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Danish Anti-Americanism: A Socio-Cultural Perspective

by Poul Houe

In the spring of 2002, Granta, the distinguished "Magazine of New Writing," put out a special issue in which "twenty-four writers drawn from many countries" reflect on "What We Think of America." On the magazine's back cover, the occasion for their musings is presented as follows:

The September 11 attacks on the US provoked shock and pity in the rest of the world, but mingled with the sympathy was something harsher: anti-Americanism. It wasn't confined to the West Bank or Kabul. It could be heard in English country pubs, in the bars of Paris and Rome, the tea stalls of New Delhi. 'Hubris' was the general idea: in one opinion poll, two-thirds of the respondents outside the US agreed to the proposition that it was 'good that Americans now know what it's like to be vulnerable'. -- Is the US really so disliked? If so, why?

These are the questions the twenty-four international writers seek to answer as they "describe the part America has played in their lives—for better or worse," and as they "deliver their estimate of the good and the bad it has done as the world's supreme political, military, economic and cultural power." There are no Danes among the twenty-four, but is Denmark the exception that is immune to current sentiments of world-wide anti-Americanism? "If so, why?"

"Next to the UK, DK is probably the country in Europe with the closest attachment to the US," wrote Mihail Larsen, once a leader of the radical Danish student rebellion in the 1960s, in a feature article published on July 4th, 2002.¹ His piece was entitled "The US in Our Hearts," and both its pronouncements on Denmark's remarkable pro-Americanism in general and Larsen's own way of tempering this positive attitude with an equally emphatic criticism of America, make the essay quite representative of Denmark's contradictory view of the US in recent years.
While open or ill-concealed attraction goes hand-in-hand with skeptical, if not downright hostile attitudes to America in so many countries, and in most of the Granta articles, the currents of anti-American sentiments running through Denmark's cultural landscape are both wider and deeper, and bear a clearer stamp of public approval and political correctness, than could be expected, considering this country's pro-American climate overall. I find it worth pondering why this is so, and what the apparent dichotomy can possibly teach us. What does it tell us about the US, about DK, and about the two countries' relation to one another? Due to space constraints, my case in point will be 9-11, too, as reflected in print media reactions, yet given a historical and socio-cultural spin akin to the perspectives suggested in Granta. But first a few principle words and a caveat about the very term: anti-Americanism.

Its usage in public discourse is obviously so inflated and imprecise as to render its analytical value questionable. Must an attitude, in order to qualify as anti-American, affront the very American Soul (in which case it's unlikely ever to show, since even the most hostile Tom, Dick and Harry is prone to be humming an American popular tune or identifying with an American sports star)? Or will it, conversely, suffice to qualify for anti-Americanism that a single instance of discord pops up in an otherwise favorable discourse (as was typically the case during the McCarthy years, when so apolitical a Danish Americanist as the young Elsa Gress was denied renewal of her research visa to the US on the grounds that during her stay in London 1945-46 she had worked for the notoriously communist hotbed BBC).JWT

While all but impossible to state in quantifiable terms, a middle ground definition seems rather preferable. Anti-Americanism would then be the issue when and only when the negative components of a given discourse clearly outweigh the positive ones, and when the negativity in question is discernible in (blistering) tone as well as in (critical) substance. Differently put, an anti-American stance would typically be distinguished by a less than constructive critical mass, and by an appreciation of things American that is token and self-serving at best.
A particularly insidious instance of the latter is comparable to the anti-Zionism practiced in the former Soviet Union. Unwilling to openly admit to its notorious anti-Semitism, the Soviet state concocted the notion that it was not at odds with Jews per se, but only with their allegiance to the Jewish state (knowing full well that few Jews would separate their identity from that of Israel and its right to exist). In the same way that anti-Zionism thus became a sanctimonious stand-in for anti-Semitism, modern anti-Americanism often takes the form of objections to American policies and societal practices by observers who concurrently claim to cherish the American people. While these critics may well find outspoken sympathizers in America proper—a vitriolic Noam Chomsky, say—the idea of combining a wholesale rejection of American mores and ways, political and otherwise, with praise for the country's *populus* amounts to disqualifying the democratic and electoral capacity of the very individuals that constitute this body. It is indeed a self-serving gesture concealed as token politeness.

As for the principal grievances submitted by America's critics—be they anti-American or not—there is little attitudinal variation to be derived exclusively from differences in their national provenance. A laundry list culled from the *Granta* volume will coincide in large parts with complaints extracted from Danish newspaper articles and letters to the editor. The German poet Hans Magnus Enzensberger serves up a typical menu of inedible American specialties detested by Danes as well: "a penchant for dictatorships in many parts of the world, a fair supply of double standards, a curious mix of ruthless self-interest and missionary rhetoric and, at home, a bizarre gun cult and a relish for the death penalty," to which can be added such benign stereotypes as "a land of doctrinaires, naively devoted to a stupefying array of world-improving projects and life-changing therapies, where even politicians are judged by how sincere they seem to be, and literature and philosophy are used to inculcate an unyielding optimism about human possibilities."

It is equally important to note, however, that the authors of the two portrayals, Enzensberger and British professor Gray, respectively, take pains at putting their critical words in a self-critical context or directly at a distance from their personal creeds. Even when critics of America aim at such inflammatory flashing
points as her role in Vietnam or the Middle East, or at her unfettered global imperialism and domestic materialism, they are generally trying to soften their condemnation with some recognition that the culprit is not entirely devoid of virtues.

In fact, out of *Granta*‘s twenty-four writers, the British playwright Harold Pinter is the only one to blast at the US with an all-out onslaught on her essential values and properties: a terrorizer of civilian populations, complicit in the murder of hundreds upon hundreds of thousand innocents from at least fifteen countries who merely "dared to question the status quo, the endless plateau of poverty, disease, degradation and oppression which is their birthright," a possessor of a prison system that "can accurately be described as a vast gulag," an exerciser of "sustained, systematic, remorseless and quite clinical manipulation of power worldwide, while masquerading as a force for universal good;" a "rogue state" and a "fully-fledged, award-winning, gold-plated monster" that "has effectively declared war on the world" and that "knows only one language -- bombs and death."

I think you will agree that this is anti-Americanism if there ever was such an animal. The fact that its origin is British relieves me from discussing its motivating factors and cultural implications here, but as its tenor is not without Danish counterparts, the explanatory task cannot be eschewed altogether. And a task it is in the sense that tangible socio-cultural indicators do not apply as readily to exceptional aberrations from received knowledge and empirical observation as they do to instances of at least some verisimilitude and intersubjective transparency.

Given his life in a freedom-starved Soviet client state it comes as no surprise that Ivan Klima of the Czech Republic celebrates the complexity and paradoxes of American freedoms and downplays whatever misgivings he might harbor about trivial American celebrity and entertainment cults in order to proclaim his unreserved solidarity with the people and nation that were victimized on 9-11. Nor is it surprising to hear Britain’s Doris Lessing, with her history as a communist activist, sneer at America’s resentment at having been exposed as vulnerable and "expelled from their Eden," to which "they," by her account, were never entitled in the first place. What these writers foreground is consistent with their backgrounds, and
so are the ups and downs in Palestine writer Raja Shehadeh's feelings for America in quite audible concert with the ups and downs of the Palestinian state of affairs vis-à-vis Israel in her native Ramallah.¹⁰

In a Danish context the breeding-ground for comparable responses to America's presence on the world stage is, of course, informed by historical experiences beyond Denmark's boundaries as well as by the lineaments of its internal history of mentality, cultural identity and national character. Danish critics of America have entered this mini stage both from left and right. Communists and other leftists have been predictably adverse to American influences in the broadest sense, whereas criticism from the right has been a house divided. On the one hand, America was seen as the stalwart defender of the West and its values and as such considered an ally. On the other hand, it was a country spearheading crass materialistic modernity at the expense of refined tradition and lasting memory and thus an obvious menace to old world conservatives. The conflict-ridden works of author Jacob Paludan are quite recent instances of the uneasiness many modern conservatives have felt about the impulses from new world reality and fiction.¹¹

Even more confusing was the reception of American society and culture in various walks of Danish liberalism. Its radical wing, initially led by such individuals as the brothers Georg and Edvard Brandes and centered on the Copenhagen daily Politiken, was professing a program of modernity, yet beholden to an aristocratic individualism quite apart from the populist strands of American culture and social life. At the same time, Henrik Cavling, the powerful editor of precisely Politiken in the early years of the 20th century, was unflinching in his search for American inspiration both to modernize his paper and to usher in a sister tabloid.

In the broader political arena, the non-socialist center appears to encounter America's bewildering radiation of moral rectitude and pragmatic self-interest with some conflicting needs of its own. And as conservatives and social democrats from each side increasingly converge on this middle ground with few ideological distinctions between them, a fundamentally pro-American agenda emerges alongside habitual outbursts of strident opposition to American cultural norms and political behaviors. As illustration of the balance
between these pros and cons, and between the political players of opposing persuasions who administer them, suffice it to mention how the Danish foreign minister, the social democrat Mogens Lykketoft, had severely upbraided the American administration shortly before 9-11, only to speak with similar conviction as he declared it his unconditional support immediately upon the tragedy in New York and Washington. By comparison, the current liberal government is not likely to trump its precursor’s pros, but quite likely to avoid or moderate its cons.

None of this is uniquely Danish, and echoes from the Granta exhibit could be heard all along. As for the distinction between liberal prime minister Fogh Rasmussen and Mr. Lykketoft’s conceptions of the US, while national to a degree it is a party political matter no less, as suggested by the America-criticism coming out of Stockholm, where Lykketoft’s fellow social democrat Goran Persson is at the helm of government. But the tendency to so easily allow critical punches to penetrate an otherwise pro-American consensus—certainly evident before 9-11, but noticeable to a degree even after the catastrophe—may well be accentuated by cultural premises of particular import in Norden.

The sense that Americans were overdue to experience their vulnerabilities and to reflect on their dubious record in world affairs, alluded to by Doris Lessing, resonates with many Danes as well. As the historian Uffe Østergaard has argued on many occasions, the anti-American strains are as ubiquitous in Denmark as in other European countries, and unlike Danish anti-images of Swedes and Germans, they are not evoked to serve a definition of Denmark’s national identity with contrasts indispensable for its citizens’ self-identification. Rather, Danish versions of anti-Americanism are situated within well-defined cultural parameters.

As Henry Kissinger has intimated in his most recent book, Americans, so inexperienced with foreign invaders and so confident in their historical exceptionalism and manifest destiny, tend to bring their vast military, economical, political, and cultural resources to bear on confrontation and resolution of conflicts, whenever need be. Europeans, being less resourceful militarily and more deeply traumatized by centuries of devastating warfare, accordingly are more inclined to merely manage conflicts. Whereas Americans tend
to make a virtue out of their experiential disregard for limits and
boundaries, even militarily. Europeans have come to take limits and
boundaries rather at face value and to operate behind them or
around them with endless diplomatic maneuvers and soothing
humanitarian efforts.

Small wonder that tiny Denmark, receding with particular
consistency from one century and boundary to the next, is destined
to react with dismay—mixed with tacit admiration—when the
American bully takes on the evils so sorely out of the minor's
personal reach. As Michael Hirsh convincingly argues in a recent
issue of *Foreign Affairs*, George W. Bush has indeed aroused
traditional European ire against American unilateralism and
hegemonies, and the relative merits of the American position
notwithstanding, it has undoubtedly compelled Europeans to ignore
the fact that the lone superpower has been rather more benign than
the neoimperialistic monster they see before them. Danes have not
been immune to this knee-jerk response to US supremacy, and their
images of the trigger-happy American cowboy-president are stock
materials that speak for themselves.

Less self-evident is the mixture of values and attitudes that Danes
have developed in part as internal compensation for their country's
external failures as a political power of note. Steven Borish, in his
book, *Denmark's Non-Violent Path to Modernization*, sums them up in
chapters about "Democracy and Egalitarianism," "Balance and
Moderation," *Hygge* and the Art of Celebration," and "Welfare and
Social Responsibility," all preceding a darker "Counter-Perspective
on Danish National Character," which includes, for instance, a
troubling deference in Danish culture to the repressive Law of Jante,
some mismanaged cultural collisions, and last but not least, an
imposition on the country's protective social contract and fabric by
more callous German, British, and especially American strands of
global capitalism.

Without going into details, it seems rather obvious that the core
mentality and the attitudes sketched here are not positively disposed
to the kind of extremities and excesses by which the middle of the
road in American culture and politics is typically surrounded and
informed. A blanket dismissal of treaties from Kyoto to ABM does
not sit well with European and Scandinavian mentality, and when
American ways of personal responsibility and self-betterment further intrude on its premises—inculcated since long with as much compassion for losers, even criminals, as for their innocent victims\textsuperscript{17}—the result becomes an ill-suited catalyst for evolving cross-cultural exchange. Indeed, as Henry Kissinger is also quick to point out, the expansion in recent years of a competitive market economy at the expense of sacred social programs, has in parts of Europe been politically compensated for by center-left governments giving their left wing constituencies rather free reign in terms of unbridled criticism of America as the foreign root of their perceived social evils.\textsuperscript{18} To which complexity must be added an increasing presence of Near-Eastern migrants claiming to have their own bones to pick with America, as the young Palestinian Danes who celebrated 9-11 before the eyes of an embarrassed majority population.

My opening quote from Mihail Larsen's disquisition on today's America in the heart of Danes, may suggest a novel equilibrium between impressions of the US that seem both confusing and conflicting at first glance; yet for each such seesaw proponent we find unscrupulous converts and incorrigible diehards. Unlike Enzensberger they each in their way seem to have learned little from the commanding presence of the Other on the other side of the Atlantic pond.

What Danish responses to America, notably in the wake of 9-11, unveil, then, is not a pattern of more generosity or self-reflection than can be found elsewhere in the world. To the extent the Danish material stands out on this general background, it is as more conflict-ridden and more inclined in its claim to consensus to have it both ways: pro-American in large measure, yet footnoting its allegiance with dissenting or conditional messages, as it has long been doing in its relation to the rest of Europe. Perhaps its conflictual signals to America projects its admittedly mixed European feelings onto a screen so distant that here the dilemma, when closer to home, can play itself out more safely. The inveterate anti-Americans seem not to partake in this dilemma, but in consigning it to oblivion—against all odds and reason—America's foremost enemies after all deliver the most striking admission of her cultural power.
Georg Brandes, the leading cultural radical and spokesman of the modern breakthrough in Scandinavian letters around 1870, visited America in 1914. He was haughtily ill-prepared for finding much other than confirmation of his European prejudices in the host culture. A good European highbrow, his presence in the new world was coveted but one-sided. By last century's end his principal bio- and hagio-grapher, the author and educator Jørgen Knudsen, undertook an even blinder observation of America. On 9-25, 2001, he rejoiced in the shift of power from the evil rich to the disenfranchised masses which the collapsing WTC towers symbolized to him, and he spent much ink and capital on commiserating in absentia with the 9-11 terrorists. Can people willing to sacrifice their lives for a cause really be evil, he asked rhetorically, and followed up with an offensive article six months later, which he foiled to be a letter from his friend Osama Bin Laden.

Ole Thyssen, a philosopher and comrade in arms of the 68' generation wrote already on 9-19 in the same vein as Knudsen, showering pity over the terrorists who were merely victims of America's perennial cold war activities. He was joined on 9-22, and again four months later, by the movie director Chr. Braad Thomsen, who turned the tables completely and called the Americans terrorists, vindictive to boot, in their bombing of Afghanistan and other places. If there was evil in this world, it was Western culture and the US in particular! Even so respected and sober an author and cultural radical as the late Villy Sørensen engaged in just indignation over the world's injustices underlying the 9-11 attacks and ascribed the notion of police state to the US. Yet neither his nor others' efforts to divert attention from the actual acts of terrorism to their putative root causes—in a deprivation and repression attributable to American imperial monstrosity—managed to obfuscate how unconscionably prominent cultural radicals—disproportionately influential in Danish public debate for decades—continue their double talk.

While superciliously wedding themselves to the European Mother of all culture—showing abstract solidarity with the wretched of the Earth—they equally seek to suppress the distant, yet concretely obtrusive and illegitimate American Father, and to blind themselves to their own procedure. So, after 9-11 the return of the
repressed is incomplete at best. The typical result is a tedious tit for tat, as when Bent Jensen, a conservative history professor and self-proclaimed witch hunter of red intellectuals past and present, responds to Jørgen Knudsen's letter from Osama Bin Laden with his own irate "Letter to Osama Bin Knudsen." But blind spots are in the eyes of this beholder, too, and blistering pro-Americanism is no less ill-informed and inadequate as an approach to a subject so utterly complex and self-contradictory.

Although anti-Americanism in its most hateful form is a troubling fact of life, as Martin Amis argued in an essay last September, it usually appears in the West, as did Harold Pinter's piece in Granta, in the fortunate context of reactions and opinions as widely diverging as the reality of the country and culture whose reputation is being debunked. Precisely this multifariousness is what most sorely is missing in Denmark, where the quality of public discourse and dissent on America rapidly tends to be predictably polarized—and the public space between the usual combatants so readily voided by self-congratulations and attrition.

In place of exchanges grounded in alternative experiences and rigorous reflections, the cultural radicals long enjoyed a virtual monopoly of eloquent but vacuous opinion fabrication, the insights of which were unsusceptible to the inner workings of American society and political culture and long failed to engage less myopic or provincial queries. But again, for the latter America's mindless foes and friends are equally to blame in that US conduct has often commanded both approval and disdain but rarely a sustained understanding that fully accommodates both.

Unlike the more vapid and desultory exercises which usually dominate on both sides of this axis, the unbendable testimonies of anti-Americanism expressed by certain vociferous debaters has, all the same, a potential that is worth pondering. In the paranoid atmosphere of the McCarthy era that enveloped Elsa Gress, some of these statements no doubt would qualify for aiding and abetting the enemy. Such a conclusion would be inexcusable today.

One would hope that the public targets of the anti-American bile, no matter how incensed their reactions may turn out as their war on terrorism gains momentum, will resist the temptation to extend their understandable patriotic zeal to attempts at curtailing the scope of
expression currently employed by their blindly insightful accusers. For out of the anti-American pens flow, in verbal and no less conspicuous silent forms, the explosive ingredients that tend to detonate so lethally in the hands of less vicariously inclined individuals and groups.

Bibliographical PS October 2002: While anti-Americanism in many parts of the world has been dealt with extensively in books and articles, Danish—and for that matter Nordic—anti-Americanism has been somewhat left out in the cold. How closely a discussion such as the above is related to the international literature may be illustrated by Salman Rushdie's most recent book, *Step Across the Line* (2002). Just a couple of days after the conclusion of the Omaha-Conference, when Rushdie happened to appear on PBS's NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, his conversation with Ray Suarez concluded with a comment on this statement in his book: "America finds itself facing an ideological enemy that may turn out to be harder to defeat than militant Islam; that is to say, anti-Americanism, which is presently taking the world by storm." Elaborating on the assertion, Rushdie told Suarez: "I'm representing a phenomenon that really worries me profoundly, a union, if you like, of opposition to America from, on the one hand, fundamentalist Islam, and on the other hand, kind of leftist European thinkers and commentators who ought to be in such a war on America's side."28

Both the tenor of Rushdie's elaboration and its particulars are in agreement with my conference presentation. And so is an entry three weeks later of "Tom's Journal" on the same program. Here Thomas Friedman, upon return from Berlin among other places, has this to tell Ray Suarez: "... the sense of anti-Americanism that you feel in the Gulf, the sense of Americans, you know, are from Mars and Germans are from Venus—very, very profound here. You really felt two things coming together in Germany. One is anti-Americanism. The kind that really is spread all over Europe today, which I think is a lot about what Joe Joffe, the editor of *Die Zeit*, calls the axis of envy, this kind of resentment and envy of America's overwhelming power. You also have another thing; you have anti-Bushism—a real resentment of the unilateral anti-green, anti-Kyoto, anti-world court, pugnaciousness of this administration. It's the two
Danish anti-Americanism is a particular variation on a principal theme that is disconcertingly alive and well at this writing.

**Bibliographical PS April 2004:** With the benefit of hindsight, as insurrections and urban warfare in many Iraqi cities are dramatically escalating before our eyes—or TV screens—in the wake of the second Gulf War, it may be appropriate to update the main text and its *PS* in light of such topical variations on the principal theme of anti-Americanism.

It is worth adding, for instance, what Thomas Friedman’s German interviewee, Mr. Joffe, so perceptively noted as early as June 2001, namely, that what had thus far prevented even widespread occurrences of anti-Americanism in Europe from coalescing or “ganging up against the United States,” was the fact that “America annoys and antagonizes, but it does not provoke counteralliances and war.”

It seems as though this benign version of the American superpower—“They hate us! They need us!” as Friedman calls his column—is being compromised and relegated to a solace of the past as public perceptions of America as liberator give way to precisely the alternative image of the imperialist conqueror.

In a European context, this change of mind vis-à-vis the Americans only gets further exacerbated by the growing discord separating the political cultures of the two worlds. Henry Kissinger has been cited already for his take on the matter, but Robert Kagan, in his bestselling book *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, puts it even clearer: While the image of America in Europe is that of an illegitimate unipolar hegemon, the image of Europe in America is that of a paradise hypocritically denouncing American power while tacitly relying on this very power to fend off the jungle outside the gates of Eden. Or even worse, according to Kagan, the Europeans tend to deny that such a Hobbesian jungle even exists or presents a threat to their postmodern paradise, which in turn renders America’s Hobbesian ways truly illegitimate!

While Kissinger, the Republican pragmatist, and Kagan, the neoconservatist, both slant their analyses in favor of the official American position, Stanley Hoffmann, writing in June 2003 from the
liberal left, is unswerving in his empathy with the opposite side: “The anti-Americanism on the rise throughout the world is not just hostility toward the most powerful nation, or based on the old clichés of the left and the right; nor is it only envy or hatred of our values. It is, more often than not, a resentment of double standards and double talk, of crass ignorance and arrogance, of wrong assumptions and dubious policies.”

It is my contention that, on balance, these left and right exposures of America’s foreign affairs circumscribe and contextualize the middle ground of European anti-Americanism quite accurately at the present critical juncture in our shared history. Danish anti-Americanism remains part and parcel of the picture.

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1 Mihail Larsen, "USA i vore hjerter." Politiken, July 4, 2002.
2 David Gress, the American-Danish son of Elsa and now a professor at Boston University, concludes his article on "Elsa and America" by characterizing his mother’s view of Americans as implacably double-edged: "the most lovable people in the world, who nonetheless suffer from a distorted notion of relations between the sexes and from primitive political rituals." (Michael Cotta-Schønberg & Helga Vang Lauridsen (eds.), Nærværende: En bog om Elsa Gress (Copenhagen: Gyldendal/Det Kongelige Bibliotek, 1990), 118-33, espec. 122 and 133).
4 In Granta, 77 (Spring 2002), two pieces fall into this trap. James Hamilton-Paterson from Britain seeks to dissociate his wonderful acquaintances within the American electorate from what he considers their unworthy elected representatives (45), while Ahdaf Soueif from Egypt in like manner affronts the Zionist lobby and alleges that the "identification of 'Jewish with 'Israeli' or 'Zionist'" is one "which many Jews now openly reject" (81).
5 Hans Magnus Enzensberger in Granta, op. cit., 35.
6 John Gray in Granta, op. cit., 36.
7 Harold Pinter in Granta, op. cit., 67-69.
8 Ivan Klima in Granta, op. cit., 50-53.
9 Doris Lessing in Granta, op. cit., 53-54.
10 Raja Shehadeh in Granta, op. cit., 71-74.
12 For a somewhat balanced view, formed as a critical yet cordial open letter to George W. Bush, written after the social democratic government had lost
the general election to the liberals and conservatives, see Mogens Lykketoft, "Til Dem, hr. præsident ..." Politiken, July 16, 2002.


17See, e.g., Johannes Jørgensen, Rejsebilleder fra Nord og Syd (Copenhagen & Kristiania: Gyldendal/Nordisk Forlag, 1905), 139-40.

18Kissinger, op. cit., 295.

19See Poul Houe, "Georg Brandes i Amerika." Weekendavisen (Berlingske), August 11-17, 2000.


27This is not to say that diversity is absent from Danish culture (although its multidimensionality cannot possibly challenge American multiculturalism).
I am referring here to such anecdotal evidence as Lars Henrik Aagaard’s feature article, "Vi er ekstreme," in which he claims that Danes show an abundance of extremes and border-transgressions in numerous central areas (Berlingske Tidende, September 30, 2001). Compare this to the anecdotal observations in Kirsten Stendevad’s article, "Modstænninger avler fornøjelse," which proclaims that extremes are indeed America’s foremost propellant (Berlingske Tidende, July 29, 2001).


33 Significantly, many pro-American writers, witness the author Søren Sorensen, have for some time been nervously watching the decaying image of the US in Denmark. In his article “Stop volden” (Politiken, December 30, 2002), Sørensen pleads with the American ambassador to take seriously the pervasive displays—in imported popular culture and media products—of his country as the site of endless violence and moral decrepitude.