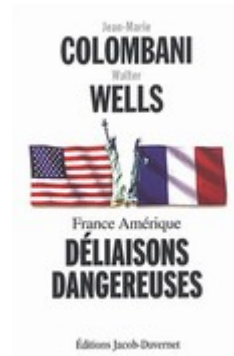


Between February 2004 and February 2005 I wrote twenty six freelance articles for francophile internet magazine *Bonjour Paris* + one article with Karen Fawcett (President) and Sarah Gilbert Fox (Directeur Général), which was published in the guide-book, "Paris For Dummies." Here is one of the original twenty six, with the original self-penned lead...

Dé liaisons Dangereuses – What’s Really Behind The War Between France & The US?

Pat Brien attended the book-signing at Brentano’s Bookstore expecting a little light-hearted banter and came away with some serious food for thought on the future of French/American relations. [READ MORE.](#)



When I first picked up this assignment I somehow got the impression that I would be reviewing a kind of light-hearted, slightly comic review of the differences between France and the good ol’ US of A.

From there, I presumed that the book-signing would be a grinning, slightly camp equivalent of a Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers, “*You say potato, I say... pomme-de-terre,*” type of thing. Ha, ha, ha, slaps on the back, everybody goes home.

Mercifully, I was wrong.

The event was held in Brentano’s excellent, spacious and customer-friendly French/English bookstore at 37, rue de l’Opera on 1 April*.

The first major difference between France and the US I noticed was that Walter Wells, American co-author of the book and editor of the International Herald Tribune, hadn’t turned up, whereas Jean-Marie Colombani, editor of *Le Monde*, had. Points for France, then.

Another major difference I picked up on was that, whereas the French language version of the book had a cool cover design, featuring the Statue of Liberty torn asunder, and with a large photograph of the authors on the back, retailing at 16.95 euros, the English language version had only a very basic cover, no photograph, and retailed at 22.10 euros.

With one of the main American complaints about Europe being it’s high costs, the word ‘irony’ sprang immediately to mind.

I then realized that without Walter Wells, who was sick in bed apparently, the whole event would be held in the French language. This didn't help my cause, as I sell myself as somebody who can relate to and write for those coming to Paris sans a full grasp of the language.

But it didn't matter. I'd already bought and read the book, which left me capable of picking up on what was being said.

The place was packed and Jean-Marie Colombani didn't appear to have any ruffled feathers about being left to hold the fort alone; in fact, he gave the impression that it would be difficult to ruffle his feathers at all.

Relaxed and smiling, he seemed one of those people who look at life through slightly-amused, knowing eyes most of the time, and who would be pretty hard to shock or surprise, even if you're American and good at it.

But, despite the quiet humour of the man, this was no Fred and Ginger song-and-dance routine.

One, Ginger hadn't turned up; and Two, '*Dé liaisons Dangereuses – What's Really Behind The War Between France and The US?*' is a serious, intellectual attempt to question modern-day differences between France and the US and to discover the real reasons behind a growing animosity.



Jean-Marie Colombani - April Fooled (non!) But Unruffled.

It does this by raising the necessary questions about recent international events, then studying them in the context of the historical differences between the two nations, before going on from there to question the possible future of French, US relations.

All good, well-rounded stuff.

It also explores the times of friendship in war and suffering between the two nations and their complex cultural contradictions: America's feeling of cultural inferiority towards France, for example, and the French fascination with the awesome myth of The American Dream.

The book is serious but not difficult. It has an easy-going interview style, cutting from Colombani and his French viewpoint, to Wells and his American perspective, which breaks the text up nicely and prevents some very serious thinking from becoming turgid, heavy reading.

Pitted against today's dark political reality, almost all aspects of American and French society are investigated and discussed in-depth: French bureaucracy, stemming from the deep-rooted socialist belief that people should be financially and legally protected, is contrasted sharply against the American belief in independence, with its 'Land of Opportunity/ American Dream,' drive to personal success.

Many other political and cultural conflicts are also dealt with in a straight-forward, no-nonsense manner by the two writers.



Shooting For The Stars: Living & Dying the Dream.

Importantly, the book resists the temptation to slyly ridicule one system whilst quietly promoting the other. It gives a balanced view, attempting to understand the mentalities of the French and American people living within those systems, cleverly keeping its eyes on the ball, rather than sinking into yet another heated political debate that leads nowhere.

It's possible to assume that if there were more French people like Colombani and more American's like Wells, they could well have ditched this book idea altogether and just recorded that Fred & Ginger number I was talking about back at the start.

But alas, these are serious times, and this book is serious reading and a MUST for anybody with an interest in the modern political scene and the question of what the future

holds. Certainly questions concerning the relationship between France and the US will not go away anytime soon.

In fact, they will almost certainly become louder and more frequent as time goes on.

So, if you're one of those people who like being in the know, get down to Brentano's and snap up a copy of '*Dé liaisons Dangereuses – What's Really Behind The War Between France and The US?*' and start making up your own mind.

And in case I've whetted your appetite, Brentano's may also have some Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers movies available in their video/DVD stocks.

Happy viewing.



**2004. Paris: The Student Struggle For The Status Quo.*