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2014

[Introduction to] Anti-Americanism and the Rise of World Opinion

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Recommended Citation

Datta, Monti N. *Anti-Americanism and the Rise of World Opinion*. London: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

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Preface

Why study the consequences of anti-Americanism?

On the morning of September 11, 2001, I was at my part-time job in Crystal City, Virginia, just a few blocks away from the Pentagon. Around 9:00 am, I settled into my office, sipped some hot chocolate, and checked the news online. At first, I didn't make much of the breaking story of what appeared to be a small plane hitting the North Tower of the World Trade Center. I assumed it was simply an unfortunate accident that befell New York City on that chilly fall morning. I closed my Internet browser and got back to work.

Things took a different turn at 9:37 am, when American Airlines Flight 77 slammed into the Pentagon, disintegrating upon impact. My office shook, as if a minor tremor had struck Northern Virginia. "It can't be an earthquake," I thought. About fifteen minutes later, I looked outside the window, noticing bits of dust and debris swirling in the sky, like confetti. That's when the phone rang. It was a member of my family, panic-stricken and confused that I might have been killed at the Pentagon. It turns out those bits of debris in the sky were from the smoke, flames, and pulverized concrete of the explosion nearby. I went back online and saw that both towers of the World Trade Center had been struck and that the United States was under attack.

The rest is history. President Bush put the nation on alert that evening, in which he recalled, "Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The victims were in airplanes or in their offices – secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers. Moms and dads. Friends and neighbors."¹

He couldn't have been more right. What I wouldn't learn until that night was that one of my professors from Georgetown University – Leslie

¹ President Bush's Address to the Nation on September 11, 2001, <http://blogs.archives.gov/prologue/?p=6807>.

A. Whittington, in addition to her husband, Charles S. Falkenberg, and their two daughters, Zoe and Dana – had been aboard American Airlines Flight 77. Pangs of confusion, sadness, and anger swept among my friends and colleagues at the Georgetown Public Policy Institute, where Leslie taught and advised us on how to make a change for the better in the Beltway. A group of us stayed out late at Trio's in Dupont Circle, trying to make sense out of what happened. I had been familiar with the phenomenon of anti-Americanism before the events of September 11, but it was only at that moment that I felt it so close to home.

My first encounter with anti-Americanism occurred years earlier, when I lived in South Korea and taught English to children and adults in the seaside city of Yeosu. One afternoon I was at the local bus stop when a co-teacher with whom I instructed students pulled me aside. Taking a long drag on a cigarette amidst the coastal breeze and squinting his eyes in the afternoon sun, he remarked, "I like you, but I don't like your country." I thought more about his words on 9/11, and haven't forgotten them since. They have accompanied me wherever I have gone abroad as an American and whenever I have heard the candid observations of those who admire the United States and its culture, but who at times loathe its foreign policy.

The genesis of this book hails from such events. Anti-Americanism can be cancerous. As the research in this book systematically shows, it hurts the United States and stymies its national interest. By studying this phenomenon, I hope to inform the policy community of its effects and stimulate ways to reduce its prevalence. It is my wish that, one day, pro-Americanism becomes more of a household term than anti-Americanism has ever been.