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Name: Lindsey Morgan

College: Arts + Sciences Department: Modern Languages + Literatures

Faculty Mentor: John B. Romeiser

PROJECT TITLE: "The Pas de deux of France and the U.S."

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

Signed: John B. Romeiser, Faculty Mentor

Date: 4-16-04

Comments (Optional):

Excellent, well researched piece of work.

The *Pas de Deux* of France and the United States:
An Analysis of Cultural Relations
During Operation Iraqi Freedom

Lindsey Morgan
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Abstract

Since France helped the United States win the Revolutionary War in the eighteenth century, the two countries have been involved in a love-hate relationship that has been tested by several key events in history. Most recently, the United States' policies and attitudes concerning Operation Iraqi Freedom have once again strained the countries' rapport and caused many people, both French and American, to question the other's intentions and actions. Each country reacted in very different ways to their disagreements about government policy and citizen support of that policy, and this disparity was most likely caused by pre-existing opinions and views. While French citizens as a group chose to chastise George Bush for his decisions about Iraq and overwhelmingly took an "anti-Bush" stance internationally, Americans focused their energies on attacking French culture and French people, using humor as their main method of chastisement.

This article seeks to explore the current relationship between France and the United States during the Spring of 2003 with two basic themes as a starting point; first, that cultural differences and mindsets create misunderstanding between nations, and second, that political similarities cause mutual frustrations. Research was done by pinpointing key dates during the war and comparing and contrasting responses to each key event in *The New York Times* and *Le Monde*. Analysis and commentary of responses is made based both on cultural differences and attitudes and my experiences as an American student living in France at the time.

The story of the relationship between France and the United States has been a veritable rollercoaster of good times and bad, as well as friendly relations with an undertone of suspicion about the other's silly quirks and foreign policy. While the reasons for the sometimes annoying, always comical, *pas de deux* between the two countries are interesting, more intriguing is how each culture has chosen to cope with, approach, or just relate to, the current situation. Everyone knows that there are two sides to every story, and we can go even further and say that there are two sets of lenses that we can use to look at the two sides of the story. Inherent cultural differences lead to different *reactions* to those cultural differences, and witnessing those reactions simultaneously leads to some very interesting observations. That is to say that since the United States and France are very different, they will react to those differences in unique ways. It is the ways each reacts that are of interest to us.

The word "culture," we come to find out, can be a very loaded word, and can have different connotations depending on its use in describing political, social, economic, or national ideas. For the purpose of this study, the word culture will refer to the traditions, backgrounds, and way of life of a people insofar as these aspects can be justly generalized to the majority of the population of the country. We should start by examining the cultural differences that will explain how each country views its differences. Ironically, though, what the curious onlooker finds out when he very diligently observes France, then does the same with the United States, is that maybe the differences are not the problem after all. Maybe, just maybe, small differences that become apparent in times of crisis highlight grand similarities that have been existent, if not painfully evident, for nearly two centuries. The fact of the matter is that no country,

whether its own ego tempts it to believe so or not, is isolated from the rest of the world. No action, we learn, is without an equal reaction, and this theory holds true when speaking of nation states in the international community. (It might amuse us to challenge the element of this famous theory of Newton's that claims that the reaction is "opposite;" we may be surprised to find out that it is the similar reactions that cause the biggest problems.)

The United States could not have gained its independence without the help of its loyal French ally. And as the new nation made its entrance into the global, or at least Western, community, it could not help but affect its transatlantic neighbor. Only six years after America finished its revolution, France experienced its own. And here we see the first evidence of how the same type of situation can be, and was, approached from two radically different angles. The effects of the back-to-back revolutions were dramatically different, which comes as no surprise when we take into account the dramatically different groups of people involved. The United States had been won by patriots willing to do anything to gain freedom from an oppressor an ocean away. However, the French bourgeois and lower classes were battling their own people—oppressors at home (the nobility, royalty, and church). Furthermore, the people within each class system and the people running the government were somewhat different than those in the New World, although many got along with each other. Thomas Jefferson, for instance, spent a great deal of time in France. So of course, everyone involved reacted differently in the face of a crisis.

While Americans struggled with the essential hardships of creating a new democracy, French citizens in the nineteenth century read de Toqueville's *Democracy in*

America while suffering through republic after empire after republic. Both revolutions were based on new ideas of liberalism from writers such as Locke and Rousseau (French, no less.) But the results of the revolutions would color, or taint even, the lenses through which each culture would view the reality of liberalism in the future. While the love-hate relationship of the United States and France becomes much more complex over the course of the next two centuries, most relevant to Francophiles and Francophobes alike today is the present situation of the American (note: not United Nations') war in Iraq. Just as the two countries responded differently to their revolutions in the eighteenth century, they responded differently to the impending crisis in the twenty-first century. These two countries, with very different personal histories that had developed in the same world, once again clashed on their very strong views about a third country. What each did, and what each did not do, would affect the other, and neither, similarly, was willing to give in.

Historical experience, but also cultural mindsets, creates misunderstandings. One thing that any French or American must agree on is that in their beloved democracies the voice of the people really does matter. The opinions of the people are important in politics, for better or for worse. Politicians' decisions trickle down to the people, but the people's opinions trickle up to their elected politicians. Franklin, Jefferson, and Lafayette communicated with citizens of the other culture. But today that communication has broadened so that Americans can read French newspapers as soon as the French, and vice versa. Thousands of Americans live in France and interact with the French every day, and thousands of French live in America and interact with Americans every day.

Communication is fast and efficient, so that a large part of the citizens themselves

are communicating with each other and totally altering the way foreign relations work. The Internet has totally altered the speed at which information is shared, and non-political citizens can access information just as soon as politicians, in some cases. Citizen support of their own government policy is important to citizens under other governments, and in democracies, those angry citizens have the opportunity to make their voices heard. These voices and opinions, displayed in newspapers as well as many other media, make Franco-American relations from February to May, 2003, months of great interest to the international community.

Media, although it is not independent of or isolated from the government, is what citizens rely on to obtain information and formulate opinions. Although publicists and journalists would have us believe otherwise, it does, indeed, make a difference whether I read a newspaper in Paris or New York. The same facts, whether we would like to believe it or not, are presented in slightly altered ways. And slight alterations have great consequences in the way we form opinions.

While living in Rennes, France, a small university town in Brittany, I embarked on the not very small task of attempting to actually get both sides of the story that was the Crisis in Iraq, and later the War in Iraq. Every day I immersed myself in information, which I liked to think was wholly to educate myself on what was going on in the world and to embrace this wonderful international opportunity head on. However, I was also preparing myself for the daily debates I was having with French and fellow international students on campus and in the dorms. At first the motive behind my reading multiple newspapers was simple: read *Le Monde*, then refer to *The New York Times* website to make sure I was understanding all the French vocabulary and getting the story straight.

However, it did not take long before I started realizing that, while most of the numbers in the papers reported the same information, and I was basically getting the same story no matter what source I checked, small but important things were vastly different. This difference, of course, makes sense; different people see things in different ways, which we notice even in comparing liberal and conservative American newspapers. But I began to view the way the newspapers presented the story as a way to try to understand some of those cultural differences we all learned about in our preparations to go abroad. Officially, France and the United States were on opposite sides of the Iraq debate, and their newspapers were like an unofficial code with which to track their reactions to the series of events that would follow.

To try to break that code in the French and American newspapers, I have chosen several key dates during the months of February to April as reference points with which to check the newspapers and look for small discrepancies in the way each presented important events. Headlines, photographs, captions, placement in the paper and page, and cartoons all served to present a clear attitude that evolved in each country into what would become an unofficial reaction to the crisis. The attitudes were relevant on both an international level and on a personal level for every citizen, since as previously noted, reactions seem to both trickle down and trickle up. So we will start this chronology at the beginning of the end of past diplomatic conditions: February of 2003.

February 1: The Beginning of an International Crisis, Personally and At Large

I arrived at Charles de Gaulle airport in the morning and had my first experience with stereotypical differences almost immediately. Our train was eventually three hours late, which everyone said was unheard of but which I came to chalk up to typical French

attitudes regarding promptness. Meanwhile, on a more international scale my culture and “theirs” were beginning our own *pas de deux*, misunderstanding of different ingrained attitudes. Hans Blix, on January 27, had reported to the United Nations suspicions that Iraq was moving hidden items at inspection sites before visits. The seeds of doubt were planted, each government responding to the news about Iraq.

February 14: The Impatient Brat Decides the Moment of Truth

Colin Powell addressed the United Nations Security Council on Valentine’s Day, citing UN Sanction 1441 as “not merely a process of inspections that goes on forever without ever resolving the basic problem.” The difference, as became the subject of every headline of newspapers in both countries, was just what constitutes forever, anyway. Everyone, every government, only has so much patience, and the United States definitely earned the reputation, during the Spring of 2003, as the impatient, spoiled little brat of the international community.

On the front page of *The New York Times*, the headline “Powell Calls for U.N. to Act on Iraq and Meets Deep Resistance” addressed the problems the United States had encountered at the Security Council meeting. Each country’s leaders struggled to define their places in the decision-making process. Powell, recognizing America’s youth, described it as “the oldest democracy” assembled at the moment. De Villepin, French Minister of Defense, took a more humorous approach, referring to France as part of the “Old Europe” that Americans had already begun to chastise, but noting his pride in this title.

The New York Times, on February 15, presented page upon page of editorials along with word-for-word speeches made by American and French politicians, including

a full page detailing the goings-on of the Security Council meeting. On the same day, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the front page of *Le Monde* read, “War or Peace: Hour of Truth.” From the beginning, then, the French and American newspaper-reading citizens seemed to be receiving information that was not quite the same. While *The New York Times* news stories presented war as the means for peace, *Le Monde* presented war as the thing furthest from it. The American front page picture showed the United Nations “main players” faces looking their parts: de Villepin the un-cooperating and concerned quasi-ally, and Powell the defensive (also concerned) representative of the future of democracy.

The French front page showed only a cartoon, of an Uncle Sam figure holding a U.S. dollar sign made of missiles (see Appendix A). Already in the mind of the French media, the judgment on the potential war’s motives was made and printed for all to see. Truly the whole issue was already a debate with no exit. The same term, appropriately, was used by Sartre in his book about three people who came to realize that not only were they in hell, but that hell was for each of them the other people.

The French newspaper also began a section that would appear in each edition called “The Iraqi Crisis.” On the first page of the February 15 section, a cartoon featuring President Bush and Prime Minister Blair noted the lack of hard evidence that the French felt would be necessary to justify a war. Almost as important as the comment on lack of evidence (since in hindsight, the French may just have been the correct ones on this topic) is the growing view of Tony Blair as becoming George Bush’s marionette. This view caught on quickly with French citizens and perhaps made them more determined to make a point of not jumping on the bandwagon, especially if the wagoneer

was going to be an American. In civilization class my very diverse classmates (four Americans, three Chinese, three Japanese, one Macedonian, one Afghani, one Yugoslav, two Russians, and one Iranian) laughed as the French teacher wrote the word, in English, "lap dog" on the blackboard, describing Blair (see Appendix B). Conversely, of course, Americans started seeing the prime minister as an excellent ally whose lead de Villepin and Chirac should follow.

March 7: The French are Always There When They Need US

Three weeks after Powell addressed the Security Council lecturing about 1441, he again pled with members to bring the issue to a vote. He accused the Iraqi regime of being un-cooperative, with no plans of changing. Although some time had passed, it, of course, was not enough to satisfy "Old Europe" (This phrase, originally coined by Donald Rumsfeld, became one of the most popular ways with which to refer to the non-complying nations of Europe). Perhaps its relative youth made the United States more eager to attack the issue and get answers. Perhaps the wisdom and experience of "Old Europe" found patience to be the safer route, since in the past impatience had caused detrimental effects that nobody wanted replayed. (French citizens had already stood by pitifully watching their enemies march through their beloved Arc de Triomphe as a result of wars they had lost.) Each side of the debate, certainly, had strong reasons behind their views. Indeed, each claimed to be arguing for the same goals: peace and democracy. It was the means, not the ends, that became the issue that some thought might finally bring the era of the United Nations to an end.

As of March 7, a truly important question became the topic of debate and loathing, at least internationally among citizens of France. What would the United States

do if, as it was becoming evident just might happen, France (at least) vetoed a new resolution to invade Iraq? In *The New York Times* the issue only made a side story, titled “U.N. Split Widens as Allies Dismiss Deadline on Iraq.” They got one fact correct: the U.N. was definitely splitting. But while Americans saw the ball as being (until the U.S. decided otherwise, that is) in the Allies’ court, the French newspapers described the situation much differently.

The front page of *Le Monde* read “Bush: War, With or Without U.N.” with a cartoon featuring George Bush serving up more missiles (see Appendix C). The French, as I came to find out in various conversations with classmates and dorm-mates, took this plan very personally—a sign of disrespect towards an ally. If Americans had not been viewed as arrogant before March 7, this move definitely put the nail in the diplomatic coffin. And, coincidentally, Americans were starting to see the French as arrogant themselves; here was a situation in which the United States was asking for assistance, and many citizens felt the French were refusing to help out of pride, not principle.

Countless references to past times when Americans had “saved” the French surfaced in newspapers, late night comedy shows, and day-to-day conversations in the United States. The reputation of French citizens, not just France, was threatening to become one of an ungrateful group of people who were only willing to become involved when they were the ones who needed help. For now in the newspaper, French officials were blamed as leading a coalition against actions by the United States. Most discussion in *The New York Times* focused on the future of the United Nations; to parallel the press, bumper stickers and signs at public events encouraged American leaders to get us out of the U.N. Perhaps the individualistic culture of the United States led to the assumption,

correct or incorrect, that America (and American dollars) was the driving force behind the alliance anyway, and that we could face the world alone—especially if our allies were not helping when we needed help anyway. However, those actions should not discount groups of people, both French and American, who desperately wanted to preserve the sanctity of the United Nations. Assuming the United States could “go it alone,” as it were, could prove to be an extremely dangerous gamble.

The New York Times called March 7 a “day of emotion and undiplomatic bluntness,” with Americans and their opposing allies battling it out over what should be done about Iraq’s quasi-compliance. The news from Hans Blix and his team of inspectors was just enough that either side could use the news for its own benefit. Colin Powell spoke of Iraq’s actions as not compliant enough, while de Villepin urged members of the Security Council to see his actions as the beginnings of compliance, which would justify more waiting. It was as if each team were fighting not just about its view on a country or its safety, but about its very place in the international forum. Each was judging the other, sure to reference decisions and attitudes in the future.

If competition, whether economic, political, or military, is not the leading cause of conflict and problems in the world, it is definitely one of the top ten. The interesting phenomenon we see during the Iraqi crisis is the multi-directional paths of competition. For example, besides the competition between Iraq and the rest of the world (the United Nations pressured Hussein to comply with previous sanctions while he refused, each wanting the upper hand) France and America experienced several different types of competition as fellow anti-Hussein governments. Competition for status in the United Nations led, in a way, to competition between the countries, which led to tension between

citizen groups. Each claimed, indirectly, a type of moral superiority over the other, while simultaneously chastising the other for its air of superiority. As stated previously, similarities between people of a nation cause mutual frustrations; that is to say that since both the United States and France saw themselves as past or present centers of culture or progress or morality or political greatness, competition concerning these principles was brought to light when competition within the U.N. became an issue.

March 16: Actions, or Inactions, Speak Louder than Words

As the month went on with the same arguments and counter-arguments being hashed out over and over, people started getting nervous. I started getting emails from people asking if I felt safe and if I thought I would be sent home when the war started. I assured them, as did my fellow American students, that I did not feel I was in danger. I was advised to stay away from large cities and anti-war (read: anti-Bush) rallies, but this advice was difficult to follow. Never in a million years would I have thought I would see so much of America during my semester abroad, but the face of my president, posted in a mocking way, seemed to be on the door of every school building and street corner.

As an American student, a kind of unofficial ambassador with information about “how Americans feel” about the war, French students jokingly told me “I hate Bush” (the “h” in hate, of course, comically lacking) but followed it with a chuckle that seemed more sympathetic to my situation than resentful. They assumed I would be against the war, since that was the impression the French media gave about Americans. Bush was seen as a leader who a) saw himself as appointed by God (this phrase was shared with me many times) and b) who was not supported by the majority (some figures I heard in class implied an amazing 90% disapproval rating) of Americans.

In the back of my mind, sitting in civilization class, I wondered how the mood would change once the United States symbolically declared itself above the opinion of the United Nations Security Council. Even the threat of this arrogant act occurring was enough to anger any good French citizen; so once it actually happened, I feared, I might be facing some serious and not so friendly criticism. On March 16, when Bush gave Hussein a 48-hour ultimatum to leave Iraq, moods were certainly changing, or becoming more extreme. In the United States there were mixed feelings about this seeming point of no return. The same newspapers showed one page of articles supporting the war and another of petitions of academics and others who vehemently opposed it.

One article in *The New York Times* traced, somewhat depressingly, the “long, winding road to a diplomatic dead end.” Bush’s opinion remained that, after all, it was Hussein’s decision whether there would be war or not; he simply had to leave the country and cooperate with the international community and all his problems would go away.¹ More emphasis was put in American papers on the relationship of the United States and the world if diplomacy was in fact over than on the impending war with Iraq. Last ditch efforts were made to win France over, or at least convince leaders not to use their vetoes at the next Security Council meeting. Overwhelming frustration that had been evident to Americans since late January with de Villepin led to a feeling of hopelessness about the prospect of France’s declining to use her veto.

Perhaps one of the most interesting and subtle differences used when telling the one story from two different angles was the use of pictures during the final days of deliberations and first days of the war. For example, on March 16 at the United Nations Security Council talks, when Blair, Bush, et al. were discussing diplomacy and its

impending end, *The New York Times* and *Le Monde*, not surprisingly, presented on their respective front pages two very different portraits of President Bush, taken from the same angle at the same conference (see Appendix D). *The New York Times* shows Bush glancing at Blair with a worried, concerned glance: head level, slight frown, his face in focus in an otherwise blurry photograph. In *Le Monde's* version, Bush's head is slightly turned up and he seems to be looking over at Blair through arrogant, slitted eyes (see Appendix page). While both accurate (they had to have happened since we saw photos of them), the two pictures that each newspaper chose to show its readers were obviously picked to back up the stories that they represented. The viewpoints of each country about the war, the talks, the question of diplomacy and what that meant seemed to scream out from behind the glance of George Bush in that one scene.

March 19: Decision Day

The expiration of Bush's 48-hour ultimatum to Hussein to leave marked many ends and beginnings. The beginning of the war marked the end of what had been the mostly friendly, sometimes suspicious, relationship between the United States and France. While throughout their history each had good-naturedly poked fun at the other and its "arrogant" ways, now there was fuel for the fire, and the mocking and talk of cultural differences took on a more serious and hostile tone. In class in France, the Americans started becoming the target of conversation, not participants in it. Once we unexpectedly (I came to find out that most French citizens thought most American citizens were against the war) started defending what Bush was doing and questioning the inactions of the United Nations, the other international students judged us just as harshly as they did Bush, and the tone of the class, our own little international community, also

became extremely nervous. Interestingly, almost all the American students with whom I came into contact in France defended America's policies, whether they were for or against war in general. Most said being in an environment in which their country was being put on the defensive made them more patriotic and made them want to defend its actions.

Meanwhile on a larger scale, anti-war rallies were springing up everywhere. And they were becoming less anti-war and more anti-American or anti-Bush. People on both sides of the issue were growing more and more resentful; the French resentful of the arrogance of Americans to go into war knowing the United Nations was against it, and the Americans resentful of the arrogance of the French not to join the war and act like an ally. While each of the governments was scrambling around to try to salvage what was left of the United Nations and international relations, it seemed like the citizens had given up. While they realized that politically it was not wise to cease diplomacy, on another level jokes were made left and right by radio stations, newspaper columnists, and talk show hosts. Humor and culture-bashing became a way to vent while the higher-ups tried to keep international relations smooth.

The New York Times ran a story sympathizing with French winemakers and tracing the history of Americans and French in the industry. Americans had started unofficial boycotts (complete with dumpings reminiscent of the Boston tea party) of French wine to show their disapproval of foreign policy: an example of focusing on the citizens of France instead of the government that made the policy. That is not to say that the government escaped criticism of its own. The newspaper also ran the second installment of a story titled "French Connection" that implied a less than honorable

relationship between France and Iraq (Americans were also fond of calling the president “Jacques Iraq” to imply this same relationship).

The front page of *Le Monde* read “The war, its time and its legality” criticizing, again, the United States’ going into the war with no support. Where American newspapers talked of bombing in Baghdad, the French papers described life in Baghdad ending, little by little. Where pro-Bush Americans saw the bombing and war as a temporary means to a better end of a peaceful Iraq sans Hussein, the French saw it as a hopeless crusade that would not bring the ends that the Americans hoped for. The newspaper also talked about the degrading American image through Europe because of its war; interestingly, though, they used figures collected by the Pew Research Center in Washington, D.C.

Discrepancies about war-related opinions could be found in the media as well; Michael Moore’s anti-war acceptance speech during the March 23 Academy Awards Ceremony is a prime example. In the March 25 edition of *Le Monde*, an article explained that many awardees chastised the Bush administration and that Moore was both applauded and booed for his remarks. However, on the major news networks in France we watched clips of his speech followed by clips of a standing ovation—a response he definitely did not receive. While a somewhat subtle implication and not yet a direct untruth about what had happened in America and citizen opinion in the United States, ways of presenting information indeed played a large part in communicating the wartime environment between cultures.

April 1: The Definition of “Fool” Depends on Your Point of View

The New York Times, under a picture of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and General Richard B. Myers, described the two as “lashing out” against critics of the war in Iraq. Resistance, it seemed, was not tolerated at all. Fortunately for them, the majority of Americans at the time supported the effort in Iraq, especially once the forces proved successful. More importantly, American citizens were overwhelmingly supportive of the troops sent to Iraq. By focusing more on troops and less on the fact that there was a war going on with Iraqis losing their homes and families, a more positive tone was found. For instance, two stories appeared on the front page: one of Arab volunteers helping coalition forces, and another of Private Jessica Lynch’s rescue. Another picture on the front page showed American soldiers helping a wounded Iraqi woman, an image that would be greatly contrasted with French photographs.

In celebration of April Fool’s Day *Le Monde* showed Iraqis (women, children, and mustached men) holding “Welcome” signs and “April 1st” signs greeting the arriving American fools—everyone smiled and a seemingly moved but fooled soldier, planted on a tank with gun in hand, thanks them with teary eyes (see Appendix E). It seemed that the French were not as impressed as the American government wanted them to be with their progress towards Baghdad.

Meanwhile, the demonstrations against the war continued. One particular event that I accidentally encountered was held downtown in Rennes. All during the weeks before it was nearly impossible to walk anywhere, get on the metro, or be on campus without someone handing me a flyer against the war. Even after the war was over, in fact, the pamphlets continued. Tee shirts with George Bush’s face on them that read (in French) “Bushism: the new facism” seemed to spring up everywhere. Tensions were

high, but most anger and frustration were directed at the American and British governments, not at us as American citizens. After all, we must like the French a little, since we had decided to live there temporarily. One should not underestimate, however, the effect seemingly incessant conversations about how one's home country is wrong and becoming evil can have on a person already somewhat stranded in a place. It seemed, by April, that opinions were getting personal.

The United States was no different; indeed, it may have been worse than France in its tendency to make the grand issue of the war into a sub-issue of cultural differences and petty conflicts with the French. The most talked about reaction was certainly the "freedom fries" that replaced French fries in Washington, D.C. Could our government be so childish? Were these jokes and slight changes in vocabulary just a distraction from the seriousness of the war, or were people really reacting to having been insulted by the French inaction and lack of support? Perhaps, in the end, these jokes can be attributed to an overall tendency of Americans using humor to lighten up a situation. Since talk show hosts and Saturday Night Live comics regularly mock American politicians, actors, and stereotypes, perhaps it is unfair for the French to take such offense at simple name calling. The question is whether, now that ordinary citizens can spread their ideas internationally and in such broad scope, they should take more responsibility and adopt more diplomatic attitudes.

APRIL 15: Winners and Losers and Little Red Hen Syndrome

Walking into a campus dining hall in Rennes and seeing television images of Iraqi children cheering in the streets by a fallen statue of Hussein may be one of the most striking memories of my time in France. Finally, I thought, I can stop defending

Americans against the reputation of being oil-mongering colonizers. Surely, I told myself, people would not be able to ignore the images of how happy the Iraqis now were. While I realized even then that there was much work to be done and that nothing, really, was “over,” part of me was very relieved to see some positive news on French television.

By the middle of April, while the Iraqi crisis was still only just beginning, the major combat was ending and the coalition forces had taken Baghdad and officially ousted Saddam Hussein. Relatively speaking, compared to other wars the war in Iraq had been quick and American casualties were few. Many accounts had focused on civilian injuries and deaths, but still soldiers tried to keep these statistics to a minimum. Overall, most news seemed to be good news. Finally the forces were seeing success, and news programs showed countless images of Iraqis tearing down a statue of Hussein and cheering in the streets. Headlines in *The New York Times* clearly portrayed the overall sentiment of this (temporarily) joyous and hopeful time. Front page stories “G.I.’s and Iraqis Patrol Together to Bring Order,” “Pentagon Asserts the Main Fighting is Finished in Iraq,” and “In Hometown, Hussein’s Glory is Quickly Gone” assured American readers that the war had been a good thing. One picture showed an American sergeant napping in the Republican Presidential Palace in Baghdad, an unquestionable proof of victory.

The April 15 issue of *Le Monde* was less optimistic. While the T.V. stations did not neglect to show faces of happy Iraqis, newspaper stories focused on the destruction that had occurred and the lives that now needed to be rebuilt. Two quotes that stood out in large print were “If this continues like this, there is a risk of civil war!” and “The Americans demonstrate their presence but remain unable to establish order.”

Furthermore, the majority of French citizens remained unimpressed that the coalition forces had been victorious in Iraq. While *The New York Times* focused on the present and how much happier the citizens seemed to be, *Le Monde* made clear that military success does not justify war. This statement, of course, was right. It appeared in American newspapers as well, just not on the front page.

Now that, for better or worse, combat had happened, the world was entering into a new phase in the Iraqi situation. The question of how to rebuild, begin a government, and keep the country as peaceful as possible became the most important issue on everyone's minds. *Le Monde* printed articles suggesting that French officials wished the United Nations to be in control of any nation-building projects in Iraq. According to people's comments in my classes, this idea was the general consensus in European countries. The United States should not be in charge of keeping military control in Iraq or placing a leader to begin a new government; this very important issue should be the decision of the United Nations.

Unfortunately, this feeling spurred on another round of each country calling the other arrogant, and each country finding offense at being called arrogant. An analogy could be made to the story of The Little Red Hen, who repeatedly asked the other farm animals "who will help me sow the seeds?" and questions such as that. At the end of the story, when the bread has been prepared and is ready to be enjoyed, the pig, cow, and other animals are shocked and disappointed not to be able to share in the reward. The moral is obvious: the reward is only to be enjoyed by those that shared in the hard work. Why should the other animals expect to eat bread, when they refused (even though asked) to help prepare it?

Of course, baking bread has no moral implications, but the American attitude at the “end” of the war, when the United Nations wanted to be included in the rebuilding of Iraq, was similar to that of the little red hen; other nations had their chance to send troops or money to help invade the country and refused. Now it was up to the United States and its coalition to finish the project they had begun.

EPILOGUE

By the time my plane left Paris in May, Franco-American relations, from what I could tell on a personal level, had entered into a phase of trying to be diplomatic and preventing the situation from becoming any worse than it already was. In a short amount of time, tensions had become high and everyone had grown very nervous about the future of the relationship of France and the United States. While government officials attempted, and in many cases succeeded, to repair newfound suspicions and hostilities about the other’s stubbornness, ordinary citizens reacted in different ways. The threat was not over and the war on terrorism had only just begun. However, Operation Iraqi Freedom and the constant feeling of impending doom and actual combat were over.

Reactions of citizens differed not as much according to their nationality, but according to pre-existing views on international relations and the other country in general. Some French citizens were excited about the possibility of the United Nations’ presence in Iraq and a new era of Franco-American relations, while others still focused on the fact that the United States had ignored France’s wishes and de facto removed itself from the authority of the international community. Demonstrations continued to be held in the streets, typical of a French reaction to any issue. People still talked about the war

and the American presence in Iraq, but other issues crept onto the front page of *Le Monde*, such as the SARS virus in Asia (and now other countries) and local news stories.

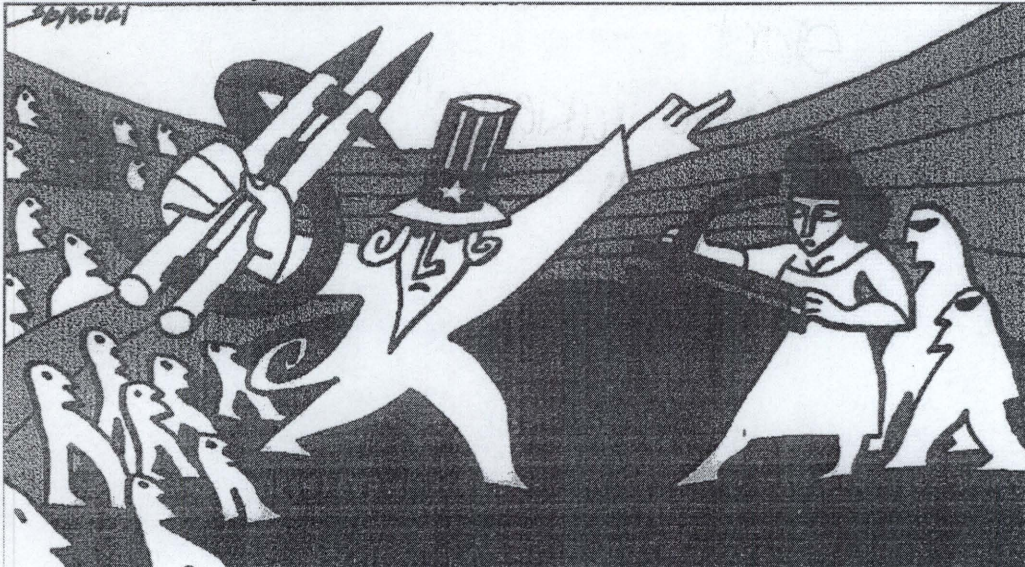
For the United States the Iraqi crisis continued to be a dominant issue. Soldiers continued to be sent overseas and families continued to be affected. News stories focused less on the lack of support from France (and therefore French diplomacy) and more on what American soldiers were doing and how Iraqi citizens were reacting. In effect, the issue had moved from a question of Franco-American relations and what would become of the United Nations to a question of Iraqi-American relations and what was becoming of the United Nations insofar as it affected America. While some feelings of resentment remained and jokes about the French still lingered, nobody was really worried that France and America could never be friends again.

Over the four months that I lived in France and had the opportunity to witness an American (and international) crisis from a non-American perspective, I learned a lot about how people in different situations and nations respond to the same international situation differently. By talking to people from both countries each day, asking the same questions to both friends and family in the United States and classmates and teachers in France, I found out that each was approaching the war from different backgrounds and cultural mindsets. Of course a French citizen would view a war, especially an American-encouraged war, differently than an American citizen. Even though the world is becoming more and more global, differences remain in countries and long histories are impossible to ignore. After all, history does repeat itself, so depending on the particular history of a country, people are going to be more or less willing to repeat certain events.

Possibly the most interesting and important detail I learned through my systematic decoding of French and American mindsets was the tremendous influence newspapers and other media have on citizens. Facts are the same regardless of in which newspaper they appear or what language in which they are read; what is important, and what can make the difference in the process of forming an opinion or attitude about an important issue, is how those hard facts are presented, and which facts are deemed as most important in which newspaper. A list of statistics by a glaring photograph of George Bush incites a different emotional reaction than that same list by a concerned and calm photograph of the same man. The most influential aspects of a news story might possibly be the ones we do not realize are there, and this fact begs incredible questions as to the power of newspapers, and public opinion, in shaping the future of international relations in the world.

Appendix A

Le Monde, February 15, 2003



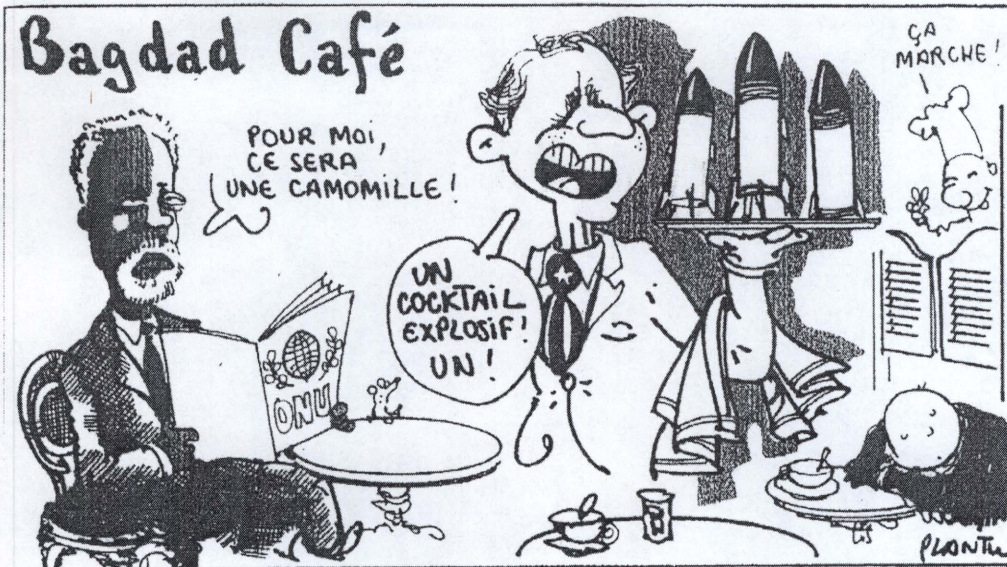
Appendix B

Le Monde, February 15, 2003



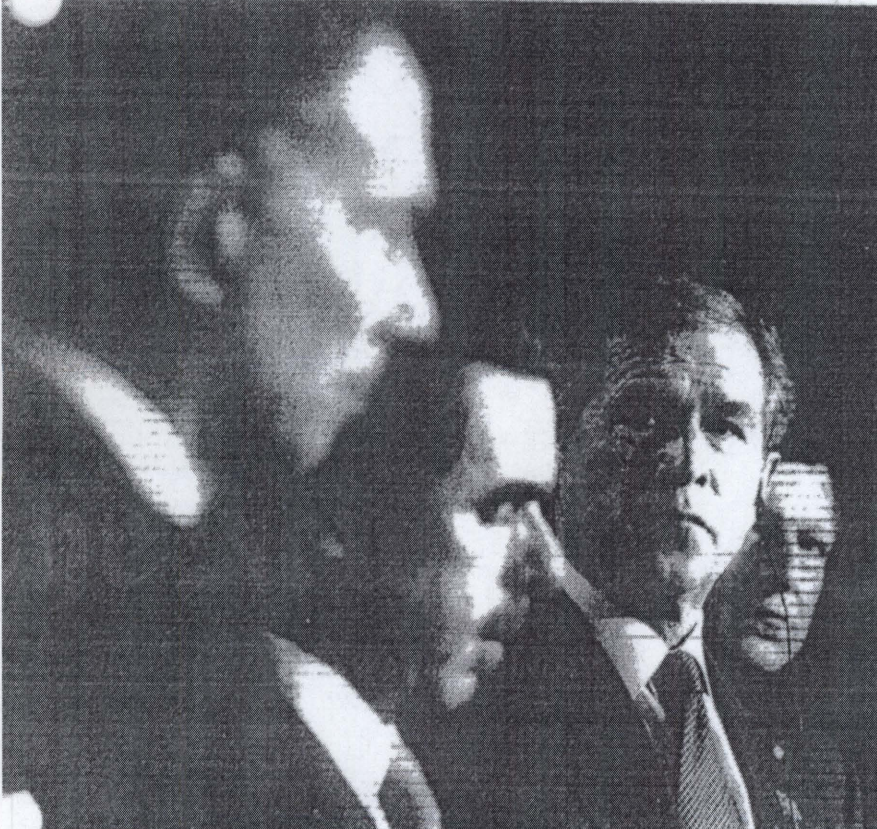
Appendix C

Le Monde, March 8, 2003



Appendix D

The New York Times, March 17, 2003



Le Monde, March 17, 2003



Appendix E

Le Monde, April 1, 2003

