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Stephen L. Harp, *Marketing Michelin, Advertising and Cultural Identity in Twentieth-Century France*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001. xiii + 356 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 U.S. (cl.). ISBN 0-8018-6651-0.

Review by Rosemary Wakeman, Fordham University.

Using Bibendum, or the Michelin tire man, as his mascot, Stephen Harp has written a first-class advertising and cultural history that is both informative and engaging. Bibendum is a well-known twentieth-century cultural icon that makes a fascinating story in its own right, as the book's many good illustrations attest. However Harp has successfully taken on a much more ambitious challenge, that is to explore what Michelin's promotional campaigns reveal about twentieth-century French culture and society, its representations of race, class, and gender, and its understanding of modernization and Americanization. In doing so, *Marketing Michelin* provides us with a provocative portrait of France and the ways in which its business culture contributed to its transformation. This is key because the conclusions drawn by historians of French business have too long been a straight-jacket of censure and condemnation, with the opprobrious adjective "Malthusian" as the ultimate indicator of "backwardness." French business history also has been slower to share in cultural research. Harp's book is thus a welcome, fresh perspective on corporate strategies and their impact on twentieth-century French identity.

Harp argues that Michelin's marketing offers a useful case study for the cultural impact of business because of the diversity and breadth of the company's efforts to sell both its products and the causes the Michelin brothers held dear. In an age of growing automobile travel, the advent of aviation and modern gastronomy, intense nationalism, preoccupation with birthrates, gender, and social roles, "Michelin managed to link its name with each of these phenomena" (p. 2). André and Edouard Michelin's Bibendum was a white, upper-class Frenchman, a man about town, a conqueror of both women and empire, a sportsman and automobile enthusiast who appreciated how well pneumatic tires ate up the road. By appealing to the bourgeois who could afford to buy its product, Michelin helped to define and confirm social identity. In an age of nationalism, Michelin tires were quality French goods backed by technical assistance and customer care. Through its advertising and public outreach, Michelin both reflected and helped to create a vision of modern France.

Although Harp's analysis of race and gender is perhaps self-evident, his study of Michelin's promotion of tourism breaks new ground in understanding how France was constructed as a modern landscape. Working alongside the Touring Club of France, Michelin paved the way for auto touring with its famous Red Guides, its drawing of tourist maps and itineraries, its support for road numbering and regional gastronomy, and in general by lobbying for the modernization of France's provincial tourist infrastructure. The result was to domesticate the French provincial landscape and make it acceptable for bourgeois experience. Harp argues that Michelin had a role in "defining and disseminating a form of national consciousness among the French bourgeoisie" (p. 88). No where was this more important than in Michelin's tours of the First World War battlefields, where the company interpreted the war in a nationalistic vein as the result of German aggression and invented a tourist viewpoint that mimicked that of the nation's victorious generals.

Identifying with French patriotism was a brilliant marketing concept that fit together nicely both with the Michelin brothers' worldviews and with André Michelin's support for pronatalism as the key to France's future. Michelin's support for the pronatalist Alliance Nationale and the company's generous family allowance policies helped to forge the language and values of a modern, paternalistic welfare system. The company offered subsidized housing, medical insurance, recreation programs, and munificent family allowances meant to produce an industrious and loyal workforce. Harp argues that it was this merging of modern business strategies with French patriotic causes such as pronatalism that produced Michelin's successful public image as a quintessentially modern French firm in the interwar years. The company thus was able to introduce a French version of Taylorism and Fordism--archetypal American business strategies--and to associate itself with modernity and the future. Given the recent takedown of Jean-Marie Messier for attempting much the same thing at Vivendi, this was no mean feat. Chez Michelin, the mass production and mass consumption of automobiles (each of which needed four Michelin tires) was not an effort to "Americanize" France but rather a way to modernize and preserve French industry in the face of the American menace. To paraphrase the advertisements, Bibendum could vanquish even that formidable obstacle.

The brothers' advocacy of modernization and their patriotism extended to the promotion of French aeronautics. This was not so much advertising as it was lobbying for a strong air force to protect France from future invasion. Yet it kept "the Michelin name before the French public" as a symbol of progress and technological innovation and "helped to define the interests of the French nation" (p. 157). As with so many of its causes, Michelin worked with promotional organizations, in this case the Aero-Club of France, and established competitive prizes to generate publicity and support. Here as well, Harp examines André Michelin's crusade for American production methods that would allow France to compete in both commercial and military aviation and thus protect itself from future German threat. In the process, Michelin was instrumental in associating modern French identity with technological prowess--as measured by its automobiles and especially by its airplanes.

A better sense of the reaction to Michelin's marketing would be useful to Harp's study. Only the proverbial "anti-American" comeback is offered as a foil to the company's pervasive message. One can imagine no end of biting satirical responses toward the Michelin brothers' alter ego Bibendum. It would be interesting to know more about Michelin's influence on French business practices in general. More importantly, the key term in *Marketing Michelin* might well be fecundity--more babies, more tourists, more automobiles, and more airplanes. Harp concludes his study by affirming the degree to which Michelin was able to associate its name with French national identity in the first half of the twentieth century. The company helped create a "certain idea of France," that it was "the place to eat, drink and tour, and a place of modern innovation" (p. 281). But the fear over French survival, the dread of the nation's falling behind in a mass cultural age filled with other people, other commodities, and other threats underpins this material and is worth further reflection. The crucial interplay between corporate culture and mass culture would also be important to consider theoretically as well as within the context of this case study. These queries would only help to enliven an already engaging contribution that advances both French business history and cultural history by leaps and bounds.

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