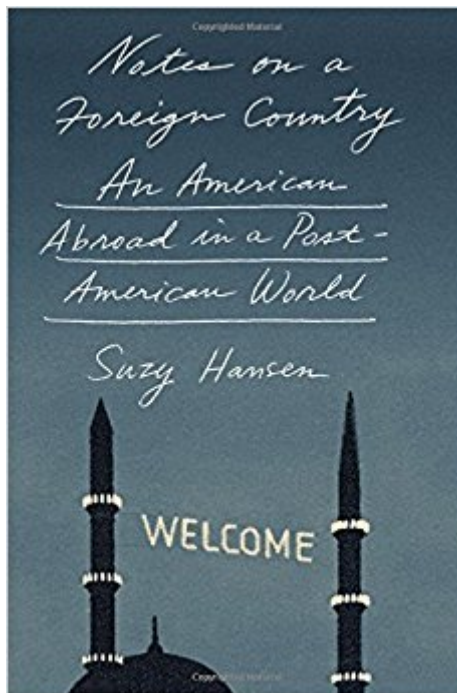




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# Notes On A Foreign Country: An American Abroad In A Post-American World



## Synopsis

"A deeply honest and brave portrait of of an individual sensibility reckoning with her country's violent role in the world." —Hisham Matar, The New York Times Book Review

In the wake of the September 11 attacks and the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, Suzy Hansen, who grew up in an insular conservative town in New Jersey, was enjoying early success as a journalist for a high-profile New York newspaper. Increasingly, though, the disconnect between the chaos of world events and the response at home took on pressing urgency for her. Seeking to understand the Muslim world that had been reduced to scaremongering headlines, she moved to Istanbul. Hansen arrived in Istanbul with romantic ideas about a mythical city perched between East and West, and with a naïve sense of the Islamic world beyond. Over the course of her many years of living in Turkey and traveling in Greece, Egypt, Afghanistan, and Iran, she learned a great deal about these countries and their cultures and histories and politics. But the greatest, most unsettling surprise would be what she learned about her own country—and herself, an American abroad in the era of American decline. It would take leaving her home to discover what she came to think of as the two Americas: the country and its people, and the experience of American power around the world. She came to understand that anti-Americanism is not a violent pathology. It is, Hansen writes, "a broken heart . . . A one-hundred-year-old relationship." Blending memoir, journalism, and history, and deeply attuned to the voices of those she met on her travels, *Notes on a Foreign Country* is a moving reflection on America's place in the world. It is a powerful journey of self-discovery and revelation—a profound reckoning with what it means to be American in a moment of grave national and global turmoil.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Deeply honest and brave . . . A sincere and intelligent act of self-questioning . . . Hansen is doing something both rare and necessary." â•Hisham Matar, The New York Times Book Review (cover)"Searching and searing . . . [Suzy Hansen] combines a brisk history of Americaâ™s anguished intervention in the region; artful reporting on how citizens in Turkey and its neighbors view the United States today; and unsparing self-reflection to explain how she, an Ivy League-educated journalist, could be so ignorant of the extent of her countryâ™s role in remaking the post-World War II world . . . Notes on a Foreign Country is a testament to one journalistâ™s courage in digging deep within herself to understand the real story and to make sure she gets it right." â•Barbara Spindel, The Christian Science Monitor"Compelling . . . [Hansen] vividly captures the disorientation we experience when our preconceived notions collide with uncomfortable discoveries . . . Rare and refreshing . . . Hansen's principal injunction to Americans to understand how others view them and their country's policies is timely and urgent." â•Ali Wyne, The Washington Post"Hansen turns a coming-of-age travelogue into a geopolitical memoir of sorts, without sacrificing personal urgency in the process . . . Her long stay in Istanbul (sheâ™s still there) gives her an outsiderâ™s vantage on myopic American arrogance that is bracing. And her fascinating insiderâ™s view of Recep Tayyip Erdoganâ™s rise upends Western simplicities . . . The experience is contagious." â•Ann Hulbert, The Atlantic"Ardent, often lovely . . . If Noam Chomsky could write like this, Hansen's work would already be done." â•Karl Vick, TIME"Eloquent and impassioned . . . Hansen leaves us with the fervent hope that Americans can reconnect us to the rest of humanity." â•Tom Zelman, Minneapolis Star-Tribune"Fascinating . . . Hansen artfully conveys her own initial lack of awareness of the world, and her realization that she had internalized American exceptionalism into her own identity." â•The National Book ReviewâœHansenâ™s must-read book makes the argument that Americans, specifically white Americans, are decades overdue in examining and accepting their countryâ™s imperial identity . . . Hansen builds her winning argument by combining personal examination and observation with geopolitical history lessons. She is a fearless patriot, and this is a book for the brave.â•Emily Dziuban, Booklist (starred review)âœLucid, reflective, probing, and poetic, Hansenâ™s book is also a searing critique of the ugly depths of American ignorance, made more dangerous because the declining U.S. imperial system coincides with decay at home. The book is a revelatory indictment of American

policy both domestic and foreign, made gripping by Hansen's confident . . . distillation of complicated historical processes and her detailed, evocative descriptions of places, people, and experiences most American audiences can't imagine.

• Publishers Weekly (starred and boxed review) "To be an American is of itself, George Santayana once wrote, a moral condition and education. *Notes on a Foreign Country* embraces this fate with a unique blend of passionate honesty, coruscating insight, and tenderness. A book of extraordinary power, it achieves something very rare: it opens up new ways of thinking and feeling."

• Pankaj Mishra, author of *Age of Anger* "Suzy Hansen's *Notes on a Foreign Country* is an essential, compelling read of an American woman's coming of age and her experience abroad. Hansen describes how her own narrative of the United States' role in geopolitics began to unravel only once she stepped out of her insular life in New York and into the unfamiliar world of Istanbul. With colorful anecdotes, observations, and telling interviews, Hansen seamlessly weaves together the complex fabric of Turkish society, and with that presents a fresh look at the United States and the perceptions abroad of its foreign policy and of its people."

• Lynsey Addario, photographer and the author of *It* "It is rare to come across an American writer who has moved through the world—especially the Islamic world—with the acute self-awareness and thoughtfulness of Suzy Hansen. She has deftly blended memoir, reportage, and history to produce a book of great beauty and intellectual rigor. Everybody interested in America and the Middle East must read it."

• Basharat Peer, author of *A Question of Order* "Notes On a Foreign Country is at once a kaleidoscopic look at modern Turkey, a meditation on American identity in an age of American decline, and a gripping intellectual bildungsroman. I'm in awe of this wise, coruscating book."

• Michelle Goldberg, author of *The Goddess Pose* "It's really quite simple: if you have any interest at all in how the non-Western world views America and Americans, you must read Suzy Hansen's beautifully composed memoir *Notes on a Foreign Country*. And when America's leaders complain—while campaigning and in office—that there is "great hatred" for the U.S. (and that they want to get to the bottom of it), it should be required reading by government officials—all the way to the Oval Office."

• Hooman Majd, author of *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ*

Suzy Hansen is contributing writer to *The New York Times Magazine* and has written for many other publications. In 2007, she was awarded a fellowship from the Institute of Current World Affairs to do research in Turkey. She currently lives in Istanbul. *Notes on a Foreign Country* is her first book.

Love the point of view. Continue the good work of bringing people together and promote PEACE in

this era of plenty of mischief.

Suzy Hansen has written a very easy to read and well factual supported book on how the vision of spreading democracy by the United States around the world had an inherent set of problems. I believe Ms Hansen presents a strong case that the problems we have in the US with Middle Eastern countries is our making because we believed that our democracy was for everyone without actually understanding the history of the country we tried to change, as well as how we tried to make the countries change in subtle ( think covert CIA ) or just plain overt methods with money. Ms Hansen shares her history of living and traveling the Middle Eastern countries that supports her story as well as many references of other writers that have detailed what the US has done to bring us to this point of time. In my opinion this is a must read for members of our US government so they will understand that choices or actions they take towards other countries must be well researched from that countries perspective, not just from the USA's.

Brilliant. The most important book I've read all year. James Baldwin would have been proud of the searching eloquence of Hansen's book, her insistence on peeling back the lethal innocence of so many fundamental American myths, of American exceptionalism, of America's inherent goodness in the world, and of the widespread American assumption that, in smaller, weaker countries a suspicion of America can be dismissed as envy or knee-jerk anti-Americanism. Not so. I've lived in America for 35 years, but before that I grew up in South Africa, where many of the observations that Hansen makes about America's brutal interference in Turkish and Pakistani and Iranian and Greek politics have half-echoes. From the perspective of smaller countries—Turkey, Guatemala, South Africa, wherever—a gaping contradiction opens up between America's self-image as disseminator of democracy and it's on-the-ground actions to overthrow democracy, undermine sovereignty, prop up apartheid, install dictators. One of Hansen's essential points is this: so much American foreign policy has been premised on a binary of good and evil, a binary intolerant of—and ruinous toward—the infinitely varied local permutations of what particular societies consider to be their own particular ideals. If you belong to an empire, you—we—have to own our outsize responsibility, which first and foremost means owning your history. As Americans we are at liberty to forget, to remain in a cocoon of ignorance, not so the peoples who have been at the sharp end of America's actions. Others may see this book differently, but as a naturalized American I read it as a clear-eyed love letter to America, a challenge to the nation to become its own best self by facing up to the global (and internal) costs of its historical

self-delusions. Congratulations to Hansen on carrying forward the spirit of that most passionate and visionary American writer, James Baldwin.

This is a very short review: This book should be read by every US citizen.

This book shook me to my core. Since the moment I finished, I couldn't think about it. There was nothing in it that I didn't know, to some degree. Growing up in Turkey, you hear about how there's Uncle Sam behind it all. The Americans organized the coup. The Americans fattened up the Islamists. The Americans probably even stole your newspaper from your doorstep. It's tough, to separate fact from fiction. And hearing the same stories over and over again, it's hard to not get so jaded, that you come out apathetic on the other side. But then, sometimes you need a punch in the stomach like this book. This book is undeniably about America, how the false premise of American exceptionalism, that's built on, generously speaking, lies, has led Americans, more than any other reason, to project their values on the rest of the world. Suzy Hansen's slow undoing of her American innocence, and discovering what it means to be American in a post-pax-Americana world is a must read.

this woman has got the chops. A probable winner of many awards in her future!

A valiant attempt by an imperialist American who tried to stay objective while writing about something they do not know: not-America. She does question her unshakeable belief in America, but everytime I think she finally broke out, she reaffirms her "white American" prejudice of the non-American. Yet at the same time she is surprisingly honest about these fascist beliefs. Her insights on Turkey is well reported and refreshing. It serves as a valuable guide for any foreigner moving to or living in Turkey, specifically on how to deal with American expats they come in contact with.

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