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THE IMPERIALISM OF REPRESENTATION
THE REPRESENTATION OF IMPERIALISM

AMERICANISM FOR EXPORT

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> America is more than a country. America is more than a continent. America is an ideal... America is the apotheosis of all that is right.
> —Samuel Gompers (c. 1918)

> America is not a country, much less a fatherland...America is a structure, though not a territorial one...it is a system of thought and action, a method, a technique...the hegemony of mechanistic rationalism.
> —Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu (1931)

BY THE LATE 1920s, "AMERICANISM" HAD become a familiar term in Western nations. At home, "one hundred percent americanism" meant taking Samuel Gompers' reformism, Babbitry, and America's global mission to heart; campaigns in its name were to convert the alien, and to plunge the worker, the ethnic, and the emigrant into the great melting pot. In Europe, *americanisation, Amerikanismus, americanismo* signified the new and the idiosyncratic, and were key words in disputes over the significance of the United States' economic "invasion," and the meaning of mass society in predictions about the rise and decay of civilization and cultures. Not just in the 1920s, but in the 1930s, and at mid-century—at each moment, that is, when people awoke to major transformations within the United States itself, or in the relations between it and the world—the meaning of americanism, as a model of capitalist growth, a cultural configuration, and an ensemble of political and social values, was contested between right and left, debated, and redefined. In the process, americanism acquired ever more meanings; no mere hegemonic nationalism, it came to signify mechanical civilization itself, prefiguring the cultural and productive might of a global industrial future.

In the 1960s, however, the word americanism lost currency in both Europe and the United States. The reasons were twofold. On the one hand, conservatives and liberals, with overweaning confidence in the triumph of the "American century," tacitly accepted that the United States' developmental experience was indeed a universal model. On the other hand, as a result of the Vietnam War, the American model of development faced the first major challenge to its legitimacy since World War II. Thus, while in mainstream social science the terms "consensus" and "modernization" replaced "americanism," and in Europe, Servan-Schrieber turned the "menace" of americanization into the more manageable "American challenge," critics of American empire in the United States and elsewhere resorted to the notion of cultural imperialism, by which they intended to underscore the ideological dimension of America's meddling in other nations' affairs. As it came to be used by the U.S. left, this term, cultural imperialism, denied that the American developmental experience was peculiar with respect to that of other capitalist states, or that it had any intrinsic appeal. Indeed, the very notion of a specifically cultural form of imperialism, although having a long history in European (specifically Marxist-Leninist) political analysis became popular in the sixties precisely to refute liberal-progressivist explanations of U.S. exceptionalism. In particular, it took issue with two commonplaces: first, that America's global primacy was in any way consensual or freely accepted; and second, that the special circumstances of American development constituted absolute rules for the modernizing process elsewhere.

The abandonment of the term americanism might be considered only to the good; for it did, after all, signal a sharper political confrontation and debate between critics and apologists of American empire, and it cleared up ambiguities inevitably resulting from diverse ideological positions laying claim to a common word. But as the history of its usage shows, americanism was more than a label. The word had acquired layers of meaning, the very complexity and contradictoriness of which suggests why the power of American empire has been so difficult to grasp. To put aside the term thus had the effect of ending discussion of certain unresolved, yet still basic issues, the most obvious being whether the United States' development was indeed exceptional, by virtue of not having generated class-based social movements in the tradition of the European left. It also deterred analysis of the historical process by which the American experience was transformed into a universal model of business society based on advanced technology and promising formal equality and unlimited mass consumption.

To reappropriate the concept of americanism, or, at least, to reexamine how it has been used, is intended here as a first step toward a critical appraisal of why the U.S. model has proved so influential world-wide, and how its appeal has supported America's global expansion in the twentieth century. But how to establish critical distance with regard to a phenomenon which has conditioned the very way progress itself has come to be understood—to the point where it is difficult to conceive of real alternatives? In this essay, I have worked from two vantage points: the one, an American critical tradition, developed, so to speak, within the Empire and looking out; the other, a European mode of analysis, originating, that is, outside of the Empire, or at what during the early twentieth century was an outer edge. The first section thus focuses on how the concept of cultural imperialism has been used to explain the influence exercised by America abroad; the second examines the terms developed in Europe since the 1920s to analyze American hegemony. These were the outcome of debates between left and right about the relationship between economic growth and mass culture which used American capitalist society as the key reference. To examine these two modes of analysis without specific discussion of America's brutal highhandedness in the Third World is not to ignore the very real differences between the ties of dependency within the Atlantic world and the crushing subjection involved in North-South relations. The point here, however, is another: to show how the very notion of a cultural imperialism was drawn from European preoccupations with the relationship between sovereignty and national cultural identity; to underscore the degree to which European as well as American Marxists have been conditioned by the American model of development in debating the alternatives to capitalist mass production systems; finally, to emphasize that neither tradition has adequately confronted, much less explained, the astounding tenacity of the appeal of americanism, even now that one of its major premises—unlimited growth—appears to have crumbled.

The notion of a distinctly cultural form of imperialism was never theorized before the 1960s. Only after being assimilated into American radical political culture was it dignified with the status of "theory"; and even then it remained an untidy amalgam of critical theory, determinististic Marxism, and Third World sympathies. Its main proponents, preeminently the communications sociologist Herbert Schiller, drew evidence of the formidably manipulative operations of late capitalist media systems from critics of mass culture. They took the notion that americanism was the "false consciousness" of empire from an orthodox reading of Marxism. And they advocated "cultural-communications struggles" modeled on Third World political movements to shake imperialized societies from cultural as well as political and economic dependency on Western models.[1] The result was a grossly simplified model of how cultural influences operate; this emphasized at once the one-dimensionality of American mass culture and its instrumentalization by American capitalism to manipulate the modernizing process world-wide. Accordingly, dominant cultural values made their insidious way from center

1. Cultural imperialism's major American theorist has been sociologist Herbert Schiller. See his *Mass Communications and American Empire* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1969); and *Communication and Cultural Domination* (White Plains, N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1976). See also, Alan Wells, *Picture Tube Imperialism? The Impact of U.S. Television on Latin America* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1972); and a similar assessment by the British Anthony Smith, *The Geopolitics of Information* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980). For a critique, see Jeremy Tunstall, *The Media are American* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); and Chin-Chuan Lee, *Media Imperialism Reconsidered* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980).

to periphery, passing through local elites to condition and control entire indigenous populations. This resulted in social control on a global scale: while economic exploitation drained the sovereign body of colonialized societies, a high-tech dream, alien as well as inauthentic, effected what a recent French *vulgarisation* of "new left" work called the "conquest of the spirit."[2]

Although communications politics has now become a booming field of study and there are at least a half-dozen recent works addressing the cultural dimensions of U.S. foreign policy, almost all of this work focuses on what could be called the "export mechanism"—that is, the means by which American cultural policies are formulated and relayed abroad. Nearly all of these have been primarily concerned with exposing the degree and nature of cooperation between government programs and private enterprise. How more precisely such cultural products were received, and what more generally American mass culture represents elsewhere are questions glossed over. This is true not least of all of Emily Rosenberg's *Spreading the American Dream*, a work that nevertheless merits special attention here because it provides the first historical overview of how America's "exceptional" development was established as a universal referent. This, as she underscores, was the effect not just of capital investment or technological wizardry, but of the global appeal of American mass culture.[3]

Rosenberg's major focus is the dissemination of the so-called ideology of "liberal developmentalism." This combined the classical nineteenth century liberal credo—faith in private enterprise, unhindered passage of commerce and investment, and free flow of information and culture—with the studied conviction that these "laws" should and could be replicated by other peoples for their self-betterment, and in the interest of global progress as well. But such precepts were inherently contradictory, Rosenberg argues, and thus eminently impracticable elsewhere. From the beginning, the United States, like Dickens' Bounderby, denied its own sheltered infancy and special endowments, prescribing for others a developmental process that was not ever its own. While preaching private enterprise, its policy-makers applied their liberal canons selectively—upholding those that favored the United States, and ignoring or modifying those that did not. Most importantly, although the impulse behind American expansionism may originally have been private, in the twentieth century there was an increasingly complex interplay between state policy and private interests; while government helped the private sector export American influence, private initiative aided government in fulfilling America's self-defined global mission. As the "promotional state" of the Progressive era gave way to the "coop-

2. Yves Eude, *La Conquête des esprits* (Paris: Maspéro, 1982).
3. Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

erative state" of Hooverism—and this in turn was superseded by Roosevelt's "regulatory" institutions—interventionist reality and liberalist precepts were ever more at odds. Any people adhering to, or forced to take these literally, were bound to have a rude awakening as they discovered that America's belief in its special universal mission ill-tolerated attempts to find alternatives, or at least any that curbed the freedom of American enterprise.

This contradictoriness had special implications in the domain of cultural expansionism. Like capital, culture was initially exported privately, by cowboys and missionaries as it were. By the 1920s, this export, in the case of the movie industry, was being commercialized on a grand scale; or, as was true for philanthropic and voluntary institutions, regulated through expansive international networks. In either case, it was government-sanctioned. Thus, Rotary International, with its 725 foreign-member sections, and the YMCA, with its far-flung outposts, were as much "chosen instruments" of U.S. cultural diplomacy as, say, the Morgan Bank had been for European loan and war debt negotiations in the 1920s. Likewise, when Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford made their grand European tour in 1920, they styled themselves ambassadors of the American way of life, and were treated accordingly both by foreign heads of state and United States diplomacy. By the late 1930s, cultural expansionism was being translated into an artful politics of persuasion. The state and private sector joined forces to break into the French colonial sphere and penetrate the well-defended British system of imperial preferences. This cooperation was reinforced in the battle against Axis propaganda; it was then definitively consolidated in the all-out struggle of ideas against Soviet communism in the Cold War, in the course of which were laid the expansionist structures that would dominate the postwar world.

From her insistence on state involvement, Rosenberg would seem primarily to be explaining only the means of spreading the American dream rather than the nature of its appeal. That state power backed private initiatives in the twentieth century is not, however, especially surprising. The interpenetration of public and private in what sometimes are called "ideological apparatuses of the state," has been often enough remarked on by political theorists of all persuasions as being a typically late capitalist phenomenon. At the close of the twentieth century, it would be remarkable only in the absence. True, as Rosenberg observes, state intervention gave the lie to the liberal-developmentalist belief that American culture was value-free and nonideological; it also gave proof of the falseness of claiming that the so-called doctrine of free flow in cultural products, as well as trade, was exactly analogous to the "law" of comparative advantage in economics, a doctrine which, loosely interpreted, would have had values and beliefs, like commodities, testing each other out, and besting each other in a fast-trading global marketplace of ideas.

In this argument, however, American statism did more than demonstrate the sham of anti-monopolistic pieties and the rooted contradictoriness of liberal-developmentalism. It also claimed to account for the vitality of America's ideological appeal. This in two ways: first, state intervention politically manipulated messages, or, at least, gave them an ideological charge otherwise lacking; second, promotional measures gave American cultural products an "unfair" advantage in competing with those of other societies. In other words, the contention is that cultural models operate like commodity flows, and that their major power derives from being mediated, promoted, and interpreted by state institutions.

The first argument, of course, depends on whether state mediation did in fact change the content of cultural exports. The most obvious ways it could have done so were by outright censorship, by selective promotion (calling for a national cultural policy), or by creating its own special programs to embellish, so to speak, on the dream. Rosenberg's history, like Frank Ninkowich's recent book on American cultural diplomacy from 1938 to 1950,[4] documents very clearly that outright censorship was exceptionally rare: an instance, the World War II Office of War Information's successful pressure on RKO not to re-release *Gunga Din*, a movie glorifying British imperialism. True, a pious officialdom worried that America's postwar image would be sullied if the ratio of *True Confessions* to *Harper's* exported abroad stayed at its annual prewar level of two hundred to one. But nobody in government pretended to devise the code-enforced prudery Hollywood concocted in the thirties to appease that truly universalist institution, the Catholic Church. Unquestionably, state-sponsored cultural and informational programs proliferated in the postwar era: not just the Voice of America and Fulbright Exchange, or the highly propagandized Peace Corps of the Kennedy years, or the covert CIA aid to the British *Encounter* and its continental clones (whose discovery so disquieted the new left in the 1960s), but also the little-known "technical missions" sponsored under the Marshall Plan that formed an entirely new American-style managerial elite for 1950s' Europe.[5] All told, official imagery never accounted for any more than a tiny portion of total cultural exports; and there is little evidence that, rhetorical flourishes aside, the models it disseminated or the messages it spread differed in any significant way from the dominant values of American civic culture.

In brief, it can be argued that cultural models for export and those for home use were substantially alike. The United States was, after all, the first imperial power constituted entirely in the era of mass communication and consump-

4. Frank Ninkowich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

5. As in the pioneering work of Luc Boltanski, "America, America: le plan Marshall et l'importation du 'management'," *Actes de la recherches en sciences sociales* 32 (1981): 19-41.

tion. Unlike nineteenth century Great Britain, U.S. industry did not employ its imperial preference system to dump its cheap calicos when its own workers had started to "dress up." The American B-movie, the *Reader's Digest*, and the Ford lemon were designed to go as far as the market would take them, starting at home. This held true for other "exports" as well: from the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show, a great hit on its European tour in the 1890s, to the Rotary International motto, "He profits most who serves the best"—which was a translator's nightmare as well as painfully embarrassing to the dapper continental Rotarians, and duly restyled as "Service above self." In sum, cultural exports shared the basic features of American mass culture, intending by that term not only the cultural artifacts and associated forms, but also the civic values and social relations of the first capitalist mass society. Moreover, this culture moved primarily through market relations. Except for the rare intervention, like the now two-decade old Cuba boycott, this movement occurred regardless of administrative policies, or the normal vicissitudes of foreign relations.

The second argument at issue is whether state support gave American cultural expansionism an "unfair" boost. Free-flow doctrine was certainly motivated not only on economic grounds and reasons of ideological consistency, but politically as well. For American foreign policy-makers it was a major ideological weapon against the Soviet Union, just as it had been, they pointed out, against previous totalitarianism. The cultural imperialist argument runs that, by enforcing it, as it often imperiously has, the U.S. government determined an unfair advantage for American culture. First, it deprived others of offering any effective social ideological defense against American mass culture. Free flow-ers insisted that there was no incompatibility between the universalist values of americanism and local identities, unless, of course, the latter proved to be ideological, irrational, or obsolescent. To argue back implied that one was anti-progress, despotic, or worse, a communist dupe. Second, state-backed free flow aggravated the duplicity inherent in the very nature of American mass culture. But this is a very different sort of contention. Suddenly it slips out that there is something mendacious about cultural production in the U.S.; it is, according to Rosenberg, "democratic in that it appealed to a broad social spectrum, but oligarchic in that it was contrived and narrowly controlled."[6] In other words, the problem is not just that the American state was pushing the product, but that the product, even in the best of circumstances, was bad for the consumer, and especially bad for the consumer in underdeveloped countries.

But this line of argument shifts the whole nature of the discussion, from analyzing the impact of state intervention to judging the substance of the American dream. Inexorably, we have slipped into the old debate over mass culture, as defined over a century around two basic positions: the optimistic school, or the cultural modernists, including both liberals and the Marxist left; and the pessimistic school, or the cultural traditionalists, including conservatives and radicals. In theory, either position could be presumed accurate. Suffice it to reflect on the importance of radio broadcasting in rural areas, or the pleasure as well as the intelligence derived from emerging consumer cultures, and we could argue that American mass culture has exercised a progressive function, undermining class hierarchies, shaking patriarchal authority, and engaging people in new forms of civic participation. Conjure up the junked-Ford car cemeteries, aeriel-bedecked shanties, and giant pharmaceuticals on Puerto Rico's northern strip, or consider that ninety percent of the movies shown in Thailand in 1975 were American-made, and we could easily sustain that American mass culture, like mass-produced goods and services, has debased standards, eroded popular culture, and weakened informal familial and community solidarities supporting democratic participation.[7] The fact of the matter is that we have ended up with a judgment of effects, an unsupported one at that, when our interest should be to discover the dynamics of a relationship.

To think that this conceptual problem can be resolved by more empirical studies of the impact of americanization is mistaken. This is history from the center. Even if it were complemented by myriad histories from below, or, better, from the periphery, it would fail before the complex social interchanges and cultural mediations, through marketplace and across class lines, touching community, family, and gender, that should be accounted for to explain the appeal and effects of americanism elsewhere.

To reopen the problem of americanism we need to begin over, starting with a semantic change, and shifting geographic perspective. For American "dream," substitute American "myth" or "myths," with the meanings Roland Barthes gave the word in the mid-1950s as European intellectuals on the left were just discovering the pervasive impact of American mass culture on daily life.[8] Whereas dream is ideology—a promise or desire that, when betrayed by capitalist realities, becomes a nightmare—a myth is any sign, any word, any of myriad forms, images, and occasions giving significance to daily occurrences. Like the American dream, such myths could signify modernity, abundance, and diversion, but without implying that these were unat-

6. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream*, p. 36.

7. On both views, see Tunstall, *The Media are American*; for the former, see Herbert J. Gans, "Hollywood Films on British Screens: An Analysis of the Functions of American Popular Culture Abroad," *Social Problems* 9 (1962): 324-328.

8. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

tainable or fraudulent. They could thus signal new social arrangements, cultural styles, even political customs, without necessarily disturbing traditional class relationships. The great "appeal" of the American language, George Orwell observed, was not just that it was evocative and efficient (you could add *ize* to words), but that "one can adopt an American word without crossing a class barrier." By purifying the original experience of its contradictoriness, myths gave a sense of inevitability to what had happened by human agency (and human suffering and struggle). Explaining nothing, deforming everything, they made an American-style development seem natural and obvious, possible and immediate for everywhere and for anybody. Divorced from the ensemble of real social relations in which they were formed, such myths, Barthes stressed, were both depoliticized and depoliticizing.

This is not to say, however, that they haven't embodied relations of power. In the first place, imports of American culture, no matter how far removed from their original sources, were initially manifestations of American social relations. In other words, they carried the imprint of what William Appleman Williams calls the "imperial way of life."[9] That this was the outcome of a two-century-old historical cycle, independent of any specific administrative or establishment policy, had already been well obscured in the United States itself by the myth-making capacity of American civic culture. Thus, what Williams signals as the "imperial confusion of an economically defined way of life with a culturally defined standard of living" had in one way or another touched every facet of social and private life: from the model of mass standardized production, the practice of distribution, and the patterns of consumption, to habits of association and family life, definitions of gender, and displays of sexuality. It is indeed this very abundance of empire, its imperial foundation well-concealed, that has supported the power of attraction—the myth-making capacity—of American cultural models elsewhere.

The key question is whether emulating the American way of life has resulted in the subordination of other societies to American political and economic power. The notion that Williams advances—that the power of the imperial way of life comes from it being a societal phenomenon, rooted in the civic culture, rather than imposed by the state—recalls some of the terms of the Marxist problematic of hegemony. When it was first used in nineteenth century German political theory, hegemony of course referred to the political preeminence of nation-states in international relations. When appropriated by the Bolsheviks, and then by the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, to discuss relations of power among classes within the nation-state, the term acquired cultural meanings absent in the original. Thus it came to signify an integral form of class rule premised on involving subaltern classes in the political-cultural institutions and social-cultural experiences of dominant groups. In referring to the debate over americanism in 1920s' Europe, Gramsci himself raised the possibility that this notion of hegemony had implications for the study of relations among national states. He raised the question whether, in the modern world, one national could establish "cultural hegemony" over others; "or has the world become so unified in its economic-social structure, that a single country can no longer use its chronological edge on innovation to establish a political monopoly, and thereby use it as the basis for hegemony?"[10] His implied response was negative. Culture could legitimate the political power of the state, but in itself it could not confer such power; nor, for that matter, could it destroy power. Moreover, culture was by its nature easily transferable. Another society might appropriate and develop it to legitimate already constituted state power, much in the same way that in Marxist theory the working class could appropriate and wield bourgeois technology to revolutionize capitalist society.

But Gramsci was not thinking in terms of a broader diffusion through civil society of foreign models, values, or myths; his notion of cultural imperialism was couched in terms of the enlightened elitism of French imperial culture, or the industrial edge of the nineteenth century British "workshop of the world." In sum, he was reckoning without mass culture. But in a world in which communication had become so rapid, intense, and ubiquitous, in which masses as well as elites were involved in new consumption patterns and cultural habits, the nature of hegemonic relations among classes within single states was certainly no longer defined exclusively within the confines of national boundaries. As both dominant and oppositional classes responded to cultural models of the most advanced state within the international system, these models, transmitted from one civil society by means of marketplace or associational networks, entered into the social contest. Bypassing central authority, as well as the mediation of political organizations, they might exercise a formidable challenge to prevailing social relations and cultural arrangements; this challenge might be all the greater and more perplexing insofar as such models defied any easy manipulation by the political system, and were latent rather than explicit in the policy-making process.

Gramsci was of course echoing real issues that have been debated in Europe since the 1920s under the rubric of americanism. In post-World War I Europe, the United States suddenly became a major and exigent creditor after having been Europe's debtor for over a century, America's prodigious productive capacity threatening to invade European markets and those of Europe's colonies as well. Operating through "informal structures of cooperation," and exploiting its imposing advantage over European production, the U.S. challenged Europe not just with the strength of its economic techniques—Taylorism and Fordism—but with an entirely new structure of social-cultural possibilities as well.[11] Thus standardized production might level consumer habits and erase inherited status differences. Advertising science would educate as well as level tastes. Mass cultural industries, especially the cinema, would break down traditional class distinctions, reshaping community identities and gender roles, perhaps yielding new, more democratic national publics.

9. William Appleman Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

10. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, 4 vols., ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), vol. 3, p. 1618.

America immediately presented itself as more than a material reality—a menacing invader or a welcome investor; it was a "capitalist wonderland," a model of seemingly superrationalized production and orderly democracy. As such, it emerged as a common reference point for a wide variety of groups which, notwithstanding their disparate and perhaps conflicting social positions, economic interests, and cultural experiences, were seeking to come to terms with the rapid changes their own societies were undergoing and with their own condition and fate in that process. As the country furnishing the terms of debate, the United States thus exercised a cultural-ideological power different from that identified with its economic might—a diffuse, deep, and hidden power, not unlike that suggested in Foucault's notion of discourse—to interpret the meaning of change and to define goals and parameters of action. This was true even for groups that, because of their class position or political allegiance, might be expected to be in radical discord with the techniques and values of American capitalism.

The perception that the United States was both a challenge to national-state power and a new model of progressive mass society was shared by both right and left. The problem was how to get around the choice this seemed to impose: the choice, as Ernest Mandel put it, "between the devil of American capital and the deep blue sea of Americanization."[12] Should Europe reject both—productive might and social-cultural modernity—and, wielding the values of old world culture, engage in the "revolution against progress" championed by cultural pessimists like the young Frenchmen Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu?[13] Or rather, should it endorse the former without the latter—abundance of mass production without the discomforts of new social relations—which for conservative elites, to use the old-world expression, meant a "full barrel and a drunken wife"? Or should Europe, as the left proposed, accept both, trusting that both could be totally reformed, the better to defend against and eventually overcome the supremacy of American capitalist power?

Over the long run, the choices would turn out to be less stark: in this first phase of americanism, new economic models and social-cultural innovation could be guided from above without provoking ruptures in traditional class arrangements. However, at the moment of first impact—before, that is, the phenomenon of americanism became so commonplace that it was "de-named"—two critiques appeared which might loosely be characterized as conservative and left, and which would orient successive generations of Europeans down to the 1960s.

For one whole sector of European society, that is, for conservatives, americanism represented first and foremost mass culture—democratic, leveling, mechanistic, and mediocre. Bound up with economic power, and potentially reinforced from the East by Bolshevist materialism, it aggravated an already widespread pessimism about the encroachments of mass society. Cultural conservatives included traditional intellectuals as varied as Spengler, F.R. Leavis, Pirandello, and Ortega y Gasset, conservative elites, and small-town professionals, the European "babbitry" whose social ideal was the gentry, the churchman, or government functionary, rather than the entrepreneur or the new technical "cadre." They also included Catholics and fascists, and even so sober a liberal as André Siegfried, one of Europe's most knowledgeable observers of the United States, who feared that for Europe and for the world, the choice had come down to Ford or Ghandi—mechanized existence or "orientalizing" spiritualism. In common, they formulated the conflict between americanism and an expediently conceived "europeanism" in terms of contrasts: culture vs. civilization, quality over quantity, community against anomie, humanity against the machine process. More concretely, as in the movie industry, americanism was interpreted as standing for large-scale, capital-intensive technology, an action-filled diversionary style pitched to a classless public, and the rule of market pure and simple; whereas European tradition was identified with the artisan *atelier*, with theatrical and other dramatic conventions attuned to a status-defined public, and last, with a commercial network mediated by intellectuals—directors, cultural organizers, and critics.

11. There is no comprehensive study of the American impact in post-World War I Europe, but for the new context of international relations, see M.P. Leffler, *The Elusive Quest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); and Stephen E. Schuker, *The End of French Predominance in Europe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976). On the U.S. economic penetration, see Frank Southard, *American Industry in Europe* (1931; reprint, Boston and New York: Arno Press, 1976). On the culture of technology, see Judith Merkle, *Management and Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Georges Friedmann, *La Crise du progrès* (Paris: Gallimard, 1936); Charlotte Lütkens, "Die Amerika Legende," *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 38 (1932): 45-50.

12. Ernest Mandel, *Europe vs. America; Contradictions of Imperialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), p. 154.

13. Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu, *Le Cancér américain* (Paris: Editions Rieder, 1931).

How could americanism be resisted? By the mid-1930s, Siegfried had concluded that "we of the old world must tell ourselves sadly that in Europe mass production and civilization do not go together."[14] Technology-based growth had to be renounced to preserve culture and community. The critic Leavis knew better: "It is a commonplace that we are being americanized," he wrote, "but those who are most defiant of America do not propose to reverse the processes consequent upon the machine." Leavis, the "natural heir to Matthew Arnold,"[15] like Ortega and Spengler, responded to the purported decay of spiritual identity and cultural purpose through cultural criticism, that is, by urging a deepening of traditional European "high" cultural values. Others took more interested positions: from the 1920s, there was a great outcry for government to protect (and define) the "national" culture, while administrations and parties appealed for intellectual support in the name of protecting national cultural legacies (policies which André Malraux was to echo while De Gaulle's Minister of Culture in the 1960s). By the 1930s, numerous movements, some explicitly fascist, others with strong affinities for a new right politics, pretended to repudiate americanism on both a material and ideological level by rerouting capitalist economic development within the framework of national values. In its most extreme form, the defense against americanism took the form of cultural autarchy: by guiding mass consumption and establishing tightly controlled cultural industries, the fascist dictatorships sought to build a mass Europeanist counter-culture, based in a new economic order whose extensions at the height of the Axis domination were on a scale equal to the vast dimensions of the American domestic market.

For the Marxist left, by contrast, americanism was "one of the last of the great doctrines of progress born in the bourgeoisie."[16] True, it was intellectually feebler for having as its "philosophers" not Diderot or Saint Simon but Henry Ford and F. W. Taylor, and as its dictum, not the *bon mots* of Enlightenment thought, but pragmatic slogans like "the one best way." In compensation, its production models were *non-pareil*: it was this economic aspect of americanism, rather than its cultural style, that swayed reformist and revolutionary alike. To social democrats, for whom prosperity paved the way to socialism, American technology offered a future of automated factories for consumer-oriented markets, higher wages, and more leisure for working-class civic involvement. For communists, by contrast, who saw the road to revolution through mounting economic crisis and imperialist war, the United States was both exporter of economic crisis and bulwark of international reaction. But inasmuch as political power was bound up with economic might, they were ambivalent about American industrialism: at the very least, as Trotsky put it, "bolshevism had to be shod with American nails."[17] Gramsci was exceptional only in the scope and subtlety of his thoughts about americanism. In fundamentals, he reflected the optimistic economism typical of all of the traditional left. Thus, americanism in the form of ultra-modern production would aggravate social contradiction and advance the class struggle, thereby opening the way to socialism. With equal confidence, he anticipated that the working class could appropriate capitalist technologies and, along with bourgeois science and culture generally, convert them to building socialist institutions.[18] Like others, he argued that workers were not opposed to these *per se*, but rather to their exploitative use under capitalist control. The major task of socialism was in fact to use these techniques to develop new social relations of production.

What about American mass culture? Typically, the left intellectual was an internationalist and strongly resisted the notion of "national" cultural values. So American mass culture was not a menace under that profile. On the contrary: for numerous Marxist intellectuals, from Paul Nizan and Cesare Pavese to Bertolt Brecht, the skyscraper modernism of American life, reflected in its language, music, cinema, and prose style, worked against conservative cultural conventions. But more commonly there was a blind spot about the implications of mass culture. Gramsci, for example, saw americanism as "hegemony born in the factory," as a culture of discipline rather than a culture of consumerism, the rationalized superstructure of Fordized production rather than mass diversion. In general, reformists and revolutionaries shared his faith that socialist industrialism would rationalize cultural forms, purging them of unwanted capitalist values. Consequently, not much attention was paid on a theoretical level to investigating the impact of American mass culture on collective identities or individual choices. The response on a practical plane was largely empirical, inclined on the one hand to fortifying popular and proletarian subcultures, while on the other, accepting americanized mass culture, with the intent of sustaining the attack on American capitalist power on economic and political grounds.

Because the old left's analysis of americanism was so completely bound up with its seeming ability to offer a clearcut economic alternative, socialism today is everywhere faced with a quandary. Since the 1960s, first the United States, then Western Europe, have been undergoing a "silent revolution," in the process of which americanism has acquired altogether new meanings. On the one hand, the American model of development, understood in narrowest terms as a model of growth, is in crisis; among other problems, the technologies that were once part and parcel of its power now have other centers of dissemination, such as Japan and Europe itself. On the other hand, the United States has emerged paradoxically as a society of *quality*—of new social movements and grass-roots activism advancing post-materialist values and demands. Meanwhile, the United States' expansionist mass culture sustains the americanization of civil society elsewhere. In the last two decades this has invested not only the spheres of production and consumption, but of politics as well. For the left, in particular, this challenge is, if anything, greater than that of the first phase of americanism; for the new social movements of a more complex society threaten to undermine the social bases and modes of organizing traditional to the mass parties of the left.[19]

This second phase of americanism, post-materialist rather than production-oriented, has badly disoriented the left everywhere. One moment, we find an attitude similar to the americanizing zeal of 1920s social democrats; but emphasis now is on emulating the organizing style and programmatic concerns of new social movements, rather than acquiring the production techniques of the "rationalized" economy. The next moment, as in the French case, we find a renascence of cultural conservatism, with an enlightened internationalist flair. Though staunchly americanist in foreign affairs, the French socialist government evokes protectionist measures to defend national identity against American "cultural imperialism." In its call to promote an "Estates General" of global intelligentsia and an "encyclopedia of all the world's cultures," it resorts to the typical organizing tools of bourgeois high culture.

This European dilemma is inevitably bound up with coming to terms with americanism in the heart of the Empire. Williams has called on Americans to confront their "imperial self-deception" and renounce the opiate of the "imperial way of life." True, at the center it is most splendiferous, costly, and dangerous to humankind. But if, in 1983 Italy, billboard advertising for men's briefs is colored red, white, and blue, and flaunts the slogan "more liberty, less equality," at one level at least, it signifies that the imperial way of life extends far and wide. Given that this imperial lifestyle has been internationalized and U.S. mass culture has become the cement of what Claude Julien calls "the empire without frontiers," it is probably futile and most certainly presumptuous to renounce its effects on behalf of others. More, it displays an oddly parochial cast of mind not to recognize that the American way of life is bound up with values, which in myriad and conflictual ways—elsewhere as at home—have been understood as progress.

Coming to terms with americanism also bears on an urgent political question. Having once ascertained the power of appeal of the American model in the 1940s, American policy-makers built it into their evaluations of the United States' global strength. As the real power of the United States has diminished since Vietnam, and it became the object of anti-americanism, ever greater emphasis has been placed on persuasion in foreign policy. But to seek to build *global* consensus is tricky: cultural diplomacy, like any culture industry, is ultra-sensitive to consumer response; and American policy-makers don't seem to make fine distinctions between indifference, withdrawal, or outright revolt. The ultimate paradox is that Reagan, the "great communicator," subscribes to the statist notion that the American "dream" can be reconcocted with good public relations. So his Project Democracy will bombard rebellious Salvadoran peasants and Europe's "successor generation" with the same stupefying messages. If past history proves right, these will be ignored, or interpreted according to other canons. Meanwhile, critics of American imperial power should not be misled into thinking that less state intervention, or a different form as, say, Carter's human rights stand, will address the question at hand.

In the 1950s, Louis Hartz tried to explode the parochialism of the American liberal-progressivist tradition, the better to revive liberalism and celebrate the "true" uniqueness of American society.[20] The only way to prevent U.S. liberalism from elevating the peculiar American experience into absolute categories was to acquire a "sense of relativity, a spark of philosophy" through "external experience." But how do we get outside the national experience? Using the notion of cultural imperialism, as the American new left did, only meant replacing an American-biased liberal analysis with a Eurocentric one and, at the very moment when the typically state-focused, deterministic modes of analysis of European socialism were being completely overwhelmed by the phenomenon of americanism. Going outside means, rather, undertaking a whole new inquiry, at once historical and international in perspective: historical, moving back in time to recapture what practice could have been without reference to American authority, as well as to understand how alternatives were conditioned, when not abandoned outright in the face of americanization; international, crossing national-state boundaries to recover testimony of the resistances against and diverse experiences of a common process, thereby to shake the myth that the americanization of the world is natural and inevitable.

14. André Siegfried, *La Crise de l'Europe* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1935), p. 115.
15. C.W.E. Bigsby, ed., *Superculture; American Popular Culture and Europe* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Press, 1975).
16. Friedmann, *La Crise du progrès*, p. 115.
17. Leon Trotsky, *Europe et Amérique* (Paris, 1925), p. 47.
18. Antonio Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).
19. For some responses, see A.N.J. Den Hollander, ed., *Contagious Conflict: The Impact of American Dissent in European Life* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973); Annie Kriegel, "Consistent Misapprehension: European Views of America and Their Logic," *Daedalus* 101, no. 4 (Fall 1972): 87-102.
20. Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.: 1955).