

1.

America à la Mode: The 1980s

America, and much that was associated with America, was in vogue in France during the 1980s. Ralph Lauren fashions, California wines, Hollywood blockbuster movies, and venture capitalists were all chic. One Parisian couturier served McDonald's hamburgers at the opening of his fashion show. The socialist president of France, François Mitterrand, paid a visit to California's Silicon Valley and also admitted that he was a fan of the television show *Dallas*. U.S. president Ronald Reagan, after initially facing a cool reception, became so popular that many French wanted him reelected in 1984. President George H. W. Bush, especially after the success of German reunification, was even more highly regarded than his predecessor. And anti-Americanism, which once was synonymous with the cognoscenti of the Left Bank, was now unfashionable. By the end of the decade America, Americans, American society, and American popular culture were more warmly received than at any time since the GIs marched through a liberated Paris in 1944.

This narrative of French perceptions of America at the fin de siècle begins with an era of relative good feeling from the early 1980s to the early 1990s. The major aims of this chapter are, first, to describe and explain the warmth of these years as a prelude to the creeping chilliness in perceptions and relations that followed while watching the underlying rivalry that generated controversies and, second and more specifically,

to examine how the French responded to the American model—principally Reagan’s domestic policies.

Why were the two decades of the *fin de siècle* apparently different? The answer lay in an unusual conjuncture of circumstances in the 1980s. Among the reasons for transatlantic amity was the admirable way Washington navigated the end of the Cold War. The splendid performance of the U.S. economy in the mid-1980s and the personal appeal of Reagan enhanced America’s reputation. French domestic politics also contributed when the attempt at advancing socialism crashed and “Reaganomics,” at least to some French conservatives, briefly seemed attractive. Then there was the craze for American popular culture, especially among young people, and the spectacle of the French government courting the Walt Disney Company and showering awards on Hollywood stars. But one should not be deceived by appearances: these were not two completely different decades.

The contrast at the *fin de siècle* cannot be described simply as a shift from the balmy 1980s to the chilly 1990s or from America as a model to America as a pariah. This story is too complex for such simplifications because history, in this case, did not occur in neat decadelong packages; because perceptions were complex, nuanced, and fluid; because attitudes varied among different social and political groups; and because when it came to specific issues—such as American television programs—there was a range of responses, some of which were quite hostile. Amiability at the level of state-to-state relations, which itself was rather staged, existed only for brief periods, such as the years 1982–85 or 1989–91, and even these times were marred by serious quarrels. Moreover, Reagan’s popularity was ephemeral and his domestic policies failed to inspire. At the same time transatlantic rivalry obstructed French efforts at combating the AIDS epidemic and cost over a thousand lives. Finally, favorable opinion was often informed by basic ambivalence about America and even about Americans. In short, the historian should be cautious in making generalizations about the decade, with one important exception: that of the public’s general welcoming posture toward America,

Americans, and American popular culture. This seems indisputable. If the general mood was more comfortable during the 1980s than either before or after, it was nevertheless fragile and, as we shall see, easily upset.

- Before France could become more welcoming to America there had to be fundamental changes in politics and society. The French had to be liberated from two older narratives about their destiny and they had to come to enjoy the benefits of a more open consumer society. Political change as well as deep socioeconomic transformations opened the way to an appreciation of the American way in the 1980s.

Up to the 1970s Gaullism and communism—two entrenched political ideologies that defined what loyalists believed constituted France's identity, and both remnants of the early postwar era—together commanded the loyalty of roughly half the French electorate. Both, in their own ways, were pillars of anti-Americanism. The peaks of French anti-Americanism following the Second World War occurred in the early 1950s and the during the 1960s: the first was largely the work of the communists and the second that of the Gaullists. The 1970s were something of a transition as these two sources ebbed: their demise was crucial to the transatlantic affability of the Reagan/Bush/Mitterrand years.

Gaullism lost much of its allure after General Charles de Gaulle retired as president of the Fifth Republic in 1969. His call to grandeur seemed rather passé once France had lost its empire, and his plans for remaking Europe lost credibility. He was unable to persuade either the United States or the USSR to end their bipolar hegemony and his effort at reinforcing the Paris-Bonn axis stumbled over the preference of West Germans for the Atlantic Alliance. De Gaulle's attempts at reshaping the incipient European Community, even though he succeeded in vetoing admission of the British, had not brought France the leverage he sought. From the U.S. government's perspective the general was notorious for removing France from NATO's integrated command and challenging the *pax Americana*. After his departure the Gaullist credo based on national independence, an autonomous nuclear force, bal-

ance among the superpowers, and continued presence in traditional French preserves like Africa survived and formed a consensus among the French political class, but there was little enthusiasm for appeals to grandeur, threats to withdraw from the Atlantic Alliance, pronouncements aimed at embarrassing Washington, D.C., or pretensions that France should be present at every international crisis. Ironically, once de Gaulle had restored some distance between Paris and Washington there seemed to be less need to taunt Uncle Sam. The French people slowly accepted the reality that their country had become a middling power rather than a competitor with the superpowers and a candidate for grandeur. By the early 1980s less than a quarter of the French believed their nation was any longer a great power.¹ De Gaulle's successor Georges Pompidou quietly retreated from the Gaullist creed by admitting the United Kingdom into the European Community; and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who followed Pompidou to the Elysée in 1974, was not even a Gaullist. Giscard refrained from baiting the Americans and, in the eyes of diehard Gaullists, abandoned France to Atlanticism.

The decline of the Gaullism carried with it a domestic message—that state direction of the economy or *dirigisme* had reached its limits. The Gaullist approach to macroeconomic management and modernization, a strategy that was in great part responsible for the reconstruction of the economy after World War II, seemed to many to have become heavy-handed and out-of-date by the 1970s. De Gaulle's presidency featured national economic planning; tightly regulated financial markets; protection of "strategic sectors," especially from American takeovers; the elevation of "national champions" (i.e., high-tech companies that could show the tricolor in global competition); resistance to the hegemony of the dollar; shelters for agriculture and certain noncompetitive industries; and an integrated Europe closed to Anglo-American influence. Critics from the center and right of the political spectrum and much of the business community had come to see Gaullist economics as flawed. France, in their view, needed relief from suffocating state dirigisme that curbed healthy competition, denigrated private profitability,

subsidized lame-duck industries, distorted investment, and stifled entrepreneurship. The pendulum of political economy needed to swing back toward deregulation and the free market—the direction Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were to head. This, however, was not the view of Gaullism's other critics, Mitterrand's socialists—as we shall see.

A moderation of Gaullist dirigisme was underway in the 1970s. Presidents Pompidou and Giscard d'Estaing advanced deregulation, marginalized economic planning, and made state intervention conform more closely to market criteria of profitability. Giscard infuriated traditional Gaullists by exposing vital industrial sectors to American multinationals. During the administrations of Pompidou and Giscard the French economy benefited from the expansion of trade within the new European Community and rapidly opened to markets outside the continent. When De Gaulle came to power at the end of the 1950s the share of imports and exports in gross domestic product (GDP) was less than 10 percent, but by 1980 these shares had climbed to 25 percent.² The realities of the global economy would, in time, teach the socialists that France needed to streamline dirigisme and take a dose of market medicine.

To a great extent Gaullism depended for its verve and appeal on the status and vision of a heroic wartime leader, and the cause lost momentum once the great man left the political scene. The Gaullist party survived, but as a conventional right-wing organization, one among several conservative parties run by career politicians like Jacques Chirac rather than as a national movement above partisanship, a rally of all French men and women, which had been the general's intention. Like an old Napoleonic battle flag in a military museum, the colors in the banner of Gaullism had faded by 1980.

The rival grand narrative to Gaullism, that heralded by the French Communist Party, which formed the hardcore of anti-Americanism on the far left, was also in disarray by the 1970s. The red star symbolized by the Soviet Union was no longer at the apex of the firmament: it had dimmed as the hope of progressives. Revelations of Stalinist gulags and

economic failures, repression of dissent, and sclerotic political leadership had tarnished the reputation of the Soviet way. Equally damaging was Moscow's oppressive control over other communist regimes in Eastern Europe including armed intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Even the vaunted Red Army was humbled in Afghanistan after 1979. In France the Communist Party suffered from similar sclerosis under the leadership of Georges Marchais and from the weight of a nineteenth-century political program featuring the dictatorship of the proletariat. As France deindustrialized—that is, closed coal mines, docks, textile mills, and iron foundries—the industrial working class, the proletariat of Marxism, shrank. Radical student activism and the events of 1968 made the party appear to a young generation as a leftover of a Stalinist past. For intellectuals alignment with the communists was no longer *de rigueur*. Locked in a sociopolitical ghetto the party suffered from sagging electoral support and in the 1970s faced a revived rival on the left, the rebuilt Socialist Party of François Mitterrand. Because he was afraid of it becoming a junior party, Marchais abandoned what appeared to be a winning electoral alliance with the socialists in 1977. The heroic days of communism were long past.

By the 1970s the ability of traditional Gaullism and communism—two pillars of anti-Americanism—to intoxicate the French polity had crumbled. The path was open to alternatives. The Jacobin socialist model advocated by Mitterrand would be tried in the early 1980s, but it would fail to inspire economic growth and the socialists would be forced to make a right turn toward the market. The American model, our subject, was the other alternative. It became more attractive not only because Gaullism and communism had waned but also because of long-term economic and social changes—in particular, the arrival of consumer society.

What had been derided and dreaded by anti-Americans of earlier generations had become French social reality by the 1970s. The signs were everywhere: consumers possessed the purchasing power to buy consumer durables like automobiles and the latest home appliances. For

example, in 1960 only one of four households owned a refrigerator, but fifteen years later nine of ten did; they spent less of their income on necessities and more on comforts, health, communications, and leisure; they shopped at supermarkets, franchise stores (including American outlets), and discount marts; bought on credit; and enjoyed vacations abroad including tours to the United States. And advertising, much of it speaking in American English, was ubiquitous. Affluence, which arrived in the late 1960s, also brought American brand products like Tide detergent, Levi's jeans, Hollywood chewing gum, Marlboro cigarettes, Tupperware, and Hertz rental cars. To the dismay of at least one American couple, by the mid-1970s the French had sacrificed their quaintness: they had adopted frozen food, carpeted floors, dishwashers, shopping centers, and Kleenex.³ Social mobility accompanied consumer society making the old class distinctions of *bourgeois* and *paysan* seem like archaisms of the last century. Distinct social stratification—though far from absent—had eroded, and sociologists spoke of the new French society, one that was more informal, open, and fluid.⁴ *Classe moyenne* replaced *bourgeoisie* just as *agriculteur* ("farmer") replaced *paysan*. Advances in transportation and communication like television brought new physical mobility and easy access to national and world events to the rural populace and eroded parochialism. What modernizers criticized as "the stalled society" of the 1950s was on the move. Traditional markers of identity like the village, the peasantry, and the Catholic Church lost ground, and in this new French society of openness and movement American society seemed closer to home than ever before. Social status, according to the chic set who flirted with Americanization, consisted of the muffled sound of a closing car door. As the Atlantic narrowed, the American model became more relevant.

The clearing of the way for increasing interest in America as sketched here formed the background for amiability. In the foreground, as we shall see, were developments in international affairs, economic policy, intellectual life, and popular culture. The net result was a decade or more of relaxed attitudes.

- In the 1980s the French said they liked Americans, their society and culture, and they also approved of the United States as an actor in world affairs—even if they harbored reservations and made distinctions among Washington’s policies. How the French perceived America was registered in opinion surveys as well as in newspapers, magazines, and other forms of the media. But surveys are the best source for what the public thought given the representative nature of their sampling, the specificity of questions, the connection of attitudes with categories like age and occupation, and the professional and systematic way the material was usually collected. These surveys were mainly conducted by local polling organizations often under contract with newspapers or U.S. government agencies.

When asked to describe themselves, approximately three times as many of the French said they were “pro-American” as those who admitted they were “anti-American.”⁵ Americans, in the eyes of most, were a generous, industrious, energetic, inventive, decisive, trustworthy, and friendly people who appreciated French history and culture.⁶ They were praised for their achievements in science, technology, and information processing and virtually every French person who claimed to have had direct contact with Americans—for example, through travel, education, or friendships—described the experiences favorably.

American society was appreciated much like Americans themselves, but here qualifications entered the Gallic assessment. The descriptive words most commonly evoked were all laudatory: *power*, *dynamism*, *wealth*, and *freedom*. Less complimentary descriptors such as *violence*, *racism*, *inequality*, *moral permissiveness*, and *imperialism* lagged behind. Almost absent were words like *youthful* and *innocent* that historically had described Americans.⁷ Like other West Europeans the French gave high marks to American society for economic and social opportunity, law and order, political and religious freedom, and artistic diversity; they gave middling grades for providing all Americans with equal justice and an adequate standard of living; but they awarded awful scores for the care of the sick and the elderly and respect for the rights of ethnic

and racial minorities.⁸ The French were rather distinctive among West Europeans in finding greater differences between their values and those supposedly held by Americans.⁹ Despite these reservations, when asked the hypothetical question, “If you were to leave France, which country would you like to live in?” the United States led others by a wide margin especially among those in their twenties and thirties and among those who associated themselves with the political Right.¹⁰

Self-professed “anti-Americans” were a durable minority hovering in the range of 15 to 25 percent in this decade, much like such minorities in West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Belgium, but rather less numerous than those in the United Kingdom, Spain, and Greece. Those who held this anti-American reflex among the French diminished slightly between 1982 and 1988 by which date they were considerably less (18 percent) than those recorded in the United Kingdom. Among West European voters in general those attached to left-wing parties were two to three times more likely to consider themselves anti-American, while a tiny fraction of those associated with right-wing parties also expressed such hostility.¹¹

American popular culture appealed to the public in the 1980s even though the ruling socialists and some intellectuals insisted that it subverted national identity. Majorities thought that American cinema, clothes, advertising, food, sports, literature, art, and even American English posed little or no problem, but popular music was more divisive and television programming was commonly viewed as invasive.¹² In fact, two of three said they liked American music, cinema, and sports.¹³ Americanization, as a cultural phenomenon, simply failed to arouse as much opposition in this decade as it did earlier—or later.

Unlike perceptions of Americans or American society, views of the United States in world affairs were highly volatile. If most assessed bilateral relations as good and thought the United States treated France with “dignity and respect,” almost two of three also found the U.S. government domineering, and substantial numbers voiced their disapproval of certain policies like the Reagan administration’s unbending adherence

to the strong dollar or its aid to the anti-Sandinistas in Nicaragua.¹⁴ The United States ranked near the top, along with West Germany, Belgium, and Canada, as one of France's closest friends while Iran, Libya, and the Soviet Union were singled out as its principal enemies. When asked specifically if they felt rather friendly or unfriendly toward the United States, a majority said friendly, a handful voiced an unfriendly opinion, and a third said "neither." Once again, expressions of friendship came more from those associated with right-wing parties and slightly more approval came from the young and from business managers and farmers.¹⁵ In most polls unfavorable attitudes ranged from 14 to 30 percent, which corresponded closely to the number of those who professed being anti-American.

- François Mitterrand had to wait a long time before he became the first socialist president of the Fifth Republic in 1981. He had first run for the presidency against Charles de Gaulle in 1965 and compounded this defeat with two more setbacks in 1969 and again in 1974 in a close run off against Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. Raised as a Catholic, his student affiliations were with the Right and he began his political career during the Second World War when he maneuvered between the Vichy regime and the resistance. During the Fourth Republic (1946–58), which was infamous for its instability, he served as a cabinet minister in several left-center governments, enhancing his reputation as a political survivor. Under the Fifth Republic Mitterrand became an outspoken critic of President de Gaulle, and in the 1970s joined and renovated the Socialist Party, moving it toward a steely anticapitalism and collaboration with the Communist Party. His reputation was that of the consummate politician, a clever and ruthless tactician, and an opportunist rather than an ideologue, yet a man of courage, conviction, and patience—an enigmatic figure, or, as he was sometimes labeled, "the Florentine."

As he described himself, Mitterrand was a friend of the American people. The heroes and ideals of the American Revolution, he said, had stirred him as a child and, later, as president he was thrilled to visit Wil-

liamsburg, Virginia, with its evocations of the Founding Fathers.¹⁶ He also made several private visits to the United States after the war—the first in 1946 when the sight of New York City from the air reminded him, strangely, of a Renaissance painting. On the one hand he had an idealized vision of America, the land of freedom and creativity; on the other hand, he detested Wall Street, the Pentagon, the urban ghettos, and the war in Vietnam. But he was never interested in America itself—for example, society or politics—or American culture except for literature: he was familiar with the adventure stories of James Oliver Curwood as well as social critics like John Steinbeck and contemporary writers like William Styron.¹⁷

As the fates of international politics would have it, François Mitterrand had to work with Ronald Reagan for his entire first term (1981–88) as president of the Fifth Republic. A socialist who promised to break with capitalism, a cultivated author with philosophical pretensions, a rather provincial Frenchman who was not close to the United States, a party leader who had not been a partisan of NATO, and a politician known for his devious ways faced, in the White House, a conservative Republican, a champion of free enterprise, a patriot who intended to assert American leadership, and a former actor not known for either refined tastes or cosmopolitan interests who affected an affable and straightforward demeanor. The Florentine and the Cowboy were an unpromising pairing for a harmonious political script. Yet Mitterrand's Elysée Palace and Reagan's White House, despite mutual suspicion, some cagey maneuvering, and several public spats, managed to maintain cordial relations.

Ronald Reagan's victory in 1980 over Jimmy Carter was more perplexing than surprising to the French. Assessing the presidential race the French press viewed Carter as a weak candidate for reelection. The prestigious left-center daily *Le Monde* described the Democratic incumbent as intelligent, informed, and well-meaning, but indecisive and too idealistic.¹⁸ During his presidency the White House appeared adrift and weak; witness the continued embarrassment over American hostages in

Tehran. It was only at the end of his term, in the view of *Le Monde*, that Carter grasped the Soviet danger. In the conservative *Le Figaro Magazine* one columnist, on the eve of the election, not only assailed Carter's pursuit of détente with the Soviets but complained about the decline of culture, civility, and the virile pioneering spirit among Americans in general during the 1970s.¹⁹ Carter's America seemed to represent the decline of American power both hard and soft. The public, as opposed to the media, had a favorable opinion of Carter as a person, finding him honest, moral, personable, and trustworthy.²⁰ But polls showed that a majority lacked confidence in his foreign policy and almost as many thought U.S. prestige had declined.²¹ Carter's agonizing over the hostages and his innocence in dealing with the Soviets had dimmed his reputation. The French reacted with indifference to his defeat. But Reagan's victory caught attention.

The French media greeted Reagan's election in 1980 with snickers, curiosity, and apprehension. One headline from the left-leaning daily *Libération* mockingly read, "In association with Warner Brothers, the State of California, and the Republican Party, *Libération* presents Ronald Reagan in an American blockbuster 'The Empire Strikes Back.'" ²² The new occupant of the White House was inexperienced, puzzling, and unfamiliar. He had been snubbed by the government of Giscard d'Estaing when he visited Paris in 1978. The press filled columns with references to the cowboy president, the TV huckster, the aging Hollywood actor—"an old star is born," one quipped. There was apprehension about both Reagan's economic and foreign policies: Would he face up to the international economic crisis that was dragging down Europe? Would he let the market run roughshod? Would he turn back the welfare state and damage workers' rights? Would he, in his effort to make American strong, act belligerently toward the Soviets?

Why had the Americans chosen Reagan? The French media attributed it to nostalgia. Pretending to speak for the American voter, *Libération* commented, "We've had enough of Jimmy Carter. He's not a bad guy, but he doesn't understand where we want to go. He's

weak and doesn't know how to lead. He thinks you can work with the enemy. . . . We don't feel safe with him. Please Ronnie take us home." "Home" meant returning to the halcyon 1950s when America was still the most powerful nation in the world, when the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries didn't matter, when racial tensions didn't exist, when the minimum wage didn't cause unemployment; all that was needed was "the spirit of initiative and courage, which has always been the grandeur of the American people, to put everything in order."²³ As the paper saw it, the Americans were waiting for a superhero to save them, and this explained Reagan's election.

Where one might have expected enthusiasm, on the right, there was at best cautious approval. *Le Figaro* spoke optimistically of "a new Eisenhower" and an end to years of vacillation, but worried that the president-elect was prone to simplistic answers on complex issues.²⁴ Right-leaning politicians welcomed a more resolute president who would not tolerate Soviet expansionism. Jacques Chirac, then mayor of Paris, said the election demonstrated that "the American people refused to fade away."²⁵ But no one was sure of what to expect of the new occupant of the White House.

Anxiety and curiosity marked the Left's response to the 1980 election. Without hesitation socialist leaders opened fire. Laurent Fabius, a future Socialist Party minister and prime minister, thought the new president was oblivious to the problems of the Third World, and his assertion of U.S. leadership through military strength risked confrontations. Jean-Pierre Chevènement, another future minister for Mitterrand, warned about the danger of rising international tension given the "imperialist" convictions of Reagan.²⁶ The Republican victory, it was feared by some socialists, opened the way to reactionaries like the Moral Majority. *Le Monde* was only slightly less worried than the socialists. The election represented simultaneously a "patriotic, interventionist, and isolationist earthquake."²⁷ Transatlantic relations were threatened by a president who believed you could eliminate differences by speaking loudly, taking a hard line toward Moscow, and forcing Europeans

to align with the policies of Washington, D.C. There were larger issues: Would Reagan adopt a pugnacious and unrestrained form of American interventionism or retreat into “fortress America”? Would Europeans profit from a strong United States willing to face the Soviets, or would they suffer from American domination?

For the first two years of Reagan’s tenure, French perceptions of the United States were no more upbeat than they had been under Jimmy Carter. A majority blamed Reagan’s policies—for example, high interest rates—for harming the French economy.²⁸ Dissatisfaction with transatlantic economic relations ranged across the entire political spectrum.²⁹ As for attractive foreign prototypes, when asked in 1981 which model of socioeconomic reform would be best for France, most of those surveyed chose social democracy as represented by West Germany or Sweden while only a small number (17 percent) preferred following American “liberal capitalism.”³⁰ The deep recession that accompanied the first two years of Reagan’s administration confirmed French suspicions.

Then, rather quickly, perceptions brightened. The American success at creating jobs after 1982 and Washington’s tough diplomatic stance won approval from the French. Books and articles began to appear praising the economic accomplishments of the Reagan administration. Given rising Cold War tension, the French were reassured that the United States would protect them in the event of a confrontation with the Soviet Union. Most unusual was the absence of fear of American domination. In 1984, half of those surveyed were not worried about Washington’s interference in French foreign policy and slightly less expressed anxiety about interference in economic affairs.³¹ Apprehension of Yankee domination faded in spite of the bolder posture of Washington.

The management of the economy under the Reagan administration attracted considerable comment and made some converts, but it also inspired skepticism and criticism. No one could deny that so-called Reaganomics had produced impressive results: gone was the depressing “stagflation” of the 1970s. The conservative media took some pleasure

in listing American achievements after 1982: the creation of a million jobs, a fall in inflation, strong economic growth, a buoyant entrepreneurial spirit, lower taxes, and fewer regulations. Such glowing assessments were often made with either an implicit or explicit comparison to the poor performance of the French economy under the socialists: the Yankees were doing better.

Reaganomics inspired a few prominent French followers. Guy Sorman, a lecturer at Sciences Po and a columnist/author, was perhaps the best known.³² Reagan's election, to him, was the turning point in a global shift toward economic liberalism. ("Liberalism" in the European lexicon has the opposite meaning of the term as used by Americans: it refers to a market oriented economy and an aversion to state intervention.) Sorman borrowed heavily from the Chicago school of economics (e.g., that of Friedrich Hayek), celebrated supply-side economics, cited neoconservatives like Norman Podhoretz, and wrote ardently about both Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority and the advent of computers. "The neoconservative ideology is at present the only Western model that successfully unites morality and the microprocessor."³³ His message was simple; he was against socialism, bureaucracy, big government, and technocrats and he was for free enterprise, individual initiative, and the market. Since the motor of the economy was the entrepreneurial spirit, which the Americans embodied, he recommended that the French deregulate their economy and adopt an "optimistic liberal ideology."³⁴ "Reagan the simple cowboy has become the devil for some of the Left," Sorman wrote, because "he crystallizes a coherent ideological system that is an effective counter to the socialist model."³⁵ President Reagan returned the compliment by citing Sorman in a 1984 speech at his alma mater in Illinois as one of the French thinkers who "are rejecting the old clichés about state power and rediscovering the danger such power poses to personal freedom."³⁶

Reaganomics attracted other French fans. Philippe Lefournier, writing for *L'Expansion*, a major business review, praised the United States as "the first country to emerge from the great 'crisis' of capitalism"

and spoke of the “exciting future” of the nation that had “married high-tech with the old spirit of enterprise and an awakened patriotism.”³⁷ Louis Pauwels, the director of *Le Figaro Magazine*, paired Ronald Reagan with Pope Jean Paul II as the two great contemporary “charismatic leaders of human freedom.”³⁸ As a disciple of American neoconservatives, Pauwels proselytized for market liberalism because it was the natural human order, because it assured prosperity, and because it was based on Christian principles. He urged the French to admit that Reaganomics worked, that socialism had failed, and that learning from America meant cutting taxes, relying on private initiative, and taking pride in national and traditional values. Even the Left, on occasion, was complimentary, or as *Libération* observed, grudgingly, “Less State, fewer taxes, more optimism: the Reagan recipe was simple, even simplistic, but it has worked.”³⁹ A virtual tour of Parisian bookstores, conducted by *Le Nouvel Observateur*, demonstrated the popularity of titles like those by Sorman celebrating market liberalism, including translations of the “anarcho-Reaganite” Milton Friedman. Writing for this review Alain Minc, a young economist and corporate manager, warned the “French Reaganites” against expecting miracles from the market, yet he advised his socialist friends that “the Left will be liberal or it will not survive.”⁴⁰

If the press invariably pointed out the obvious shortcoming of Reaganomics like big budget deficits, it tended to evaluate these as less important than its accomplishments.⁴¹ The only question was, Why had the Americans succeeded? And here the answers scattered. The possibilities were many: a strong dollar, lower taxes, deregulation, deficit spending, new technologies like computers, industrial redeployment, a flexible labor market, immigrant workers, an expanding service sector, and/or a probusiness atmosphere. Or, as Jude Wanniski, the originator of the expression “supply-side economics” simply answered, “Be confident in long term investment, in enterprise, and in individuals. You will see how well it works. Even Mitterrand understands it.”⁴²

Not all conservatives, however, were pro-Reagan enthusiasts. Sorman lamented that the “intellectual and political Right” were too *divi-*

giste to accept Reagan's liberalism.⁴³ A popular and otherwise sympathetic book on Americans written by the New York correspondent for *Le Figaro* disdained Reagan's social and environmental policies.⁴⁴ Some experts were not convinced that American methods were transferable to Europe. They pointed out the unique position of the dollar, the openness of the American economy, the perils of deficits, and French dependence on the state.⁴⁵ Should we imitate the Americans, even if we could? some asked. Or, as one business journal put it, "Our old country often envies the benefits of the American model while forgetting the basis on which it is built, the sacrifices and the dynamism it assumes. . . . Young Americans have bet on optimism, work, ambition, personal independence, a taste for challenge, family, and the United States," with the consequence of creating a generation of egotistical careerists.⁴⁶

The moderate and left-wing press mocked the American "soap bubble" economy built on huge budgetary and commercial deficits, growing social inequality, cutbacks in social assistance, brutal layoffs in rust belt industries, high interest rates, "McJobs" (low-level, part-time work in fast-food outlets), and protectionism.⁴⁷ Nicole Bernheim, the correspondent in New York for *Le Monde*, indicted Reagan for shredding America's already tattered social safety net, widening inequality, and deepening discontent among minorities. The plight of the unemployed in northern cities who trekked off looking for jobs reminded her of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Reagan simplified issues, like calling the USSR the evil empire, to win the support of the American heartland: he had revived the Left's caricature of Uncle Sam as rich, ignorant, and selfish. Bernheim reported that the French who had fled the socialists after 1981 to make their fortune in the United States had discovered the precariousness and expense of life under "wild capitalism" and were ready to go home.⁴⁸ The left-leaning weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* offered a mixed assessment that, in the end, was more hostile than generous. It credited Reagan with engineering recovery, conceded that France should import America's entrepreneurial élan, and noted how the socialist government was interested in learning

from the Americans—but it scorned Reaganism for its methods and its costs. In order to kick-start growth, “Reagan the ruthless” (*Reagan l’Impitoyable*), as he was lampooned, had encouraged cruel restructuring in sectors like the automobile industry, which had forced the mayor of Detroit to rely on nightly curfews to keep order. The American “miracle,” as far as this review was concerned, was built on deficits, the impoverishment of the marginal, an artificially strong currency, and selfishness: “to live as an American, is, above all, to live for yourself.”⁴⁹ The prototype of Reagan’s economy were the “yuppies,” the children of “baby boomers,” whom the Left, updating the historical stereotype of Americans, caricatured as overly planned, materialistic go-getters who had no time for vacations, enjoyment, or marriage and possibly preferred physical exercise to sex.⁵⁰

International affairs will be discussed in detail in chapter 3, but a brief note is helpful here. At first the French thought poorly of the Reagan administration’s international posture; a majority in late 1982, mainly among socialists and communists, but also some associated with the Right, volunteered a very, or rather, “bad opinion” of America’s position in world affairs.⁵¹ But attitudes improved dramatically between 1982 and 1984 among men and women, among all ages and occupations, and for those associated with both the Left and the Right, and this image remained flattering, in the range of 70 percent, through the early years of the administration of President George H. W. Bush. On the eve of the fall of the Berlin Wall the French viewed the United States as warmly as did the West Germans and the British.⁵² But this pretty picture needs shading. The French welcomed the assurances given by the Reagan administration that the United States would come to their assistance if the Soviets threatened, but this appreciation was hardly novel: the French had about the same level of confidence in Jimmy Carter in 1977.⁵³ And Reagan’s international stance never commanded a majority. In 1984 he won less support for his overall policy than had Carter.⁵⁴ Reagan’s strong stand against the Soviet Union divided the French into thirds: for, against, and no opinion.⁵⁵

The electoral campaign and eventual reelection of Ronald Reagan in November 1984 offered the French an opportunity to assess his achievements. In that year Reagan's reputation peaked; early disdain had virtually disappeared. Still, skepticism remained the rule.

President Reagan's standing within the Hexagon by 1984 was marginally better than that of his immediate predecessors in the White House and certainly higher among the French than it was among other West Europeans. When asked in late October for whom, if they had the vote, they would cast their ballot, 38 percent of the French selected Ronald Reagan and 25 percent preferred his opponent, Walter Mondale—but 37 percent gave no response.⁵⁶ In other words, those who were indifferent were almost as numerous as those who “voted” for him. This choice was, nevertheless, relatively strong compared to the tepid support given Presidents Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter before him—though Carter had his advocates—and to that awarded George H. W. Bush in the 1988 election. And Reagan's 38 percent backing was uniformly firm among men and women, among all age groups, and for almost all occupations; the anomalies were relatively higher support among businesspeople, from shopkeepers to top managers, but relatively low approval from farmers. A comparison among West Europeans revealed much cooler attitudes among West Germans and the British, who split their “votes” almost equally between Mondale and Reagan.⁵⁷ More French men and women in 1984 thought of themselves as pro-American, as opposed to anti-American (44 percent versus 15 percent) than did West Germans (35 percent versus 19 percent) or the British (39 percent versus 20 percent). But this international comparison can be readily explained: it was Reagan's foreign policy. Far more of the West Germans and the British than the French thought his policies had increased the chance of war.⁵⁸ Reagan's strong stance against the Soviets, as we shall see, was more welcome in France.

Analyzing Reagan's reelection, *Le Monde* editorialized that Americans wanted an “homme sympathique,” a seemingly kind, good-humored leader, and likened him to “a grandfather of their dreams” who, though

a bit old-fashioned and even doddering, offered order and stability in a rapidly changing world.⁵⁹ In fact, Reagan also appealed on the personal level to many French men and women. They liked his rosy demeanor, and his message of “morning in America” traveled easily. The press wrote approvingly of Americans’ enthusiasm for their president’s amiability, optimism, good sense, self-assurance, and courage. Columnists contrasted the new mood of confidence in the United States in 1984 with the vacillation and soul-searching of Carter and with the morose mood of the Nixon and Ford years. One news magazine drew the contrast this way: the seizure of American hostages in Tehran had lost Carter the trust of many Americans and opened the way for Reagan, who represented “the Zorro of justice and vengeance.”⁶⁰

“The French prefer Reagan to Reaganism,” as *Le Monde* put it.⁶¹ If the French tended to approve of the president, they were far less enthusiastic about his domestic policies despite his achievements, such as creating jobs. For most, Reaganomics—given its partiality for the market and its harsh treatment of the less privileged—was not seen as an antidote to French economic or social problems. Only one in four of those polled in 1984 wanted France to imitate Reagan’s social and economic policies.⁶² Virtually every social category, from managers and professionals to workers and farmers, turned thumbs down on adopting such programs. The French thought the aspect of American society that had deteriorated most between 1982 and 1987 was that of the care of the sick and elderly, and this deterioration was attributed to retrenchment in social spending.⁶³ Reagan’s economic success could not convince many of the French to tamper with their social model.

The most compelling explanation for Reagan’s popularity in the mid-1980s is also the simplest: it was largely a matter of political partisanship. His “voters” were mainly, but not exclusively, French conservatives. Reagan’s economic and social policies generally made the French apprehensive except for those aligned with the Right. Partisanship determined positive and negative answers to a survey that asked about opinions of the United States in the world; it was those

aligned with the two conservative parties that most eagerly nodded their approval.⁶⁴ Jacques Chirac, the head of the Gaullist *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR), hailed the American electorate for rejecting the mood of doubt and decline and electing “a man who by his convictions, actions, and style represents a voluntaristic and dynamic conception of the United States” and added, “The economic and military renewal of American power is going to continue and permit France and Europe to count on a respected ally conscious of its responsibilities.”⁶⁵ This partisan response found an echo in the conservative press with one editorialist in *Le Figaro* anticipating Reagan’s reelection, noting, “France and Europe will be thrilled at a Republican victory, not just because of the very sympathetic personality of Reagan, but because we will see in his success proof that the United States remains committed to a renewal of “American values” like “courage, the spirit of enterprise, and individualism linked to a sense of civic duty.”⁶⁶ The right-wing press lavishly praised Reagan for his contribution to his country’s recent economic recovery, which undoubtedly reflected some backlash against Mitterrand’s failed interventionist economic policies that had rebounded in Reagan’s favor. By 1984 France and the United States seemed headed in opposite directions, and Reagan’s team looked far better than the socialists did as economic managers. Thus, when polled about the “ultraliberal” or Reaganlike policies, referring specifically to a reduction of state intervention, it was supporters of the Right who gave the strongest affirmative responses.⁶⁷ French conservatives liked the Reagan message: “Government is not the solution to our problems, it *is* the problem.” The head of the national federation of employers applauded Reagan’s victory as an inspiration for France from a people who knew how “to roll up their shirt sleeves” and the center-right *Union pour la Démocratie Française* (UDF) called the election results a victory for economic liberalism and private initiative rather than the state.⁶⁸ Jean-Marie Le Pen, head of the extreme right-wing party, the *Front National*, stated that “his model” was Reagan.⁶⁹

In contrast, Lionel Jospin, the secretary-general of the French Socialist Party, disparaged Reagan's reelection, calling attention to the high number of abstentions, and admonishing, "The conservative and puritanical America of Reagan in the next four years better take into account others, others at home and others in the world."⁷⁰ *Le Monde* held back any endorsement and gave a balanced accounting, calling Reagan a "Super Pinay" (referring to the conservative French prime minister of the 1950s) who brought down inflation and created jobs, but at the price of large deficits that might undermine his achievements.⁷¹

It would be unfair to confine President Reagan's support in France to political and economic conservatives. To some extent he commanded admiration, or at least grudging respect, in the mid-1980s from a wide swath of the population who might not have "voted" for him but who liked his persona as well as certain aspects of his policies—especially how the American economy flourished under his tutelage and, to a lesser extent, how he dealt with the Cold War. Whereas almost half the French population thought the United States had overcome the economic crisis in early 1984, virtually no one thought France had done so—including most on the left.⁷² Economic performance mattered. The socialists' faltering management of the economy in the early 1980s unintentionally boosted Reagan's image. But political reputations are transient and Reagan's stock would fall before the end of his second term.

- Reagan's economic model was largely irrelevant to the policies pursued by French president François Mitterrand—at least initially. Yet within two years the socialists took notice and once the conservatives under Jacques Chirac regained the premiership in 1986 free-market liberalism was in vogue. But Reaganomics was not a major reference for either Mitterrand or Chirac. French economic and social policy, as one would expect, was almost entirely driven by domestic issues, internal politics, and economic developments while Anglo-American market liberalism remained suspect even to Chirac and the Gaullists. Nevertheless, America was watched, and it functioned as a standard of measurement for

economic performance. Mitterrand's government wanted, according to Diana Pinto, to demonstrate that "real socialism" could offer an alternative to "flabby social democracy," Soviet totalitarianism, and "American economic imperialism."⁷³

After his election in 1981 Mitterrand set out to introduce "socialism with a human face"—hardly a program to endear him to the America of Ronald Reagan. After decades of sitting on the sidelines of the political life of the Fifth Republic, the newly elected socialists, along with their communist partners, were eager to introduce their agenda, which featured a daring effort to relaunch the economy and an ambitious social program that would mark a "rupture with capitalism." The stagnation of the 1970s—triggered by the energy crisis, which had brought sagging growth and unemployment—could be reversed, or so the Left thought, with ramped up public spending, extensive nationalizations, aid for the least favored members of society, and strengthened labor at the plant level. "Reflation," or pumping up demand, meant, among other tactics, raising the minimum wage, cutting the workweek to thirty-nine hours, adding a fifth week of paid vacation, encouraging early retirement, raising social benefits, and adding to the public payroll. The wealthy would contribute to recovery by paying a special tax. The driver of recovery would be a vastly enlarged public sector encompassing almost the entire banking system. Among the newly nationalized firms were investment banks like Paribas and nearly a dozen major industrial groups, including high-tech firms like the aeronautics manufacturer Dassault-Breguet and the *Compagnie Générale d'Electricité*. These nationalized companies were to receive large capital inputs, streamline their structures, and raise France to the top of international competition in the most advanced sectors of industry. Mitterrand's France was heading in the opposite direction of the Anglo-Americans in 1981: where Reagan and Thatcher took aim at inflation, Mitterrand targeted unemployment and growth. The former embraced tight money, deregulation, and tax relief; the latter preferred spending, nationalizations, and a tax on the rich.

Mitterrand's team assumed the world economy was about to bounce back and that France could count on rising exports and lower interest rates. This was a losing gamble. By mid-1982 it was evident that the international economy was still in the doldrums. Foreign imports—especially expensive dollar-denominated petroleum products—poured into France, and exports found few buyers. As a consequence there was a galloping deficit in trade, steeply rising budget deficits, price inflation, and stubborn unemployment. Even a series of devaluations had little effect. The government under the premiership of Pierre Mauroy (1981–84) had to face the prospect of abandoning its brave program of a rupture with capitalism and instead embrace austerity. By 1983 tax increases, price controls, spending cuts, business profitability, and a strong franc had become the way out. As one authority has described it, “the year 1983 . . . marked the end of the socialist economic project both as ideology and as policy.”⁷⁴

A new socialist prime minister, Laurent Fabius (1984–86), who formed a government without communist participation, advanced economic liberalization—with a socialist face—even further. He hailed modernization and entrepreneurship and helped business expand so it could create jobs. Fabius, who had been Mauroy's minister of industry, openly expressed his interest in developments in the United States. To some on the left, his button-down shirts marked him as an Americanizer. Stronger evidence of his sympathies came when he initiated negotiations with the Walt Disney Company in 1985 to bring its proposed leisure park to France. Fabius also commissioned an extensive report on comparative technology policies: it used the example of Silicon Valley to recommend greater reliance on the private sector for developing technologies like those in the information sector.⁷⁵ He boldly asserted, “The private sector is predominant in France and it is going to stay that way.”⁷⁶ Fabius reflected the country's new mood. Entrepreneurship, profits, and CEOs, according to opinion surveys, were increasingly favored: one management consulting firm found that virtually everyone believed that an improvement in the economy required first that French

enterprises become more competitive, and a large majority thought that regulations on companies had to be reduced.⁷⁷

The socialists under Mitterrand and Fabius were eager to do whatever was necessary, even if this meant borrowing from Reagan's America and embracing entrepreneurship, to avoid defeat in the 1986 legislative elections. "America, even among the Socialists, that's what's chic," *Le Nouvel Observateur* proclaimed.⁷⁸ The government was thrilled to learn that surveys showed that two million French citizens wanted to start their own companies. Jacques Attali, Mitterrand's adviser, visited Washington, D.C., and spoke with officials like Donald Regan, the secretary of the treasury, about American success. Jacques Delors, the minister of finance and principal adviser on economics to Mitterrand, in 1984 called for "a French modernization à l'américaine." Wholesale imitation was not in order, but a healthy dose of American competitiveness, carefully applied, was. Thus, Fabius tolerated massive layoffs at the Citroën and Talbot plants, but they were to be gradual and accompanied by job training because the government refused to apply what some called the "American logic" of massive firings.

The most explicit expression of interest in the American economy, muted by a stout defense of socialist policy, came during Mitterrand's formal state visit to the United States in March 1984. In Washington, D.C., he spoke to a joint session of Congress where, after praising the American War of Independence and the Atlantic Alliance, he appealed to his audience by describing the French economy as competitive, one that "preferred risk—good risk, modernity to comfort," and noted that brakes had been applied to inflation and state intervention. After a visit to the White House and a stop in Atlanta, Mitterrand flew to California for his now famous visit to Silicon Valley, where he and his team inquired about venture capital, start-ups, scientific and technological research, academic and industrial linkage, and solar energy. One reason for this visit, according to his staff, was to impress the French on the need for scientific research and investment.⁷⁹ After a visit to a farm in Illinois where he displayed his agricultural savoir faire by posing with

a baby pig, Mitterrand addressed the Economic Club of New York; to this assembly of business leaders he presented the French economy as more open and dynamic than his audience probably imagined. Mitterrand was on the defensive because France faced serious inflation and deficits despite—or more likely because of—his aggressive interventionism and massive nationalizations. Trying to calm his audience's concerns he wryly announced, "We [socialists] have not burned the churches, closed factories, or dropped the iron curtain."⁸⁰ Nor, he noted, had they collectivized the economy; in fact, they had created 80,000 companies recently and now welcomed American investors. To American businesspeople who owned companies in France and were, for whatever reason, unhappy, he said, "Come see me. We'll take care of you." Even though he asserted there would be no further nationalizations, he still encountered skepticism among his listeners, who asked him about the weak franc, state intervention, protectionism, and the difficulties of hiring and firing employees.

Liberalization and modest borrowing from the Americans was in Mitterrand's view consistent with socialism, but America was not a model. Modernization and industrial restructuring, he argued after his return from the United States, aimed at supplying the domestic market and gaining international competitiveness had long been his goal.⁸¹ He said he had no grief with entrepreneurs and "just profits"—meaning gains made by innovation, work, and savings that created wealth for everyone—but he did not concede on his larger agenda: nationalizations marked a "rupture with capitalism" and the "mixed economy" was a transition to socialism. The balance between the public and private sectors in the mixed economy meant France would not subscribe either to "English ultraliberalism or Chinese collectivism." In the course of his tour of the United States, Mitterrand had taken a swipe at the Reagan administration's economic policy—especially the budget deficits and high interest rates that harmed Europeans. When asked what lessons he found applicable to France, he responded coyly by complimenting the American people on their energy and inventiveness, singling out,

as an example, the cooperation between academic research and private entrepreneurs. But he took issue with calling America a model economy because it benefited from a privileged situation—the size of its market and role of the dollar—and because “the American recovery has been accompanied by considerable disorder and is based on a few tricks [*quelques artifices*].” “I admire the virtues of these people,” he concluded, but the lesson was that France needed to reorganize its own way and not imitate America.

Efforts at turning the economy around, which included stimulus via market incentives, gradually began to show results, but they were not sufficient to convince the French that the socialists were good managers. Mitterrand’s reputation plummeted, even among fellow socialists who felt betrayed by *rigueur*, making him the most unpopular president of the Fifth Republic to that date. By the mid-1980s the vocabulary associated with the Left—words like *socialism* and *nationalization*—aroused more hostility than approval, while terms like *competition* and *free market* that were favored by economic liberals were fashionable. Polls showed that the majority of those surveyed, including most socialists, now wanted the development of private enterprise rather than the public sector and that the people also placed the health of businesses ahead of raising individuals’ standards of living.⁸² Majorities wanted to privatize industrial groups that had been recently nationalized and preferred easing social charges on businesses—even at the cost of some social protection. A plurality asked for a reduction of state intervention in economic and social affairs. One business journal crowed that the French seemed finally to have discovered economic orthodoxy as a reaction to socialist failure.⁸³

Disappointment with Socialists’ efforts at economic revival led directly to their defeat in the legislative elections of 1986. Mitterrand was forced to name Jacques Chirac, the leader of the Gaullist RPR, as his prime minister, and the Fifth Republic embarked on its first experiment with “cohabitation”—that is, with a president and prime minister belonging to opposing parties. The socialist president stepped aside and

allowed Chirac, with a few exceptions, to pursue an antisocialist program that undid much of what had been introduced between 1981 and 1982. Leading the way was the sweeping privatization of many of the firms that the socialists had nationalized, along with tax cuts, including abolishing the new wealth tax; deregulation; the easing of rules on hiring and firing; and a general turn toward bolstering private enterprise and invigorating the market. Economic liberalism was in vogue as interest in the Anglo-American model peaked. What had begun with the socialists during 1983–85 as a grudging concession to the market now became a principle of good governance.

Within Chirac's governing coalition, which included the UDF and its affiliates, were some eager free-market ideologues. Younger UDF leaders, like François Léotard, occupied the Ministry of Culture and Communication while Alain Madelin became head of the Ministry of Industry; he rather overreached by proclaiming that "today, everyone is a liberal."⁸⁴ The RPR also had a few true-blue liberals, like Philippe Séguin at the Ministry of Social Affairs. But the ideologues were not the dominant faction in the new government; that role belonged to more moderate, or pragmatic, liberals like Chirac himself and his finance minister Édouard Balladur, who represented the dirigiste strain in the Gaullist party derived from their mentor Georges Pompidou; they were less committed in principle to the self-regulating market, but viewed reforms that advanced competitiveness and private enterprise as politically and economically useful. As Balladur famously remarked, "Good sense should temper liberalism."⁸⁵

Laissez-faire, laissez-passer as a basis for economic policy has a long history in France even though, ironically, its most fervent advocates have always been the Anglo-Americans. It was no different at the end of the twentieth century when Reagan and Thatcher led the way and Chirac limped behind. The rebirth of what was called "new liberalism" during the 1970s and '80s was almost entirely a product of French concerns and traditions and owed rather little to the Anglo-Americans except for a few popularizers like Sorman who, as we have seen, opted to

import the Chicago school. The new liberals, whose reputation soared in the mid-1980s—mainly economists close to the employers' movement like Michel Drancourt and Octave Gélienier or businesspeople like Yvon Gattaz—were largely homegrown. These Gallic true believers, according to Suzanne Berger, arrived at their convictions from an aversion for socialism and communism, a distrust of technocrats, and a concern about an ambient anticapitalism.⁸⁶ They received an enormous boost from widespread frustration with the interventionist reforms and economic disappointments of socialist governance after 1981. Internal political and economic dynamics created the liberal moment of 1986–88 while the successes of Reagan and Thatcher served, at most, to embolden French proponents.

If the causes of a resurgent liberalism were entirely French, so was the content of their program; it was not a bland copy of that of either the American or British conservatives. For example, French new liberals accepted a far larger role for the state as the guardian of the general good over private interests than did the advocates of Reaganomics or Thatcherism. They assumed that the market, if left unattended, would logically end up in *libéralisme sauvage* and thus attributed a substantial role to government for addressing social problems like poverty and income inequalities.⁸⁷

The French public endorsed the liberal turn as long as it was strongly flavored with dirigisme and deferred to Republican solidarity. A week after the 1986 election a national survey demonstrated the electorate was prepared for only a modest turn toward the market and remained strongly attached to social protection: if a majority was ready for an end to price controls and privatization of big firms, an equal number or more wanted to retain administrative regulation of layoffs, the new tax on wealth, and endorsed increased aid to large families.⁸⁸ Even businesspeople, who opted for denationalization and deregulation, wanted to retain the minimum wage.⁸⁹

Economic liberalism within Chirac's governing circle, except for a tiny cohort of ministers, displayed little of the ideological zest of the

new liberals. In the hands of Chirac and Balladur, liberalism was more a practical approach to problems than it was a matter of principle or dogma: it could get a stalled economy moving and function as a powerful weapon against socialist rivals. Chirac himself never subscribed fully to the liberal credo and employed market-oriented policies opportunistically. One should be skeptical about his pronouncements as prime minister, such as his claim that “statism and bureaucracy are in the past. The future belongs to free and independent private enterprise” or his earlier endorsement of Reagan and Thatcher declaring that “the only problem with liberalism is that in France it has never been tried.”⁹⁰ Yet when the government’s economic policies faltered, Chirac blamed Balladur for being “too liberal.”⁹¹ Years later, at the end of his long career, Chirac would tell an interviewer that liberalism, like communism, was a perversion of human thought, led to the same excesses, and was destined to failure.⁹² Even a loyal disciple of the Anglo-Americans like the Gaullist Philippe Séguin was circumspect about the market. As minister of social affairs Séguin promoted studies of the American economy aimed especially at finding answers to unemployment. Séguin managed to open the labor market with legislation that, among other reforms, softened the requirement of administrative authorization for layoffs. But even he was reluctant to import Reaganomics, pointing out the risks of tactics like deregulation.⁹³ The truest of the ideological liberals, Alain Madelin, went to such an extreme in refusing to rescue embattled firms and pruning his own budget that he ended up isolated among Chirac’s ministers, who liked to mute their Reaganesque impulses with activism like subsidizing ailing industries and aiding companies in hiring young workers. If the most important liberal departure of the 1980s was the privatizations of industrial firms, banks, and television stations, the way Chirac and Balladur managed the process—for example, by apportioning shares of denationalized firms—was far more interventionist than the way Thatcher achieved the same goal.⁹⁴ Stanley Hoffmann wrote at the time, “The state is loosening the screws, not removing them.”⁹⁵ Dirigisme was alive, if rather anemic, even when the liberals ruled.

Well before the presidential election in 1988 the French flirtation with free-market liberalism had flagged. It had brought only mediocre economic results—for example, failing to reduce unemployment or revive growth—and it had antagonized many with its apparent favoritism to the wealthy. It had also left many indifferent because its reforms were so cautious that Chirac seemed little different from his “liberalized” socialist predecessor Laurent Fabius. Then in 1987, Wall Street collapsed, and that collapse carried with it much of the prestige of the “American way” and its French fans. One beneficiary of Chirac’s stumble was Mitterrand, who worked his magic, regained popularity and the presidency in 1988, and returned a socialist—Michel Rocard—to the head of government. Opponents of Chirac’s liberal turn massively backed Mitterrand and the socialists.⁹⁶

For the rest of the decade (1988–91) economic policy was in the hands of Rocard, who practiced a sober, if not austere, kind of socialism that was closer to the policies pursued during 1983–85 than to the “rupture” of 1981–82. The new premier attracted a formidable following among American experts on French affairs. In fact, the Radical Left tried to denigrate Rocard by associating him with America. But he was no economic liberal; as Mitterrand’s agriculture minister he had been an outspoken critic of Reagan’s economic and trade policies.⁹⁷ Rocard was a cautious socialist who aimed at solid, incremental gains. Ideology and ruptures, whether in the form of socialism or liberalism, gave way to pragmatism and the “mixed economy” that featured participation for entrepreneurs, the state, and the “social partners” as well as an industrial policy to promote sectors like information technology.

By the end of the 1980s the faint glow of Reaganomics had been extinguished and Ronald Reagan’s record, though he had left the White House, continued to be smeared by Gallic critics, many of whom had once been associated with the liberal turn. Among the socialists, Laurent Fabius, now head of the National Assembly, insisted that Reagan might have spoken about shrinking the state but actually expanded it and spurred growth with the biggest Keynesian style boost in U.S. his-

tory.⁹⁸ The former head of economic planning, the liberal economist Michel Albert, warned against the consequences of following the flashy “casino economy” of the Americans—for example, the loss in social services. The self-proclaimed Reaganite Jean-Marie Le Pen, who had applauded the free market and privatization and found U.S. global economic domination justifiable in the 1980s, abandoned liberalism and moved toward a protectionist, anti-American stance. In fact, the leader of the Front National had never embraced liberalism in principle: Le Pen regarded it at best a useful economic strategy in certain circumstances.⁹⁹ The Reagan model had lost its glitter and attention turned to alternative experiments like the “Rhineland model” or to Japanese methods.¹⁰⁰

- The tepid interest in Reaganomics was only one way in which French policy makers watched, and then rejected, trends in America. Below the surface of Franco-American amity during the Mitterrand-Reagan years there was intense rivalry: it ranged over politics, trade, culture, and even medicine. Rather unexpectedly, medical research and practice generated controversy and scandal and marked the most tragic episode of this rivalry. Settling this dispute eventually required the personal intervention of President Reagan and Jacques Chirac, the French prime minister.

The deadly AIDS epidemic, which emerged during the early 1980s among Americans, threatened to envelop Europe and spurred researchers in both France and the United States to find its cause. A team of virologists at the Pasteur Institute in Paris led by Dr. Luc Montagnier and another at the National Cancer Institute in Maryland under Dr. Robert Gallo claimed almost simultaneously, between 1983 and 1984, the discovery of the culprit, what later became known as the human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV. At first there was transatlantic scientific cooperation: the Pasteur team provided the Americans with specimens and research data, which the latter used to isolate and reproduce the virus. Identification of the virus led to research for techniques to curb

the disease and especially for a test that would screen blood supplies and donors. Patent rights for such a test, given a viral outbreak that could become a pandemic, had the potential of generating revenues on a global scale. The French and the Americans soon became embroiled in a controversy—which lasted almost a decade—over who had discovered HIV and who deserved the patent rights. In 1984 the U.S. Patent Office ignored a request by the Pasteur Institute for rights to a prototype diagnostic test, which it had licensed to a Seattle company, and instead awarded a patent to the Gallo team on behalf of the U.S. government. At stake were not only millions of dollars in royalties but also the scientific prestige of discovery—which was keenly felt by the Pasteur Institute because its reputation had been eclipsed. Some speculated (correctly, as it turned out) that a Nobel Prize might even be awarded the researchers.

The transatlantic rivalry inflected the way France confronted the AIDS epidemic in three ways: patent rights, blood transfusions (i.e., treatment with heated versus unheated blood products), and testing blood donors and stocks. In the latter two cases the contest had deleterious consequences for hundreds of French patients.

Administrative control of the blood supply in France was complicated. This bureaucratic tangle played an important part in this sad affair because it hampered communication and clouded responsibility. The Centre National de Transfusion Sanguine, or CNTS (National Blood Transfusion Center), was “national” in only a limited sense: it monopolized the import of all blood products from abroad, represented France internationally, and acted as the principal technical adviser to the government. As a major fractionating, or separation, center it also supplied plasma and concentrated blood products for Paris and much of northern and western France. But the CNTS had no authority over either 160 other transfusion centers, which also collected blood from donors and distributed products to users like physicians and hospitals, or the several regional fractionating centers like the one at Lille, which sometimes cooperated with, and sometimes competed against, the CNTS. The CNTS itself was divided into two sections: one for production and

distribution and another for research. It received advice from numerous consultative boards composed of hematologists and other medical researchers, and in turn reported through various bureaucratic routes to the Ministry of Health and, above all, the Ministry of Social Affairs, which subsidized the CNTS, set prices for products, and bore the ultimate responsibility for the national blood supply. The point person for the administration was the director of health, a post held at the time by Jacques Roux.

At first, French officials regarded AIDS as a sexually transmitted infectious disease confined mainly to American homosexuals; it was not long, however, before cases appeared among those receiving transfusions in both countries, suggesting that blood could be a carrier. French authorities were confident that their blood stocks were “pure,” certainly compared to those in the United States. Blood donations in France were given freely, without reimbursement, and were thus presumably less likely to carry disease than donations enticed by payment from marginal members of the populace. The best protection then appeared to be stopping the importation of blood products from the United States.

If recipients of transfusions were in danger, hemophiliacs were even more vulnerable because they needed regular treatment with anticoagulants that were especially susceptible to HIV contamination. Anticoagulants derived from blood lots donated by thousands of donors multiplied the risk of contamination. If blood could transmit HIV, then donors required screening and blood needed treatment before it could be used. France relied entirely on unheated blood products, but over the course of 1983–84 studies showed that heating blood products reduced the possibility of contamination. Preliminary findings, reported at an international conference held in Munich in the summer of 1984, tentatively confirmed the effectiveness of heating blood products and testing donors. When an American company, Travenol-Hyland Laboratories, offered to sell heated products to the CNTS in early 1984, the center ignored the proposal on the grounds that imports would cause a panic among French users who would think that they had been exposed to

infection by the use of unheated products.¹⁰¹ Confidence in the safety of the French blood bank precluded American imports.

By then France—and Paris, in particular—was in the grip of the AIDS epidemic and it was becoming increasingly clear that one of its target populations was that of hemophiliacs. But the CNTS, which was directed by Dr. Michel Garretta after October 1984, harbored doubts about the effectiveness of heated products in deactivating both HIV and a certain type of hepatitis. There was also the fear of incurring huge financial loss from the unsold French blood bank and causing a panic, especially among those dependent on regular transfusions.¹⁰² Garretta elected to continue using unheated concentrates, including Factor VIII, which was one of the anticoagulants used by hemophiliacs that were easily contaminated by the dreaded virus. Dr. Garretta, who was under pressure from the Ministry of Health to make France self-sufficient in blood products—in part to avoid imports that might be contaminated—accelerated the production of Factor VIII without waiting for the development of heating techniques and without increasing imports of heated products from outside sources like the United States. But the director of the CNTS did take precautions: he signed a contract with an Austrian firm to use its heating technology in a new plant that would come on line in 1985.

By early 1985, evidence gathered by French researchers demonstrated that the national blood supply was probably contaminated and that there was a grave risk of infection from the use of unheated products. Meanwhile, Dr. Montagnier's team confirmed that heating blood concentrates deactivated the virus. Those responsible for the blood supply had to choose: they could recall previously distributed products, destroy the rest, and turn to the Americans or other suppliers for heated products, or they could continue monitoring the situation and depend on the Pasteur Institute, which was on the verge of perfecting its own heating process, and wait for the opening of the new CNTS plant that would rely on Austrian technology. They chose to wait. Opting for a recall and turning to American or other suppliers of heated blood prod-

ucts would incur heavy financial loss for the CNTS, which was under instructions from the Fabius government to control costs. Moreover, foreign laboratories, principally American, would most likely replace French suppliers. There was a third alternative, but because of rivalries among the transfusion centers the CNTS also rejected turning to local fractionating plants like the center at Strasbourg, which Travenol-Hyland Laboratories was assisting in developing its heating process, and the center at Lille, which had designed its own technique. In April, Dr. Garretta attended an AIDS medical convention in Atlanta; he later admitted that he should have begun purchasing American products then: "I should have bought massive amounts of heat-treated blood from abroad. I didn't do it. It was a mistake."¹⁰³

Advisers to the CNTS in the spring of 1985 were giving contradictory advice: some recommended that "the stock of 'contaminated' products be distributed entirely before proposing the substitution of heated products"; this might mean, they acknowledged, selling their stores at discount on the French market or exporting them.¹⁰⁴ Others urged that all stocks be recalled immediately and destroyed. At a fateful meeting of the CNTS on May 29, Dr. Garretta acknowledged that all the Paris center's stocks were, at least in a statistical sense, contaminated. One scientist in attendance estimated the probability of any lot of CNTS blood being safe was 1 in 22,000. Nevertheless, Dr. Garretta cited administrative, judicial, and practical obstacles for a recall, especially noting "serious economic consequences."¹⁰⁵ Estimated losses for halting the distribution of Factor VIII alone were over a million dollars a month while destroying the large store of unheated blood and importing concentrates would cost \$10 million or more. Dr. Garretta chose to continue the current practice of distributing unheated supplies and passed responsibility, including the financial losses, for changing course to the ministries.¹⁰⁶ But recommendations to the ministries from the CNTS about modifying existing policy were often ambivalent: they cited costs and uncertainties about obtaining supplies and managing a recall, and these reports, once forwarded, seemed to get lost in the

bureaucracy. Without intervention by the supervisory ministries, the practice of depleting the unheated stores continued throughout the summer and early autumn of 1985. Budgetary constraints, bureaucratic fumbling, and holding off the Americans trumped medical ethics and safety.

Meanwhile, inquisitive and often critical articles in medical journals and the press urged the government to act promptly to secure the blood supply. But Dr. Garretta received no instructions from the ministries to recall or destroy existing blood stocks. On June 26 he informed his colleagues in charge of transfusion that sufficient heated blood products from domestic providers would not be available for at least a month, and concluded, "The distribution of nonheated products remains the normal procedure, so long as they are in stock."¹⁰⁷ He later argued that he had to wait on French suppliers because available imports were inadequate, but this argument has been challenged: it seems foreign suppliers, like the Americans, were willing and able to meet French needs.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the regional fractionating center at Lille, which had acquired the technology, claimed it could fill much of the demand itself.¹⁰⁹ As a precaution the CNTS, which now was fully aware of the risk of contamination, urged using remaining unheated French products for those already infected with HIV and reserving the heated supply for patients without HIV. Yet without readily available screening tests, it was impossible to know which patients were HIV-positive.

Screening tests were a second missed opportunity that turned on the rivalry with America. Until 1985 there was no reliable way to check donors or the blood supply for HIV. Researchers at the Pasteur Institute were working on such a technique when in February 1985 the Americans perfected a process and offered it to the French. Abbott Laboratories, which marketed the test, contacted the CNTS and sent representatives to local French transfusion centers selling their technology. Thus the Americans forced another decision on the CNTS and the responsible ministries: importing the Abbott test would rob the Pasteur Institute of its French market valued at \$11 million and possibly its global market.¹¹⁰

In early May, at a meeting of representatives of the ministries, the scientist representing the prime minister's office decided to delay licensing the Abbott test, even though it was less costly and simpler to use, in order to protect the French market for the Pasteur Institute.¹¹¹ The American rival was on their minds. Officials were told to do what they could to save the national market, which was "already in large part captured by the American test," for the Pasteur test.¹¹² As Jacques Roux, a key official in the health administration, stated later, "It appeared utterly normal that they tried to help Pasteur whose financial weakness handicapped it industrially and commercially compared to an American industrial giant."¹¹³ A month later, on June 18, 1985, Dr. Montagnier confirmed that the Pasteur Institute had perfected its screening technique; the next day Prime Minister Fabius promised the National Assembly he would make checking for HIV mandatory for blood donations. The Pasteur test was immediately licensed while the Abbott test did not receive its certification until the end of July. During the intervening weeks the principal transfusion centers equipped themselves with the Pasteur test. The Fabius government continued to dally. It was not until July 23 that the Ministries of Health and Social Affairs ordered mandatory tests, but they postponed the start date until October 1 and did not require the destruction of existing blood stocks.

Together, hesitant and divided officials from the CNTS and the ministries delayed introducing screening tests and continued providing unheated products, which were most likely contaminated, during the spring and summer of 1985 to anyone who would buy them; this deadly practice continued until October. The CNTS and the supervisory government officials had passed up importing American heated products and the Abbott test in order to avoid financial losses and to protect the French from dependence on the United States. They did not want to undermine confidence in French medicine and medical research, to give an advantage to the Americans in the competition for medical markets including France itself, especially in patenting and selling the tests and treatment that might control the epidemic, or to boost their

transatlantic rivals' claim in the legal contest over who discovered HIV. But this unseemly rivalry had its costs. Between April and August 1985, when the risk of communicating the virus was obvious, over a million units of unheated factor VIII alone were sold and, it has been calculated, over 1,000 recipients—mainly hemophiliacs—were infected with AIDS.¹¹⁴ France continued distributing unscreened blood products for more than six months after the United States, Canada, and several other countries had stopped the practice. The transatlantic rivalry was more than a battle of words and policies; in this case it cost hundreds of lives.

To be sure, competition with the United States was not the only, and probably not even the principal, reason for French mismanagement of the AIDS epidemic in 1984–85. There were several problems, such as the complicated administrative hierarchy that obscured responsibility, generated turf battles, and compartmentalized information; the concern over budgets and financial losses; the illusion of a pure national blood supply; the uncertainty among medical experts about the infection and its treatment; and the monopoly of imports that prevented access to foreign suppliers by transfusion centers as well as some incompetence and moral obtuseness. Nevertheless, the Americans offered an alternative in the way of screening tests and heated products that the French spurned; here is where the rivalry turned into tragedy.

The introduction of safeguards like mandatory testing did not end the quarrel over patents. In 1985 the Pasteur Institute sued the U.S. government: the French insisted on recognition of the institute's claim to the discovery of HIV and the right both to sell its tests in the U.S. market and its share of royalties from the American tests.¹¹⁵ At this point the world market for screening AIDS was valued at \$150 million per year. The Pasteur Institute also tried to burnish its reputation by introducing a trial drug in 1985 that seemed to have some success in halting the infection. AIDS victims from all over the world, including Americans like the actor Rock Hudson, flew to France for treatment. For a moment France seemed to have regained the lead in the search to contain the epidemic. Nevertheless, the quarrel continued. It was only in 1987

that the transatlantic dispute was settled, but it required intervention at the highest level of government. Once the Montagnier and Gallo research teams had reached an agreement about their respective roles, President Reagan and Prime Minister Chirac officially resolved the issue by meeting in Washington, D.C., and declaring both the United States and France shared in the discovery of HIV and that they would divide patent rights.

Even the Chirac-Reagan agreement did not end the controversy. There were further inquiries in the United States into Dr. Gallo's research methods, and in 1991 the French realized they were facing a major medical and political scandal. Investigators charged that government officials and their medical advisers knowingly continued to distribute contaminated blood products in 1985. Trials in 1992 and again in 1998–99 ended in jail sentences for several of the leading participants, including Dr. Garretta; a suspended sentence for others like Jacques Roux; reprimands for officials in the ministries; and acquittals for others, including Prime Minister Fabius on the more serious charge of “complicity in poisoning.” President Mitterrand's role in the scandal remains a mystery. At the root it was French and American competition for medical prestige and lucrative markets. It was one of the most shameful chapters in this narrative.

What one day may be construed as the grand finale to this story came in 2008 when Dr. Montagnier and his fellow virologist Françoise Barré-Sinoussi shared the Nobel Prize in Medicine for discovering HIV. Dr. Gallo was passed over, though Dr. Montagnier stated the American was equally deserving of the award. Some experts continued to believe that the French and American teams deserved to be honored as codiscoverers.¹¹⁶

- As the presidential election approached in the autumn of 1988 the French used the juncture once again to assess Ronald Reagan—and America. The stock of the “great communicator” fell from its peak four years earlier because of his troubles in the Middle East—especially

the fiasco surrounding Iran, shortcomings in his domestic policy, and the rise of a new star in the East, Mikhail Gorbachev. But the actor-turned-president was still popular. There was considerable admiration, especially on the right, for Reagan. "Who have been the two greatest presidents of the United States since the war?" one French survey asked. John F. Kennedy, who had achieved legendary status in France by then, was selected first. In a virtual tie for runner-up, though far behind JFK, were Ronald Reagan and Dwight D. Eisenhower. Even farther behind were Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, and Harry Truman.¹¹⁷

Reagan was less of a pop hero in 1988 than he had been because he had to share center stage as peacemaker with Gorbachev. When asked to name the two most important statesmen of the 1980s, the French placed Mitterrand and Gorbachev at the top, followed by Thatcher; Reagan finished fourth.¹¹⁸ Other questions that compared the United States and the Soviet Union as peacemakers or advocates of arms control showed that Gorbachev had closed the gap that existed before he came to power in Moscow.¹¹⁹ The press tended to credit Reagan with adopting a more vigorous stance in international affairs, especially for negotiating with the Soviets from a position of strength, but journalists also detailed his setbacks in foreign policy, like the forced retreat from Lebanon, the misguided interventions in Central America, the fantasy of the "Star Wars" defense plan, and the scandal over trading arms for hostages with Iran.

In domestic affairs Reagan received mediocre grades as manager of the American economy. "Was the presidency of Ronald Reagan in economic affairs more or less a success?" was the question. In 1988 slightly more than one-third of those surveyed thought him rather successful, but 44 percent said he was neither a success nor a failure or they had no opinion. What is apparent, and more important for long-term trends, was the emergence in the media of an indictment of American society. By 1988, at least according to the press, Reagan was leaving America in a sorry mess. Readers' attention was drawn to the spending cuts mandated by the Republicans in social programs like public

health, education, and child care. A collage composed of the homeless, poverty, drugs, and crime presented a grim picture of American cities. *Le Monde* tried to show both sides of the Reagan legacy, crediting him with ending the pessimism of the 1970s, spurring economic growth, stemming inflation, and creating jobs, but also exposing his legacy of social inequality, indifference to the underprivileged, “colossal” budget deficits, and urban decay.¹²⁰ A more sympathetic paper like *Le Figaro* regretted that Reagan had done nothing to help the three million U.S. homeless.¹²¹ A leading business review, which had once embraced Reaganomics, now drew a vivid contrast between a country in full expansion yet burdened with huge deficits, concluding that Reagan’s legacy was an economy “rejuvenated but ruined.”¹²² One weekly, referring to the budget deficits, declared “the party’s over” and that Reagan’s successor would have his hands tied in addressing social issues like alleviating poverty.¹²³ Despite attacks on the federal government, the press pointed out, bureaucracy had grown. Despite promise of a moral renewal, the Reagan administration had been racked by scandals. More than one journal either labeled the Reagan administration as “corrupt,” listing scandals and dwelling on “Irangate,” or at least criticized the Republican White House for failing to deliver on its promise of moral rectitude.¹²⁴ In 1988 the media were ahead of the public in perceiving America’s social problems. The social critique that would dominate French opinion in the 1990s was already apparent, at least in the media, because of the stern social policies associated with eight years of Ronald Reagan.

The U.S. presidential election of 1988 itself did not elicit much interest in France. Had the French been able to participate, they would have “voted” by a small margin for George H. W. Bush rather than Michael Dukakis (24 to 19 percent), but more than half had no opinion. The press that supported the Republican candidate praised Bush for his wide experience in international affairs and his pragmatic approach, contrasting him with the more ideological and less reliable Reagan.¹²⁵ In fact, President Bush was going to surpass Reagan in Gallic esteem.

The year 1988 recorded the most favorable postwar poll for America.¹²⁶ Queried about their overall impression of the United States, 54 percent in France said they were sympathetic, and a meager 6 percent registered their antipathy (while one-third said neither one nor the other). The vocabulary most often associated with the United States was one of *power, dynamism, wealth, and liberty*. Only one-fourth of those surveyed cited violence, racism, or social inequality.¹²⁷ Over half dismissed the economic influence of the United States on France. But there were some shadows. Respondents continued to disapprove strongly of Reagan's economic policies, and American culture—referring mainly to television programming, cinema, and music—seemed excessive to a majority. America set a good example for free enterprise, the media, political institutions, and education, but less so for its treatment of minorities.¹²⁸

- As an economic model, Reagan's America won the attention of many in France but failed to win many adherents. The socialists went so far as to make a pilgrimage to Silicon Valley, study American economic practices, consult American officials, and endorse entrepreneurship and private enterprise, yet in the end Mitterrand and his ministers rejected any transfer of Reaganomics as a betrayal of their socialist mission and republican principles. At the same time left-wing editorialists ridiculed the accomplishments of Reaganomics and exposed the deceptions and social costs. The right-wing press was more laudatory, and there were even a few true believers among economists, businesspeople, and politicians, but they were never in charge of policy. During the brief liberal moment when Jacques Chirac was prime minister (1986–88), the cohort of Americanized liberals remained marginalized and the dominant party of Gaullists, led by Chirac and Édouard Balladur, designed their own version of market reforms without ever subscribing, or even paying much attention, to Reagan's policies. The public, much like the political elite, found little merit in transporting American practices across the Atlantic. Reagan may have been more popular than his predecessors,

but his appeal did not translate into enthusiasm for his policies. In the end, French ideals of Republican solidarity informed both left and right and insulated the French public against adopting either free-market principles or the tough social policies associated with the Reagan administration. Reagan's version of the American model was not for the French.

In retrospect the rosy glow that radiated across the Atlantic during the 1980s was fleeting, and it also concealed much. It is erroneous to conceptualize the decade as some halcyon past. There was a Reagan "bubble," a brief period when Paris and Washington, D.C., became anxious about a renewed Soviet threat and America's economic prosperity made the United States seem admirable. But the bubble dissipated quickly and the more typical pattern of bickering and competition emerged. The good feelings of the middle years of the Reagan/Mitterrand relationship obscured an unrelenting and disruptive transatlantic rivalry—a rivalry felt more keenly by the French than by the Americans. It informed the two nations' economic and social policies and even the two medical communities—in the case of combating HIV, acting as competitors rather than partners—with tragic consequences.

The government of Laurent Fabius during the mid-1980s illustrates the underlying rivalry. Fabius may have endorsed American-style entrepreneurship and sought to emulate Silicon Valley, but only to serve his socialist agenda; he courted the Walt Disney Company to win the theme park from other Europeans; he permitted shameful practices during the AIDS epidemic rather than turn to American medical companies; and when Reagan faltered, he attacked Reaganomics. He remained a French socialist despite his Brooks Brothers shirts.

The rivalry that emerged over economic policy and the HIV contagion also surfaced in cultural affairs. The socialists attempted to ward off what was labeled as "American cultural imperialism," and this effort ignited a lively dispute over anti-Americanism—a dispute that exposed a significant trend among French intellectuals. These controversies are the subject of the next chapter.