

# Not Quite the Best Defense

By Susan Webber

## Anti-Americanism

By Jean-François Revel  
Translated by Diarmid Cammell  
Encounter, \$25.95

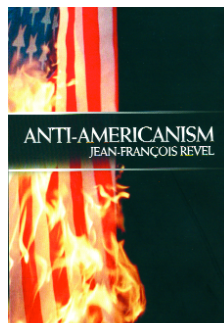
Why is America so widely disliked? Americans once hardly gave the question a passing thought, but in the wake of 9/11, understanding the causes and, where practical, taking countermeasures seems a worthwhile exercise. But anti-Americanism is not an easy topic to tease out. It requires sorting through cultural assumptions, prejudices, passions, and disputes over facts.

Best known for *Without Marx or Jesus*, his best-selling 1972 defense of the United States, Jean-François Revel would seem an ideal candidate to explicate the European view of America and sort out bias, slurs, and posturing from legitimate grievances. His sequel, *Anti-Americanism*, aims to do exactly that.

Revel clearly considers himself a loyal friend of America. But the most valuable

friends are not slavish followers—they have the courage to say things we may not want to hear. Revel fails this test.

The author's French title, *l'obsession anti-américaine*, signals his aims. Revel is interested not in the broad phenomenon of anti-Americanism but rather in a narrower,



more strident, more neurotic manifestation. He sets out to dissect “the intrinsically contradictory character of passionate anti-Americanism. . . . The illogicality at base consists in reproaching the United States for some shortcoming, then for its opposite. Here is a convincing sign that we are in the presence, not of rational analysis, but of obsession.” The book spent several weeks on French best-seller lists, evidence of

support and sympathy for the United States despite the cantankerous state of U.S.-French relationships.

Revel argues that European criticism reflects a willful, persistent ignorance of the United States, rooted in jealousy and denial: a deep-seated need to shore up bruised national egos and defend failed anti-capitalist doctrines. He relies heavily on French examples because they offer “the most extreme and transparent form of a set of ideas about the United States that are encountered, in less polemical and more diluted form, throughout Europe and elsewhere.”

The author starts well. He observes that Europe's failings are self-inflicted, born out of a profound anti-liberal bias, a preference for *dirigisme* or state control, and the failure of Europeans to unite and act as an effective counterbalance to the United States. Commentators single out America for criticism, for instance, in the environmental realm, when other equally culpable countries, such as Russia, get off scot-free. Europeans cavil about America's eagerness to use force yet quickly call on the superpower to intervene in hot spots.

As Revel moves ahead, though,

---

SUSAN WEBBER is founder of Aurora Advisors, a management-consulting firm based in New York and Sydney. She reviewed two biographies of Larry Ellison in the Jan/Feb issue.

## Worth Noting

### The End of Oil

On the Edge of a Perilous New World

By Paul Roberts

Houghton Mifflin, \$26.00

**R**oberts argues that the “energy economy” has been humming along for so long, making so many people and companies rich, that we’ve underplayed both its true costs—from pollution to corruption to war—and the disruption that will strike when that well-oiled economy inevitably comes to an end. He insists that we have no choice but to change the way we deal with energy—and that we can’t wait decades for hydrogen technology to mature. Roberts broadly apportions blame for today’s untenable situation but wisely focuses on the future, offering a quick look at the approaching oil crisis; a clear-eyed study of the no-silver-bullet status of solar, wind, and hydrogen; and finally, a vision of a transition to a new energy system. *The End of Oil* is a brisk, high-impact read, albeit a disheartening one, and absolutely necessary. As energy becomes ever more central to our daily lives and unpredictable geopolitics, it’s crucial to learn what’s at stake—which makes Roberts’ book an essential primer and resource.

—MATTHEW BUDMAN

### Make the Rules or Your Rivals Will

By G. Richard Shell

Crown, \$27.50

**I**n this new book on the uses of legal strategy for competitive advantage, the author is quick to point out that he doesn’t approve of the “hard-nosed and controversial” tactics that he describes. That doesn’t stop him, however, from going into entertaining detail about the legal shenanigans that corporations have engaged in to thwart their rivals and improve their own positions, such as “filing lawsuits to delay a competitor’s launch,” “striking midnight deals to get a tax break,” or “tying up a lifesaving innovation in regulatory red

hectoring, undermining his credibility. If you’re attacking others for sloppy thinking, it is incumbent on you to marshal solid arguments. But *Anti-Americanism* careens from reasoned response to glib sloganeering and snide remark.

His treatise suffers from four systemic flaws. First, Revel often falls short of making a full, effective rejoinder to the anti-American case. He pokes holes in his opponents’ arguments but too often moves on without having dismantled them. It’s unsatisfying, like making a meal out of junk food. For instance, he notes that Europeans complain about wanton U.S. intervention, but when the Bush administration, early on, signaled that it was disinclined to act abroad, the European intelligentsia quickly labeled it “isolationist.” Revel cites this backflip to prove that Europe finds fault regardless of America’s particular stance. While his conclusion is probably correct, Revel is less than convincing—he needed to address whether the United States had indeed pulled back too far.

Second, Revel’s focus on “the extreme and transparent” form of anti-Americanism creates an easy straw man to knock down. But it raises doubts about whether

more efficient production. Revel portrays the anti-globalizers as intellectually bankrupt, lacking any positive counterproposals, acting out a fantasy of revolutionary action. This description applies to the rioters of Genoa and Seattle, but Revel goes further, asserting that there are no peaceful activists and no supporting logic.

But it’s just plain wrong to assert that anyone who questions globalization comes from the lunatic fringe. Revel’s purely economic perspective omits important considerations. For example, Michael Prowse in the *Financial Times* has pointed out that social psychologists have a very different view of what constitutes social good than economists do. Beyond a certain income level (and not a very high one), money does not make people happier; indeed, *The New Scientist* recently posited that happiness has not increased in industrialized societies over the last sixty years because the desire for more goods suppresses happiness.

Where does globalization fit in? Well, losing jobs makes people very unhappy and increases social and political instability—no matter how sound the free-market philosophy. So the globalization process, which creates dislocation as industries are restructured and

## Revel portrays the anti-globalizers as intellectually bankrupt.

moderate elements would make for as strong a case.

Take the chapter on anti-globalization. It’s a stretch to equate anti-globalization with anti-Americanism, as he does, though they are related. From a strictly economic standpoint, globalization is worthwhile because it raises incomes by integrating markets and enabling

inefficient operations shuttered, may indeed not be such a good thing unless you are one of the lucky beneficiaries.

Third, for someone who presumes to correct the record about America, Revel too often gets his facts wrong. For example, he states that “officially condoned” U.S. gun sales require registration and licensing, but

Massachusetts is the only state that has those requirements for all guns. In fact, thirty-five states do not require registration or licensing for any type of gun.

Moreover, Revel repeatedly criticizes U.S. and European human-rights advocates for opposing the Guantanamo Bay

## We like to think that our influence on pop culture is won on merits.

detention of more than six hundred suspects, arguing that they are “al-Qa’ida terrorists.” But in branding the detainees terrorists, he completely misses the point. Napoleonic Code nations treat the accused as guilty, but the Anglo tradition starts from a presumption of innocence. The right of habeas corpus is a cornerstone of American jurisprudence, and circumventing it by holding the detainees outside any legal system sets a dangerous precedent.

Also, it isn’t just the usual human-rights suspects like the ACLU that are up in arms about Guantanamo Bay. Those lodging protests include the Human Rights Institute of the International Bar Association, Lord Johan van Zyl Steyn (one of Britain’s law lords, a senior judge in its highest court), the Commonwealth Lawyers Association, several former U.S. federal court judges, and 175 Members of Parliament. Revel could have acknowledged that the rise of radical Islam requires the United States to make tough choices between security and liberty, but his knee-jerk support of a violation of deeply held legal principles contrasts starkly with his defense of America as a democratic society.

Finally, Revel seems as strident and obsessive in his support of the United States as its critics are in their attacks. His asides occa-

sionally acknowledge an American shortcoming, but they come across as mere rhetorical flourishes.

In fact, Americans seldom take many of foreigners’ charges seriously—it is difficult to see what harm is done by foreigners over-consuming U.S. movies. But as

Revel points out, the United States is the first global superpower, the first ever to dominate on the economic, military, cultural, and technological fronts. It should be no surprise that other nations are uncomfortable with this concentration of power.

We like to think that our influence in pop culture is won on merits, but U.S. media companies have enormous marketing and distribution power. As a Time Warner executive pointed out, “There are lots of pretty girls who can sing, but it takes millions to make a star.” There is a fear of multinationals, predominantly American, becoming too powerful in local economies and being able to sway government policy. And the United States has a nasty habit of intervening in unstable countries in opposition to democratically elected leaders. Haiti’s deposed Jean-Bertrand Aristide had plenty of warts, but he looks like a prince compared to fellow exile Baby Doc Duvalier, the self-declared “president for life” who stands accused of torture, mass killings, and looting the Haitian treasury during his 1970s and ’80s reign.

America’s system of checks and balances recognizes the need to curb power. So should it be a complete surprise when, in the absence of any effective recourse, our allies fall back on complaining? ♦

## Worth Noting

tape.” Shell makes effective use of anecdotes in his explanation of how companies use legislation, litigation, and regulation to their advantage; admirably, he maintains throughout that this information is provided so that readers can defend themselves against nefarious competitors, rather than considering that readers might adopt some of these schemes for themselves. The most amusing example for this reviewer was the touching story of how the founder of Federated Department Stores, representing a coalition of retailers, persuaded Franklin Delano Roosevelt to move Thanksgiving from the fourth Thursday in November to the third, in order to extend the Christmas shopping season by a week. When it comes to legal wrangling, nothing is sacred.

—MELISSA MASTER

**Just Enough**  
Tools for Creating Success in  
Your Work and Life  
By Laura Nash and Howard Stevenson  
Wiley, \$24.95

The bar keeps rising, faster than ever, for what constitutes personal success—and it’s not just about money. In a world in which “nothing is ever enough,” write Nash and Stevenson, what’s critical is deciding at what point to be satisfied. Based on surveys and interviews with successful professionals and top executives, *Just Enough* argues for “an authentic view of success” grounded in realistic expectations, diversity rather than narrow focus, and self-realization. Despite the blobby matrix diagrams, the authors’ counsel is straightforward and commonsense, and some may find the tone and bold-and-bullets format a bit self-helpish. But *Just Enough* goes to the core of how to find satisfaction in a fast-moving, winner-take-all society. As such, it’s tremendously important, with the potential to genuinely change one’s outlook on work and life. How many books can truly make that claim?

—M.B.