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Book Review

Amerika: Özgürlük Havarisi Mi? Yoksa Günah Keçisi Mi? (America: A Messenger of Freedom or a Scapegoat?) by Okan Arslan and Selçuk Arı. Ankara: Platin, 2004. 433 pages. ISBN 9758163450.

By Derya Dumlu

With *Amerika: Özgürlük Havarisi Mi? Yoksa Günah Keçisi Mi?* Okan Arslan and Selçuk Arı seek to help Turkish educators and students gain an overall understanding of American history and culture. Okan Arslan is a doctoral candidate in Euro-Asian Studies at Middle East Technical University. Selçuk Arı received his undergraduate degree from the Faculty of Economics at Istanbul University and his graduate degree from the London School of Economics.

The authors survey American history from a broad perspective, starting with the American Revolution and ending with the period since the bombing of the Twin Towers in 2001. The book starts with a short overview of American history, titled "A Nation made up of Nations." Here the focus is primarily on the impact of major historical events, such as the American Revolution and the Civil War, on American society, culture and way of thinking. The authors emphasize that the shaping of America is unique compared to the development of other nation states. Then, in the following chapters, Arslan and Arı try to shed light on how Americans and others perceived America as the superpower of the late twentieth century by asking the question: "Good, Bad, or Ugly America?" The answer is reached with the scrutiny of anti-Americanism by giving examples from different parts of the world as well as within America itself.

Considering the significance of the United States in world politics today, the book justifiably devotes a chapter to U.S. foreign relations by focusing on different periods of American political and diplomatic history. The authors also compare the Roman Empire and the United States; implying that America became the empire of the twentieth century. Meanwhile, as a recent work on the topic, the influence of the September 11 attacks on Americans' perception of terrorism, political thinking and foreign policy is also discussed. After the attacks, the authors argue that America has forgotten its role as a supporter of sustainable peace and justice and alienated

itself from the rest of the world by creating two new poles: "us" and "them." The final part of the book consists of the authors' speculations about the power of America in the twenty-first century in relation to the European Union and China as possible rivals to American power - what America needs to do in the future in order to stay both powerful and favorable in the eyes of the world.

Although the book is written for scholars and college students, long sentences and unnecessarily complicated words make the book's narrative a bit confusing. Also, the reader feels led to a certain conclusion through the authors' selective quotations that lean towards only one side of the issues. When discussing the power of U.S. presidents, the authors give examples only of how presidents have been too powerful (141). There are, also, historical mistakes that undermine the reliability of the book. Alexander Hamilton has never been a president of the United States (145), nor can the American Revolution be considered a copy of the later French Revolution (48). The book lacks footnotes, preventing readers from verifying statistics and figures. The book's overgeneralizations about America seem too partial, though it is difficult to fit the whole of American history into a single text. Arslan and Arı deserve appreciation for intending to help Turkish people understand the superpower of our age, but, in the end, for an alternative overview of American history, the reader may consult *ABD Tarihi* (American History) by Allan Nevins and Henry Commager, translated by Halil İnalcık (1961; reprint ed., Ankara: Doğubatı Yayıncılık, 2005).