

From Model to Menace: French Intellectuals and American Civilization

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I

The international debate about the Iraqi War once again brought to light a difference between Europe and America. Particularly striking was the French initiative to criticize American unilateralism, which aroused the resentment of the American people and provoked the Secretary of Defense to speak of “punishing” France. Jacques Chirac’s determined resistance to the Bush Administration’s war policy was countered with Donald Rumsfeld’s angry complaint against “old Europe.” Not only did the diplomats and politicians of the two countries reproach each other, but also in public opinion and popular sentiments, mutual antipathy has been growing on both sides of the Atlantic.

The French government questioned the legitimacy of the Iraqi War and criticized American occupational policies. As far as these current issues are concerned, a diplomatic compromise will be possible and is to be reached in the process of international negotiation. The French government’s bitter criticism of U.S. diplomacy, however, raised a more general question about the American approach to foreign affairs. In spite of the unanimous sympathy of the international community with American people after the disaster of September 11th, the Bush Administration’s

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strategy of war against terrorism and its rhetoric about “an axis of evil” were regarded from the European perspective as simplistic and dangerous. Against this background of growing worry about U.S. hegemony, President Chirac’s challenge was enthusiastically welcomed by most French people, whether on the right or on the left, and supported by public opinion throughout Europe, especially in Germany.

Moreover, it is not only the current foreign policies of the United States and the Bush Administration’s unilateralism that have aroused French antipathy. In fact, long before September 11, 2001, American predominance as an unparalleled superpower engendered frustration and resistance among French public opinion and sometimes gave rise to a reemergence of the anti-Americanism that is deeply rooted in French intellectual history. Apparently, this rise of anti-American sentiment in France is one of the repercussions of the globalization of the economy, which has been going on under the overwhelming hegemony of the United States since the end of the cold war. Afraid of a loss of national identity, many French people have become cautious about globalization and some, resolutely anti-American.

Thus, anti-Americanism or antipathy to American predominance has been a notable intellectual tendency in France since the 1990s. The Franco-American controversy about the Iraqi War was just the most prominent occasion on which it attracted the world’s attention. The recent publication of numerous books dealing with the French image of America¹ shows that America is still a controversial topic for the French people. Of course, it would be wrong to say that the entire French population is anti-American. Not only resolute anti-Americans like Régis Debray but also friends of America like Jean-Francois Revel are participating in the present debate about America.² But, does not the latter’s worry itself suggest a rise of anti-Americanism at present?

The recent revival of anti-Americanism in France obliges us to reconsider its historical nature and social background. French anti-Americanism in the cold war era was closely bound to the political and ideological context of the time. The anti-Americanism of intellectuals was a consequence of the heavy influence of Marxism and, in some cases, a natural result of their pro-Soviet attitude. That of Charles de Gaulle and his followers was inspired by nationalism. Consequently, both types of anti-Americanism were expected to fade away with the decrease of the political and ideological tensions of the cold war. With the decline of Marxism and Communism in the French intellectual world and in the

euphoric atmosphere of the “détente” of the 1970s, this expectation seemed to be realized. In the course of the 1970s and 1980s, the anti-Americanism of intellectuals in the preceding decades was largely replaced by popular enthusiasm for things American. Richard Kuisel’s narrative of French resistance to Americanization in the postwar era ends with the opening of Euro Disneyland.³ Indeed, several observers of the French intellectual scene declared the death of anti-Americanism in France after the collapse of Soviet socialism.⁴ In retrospect, this declaration turned out to be premature. Anti-Americanism has survived and is very much alive today, as shown above.

So, it is not sufficient to consider French anti-Americanism in the ideological context of the cold war era. Its intellectual origin should be traced back to earlier times, while new conditions for its growth are to be explored in the recent development of the world. In order to understand this trend in 20th century France and its intellectual background, it is necessary to place the subject in the broader context of the history of the French image of America. This article tries to tackle this task.

II

First I shall discuss several characteristics of the French approach to America, which distinguish it from other European perspectives, and explain how and why the French literature has a privileged place in the European tradition of discussion of America. Then I shall try to identify three epochs in which the French people were greatly interested in America and influential books were written in France about the new nation. In the last part, I shall concentrate on the last epoch of the three, the so-called interwar era, and show why it marked a turning point in the history of French discussion of America. In particular, I shall pick up as the origin of modern anti-Americanism in France two typical works of the time and analyze their arguments: Georges Duhamel’s *America, the Menace* (the original French title is *Scènes de la vie future*) and André Siegfried’s *America Comes of Age* (*Les États-Unis d’aujourd’hui*).⁵

It is not exceptional at all that a culture or a nation is continuously interested in some other culture or nation. For European people, however, America is not just one among a multitude of other countries, but another self, an alter ego. On one hand, American civilization is a child of Europe. The ideals and principles on which American society was founded, Puritanism, republicanism or Enlightenment philosophy, were

all born in modern Europe and transplanted to the new world. The people who built the new civilization were descendents of Europeans. On the other hand, Americans did not bear the yoke of the past, which they had left in the old world. America had neither court nor aristocracy. There were no feudal lords or privileged classes to arouse the resentment of the common people. Emancipated from the bonds of tradition, the principles of modernity, liberty, equality and the pursuit of happiness developed fully on the new continent and resulted in a wholly new society, which gave an equal opportunity to everybody and provided material abundance for many. But, at the same time, Europeans have always wondered, has it given birth to a prosaic culture of materialism and conformism lacking in good taste?

Thus, for Europe, America is a unique stranger who, emerging from its own womb, has grown up in a totally different environment. American civilization is a mirror in which Europeans see their own future, whether hopeful or terrifying. That is the reason why innumerable books on America have been written by Europeans from the time of the American Revolution to the present.⁶ And of that enormous collection of books about America, the French literature forms a major part. In this genre, not only does it surpass the literature of any other language in quantity, but always dominates the European argument. The French voice is louder than any other European voice in applauding American idealism as well as in denouncing the materialism of the society. Moreover, the French tradition of discussing America is remarkable for the intellectual quality of its founders and developers. Most French classics on America are not written by specialists or simple travelers but by philosophers and writers of great fame. From 18th century philosophers like Diderot and Cudorcet through Tocqueville to Siegfried and Duhamel, the list of authors who wrote about America contains many major names in the intellectual history of modern France. Among 20th century intellectuals following Siegfried and Duhamel are André Maurois, Jules Romains, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Jacques Maritain, Michel Crozier, Jean Baudrillard and others. Many public intellectuals or *litterati* traveled the United States and wrote about America during the last century. In contrast, the French academic world is not so well-supplied with professional experts of American studies.⁷ This contrast eloquently shows that, in France, the discussion of America is not monopolized by specialists but is a common concern for all intellectuals.

III

There are several reasons why the French viewpoint on America can be regarded as somehow representative of the European.

The first is the French universalist way of thinking. A French man, Louis Dumont says, thinks that he is a human being by nature and French by accident.⁸ Other peoples, according to him, think the other way: for a German, he or she is German before being human. Although I do not subscribe to this too overtly general view of the French anthropologist, I do believe that no one besides a French intellectual would make such a bold statement. At least, it suggests that the French people think of themselves as more universalist than any other people. They have a tendency to identify their own view with that of Europeans in general, not to say of mankind.

Second, there is a remarkable historical accumulation of cultural and intellectual exchanges between France and the United States, which cannot be seen in any other bilateral relationship. Since the enthusiasm of 18th century philosophers for the American Revolution, French liberals and republicans have projected their own ideals onto the screen of America. From the Americanism of La Fayette and Brissot to the gift of the Statue of Liberty on the centenary of the American Revolution, admiration for the sister republic over the Atlantic was part of French republican political culture. American intellectuals' enthusiasm for French or Parisian culture also has a long history. From Franklin and Jefferson to the writers of the "lost generation" in the 1920s, there was a continuous flow of American intellectual tourists, who came to Paris to learn European high culture. Even today, French modern or post-modern philosophy, from existentialism to post-structuralism, attracts its most enthusiastic followers on American campuses. Without a doubt, this cultural and intellectual sympathy between the two countries provided a favorable basis for their diplomatic relations, which were relatively friendly as late as the beginning of the 20th century.

This does not imply, however, a permanent collaboration or alliance between the two countries. In spite of the intellectual intimacy between the two peoples, the Franco-American bilateral relationship was in general uneventful throughout the 19th century.⁹ The United States kept its distance from European affairs and France had, since the Louisiana Purchase, no important territories in North America except in Canada.

There was neither a common interest uniting the two countries, nor a seed of serious conflicts between them. Napoleon III's intervention in the Mexican civil war was only an exceptional episode. This combination of political distance and intellectual intimacy characteristic of Franco-American relations in the 19th century gave French observers of America a certain advantage of disinterestedness that British or Spanish counterparts could hardly duplicate.

On the other hand, France is different from the other countries of Continental Europe in her absence from the emigration race to the New World. Apart from the existence of numerous descendents of French colonists and immigrants from French Canada, the French share in the great exodus from Europe to America in the 19th and 20th centuries was very small. Historically important were emigrants from revolutionary France and political refugees during World War II, among whom there were not a few political leaders and eminent intellectuals. The reasons for their emigration, however, consisted in a serious but temporary political crisis in Europe. Naturally, as the crisis passed and political stability returned, most of the people involved came back to France.¹⁰ It would be of little meaning to speak of French Americans as an ethnic group, for, as distinct from other Americans of non-English origin, they have never been oppressed as a minority, nor felt the need to band together as an ethnic pressure group. They have had no experience comparable to the political frustration of their cousins in Quebec, where Charles de Gaulle once shouted, "Vive le Québec libre!"

To sum up, the French have had an ardent curiosity about American culture and society since the 18th century, but this has had little influence on the diplomatic relations between the two countries, which were basically friendly but distant from the American Revolution up to World War I. The relative insignificance of French immigrants in American society left them out of its ethnic conflicts. This is the background against which French observers look at American civilization. It can be summarized as a mixture of intellectual intimacy and diplomatic distance. Probably that is the reason why the American people themselves welcome most French works on America. They are accepted as impartial, though not uncritical. Paradoxically, the increasing diplomatic and military commitment of the United States to Europe since World War I has aroused a strong antipathy among French intellectuals, some of whom, feeling menaced by American civilization, have given an extremely negative description of it, contrary to the traditional French image. After World War II, among

Western European countries, which were increasingly dependent on the United States, French public opinion was the most anti-American and the Presidents of the Fifth Republic from Charles de Gaulle to Jacques Chirac have always challenged American diplomatic hegemony.¹¹

IV

Reviewing the French literature on America from the 18th century to the present, we can identify three historical periods in which the French people were particularly interested in the new country. The first was the epoch of the American Revolution and the foundation of the United States. The second was around the 1830s, and the third was the so-called inter-war era in the 20th century. Commonly recognizable in each of the three periods is the historical coincidence of social and political crises in both countries. This goes a long way toward explaining the rise of French interest in America during the periods in question.

Of course, the American Revolution was followed by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. Historians have argued about the influence of the American Revolution on the French and the differences and similarities between the two, but no one has treated them as independent of each other. In the intellectual climate of the Enlightenment, it was only natural that the French public opinion should cheer the astonishing news from North America. Not only those who, like Crèvecoeur and Chastellux, had lived in or visited America, but also those who had never been there enthusiastically discussed the American Revolution and the new republic. Raynal, Diderot, Mably and Condorcet were just a few of the French 'philosophes' who wrote about America in the late 18th century. Inevitably these political discourses on America had a huge resonance in public opinion under the Old Regime and helped pave the way for the French Revolution. It is undeniable that the Declaration of Independence and la Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen had some theoretical basis in common. The image of America which took shape in French opinion on the eve of the Revolution had various echoes in the later discussion about the new country.¹²

The age of Jackson, beginning in the 1820s, marked a decisive turning point in 19th century America. Jackson's victory over John Quincy Adams dramatically showed the transformation of American society brought about by the rise of the common man. Universal male suffrage, party politics with the spoils system and other practices of American

democracy in the 19th century have their roots in this epoch. The frontier movement began to transform the Union into a huge continental empire. In a word, the Jacksonian era put an end to the classical republicanism of the founding fathers and proclaimed the coming of a new age characterized by equality of opportunity and the dream of success.

Simultaneously, from the 1820s to the 1840s, France also underwent a rapid social change. The July Revolution in 1830, dethroning the Bourbon and establishing Louis Phillipe's 'bourgeois monarchy,' made clear the political victory of the middle classes over aristocracy. In the turmoil of industrialization and social transformation, however, the "Trois Glorieuses" could not resolve the confusion of the post-revolutionary era: far from a French version of the Glorious Revolution, it was simply a prelude to a bigger revolution in 1848. The democratization and industrialization triggered by the 'double revolution' (the French and the Industrial) of the preceding century, with all their effects on society, provoked various reactions that were difficult to deal with. This was the situation in which Alexis de Tocqueville and Michel Chevalier looked up to the example of America, thinking of the problems of France or Europe. Both considered democratization and industrialization as decisive and inevitable for modern society, in Europe as well as in America.

World War I and its consequences had a profound impact on the European mind and bred an acute consciousness of the crisis of Europe, as shown by Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. Haunted by the nightmare of the end of European civilization, many intellectuals became sharply aware of the dissolution of their spiritual basis and lost self-confidence. And this worrying consciousness about the future of Europe was frequently coupled with a mixed feeling of fear and expectation toward the two illegitimate children of Europe, the Soviet Union and the United States. Many European intellectuals in the inter-war era were terrified by the rise of these new nations, finding in them either a barbarism arising from within Western civilization or an ultra-modernity far surpassing that of modern Europe. A minority, fascinated by them, expected them to save European civilization from decadence. Whether terrifying or mesmerizing, the United States and the Soviet Union, however different from each other, appeared in European eyes to be a pair of new powers which had something in common in contrast to Europe. Many European travelers in both countries in the 1920s and the 1930s observed the new societies from this particular viewpoint.¹³

What, then, was the situation in the United States at that time? After fighting in World War I in order to make "the world safe for democracy," the American people were disappointed in the post-war arrangements of the Versailles Treaty and lost interest in Europe. Not only did U.S. diplomacy return to isolationism, but also the whole nation, under the slogan, "Back to normalcy," began to concern itself almost exclusively with domestic affairs. At the same time, the American economy, now the biggest in the world, was approaching its zenith. Steadily increasing wages under the remarkable stability of commodity prices boosted popular spending and strikingly improved the living standard of common people. Many families had a model T Ford and other consumer goods, which made everyday life easy and comfortable. The new media of the time, radio and the movies, excited popular passions and commercial advertisements constantly stimulated consumers' desires. In retrospect, this economic prosperity in the 1920s turned out to be so precarious that it would abruptly be replaced by a long depression in the following decade. Nevertheless, the various aspects of American society in the inter-war era, displaying an early phase of mass society, had a profound impact upon many European observers.

It would be wrong, however, to regard those aspects as totally new and unprecedented. Indeed, materialism and economic prosperity had been an integral part of the European image of America since the 18th century, although the development of technology in the 20th century, introducing many innovations in products and services, amazingly changed the life style of the American people. Moreover, behind the highly modern aspect of society, there were symptoms of the rise of fundamentalism deeply rooted in American culture such as the social and political confusion caused by the 18th Amendment, the exclusion of the theory of evolution from the school curriculum in southern states, and the racism of the Ku Klux Klan. American society in the 1920s, then, presented a contradictory image. On one hand, it was a highly mechanized consumer society that might represent the future of all countries. On the other, it was clear that the moral and religious fanaticism latent in American culture, awakened by the fear of new immigrants and urban decadence, had a tendency to result in irrational popular movements. It was in this double anxiety that some European intellectuals cast their embarrassed eyes on America in the inter-war era: the American scene, dreadful or hopeful, predicted their own inevitable future, while some aspects of American behavior were embarrassingly parochial and

anachronistic. Against this intellectual background, some French travelers in America brought back a very negative impression. The English version of Georges Duhamel's *Scènes de la vie future*, probably the most hostile description of America ever written in French, was entitled *America, the Menace*. André Siegfried's *Les États-Unis d'aujourd'hui*, translated into English as *America Comes of Age*, was less unfavorable and more objective, but the author's perspective had many things in common with Duhamel's. Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu, under the heavy influence of the two predecessors and in fear of a world economic crisis triggered by the Wall Street crash of 1929, wrote *Le Cancer américain*.¹⁴ According to the diagnosis of the book, not only was America cancerous, but the disease would inevitably spread to Europe.

V

Thus, French interest in America increased sharply at periods of simultaneous crisis in the two countries. In each case, not only were the two nations respectively approaching a historical turning point, but also some common ground or close relationship was recognized between the historical situations in which they found themselves. Most important French works on America were the products of such a historical period.

By contrast, no matter how serious a crisis the United States was facing, if France was in a stable condition or the crisis was conceived as a peculiarly American affair, the French people did not take a keen interest in it. For instance, the Civil War was evidently the greatest crisis in the history of the United States to that time. The main issues of the War, however, such as slavery or the right of a state to secede from the Union, were not matters of serious concern for Europeans. So, this catastrophe of 19th century American history did not have any lasting impact on the French image of America. No influential work on America was written in France at the time and the young Clemenceau's newspaper reports about American politics in the Reconstruction era found no resonance in French public opinion. As for the problem of race in America, Tocqueville's pessimistic prognosis decades before was not superseded by new studies following emancipation. The American victory over Spain in 1898 and the takeover of the Philippines had an impact on the French government and people and provoked a sharp reaction from journalists¹⁵, for these events spectacularly showed the emergence of a new imperial power and revealed the offensive aspect of the Monroe doc-

trine. Until World War I, however, the French people had not taken seriously the rise of the United States as a world power.

After World War II, the relationship between the United States and France was far closer than before. The American presence in Europe became permanent and the influence of American culture was palpable everywhere. The disappearance of distance between the two countries, however, did not introduce a fresh perspective into the French view of America. It is true that everyday contacts with American people and American products nurtured in the popular mind various clichés or stereotypes about America and Americans. Jean-Luc Godard's film, *Au bout de souffle*, for example, vividly depicted those stereotypes prevalent in postwar Paris. But it was doubtful whether the common people's daily contacts with American culture would bring about a drastic revision of the traditional French image of America, which had been built up by intellectuals. Postwar intellectuals, for their part, following the course of their predecessors, visited and wrote about America in great numbers. But most of the new examples of this genre of French literature, from Jean-Paul Sartre's to Jean Baudrillard's, were not so much original studies as echoes of earlier writings. Sartre's embarrassment at American civilization was a reserved version of Duhamel's bitter critique of it, and his remark about "la liaison profonde du conformisme américain et de l'individualité"¹⁶ was nothing but a variation of Tocqueville's insight. Baudrillard's semiotic reflection on America¹⁷, a good text for learning the jargon of postmodernism, added nothing new to the perception of American society. Michel Crozier's sociological study¹⁸ on the American disease of the Carter era was much more objective, but the main line of his argument did not escape from the Tocquevillian perspective. Raymond Aron, the Tocqueville of the 20th century, did not discuss America in a systematic way. The only book he wrote about the United States treated American diplomacy and its cold war policies.¹⁹ The greatest friend of America among 20th century French intellectuals was probably Jacques Maritain, whose book, *Réflexions sur l'Amérique*²⁰, could be considered as a refutation of Duhamel's. Maritain spent many years in the United States and earned the profound respect of American scholars and intellectuals. But, paradoxically, his increasing fame in America to some extent discredited him among his colleagues in France. By contrast, François Mauriac, the highly respected Catholic writer in postwar France, shared with leftwing intellectuals a haughty disdain for the "mercantile" culture of America.²¹

VI

Both Siegfried and Duhamel saw in America a vision of a new society in sharp contrast to European realities. In seeking a vision of the future in the New World, they followed their forerunners in the eighteenth century. But contrary to Enlightenment philosophers, who hung on the new republic their hope of changing old Europe, the two writers had a great fear of the emerging mass society in America.

In the Preface of *America, the Menace*, Duhamel began by refuting Curtius, the German cultural historian, who asked all European intellectuals to throw away their national ideologies and to have a common belief in universal civilization. Referring to his own experience as a medical doctor participating in the international community of science, Duhamel argued that most European intellectuals had been free from national prejudice and obtained a universal idea of civilization as early as at the turn of the century. In Europe after World War I, he continued, the most serious task was not to save civilization from struggles among nations, but to defend a true, moral civilization against the rise of a new civilization of technology and materialism. Contrasting the concept of moral or “absolute” civilization, fit to make people more human, with that of another, material and mechanical, or “relative” civilization, which was only instrumental and neither good nor bad in itself, he warned that the future would be threatened with the predominance of the latter over the former. America represented that future for Europeans:

... no nation has thrown itself into the excesses of industrial civilization more deliberately than America. If you were to picture the stages of that civilization as a series of experiments made by some malign genie on laboratory animals, North America would immediately appear to you as the most scientifically poisoned of them all (le sujet le plus savamment intoxiqué).²²

Here we see the archetype of the viewpoint from which certain European intellectuals of the 20th century approached American civilization. For them, America was a laboratory of modern civilization of industry and commerce, of technology and materialism, deprived of all spiritual bases. This civilization, which Duhamel characterized also as Baconian, had indeed its origin in Europe²³, but the tradition of moral or spiritual civilization was still alive there and restrained the excesses of the former. Without any historical restraints on materialism, he deplored, Americans were driven by the force of commercialization to endless

spending and consumption. In the ardent pursuit of convenience and efficiency, they had lost all the virtues and beauties of a quiet life. They enjoyed the benefits of modern technological civilization, but they were its victims at the same time. Like the sorcerer's apprentice, who didn't know how to stop his own magic, they had lost control of the development of their own society.

Most of the things and phenomena that Duhamel described with great fear as scenes of the future have now become commonplace not only in France and Europe but also all over the world. Present day readers would be puzzled by the author's virulent antipathy to motorization, radio and the movies. The scenery of the Chicago abattoirs, which he called "the kingdom of death,"²⁴ might seem to them more humane than that of today's highly mechanized and hygienically well-controlled slaughterhouses. What is most interesting and striking, in retrospect, about this book published more than seventy years ago is the author's uneasiness and fear about all the products of modern commercial society. It is an eloquent testimony to the early appearance in the United States of a society of mass consumption and mass media. At the same time, it tells how strange and shocking that new society was to the eyes of a representative European intellectual of the time. It is true that, even today, not a few intellectuals hate the vulgarity of mass culture and raise their eyebrows at the invasion of commercialism into society. But, who would dare to say today that American movies would bring the nation's moral decadence to its extreme in half a century and seriously call for organizing an association against advertisements?²⁵

The cultural phenomena that Duhamel found in the daily life of Americans were the products of 20th century technology and science, but in his disdain for the conformity and materialism of American society, he echoed and amplified the acid tone of contempt with which many European observers had talked of American culture. His criticisms and warnings about America were in many cases variations on his predecessors' remarks. There was no art for art's sake in America; higher education was poor; American products, which were manufactured easily and rapidly, were imperfect; neither historic monuments nor masterpieces of craft could be found in the United States. These observations about the poverty of American culture were repetitions of the arguments that Tocqueville had made more carefully in the Second Volume of *Democracy in America*. On the other hand, Duhamel's harsh statement about American big cities ("Chicago is no more paintable than the

desert”²⁶) would have resonance in Sartre’s remark about New York and Baudrillard’s description of California.

In a word, Duhamel looked at the new reality of mass society in America through the old glasses of the European intellectual. His astonishment and fear about the new American civilization shockingly revealed the prejudices of the traditional European perspective, all the more because his worry about the future of Europe was serious. He went so far as to say that the conformist way of behavior of the American people reminded him of insects.

In the United States, . . . what strikes the European traveler is the progressive approximation of human life to what we know of the way of life of insects—the same effacement of the individual, the same progressive reduction and unification of social types, the same organization of the group into special castes, the same submission of every one to those obscure exigencies which Maeterlinck names the genius of hive or of the ant-hill.²⁷

However unconvincing these lines might be to American readers, Duhamel’s horrible vision of America obtained wide currency in Europe at the time and provided a prototype of cultural anti-Americanism for French intellectuals in later years. André Maurois, in his book about America, which was a product of his residence in Princeton in the early 30s, presented the opinion of one of his friends in Europe. On hearing of Maurois’ reception of an invitation from Princeton University, that friend, “who had never crossed the Atlantic,” strongly advised him not to go.

You don’t know America. It’s a country where people are too restless to have a minute of leisure time, a country of constant noise where you could neither sleep nor take a rest, a country where men are killed at the age of forty by excessive work and women leave home in the early morning to join the restless movement of society. . . . People talk of nothing but money. Since childhood, you have known the good taste of spiritual civilization. Well, you will find a civilization of bathroom, of central heating, of refrigerator. . . . Have you read, my friend, the description of the abattoirs of Chicago? It’s a monstrous vision, say, apocalyptic. . . .²⁸

Although Maurois suggested nothing, it is evident that this caricature borrowed many motifs from Duhamel’s book.

VII

The most serious trouble with America, in Duhamel's view, was the absence of intellectuals protesting against technological civilization and mass culture. Worse, in America, resistance to the excesses of technology and materialism took the form of irrational fundamentalism, religious or secular, denouncing the modern creed of human reason and spiritual liberty. Social confusions brought about by the Prohibition movement, fundamentalist attacks on the theory of evolution, and the activities of the Ku Klux Klan were the second theme of inquiry for both Duhamel and Siegfried. These phenomena were in appearance in conflict with the urban life of pleasure and amusement celebrated by the mass media and advertising, but, both asked, were they in reality the other side of the same coin of American culture?

As distinct from Duhamel's impressionistic approach, Siegfried's way of inquiry was much more methodical. Born into the family of a leading politician of the Third Republic, he spent a long time traveling all over the world starting in his youth. Comparative study of different cultures was his usual method of research. He had traveled many times in the United States before he wrote *The United States Comes of Age*, which was the result of long research and careful reflection. There is no question that, in the history of French literature on America, it was an important synthesis, second only to *Democracy in America*.²⁹

Siegfried focused on the changing pattern of the racial and ethnic structure of American society, which had in fact been greatly transformed over the years. As is well known, the continuous flow of new immigrants since the 19th century had a profound impact on the society and brought about various social conflicts. Various groups of new immigrants, different in color, religion, language and culture, and difficult to assimilate, formed their own communities in urban slums, resulting in a prototype of what we now call multi-cultural societies. Behind the main streets of big cities, these new immigrants were integrated into American society through the controversial activities of party machines. Even mafia groups played a role in settling the newcomers, and they exerted a considerable influence over immigrants' communities. The WASP middle class, representing the main stream of American civilization so far, felt menaced by the rapid growth of new communities of immigrants in New York or Chicago and reacted violently to it. They denounced as

un-American all the ethnic cultures and ways of life that new immigrants brought from their native countries. Underneath the social issues of the time, Siegfried found an increasing tension between the descendants of early Americans and new immigrants. Indeed, the greater the number of new immigrants such as Catholics, Jews and Asians in metropolitan areas became, the more audiences were attracted in the Midwest and the South to fundamentalist doctrines, which emphasized the American creed of the Bible and Puritanism. The basic problem of the time, in Siegfried's words, was the conflict between "two Americanisms," or the struggle of "native America vs. alien ideals."³⁰

Looking for an answer to the question of whether America would remain Protestant and Anglo-Saxon, Siegfried examined the ethnic and religious background of the political issues and social conflicts of the time. Applying the mode of analysis that he had used in *Tableau politique de la France de l'Ouest dans la III^{me} République*, he explained how public opinion about Prohibition or Darwin's theory of evolution was determined by the geographical distribution of religious and ethnic groups. In Southern and Mid-western States, where Anglo-Saxon or white middle classes were predominant and fundamentalist sects were active, Prohibition was rigorously imposed and Darwin's theory of evolution was violently attacked. In contrast, urban areas of the East, in particular New England, had a growing number of Irish, Italian and other Catholic immigrants and had a tendency toward liberalism and permissiveness.

In order to acknowledge Siegfried's contribution to the French discussion of America, it is necessary to consider three points. The first is his emphasis on the problem of ethnic conflicts and assimilation of new immigrants. The second is the role of religion in American society. The third is the problem of the intolerance of democracy and its remedies. Put more precisely, do democratic institutions such as associations and local self-government effectively restrain the tyranny of the majority or that of factions? All three issues had been discussed some way or other, in the long debate over America. What was new about Siegfried's arguments?

Since colonial years, the American people have been made up of different racial and ethnic groups. The notion of the metamorphosis of various people of different origins into one American nation was born at the moment of Independence. Crèvecoeur's discovery of the birth of "a new race" of Americans anticipated the later notion of the melting pot. At that

time, however, the larger part of the population was of British origin and most immigrants came from a limited number of European countries. The assimilation of minorities, cultural or religious or linguistic, did not become a serious issue until the last half of the 19th century. Tocqueville had made a prophetic argument about the destiny of Native Americans and African Americans, but he excluded them from the democratic society of America. As for ethnic minorities within the society of white Americans, he treated only Irish immigrants as part of the problem of Catholicism in the United States.

Compared with these earlier works on America, Siegfried's emphasis on racial and ethnic conflicts introduced a new perspective from which to analyze the heavy impact on society of the drastic change in the demographic structure of the country since the end of the 19th century. Indeed, *America Comes of Age* was the first exhaustive study in France of racial and ethnic problems in America. It is still worth reading, all the more because the problems of multi-culturalism are heatedly discussed in America today.

The French have recognized the importance of religion in American society since the time of the American Revolution. Eighteenth-century philosophers were attracted to the liberal and tolerant co-existence of different churches in America. It was natural that they should lay their hope on the American ideal of religious freedom, for they were involved in a bitter struggle against oppression by the Catholic Church. Tocqueville's emphasis on the good effects of religion on American democracy had the purpose of persuading both secular liberals and religious conservatives of the compatibility of Christian beliefs and the ideals of liberty and equality. As a result, his description of American Christianity focused on its rational and utilitarian aspects. American Puritanism, he maintained, was from the beginning connected with republican and democratic principles. Under the rule of the separation of church and state, all American churches and denominations were excluded from party politics, and therefore exerted a healthy moral influence on every citizen. American Catholics were enthusiastic republicans and promoters of political equality. It is true that Tocqueville took notice of the religious excitement aroused by the Revivalists, but he explained it simply as the excessive reaction of frustrated spiritualists to the predominant materialism and utilitarianism of society. For him, a typical American Protestant was Unitarian, and he predicted that in the future of democratic society, many Protestants would take the way to atheism through

deism, while a few of them, still believing in God, would convert to Catholicism.

Siegfried observed a wide variety of churches and denominations in America, including the Jewish religion, and found in the background of the Prohibition movement or the debate on the theory of evolution the rise of religious fundamentalism and anti-intellectualism. His view of American religion urged revision of the traditional French understanding of it, which mainly celebrated its reasonableness and tolerance. In sharp contrast to Tocqueville's observation that religion in America, by imposing a salutary control on the intellect, successfully restrained the excess of individual liberty and the tyranny of opinion, Siegfried worried about the irrational and anti-intellectual fanaticism of certain denominations of American Protestantism.

Finally, as for the problem of the majority's oppression of the minority, which has been a favorite topic for French observers of America, what is characteristic of Siegfried's argument? In seeing intolerance against alien ideals and a repression of minorities in the Prohibition movement and the rise of irrational fundamentalism, he inherited Madison's worry about oppression by factions and Tocqueville's warning against the tyranny of the majority. However, Siegfried's understanding of the mechanism of the oppression of the minority was very different from Tocqueville's, for the former's topics such as Prohibition and the exclusion of the theory of evolution from the school curriculum were examples of legislation imposed by the pressure of well-organized associations. In other words, according to Siegfried, the very activity of association that Tocqueville had regarded as useful for restraining the tyranny of the majority provided a powerful weapon for those who were intolerant of different opinions. Repeatedly he warned of the danger of public opinion being manipulated by "organized minorities" or "vigorous associations with access to the local or national moneyed interests."³¹ The serious trouble with American political life, according to him, was not the tyranny of the majority, but that of associations.

VIII

After a rough sketch of the history of the French image of America, we have examined the intellectual background against which the French sentiment toward America underwent a rapid change in the 1920s and made an analysis, in particular, of the arguments of the two representa-

tive works of the time, Duhamel's *America the Menace* and Siegfried's *America Comes of Age*. Different in size and style, both books were clear expressions of the fear and anxiety about America felt by many French intellectuals in the aftermath of World War I. Together with some other books immediately following them, such as Aron and Dandieu's *Le Cancer américain*, they marked the starting point of the French anti-Americanism of the 20th century. It is not true of course that everything began with Duhamel and Siegfried. Most of their topics, such as materialism, money worship, cultural poverty, restlessness of life, and so on, were all familiar issues in the long history of the French discussion of America. Although the dominant tone of the discussion was favorable throughout the 19th century, discordant voices have always disturbed it since the time of the American Revolution. Indeed, few French admirers of America failed to drop critical remarks about some aspects of American society and culture. What was new about Duhamel and Siegfried was not their particular motifs, but the whole picture they drew of America.

This negative picture of America found a tremendous resonance among French intellectuals in subsequent decades, all the more because the American presence in Europe rapidly increased. Of course, succeeding crises in the Atlantic world had a great impact on the French image of America: the depression in the 1930s, the war against Hitler and the defeat of 1940, the cold war and the Atlantic Alliance. These major upheavals of the 20th century made France more and more dependent on the United States, and, paradoxically, this increasing dependence of the country strengthened the anti-Americanism of many French intellectuals while producing a small group of friends of America. The arguments of Duhamel and Siegfried should be reconsidered in the light of this later history of French anti-Americanism.

What should we say, then, about the recent revival of anti-Americanism in France, which was allegedly expected to disappear with the end of the cold war? Is it a simple repetition of the old song, or new music for the 21st century? The answer is that it is partly new and partly old.

In the present French discourse about America, we can hear many variations on the old themes, which have appeared many times in the former movements of the score. This is not meant to deny, however, that a familiar melody sounds different in a new arrangement. In conclusion, I would like to identify some new sounds in the present chorus of anti-Americanism.

First, it seems undeniable that present day anti-Americans are fighting a defensive engagement. One of the main battlefields of anti-Americanism has always been culture. Present day cultural anti-Americans, however, seem to have lost the absolute belief of their forerunners in universal culture, and are making efforts to defend their national culture against the commercial penetration of American popular culture. This defensive attitude is quite clear, for instance, in the debate about the protection of the French film industry against Hollywood.

On the other hand, the increasing globalization of the market economy has been nurturing popular antipathy toward America. It was often said in the cold war era that the anti-Americanism of French intellectuals was not widely shared by the common people.³² The recent popularity of the anti-American national hero, José Bové, seems to discredit this old assumption. Indeed, the growing globalization of the economy always has the effect of generating anti-American sentiment among the common people, for it is conceived, right or wrong, as a synonym of Americanization. This popular anti-Americanism is not limited to the French, but shared by many Europeans. So, the present day anti-Americanism as a reaction to the global economy is becoming a European chorus of local voices. French intellectuals' anti-Americanism in the past was a negative expression of their sense of European crisis. Aron and Dandieu, therefore, concluded their book with an appeal for the rebirth of European consciousness: "Wake up, Europe!"³³ It sounded, however, like a desperate attempt to regain a lost past. Today, European consciousness is deeply penetrating into the mind of the common people. If there is anything that provides a solid basis for the present European attitude toward America, it is this widely shared sense of European citizenship, which has grown up through the long process of making the European Union.

Finally, one of the most popular terms in the present discourse about America is "empire." Of course, it is not a new word at all for describing America. From Jefferson's "empire of liberty" to the Marxist charge of American imperialism, there have been many examples of emphasizing the imperial aspect of the American nation. Raymond Aron has given it a contradictory name, the imperial republic. What is new and characteristic of the present discourse of empire is its focus on the power of information. Military supremacy and economic predominance are indispensable, but in the present state of affairs, the new theorists of empire argue, both heavily depend on the power of controlling and managing information. Thus emphasizing the new technology of information, they

describe a picture of the new empire as a complicated network of nations, areas and organizations. The United States is the center of this network and exerts overwhelming power in the interest of maintaining it, but could never be identified with it.³⁴ Consequently, it is sometimes questionable to call it the American Empire, for the network of this empire is bigger than the United States. So, Tocqueville's old dictum, "I saw in America more than America,"³⁵ is still alive in the current European discourse about America.

NOTES

¹ Among a number of recent French works, the most important are, Denis Lacorne, Jacques Rupnik and Marie France Toinet (ed.), *L'Amérique dans les têtes* (Paris: Hachette, 1986), Christine Fauré and Tom Bishop (ed.), *L'Amérique des Français* (Paris: François Bourin, 1992), André Kaspi, *Mal connus, mal aimés, mal compris, Les États-Unis aujourd'hui* (Paris: Plon, 1999), and Philippe Roger, *L'Ennemi américain* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

² Jean-François Revel, *L'Obsession anti-américaine* (Paris: Plon, 2002)

³ Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), ch.9.

⁴ See André Kaspi, *op.cit.*

⁵ André Siegfried, *Les États-Unis d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1927). The English translation by H. H. Hemming and D. Hemming, *America Comes of Age* (New York: Harcourt, 1927). Georges Duhamel, *Scènes de la vie future* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1930). The English translation by C. M. Thompson, *America, the Menace: Scenes from the Life of the Future* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1931). Both works were the products of the authors' observation of American society in the 1920s, that is to say, before the Great Depression, but were widely read in the 1930s and 1940s in France as well as in the United States. In particular, Siegfried's book gained wide publicity all over the world and became a frame of reference for thinking about 20th century America. At least three different Japanese translations have been published, though none of them are available now.

I refer to both the French and the English versions of the two works and quote from the English. But the English translations are not so exact and sometimes misleading. So, when necessary, I supply the original French text in addition to English quotations.

⁶ For a general survey of European writings on America, see Halvden Koht, *The American Spirit in Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949), Sigmund Skard, *The American Myth and the European Mind* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

Some scholars explore European interests in America long before the American Revolution and the foundation of the United States. Gilbert Chinard, *L'exotisme américain dans la littérature française au xvi^e siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1911), *ibid.*, *L'Amérique et le rêve exotique dans la littérature française au xvii^e et xviii^e siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1934).

⁷ Probably, France is one of the European countries where the academic discipline of American studies is least developed. This is clearly in contrast to the fact that French studies are enthusiastically conducted in all major universities in the United States. Not a few American experts on French history or literature are highly respected by their

French colleagues. But it is difficult to find the French counterpart of someone like Robert Darnton or Natalie Zemon Davis.

⁸ Louis Dumont, *L'Idéologie allemande, France-Allemagne et le retour: Homo aequalis II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 15.

⁹ Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *La France et les États-Unis des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1976).

¹⁰ Among francophone refugees in America in the 1930s and the 1940s were many eminent scholars and famous writers: Jacques Maritain, André Breton, Jules Romains, Denis de Rougemont, Alexandre Koyré, Georges Gurvitch and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Some of them (Maritain and Koyré, in particular) established a lasting influence in America, but most of them returned to Europe after the War. This constitutes a striking difference from German-speaking refugee scholars, most of whom settled in the United States. See, C.W. Nettelbeck, *Forever French: Exile in the United States (1939–1945)* (New York: Berg, 1991).

¹¹ As for anti-Americanism in postwar France and its later disappearance, see, Richard Kuisel, *op. cit.* Kuisel finishes his book by referring to the opening of Euro Disneyland, but the recent conflicts between Europe and the United States show that the issue has not disappeared.

¹² Durrand Echeverria, *Mirage in the West: A History of the French Image of American Society to 1815* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

¹³ A few years before he visited the United States, Duhamel had traveled the Soviet Union and written a book about the country: *Le voyage de Moscou* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1927). He was not uncritical about Bolshevism, but his description of Soviet Russia was much warmer than his gloomy picture of America. In the last part of *America, the Menace*, he compared the two experiments, the Russian and the American, and found a greater menace in the latter, for, according to him, it was much larger than a political experiment, while the former was purely political and ideological. *America, the Menace*, 211.

¹⁴ Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu, *Le Cancer américain* (Paris: Rieder, 1931).

¹⁵ Philippe Roger, *op.cit.*, 192ff.

¹⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations, III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 85.

¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique* (Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1986).

¹⁸ Michel Crozier, *Le mal américain* (Paris: Fayard, 1980).

¹⁹ Raymond Aron, *République impériale* (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1973).

²⁰ Jacques Maritain, *Réflexions sur l'Amérique* (Paris: Fayard, 1959).

²¹ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect, French Intellectuals, 1944–1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 262.

²² Duhamel, *America, the Menace*, xiii.

²³ That the technological civilization of America has its origin in Europe is a remark almost all European observers have repeated. The American people, it implies, lack originality even in their vices. Aron and Dandieu, designating Descartes as the prime mover of that technological civilization, wrote, “the American spirit, which makes practical use of the conquests of reason without having made any efforts to discover, is nothing but the application of this degraded reason to a purely technical field . . . Descartes and Cartesians, in their creative fever and will of conquest, could not anticipate this degradation of their method. Coming down in the street and going up in buildings, Descartes has completely lost his human value and sentimental eminence.” Aron and Dandieu, *op.cit.*, 83–84. This reminds us of Tocqueville’s classical statement that every American is a disciple of Descartes without knowing anything about his philosophical doctrine. Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique II* (1840), *Œuvres de Tocqueville* (Pléiade) II (Paris: Gallimard, 1992) 513ff.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Ch. 8. Duhamel's description of the Chicago abattoirs made them widely known to the French people and provided a popular topic for the subsequent French discussion of America.

²⁵ "The cinema is a pastime for slaves, an amusement for the illiterate, for poor creatures stupefied by work and anxiety. . . . I assert that any people subjected for half a century to the actual influence of the American 'movie' is on the way to the worst decadence." *Ibid.*, 34–35.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

²⁸ André Maurois, *L'Amérique inattendue* (Paris: Éditions Mornay, 1931), 6–7. The translation is mine.

²⁹ After the publication of *The United States Comes of Age*, Siegfried wrote two further books about America: *Qu'est-ce que l'Amérique?* (Paris: Flammarion, 1936) and *Tableaux des États-Unis, 1954* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1954). The former is nothing but an extract of the first book, but the latter is more than a revised version of it. He recognized so great a change in American society after World War II that he was not satisfied to revise the old book and wrote a new one. But the second synthesis did not find as wide a resonance as the first.

³⁰ *America Comes of Age*, 141ff. The French title of the chapter, "Deux américanismes" was changed in the English version into "Native America vs. Alien Ideals." In the present usage of the word, "native America," meaning the America of Anglo-Saxons, would be unacceptable.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 242ff.

³² See Kuisel, *op. cit.*

³³ Aron and Dandieu, *op. cit.*, 246.

³⁴ Representative arguments of this kind are seen in, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), and Emmanuel Todd, *Après Empire, Essai sur la décomposition du système américain* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002)

³⁵ Tocqueville, *op. cit.*, 15.