisation, and continues today with the focus on anti-Americanism as a dominant component of anti-globalization.” The fourth phase began on

September 11, 2001 with the arrival of terrorist anti-Americanism as a significant and widely discussed force.

Beyond the historical classifications, he notes “much work is still required on differentiating real anti-Americanism from what would be better described as criticism. A narrow definition of anti-Americanism that defines it as an indiscriminate attack on America is probably the most useful starting point.”

He concludes “Prejudiced rhetoric weakens otherwise justifiable critiques of America’s many faults. At the same time it hinders the ability to appreciate the promise that America still holds for itself and the world.”

If one wants to explore the subject of this paper in greater detail than time permits, I suggest reading the Princeton Project on National Security’s 32-page “Report of the Working Group on Anti-Americanism, or a 28-page paper on “Understanding Anti-Americanism” published by the University of Western Sydney.

Vexen Crabtree is British author whose religious beliefs are far different from most of us in this room. Among his stated Religions are Satanism,

Discordianism and the Church of the Subgenious. Nonetheless, in September 2001, after 9/11, he wrote an insightful Essay entitled “Why People Hate America-A Summary of Anti-Americanism.”

He starts by saying that there is much unjustified hatred in the world and that there is *unjustified hatred of the USA*. He observes that whoever is powerful or successful will also be hated and “This immature hatred often evaporates quickly with a little reason or thought and that the most widespread hate is the hate by people the world over who fall victim to their own shortcoming, and want a scapegoat.”

He notes “Many of today’s achievements would not be possible without the help or aid of the USA. Many medical, technological advances and much human aid and third world relieve comes from this rich nation.”

In Europe he notes, “it is largely intellectual hatred of America that people take with them after abandoning childhood jealousy.”

He continues: “Note that in many countries religious, ideological and political circumstances lead to a government or mass media using the USA as a scapegoat. If these governments are stating the USA is suppressing

them, the spin that it is put on it is false: individual Americans are not out to ‘oppress’ the rest of the world.”

Noting that “ignorance, herd mentality and stupidity, along with envy, cause anti-Americanism. The UK public is frequently obnoxious and stupid when it comes to the USA.”

I disagree with his statement that Americans “do not realize that they have long ago surpassed the UK and other colonial countries as the most hated country.” Most of us do; hence the topic of this paper.

President Bush observed after 9/11 that the attacks were on *freedom and democracy*. Crabtree notes: “Although not democratic, the sequence of targets, the American symbol of power and commercial trade (the Twin Towers), the Pentagon, the head of the military and the Foreign Policy offices do not show an attack on Democracy but a very specific attack on America. ...the attacks are wrong, misguided and desperate, but they are not an attack on freedom.”

Finally, he states that “The USA has a child as a government, a young country which is only recently learning that actions last forever, something

that plagues older nations embarrassed leaders. The dislike of America is not as great as peoples' dislike for terrorism, its atrocities and oppression not a bad as Imperial England.”

One of the most interesting papers I read was written by an American, Bruce Bawer, who moved to Europe in 1998 and wrote a paper called, “Hating America.”

He observes “most foreigners never set foot in the United States, and that the things they think they know about it are consequentially based not on first – hand experience but on school textbooks, books by people like Michael Moore, movies about spies and gangsters, ...and above all, the daily news reports in their own national media. What, one must therefore ask, are their media telling them? What *aren't* they telling them?”

He further observes: “Every nation requires serious, responsible criticism, particularly if it's the planet's leading economic power, the arsenal of democracy and the center of humanity's common culture.” In other words, the very size and power of America will raise questions. He criticizes one of the many authors who have criticized America by stating that his criticism of America is “neither serious nor responsible.”

He states: “If America is founded on liberty - and on the idea that its preservation is worth great sacrifice - those who steer the fortunes of Western Europe have no strong unifying principle for which they can imagine sacrificing much. Their common cause is not liberty but security and stability.If in the view of many Americans, a love of freedom and hatred of tyranny provide all the legitimacy required for taking actions like the invasion of Iraq, European intellectuals, having no such deeply held principles to guide them, turn instinctively to the U.N., as if it existed, like some divine oracle....”

As he observes “Envy and insecurity have played a role in Anti-Americanism, too.”

The second part of the title of this paper asks the question “Why do they hate us?” Let me say at the outset that it is impossible to answer that question without taking a one year sabbatical and travelling to different countries throughout the world to try and ask people to answer that question. Short of that, any answer I now give, even after all the reading I have done, is nevertheless quite subjective.

It would be gross oversimplification of my topic to abruptly conclude that the principal reason that America is hated is its support of Israel. Summarizing a recent article by William Kristol, someone known as “mistermoleman” on the internet states, “The anti-Israel front doesn’t hate us because we support Israel; they hate us because we are LIKE Israel: Democratic, respecting free speech and religious freedom, willing to live in peace with our neighbors, modern and economically successful. Everything the Arabs and Iranians and their allies are not.” Kristol observes that “terrorists of all stripes know who their enemies are. They attack across the world and kill Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike - but they grasp that the centers of resistance, the nations that stand most squarely in their path are the United States and Israel.”

I do not think that the whole world hates America. I also do not think that the most ardent Anti-American beliefs are focused on us as individual citizens of America. Rather, they are focused on the size of America, the fact that it may now be the only global superpower, on its military history, and the enviable success of its economy and its culture. America is now and has been many things to many people in this world. But unlike Great Britain

and France and Spain, it is not now, nor has it ever an empire, which controlled and indeed subjugated the citizens of that empire's colonies.

After all is said and done, America is an easy target because of its dominance on the world's stage. Its flag is instantly recognized by people around the globe. Its culture, its fashions, its dominance in movies, in music, in fashions, its automobiles, and, yes, its fast foods are unmatched by those of other nations. And thus, it is a source of envy by people all over the world. And those who envy America can also hate us, particularly if prompted to do so by events or by the propaganda of their own governments.

America is the most dominant military power in the world and is a strong economic power as well. But there are other powerful countries in the world such as China. While many resent our military power, the events of the "Arab Spring" reveal among the dissidents a repeated desire to have America use that power to support their aspirations for change. And when we do, the results are mixed.

There were many articles about anti-Americanism after the recent events in Libya where our ambassador was killed. It is significant that after his death

there were many Libyans showing signs praising him and our country as their friends. They did not hate us.

We have not made a lot of friends in the world by putting American boots on the ground, first in Viet Nam, then Iraq, and then Afghanistan. Yet there is no reason to reduce our military capabilities.

Vladimir Putin's governmentally directed anti-Americanism is transparent, his banning adoption of Russian children being the latest example. Putin has blamed our country for his, and by extension Russian, problems. As observed in a recent op-ed piece by David Kramer and Arch Puddington, "The Putin regime demonizes the United States, heaps abuse on its officials, derides its democratic values, and treats the humanitarian motives of its people as suspect, while backing the murderous Assad regime."

Nothing our country does or has done will eliminate Anti-Americanism. The fact that exists is a direct result of the size and influence of this country. America should not seek to be less dominant; much less assume an apologetic tone for everything America does. To be sure, mistakes have been made in the foreign policy decisions our leaders have made. And Americans and non-Americans have criticized them.

The world looks to America for leadership, and when our country leads, it will produce criticism, Anti-Americanism, and, sadly, terrorist acts against our citizens. America should not shrink from its responsibilities, nor abandon its allies. Nor should we seek a “quick fix” for Anti-Americanism, such as abandoning Israel, or becoming isolationist. Our position in the world is somewhat tenuous, but the fact that Anti-Americanism exists is no reason to accept that our country is in decline. It is not.

One could write a paper on American hubris as a source of anti-Americanism. Peter Beinart wrote an entire book on that subject “The Icarus Syndrome.” He concludes his book with these words: “Now another generation of Americans must jettison our visions of invincibility. We should do so joyfully for the recognition that no collection of mortals can impose its will on an unruly globe is not a sign of decay, but of wisdom. And tempered by wisdom, American optimism is---and always will be... one of the great wonders of the world.”

To put this all in context, Jonathan Tepperman, a Senior Editor of *Foreign Affairs* wrote in 2004 “A more conciliatory American tone in the years ahead might quiet the country’s critics somewhat. But nothing Washington

could realistically do would be likely to change the minds of those determined, for their own reasons to hate it. Anti-Americanism is something we are stuck with for at least as long as America remains pre-eminent.”

It is the fervent wish of this immigrant’s son that America **does** remain pre-eminent in this world.

When Irving Berlin was a little boy living on the lower east side in New York City, his mother daily repeated a prayer that he made the title of a song that he wrote while serving in World I, and which was not published until the 40’s when Kate Smith sang it to rally a nation entering into World War II. It is the same song that members of Congress spontaneously sang on the steps of the Capital Building after the attacks of 9/11. It is well that we daily repeat Irving Berlins’ mother’s prayer - “God Bless America.” The song goes like this: