

# The French Review

## *From the Editor's Desk*

The over 500 of you who attended our seventy-sixth annual convention at the Pointe-du-Bout in Martinique, across the bay from Fort-de-France, know what a smashing success both our visit to Martinique and encounter with her people were.

The convention itself was loaded with highlights, including a performance of Suzanne Dracius's play, *Lumina Sophie dite Surprise*, sessions on French Caribbean writers, culture, and civilization including Guadeloupe, Haiti, and Martinique. Other speakers covered Caribbean Francophones in France, the Francophone Colonial Era, Joséphine de Beauharnais, Teaching with Francophone film, etc.

One of the best-attended of the sessions with over 120 present was entitled "Franco-phobia: How Can We Respond?" Chantal Manès, Chef du Service de coopération universitaire, linguistique et éducative, from the French Embassy in Washington; Jean-Pierre Piriou, President of the AATF, Ann Sunderland of Truman High School in Kansas City, Missouri, and I myself all made presentations. There followed a lively forty minute discussion which could have gone on for hours had there not been another session scheduled immediately after ours in the same room. A packet including articles, newspaper clippings, Web sites, and a short bibliography was distributed, and when we ran out, a list of fifty people signed up to have the packet mailed to them. Thanks to April Cole at National Headquarters, everyone who requested the packet got one. The session was also covered by one of the television stations in Fort-de-France. Participants in the discussion told of their experiences and offered suggestions for how to cope with this serious problem and its consequences for French enrollments. Chantal Manès will follow up with a study of the enrollment question. The events of the spring and summer of 2003 remind us that there is always a potential for anti-French sentiment in the United States. What we must do as teachers is to remind students, colleagues, administrators, parents, and the general public that the historical and cultural ties that bind our two countries are far stronger than the political concerns and strategies of a particular moment. We can do this best by reacquainting ourselves with the history of our two countries and bringing it to bear on our discussions, both in and out of class. The governments of the United States and France will continue to pursue what they consider the best interests of their respective peoples. We cannot expect that those interests will always coincide, so we must accept that there will sometimes be disagreements where neither country may necessarily be wrong (or right) in the path it has chosen. Yet the differences and disagreements that do exist must never be allowed to obscure the fact that France and the United States will always be inextricably bound together by a host of mutual interests and concerns. This is the message that we must communicate in the strongest terms to those who would divide us. Do let me know how things are going in your school and community.

Other highlights of the convention included a soirée martiniquaise filled with dance and song. In fact, music and dance were themes that ran through the entire conference. No sooner had we debarked from our charter flight than we were greeted by a Martinican band at the airport! Many of us were able to enjoy the dancers, players, and singers of the internationally famous Martinican dance troupe, Les Grands Ballets de La Martinique, which presented a panorama of the history of Caribbean dance, including the "biguine," a dance invented in Martinique. The closing banquet was also a great success with still more

music and dance. Those who participated in the variety of pre- and post-convention excursions were delighted by the chance to see different beauty spots, from the Montagne Pelée in the north, to the beautiful, sandy beaches of the south. Some visited la Pagerie, the museum devoted to Joséphine de Beauharnais, who remains controversial to this day for her attitudes on slavery, as the headless statue of her in the Savane Park in Fort-de-France demonstrates. Some of us visited the splendid Schoelcher Library, featured on the cover of the May 2003 *French Review*. The cover simply did not do justice to the greens and yellows of the library.

Our convention took place a week after the celebration of Aimé Césaire's ninetieth birthday, and a number of attendees were able to meet Césaire in person. Some of us also took advantage of travel by the "taxis collectifs," that wonderful Martinican institution that allows one to break the barriers of color and economic status to meet Martinicans from all walks of life in a setting where mutual aid and respect are the norm.

We all owe a message of thanks to Jean-Pierre Piriou, Jayne Abrate, l'Office du tourisme de la Martinique (especially Muriel Wiltord and Valérie Vulcain), and Carib Congrès (the package tour organizer) for making the convention such a success. I also want to thank the French Cultural Services for their grant of \$2,250, which helped to subsidize the expenses for the May special issue. As always, the editors of the *French Review* and the *National Bulletin* presented a "Meet the Editors" session, and the editors of the *Review* feted the year's work with an Editors' luncheon at the La Grange Inn, a memorable event. We are now at work on a special issue devoted to Francophone literature and culture to be published in May 2004 in honor of our joint meeting with the Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Français to be held in Atlanta. There will be a wide variety of countries and literatures represented.

The Martinique convention also allowed the Program Committee to meet with a Canadian delegation, Dario Pagel, president of the FIPF, and Alain Braun, immediate past president of the FIPF to continue planning for next year's meeting. Great progress was made and by the time you receive this issue we will have advanced still further towards a successful joint meeting.

I hope that you all participated in the fifth annual Semaine du Français and that you are having success in reigniting the eternal flame for the French language in your schools throughout North America and abroad. Bonnes vacances et Bonne Année à tous et à toutes!

Christopher P. Pinet