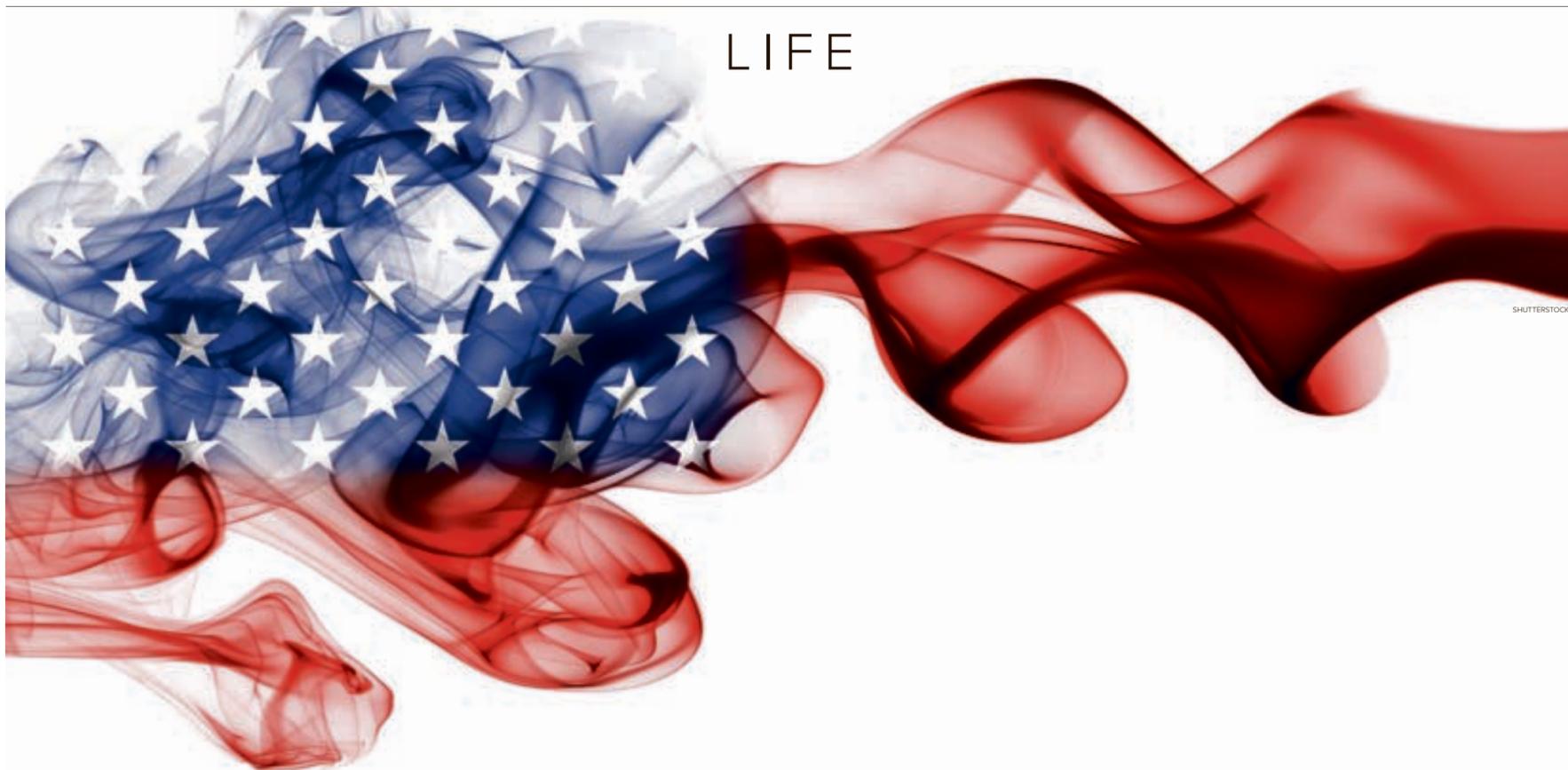


LIFE



Anti-Amerikanismus?

Berlin and Washington are not seeing eye to eye, German criticism of the Trump administration is intense and three-quarters of all Germans rate relations between the two countries as poor or very poor. But is that “hatred of America”?

Hypocrites

BY TANJA DÜCKERS

The German-American friendship has sunk so low that Germans now have more trust in China than in the United States. A recent survey commissioned by the Atlantik-Brücke and conducted by the polling firm Civey found that 85 percent of respondents rate relations between the two countries as poor to very poor.

But Germans are airing their resentment not only in anonymous polls. A number of leading intellectuals, writers, journalists and politicians are also making no secret of their anti-American feelings. Some of them are even publicly declaring their general avoidance of traveling to the US. Indeed, it would appear that a trip to the US is no longer considered an essential life experience for Germans.

A growing number of German authors have recently rejected invitations to speak publicly in the US, for fear of appearing to condone what's happening “in that fascist country.” Yet they have no qualms about traveling to Egypt, China or Russia for professional engagements. TTIP, the ultimately failed free trade agreement, brought German intellectuals to the barricades, claiming that the US intended to shove its fast-food culture down their throats. A short time ago on Facebook, the politician Oskar Lafontaine dubbed the US “the most rogue nation on earth” that “lies shamelessly to provoke wars.” The country “revealed its moral decay decades ago when it cleared the jungle in Vietnam with Agent Orange.”

Anti-American reflexes also have little to do with the myriad of concrete US foreign policy transgressions that one might go so far as to call crimes.

In fact, Germans look down on the US to a much greater degree for its embodiment of such things as capitalism, consumerism, bad taste, materialism and superficiality. Prejudice is never about facts, and always about feelings. Most Germans who judge do so about countries they have either never seen or have visited maybe once or twice. What we have here is a classic case of prejudice.

Germans' prejudices with regard to America have both a cultural and a psychological dimension. They see the US as the land of evil capitalists, of fatties and dummies, of the rude and the arrogant, of narcissists who care about nothing in the world except themselves, of women who chase after countless cosmetic surgeries, and of men who, like the character of Scrooge McDuck (an American invention), are interested only in money instead of art and moral values (as we Germans are). They see the US as the land of popcorn children and moronic Trump voters in the Midwest, where, in fact, half of the citizens did not vote for him.

Germany's long-felt inferiority complex – being the loser of the war and then a mere junior partner after that war – is offset by clinging to “higher values,” exhibiting allegedly higher moral integrity, inhabiting a higher cultural and psychological plane and embracing a better form of capitalism, namely Rhine Capitalism. This aversion also derives from the closeness of the relationship between the two countries.

Indeed, Germans are closer in culture and customs to Americans than to citizens of China or India. Yet Germans are reserved in their criticism of these “exotic” countries: When have we ever heard substantial German criticism of the over 5,000 state executions that Amnesty International says take place in China every year?

The US is like an unloved older half-brother who simultaneously does everything better and worse than his younger German sibling. Germany has long been fixated on the American way of life, and has copied it as much as it can. But there remains a deep resentment of the US as a poster child and symbol of unbridled modernism, alienation, rootlessness and acceleration.

How deeply anchored and socially acceptable this unsophisticated anti-American resentment has become is evidenced by the success of the now-disgraced *Der Spiegel* journalist, Claas Relotius, who enjoyed particular acclaim for his invented reporting on exceedingly unlikeable Americans. It went over well. (See page 6.)

Intellectuals in Germany have considerably less to say about the reasons for America's success, which is indeed not solely grounded in exploitation and imperialism. Despite all its shortcomings, the unbelievably inspiring degree of ethnic and cultural integration enjoyed by this vastly heterogeneous country, the high level of personal discipline exhibited by countless workers in the US as well as the willingness of many Americans to embrace sacrifice and risk are seldom mentioned.

Amid all the justified criticism of the materialism of US citizens, their idealistic and romantic sides are rarely appreciated. When President George W. Bush came off more as unworldly and naïve than as a classic villain when he coined the term “axis of evil,” the formulation contained traces of the values-driven idea that the US was capable of exercising a “positive” influence on the world and that Americans do not wage senseless wars primarily for “oil.”

This idea of a swan song for “America” has many fans in Germany. Unfortunately, however, no one ever thinks about what would happen if the US were to fall. Will capitalism perish if the US continues to decline? Hardly. And very little effort is being made to envisage what the alternative to the Western capitalist way of life as embodied by the US would actually look like.

Critics of America love to churn out their barbs on Apple laptops with Rihanna playing in the background. Honest and consistent criticism of capitalism and globalization would look a whole lot different than that; it also just might send us back to the dark days of nationalism.

Today, the most interesting approaches to imagining a better life are coming from people who resist focusing on unsophisticated resentments of the US and instead work at containing the anti-social excesses of capitalism and reckless gambling with the world's ecological balance. Many of these people live in the US.

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Realists

BY PETER H. KOEPP

According to Andrei S. Markovits, “anti-Americanism is a particularly murky concept because it invariably merges antipathy towards what America *does* with what America *is*.” In a 2004 book, he bemoaned what he called the “hatred of America.” Markovits could republish this book, subtitled *Anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism in Western Europe*, restating and updating the antipathy against America – if indeed this hate, this anti-Americanism exists.

One can heed the political theorist Herfried Münkler, who somewhat laconically opined that empires always inspire both admiration and hostility. But that, too, is too simplistic.

When an empire foments antagonism – indeed, in all four corners of the globe – are there rational reasons explaining why? Should we not at least try to speak among our partners about our accusations?

Three-quarters of all Germans rate German-American relations as poor or very poor. But do they hate an entire country along with all its people? Or would these answers have more to do with politics, that is, with political actors and their decisions. It is surely not America that is doing something, but rather people, politicians and bosses of powerful global corporation who are the actual targets of the criticism.

As for America, the country, generations of Germans have openly admired this country – and its culture – to such a degree that they have been traveling there in masses. The vast majority of Germans, including young Germans, like the American way of life. Their language is peppered with English words and phrases. A growing number of German 11th-graders spend an exchange in the US and return home the better for it. The overwhelming majority of Germans are fans of American pop music, watch American films, binge American series on Netflix, even those in which the Germans are the bad guys (usually Nazis). They gobble up the products of America's cultural industry as readily as they do the products of the US economy.

And yet, trust in Germany's greatest ally is weaker than it has been in decades, albeit with material differences than at earlier points in postwar history. What some American politicians say and do is disturbing to many Germans, and they are venturing to express it. And why not? If democracy is about the freedom of individuals, the pursuit of happiness and the good life, then it also includes the freedom of speech. Indeed, whoever believes that things are progressing in the wrong direction has a democratic duty to speak up. This is as true in the US as it here in Europe.

There have been high points and low points in German-American cooperation. When John F. Kennedy spoke in Berlin in June 1963, 500,000 people cheered him on. After the towers of the World Trade Center collapsed, a Social Democratic politician spoke for millions of Germans and proclaimed: “Today, we are all Americans.” And when Barack Obama, still a candidate for the presidency in July 2008, held a rally in Berlin's Tiergarten, he was joined by more than 200,000 individuals.

Every low, however, breeds more claims of anti-Americanism, even among Germany's self-proclaimed transatlanticists. Yet those who criticized the war in Iraq and expressed their revulsion over the excesses of many soldiers there did not do so out of hate

for America or out of frustration that Germany was defeated twice last century, as Markovits offers in his book. Nor will anyone let the crimes of the Nazis “disappear behind the monstrous perception of America.” Moreover, there was no and still is no “conformity of public opinion.” It's plain to see that those who pointed to the lies and deceit during the lead-up to the war in Iraq and now to the outcome – radical Islamic terrorism – were right in every way.

Furthermore, is it anti-American to criticize withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal and the INF treaty if the US ambassador threatens sanctions against German companies that continue doing business in Iran or Russia? Was it anti-American to object to the American economic system for being too enthralled with the invisible hand of the market and to point out that US banks were to blame for creating turbulence in the markets? Was is anti-Americanism that led to the majority of Germans rejecting the free trade agreement with the US during the Obama administration, as market-oriented journalists, politicians and lobbyists were so eager to claim? No. Many Germans and millions of people from other countries feared the plummeting of salaries, social welfare levels and production and environmental standards as well as the loss of long-fought-for consumer protections and workers' rights.

The term “anti-Americanism” is a weapon for polemicists, a debate killer. Fundamental and collective anti-Americanism would not manifest itself in impulsive undulations. No. What they call anti-Americanism is oftentimes the result of poorly vetted survey findings in the wake of outrage over certain events – Agent Orange in Vietnam, the lies at the UN Security Council in the lead-up to the Iraq war, Abu Ghraib and the German chancellor's wiretapped phone line. And when the anger dissipates, happier polling numbers will bounce right back.

And today, there certainly are good reasons as to why “the empire” is drawing such ire. Is it fair to say that US policies in many countries across the world were “expressly negative, often exploitative and in some cases brutal and murderous”? Yes, Markovits, Michael Moore and Noam Chomsky get to say it. But if Europeans make the same claim, then these Americans are allegedly being “instrumentalized,” and serve as “a justification for giving free rein to anti-Americanism” (Markovits). In other words: Pipe down, Europeans, when it comes to the US!

But how? What should we do? The US and its representatives for the most part set global policy and determine the global economy – in pursuit of their own interests, of course. Some of these interests are not in line with those of Europe, and what results is a competition over the future of our society, or our societies. At stake are fundamental questions of great significance to each individual person as well as to the collective population of planet Earth. At stake is the question of what sort of world we want and who gets what share of the yield of our collective toils. If proponents of economic liberalism, privatization and deregulation accuse their critics of anti-Americanism, it's a bald attempt to muzzle them. And whatever it is, it's not liberal.

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