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TOP TRENDS 2001

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The official start of the third millennium begins with muted celebrations in an air of caution.

Back in the States, a dull presidential campaign turned into a wild spectacle that will polarize and possibly paralyze the nation in 2001. Economically, the best of times are over as the Nasdaq dives, the Dow downtrends, and the economy teeters between a soft or hard landing.

An overstressed nation is on the verge of a social nervous breakdown. There is no relief in sight for the problems and symptoms – including the anxieties of air-rage, road-rage, increasing personal debt, declining health care, and the fear of downsizing.

All nations will be affected by the aftershocks of America's economic and political problems, which will exacerbate the internal and intramural tensions that already exist among them. In 2001, stability will be in short supply and great demand.

UGLY AMERICANS

A wave of Anti-Americanism will sweep across the globe in the 21st century, greater and more sustained than any of the “yankee-go-home” movements that periodically erupted throughout the 20th century.

As the rhetoric heats up and the sentiment deepens, international demand for American products will dampen and American citizens will feel unwelcome – and often unsafe – in hostile atmospheres abroad.

The half-century love-hate relationship that existed between America and the rest of the world will tilt strongly toward the negative side of the emotional equation. When the world was divided between superpowers, U.S. allies were muted in their criticism, but will now feel free to join the loud chorus of anti-Americanism. In the heat of world wars and cold wars, America's friends overlooked or condoned her domineering ways and self-righteous attitude. Now, as their need recedes and nations become more self-assertive, they are no longer willing to make allowances. Though wooed by

America's vibrant pop culture, sheltered by her military might and in awe of her economic prowess, a series of cracks in her character and questions about her behavior are cooling the world's ardor for all things American.

ACROSS THE SPECTRUM

American pop culture, once so fresh and intoxicating for tightly controlled and stratified societies abroad, is now regarded – with its emphasis on violence, mindless consumption, fake sex and real stupidity – as numbing and dangerous. The massive penetration of American customs, tastes and products in overseas markets has resulted in growing defenses against the threat to national character.

The world is less willing to readily accept anything that comes with a Made in U.S.A. label. Even her puritan work ethic, embraced as necessary for progress and wealth accumulation in the 20th century, is now being ridiculed as the addiction of a society that lives to work rather than one that works to live. The global barriers erected to stop importation of genetically modified foods and hormone-laden meats from the U.S. will be fortified to fend off icons of its cul-

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UGLY AMERICANS

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tural hegemony.

America's military muscle has always been a double-edged sword. Now, the fallout from the wars it has waged is catching up with the United States. From the Gulf War to the War in Kosovo, the blush of military victories have faded while enmity has grown, not only among opponents but also within those friendly nations suspicious of America's intentions and outraged by the toll in human suffering.

Governments throughout South America resent America's involvement in Columbia's civil war, ostensibly to stop the flow of drugs, fearing a spillover effect that will destabilize the region. The never-ending war in the Middle East and the United States' unyielding support for Israel continue to provide an inexhaustible fuel supply for Anti-Americanism. From allies and from the non-aligned, from South Korea to Pakistan, calls for America to get out or keep out continue to intensify.

DUH-MOCRACY

America's credibility on the world stage has been further tarnished by her performance on the home front. Though it has long claimed to be the champion of truth and justice, the American way of promoting human rights and democracy has become open to attack by friends and foes alike.

Foreign fingers point to her overcrowded prisons, over-worked death chambers and a racial policy that calls into question America's claim of equality



for all. The recent revelation of her fundamentally flawed electoral system, in which campaign financing guarantees an unfair voice to monied interests and the simple counting of ballots becomes a federal case, has done more than make America a laughing stock. It has emboldened critics and crystallized the world's distaste for America's "do as I say, not as I do" actions and stripped away the mantle of moral righteousness, making transparent her duplicity and hypocrisy.

Myopic in its view of the outside world and oblivious to criticisms, America will misjudge the changing face of the future. Failing to recognize its declining stature or the reasons behind it, the U.S. will fail to embrace measures that might restore credibility and goodwill.

Note: *More than its image will be lost: As American charisma fades, brand America will become a harder sell. American companies will find that they need to be more competitive, and more responsive to the needs and sensitivities of their foreign markets. All successful business plans must incorporate strategies to overcome strong negative stereotypes.*

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