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Sommario/riassunto

Negative views of the United States abound, but we know too little about how such views affect politics. Drawing on careful research on post-Soviet Central Asia, Edward Schatz argues that anti-Americanism is best seen not as a rising tide that swamps or as a conflagration that overwhelms. Rather, "America" is a symbolic resource that resides quietly in the mundane but always has potential value for social and political mobilizers. Using a wide range of evidence and a novel analytic framework, Schatz considers how Islamist movements, human rights activists, and labor mobilizers across Central Asia avail themselves of this fact, thus changing their ability to pursue their respective agendas. By refocusing our analytic gaze away from high politics, he affords us a clearer view of the slower-moving, partially occluded, and socially embedded processes that ground how "America" becomes political. In turn, we gain a nuanced appreciation of the downstream effects of US foreign policy choices and a sober sense of the challenges posed by the politics of traveling images. Most treatments of anti-Americanism focus on politics in the realm of presidential elections and foreign policies. By focusing instead on symbols, Schatz lays bare how changing public attitudes shift social relations in politically significant ways, and considers how changing symbolic depictions of the United States recombine the raw material available for social mobilizers. Just like sediment traveling along waterways before reaching its final destination, the raw material that constitutes symbolic America can travel among various social groups, and can settle into place to form the basis of new social meanings. Symbolic America, Schatz shows us, matters for politics in Central Asia and beyond.
