

# the roosevelt revolution:

## french observers and the new deal

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During the decade following World War I, a careful observer might well have feared the spiritual secession of America from European civilization. Certain New World countries, after establishing their political independence and reasonable autonomy in the economic sphere, apparently dreamed of abandoning completely western civilization in order to seek a new destiny.

. . . Since the onset of economic disorder, this threat has lost much of its force.

Georges Duhamel, 1937

The French view of the New Deal has a special fascination for the American reader because it is the product of preoccupations and values which are substantially different from his own and from those of most American scholars who study the New Deal. The French observer, unlike his American counterparts, displayed almost no interest in whether the New Deal would cure the American Depression; he rarely gave a systematic account of the legislative enactments which together constitute the achievement of the Roosevelt administration, nor was he particularly concerned with assessing Roosevelt's place in the American liberal tradition. French interest in the New Deal stemmed largely from a desire to see how American civilization, which first emerged as a threat to the French way of life in the 1920's, was faring in the midst of the Depression.

The French preoccupation with American civilization developed on the heels of a diplomatic falling-out between the two countries over the issues of War debts and disarmament. The French had bitterly and unsuccessfully opposed the American effort to collect the money loaned to France during World War I, while the Americans had been unsuccess-

ful in convincing France that the road to peace lay through disarmament. These political tensions helped to stimulate the rising fear of American imperialism after 1925. American loans and investments in Europe were only one aspect of American power on the Continent. Frenchmen were increasingly aware of new cultural trends in Europe which they labeled "Americanism." This term referred to a multitude of technological advances including such industrial processes as the moving assembly line and the Taylor System. In addition, the development of the consumer society featuring the automobile, the movie and jazz were also considered manifestations of "Americanism." By the end of the decade Frenchmen had begun to identify American life exclusively in terms of the technology which America was exporting; at the same time, France was urged by its experts on American culture to resist the advent of this technology as a form of cultural imperialism which would ultimately destroy the spiritual values of French civilization.

Within the United States, Frenchmen identified an equally unattractive form of cultural imperialism which they also labeled "Americanism," or, more frequently, "Puritanism." This development featured the struggle by Anglo-Saxon and Nordic elements to preserve their control over American civilization in the face of a strong challenge from "foreign" ethnic groups. The Prohibition amendment, immigration restriction and the conviction of Sacco and Vanzetti offended French observers because these measures were considered instances of a defensive reaction by the Anglo-Saxon majority. It seemed clear to Frenchmen that the native Americans believed in the inferiority of the Latin people and their customs, as well as other European immigrant groups.

Preoccupied with the development of both varieties of Americanism in the late twenties, Frenchmen declined to discuss other areas of American life. As a result, America came to be exclusively identified in the French mind with Puritanism and the various aspects of mass society. While the interest in exploring the development of these forces during the New Deal accounts for the originality of the French perspective, it is also true that the definition of American behavior in such narrow terms created serious problems for French critics. As Pierre Lyautey pointed out: "The mistake of our reporters was to insist on finding in America the Americanism which was also spreading in Europe. . . . The French public was thus sometimes deceived about America. . . . A legend was created which could be summarized as follows: America is the country of standardization."<sup>1</sup>

In attempting to understand the impact of the New Deal on both kinds of Americanism French observers found evidence of materialism and Puritanism in Roosevelt's America as well as developments which indicated the repudiation of these old values. The concept of Americanism, so strongly fixed in the French mind by 1932, was carried forward after Roosevelt's inauguration to describe the main contours of

American civilization. When certain aspects of the New Deal appeared to repudiate Americanism, Frenchmen were quick to conclude that Roosevelt was engaged in a revolutionary undertaking. Refusing to abandon their old definition of American civilization, French observers argued simultaneously that the New Deal was a revolutionary rejection of old values and an affirmation of them.

Among French observers who came to investigate the future of Americanism were a large number of professional journalists. Pierre Lyautey of *Le Matin* and Raymond Recouly of *Le Temps*, both large Paris dailies of a conservative persuasion, and three correspondents of liberal dailies—Georges Boris of *Le Quotidien*, Robert de Saint Jean of *Paris Soir* and Emmanuel Bourcier of *l'Intransigeant*—all collected their observations into book-length studies.

The most prestigious Frenchmen to witness and describe the New Deal were three future members of the French Academy: the novelists André Maurois and Jules Romains, and the political scientist André Siegfried. Maurois' visit to the United States in 1933 was his third in five years, while Romains, who taught at Mills College in the summer of 1936, had seen America in silent dismay twelve years earlier. André Siegfried's first contact with the United States dated back to 1898; during the twenties, Siegfried renewed his acquaintance with America and published the most respected study of the United States by a Frenchman: *Les Etats-Unis d'aujourd'hui*.<sup>2</sup> He was no match, however, for his colleague at the Collège de France, Bernard Fay, who was making his twenty-second visit to the United States in 1935.

There were three other observers of the New Deal who had traveled extensively in America before the Depression. Two advocates of mass production and the assembly line, Henri Dubreuil and Emile Schreiber,<sup>3</sup> returned to see how the Depression had affected modern technology, while Bertrand de Jouvenel, who was later to become an enthusiastic defender of modernization, witnessed the end of Hoover's administration and the early days of the New Deal.

Taken as a group, these observers practiced a variety of occupations including journalism, writing novels and biography, teaching and labor organizing. Various positions on the political spectrum, ranging from moderate socialism on the left to conservative republicanism on the right, were represented by the group. Moreover, conditions and timing of the visits were also diverse. The duration of the trips to America varied from a month to a year; some observers came as early as 1933, while others arrived only in 1936. Some came to teach, others as tourists, and still others as reporters.

Despite these differences of circumstances, predispositions and interests, however, certain patterns emerged from the discussion of the New Deal. All of the travelers agreed that it constituted a major change in the American system. No less than three authors proclaimed the

Roosevelt administration “revolutionary” in their titles. Pierre Lyautey discovered *La révolution américaine*; Georges Boris reported on *La révolution Roosevelt*;<sup>4</sup> and Robert de Saint Jean considered *La vraie révolution de Roosevelt*.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Bertrand de Jouvenel entitled two of his chapters devoted to the New Deal “La révolution des idées” and “La révolution des faits.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the contents, if not the titles, of other French reports on the New Deal indicated that their authors regarded the Roosevelt administration as an important departure from the American tradition.

For French observers, the change wrought by the New Deal was not to be measured in the number and scope of legislative enactments. The passage of laws was only the outward manifestation of significant changes of a less tangible nature which were occurring in the realm of American values. Robert de Saint Jean argued that

the real revolution of Mr. Roosevelt, the one which he has pushed farther than the others, is of a psychological order. This revolution would be complete if people no longer waited for the golden age, if Americans stopped dreaming of fabulous fortunes, and coveted only honest comfort. . . . In any case, no one thinks of denying that the President has awakened American idealism; he has denounced in his compatriots what we French designate simply and sometimes wrongly with the pejorative term of Americanism.<sup>7</sup>

From Saint Jean’s point of view, the most significant feature of the New Deal was its deliberate effort to reform American values. President Roosevelt was in apparent accord with the campaign against Americanism, which French critics had begun in the twenties.

Saint Jean’s conception of the struggle waged by Roosevelt against “Americanism” was cast in the terms which Roosevelt had chosen in his first inaugural speech. Christ was driving the money changers from the temple. The American people, who once accepted the “promises of the sovereign tempter, the Satan of Wall Street, who strews at the feet of the skyscrapers the treasures of the World” were now prepared to join Roosevelt in a holy war against materialism.<sup>8</sup> This was evident in other facets of public life in the United States. Saint Jean devoted a chapter of his book to the struggle of “Savonarole contre Morgan” in which he applauded the radio campaign of Father Coughlin against the leading figures of American capitalism, with special focus on J. P. Morgan, Jr. For Saint Jean, the New Deal was a modern version of the Christian revolt against pagan values.

Saint Jean’s view of the Roosevelt administration was corroborated by the reports of other observers in somewhat different terms. This was evident in Bernard Fay’s remarks on the significance of the election of 1932. “After the intoxication of prosperity, happiness, science, and expansion in all directions, the United States enters a difficult period where

she must learn to appreciate more fully the pleasures of intelligence, discipline, and choice. The election of 1932 is not simply a defeat for Mr. Hoover, or Wall Street, or optimism *a la Ford*, but also for the machine and science.”<sup>9</sup> The political and economic aspects of the election seemed far less important to Fay than the apparent repudiation of old values. Fay’s endorsement of this change was made clear by his selection of chapter titles. The twenties were described in a unit called “l’Amérique perdue,” while the chapter on the New Deal was entitled “l’Amérique se retrouve.” Fay was particularly impressed by the willingness of the United States to devalue the dollar. Although the Roosevelt administration certainly hoped that this measure would stimulate the economy and return the country to a condition of prosperity, Fay applauded devaluation because it proved that Americans were now indifferent to material possessions.<sup>10</sup> Human needs took precedence over property.

In Bertrand de Jouvenel’s opinion, the revolution which the New Deal had brought about consisted largely in the new-found concern among Americans for the public as opposed to the private domain. “For a Frenchman, the most astonishing characteristic of America in 1931 was the absence of any patriotism in the ruling classes. Bankers, professors, and politicians all appeared to feel no responsibility for the destinies of the nation. This indifference was not caused by egotism, but rather by a universal timidity . . . Roosevelt has created a national mentality, a civic spirit transcending local borders.”<sup>11</sup> Unlike Fay and Saint Jean, Jouvenel did not maintain that materialism had been overcome by the New Deal, but he did agree that the selfish concern of individuals for their own interests had been diminished. In this sense, Jouvenel too was describing a change in values.

Another way of characterizing the revolution was to speak of the shift in power from Wall Street to Washington. Jouvenel dramatized this development in his description of the hearings of the Senate Banking and Currency Committee. Ironically, these hearings had been instituted with the blessing of President Hoover, but their findings reached the public just as Roosevelt was taking office. The most dramatic revelation at the hearings was the fact that J. P. Morgan, Jr., had paid no income tax in the United States between 1929 and 1933. This information was elicited from Morgan by the Committee counsel, Ferdinand Pecora, a Sicilian immigrant, which seemed to establish symbolically the shift in power from Wall Street bankers to the new rulers in Washington representing the lower and lower middle classes.<sup>12</sup>

Other observers remarked on the emergence of Washington as a new center of power in the American system. Pierre Lyautey entitled one of his chapters “Qui sera le maître? Washington ou New-York?”; after examining the question in the light of the events of 1933, Lyautey concluded that Wall Street’s domination of American life was at an end.<sup>13</sup>

The same issue was raised in other terms by Robert de Saint Jean. He contrasted the indifference among Americans to the whole political process in the twenties with the new interest in the activities in Washington. It was evident that the exclusive concern for the pursuit of wealth was at an end.<sup>14</sup>

Bernard Fay called attention to still another aspect of the shift in power which occurred in 1933. The struggle between Morgan and Pecora, which Bertrand de Jouvenel had found so revealing, concealed a somewhat different lesson for Fay: "Mr. Pecora, a good Italian, was transplanted in his youth from the laughing shores of the Mediterranean to the frigid coasts of the Atlantic, but he is still gifted with the eloquence which formerly inspired Cicero and which still today gives distinction to Mussolini. Mr. Pecora began torturing Mr. Morgan. The Italian verb, the preletarian zeal, and the political skill" were all weapons designed to undermine Anglo-Saxon domination.<sup>15</sup> In effect, the struggle against materialism was heightened by the ethnic conflict. The victory of Washington over Wall Street, of Pecora over Morgan, of idealism over materialism was also the beginning of the decline of Anglo-Saxon control in America.

The revolutionary character of the New Deal was confirmed as well by the creation of the Brain Trust. Most French observers were delighted and surprised by the role of the intellectual in Roosevelt's administration. Once again, the contrast of the present with the twenties was enlightening. The former dominance of businessmen was attributed by Bernard Fay to the nation's value system; Americans preferred action to thought. The collapse of the economy, however, destroyed the prestige of the business classes. Their inability to find a solution to the Depression forced Americans to seek help from other quarters. The Brain Trust, according to Fay, provided the President with new ideas without restricting his freedom of movement. More important, "the underhanded blow which the upper bourgeoisie hoped to strike against him [Roosevelt] was parried by a few small professors."<sup>16</sup> They not only strengthened the impression that the new administration was creating a moral revolution against the reign of materialism, but also increased the power of the New Deal to curb big business.

The ideological alliance of the Brain Trust with the little man was also praised by Pierre Lyautey who accordingly characterized the Roosevelt government as "popular and intellectual." Lyautey, like Fay, saw the intellectuals as an instrument to attack the interests of big business. The new power of the Brain Trust suggested the commitment of the nation to intellectual rather than material concerns.<sup>17</sup>

A few travelers expressed mild reservations about the role of intellectuals in the New Deal. André Maurois was somewhat dubious about the efforts of professors—as opposed to more practical men—to seek solutions for complex economic problems.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, Maurois and other

French observers, who were themselves "intellectuals," identified with an administration which gave both power and prestige to Americans of similar professional backgrounds. The Brain Trust was just one of a number of factors which convinced French travelers that Roosevelt had brought about a revolution in American life.

The New Deal affected not only the character of the government in Washington and the business classes, but made its deepest mark on the attitudes of ordinary Americans. These attitudes could be measured, as Jules Romains suggested, by attempting to describe "the human atmosphere, or—to borrow an expression, that Maurois has brought into fashion—the change in the moral and social climate."<sup>19</sup> In the twenties, Frenchmen had identified the typical American as a Babbitt. Now, according to Luc Durtain, America had entered the age of Roosevelt.<sup>20</sup> Smugness and optimism were no longer the trademarks of the American character. André Siegfried noted the same transition. "Babbitt appeared to be the definitive American type just after the great war. Today, he has gone out of fashion. The jobless wanderer and the distressed student in search of a job will no doubt be antiquated in the future."<sup>21</sup> Siegfried tended to regard the Depression as an untypical period, but admitted that it had made at least temporary marks on the national character.

André Maurois also hailed the end of the age of Babbitt and the emergence of a new America. During his first visit to the United States in 1927 Maurois strongly criticized the absence of family life and the rigid conformity of individuals to social norms. In Maurois' view, Americans were far too concerned with the acquisition of material goods, a condition which bred bland optimism among the American people.

When Maurois returned to the United States in 1931 to teach at Princeton University, he claimed that the emphasis on material values, characteristic of the twenties, had disappeared; Americans now understood suffering, which made them more sympathetic to the problems of Europe.<sup>22</sup> Maurois also noted the development of a more reflective atmosphere among ordinary Americans, the counterpart of the Brain Trust at higher levels. In the twenties, Americans "posed no problems. Thinking was suspect, dangerous, unhealthy." The Depression had forced Americans to think as well as suffer. The economic crisis, however, had not created a morose atmosphere. On the contrary, with the repeal of Prohibition, America had become a more lively place. Maurois remarked with enthusiasm that "Puritanism is in retreat. . . ."<sup>23</sup>

It was this same decline of Puritanism, related to the rise of non-Anglo-Saxon ethnic elements, which pleased Jules Romains. He thoroughly enjoyed the less refined aspects of New York including the crowds in Times Square and Coney Island. Their air of gaiety caused Romains to speak of the pervasive meridional atmosphere in Manhattan. The city had an electric climate like Nice. It could boast of a population

of Mediterranean origin including Jews and Italians. Even "if the Irish are geographically of northern origin, their character traits and their religious and moral culture are unmarked by their origin."<sup>24</sup> French observers in the twenties had found Celts and Latins in the United States, but they were confronted by the overwhelming domination of the Anglo-Saxons. By 1935, the Nordic elements no longer established the tone of American life. The demise of Morgan before Pecora's onslaught found its counterpart in the American streets.

The retreat of Puritanism was a logical counterpart of the decline of Anglo-Saxon influence. Romaine, like Maurois, rejoiced at the repeal of Prohibition and the decline of materialism during the Depression. He deplored the negative effects of Prohibition. "This absurd system had managed to destroy the daily savor of life, . . . impregnate the atmosphere with constraint and a subtle and polymorphous hypocrisy, create suspicion in the eyes of perfectly honest people and in their expression a recess of fraud." The end of Prohibition had a special importance for Frenchmen. Its enactment had indicated the hostility of Americans to French values. With its repeal, the French could once again believe in the compatibility between French and American values.

Romaine was equally harsh in his condemnation of the materialism of the twenties and for similar reasons.

the period of rising prosperity and smugness permitted no gaiety in the appearance of New York. . . . Neither a man nor a people can enjoy life if every minute of leisure granted to them is experienced as a missed opportunity to earn money. Americans, since the Crash, have lost neither their confidence nor their optimism. However, they realize that they have made mistakes and will make them again. They take themselves less seriously. They have learned the nuances of doubt and of smiling.<sup>25</sup>

The paradoxical assertion by French visitors that the Depression was a happy era reflects their own distaste for mass production and Prohibition. Now that Americans had apparently repudiated these social constraints, they seemed to be both freer and happier as a result. So concerned were travelers with the themes of technology and race that little was said about the feelings or the condition of the millions of unemployed Americans.

The conviction of French critics that there was a decisive change in the human atmosphere in America forced them to restate their conception of the relationship between European and American civilizations. In the twenties, French critics had deplored the stress on materialism and Puritanism in the United States. Now that these values were in decline, the cultural breach between the two continents seemed to disappear. As Pierre Lyautey explained, America "has built a way of life which was only known in Europe heretofore . . . America used to be a

factory. Art, Esthetics and the mind were the exclusive concerns of Europe. Now the United States is turning inward, and, in a few years, the former pupils will have developed an autonomous spiritual life requiring only exchanges with Europe.”<sup>26</sup>

In attempting to assess the change in the American character wrought by the New Deal, French observers naturally looked to President Roosevelt himself. The personality of the President, especially in contrast to Hoover’s was striking evidence that the human atmosphere in the United States had indeed undergone a revolution. The French, of course, continued to nourish grievances against the former President for his opposition to their views on War debts as well as disarmament.<sup>27</sup> No doubt this disagreement accounted in part for the reaction to Hoover’s defeat in 1932. “There is nobody in France who does not acclaim from the bottom of his heart the failure of Mr. Hoover. In our anguish, it is a smile, a ray of sunlight . . . the intoxicating odor of an enemy dead.”<sup>28</sup>

Most observers focused their discussion on differences of personality between the two men. After meeting Roosevelt at a press conference, Raymond Recouly contrasted Roosevelt’s warmth with Hoover’s difficulties in communication. The contrast was strengthened in Recouly’s mind by Roosevelt’s ability to speak French. In comparison, Hoover seemed a provincial figure.<sup>29</sup> Even André Siegfried, who did not disguise his hostility to the inflationary objectives of the New Deal program, found Roosevelt personally attractive. “He gives the impression of a human being who understands you and wants to help you. He is extremely seductive; his smile is irresistible. When he tells you at a reception, ‘I am happy to see you,’ he gives you the impression that he believes it, and you feel taken into his confidence.”<sup>30</sup>

The press conference and the reception were not the only instruments by which Roosevelt conveyed to Frenchmen a sense of personal warmth. Henri Dubreuil argued that the Fireside Chat was an equally effective institution, especially because it enabled Roosevelt to appeal to the average citizen. “This is not the language of a statesman who delivers a solemn address from the top of a platform to the concentric seats of a Parliament. This is not the language of a European ‘intellectual’ who never forgets that he is a cultured man, and speaks a literary language which ‘the man in the street’ only understands in part. This is rather the calm conversation of a man speaking to his friends in some private meeting, in order to explain some difficulties, and invite them to help him to better understand them.”<sup>31</sup>

While these judgments of individual personalities and the public mood were fundamental to the claim that a revolution was under way, Frenchmen did not entirely neglect the New Deal program itself. Indeed, a number of the bills supported by Roosevelt provided additional

evidence for the French observer of the revolutionary character of the administration.

The New Deal program which was described in the studies of French observers bears little resemblance to accounts of that movement by American historians. While considerable attention was given to certain phases of Roosevelt's program such as the NRA, the AAA, and monetary reforms, other developments including the CCC, TVA, and WPA were rarely mentioned.

To many French critics, indeed, the NRA was not only a central feature of the New Deal, but it was considered the only important element in Roosevelt's program.<sup>32</sup> André Siegfried, for example, referred to the NRA as the economic solution of the thirties and contrasted it with Fordism which he regarded as the typical solution of the twenties. The NRA stressed high prices and limited production, precisely the contrary of Fordism. In analyzing the New Deal, Siegfried argued that a single policy could be identified and described as the essence of F.D.R.'s program.<sup>33</sup>

Other critics adopted his methods. Henri Dubreuil entitled his volume *Les codes de Roosevelt*, and omitted most other efforts of the New Deal to solve the Depression. One reason for the exaggerated importance given to the NRA is evident from Robert de Saint Jean's chapter on "La Campagne du NRA." He and others found it difficult to ignore the spectacular features of this operation, including the parades, the blue eagle, and most of all, General Johnson and his pronouncements.<sup>34</sup>

French observers were quick to deny that the New Deal was tainted by any of the contemporary ideologies towards which Europeans were then turning for solutions to their problems. That Roosevelt occupied a middle ground somewhere between the extremes of Communism and Fascism was bound to be an attractive state of affairs for liberal and conservative observers, who admitted the necessity of reforms, but had little taste for totalitarian solutions. André Maurois saw the significance of the New Deal in precisely these terms. "For the first time, a non-revolutionary head of state has refused to tolerate the indefensible scandal by which abundance, accompanied by misery, becomes a necessary law of nature."<sup>35</sup>

Even those authors who considered the New Deal a revolution saw no link between the Roosevelt administration and European revolutionary movements. According to Georges Boris, all European theorists of a doctrinaire bent were bound to be hostile to the New Deal because of its experimental character. By European standards, even the members of the Brain Trust were empiricists. Boris especially cautioned his readers not to confuse Roosevelt with Hitler or Mussolini, who had no respect for the democratic tradition. The success of Roosevelt in achieving the passage of his program would not prevent the Congress from revising or eliminating parts of the New Deal.<sup>36</sup>

Boris' version of the nature and sources of the New Deal was accepted without qualification by Saint Jean and Romains. According to Saint Jean, the New Dealers' methods bore no resemblance to Cartesian nationalism, or any other European system. Both authors agreed that Roosevelt's program was rooted in the American tradition of pioneer empiricism.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, despite accusations to the contrary, Roosevelt was no totalitarian. Saint Jean explained: "Mr. Roosevelt has strengthened the state without enslaving man." The blue eagle ought not to be confused with the swastika or the hammer and sickle.<sup>38</sup>

If most French critics were relieved that the Roosevelt Revolution was being conducted in a democratic fashion, many were pleased to note that capitalism had survived the crisis. Indeed, Henri Dubreuil believed that the NRA codes were designed to aid the recovery of the free enterprise system, rather than destroy it.<sup>39</sup> His fellow advocate of assembly-line techniques, Emile Schreiber, evidently agreed. Schreiber was particularly impressed by the absence of violence and class hatred in 1934, despite the upheaval which the American system was undergoing.<sup>40</sup>

Only one aspect of the New Deal program drew consistent criticism from French travelers. Almost all conservatives objected to the inflationary schemes of the administration. André Siegfried referred to the "mad policy of spending and government subsidies" undertaken by Roosevelt,<sup>41</sup> while André Maurois refused to believe that these policies helped the United States to recover from the Depression.<sup>42</sup> Somewhat more extreme was Lucien Page who devoted an entire volume to a critique of the devaluation of the dollar.<sup>43</sup> With the exception of Page and Siegfried, however, disapproval of particular reforms rarely led to a condemnation of the whole New Deal. As an alternative to Communism and Fascism, the Roosevelt administration elicited the sympathy of most French observers.

It is understandable that French critics would see in the New Deal program a uniquely American phenomenon, rooted in the American tradition. In the early thirties, the contrast between the Roosevelt administration and Hitler and Stalin must have seemed striking indeed. What is far less clear is how the American tradition could have generated such a revolution, especially considering the French belief that before the New Deal, American civilization had been synonymous with materialism. The supposed source of the revolution, pioneer empiricism, had been blamed by French critics for generating the exclusive interest in mass production which had characterized American life in the twenties. Either the account of American materialism was wrong or else the New Deal stemmed from some other source.

Indeed, in the earlier discussion of a revolution in values, Frenchmen had implied at points, and stated explicitly elsewhere, that the new values which emerged in America during the Depression had their source outside the country. Saint Jean had pointed to the Christian inspiration

for the New Deal, while Maurois and Romains, stressing the gaiety and intellectuality of Roosevelt's America, discovered Latin and Celtic influence in America. The sympathy of French critics for the United States in the thirties was based on the conviction that the new America had adopted European values. While French critics agreed that Americans were rebelling against their old values, they claimed that the source of the rebellion was at once within and outside of the American tradition. The tension might have been reconciled but critics never addressed themselves to the issue.

To complicate matters further, French observers not only proclaimed the New Deal a revolution, but continued to argue that the old American system had survived the revolution intact. They were certain that the revolution had occurred, but it was equally clear that most of the old institutions were in place. The continuity between the twenties and the New Deal was especially evident in the work of André Siegfried. He was, of course, obliged to recognize the Depression and the steps taken to remedy it. However, after admitting that the crisis might produce an aging effect on America, Siegfried confessed that "certain things which persist below the surface, could well reappear. . . . It sometimes happens that the conviction of youth survives youth itself."<sup>44</sup> According to Siegfried, the Depression had produced no lasting effect on the United States. The country remained optimistic, and was still the land of prosperity.

Other critics agreed with Siegfried on the persistence of old traits. Although the architect of a revolution against earlier values, F.D.R. was regarded by Saint Jean as a typical American. His "infantile joy" suggested the youthfulness of the American character, in vivid contrast to the sophistication of the French character. The President's childish behavior was evident in his proposal to create a Children's Day as a counterpart to Mother's Day; it was also revealed when Roosevelt made the cutting of the turkey on Thanksgiving Day into a public ceremony.<sup>45</sup>

There was much evidence, as well, to support Siegfried's contention that, despite the Depression, America remained the land of prosperity. Jules Romains observed in 1936 that the American worker was still two or three times better off than his French counterpart. Thanks to the machine, prices were low and salaries were high in the United States.<sup>46</sup> Even in 1933, Emile Schreiber was surprised to find the crowds of New York just as elegant, noisy, and active as before the War. The whole of New York, including Harlem, exhibited no signs of misery.<sup>47</sup> Although he recognized the existence of pockets of poverty in the South, André Maurois found the United States a flourishing land in comparison with Europe. The universities were full, the cinemas and popular restaurants heavily patronized. Despite the Depression, the common man in the United States was far better off than the average European.<sup>48</sup>

A number of French observers, especially André Maurois and Jules Romains, argued that the suffering produced by the Depression had

radically changed America, thus diminishing the cultural gap between the Old World and the New. André Siegfried also considered these claims as the new French passenger ship, the *Normandy*, docked in New York harbor in 1935. "For several hours, I felt closer to Europe and France, and I was clearly aware of the link between continents which was established by putting such a boat into service." Improved transportation and communication did nothing, however, to alter the cultural gap between the continents. "It's the impression of distance and separation which remains dominant in my mind. Europe's clamors reach here no doubt, but are confused, distant, and softened. Europe and America form two continents, and the opposition would be more marked if we added: Old Europe and new continent."<sup>49</sup>

When Siegfried returned to America in 1938, it was evident that the cultural gap noted three years earlier had not diminished. He remarked, "When we speak of the New World, we often believe that we are employing simply a verbal expedient. In fact we are saying the most profound thing we can say about America." The geographic differences between two worlds were reflected in the rise of two radically different civilizations.<sup>50</sup> These differences were symbolized by the April 1933 encounter between Herriot and Roosevelt which Emanuel Bourcier described in terms of "The Old World opposite the New."<sup>51</sup> The Depression and the New Deal, which led some observers to the conclusion that the gap between the two worlds had decreased, merely confirmed in the minds of others the separation between the continents.

In other respects, as well, the America of the twenties escaped unscathed by poverty and the repeal of Prohibition, in the estimation of French critics. Despite setbacks in automobile production and heavy unemployment in Detroit, Siegfried proclaimed in 1935 that "America's heartbeat is in Detroit. I know of no American city which better reflects the development of postwar United States." He added, "If you haven't seen the assembly line at Ford, you haven't seen America."<sup>52</sup> Other reporters went to Washington to understand the United States in 1933 but Siegfried still regarded the assembly line as the single most noteworthy feature of American life. Here was major evidence of continuity between the twenties and the New Deal.

Other French observers were also impressed with the continued importance of new industrial methods in American life. Despite the *Révolution américaine* accomplished by F.D.R., Pierre Lyautey insisted that America was still the land of factories.<sup>53</sup> Jules Romains did not hesitate to point up the similarities between American Capitalism and Soviet Communism. "Because of [America's] stress on machines and technology as well as the industrialized and rationalized atmosphere with which it surrounds man, an American would be less uprooted and disturbed by Communism than many Western Europeans."<sup>54</sup> The New Deal had

done nothing to alter the enthusiasm of Americans for industrial progress.

The persistence of Americanism was especially obvious in the realm of agriculture. André Siegfried recommended that American farmers abandon the single crop and learn French peasant prudence.<sup>55</sup> He was joined by André Maurois, who found that "too many American farmers are businessmen." Maurois observed "not far from New York, a dairy farm which seems to emerge from your *Scènes de la vie future*, Duhamel."<sup>56</sup> To this standardization on the land, Maurois preferred the self-sufficient farmers of his native Perigord. Even Henri Dubreuil, the persistent advocate of American industrial methods, opposed commercial farming. In his opinion, the peasant class is "the only one which has assured the perenniality of nations."<sup>57</sup> All French reporters applauded New Deal measures to reconstitute small farms in America, but felt, as did André Maurois, that a greater effort was needed in this direction.

The standardization of agriculture and industry in the United States continued to have its effects on American communities and the American people. Robert de Saint Jean regretted the absence of regional diversity in the nation, and André Siegfried continued to argue that all American towns resembled Main Street. It is not surprising that such a monotonous human environment should appear to discourage the development of individuality in the American character. Regarded by some Frenchmen as an outdated symbol of the American character, Babbitt remained for André Siegfried the typical American.<sup>58</sup>

If French critics were certain that the New Deal was a revolution, it nonetheless had not affected the American character, which remained basically childish and conformist. It had not altered the basic form of the economy, which was still oriented towards mass production. In these respects, critics agreed that American civilization continued to provide a vivid contrast to French and European life.

The contrast was reenforced by the persistent belief that the American experience was shaped by the Anglo-Saxon heritage. This belief was unaffected by the claim of French critics that the New Deal was evidence of a decline in Anglo-Saxon control of American life. Few critics disputed Pierre Lyautey's judgment that in spite of the Roosevelt administration, "Protestant America remains."<sup>59</sup>

Even President Roosevelt himself was unable to escape identification as a member of the dominant race. This was clear in Emmanuel Bourcier's description of the Roosevelt-Herriot meeting as a confrontation between "The American and the Latin."<sup>60</sup> Bernard Fay was more explicit. For Fay, the United States was still a cultural extension of England, and Roosevelt a typical representative of the American people. "Franklin Roosevelt is an Anglo-Saxon. With his Dutch name and his French blood, he is the descendant of a race in which the Anglo-Saxon

element has been dominant. The American people elected him because he was an Anglo-Saxon." Like other Anglo-Saxon leaders such as Washington and Jefferson, Roosevelt, in Fay's view, was intellectually dull. This attribute of the race was a blessing because it enabled Anglo-Saxons to avoid the interminable discussions which prevented Latin countries from achieving progress.<sup>61</sup> Such an analysis was especially puzzling, because Fay had previously seen the struggle between Pecora and Morgan as symbolizing the end of Anglo-Saxon control in America. Now he argued that the New Deal was itself the creation of the Anglo-Saxon mentality.

Other critics, like Pierre Lyautey, applied this theory of the Anglo-Saxon origins of the New Deal in somewhat modified form. Lyautey indicated that "The Roosevelts' Dutch origins have spared them the narrowness of New England Puritanism. Their Anglo-Saxonism has been rejuvenated by American battles."<sup>62</sup> At least one critic argued that Roosevelt's program, as well as his personality, derived from his Anglo-Saxon heritage. The adoption of an inflationary policy by F.D.R. was regarded by Lucien Page as a typical response to economic problems by an Anglo Saxon statesman.<sup>63</sup>

The claim that America remained under Anglo-Saxon domination was verified by numerous French observers. André Siegfried contrasted the American with the Latin attitude toward the law. "We Latins pass laws, but never enforce them 100%; that is why life in the Latin countries is always easy, charming, and human, although disordered."<sup>64</sup> This attitude toward the law helped to account for the greater individualism of Latin societies. On the other hand, the claim that Anglo-Saxons were individualists was only a "cliché" in the opinion of Jules Romains; moreover, like all Anglo-Saxons, Americans were conformists.<sup>65</sup> The constraints which ruled the society were especially apparent in aesthetic matters. Robert de Saint Jean offered as evidence of the survival of Puritanism an anecdote about a woman's college in the midwest which removed a Venus de Milo statue from the campus to avoid overstimulating male visitors.<sup>66</sup>

Other evidence of Anglo-Saxon domination of America was provided when French travelers discovered those enclaves in America which were still characterized by Latin behavior. André Siegfried contrasted French Canadian culture with the dominant Anglo-Saxon tradition. "In this America which we call the New World, it [French Canada] represents a tradition and is the symbol of stability. It thus maintains a philosophy of life which is similar to that of our peasants, in the midst of a continent where radically different cultural traditions are developing."<sup>67</sup> Other travelers looked to the United States proper for evidence of the survival of Latin behavior. Charleston and San Francisco were favorite spots for Frenchmen, along with the perennial Latin center of New Orleans. Raymond Recouly and Emile Schreiber recalled their

visits with Huguenot families in Charleston.<sup>68</sup> Recouly also praised the French atmosphere of San Francisco while Schreiber asked rhetorically, "Is it because the Spaniards and numerous Latins who live there have given it a character closer to our conceptions," that we enjoy San Francisco?<sup>69</sup> The preferred behavior of Latins implied the existence of a dominant Anglo-Saxon culture which continued to exhibit features strongly distasteful to Frenchmen.

The preoccupation of French travelers with the two aspects of Americanism suggests the degree to which they were bound by the concerns of the twenties. While most Americans have seen the New Deal as a response to the problems of the Depression, Frenchmen came seeking evidence that United States had recognized her mistakes of the twenties, and had adopted a higher set of goals. Given these preoccupations, Frenchmen placed special emphasis on certain developments, which have seemed less important to Americans, such as the repeal of Prohibition, the rise of the Brain Trust, the NRA, and the personality of the President. While this selective attention tends to distort the New Deal taken as a political movement, it is perhaps fairer to consider French critics as commentators on American culture as a whole. In this regard, their perception of the central importance of ethnic and technological issues is more pertinent. However, even this perception is marred by the carelessness with which they considered the implications of some of the New Deal developments. Poverty and the repeal of Prohibition did not guarantee the fall of Puritanism any more than the rise of the Brain Trust was proof of America's conversion to intellectual values. Frenchmen were too quick to conclude that the New Deal was a revolution, and, at the same time, too slow to abandon their narrow vision of the America of the twenties. They made no effort to reconcile the tension between their claim that the New Deal was a revolution and the belief that Americanism had survived the Depression untarnished. In large part this failure stemmed from the too rigid conception of the United States in the twenties. This conception was both carried over into the thirties and repudiated at the same time. Babbitt and Roosevelt managed to coexist in separate compartments of the French mind.

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### footnotes

The author wishes to acknowledge the generous assistance of the Colgate Research Council in the research and writing of this article.

1. *La révolution américaine* (Paris, 1934), 215-216.

2. (Paris, 1927).

3. Schreiber's son, Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, is the founder of the French weekly, *l'Express*.

4. (Paris, 1934).

5. (Paris, 1934).

6. *La crise du capitalisme américain* (Paris, 1933).

7. *La vraie*, 253.

8. *Ibid.*, 267.

9. *Roosevelt et son Amerique* (Paris, 1933), 284.
10. *Roosevelt*, 286.
11. *La crise*, 343.
12. *Ibid.*, 318.
13. *La revolution*, 101.
14. *La vraie*, 158.
15. *Roosevelt*, 280.
16. *Ibid.*, 233.
17. *La revolution*, 232.
18. *Chantiers americains* (Paris, 1933), 81.
19. *Visite aux Americains* (Paris, 1936), 21.
20. Francois Drujon, *L'Amerique et l'avenir* (Paris, 1938), 13.
21. Didier Lazard, *Contrastes Americaines* (Paris, 1940), 9.
22. *L'Amerique inattendue* (Paris, 1931), 99, 110.
23. *Chantiers*, 19, 181.
24. *Visite*, 27.
25. *Ibid.*, 29, 32.
26. *La revolution*, 241.
27. Hoover insisted that the payment of the War debts must not be linked to German reparations payments. His proposal for reducing all armed forces by one-third, presented to the World Disarmament Conference in 1932, ran counter to French ideas of security. While Roosevelt's position on War Debts was identical to Hoover's, this fact was obscured because the issue became dormant after 1933.
28. Quoted in Frances D. Pingeon, "French Opinion of the New Deal" (Master's Essay, Columbia University, 1962), 3-4.
29. *L'Amerique pauvre* (Paris, 1933), 355, 357.
30. *Qu'est-ce que l'Amerique?* (Paris, 1938), 42.
31. *Les codes de Roosevelt* (Paris, 1934), 157.
32. In her study of the French press, Frances D. Pingeon found a similar exaggeration of the role of the NRA. "French Opinion," 49.
33. *Qu'est-ce*, 41.
34. The exaggeration of the role of the NRA was compounded by misunderstandings. Emile Schreiber insisted that the NRA was a relief organization. *L'Amerique reagit* (Paris, 1934), 120. Louis Bonnichon suggested that the social aspects of the New Deal could be reduced exclusively to the NRA. *Des aspects sociaux de la "Reforme Roosevelt"* (Paris, 1934), 172.
35. *Chantiers*, 186.
36. *La revolution*, 8, 42, 203, 206.
37. *La vraie*, 9; *Visite*, 200.
38. *La vraie*, 9.
39. *Les codes*, 76.
40. *L'Amerique*, 219.
41. *Etats-Unis, Canada, Mexique* (Le Havre, 1935), 62.
42. *Etats-Unis* (Paris, 1939), 31-33.
43. *L'experience Roosevelt* (Paris, 1934), 125.
44. *Qu'est-ce*, 48. French observers of the New Deal continued to praise Siegfried's study of America in the twenties, *Les Etats-Unis d'aujourd'hui* (Paris, 1927). Robert de Saint Jean called it a "classic work," (*La vraie*, 157) while Pierre Lyautey considered it a "basic work." (*La revolution*, 37) Other observers cited Siegfried's observations in support of their own.
45. *La vraie*, 37, 28.
46. *Visite*, 138.
47. *L'Amerique*, 23, 46.
48. *Chantiers*, 32; *Etats-Unis*, 39, 119. Despite its title, Raymond Recouly's *L'Amerique pauvre* provided little evidence of the decline of prosperity in America. The author recounted his visits with Vanderbilt in New York, Governor Lowden in Illinois, and a trip to the Hearst estate in California. There was much information about American gangsters, but very little about poverty.
49. *Etats-Unis*, 3.
50. *Qu'est-ce*, 11, 14.
51. *U.S.A. 33* (Paris, 1934), 227.
52. *Etats-Unis*, 13-14.
53. *La revolution*, 172.
54. *Visite*, 203.
55. *Etats-Unis*, 24.
56. *Chantiers*, 49, 47. Georges Duhamel wrote *Scenes de la vie future* in 1930 to denounce the advent of mass culture and mass production in America.
57. *Les codes*, 161.

58. *La vraie*, 34; *Etats-Unis*, 10, 51, 42.
59. *La revolution*, 121.
60. *U.S.A.* 33, 227.
61. *Roosevelt*, 13, 19.
62. *La revolution*, 13.
63. *L'experience*, 125.
64. *Etats-Unis*, 60.
65. *Visite*, 201.
66. *La vraie*, 44.
67. *Etats-Unis*, 10.
68. *L'Amerique pauvre*, 290; *L'Amerique reagit*, 163.
69. *L'Amerique pauvre*, 199; *L'Amerique reagit*, 163.