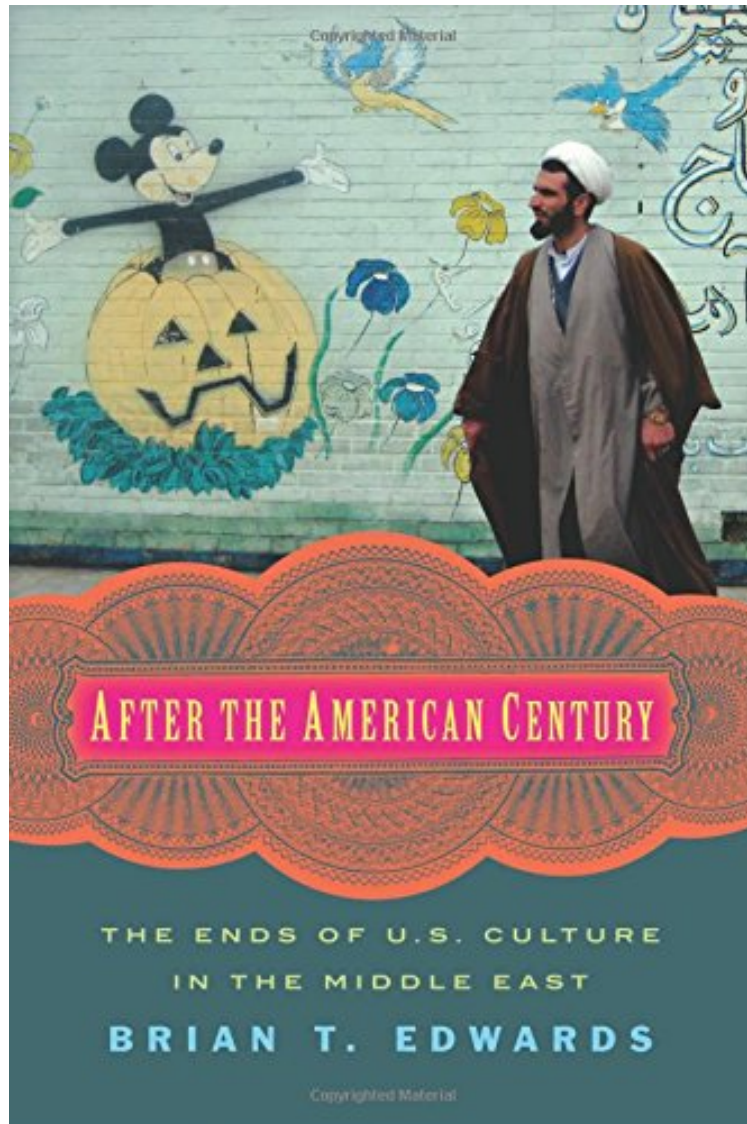


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Brian T. Edwards

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#1551979 in Books Brian T Edwards 2015-12-01Ingredients: Example IngredientsOriginal language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.10 x .90 x 6.10l, 1.16 #File Name: 0231174004288 pagesAfter the American Century The Ends of U S Culture in the Middle East | File size: 47.Mb

Brian T. Edwards : After the American Century: The Ends of U.S. Culture in the Middle East before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised After the American Century: The Ends of U.S. Culture in the Middle East:

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Beginnings and EndsBy C. W. DayOne of the more delightful

aspects of Brian Edwards writing, both in his latest book *After the American Century* and his previous work *Morocco Bound* is the open ended play of multiple meanings in both his language and his analysis. In a book that discusses the interaction between globalized American culture and local reimagination and appropriation of that culture, this is perhaps most evident in Edwards invocation of the phrase the ends of circulation. The multiple meanings of this phrase certainly include dual senses of ends as purpose or intention and ends as a stopping point at which circulation ceases. Perhaps this is not surprising in a writer who seems to be as deeply grounded in post-structuralist critical analysis as he is in Middle Eastern language and culture. It is apparent from the beginning that Edwards slim volume is a distillation of years of field work in the Middle East and North Africa beginning and ending in Morocco filtered through a fabric densely woven from an intimate knowledge of literature, cinema, and critical theory over years of study. Like Edwards previous work, the book is self-consciously academic from the beginning and yet accessible to an intelligent and attentive layman. One premise of the book is that American cultures ever accelerated distribution with the advent of digital technology has permeated global culture, but concomitantly with the waning of American political and economic hegemony, American culture abroad has become increasingly deracinated. As Americans, we think we know what American culture stands for, and we tend to interpret it in generally positive ways for its association with freedom and prosperity, without reflecting on the ways in which Americas standing abroad has soured since September 11, 2001. We fail to see the ways in which other cultures reinterpret it on their own terms, whether by dubbing the donkey in *Shrek* with subversive songs in Moroccan darija (dialect), subtly transposing meanings in Persian translations of American cinema, or reinventing the graphic novel in Egypt on the eve of the uprising in Tahrir Square in Egypt. In each of the instances, Americans looking in from the outside naively assume that they can explain events in these cultures from the perspective of the export of American values, when a more thoughtful, insightful, and experienced analysis would suggest that the manipulation of American forms and symbols is turned to local purposes in a manner that is often completely opaque to Americans unfamiliar with the countrys cultural nuances. Thus we naively congratulate ourselves on Americas export of Facebook to purportedly exotic and chaotic foreign lands as though it conveyed American sensibilities; this is a convenient narrative into which we can shoehorn the politics of other cultures. In doing so, we fail to see the ways in which these countries have developed their own narratives under the impact of globalization in ways quite apart from our easy assumptions about how the world is constituted. By seizing on the facile and accessible Facebook narrative, we overlook the complex literary culture in Egypt that had a far more central role in building opposition to the brutal Mubarak regime so enthusiastically supported by the United States foreign policy establishment. Ironically, the very centrality of that tradition to Egyptian culture the fact that American forms have been steeped in Egyptian culture and reinterpreted in ways easily apparent only to Egyptians tends to wall off an understanding of such cultural end products from reverse assimilation by Americans. In perhaps the same sense of Magrittes famous painting of a pipe *This is not a pipe* or the Iranian film maker Jafar Panahis film *This is not a film*, which Edwards discusses, *After the American Century* could have been aptly subtitled *This is not a book about American culture*. Certainly, the center of gravity of the book is the ways in which the cultures of Egypt, Iran, and Morocco have assimilated artifacts of American culture for their own ends (that word again!). Perhaps most surprisingly in his description of the complexities of contemporary Iranian culture where he observes that everything is forbidden and everything is permitted Edwards strips bare the facile assumptions of American Orientalism. This is not to suggest that the Revolutionary government is not harsh or repressive, but it is to suggest that there is more to Iran than political conflict with the United States, and that even that conflict is not one-sided. Quite apart from the political history of American intervention in Iranian affairs, Edwards illustrates this complexity in his analysis of Irans ambivalence over the reception in Europe toward the sophisticated Iranian cinematic tradition simultaneous pride in the acclaim and suspicion of the politicization of films that in part by necessity are not intrinsically political. American understanding of a region in which it has become increasingly and ever more brutally involved will never mature so long as the circulation and consumption of cultural production is largely unidirectional. This cultural sclerosis has multiple consequences: it blinds us to how the world understands us, and it inhibits us from coming to a better understanding of the world. As we move beyond the American century into an increasingly fractured world, our dependence on outdated cultural assumptions and our unwillingness or inability to come to grips with the originality of other cultures can only work to our detriment. Edwards work thoughtfully considered is perhaps the beginning of a corrective.²

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Are we still Ugly Americans in the Middle East?By Jeanne WolfAn eye-opening view of how America is thought of in the Middle East. Important ideas and fascinating facts.

When Henry Luce announced in 1941 that we were living in the "American century," he believed that the international popularity of American culture made the world favorable to U.S. interests. Now, in the digital twenty-first century, the American century has been superseded, as American movies, music, and video games are received, understood, and transformed. How do we make sense of this shift? Building on a decade of fieldwork in Cairo, Casablanca, and Tehran, Brian T. Edwards maps new routes of cultural exchange that are innovative, accelerated, and full of diversions. Shaped by the digital revolution, these paths are entwined with the growing fragility of American "soft" power. They indicate

an era after the American century, in which popular American products and phenomena such as comic books, teen romances, social-networking sites, and ways of expressing sexuality are stripped of their associations with the United States and recast in very different forms. Arguing against those who talk about a world in which American culture is merely replicated or appropriated, Edwards focuses on creative moments of uptake, in which Arabs and Iranians make something unexpected. He argues that these products do more than extend the reach of the original. They reflect a world in which culture endlessly circulates and gathers new meanings.

After the American Century offers a fascinating tour of the appropriation and deployment of American popular culture in a globalized, restless Middle East. From cinema and novels to hip-hop and comic books, this wonderfully written and richly observed book presents novel and exciting readings of familiar cultural forms in new political environments. (Marc Lynch, author of *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*) After the American Century is a book of exquisite audacity. Bold in its detailed precision and daring in its imaginative topography of topics, Brian T. Edwards's writing cuts through much noise and nuisance to lay bare what lies ahead. Its arguments do not just dismantle the imperial fantasy of an 'American century,' but point to the uncharted worlds far beyond its captured imagination. (Hamid Dabashi, Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature, Columbia University) This book is a rich account of what happens when cultural objects, literary texts, and films circulate between the Middle East and the United States: how they are interpreted and reinvented, in the process engendering new publics and counterpublics. A nuanced analysis of cultural politics that extends our understanding of the forms and limits of Western domination of the Middle East. (Saba Mahmood, author of *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*) In *After the American Century*, Edwards has devised subtle, ethnographically informed reading methodologies to explain how anomalous logics of transnational circulation have radically undermined plans for a 'new American century.' The book will fast become indispensable to an understanding of the genealogy of transnational American studies. (Donald E. Pease, Ted and Helen Geisel Third Century Professor in the Humanities and founding director of the Futures of American Studies Institute at Dartmouth College) Edwards plunges into the cultural lives of Cairo, Casablanca, and Tehran to illustrate the demise of one aspect of "the American century": the outsize influence that U.S. popular culture exercised in the Middle East. (John Waterbury Foreign Affairs) Edwards' background and considerable expertise shine... making the book a worthwhile read for anyone interested in the region. (Middle East Journal) Now that American power is receding across the globe it is a good time to ask how... methodologies might adapt to these new circumstances, and what we might name such an academic adaptation. Brian T. Edwards' important new book... provides us with a possible answer to this arguably urgent question. (Post45) Ambitious, wide-ranging, and highly valuable. (European Journal of American Culture) Edwards challenges traditional narratives of US cultural imperialism.... Highly recommended. (CHOICE) Edwards is to be commended for his ethnographic methods, his command of local languages, and the originality of his archive. (International Journal of Middle East Studies) A genuinely important contribution to our understanding of how American literary studies circulates internationally in the twenty-first century. (American Literature) A welcome work, valuable for its rich readings of unfamiliar yet important Middle Eastern artists and for its stimulating arguments about the transnational circulation of American culture in our global, digital age. (Journal of American History) One of the most innovative contributions to American Studies in recent years (American Literary History) About the Author Brian T. Edwards is Crown Professor in Middle East Studies and professor of English and comparative literary studies at Northwestern University, where he is also the founding director of the Middle East and North African Studies Program. He is the author of *Morocco Bound: Disorienting America's Maghreb*, from Casablanca to the Marrakech Express (2005) and a coeditor of *Globalizing American Studies* (2010). His articles have been published in the *Believer*, *Public Culture*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and elsewhere.