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FRENCH VIEWS OF THE SECOND AMERICAN REVOLUTION*

By

PAUL A. GAGNON

The sorcerer's apprentice has started the water-spreading mop:
The flood is rising on every side, and the apprentice does not
know the magic word that controls the terrifying servant.

Georges Duhamel, *America the Menace*

To the most articulate Frenchmen of the late 18th century, the first American Revolution shone as a bright promise of human liberation through political reform. Even after the first vision of perfection faded—as traveling Frenchmen discovered a less-than-perfect America, and France's own revolution appeared to end in terror and dictatorship—the republic of the New World remained for many the most hopeful earthly experiment with the ideas of the 18th century *philosophes*. No such acclaim or comfortable acceptance greeted what many now call the second American revolution, when, at the turn of the twentieth century, men like Frederick W. Taylor and Henry Ford dramatized the application of Science and Reason to industrial management and production. The rationalization of mass production, with its task time studies, assembly lines, and standardization of parts, was matched by a rationalization of mass consumption, of which the most dramatic single act was Ford's decree in 1914 giving his workers an eight-hour, five-dollar day. From that moment the American worker, who already enjoyed—when he was working—a higher standard of living than most of his European fellows, became more and more the consumer of the goods he made. The old capitalism of scarcity, seeking the highest profit by means of the lowest wage and the cornering of existing markets, began giving way to a capitalism of mass consumption resting on the creation of new markets through

* The views and citations here offered are typical and illustrative only. A detailed study and a guide to the materials on the subject will be included in the author's forthcoming book on French opinion of American civilization since 1918.

high wages, increased leisure, intense advertising, extended credit and standardized products.¹

The first World War and its immediate aftermath did more than anything else to reveal the new dimensions of the economic giant in the West to even the most inattentive European. If initial impressions are the most lasting, it is perhaps unfortunate that Frenchmen first turned in large numbers to seek the meaning of the second American revolution in the decade of the 1920's, when Americans surely did not appear at their best, even to themselves. If by now American historians have decided that the Jazz Age was not so foolish or frenetic as it appeared on the surface, it was that surface that most often caught foreign attention and inevitably affected foreign judgment about what America was coming to. The political and diplomatic climate of the Harding-Coolidge-Hoover era was little more encouraging to Frenchmen than the gaudy tales of Prohibition, gangland murders, and Hollywood nights that almost daily graced their newspapers. After a wartime Franco-American love affair, in which men commonly so far apart as Barrès and Blum joined to praise American wisdom and American loyalty to France, came years of mutual recrimination and wearisome sermonizing.

From the common cause so loftily proclaimed, Frenchmen felt that they had drawn the losses and the suffering and now faced alone the dangers of a volatile Europe. America, so immensely enriched by the war, was, as Denis W. Brogan put it, the eleventh-hour laborer in the vineyard. But Frenchmen could and did add that America had not only received more than her full denarius, but had sold the earlier laborers both their food and tools at a swollen profit and now was buying up the vineyard itself, all the while intoning the virtues of patience and toil.

At the same time, the decade of the 1920's became for France a time of even more than usual self-examination. Not only the scourge of war but the scourge of Ford excited men to consider the fate of their society and their civilization. In the 1830's Tocqueville had come to study popular democracy,

¹ For a recent, largely uncritical, French view of this development, see Raymond L. Bruckberger, *Image of America* (New York, 1959).

which he considered the wave of the future, to see how it might best be adapted to French conditions, and, hopefully, to French values. But the new America of the twentieth century presented not only a political system but a total way of life, dominated by an economic order of mass consumption that appeared to dictate its own conditions and to replace traditional values with newer ones better suited to its efficient functioning. While no single French work of the period approached the stature of Tocqueville's masterpiece, many of them offered insights which, taken together, brought it up to date, particularly in their interpretations of the effects of modern industrial abundance on American life and character.

Most agreed that the spectacular economic success of the United States had been long in the making. But their explanations for this success differed markedly from those then current in American textbooks and folklore; they also reflected French sensitivity to the different pasts of the two nations and French doubts that the American system could, or should, be applied in France. Great luck, if not Divine Providence, seemed to mark every stage of American history. Neither revolution nor frontier massacre, neither civil war nor rapid industrialization, had left permanent scars. America had either avoided or overcome, and forgotten, the ills of which France was both heir and prisoner. Moreover, natural resources appeared inexhaustible and space allowed the most imaginative economic experiments. These factors alone assured that the 20th century would be America's, said Edouard Herriot in 1923, unless, of course, Russia managed to organize and exploit her own great bulk.² Observers like Bernard Faÿ saw space and wealth molding human character, spurring "boundless ambition," activity, and self-confidence.³ André Tardieu echoed Tocqueville and Bryce in citing "the feeling of unlimited potentiality" so common in America, so rare in France.⁴ In this respect at least, the old 18th century theory of American degeneration was dead. Whatever one might think of their cultural shortcomings, the American people had been admirably fitted with physical vigor and expectant

² Edouard Herriot, *Impressions d'Amérique* (Paris, 1923), pp. 20-21.

³ Bernard Faÿ, *The American Experiment* (New York, 1929), p. 75.

⁴ André Tardieu, *France and America* (New York, 1927), p. 56.

optimism for the tasks decreed by nature. The American type might range only from Deerslayer to Babbitt, but there were few Oblomovs.

Frenchmen who looked at our past saw the rhythm of world history itself conspire for America's success. The young republic and the industrial revolution had been children of the same generation. They were made for each other, said Lucien Romier, and their union was a momentous historical fact: "America began to take form as a civilization of the mass, by the mass, for the mass . . . without any tyrannical oppression to fight."⁵ In contrast to European nations, and especially to France, Firmin Roz said, the machine in America found *tabula rasa* and the great organizers of industry had a free hand on uncharted ground.⁶ Régis Michaud recited the advantages of America, the disadvantages of France: "For them, no burdens of historical tradition, no domestic quarrels, no envious or covetous neighbors, no militarism, no anti-clericalism, no communism. . . ."⁷ America's advantages were so striking, thought Marcel Braunschvig, that they nullified the very laws of history as old Europe had known them.⁸

At every stage, American history had been blessed with a happy interaction of favorable forces. The earlier industrialization of Western Europe had created reserves of capital which enabled the American, Pierre Davaud observed, to reap, without having sowed, "the fruits of the Old World's immense labor, the universal efforts of generations that preceded his."⁹ Encouraging the swift introduction of the machine was the westward movement, creating a chronic shortage of labor in the eastern industrial regions. More than one French economist saw Taylorism itself as possible only in a land that combined a need to economize on labor with an ability to risk mountains of raw materials in uncertain experi-

⁵ Lucien Romier, *Who Will Be Master: Europe or America?* (New York, 1928), p. 152.

⁶ Firmin Roz, *Les grands problèmes de la politique des États-Unis* (Paris, 1935), p. 95.

⁷ Régis Michaud, *Ce qu'il faut connaître de l'âme américaine* (Paris, 1929), p. 153. Michaud had taught at American universities for 20 years.

⁸ Marcel Braunschvig, *La vie américaine et ses leçons* (Paris, 1931), p. 11. Braunschvig taught at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand.

⁹ Pierre Davaud, *Ce qu'il faut connaître de l'histoire des États-Unis* (Paris, 1927), p. 148.

ments, and with an immense inner market, free of barriers, yearly adding a new margin of consumers. In these conditions, building big was not a risk but a necessity. The frontier allowed America to escape the social and political consequences of occasional labor surplus, while immigration was insurance against labor shortage. Would newcomers lag and break the necessary rhythm? Steam navigation, famine in Ireland, aborted revolution in Germany, pogrom in Russia—the very accidents of history joined to swell the stream. The American economic triumph, then, was hardly a matter of mere will power, or sensible virtue, or the sound principles of Mr. Hoover. No sermon of Mr. Mellon's or exhortation by M. Citroën could reproduce it in France overnight.

Beyond the gifts of nature and history, Frenchmen in the 1920's gave credit, as had their predecessors, to two other factors quite foreign to the French scene: a utilitarian materialism and a business-minded Puritan religious spirit. Benjamin Franklin's renowned practicality was no less typically American in the twentieth century than it had been in the eighteenth, although Franklin's successors had somewhere lost his grace, his literacy, and his cosmopolitan wit. They were, if anything, even more hard-headedly practical than the kite-flying American *philosophe*, whose ideas would certainly scandalize modern Philadelphians. What others dreamed, discovered or invented, Americans tinkered with and put to immediate use. Here was the frontier's effect. Ideas and originality, culture, and intellect counted for little; quickness, raw strength, ingenuity, and energy were indispensable. Madame Louis Cazamian, whose book was perhaps the most pro-American of the period, repeated with many others the old idea that Americans were uncultured because they were young and labored amid rude nature.¹⁰

The American religious heritage was likewise thoroughly practical, designed to make good businessmen and sober, though now free-spending, citizens. André Siegfried was among many who developed at length the influence of Calvinism and what he called its confusion of religion and wealth.¹¹ Régis Michaud sardonically observed that the origi-

¹⁰ Madeleine Cazamian, *L'autre Amérique* (Paris, 1931), p. 279.

¹¹ André Siegfried, *America Comes of Age* (New York, 1927), p. 36.

nal Puritan had met, along his way, the good things of life: "*Tant pis* for Calvin if the kingdom proved to be of this earth. From inside the man of scruples and remorse emerged the practical Yankee, Poor Richard." ¹²

Concentration on getting, and then on spending, had been decreed by nature, history and temperament, and sanctified by religion—all vastly different from the legacy of France. Between French and American history, said Tardieu, there was a "chasm wider than the Atlantic." ¹³ Firmin Roz, who devoted much of his life to Franco-American studies, spoke for many in saying that in the beginning there were in America the economic needs and conditions and that all the rest, political action and organization, military affairs, imperialism and isolation, culture and ideas, were built thereon, or severely adapted thereto. If the business of America was business, her history was economics. A striking contrast to European societies, where the order was inverted and modern economic developments had to make their way painfully through "superstructures that were given," inflexible. ¹⁴

Most of these views were merely logical extensions of ideas about America that were familiar before Tocqueville. And most French observers of the postwar decade also agreed with their predecessors, like Tocqueville, that economic abundance was above all other factors responsible for America's success in fulfilling many of the 18th century's political ideals. But now they feared that the vastly increased tempo of mass production and consumption might well endanger those same ideals. The spectacle of the Jazz Age was not encouraging. Rather than building upon and adding to her legacy of brave deeds and generous ideals, America seemed to be rejecting them in complacent enjoyment of a new jealously-guarded island of prosperity. Faÿ said that America, like Rome, was in danger "of falling in love with its own mass and power, thereby forgetting its obligations and losing its sense of proportion." ¹⁵

Throughout the decade, the more immediate French fear

¹² Michaud, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹³ Tardieu, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁴ Roz, *L'Énergie américaine*, (Paris, 1911), p. 51.

¹⁵ Faÿ, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

was that the United States would use its new power to impose an economic hegemony upon a grievously weakened Europe. From Marcel Cachin in *L'Humanité* on the Left to businessmen like Louis Thomas, French publicists warned their countrymen that they would have to struggle to maintain their independence of American business interests.¹⁶ But the deeper concern was that America's great economic preponderance would lead Europe and the world, directly or indirectly, whether Americans desired it or not, into new paths of political, social and cultural life. "In the face of a bleeding and impoverished Europe," said Romain Rolland, "they represent the dominant force in the future of white civilization."¹⁷

To see the effects of mass economics on America herself was imperative to those Frenchmen who pondered the fate of their way of life. Of the many books portraying American civilization for French readers, none achieved more notoriety than Georges Duhamel's *America the Menace*. No task was more urgent to men of his day, he said, than "that of incessantly reviewing and correcting the idea of civilization."¹⁸ To this task, Duhamel brought the idealism and hyper-sensitivity of a cultured and reformist bourgeois radical. Claiming a political position at an equal distance from Left and Right, he had called since the war, in which he served as an army surgeon, for a "new humanism" and attacked the machine in all of its forms, urging man to make himself master of the inanimate thing, to order human ends first, to reduce the machine to its proper role as slave. Visiting America briefly in 1928, he composed a series of acid sketches, attributing all of the evils he found to mass economic life. Man in North America, he said, was happily making himself the slave of things and of mechanical routine:

As yet no nation has thrown itself into the excesses of industrial civilization more deliberately than America. If you were to pic-

¹⁶ Louis Thomas, *Les États-Unis inconnus* (Paris, 1920), p. 69. Marcel Cachin in *L'Humanité*, July 14, 1919, p. 1. Cachin was to take the paper into the Communist camp in the following year.

¹⁷ Romain Rolland, *I Will Not Rest* (New York, 1934), p. 167; excerpt from a letter to J. H. Holmes, September 10, 1926. Rolland, moving steadily to the Left, generally accepted the Soviet system by 1927.

¹⁸ Georges Duhamel, *America the Menace* (New York, 1931), p. v.

ture 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.¹⁹

Before twenty years had passed, he predicted, Europe would be in the grip of the same "diseases." Like Chesterton before him, Duhamel asserted that it was America and not Europe that was now the elder sister: "In material civilization, the American people are older than we, a people prematurely old perhaps, who never properly matured, but who even now are enacting for us many scenes of our future life."²⁰ He undertook his journey to America more ready to confirm his fears than to seek reasons for hope. The resulting book was a recital of those fears, strikingly akin to the scenes offered by Aldous Huxley, two years later, in *Brave New World*. Men in the future would be happy slaves, comfortable brutes, ignorant manipulators of an antiseptic, technicized horror of inhuman efficiency.

America, the promised land of the immigrants who fled older forms of subjection, offered only a newer, more compelling because more comfortable, kind of bondage. In exchange for their sacrifices, it gave them only new appetites and new desires:

They yearn desperately for phonographs, radios, illustrated magazines, 'movies', electric refrigerators, and automobiles, automobiles, and, once again, automobiles. They want to own at the earliest possible moment all the articles mentioned, which are so wonderfully convenient, and of which, by an odd reversal of things, they immediately become the anxious slaves.²¹

This industrial dictatorship, he said, gathered millions of human beings to itself, broke them down and remade them into efficient producers and voracious consumers. It would end by molding man in new forms, to the greater good of economic perfection: "Breed, O America, the human tool. . . . Is it impossible for you to imitate the bees and the ants, and create a body of people, sexless, devoid of passion, exclu-

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xiv. The French edition of his work, which appeared in 1930, was entitled *Scènes de la vie future*.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

sively devoted to the instruction, the feeding, the defense of the city?"²² The idea of rebellion was unthinkable. American writers and intellectuals either fled or were silenced; the universities were dominated and domesticated by their businessmen trustees. Yet it was not repression that kept America safe from revolt, not legislation or army or police, but the "inextricable complexity" of the giant system, a complexity already beyond human comprehension: "This people is caught in the meshes of a machine, of which soon no one will know the secrets—the king-bolts, the vulnerable zones, the vital centers."²³

Duhamel's book produced an immediate controversy on both sides of the Atlantic. It seemed to sum up all the criticism of the decade; it was a literary and polemical success, eclipsing many deeper and more careful studies and became *the* book for young Frenchmen to read before setting foot in America. Unlike the usually Rightist critiques of our first revolution, *America the Menace* appealed in various of its parts to every shade of political opinion and gave ammunition to any who desired it, for whatever motive. Although it was vigorously attacked by American critics and more friendly French observers, few admitted how much Duhamel was only repeating and pulling together many views of American civilization already broadcast by French writers since the war.

As in their interpretations of American history, French visitors in the postwar period were likely to see all aspects of America's culture as flowing out of the giant economy whose more spectacular features they never tired of describing. Whether it was the mechanized slaughter of Chicago's packing houses or the sprawling automobile plants, a tour of "un système américain" seemed a necessary part of every visit and of nearly every resulting book. The most popular of all was the empire of Henry Ford. Aldous Huxley was far from the first to present Ford as the symbol, even the deity, of the brave new world. Around the man, the system and the car grew a whole literature, now admiring, now condemning, now fanciful, now serious, but nearly always assuming that

²² *Ibid.*, p. 197.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

Ford stood for America of the 1920's. The Comte de Fels saw the future of the world, as did many others, as a choice between Ford and Lenin.²⁴ André Siegfried, pitting the machine against the individual, called it a dialogue between Ford and Gandhi.²⁵ To many, Ford was truly a scourge; to others, like André Citroën, a model to be admired and copied.²⁶

Did not Fordism mean mass production, efficiency, standardization, speed and volume and high wages, resulting in mass consumption? Were his cars not the universal symbols of prosperity? Were they not helping to change the behavior, including the patterns of courtship and marriage, of an entire generation? The Ford was both the symbol and the instrument of mobility, in space and in class. It brought the country to the city and the city to the country, until all America became a single undifferentiated metropolis. And what of the man himself? Was he not the super-American in his energy, his practicality, his love of bigness and wealth and power? And regrettably typical in his lack of culture, his racism, his 100% Americanism? Like his country, he swung from isolationism to the astounding and naive crusade of the Peace Ship, then back to bitter isolation. Here was the American businessman, from whose works flowed the good and the bad. His apostles, at home and abroad, were the priests of Americanism, the religion of the dollar. Who would know America, therefore, must first explore its great industrial system.

In this exploration, two books stand out from the rest, those of Hyacinthe Dubreuil and André Philip. The former was secretary-general of a group of Catholic trade unions in France and spent fifteen months (mostly during 1928) as a skilled laborer in various American plants. Both his first book and his second, which was in large part an answer to Duhamel, were among the most friendly and penetrating of all French works on America in the period.²⁷ Philip, although far less pleased at what he saw, was also a fair and tireless ob-

²⁴ Comte de Fels, "Ford ou Lenine," *Revue de Paris* (Dec. 1, 1931), p. 675.

²⁵ Siegfried, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

²⁶ André Citroën, "Speeding up the Automobile Industry," *European Finance* (June 13, 1928), p. 171 and "The Future of the Automobile," *EF* (Aug. 2, 1929), p. 103.

²⁷ Hyacinthe Dubreuil, *Standards: le travail américain vu par un ouvrier français* (Paris, 1929) and *Nouveaux standards* (Paris, 1931).

server. Already known as a socialist theoretician, he was at this time a member of the law faculty at Lyons.²⁸ Both were, in French terms, moderate socialists interested in adapting Taylor's system to French conditions and seeking to resolve the difficulties of socialist doctrines in a new industrial world dominated by corporate giants.

For Dubreuil, the progressive rationalization of industry into larger units was welcome as "necessary to the development of the common wealth, to the progress of civilization." The only question remaining was how it should be adapted to the human needs of the working class. Philip's approach was closer to that of an orthodox socialist. Where Dubreuil dwelt upon the strengths of the system and recommended lessons that Frenchmen might learn from it, Philip stressed its oppressive side and warned French socialists and union leaders of the dangers of any "Americanization" that was not preceded by a change in ownership of the means of production.

Human spontaneity, said Philip, had no place in American scientific management, that "optimum exploitation of the worker." The basic discovery of Taylor, perfected by men like Ford, was that the worker who was well paid and in good health, mental as well as physical, could be driven to almost any extreme in adapting himself to a mechanized factory. The result was the self-abasement of the man before the machine, the destruction of the worker's creativity, his independence and his personality.²⁹ Here Philip agreed with the majority of French writers who ventured into an American industrial plant and with those others who, staying at home in France, perhaps were content with a viewing, in 1931, of Charlie Chaplin's "Modern Times."

Dubreuil nearly alone undertook to defend the system from the point of view of the worker. A Ford assembly-line, he said, was "one of the most admirable instruments of labor on earth." As for reducing the working man to an automaton and depriving him of his skill as an artisan, the machine just as often tended to increase his professional status and mo-

²⁸ André Philip, *Le problème ouvrier aux États-Unis* (Paris, 1927).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 224.

bility.³⁰ There was something naive, if not uncandid, in the shrill protests of intellectuals, in their poetic visions of a return to handwork or the "simple life of the soil." Of course there was much that was monotonous and repetitious in industrial labor, but which of the critics would himself live close to the land?

The poor sower could doubtless inform the poet, if the latter did him the honor of questioning him rather than merely contemplating him from afar, that his motion was monotonous indeed to repeat endlessly, from dawn to dusk, up and down the furrows.³¹

Dubreuil rejoined the majority, however, in its low estimate of the mass culture that rested on the new industrial system. A visit to an American worker's home on a Sunday afternoon could be a painful experience. The parlor was filled with the latest furnishings, radio and gramophone, but his friends could find nothing to talk about. The silence was finally broken, as on other such occasions, by an automobile ride, itself aimless and silent, which mercifully consumed the rest of the afternoon. To say, however, that the low cultural level of American workers was caused by their working conditions or their material rewards was absurd, said Dubreuil. These were, after all, the unlettered immigrants to whom the cultured of Europe had denied any access to learning for centuries past. Nor was Babbitt in any class an American monopoly. M. Duhamel and his friends could complain all they chose about America's lack of culture, but Sinclair Lewis, whether he knew it or not, had painted a universal type:

I was well acquainted with the French bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century, that of the provinces as well as that of Paris, and they thought in the same way, lived in the same way, just as firmly astride an optimism feeding on agricultural, bureaucratic, and stockholding affluence as is the 'average' American citizen on his industrial, commercial and financial wealth. . . . Aside from their Latin, which they knew very badly indeed, they knew nothing: neither history, nor geography, nor literature. Their conversation was fully as empty and platitudinous as is Babbitt's.

³⁰ Dubreuil, *Standards*, pp. 94, 178.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

Their taste in art and books fully as ridiculous. Their political ideas fully as stupid as well as dangerous.³²

France had largely survived her bourgeoisie and America, with her free libraries and universities open even to workers' sons, gave even better promise of surviving her Babbitts.

Most serious in Dubreuil's eyes were the economic dangers of the American system. Although Ford's assembly-line was a marvel, the same Ford could with impunity close his entire plant in 1928, while preparing a new model, and condemn 60,000 men to long months of unemployment, "one of the most terrible calamities to befall the proletariat anywhere in the world."³³ The continuous changes, retooling, and recasting of production methods meant great insecurity to American workers, who were less well protected than their European counterparts. But beyond seasonal unemployment was the spectre of "technical joblessness" that the accelerated use of machines threatened to bring about. America's greatest gift to herself and to the world, said Dubreuil, now became an object of fear. In American popular literature, a new figure arose to haunt the imagination: the Robot.³⁴

This fear was common among French observers of the American scene even before the collapse of 1929. In their writings, over-mechanization, overproduction—and consequent depression—shared space with their horror over America's waste of natural resources. Nevertheless, Dubreuil and Philip joined businessmen like Thomas, Citroën, and J. L. Duplan, economists like Victor Cambon, Pierre Bonnet, and Albert Demangeon, and political figures such as Tardieu and Herriot to urge their countrymen to adopt at least some of the features of the new economics.³⁵ Dubreuil taunted both the laggard French entrepreneurs and his left wing socialist critics by recalling Lenin's demand that Taylor's system be adopted by the Soviets.³⁶ His own proposal was to combine

³² Dubreuil, *Nouveaux standards*, pp. 75-76.

³³ Dubreuil, *Standards*, p. 48.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

³⁵ Joseph L. Duplan, *Sa majesté la machine* (Paris, 1930); Victor Cambon, *Notre avenir* (Paris, 1916) and *L'Industrie organisée d'après les méthodes américaines* (Paris, 1920); Pierre Bonnet, *La commercialisation de la vie française* (Paris, 1929); Albert Demangeon, *America and the Race for World Dominion* (New York, 1921).

³⁶ Dubreuil, *Standards*, p. 146.

Taylor's methods with a cooperative, democratic management of production by workers' councils, which he called "the mating of Ford and Fourier."³⁷

André Philip, while taking a less sanguine view of American practices, took a somewhat similar message to European socialists. At this time a follower of the Belgian revisionist socialist Henri de Man, Philip warned the French leaders that they were frozen in their doctrines, in danger of being bypassed by industrial progress which would bring in its train vital social and psychological changes that they were ill-equipped to face at the moment. Like Dubreuil, he warned that socialists "must lift the class struggle from the economic to the ethical plane" if they were to elude the tempting traps of "neocapitalism."³⁸ The influence each might have had on French socialism is problematical, since the crisis of 1929 intervened. The ensuing depression in America—and in Germany, that most "Americanized" of European countries—threw doubt on the wisdom and even the sanity of scientific mass production and on the ideas of both men that socialism could progress only by adopting the methods of Taylor and Ford.

Around and above the debates over the economic system itself there swirled a flood of books and articles purporting to analyse the effects of the second American revolution on American culture and American ideals. In them, the influence of America's own critics was unmistakable. Most of the authors appeared to have read, or read others who had read, Waldo Frank, Mencken, Dreiser, Dos Passos, and, most of all, Sinclair Lewis. More certainly, they had been subjected to the American motion picture. They were unanimous in denouncing its vapidty (only Chaplin escaped the general censure) and blamed mass production both for its low character and for its deplorable success in driving the better European films from the screens of France. The popular theory ran that the "movies" served as a means of escape, the opium of a people whose minds were dulled and whose aspirations were vulgarized by the new business, advertising, and

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

³⁸ Philip, *Henri de Man et la crise doctrinale du socialisme* (Paris, 1928), p. 49.

industrial tyrannies of the twentieth century. Another such opiate was spectator sport. And when the American was not at the new Roxy or the new Yankee Stadium, he was most often assumed to be driving, repairing, grooming, or talking about his automobile.

It went without saying that the new mass existence destroyed all of the subtler pleasures of man. For the sake of sober efficiency and healthy purchasing power, the lunacy of Prohibition deprived men of wine—and left them with the most noxious of illicit alcohols. Not even the pleasures of gastronomy were allowed to the benighted inhabitants of the frantic new world. Mass production gave all food the taste of machinery, and American bread “resembled nothing so much as a ball of cotton caught in a downpour.”³⁹ The great Curnonsky found American food “doctored, thermochemical, and dreadful.” Was it any wonder that jazz bands blared in every restaurant to stifle “the cries of despair emitted by the unfortunate diners?”⁴⁰

All this was bad enough, but Frenchmen feared that far more serious sacrifices were being imposed on Americans for the sake of material efficiency and modernity, sacrifices of ideals and human personality. André Siegfried saw big business and its allies gaining firm control of religious institutions, making of religion little more than a “dreary social pragmatism” of collective progress, a rationalization of success. Only Catholicism remained—for how long?—a kind of oasis for the souls of the tired, the foreigner, the sinner, the failure, and (almost) the Negro.⁴¹ Régis Michaud believed that religion in America was used primarily to buttress the existing order and to impose conformity to a system sanctified by its material results.⁴² Luc Durtain pictured in one of his novels a certain Mr. Smith, insurance executive, who as a church trustee kept a close watch over the pastor and “even beyond:”

After all, it was necessary that good and serious citizens keep an eye on God, that foreigner whose conduct in the past had been

³⁹ Claude Blanchard, “U.S.A.,” *Crapouillot* (October, 1930), p. 58.

⁴⁰ Curnonsky and Marcel Rouff, *The Epicure's Guide to France*, I (New York, 1927), 35, 54.

⁴¹ Siegfried, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁴² Michaud, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

more than once tinged with socialism and political extremism.⁴³

In public affairs as in religion, French observers often assumed that the new prosperity coupled with the enormous power and prestige of the magnates served to make Americans more conservative and exclusive than they had ever been. Discrimination against Jews and Negroes was heightened by fears of competition, in commerce and industry. French travelers found everywhere, and especially in what they called Hearst's Midwest, a suspicion of ideas and people of recent European origin. The old and generous ideal of the melting-pot was fading, and in its place rose the ugliness of 100% Americanism.

One prominent sign of the reaction was the legislation restricting immigration and prescribing complex, and often insulting, procedures for admitting even the most casual foreign visitor. French writers were divided on whether such exclusion strengthened or weakened the society as a whole, but they agreed that it was a perversion of America's proclaimed ideals and that the economic interests of both labor and management had brought it about. From the most friendly to the least, from Herriot and Dubreuil to Duhamel, the process of arrival in an American port was excoriated as a baseless injustice done to American principles. Suspicion weighted the air; the traveler or immigrant was presumed guilty until he could prove his innocence: "A complete change," said Marcel Braunschvig, "America, hitherto so hospitable, is today the most difficult country in the world for a foreigner to enter." In golden, prosperous America nobody would be admitted who could not prove his "usefulness" to society; the lame, the old, and the ill found no refuge. "The great statue of Liberty," he observed (with many others), "turns her back on America."⁴⁴

The era of Harding-Coolidge-Hoover struck most Frenchmen as unlikely to rally the rest of the world to the American way, at least in political life. From Left to Right, writers who agreed on little else were unanimous that business ran American politics for its own interests. No episode more confirmed

⁴³ Luc Durtain, *Quarantième étage* (Paris, 1927), p. 210.

⁴⁴ Braunschvig, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 21-22.

their suspicions than the ordeal of Sacco and Vanzetti. Pierre Bernus, writing in the conservative *Journal des Débats*, said that Russian crimes were accepted more easily; nobody expected fair play in the Communist world. Of America, people expected more; now they knew better.⁴⁵ André Siegfried mourned the loss of American political ideals in a decade of prosperous reaction. The effect of modern industry, he said, was to turn the bourgeoisie even more to the Right. The "sacred heritage of British freedom" was threatened by a business leadership that was certain to betray the ideals of the eighteenth century: "Experience has convinced them that business success is based on authority and discipline and not on liberty." Between ideals and success, the rulers of the nation had made their choice: "In its pursuit of wealth and power, America has abandoned the ideal of liberty to follow that of prosperity."⁴⁶

Frenchmen assumed that this choice rested on an increasing forgetfulness or disdain for the individual person, for his dignity and his rights, and—a most dangerous and surely impractical attitude—for what the individual's peculiar intuition could do for the society as a whole over the long term. But standardized tastes and ideas were more efficient, allowed mass production and consumption to expand indefinitely. Lucien Romier saw the "standardized man" holding sway: "The new fashions or morals, besides being spread with surprising vigor, are also encouraged, sanctioned by the vast group interests which exploit them . . . and banded together in quest of profits they will commonly share."⁴⁷ Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu went further, to see a "heartless worship of statistics" which aimed to "sweep away the individual and to sterilize all passions." America's most cherished purpose, they said, was to make all men alike, to annihilate troublesome differences so that manufacture and sales might become completely rational. Here was a "communism from above," a new religion with prosperity as its opiate.⁴⁸ Siegfried, less

⁴⁵ Pierre Bernus, "Sacco et Vanzetti," *Journal des Débats* (August 26, 1927), pp. 339-340.

⁴⁶ Siegfried, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 278.

⁴⁷ Romier, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

⁴⁸ Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu, *Le cancer américain* (Paris, 1931) pp. 130-132.

stridently, called it "practical collectivism," a trading away of individuality for material success through mass cooperation, in which Americans sacrificed art, refinement and even intelligence to obtain affluence and comfort.⁴⁹

There was yet another price for prosperity, however, that concerned French observers: Americans betrayed a high level of tension, anxiety and, contrary to popular European assumptions, inner doubts. Emil Coué, whom many considered a chief beneficiary of American anxieties, himself agreed that Americans were subject to extreme tensions; nine of ten people who personally sought him out were suffering from nervous afflictions.⁵⁰ The Abbé Gillet agreed with his friend Dr. Alexis Carrel that the pace of American life was "inhuman," and they wondered whether men could endure such prolonged nervous strains without severe biological and psychological damage.⁵¹ Fear was ruining human personality, said Aron and Dandieu, fear that stemmed from the artificiality and the terrifying power of economic institutions that were running out of control. The "cancer" with which America was affected, and which Europe must avoid at all cost, was psychological and spiritual, a loss of contact with natural life, brought by a "technician's civilization" where the mind was only a tool and rationalization meant death for the individual.⁵²

Paradoxically, French writers appeared fully as worried by American public optimism as by American private anxieties. If, after the horrors of world war, a few of them might admire, wistfully and from afar, a nation whose official soul was without doubt, many more found peril for America in her own self-confidence. From youthful optimism it was but a step to childish and heedless egotism. If one made America, in Tardieu's words, "better equipped than the French for the battle of life," the other was a "source of weakness, a diseased pride." The American, he said, took too few pains to pene-

⁴⁹ Siegfried, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

⁵⁰ Emil Coué, *My Method, Including American Impressions* (New York, 1923) p. 111.

⁵¹ R. P. Gillet, "Ce que j'ai vu aux États-Unis," *Revue de Paris* (March 15, 1931), p. 326.

⁵² Aron and Dandieu, *op. cit.*, pp. 83, 107. Their remedy was a Christian and individualist revolution, destroying the capitalist system.

trate the significance of things he did not understand.⁵³ Victory in the great war had further convinced Americans, said the caustic Lucien Lehman, that they had nothing to learn. Confined within her outmoded formulas, America had "learned nothing and forgotten nothing" and was becoming an "anachronistic nation, exciting not envy but pity."⁵⁴ It did not appear hopeful to French observers that the only leadership in sight for America in the postwar decade was that of her businessmen. A businessman was a trader, not a creator or thinker, said Gerard de Catalogne, and he was oblivious to his responsibilities for the future, "a future that would be in grave danger if the drive to gather profit were to destroy the mind and the arts."⁵⁵ Lucien Romier said that the first danger of business leadership was political ineptitude: "The business aristocracy could prove unequal to saving the framework of American civilization" in the event of crisis. Commerce, admittedly, had been the companion of progress in the past, but was itself neither an educative or moral force. The main weakness, he thought, was that Americans were unable to formulate ideas that would make their own lives and problems clear to them. Hence the "aimlessness" that formed the greatest contrast between America and Europe.⁵⁶

Romier, then, put the challenge in much the same manner as had Waldo Frank in 1919 and as Jacques Maritain was to put it forty years later.⁵⁷ America, said all three, was engaged in a struggle for her soul, a contest between her best ideals and instincts on the one hand and the demands (and satisfactions) of modern industrialism on the other. Her future and, if Duhamel was right, the future of Europe depended upon the outcome. Yet too few Americans were ready to admit that there was a struggle at all and fewer still seemed able to put it into words. Romier, like so many others, had

⁵³ Tardieu, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

⁵⁴ Lucien Lehman, *The American Illusion* (New York, 1931), p. 262.

⁵⁵ Gerard de Catalogne, *Dialogue entre deux mondes* (Paris, 1931), p. 21. Catalogne conducted a poll of letters in *Le Figaro* which, though distorted by his questions and the onset of depression, provided many interesting views of Duhamel and American civilization.

⁵⁶ Romier, *op. cit.*, pp. 219-220, 292-293.

⁵⁷ Waldo Frank, *Our America* (New York, 1919) was written at the urging of Gaston Gallimard and translated immediately into French. It was introduced with fanfare in Paris and widely-quoted through the decade. Jacques Maritain, *Reflections on America* (New York, 1958).

written his book to make clear the larger implications of the great American economic achievement to both peoples. Might it not be Europe's role to help Americans bring their new revolution safely into the Western tradition? And to learn from America those lessons that could revive and strengthen Europe herself?

One after another, French observers of the decade came to this point. Few joined Duhamel in seeing America as un-mixed menace; fewer still imitated Madame Cazamian's un-mixed praise. For the great majority, the new America presented a complex mixture of bad and good, combining dangers, which France must learn to avoid, with hope—for both France and America—in a synthesis of the best qualities of each. The future of the West, they said, lay in the willingness of Frenchmen and Americans to learn from each other. Naturally the decade saw also a more traditional Right-Left split in French opinion of American foreign policy, the questions of debts, tariffs, and disarmament. But the great bulk of books and articles written about the United States, as opposed to the daily newspaper coverage, reflected a primary concern with the new "Americanism" and its meaning for what French observers of every political hue considered the good life and proper human values.

No doubt Frenchmen very often saw in America only what they wanted or were prepared to see; no doubt they reacted subjectively and presented what most American commentators of that day considered unfair and unbalanced judgments. Yet considering the image that America in the 1920's was projecting of herself, in moving pictures, in those fads and gadgets that are unfortunately the most easily exportable, through tourists and expatriates, and even in official declarations, it is likely that French visitors more often corrected than distorted the impressions their countrymen already had of the United States. It is certain that they fastened upon questions that Americans themselves have only recently begun to make the subjects of popular debate, of a national self-examination which, appropriately enough, is mainly concerned with America's image abroad and with America's ability to compete and survive in a grown-up world.

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