

## **American Studies in Algeria, the Obama Effect, and the Recovery of America's Image**

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America's image in Algeria and across the Arab world was seriously dented by George W. Bush's confrontational attitude and requisition for a "crusade" in the wake of the 9/11 tragic attacks, and especially by the unveiling of the abuses in both Iraq and Guantanamo. Consequently, the tasks of Algerian Americanists to implement American Studies programs in English departments was complicated by a noticeably felt apathy, if not hostility, amongst students who adopted fault-finding attitudes expressed in the choice of dissertation topics particularly critical of US foreign policy excesses. However, Obama's victory has somehow attenuated the unease of Algerian American Studies scholars, sparing them the need to continuously justify the relevance of the discipline. The transformational potential of the new president's "soft power," "smart diplomacy," multilateralism, UN rehabilitation, and image refurbishment is perceived here as a promise of unison after rupture. A more positive attitude towards American culture amongst university students of English has somehow started to take shape within dialogical and comparative contexts. My paper, which is based on a survey of B.A. finalist students of English, probes the Obama effect on the appeal of American Studies to Algerian Students and explores the extent to which it can contribute to the recovery of the image of the US in the region. I argue that despite the shift from fracture to union, the attraction to America has always been ideology-free and fares better when it remains so. I conclude by suggesting that, under the present circumstances, non-American based scholars can potentially play a central role in the dissemination of a conciliatory American Studies that could help repair America's image in the Arab world.