

Model America

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Early on, the USA – "America" – became a point of reference within European consciousnesses against which European societies could analyse themselves. At the same time, America acted as a repository for new models which Europe studied in order to discover whether they could be exported. This article discusses European perceptions of America from the 17th century onwards and some of the types of models created. A review of "Americanisation" – much discussed in the 20th century – follows, offering an opportunity to investigate the limits of the transferability of these models.

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Introduction

A few years ago, the American political scientist James W. Ceaser (→ Media Link #ab) angrily called for a struggle to reclaim the power to define his country: "It is time to take America back." He felt that "America" had become the Europeans' symbolic hostage; he had in his sights those "literary critics, philosophers and self-styled postmodern thinkers" for whom "America" could only have meaning with negative connotations, as a symbol "for that which is grotesque, obscene, monstrous, stultifying, stunted, leveling, deadening, deracinating, deforming, rootless, uncultured and – always in quotation marks – 'free'". Above all, among the great German and French thinkers – "from Hegel to Heidegger ... and from Buffon to Baudrillard" – Ceaser discovered a tendency not to perceive America as a place or country: "they have converted it into a concept of philosophy and a trope of literature."¹ In Ceaser's eyes, this form of imagined, symbolic or "metaphysical" "America" – coupled with terms such as "Americanism" or "Americanisation" – offers the intellectuals only material for anti-Americanism.

▲ 1

In taking up battle lines against the German and French philosophical traditions, Ceaser's attack had conservative motives. His patriotic polemic failed entirely, however, to see that not only Europeans, but also Americans themselves loaded "America" with "metaphysical" content. Indeed, this had been the case ever since the very first appropriations of land by Europeans: from John Winthrop's (1588–1649) (→ Media Link #ad) Puritan euphoria in 1630 that New England could be a "city upon a hill", a new Jerusalem,² to the social sciences' theory of modernisation in the 20th century, whose ideological precursors wanted to see the USA as the incarnation of Western development,³ the English colonies and, later, the USA were ascribed an importance that transcended that of a mere place. These two variants of an "America", which was responsible for its own metaphysical connotations, reveal two options that at first sight seem to be contradictory: the "city upon a hill" designates an exceptionalism that (in a secularised form) was developed into a complete ideology. The singularity of America postulated here provided an interpretive framework, a "grand narrative", into which the many "small" histories of immigration (→ Media Link #ae), economic success and social advancement could be easily incorporated. However, exceptionalism did not offer a model, did not invite imitation elsewhere. Those who wanted to participate in the American experiment had to become involved *in* America. However, the social sciences' theory of modernisation (which included the idea of a "normal" path of development) which regarded America as a model of Western development and recommended its imitation seems to contradict this singularity. Nevertheless, both interpretative frameworks are closely connected: only on the basis of a self-image of unique development could

the civilising mission (which was, at the latest, evident from the end of the 19th century, and culminated in Woodrow Wilson's (1856–1924) (→ Media Link #af) concept of world politics) emerge in which the equation of America with democracy allowed "America" to become universal – a beacon, yardstick and exportable model (at least in its basic democratic configuration) all rolled into one.

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This view of "America" as a trend was already implicit in the work of Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) (→ Media Link #ag). Tocqueville (see below) also took up the semantic shift (and contributed to its implementation like few others) that was the prerequisite to imbuing the concept of "America" with its "metaphysical" content: the equation of the USA and America. But how was it possible for the name of a large continent to become synonymous with *one* state within it as early as the 19th century? Indeed, well into the 18th century, North America had by no means dominated the European perception of the New World. In contrast to the rich colonies in the Andes and Central America, on the Brazilian coast and in the Caribbean, the English and French colonies on North America's eastern coast and the banks of the Saint Lawrence River were more peripheral; above all, they were not economically successful and of lesser importance for the mother countries than the Caribbean. In the 18th century, "America" was more a synonym for the south of the continent. However, during the so-called "Sattelzeit" (transition period) between the early modern and the modern period (1750 to 1850), this perception shifted – and Tocqueville could write in 1835 of "Democracy in America" and be certain that his readers would not think of Mexico or Argentina. The reasons for the USA's semantic success, for its right to be the exclusive representative of "America", lay in the achievement of state independence, won by the American Revolution (→ Media Link #ah) (which ended by peace with Great Britain in 1783). This unprecedented process of founding a state by means of an anti-colonial revolt and the rapid stabilisation of the American republic drew at once attention to the experiment in the USA. There, the New World seemed to have found its most advanced form. In the second half of the 19th century, the south of the continent accepted the term of "Latin America" put forward by France (which meant to advance its own political ambitions). This was a sign of the fact that the south had given up the discursive struggle for the concept of "America".⁴ The New World was now semantically organised: America was now a synonym for the USA; south of the USA began Latin America – and Canadians have since wondered whether they are "Americans", too.⁵

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The equation of the USA and "America", and the USA's progressive increase in importance and power has, however, led to the fact that "America" really has achieved a "status of pure abstraction" and – especially in the era of globalisation – become an "object of universal reference".⁶ There is no other point of reference today that is so embedded in the consciousness in all parts of the world than that which is understood by the word "America": "People may either love or hate America, but they almost never ignore it".⁷ In the globalised communicative space this is a one way street: there is no American view of Germany, Sweden or Ethiopia in the way that there are German, Swedish and Ethiopian images of America.⁸

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This, however, necessitates an investigation of America's function as a model for Europe, both today and in the past, which examines not only chronology, but also pluralisation. The level of abstraction achieved and the universality admit a range of interpretative frameworks: there were and there are many "Americas", and there exist almost unlimited possibilities for the transfer of select "parts" or the "entirety" of the model (including America as a negative model). The possibilities can be limited by the conditions prevailing in the receiving countries, but hardly by the construct of "America" itself. The perception of "America" and its function as a model are related: because there are so many "Americas" available, the USA also offers a very large pool of models. And because the international demand for models – for purposes of imitation or delimitation – is so high, a wide range of "Americas" exist. However, from the European perspective, the appropriation of "America" has a special quality: because Europeans see "America" as a branch on the family tree,⁹ the reception and use of "America" is always connected to the Europeans' self-analysis: the perpetual European debate about America gives rise to proximity – the feeling of representing variations of a common "West (→ Media Link #ak)" – as well as to the impression of distance, which leads to the use of America as a point of contrast. In dealing with convergence and divergence, the two principle viewpoints of the European discourse on America, one further fact also plays an important role: Europe was itself a point of reference for the USA and provided a model long after independence had been achieved. Tocqueville's famous book, which saw America as a trend that would inevitably pull Europe with it, should not obscure the fact that until the early 20th century the USA was a cultural province of Europe, not least in the self-image of its own elite.

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Indeed, since the beginnings of this reciprocal observation – i.e. since the permanent European settlement of the continent from the early 17th century on – there has been, on both sides of the Atlantic, an over- as well as an underestimation of the other: while the American self-image oscillates between euphoria ("city upon a hill") and a feeling of cultural inferiority, European perceptions range from regarding the American experiment as the future to feeling contempt for America as a colonial backwater (albeit with modifications to fit the changing circumstances). How, however, do models emerge and take shape from this mesh of many-voiced perceptions? Who in Europe needs models from America and for what reasons? The ways in which America can function as a model can be differentiated systematically; there are four ideal types:

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1. "America" as a component in social theory. This "America" has an extremely high level of abstraction and those who need and use it may not have direct experience of the country.

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2. "America" as a reality for travellers who informed their European audience of the "essence" of America or parts of it and in doing so almost inevitably made statements about the differences between Europe and America. These statements, in turn, are the precursors to the explicit and implicit creation of models of the foreign country.

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3. America as an "invented" country – not in the sense of an utopos, but rather imbuing it with values. Here, the European motives of cultural criticism and contemporary analysis are more clearly evident than in the case of travelogues. The "invented" America is in demand when Europe believes itself to be in crisis. To a Europe undergoing accelerated change, "America" therefore seems to be less a place and more a process.

▲ 9

4. "America" as a motor and trendsetter of transnational transformation. The Americanisation of Europe – and the world – that has been much-discussed since the early 20th century has a complex relationship to the image of America as a model. With the concept of "Americanisation", "America" was clearly no longer marked out as just a process, but rather as an event that crossed national borders and arrived as a way of life, emancipated from a place and therefore transferrable. Where such a real or imagined Americanisation was seen as undesired or even as a threat, America had already lost its potential to serve as a (positive) model. However, even where Americanisation was met with indifference or acclaim, it also did not seem to offer a model. The model "America" offers a chance for those receiving it to decide: do I learn from "America", do I learn from the conscious rejection of "America" or do I remain neutral? Americanisation, however, does not seem to permit this choice; it comes crushing down like a natural force of modernity. Certainly, there is no Americanisation without a ready-made interpretative framework of America. Americanisation is decoded on the basis of existing attitudes towards very particular configurations of "America" – and the way in which the transformations in one's environment understood as Americanisation unfold, of course, has an impact on the perception of the USA. The decisive aspect in this context is that the agents of Americanisation rarely come from the USA. However, the proponents of modernisation (→ Media Link #a1) in the (West) European states after the two world wars certainly used models of America (as well as the positive image of the USA) in order to bring in and justify rationalisation, mechanisation, consumption, changes in gender relationships etc. They – and not the distant USA – were always the targets and objects of hate of anti-Americanism.

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These four patterns of using "America" as a model, however, can also be assessed in a further way: in all of them, America can be presented as a country of progress and the future, but also as a latecomer and European province. These two interpretative frameworks, in turn, work in two variants: they can both be positive or negative. Those who want to see the USA as an incarnation of progress do not necessarily have to recommend it for imitation; those, on the other hand, who see in "America" a raw, archaic offshoot of Europe could see in it an opportunity to revitalise the old world.¹⁰

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The following will examine more closely these four types of models of "America" using selected examples. It is not possible to present a complete catalogue of the models. Rather, the paper aims to give a systematising overview with the goal of clearly analysing the four examples presented so that the numerous other models can be referred back to the

basic types. A review of the four types also creates a chronology: the path from the abstraction of social theory to the debate over Americanisation stretches from the 17th century into the present.

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Locke and Hegel: "America" Unseen

John Locke's (1632–1704) (→ Media Link #an) famous sentence from his *Second Treatise of Government* of 1690 "In the beginning all the world was America"¹¹ marks the beginning of America's career in European social theory. Locke wrote this sentence in the context of his theory of a social contract based on natural law. By describing America as a model (ideal type) of the state of nature, he pioneered the use of America for Europe's self-examination. The thing that directs his attention to America is his interest in European conditions – and the attempt to describe these in the light of the American new beginning.¹² Certainly, with this sentence Locke also intended to provide the optimal starting point for justifying the settlement of the territory.¹³ However, this promotional aspect was, at best, only a by-product, as Locke, of course, was describing an ideal moment that could only be identified theoretically, and which evaporated the moment a monetary economy was introduced.¹⁴ Locke cannot have overseen the fact that the future of the English colonies in North America depended on this monetary economy and on the connection to the economy of the mother country. For Locke, "America" was therefore at best a model in the theory of natural law; in practice, it was Europe who offered the model for America from the moment America was removed from the state of "genesis" – and this removal was the result of European settlement. Inherent to this was not only America's dependence on Europe, but also its social backwardness: this perspective gave later also rise to historians' long-held image of colonial society as a mere simplification of the conditions in the home country.

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This idea of an original American order received an update at the end of the 19th century under the influence of both Darwin's theory of evolution and Social Darwinism (which is not the same as the theory of evolution): for the Englishman Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) (→ Media Link #ao), America really did represent an example of a late but accelerated evolution, whose significant stages ranged from the original "simplification" of the first settlers to the growing complexity of agriculture to industrialisation (→ Media Link #ap) and urbanisation.¹⁵ The American historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1861–1932) (→ Media Link #aq) also referred to this idea of a "natural" social evolution in his 1893 examination of the frontier as America's original space;¹⁶ he "Americanised" Locke's model and thereby not only presented an extremely successful interpretation of the advancing settled border, but also established historiography as form of analysing the present: the starting point for Turner's thesis was the disappearance of the frontier at the end of the 19th century when the American census authorities officially "declared" the state's territory to have been settled.

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Roughly 130 years after Locke, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) (→ Media Link #ar) still understood America to be clearly dependent on European developments: "What takes place in America is but an emanation of Europe ... What has taken place in the New World up to the present time is only an echo of the Old World."¹⁷ Nevertheless, Hegel saw America – in explicit contrast to the "conquered" but not "colonised" South America¹⁸ – as the "land of the future". Unlike Tocqueville later, this formulation did not contain a prophecy that the USA would adopt a leading role. Rather, Hegel refers here to America's backwardness in the early 19th century compared to the European nations: according to Hegel, America was still in a "civil condition", the characteristics of which were that the "general object" of the political was "not yet fixed and determined" because for Hegel there did not exist "a real state and a real government". The relative equality of American society and the chances to move to the West seemed, for the time being, to make a state superfluous. It would only arise "after a distinction of classes has arisen, when wealth and poverty become extreme".¹⁹ "America" was the future for Hegel only in the sense of a "motion for adjournment". However, Hegel also made reference to America's function as a model for Europe and this extended well beyond Locke's natural law model – Hegel saw America as the collecting tank for Europe's "surplus" population:

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Europe has sent its surplus population to America in much the same way as from the old Imperial Cities, where trade-guilds were dominant and trade was stereotyped, many persons escaped to other towns which were not under such a yoke, and where the burden of imposts was not so heavy. Thus arose, by the side of Hamburg, Altona, by Frankfort, Offenbach, by Nuremberg, Fürth ... The relation between North America and

This assessment of "America" does not contain, as is sometimes claimed, a contempt for America as a periphery²¹ or even a vehement criticism of America.²² Rather, Hegel described – with quite precise knowledge of urban conditions in Germany – America's comparative advantage. In Hegel's eyes, just as Offenbach could establish freedom of trade as Hesse's industrial city and for a couple of decades drain off business and political status (and attract competent entrepreneurs) from the stagnating Free City of Frankfurt,²³ so could America do the same to Europe. America was not only a dependent periphery, but also a free space for development, unharmed by traditions and customary blockades. Offenbach and Frankfurt, America and Europe: from the perspective of the dissolution of German corporate society in the early 19th century, this was the chance for progress, maybe even for taking the lead.

▲ 16

Tocqueville and the German Liberals: The Problem of Transferability

In contrast to Locke, Hegel was a contemporary of the independent American republic. Although the statehood of this republic did not seem assured, he was conscious of the "permanent example of a republican constitution".²⁴ Colonial North America had provided at best a model for a natural law argument. After the American Revolution, the confirmation of the USA's independence and the proclamation of the American constitution, it offered much more to learn from. However, Hegel did express a dismissive attitude if not to America itself, then to the American Revolution: while he is clearly preoccupied by the meaning of the French Revolution (→ Media Link #as) and its impact on Germany and elsewhere,²⁵ the American Revolution has no place in Hegel's works. The audience for his lectures on the "Philosophy of World History" remained in the dark as to why the creation of the US nation state happened at all. Hegel provides an important example for what Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) (→ Media Link #at) in her book *On Revolution* (1963) called the "non-influence of the American Revolution upon the course of modern revolutions".²⁶ While the French Revolution "made world history" the American Revolution "has remained an event of little more than local importance".²⁷ The very factors which Arendt identified as the prerequisite for the success of the American Revolution with its lineal development of a state and the stabilisation of freedom, forced the revolution into the background of the European consciousness: according to Arendt, the American Revolution was a genuine political revolution, which – in her interpretation of a careful divide between the political and social spheres inspired by Aristotle²⁸ – succeeded because the social question played little role in the colonies' struggle for independence. The French Revolution, however, fed on the social question and it was exactly here that its problem lay, but also its international and historical power.

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Certainly, the protagonists of both revolutions understood their revolution to have an international historical mission: in the case of the American Revolution, Thomas Paine (1737–1809) (→ Media Link #au) wrote in his book *Common Sense* (1776): "The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind."²⁹ Paine later saw the connection between the two revolutions (and worked for both), but the British politician and publicist Edmund Burke (1729–1797) (→ Media Link #av), who had supported the American Revolution but rejected its French counterpart, did not see a common "Atlantic" process of democratic revolutions at all. For Burke, the American Revolution was the "legitimate daughter of the Glorious Revolution" of 1688 in England: it defended the time-honoured rights of the freeborn Englishman against parliament, which had "forgotten" in the treatment of the colonists that this was the foundation of its strength in England: no taxation without representation. In Burke's eyes, the American Revolution did not subvert or innovate, but rather confirmed and conserved.³⁰ For Burke, "America" could only be a model in so far as it helped to (latently) universalise the real English model. Is something that only caught up with and confirmed the level of European development a suitable model?

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Indeed, America only became interesting for European development if one was willing to see the American experiment as being about more than just the preservation of traditional freedoms. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that a Frenchman, the liberal aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville, against the background of the recurring experience of revolution in his own country, understood the democratic qualities of the USA as an innovation and process. His greatest work, which has since become a classic, *Democracy in America* (two volumes 1835/1840) (→ Media Link #aw), was the fruit of a nine-and-a-half-month journey in 1831/1832, which took him through the USA's entire territory. Tocqueville was convinced that a democratic age had dawned and that the American situation would reveal to Europeans an insight into a

It appears to me beyond a doubt that sooner or later we shall arrive, like the Americans, at an almost complete equality of conditions. ... It is not, then, merely to satisfy a legitimate curiosity that I have examined America; my wish has been to find instruction by which we may ourselves profit.³¹

Now, with Tocqueville, America had really become a model – not just in the sense of the direct transfer of institutions or customs to Europe, but rather in the sense of an object of study through which one could better understand the direction of European development. It is certainly true that Tocqueville's book became a classic of American political theory (the only classic alongside the *Federalist Papers*) because Tocqueville – even today – allows the different political camps (normally referred to as conservatives and liberals) to agree on his insights.³² However, the work is also a classic of the European commentary upon America, especially because it maintains a careful balance: Tocqueville knows the America about which he writes,³³ but he also knows his European audience's interest in America which he has to satisfy. Apart from Tocqueville, no one investigating the concept of America has managed to write a work that became a popular classic in both Europe and America.

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Tocqueville was above all interested in the question of how a democratic order based on equality and freedom could remain stable. From the obvious success of democracy in America, he concluded that not democracy itself but rather the transition to democracy endangered stability. America had not undergone such a transition because democracy had always existed there. The "novelty" of freedom in Europe made room for a dynamic which could threaten freedom. With this essential insight, Tocqueville rightly directed attention to the social and historical conditions of democracy and freedom. This (almost) answered the question of the transferability of the American model from the outset: Tocqueville was less interested in the adoption of American institutions or customs than in a comparative perspective that would reveal the possible national characteristics of (and barriers to) universal (Western) trends.

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For Tocqueville's liberal contemporaries in Germany, the example of the USA (which, on the whole, they did not know from personal experience) remained, in the words of Carl von Rotteck (1775–1840) (→ Media Link #ax), "reine Theorie, welcher sich in Europa so feindselig das historische Recht entgegenstellt".³⁴ The example of the American constitution played the role of an intellectual wellspring in the debates of the liberals before the 1848 Revolutions and then in the Frankfurt Parliament of 1848/1849. More was not possible because the basic prerequisites which would have allowed to regard the American constitutional ideas as a paradigm did not exist in Germany before 1848.³⁵ The position of the monarch was enshrined in the constitutional and political thought of the liberals. This largely ruled out an orientation towards the model of the American constitution.³⁶

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Max Weber and James Bryce: The "Invention" and the "Discovery" of America at the End of the 19th Century

It is difficult to judge the level of interest in "America" within 19th century European societies. Certain trends, however, are evident: especially in the last decade of the 19th century, the interest in the USA increased considerably. There were various reasons for this. The USA acquired a greater significance for those in Europe with an interest in world politics, on the one hand due to its increasing economic importance and, on the other, following – at the latest – the military conflict with Spain in 1898 and the country's participation in the "occidental" phenomenon of imperialism (→ Media Link #ay). However, the interest of a new generation of observers of America was not only provoked by the growing importance of the USA, but also by a particular sense of crisis in Europe. This sense of crisis was not simply a result of the realisation that Europe was no longer at the centre of world history.³⁷ It was also – above all for the opinion-shaping middle classes – the product of a highly varied uncertainty created by, to name but two causes, the disintegration of old value systems (religion) and the challenge to liberalism's political power posed by the new mass movements of socialism and political Catholicism.³⁸

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An important representative of this sense of crisis was Max Weber (1864–1920) (→ Media Link #az), for whom the stagnation of the European bourgeois world could be described using terms such as bureaucratisation, rationalisation and de-personalisation signifying the reduction to one's professional or specialist function (*Berufs- and Fachmenschen-tum*). Weber's "America" was based on personal experience: in 1904, he was invited to an academic conference at the world fair in St. Louis and undertook a journey to the USA that lasted several months. Weber did not write a book on America, but his socio-religious work on the Protestant ethic had already revealed an interest in the particularities of American religion; moreover, the references to the situation in America, including the political conditions, are so numerous in Weber's uncompleted work on the "Economy and Society" that the role of "America" in Weber's thought is difficult to miss. America fascinated him: Weber wondered whether the particular challenges faced by American Protestants, and above all their liberal ideal of life (the great importance of the Protestant sects "und ihre[r] säkularen Derivat[e] wie Clubs und andere[r] freiwillige[r] Vereinigungen"³⁹ ("and their secular derivations such as clubs and other voluntary associations") really offered an alternative route to modernity – one that did not lead to the "shell of bondage" ("Gehäus der Hörigkeit"). In a letter to the Protestant theologian Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) (→ Media Link #b1), Weber wrote of Puritanism's historical achievement:

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Wir dürfen doch nicht vergessen, dass wir den Sekten Dinge verdanken, die niemand von uns heute missen könnte, Gewissensfreiheit und die elementarsten Menschenrechte, die uns heute selbstverständlicher Besitz sind. Nur radikaler Idealismus konnte das schaffen.⁴⁰

For Weber, here was the basis for the chance for personal charisma and a permanent revitalisation of freedom with all their consequences for very different spheres of society – a revitalisation which he could scarcely find in the German Lutheran state-church.

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At the same time, Weber's hope in America remained ambivalent. Regardless of the USA's apparently unique guarantee of freedom, Weber believed that sooner or later America would follow the path already taken by European societies, which for Weber posed a growing threat to freedom in the form of "occidental rationalism". In several respects, Weber reproduces here the old pattern of a picture of "America" that has not yet reached the same level of development as the (West) European nations. In contrast to the culturally conservative and pessimistic reading, which perceived in this backwardness the "unculturedness" of America, Weber saw in this "backwardness" the chance to preserve elemental freedoms, whose existence, however, was threatened by the process of convergence or "Europeanisation (→ Media Link #b2)", a danger also feared by many Americans. Thus, it has been rightly argued that Weber did not "discover", but rather "invented" his America.⁴¹ This differentiation does not aim to accuse Weber of possessing only a superficial knowledge of the country. Rather, his model can be characterised as an "invention" for two reasons: on the one hand, Weber employed "America" as a "strategic argument" in order to underpin via a "strategy of plausibility" his political sociology and its ideas on the concept of charisma and the selection of leaders; on the other – and this seems to be a possible motive for the ideas of "America" held by many of Weber's contemporaries – "America" was invented in order to evaluate critically the situation and undesirable political developments in his own country.⁴²

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Of course, this may have been particular to Germany. Elsewhere, "America" was not always "invented" at the end of the 19th century in order to analyse the present. The British historian and politician James Bryce (1838–1922) (→ Media Link #b3), who in 1888 published a two-volume study on the "American Commonwealth" (which was later repeatedly revised and republished) was not as "nervous" when writing about his subject, which he "discovered" rather than "invented". Bryce's work, which at the time also appeared in American editions and established its author as a central contemporary interpreter of America in the English-speaking world, effortlessly took up Tocqueville's themes. However, Bryce concentrated on institutions – from the president to the city administrations – and only touched on the "customs" and behaviour of Americans.⁴³ For Bryce, too, America seemed to be a model, but it was not a critical yardstick against which to judge his own society. He preferred Tocqueville's perspective on the USA as an advanced nation that showed European nations the future:

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something more than an experiment, for they are believed to disclose and display the type of institutions to-

wards which, as by a law of fate, the rest of civilized mankind are forced to move, some with swifter, others with slower, but all with unresting feet.⁴⁴

Bryce had a nuanced view of the transfer of institutions and ideas across the Atlantic based on insights into the social and historical background:

▲ 28

Many an American institution would bear different fruit if transplanted to England, as there is hardly an English institution which has not undergone, like the plants and animals of the Old World, some change in America. The examination and appraisal of the institutions of the United States is no doubt full of instruction for Europe, full of encouragement, full of warning; but its chief value lies in what may be called the laws of political biology which it reveals ... Now and then we may directly claim transatlantic experience as accrediting or discrediting some specific constitutional device or the policy of some enactment. But even in these cases he who desires to rely on the results shown in America must first satisfy himself that there is such a parity of conditions and surroundings in respect to the particular matter as justifies him in reasoning directly from ascertained results there to probable results in his own country.⁴⁵

In an imaginary dialogue with Weber, both could have probably come to an agreement on the concept of fate, but beyond that their models of America were diametric opposites: Weber believed fate to be at home in Europe and believed that, in the long run, America could not avoid it; Bryce, by contrast, considered America to have a head start, while Europe was straggling behind (and going at different speeds). Bryce was interested in institutions and, on the basis of this, the possibility of transfer; in contrast, Weber did not consider the transfer of institutions at all, but rather placed his hopes in the scope of freedom that (still) existed in the USA. One can call Weber a pessimist and Bryce an optimist. Bryce argued, of course, against the background of the special relationship between Britain and the USA, and with the confidence of a British subject whose commonwealth did not need to hide from the USA. Weber could not draw on such a "national" self-assurance.

▲ 29

"Americanisation" in the 20th Century and the Limits of the Model

When Weber and Bryce were thinking and writing about "America", it seemed possible to draw a clear dividing line between Europe and America. Only things that are separate can be placed in a relationship with one another, only at a distance can one talk about models. At the turn of the 20th century, however, a concept emerged that seemed to question this very distance: in 1902, the British journalist William Thomas Stead (1849–1912) (→ Media Link #b4) published his book *The Americanization of the World, or the Trend of the 20th Century*, which appeared in German and French in the same year.⁴⁶ It introduced a concept to the world according to which "America" was less a model and more a trend – but in a different way to that described by Tocqueville: America was now no longer seen as a pioneer whose development pointed the way to one's own future – and thus benefited the stragglers, who could avoid "mistakes" by learning from America. "Americanisation" meant something else: the swift creation of "simultaneity", if not in the "world", then at least in the areas of American influence, above all in Europe. The ideal of this "simultaneity" did not mean a complete conformity with the USA, but rather a high level of receptiveness.

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In the early 20th century, "Americanisation" did not refer to the transfer of political ideas and institutions. Instead, it concerned the performance and exportability of American industry. Stead quoted in his book from the article of a journalist colleague:

▲ 31

The average man [in England] rises in the morning from his New England sheets, he shaves with 'Williams' soap and a Yankee razor, pulls on his Boston boots over his socks from North Carolina, fastens his Connecticut braces, slips his Waltham or Waterbury watch in his pocket, and sits down to breakfast. There he congratulates his wife on the way her Illinois straight-front corset sets off her Massachusetts blouse, and he tackles his breakfast, where he eats bread made from prairie flour ... tinned oysters from Baltimore and a little

While the concept of "Americanisation" – above all in the USA itself – could also refer to the homogenisation of the country's ethnically diverse population,⁴⁸ outside the USA it quickly came to mean a situation describable less in terms of convergence or divergence and more in terms of inundation by and submission to the American consumer economy. "Americanisation" provoked in the European discourse – at the latest after the end of the First World War – a feeling of inferiority or an insisting on a "residual" superiority.⁴⁹

▲ 32

The first large surge of "Americanisation" – beyond the export of goods and intellectual reflections on the concept – came with the end of the First World War and the economic weakening experienced by nearly all European states. The successful American economy seemed to offer a range of models that promised to revitalise the European economy and help it catch up with the American competition. In his *Prison Notebooks* written between 1929 and 1935, the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) (→ Media Link #b5) pondered upon the coherent basis of "Americanism". He found it to exist not only in the syndromes of Taylorism and Fordism, but also, and indeed above all, in a "rational demographic composition" that "consists in the fact that there do not exist numerous classes with no essential function in the world of production, in other words classes which are purely parasitic".⁵⁰ In this way, Gramsci marked out a fundamental difference to Europe where there were too many "pensioners of economy history" who were "living 'on their ancestral patrimony'".⁵¹ Gramsci was anything but "anti-American"; America seemed to him – as it had earlier to Karl Marx (1818–1883) (→ Media Link #b6) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) (→ Media Link #b7)⁵² – to be the most advanced capitalist society, which pointed the way forward to European societies. For Gramsci it remained unsettled, whether America could force Europe to change its socio-economic system through its real economic power, or if the changes in the system only seemed to be the result of an American invasion but represented, in fact, a somewhat slower, but genuinely European phenomenon.⁵³ In any case, he imbued "Americanism" with a power that could help modernise Italy, which Gramsci saw as backward and pre-industrial: only in an "Americanised" society could the working class achieve better conditions for their advancement.⁵⁴

▲ 33

The topics discussed by Gramsci and others under the terms Taylorism and Fordism, i.e. scientific management and the technologies of mass production based on the division of labour, rarely went beyond the discursive sphere because the structural preconditions for a thorough Americanisation as modernisation in the sphere of the industrial economy and the organisation of labour did not exist in the 1920s to a sufficient degree, as a result of which the American example only had a limited range.⁵⁵ It was much easier to adopt the consumption of the products of popular culture (film) than models of organising labour or entrepreneurship.⁵⁶

▲ 34

Certainly, in the years after the Great Depression – and then at an accelerated pace after the Second World War – European economies successfully adapted American standards. However, the transfer of models always took place in the form of the integration of individual elements into the particular national framework: self-service in food retailing for example was tried in the USA in 1912 and introduced in Germany in 1938, where after the Second World War it became the norm alongside the creation of chain stores (also adopted from the USA).⁵⁷ But these changes took place within the context of a "social market economy", which was not the result of an orientation towards the American example, but rather – in its combination of market structures and state intervention – represented a modernisation of the German tradition of corporatism.

▲ 35

With the international conflict between democracy and dictatorship and the Second World War, however, "America" as a transferable model had to prove its worth in other ways. The famous dictum of the "American Century" formulated by Henry Robinson Luce (1898–1967) (→ Media Link #b9) in a 1941 essay in the magazine *Life* did not limit itself to consumption and cinema: of primary importance for Luce was the universally relevant trend towards a constitutional state and democracy (which, it is true, were for him irrevocably bound up with the capitalist economy).⁵⁸ At the period when democracy was not a practice which could be taken for granted – especially in Germany –, "Americanisation" had a double meaning: democracy plus popular culture.⁵⁹ Only when democracy (and "Westernisation") became a matter of course in Germany, was the formula "Americanisation" again reduced, as it had been in the first decades of the 20th

After the Second World War, "Americanisation" went hand in hand with the USA's international economic and political hegemony.⁶⁰ In the second half of the 20th century, Germany was – like other North and West European states – receptive and keen to learn, but only in so far as American models could be adapted to local conditions. Rotteck's statement on the contradictions between "theory" and "the law of history" are still valid and indicate clearly the limits of the American model in so far as one might want to see it as a repository of potentially transferable institutions and ideas. The "law of history" is known today as "path dependence"⁶¹: the study and adoption of examples from other states and societies takes place – at best – only via adaptation to one's own traditions and routes of development. This does not *a priori* rule out interest in foreign models; they can always be used to mark out a (mental) space and force the existing system, especially where it requires reform, to justify itself.⁶² Such models are beneficial in creating this space for social change and much of that which was commonly debated (especially since 1945) under the term "Americanisation" had this function.⁶³ However, transfers would soon come up against the problem of path dependence – and the European societies, which do not even follow a common "path" or differ from America in the same way, contain less "America" – even at the current apex of globalisation – than either the euphoric proponents or bitter opponents of "Americanisation" like to think.

Marcus Gräser, Washington, D.C.

Appendix

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- ¹ ^ Ceaser, America 1997, p. 1.
- ² ^ Cf. Taylor, Colonies 2001, pp. 167f.
- ³ ^ Wehler, Modernisierungstheorie 1975. The possibilities for updating the theory of modernisation to transcend the schematisation of "normal" development and *Sonderweg* are emphasised by Mergel, Geht es weiterhin voran? 1997.
- ⁴ ^ Rinke, Amerika 2008.
- ⁵ ^ Hoerder, Canada 2005, pp. 65–87.
- ⁶ ^ Ceaser, America 1997, pp. 2f.
- ⁷ ^ ibidem, p. 3.
- ⁸ ^ ibidem.
- ⁹ ^ Offe, Selbstbetrachtung 2004, p. 10.
- ¹⁰ ^ ibidem, p. 13.
- ¹¹ ^ Locke, Government 1960, p. 343.
- ¹² ^ Kamphausen, Erfindung 2002, p. 146.
- ¹³ ^ Greene, Construction 1993, p. 52.
- ¹⁴ ^ The complete quotation from Locke is: "Thus in the beginning all the World was America, and more so than that is now; for no such thing as money was any where known." (Locke, Government 1960, p. 343).
- ¹⁵ ^ Waechter, Erfindung 1995, p. 104.
- ¹⁶ ^ Kamphausen, Erfindung 2002, p. 170.
- ¹⁷ ^ Hegel, Philosophy of History 1900, pp. 82, 87.
- ¹⁸ ^ ibidem, p. 84.

19. ^ ibidem, p. 86, 85.
20. ^ ibidem, p. 82.
21. ^ Kamphausen, *Erfindung* 2002, p. 151.
22. ^ Offe, *Selbstbetrachtung* 2004, p. 13. Other statements from Hegel do not justify the claim that he aimed to depict Americans as bedraggled adolescents and was, as a result, an important source and court of appeal for anti-Americanism (ibidem, p. 14). Hegel's reference to America as the country of the future clearly underlined the historicity of his description.
23. ^ On Offenbach's significance in the history of the industrialisation of the Rhein Main area, see Gessner, *Industrialisierung* 1996.
24. ^ Hegel, *Philosophy of History* 1900, p. 84.
25. ^ Cf. Ritter, *Hegel* 1965.
26. ^ Arendt, *Revolution* 2009, p. 14. The traces of the American Revolution in German journalistic writings and political thought are explored in Dippel, *Germany* 1977, and Depkat, *Amerikabilder* 1998.
27. ^ Arendt, *Revolution* 2009, p. 46.
28. ^ On the criticism of Arendt's premises cf. Habermas, *Geschichte* 1981. I thank Teresa Orozco for her suggestions of reading material on Arendt (see also Orozco, *Renaissance des Unpolitischen* 1999.)
29. ^ Rinke, *Amerika* 2008, p. 97.
30. ^ Cf. Raynaud, *Amerikanische Revolution* 1996, pp. 961ff.
31. ^ Tocqueville, *Democracy* 1899, p. 14.
32. ^ Cf. Wolin, *Tocqueville* 2001, p. 3.
33. ^ Certainly, he is regularly accused of drawing on a relatively small empirical basis and excluding elementary facts (steamship travel, rail etc.). Cf. Ritter, *Tocqueville* 2004.
34. ^ "pure theory, which in Europe is contradicted with such hostility by the law of history " (translated by C.G.), *Wellenreuther, USA* 1993, p. 39.
35. ^ ibidem, pp. 35f. The older work of Franz, *Amerikabild* 1958, offers a more optimistic evaluation of the reception of America before and during the 1848/1849 Revolution.
36. ^ Meyer, *Nord-Amerika* 1929, remains even today an indispensable survey of the reception of America in Germany before the 1848 Revolution. Cf. also the large collection of documents by Fraenkel, *Amerika* 1959.
37. ^ Kamphausen, *Erfindung* 2002, p. 22.
38. ^ On nervousness as a "cultural state" in the Wilhelmine Empire cf. Radkau, *Zeitalter* 1998.
39. ^ Offe, *Selbstbetrachtung* 2004, p. 74.
40. ^ "We must not forget that we owe things to the sects that nobody can ignore today: freedom of conscience and the most elementary human rights that today we take for granted. Only radical idealism could achieve that" (transl. by C.G.). Quoted in Mommsen, *Amerika* 1982, p. 76. On Weber in America, cf. also Radkau, *Weber* 2005, pp. 375–379.
41. ^ Kamphausen, *Erfindung* 2002, p. 197.
42. ^ On the reflection of European moods and deficits in the image of America, cf. also Schmidt, *Reisen* 1997.
43. ^ Bryce, *Commonwealth* 1910, p. 3.
44. ^ ibidem, p. 1.
45. ^ ibidem, p. 9.
46. ^ Cf. Klautke, *Möglichkeiten* 2003, p. 7.
47. ^ Quoted in Iriye, *Globalization* 2007, p. 32.
48. ^ Cf. Lüdtke, *Einleitung* 1996, p. 9, and Herrmann, *American* 1996.
49. ^ Cf. Kaelble, *Europa* 2001, pp. 128–183. Convergences and divergences in comparison between the European societies and the USA are examined in idem, *Weg* 1987.
50. ^ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* 1998, p. 281.
51. ^ ibidem.
52. ^ Cf. Moore, *Promised Land* 1970, p. 9.
53. ^ Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte* 1999, p. 2098.
54. ^ Tanner, Art. "Amerikanismus" 1994, col. 193.
55. ^ Doering-Manteuffel, *Amerikanisierung* 1999, p. 28. Cf. also Maier, *Taylorismus* 1985.
56. ^ Rosenhaft, *Kinosucht* 1996. For general information cf. also the articles in Becker, *Mythos* 2006.
57. ^ Schröter, *Winners* 2008, p. 85.
58. ^ Gassert, *Amerikanisierung* 2000, p. 785.
59. ^ ibidem, p. 787.
60. ^ Doering-Manteuffel, *Amerikanisierung* 1999, pp. 28, 36.
61. ^ Ertmann, *Entwicklung* 1999.
62. ^ On the exemplary role of the USA in the debates about the "United States of Europe" see Schmale, *Geschichte*

2008, p. 135.

63. ^ See Doering-Manteuffel, Amerikanisierung 1999, pp. 71–126 ("Westernisierung als Gesellschaftsreform").

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Link #b6

- Karl Marx (1818–1883) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/49228757>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/118578537>)
ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118578537.html>)

Link #b7

- Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/68928644>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/118530380>)
ADB/NDB  (<http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118530380.html>)

Link #b9

- Henry Robinson Luce (1898–1967) VIAF   (<http://viaf.org/viaf/77116355>) DNB  (<http://d-nb.info/gnd/119007932>)