

# Introduction

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Few topics have been as popular among European and Scandinavian Americanists in recent years as those dealing with aspects of "Americanization." The number of articles and books is steadily increasing, as are the conferences and workshops concerned with problematizing the issue. There are, we believe, two main reasons for this continuing interest, the first being the obvious fact that American ideas, trends, and products continue to have a visible presence in our part of the world. Throughout Europe and the Scandinavian countries, the influence of the United States in every aspect of popular culture has fueled recurring debates about our dependence on and relationship to the world's sole remaining superpower. These debates have intensified following the events of September 11, 2001.

The second reason why the issue of the American influence in other nations has become so popular in academic circles may be that in many ways it is an ideal study area for Americanists who work outside the United States. Since most of us can claim some knowledge of or expertise in certain aspects of American culture and society, and, in addition, also know our own countries and cultures reasonably well, we are thus able – ideally, at least – to bring a dual perspective to our studies. This is an important point, considering that the study of the "Americanization" process presupposes a comparative and often interdisciplinary approach.

During the last couple of years, we have been involved with a project on "American Influences in Sweden," a project which aims at deepening our knowledge of the area by studying it from an historical as well as a contemporary perspective. Instead of viewing the process as a mechanical transfer of cultural elements from an active center to a passive

periphery, American influences in different spheres of Swedish society are viewed as part of a larger global process. How various American elements are incorporated and contextualized into Swedish culture is a pivotal aspect of our research (<http://www.engelska.uu.se/research.influence.html>).

On December 6-7, 2002, we hosted a workshop in Uppsala on "Americanization" with a group of domestic and international scholars. The papers presented at the workshop have been revised for this special issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia*. While several of the contributions are empirical in nature, others are more general or deal with matters pertaining to definitions and terminology. The authors generally take it for granted that American ideas and practices have had an impact on the subject matter they have been studying.

The main exception here is the introductory article by Richard Pells, in which he argues that America's cultural connections with other countries over the past century have been reciprocal rather than one-sided. According to this thesis, the U.S. has been a recipient as much as an exporter of global culture, a consumer of foreign artistic and intellectual influences as much as a shaper of the world's cultural tastes. And it is precisely these numerous foreign influences, Pells writes, that account for the enduring popularity of American culture around the globe.

It is a notable fact that this kind of argument, which tends to deemphasize (some would say underestimate) the impact of the U.S. on other nations, is rarely put forward by non-American scholars in the field. We invite the readers of these essays to ponder why this seems to be so.