
H-France Review Vol. 5 (October 2005), No. 106

Harvey Levenstein, *We'll Always Have Paris: American Tourists in France since 1930*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004. xiv + 382 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$35 U.S. (cl.). ISBN 0-226-47378-3.

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Whither Francophilia? How have American affinities for things French fared in an era of diplomatic tension and cultural transformation? These questions lie at the heart of Harvey Levenstein's colorful account of American tourism to France since the 1930s. A companion to his 1998 book covering tourism from "Jefferson to the Jazz Age," Levenstein's latest book provides rich detail on recent American encounters with France. [1] The book also offers an occasion to reflect on the declining prominence of French culture in contemporary America. Readers of H-France, whose livelihoods in many cases depend on continuing American interest in France, would do well to engage with themes raised in this book.

Before we turn to the question of decline, a summary of the book's main arguments is in order. *We'll Always Have Paris* addresses two broad analytical fields, one concerning tourism studies and the other involving U.S.-French cultural relations. In terms of conceptualizing tourism, Levenstein suggests that twentieth-century American travelers have for the most part followed cultural patterns created in the 1920s. In his first book, Levenstein delineated a nineteenth-century rivalry between two styles of travel. While some Americans emphasized a cultural tourism that promised self-improvement through the earnest study of French culture, others pursued leisure tourism, or the quest for relaxation, amusement, and indulgence. Although most tourists, beginning with Thomas Jefferson, combined elements of both, Levenstein argued that by the 1920s wealthy Americans had begun to blur the boundaries between these traditions. As Americans absorbed the lessons of Freud and mass advertising, the pursuit of intense emotions and pleasures evolved into a new form of self-improvement, or therapy for harried modern souls. To explain the years since 1930 in his new book, Levenstein stresses that American tourists have largely intensified this process of blurring the line between cultural and leisure tourism.

Levenstein traces this theme across major twentieth-century events. Beginning with the Great Depression, he describes how vanishing stock dividends and a weaker dollar pulled home all but the wealthiest of travelers. Americans returned en masse during World War II, although Francophiles in the U.S. military were far outnumbered by soldiers with little interest in French culture. Impatient to return home, G.I.'s complained of high prices and swindling shopkeepers. In extreme cases, they formed gangs that roamed the streets of Paris, robbing cafés or liberating wallets from their Parisian owners. These tensions in turn led the U.S. military and French government to devise ways to keep the involuntary tourists happy with their hosts. After the war, while a tense indifference emerged in the towns surrounding the United States' permanent bases in France, a fresh round of civilian leisure travel resumed. Most prominent were American authors such as Richard Wright, a distinguished guest of the French government, and Norman Mailer, a beneficiary of the G.I. Bill. But the heart of tourism still remained with the upper- and upper-middle-class from the urban Northeast. Despite reports of Gallic antipathy, these wealthy Americans flocked to France because of its reputation for romance, artistic and literary experimentation, and the promise of magical self-transformation depicted in films such as 1954's *Sabrina*. Yet, as Levenstein reminds us, hopes for a truly mass market in travel would have to wait. The trip to Europe remained prohibitively expensive for most middle-class Americans. At a time when a comfortable white-collar American family might earn only \$4,000 or \$5,000 a year, postwar steamship fares cost a daunting \$900.

Levenstein locates the real rise of mass transatlantic tourism in the late 1950s and 1960s, when reduced airfares on larger planes helped give birth to the “If It’s Tuesday, This Must Be Belgium” style of tour through Europe. For these tourists, who in many cases spent only a day or two in France, simply standing in the presence of famous sights represented a viable form of self-improvement. Some commentators at the time decried these rapid tours as a fetishization of image over substance.^[2] Levenstein, however, adopts a more neutral tone and refuses to condemn hurried tourists who in many cases could only afford one trip to Europe in their lifetime. Moreover, where postwar critics of mass culture decried a homogenization of personal experiences, Levenstein notes that mass tourism ultimately evolved into a fragmented field of niche markets catering to subgroups such as art lovers, gays, students, and gourmets.

Levenstein’s narrative includes a number of valuable subthemes. Several chapters reference African Americans’ attraction to France as a haven from racism in the United States. Following other authors on this topic, Levenstein’s focus here is not so much on average black tourists as on well-known performers and intellectuals such as Jack Johnson, Josephine Baker, and James Baldwin.^[3] To a greater degree than in his first volume, Levenstein also discusses French perceptions of Americans, emphasizing government worries that American tourists, their most lucrative foreign visitors, were not spending enough time and money in France. These anxieties led to periodic campaigns, in the 1930s, late 1940s, 1960s, and again in the 1980s, to smooth over tourist-host tensions surrounding issues like tipping, service charges, and the alleged rudeness of Parisians.^[4] Levenstein concludes that these campaigns failed to alter French attitudes. But he does detect an improvement in the last decades of the century, when the rise of intra-European tourism helped the French see that American tourists held no monopoly on boorish behavior.

Levenstein also enriches his story with numerous references to gastronomy. Given his prior work on the history of food in the United States, his findings here are especially insightful.^[5] Wealthy Americans’ interest in French cooking, Levenstein argues, had hit a low point in the 1930s. Prohibition deprived restaurants of their alcohol sales and thus proved fatal to many French establishments in the United States. One might have expected a quick return with post-1945 prosperity, but, surprisingly, American food tastes had evolved into “classless” forms (p. 168). New York’s most regarded restaurants after World War II often served the same steak and burger fare available elsewhere and acquired their distinction not by offering sophisticated food but simply by being exclusive. Yet by the 1950s, wealthy Americans’ increased interest in pleasure led them to roam France in search of new food experiences. Women’s magazines, which once stressed food as a way to please husbands and children, increasingly wrote about eating as a source of pleasure for women themselves. The independent-minded Julia Child was as much a product as an instigator of this revival. Another critical force behind the flourishing of gastronomic tourism was reduced airfare. With prices falling in the 1970s, upper- and upper-middle-class Americans planned each trip with confidence that it would be just one of many that they would take in their lifetime. With less pressure to see all of Europe at once, more of these tourists chose to linger in specific regions on trips in which eating experiences took the place of sight-seeing.

In recounting these trends, Levenstein has given us an eminently readable book. Historiographic debate occupies only a minor place here, while the author displays an eye for telling details and lively anecdotes, drawn mainly from newspapers, magazines, and diaries. Consider the excitement of one 1930s voyager, flush from his first bottle of red wine in France, who recorded his “astounding discovery that drinking has no connection with sin and morality” (p. 32). Another passage recreates in tantalizing detail the sights, sounds, and scams that accompanied the famed “Paris by Night” tours through the city’s nightclubs. The writing is conversational, at times literally so. One footnote cites “many interviews” with the author’s wife to buttress a discussion on how American women view French women (p. 286). Of course, Levenstein also interviewed culinary figures such as Julia Child and Craig Clairborne, other (non-related) tourists, and several experienced French hoteliers and restaurateurs.

Embedded within all this material is the important issue of decline, in particular the issue of whether France still holds the same importance in American culture that it did at the turn of the last century. With echoes of French-bashing “freedom fries” still ringing through the United States, the idea that Americans do not think as much about France might seem untimely. Long-term trends, however, paint an undeniable picture. In the international tourist market, France no longer holds a commanding lead over rival host countries. In absolute numbers, France welcomes more and more Americans each decade, but it must share these tourists with a wider range of competing destinations. Decline is even more apparent in American classrooms, where French fell behind Spanish as the foreign language of choice in the mid-1970s. Bertram Gordon’s stimulating quantification of American magazine coverage shows a marked downward turn in France’s status as “a cultural icon,” especially beginning in the 1970s. Modest gains in minor media topics such as French philosophy pale next to substantial declines in almost all other topics.[6]

How to explain this decline? Gordon stressed rising Latino immigration to the United States; European integration, which reduced the singularity of France in world affairs; and improved global transportation, which diminished Paris’ importance as a convenient travel hub. Levenstein’s book reinforces Gordon’s general argument, and then adds some new themes. Writing in the midst of the 2002-2003 Iraq crisis, Levenstein smartly downplays the importance of politically-motivated France-bashing, noting that those who trade in anti-French discourse have rarely been the types to visit and study France in the first place.

Levenstein’s greatest contributions to the question of decline are novel explanations rooted in changing American cultural norms. Most striking is Levenstein’s provocative and compelling connection between the decline of France as a cultural icon and Americans’ recent fascination with the notion of “self-actualization.” Young travelers in the 1970s, attempting to move beyond sterile and passive visions of culture, amplified the Jazz Age tendency to erase the line between self-improvement and pleasure. Self-improvement did not necessarily come by acquiring new knowledge but by encountering intense and challenging experiences. Personal growth might come in some quiet wing of the Louvre, but it might also take place in a hostel room shared with other foreign backpackers or in a drunk-driving escapade in an unfamiliar city (p. 229). This countercultural pursuit of growth through freedom, Levenstein argues, crossed the generation gap, so that by the end of the 1970s middle-aged American tourists were dressing down and placing a premium on their own “unscripted personal experiences” (p. 233). And here is where the iconic status of France began to suffer. When it came to this kind of free-form adventure, Paris was a fine stage, but so too was any place where people gathered. Worse, Parisian nightclubs had lost their edge, and the city suffered from a reputation for strict penalties on drug use. Meanwhile, destinations known for swinging good times such as London, Amsterdam, and Morocco promised more individual freedom.

Other changes in American society furthered the declining singularity of France. The end of formal Jim Crow segregation reduced France’s status as a haven from racism for African Americans. Increasingly adventurous food tastes introduced American gourmets to Chinese, Thai, and other cuisines and encouraged Alice Waters’s California cuisine movement, with its emphasis on locally produced artisanal foodstuffs. Perhaps most profoundly, Levenstein calls attention to the decline of the deindustrializing northeastern United States and the rise of the Sun Belt. By the 1970s and 1980s, a new class of business and political elites emerged from a region without a strong historical connection to travel in France. To Levenstein, George W. Bush’s lack of interest in European travel before entering the White House symbolizes this absence of Francophilia among the new Sunbelt elite (p. 225).[7] Levenstein is on to something important here. Although not an example in his book, the 1970s country music hit “(We’re Not) The Jet Set” reveals an early example of the common-folk currents that Bush later tapped on his ride to the White House. As sung by George Jones and Tammy Wynette over a straining mandolin, the song mocks Eurocentric cosmopolitanism by proudly announcing a romance sparked not in Paris,

France, but in Paris, Tennessee.[8] In an inversion of established cultural patterns, not traveling to Europe had become a status symbol.

Perhaps the essential dilemma for French culture in contemporary American life is that its historically privileged place faces challenges from two distinct, even antagonistic trends. French culture suffers from a provincial populism embodied by Sun Belt conservatism, and, paradoxically, from a growing American cosmopolitanism. While country singers tout the virtues of staying at home, the spirit of cosmopolitanism that so many Americans once cultivated in Paris has, in an age of easy global travel, shifted attention to more diverse and formerly remote destinations in Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe.[9] Cosmopolitanism's toll on Francophilia appears in other realms too. In film, the French New Wave promoted the notion of filmmaker as *auteur*, which Americans, since the days of *Bonnie and Clyde*, have adopted as their own. In food and drink, the growing interest in small-scale American producers and the ongoing discovery of *terroir* in California vineyards means that upscale Americans can pursue sophisticated gastronomy without ever visiting France. In sum, the more cosmopolitans in America act French, the less they need France itself.

Despite all this reason for pessimism, Levenstein himself chooses to end on an optimistic note, drawing not from country music but from the world of hip hop. His book's final quotation comes from entertainer P. Diddy (Sean Combs), whose 2002 visit to Paris inspired the enthusiastic comment, "These people have the food, the clothes, the love. The city is just mad beautiful" (p. 288). At first glance, this Francophilia from a black rap artist seems to suggest a broadening of interest, not a relative decline, in French culture and travel. But when we consider that P. Diddy is a New York City native who attended the private East Coast college of Howard University, we see again that France still matters most to the well-educated denizens of the metropolitan Northeast.

NOTES

[1] Harvey Levenstein, *Seductive Journey: American Tourists in France from Jefferson to the Jazz Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[2] See especially Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image, or What Happened to the American Dream* (New York: Pelican Books, 1962).

[3] More detailed coverage of these topics appears in Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).

[4] For further discussion on notions of French (in)hospitality, see my own *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

[5] See for instance, Harvey Levenstein, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[6] Bertram M. Gordon, "The Decline of a Cultural Icon: France in American Perspective," *French Historical Studies* 22 (1999): 625-51.

[7] See also Nicholas Lemann, "William Jennings Bush," *New Yorker* (10 September 2001): 47.

[8] Bobby Braddock, "(We're Not) The Jet Set," sung by George Jones and Tammy Wynette, *16 Biggest Hits*, Sony compact disc 69969.

[9] Jacques Chirac's push for a new museum of Third World art on the Quai Branly in Paris is in part an acknowledgement of this decentering of travel market tastes, even if it is unlikely to restore the prominence Paris once enjoyed on travel circuits.

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