

The French Review

From the Editor's Desk

Those of you who attended the annual meeting of the AATF in Milwaukee (5–8 July) experienced a rare treat: the first-time presence and participation of a Minister of the French government. Azouz Begag, *Ministre délégué à la Promotion de l'Égalité des chances* and noted author, delivered a compelling and compassionate opening speech on his first year as Minister. Begag began with a consideration of the influence of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Martin Luther King on his own intellectual and moral development as a young boy growing up in a shantytown without water or electricity in Lyons. King would continue to influence him after Begag became a sociologist and novelist concerned with the state of French youth of maghrebien descent in the French *banlieue*. With spirit and humor Minister Begag then turned to themes such as the need for contact among people of different ethnic backgrounds, social and economic mobility, the imperative of equal opportunity for visible and other minorities, and the new equal opportunity law in France. He closed by sharing his vision of a France where people will be judged by their competence and character—not by the color of their skin. In short, Azouz Begag inspired all of us as teachers of language and humans to be active participants in the on-going struggle for a more equitable, tolerant, and color-blind society; one that can only reach its potential by embracing its diversity. After the evening showing of the film of Begag's prize-winning novel, *Le Gone du Chaïba*, the minister provided a social and historical context for the film, answered questions from the audience, and signed books until midnight. It was a day that we will not soon forget. The text of Minister Begag's speech can be found on the AATF web site. The French victory over Portugal in the semi-final round of the World Cup soccer tournament added to the exhilaration.

The AATF was also privileged by the presence of the French Ambassador to the United States, the remarkable diplomat Jean-David Levitte. Ambassador Levitte gave the luncheon address and talked at length of French-American cooperation throughout the world. He also responded to Minister Begag by sharing his own ethnic background (his father was a Jewish immigrant from Russia, and his mother was born in Mozambique). The French Consul from Chicago, Richard Barbeyron, also attended the convention and all three viewed the France-Portugal match at the Milwaukee Alliance Française. The victory was feted with champagne!

The Milwaukee reception committee which hosted the convention (largely made up of professors from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee) pulled out the stops in providing a warm welcome. The highlight was the reception held at the Milwaukee Museum of Art housed in a stunning architectural structure designed by the Spanish architect, Calatrava. As in *Hamlet* people saw all manner of representations in the museum—from the Manta ray to the Blue whale; from a sailing ship to a bateau-mouche and more. The museum's entire collection was impressive, but people singled out the Haitian folk art and the permanent display of modern, abstract paintings and sculpture.

There were many workshops and sessions on film, the theme of the conference. There were also sessions on the 2005–06 crisis in the French *banlieues*; French/American cultural differences; Alek Toumi's reading from his play, *De Beauvoir à Beau voile*; a talk on Haitian art; the annual dictée given by Marie-Simone Pavolovich; Francophone literature from Québec to Sénégal, and from Haiti to the Maghreb. This gives you only a small sense of the richness of the offerings.

Once again we held a "Meet the Editors Session," and a dozen of us attended the Editors' Luncheon at the Lake Park Bistro. We have now selected the articles for the special issue, "La Francophonie aux Etats-Unis," to be published in May 2007 in honor of our meeting to be held in Baton Rouge, Louisiana from 12–15 July 2007. I will have more to say about the issue in the May 2007 *French Review*.

I congratulate all of you who participated in the eighth annual Semaine du Français and wish you all de très bonnes vacances et une excellente nouvelle année!

Christopher P. Pinet