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Photo by Nancy Kaszerman

Bernard-Henri Lévy discusses his American travels at the New York Public Library on 2005.

America's unlikely defender

French provocateur Bernard-Henri Lévy denounces anti-Americanism and defends the idealism of the neocons.

By Oliver Broudy

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In the United States, Bernard-Henri Lévy is best known for his book "Who Killed Daniel Pearl," investigating the 2002 murder of the Wall Street Journal reporter on assignment in Pakistan. In France, however, BHL (as he is called) is known more for himself: a flamboyant, courageous, infuriating, charismatic and highly unpredictable writer, who in his checkered career has also played the role of philosopher, filmmaker, diplomatic envoy, war reporter and political activist. He is a celebrity intellectual, a driven enemy of orthodoxy who is regularly compared to Camus and Malraux.

Besides his book on Daniel Pearl, Lévy has also written an in-depth study of Sartre, and a book on Africa's forgotten wars, ambitiously titled "War, Evil, and the End of History." His untranslated works number 30, and he has written countless articles, columns and essays. He is among the most and outspoken public figures in France, appearing regularly as a commentator on French television programs, and clashing frequently with other public figures, as when he traded blows in the fall of 2003 with the Muslim intellectual Tariq Ramadan, who had accused Lévy (along with a handful of other French Jewish intellectuals) of "communitarian politics"