

Books

THE AMERICAN IMAGE OF THE OLD WORLD

by Cushing Strout
Harper & Row\$4.75

Reviewed by Paul R. Baker,
lecturer in history at UC-Riverside

In this richly rewarding critical narrative, Cushing Strout, Caltech professor of history, deals with the American "idea" of Europe in its many varied manifestations throughout the course of American history. Just as the concept of America has long had profound meaning to Europeans, so also Americans themselves have looked at Europe in many ways and with mixed feelings.

Although articulate colonial Americans, whose cultural ties to Europe were usually strong, seldom had much sense of opposition to the Old World, by the time of the American Revolution the concept of America as an anti-Europe (already long a European idea) had begun to develop in the New World. Throughout the nineteenth century this idea of polar opposition formed the basis of the American image: the United States was constantly being represented as innocence, virtue, and purity, in contrast to the Old World — which invariably meant

sophistication, vice, and corruption.

These valuations and attitudes, of course, were important foundations for the powerful tradition of isolationism. The image of Europe, nonetheless, was by no means a simple dichotomy for many Americans, who, though often smug and self-righteous in their opposition to the Old World, were still attracted to Europe and eager to learn from it. Thomas Jefferson displayed this double attitude, and it has subsequently been stressed time and again, especially among writers and artists, leading to both inner tensions and profound insights in their creative work. Professor Strout's discussion of the idea of the Old World held by American painters and sculptors is somewhat weaker.

The decades since the late nineteenth century have brought new meanings and further ambiguity to the image. With lively detail the author shows how the basic concept was altered and took on new dimensions at the end of the last century as huge numbers of immigrants poured into the country and as the United States emerged as a world power.

During and immediately following World War I, Wilsonian internation-

alism brought the question of the meaning of Europe close to all Americans, and once again the old anti-thesis was reaffirmed. In the 1920's, as American expatriates on a previously unequalled scale sought a new life abroad, another twist was given to the polar opposition, and the Old World took on new and positive attributes. The recent decades of depression, war, and cold war have led to further transmutations and a general weakening of the traditional image, especially as an Atlantic community has taken shape.

Professor Strout has based his stimulating discussion of this complex and ever-changing idea upon an impressive use of source materials, ranging in variety from close analysis of both major and little-known works of fiction to revealing probings into the significance of political and diplomatic events and of opinion poll compilations. The result is an important book, providing many fresh insights about the values and assumptions, the psychological needs, and the historical experience of the American people, and throwing light on some heretofore neglected patterns in the complex tapestry of American history.

Letters

Exploding Galaxy

Fort Huachuca, Arizona

DEAR SIR:

The October issue of *Engineering and Science* is one of the better issues that I have received in some time. Dr. Pickering's article, "Man at the Threshold of Space," is a most provocative dissertation on "whither are we drifting."

The article on "Exploding Galaxy" was also extremely interesting; however, in my ignorance of astronomy I was unable to reconcile the statements in the first and second paragraphs. The first paragraph states that "Galaxy M 82 is comparatively nearby (only 60 billion billion miles or 10 million light years away)." The second paragraph states: "It was calculated that the explosion started 1,500,000 years ago." It is my understanding that the definition of a light year is the distance traveled by light at 186,000 miles per second in one year. Since Galaxy M 82 is 10,000,000

light years away from the earth, then from the statement in the second paragraph that the explosion started 1,500,000 years ago, it would seem that the velocity of propagation outward from Galaxy M 82 must be 6.7 times the velocity of light if it is to be seen at the earth today.

I would appreciate you straightening me out on this little matter.

Yours truly,
WALTER L. BRYANT, '25

According to Dr. Allan Sandage, staff member at the Mt. Wilson and Palomar Observatories:

"The statement that the explosion took place 1,500,000 years ago refers to events as seen from the earth. If astronomers could have observed M 82 from earth 1,500,000 years ago, they would have seen the explosion in its initial phases. In cosmic time, of course, the explosion took place 1,500,000 years ago plus the time it took light to travel from the galaxy to us. It is always assumed in dis-

cussions of this type that the event took place a time ago as seen from the earth."

Suggestion

Hawthorne, Calif.

EDITOR:

I thought you might like to see this unsolicited compliment in the Letters column of the September - October issue of the *UCLA Alumni Magazine*:

"I am enclosing \$7.50 for alumni dues, but I'm not sure why. It seems to have no worth at all. May I suggest . . . a magazine that has articles of new research by professors on campus. Each time it comes I do a slow burn, because the Caltech magazine also comes to our home. Take a look at one and see for yourself . . ."

Mrs. Barbara Doss McKinlay '41

I concur completely.

GORDON S. REITER '56

ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE