

America Against America (USA)

Author: Wang Huning

Release date: 1991

*Note: As a reminder to [issues6](#), against **is** much more appropriate than [Oppose](#) in the original project name, so I will use America against America as its English translation in the future.*

Preface

From late August 1988, I was invited to the United States for a six-month academic visit. During that time, I visited more than thirty cities and nearly twenty universities, did research in dozens of government and private sectors, and discussed the United States with a wide range of Americans and foreigners. I documented my daily discussions, visits, and observations, and this book was born.

Obviously, I studied and viewed the United States as a society as an observer rather than an investigator, and I can say that my visit in the United States had a purpose, which was to get to know this number one capitalist country in more detail and in a more realistic way. We should look at it as a history, a culture, a people, a set of institutions, and not as a few abstract dogmatic concepts. In my book *Comparative Political Analysis*, published in 1987, I proposed a design for analyzing socio-political movements using a historically-socially-culturally conditioned landscape. In that book, it was by and large only a macro-framework design. This time, too, an attempt is made to use this approach to analyze a political community, the United States, specifically.

The fundamental purpose of this book, therefore, is not to explore the diverse dimensions, the colorful landscapes, and the intricate movements it depicts, but to explore the political and social management processes of American society, and although the book attempts to cover as many dimensions and topics as possible, its analysis remains consistent with these themes. The development and flux of a society is inseparable from its politics and the way it is managed. It can be said that what kind of politics and social management there is, is what kind of social development there is. It is difficult to analyze and understand the United States without this logic. I just want to answer a simple H0 question by dissecting the multiple dimensions of society: "Why is there an America?" This question is simple, but it is far beyond my ability to do so, and I know it well.

The approach of this book is to analyze American society using a framework of historical-social-cultural conditions without considering any of these factors in isolation. Human social life, political life, and cultural life are infinitely intricate and intertwined networks. It would be difficult to analyze and view one of these issues in isolation or simply.

Since it is a concrete application of the above method, it requires careful and vivid observation, documentation, and analysis of all aspects of a society. That is why this book is more about concrete portrayal and factual recording than abstract reasoning. Any abstract reasoning can only be derived from observation and analysis of facts, and for abstract reasoning to be convincing, it is important that there are no convincing facts to lay the foundation. Sometimes one needs to do a kind of work, which is to provide the opportunity to think, rather than the conclusion of thinking. Of course, the various real-life accounts in this book follow my thinking and conclusions, but I have also tried to make it possible to provide opportunities for others to think.

This book takes the United States as the object of analysis, because the United States, like China, constitutes a special phenomenon of humanity in the twentieth century, which can be called the "American phenomenon". The "Chinese phenomenon" is why this ancient civilization with a long history of more than 2,000 years has declined in the modern era. Why is it lagging behind the modern nations of the world? This has caused generations of scholars and scholars to think hard. The "American phenomenon" has a different dimension, and people wonder why this nation, with a short history of only two hundred years, has become the world's leading developed country today. I believe that scholars living in the twentieth century have a responsibility to study these two phenomena. As a Chinese scholar, he has a dual responsibility to study both the "Chinese phenomenon" and the "American phenomenon. In this way, he can better understand himself and the world, and better explore the path to China's strength.

America Against America is probably a strange and rather puzzling title for a book. My intention with this title is to show that America is not a simple homogeneous whole that can be dismissed with a single sentence. In the old days, when people started from a dogmatic view of America as a mere "exploitation of surplus value," a "dictatorship of the bourgeoisie," and nothing more, then the reality of America would

oppose this ominous "America ", the rigid conception of the United States. Now there is another extreme, some people imagine the United States as a rich paradise, perfect, then the reality of the United States is also opposed to such "America", idealized America. Including American society itself, it has its affirmative and negative forces, and wherever affirmative forces can be found, negative forces can be found. This is the basic meaning of America Against America.

America Against America, shows the basic movement of society. But wherever there is a human invention, it cannot be ironclad, and it is not and cannot be possible to subsume a society all under one established concept. *America Against America*, indicates the book's attempt to reveal what factors in American society constitute each of these two relative quantities of for. We cannot say in one sentence what America is, to say, but only: "America against America".

The more one delves into the study of America, the more one gets rid of the sketched image, the easier it is to discover this inherent contradiction in American society. As a scholar who studies a society as an object of scientific research, one should not paint one's object with a rose color, and certainly not with a coal gray color. Rather, one should objectively identify the pros and cons of the society. In general, scholars should be critical of what exists, which is the most important motivation for social development. In the case of the United States, I hold such a critical attitude. It is worth noting that the mechanisms that exist in American society, both good and bad, are the product of the historical-social-cultural conditions of that society, and they exist only in that environment, and cannot simply be applied to other societies. In this regard, it is not possible to simply imitate them between different countries.

The United States is a large country. In this big country, cite one image of America to cite an image of America in opposition to it. As is generally believed, the United States is a rich country, indeed, many people living in this place are very rich, rich enough to own a private jet airliner is not uncommon. The majority of the population can also be said to be living in "peace and happiness", ordinary people generally have a small car and other equipment. But if this is America, then one can immediately paint a different picture of America. At the University of California, Berkeley, there is a place called "People's Park". The so-called "People's Park" was originally an empty lot on Berkeley's campus, but it was later occupied by homeless people. When I

was there, there were hundreds of homeless people dressed in rags who spent the night there every day, some with small tents made of rags, others with newspapers on the ground, sleeping on the ground. The dirty, filthy, listless appearance of these Americans did not fit the concept of America in any way. Church charities came to give out breakfast each morning, and the university swimming pool was regularly opened for them to wash their bodies. On the night Bush was inaugurated as the 41st president, I saw homeless people sleeping in the doorways of the buildings lining Bush Street in San Francisco. Isn't this America? Is this America? I'm afraid I can't answer that with a single word.

The United States is also generally considered to be a Western democracy, and a typical Western democracy at that, and Americans are proud of it. The Constitution, election campaigns, separation of powers, citizen participation in politics, and so on and so forth show one side of this system, but on the other side, can each commoner really dominate the politics of this country? My analysis in this book shows that the powerful groups that dominate politics are above the common people. The constraints of private property on political democracy in the capitalist system of the United States cannot be ignored. Even American scholars have said that a political democracy cannot function properly where the differences in economic power are so great that one group can use non-political means to determine the woes of another group. A true political democracy must therefore involve the right of the governed to control economic policy through their representatives." (Sydney Hooker, *Reason, Social Myths, and Democracy*, p. 286) Economic decision-making in the United States is largely controlled by private consortia. Is this democratic? Is it undemocratic? I'm afraid it can't be answered in a single word.

Paradoxes like these abound. It can be said that the United States is a rich country, but it can also be said that the United States is a country full of poor people; it can be said that the United States is a typical Western democracy, but it can also be said that the United States is a not so democratic country; it can be said that the United States is a country with advanced education, but it can also be said that the United States has a lot of education problems; it can be said that the United States is a country where equality is paramount, but it can also be said that the United States is not so equal; it can be said that the United States is a stable We can say that the United States is a stable and developing society, but we can also say that the United

States is a crisis-ridden society. My idea is to oppose the imaginary America with the factual America.

The United States is only one capitalist country, and it does not represent all Western capitalist societies. I simply want to use the case study of the United States to promote our understanding of capitalism and, indirectly, socialism as well.

One hundred and fifty years ago, Marx and Engels declared in *The Communist Manifesto*: "With the development of big industry, the very basis on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates its products is itself dug out from under its feet. It produces first of all its own gravediggers." (Marx and Engels, vol. 1, p. 263) Lenin declared imperialism "dying" and "decaying" at the beginning of this century. After all these years, it should be said that capitalism is still developing and cannot be underestimated. The judgments and analyses of historical materialism are correct in terms of historical development. However, the law of the development of human society as indicated by historical materialism needs the maturity of historical conditions. When these conditions are not ripe, any subjective judgment is rather inconsistent with the logic of historical materialism. For a long time, driven by the reinforcement of ideology, once there was a total rejection of capitalism, which was influenced by dogmatism, which prevented people from judging capitalist society objectively and scientifically, and the influence of "left" ideology, which took class struggle as the outline, which disturbed our perspective of the whole world and prevented people from learning from advanced experience of other countries. It also prevents people from learning from the advanced experience of other countries. This not only hinders this, but actually also prevents people from correctly understanding and grasping the shortcomings of capitalism.

As human societies, no matter what the system is, there will be conflicts, conflicts, and needs. It should be useful to understand what methods different human societies use to resolve contradictions, mitigate conflicts, and meet needs. If my analysis of these issues contributes to the development and progress of Chinese society, then I will have achieved my original intention.

I think that the first thing to know about anything is to know and grasp it accurately or precisely, and then to analyze and evaluate it. This book is based on such logic.

There are eleven chapters in this book, and I would like to briefly point out here: (1) the uneven development of society and its various features; (2) the values that dominate political life and their flux; (3) the diverse character of the nation and its social efficacy; (4) the formal and informal mechanisms that regulate people's social activities; (5) the political forces active in society and their relations; (6) the democratic and non-democratic elements in election campaigns; (7) top-down political operations and their characteristics; (8) non-political coordination mechanisms and socialized regulation; (9) the reproduction of culture, values and even institutions and the connection with education; (10) the role of ideas in the development and management of society; (11) the various undercurrents that threaten future development.

Although these eleven chapters contain quite a few aspects, the object is a large country, so the facets actually covered are only a limited aspect of American society. From this perspective, I think the book falls short on two counts.

First: The book is limited in its coverage and cannot possibly cover all aspects of every tree in the American forest, so it should be said that there are limitations. It cannot be said that these aspects adequately reflect the subject matter of this book. I wanted to do a "peek-a-boo" thing, but the question is whether the "peek-a-boo" was found. I think we have found some, but not many. The good thing is that we can find a lot of other literature that can make up for the shortcomings of this book.

Second, I analyze American society as an observer rather than a researcher. Some of the data and materials, though sourced, do not meet the standards of rigorous statistics. I am afraid that some of the issues discussed may be subjective, or even erroneous. Therefore, I hope that people will read this book from a macro-sociological point of view, rather than treating it as microbiology.

Also, in this book, I do not want to torture the reader with too much thoughtful analysis and theoretical quotations, which is not the purpose of this book.

Finally, I would like to thank the many institutions and friends who have been instrumental in bringing this book to fruition and without whom it could not have been written.

The CSCPRC, which invited me to be a visiting scholar in the United States for three months after the delegation's visit, provided all the expenses; Fudan University, which arranged such a long period of time for me to leave my teaching job so that I could have time to study this topic; The University of Iowa's political science department, which hosted me for three months and provided me with all the research and office facilities; the Chinese Cultural Studies Center at the University of Michigan, the political science department at Miami University in Ohio, which provided me with the opportunity to study this topic. The Center for Chinese Cultural Studies at the University of Michigan, the Department of Political Science at Miami University in Ohio, and the School of International Relations at the University of California, San Diego, all of which arranged short visits for me; and the Institute of East Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, where I spent three weeks as a visiting scholar and was warmly received. Finally, I would like to thank the Faculty of Law at Keio University in Japan, where I spent a week gaining insight into the "Empire of the Sun" section.

On a personal note, that would be too much, and I would like to thank: Ms. Vergena Yen of the U.S.-China Academic Exchange Council, who carefully arranged the planning of my visit; Professor Steeves and family at the University of Iowa, who facilitated my visit for three months in a way that no one else could; Professor Douglas Madsen, Chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of Iowa, and the entire faculty and staff, who helped me overcome many difficulties, and others such as Professor Lucine Pye, President of the American Political Science Association, Professor Arnold of the University of Miami, Professors Oxenberg and Kanru Lee of the University of Michigan, Professor Rosenblum of the University of Syracuse, Professor Mal Kahler of the University of California, San Diego, Professor Robert Scalavano of the University of California, Berkeley Professors Robert Scalavano and Giorgos; Professor Ryosei Kokubu of Keio University, Japan, and others. They have given me invaluable help.

I would like to thank my Chinese friends in the U.S. who have been living in the U.S. for many years and have enlightened me with many insights: Zheng Shiping, Shen Yi, Chen Feng, Gong Ting, Zhou Xueguang, Yu Xu, Wang Renli, Wu Danli, Lin Zhimin, Xu Huahua, Jin Ping, Gai Zheya, He Yufan, Yang Rijun, Huang Geng, Zhu Sheng, and many others. They live in different parts of the United States and all received the most typical Chinese hospitality when I arrived at their places.

I would like to thank Associate Professor Ni Shixiong, with whom I spent a lot of time at Berkeley, for his sincere help. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Ren Xiao, Qiu Kaiming, Yao Qin, Guo Dingping, and Ding Chunfang for their help in putting together the drafts of this book during the final finishing stages, and to Ding Chunfang for her careful proofreading of the entire manuscript. I am also grateful to all the staff in our departmental reference room and office, who are always so helpful.

I would also like to thank my wife, Qi Zhou, who has helped me in a way that no one can replace.

Wang Huning

April 1, 1989

Department of International Politics, Fudan University