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Richard F. Kuisel, *The French Way: How France Embraced and Rejected American Values and Power*. Princeton, N.J. and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012. xxii + 487 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$49.95 (cl). ISBN 978-0-691-15181-6.

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Richard Kuisel broaches a topic that would scare off many historians—the very contemporary history of French perceptions of America. It is fitting that one whose work has told us much about these attitudes earlier in the twentieth century would do so, however, and in many ways, *The French Way* serves as a complement to Kuisel's work on the postwar decades. This is in part because the attitudes and mentalities underlying French-American tensions are enduring. As sister republics, these two nations have much in common, and it is a commonality that lies at the heart of the tension, since "Rooted in history and lodged in the people's collective psychology was the conviction that the French, like the Americans, had a special global mission" (p. 353). Or, as Kuisel pithily remarks, "the Americans and the French are the only two people who believe everyone else in the world would like to be them" (p. 353). These universalizing ambitions, as well as the French perception that the United States was alternately obstructing its ability to act or foisting its own values upon a nation unable or unwilling to resist, have been a source of tension for far longer than the period under study. Kuisel engagingly traces the ebbs and flows of this relationship in the final two decades of the century, all the while highlighting the contradictions within French perceptions of the United States and showing how America has served as a foil against which France can define itself, a measure to use in judging whether it can become modern yet remain independent.

Kuisel focuses his analysis on the areas of international relations, economic policy, and popular culture, themes that are reminiscent of his earlier work.^[1] He deftly highlights both the twists and turns in French perceptions during these two decades, as well as their internal contradictions: the French consumed American products, yet criticized them; cooperated internationally with the United States, yet resisted American hegemony; and suspected American intentions overseas. The general arc of public opinion that Kuisel traces starts with a France more receptive to America at the end of the 1970s than in previous decades, in large part, because of the diminished influence of both Gaullism and Communism, which was compounded by a general loss of respect for the Soviet system, whose oppressiveness strengthened the appeal of the United States. During the 1980s, perceptions remained quite positive, but these turned toward the negative during the 1990s. It might be surprising for American readers to learn that Ronald Reagan was relatively popular in France, where public opinion approved of his "amiability, optimism, good sense, self-assurance, and courage," qualities which were perceived as a welcome improvement on predecessor Jimmy Carter's "vacillation and soul-searching" (p. 20).

Conventional wisdom suggests that Bill Clinton's cosmopolitan qualities should have appealed to French tastes, but his administration's approach to the handling of events in Eastern Europe fostered antagonism in the hexagon. One of the many incidents Kuisel analyzes, the fallout from the military exercises in the Balkans, encapsulates some of the recurring difficulties of the French-American relationship. France took a leading role in implementing United Nations resolutions in the former Yugoslavia, and Jacques Chirac urged the United States to take a more assertive role in the conflict, but when the Dayton Peace Accords were held, France was given a backseat in the process. Kuisel quotes Richard Holbrooke's admission, "The French say that they were humiliated at Dayton and they were right" (p. 222). France found itself both unable to oppose the United States on its own, and

unrecognized when it cooperated with the Americans. These events contributed to the perception that France was being denied its rightful place as a world power.

Kuisel's explanation of the new tensions that arose at the end of the Cold War will be a fitting sequel for those familiar with his work on the postwar period, at which time the Cold War and Communist opposition did much to shape opinions of the US. Ironically, it was the end of the Cold War that once again increased tensions in the 1990s. Conflict over the future of NATO in a post-Cold War world pitted the United States, which planned to maintain its political influence in Europe, against France, which sought to create a European alliance outside of NATO. Negotiations over the re-entry of France into NATO's command structure faltered over the prospect of placing American troops under European command. Once again, France was unable to assert what it saw as its rightful position. As Kuisel notes, "Paris believed that Washington, despite its rhetoric about burden sharing with Europeans, did not want to share its authority over security" (p. 229). And when foreign minister Hubert Védrine remarked, "when the United States works with others, it always has a hard time resisting the temptation to tell them what to do" (p. 264), he was expressing a frequent frustration of the Atlantic Alliance.

Kuisel's analysis of perceptions of the American government generally focuses on American attempts to wield power in the international arena, as well as views of economic liberalism. For some in France, American economic dogma seemed a threat to French *dirigisme* and notions of the social contract that undergirded French republicanism. Moving beyond diplomatic and economic history, Kuisel examines elite opinion of the United States, French receptiveness to American business practices and culture, and American cultural imperialism in the form of the iconic brands of McDonald's, Coca-Cola, and Disney. Addressing the scholarly debate on the extent to which American products were thrust upon Europeans unchanged or were forced to change to meet the individual conditions of host countries, Kuisel maintains that there was very little adaptation at work. The three companies he examines made small modifications, "but they did so without changing anything essential about their operations, products, or appeal" (p. 207). For the French, however, these products "helped change consumer habits of eating, drinking, and leisure" (p. 207). Kuisel views the adaptation thesis as too benign and emphasizes the changes wrought by American firms.[2]

Both Kuisel's discussions of elite opinion of the United States and his analysis of American products and practices are fascinating, showing both the complexity and the internal contradictions of French perceptions. He also shows the durability of stereotypes and impressions over time. The opinions expressed by those such as Jack Lang, the socialist minister of culture in the 1980s, are reminiscent of intellectuals in the 1950s, revealing the tenacity of perceptions that American culture was, in the words of Lang, "an international mass culture without roots, soul, color, or taste" (p. 63). Despite the consistency of such characterizations, Kuisel shows how proponents of what he calls "anti-anti-Americanism" combatted the rhetoric of Lang and others and how true anti-Americanism was relegated to the ends of the political spectrum by the end of the 1980s. The fact that some of the claims about the United States were so similar to those of the postwar decades left me hoping for more discussion of how this rhetoric has survived despite the fact that the relative positions of France and the United States have changed significantly. Especially interesting is the contrast between the immediate postwar years—during which period France was only slowly becoming a mass consumer society while the United States reigned uncontested—to conditions at the end of the century, at which point France had an indigenous mass consumer society and American primacy was challenged by other capitalist powerhouses, such as Japan and Germany. Granted, too much comparison would have shifted Kuisel's focus away from the 1980s and 1990s, but a bit more explanation of change (or lack thereof) over time would have made for interesting reading.

More discussion of the lifestyle changes wrought by the earlier arrival of mass consumer society in France might also add to the author's discussion of the impact of American entertainment, food, and drink in the 1980s and 1990s. Kuisel includes an illuminating discussion of the campaign against *la*

malbouffe—or bad, standardized food—as well as the introduction of a “Taste Week” in schools, where chefs visited classrooms and children took tours of farmers’ markets. This does suggest that despite the changes to France in the second half of the century, a particular French tradition of food remained part of national identity. I wondered, however, how much of this perceived need for education was due to the spread of McDonald’s and the “hamburger industry,” and how much was due to other changes in lifestyle that started as early as the late 1950s, when supermarkets and other features of mass consumer society began to spread in France.[3] While in the 1950s prepared foods from the grocery store were viewed as an unappealing element of American society, by 2006 a significant percentage of French meals included packaged meat, fish, or vegetable dishes and were bought in supermarkets.[4] Whether this is now a practice considered French, and no longer associated with the United States, would be interesting to know. Kuisel does allow that changes in diet are likely related in some degree to the fact that more women work outside of the home, but further exploration of the role played by internal changes to lifestyle and consumption might complement what he shows us about changes imposed from the outside. It would also be instructive to explore which elements of American culture are attractive, and why, to particular segments of the population. While Kuisel does refer to myriad opinion polls reflecting attitudes toward the United States, it is less clear what the French public liked, and why, than what it disliked. What American culture offered particular groups at this moment might be interesting to explore, though admittedly, it is perhaps a sufficiently involved topic to comprise another monograph.

Finally, though Kuisel explicitly states that he has chosen not to discuss immigration policy in his treatment of this relationship, I could not help but wonder how the introduction of new languages, foods, and lifestyles might have influenced campaigns such as those lauding French food or attempting to maintain the purity of the lexicon. Kuisel states that one cause for French resentment was that “Americans seemed to mock assimilation with their advocacy of multiculturalism as the preferred approach to immigration” (p. 363), something which ran counter to French notions of how to integrate newcomers. Even leaving to the side the question of immigration policy, Kuisel does seem to imply that a unitary French identity, defined by “literature, the arts, humanism, food, *bon goût*, and the French language itself” (p. 354) continued to hold sway in France, despite the demographic change experienced in the second half of the century. The role of immigration in the drama Kuisel describes would be interesting to explore. Further, it is striking that many of the sources of tension he links to anti-Americanism: the threat to national sovereignty posed by European integration, the precarious position of the French social model, and the idealization of the French notion of republicanism, are factors that Joan Scott has identified as significant contributors to negative perceptions of Islam that exist in France.[5] This issue raises questions of how opinion toward immigrants and their French-born children and toward anti-Americanism might be related.

However, to ask for further explanation is probably unfair, given the territory that Kuisel has already covered in this work. Therefore, my questions are instead ones for future historians, who will be indebted to Kuisel for this readable yet detailed analysis of French views on American politics, economics, and popular culture in the late twentieth century. His work both explores the specific challenges and high points of the 1980s and 1990s and shows the consistency of French perceptions and sources of tensions across the second half of the twentieth century. I have addressed very little of what he covers in his long and meticulously researched work, which will become, as are his other works, a must-read for historians of society, culture, and diplomacy in the late twentieth-century.

Notes

[1] For the post-WWII period, see Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[2] For historians who emphasize the modification of American products, see Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture since WWII* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); and Uta Poiger, "Beyond 'Modernization' and 'Colonization,'" *Diplomatic History* 23 (1999): 45-56. See also the summer 2000 issue of *Diplomatic History*, which includes Jessica Gienow-Hecht, "Academics, Cultural Transfer, and the Cold War—A Critical Review," *Diplomatic History* 24 (2000): 465-494 as well as a series of essays on the topic, including one by Richard Kuisel.

[3] See Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and William James Adams, *Restructuring the French Economy: Government and the Rise of Market Competition since World War II* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1989), 220-1.

[4] See Rebecca Pulju, *Women and Mass Consumer Society in Postwar France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 212.

[5] See Joan Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 6-7.

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