

## AMERICAN FRANCOPHOBIA TAKES A NEW TURN

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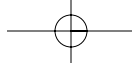
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At the dawn of the 21st century, something new may be happening in the heartland of America: the spread of a negative image of France.<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, a mostly positive image of France linked to its reputation for good food, high fashion, and sophisticated tourism, coexisted with a somewhat negative image in some elite circles. But the most important factor was definitely a lack of knowledge and the fact that above all, indifference reigned supreme. (See Body-Gendrot in this issue.)

“Francophobia” (not a very satisfactory term<sup>2</sup>) does not constitute rational criticism of France. It expresses a systematic bias against this country, the way anti-Americanism does against the United States. It is based on a set of stereotypes, prejudices, insults, and ready-made judgments. Moreover, like anti-Americanism it deliberately conflates what a country *is* and what it *does*. Negative stereotypes about personal characteristics of the French, (for example, they are lazy, immoral, or arrogant) are combined with stereotypes about French society (elitist, unwilling to modernize, or anti-American) and stereotypes about French foreign policy (allegedly based on purely commercial interests or nostalgia for past glory) to produce a complete, if sometimes self-contradictory, discourse of disparagement, what Jean-Philippe Mathy calls in this issue a “system of Francophobia,” a web of loosely related clichés that can be mobilized at will—especially, of course, when a diplomatic crisis erupts. This article will offer a brief overview of Francophobia, describing its content and its political base. It will also assess the changes that occurred in 2002-2003, and attempt to establish how new and how important the most recent developments are.

It is difficult to know whether this new mass version of “Francophobia” will prove as long lasting and widespread as is feared. But there is no doubt



that in 2003 France joined the ranks of countries subjected to a campaign of widespread bashing from the American population—Japan in the 1980s being the most recent example. While much of the negative recent stereotyping is familiar to students of anti-French sentiment in the US, the replacement of Honda-smashing by Peugeot-smashing<sup>3</sup> in some popular rallies, that is, its diffusion into the wider population, as well as the striking political polarization of Francophobia around conservative patriotic circles, are new characteristics.

### **The Worst of Friends: Francophobic Stereotypes in Historical Perspective**

Broad characterizations of other countries are the legacy of many layers of history and of various political disagreements, and in no case the result of a serious, let alone scientific, observation of a country or a society at any given moment in time.<sup>4</sup> The temptation of essentialism is thus the hidden assumption of anti-Americans and Francophobes, and stereotypes remain very persistent despite the dynamism of the societies they purport to represent.

France and America have of course never fought a real war against each other, and have indeed sided together in many international crises. But as Jean-Baptiste Duroselle has demonstrated, most of the history of US-French relations has been characterized by disagreements and disputes, and each episode has created its own set of negative perceptions and stereotypes, which then becomes available for future discourse on France.<sup>5</sup> The French Revolution gave birth to the stereotype of an unstable and illiberal country and of a quarrelsome and restive people. The famous “XYZ” affair in 1797-98, in which Foreign Minister Talleyrand asked agents of US President John Adams for a bribe in return for his diplomatic services, reinforces the stereotype of the immoral and frivolous Frenchman. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, America partly defined itself in opposition to a Europe it tended to view as corrupt and class-ridden and its immigrant population, especially second-generation immigrants, forcefully rejected their ancestral homelands.<sup>6</sup> The Dreyfus affair in the first decade of the twentieth century established the image of an anti-Semitic France. Some American soldiers sent to France during World War I met only rapacious merchants and whores, and tourists in the 1920s were often cheated, crystallizing the general image of a dishonest, greedy, and ungrateful France. So much so, in fact, that French Ambassador Jusserand felt that he needed to react, in 1919-1920, against a growing myth: the French are so mean and ungrateful that the US government has to *rent* the trenches in which the brave American boys had come to sacrifice their lives for France.<sup>7</sup>

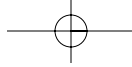
The major historical event that froze a negative image of France in the American consciousness was the German military defeat of France in 1940. This event, along with the appeasement of the 1930s that preceded it and the

abuses of the Vichy Regime that followed it, served as a major upgrade to the "system of Francophobia" by adding the notions of the incompetence and cowardice of the French armed forces, the willingness to appease dictators, anti-Semitism and moral inferiority, and a natural tendency towards authoritarianism.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, the US would forever view France with condescension, as a secondary and dependent player on the international scene. As Costigliola shows,<sup>9</sup> this is when the image of a helpless, feminine France took root echoed in more recent macho references, such as the suggestion by US Secretary of State Colin Powell that Hubert Védrine "must be getting the vapors," the description by Senator John McCain of France as "an aging actress of the 1940s who is still trying to dine out on her looks, but doesn't have the face for it," or political analyst Robert Kagan's recent "American are from Mars, Europeans are from Venus."<sup>10</sup>

The 1950s and 1960s brought the negative cliché of an oppressive and colonialist France, while increasing American tourism in France reinforced the stereotype of a rural country that refuses to modernize, let alone industrialize. De Gaulle's foreign policy consolidated the impression of an ungrateful and, above all, unhelpful country, which is anti-Semitic as well. Since then, it is interesting to note that no new clichés have taken root. The same old negative stereotypes are simply used again in new situations. A lively treasure-trove of francophobe images, insults and discourses is thus ready for use whenever the need arises, about Frenchmen, about French society and about French foreign policy.

Because they crystallized in different historical periods, come from different segments of America, and deal with diverse aspects of French society, these negative stereotypes are often in contradiction with each other, not to mention with the various positive stereotypes. For example, France is a messy country of Gallic indiscipline and disorder, but it is also the country of excessive Cartesianism, theoretical order and love of logic. In foreign policy, France is the country of cynical *realpolitik* and hard-nose calculations, but also a country with delusions about its own power. Frenchmen are notoriously inept at commerce and trade, but another negative cliché sees them as dangerously seductive salesmen.<sup>11</sup>

Stereotypes have of course a complex relationship with reality. On the one hand, they are inaccurate, or simply "wrong," in that they don't capture an objective slice of reality. They offer a refracted image of what they are supposed to reflect, while pretending to be faithful. On the other hand, they always have some link with reality, without which they would not have any currency or staying-power. Sometimes they reflect a partial reality, and generalize it; sometimes they reflect a reality of the past, while failing to acknowledge progress or change. The stereotype of an anti-Semitic France is an example of both of these tendencies. As Stanley Hoffmann has shown, the idea that France refuses to confront its anti-Semitic past and denies its errors during World War II had indeed been true, but only up until the 1960s. Recent



books making that point are simply not honest—or ill-informed. And while some anti-Semitism does persist in France (often under the new guise of “judeophobia”), to label it a generalized or widespread feeling in the population is simply inaccurate.<sup>12</sup> If stereotypes generally fail to account for the complexity of the reality, it doesn’t follow that they themselves are not real. On the contrary, as Jean-Noël Jeanneney puts it, “Une idée fausse est un fait vrai,” and the images stereotypes project have consequences.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, American Francophobia also owes a great deal to its English roots, and shares much with current British Francophobia.<sup>14</sup> But even if many stereotypes are shared by the two countries, and by others as well (the image of an arrogant France among its European partners, for example), a large share of American stereotypes of France are specific to America. These stereotypes are either the product of French-American history or the result of salient differences between these two democracies. The respective position of each country in the international system has also resulted in specific stereotypes (for instance, the anti-American image of the cowboy nation; the francophobe notion of a free-rider country).

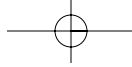
### **Diplomats, Liberals, Conservatives, Jewish-Americans: Four Specific Discourses**

We know that “America” in the eyes of French anti-American communists or of Green Party members is not the same as “America” as seen by anti-American Gaullists or National Front party members. The same holds true for Francophobia, and it is possible to identify at least four distinct negative images of France in America. It should be noted that this is nothing new. In the early days of the American Republic, the federalists, or Hamiltonians, were anti-France and often francophobic, whereas Jeffersonians, or Republicans, were generally pro-France and Francophiles.

#### *1. Francophobia in Diplomatic Circles*

Like any other foreign ministry, the US State Department has produced stereotypes of other countries—some positive, some negative. In diplomatic circles, especially in the lower ranks, the collective view of France is largely negative.<sup>15</sup> To warm up an audience, nothing is more welcomed in Washington foreign policy circles than an anti-French joke. Culturalism and a lack of historical knowledge, or rather a selective memory, often support this negative vision. World War II is the key that explains everything, from France’s anti-Semitism in its dealings with Israel to its alleged tendency to appease dictators or to let Serbian war criminals go freely in occupied Bosnia.

Frustration with France’s frequent opposition to American foreign policy, especially since de Gaulle’s presidency, has led to many stereotypes that provide a comfortable explanation for French attitudes. French anti-Americanism is



the most useful one, as it supposes a systematic opposition, whatever the merits of the case. Why would one even try to alter the French position, if it is inspired by systematic malevolence? This stereotype can also be the basis for a European strategy: minimize European opposition by dismissing it as mere Gallic quibbling, not as a serious political objection by other European countries. Other dark motives purportedly account for French opposition: commercial gain, nostalgia for past glory, political corruption (Saddam Hussein allegedly financed Chirac's electoral campaigns), or simply a taste for posturing.

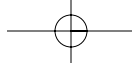
The widely held assumption that America is working for the common good in the world rather than for its narrow national interest, and that France is viciously blocking this generosity, has also led to a set of specific visions and stereotypes which are linked to the idea of treason. France is "unhelpful" and "counter-productive," sometimes even "perfidious"; it is immoral and it encourages others Europeans to resist US policy. Finally, it is ungrateful and free-riding, since America ensures European security.

A widespread stereotype, found in diplomatic circles and beyond, that deserves additional scrutiny is the one that dismisses France's behavior as nostalgia for its past glory.<sup>16</sup> This stereotype is based on an obvious observation—the France of Chirac is not as strong, in relative terms, as the France of Louis XIV. On 23 April 2002, both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* used the cliché, the first to explain abstentions in the French presidential election, the second to account for the dilemma of French elites after the election.<sup>17</sup> This stereotype has the advantage of disqualifying any French action by reducing it to a well-known symptom of mental illness, delusions of grandeur. And it contains three implicit criticisms: France is currently insignificant (since it is a glorious *past* that is recalled); it abuses its actual power; in so doing, it is not only pretentious but also out of touch with reality. Thus, the person who uses this stereotype can feel superior and more realistic, that is on the side of actual power, not imagination.

## 2. *In the Eyes of Liberals: is France Really Democratic?*

Even though the political principles of American liberalism are very similar to many aspects of French and European political principles (such as an emphasis on social cohesion and solidarity), a distinct liberal francophobe image does exist. It is based on two negative stereotypes: France as a semi- and illiberal democracy, and France as a country where minorities are oppressed.

There has always been a suspicion that France was not really as democratic as the UK and the US, a suspicion fed by France's history, until recently, of authoritarian interludes and weak democratic regimes. This negative image of an unstable and somewhat illiberal country, always tempted by authoritarianism and always resorting to providential leaders, is reinforced by the idea that minorities (such as immigrants, homosexuals, and non-Catholics) are oppressed in France. Some American multiculturalists hold that because of the vaunted "*modèle républicain*" which requires them to conform to an



exclusive model of “Frenchness” and assimilate, minorities are simply excluded and negated. Diversity is simply not welcomed.<sup>18</sup>

3. *Conservatives and Neo-Conservatives: “Comment peut-on être Français ?”*

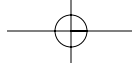
Francophobia comes much more naturally to American conservatives and neoconservatives, including many famous columnists, such as William Safire, Charles Krauthammer,<sup>19</sup> Michael Kelly, George Will, and Robert Kagan, who keep the flame of Francophobia alive. There are at least two reasons for this: first, this group is more nationalistic than other political groups, and quicker to write off other countries; second, its political values, including placing faith in the market and rejecting the state’s social and economic role are often diametrically opposed to French political values.

Conservatives often describe France as a Soviet-style economy, and reading their assessments often makes one wonder why France is not bankrupt yet, let alone why it holds its position as the fifth largest economy in the world.<sup>20</sup> Demonizing France has long been, in conservative circles, a way to criticize domestic opponents—liberals and democrats—and demonstrate how dangerous their economic and social ideas are.<sup>21</sup> State intervention in particular is emphasized as a perversion of a truly free society, where economic freedoms and other freedoms go hand in hand. This is also why the bureaucratic European Union is seen as an ominous danger by American and British conservatives alike.

In the social realm, conservatives despise centralism and elitism, which in their eyes are the hallmarks of France; they tout America’s diverse and democratic society. Their anti-intellectualism, which has long accompanied the American conservative movement, and has British roots, starting with Edmund Burke, targets the role of intellectuals in public life, as opposed to their democratic recognition of the people’s role and centrality.<sup>22</sup>

One of the *bêtes noires* of conservatives is “French theory,” though it was actually developed on American campuses, and more generally French intellectuals (such as Foucault, Kristeva, Guattari, Baudrillard, Derrida, and Deleuze) who are accused of debunking traditional values. The Sokal affair, even if it originated from more liberal quarters, exemplifies this suspicion of French intellectuals, and fits neatly into the tradition of Anglo-Saxon criticisms of French thinkers as obscure, imprecise, arrogant, and vain.

In foreign policy, conservatives and neo-conservatives place a great emphasis on hard power, especially military force, and on the importance of America’s sovereignty (unilateralism). This puts them at odds with France—and Europe—which emphasizes soft power (for example, development aid and collective management of international challenges) and multilateralism. They also take a very moralistic view of international affairs, and the cliché of a “cynical and effete France” (its defenders would say “nuanced and prudent”) is simply the francophobe mirror image of the anti-American cliché of a “simplistic and trigger-happy America” (its defenders would say “clear-minded and resolute”).



#### *4. An Anti-Semitic France*

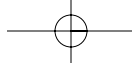
The last set of negative stereotypes about France depicts a country overwhelmed by anti-Semitism.<sup>23</sup> This image is in no way limited to Jewish-Americans—in fact, it is more often used by conservatives, whatever their religion, to score points in any given debate against France. And many of the best scientific or artistic experts on France are indeed Jewish-Americans, without even mentioning the love relationship between a large part of the American Jewish community and Paris—the “Woody Allen” culture. Still, the dark image of a country where a second “final solution” is currently being prepared is, for obvious reasons, more present in Jewish-American circles.<sup>24</sup>

At this point, it is important to acknowledge how disturbing and shocking acts of violence against French Jews have been in the recent years—and denouncing them should in no case be equated with Francophobia. A surge in such acts began after September 2000, coinciding with the beginning of the second Intifada, and a spike occurred in March and April 2002, coinciding with renewed tension between Israel and the Palestinians, and the intervention of Israeli armed forces in occupied territories. The real problem with the image of an overwhelmingly anti-Semitic France is not that it darkens the picture but that it obscures the nature of current anti-Semitism in France.<sup>25</sup>

Anti-Semitism in its traditional form—part of a general impulse on the French far right for the preservation of “Frenchness”—has been dwindling in recent decades, as exemplified by its disappearance from Jean-Marie Le Pen’s political discourse. Unfortunately, another brand of “judeophobia” has arisen, centered on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and very present among young French people of Arab origin, many of them alienated from wider French society. These youths, in spite of appeals by their community leaders to avoid such confusions, tend to identify with their Palestinian “brothers” and associate the Jews of France with the Israelis.

France was the protector of Jewish communities abroad in the 19th century (especially in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire) and has a long record of integrating Jews into its public life from the French Revolution to Léon Blum and Dominique Strauss-Kahn.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, the well-documented history of French anti-Semitism, from the Dreyfus affair to the Vichy regime, feeds current perceptions of France as anti-Semitic.<sup>27</sup> The growing awareness in America that the United States did not do enough in the past, especially in the 1930s and 1940s, to rescue European Jews, has also recently provoked a degree of overcompensation, part of which is a very high sensitivity, and occasionally a self-righteous attitude toward current challenges facing Jewish communities abroad.<sup>28</sup>

Another central reason for this image as a country imbued with atavistic anti-Semitism is the usefulness of such an image in the diplomatic debate over the Middle East. Opponents of France’s position on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute can simply dismiss French arguments, either because French diplomacy is said to be directly inspired and guided by anti-Semitism or because of the



French government's supposedly absolute fear of Arab-Jewish communal violence on French streets. In this way, the stereotype of an anti-Semitic France is easily combined with other stereotypes, such as those of cowardice, immorality, and racism, which reinforce it and make it appear logical.

### **From Frustrated Patriotism to Useful Disqualification: Understanding Francophobia**

Before trying to understand the most frequent reasons for Francophobia, it might be useful to investigate why France is singled out for condemnation (and not Germany or Spain, for example), why it so often serves as the country that most fascinates Americans, and sometimes as the one they love to hate. Pierre Verdaguer may have offered the best rationale:

Gageons que ce statut particulier de la stéréotypie française est sans doute fonction de l'ambiguïté qui marque les rapports avec la France, perçue à la fois comme un allié et comme un ennemi culturel, dans la mesure où elle est assimilée à une nation officiellement rebelle aux valeurs américaines. De fait, le bouc émissaire culturel idéal doit être à la fois suffisamment proche de l'autre culture (et à bien des égards avoir d'indéniables affinités avec elle), et cependant suffisamment différent et, par tant, craint: il doit représenter une menace pour pouvoir être rejeté par tous au moment opportun.<sup>29</sup>

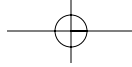
The first reason for Francophobia is precisely linked to Verdaguer's remark : it has to do with identity and self-pride. Blasting others, deriding them systematically, or denouncing them as evil is a way to reaffirm one's own identity and the value of one's own culture.<sup>30</sup> In other words, using francophobe stereotypes is a variation on the theme "I am American, and America is a great country." Some Americans, for example, who cannot adapt to a foreign country or become overwhelmed by it, often begin to hate its culture and people.

Before, I used to admire them [...] But suddenly their ubiquitous dogs annoyed me, and so did their insistence that I stay off the grass in the parks. Before I found them exotic, cultivated, engaging. Now I found them surly, small-minded, bitter. It was time to go. Six years is, perhaps, too long a time to live among the French, the most maddeningly idiosyncratic of civilized people.<sup>31</sup>

In the political realm, blasting France is one of the many way to reaffirm one's patriotism, as exemplified by conservative show host Bill O'Reilly on Fox News in March 2003:

I'm so angry at that country for their duplicity and dishonesty and their aggressive strategy to try to embarrass this nation. [...] They have put our people in danger, Mr. Ambassador. And you want to get them in to help pay for it? Hey, keep your francs. That's what I say.<sup>32</sup>





Blasting France as a perfidious or “malicious” nation, as Newt Gingrich did on the same day on Fox News, presents other advantages as well. It provides an easy explanation, indeed a scapegoat, for America’s own failures (if Washington did not get the votes at the UN in March 2003, don’t ask if the diplomatic strategy was right, blame it on France), and a very efficient way to stigmatize domestic opposition to the Administration’s projects by linking this opposition to a foreign—hence unpatriotic—attitude. And it works. Shortly before the US-led coalition launched the war against Iraq, many Democrats, and 52% of Americans, shared in effect the French position, which favored giving UN inspectors more time. Nonetheless, almost everyone agreed that France was stabbing the US in the back.<sup>33</sup>

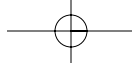
The third mechanism that explains the use of francophobe stereotyping is its usefulness in the political debate. When France opposes the US, it is much easier to frame this opposition as a familiar symptom of Gallic wickedness and immorality rather than to address the merits of one’s particular case.

It is indeed “*simplisme*” to pick fights with evil regimes just because those regimes want to kill you or enslave you or at least force you to knuckle under and collaborate in their evil, when one might choose the far safer and far more profitable path of shrugging one’s shoulders in a fetchingly Gallic fashion and sending one’s Jews off to the camps, as one’s new masters in government request.”<sup>34</sup>

Here, Michael Kelly uses no less than six francophobe clichés (intellectual arrogance, immorality, venality, frivolity, anti-Semitism and cowardliness). But other than those insults, he doesn’t provide any argument to rebut Vedrine’s criticism that reducing all international problems to the war on terrorism was simplistic. After all these insults, what reader would care about Hubert Vedrine’s view anyway? This is precisely the point of negative stereotyping: changing the focus of the debate, disqualifying one’s opponent rather than addressing his or her point of view.

More generally, Francophobia and anti-Americanism should be put in the context of diverging democratic models of society (on such fundamental issues as the role of the state, the conception of the general interest, the proper place of religion and the management of minorities). The competition between two universalistic visions easily leads to negative stereotyping, as the merits of one’s model need to be reaffirmed by belittling the other model—or deriding it as immoral. Interestingly enough, during the French-American diplomatic showdown of 2003, Jacques Chirac and George Bush appealed to different universalistic values (peace through diplomacy on the one hand, democracy through the fight against tyranny on the other) and both actually elicited a worldwide response.<sup>35</sup>

The fifth reason for Francophobia is more a condition of possibility than a cause *per se*, but it is quite important. It is the absence of any kind stigma attached to anti-French discourse in the United States. This is probably explained by the absence of any large French-American community in the US,



which means there is no painful history of anti-French violence or oppression in the United States and makes France-bashing fair game. Francophobic stereotyping and anti-French jokes would be unacceptable if they dealt with the Japanese, the Arabs or the Mexicans, but one can freely talk about French national cowardice or body odor. No sense of political correctness vis-à-vis the French stands in the way.

The last reason for American Francophobia is a crucial one. There is no doubt that France is unfairly treated, but this is a price that Paris is prepared to pay for its willingness to confront the United States in the diplomatic sphere when it disagrees, and that the French are prepared to pay for their independence and their way of life. In other words, one should expect to be hit, sometimes unfairly, when one chooses to chart an independent course and not always get in step. To a large extent, Francophobia exists because France agrees to it.

### **The New Francophobia and its Instrumentalization by the Bush Administration**

During 2002 and the first half of 2003, American Francophobia has taken a new turn. While a benign image of France, or at least indifference has prevailed in the past among the general American populace, a sharply negative image now seems to have found its way in heartland America. If the same old tired clichés are being put to work once again, it is their widespread diffusion that constitutes a new factor, coinciding of course with diplomatic tensions about Iraq. Late-night comedians are making anti-French jokes. The expression “cheese-eating surrender monkeys” from *The Simpsons* has become the popular American counterpart of “frogs” in Great Britain. “French fries” (which were never French in the first place) have become “freedom fries” in patriotic restaurants and at the cafeteria of the US House of Representatives. Appeals to boycott French products have multiplied and anti-French sentiment has found its way into the “Rallies for America” (the pro-Bush and pro-war rallies of March and April 2003), where one could see signs reading “Bomb France Now” or buy “Iraq now, France next” bumper-stickers.

The strong identification of Francophobia with Republican and conservative circles is another new element. Indeed, France-bashing seems to have become part of right-wing popular culture. Bashing France has become a way to express one’s patriotism, some would say jingoism. Signs like “Iraq is French for Hollywood” or, even more explicitly, “Tom Daschle for President of France” in a “Rally for America” on 23 March 2003, as well as signs of sympathy for France in liberal circles, demonstrated that sentiment for France had become reflective of the general polarization of partisan politics in the United States.

A renewed sense of patriotism since 9/11 has certainly been a driving force behind the recent spike of Francophobia, as France was seen as blocking

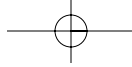
Washington in every way it could on an issue presented and perceived as being vital for American national security—and being part of the war against terrorism (whatever the dubious merits of this claim). Even commentators who shared large parts of the French analysis dismissed France's position. While acknowledging that there were good arguments to be made against a rapid intervention in Iraq, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman basically dismissed these very same arguments when made by Paris or Berlin. When voiced by these countries, he wrote, these arguments stem from "expedience," "weakness" or "identity crisis," not from real belief.<sup>36</sup> Another sign of the importance of patriotism is that Americans have been anti-French, not anti-Chirac, whereas French have mostly been anti-Bush, not anti-American, in this latest dispute.

There are many indications that the new Francophobia, more widespread in the general public, more associated with a particular party, and fueled by the media, is real. In March 2003, favorable opinion of France had plummeted to a low of 34%, whereas it was still at 79% in February 2002.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, there is no doubt that the Bush administration and its political allies have played the anti-French card to muster support and find a useful scapegoat for their diplomatic debacle in failing to gain a final UN Security Council resolution in support of an intervention in Iraq.<sup>38</sup>

On 5 March 2003, President George W. Bush was interviewed about possible retribution against Mexico if that country, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, refused to vote in favor of the US-British resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq. According to Bush, "there is an interesting phenomena taking place here in America about the French. And there is a backlash against the French—not stirred up by anybody except by the people."<sup>39</sup> Ari Fleischer, spokesman for President Bush, asked about retribution against France for its stance in the Iraq diplomatic imbroglio, told journalists a week later: "What you have to do is watch your television and see the natural reaction of the American people. They're reacting. [...] And that is their right [...] I think you are seeing the American people speak spontaneously."<sup>40</sup>

This thesis of a spontaneous reaction by "the American people" against France does not tell the whole story. There are many indications the administration, indirectly and through its political allies, has encouraged Francophobia in its popular forms.

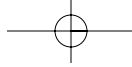
First, there is, to be sure, an indirect involvement. The administration has created a favorable climate in which Francophobia and stigmatization of any kind of dissent could thrive.<sup>41</sup> The rationale of "You're either with us or against us" as repeated by the President on different occasions after 9/11 leaves no way to discuss the best method of fighting terrorism. On the domestic scene, it means that challenging the administration's choices is unpatriotic. In the international arena, it means that non-alignment with Washington amounts to an attack on US national security.



The Bush administration has used the myth of a filibustering and “unreasonable” France to account for its diplomatic failure to get nine votes at the United Nations, even though not forcing a vote as announced by the President on 6 March clearly showed that France was not alone in advocating the reinforcement of the inspection process.<sup>42</sup> In the final days before the war, the Bush administration portrayed President Chirac’s sentence on March 10, “Ma position, c’est que, quelles que soient les circonstances, la France votera non parce qu’elle considère ce soir qu’il n’y a pas lieu de faire une guerre pour atteindre l’objectif que nous nous sommes fixé, c’est-à-dire le désarmement de l’Iraq” as a pledge to always veto a second resolution whatever the circumstances in Iraq. However, as Chirac made clear, France would vote “no” at this specific stage of the process. And as the administration knew, “whatever the circumstances” was a reference to however the other nations of the Security Council might vote on the current resolution, not a reference to the circumstances on the ground in Iraq.<sup>43</sup> The administration knew this but interpreted Chirac’s remark in a way that made France the scapegoat for its own diplomatic failure.

Such scapegoating and finger-pointing by the administration alone could probably not, however, trigger a popular wave of Francophobia. The second stimulus of this “spontaneous” wave of France-bashing is the active intervention of some media. First come the political allies of the administration, especially conservative or neo-conservative pundits in major newspapers, such as Charles Krauthammer, Michael Kelly, George Will and William Safire. If all of them are self-proclaimed Francophobes, the last stands out for his willingness to use unchecked facts and plain slander to bash France in America’s most important newspaper, as when he tried to demonstrate France’s involvement in supplying Saddam Hussein with rocket fuel—an allegation still in search of any actual facts. Some of his columns exhibit very low journalistic standards.<sup>44</sup> In the same vein, Bill Gertz of *The Washington Times*, a conservative daily, also claimed that a French company was selling spare parts to Iraq for its planes, with just as few verifiable facts to back his thesis up.<sup>45</sup> Whatever the seriousness of such allegations against France, they are repeated by other conservative commentators, become conventional wisdom, and reinforce the image of a perfidious nation that stabs the US in the back.

Beyond conservative and neoconservative pundits and newspapers (*The Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Times* among others), a second specific category of France-bashing media is made up of Rupert Murdoch outlets.<sup>46</sup> These range from the low-brow Fox News network to the more intellectual *Weekly Standard* magazine, and include the *New York Post* tabloid and its British counterpart *The Sun*. It has been a consistent political position of all Murdoch (and Lord Black) media outlets to urge for a war in Iraq, bash France and use negative stereotypes and insults when referring to it. *The New York Post* has offered the most offensive articles, showing for example a doctored front page photo in which the heads of the French and German representatives to the UN were replaced by weasel faces.<sup>47</sup> The irony in this concerted offensive to undermine

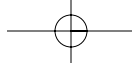


support for UN inspections by lashing out at France is that it contradicts one of the most basic francophobe stereotypes—that France is insignificant, that it does not count anymore. Indeed, not a week passes without numerous references to France being made in *The Weekly Standard* and other Murdoch media.

A close look at the so-called “spontaneous” appeals to boycott French products leads the wary social scientist into an unexpected dip into the “vast right-wing conspiracy” denounced years ago by Hillary Clinton. It may seem odd or far-fetched, but the two main organizations having called for a boycott have ties with conservative operatives and organizations which were active in the anti-Clinton campaigns of the 1990s. Dave Bossie, a long-time low-level republican operative, spent the best part of the 1990s trying to track down information on the Whitewater scandal, and was fired from Congress where he worked for Representative Dan Burton’s office for having leaked information to the press. In 1994, he joined Citizens United, an organization dedicated to the task of finding proof of President Clinton’s corruption and sending them to the press.<sup>48</sup> Citizens United is now calling for a boycott of French products, and Dave Bossie has appeared on many shows to promote the idea. The second organization to appeal “spontaneously” for the boycott of French products is NewsMax.com, whose editor, president and CEO Christopher Ruddy also spent a large part of the 1990s investigating the Whitewater affair and Vincent Foster’s death. One of the funders of NewsMax.com is no other than Richard Scaife, who was accused of being the purse behind the Republicans’ activism against Bill and Hillary Clinton. In other words, far from being a grass-roots movement, the boycott has been orchestrated by specific interests close to the administration. As for the spontaneous “Rallies for America” in support of the Bush administration and the war in March and April of 2003, and where a lot of France-bashing was heard, many articles have pointed out that they were prompted and organized by friends of the administration, including a network of conservative radio stations, Clear Channel Inc., with close ties to George W. Bush himself, going back to his years in Texas.<sup>49</sup>

In other words, while there is no doubt that many patriotic Americans resented French President Jacques Chirac’s policy *vis-à-vis* Iraq and spontaneously took a negative view of France as a result, the Bush administration and its allies in the media encouraged concrete expressions to the recent spike of Francophobia, because it was in their political interest to muster domestic support. The role played by Republicans in Congress, especially Dennis Hastert, in fanning anti-French sentiment, should also be noted.<sup>50</sup>

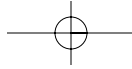
In conclusion, there is a real danger for a government in fanning popular resentment towards a country, as one can never predict where this movement will stop. At the time of this writing, it is difficult not to interpret the current evolution of American Francophobia as a dangerous turn, a crystallizing moment, even if US-French relations have been difficult in the past, and have usually mended after some time. Second, the perplexing problem of Franco-



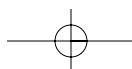
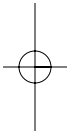
phobia should certainly be seen in the broader context of the souring of transatlantic relations, and of American “europhobia.”<sup>51</sup> But for all the signs that Europe may some day ease the burden of the French and become the new villain, there are other signs that point to an enduring and specific anti-French bias. Few countries have the costly privilege of being so close to and yet so different from the American Superpower, or of being at the same time its oldest ally and its first critic.

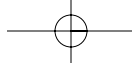
### Notes

1. The academic study which provided the basis for this article, presented at a meeting organized by the French-American Foundation in New York on 25 June 2002 (see Emily Eakin, “An Old *Amour*, More Off than On” (*New York Times*, 6 July 2002)), was used for other pieces, including “Etats-Unis: le regain francophobe,” *Politique internationale* 97 (Fall 2002) and “Des clichés qui font mal,” *Le Figaro Magazine* (8 February 2003).
2. The etymological root “phobia” describes fear, rather than disdain or contempt. Other uses of this root, however, present a similar disconnection between their etymology and their meaning, such as “homophobia”. The expression “France-bashing” is better, but it is less convenient, partly because it describes an action rather than a personal creed or a set of discourses and clichés. And there is no equivalent to the strange word “Anti-Americanism”—see pages 13-15 of Philippe Roger’s masterpiece, *L’Ennemi américain – Généalogie de l’antiaméricanisme français* (Paris: Seuil, 2003).
3. A shock-jock near Atlanta offered people the chance to smash a Peugeot for \$10.00, just out of anger at France, during a pro-war rally in late February 2003 (heard on NPR, 29 February 2003). This recalls similar instances of Toyota and Honda smashing in the 1980s.
4. See Denis Lacorne, “Les dessous de la francophobie,” *Le Nouvel Observateur* 37 (February 2003); Eugen Weber, “Of Stereotypes and of the French,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 25 (1990); Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance Since World War II* (New York: Twayne, 1992); see also “L’image de la France aux Etats-Unis,” *Cahiers de l’IHTP* 28 (June 1994).
5. Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *La France et les États-Unis: des origines à nos jours* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1976).
6. Columnist Charles Krauthammer, a second-generation immigrant who acknowledges his Francophobia, provides a good example: his parents were French citizens, and French was his first language. See “Not for Moi, Thanks,” *Washington Post*, 26 November 1999.
7. Duroselle, *La France et les États-Unis*.
8. Rewriting military history has become an essential part of the francophobia industry. This holds particularly true for appeasement in the 1930s, for which France alone is blamed, as if isolationist America had not been a key part of the problem and as if Washington had not held on to the same policy until the end of 1941, long after both Britain and France had abandoned appeasement. Indeed, Franklin

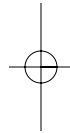
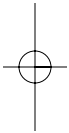


- Roosevelt congratulated British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain after the Munich Conference of 1938 with a telegram that proclaimed him a "Good Man."
9. Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States*.
  10. Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power—America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Knopf, 2003). A large part of Kagan's thesis is indeed an intellectual elaboration on the macho theme "mine is bigger than yours."
  11. Pierre Verdaguer, "La France vue par l'Amérique: considérations sur la pérennité des stéréotypes," *Contemporary French Civilization* 20, 2 (1996).
  12. See for example Stanley Hoffmann on the question of anti-Semitism, "Battling Clichés," *French Historical Studies* 19, 2 (Fall 1995). See also Adam Nossiter, *The Algeria Hotel—France, Memory and the Second World War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001); Pierre-André Taguieff, *La nouvelle judéophobie* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2001). Ariane Chebel d'Appollonia "The National Front and Anti-Semitism in France," *US—France Analysis*, Center on the US and France, The Brookings Institution, July 2002 (<http://www.brook.edu/fp/cusf/analysis/dappollonia.htm>); and Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Jonathan Laurence, "Anti-Semitism in France," *US—France Analysis*, Center on the US and France, The Brookings Institution, May 2002 ([http://www.brook.edu/fp/cusf/analysis/dreyfus\\_20020514.htm](http://www.brook.edu/fp/cusf/analysis/dreyfus_20020514.htm)).
  13. See Jean-Noël Jeanneney, ed., *Une idée fausse est un fait vrai: Les stéréotypes nationaux en Europe* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2000).
  14. See Mathy in this issue, and Crane Brinton, *The Americans and the French* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968).
  15. On Francophobia in diplomatic circles, see Simon Serfaty, "La France vue par les États-Unis : réflexions sur la francophobie à Washington," paper prepared for the Centre français sur les États-Unis, IFRI, November 2002.
  16. Cf. Verdaguer, "La France vue par l'Amérique," 1996.
  17. *New York Times*, 23 April 2002: "Weary of the erosion of their country as a cultural and political power, French voters stayed home in record numbers, and those who did go to the polls spread their votes among a record 16 candidates, handing a shocking upset victory to the far-right candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen." See also Jim Hoagland, "Le Pen: An Electoral Mess..." *Washington Post*, 23 April 2002: "But this barely softens the blow of Sunday's outcome for France's political class, which suddenly finds itself shipwrecked between memories of past national glory and visions of a European future still distant and incomprehensible for many French citizens."
  18. Cf. Eric Fassin, "'Good to Think': The American Reference in French Discourses of Immigration and Ethnicity", in *Multicultural Questions*, eds. Christian Joppke and Steven Lukes (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999). Cf. also Jean-Philippe Mathy in this issue.
  19. Among many other pieces, see Charles Krauthammer, "Not for Moi, Thanks," *Washington Post*, 26 November 1999.
  20. Among other examples, see the *Index of Economic Freedom* compiled by two conservative outlets, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Heritage Foundation*, available at <http://www.heritage.org/research/features/index/>. In "economic freedom," France ranked 45th in 2002, and 40th in 2003.
  21. Cf. Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York: Doubleday, 2000).
  22. Cf. Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1963). See also Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944–54* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). See Stanley Hoffmann, "Battling Clichés," 1995.
  23. See a good analysis of this delicate issue in Tony Judt, "The Way We Live Now," *New York Review of Books*, 27 March 2003.

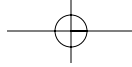




24. Cf. George Will, "Final Solution, Phase 2," *Washington Post*, 2 May 2002: "This crisis has become the second—and final?—phase of the struggle for a 'final solution to the Jewish question.'"
25. See Ariane Chebel d'Appollonia, "The National Front," as well as Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Jonathan Laurence, "Anti-Semitism in France."
26. See Justin Vaïsse, "États-Unis: le regain francophobe," *Politique internationale* 97 (Fall 2002).
27. The memories of the Dreyfus Affair are somewhat divergent. In the US, it is seen as a proof of French anti-Semitism. In France, it is also remembered for the strong and honorable reaction it prompted from the intellectuals (it indeed signals their emergence into the political debate) and for its fair ending—Dreyfus was vindicated and rehabilitated.
28. For an example of how such stereotypes have an impact on the US Congress (in the context of reparations for confiscated Jewish property during World War II), see Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Regula Ludi, "Historians as Political Trouble-Shooters: Officially Commissioned Surveys of Holocaust Legacies in France and Switzerland," *Center for European Studies Working Paper Series No. 80*, Harvard University, 2001.
29. Verdaguer, "La France vue par l'Amérique," 1996.
30. See again Verdaguer, "La France vue par l'Amérique," 1996.
31. Sharon Waxman, "French Kiss-off; After Six Gallic Years, There's No Love Lost Here," *Washington Post*, 30 October 1995.
32. *The O'Reilly Factor*, 17 March 2003, Fox News, Transcript # 031703cb.256.
33. Adam Nagourney and Janet Elder, "Threats And Responses: The Poll; More Americans Now Faulting UN On Iraq, Poll Finds," *New York Times*, 11 March 2003.
34. Michael Kelly, "As Good as Doctrine Gets," *Washington Post*, 13 February 2002.
35. See Stanley Hoffmann, "Deux Universalismes en Conflit," *The Tocqueville Review* 21, 1 (2000).
36. Thomas Friedman, "Ah, Those Principled Europeans," *New York Times*, 2 February 2003; see also "Vote France Off the Island", 9 February 2003.
37. See David W. Moore, "Majority of Americans View France as Ally or Friend—Say 'freedom fries' a silly idea," *Gallup Poll*, 20 March 2003.
38. Cf. Bill Sammon, "How the Administration Found And Exploited the French Connection," *White House Weekly* (18 March 2003).
39. Copley News Service, 5 March 2003, "Transcript of Bush remarks on Mexico."
40. Press Briefing by Ari Fleischer, 13 March 2003.
41. Cf. Gary Young, "McCarthy's Ghost," *Guardian*, 27 March 2003.
42. On March 6, the President was asked "Will you call for a vote on that resolution, even if you aren't sure you have the vote?" He answered "No matter what the whip count is, we're calling for the vote." See transcript on the White House website, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030306-8.html>
43. See transcript of Chirac's press conference of March 10th on the Elysée's website, [http://www.elysee.fr/rech/rech\\_.htm](http://www.elysee.fr/rech/rech_.htm)
44. William Safire, "The French Connection," *New York Times*, 13 March 2003; and "The French Connection II", 20 March 2003. For a rebuttal, see Barry Lando, "Brutale francophobie: une contre-enquête," *Le Monde*, 25 March 2003. See also Safire's "Slavery Triumphs," *New York Times*, 7 May 2001, where the columnist claims that France has plotted with China, African and Asian dictators to expel the US from the UN human rights commission, even though the Quai d'Orsay, contrary to the protocol, revealed its secret vote—in favor of the US.
45. Bill Gertz, "Iraq Strengthens Air Force with French Parts," *Washington Times*, 7 March 2003.







46. Cf. Jacques Duplouch, "Rupert Murdoch et Lord Black: deux serviteurs zélés de la propagande francophobe," *Le Figaro*, 17 February 2003; see also David Kirkpatrick, "Mr. Murdoch's War," *New York Times*, 7 April 2003.
47. "UN Meets – Weasels to Hear More Iraq Evidence," *New York Post*, 14 February 2003.
48. See [www.citizensunited.org](http://www.citizensunited.org); see also David Bresnahan, "Who is Dave Bossie?" *WorldNetDaily*, 7 May 1998.
49. See Paul Krugman, "Channels of Influence," *New York Times*, 25 March 2003; Frank Ahrens, "'Rallies for America' Draw Scrutiny," *Washington Post*, 26 March 2003.
50. Felicia Lee, "Americans Turning Eagerly to Gibes at the French," *New York Times*, February 15, 2003.
51. See for example Timothy Garton Ash, "Anti-Europeanism in America," *New York Review of Books*, 13 February 2003.

