

The French Review

From the Editor's Desk

In late October 2004 I was fortunate to participate in a Round Table held at the annual meeting of the Federation of Alliances Françaises, U.S.A., Inc. in Washington, D.C. The title of the session was "French-American Relations: The Short Term and the Long View." In preparation for the meeting I read several books, three of which I believe you will find helpful in understanding diplomatic relations between our two nations since World War II. The first is by Frank Costigliola and is entitled *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance since World War II* (Twayne Publishers, 1992). In it Costigliola charts the ups and downs that have characterized our relations in the economic, cultural, and political spheres as France tried to reestablish herself in Europe and the world after World War II and the United States sought to expand its position as a dominant superpower. As one would expect, the interests of France and the United States have not always been the same. Costigliola shows clearly how the divergent perspectives date from the Revolutionary period and how cumulative negative stereotypes developed on both sides of the Atlantic as the two countries and their leaders tried to work together to confront the critical world issues of the twentieth century. A close reading of Costigliola's book helps us to put the difficulties of the past two hundred and fifty years in perspective.

Nos Amis les Français: guide pratique à l'usage des GI's en France 1944-1945 (Le Cherche midi, 2003) is a best-selling translation of *112 Gripes about the French*, published in Paris in 1945 by the "Information Division and Education Division" of the U.S. Occupation Services. miquelon.org lists the 112 gripes in English. Scrutiny of this list and the suggestions it offers to American GI's about how to come to terms with French cultural differences and political perspectives shows that many of the recent negative comments about the French indulged in by late-night talk show hosts and newspaper columnists reflect the stereotypes common in the immediate post-war period.

The third book, *French Negotiating Behavior: Dealing with the "Grande Nation"* (United States Institute of Peace Studies, Washington, D.C., 2003) was written by one of the panelists present in Washington, Charles Cogan. Cogan's book is particularly helpful because he offers case studies of some French/American entanglements including the conflict over the war begun in Iraq in 2003 and disagreements over the French and U.S. roles in NATO. He suggests that the two countries have a tendency to misread one another, shows how and why, and offers an in-depth analysis of the French approach to negotiations generally. Though the book is aimed at American diplomats, it also offers insights to those of us who teach French and will help us to educate our students about French/U.S. diplomatic behavior and how to understand it within the context of the history of our two countries.

I came away from the meeting with the feeling that now, more than ever, we must work with other organizations such as the Federation of Alliances Françaises, U.S.A., Inc. so that we can promote the strong historical, economic, and cultural ties that bind our two countries together while coming to terms with the differences that sometimes divide us. Educating ourselves and our students will allow us to dispel the negative stereotypes of the French that have dominated so much of public discourse for the past two years.

An article in this issue entitled "Does French Matter? France and Francophonie in the Age of Globalization," demonstrates the importance of the Organisation Internationale de

la Francophonie (OIF) in furnishing a French-speaking voice in defense of Francophone cultures and the French language world-wide. Beyond this, the authors show how the OIF is trying to serve as a spearhead for advancing the economic interests of French-speaking nations. In this context we should not forget that the United States does more business with French-speaking nations than with those of any other language. At the same time there is sometimes friction between the World Trade Organization and the OIF leading to conflict between the United States and France over globalization. It is also true that the dominant role played by France, Canada, and Quebec in the OIF has led to suspicions among developing nations about "French and Canadian motives for OIF participation." Some of the linguistic and cultural aspects of the debate were alluded to in the February issue of the *French Review*.

What is clear is that Francophone countries will have to redouble their efforts and put aside their differences if French is to survive in the face of increasing English language hegemony. In the United States and North America we have a similar challenge, something the new advocacy program undertaken by the AATF is trying to address. The AATF has also tried to find common cause with the FIPF. Ultimately, our ability to keep French alive and thriving in the United States and elsewhere will be a function of our capacity to educate ourselves, our students, and the larger community about the value of the French language and the importance of the Francophone world; to stand fast, and to respond to French bashing wherever we encounter it.

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