

Career Training

**French provocateur discusses America, his fellow intellectuals and fighting Garrison Keillor.**

**INTERVIEW** In France, Bernard-Henri Levy is so ubiquitous that he is referred to by his initials. The Atlantic Monthly sent him on a nine-month road trip to retrace the steps of Alexis de Tocqueville, the first Frenchman charged with explaining America to itself and the rest of the world. When Metro met BHL, he had just discovered that Garrison Keillor panned his book, "American Vertigo," in the New York Times Book Review.



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**PHILOSOPHER and author Bernard-Henri Levy talked to Metro about his new book and his beef with a prominent reviewer.**

# Notorious BHL

- ▶ We keep hearing that Americans are divided between red and blue states, or the coasts and the heartland. Did you find that to be true?
  - ▶▶ I spent nine months talking to hundreds of Americans. Red states and blue states; Democrats and Republicans; Darwinists and creationists. They don't speak to each other. One of the reasons I did this book was to have these two worlds of America communicate with each other.
- ▶ Many New Yorkers feel they have more in common with Europeans than Americans. Are they right?
  - ▶▶ I think it is not true. A
- ▶ U.S. foreign policy is not popular abroad right now. What do U.S. leaders need to do about that?
  - ▶▶ America needs to go back to a true Wilsonian model. Wilsonism is about creating democracy abroad, but acting multilaterally. Woodrow Wilson was able to intervene militarily, because he had the League of Nations. When I hear the
- ▶ neo-cons call themselves Wilsonian, I laugh.
  - ▶ You are a huge public figure in France. Would you like to be one here?
    - ▶▶ I do not want to be a public figure. If I could help to facilitate public debate, I would be very glad to do that. I would love to be able to explain to my fellow intellectuals how America could keep its tradition of democracy within the federalist state, but with a little grain of salt. I would like to share my experience about how we handled it in France. But I am not an egotist.
- ▶ Do you agree with those who suggest that domestic issues should take a back

seat to foreign policy?

- ▶▶ I think two things. First, it's unconscionable for a democracy like America to have to choose between the world and home. You American people can count to two. There are some, like Michael Moore, who tend to say, "It's either Katrina, either Middle East, either home and home disasters or the world." No, the duty of America is to do both at the same time, like the duty of France. Second thing: I really believe the American left is far too shy on domestic issues. This I don't really understand.

- ▶ How do you feel about Garrison Keillor?
  - ▶▶ Here is my response. I wrote this book to America. It has to be reviewed. Good reviews, bad reviews — either way, I have nothing to say to that. I could debate Mr. Keillor, but face to face. He can choose the field. He said what he said about me in a newspaper. I would like to say in front of him. It can be on his radio show, it can be in New York City, it can be on Charlie Rose. The challenge is open. Here are my terms: Number one, fair play. Number two, be ready for confrontation. And number three, on the field he wants. Minnesota, New York or the moon.



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