

Mary Nolan

America's Century in Europe

Reflections on Americanization, Anti-Americanism and
the Transatlantic Partnership



Jena Center

Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts
20th Century History

Wallstein

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Vorträge und Kolloquien
Band 28



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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

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Vom Verlag gesetzt aus der Sabon und der Univers

Umschlaggestaltung: Steffen Röder, Berlin

Foto: Matthew Weinstein, Brooklyn

ISBN (Print) 978-3-8353-5264-3

ISBN (E-Book, pdf) 978-3-8353-4924-7

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Rethinking Transatlantic Relations in the First Cold War Decades

In 1941, prominent American magazine publisher Henry Luce proclaimed his hopes for an »*American* internationalism,« led by his fellow countrymen who would »accept wholeheartedly our duty and our opportunity ... to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence, for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit.«¹ His call for an »American Century« found ready resonance among U.S. politicians, pundits, and intellectuals, who both during and after the war sought to revamp transatlantic and global economic, political, military, and cultural relations. If ever this sweeping vision was realized, it was in the first post-World War II decades, above all (but not exclusively) in Western Europe. America's mid-century dominance there rested on its economic prowess and model of Fordist modernity; on unchallenged military might, conventional and nuclear; and on a pervasive transatlantic consensus – at least among elites – about anti-Communism and containment, but also about Keynesianism and generous social policies. It was also supported by the admiration of Western Europeans for American political values and popular culture and their willingness to be junior partners in America's »empire by invitation.«² The final prerequisite for America's extraordinary influence was the relative weakness of its transatlantic Allies and its Soviet enemy, who had suffered such enormous losses in World War II.

The American Century was, however, neither as long-lived as its name might imply nor as hegemonic as its proponents had imagined, even in the first Cold War decades. We can recognize America's preponderance of power in transatlantic relations, while simultaneously recalling that the arguments about Americanization need to be complicated, that other circuits of exchange of ideas, products, and people are ac-

knowledge, and that the Atlantic Community is recontextualized in terms of its two »others« – the socialist Second World and the Third World. This essay suggests some of the ways to do this. First, it situates the exceptional years from 1945 until the early 1970s in the history of transatlantic relations over the long 20th century. Second, it illustrates the limits of Americanization in Western Europe, notes some of the cooperative projects and ongoing conflicts that suggest mutual dependencies and two-way exchanges, and highlights some European influences on postwar America, in addition to those of the experts, professionals, and intellectuals who feature in the subsequent essays. Third, the complex circuits of exchange within Europe, including across the Iron Curtain, illustrate the multidirectionality of European interests and influences and warn against an overemphasis on Atlantic crossings in whatever direction. Finally, an emphasis on the importance of European and American global economic aspirations and mental maps as well as of concrete interactions with the Third World not only helps to situate the transatlantic within the global, it also shows how central the colonial and Third Worlds were to the politics, economics, and self-definition of those in the Atlantic Community from the late 19th century on – even if the exact nature of the relations and self-definitions changed over the long 20th century.

Europe's American Century

Sweeping narratives of the decline of the Old World and the rise of the New World capture elements of the shifting relationship between Europe and America in the 20th century, but they do justice neither to the complexity of the exchanges of goods, people, institutions, and ideas in both directions across the Atlantic nor to the ambivalent and contradictory attitudes of Europeans and Americans toward one another. We cannot reduce the history of shifting transatlantic power relations, provisional outcomes and ongoing indetermina-

cies, cooperative projects, and competing visions of capitalism, modernity, and empire to the inevitable triumph of the United States. That history is much more nuanced, contingent, and contradictory. It shows the unique and transitory character of the post-1945 constellation of transatlantic relations, while also suggesting continuities across periods.

In the multipolar decades before 1914, the economic, imperial, and intellectual exchanges in both directions between Europe and the United States were multiplying, though U.S. dominance was neither evident nor viewed as inevitable. The United States was not a major imperial power; it was not seen as a political or military model to imitate or fear. Although American industrial production was growing and its investments and goods were moving into Europe – think Singer sewing machines, International Harvest reapers, and Kodak cameras – Britain remained the world's banker, insurer, and leading trader – and Germany was a mighty industrial rival. America had not yet come to be viewed as an economic model to emulate. And in the arena of social policy, as Dan Rodgers showed, Americans were the students, Europeans – often Germans – the teachers.³

To be sure, some worried about an *Americanization of the World*, to quote the title of William Stead's book, which was actually about U.S. threats to the British Empire. Other Brits wrote of »American invaders« and the »American threat.« However, German officials and industrialists were overall confident about their ability to compete economically, and the French perceived little danger. Many Europeans wrote about the puzzling »American woman,« the peculiarities of gender relations in the United States, and lamented the lack of *Kultur*. Still, none feared that these U.S. peculiarities might be imported into Europe.⁴ In short, before 1914, there was an uncertain balance of power in transatlantic relations and mutual interest, but there was no obsessive preoccupation: Neither anti-Americanism nor anti-Europeanism existed on a significant scale. The American Century had not yet begun.

World War I and its economic and political repercussions changed all that, paving the way – albeit in stops and starts – for the eclipse of European hegemony and the rise of an interventionist America. Only then did a significant transatlantic divide and the deep ambivalence that has ever since characterized Europeans' view of America and Americans' of Europe develop. World War I encouraged American disdain for European militarism and led the United States to see itself as Europe's »savior,« entitled to prescribe peace terms. These contradictory assessments encouraged both interventionism and isolationism in the interwar years. Britain and France needed American aid but resented the terms on which it was being offered and promoted a very different peace settlement than Wilson wanted. The war experience on each side of the Atlantic was radically different, and these different experiences and memories of total war would complicate European-American relations throughout the 20th century.⁵

The war's economic aftermath set the stage for the 1920s. On the one hand, Europe was economically devastated, globally weakened, and heavily indebted; on the other hand, the United States was pioneering a new form of mass production and consumption: Fordism. Europe's dramatically altered situation fueled a preoccupation with America, greatest in Germany and the Soviet Union but present everywhere. It took varied forms, ranging from enthusiasm to abhorrence. For its part, the United States alternated between isolationism and unilateralism; economic engagement via loans, exports, and investments; and political distancing from individual countries and new international institutions, the League of Nations above all.⁶

The allure of America as the land of unrivaled prosperity, unlimited growth, and unequivocal modernity dissipated during the 1930s, as the Depression devastated both sides of the Atlantic. The global economy became disarticulated, and transatlantic political divisions multiplied. The United States, with its mass unemployment and escalating class conflicts,

seemed to be becoming Europeanized. Yet, the attraction to America did not disappear completely. Despite the rhetorical condemnation of economic Americanism in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy and growing critiques of American popular culture there and in the Soviet Union, Germany, Italy, and especially the Soviet Union borrowed elements of the Fordist model of production – but not its accompanying stress on consumption. They shared with the United States (and Sweden) more interventionist approaches to the Depression, such as labor services and a penchant for giant infrastructure projects. To be sure, different countries harnessed these economic and social policies for quite different political ends⁷: Those countries closest to the United States politically and culturally, Britain and France, were more reluctant to adopt such economic and social measures. Political divisions, ideological cleavages, and economic visions thus seemed simultaneously sharper and more blurred, as the transatlantic world moved haltingly toward a postliberal order whose contours were contested and uncertain. As would be the case post-1945, the European adoption of things American was selective. Some things borrowed were transformed, often beyond recognition, when put in different national contexts, so that Europe was far from being Americanized. When Henry Luce published his famous »American Century« essay, it was less a description of America's role in Europe and the world than a plea for Americans to take up a global mission.

World War II dramatically changed the transatlantic balance of power, devastating Europe economically, disrupting it socially, and discrediting elites and parties in many countries politically and culturally. It brought the United States and the USSR closer than at any time in the long 20th century. Then, the onset of the Cold War, for which both superpowers were responsible, ended the wartime community of interests and led Western Europeans and Americans to define the emerging Atlantic Community as separate from and opposed to the Soviet bloc. War and preparations for peace ended

American ambivalence about »entangling alliances«⁸ and belief in isolationism. From the late 1940s to the early 1970s, the United States reshaped the global economic order, helped restructure political regimes across Western Europe, and experimented with both containment and rollback toward the Soviet bloc.⁹ American businessmen, soldiers, and aid officials as well as American wares, movies, music, and high culture flooded into Europe. Never had the American presence and influence been greater.

Even at the high point of America's preponderance of power, however, significant tensions remained between the United States and its Western European allies over welfare and warfare, nuclear weapons and economic policies, attitudes toward the Soviet bloc, and relations with the Third World. France replaced Britain and Germany as the country where ambivalence about American power and products was greatest. Europeans engaged in complex negotiations with American ideas, cultural products, and commodities, and created hybrid forms of mass culture and modern living. Culture wars were fought within European countries, between East and West, and among members of the Atlantic Community, concerning American movies, music, and wares in Europe and about whether and how politics and states should instrumentalize culture for Cold War ends.¹⁰

From the 1970s onward, American influence began to erode.¹¹ The protest movements of the late 1960s challenged both American hegemony and the Cold War categories central to it, and growing antinuclear movements further contested U.S. leadership. The multiple economic crises of the 1970s – the gold drain, oil shocks, and the exhaustion of Fordism – weakened America's domination of the global economy. Détente, as practiced by the United States and the USSR, on the one hand, and European states, on the other hand, took different forms reflecting Western Europe's increasing autonomy. In the 1980s, the United States and much of Europe grew still farther apart, as America, along with

Britain, embraced neoliberalism, while continental European states defended important parts of their social-democratic social policies and their particular varieties of more regulated capitalism, even as they liberalized the financial sector.¹²

The fall of Communism represented for many Americans the longed-for American Cold War victory, the end of a troubled history of challenges to liberalism and capitalism, and the beginning of U.S. unilateral global dominance. For Europeans, the series of events for which »1989« is shorthand was more complex: Far from ending history, they opened a new era in which Europe was forced to redefine its identity and institutions and in which Europeans borrowed more from one another than from America.¹³ Now, as America turned away from Europe, Europe intensified its economic and political integration, and European states frequently dissented from American global projects, military and economic. Of equal importance, a multipolar world came into being: The North Atlantic no longer contains all the key players, nor is it central to all exchanges and networks. Of course, the transatlantic movement of ideas, goods, investments, and cultural products in both directions will continue – and perhaps even intensify if the EU-U.S. free trade agreement is implemented – just as it has over the long 20th century, with Europe and America alternately dominating in different areas. Yet, the Atlantic Community, insofar as it survives, will no longer be the only or most important institutional and imagined political, military, and economic supranational entity, for either Europeans or Americans.¹⁴

Limits of Americanization

In the years after 1945, American military personnel, businessmen, Marshall Plan administrators, labor leaders, foundation officials, and educators moved out across Western Europe to spread the gospel of democratic capitalism and anti-Communism. They encouraged Europeans to adopt the »politics of

productivity,« to open their markets, integrate their economies, and allow Hollywood films, jazz, and rock'n'roll to circulate freely. »You can be like us« was the American promise – one many perceived as a threat.¹⁵ But did the combination of aid and investment, multinationals and foundations, consumer goods and cultural products – all varied forms of American soft and semihard power – transform European economies and societies in the ways anticipated?

At issue are not American ambitions but rather Western Europe's openness to all things American and its ability to adopt or adapt them. While most scholars agree that concepts such as »thoroughgoing European emulation« or »American cultural imperialism« are too crude to describe the complex transatlantic interactions, there is much room for disagreement about what postwar Americanization looked like in different areas of economy and society, in different countries, and for different generations and genders. Indeed, there is much disagreement about how to define that elusive term. Some speak of the »transfer« of the American model and partial convergence, while others opt for »cross-fertilization« and »American engagements« or speak of »adaptation, negotiation, and the resulting creation of hybrid practices, products, and policies.« The essence of the American model is equally open to dispute. For Victoria de Grazia, its core lies in American consumer culture, with its distinctive Fordized system of distribution, its new advertising techniques and messages, its democratic and egalitarian ethos and consumer citizens, and its promise of a dramatically new standard of living. For Charles Maier, the American model exported post-1945 was as much ideological as it was institutional – a politics of productivity promoted by mass production, organizational rationalization, new technology, and an open international economic order – one that promised not only growth but an escape from the zero-sum distribution struggles and ideological politics of earlier decades. For Marie-Laure Djelic, the essence of the postwar American

model, a model that was historically specific but claimed universal validity, was the large multidivisional, rationalized corporation, operating under the constraints of antitrust legislation and competing in oligopolistic markets. Both Christian Kleinschmidt and the authors in the collection edited by Jonathan Zeitlin and Gary Herrigel reject the idea of a unitary American model embodying the best practices for productivity. Instead, they see the United States as having offered an ensemble of organizational innovations, technologies, and management and marketing practices, among which Europeans could pick and choose as well as modify and recombine to suit local institutions, needs, preferences, and prejudices.¹⁶

America's influence varied across European countries, depending on the amount of U.S. aid and investment, the size of the U.S. military presence, the strength of prior cultural ties and exchanges, and the depth of national resistance to imports from across the Atlantic. Germany was among the most »Americanized« countries; France was among the least. That said, one can generalize about the kinds and degrees of Americanization in different areas of European economic, political, and cultural life in the first Cold War decades.

After 1945, American popular culture – jazz, rock 'n' roll, Hollywood films, Coca-Cola, and blue jeans – was enthusiastically embraced, above all by European youth on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Among traditional elites, cultural figures, religious leaders, and politicians in the Christian-Democratic and Communist regimes, the presence of such cultural artifacts aroused great anxiety; these quintessential symbols of American mass culture and consumption seemed to threaten established gender norms, generational hierarchies, religious and political authority, and ostensibly self-contained national cultures. Yet, consumption did not necessarily indicate full-scale Americanization. Going to Hollywood films, for example, did not mean wanting to become American; it might be just a fun escape or akin to visiting a familiar foreign country. If postwar popular culture

began in America, it soon incorporated European influences. For example, while Elvis dominated rock in the 1950s, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones did so in the 1960s and 1970s. A European-led international music scene emerged as part of transatlantic youth culture. In the 1950s, the embrace of American popular culture reflected and reinforced support for American political values and practices; by the late 1960s, European youth had continued to consume American mass culture, but many no longer endorsed American policies in Europe or globally.¹⁷

Americans sought not only to sell their commodities and cultural wares but also to impart their political values, pedagogy, and associational forms. Learning about American history and contemporary life was to become an integral part of the Americanization of Western Europe. The U.S. government engaged in cultural diplomacy, seeking to win hearts and minds with radio programming, tours by American artists, and exhibits of art, technology, and kitchens. The officially nongovernmental Congress for Cultural Freedom published journals and organized conferences to woo intellectuals away from any Communist sympathies, while the Ford Foundation funded the Salzburg Seminars to teach American Studies to Europeans. The government brought thousands of West German business people, engineers, trade unionists, and journalists to the United States for short study tours in the late 1940s and 1950s. Thereafter, the vast Fulbright and IREX programs as well as private fellowships brought a growing number of foreign students to the United States—while also sending thousands of Americans abroad.¹⁸

These efforts met with mixed success. The Congress for Cultural Freedom, for example, won many converts in the 1950s but lost credibility in the 1960s when its ties to the CIA were exposed. Trade unionists learned about the American model of business unionism but never adopted it at home. American officials and foundations argued that American art, music, and literature were as developed as that of Eu-

rope, but many Europeans were more interested in American popular culture and continued to believe that *Kultur* was the distinctive preserve of Europe, while American prowess lay in economics and technology. (Many Americans may well have agreed, but that is a subject still in need of exploration.)

Educational exchanges have been assessed primarily in terms of whether they made Western and later Eastern Europeans more democratic and sympathetic to American interests.¹⁹ Two questions relevant to our theme remain unanswered: First, how did Europeans who studied in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s and returned to Europe – or who were European-educated and then made their careers in the United States from the late 1960s onward – shape American scholarship as well as American politics and culture? They were well positioned to build transatlantic networks and in history, the field I know best, to continue the work of explaining Europe to Americans begun by the refugee generation. Thomas Wheatland's essay considers this generation, and Merel Leeman writes about the younger generation that came before the war.²⁰ They were enormously influential in shaping European history, whereas European Americanists, such as Rob Kroes or David Ellwood, have been largely ignored by historians in the United States, who seem to feel American history can be written only by Americans. Second, what did all those Americans who studied and researched in Europe bring back to their work and lives in the United States? How were they shaped by the intellectual approaches, political milieus, and cultural practices they encountered?

While Americans valued their cultural and educational initiatives, they saw economic reconstruction, reform, and modernization as prerequisites for a new Europe in a new Atlantic community. Fordism – the system of mass production and mass consumption of consumer durables built on integrated production, minutely divided assembly line work, high wages, and credit purchases – was, along with free trade, at the core of America's economic message. Eu-

Europeans first encountered Fordism in the interwar years through Henry Ford's writings and trips to his River Rouge plant in Detroit. Reactions were mixed. Conservative elites, who deplored America's gender relations, homogeneous, standardized products, and lack of *Kultur*, abhorred Fordism, as did industrialists and most politicians who insisted that mass consumption and high wages were impossible in war-ravaged Europe. German Social Democrats were willing to embrace the assembly line if it brought a higher standard of living, and the Soviets saw socialist Fordism as a way to industrialize and modernize. Most Europeans, however, were ambivalent about Fordism and failed to emulate the American economic model.²¹

After 1945, the United States sought to export Fordism and Taylorism with its minute division of labor and close managerial supervision of workers via the Marshall Plan and European Productivity Agency, and to promote European economic integration to create a large American-style market. Historians and social scientists positing far-reaching Americanization look at the most advanced industrial sectors like steel or autos, emphasize the growing production and purchase of consumer durables, and note the adoption of American corporate organization, advertising, and management practices. Others see the persistence of varieties of capitalism and emphasize the diversity of firms, production processes, and technologies in Western Europe. The latter point to distinctive labor relations, worker training, and firm financing, emphasizing the prevalence of corporatist bargaining among labor, capital, and the state in countries such as Sweden, The Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, and Britain.²² Like blind people describing an elephant, these historians and social scientists envision an utterly different beast, depending on which part of the elephant – or the economy – they touch.

A reading of the literature on both Americanization and varieties of capitalism, however, enables some generaliza-

tions. »Selective adaptation, creative modification, and innovative hybridization« most accurately captures European developments. Although Western European economies were significantly modified postwar, distinctive varieties of capitalism nonetheless persisted.²³ Europeans negotiated with American products, processes, and practices but also drew on their own traditions and visions of the future. Western Europeans accorded the state a much greater economic role than did Americans. After World War II, they either lived with inherited nationalized industries (Italy) or nationalized key sectors of industry, finance, and transport (Britain and France); they embraced planning and state subsidies. What Jan Logemann has argued for West Germany holds more broadly: Europeans accorded much more importance to public goods than Americans did, who prioritized private consumption at the expense of social and economic policy.²⁴ Although European growth rates were higher than those in the United States, the overall level of consumption was much lower, especially in the 1950s. Western Europe began purchasing consumer durables – washing machines, refrigerators, TVs, and cars – on a massive scale at the end of the decade, and Eastern Europe followed in the 1970s.²⁵ But, as the Swedish anthropologist Orvar Löfgren has perceptively noted, American visitors to Sweden found the use of appliances, the preferred color schemes of homes and offices, the shape of brooms, even the smell of multinational disinfectant to be different. Everyday modernity was at once American, international, and profoundly, if often elusively, national.²⁶

To be sure, the concept of Americanization cannot be dispensed with entirely when looking at production and consumption. It captures the postwar power relations that made America the model against which Western Europeans defined their economic practices, especially in the early postwar period. By the late 1960s, however, America accounted for only 35 % of global manufacturing and was failing to improve productivity, while European nations regained com-

petitiveness and enjoyed unprecedented prosperity.²⁷ They no longer felt compelled to look to America. They were not only producing for their own domestic markets and those of other European states; they were exporting to the United States as well.

The late 1960s and early 1970s marked the apogee of Americanization because of Europe's recovery and growing autonomy, and because of the multiple economic and political crises the United States suffered in the 1970s. Of equal importance, the American model itself changed: It came to stand for a post-Fordist, IT- and finance-based economy, neoliberal economic policies, and an ownership society that drastically curbed social rights and social infrastructure. After the 1970s, Western Europe did not make the sharp neoliberal turn the United States and Great Britain did. The resulting market gap contributed to a widening of the Atlantic and tensions within the Atlantic Community.

Joint Ventures and American Borrowings

European-American relations in the first postwar decades are often written as a story of Western European immaturity and dependence on the United States – for political tutelage; for military protection via NATO, U.S. forces, and the American nuclear umbrella; and for economic assistance via the Bretton Woods monetary system, the Marshall Plan, investment, and technological education. That certainly captures the first postwar decade, but even then, America believed it needed an open and prosperous Europe as a market for U.S. goods and investments. Other American dependencies followed. Let's take one example: The United States developed a balance-of-payments problem in the 1950s as American imports from Europe exceeded exports to the continent, stationing hundreds of thousands of troops was costly, multinationals invested heavily, and tourists spent freely. The resulting dollar drain put pressure on America's gold reserves. The

United States had to negotiate »offset« payments from West Germany to help cover military costs and beg France and Germany not to cash in their dollar holdings for gold.²⁸ The exchangeability of currencies and tariff rates were also a constant source of friction.

Americans expected Western Europeans to comply with American wishes for freer trade, more military spending, and protection of U.S. gold reserves out of gratitude for everything the United States had done for Europe – though they did not wish to share decision-making power. In practice, an ongoing renegotiation of American hegemony made the relationship within the Atlantic Community more equal and the interests of different partners more distinct. The 1971 American decision to abandon the Bretton Woods monetary system, the 1973 oil crisis, and the end of the postwar boom created bitter transatlantic conflicts and separate policy paths. Nonetheless, the creation of the G7 and the deliberations of the Trilateral Commission, composed of business people, government officials, and social scientists from the United States, Western Europe, and Japan, revealed ongoing efforts to keep the Atlantic Community – now expanded to include Japan – relevant to a world that little resembled that of the late 1940s.²⁹ America wanted both to assert its interests and to remain a European power – no easy task, even before the end of the Cold War.

Americans not only solicited European help; they received European goods and ideas. The modern home provides an example: Before and after World War I, America pioneered the discipline of home economics and the production of household technology, but Europeans did more to advance the design of the modern home, as evidenced by the Bauhaus, the *Frankfurt Kitchen*, and the functional furniture and apartments displayed at the 1930 Stockholm exhibition. International modernism was a transatlantic project, albeit one that always had distinctive national inflections. Initially, Europe led the way until many of its proponents were forced