

The French Review

From the Editor's Desk

In a luncheon speech delivered on 26 October 2006 at the annual meeting and convention of the Federation of Alliances Françaises USA, Inc. French Ambassador Jean-David Levitte underscored the new tenor of cooperation in Franco-American relations. He pointed to joint military efforts by the U.S. and French military operations in Afghanistan and the leadership role that France was called on to play in the Israeli/Lebanese crisis. For Levitte this shows that when the United States calls on its allies to help in joint global efforts where these countries have historical ties, things tend to turn out better than when Washington goes it alone. While the Ambassador's remarks and analysis of Franco-American cooperation were welcome and encouraging to Francophiles and Francophones alike, some of us have been wondering what ever happened to Freedom Fries and Liberty Toast.

A glance at the <miquelon.org> Web site shows a more mixed picture, at least with regards to media depictions of the French. All to the good is the news that French Fries and French Toast are back on the menu of the Capitol Hill cafeterias after a three-year hiatus. In an article entitled "The 'French' is Back in Capitol Hill Cuisine" Jennifer Duck (no canard) of ABC News reported the good news on 3 August 2006. On 11 March 2003, after France said that the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq was premature, the two Republican congressmen responsible for the change, Bob Ney of Ohio and Walter Jones of North Carolina, said that the switch to Freedom Fries and Liberty Toast was a "small but symbolic effort to show the strong displeasure of many on Capitol Hill with the actions of our so-called ally, France." According to Duck the two congressmen claimed that they had nothing to do with the change back. Ney, of course, had to resign his post on 7 August 2006 after admitting that he had taken tens of thousands of dollars in gifts from Jack Abramoff. On 16 June 2005 Jones joined with three other Congressmen in introducing a resolution calling for the start of a withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq to begin by October 2006. He also made a public admission in 2005 that he wished the renaming had never happened. Apparently the decision to change back was made by congressman Vernon Ehler, chairman of the Committee on House Affairs. His office refused to comment. As for the Senate, it never changed the names in the first place and avoided all the embarrassment.

On 2 August 2006 *The Washington Times* cited a Pew Global Attitudes survey commissioned in June to confirm that Americans felt more positive about the French. The survey showed that 52% of Americans now have a favorable impression of France, up from 46% in 2005 and 29% in May of 2003. Before the Iraq war 79% of Americans said that they had a favorable impression of France. Perhaps the slower-than-expected improvement has had something to do with the variety of television pundits, including Carson Daly, Glenn Beck, Jay Leno, and Bill O'Reilly, who continue to bash the French in front of millions of American television viewers. Marc Saint-Aubin du Cormier, the founder of <miquelon.org>, quotes Glenn Beck, who joined CNN's Headline Prime News in May 2006 from his 19 September program as follows: "Come to France, where we have lots of wine but zero spine..."; "Has the world learned anything? I'm convinced that the French government is either the biggest group of idiots or that they're constantly drunk...How many times does your country need to be overrun before you finally get it, France?" Finally, Beck said "I mean I don't know

about you, but I'm to a point where I can't even keep up with all the reasons I hate the French." There is then a series of images showing the people or things one should hate about France.

Others, like Carson Daly, continue to suggest that the French were cowards during the world wars. The "Super Frenchie" Web site in an article entitled "The New Hollywood Villain: the Frenchie!" lists nine recent Holly films that depict the French in a negative way. After the 7 November 2006 mid-term elections <miquelon.org> listed eight congressmen and women who were reelected to the United States House of Representatives and their disparaging remarks about the French made in 2003. Bill O'Reilly, of course, continues to attack the French and boycott their wine, although French wine sales are making a comeback.

There will always be those who bait and bash the French, just as there are French people who feel the same way about Americans. But we do not have to stand still for public disparagement; nor should we. So let us continue to work in positive ways to maintain strong French and Francophone ties. We also need to explain to our students why such bashing occurs and establish an historical context for them. We should certainly not let those who publicly bash the French, Quebecers, or any other Francophone peoples off the hook—let us make it clear just as publicly in our classrooms and with our colleagues that such attacks are unacceptable.

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