

Hating Uncle Sam

A Princeton class dissects the causes of anti-Americanism and what can be done about them.

By Mark T. Bernstein '83

Why do they hate us? Americans have asked that question about the world at least since the beginning of the Cold War, sometimes plaintively and sometimes peevishly, but never more pointedly than since the opening of the war in Iraq.

"Why do they hate us?" George W. Bush asked rhetorically in his speech to a joint session of Congress nine days after the 9/11 attacks. Islamic fundamentalists hate America's democratic form of government, the president concluded. Some analysts say that foreign governments whip up anti-Americanism to divert attention from their own shortcomings; others call negative attitudes abroad a fitting rebuke for American policies that defy or divide world opinion, ranging from our overuse of natural resources to our role in the Middle East.

Analyzing anti-Americanism has become a flourishing academic specialty. Last fall, eight members of a junior task force at the Woodrow Wilson School for Public and International Affairs studied the issue in depth. The task force was taught by Sophie Meunier, a research scholar who has written extensively on the subject and currently is working on a book about anti-American attitudes in her native France and elsewhere. The students produced a 16-page policy paper, "Dealing with Anti-Americanism: A Report to the New Administration," which it presented to policymakers in Washington in December. Meunier was planning to send a much longer, final report, completed in January, to members of the new administration, including former Woodrow Wilson School dean Anne-Marie Slaughter '80, the incoming director of the State Department's policy-planning staff.

Anti-American attitudes are not confined to jihadists, and polls — taken before the election of Barack Obama — suggest they have been deepening, even among those who are supposed to be our allies. According to a survey released in

December by the Pew Global Attitudes Project, an affiliate of the Pew Research Center, only 53 percent of Britons think favorably of the United States, down from 83 percent nine years ago. Just 31 percent of Spaniards hold a favorable opinion of the United States, and in Turkey, an aspiring member of the European Union, approval runs at a mere 12 percent. In large swaths of the world, anti-American jibes have become a staple of popular humor: A recent advertisement in South Africa for the European-made Smart car boasted that it featured "German engineering, Swiss innovation, American nothing."

Still, in some parts of the world, especially the former Soviet satellites of Eastern Europe and in sub-Saharan Africa, the United States remains very popular. According to Pew, 68 percent of Poles and 64 percent of Nigerians hold favorable opinions of this country; in South Korea, which U.S. troops have defended for half a century, it is 70 percent. Many people strongly oppose particular U.S. policies while professing deep affection for American culture or for Americans personally. Fewer than 40 percent of Mexicans, for example, say they hold a favorable opinion of the United States — but immigration runs in one direction.

The task force members bring perspectives from around the globe, which makes them perfectly suited to delve into their topic. Five of the eight students on the task force have lived abroad, and one is a foreign citizen.

And the professor? "I'm French," Meunier jokes, "so that qualifies me to teach about anti-Americanism."

In fact, the course had its genesis in Meunier's academic work. Born in Paris, she earned a bachelor's degree at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris. After graduate studies at Harvard's Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies and the University of Chicago, she received a Ph.D. from MIT. With the exception of a brief period at the Brookings Institution, she has taught at Princeton since 1998.

Meunier says she grew up steeped in the tradition of French anti-Americanism. France may be America's oldest ally, she notes, but it also is the country with the oldest tradition of negative attitudes toward America, dating back to the French and Indian War before the United States even existed as a nation. In modern times, relations between the two countries have been fraught at least since Charles de Gaulle withdrew France from NATO during the 1960s, preferring to develop his country's own nuclear-weapons program rather than remain under the American defense umbrella. As satirist Tom Lehrer sang at the time about nuclear proliferation: "France got the bomb, but don't you grieve / 'Cause they're on our side — I believe."

In 2001, Meunier published her first book, *The French Challenge: Adapting to Globalization* (Brookings Institution Press), an analysis of the uniquely French opposition to economic and cultural globalization that was best characterized by protests against McDonald's outlets led by a French farmer, José Bové. Because the United States is the dominant world economy, Meunier says, the French have come to equate globalization with the might of American capital. In 2006, she was approached by Peter Katzenstein, a professor at Cornell, and Robert Keohane, a professor at the Wilson School, to write a chapter on France for their book, *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics* (Cornell University Press).

"I thought it would be an easy task," Meunier recalls, but as she began working on her chapter, she found that little analysis of anti-Americanism had been done with a sound grounding in the social sciences. She decided to conduct that work herself. In doing so, she discovered that French anti-Americanism differs from anti-Americanism elsewhere in that it spans the political spectrum. French leftists disdain American militarism and cultural hegemony at the same time that former Gaullists scorn the country that they believe usurped France's role in world leadership.

Those servings of French fries petulantly renamed "freedom fries" notwithstanding, French anti-Americanism has had no discernible effect on American policy, Meunier concludes. Instead, she says, it boomerangs back onto France, stifling economic and social reforms. Proposals to address the plight of the Muslim underclass with affirmative action or

to spur economic growth by lowering taxes can be thwarted by describing them as "American" ideas. Meunier is expanding her study into a book that she hopes to finish this year.

The timeliness of studying anti-Americanism is what led Meunier to develop the task force — and what led most of the eight juniors to enroll in it. All undergraduates in the Wilson School are required to participate in two policy task forces during their junior year — the equivalent of writing junior papers in other departments. (Task forces this year are being offered on topics ranging from U.S. policy toward the United Nations to combating childhood obesity.)

At their first class meeting, Meunier asked the students to introduce themselves. "My name is Sarah," began Sarah Dajani '09, who serves as the task force's "senior commissioner" (a

student who helps the instructor coordinate the task force). "My parents are from Egypt, I visit there almost every summer, and I am studying Arabic."

"My name is Sarah, my parents are from Egypt, I visit almost every summer, and I am studying Arabic, too," announced the next student, Sarah Mousa '10.

"I spent last summer in Morocco," Farrell Harding '10 chimed in. "I've studied Arabic for three years, and I'm starting to learn Farsi."

Students were aware of anti-American attitudes abroad, sometimes from personal

encounters, but their experience showed that people in other countries liked Americans individually and devoured American culture. Mousa recalls being driven by an Egyptian cab driver who excoriated the American military presence in Iraq, only to make it clear that he did not hold it against her personally.

Mac Steele '10 grew up in Seattle but attended high school in Australia after his father, a Microsoft executive, was transferred to Sydney. Australians, he found, largely were unfamiliar with the United States' cultural diversity and believed Americans to be ignorant of the rest of the world. He frequently was called upon to explain American government positions, which forced him to inform himself about them. "If I didn't know the facts, I thought I would just be affirming their beliefs" about American ignorance, he says.

Ashley Schoettle '10 has spent three summers in Nigeria and South Africa with an international community-service program and as an assistant to Carolyn Rouse, a Princeton associate professor of anthropology. She says she has found that America remains very popular in Africa, in part because of pride in the political success of Barack Obama but also because of the Bush administration's funding for AIDS treatment. Marina Henke, a second-year Ph.D. candidate from Stuttgart who served as Meunier's graduate-student consult-



ant, suggests that many foreign stereotypes of Americans are perpetuated by cultural exports such as the animated TV series *The Simpsons*, which gives many Germans their most salient impressions of U.S. culture.

As a Chinese citizen, Lingzi Gui '10 says she witnessed anti-American demonstrations firsthand after the accidental NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 and after an incident two years later in which a U.S. military plane was forced down after colliding with a Chinese fighter jet. To many Chinese, she says, the United States appears proud and arrogant. But she adds that she has noticed her own country attracting more international criticism as it assumes a greater role on the world stage. Seeing anti-Chinese protests last year during the Olympic torch relay, Gui says, made her suspect that America is hated in some corners of the world simply because it is the most powerful and prominent nation. "No matter what the government does," she says, "people will be against you."

As the Princeton students explored the elements of anti-Americanism early in the semester, their discussions were supplemented by weekly reading from journals and international newspapers and by visiting lecturers: diplomats, a State Department official, and experts on foreign sentiments. A great problem, said Thomas Miller, the former U.S. ambassador to Greece and now vice president of an organization that works to challenge anti-American attitudes, has been a lack of emphasis by the State Department on public diplomacy. There are more musicians in U.S. military bands, Miller told the students, than there are people in the foreign service.

Because the end of the semester coincided closely with the presidential inauguration and change in administrations, each student prepared a two-page précis of his or her report chapter, which would be incorporated into the 16-page document presented in Washington in December. The report attempts to set out cost-effective strategies to improve U.S. public diplomacy and combat anti-American attitudes. In addition to focusing on steps that can be taken in strategically sensitive regions such as the Middle East, Pakistan, and China, the report addresses anti-American attitudes around the globe that stem from U.S. policy choices on climate change (in a section prepared by Carolyn Edelstein '10), economic globalization, and the war in Iraq.

Once the students submitted drafts of their summary papers, the class met to read them aloud and synthesize their conclusions. The only area in which this proved contentious, perhaps not surprisingly, was the chapter on the Middle East. Sarah Mousa's draft included a recommendation that the United States initiate direct talks with Hamas, the governing authority in Gaza, which the American government considers a terrorist organization. After debates with her classmates and out-of-class discussions with contacts she had made at the Arab-American Institute and the State Department — who told her that such a proposal would be regarded as unrealistic by American policymakers — Mousa withdrew that recommendation. Instead, in the final report she calls

for the United States to initiate direct talks with Syria.

As befits possible future diplomats, the students' report strikes a balanced and pragmatic tone. Many of its recommendations — such as training U.S. ambassadors to be better public diplomats, furthering corporate-exchange programs, and promoting greater media freedom in Pakistan — seem uncontroversial. Others, such as requiring the U.S. military to justify all prisoner detentions to an international judge, surely would provoke opposition.

After several rounds of editing and review, Meunier and the task force took an early train to Washington Dec. 5 to present their conclusions to people in positions to do something about them. Their first stop was the State Department, where they met with Mark Davidson, a career foreign-service officer. With more than a dozen people crammed into a conference room designed to hold half that number, the class chose Mac Steele to make their presentation.

Several times, Davidson interrupted Steele's presentation to offer positive comments. When Steele proposed that the government prove its commitment to combat global warming by retrofitting government buildings to meet sustainability standards, Davidson interjected that the State Department recently announced plans to do just that at all U.S. embassies. "Bravo — truly incisive," Davidson applauded at the conclusion of the presentation. "You have obviously done your homework"

The day also included visits to the Pew Research Center and Capitol Hill for a meeting with the chief of staff to Chuck Hagel, the outgoing Republican senator from Nebraska and longtime critic of the Bush administration's foreign policy. Since then, Meunier has distributed the report to others, including Kristin Lord of the Brookings Institution, who wrote to Meunier that she especially appreciated the "focus on science and technology."

An obvious question about anti-Americanism is to what extent the departure of the widely unpopular George W. Bush may fix it. While some students, such as Ashley Schoettle, can speak firsthand of President Obama's immense popularity in other parts of the world, the students suggest that Obama's inauguration will go only so far in lessening hostility toward the United States. To the extent that Obama pursues the same policies abroad that have proven unpopular, the early glow of international enthusiasm for him is likely to fade.

Gui says the task force strengthened her interest in pursuing a career in public diplomacy when she returns to China, if only "because the Chinese are very bad at it." Sam Gulland '10, who wrote the section on anti-Americanism and the military, also has a personal interest in the topic. As part of his ROTC training, he has been reading the Army's new *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*. The manual emphasizes that not only diplomats, but also soldiers, will find themselves engaged in working with the local population and thus presenting America favorably to other parts of the world.

Says Gulland: "It is all about winning hearts and minds." ■

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