

# **WHY DO PEOPLE HATE AMERICA?**

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Hating America and Transcending Hatred

In Mathieu Kassovitz's film *La Haine* ('Hate', 1995), three young men living in a Parisian housing project discover the meaning of hatred. This multicultural group – Vinz, moody and intense, Jewish and working-class; the fun-loving Arab, Said; and Hubert, an introspective black African boxer – has little to do but kill time, their alienation consolidating a real sense of kinship. These adolescents have no jobs, no money and, even more important, no prospects of any kind. So, they hang out much like any inner-city group of marginalised young men, drifting aimlessly through the streets and suburbs. But doing nothing has its consequences, particularly when the police have singled you out as a possible source of criminal activity.

Kassovitz, who won the directorial prize at Cannes, is concerned with showing that marginalisation itself is a form of violence; that it leads to other types of violence, feeds back on itself and eventually spirals out of control. The film's protagonists are not particularly bad or violent individuals. They are simply humans trying to be human, with all their strengths and faults. But their ethnicity and appearance, their class and social backgrounds, have labelled them as inferior and violent. So that's the way they are treated by society in general, and by the police –

who do not hesitate to torture the boys – in particular. And, in their turn, the boys' hatred is a compound product of their economic marginalisation, their cultural and racial treatment, and their own interpretation of their existence.

While the world out there may not condone their behaviour, it would certainly sympathise with the plight of the gang in *La Haine*. For much of the developing world, too, has been ruthlessly marginalised and culturally abused. The fictional characters of *La Haine* largely direct their hatred towards the police, who are both the immediate cause of their suffering and the representatives of an authoritarian establishment. The real world directs its resentment towards America, the global hyperpower that behaves much like the police in *La Haine*; an empire unlike any in history, that has systematically rubbed everyone else's nose in the dirt.

However, no one actually *wants* to hate American people. Who would want to hate Denzel Washington or Sydney Poitier, Halle Berry or Whoopi Goldberg, Muhammad Ali or Tiger Woods, John Steinbeck or Arthur Miller, Gore Vidal or Susan Sontag? What most people hate is 'America', the political entity based on authoritarian violence, double standards, self-obsessed self-interest, and an ahistorical naivety that equates the Self with the World. Indeed, there are many obvious reasons to hate America. Three of the most commonly cited are: American support for Israel, which is seen by many in the Arab world as a US-armed and -funded colony; Washington's support for authoritarian regimes such as those in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Algeria; and the all-too-frequent American military interventions in the developing world. But these reasons are simply that: obvious. Moreover, many other frequently cited reasons for hating America often come wrapped in equal amounts of love. For example, American popular culture, ranging from Hollywood films to pop music, inspires both love and hate in equal measure, as if the two passions were inseparable parts of a single whole. So America often seduces and horrifies at the same time.

To appreciate the scope and extent of the hatred, we need to go beyond the obvious. This is what we have tried to do in this book. We also need to be aware that dislike for America is not confined to certain groups such as Muslims, or 'fundamentalists', or European left-wing intellectuals. There are hardly any universals left in our postmodern times, but loathing for America is about as close as we can get to a universal sentiment: it is the one dynamic that unites fundamentalists and liberals, Arabs and Latin Americans, Asians and Europeans, and even the overshadowed Canadians, with the rest of the world. Such a universal phenomenon must have a truly subterranean rationale.

The action in *La Haine* takes place in an unforgiving environment. Kassovitz sets his film in concrete suburbs that exude inhumanity. These empty vistas not only parade their hostility to the three young men, they make it impossible for them to breathe, to exist, to prosper as human beings – to be themselves. American governments and corporations have, over a period of decades, created a similarly bleak global context, a world that makes life difficult, and sometimes impossible, for many cultures and societies. Hatred for America thus has a deeper mooring; it is located in the imposed inability of other societies and cultures to exist as full and free entities, to live as they would wish to live. This confinement of cultures is not limited to the domain of politics – it extends into a wider conceptual sphere; and it is here that the four main reasons for objecting to the USA are to be found.

1. The first reason is existential. The US has simply made it too difficult for other people to exist. In economic terms, this is a stark reality for the majority of the world's population. As we have seen, the US has structured the global economy to perpetually enrich itself and reduce non-Western societies to abject poverty. 'Free markets' is simply a euphemism for free mobility of American capital, unrestrained expansion of American corporations, and free (uni-directional) movement of goods and

services from America to the rest of the world. The US dollar is the world's main reserve currency, the medium that everyone needs to pay for their foreign imports, and there is no restraint on the US's ability to print its own currency to finance its trade deficits with the rest of the world. Since international lending is carried out in dollars, crisis-ridden borrowing countries saddled with trade deficits always have to take on dollar debt burdens greater than their capacity to repay. Couple this with the US control of international financial institutions such as the IMF, World Bank and WTO, and we see how the world economy functions to marginalise the less-developed world. We are moving towards a world in which global markets in such basic things as healthcare, welfare, pensions, education and food and water are supplied and controlled by American corporations. The ability of developing countries to provide universal access to basic social services has been systematically and ruthlessly eroded. This is why absolute poverty has increased over the past decades; and the gulf between the rich and poor has now reached unimagined depths. America is literally taking bread out of the mouths of the people of the developing world.

Politically, two simultaneous processes are reducing the choices and freedoms of the rest of the world. The process of *enlargement*, the expansion of the reach and influence of America – through trans-national economic regimes and multinational capital as well as aggregation of power from supposedly multi-lateral institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and WTO to the United States – is simultaneously, in effect, a process of hierarchical *integration* of the rest of the world. The world is being integrated in the shape of a rigid, iron-clad pyramid. Those at the bottom of the pyramid are not just economically excluded, they are also politically contained. So their political existence is as perilous as their economic reality.

Moreover, American-led globalisation has also shrunk cultural space. Even the most economically and politically disadvantaged people seek cultural expression and fulfilment. But the

pyramid-shaped globe allows little room for other cultures to exist as such, let alone permit the full expression and flowering of non-Western cultures. Quite simply, there is no space left for difference to exist on its own terms and within its own categories.

Thus, existence *per se* – physical, political and cultural – has become a problem for the developing world. Like the protagonists of *La Haine*, the people of the Third World are angry at their existential condition. They see America as the main culprit and the continuing source of their predicament; and thus direct their hostility towards it.

2. The second major reason for objecting to America is cosmological. In the conventional cosmological argument for God, derived originally from Aristotle, God is described as the cause of everything; this is why some versions of this argument are called the 'first cause' argument. In today's globalised world, America is seen as the prime cause of everything. Nothing seems to move without America's consent; nothing can be solved without America's involvement. Only America can resolve the conflict between Palestine and Israel; only America's intervention can lead to some sort of resolution between India and Pakistan over Kashmir; and it was America's involvement in Northern Ireland that brokered a political settlement. Without American ratification, the Kyoto Treaty on carbon dioxide emissions is not worth the paper it is written on; without an American nod, nothing moves at the WTO or World Bank; and without America, the UN ceases to be a United Nations. At the global level, America is both the first cause and the sustaining cause.

The cosmological grounds for resentment also relate to the 'gigantism' of America itself. A Chinese proverb says that the tallest tree attracts the most dangerous winds during a typhoon. As a tree with branches that touch every corner of the globe, America is a natural target. But this is compounded by the hubris that is an integral part of the cosmological structure that America cannot see. Western empires – Roman, Spanish, British

– were concerned with sustaining and enhancing their control of subject populations. America has taken this principle to a new quantum level: American empire is a colonisation of the future that becomes a total consumption of all space and time – rewriting history, changing the very stuff of life in our genetic structure, shifting weather patterns, colonising outer space, indeed, changing the course of evolution itself! It is this height and breadth of arrogance that startles and, not surprisingly, terrifies most of the world. If there are no limits, what is there to stop the US from actually consuming the non-American people of the world? Inducted in the cosmological structure of America, the rest of the world will vanish. While travelling on the metro, the three teenagers of *La Haine* see an advertising billboard with the bold caption: ‘The World is Yours.’ They delete the ‘Y’, making the point that ‘the world’ does not include all of us. It seems to belong only to those with limitless possibilities, those who have restructured the world to their own cosmological outlook.

3. The third main reason for anti-American feeling is ontological – that is, relating to the very nature of being. Once again, this takes us back to standard arguments for God. The ontological argument for God’s existence, attributed to St Anselm, goes something like this: God is the most perfect being; it is more perfect to exist than not to exist; therefore, God exists. It is, of course, a circular argument. Ontological arguments infer that something exists because certain concepts are related in certain ways. Good and evil are related as opposites. So, if evil exists, there must also be good. America relates to the world through such circular, ontological logic: because ‘terrorists’ are evil, America is good and virtuous; the ‘Axis of Evil’ implicitly positions the US and its allies as the ‘Axis of Good’. But this is not simply a binary opposition: the ontological element, the nature of American being, makes America *only* good and virtuous. It is a small step then to assume that you are chosen both by God and history. How often have we heard American leaders proclaim

that God is with them; or that history has called on America to act?

But appropriating goodness to one’s self, and then doing evil, spells hypocrisy to others. Bruce Tonn, Professor in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, notes: ‘People around the world constantly ask why the US says one thing and does something totally opposite; why the standards it wants to impose on others do not apply to the US itself. How can the United States claim to be the repository of Goodness yet have such disdain for the poor and deny them the basic right to food and water? People dying of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa wonder why Americans can afford super computers and stealth bombers but cannot help them afford AZT and other drugs. People living in and around tropical rainforests cannot understand American criticism of their management of these crucial resources while Americans continue to trash their own environment, from destroying their wetlands to increasing emissions of global warming gases such as carbon dioxide. Europeans cannot fathom why the United States does not support global environmental protection, land mine treaties, or strong provisions to control biological and nuclear weapons or why the United States insists on selling Europeans meat and grains that are tainted with steroids and the result of genetic engineering. Russians and East Europeans do not understand why America insists on imposing economic measures on their countries that increase inequality by every criteria known to humanity. Canadians rue the impact of American culture on their own society.’<sup>21</sup>

Then there are the hypocritical elements of American society itself. The O.J. Simpson trial highlighted the institutionalised lying that forms the basis of American trial law for the entire world to see. The trial also brought to the world’s attention the anger that many American people of colour harbour toward their government, and their deep scepticism about the fairness

of the US legal system. The Clinton impeachment trial demonstrated the hypocrisy of the political establishment: conservative politicians, many of whom were also guilty of sexual 'misconduct', had no qualms in their attempt at political assassination. The Florida election debacle highlighted America's hypocrisy concerning democracy: not counting everyone's vote is only an egregious sin if it occurs in fledgling democracies of the developing world. All the people of the world duly noted that the US Supreme Court decided the outcome of the election by finding reasons not to recount all of the votes.

Why, people around the world keep asking, is the American public, in a country with the world's most advanced education system and institutions of learning, so exceedingly ignorant of world affairs? They don't know the names of the leaders of other countries, even those of their allies in the West. They don't know where other countries are located. They don't know the history of the world. They apparently don't care, either. They care about their cars, their second homes, about not paying taxes, about low gasoline prices. But why don't they care about the rest of the world? Why do Americans tend towards an insidious distrust of others, and show such neglect for the needs, desires and hopes of the rest of the world? Why?

Of course, neither America, the political entity, nor many Americans, can hear these questions. The USA may be an open society, but it's also a closed circle. Outside concerns and voices cannot penetrate the impregnable ontological walls of America. What could others – ontologically removed from being good – possibly have to tell the good, innocent and virtuous people chosen by God and history? And if America does think of them at all, what other formula can there be than the self-evident dictum that what's good for America must necessarily be good for everyone? It's not surprising that Americans are perpetually wrapping themselves in the flag, the symbol of their ontological goodness. Since the flag represents everything that is good, it must, in American eyes, attract reverence from all quarters. But

to the rest of the world it's just a piece of cloth, wrapped around delusionary ideas of innocence and goodness, and shrink-wrapped in the cling-film of American corporate capitalism. The US media projects American hypocrisies on a global scale, a formula for a vicious circle of hatred. Hatred breeds hatred: ontological presumptions of goodness foster ontologically grounded hatred, which leads to its own inevitable conclusion.

4. The fourth major reason for hostility towards America has to do with definitions. America is not just the lone hyperpower – it has become the *defining* power of the world. America defines what is democracy, justice, freedom; what are human rights and what is multiculturalism; who is a 'fundamentalist', a 'terrorist', or simply 'evil'. In short, what it means to be human. The rest of the world, including Europe, must simply accept these definitions and follow the American lead (which, in most cases, Britain does exceptionally faithfully). But America defines all these things in singular terms – in terms of American self-identity, history, experience and culture, and, more often than not, in terms of American self-interest. So when President Bush, for example, says in his 2002 State of the Union address, 'America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere', he takes it for granted that American ideas of liberty and justice are the only ones that there are. There is no scope for these values to be interpreted and practised in different ways; no sense that the history and experience of other cultures may have generated their own notions of freedom and justice.

We can see this most clearly in terms of human rights issues. The Western, liberal notion of human rights equates it solely with individual political and civil freedoms. The US has reduced it further and redefined it in terms of market forces and 'free trade'. Despite enormous efforts by developing countries for over two decades, the US refuses to acknowledge that the right to food, housing, basic sanitation and the preservation of one's

own identity and culture are far more important than the preservation of market forces. The UN Social Development Summit, held in March 1995, was an attempt to incorporate these concerns and reshape the human rights agenda. But, as in all such attempts, 'global market forces' won the day at the insistence of the US. As the Malaysian political scientist and human rights activist Chandra Muzaffar notes, 'of what use is the human rights struggle to the poverty-stricken billions of the South if it does not liberate them from hunger, from homelessness, from ignorance, from disease?'<sup>2</sup>

But the American definition of human rights is not immutable; it is a moveable feast. Thus, while the US considers the struggle of the Muslims in East Turkestan against China as a 'human rights issue', it rejects the proposition that the struggle of Chechen Muslims against Russia has anything to do with human rights. Muslims happen to be in the majority in both Chechnya and East Turkestan, and are fighting for independence in both places. On the whole, the US has ignored human rights violation in China, because China is a trading partner of increasing importance. But when US intellectual property rights were at risk, human rights came quickly to the fore, and even a trade war was threatened to induce Chinese cooperation. It is because of their narrow definition and shifting nature that US ideas of 'human rights' are frequently described by thinkers of developing countries as the most evolved form of American hyper-imperialism. The US defines human rights as it wishes, then uses the emotive language of human rights as a stick to beat any country that does not fall in line with its economic policies.

The much-vaunted universal precept of 'freedom of the press' gets similar treatment. When it comes to other countries, it is defined as a universal imperative. When freedom of the press ends up with criticism of America, it becomes dangerously subversive. So the US went out of its way to stop Qatar-based Al-Jazeera, the only independent satellite television station in the Arab world, from broadcasting from Afghanistan. It placed

enormous pressure on Qatar to 'rein in' Al-Jazeera, and eventually bombed its office in Kabul. Early in 2002, the US closed down the Palestinian independent weekly *Hebron Times*. The Palestinian Authority let it be known that 'CIA officials had recommended the closure of the paper for being overly critical of Israel and US policy towards the Palestinian people'.<sup>3</sup> The editor of the *Hebron Times*, Walid Amayreh, declared: 'It is lamentable that the United States which values press freedom at home is bullying the Palestinian Authority to suppress freedom in Palestine. What happened to the American First Amendment, or maybe it doesn't apply to non-Americans?'<sup>4</sup>

The uniquely self-interested way in which America defines and redefines human rights, and then uses them as an instrument of its foreign policy, sends a dual message to the world. It suggests that, on the one hand, abiding by the constraints imposed by human rights is mainly for others, not for America; while on the other hand, it delivers a clear message to developing countries: adopt economic policies recommended by America, even at the expense of human rights. Not surprisingly, this approach generates a great deal of hatred for the US.

The power to define also extends to representation: America defines the way in which other people should be seen and characterised. The US is the storyteller to the world. For the most part, the stories it tells are either based on its own experiences or, if appropriated from other cultures, given a specifically American context. This power to define others in terms of American perceptions and interests often leads to the demonisation of entire groups of people. Consider the way in which all Arabs are seen as 'fundamentalists', all those who question the control of science by American corporations as anti-science, or those who question American foreign policy as 'morally bankrupt', 'nihilists' or 'idiots', as we saw in chapter one.

The US operates its foreign policy and relates to the rest of the world on the basis of the four conceptual categories discussed

above. They have become axiomatic for America: they are as integral to American self-identity as the 'self-evident truths' – such as 'all men are created equal' – that the Founding Fathers spoke about (but which they also provided Constitutional warrant to deny in practice). Inasmuch as human beings think with concepts, and move within paradigmatic beliefs, these categories have become as natural to America as breathing. This is why Americans are happy to consume most of the resources of the world, insist on exceptionally cheap petrol, and expect to be provided with an endless variety of cheap, processed food – because America is the cosmos. Just as all stories, all human experiences, are the precursor to the establishment of the US, so all futures are essentially the future of the United States. In the final analysis, America regards the rest of the world as it perceived the Red Indians – as 'natural children' that can be taught and brought to civilisation according to the demands of that American future.

Not surprisingly, the rest of the world begs to differ. Different societies find different objections within the four conceptual categories. For example, existential reasons play an important part in Africa and the poorer parts of Asia and Latin America. Cosmological reasons have generated an intense loathing for America in Europe, particularly in environmental and left-wing circles. Ontological reasons are responsible for anti-American feeling in the Muslim world, as well as in Europe. The power of America to define key notions has generated enormous resentment in China and India and among Muslim people in general. Collectively, the four conceptual planes ensure that enmity towards America is almost as universal as the desire for fresh, unpolluted air.

Clearly, it is not in the world's best interests for this hatred to continue. But can there be transcendence? Hatred, as we have already argued, is a body of opinion and ideas with an emotional baggage of prejudice that operates in an ongoing relationship, as part of a context of interaction. But hatred always

simplifies. So from the point of view of the less-developed world, we have America, the Great Satan, the hyperpower, the motive factor in all that is wrong, that everywhere prevents sensible and responsible self-determination and humane solutions. And we have, from the American point of view, the only answers to the human future: freedom, democracy, liberty, free speech and free market forces, all under attack from evil enemies who are beyond moral persuasion and therefore must be rooted out and killed for the preservation of the good, which is endlessly vulnerable to attack because of its openness and honesty. This is a cartoon version of reality on both sides. But in a world dominated by sound-bites and short attention spans, and tightly controlled media, the cartoon version goes from strength to strength because it looks like a believable, gripping narrative that explains everything. The antidote is to learn to love complexity and refuse to be frightened by stories of bogeymen and monsters under the bed. We have, as a wise man once said, 'nothing to fear but fear itself'. The entire purpose of simplified narratives is to make us, and keep us, afraid of the great big complex world out there.

Hatred makes monolithic monsters of people whose differences include common values, similar aspirations and human feelings. Transcending stereotypes can begin by unpicking one of the most precious of human ideals – that all men and women are created equal – and understanding it in a more complex way. That all are created equal is both a 'self evident' truth and meaningless if it remains 'self evident' rather than explored, questioned and permitted to express difference and diversity. All people are indeed created equal, but live with the actual inheritance of human inequalities, the legacy of real history. Equality of opportunity, equal right to exercise the liberty to be themselves, equal freedom to define and live out their beliefs as they understand them, requires more than just treating everyone the same. The libertarian rhetoric of equal rights and self-evident equal creation can be as doctrinaire, illiberal, intolerant and



inequitable as any ideological system. A world in which people are created equal can be a world of difference, where diversity too has its rights. To do justly and fairly by everyone, to be genuinely equitable to all, it is necessary to be adaptable and to see the same ideal, the same end, achieved through different means in different places. This would be a world that could not be paraphrased in a sound-bite, a world dependent upon the responsibility to learn more about each other, and most of all a world prepared to accept the necessity to defer to other peoples' judgments.

Hatred works through insecurity and paranoia. It creates a political discourse of self-defensive, pre-emptive, aggressive posturing. Where insecurity and paranoia rule, we invite the dialogue of the deaf, negotiation and consultation by mutual harangues, name-calling, vilification and blame. Hatred generates parallel universes of self-justification and the ethos of the bomb-o-gram. Insecurity and paranoia make the first strike the first resort of choice in a political arena that has all the sophistication of a children's playground ruled by the ethics of the bully. Where in such a world is there any hope of transcendence? The culture of violence, the political rhetoric of the bomb-o-gram, has to be opposed everywhere. But it will be opposed only when there is genuine commitment to alternative means of communication. Political arenas and institutions have to become effective and responsive in offering negotiation, accommodation and the capacity to act.

The antithesis of hatred is trust and confidence. The problem at present is that the rest of the world has no trust in America, no confidence in American willingness or ability to use its immense power responsibly, or indeed to define the use of its power for anything except selfish motives, to recognise the common good as anything other than its own self-interest. As the hyperpower that straddles the world militarily, politically, economically and culturally, America is a real presence in the life of all nations of the world. Its wealth and abundance are derived

from its relations with the rest of the world. America cannot, therefore, pick and choose about being engaged or disengaged from the consequences of the global system that sustains its lifestyle. 'No taxation without representation', said the discontented gentlemen of the English colonies who began the American Revolution. The rest of the world, with good reason, might say the same. The more America acts like King George's England in its relations with the rest of the world, the more it legitimates revolutionary malcontents, a world that wishes to secede from America.

Hatred is sustained by wilful, 'knowledgeable ignorance'. Transcending hatred and its perverse expressions is a work of knowledge, of rethinking the limitations of what we have learnt and what we think we know. For centuries, Muslims, Indians, Chinese and many others have been told that theirs are traditional civilisations, stultifying, atrophied and rendered incapable by their traditional world-views. In truth, the West too, and America in particular, has become a traditional civilisation, with all the rigidity and sanctimonious sense of its inherent rightness that it has been so ready to condemn in other civilisations. The challenge for everyone is to make the transition from dead traditionalism – the substitution of the opinions of dead good men for doing one's own thinking – to living tradition, using cherished values and concepts as systems of critical questioning and adaptive devices to create meaningful change. The debates and ideas about revitalising tradition in the non-West are usually invisible and inaudible, but they have a great deal to teach the West. Dead traditionalism closes minds, fossilises ideas and can end by subverting, counteracting and diminishing the very values invoked as most sacred. The West in general, but America in particular, must also face up to this challenge. America demonstrates this character flaw more than any other Western society.

The most hateful of all acts of 'knowledgeable ignorance' is the failure to examine history and to acknowledge that deeds

done to others in the name of virtue have actually done great harm. Rewriting history does not wipe the slate clean; indeed, there are ways in which the postmodern passion for rewriting history seeks to disestablish history entirely, rather than address the problems that it bequeathes to today's world. Just as we cannot rely on the strictures and limitations of dead good men to solve today's dilemmas, but have to do our own thinking about the ideas that they had, so too we have to resolve the legacy of problems inherited from their imperfect actions and the operation of their beliefs. We are all sinners, and have all been sinned against. That does not mean that we should abandon investigating and making judgements about which transgressions were most egregious. It is certainly neither excuse nor rationale for doing nothing about the consequences.

Poverty and despair breed frustration. But terrorism is not always the weapon of the weak. It is often the weapon of the alienated, a parody of power, the reverse aspect of the doctrine that might alone is right. This is no justification for terror. But it does demand that we be as ready to condemn the naked use of power to override the rights of others *in all instances*, just as we do in the case of terrorism. It is as unconscionable to justify civilian casualties in the war on terrorism by saying 'War is hell and in war innocents die; too bad', as it is to argue that because bad consequences follow American foreign policy, then any and all Americans are legitimate targets. In a world that lives by double standards, death is also dealt out by double standards. Everyone becomes blind to the one thing that we should all be able to acknowledge: pain and suffering are always the same. There are no acceptable casualties, no forfeitable, dispensable lives. To allow this pernicious doctrine to rule is precisely what makes acts of terror and the practice of state terrorism possible. If terrorism is a parody of power, it cannot be ended by the application of more power tactics.

There are no quick-fix solutions. It is not a matter of merely changing a few policies in a few places. First, these would be

palliatives; they might buy time but would not prevent new flashpoints from occurring. Secondly, even to change a few policies in a few places is no easy matter. The most obvious policies, American support for Israel for example, would prove to be the hardest, most intractable problems of all. It is an illusion to think that change will be either swift, easy or painless, and even honestly beginning the process cannot guarantee security and safety. But accepting the *scale* of what is wrong with the way we live together in this world can at least provide the commitment to working for change. Without willingness to think, learn, listen and respect our honest differences, making better policy, or effecting meaningful change, cannot happen.

One of *La Haine*'s main faults is the film's refusal to allow its protagonists some complicity in their own behaviour. They see outsiders in monolithic terms – even those who are trying to help are seen as enemies. People who equate all Americans with the state are guilty of the same crime. It is necessary to appreciate that the United States is a very complex country; and that being American is probably experienced in different ways by different people, depending on their race, ethnicity and ancestry. Moreover, the experience of 'being American' is perhaps rather different than other people's experience of being Chinese or German or Russian. So, simply hating America and the uses and abuses of its power is no answer. It has been, and is, the great excuse. Across the developing world, this great excuse leads moderate, reasonable and concerned people to abandon the political process and disengage from social activism, in the conviction that there is no prospect of achieving significant change. While the silent majority are silent, however valid their reasons, they hand the mantle of action to extremists.

There are many varieties and grades of complicity with the growth of extremism. There is complicity within the Muslim world and other Third World societies, and there is also American complicity. But disengaging from the political process is not a problem of the Third World alone. It also afflicts America.

The lobbying of competing vested interests in the US is not a political debate, it is a whorehouse auction. Foreign policy without effective scrutiny at the ballot-box is a recipe for quasi-elected tyranny. If the abuse of power cannot be restrained in a country that calls itself the shining beacon of liberty and democracy, there is even less hope that wiser counsels will prevail where there is neither democracy nor liberty. This is no excuse, in America or elsewhere, for not taking action to make politics relevant, accountable and responsive. In the world at large as well as within the US, the failure to engage with the problem of America hands victory to the extremists, who answer with the only rhetoric that America seems to understand: violence. We have all participated in the creation of a world in which gun law rules unrestrained.

America too, of course, has its voices of conscience, its smaller structures, its dissenting communities, intellectuals, writers and thinkers concerned about the plight of the rest of the world and seeking to limit American hyperpower and hyper-imperialism. Indeed, we have deliberately quoted and mentioned some of these people throughout the book, as essential testimony that America is not a monolith. There is a moral here for America: the rest of the world is not monolithic either. But our decision to concentrate on American critics of America goes further. Firstly, it suggests that there are new constituencies that can be built across national and cultural boundaries, that there are alternatives to the redundant and inherently dangerous face-off of power tactics. There are more choices than simply being on one side or the other of George W. Bush's 'line in the sand'.

Secondly, and even more importantly, the problems between America and the world exist also within America. America is not the world, nor can America be the world – a one-stop answer to all problems. America itself is fractured, troubled, increasingly split into sundered communities of ideas and interests, suffering an identity crisis on exactly the fault-lines and issues that affect its relations with the rest of the world. We have

noted Arthur Schlesinger bemoaning the 'disuniting of America'. Politicians and commentators note the increasingly unbridgeable world-views of the two cultures, liberal and conservative, seeking to pull the nation in opposite directions on issues from abortion to school prayer. We have looked at the rise of Afrocentric education as one among the many permutations of a multicultural vision for re-evaluating identity. And there is the proliferation of survivalist armed militias establishing their own mini-republics in the wilderness, who see the American government as the enemy of freedom, and hate it with a passion; as we have noted, it was the philosophy of the survivalists that motivated the terrorist attack in Oklahoma City. These are the same problems, requiring the same remedies, as those we have pointed to in respect of America's relations with other nations and cultures beyond its shores. America has as much to do to make its own democracy work, to make peace with itself, to mature its own self-identity, as it has to do in coming to terms with the rest of the world.

*La Haine* begins and ends with the story of a man who falls from a skyscraper. On his way down, he keeps saying, 'So far so good, so far so good'. How people fall, the film seems to be saying, how they come to hate, doesn't really matter. What matters is how you land. The key to a viable and sane future for us all lies in transcending hatred. Since America is both the object and the source of global hatred, it must carry the responsibility of moving us all beyond it. America needs to unwrap itself from the flag, and envelop itself in the prayer of St Francis of Assisi:

O Master, grant that I may never seek  
So much to be consoled as to console,  
To be understood as to understand,  
To be loved, as to love, with all my soul.<sup>5</sup>