

Virginia R. Domínguez, Jane Desmond, eds.. *Global Perspectives on the United States: Pro-Americanism, Anti-Americanism, and the Discourses Between.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017. 352 pp. \$30.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-252-08233-7.

Reviewed by Miguel Valenzuela

Published on H-Diplo (March, 2018)

Commissioned by Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

Four different historical periods have been crucial to US interactions with the world: the Great War, World War II, the Cold War, and the end of the Cold War. During and after each of these events, the United States was able to influence the world from both the top of the international system to the grassroots and the other way around. The US was key to defining the ideas, ideals, and values that shaped the world in the twentieth century; as per Carl Schmitt, it molded the *nomos* of the earth.[1] This is why I claimed at a conference at the Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales five years ago that the twenty-first century would be an American century with or without US hegemony. Many of the world's political values, consumption patterns, and cultural expressions have some degree of relation to those of the United States. Take, for example, the promotion of democracy as an antithesis to totalitarianism of any kind. In consequence democracy was related to freedom and US political values, although American democracy is but one form of democracy. This situation makes studies on the United States from different perspectives mandatory, especially those with new approaches.

The world has been clearly Americanized, but that does not mean that it is mainly pro-American or anti-American; in fact, many places and cases

exhibit both sentiments; how these concepts are understood and expressed is the question we should try to discuss and answer. Edited by Virginia R. Domínguez and Jane C. Desmond, with the collaboration of eighteen other scholars from many different countries and disciplines, *Global Perspectives on the United States* is a very fresh, intelligent, and provocative book. It is not a theoretical or ideological analysis of the rise and (alleged) fall of US hegemony, but a conjunction of very different perspectives on how this process of Americanization has influenced different countries and is manifested in their politics or culture. *Global Perspectives* not only offers a variety of contexts (Germany, Japan, Italy, Egypt, Panama, Georgia, South Africa, *inter alia*) but also different sources (political phenomena, musical expressions, propaganda, movies, and academic research). This book's very particularity helps the reader to understand the complexity of anti- and pro-American discourse, even within the United States. There are many conclusions, as the editors suggest, but more important than those are the questions that remain—the stimulation to keep thinking and inquiring about some of the topics explored in this book.

The book is divided into six parts, each with two main articles related by region or topic, fol-

lowed by two “looks,” which is one of the most interesting and original aspects of the book. In the second look, each of the two main authors comment on (and on occasion, link) the preceding chapter of her/his colleague; but in the third look, a third-party critiques both articles, which is in my opinion the most appealing part in this already appealing book. One might wish, however, that this part, albeit rich, were more in-depth; nevertheless, it still enhances the debate over the articles and their topics. The pragmatic and constructivist approach of the book and the articles gives the reader a vivid and dynamic view of the different phenomena; even as the articles provide specific historic situations one can clearly understand the influence or the parallels to many other current situations.

Part 1, “Whose ‘America’? Whose ‘Anti-Americanism?’” includes articles by Sabine Broeck (“Internationalizing African American Studies, Too: White (West-) German Responses to the Civil Rights Movement”) and Giorgio Mariani (“What We Talk about When We Talk about Anti-Americanism: An Italian Perspective”). Broeck examines the (common) ambivalence toward the United States in Germany, characterized by strong criticism of US foreign policy but also a deep sympathy with “the Other America”—for example, jazz, ecological protests, and minorities rights movements—and the importance of African American studies for a better understanding of “black studies” in Europe, the latter being without question a very provocative idea. On the other hand, Mariani establishes that there is no single ideology or set of principles or objectives within the Italian anti-Americanism perspective (in fact, this is very likely true all over the world). The author stresses the deep irrationalism in anti-Americanism, as well as the discursive use of it as a way to legitimize or delegitimize certain politics or policies.

Part 2, “Histories of Engagements: Two Cases Studies Looking Domestic Consumption and Their Contexts,” contains articles by Kate Delaney and

Andrzej Antoszek (“Americanization and Anti-Americanism in Poland: A Case Study, 1945-2006”) and by Loe Nas (“Americanization and Anti-American Attitudes in South Africa and Georgia: A Historical Snapshot from 2005”). Delaney and Antoszek’s essay stresses the exceptionalism of Polish attitudes toward the United States during the Cold War and the post-Cold War era, which were influenced by political conditions in the Eastern bloc as well as Polish immigrants in the United States who transmitted American culture, values, and products back to their relatives, products and values that were perceived as symbols of anticommunism and hence as resistance to the regime. In the post-Cold War era, Americanization of Polish culture in many way deepened, as the authors show. The article by Loes Nas describes the intersection in South Africa and Georgia of two opposite political transformation processes and perspectives toward the United States: from Americanization to anti-Americanism in South Africa, and vice versa in Georgia, which is a very similar case to that of Poland. In the case of South Africa, it is interesting to see the influence of African American culture in South African cities (Americanism), which is coupled with a parallel and antagonistic process in the political sphere (anti-Americanism). Even though it is obvious to a certain point that countries from the former Western world are now critical of the United States, and those from the Eastern world are now pro-American, it is worth studying the development and expressions of both attitudes.

Part 3 of the book, “Debating the Terms of Debate,” contains articles by Manar Shorbagy (“Kefaya and the New Politics of Anti-Americanism”) and Edward Schatz (“Understanding Anti-Americanism in Central Asia”). Shorbagy focuses on the Kefaya movement in Egypt and the central role of anti-Americanism in it, as a response to the US foreign policy and in such a tone as to turn anti-Americanism into a unifying discourse. According to Shorbagy, the Kefaya movement became the first transideological movement in Egypt’s mod-

ern history and a model for pacific resistance in the Arab Islamic world, but as a starting point, the movement needed an enemy in Schmittian terms—that is, an enemy who represents an existential threat to the political being. It is also, as Shorbagy shows, a democratic and inclusive movement that makes it resilient to any foreign intervention. Schatz shows the United States as a symbolic and meaningful actor in the region, well beyond its military, economic, and cultural policies. This is why Schatz points out the strategy of Islamic groups—such as Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan or Hizb ut-Tahrir—to use the United States as a symbol of what has to be overridden in order to create a national Islamic rather than a global order, representing again a Schmittian view.

In part 4, “Visual Engagements and Their Interpretation,” we find two very different artistic expressions: sculpture and cinema. In the essay “Lost and Found in Translation: Problems of Cultural Translation in Hungary after 1989,” Zsófia Bán explains the importance of “cross-culturalization” and American artistic expressions in the Hungarian process of identity consolidation after communism and the suppression of national as well as local identity expressions. She presents the very interesting example of the Kisvarsó group as an agitator and creator of new meanings in cultural expressions within a postideological context. Richard Ellis, in “Westward Ho with Kholiwood: The Transnational Turn in the Neoliberal Marketplace,” uses a film by Hollywood (*Lost in Translation*) and another from Bollywood (*Bride and Prejudice*) to explain the deep roots of Americanization (or Westernization, to a point) and how there is a certain need to Americanize/Westernize pop cinema. In this scenario, Ellis establishes New American studies as a new branch of American studies that focuses on processes that transcend the United States, both due to globalizing processes as well as resistance. Once again the idea that Americanism and anti-Americanism coexist is unequivocally demonstrated.

The articles by Kiristin Solli and Ian Condry constitute part 5, “Disrupting Binaries: Whose ‘Country Music’ and Whose ‘Hip-Hop?’” Solli’s article, “Tale of the West: ‘Americanization’ in an Era of ‘Europeanization,’” explains the very interesting phenomena of the adoption of US country music in the Norwegian countryside and its role in promoting national values against the Europeanization of Norway, particularly the one that happens in Norwegian big cities; it is also very interesting how there are some political parallels between both cultural expressions. In the essay “What Do the Terms ‘Pro-American’ and ‘Anti-American’ Mean in Today’s Globalizing World?” Condry asks the central question of the book. In “Japanese Rappers, 9/11, and Soft Power: Anti-American Sentiments in ‘American’ Popular Culture,” Condry uses his wide knowledge of Japanese rap (Rhymester or Hannya) to show how it critiques the US establishment and wonders if it is American or anti-American to use American-rooted music to do so. Once more, we see an American world: anti-Americanism is expressed with American (rooted) tools.

Finally, in part 6, “Is It Americanization or Pro-Americanism? The Americas, Pan-Americanism, and Immigration” Amy Spellacy analyzes the Americanization of Latin America, specifically, Panama, with her essay, “Making Pals in Panama: US-Latin America Relations and the Trope of the Good Neighbor in Coca Cola Advertising during the 1940s.” This strategy helped the United States, she claims, to “establish ... and maintain an informal empire” (p. 266) in the region, and reduced the possibility of an external (European) intervention. Guillermo Ibarra, in “Americanism and Anti-Americanism of Mexican Immigrants in Los Angeles,” not only explains the complex and volatile relations and perceptions between Americans and Mexicans, according to different polls, but also shows us that anti-Americanism can indeed exist within the United States (I would even propose the term “American anti-Americanism”), in this case expressed in the creation of a new citizen-

ship, a new society, and even new values and ideals adopted by immigrants. These immigrants want to stay in the United States, but after some time they want be Americans also; they want rights, and they fight for them. Doing so is perceived as American; they want to be Latin American or Mexican Americans.

Once the reader finishes this provocative book there are more questions than answers, more reasons, topics, and perspectives to study, discuss, and debate. *Global Perspectives on the United States* offers rich, interesting, innovative, and thought-provoking reflections on the processes of assimilation, adaptation, and transformation of American values and cultural expressions, within different contexts. The book, whether intended or not, shows the utility and complexity of constructivist approaches in international and social studies.

Note

[1]. Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum* (1950; New York: Telos Press, 2003).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-diplo>

Citation: Miguel Valenzuela. Review of Domínguez, Virginia R.; Desmond, Jane, eds. *Global Perspectives on the United States: Pro-Americanism, Anti-Americanism, and the Discourses Between*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. March, 2018.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=50224>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.