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## **Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization**

*Richard F. Kuisel*

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#1313320 in Books Richard F Kuisel 1997-01-27 1997-01-27Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.00 x .75 x 6.00l, .96 #File Name: 0520206983293 pagesSeducing the French The Dilemma of Americanization | File size: 75.Mb

**Richard F. Kuisel : Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization*:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Book Report ChoiceBy SarahSky92I choose this book for a book report in my French History class. Im studying in Paris for a semester and this seemed appropriate concerning I'm an American living in France. It was good. A bit repetitive. Had lots of quotes. Large portion devoted to history.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Good, but Roger is better.By FrugalDutchmanKuisel's work covers the

ambiguous and changing attitudes of French anti-Americanism from its solidification against the tendencies of modernism in the 1930s through its continued tension during the Second World War, the Cold War, and the fall of Communism. Kuisel makes a number of generalizations about French anti-Americanism before the 1930s, but these seem largely unsubstantiated and counter to the arguments made by Phillippe Roger in his 2005 monograph, *The American Enemy*. For instance, Kuisel argues America and France had trajectories that "did not intersect" and that America had been of "marginal interest" (1) to France before the Second World War. (2) Kuisel notes repeatedly that French anti-Americanism is ambiguous. He defines anti-Americanism not as a dislike of particular American cultural products or ideas, but a consistent political and cultural antipathy to the American way of life. For some French, Americans were *les grande enfants*, the youthful nation that had no history, no tradition, and thus no culture except thoughtless mass culture. This sentiment was not limited to the elites, but then again, some of the most powerful proponents of American could be found among liberal elites. The French public rarely showed strong anti-American sentiment. The strongest anti-Americans were naturally socialist, their liberal sympathizers, and Communists. They attacked America because they perceived the power of its capitalism as a great threat to humanity. America was run by large trusts and there was little free thought. The strength of the U.S. and the American role in Europe after the Second World War gave credence to the fears of American world hegemony. Some saw U.S. foreign policy as intentionally imperialistic in Europe. Yet the Americans did not force their ideologies by gunpoint, rather they created false needs for consumer products. They enslaved the mind, not the body. The U.S. supported cultural programs in France and channeled funds to the country through the Marshall Plan, but this seemed often impersonal and overwhelming. French anti-Americans were quick to point out the contradictions inherent in a democracy which naturally silences some dissenting voices. Yet, there was still a great misunderstanding between the two countries and they endeavored to feel out their war in the post-war world. This is highlighted by J. Edgar Hoover's remark that he had to find. "Find out who this Sartre is." (31) During the Cold War France wanted to assert itself as a third power, an alternate way in a bipolar Cold War world. Communists in France took the opportunity to, paradoxically, support French nationalism as a foil to American influence. In a sense, this was a mild reverse McCarthyism, with Communist intellectuals suspecting a U.S. takeover. Coca-Cola, the most American of products, took on role as symbol of democracy. A campaign of fear worked to protect country from the evil influences of the poisonous coke. But even the leftists Jean Paul Sartre, however, had some ambiguity in his anti-Americanism. He still enjoyed American music, for example. French businessmen were influenced by what they saw in America. French businessmen went on missions to the United States to view American industries and business practices. They quickly realized that an efficiency and productivity gap was behind a real dichotomy in the standard of living. American workers, it seemed, had more material prosperity than many French business leaders. Communists warned that raising productivity would negatively affect workers health. While the French did not adopt everything they learned in America, nor would that have been practical given the available markets in France, they learned enough to challenge their own system to improve. They learned the importance of people in business, and saw how America had a hierarchy of business, while European companies were run as dictatorships. The French learned how to delegate, to promote good morale among workers, and to question the status quo. Under President De Gaulle, France's foreign policy became more anti-American. De Gaulle wanted to reassert French power as a first rate, nuclear nation. As a counter to the bi-polar Soviet-American cold war, De Gaulle sought a third player, a unified, common market Europe. Despite De Gaulle's rebuffs of American policy and his often uncompromising and critical stance, he admitted that at the heart of the matter, France had to side with the west against communist Russia. DeGaulle's anti-Americanism was reflected in French society in the 1960s. France feared American investments and the potential of an American takeover of French businesses. It seemed that the Americans did not play on level playing field. They printed money only to send it to Europe, they dominated major French industries, pushing out all competition, and they gave unequally to Great Britain and Germany. France tried to regulate American investment, but knew that the country needed outside capital to prosper. Consumer culture came to France gradually and with more opposition than in other European countries. Initially products slow to catch on. Some French critics realized that technological progress and materialism did not necessarily lead to dehumanization. "If American materialism meant creating universities, museums, and libraries like those in the United States, then they wished Europeans were `a little more materialistic.'" (111) Americans universities were seen as free zones where important discussions and debates were free and common. Maybe consumerism didn't enslave the individual, but allowed for his freedom to spend more time in thought. Yet social and cultural conformity and resulting anti-intellectualism were still threats the French feared. After DeGaulle, France took a more U.S.-friendly foreign policy. As communism withered and American democracy prospered, it became more difficult for leftists to justify their anti-Americanism. In the 1980s, French anti-Americanism relaxed. The French began absorbing more American mass culture in restaurants, entertainment and clothing styles. Intellectuals continued to point out the threats of consumer culture. Books like Servan-Schreiber's *Le Defi americain*, challenged the French to become economically dynamic or risk becoming an American satellite. France could take from American culture but still remain French. At the root of the tensions between France and American, Kuisel identifies two universal values. The French believe they are the carriers of civilization, the United States believe they

are the true promoters of freedom and democracy. By the 1990s, France had learned that it can carry on civilization in a democratic, liberal world.<sup>7</sup> of 8 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating Study, Obvious Conclusions By Gregory Canellis Richard Kuisel ponders whether the so called "seduction" of the French people by the material based consumer society of America in the years since World War II has caused the French to lose their identity, or "Frenchness." "Curiosity as to why the French once perceived America so harshly and later seemed to succumb to the American way of life," writes Kuisel, "is a natural response for an American historian who has studied and lived in France" The key word here is "seemed." After reading a little over two hundred pages of Professor Kuisel's book the foregone conclusion and obvious answer to the query he posed in the Preface is no, the French did not lose their Frenchness. The French did not "succumb to the American way of life" by drinking Coca-Cola, watching Hollywood films or listening to American Jazz any more than Americans would lose their identity by driving Japanese automobiles or sporting Italian shoes. If this conclusion seems obvious, it is! Mr. Kuisel has written a significant study, and enjoyable read, however, in the process, he has not shattered any existing historical or sociological paradigms. The author has divided his study of the French reaction to modernization and America in the post-war years into three categories: intellectual, economic, and cultural considerations. The strength of Kuisel's book lies in the placing of French sentiment towards the Americans in historical context. Yet this strength contains a dual nature and perhaps conceals a hidden weakness. On the one hand, placing anti-American outlooks within the context of Cold War politics reveals legitimate reasons for French emotions running high. France, as well as West Germany, stood in between to armed camps. If a cataclysmic Third World War was going to eventually come about, France, as was the case in the previous two global conflicts, would once again become a battlefield. This should be a realization for those who have come to believe that the French just hate Americans period. On the other hand, however, a vast majority of anti-Americanism was coming from a logical place: Leftist propaganda via "Le Monde" and other predominantly Leftist publications. Although Kuisel admits that anti-American feelings existed on the Right as well, he fails to provide an adequate comparative political analysis. The result of this omission is, once again, an obvious conclusion for the source of Anti-American sentiment, rather than an astonishing revelation. The French Communists also played an influential role in trying to ban the import of Coca-Cola. The author provides an impressive explanation of the arguments against the importing of the famous American soft drink. French farmers and wine growers as well as other soft drink manufacturers had a legitimate gripe against the possible consequences of an influx of Coca-Cola, yet in the long run, the Communists exhausted their political machinations and American pressure won out. The battle with Coca-Cola was purely political and Kuisel's argument that it represented "a symbolic controversy ... derived from French fear of growing American domination in a political economic and cultural sense" is not well substantiated. In spite of his leaning towards the obvious, Kuisel has provided us with a significant work of post-war French cultural history. Any one who reads this book will come away with a better understanding of the French and why their feelings about Americans have evolved and transformed in the post-war decades. For those that were anticipating an American victory over France in the culture wars, however, may be somewhat disappointed. C'est le guerre!

When Coca-Cola was introduced in France in the late 1940s, the country's most prestigious newspaper warned that Coke threatened France's cultural landscape. This is one of the examples cited in Richard Kuisel's engaging exploration of France's response to American influence after World War II. In analyzing early French resistance and then the gradual adaptation to all things American that evolved by the mid-1980s, he offers an intriguing study of national identity and the protection of cultural boundaries. The French have historically struggled against Americanization in order to safeguard "Frenchness." What would happen to the French way of life if gaining American prosperity brought vulgar materialism and social conformity? A clash between American consumerism and French civilisation seemed inevitable. Cold War anti-Communism, the Marshall Plan, the Coca-Cola controversy, and de Gaulle's efforts to curb American investment illustrate ways that anti-Americanization was played out. Kuisel also raises issues that extend beyond France, including the economic, social, and cultural effects of the Americanized consumer society that have become a global phenomenon. Kuisel's lively account reaches across French society to include politicians, businessmen, trade unionists, Parisian intelligentsia, and ordinary citizens. The result reveals much about the French and about Americans. As Euro Disney welcomes travellers to its Parisian fantasyland, and with French recently declared the official language of France (to defend it from the encroachments of English), Kuisel's book is especially relevant.

From Publishers Weekly In this selective study of American influence on postwar France, Kuisel ( *Capitalism and the State of Modern France* ) capably, if dryly, analyzes a few major points of encounter. A review of anti-American attitudes prevalent before WW II is followed by French leftist criticism of U.S. Cold War efforts such as the Marshall Plan and even a bizarre attack on Coca-Cola when it was introduced in the late 1940s. The spread of American consumerism forced the French to debate the standards of their own civilisation . Although the French view of America softened after the 1956 Soviet intervention in Hungary, Kuisel notes that in the 1960s, De Gaulle expressed antipathy toward this country even while his economic model Americanized France. By then intellectuals had begun to

criticize consumer society in general without targeting the U. S. Kuisel suggests that since the '70s, arguments with Americanization center around mass media and culture. While anti-Americanism may have quieted by the 1990s, he observes, "the rivalry is latent and potent." However, a study that fails to discuss the French fascination with Jerry Lewis and Woody Allen has missed an opportunity to lighten up. Illustrations. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Kuisel proposes an examination of French cultural preconceptions and of how the French response to American culture reveals what France thinks of itself. But what is promised by the leading questions, and by the sexy title, is not delivered. Instead, we have a dry history of the waning of French anti-Americanism based largely on the voices of leading French intellectuals, politicians, and journalists. The result is thorough and useful but perhaps not as interesting or incisive as the cultural analysis that might have been. For instance, the most thorough chapter, based extensively on primary sources, recounts the reactions to American affluence of French businessmen brought over under the auspices of Marshall Plan administrators. These reactions shed light on the French response to the imperatives of modernization, but the topic does not make the heart leap. - Timothy Christenfeld, Columbia Univ. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. From the Back Cover 'Great Britain is an island, France the cape of a continent, America another world, ' Charles de Gaulle once observed. The nation's most celebrated modern statesman aptly voiced the common Gallic opinion that America was more than different. It was something new and momentous, but not necessarily admirable.