

came a holiday resort, a site of consumption, leisure, and contemplation, and not of productive work.

In one of the book's most interesting chapters, "Posing for Posterity," Garner analyzes the visual representations of Arcachon and native fishermen and, especially, fisherwomen through posters, postcards, guidebooks, and illustrations, which helped to create an identity for the region. Arcachon was famous for its oysters and oyster farming, which is still an important business. Photographers depicted this occupation more than any other. The *benaiize*, a form of head covering worn by female oyster diggers, came to symbolize regional tradition, even though oyster farming had developed only after the 1840s. Countless postcards show women, bent over, skirt or trousers hitched to their knees, bare-legged, suggesting an erotic pose. Garner indicates the ways in which these same women subverted the photographer's gaze. Ultimately, however, by World War I, the viewer of such images is left in no doubt that the beach belonged to the visitors, as Arcachon's original inhabitants and their boats were displaced one by one.

What makes *A Shifting Shore* unique is the way in which Garner not only captures the image of the people of Arcachon as presented by outsiders, but their experiences as well, even though she recognizes that these experiences are often mediated by the texts and photographs of others. In this sense, Garner's book constitutes social and cultural history at its finest. She has delved deeply into the local archives and sheds light on the kinds of conflicts and anxieties that accompanied everyday life, including nineteenth-century fears of drowning and the national fascination with shipwrecks. In this masterful story of change, this talented historian was compelled to learn about the principles of engineering, map-drawing, oyster-farming, architecture, navigation, and medicine. In so doing, she has succeeded admirably in showing how Arcachon was transformed over the *longue durée*, even though many of the nineteenth-century tensions between locals and outsiders still clearly live on.

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Bringing the Empire Back Home: France in the Global Age. By Herman Lebovics (Durham, Duke University Press, 2004) 240 pp. \$29.95

The reasons why France has made headlines in recent years in the United States may seem incomprehensible to many Americans. How could a sheep-farmer who destroyed a McDonalds become a national hero? Why, if not out of ungratefulness, would the French government lead an international cabal to undermine American foreign policy? How could a democratic state forbid its citizens from wearing religious displays, if this is what their faith demands? All of these apparently disjointed French peculiarities stem from the central question of Lebovics'

lively new book: What does it mean to be French today and what constitutes France's shared national heritage?

The book proceeds to answer these questions by examining sequentially five ways in which the nature of French national identity has been challenged in recent decades. The interesting first chapter, "Gardarem lo Larzac!", examines the birth of the antiglobalization movement in France *avant la lettre* by focusing on the struggle of ecologists, pacifists, and urban leftists in the early 1970s to promote regionalism in a highly centralized country and to link their regional struggle with the anti-imperialist decolonization movements of the 1960s. The second chapter delves more deeply into that link by exploring how France implemented an activist cultural policy in response to the erosion of its colonial empire. Through a fascinating focus on a Corsican civil servant named Emile Biasini, Lebovics recounts how successive governments used cultural instruments in order to pursue the country's *mission civilisatrice* within the borders of continental France.

In the third chapter, the author develops the idea of *patrimoine*—a word difficult to translate with precision—conveying the sense of a shared national legacy, by focusing on internal conflicts and reforms within the field of ethnology. Chapter 4 examines the effect of multiculturalism on the traditional concepts of an indivisible republic and universal rights, and it questions whether France's culture and polity have been updated to become pluralistic. The last chapter focuses on the recent "dance of the museums" to approach the question of what is distinct about France—what the French like to refer to as their national exceptionalism.

Bringing the Empire Back Home is, in a way, a tour de force. Through its lively narrative, it succeeds in painting a complex portrait of contemporary French identity and of the tools that socially and politically construct it. The book is particularly strong in showing how the current struggle to contest globalization arose from the interplay between French cultural policy and decolonization, and from the fact that the French centralized model manifests itself in all walks of life—from controlling academic curricula to deciding on the content of museums' collections.

Yet Lebovics' methodology, based on a juxtaposed narrative of five different challenges to French identity, leaves something to be desired. First, the focus of certain chapters on individuals and others on institutions seems to lack any underlying logic. Why not, for instance, pick an important actor in each of these five areas to illustrate the evolution of French identity? This consistency might facilitate the analytical leap from narrative to explanation, as well as to political implications, which introduces a second weakness of this book. Some of the paradoxical developments in contemporary French politics are not foreshadowed by the recent history as told by Lebovics: Why is the moderate right increasingly gaining the favor of the immigrants and the *beurs* (a variation of the French term, *arabe*)? Why is Jacobin republicanism a value of the

left, preventing the emergence of affirmative action and “positive discrimination”? Why has President Chirac, a conservative, become a national and international herald of anti-globalization, at least in rhetoric?

The strongest reservation about this otherwise interesting book is that it does not discuss the construction and constant reactive reconstruction of French national identity. What it means to be French is also partly defined by what it means not to be French. France’s exceptionalism emerges largely in opposition to the perceived flaws of other nations’ characteristics—the United States’, for one. On a related note, the author’s contention that the European Union does not enter French identity because it is not part of the French heritage is puzzling, to say the least. If true, he needs to explain why. The current lively debate on the European Constitution and the future of European integration certainly shows that this issue is far from settled. But is Lebovics correct? After all, France has abandoned much of its national sovereignty to Europe over the years, not the least its national currency, the Franc, a symbol until then of national identity. Whether the construction of French identity includes a European dimension is worth exploring further, perhaps in another book.

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Bruges: Cradle of Capitalism. By James M. Murray (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005) 409 pp. \$100.00

Before Antwerp, Amsterdam, and London became, in Braudel’s view, anchors of the early-modern world economy, Bruges was the trade center of northern Europe, and the economic midwife to these heirs.¹ For all its economic complexity and cultural richness, fourteenth-century Bruges is surprisingly understudied, especially outside of Belgium. Murray’s new book is a fresh, deeply researched social portrait of the city and its economic life from the late thirteenth to the late fourteenth century that goes a long way to fill this scholarly lacuna. The book bristles with important social data about Bruges’ financial world and its wider civic realm, offering a compelling, impressively researched case study of early capitalism in a mercantile society. For this reason alone, Murray’s study should be of signal importance to scholars who seek to understand better one of late-medieval Europe’s economic linchpins and how its nexus of moneychangers, brokers, hostellers, and merchants made Bruges an international “node and network” of commerce, finance, international trade, and textiles.

Murray’s book offers the fullest portrait hitherto of Bruges as an early center of capitalism. This city, after all, had the famous Bourse

1 Ferdinand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism. III. The Perspective of the World* (London, 1984).