On 13 May 1958, it may have seemed to many that Latin Americans just did not like the United States anymore. That afternoon, Vice President Richard Nixon, while on a good will mission to South America, headed a motorcade into Caracas, Venezuela’s capital. When the cars slowed down, a crowd rushed around them. For twelve minutes, the crowd rocked the vehicles, bashed them with sticks and iron bars, spat on the windows, and shouted at the passengers. The U.S. delegates and their Venezuelan escorts feared for their lives, and barely escaped. The incident brought a climax to protests that marred every stop on Nixon’s itinerary. Whatever else this was, most witnesses agreed, it was anti-Americanism—unbridled hostility at “the United States.” Costa Rican President José Figueres, like others, tried to define the problem narrowly: “People cannot spit on a foreign policy which is what they meant to do.” Others feared a tide of revolution. As one aide told Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, “The preponderance of U.S. influence in Latin America is being challenged.” Among shaken U.S. diplomats, the general consensus was at least that “real violence” against U.S. representatives was “something new,” a qualitative leap in boldness indicating resentment against nearly every aspect of U.S. influence in Latin America.1

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The stoning of Nixon did at least signal, if anything, the readiness of mass-based
groups to express hostility directly to the U.S. government. Anti-Americanism, to be sure,
had a long history in Latin America. Before the late 1950s, however, critics there were poor,
powerless, or disunited, and the U.S. government could dispatch them with the signing of a
minor treaty or silence them with a few hundred Marines. By 1958, the right conditions—the
growth of U.S. investment and influence in Latin America, Cold War tensions, dictatorial
defeats, urbanization, and the increasing political power of middling groups—lined up to
transform widespread anti-U.S. sentiment into a compelling political strategy. In this
environment, anti-U.S. movements gained momentum, internal coherence, and international
prestige.

This paper, part of a larger study on anti-Americanism in the Spanish-speaking
Caribbean in the 1950s and 1960s, uses the Caracas uprising of 1958 to suggest historical
trends U.S. responses to such hostility. It takes a broad definition of anti-Americanism that
encompasses any expression of a disposition against U.S. power, whether cultural or
political; it seeks in fact to trace the connections between deep-rooted cultural resentment
and more ephemeral political crises. The Caracas episode is more an example of the latter. In
fact, the apparent suddenness of the resentment and violence in Caracas was what made them
of such interest to U.S. policymakers, who responded with a political outlook conditioned by
their own cultural views of Latin America. Anti-Americanism expressed in such angry,
popular ways seemed new in the Western Hemisphere, and Washington’s response presage
its handling of anti-U.S. hostility in Latin America and beyond it.

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2 McPherson, Diplomacy of Defiance: Latin American Anti-Americanism and U.S. Responses
This paper concludes that Caracas began a special period of anti-U.S. diplomacy, one in which several short cycles made up of Latin American outbursts and U.S. responses added up to a lengthier cycle that lasted ten years or so. As one of these short cycles, Caracas opened with a brief questioning by the United States of its role in the world and then quickly closed with a return of a somewhat superficial consensus about the basic benevolence of U.S. influence abroad. The resilience expressed in this U.S. response typified both the promise and the peril of U.S. world leadership.

“Do They Like Us?”

Before and after the Nixon trip, a dilemma shaped U.S. responses to foreign criticism. U.S. citizens longed to know, “Do they like us?” while simultaneously denying that “they” mattered. It was a dilemma that had long existed both in the U.S. public and among U.S. policymakers, but one that intensified after 1945 once the United States became a superpower. It was also a dilemma largely without resolution.

The dilemma consisted of a tension between themes no less momentous than democracy and power. On one hand, U.S. officials and others after 1945 were optimistic about their ability to tap into the instincts of ordinary peoples the world over and sincerely wished to take account of foreign public opinion in carrying out harmonious international affairs. Imbued with a Wilsonian belief that foreign elites suppressed the goodness and common sense of masses, policymakers longed to enjoy a two-way channel of communication with world public opinion. (Interestingly, the adjective “anti-American” first appeared in 1773, along with the nation itself, to qualify a “doctrine” held by the British
parliament and its colonial representatives.) As Samuel Huntington and others have argued, in matters of foreign policy, the United States expected more from itself than Europe did from itself. Peregrine Worsthorne, a British correspondent to the United States, wrote in the 1950s that even “Europe accepts the idea that America is a country with a difference, from whom it is reasonable to demand an exceptionally altruistic standard of behavior.”

Buttressing this idealism were the assumptions that not only were U.S. influences good for foreigners, but that these foreigners wanted them. And so were joined two fundamentals of U.S. national identity—the consent of the governed and the universal potential of U.S. civilization—into a ready rebuttal to anti-Americanism. One scholar characterized the marriage as the “desire to be liked, coupled with the conviction that, as we become better known, we will become better liked.”

On the other hand, for all their idealism, U.S. officials by and large were safe in the knowledge that foreign public opinion had no legal mechanisms to influence their decisions. Even U.S. voters had little say, constitutionally speaking, in foreign policy. If there were, as it was said, no votes in foreign policy issues, there were fewer still in dealing with anti-

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Americanism. And given the great-power struggle for military preponderance in the immediate postwar world, the question of foreign public opinion was a distant priority no matter how true a reflection of U.S. national identity. “Narcissus psychosis” is what Secretary of State Dean Acheson called the occasional U.S. concern with foreign public opinion. Because of such attitudes, noted theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, Soviet and U.S. planners similarly tended to undertake the Cold War without much consultation with their citizens. Journalist James Reston agreed that “the gap between our public pronouncements of equality and our private demands for authority equal to our power leaves us open to charges of hypocrisy.”

This postwar dilemma, pitting the universalism of democratic hopes against the exceptionalism of superpowerdom, most clearly emerged in Europe. It was in Europe that one theme became clear: anti-Americanism as a particular phenomenon of allies. Moscow was obviously a source of foreign criticism after 1945, but to U.S. officials it was state-controlled and mind-numbingly formulaic and it did not constitute the core of what U.S. citizens considered anti-Americanism. The opinion of both European elites and masses, in contrast, mattered far more. Many ordinary Europeans were meeting U.S. citizens—GIs and tourists especially—for the first time after World War II. And because of their still-powerful intellectual resonance in former and remaining colonies, European politicians and media figures could influence much of the world if they turned virulently anti-American as many in

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France had in the 1920s. Most important, anti-Americanism in Europe directly affected the Cold War, argued the New Republic, “not because the aim of life is to be liked by others, but because the rise of anti-Americanism helps the Russians isolate the US from its allies.”

Apart from England, France, Italy and West Germany, after all, few other democracies and market-driven economies were potentially strong U.S. allies. So if anti-Americanism could not be debunked or prevented there, if might not be anywhere.

Paradoxically, these worries came about just as evidence indicated a widespread pro-Americanism in European streets. Life magazine in 1957, for instance, featured views from Europeans about U.S. tourists and GIs. It faithfully repeated criticisms of U.S. cultural insularity, boorishness, and arrogance, but its overall point was that U.S. “envoys-ordinary” were still, after twelve years of peace, “winning foreign hearts” with their generosity, sincerity, religious devoutness, and optimism. Europeans remembered U.S. servicemen who handed out food packages, built schools, or raised money for orphanages. Again and again, European descriptions of U.S. citizens expressed ambivalence through generous if paternalistic language: “just bighearted boys,” “noisy but good-hearted children,” and “delightfully adolescent” were common descriptors. One British editor concluded, “The more

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the Americans can visit here and work here, the better the effect will be on our relationship. Looking at the whole pattern, they unquestionably have been a success.”

In addition, starting in 1948 and continuing through the early 1950s, pathbreaking United Nations polls of foreign public opinion indicated that U.S. citizens were liked by ordinary Europeans. U.S. citizens were perhaps more “domineering” than, say, the Dutch, but overall, respondents thought them “generous” and “practical,” a rating much better than the Soviets got. Polls in the following decades consistently confirmed European goodwill both toward U.S. citizens and, to a lesser but still substantial extent, U.S. policies. These results must have been a relief to U.S. officials unsure of what to make of the increased incidence of anti-U.S. demonstrations by small groups.

Faced with this evidence of continuing small-scale protests amid general agreement with U.S. social and political leadership, many reflected on the passing of the torch of world leadership and the worldwide criticism that inevitably runs alongside it. As James Reston wrote, the United States would have to contend with the jealousies of Britain and France under any circumstances: “This is their century to be annoyed.”

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10 Circumscribing anti-Americanism in France, for example, Richard Kuisel writes that “anti-Americanism during the Cold war, in my interpretation, did not represent the French and was in its most polemical form essentially the product of leftist Parisian, especially marxisant and Christian, literati and of the Communist party,” in Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 16.

11 Reston, “Why We Irritate Our Allies,” p. 29.
eggs which John Bull used to get.” The Saturday Review argued a more prescient, but equally common theme—that Western European criticisms “are not specifically criticisms of or complaints about America. They are criticisms of the modern world.”12 This surrender to the apparent truism that with great power comes great animosity set forth a common U.S. response to anti-Americanism.

U.S. observers in and out of government, in other words, were making of anti-Americanism a distinct issue. They understood that allies did have sincere grievances against the United States even if some could use them for political purposes. Many also appreciated that anti-Americanism was not communism itself but at best a “counterpart” to it, as Reston said. Because anti-Americanism was a legitimate sentiment among allies, U.S. observers were hurt at the core of their national identity and could not help but express dismay. “It irks us Americans to think that Europeans don’t like us,” admitted America. “We feel that anyone in his right mind ought to like us, or at least understand us . . . After all, aren’t we the most ‘normal’ people in the world?”13 The Catholic World answered its own question, “Do they like us?” with resignation: “The Europeans do not love us . . . The postwar illusion of European-American friendship has been dispelled.”14

In the late 1950s, negative sentiment seemed to be spilling out from Europe and into the developing and decolonizing worlds, which largely overlapped. Despite scattered criticism against U.S. policies, soldiers, and tourists, however, there was relatively little


organized mass hostility in the streets before 1958. While reporting on small protests against U.S. soldiers’ behavior in Japan and Taiwan in 1957, *Commonweal* noted that there were “few incidents” like those. “The surprising thing is rather that the record of our troops abroad has been so good.” At the same time, *Newsweek* provided a worldwide map of “the feeling about us” and concluded that in every region—save for East Asia, where hostility against U.S. bases had recently flared up—relations between foreigners and U.S. citizens abroad were either “better” or the “best ever.”

*Newsweek*’s map from 1957 did not even include Latin America. The disdain with which the Eisenhower administration looked upon the region made it likely that Washington would pay little attention to anti-Americanism there short of a crisis. Mostly, U.S. observers believed that Latin American statesmen who criticized U.S. policy were divorced from popular will and tethered to European tastes. While reporting Argentine leader Juan Perón’s repeated confrontations with U.S. power, for instance, U.S. magazines focused on the details of “hate-the-yanquis campaign[s]” through ambassadors, official press, and labor unions rather than on the sympathetic reception of that propaganda among Argentines. When foreigners spoke of U.S. cultural mediocrity, U.S. observers were quick to retort. “It is hard to take the charge of illiteracy with equanimity,” wrote one journalist who returned from Brazil in 1951, “from a nation in which countless millions, indeed a majority of the population, are still illiterate.” He resurrected the anti-Arielist charge of earlier in the century, according to which Latin Americans were under the negative influence of European intellectual snobbery. “The French have been sending cultural ambassadors, professors,

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writers, and so on, to Brazil for nearly a hundred years. Brazilians have been going to France to study for that long. Culture is to Brazilians . . . synonymous with France, and to a lesser degree with England.” The cry of “go home” gathering steam in Latin America, others noted, was allegedly born in postwar Germany. And as for communists in the region, their propaganda also merely parroted that of the Soviet Bloc in the eyes of many U.S. citizens. As a measure of Latin America’s distant importance, in 1957, when the United States Information Agency (USIA) had been taking worldwide polls of attitudes towards the United States for two years already, an internal memorandum concluded that negative attitudes about the United States did of course exist there, but that it was unnecessary “to bring them up and make issues of them, even for purposes of refutation.”

Caracas

The riots against Vice President Nixon in Venezuela were, as one State Department official said days later, “the first time that minority groups have been able to exploit these issues [of resentment toward the United States] to incite actual violence against an important American representative. This is something new in Latin America.” Nixon’s trip did convey the impression that anti-Americanism in Latin America enjoyed popular appeal. However, once again the dilemma of the U.S. response re-emerged: recognizing Latin American’s

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democratic right to rebel was one thing, but admitting anything near “U.S. imperialism” would place U.S. power in jeopardy. The vice president reflected a few years after the event that “Caracas was a much-needed shock treatment which jolted us out of dangerous complacency.”  

A shock to the body, perhaps, but not to the mind. The ordeal triggered no deep questioning of the impact of U.S. influence in Latin America but simply revitalized a public relations approach to anti-Americanism. The U.S. response, it seemed to Washington, had to be more culturally sensitive, more accurate, and faster.

“Of all the trips I made abroad as Vice President the one I least wanted to take was my visit to South America in 1958 . . . because I thought it would be relatively unimportant and uninteresting.” So began Nixon’s memoirs of the trip, reflecting the complacency of the Eisenhower administration toward the Hemisphere. As the trip’s planners began to warn him that he would be beleaguered by protesters, however, Nixon grew interested. A product of the middle class himself, the vice president seemed genuinely distressed by the solidifying of anti-Americanism among new social strata. He wished “to meet the opinion makers and people in all walks of life”: the “university students, labor leaders, editors, and other opinion makers . . . I was determined to meet and answer head on some of the attacks which were currently being made against the United States in Latin America.”

Before Caracas, the trip was generally safe and even pleasant at times. Pro-U.S. demonstrators usually outnumbered anti-U.S. ones, and foreign leaders seemed pleased to receive such a high dignitary. Protesters did show up in every country Nixon went to, but they were small groups who did little more than burn photos of the vice president and hand

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out anti-imperialist pamphlets. In the repressive regime of Paraguay, students were arrested not for anti-Americanism but for shouting the anti-government slogan “Long Live Liberty!” Nixon the stern Quaker could even charm crowds when he really tried. In front of ten thousand Ecuadoreans cheering “Viva Nixon!” he walked onto a fútbol field and practiced awkwardly with a ball, joking that he never could use his head.²¹

Privately, however, Nixon and aides noticed the growing visibility of anti-Americanism and disparaged it as a weakness in Latin American political culture. They were incensed at hecklers who called the vice president a “shark” and a “pirate.” To Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Roy Rubottom, a first debate with students in Montevideo “began the beat of the drums all the way up the line for the rest of our trip.”²² Nixon personally showed little sympathy for counterparts who were trapped between their duty to protect him and their need to soothe the anger of the crowds. The chief of police in Lima, Peru, for instance, advised Nixon not to show up at the city’s leftist San Marcos University, yet “at the same time said, in effect: please don’t quote me—publicly.” Nixon had to lay his head on his pillow one night while crowds outside his hotel chanted “Fuera Nixon, Fuera Nixon, Fuera Nixon [Get Out Nixon].” Stoned by students the following day after he disregarded security warnings, Nixon wagged his finger at them and shouted back, “You are cowards, you are afraid of the truth! You are the worst kind of cowards.”²³

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²¹ Marvin Zahnister, “A Diplomatic Pearl Harbor? Richard Nixon’s Goodwill Mission to Latin America in 1958,” Diplomatic History 13 (March 1989): 179. The most complete public reporting at the time was William Hines’s “The Venezuela Story,” Washington Evening Star, 25-29 May 1958. For internal government narratives, see J. M. Perry to Terry Sanders; Viron Vaky to Sanders; and Jackson Wilson to Sanders, all 14 May 1958, folder Vice President Nixon’s Trip—General, box 24, lot 62D31, RG 59, NARA.

²² Rubottom interview by Luter, 22 December 1969.

²³ Nixon, Six Crises, p. 238.
Venezuela brought together many of the conditions that made Latin America so propitious for a mass-based anti-U.S. incident. First, Venezuelan democracy was uncertain in May 1958. The previous January, a military junta had taken power after the overthrow of dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez, whom the Eisenhower administration had decorated and now harbored, and a legitimate government had yet to be elected. Second, the U.S. government imposed restrictions on crude oil imports from Venezuela, contradicting its free trade ideology and crippling Venezuela’s comparative trade advantage. Third, small groups of communists operated in a political atmosphere brimming with newfound freedom, and the martyrdom they carried over from the previous regime gave them a prestige far beyond their numbers.

Most immediately, however, security forces were ineffective. During the overthrow of Pérez Jiménez, Venezuelans hunted down his secret police in the streets. In the months that followed, police officers became wary of keeping the peace in any situation, especially to protect U.S. representatives. The Venezuelan junta oscillated between warning the U.S. delegation not to come and reassuring it that there would be no danger. Rubottom arranged to make Caracas the last stop on the trip because he knew “that there would be a critical security problem.” Nixon, however, heightened his own peril by disregarding the CIA’s warnings about assassination plots and refusing to line up police along the seventeen-
kilometer road from the airport to downtown. The vice president’s party even requested an open car. The response from Caracas: “Are you people out of your minds?”

The Nixon delegation’s experience in the capital on Tuesday the 13th—a day of bad luck, according to Latin American tradition—changed from insult to terror in a matter of minutes. As Nixon and his wife Pat deplaned, one embassy staffer recalled, “the waves and broad smiles of the Nixons quickly disappeared.” The banners on the tarmac and the balcony were less than welcoming: “Go home, Nixon,” “Tricky Dick, Go Home,” “Go away, Nixon,” and “Out, dog,” they read. The crowd that carried them—according to one journalist, a group of five hundred, about 90 percent of whom were teenagers—whistled, hooted, and blew on razzberries—all expressions of contempt in Venezuela. How deep the hostility ran became all too clear when the spitting began. “It was the damnedest thing I ever saw in my life,” said one witness. “I thought it was a new trick,” Nixon recalled, “someone busting water bags on us.” “Where is this coming from?” thought a military attaché. “Then I saw the people from behind the [Venezuelan] soldiers. They had cocked their heads back and were spitting up into the air. They weren’t spitting on the soldiers—they were spitting over them.”

Aides pushed the vice president into a car—one with a roof on it—as the Venezuelan foreign minister wiped spit off his guest’s suit and face. “Don’t bother,” Nixon shot at him.

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27 Olson, “‘You Can’t Spit,’” p. 33.

“I am going to burn these clothes as soon as I can get out of them.” The embarrassment was nothing compared to the upcoming terror. Nixon recalled the moment when, minutes later, his motorcade ground to a halt in the working-class suburb of Catia. “Out of the alleys and the side streets poured a screaming mob of two to three hundred, throwing rocks, brandishing sticks and pieces of steel pipe . . . Those who had no weapons used their feet and bare fists to beat upon the car. The spit was flying so fast that the driver turned on his windshield wipers.”

“I saw the attack from a truck 15 feet in front of Nixon’s Cadillac,” said one correspondent soon after. Even the “expression of silent sidewalk on-lookers—those who did not demonstrate—were icily hostile.”29 After what seemed an eternity to the passengers, the motorcade’s Venezuelan drivers gunned their cars away from the crowds, by chance avoided a planned visit to a sacred tomb where six thousand protesters awaited, and headed straight for the U.S. embassy. The Nixon trip to South America was over. The violence had completely overshadowed its good will.

Once Nixon was back in Washington, many refused to confront the evidence that the massive anti-Americanism displayed in Caracas was indeed widespread. They preferred to see anti-U.S. sentiment as a subset of communism, and not the other way around. J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI publicly fingered the small groups of communists who had printed propaganda and organized demonstrations against Nixon. “Red”-obsessed publications such as U.S. News & World Report used a traditional anti-communist language of forethought and coordination. Chaotic protesters, it wrote, supposedly used “clocklike precision,” acted “as

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29 Unnamed correspondent cited in Bill Brammer to Senator Lyndon Johnson, 18 June 1958, folder Reaction to Nixon’s South American Trip, box 602, Subject Files 1958, Senate Papers, Lyndon B. Johnson Library; other quotations from Nixon, Six Crises, pp. 255, 256-257.
though on signal,” and “methodically” ripped a U.S. flag from Nixon’s car.\(^3^0\) As usual, charges of gunboat diplomacy left Secretary Dulles unruffled, and he supported Eisenhower’s decision to put the U.S. fleet on alert. Dulles fell back on his patrician and paternalistic instincts and warned against “a tremendous surge in the direction of popular government by peoples who have practically no capacity for self-government and indeed are like children in facing this problem.”\(^3^1\) Still others concluded—more accurately, but still neglecting deeper issues—that the only problem had been the incompetence of Venezuela’s security forces.\(^3^2\)

For the U.S. public and policymakers as a whole, however, anti-Americanism was emerging as a distinct issue for three reasons. First, it simultaneously became a worldwide issue, which increased its visibility at the White House far beyond what Caracas alone would have. The day of the Nixon disaster coincided with a burst of other anti-U.S. protests in Lebanon, Algeria, and Burma. “Another of the worst days of our lives,” wrote Eisenhower’s secretary in her diary once the sun mercifully set on 13 May.\(^3^3\) The anti-colonial aspect of many of the protests was too obvious to ignore. “Does the rest of the world hate the United


\(^{32}\) Robert Cushman interview by Thomas Soapes, 4 March 1977, DDEL.

States?” asked Newsweek. At the very least, the magazine now included Latin America in its world overviews of anti-U.S. hostility.34

Second, there was little evidence that international communists had orchestrated Caracas or any other South American protest. Aides did suggest to Nixon and Eisenhower that they should emphasize in public that “the abuse to which the Vice President and Mrs. Nixon were subjected was due solely to the organization and inspiration of an ugly international conspiracy.”35 But the same aides concurred in private that communist groups were small and clumsily dwelled on international issues rather than on more compelling national grievances. Protesters also lacked coordination between and even within Latin American countries. Even local communist parties were “surprised by the virulence of the students’ reaction.”36 In fact, many in the United States admitted, there seemed to be no conspiracy at all. One State Department official conceded to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 19 May that “there is no evidence at present of a Soviet effort to effect a coordinated worldwide demonstration of anti-Americanism coinciding with Vice President Nixon’s visit to Latin America.” Recalling not only South America but Algeria, Burma, and

34 “How Deep ‘Hate-America’,” Newsweek, 26 May 1958, p. 29.

35 William Snow to Dulles, 15 May 1958, folder Vice President Nixon’s Trip—General, box 24, lot 62D31, RG 59, NARA. The statements themselves are in “Remarks by the President and the Vice President at Mats Terminal on the Return of the Vice President from his South American Tour,” 15 May 1958, folder Vice President’s Return 5/15/58, box 26, Speech Series, Eisenhower Papers as President, 1953-1961, DDEL. Senator Homer Capeheart (R-IN) blamed “a 100 percent Russian penetration.” Senator Bourke Hickenlooper (R-IA) said the trip revealed a “world-wide pattern of Communist stimulus,” both cited in Peter Smith, Talons of the Eagle: Dynamics of U.S.-Latin American Relations (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 140.

36 Henry Hoyt to Rubottom, Snow, and Bernbaum, 19 June 1958, folder Nixon Trip—Follow-up 1958, box 8, Office Files of Henry Hoyt, lot 60D513, RG 59, NARA.
additional incidents in Lebanon and Indonesia, he found “no marked step-up in Moscow’s propaganda immediately prior to the events in these areas.”

The third reason why anti-Americanism took on sudden importance was because it altered domestic U.S. politics. Nixon was ever alert to his chances in the 1960 presidential election. He returned from Caracas eager to balance his vigorous defense of U.S. policies with his attempts to convince the common man in Latin America to embrace U.S. friendship rather than communism. “We must all take the line that this trip was a plus,” Nixon urged Dulles. Eisenhower did his best. The president orchestrated a hero’s welcome for him at the airport in Washington, and indeed U.S. citizens seemed to rally behind their beleaguered vice president. Nixon himself boasted in *Six Crises* that, one month after the trip, a “Gallup Poll showed me leading Adlai Stevenson for the first time, and running neck-and-neck against John F. Kennedy [both contenders for the Democratic nomination]. It was the high point of my political popularity up to that time.” Nixon also muffled rumors that the CIA and State Department were blaming one another for failing to predict the riots, thus avoiding a potential political embarrassment. Yet trouble continued. Long-time Democrat Adolf Berle called it the “Venezuelan Waterloo.” Immediately after Caracas, Senator Wayne Morse (D-
OR), a prominent figure in inter-American relations, called for hearings in Congress that came to little but annoyed the White House.40

As a result of anti-Americanism’s new resonance, the press experimented with a tone of lofty open-mindedness. The Des Moines Register warned that “the anti-American demonstrations around the world cannot be passed off as just the unavoidable price of power and leadership. Americans need to be aware of the often justifiable causes of discontent with their policies and to try to adjust these policies accordingly.” The New York Times called for calm while the United States faced “a test of maturity, statesmanship and common sense.” Even The Nation was pleased that Hoover was in the minority and that “public opinion has not veered toward isolationism.”41

Bouncing Back

Anti-Americanism, thus framed as a rite of passage for a democratic superpower, sparked a burst of activity. Eisenhower officials wondered how to showcase a fresh, smiling attitude while doing as little as possible to alter the asymmetries of U.S. power in Latin America. They abandoned their fondness for psychological warfare in the face of such a manifestly civilian discontent. The post-Caracas situation, rather, presented them with the opportunity to try out modern marketing metaphors to win what they considered a somewhat vapid but necessary world popularity contest.


The most basic change in the administration was one of attitude, not policy. Upon the vice president’s return from Caracas, a reporter asked Nixon which “South American liberation movement” he preferred. Was it the rumba, the samba, or the cha-cha-cha? he joked. Nixon gently reproved the reporter for his levity.\footnote{Nixon speech to National Press Club, 21 May 1958, folder The Vice President 1957-1958, box 353, lot 62D92, Public Affairs Subject Files, Executive Office, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, RG 59, NARA.} The Operations Coordinating Board (OCB), which helped set the agenda of the National Security Council (NSC), similarly reported that “our failure to win understanding and support from the Latin Americans was due to our not being sufficiently mindful of Latin American interests, emotional prejudices and sensitivities.” Even Eisenhower lamented the “superior attitude” of the United States and spoke of “the vital necessity to avoid giving rise to injured feelings by the other American Republics.”\footnote{OCB special report to NSC, 28 November 1958, \textit{FRUS} 1958-1960, 5: 54; NSC meeting notes, folder 396th Meeting of NSC February 12, 1959, box 11, NSC Series, Eisenhower Papers as President, 1953-1961, DDEL.}

This new premium placed on “attitudes,” “feelings,” and “sensitivities” may have sounded impalpable to some, but at the very least it opened the door to appreciating the complex, overlapping emotional dualities of anti-Americanism. A National Intelligence Estimate, for instance, noted how “Latin American attitudes toward the US” were “ambivalent”: they expressed “envy by disparaging US materialism”; they admired U.S. stability and democracy but were “keenly aware of imperfections”; they wanted hemispheric solidarity yet insisted on each country’s uniqueness; they wanted U.S. protection without having to contribute.\footnote{National Intelligence Estimate 80/90-58, “Latin American Attitudes toward the US,” \textit{FRUS} 1958-1960, 5: 69, 70.}
The Nixon trip notably reinvigorated the practice of drawing up lists of Latin American “grievances” and “attitudes” toward the United States. These lists seemed to inform every other report going through the White House for the next decade or so. While Nixon was still in Caracas, one Department of State memorandum drew up nineteen of these items, many of which were economic but many of which recognized the importance of emotional issues: “belief that the U.S. does not pay attention to Latin American problems,” “feeling that Latin America is a step-child so far as the U.S. is concerned,” “cultural and religious differences,” “vestigial remembrances of U.S. military intervention,” “the race question,” and so on. Synthesizing the results of such lists, one official wrote Rubottom that “this nationalism is anti-American for various reasons, most of them irrational and unjustified. The problem it poses is primarily a psychological one, not to be measured in financial terms nor answered with dollars.”

The lists themselves suggested a lack of self-criticism and direction in Washington. The point of the oft-repeated exercise was unclear. Lists most likely served to train Foreign Service Officers, Agency for International Development staff, and Peace Corps Volunteers to be sensitive to—or at least anticipate—certain lines of criticism. Otherwise, drawing lists seemed to offer reassurance that grievances could all be written down on a few pages and therefore circumscribed as a concern. Lists did not differentiate between the behaviors of

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46 Joseph Silberstein to Terry Sanders, 14 May 1958, folder Vice President Nixon’s Trip—General, box 24, lot 62D31, RG 59, NARA; John Dreier to Rubottom, 27 May 1958, folder NSC Miscellaneous 1958, box 8, Office Files of Henry A. Hoyt, 1956-58, lot 60D513, RG 59, NARA.
U.S. civilians and military personnel or between criticisms of U.S. society and policy, and thus highlighted the U.S. tendency to define anti-Americanism as a sweeping prejudice. Just as anti-Americanism said as much about critics as they did about the United States, so lists said as much about the list-makers as about anybody else.

Regardless, anti-Americanism had earned its right to be analyzed. And although, as Newsweek said, “anti-Americanism is bigger than any government agency,” the USIA would take on the task. And what a task: the U.S. government’s propaganda arm abroad already had a track record for not quieting anti-Americanism but, on the contrary, for bringing it out. In the decade before Caracas, over fifty USIA centers or similar public diplomacy institutions in twenty-one countries had been bombed, burned, or sacked. Usually presenting literally a façade of U.S. ideals and achievements behind its windowpanes, these centers made for tempting targets. In the Eisenhower administration, the USIA also fought an uphill battle against aides such as Dulles, who figured that ambassadors should be unconcerned with uninformed masses and simply deal with counterparts. Moreover, the USIA’s ongoing “barometer reports” bypassed vocal minorities by consistently showing “good” overall worldwide views of the United States far outweighing “bad” ones.

USIA director George Allen after the Caracas trip went around meeting rooms making a candid presentation on “The Image of America.” In it, he warned against abusing superpower status. “Our chief problem is to grow up psychologically. We continue to act like adolescents. We boast about our richness, our bigness, and our strength. We talk about our

47 “How Deep ‘Hate-America,’” p. 34; McWilliams, “Anti-Americanism Updated,” p. 489.

tall buildings, our motor cars, and our income. Nations, like people, who boast can expect others to cheer when they fail.” He also made prescient observations. “There is considerable concern in many quarters lest they be swamped by American ‘cultural imperialism’—by a way of life characterized by Coca Cola, cowboys and comics.” Allen’s recommendations, however, were a mix of the reassuring—“the U.S. Government and people should relax, not into complacency but into realism”—and the petty—“if American tourists must chew gum, they should be told at least to chew it as inconspicuously as possible.” Eisenhower was not surprised. Turks, in his experience, resented U.S. soldiers for enjoying “all the women and all the wine.” Nevertheless, he took Allen’s presentation seriously and said the USIA needed to “know how we stand in the eyes of the world.”

Part of that knowledge would come from polls. By 1958, the USIA and other organizations had professional local pollsters who could query hundreds of people in a few days in major Latin American cities, all in Spanish, and supposedly without the appearance of working for the U.S. government. The Nixon fiasco sparked a frenzy of poll-taking. A “flash” survey right after the affair indicated a drop of 21 percent in the opinions of the United States held by Caracans. Worse, while negative opinions were still in the minority, Latin Americans were convinced that they were in the majority. Months later a more thorough poll concluded that “irritation at the United States . . . is very widespread. Large


numbers say that their opinion of the U.S. has recently gone down.” No previous data could confirm whether these opinions were indeed on the rise. The Spanish-language edition of Life, for its part, responded to the Nixon trip by conducting its first ever survey. It found that Latin Americans were still greatly opposed to communism but also firmly on the side of neutralism. “The U.S. must conclude that the recent deterioration of its relations with the Latin American peoples may be even more serious than the Nixon affair indicated.” Months later, according to more polls, levels of hostility remained high. Department of State pollsters assessed gloomily that “during the next few years there is little prospect that Latin American attitudes toward the United States will change substantially for the better.” Resorting to polls proved risky business as results could be undesired and unsettling.

Eisenhower officials, however, bounced back, confident about their ability to turn around Latin American public opinion. They knew they were walking a tightrope, partly strung by the polls themselves, which fostered an addictive need to improve the numbers for their own sake. Here the superpower’s dilemma between democracy and power returned: if the Eisenhower administration “gave up” on being liked and did nothing, it appeared neglectful or complacent. If it tried to “defeat” anti-Americanism through economic or military aid, it seemed a briber or a bully. Thankfully, polls, for all their alarm, also brought


good news. *Life* observed “that the Latin American peoples still consider the United States a ‘good neighbor’.” It also concluded, perhaps with not a little self-delusion, that “the Nixon tour did more good than harm.”

No matter the poll results, Nixon and others had been long open to greater cultural exchanges and economic aid, and they were more so now. In meetings with the Cabinet and the NSC, Nixon reiterated his view that the “laboring classes” were now major political actors in Latin America. He indicated that some Latin American economic grievances, such as that against U.S. resistance to commodity agreements and public funds, should be considered. Producers of raw materials were especially vulnerable to world recessions, after all. “Whenever we sneeze, they catch pneumonia,” said Nixon. In the political field, he counseled giving dictators a firm handshake and democrats a warm embrace. Finally, he suggested that educational exchange programs should be “at least doubled.”

Newly declassified portions of NSC meeting notes suggest that officials planned to “organize” pro-U.S. groups among students and intellectuals, who would then be “bought.” Soon, the administration took steps in all these directions. They also suddenly lent an ear to Presidents Juscelino Kubitschek of Brazil and Alberto Lleras Camargo of Colombia, who seized the moment and proposed a program of public investment that later became Operation Pan-America, the genesis of the Alliance for Progress.

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54 Cabinet meeting handwritten notes by Art Minnich, 16 May 1958, folder C-45 (1) May 16 and 23, 1958, box 5, Cabinet Series, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records 1952-1961, White House Office, DDEL.

55 NSC meeting notes, 23 May 1958, folder 366th Meeting of NSC May 22, 1958, box 10, NSC Series, Eisenhower Papers as President, 1953-1961, DDEL. For details on what was done, see Stephen Rabe, *Eisenhower & Latin America: The Foreign Policy of Anti-Communism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North
Overall, however, U.S. resilience carried the day in the face of foreign criticism. Throughout the Nixon trip and the frank White House debates and policy changes that followed, the denial of imperialism persisted. It characterized every government agency, Democrats and Republicans, officials and journalists, public and private comments. When a university official from Mexico wrote to Nixon in July 1958 to complain that the United States held Latin America “tied to its imperialist yoke,” State Department officials called the suggestion “malicious.” Foreign criticism created tension among U.S. observers, but not remorse. “Our failures are principally psychological,” concluded Rubottom in August 1958. “We should not, through excessive reluctance to enter into the argument or a feeling of guilt, appear to accept the prevalent Latin American argument that it is entirely our fault that they have failed to solve their problem.”

The stoning of Richard Nixon and the anxiety it produced in the United States foreshadowed the coming decade of mass hostility. But rather than force the U.S. government into a brooding, reactionary stance, anti-Americanism in the Caribbean met with a relatively buoyant atmosphere in Washington, in which U.S. officials openly discussed others’ perceptions of them. To pursue Nixon’s metaphor of Caracas as a “shock treatment,” U.S. policymakers were indeed stunned, and many responded with knee-jerk alarm. However, they were also electrified by a firm sense of U.S. national identity. The ambivalence of anti-Americanism, too, was already apparent to U.S. policymakers in 1958. Polls told them that Latin Americans were envious of U.S. standards of living and that they

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56 Emphasis in original; Rubottom to Gerard Smith, 11 August 1958, folder Latin America—General 1958, box 7, Office Files of Henry A. Hoyt, 1956-1958, lot 60D513, RG 59, NARA.
still looked to Washington for Cold War leadership. And if anything, Latin Americans had stoned Nixon because he represented the broken promises of U.S. free market modernization that they wanted realized as much as U.S. citizens did. Just as the political expression of anti-Americanism in Latin America had become, over more than a century, increasingly popular, literate, and organized, so U.S. responses to it had solidified into a consensual, consistent, and coherent defense.