

The French Review

From the Editor's Desk

We are delighted to be able to publish the keynote speech given by French Minister of Equal Opportunity, Azouz Begag, at the annual meeting of the AATF held in Milwaukee, WI from 5-8 July 2006. Though the speech is also available on the AATF Web site, the importance of the Minister's remarks for both French and American society is such that it seems appropriate to publish the speech in the *French Review* as well. The subject, of course, is the role of those immigrants, children, and grandchildren of immigrants who now hold French nationality and passports; especially those who comprise the "minorités visibles" whose plight Begag so eloquently describes. Still and all his discourse extends to all people in France with immigrant status and future immigrants as well—all those of all colors who are minorities and suffer from discrimination. In a larger sense his message also concerns immigrants in American society and "le monde entier."

Moving from his youth in a "bidonville" in Lyon to the influences of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Martin Luther King and his various stays in and impressions of the United States, Begag goes on to speak of his lifelong fight against racism and discrimination and for equal opportunity all the way to the floor of the French National Assembly. He explains how, as a sociologist, he came to understand the need for diversity and moving out into society of all groups, especially ethnic minorities, who would otherwise remain isolated from the larger society. This movement toward "the other" enables us to find common ground and overcome our prejudices. Begag has also pursued the quest for equality and equal opportunity as a novelist in works such as the award-winning *Le Gone du Chaâba*, *Béni ou le paradis privé*, and *Le Marteau Pique-cœur*. Not content with sociological studies and novels, he has used screen-plays and films as well as children's literature, essays, interviews, and television appearances to promote the cause of equal opportunity. His soon-to-be-published *Ethnicity and Equality: France in the Balance* (University of Nebraska Press, spring 2007) is his first work to appear first in English. It will be accompanied by *The Shantytown Kid*, the English translation of *Le Gone du Chaâba*, also published by the University of Nebraska Press (spring 2007). The translator of both works is Alec Hargreaves of Florida State University.

As Minister, Azouz Begag is also committed to equality for women and the handicapped. For him the needs of all minorities must be met in order for France to live up to the promise of the 1789 revolution and its republican ideals. So it is that in the new law for the Promotion of Equal Opportunity passed in the spring of 2006 there are provisions for "testing" to see whether or not discrimination has occurred (in night clubs, for example, one white person might accompany a person of color to determine whether or not the latter is refused entry). There are stiff fines for those individuals and companies guilty of discrimination. Begag has also called for the election of visible minorities and women to the French National Assembly, something that has not yet occurred for visible minorities. In an interview with the Lyon newspaper, *Le Progrès*, on 29 October 2006 Minister Begag announced that he would be a candidate for the National Assembly in the spring 2007 legislative elections to be held in April. He will also run for mayor of Lyon as an independent in 2008. Minister Begag closes with a series of reflections on the need for personal fashioning of identity and the creation of conditions which will make equal opportunity available for all.

Also in this issue we have a remarkable essay by the Tunisian poet, Samir Marzouki, entitled “‘Ambivalences, ô mes délices...’: splendeurs et misères du bilinguisme chez l’écrivain arabe francophone.” Marzouki, an “arabophone” or “Arabo-européen,” discusses his own “métissage” and that of all peoples. He explores his quest for identity in several moving poems, some of which deal with the plight of the immigrant and the imperative for learning and knowing more than one language, a theme also taken up by Azouz Begag. Another article in this issue, “Shérazade in the Museum: A Visual Approach to Leila Sebbar’s Novel,” considers the debate over Orientalism and the need for self-fashioning for a young teenage runaway named Shérazade, a first-generation “Beur” whose family left Algeria for life in the Parisian banlieue when she was only three. Her quest for identity encompasses learning about both her origins in Algeria and the reality of life in France. “The Ethics of Hospitality in Camus’s ‘L’Hôte’” deals with identity politics in Algeria and how culture shapes the notion of hospitality in the interactions of Daru and the prisoner in unexpected ways.

All of these pieces offer insights into the puzzle of culture, identity, politics, racism, discrimination, and equal opportunity in twenty-first-century France and the Maghreb. Other articles in this issue offer similar reflections on these topics in the Antilles and concerning Jewishness in the film *Mina Tannenbaum*. I hope that you will read all of these fine contributions in order to better understand and appreciate the human condition.

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