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## beyond the empire

ANDREW ROSS AND KRISTIN ROSS (EDS)

*Anti-Americanism*

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Nearly twenty years ago, the Canadian sociologist Savcan Bercovitch described 'America' as more than a nation. 'America' and 'Americanism', for Bercovitch, was a complex ideology. He saw political actors in Washington and American citizens alike as confined by 'single synthetic ideal' that fused 'nationality and universality, civic and spiritual selfhood, secular and redemptive history'.<sup>1</sup>

In a certain sense, Bercovitch was taking up an older argument. His text claimed to find an underlying texture (and structure) to American political rhetoric and life. In this regard, Bercovitch was re-reading American consensus historians in a quasi-Althusserian mode. As historian Michael Kazin has argued, throughout the Kennedy and Johnson period, authors such as Richard Hofstadter insisted on a smooth majoritarian liberalism as *the* national belief system.<sup>2</sup> For Hofstadter, '*minority movements*' (whether populist conservatism or the New Left) were synonymous with a 'paranoid style' of politics, one in which 'the feeling of persecution is central, and ... systematized in grandiose theories of conspiracy'.<sup>3</sup> For Hofstadter, only the deviant American citizens refused or resisted interpellation into the American creed of liberal-individualism.

Recently, American neo-conservative writers and authors have rediscovered the virtues of using the phrase 'the Paranoid Style' when discussing their opponents' politics. Of course, there is a particular discursive utility in this. The 'Paranoid Style', as a political label, has always carried performative resonance linked to the word 'paranoid' and its psychologistic connotations. Victor David Hanson of the

*National Review Online* magazine used the phrase in August 2005 to obliquely condemn the populist anti-war mom Cindy Sheehan. For Hanson, Sheehan's anti-war vigil at George W. Bush's Crawford ranch—seen by most commentators as the understandable rage and grief of a sacrificial victim, a 'gold star mom' of a dead soldier—was 'venom'.<sup>4</sup> Hanson sees Sheehan's 'paranoid style' in the rhetoric of any opponent of the Iraq war who argues that the war was 'unjust, impossible to win, and hatched through the result of a brainwashing of a devious few neocons'.<sup>5</sup> Most of the liberal left as well as a majority of the global public practise paranoid politics, if we are to follow Hanson.

In this sense, whether wielded by Kennedy liberal Richard Hofstadter against Joseph McCarthy's Old Right, or by Victor David Hanson in the *National Review* today, 'the paranoid style' is a particularly resonant political speech act. It has what JL Austin might call 'illocutionary' effect—it represents 'the performance of an act *in* saying something'.<sup>6</sup> To labor a metaphor, using the phrase 'the paranoid style' clears the American political symphony of discordant notes (or else instruments).

It might be argued that the phrase 'anti-American' in international politics has a similar discursive resonance to accusing your political opponents of practicing a 'paranoid style' in American political debate. Various figures on the liberal-left are regularly accused of 'Anti-Americanism' in the Australian popular media. The phrase often features in editorials and comment articles by conservatives in populist tabloids such as Melbourne's *Herald Sun* and Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*. It also frequently

appears on the pages of neo-conservative broadsheet *The Australian*, and in the speeches of Liberal Party politicians. But what exactly characterises anti-Americanism, for the Australian Right? Australian Treasurer Peter Costello argued in August that anti-Americanism 'can easily morph into anti-Westernism'.<sup>7</sup> Costello's slippage from being anti-American to 'anti-modern' was taken up by columnist Miranda Devine, citing sociologist Paul Hollander's argument: 'To the extent that Americanisation is a form of modernisation, the process can inspire understandable apprehension among those who seek to preserve a more stable and traditional way of life'.<sup>8</sup>

In Hollander and Devine's understanding of anti-Americanism, opposition to the American invasion of Iraq equates to anti-Americanism, which in turn becomes anti-western and anti-modern. That rhetorical concatenation collapses the anti-capitalist and social democratic secular Left with the Muslim religious revival in Europe and the Middle East. Even European nationalists (of France and elsewhere) might be thought to be anti-modern, inasmuch as they, too, have been accused of anti-Americanism since the invasion of Iraq. Charges of 'anti-Americanism', in this way, construct a homogenous 'enemy' from a multitude of disparate political positions. Bercovitch and Hofstadter's American ideology could now be said to have found its antithesis, through the discovery of 'anti-Americanism' as an all-encompassing label. Yet this is less a Hegelian or Marxist dialectic than an absolute scission, an eschatological confrontation. The opposition between 'Americanism' and 'anti-Americanism' can easily

be placed with George Bush's famous statement regarding terrorism, 'you are either with us or against us'.<sup>9</sup>

Most writers in Andrew and Kristin Ross's collection of essays about anti-Americanism disagree (at least implicitly) with Hollander's thesis. Greg Gradin's discussion of Latin American 'anti-Americanism' critiques Hollander for his penchant—which, as I have argued, is shared by other neo-conservatives—for psychological explanations of political phenomena. (17) And Harry Harootunian remarks that, in Japan at least, anti-Americanism is more than simply 'a short-lived, spectral apparition, a homemade commodity easily exportable abroad'. (197) Anti-Americanism, for Harootunian, and other writers in the anthology, is the result of specific regional or national engagements with material or symbolic representations of the USA. In other words, contra Miranda Devine or Peter Costello, anti-Americanism is not *of* the USA, or somehow derivative of the politics or rhetoric of the Western Left. Indeed, as Andrew and Kristin Ross's respective discussions of American and French anti-Americanism both note, hating Ameri(k)a has been more about third-worldism, or becoming other—embracing the politics of the other, of Che or Ho Chi Minh, while repudiating those of the self—in Western late-twentieth-century politics. (147, 287) Yet, while in the USA, anti-Americanism during the 1960s was the parlance of the New Left, never a numerically significant component of the American population, (287) in France the third-worldist *Gauchiste* milieu was crucial in a historical trajectory from opposition to the war in Algeria, to the May 1968 uprising, through to

the 1995 strikes. Even as Kristin Ross's essay emphasises a distinction between the specificity of third-worldist causes during the 1960s, and the diffuse resistance to neo-liberalism in France during the 1990s, she continues to insist on a common genealogy of French resistance to the USA. (151–4) Ross's reading of French politics is incisive and crucial for an understanding of the contemporary French Left, and its relations with the USA. For Ross, anti-Americanism is 'an attempt to counteract the ideological slippage towards oligarchy and the rule of experts that dominated the 1980s'. (154) These 'experts' or technocrats are, for Ross, the indigenous neo-liberals who framed French political debate during the 1980s.

I have begun with Kristin Ross, because I turned again and again to her essay when re-reading the collection. Her article represents one of the most assured articles in the collection, negotiating between the study of cultural tropes and macrological political analysis (with some obligatory small-t theory from Rancière). Yet it can also stand for some of the problems with the many of the more politically situated essays in the volume. As a spatially limited intervention into both American and French political argument—during a particularly fraught historical period—Ross's account is avowedly revisionist. Yet, even as it salutes the *Gauchiste* anti-Americanism of the Left, Ross negates French Rightist anti-Americanism. A contextualisation of de Gaulle's anti-Americanism, and the ambiguous relations between the Chirac government and the Bush administration would have been useful here. And her argument appears (to this reader at least) to run together strains of

French neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism. For Ross, neo-liberalism is anti- (French) Revolutionary, whereas the statements and thinkers she cites seem to support a neo-conservative (anti-libertarian and still relatively statist) position.

However, most of the essays in the collection are more easily categorised within a disciplinary matrix, thus avoiding the problems I found in Ross's article. Linda Gordon's chapter on the New Left and anti-Americanism in the USA continues a shift within American Studies towards studies of imperialism in the USA (or else counter-imperialism studies). Beginning with a discussion of the beginning of the use of the trope 'Amerika' during 1960s rhetoric (273) (perhaps a topic for a monograph, in itself), Gordon's article is suggestive rather than detailed (again probably related to spatial constraints). And I was not entirely convinced by her genealogy of 'Amerika', which appears to normatively condemn activist leftist militance (whether rhetorical, or otherwise). Whether or not it is to be preferred as a form of political action, the often violent (and carnivalesque) activism of the late 1960s *did* shift the parameters of American political argument, especially during the 1970s, as Van Mosse argued recently.<sup>10</sup> But Gordon's essay continues to develop a strand within American studies which merits further research. And John Kuo Wei Tchen's essay on the Right and anti-Americanism (301–15) skirts Asian American and African American studies, in a pertinent discussion of the terms under which minorities can engage in politics after 9/11. A political essay as much as a scholarly contribution, his

article is reminiscent of anti-corporate/militarist salvos on the pages of literary monthly *Harpers*.

Many of the other essays in the collection referenced intra-national political debates about the status of the USA with which I am less familiar. Rebecca E Karl's discussion on permissible and prohibited strains of anti-Americanism in China indicates possible collaboration between scholars studying establishment (or rightist) discourses in the PRC and the USA. Karl identifies a cleavage within the Chinese academy between New Leftists, many of whom have been influenced by critical and cultural theorists such as Michel Foucault and Frederic Jameson, and pro-government scholars. (244–5) The pro-government discourses she chronicles—which involved the identification of New Leftists with an unreflexive anti-Americanism—appear superficially familiar to scholars well rehearsed in the arguments made by neo-conservatives during the American 'culture wars' of the 1990s.<sup>11</sup> Karl's infusion of theory, from Hans Löwith, gave the article a trans-disciplinary breadth lacking from some of the less theoretically engaged articles in the collection. (238–9)

Indeed, if I were to make a general criticism of the collection, it would be that the theoretical sophistication present in much contemporary Australian (and American) cultural studies and political theory is absent from the anthology. But equally, the lack of an overall theoretical bent can also be said to work to the collection's advantage. For, in addition to refuting the Right's position on Anti-Americanism, this collection on anti-Americanism also presages a shift away from the quasi-Hegelian political phenomenologies produced by many

cultural and political theorists during the nineties and early 2000s. There is no semblance of an attempt to locate some ineffable *Weltbild* here, of the kind propounded most prominently by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's political theories.<sup>12</sup> It could be argued that the essays in this collection display the particular strength of trans-disciplinary area studies *qua* the nuances of contemporary politics, especially when compared to all encompassing global political theory. For example, Iraq is framed by all the writers in the collection not as a blip in a consensual international political domain dominated by the policing operations of Empire and capital, but as a defining event of international political and cultural relations this decade—perhaps *the* defining event, if we consider the shift in perceptions of the USA, and changes in the institutional diplomatic context derivative from the invasion.<sup>13</sup> This is true in general of the collection: I found the discussion of anti-Americanism in the regionally and nationally themed essays in the anthology to be meticulously historicised and contextualised. As an Americanist, after reading this collection I feel better able to answer *specifically* the question that (some) Americans attempted to ask after 9/11, but has receded in political dialogue ever since: 'why do they hate us'. The answer provided in Andrew and Kristin Ross's collection of essays on Anti-Americanism reflects both the mobility and apparent hegemony of American culture and politics in relation to the politics of other nation-states. Indeed, after reading the anthology, one is again reminded to what extent the politics of the American nation-state over-determine and interplay with the politics of

regions and nation-states. As a volume based on proceedings from a symposium at New York University in 2003 shortly after the invasion of Iraq, the collection also offers a potential model for scholarship written at specific historical conjunctures. Given the media's insistence that politics have become dominant within American cultural life over the past half decade, it is welcome to see cultural critics beginning to engage with the cultures of politics once more.

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1. Savcan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison WI, 1978, p. 176.
  2. Michael Kazin, 'Political Culture and Temperament in the Work of an American Historian', *Reviews in American History*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1999, pp. 334–48.
  3. Richard Hofstadter, 'The Paranoid Style in American Politics', in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 1965, pp. 7, 4.
  4. Victor David Hanson, 'Paranoid Style In Iraq Debate', *National Review Online*, via *CBSNews.com*, <<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/08/26/opinion/main797471.shtml>>, 26 August 2005 (accessed 6 September 2005).
  5. Hanson.
  6. JL Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 2nd edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1980.
  7. Peter Costello, in Miranda Devine, 'Beware the Left's Trojan Horse', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 August 2005, p. 13.
  8. Hollander.
  9. Anonymous, 'You are either with us or against us', *CNN.com*, <<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/>>, 6 November 2001 (accessed 3 April 2005).

10. Van Gosse, 'Postmodern America: A New Democratic Order and a New Gilded Age', in Van Gosse and Richard Mosse (eds), *The World the Sixties Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2003, pp. 1–37.
11. See, for example, Cary Nelson, *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical*, New York University Press, New York, pp. 77–126.
12. See for example Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MASS, 2001.
13. For a critique of Hardt and Negri's imperial framework in relation to the invasion of Iraq see John Agnew, 'American Hegemony Into American Empire? Lessons from the Invasion of Iraq', *Antipode*, vol. 35, no. 5, 2003, p. 878. For a critique of Hardt and Negri's reading of Foucault, especially as regards international relations and US economic interests see Mark Kelly, 'Bioimperialism: Foucault *contra* (Hardt and) Negri', conference paper delivered at the American Comparative Literature Association Conference, Penn State University, 11 March 2005.