



# Anti-Americanism and Americanophobia: A French Perspectives

Denis Lacorne

► **To cite this version:**

Denis Lacorne. Anti-Americanism and Americanophobia: A French Perspectives. 2005. <hal-01065572>

**HAL Id: hal-01065572**

**<https://hal-sciencespo.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01065572>**

Submitted on 18 Sep 2014

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## **ANTI-AMERICANISM AND AMERICANOPHOBIA : A FRENCH PERSPECTIVE**

**Denis Lacorne**  
CERI/FNSP

French anti-Americanism has never been as much the focus of debate as it is today. This is true both in France, where a crop of books has appeared on the subject, and in the United States, for reasons linked to the French refusal to support the American invasion of Iraq. Some authors have underlined the unchanging nature of the phenomenon, defining anti-Americanism as a historical “constant” since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, or again an endlessly repetitive “semantic block” to use Philippe Roger’s expression. Others, like Jean-François Revel, have tried to show what lay hidden behind such a fashionable ideology: a deep-rooted critique of economic liberalism and American democracy. Yet others, while rejecting the anti-American label, like Emmanuel Todd, have attempted to lift the veil and lay bare the weaknesses of American democracy and the extreme economic fragility of an American empire “in decline,” despite appearances.<sup>1</sup>

### *Contradictions and swings in public opinion*

What I propose to do here, rather than pick out historical constants, defend the virtues of the liberal model, or pontificate upon the inevitable decline of great empires, is to take a closer look at the contradictions of what I view as a changing and ambiguous phenomenon, a subject of frequent swings in public opinion. In *The Rise and Fall of Anti-Americanism* (1990) Jacques Rupnik and I pointed out that

France is a heterogeneous country made up of countless different groups, every one of which has its “own” image of America, which frequently changes in the light of circumstances or political events. However, it sometimes happens that this multitude of contradictory perceptions coalesces into a major trend of opinion and for a while

---

<sup>1</sup> Philippe Roger, *L'ennemi américain. Généalogie de l'antiaméricanisme français*, Paris, Seuil, 2002; Jean-François Revel, *l'obsession anti-américaine*, Paris, Plon, 2002; Emmanuel Todd, *Après l'empire. Essai sur la*

the attitudes of the country as a whole are either exaggeratedly favourable or excessively unfavourable to American realities.<sup>2</sup>

Such contrasting swings of opinion have indeed occurred over the past three years, first due to France's reaction to the tragic events of September 11, 2001, and later to France's opposition to the second Gulf war.

To properly bring out the complexity of French opinion, its ambiguities and frequent contradictions, I propose going back to the year 2000, before the upheavals of the 2001-2003 period. This was a peaceful time in Franco-American relations. According to a 2000 SOFRES poll, sympathy for the United States (41% of French respondents) was stronger than animosity (10%), and at first sight, French respondents seemed to be more Americanophile than anything else. However, the very proportion of those who refused to commit themselves one way or another (48%) was disquieting, -- suggesting a kind of discomfort before the American big brother.<sup>3</sup> To get a clearer picture, SOFRES, in the same poll, included an open-ended question, leaving a wide margin to respondents: "When you think of the United States, what words and images come to your mind?"

[TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE]

As Table 1 clearly shows, most spontaneous images of America (56%) turned out to be negative. When the French thought of the United States, the first thing that came to mind was violence (mentioned by 21% of the respondents) in every form (physical violence, drugs, the death penalty, uncontrolled gun sales), or again the weird or excessive aspects of the American character (14%), including the "obesity of Americans" and the "junk" they eat (3%). The complaints so common in the 1960s and 1970s against "American imperialism" or "capitalism" were now barely mentioned (respectively 3% et 2% of responses). As for spontaneously mentioned positive aspects, what is striking is that none of them had anything to do with American democracy. When the French hold a positive opinion of the United States, they cite, in order of importance, American grandeur or gigantism (14%), American

---

*décomposition du système américain*, Paris, Gallimard, 2002. For a discussion of these works, see Tony Judt's chapter XXX in this volume.

<sup>2</sup> Denis Lacorne and Jacques Rupnik, "France Bewitched by America," in D. Lacorne, Jacques Rupnik and Marie-France Toinet (eds.), *The Rise and Fall of Anti-Americanism. A Century of French Perception*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1990, p. 2. (trans. from the original French by Gerald Turner, *L'Amérique dans les têtes. Un siècle de fascinations et d'aversion*, Paris, Hachette, 1986.)

<sup>3</sup> French American Foundation-SOFRES Poll, May 2000. Responses to the question: "Would you rather say your feelings for the United States were a) positive; b) negative; or c) neither positive nor negative?"

power (12%), or superior technology... It is clear that for the French, America is not a political model. An insignificant number of the respondents specifically referred to key elements of economic or political liberalism, such as "individualism" (2%), "freedom" (4%), "liberalism" or "capitalism" without elaborating (3%). One even comes away with the impression – and this goes to prove the ignorance of the average Frenchman about America – that recent immigrants are more easily assimilated in France than in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

These few data suggest that the French didn't turn anti-American all of a sudden in 2003, at the time of the American invasion of Iraq. They were so before the Gulf War. Or rather, they were already of two minds, their empathy mingled with indifference, their admiration with doubt and distrust of the abnormalities of American society.

Who shapes opinion? The SOFRES study does not give a clear answer. But we could suggest a few explanations, particularly for the frequent criticism in France against the violence and racism of American society. The media may be partly to blame: films, news and current affairs programs, and all the French debates about the injustice and barbarity of the death penalty in the United States. There seem to be good reasons for the United States to become unpopular with the French, even if, as I hope to show, some of our "*belles âmes*" have overdone it to the extent of losing all credibility.<sup>5</sup>

Let us now consider the three quick swings of public opinion which have occurred since September 2001.

- *First Phase: Extreme sympathy.* Most of the French shared in the suffering of Americans, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. One of the most well known newspaper editors marked the occasion with a slogan somewhat unusual in the post-war daily press: "We are all Americans!"<sup>6</sup>. French compassion expressed itself in a hundred different ways: from the oecumenical service performed at the American Church of Paris to the three mandatory minutes of silence imposed by the government on every school and public agency, the hundreds of drawings elementary school students in Normandy sent to the US embassy in Paris, and other more modest but symbolically significant gestures

---

<sup>4</sup> In answering a closed question about the social integration of immigrants, 50% of the respondents believed that, in the United States, "things weren't better than in France" as opposed to 18% who thought the opposite. When asked to choose a word that best describes the United States (from a pre-established list), French respondents listed first "violence" (67%), and then, "power" (66%), inequality (49%), racism (43%). "Liberty" ranked 8<sup>th</sup> and was only mentioned by 16% of the respondents.

<sup>5</sup> See, in this volume, Gérard Grunberg, XXXX pp. XXX, for a detailed and nuanced analysis of French and European opinion.

like the planting of a tree of liberty next to Bartholdi's small bronze replica of the Statue of Liberty in the Luxemburg gardens in Paris. During the Bastille Day festivities of July 14, 2002, the new passionate love for America reached its climax with a red New York Fire Department truck leading the parade. It was followed by an entire class of West Point cadets that came to Paris to celebrate the bicentennial of their school – founded in the same year as the French military academy –, their Saint Cyr comrades marching alongside.

- *Second Phase:* Emergence of differences of opinion between France and the United States with the U.N. resolutions on Iraq. What came as a surprise in France, was the near-unanimous public support for Chirac's critical stance, a situation where the political left, right and far right seemed to have joined the same chorus. Stranger still, French opinion coincided perfectly with widespread European popular opposition to the war, making it possible to say that there is such a thing as a common, unified European public opinion.<sup>7</sup> On March 28th, when the war began, French public opinion confirmed its massive support for Chirac's foreign policy: 78% of a polled sample opposed the American intervention. More surprisingly, a quarter of the French (and nearly two-thirds of French Muslims) felt themselves "on the Iraqi side" and, according to the same survey, "deep down," 33% of the respondents "did not wish the United States to win" (among them, 72% of French Muslims).<sup>8</sup> In a most unprecedented declaration, the Prime Minister felt obliged to say, in Clermont-Ferrand on March 31st 2003: "Be careful not to pick the wrong enemy. [...] Opposing the war doesn't mean that we're hoping for dictatorship to win over democracy."<sup>9</sup>

A note of discord did emerge within the French elite. Influential intellectuals such as Pierre Hassner (otherwise extremely critical of the methods used by the Bush administration) spoke out in support of good sense and realism, against French diplomatic activism and the ephemeral alliance it forged with Russia, Germany and China, a combination intended to

---

<sup>6</sup> Title of an editorial by Jean-Marie Colombani, Chief Editor of *Le Monde* (12 September 2001). A year later, observing the rise in trans-Atlantic tensions, Colombani wondered whether the French hadn't "all become anti-American." Id. "L'impasse américaine," *Le Monde*, 11 September 2002.

<sup>7</sup> See Olivier Duhamel "Une opinion publique européenne," *Journal du Dimanche*, 9 February 2003. In Europe, never did more than 10% of any polled sample express an opinion favoring unilateral intervention in Iraq. In Britain, a relative majority of the polled population was opposed to any war (41%); the anti-war majority was significant in Germany (50%), substantial in France (60%), and massive in Spain (74%). EOS-Gallup Europe Poll, 29 January 2003, quoted by Duhamel.

<sup>8</sup> Polls, *Le Monde*-TF1, 28-29 March 2003 and IPSOS-*Le Figaro*, 1-3 April 2003, *Le Figaro*, 5 April 2003 (based on a national sample of French Muslims).

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in *Le Monde*, 3 April 2003.

counterbalance the power of the United States: “Even if we refuse to take orders from Bush, we can’t have the butcher of Chechnya or Tibet commanding us instead.”<sup>10</sup>

- *Third Phase: Appeasement and reconciliation.* Preparations for the G8 summit at Evian (June 2003) became an opportunity to resume friendly French-US relations. Indeed Bush concluded his *Le Figaro* interview with an unexpected “Vive la France!,” preceded by the admission that “between allies, we might have our differences, but what brings the United States closer to France, to Europe, is far more important.”<sup>11</sup> At the same time, an officer of the American forces posted at Kabul stressed the eminently positive role of the French forces helping the Americans rebuild an Afghan army. “Out here,” he pointed out to a visiting American senator, “we’ve still got French fries.”<sup>12</sup> French Defense Minister Alliot-Marie’s visit to the Pentagon, on January 22, 2004, was a major step in the restoration of frayed ties between France and United States. It was designed to prepare a visit to Normandy by President Bush in June 2004 to participate in the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of D-Day, — the planned highlight of a final Franco-American reconciliation.<sup>13</sup>

Still, whatever the ups and downs of the transatlantic relationship, we would be well advised not to ignore the vigour and tenacity of anti-American feelings in France. This is proven by the sales figures of a whole new literary genre of books about the “murky side of America.” These publications indiscriminately denounce the more monstrous aspects of American civilization. For example:

Noël Mamère and Patrick Farbiaz, *Dangereuse Amérique [Dangerous America]*, (Ramsay, 2002)

Peter Scowen, *Le Livre Noir des États-Unis [The Black Book of the United States]*, (Mango, 2002)

---

<sup>10</sup> Pierre Hassner, “Europe/Etats-Unis: la tentation du divorce,” *Politique Internationale*, no. 100, Summer 2003, p. 173. Equally strong criticism was expressed by French business leaders and supporters of the “*droit d’ingérence*,” among them André Glucksmann, Bernard-Henry Lévy, Bernard Kouchner, Bruno Latour, and Pascal Bruckner. See Laure Belot and Sophie Fay, “Les milieux d’affaires redoutent un divorce franco-américain,” *Le Monde*, 4 April, 2003; André Glucksmann, “L’étrange renversement,” *Le Monde*, 5 April 2003 and Bruno Latour, “Pourquoi cet abîme?,” *ibid.*; “America, je t’aime toujours,” Bernard Henri Lévy, (interview with Matthew Campbell), *Sunday Times*, 2 November 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Bush, “Je suis décidé à travailler avec la France” (interview), *Le Figaro*, 30 May 2003. Curiously, *The Times* in London, interpreted the same event in a quite different way, under the title: “Bush Diplomacy Begins With Attack On France,” *Times*, 31 May 2003, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Higgins, “For U.S., Waging Peace Still Requires Support From Contrarian Allies,” *Wall Street Journal* (Europe), 17 June 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Keith Richeburg, “French Defense Minister Visits U.S. in Fence-Mending Mission,” *Washington Post/Wall Street Journal Europe*, January 16, 2004.

Ziauddin Sardar and Meryll Davies, *Pourquoi le Monde Déteste-t-il l'Amérique?* [*Why Does The World Hate America ?*], (Fayard, 2002)

Thierry Meyssan, *L'Effroyable Imposture* [*The Appalling Imposture*], (Carnot, 2002)

Gilbert Achcar, *Le Choc des Barbaries* [*The Clash of Barbarians*], (Complexe, 2002)

Eric Laurent, *La Guerre des Bush: les Secrets Inavouables* [*Bush's War: The Unspeakable Secrets*], (Plon 2003).

All these books tell a similar tale of misdeeds, horrors, and threats – the American colonization of the world compounded with an even more real colonization of minds, a foreign policy that is nothing but a series of terrible conspiracies (of oil barons, genetically modified food barons, the CIA and the Pentagon), brutal domineering behaviour, complete indifference to poverty and mass killings in the world – an indictment of American abuse of power and dominant position, US disrespect for international law, in a word the neo-colonial violence of a new Roman Empire. The portrayal of Bush in the media fulfilled all expectations. It seemed tailor-made – at last a president that America-haters always dreamt of, a splendid blend of the brutal sheriff and the fanatic missionary. These studies, as we might suspect, lacked scientific rigor. Guesses and impressions passed for truths and every manner of sophistry was deployed to prove the barbarity of America. George W. Bush, for instance, when he was still the Governor of Texas, was first portrayed as a bloodthirsty leader, with a finger firmly pressed on the switch of an electric chair. Elected President, Commander-in-Chief of the US Armed Forces, Bush suddenly appeared in the role of a Christian crusader king, out to shake up the world, flying the standard of a puritan fundamentalist horde gone out of control. News headlines spoke of “George Bush’s Holy Crusade” (*Libération*), “War or Jihad?” (*Le Courrier International*), “Holy Wars” (*Le Point*), “Holy War against Jihad” (*Le Nouvel Observateur*), “The Clash of the Fundamentalists” (*Le Monde*), for over three weeks.<sup>14</sup>

*José Bové and Jean-Marie Messier: two grand causes, two fallen heroes of French modernity.*

We see that the protean anti-Americanism of the past few years has been nourished by contemporary world events, and fed also by fears and fantasies inherited from the 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The anti-globalization rhetoric of José Bové, the “shepherd of Larzac,” is in fact little but a remake of the 1920s attacks on “Americanism,” pointing to the subservience of modest independent artisans to American corporate power, brutal assembly-line discipline, and the “dehumanized settings” of an industrial society excessively rationalized by the rules

of Fordianism or Taylorism – in short, a world devoid of pride in personal initiative and accomplishment.<sup>15</sup>

Single-handedly taking on the American Goliath and its Taylorized food outlet — the McDonald's fast-food chain – José Bové proved that society had not totally silenced individual voices and that a lone David could check the inexorable advance of the juggernaut of food standardization. Wholesome food was contrasted to American “junk” (*la malbouffe*), the rich taste of a slice of Roquefort was compared with a tasteless, greasy, grilled mass of ground beef. A modern incarnation of the *personnaliste* philosophy of the thirties, José Bové symbolized a typically French form of resistance to American trade imperialism. His spectacular political protests launched with the support of the French Farmers' Confederation – the destruction of a McDonald's restaurant at Millau in the Aveyron<sup>16</sup> (euphemistically termed a “dismantling” operation), or his active participation in anti-globalization protests at the WTO's Seattle summit were happenings which established his omnipresence in the French media (he was of course barely mentioned in the US media).

Acclaimed by leaders of the right and the left, united in their opposition to the uncontrolled globalization process, José Bové became a self-made myth: he embodied the virtues of great comic book heroes. He was at once Tintin in America, going after the evil producers of genetically modified foods, and Asterix at war against the legions of a new imperial Rome.

Oddly enough, the rejection of “American” globalization, symbolized by José Bové, coincided with the emergence of a new type of French corporate globalization embodied by a truly Americanized French CEO, Jean-Marie Messier. A classic product of the elite “Grandes écoles” (Polytechnique and the National School of Administration), a high-ranking, respected civil servant in the Balladur government, Messier demonstrated that it was possible to live the American dream in France, first by changing careers, then by taking control of an old-style corporation, the Compagnie Générale des Eaux, and turning it into one of the biggest media and communications companies in the world, with its name appropriately changed to Vivendi Universal, after a series of spectacular mega-mergers. Like the frog in the fable that blew itself up to the size of an ox, this ordinary French company became one of the leading American multinationals, highly rated on Wall Street, gaining control of one of Hollywood

---

<sup>14</sup> See D. Lacorne, “Mais non, cette guerre ne fut pas une croisade !,” *Le Monde*, 17 avril 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu, *Décadence de la nation française*, Paris, Editions Rieder, 1931, p. 107-108.

<sup>16</sup> Paradoxically, at the time when José Bové was attacking McDonald's, sales of the 932 French McDonald's went up by about 3% (between 2000 and 2001), while they fell by 1% in the United States. See Shirley Leung, “McHaute Cuisine,” *Wall Street Journal*, 30 August 2002.



major studios (Universal Studios), and adopting English as its working language to satisfy the wish of the majority of its board of directors. Messier, the exemplary Parisian bureaucrat, even chose to transfer his private residence to Park Avenue, in Manhattan, to better establish his American credentials.<sup>17</sup>

However, these two emblematic figures of French modernity ended up as fallen heroes. José Bové landed in prison, sentenced by a French court for attacks on private property, and Messier in the end, was forced to quit the chairmanship of a company he had driven to the verge of bankruptcy. Both kinds of zeal led to failure. José Bové and Jean-Marie Messier, men who symbolized the difficult French transition to modernity and globalization, only revealed the paradox of French public opinion -- generally "suspicious" of globalization (72% of polled opinions, but acknowledging at the same time that globalization was a "good thing for France" (53%), and "especially good for French industry" (63%).<sup>18</sup>

This inconsistency of the French surely reflects another paradox, observed in a recent study by Philip Gordon and Sophie Meunier: "While the French (often stridently) resist globalization, they also adapt to it (discreetly and usually better than many would suspect)."<sup>19</sup> Anti-American rhetoric should therefore never be taken literally: it is often accompanied by blatantly Americanophile rhetoric, an aspect too often overlooked by the media, and by authors who have made a career out of anti-Americanism.<sup>20</sup>

Still, French anti-Americanism has a bright future. It feeds on a century-old tradition, and enjoys continuing support from leading political figures of all stripes, as well as from new lobbies, such as the Farmers' Confederation founded by José Bové in 1987, and ATTAC, an anti-globalization public interest lobby launched in 1998 at the initiative of the editors of *Le Monde Diplomatique*. Echoing José Bové's radical slogan, "I have one enemy, it's the market!" Ignacio Ramonet, the editor-in-chief of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, declared in the same vein at about the same time: "let us disarm and defeat the market at all cost!"<sup>21</sup> Bové

---

<sup>17</sup> See José Bové and François Dufour, *The World is not for Sale. Farmers against junk food*, London, Verso, 2001. and Jean-Marie Messier, *J6M.com. Faut-il avoir peur de la nouvelle économie?*, Paris, Hachette, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> According to an IPSOS poll for *Figaro Magazine* of 26 May 2000, well analysed in Philip Gordon and Sophie Meunier *Le Nouveau défi français. La France face à la mondialisation*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2002, pp. 143, 154 (translated from id., *The French Challenge. Adapting to Globalization*, Washington D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2001). According to the same poll, 35% of the French believe that "globalization is not a good thing for France" and 46% consider that it is not beneficial to workers (against 36% contrary opinions). Furthermore, 51% of the French questioned by the CSA on 30 June 2000 declared themselves favorable to José Bové's views on globalization (p. 143).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> For numerous expressions of americanophilia, see D.Lacorne, Jacques Rupnik and Marie-France Toinet, *The Rise and Fall of Anti-Americanism. op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> Cited in Philip Gordon and Sophie Meunier, *Le nouveau défi français, op. cit.*, p. 148-159.

was popular because the leftwing media readily supported his cause without questioning his motivations.<sup>22</sup>

The remarkable success of the French anti-globalization movement would not have been possible without the quasi-unanimous support of major French political parties. Among them are Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front, belligerently opposed to the globalization of trade during the European elections of 1999 as well as Charles Pasqua and Philippe de Villiers' ultra-nationalist party, the Rassemblement pour la France, which lamented the sacrifice of the "grandeur of France upon the altar of globalization" (Pasqua termed it the "new totalitarianism of our times"). The Communist Party and its general secretary, Robert Hue, who denounced the horrors of "unbridled neo-liberal globalization" at WTO's Seattle summit, to say nothing of the curious alliance of a Gaullist Chirac and a Socialist Jospin, both of whom have suggested ways to "tame" or "humanize" globalization as if it were some kind of wild beast that had to be reined in at all costs if the destruction of European cultures and economic systems were to be averted.

Worried about the increasingly important role of American pension funds in the workings of the French stock exchange, Chirac publicly attacked the selfish interests of "California and Florida pensioners" while Jospin denounced the "dictatorship of shareholders," imposed from across the Atlantic. Only the MEDEF (the leading organization of French business firms) and the centrists of Liberal Democracy, led by Alain Madelin, could see any good at all coming out of the globalization of liberal economies.<sup>23</sup>

### *The illusion of transparency*

America is indeed an open society. News and information circulate freely, American media organizations dot the globe, European journalists encounter no special obstacles when they work in the United States, and the number of Europeans traveling to America rises from year to year. However, behind this apparent transparency the real workings of American society are far from obvious. We believe we know a great deal about America, but in fact we know very little... There are numerous reasons for such ignorance: negligence, lack of in-depth research, excessive reliance on hearsay and reductionist stereotypes, old-fashioned prejudices, and no doubt, a certain arrogance, based on a feeling of European cultural and moral superiority. It is so much easier to speak without trying to understand, to look without really seeing, to condemn before checking the facts. Two controversial topics can illustrate

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-19, 147, 150-155. ATTAC is said to have over 34,000 active members and to enjoy the support of 130 French parliamentarians.

the actual ignorance that characterizes French views of America: multiculturalism and the death penalty.

American multiculturalism has been, since the 1990s, the *bête noire* of the partisans of a secular, republican and assimilationist French society, who decry the importing of a “politically correct” ideology, radically foreign to our own French ways.<sup>24</sup> Transplanted to in France, American multiculturalism is perceived as a mortal challenge the core of our centralist, republican tradition. The introduction of new forms of ethnic “identity politics”, the critics argue, would balkanize French society into rival “ethnic ghettos” or territorial “communities.” This, in turn, would prevent the assimilation of new immigrant groups and, in the end, precipitate the dissolution of the “One and Indivisible” French Republic. Worse, the acceptance of American-style multiculturalism could perpetuate regressive cultural practices like polygamy, female excision or forced marriage.<sup>25</sup>

Criticism of the excesses of American multiculturalism is not entirely unjustified. The critics, however, seem to miss the forest for the trees. In fact, there hardly exists such a thing as “American multiculturalism.” There are different types of multiculturalism, and most radical and separatist forms are rare even in the United States<sup>26</sup>. Multiculturalism, however divisive, did not prevent America’s spontaneous surge of patriotism in the aftermath of the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Beneath the apparent confusion of a multicolored mosaic, there did survive a *Unum*, a common political culture, a patriotic fervor shared by all Americans, whether they happened to be recent immigrants – Europeans, Latinos, or Asians. Multiculturalism is not, as we seem to believe in France, a source of irreconcilable differences. The “disuniting” of America is no more real than the “balkanization” of France. Opposition to multiculturalism, a French variant of anti-Americanism, is closely related to an ancestral, obsessive fear of the fragmentation of the “One and Indivisible French Republic,” — a fear that can be traced back to the French Revolution and more specifically to the Jacobins’ denunciation of their political enemies, the Girondins, unfairly accused of wanting

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. pp. 17-19, 150-155.

<sup>24</sup> For widely differing analyses of the “multiculturalist danger,” see the writings of Jean-Claude Barreau, Paul Yonnet, Alain Peyrefitte, etc., all analyzed in depth in D. Lacombe, *La crise de l’identité américaine. Du melting-pot au multiculturalisme [The American Identity Crisis. From Melting pot to Multiculturalism]*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition, Paris, Gallimard, coll. Tel, 2003, p. 31-36.

<sup>25</sup> Christian Jelen, “La régression multiculturaliste,” *Le Débat*, n° 97, November 1997, pp. 137-143, and more generally, id., *Les casseurs de la République*, Paris, Plon 1997. Six years later, Education Minister Luc Ferry denounced the “American logic” of the right to difference, a perfect “calamity,” which according to him, would aggravate the “communal excesses” that have proved so harmful for our schools. See Luc Bronner and Xavier Ternisien, “Le mauvais débat du communautarisme,” *Le Monde*, 12 April 2003.

<sup>26</sup> For a critical analysis of three competing visions of American multiculturalism, see *La crise de l’identité américaine*, op. cit., pp. 341-343.

to transform the new revolutionary regime into the chaos of a fragmented federal State, modelled on the American federal system.<sup>27</sup>

The French debate on the death penalty in the U.S. is an equally striking example of the ignorance of French commentators. The life stories of American death-row inmates, such as Karla Faye Tucker, Betty Lou Beets, Gary Graham, Odell Barnes or Mumia Abu-Jamal are thoroughly familiar to readers of French newspapers and some of the most famous French intellectuals, like Jacques Derrida, have been mobilized to denounce the injustice of the death penalty. Jack Lang, a former education minister, visited Texas to spend a few minutes with Odell Barnes in the hope of influencing the state's Board of Pardons. Robert Badinter, the former Chief Justice of the Constitutional Council, launched a press campaign against the U.S. death penalty, collecting close to a million signatures for a petition addressed to the newly elected American president, George W. Bush. Badinter found it deplorable that the "oldest democracy in the world and the greatest power on earth [...] has now joined the head pack of homicidal states, together with China, Iran, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Saudi Arabia. [...] American society seems to be in the grip of a killing madness. And yet it has failed to rid itself of crime. All it has done is respond to killing with more killing."<sup>28</sup> Serge Tornay, a professor at the National Museum of Natural History, believed he had finally discovered the reason: it could all be explained by the "theocratic" nature of American democracy. "It just might be the case," he wrote, "that human sacrifice, the notorious historical privilege of theocratic and totalitarian states, still constitutes a last resort. Faced with the threat of annihilation of their social order, Americans today, like the Aztecs long ago, are terrified by the prospect that the current cosmic cycle is coming to an end. Only the deaths of countless human beings, could generate enough energy to ward off the danger."<sup>29</sup>

The maintenance of the death penalty in America and its abolition in all European nations greatly facilitated the critics' inference: Europeans were civilized, in contrast to their American cousins, the barbarians.<sup>30</sup> But the explanation was incomplete. Paradoxically, it is not due to a lack, but rather an excess of democracy, that America maintains such a cruel practice. Indeed, contrary to what most French critics seem to assume, Congress in fact has no

---

<sup>27</sup> The Girondins, according to Laurence Cornu (who quotes Buzot) were unjustly accused of "naturalizing in France the government of America." Laurence Cornu, "Fédéralistes! et pourquoi?" in François Furet and Mona Ozouf (eds.), *La Gironde et les Girondins*, Paris, Payot, 1991, note 24, p. 284.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Badinter, "L'Amérique et la mort," *Nouvel Observateur*, 17 March 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Serge Tornay, "De la théocratie en Amérique," *Le Monde*, 2 February 1998.

<sup>30</sup> See D. Lacorne, "The Barbaric Americans," *Wilson Quarterly*, Spring 2000, pp. 51-60 and Emmanuelle Le Texier, "L'Amérique au miroir de la presse française (1998-2000)," *Revue Tocqueville*, n°1, 2001, pp. 139-161. On the recent period, see the thorough and well-informed account by Justin Vaisse, "The Future of Transatlantic

authority to abolish the death penalty across the United States. Criminal law (with the exception of federal crimes) falls within the province of the states and it is up to their legislatures to decide to abolish or to retain the death penalty. In France, a simple majority vote in the National Assembly was all it took, in 1981, to abolish the death penalty, at a time when 62 percent of the French still favored the practice. In the US, federalism and local democracy tilt the balance in favor of a practice that many jurists recognize as cruel and unjust, especially vis-à-vis ethnic minorities. The death penalty lives on simply because it is the will of the people! Also, contrary to what has often been said in France, when George W. Bush was Governor of Texas, he was not personally responsible for his state's high rate of executions: Final authority was not his, it resides exclusively with an independent Board of Pardons.

Our ignorance can be explained by the tenacity of our centralist, Jacobin tradition. The concentration of power in the "One and Indivisible" French Republic has not prepared us, French, to understand the workings of a federal government. Why in the world haven't they, Americans, abolished the death penalty like we have? Could this be because they are less democratic, and therefore less civilized? The answer, as I have tried to show, is not quite as simple as it seems.

There is indeed a "knowledge gap" between France and the United States. It concerns issues as different as the role of religion in American politics, the ravages — more imaginary than real — of "political correctness" and other such typically French exaggerations about the "horrors" of American feminism, or the seething anger of the American ghetto, verging on open warfare. The greater our ignorance, the more fanciful the stereotypes that serve to decipher American reality.

*Those not with us are against us.*

Francophobia, no doubt encouraged by the Bush administration, is an old phenomenon which can be traced back to Protestant England and was instrumental in building modern British nationalism, as well demonstrated by Linda Colley<sup>31</sup>. It was unleashed in the United States for a simple reason: the Bush administration could not tolerate any criticism from

---

Relations: a View from Europe," Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, 17 June 2003.

<sup>31</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons. Forging the nation, 1707-1837*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1992. See also Denis Lacorne, « Les dessous de la francophobie », *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 27 février 2003 (interview).

Western allies, particularly those who should have been eternally grateful for the U.S. intervention in two world wars. In the field of international relations, eternal praise is not a common political value, even from friends and allies, and yet it was expected from the Bush administration. “Those not with us are against us” was the motto of the age. There was therefore no hesitation on the part of the American press, eager to please the White House, to describe French foreign policy as that of a “perfidious” if not “treacherous” nation, the sole aim of which was the failure of the US military strategy, (despite the thin evidence presented to the U.N. by Colin Powell of the existence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction).<sup>32</sup> We know today that this evidence was more fictitious than real and that the French criticism of an untimely war against Iraq was based on a healthy dose of critical thinking, perfectly justified under the circumstances. The French manner was perhaps inelegant: the threat to use the French veto at the U.N. “whatever the circumstances” was clumsy, to say the least, and the inability of the French to envisage an end to repeated rounds of inspections aroused doubt about the good faith of French diplomats.<sup>33</sup> But to go so far as to accuse the French of treason was a line that only the most vicious Francophobes could cross.

That line was indeed crossed by several established (and not so established) members of the American press. It was a good time for bashing the French, those disgusting “cheese eating surrender monkeys” (The Simpsons) – a phrase that was endlessly repeated in signed and unsigned editorials. Murdoch’s press pictured president Chirac as a “weasel” running away from responsibility (*The New York Post*), or a wriggling worm (*The Sun*, in England), and stranger still, *The Wall Street Journal* portrayed Chirac as a “transvestite, balding, pygmy Joan of Arc”<sup>34</sup>. French leaders became a band of cowards who slunk away the moment things got hot, forgetting how America had saved France twice from disaster. As for our intellectuals, suffering, in the words of Jonah Goldberg, the editor of the *National Review On Line*, from “mental fecal impaction,” they naively believed that Old Europe still meant something, that it still carried weight in the world arena. Which is why, our visionary explained, “Hollywood morons and French intellectuals alike find the taste of Fidel Castro’s posterior so palatable.”<sup>35</sup> At the US Congress cafeteria, French fries had become ‘liberty fries’ to play up to the most xenophobic of American congressmen. One of the most merciless

---

<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey Nunberg, “A Lexicon of Francophobia, from Emerson to Fox TV,” *New York Times*, 9 February 2003. Charles Krauthammer, a *Washington Post* columnist, denounced the “sabotage” France had resorted to one month before the invasion of Iraq: “Yet the lengths to which France has gone to oppose the United States show that the stakes are much higher. France has gone far beyond mere objection, far beyond mere obstruction. It is engaged in sabotage [...],” *Washington Post*, 21 février 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Pierre Hassner, “Guerre: qui fait le jeu de qui?,” *Le Monde*, 25 February 2003; id., “Etats-Unis-Itak-Europe: le troisième round,” *Le Monde*, 26 April 2003.

<sup>34</sup> As cited in « Francophobia.com », [www.tf1.fr](http://www.tf1.fr), Feb. 12, 2003.

<sup>35</sup> *The American Enterprise Magazine Online*, December 2002, [www.taemag.com/taedec02d.htm](http://www.taemag.com/taedec02d.htm)

cartoons of President Chirac portrayed him as a transvestite, in a “compromising position” with a particularly virile Saddam Hussein, in simulated advertisements for condoms, with the legend: “‘Republican Guard’: the only proven protection for your weapon of mass destruction.”<sup>36</sup>

### *The historical origins of French Americanophobia*

Just as American Francophobia must be distinguished, for the sake of clarity, from American critiques of French politics and society, Americanophobia must be distinguished from mere anti-Americanism. By anti-Americanism, I mean the critical and reasoned expression of a disagreement with what Americans say or do. By Americanophobia, I mean the total visceral rejection of anything that has to do with American culture, democracy, or economy, in short, with American civilization. Anti-Americanism expresses itself through critical acts or words; it may not be reasonable, but it is openly debated in the public sphere and is related to the concrete events that mark the ups and downs of Franco-American relations. Philippe Roger and Jean-François Revel's recent books abound in examples of this nature (see Chapter one).

The story of French Americanophobia is an old one, going back to the beginnings of the trans-Atlantic relationship. It was best expressed in Cornelius de Pauw's virulent thesis of American degeneracy. In his *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains*, published in 1768, the primary concern of this Dutch priest who wrote in French and worked at the court Frederick the Great, was to serve the interests of his master. Realizing that the prince wished to discourage German emigration to North America, and inspired by Buffon and some French explorers, de Pauw argued that, in America, all natural forms, whether vegetal, animal or human, had degenerated to the point of having a shrunken appearance. His essay clearly aimed at terrifying the future North European settlers. Hence his dramatic description of the pernicious effects of the American climate on four-legged animals “more than six times smaller than their European counterparts,” on moronic human creatures, contaminated in every part of their organism<sup>37</sup> and rendered feeble by the horrors of famine and hunger. De Pauw did not hesitate to affirm that:

---

<sup>36</sup> Image posted on the website [www.StrangeCosmos.com](http://www.StrangeCosmos.com). See Julie Loudner, “La nouvelle francophobie” dissertation for the Cycle supérieur d'études américaines of the Ecole doctorale at the IEP, Paris, June 2003; Justin Vaisse, “Etats-Unis, le regain francophobe,” *Politique Internationale*, n° 97, Fall 2002; D. Lacorne, “Les dessous de la francophobie,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 27 February 2003 (interview); “Fuck la France. Comment les Américains nous jugent aujourd'hui,” special issue of *L'Echo des Savanes*, May, 2003

<sup>37</sup> Cornelius de Pauw, *Recherches philosophiques sur les Américains*, in *Œuvres Philosophiques de Pauw* [original edition: 1768], Paris, Jean-François Bastien, an III de la République (1792), vol. 1, p. 2.

American tigers and lions were entirely mongrelized, undersized, cowardly and a thousand times less dangerous than those of Asia and Africa [...]; wolves, wolverines and bears also occurred as miniatures in this land, and were less audacious than their counterparts on the old continent. [...]. Finally, a generalized mutation and bastardization had affected all four-legged creatures in this part of the world, deep down to the very principles of life and its regeneration.<sup>38</sup>

Animals brought from Europe survived with difficulty in the New World, to the point of “dogs losing their voice, and ceasing to bark in most of the countries of the new continent.” On the contrary, the most repugnant animals escaped this phenomenon and were of sufficiently impressive sizes to discourage potential emigrants:

Here the earth’s rotting surface was overrun with lizards, eels, snakes, reptiles and monstrous and highly poisonous insects [...] Most caterpillars, butterflies, centipedes, beetles, spiders, frogs and toads, were giant-sized, and multiplying in number beyond imagination.<sup>39</sup>

The new colonizers, still according to de Pauw, encountered terrible reproductive difficulties, since the “climate of the New World concealed a hidden vice, which to this day is inconducive to the multiplication of the human race.” Worse, the rare children who were born in this new land had a low life expectancy: “the suffocating malignancy of the atmosphere affected them right from the cradle, and strange illnesses cut them down at a young age.”<sup>40</sup>

Such exaggerations explain, in turn, why Founding Fathers like Franklin, Jefferson and Madison devoted so much energy, and much of their correspondence, to refuting the arguments put forth by de Pauw, the first example of a European truly committed to the systematic denigration of America.<sup>41</sup>

Two centuries later it was no longer possible to characterize the United States as a country that could not be civilized. On the contrary, it was now the excess of American civilization, American hyper-modernity, that nourished anti-American sentiment. Some Americanophobes, like the communist writer Roger Vailland, mixed humour and irony in their

---

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>41</sup> See James W. Ceaser, *Reconstructing America*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997, pp. 19-65 and D. Lacorne, “L’écartèlement de ‘l’homme atlantique’ ” in Christine Fauré and Tom Bishop (eds.), *L’Amérique des Français*, Paris, François Bourin, 1992, pp. 169-175.



perfectly reactionary denunciation of the French enthusiasm for what was, then, a recent American invention, the refrigerator:

I have never really understood what use a Frigidaire could ever be in a country like France, where, apart from two moderate months in a year, and then again not every year, the climate is uniformly so cold that a window pantry is quite enough to keep till Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday the leftovers from Sunday's lamb roast. Those of my friends who own one use it mainly to produce little cubes of ice, which are meant to be added to a glass of whisky (sic), and which alter its taste. Whisky, besides, has grown so dear that their Frigidaire no longer serves anything but a symbolic purpose.<sup>42</sup>

In its most extreme form, Americanophobia today expresses itself in a morbid desire for the military defeat of America, or even for the destruction of America. To sweeten his deadly pill, Dr Baudrillard thus claimed, a few days after the trauma of 9/11 that each of us, French, secretly wished the death of America. This was our *schadenfreude*, our secret joy at the suffering of others – a suffering that is necessary and justified because Americans well deserved it! Our jubilation, according to Baudrillard, was proportional to our “terrorist imagination,” supposedly shared by all well-meaning men and women. The “sacrificial” nature of the attack was beyond description. It displayed violence at its best – a strange mixture of “the white magic of cinema, and the black magic of terrorism.” The destruction of the twin towers ultimately fulfilled the dream of the West: “our aversion to any final or permanent world order.” Hence this stubborn “fact,” more real than all others, despite Baudrillard's well-known aversion for the very possibility of a reality principle:

We desired this event, each one of us wished it to happen, for it is impossible not to wish the annihilation of such an hegemonic superpower. Even though this is quite contrary to Western moral values, it is a fact, and this fact precisely reveals the pathetic violence of all efforts to deny it.<sup>43</sup>

And yet, such an extreme example of Americanophobia is not a recent phenomenon in France. It was well entrenched in the France of the 1930s, with classics on the subject of

---

<sup>42</sup> Roger Vailland, *La Tribune des Nations*, 14 March 1956, quoted in *L'Amérique dans les têtes*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>43</sup> Jean Baudrillard, “L'esprit du terrorisme,” my italics, *Le Monde*, 2 November 2001. For François Guery, there is an obvious and direct connection between Duhamel and Baudrillard. When young students read the *Scènes de la vie future*, writes Guery, they think “it's Baudrillard talking about America. They haven't heard of Duhamel. But Duhamel is nothing but Baudrillard.” F. Guery, “L'Amérique impensable?,” *Philosophie Politique*, n° 7, December 1995, p. 14-15.

French decadence like Georges Duhamel's *Scènes de la vie future* (*Scenes from the Future* -1930), Robert Aron's and Arnaud Dandieu's *La decadence de la nation française* (*The Decadence of the French Nation* - 1931) or their *Cancer américain* (*American Cancer*) published in the same year, or again Daniel Rops' *Le Monde sans âme* (*A World Without A Soul* - 1932), to which should be added the works of partisans of a French spiritual renaissance like Jacques Maritain, Alexandre Marc and Emmanuel Mounier.<sup>44</sup> But the latter did not secretly wish the death of America; their only dream was to check the evil of the age: the proliferation of American materialistic values.

For Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu, the editors of *Ordre Nouveau*, the degradation of the French spirit, or French "republican decadence," was due to "the full rationalization of modern society, which under the auspices of Ford, Taylor and Young, has dehumanized all our frames of reference."<sup>45</sup> The adoption by the French elites of a new "industrial dogma," amounted to a twofold betrayal: Betrayal of the old patriotic, emotional enthusiasm derived from the French revolutionary tradition, and betrayal of the French capitalistic tradition. From a purely "material and quantitative" perspective, according to Aron and Dandieu, France had "already lost the battle, and sacrificed itself upon the altar of social structures utterly hostile and foreign to her." In this perspective, the French had become the "parasites" of the American empire, "conquered minds" comparable to the *Graeculi* of the old Roman empire, poor teachers oblivious of the meaning of what they "copied or taught."<sup>46</sup> In a grand *élan* heralding the anti-capitalist utopias of the thirties, Aron and Dandieu attacked the "cosmopolitan plutocracy," which in submitting France to the supra-national order of the Young plan, had destroyed "all manifestations of love for the land and the nation." The war debt settlement did produce the terrible feeling, accepted as a matter of fact by all the *grands bourgeois*, "that France was done for". Anticipating the *personnalistes* theses of Emmanuel Mounier, the future editor-in-chief of the quarterly *Esprit*, Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu offered a new solution to the utter degeneration of France: a "return to a real, sentimental and anti-rational individualism." The aim was vague but grandiose. Whatever the cost, it was an urgent task to recover the revolutionary patriotic *élan*, a taste for self-affirmation, a renewed acceptance of the "risks of victory, which demand energy and aggressiveness"<sup>47</sup>. The Americanophobia of the thirties effectively expressed, to use François Furet's words, a

---

<sup>44</sup> Philippe Roger writes, "The intellectual Americanophobia of the Twenties and the Thirties still remains the unsurpassed horizon of French anti-Americanism.," *L'ennemi américain*, *op. cit.*, p. 358. On this period, Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, *Les non-conformistes des années trente*, Paris, Seuil, 1969, is essential reading.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu, *Décadence de la nation française*, Paris, Rieder, 1931, pp. 107-108

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115-116. Continuing this tradition, Régis Debray describes the attitude of a true *graeculus* of modern times in his pamphlet, *L'édit de Caracalla ou plaidoyer pour les Etats-Unis d'Occident par Xavier de C\*\*\**, Paris, Fayard, 2002.

<sup>47</sup> A. Dandieu and R. Aron, *ibid.*, pp. 243 et 57.

certain “pseudo-Nietzscheism”<sup>48</sup> that gave central importance to the exaltation of the will against the cold rationalizations of an *Homo oeconomicus*, supposedly exemplified by American bankers and captains of industry.

In *Le Cancer Américain*, Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu took stock of the gravity of the American disease, a subtly insidious, surreptitious cancer which penetrated all human communities, beginning with our cities, our universities, indeed our minds, since, they pointed out, “America is a method, a technique, a sickness of the mind.”<sup>49</sup> The link with Georges Duhamel is undeniable; it is akin also to the concerns of Emmanuel Mounier who, in his written review of Duhamel’s *Scènes de la Vie Future*, warmly applauded the author for his denunciation of “Americanism,” that “barbarism which threatens the entire human edifice” in the name of a progressive civilization destined to control the fate of the human species. An ultimate consequence would be nothing less than the “extermination of all individual life forms.” Faced with the terrifying emergence of “idolatrous mechanism,” the civilized individual, according to Mounier, had no choice but to “wake up to the alarm” in order “to save the future of mankind, whatever it might hold.”<sup>50</sup>

The founding manifesto of the quarterly *Esprit* took up the same themes in 1932, implicitly targeting the grand American tyranny, whose drastic effects called for a healthy revolt. The consequences, if the authors of the manifesto were to be believed, were quite clear: “Societies governed like businesses; savings dilapidated to adapt man to machine and to extract only material profit from human effort”; a private life torn apart by appetites and desires, totally disordered and pushed to all forms of homicide and suicide (...).” The solution, again, was to save man “by making him conscious of his true identity,” while accepting the “permanent fate of the Spirit, without any attachment to its temporal manifestations” without enslaving it to the search for profit. The final call for freedom was “It is time to free heroic action from bitterness and joy from mediocrity.”<sup>51</sup>

Strictly speaking, the exalted rhetoric of the editors of *l’Ordre Nouveau* and *Esprit*, was not just French in inspiration. Behind the spectre of a decadent France was that of a decadent Europe, and the defence of a French spiritual renewal echoed the thoughts and writings of

---

<sup>48</sup> The expression is borrowed from François Furet, *Le passé d’une illusion*, Paris, Livre de Poche, 1998, p. 504.

<sup>49</sup> *Le cancer américain*, p. 80, quoted in Loubet del Bayle, *op. cit.*, p. 259

<sup>50</sup> Mounier, *Revue de culture générale*, October 1930, pp. 14-21, quoted in Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle, *Les non-conformistes des années trente*, Paris, Seuil, 1969, p. 258. On Mounier and America, see especially Seth Armus, “The Eternal enemy: Emmanuel Mounier’s *Esprit* and French Anti-Americanism,” *French Historical Studies*, n° 2, Spring 2001, pp. 271-303.

<sup>51</sup> Folder announcing the founding of *Esprit*, February 1932, reproduced in J-L Loubet del Bayle, *op.cit.*, pp. 448-449.

an influential German philosopher, Martin Heidegger.<sup>52</sup> Heidegger shared with his French literary counterparts a similar Americanophobia. His enemy was the twin facets of modern capitalism: American and Bolshevik materialism and mechanism, the true causes of Europe's fatal sickness, and the manifestations of an unspeakable "emasculatation (*Entmachtung*) of the Spirit."

Europe, according to Heidegger, "lies in a [pair of] pincers between Russia and America, which are metaphysically the same"<sup>53</sup> because they promote a single value: equality, i.e. conformity and the destruction of all social ranks. This, in turn, according to Heidegger, produces in both countries a "boundless etcetera of indifference and always-the-sameness," which can only lead to the destruction of "every world-creating impulse of the Spirit." Hence this "onslaught" of what Heidegger defined as "the demonic, in the sense of destructive evil." What was the solution proposed by the great German philosopher? A Nietzschean solution, not without similarity to the Nazis' fascist ideology: the only way to recover the "true essence of the Spirit" consisted in recovering the "true power and beauty of the body, all sureness and boldness in combat, all authenticity and inventiveness of the understanding (...)." The "awakening of the Spirit," concluded Heidegger, demanded that the German nation "take on its historical mission" in combatting the Americano-Bolshevik axis of evil.<sup>54</sup>

### *Two totalitarianisms, Soviet and American*

Post-Second World War Americanophobia was remarkably similar to pre-World War II Americanophobia. Consider this statement written in 1981 by Alain de Benoist, one of the intellectual leaders of the French New Right: "The truth is that there exist two distinct forms of totalitarianism, with very different effects, but each as redoubtable as the other. The first, in the East, imprisons, persecutes, tortures the body; it however leaves room for hope. The other one in the West leads to the creation of happy robots. It air-conditions hell and kills the soul."<sup>55</sup> The same argument was untiringly repeated by authors as politically apart as Michel Jobert, Jacques Thibau, Jean-Marie Benoist, or Anicet Le Pors, in books with revealing titles:

---

<sup>52</sup> The influence of Heidegger on the editors of *Ordre nouveau* is well documented by J-L Loubet del Bayle, *ibid.*, p. 90. Another probable source of inspiration is the essay by Gina Lombroso, *La rançon du machinisme* (Fr. trans.), Paris, Payot, 1931.

<sup>53</sup> Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, [1935], New Haven, Yale University Press, 1974 p. 45 (based on a lecture delivered in 1935 at the University of Freiburg. "I have made no change in the content", explained Heidegger in his Preface to the 1953 German edition).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 47, 50, respectively.

<sup>55</sup> Alain de Benoist, quoted in D. Lacorne et al., *L'Amérique dans les têtes*, *op. cit.*, p. 33. Curiously, the same argument was defended by more moderate politicians, strongly inspired by the Gaullist political tradition, such as Michel Jobert, Jacques Thibau or Jean-Marie Benoist. Other major intellectuals like Merleau Ponty, Jean-Paul

*Pavances pour une Europe défunte* (1976), *La France Colonisée* (1980), *Marianne à l'encan*(1980)...

It should be clear at this point that a significant part of “Old Europe”'s intelligentsia was not just being critical of America. It rejected *all* US social and political values as barbaric, to prevent, in Heidegger's cruel words, a horrible “emasculatation of the Spirit.”

*“Old America”: a model for Europe?*

Are French intellectuals today as Americanophobe as they were in the thirties or at the end of the Cold War? I do not believe so. Baudrillard's wild imagination is probably the exception that proves the rule. The critical stance taken by France and Germany, during the Iraqi crisis, was not a sign of a total rejection of American values, quite the contrary. Economic liberalism, economic globalization and American democracy were not described as “cancers” or instruments of the “Spirit's emasculatation.” The stated goal of the Bush Administration— the elimination of weapons of mass destruction – was not being questioned. What was contested was the means chosen to attain these objectives and especially the time-table of military intervention adopted by the Pentagon. With his ironical comment about a powerless “Old Europe,” Donald Rumsfeld forgot that Old Europe -- the Europe of the Brussels Convention (to draft a future European constitution)--, was also a remarkably creative political enterprise. The delegates of the European Convention had chosen the oldest political model available to them, that of “Old America,” i.e. the America of the Philadelphia Convention, of the Founding Fathers, of the rule of law and of sophisticated constitutional compromises... A more vibrant homage could never be paid to America, at the very time when trans-Atlantic misunderstandings were degenerating into mutual abuse.

How many in the Bush administration still cared for the glorious model of “Old America”? Certainly not the President or his praetorian guard. A little more attention paid to the creation of a new constitutional Europe, a little more respect for the reasonable (but no doubt debatable) criticism expressed by the leaders of “Old Europe” would probably have averted numerous misunderstandings. Indeed, in the end, nothing illustrates the proximity of the two models, European and American, better than the motto chosen by the two federated continents: “*E Pluribus Unum*,” say the Americans; “*Unity in Diversity*,” states the Preamble

---

Sartre or Etienne Gilson defended comparable viewpoints at the end of the 1940s. See Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994.

of the future European constitution, drafted by the Brussels delegates in the year 2003.<sup>56</sup> By choice, and without realizing it, we've all become Americans, in spite of it all!

**TABLE ONE**

**Question:** "When you think of the United States, what words and images come to your mind?"

<b>POSITIVE ASPECTS</b> <b>% respondents who mention:</b>	<b>%</b> <b>43*</b>
Grandeur / Gigantism	14
Power of the United States	12
Wealth	4
Freedom	4
Superior technology	4
Modernism	3
"I like this country"	1
Dynamism	1
<b>The economy</b>	<b>6</b>
Economic strength / a strong economy	4
A strong currency/ a strong dollar	1
<b>Politics</b>	<b>4</b>
"Gives military support to other countries"	3
<b>Other positive aspects</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>NEGATIVE ASPECTS</b>	<b>56*</b>
"I don't like the United States"	2
<b>Violence</b>	<b>21</b>
Violence	14
Crime, delinquency, drugs	7
The death penalty, executions	2
Free sale of arms	2
<b>Negative psychological traits</b>	<b>14</b>
"They're excessive in everything"	3
Vanity, arrogance	2
Individualism	2
Extremism	1
Puritanism	1
Craziness / "a crazy people"	1
Selfishness	1
Intolerance	1
<b>Criticism of American influence</b>	<b>11</b>
They control other countries	9
"They think they're the world's policemen"	2
"They want to impose their way of life"	2

<sup>56</sup> See, D. Lacome, "E Pluribus Unum, a motto for Europe?," *Le Débat*, January 2003, pp. 88-97 and a special issue of *Critique Internationale* on US and European constitution-making (*Critique Internationale*, December 2003, pp. XXX )

<b>The economy</b>	<b>7</b>
“American imperialism”	3
Economic hegemony	2
Capitalism / Profit-seeking	2
<b>Food</b>	<b>3</b>
Poor food	2
The obesity of Americans	1
<b>Other negative aspects</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>NEUTRAL ASPECTS</b>	<b>43*</b>
Money	4
Economic liberalism	3
A multiracial society	3
Weapons	3
Capitalism	2
A federation of states	2
The dollar	2
The “American Dream”	1
<b>Geography</b>	<b>8</b>
The Statue of Liberty	2
Wide open spaces	2
Hollywood	2
Skyscrapers	2
Other geographical features	2
<b>Food</b>	<b>6</b>
McDonald’s	3
Fast food restaurants	3
Coca-Cola	2
<b>American Personalities</b>	<b>6</b>
Among them, Bill Clinton	4
<b>Politics</b>	<b>5</b>
Power	3
A world power	2
A military power	1
Other neutral aspects	2
Brings nothing to mind	2
<b>No answer</b>	<b>5</b>

\*Multiple responses account for totals (and subtotals) greater than 100.

**Source:** “France-Etats-Unis: regards croisés”, SOFRES/French American Foundation poll, May 2000.

[To appear in *With Us or Against Us. Essays on Global Anti-Americanism*, New York, Palgrave, 2005, ( Tony Judt and Denis Lacorne eds.)