Who is dominating American intellectual life? Eager to address this type of question, sociologists published, in the 1970s, a meticulous study comparing the reputations of different figures of the intellectual elite: Daniel Bell is mentioned first among the ten most important names, listed in alphabetical order, together with John Kenneth Galbraith, Norman Mailer, and Edmund Wilson, with David Riesman as well as Hannah Arendt appearing later. When, a little bit later, in 1981, this time in France, six hundred intellectuals, scholars, or politicians were asked to tell which personality had influenced them most, nearly a quarter of them named, without hesitating, Claude Lévi-Strauss, who received twenty votes more than his friend Raymond Aron, the latter followed by Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Fernand Braudel. Daniel Bell in the United States and Claude Lévi Strauss in France, like the majority of the named figures, testify to the strong influence the social sciences exert today on intellectual life.

Close observers of modern or traditional societies, both scholars are nevertheless very different from each other. Both stemming from European Jewry, they are separated by the fact that Claude Lévi-Strauss, profoundly assimilated according to the logic of the typically French model of universalistic integration, deliberately distanced himself from Judaism, while Daniel Bell represented the quintessential New York Jew whose points of reference continued to be those of...
the Eastern European Jewish world of the past. The author of *Tristes Tropiques* was rooted in the Jewish upper middle class that had once been honorably accepted by Napoleon III and his court. During his youth, spent in Versailles, he lived for a few years with his maternal grandfather, a rabbi. Although he celebrated a bar mitzvah, he was clearly alienated from Judaism, like his parents for whom it “was no more than a memory.” He did, of course, “know that he was Jewish,” and he belonged to a specific milieu, particularly since he married Dina Dreyfus in 1932. When embarking for Martinique from Marseille in February 1941, he confessed: “I already felt like the hunted victims of the concentration camps,” stating that there were other Jews “like me” among the passengers. Although further emphasizing that “the abominable and devastating catastrophe that befell a part of humankind I belong to … has substantially changed my destiny,” he placed patterns of thinking characteristic for the Bororos or Nambikwaras in the center of his existence and his work, and he praised the virtues of Buddhism rather than those of Judaism.

The cultural relativism apparently characterizing his ethnographic approach, which tends to exclude the Jews, has prompted the severe condemnation by Emmanuel Lévinas, who wrote:

> Modern atheism is not the negation of God. It is the total indifference of the *Tristes Tropiques*. According to my opinion, this is the most atheistic book written in our days, this absolutely disoriented and disorienting book. It menaces Judaism the same way the Hegelian and sociological view of history does.

Even if some insist, via an adventurous psychological exegesis, in seeing in Lévi-Strauss not a prophet but a “theologian in spite of himself,” it is still true that the theoretician of structural anthropology

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