

Le Nouveau Défi Américain. I.

NUMBER 15, APRIL 11, 1977

In 1967 the Frenchman Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber jolted his fellow citizens by publishing *Le Défi Américain*.¹ In the past decade the book's title has become a catch-phrase for all sorts of challenges. I did not realize until recently the extent to which Servan-Schreiber stressed the importance of the information industry, but in a recent re-reading of the book's English translation I came upon this startling conclusion: "The new frontiers of human creativity in every area lie in information systems and their utilization, and the Americans themselves do not seem fully to realize this yet. We [presumably the French] must forge ahead into this area before it is taken over by others."²

This assertion is ironic in light of the recent *cause célèbre* in which I have been involved. For lack of a better description, I have called it "Le Nouveau Défi Américain"; modesty forbids my naming it the "Garfield Challenge," since I have already named both a law³ and a constant⁴ after myself.

Last fall I published an article in *La Recherche* entitled "Is French Science Too Provincial?"⁵ I said what I had to say about the French in French, but the English translation is reprinted on the following pages.

The reaction to this article has been intense. As Barbara Burke of the *Washington Post* reported from Paris just a few weeks ago, "French Scientists Resent Dominance of English!"⁶ One French scientist has denounced the article as "pernicious"; another accused me of "linguistic imperialism"; and still another claimed that my article "questions the existence of a civilization...." It seems that I have hit a raw nerve.

Readers of *La Recherche* have had their chance to reply to the "New American Challenge," and have certainly taken advantage of it--as I'll demonstrate at length in this space next week. In the following pages you can examine for yourself the original source of their outrage.

1. Servan-Schreiber J J. *Le défi américain*. Editions Denoel, 1967.
2. -----, *The American challenge*. New York: Atheneum, 1969.
3. Garfield E. The mystery of the transposed journal lists--wherein Bradford's law of scattering is generalized according to Garfield's law of concentration. *Current Contents*[®] No. 31, 4 August 1971, p. 5-6.
4. -----, Is the ratio between number of citations and publications cited a true constant? *Current Contents* No. 6, 9 February 1976, p. 5-7.
5. -----, La science française est-elle trop provinciale? *La Recherche* 7:757-60, 1976.
6. Burke B. French scientists resent dominance of English. *Washington Post* 20 March 1977, p. E6.