FRENCH FOOD VS. FAST FOOD:
JOSÉ BOVÉ TAKES ON MCDONALD’S

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This thesis explores the French farmer and activist José Bové and his widely publicized protest against McDonald’s France in August 1999. With the help of 300 demonstrators, he dismantled a partially constructed McDonald’s restaurant and caused an international stir. Many factors influenced Bové’s protest: his background in radical agricultural activism, a historical overview of French-American cultural relations, and tensions over globalization in France. José Bové’s protest has undergone many interpretations, some that favor his cause and some that do not. Even after his trial a year later, several issues remained unresolved—how much damage the protest caused and whether the action against McDonald’s was a legitimate (if illegal) form of protest. McDonald’s France has responded to Bové’s criticisms by changing its image, décor, and menu offerings. José Bové is a complex character; though his tactics are extreme at times, he has successfully raised awareness about issues that contemporary French society faces.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated

to my mother, DeAnn Clyde Spencer,

for teaching me how to work

and to my husband Eric,

for teaching me how to relax.
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Many thanks to Chester Pach, my thesis advisor, for his patience as a mentor and teacher. He has always pushed me to excel and has helped me develop a more engaging writing style. Thanks also to Katherine Jellison for her stimulating classes and good humor. Lois Vines added many fresh insights into French culture.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Adventures of Astérix, a popular French comic book series, follows the escapades of Astérix, a mustachioed, spunky Gaul, and his humorous companions. The first page of every Astérix adventure begins: “The year is 50 B.C. Gaul is entirely occupied by the Romans. Well, not entirely. . . . One small village of indomitable Gauls still holds out against the invaders. And life is not easy for the Roman legionnaires who garrison the fortified camps of Totorum, Aquarium, Laudanum and Compendium.” The villagers lead a simple, happy life, feasting on wild boar, drinking good wine, and giving the numerous, but idiotic,
Romans a good thrashing.

While the comic series is set more than 2000 years ago, it still resonates with the French today. In the past few years, France has witnessed the reincarnation of Astérix in the person of sheep farmer José Bové. This contemporary French hero led a highly publicized protest against McDonald’s in 1999. Angry over tariffs the United States and Canada placed on luxury food items, such as the Roquefort cheese he produces, Bové decided to stage a demonstration. On August 12, he and three hundred other farmers dismantled a McDonald’s under construction in Millau, a village in southwestern France. A self-styled warrior against American cultural imperialism, globalization, and fast food, Bové has risen to stardom. Although he received a three month prison sentence for his demonstration, he declared himself the victor and called for the French to rise against fast food and all that it symbolizes—industrialized food production, loss of individuality, cultural monotony, and extinction of the small farmer.

The media’s treatment of Bové’s protest against McDonald’s often reads much like an Astérix comic book. Newspaper headlines such as “José Bové: ‘Astérix’ is at it Again,” and “The New Astérix” abound. Many sources note the similarities between Bové and Astérix. The handlebar moustache is an obvious parallel (see Figures in 6 and 7 in Chapter 2), but the similarities go beyond appearances. Like Astérix, Bové presents himself as a simple peasant defying the imperial forces of globalization and Americanization. Though he has thirty years of experience organizing radical, militant protests, Bové appeals to the public as a
farmer and *paysan*. Substituting a modern French setting for an ancient Gaul village, an updated version of the comic book might read: “The year is 1999 A.D. France is entirely occupied by McDonald’s. Well, not entirely. . . . One small village of indomitable French farmers still holds out against the invaders. And life is not easy for the surrounding McDonald’s.”

Is José Bové really a modern-day Astérix, single-handedly warding off encroaching McDonald’s franchises? Is he France’s new Robin Hood, as other sources have called him, robbing from big business and defending the right of the peasant to eat, and in this case, eat properly? And is the United States really a cultural imperialist, shoving cholesterol-laden hamburgers and fries down the throats of people accustomed to Roquefort cheese and red wine? While such images are appealing as well as entertaining, they turn out to be too simplistic to properly explain why Bové attacked McDonald’s and why he has remained such a popular national and international icon.

**A Brief Who-dun-it**

On August 12, 1999, José Bové led a group of farmers belonging to the farmer’s union Confédération Paysanne (CP, or Farmer’s Confederation) to a McDonald’s building site in the center of Millau, a town in the Languedoc region of southwestern France. The group dismantled parts of the building, then used tractors to transport some of the pieces over to city hall. Bové left town the next day to go on vacation, having no idea of the stir the demonstration had caused. When he learned there was a warrant for his arrest, he returned to Millau and turned himself in—after arranging a press conference in which he articulated his
reasons for the protest.

After his arrest, José Bové went to prison, along with ten other protesters. Bové chose to remain in jail, rather than be released on $17,000 bail—a move that encouraged his image as a “martyr” imprisoned for attacking the encroachment of “mal-bouffe,” his derogatory term for fast food, which translates as “junk food” or “bad grub.” Bové remarked, “I refused to pay bail because you can’t buy trade union freedom.”1 Supporters soon raised the bail money for him. He finally decided to leave after a twenty-day stay. After his time in prison, he was “welcomed by his wife, daughter, and several CP militants. With them, he good-naturedly shared regional products in a picnic organized in front of the prison.”2

If Bové’s arrest and jail sentence caused a stir in France and around the world, his trial a year later was even more sensational. Thousands of sympathizers and protesters flocked to Millau on 30 June 2000 for the trial. Bové arrived with nine co-defendants in a tractor-pulled wagon, surrounded by a crowd of enthusiastic supporters.3 The crowds waiting outside the courthouse held an informal “trial” on globalization, declaring it, and not Bové, the guilty party. But in September, the court sentenced him to three months in prison—a harsher sentence than he had expected.4

At first glance, José Bové’s protest is an amusing anecdote, a cute story of

1 J’avais refusé de payer une caution parce que la liberté syndicale ne s’achète pas.
2 “Libre, José Bové Continue le Combat Contre ‘La Mal-Bouffe,’” Bretagne Online 8 September 1999 (13 April 2001 <www.bretagne-online.tm.fr>).
3 “Festive Anti-Globalization Protesters Descend on French Town For McDonald’s Trial,” Agence France Presse (AFP) 13 September 2000 (13 April 2001 <commondreams.org/headlines/063000-04.htm>).
4 “France’s Anti-Globalization Hero Gets Jail Term for McDonald’s Attack,” AFP 13 September 13, 2000 (13 April 2001 <commondreams.org/headlines/091300-03.htm>).
a French peasant versus international giant. That was my initial reaction. While researching French nationalism for a paper about right-wing extremist Jean-Marie le Pen, I happened across an article in *The Spectator* about Bové’s protest, “Liberté, Egalité, and Fries” by Andrew Jack. The title intrigued me, so I kept reading. It was my first exposure to José Bové. When I finished, I laughed and said to myself, “How typically French.” Strikes, demonstrations, parades, and fruit-and-vegetable throwing are common French pastimes. After living in France for two summers, I learned first-hand that the French love to stage protests. When I was first in France, in the summer of 2000, the ATM cash deliverers were on a nation-wide strike for several weeks, making life difficult for visitors like me. I remember that my French 101 textbook devoted an entire chapter to French social unrest. I learned how to say “demonstration” and “I am on strike” along with “Where is the restroom?” and “My name is Rixa.”

But José Bové’s story is more than just a stereotypical French *manifestation*. Looking at the circumstances and events that prompted Bové’s action reveals several significant issues facing France today. When he chose McDonald’s as a target of protest, Bové targeted a symbol of American culture that the French love to hate and that sells a culture and a way of life, not just hamburgers and fries. As a member of a radical farmer’s union, Bové defends the precarious existence of the small French farmer against large corporate farms. Bové’s protest also reveals tensions over globalization in France. France is struggling with how to become a modern market economy without losing its culture to the homogenizing influences of globalization. The recent rise of fast
food restaurants has threatened French identity, which is so often linked to its renowned culinary tradition. José Bové’s protest opens a window to the pressures facing a country that wishes to be a viable global participant but tenaciously guards its culture and traditions.

To make sense of Bové’s famous/infamous protest, I turned to Thomas G. Paterson’s article, “Defining and Doing the History of American Foreign Relations: A Primer,” for structure. Paterson suggests that American foreign relations history should examine four levels of interactions: international, regional, national, and individual. To have a “comprehensive understanding of Americans and their foreign relations requires an analysis of all four parts and of their inter-relationship.” Even if a particular topic emphasizes one of the levels, all four types of analysis are necessary for a well-balanced view of American foreign relations. Each level can reveal important insights into the topic. Paterson’s method suggests that events at one level are connected to their larger context. Applied to the story of José Bové, this method can help reveal the complex factors that have evoked such strong anti-McDonald’s and anti-globalization sentiment in the past few years.

At an international level of analysis, global issues such as the international economy, cultural ties across nations, and “crossnational images” take center stage. Several international factors play a major role in French dislike of McDonald’s specifically, and globalization in general. A recent round of tariff

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6 Ibid., 38-39.
wars between North America and Europe and McDonald’s aggressive international expansion are two of them.

After the European Union refused to import hormone-enhanced beef from the United States and Canada, the North American countries appealed to the World Trade Organization. In response, the US and Canada, under the authorization from the World Trade Organization (WTO), imposed $124 million in punitive tariffs in July 1999 on certain agricultural products from Europe.\(^7\) Tariffs of 100% on French products, including Roquefort cheese, foie gras, and Dijon mustard, upset farmers who produced those items, Bové included.\(^8\) Farmers affected by the tariffs expressed their anger through several rounds. McDonald’s was a popular target. Bové has continued to pressure European Union officials to take action against the tariffs, but so far has had no success. These international trade disputes played a large role in Bové’s decision to demonstrate against McDonald’s.

In addition, the restaurant’s aggressive international expansion has provoked negative reactions in France and around the globe. In 1986, almost forty years after the company began in 1948, McDonald’s operated in forty-five countries.\(^9\) Now that number has nearly tripled, to 28,000 restaurants in 120

\(^7\) See Appendix A for an abbreviated list of items affected by the tariff.
countries. A new restaurant in the chain opens somewhere in the world every seventeen hours. Jonah Goldberg of *National Review* notes that McDonald’s is so prevalent that “Political scientists constantly use McDonald’s as a metaphor; *The Economist*, the world-wide tip sheet on global prosperity, uses a ‘Big Mac Index’ to measure disparities in purchasing power around the globe.” Over fifty countries have witnessed protests against McDonald’s since 1995. Critics complain of the restaurant’s predictability, monotony, of its “imposition of dreary sameness on the social and physical landscape.” In France, some worry that the restaurant’s “commercial hegemony threatens agriculture and [its] cultural hegemony insidiously ruins alimentary behavior—sacred reflections of French identity.”

Looking at regional as well as international elements of an issue can also highlight important factors. Regional identity influences a “nation’s security, vulnerability, freedom of choice, cultural, political, and economic ties.” France and the United States both envision their ways of life as universal, as the global ideal. When these two nations interact, each convinced of the superiority of their culture, animosity often arises.

In his book *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II*, Richard Pells shows how America has exported much of its culture into Europe and argues that much of

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13 Paterson, 39-40.
that culture has become “Europeanized.” He identifies the major problem of both Europeans and Americans: “how to live in two different worlds—one global, the other local or regional—while reaping the benefits of both.”

That tension is certainly prevalent in France, where elements of American culture tenuously co-exist with deeply embedded traditions—preference for artisanal rather than mass-produced goods, for example. Bové is an outspoken critic of globalization, but he owes his enormous popularity to globalization. Without the internet and other technological innovations that link the world together, Bové might be just another upset and obscure French farmer.

France and the United States have had a particularly intense love-hate relationship. The two countries have been allies but rarely friends. In his article “Franco-American Relations: French Perspectives,” Yves-Henri Nouailhat comments that: “For some French people, the United States is an example to be imitated; for others, it is the very example of what not to do.”

This ambivalence towards the United States has created a longstanding tradition of anti-Americanism that varies in scope and intensity. Much of the contemporary French rhetoric against globalization has descended directly from anti-Americanism, except that globalization’s critics view issues in a wider context and portray the United States as less of an aggressor and more of a victim. Thus, Bové’s arguments against globalization have a historical precedent.

The third level of analysis, the national level, explores domestic or internal

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conditions particular to the France. These factors explain why Bové’s method and form of protest were “typically French.” Understanding McDonald’s economic and cultural roles in France, the French tradition of farmer protests, and the role of food in French culture helps place Bové’s action in context.

McDonald’s is a major employer in France, providing over 45,000 jobs and numerous contracts with French farmers.\textsuperscript{16} It fills a niche previously neglected—the part-time job market. Before fast food industries entered France, very few part-time jobs existed, other than summer seasonal work such as grape harvesting or tourism. With part-time employment suddenly available, high school and college students discovered opportunities to work and go to school simultaneously. McDonald’s has capitalized upon this new labor market and done quite well, especially because France has such high unemployment (around 12\%).\textsuperscript{17}

Other fast-food hamburger chains in France such as Quick, a Belgian restaurant, have encountered no public opposition, although their food, marketing strategies, and restaurant designs mimic McDonald’s. This indicates that anti-Americanism plays a larger role that Bové would like to admit. Although he insists that he is not anti-American, just anti-globalization and anti-big business, his actions suggest otherwise, because he did not target any other foreign fast food outlets.

The nature of Bové’s protest and its widespread support also make sense.
in the context of two very French traditions: farmer protests and fine cuisine. As Janis Valls-Russell notes in her article “Fighting Fake Food: A New Hero in France,” farmers take a very active role in France. She writes, “Angry farmers are part of the French landscape. Destroying truckloads of Italian tomatoes or barrels of Spanish wine, and emptying tons of unsold fruit and vegetables in city centers is almost a hobby for some of them.” Dismantling a fast food outlet falls squarely into this tradition.

Bové also struck a familiar chord in the hearts of many French with his rhetoric about “mal-bouffe” and its pernicious effects on the French palate. In a country that prides itself on its fine cuisine, fast food can seem very threatening. Many of Bové’s protests have included organized picnics featuring local gastronomic products, such as Roquefort cheese, baguettes, and red wine. He describes his struggle as a “battle against globalization and for the right of peoples to feed themselves as they choose.”

After looking at international, regional, and national factors in the Bové incident, we must finally learn more about Bové himself. Paterson argues that individuals and their unique personalities influence the course of international affairs. Understanding “what made them tick” is a necessary aspect of foreign relations history. Although Bové promotes his image as a simple sheep farmer, he is a well-educated man with years of experience organizing radical protests.

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18 Valls-Russell, 6.
21 Paterson, 41-42.
The son of left-wing university professors, he lived in Berkeley, California for four years as a child. He learned organizing and protesting techniques while he spent ten years with other activists and small farmers trying to stop a military expansion on the Larzac plateau.\textsuperscript{22} He co-founded the Farmer’s Confederation in 1987 and has been an active participant ever since, helping its membership grow to over 40,000.\textsuperscript{23} Bové has also displayed sophistication in using the media to further his interests, staging colorful protests and making the most of his celebrity status. A simple sheep farmer might not have met with as much success as did Bové, with his years of experience in organized protests.

Chapter 2 explores José Bové’s formative experiences that prompted his involvement in radical activism as well as farming. I also discuss how Bové has used and has been used by the media. The next chapter gives the thesis a historical context, looking at the history of French-American relations, particularly as matters of culture are concerned. Chapter 4 builds upon the themes introduced in the previous chapter to explain José Bové’s arguments against globalization. In chapter 5, I look at Bové’s protest and trial in detail, focusing on some of the unresolved controversies that emerged in the media and the courtroom. Chapter 6 investigates McDonald’s in France—how it functions in the society and particularly how the restaurant has attempted to modify its image in response to Bové’s protest. In chapter 7, I offer some of my personal observations and feelings about José Bové—and why this project continues to intrigue me.


\textsuperscript{23} Kingsnorth, 39-40.
Conclusion

Exploring the many factors that have influenced Bové’s opposition to McDonald’s reveals that no single explanation can sufficiently account for his actions or for their popularity in France. Factors such as agricultural tariffs, ambivalence towards the United States and its culture, and fears of losing one’s traditional culture, for example, have all worked together to influence Bové’s choice to protest against McDonald’s. Simple explanations—that Bové is merely an outraged peasant defending his livelihood, for example—are insufficient to explain a complex series of events. In the end, Bové is more than just a modern-day Astérix, waging a simple campaign of good versus evil. Instead, he is a complex character enmeshed in the currents of both global and local influences.
If polled after the summer of 1999, the French might have chosen not actor Gerard Depardieu, not soccer player Zineddine Zidane, and not even President Jacques Chirac as the most recognizable face in France. Sheep farmer José Bové would have claimed the prize. This mild-mannered paysan has a not-so-mild history of radical, militant protest and civil disobedience.

José Bové’s years of activism and participation in radical protests have given him extensive knowledge about how to capture public attention. To the public, he promotes himself as a quintessentially French folk hero and has carefully crafted a persona that captures the essence of the traditional French paysan. But his public image and rhetoric are at odds with his everyday activities, which involve far more radical activism than organic farming. Bové has been able to promote himself as a simple peasant farmer through skillful manipulation of the media and extensive reliance on methods of mass communication made possible by the phenomenon he decries: globalization. Is Bové’s message any less “authentic” or significant, knowing that he is much more than just a farmer? Perhaps not. But the discrepancies between the Bové-the-person and Bové-the-persona are nevertheless fascinating.

Bové Playing the Peasant

José Bové has a gentle demeanor and is soft-spoken. People in the Larzac know him by his mountain hat and trademark pipe. He is slightly stocky. Journalists describe him as good-natured, with “ruddy” cheeks and “luminous” or “twinkling” blue eyes. He
wears a handlebar moustache, typical of a French peasant, that receives frequent commentary.¹ One journalist sums up Bové’s peasant persona: “A martyr for globalization, José Bové has the physique for the job. Stocky, pendulous moustache, an impish rogue always holding his inevitable pipe between his lips and leather satchel over his shoulder, he corresponds to the idea everyone holds of the French peasant” (see Figure 2).²

² Martyr de la mondialisation, José Bové a le physique de l’emploi. Râblé, la moustache pendouillante, avec une tête de lutin goguenard, serrant entre ses lèvres son incontournable pipe jamais allumée et portant musette de cuir en bandoulière, il correspond à l’idée que chacun se fait du paysan français: Barlow
Despite his pastoral manner, José Bové is hardly a backwoods peasant. One newspaper comments, “He’s not ‘authentic.’ He is more a city man.” Of course, his peasant persona is not all artifice. He has run a successful organic farm since the mid-1970s, as well as established a pattern of communal land ownership that other collectives in France have copied. He could not act the part of a simple farmer while staging highly
sophisticated, articulate protests without both backgrounds: working the land and training in radical, militant protest.\(^3\)

**Childhood Years**

Born in Bordeaux in 1953, José Bové is the son of two scientists, researchers in the food industry. His father, José Bové Sr., recently stepped down as director of the French National Institute for Agronomic Research near Bordeaux. His grandparents were market gardeners. When Bové was three years old, his parents moved to Berkeley, California to pursue their studies. The four years he spent in California exposed him to the English language. Of his Berkeley years, Bové remarks, “I have strong memories of America. I really like the United States. The language is still in my ears and it really helps to be able to explain things to the Americans in English.”\(^4\)

Bové’s political activism began at an early age. He was only fifteen when the student rebellions and nationwide strikes of 1968 occurred in France, and he soon joined antimilitary causes. At age fifteen, he chained himself to a group of antimilitary protesters, and his parents had to retrieve him from jail a few hours later.\(^5\) The next year, he began to criticize French society, “which he considered too militarized and too much under the nuclear shadow.” He organized a campaign that eventually shut down his Catholic school in May 1968.\(^6\) His enduring pacifism and antimilitarism estranged him from many other left-wing groups that focused on gaining power. Bové gravitated toward

\(^3\) Bremner, “The New Asterix.” En tout cas, pas un ‘authentique’ Il est plutôt un homme de la ville: Barlow
\(^6\) Michael McCarthy, “The Little Man From the Massif Central Brings His Battle To Britain,” *The Independent* 14 June 2001: 3.
the disarmament movement and helped defend conscientious objectors, who at the time could face life in prison. (Until just a few years ago, France required military service of all young men.)

Bové’s activism is typical of many of his generation who, after the social upheavals of 1968, reacted against middle-class, conservative ideas in search of something more meaningful. A “child of May 1968,” Bové joined many other French students-turned-activists who took part in back-to-the-land movements to symbolize their dissatisfaction with bourgeois France. Bové’s anti-military involvement eventually led him to become a sheep farmer in the Larzac plateau.

After obtaining his Baccalauréat, a rigorous examination resulting in the equivalent of a high school diploma, Bové enrolled for classes in philosophy at Bordeaux University. Protesting proved more interesting than studying, however. One journalist noted that he “barely set foot on campus, preferring anti-militarist activism to meditations on Plato.” He continued his involvement in anti-military organizations, mingling with “networks of young Catholics and non-violent libertarians.” As his understanding of radicalism developed, he solidified his commitment to nonviolence. While other far-left groups were “locked in debates about the logistics of seizing power,” Bové was “challenging the intensification of farming.” He continued to assist conscientious objectors by aiding those in military tribunals and keeping files on the proceedings. José

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7 Bové and Dufour, 33-34.
Bové’s activism also brought him together with his future wife, Alice Monier, an undergraduate in political science. They met while painting an anti-militarist banner in 1971 and soon began a relationship.

Consistent with his philosophy of non-violence, José Bové sought status as a conscientious objector. In September 1974, when he was twenty-one, the military refused to recognize him as a conscientious objector. He appealed the decision, but had to hide on a farm in the Gironde for almost a year to avoid going to prison while awaiting the results. His wife worked part-time for a local newspaper, the *Sud-Ouest*, and became pregnant during that time. Just a few days after the birth of their first child Marie in October 1975, Bové learned that his appeal was finally successful. He went to register his daughter at the town hall and was arrested by police who had not yet learned of the results. His stay at the police station was brief, however, as he was carrying his release papers.

**Anti-Military Protests in the Larzac**

During the time of this drama, José and Alice became involved in anti-military protests in the Larzac plateau. In 1970, the French military planned to expand a military testing range in the high Larzac region and bought 60,000 hectares of farm land for the project. At the time, many farmers’ children had left the country for more lucrative city jobs, leaving many farms untended. A local speculator, tipped off about the military’s plans, had bought out many deserted farms and practically the whole village of Montredon for 350,000 francs and resold the property to the military for 45 million francs.

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9 It is unclear whether Bové and Monier ever formally married. Most sources call Alice his wife, while a few others refer to her as his partner. In any case, their relationship functions as a marriage, and most sources recognize it as such.

10 Bové and Dufour, 35.
francs. Local farmers, “angry at the threatened loss of their livelihood and their rugged, beautiful homeland,” asked for help. Nearby peace activists, including Bové and Monier, joined the struggle to hamper the military’s plans.\textsuperscript{11}

With the guidance of Lanza del Vasto, an advocate of non-violence and spiritual leader of the Community of the Arche located in the Larzac, Bové and others established a Committee for the Larzac. The Committee mobilized support against the military base, using tactics such as demonstrations, memorial rallies, and fasts. Del Vasto fasted for fifteen days at Easter in 1972, a move that spurred the farmers on the plateau to stay on their land and refuse to sell land to the army. Anti-military demonstrations of over 100,000 people were frequent, gathering together farmers, local strikers from a watch factory, CO’s like Bové, and many others. The symbol of the Larzac struggle was an upturned soldier’s helmet filled with growing wheat. Slogans such “Arms Kill: Wheat Gives Life,” and “Sheep, Not Guns” articulated the movement’s preference for agricultural land use. Protest against the military expansion continued throughout the 1970s, ending in victory for the demonstrators when François Mitterrand was elected president and, as he had promised during his campaign, cancelled the military’s plans in 1981.\textsuperscript{12}

During their struggle to preserve the Larzac, Bové and Monier joined seventy-four other families in squatting in abandoned farms in Montredon that the military had purchased.\textsuperscript{13} This decision was no spontaneous move, but was a carefully planned initiative reinforced by geography specialists in the anti-military committee. Plans first

\textsuperscript{12} Bové and Dufour, 35-38; Wolfwood.
\textsuperscript{13} Wolfwood.
evolved in late 1975, and Alice and José moved into a farm in February 1976 to begin subsistence, or as one journalist called it, “resistance farming.” The first several years were difficult, as Bové and his wife struggled to survive without running water, electricity, telephone service, or roads to their farm. Nearby farmers helped the squatters by supplying farm equipment, donating livestock, and officially declaring that José and Alice were renting land—this allowed the couple to declare their occupation as farmers and collect social security. José and Alice had had previous experience in organic farming when they worked as agricultural volunteers in the Pyrénées, in Basque country. Their three-month service taught them to “test their theories of organic farming in practice.”

In 1978, Alice and Bové welcomed their second daughter Hélène. The following year, the couple decided to become Roquefort farmers. They traded their flock of sheep for milking ewes and began producing cheese sold at local markets—an uncommon practice at the time—as well as selling ewe’s milk to large Roquefort producers.

Squatters such as Bové and Monier were a persistent thorn in the military’s side. Military harassment was common on a daily basis. Still, José and others continued their active struggle against the military expansion. Acts of non-violent civil disobedience signaled protesters’ opposition. A group of about twenty dissenters, including José, broke into the military camp of La Cavalerie in June 1976 and stole documents concerning the sale of land in the Larzac. The participants were sentenced to three weeks in prison for their act. Fellow squatters compensated the dissidents for their efforts with a gift of livestock. The

14 Bové and Dufour, 37-39.
15 Ibid., 40.
next year, he and ninety others drove tractors onto the military firing range, “each with a
dissident soldier on its mudguard.”

The Larzac victory securely grounded Bové’s philosophy of militant, but non-
vviolent, resistance. The years of struggle to resist militarization of farmland and to
survive as an organic sheep farmer taught Bové that his ideals were feasible in practice.
Bové comments about the impact of the Larzac movement and of becoming a farmer:
“When I arrived at the Larzac, I immediately sensed a coherence between the place and
my aspirations. I had seen too many extreme left-wing militants blow a gasket. But at the
Larzac I have seen something concrete. I’m not a bird on a branch, I am in the real
world.” Participating in the Larzac committee also helped Bové solidify his commitment
to activism in an agricultural context. The victory, “which remains his touchstone. . . was
one of the springs of the small farmers’ movement,” comments John Lloyd, writing about
Bové in the Financial Times. In addition, during his Larzac activism Bové became
acquainted with other resistance movements contesting globalization, nuclear weapons,
and agri-businesses. Finally, Bové gained his characteristic “rhetorical style, self-
confidence and a cause” during the Larzac years.

After the army abandoned its plans in 1981, farms that were not bought back by
their previous owners became public property. The squatters formulated a plan for
collective ownership of the 6,300 hectares. The government did not like the idea at first,
but eventually Bové and other inhabitants established a collective divided between
approximately 130 families through a point system. The Larzac Land Associates (Société

16 Bové and Dufour 39; Barlow.
civile des terres du Larzac, or SCTL), organized in April 1985, oversaw the distribution and use of the land and offers contracts to farmers, non-farmers, and hunters through non-transferable free leases. Those living in the community collectively decide how the land will be used. According to Bové, the SCTL proves that it is “Not only possible to run a large estate collectively, . . .but that it can be a success right from the start” with the right organization and goals. Many other French collectives have copied the SCTL’s model.18

Bové threw himself into other causes besides the Larzac protests. He joined a movement called the “Worker-Farmers” that originated from the National Center for Young Farmers (Centre national des jeunes agriculteurs, or CNJA). After the revolts of May 1968, the Worker-Farmers became an autonomous movement that later evolved into the Farmer’s Confederation (Confédération paysanne, or CP) that Bové represents. The Larzac squatters established a trade union called the Area Center for Young Farmers (CCJA), with Alice Monier as vice-president. The CCJA took an uncompromising stance on military expansion and often worked in tandem with the Worker-Farmers.19

**Activism After the Larzac**

Besides activism in trade unions and farmer’s organizations, Bové has engaged in highly visible public protests. One French language newspaper commented that “defying the authorities is second nature to José Bové.”20 Bové’s Larzac activism gave him the experience and credentials to take his causes to larger forums. In 1995, sailed aboard Greenpeace’s ship Rainbow Warrior II in Polynesia to protest France’s resumption of nuclear tests in the area. He joined Greenpeace members, journalists, and farmers on

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18 Barlow; Bové and Dufour, 41, 131-34.
19 Bové and Dufour, 33, 40-42.
20 Défier les autorités est une seconde nature chez José Bové: Barlow.
board the ship. Around thirty ships gathered in the South Pacific on the site of French nuclear testing to form a “flotilla of peace.” José Bové commented: “We have been fighting the extension of a military camp near us for ten years, and we wanted to show that it’s possible to win a battle against the military.” The protest was aborted when the French military seized the Rainbow Warrior II. After concluding the test series in January 1996, the French government agreed to enter the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). On 13 April 1998, France and Great Britain were the first nuclear weapons states to ratify the treaty.

Bové likes to use animals in his protests. In 1988, he helped plow under the Champs de Mars, the park under the Eiffel Tower, to protest the European Union’s fallow land policy. He grazed a flock of sheep on the park. He has brought sheep into a Bordeaux cathedral, the Paris stock exchange, and in court. He recently brought a cow into the pyramid under the Louvre. “She got in free,” Bové remarked. “She was under six years old.”

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After the McDonald’s protest, Bové took his cause around the world. He traveled to Seattle in 1999 to protest the World Trade Organization (see Figure 3). He gave speeches, organized rallies, and distributed Roquefort cheese to his audiences. Bové received a rock star’s treatment: “cameras flashed, hands jockeyed to tug his leather jacket and young women shrieked ‘José! José! José!’” Bové whispered back, “I’m just a farmer,” then (ironically) commenced to head a highly symbolic rally in front of a McDonald’s. He gave a speech while standing in front of an assortment of French and
American specialties: red wine, baguettes, American cheddar, grapes, and the inevitable Roquefort cheese (484 pounds of it). Later in the year, he attended the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. He “was in the front line of protesters when the police attacked with rubber bullets and pepper spray.”

The year 2001 was also a busy one for Bové. His global fame demanded that he spend much of his time globe-trotting. In January, he traveled to Porto Alegre, Brazil to attend the first ever World Social Forum, a meeting of 3,000 activists meant to parallel the World Economic Forum. While there, he helped approximately 1,000 demonstrators destroy two hectares of genetically modified soy beans at a Monsanto research site.

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Brazilian police ordered him to leave the country, but later that day the courts overruled the order. In April, he attended a Summit of the Americas in Québec to protest a regional free trade agreement. In June of the same year, Israeli police arrested him in the West Bank while he was protesting against Jewish settlements. He and seven others detainees were later released. In November, José Bové managed to secure a visa to travel to Doha, Qatar, where the latest WTO meeting took place (see Figure 5). Protests in Qatar were few and fairly subdued; after the riotous Seattle protests, Qatar (not a country known for its toleration of dissidence) was the only country that would host the next WTO meeting. He recently traveled to Colombia to support the Uw’a resistance movement against Occidental Oil, which was forcing indigenous people off their land to make room for oil development.²⁵

Some of José Bové’s most controversial protests involved destroying fields of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). Bové and many other French oppose GMOs in their food supply, fearing that the genetic modifications might have some unknown adverse side effects. Bové has repeatedly destroyed fields of genetically-modified rice and corn in France. In 1999, he and a group of about 150 people cut down a field of genetically modified (GM) rice belonging to Cirad, an agricultural research institute affiliated with Montpellier University. In March of the same year, he received a ten-month suspended jail sentence and a fine for his actions; he and two others appealed. The appeals court handed down an even tougher punishment in December 2001: six months in prison. Over 100 fellow Farmer’s Confederation members thronged the courthouse to

hear the decision and were forced out by riot police firing tear gas. Bové lodged a second appeal to France’s highest court, the Court of Cassation. Bové has also received an eight-month jail sentence—also being appealed—for destroying GM cornfields at Agen in 1998. Until he receives his final sentencing for both acts, he does not have to serve any jail time.27

![Demonstrators destroy fields of genetically modified corn in Mauvezin, southwestern France. 28 August 2001. AP Photo Archives.]

Bové’s protests against GMOs inspired a flurry of similar demonstrations in 2001—a busy year for activists against genetically modified organisms and an unfortunate one for agricultural research companies in France. In late August and September, José Bové and like-minded activists led by the CP cut down eight fields of

GM corn. Many other attacks followed, prompted by the Farmer’s Confederation’s actions (see Figure 6). On August 26, about 150 protesters destroyed GM cornfields owned by Monsanto, a chemical and agricultural seed giant, at Salettes, near Montelimar. The group cut down the plants, put the ears in their trunks, and left signs saying “Contaminated Zone” and “No to GMO’s!.” The group then drove to Cleon d’Andran and destroyed another field of corn. A holiday atmosphere reigned as protesters brought their children and elaborate picnic lunches. One participant, farmer Marie-Hélène Tarrieux, took a break from cutting crops to feast on home-grown products with her children: foie gras, duck, brown bread, red wine, and peaches. She commented, “We’ve got nothing to gain from GMOs, and our independence to lose. We would end up being dependent on the seed salesmen every planting season.” On September 23, another 150 activists destroyed a GM corn field near Labrihe in southwestern France.

When José Bové is not globe-trotting, giving speeches, holding rallies, or destroying crops, he works on his sheep farm, vacations on the Atlantic coast, and reads books. He cites Henry David Thoreau and Adam Powell among his influences. He also enjoys reading about the international worker’s movement and the history of peasant revolts. A self-described “anarcho-syndicalist,” he admires Russian and Spanish Civil War anarchists.

José Bové thrives on media attention. When in the spotlight, he is “calm, convincing, coolly analytical,” noted one journalist. “He looks like a peasant, but talks

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like a well-briefed government Minister.” He always has accurate information and a concrete set of ideas to present to the public. While part of Bové is undoubtedly a “silver-tongued media manipulator, . . . there aren’t many peasants who could command the attention of Ministers and journalists alike, without diluting his radical message.” Still, celebrity status has its price. Bové’s position as one of three spokesmen for the Farmer’s Confederation has become much more time-consuming since August 1999. Now, José Bové cannot go anywhere without a flock of journalists and TV cameras orbiting around him. While on the plane from Washington, D.C. to Seattle in 1999, for example, one magazine reporter could not ask Bové anything “without a television crew’s camera capturing Bové’s every word.” Another writer reports: “Where José Bové is, there are a good two dozen journalists.” His wife Alice traveled less frequently with her husband, because they could rarely escape cameras and reporters. Since the protest, he has also had little or no time to work on his farm. Maintaining a dual life as a farmer and activist has proved difficult for Bové since the McDonald’s protest.

**From Astérix to Joan of Arc: Bové-Inspired Comparisons**

The news media have compared Bové to all sorts of famous personalities, from Robin Hood to Joan of Arc. The most common comparison is to the comic-book character Astérix, an “icon of French individuality refusing to be swamped by the imperial forces.” Both Bové and Astérix are good-natured and delight in defying authorities, and both manage to make their opponents appear ridiculous (see Figures 7

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31 Puisque José Bové en était, il s’y trouvait bien deux douzaines de journalistes: Barlow.
32 Jung, A24.
and 8). Bové managed this well during his trial, as he and his co-defendants turned to comedy while viewing pictures of the “demolition.”

Some have also called Bové a “peasant Robin Hood.” Others disagree with the comparison, arguing that there is nothing like José Bové in Britain and there never has been.” Instead, as Stuart Jeffries argues, José Bové is an “utterly French symbol” with his uniquely French emphasis on food. Other comparisons are perhaps more of a stretch: José Bové as Joan of Arc, David versus Goliath, Polish Solidarity movement leader Lech Walesa, and even the revolutionary Che Guevara. Bové disagrees with the last comparison, though; he has described himself as “more Gandhi than Guevara.”

![Figure 7: Astérix, ready to take on the Romans.](image)

Les Aventures d’Astérix, Goscinny and Uderzo.

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This activist in farmer’s clothing has French officials in a bind. José Bové is extremely popular, and any rejection of Bové’s message means a fall in popularity for the politician. As one French woman explained, “José Bové isn’t very well liked by the government” because he “tells truths that the government doesn’t want to hear.” Even officials who do not agree with Bové must not critique him in order to retain public support. One writer noted, “Back in France, politicians wanted a slice of Bovémania for themselves. President Jacques Chirac made a point of shaking Bové’s hand at a rally in February 2000.” President Chirac has also given verbal support to José Bové’s attack against McDonald’s. Although he described Bové’s form of protest as “unacceptable,” he expressed sympathy for farmers’ anger and stated that their concerns were just: “It would

36 Written internet conversation with Bénédicte Brabant, 22 February 2002.
37 Kingsnorth 40.
be in nobody’s interests to allow one single power, albeit a respectable and friendly one, to rule undivided over the planet’s food markets....Such situations cause anger, which sometimes may be unacceptable in their form but which take root from a farmer’s hopes of a just price for his labour.”

Prime Minister Lionel Jospin has also avoided criticizing the radical farmer too harshly, though not as gracefully as Chirac, who is “very good at playing the paysan.”

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juggled, apologetic phone calls made,” and special exemptions granted for him. After dropping by Justice Minister Marylise Lebranchu’s office in November 2000 to discuss illegally imported cattle feed, he mentioned that he needed to see the Prime Minister about a new policy. “He probably hasn’t got an appointment but M. Jospin will doubtless receive him,” commented one journalist.\(^{39}\)

Of course, José Bové has his detractors. Mike Moore, secretary general of the World Trade Organization, has harshly denounced Bové’s actions. Moore warns people not to become too sentimental over Bové, whom he describes as a first-order activist and not at all a peasant. René Riesel, a former CP member who participated in attacks against GMOs with Bové, broke with the Farmer’s Confederation in 1999 and later described Bové in less than flattering terms: “José Bové is pure showman with all that circus he cultivates around anti-globalisation. The message is too narrow. He spouts rubbish and collects slogans, and \textit{Les Bovistes} are sometimes extreme reactionaries.” Even Alice Monier has become disenchanted with her husband. She accused him and the Farmer’s Confederation of being too macho and complained that she received no support from the CP members when her marriage broke up in 2000.\(^{40}\)

Many French find themselves on middle ground about Bové, agreeing with his messages while finding some of his tactics too extreme. One French woman stated that she agrees with certain platforms, “like the problems with transgenic plant cultures that we don’t know the long term effects of. . . . But I don’t believe in violence, so when he destroys fields of crops, I don’t know what to think.” Many people who disagree


\(^{40}\) Barlow; Brenner, “The New Asterix.”
specifically with the McDonald’s demonstration still support his platforms. A McDonald’s supervisor in Nice commented that Bové’s protest makes sense given his background. She agreed that farmers have a right to defend their way of life if they feel it is threatened. Even Marc Dehani, owner of the McDonald’s in Millau, has shown some sympathy for Bové’s cause. He stated: “He’s an extremist of the left, but I myself agree with him when he denounces GMOs.”

Like the mixed opinions about the radical farmer, José Bové has some inconsistencies of his own. A central irony in the Bové story is his heavy reliance upon products and technologies made possible by globalization. He is never without his cell phone. He would not have been able to spread his message without the mass media. The Farmer’s Confederation uses the internet heavily to provide information and organize protests. John Lloyd commented: “His movement runs off the internet and the cell phone yet vilifies the science and the multinationals that created them. It seeks alliances with groups whose members are largely the beneficiaries—as citizens of the rich, powerful and globally competitive French economy—of globalisation.” José Bové has become a full-time “personnage médiatique,” authoring two books, traveling almost non-stop around the globe, and appearing on TV and radio programs. This activist-turned-farmer has now become a farmer-turned-activist. The ironies of his life have come full circle. One writer notes: “It seems the anti-globalisation protester has, himself, gone global.”

A simple peasant? No. Though José Bové has the appearance of a paysan from

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41 Brabant interview; Interview at McDonald’s on 20 Ave. Jean Médecin in Nice; Barlow.
the backwoods of France, he has engaged in radical, militant protests since his teens. He is sophisticated, speaks the language of both agriculture and counterculture. He is simultaneously an activist playing a farmer, and a farmer playing an activist. Bové is the perfect fit for staging a protest that gained international attention and raised awareness of globalization’s downfalls. He is, after all, “a cut above your average farmer.”44

France and the United States have an unusual relationship. The two countries have never fought against each other, and have served as close allies during times of war. Yet, the alliance has not been an easy one. Mutual distrust, suspicion, and sometimes outright hostility between the two countries have been the rule, and friendship the exception. Yves-Henri Nouailhat, professor of History at the University of Nantes, comments: “The history of Franco-American relations is that of an alternation between great moments of enthusiasm and affection, all the more outstanding since they have been short, and long periods of resentment, crises, and disappointments.”¹ Franco-American friendship is often more a myth than reality.

Why have the two countries, closely allied in so many ways, continued this strange love-hate relationship? The answer comes from several factors: first, the countries both hold strong universalist beliefs in their respective ways of life. While the United States promotes universal ideals of democracy, France offers an alternative conception of civilization that is often at odds with the United States’ ideals. Second, the two countries also hold generally unflattering stereotypes of each other that have proved exceptionally pervasive. The United States has continued to fascinate and repel the French, who portray the country as simultaneously youthful, energetic, and progressive, as well as crude, vulgar, and violent. The latter characterizations fed the rise of anti-Americanism in France. On their end, Americans have conceived of the French as effeminate, corrupt,

¹ Nouailhat, 663.
and weak. These stereotypes have significantly influenced how the countries interact on many levels. Third, when France and the United States were thrown into an intimate partnership during and after World War II, France’s longing to regain its sovereignty and former glory was at odds with the United States’ dismissal of France as a weak, dependent nation.

These three factors—the French notion of *civilisation* as both universal and superior, longstanding stereotypes about the United States, and a desire for sovereignty—have caused the French to remain deeply ambivalent about American presence in France. Politically, this means that French-American alliances would not guarantee friendship. Economically, France has resented U.S. foreign aid and economic models even while using them for its own benefit. Most significantly, the French have remained of two minds towards American culture. Often these conflicting attitudes arise in the same person. One social commentator, Jean-François Revel, aptly captured the love-hate relationship with American culture. He said: “Sure, we love to consume the American cultural products, and after, we love even more to reject them.”

A look into how the French have reacted to American culture explains why, in a country with over 900 thriving McDonald’s outlets, José Bové’s protest against the restaurant could be so overwhelmingly popular.

**Anti-Americanism**

Why were the French so worried about American culture and industry? Did American-style development pose a direct threat to France? The answer is yes—in the eyes of the French. Kuisel notes, “America represented scenes of a possible European

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future. If France’s future was in the making across the Atlantic, was it a matter for rejoicing or despair?” By the 1930’s, the answer was definitively the latter. The Great Depression vindicated dire French predictions about the failings of American economic structures and culture. French writers such as Georges Duhamel (America the Menace: Scenes from the Life of the Future, 1931) viewed America as a harbinger of their own future, and they usually did not like what they saw. Consumer culture brought uniformity and mass-production. Higher geographic mobility dislocated people from their surroundings. To the French, “postwar America appeared as both a model and a menace. The issue was for the French to find the way to possess American prosperity and economic power and yet to avoid what appeared to be the accompanying social and cultural costs.”

All of these worries set the stage for a lively tradition of anti-Americanism that was especially strong during and after World War II. Anti-Americanism is complex and often contradictory. In Seducing the French, Richard Kuisel argues that anti-Americanism is neither “mere criticism of America or Americans,” nor is it a “full-blown contempt for anything American or a systematic and permanent opposition to everything American.” The first definition would force even America’s enthusiasts to qualify as anti-American for the slightest critique. The second would effectively negate anti-Americanism in France, since even the harshest critics of America usually note some redeeming qualities. Jean-Paul Sartre, for example, often celebrated for his “anti-American” ideas, admired some aspects of America—its film, literature, and jazz music.

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Anti-Americanism falls somewhere in between; it is more than just trivial complaints about Americans, but it does not have to be permanent or all-consuming.¹

Instead of understanding anti-Americanism as an either/or idea, Kuisel argues that people often hold both positive and negative evaluations of the United States, sometimes simultaneously. He states: “Affirmative and critical postures are not rigid categories and often overlap or merge into one another. And the same person may express conflicting attitudes or even alter his or her views....Perhaps most perplexing is that admirers and adversaries often use the same images but attribute opposing values to them.” French attitudes about America vary depending upon time, circumstance, and political affiliation.⁵ In addition, national stereotypes have played a large role in determining how France interpreted the United States.

French attitudes and ideas about America fall into predictable patterns, whether the attitudes are positive or negative. Kuisel comments, “America is a ‘young’ country. This may mean either that Americans are open, curious, and lively or else that Americans are immature and naive.” America’s youthfulness has led the French to surmise that the country is “youthful, dynamic, wealthy, pragmatic, optimistic, and friendly.” The flip side takes a more pessimistic view of America’s youth; the French have also perceived Americans as “materialistic, puritanical, vulgar, and even racist and violent. They are les grands enfants.” Anti-Americanism almost always echoes one or more of these concerns. In contrast, the French often pride themselves on their maturity and sophistication, their ability to enjoy the finer things of life.⁶

¹ Kuisel, 6-7. ⁵ Kuisel, 8-9, Nouilhat, 665. ⁶ Kuisel, 9.
Setting the Stage: From the Revolutionary Period to the Great Depression

From America’s inception until World War I, France and the United States interacted very little with each other. Besides periodic cultural exchanges—La Fayette’s and Alexis de Tocqueville’s journeys to the U.S. in the early 1800’s, France’s gift of the Statue of Liberty, or the occasional tourist—the two countries mostly left each other alone. Richard Kuisel comments: “For over a century after the American colonies declared their independence, the two nations lived in separate worlds on the same globe....the two nations had little in common.” Unlike most other European countries, France witnessed no mass emigration to the United States and thus had no American constituency to link the Old World to the New. During the 19th century, trade and diplomatic alliances were infrequent.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the two countries still remained close enough to form opinions about each other. Richard Pells argues that Americans have always been indirectly obsessed with Europe, if only to repudiate it, to prove that they had created a vastly superior civilization free from Europe’s corruption and decadence. Europeans worried about America as well, simultaneously drawn to its promises of renewal and opportunity, but repulsed by its materialism, violence, provinciality, and lack of soul. French commentators specifically worried that “Americans lacked the sort of cultivation and taste so characteristic of France—a judgment that would shape French attitudes toward America throughout the twentieth century.” When the French did take note of America, they exhibited disgust mixed with

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7 Nouailhat, 653-54.
8 Kuisel, 1.
embarrassed fascination. Georges Duhamel, in his book *America the Menace*, found fault with American materialism, calling Americans slaves to their wealth. He despised conformity and compared Americans to ants or bees. Even French commentators such as André Maurois and André Siegfried, who found much to praise about the United States, still expressed reservations about standardization of taste and materialism in America.

A few historical events in early French-American interactions lend a shade of truth to the myth of friendship that politicians love to invoke: France was the United States’ oldest ally, and the countries have from time to time exchanged signs of goodwill such as the Statue of Liberty, which celebrated the U.S.’s centennial. Yet, as Irwin M. Wall argues in *The United States and the Making of Postwar France, 1945-1954*, “conflict, suspicion, mistrust, verbal missives, and rumors of war have been the common stuff of Franco-American relations since the founding of the American republic.”

American neutrality (bordering on a preference for England) during the French Revolution angered France. France often supported dissenting factions within the United States, such as Texas’ push for independence or the Confederacy. Napoleon III tried, and failed, to conquer Mexico—and succeeded in irritating the United States. These and many other incidents resulted in less-than-amicable relations between the two countries in the nineteenth century.

World War I and America’s emergence as a modern industrial economy changed the dynamics of Franco-American relations. Suddenly the United States was a prominent figure in French affairs and cultural debates. It became involved in World War I and

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9 Pells, 1-7.
10 Kuisel, 10-12.
briefly helped reconstruct postwar Europe. Such signs of seemingly good will on America’s part, however, were motivated less by a commitment to France and more out of ties with England. Soon after the war, the United States provoked France’s displeasure by insisting on an economically strong Germany—always a source of tension between the two countries—and by demanding that France repay its war debts. France reluctantly agreed to the Dawes Plan of 1924 and the Young Plan of 1929, which reduced the amount of reparations that Germany would have to pay to France. Although European countries, and France in particular, tried to “involve the United States in the affairs of the old continent while minimizing American influence,” the U.S. stayed aloof from most European political affairs in the 1920s and 30s.\(^{12}\)

As the United States withdrew from direct political involvement in Europe, France began to notice its economic and cultural influences—usually in a negative light. The French developed ideas and stereotypes about America that influenced interactions with the U.S. during and after World War II and that have persisted even to this day. By the eve of World War II, France had judged America as overly materialistic and spiritually sick. As France entered economic modernization, America often became a model of what \textit{not} to do.

American prosperity and technological prowess fascinated the French during the 1920s. Mass production and a consumer economy were taking hold in the U.S. Suddenly, all kinds of consumer goods became available: radios, refrigerators, cars, phonographs. Americans swam in an ocean of mass-produced, standardized abundance. The surplus of \textit{things} attracted French attention, but also became a major target of criticism. During the

\footnote{Wall, 13-14.}
interwar years, French writers and thinkers spelled out their fears. While mass production allowed more Americans to enjoy luxury items and labor-saving appliances, it also created a society that consumed uniformity. French critics accused Americans of being a “society of comfortable conformists and cultural philistines.” French writers portrayed Americans as being captives of their own affluence: “They yearn desperately for phonographs, radios, illustrated magazines, ‘movies,’ elevators, electric refrigerators, and automobiles....They want to own at the earliest possible moment all the articles mentioned, which are so wonderfully convenient, and of which, by an odd reversal of things, they immediately become the anxious slaves.” American’s wealth might feed and pamper the body, but it could not hold off the “American cancer”—an urbanized, mechanized, and overly uniform society crazed by too much prosperity.\(^\text{13}\)

Critiques of American society reveal pride in civilisation, in what the French consider a sophisticated and superior way of life. Marguerite Yerta-Melera claimed in 1931 that:

There is no American civilization...there is still no American civilization....The only civilization in America is the old civilization of Europe which is still the theoretical basis of institutions and customs. But for the rest...the box-like skyscrapers, the vile speakeasies, the over-sized cities spoiled by racketeering, the government of gangsters...the hundred-page newspapers full of inanities higher than the Chrysler building...the splendid laboratories without scientists, the to and fro of divorces, the king-cinema, the empty churches? Civilization?\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{13}\) Kuisel, 2-3, 11.
\(^{14}\) Kuisel, 11.
Civilisation means valuing aesthetics, craftsmanship, artisanal rather than mass-produced goods, ideas above objects. The concept, as articulated by Raymond Aron in 1959, embraces a wide range of intangible values. Civilisation implies “moderation, good taste, and aesthetic values.” It is an art de vivre, or an “art of living.” It can range from flânerie, “the pleasure of breaking habit, of lounging, of reflecting, even of being idle,” to a douceur de vivre, “an indefinable gentleness to life in France, a languid, pleasurable, and aesthetic quality about everyday existence.” Significantly, it is antithetical to pragmatism, conformity, functionality, and mass consumption, all qualities associated with America. Of course, an ordinary French person probably did not ponder such an esoteric concept on a daily basis. Kuisel notes that the French intelligentsia, with personal and professional interests at stake, were the ones writing about and glorifying civilisation. In order to guard their position as “gatekeepers of culture....writers evoked the France of artisans, bistros, and flânerie to broaden their appeal and conceal their elitist self-interest.”

French pride in such an intangible quality might evoked so many disputes with the United States because both nations viewed their ways of life as universal in appeal and as inherently superior. Americans often harbored “universal pretensions,” believing they “possess the secret to freedom and prosperity.” The French, on the other hand, viewed themselves as the guardians of culture, as beacons of civilisation to the rest of the world. Richard Kuisel argues that these two “pretensions, or egocentrisms,” will inevitably clash.

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16 Kuisel, 127.
World War II and Beyond

The interwar years set the stage for several decades of tense, though close, relationships between France and the United States. Prejudices on both sides hindered smooth relations. The French appreciated American aid during World War II, but resented their dependence on another nation. American officials viewed France as a degenerate, weak, and ungrateful nation and thus ignored or downplayed France’s wishes for sovereignty. The two countries had very different visions of France’s future and often clashed over issues such as the United States’ plans for a prosperous Germany and France’s method of economic modernization. Despite all of the disagreements and misunderstandings, the nations still remained closely allied to each other. France needed the United States for economic assistance as it recovered from two devastating wars. On the other hand, the United States needed France as a major ally in its campaign against communism.

American stereotypes of France affected how the United States treated France during the war. Franco-American interactions up to the mid-1900’s left Americans with prejudices against the French, who they generalized as weak, corrupt, backwards, and effeminate. Such attitudes about France were two hundred years old. In 1778, for example, John Adams wrote of France as a “nation of luxury, dissipation, and effeminacy.” Americans have portrayed France as anti-modern: “feudal, archaic, politically unstable, and economically stagnant.” After France’s collapse in 1940, American government leaders and officials viewed France as bankrupt, lacking “morality, politics, and military power.” American decision-makers also used highly gendered language to describe France. They saw France as a pathologically unstable
female, and therefore, not worthy of being taken seriously. They accused the French of being petty schemers, overly feminine, hypersensitive, and inclined to irrationality; on the other hand, the same officials portrayed themselves as strongly masculine: virile, decisive, and morally superior.\textsuperscript{17}

With such a strong misogynist bias, American officials could easily reject French actions as neurotic and irrational. France’s sudden collapse in 1940 led many Americans to conclude that the nation fell, not because of military defeat, but because of “a weakness of the nation’s moral fiber.”\textsuperscript{18} President Roosevelt and other American leaders treated France accordingly. FDR disliked General de Gaulle, who had his own vision for France, and treated the general condescendingly. Costigliola comments: “Roosevelt saw himself as a lord of France’s destiny....He coded de Gaulle as the difficult bride who did not understand France’s true interests”—again, feminizing France allowed American leaders to brush aside its concerns and wishes. Roosevelt preferred instead to support weaker leaders such as Pétain, Darlan, and Giraud, rather than the charismatic general. He and de Gaulle continually clashed over France’s pro-colonial policy. De Gaulle smarted when France was left out of the meeting between the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union at Yalta.\textsuperscript{19}

France’s wartime experiences rendered it especially sensitive to dependence on other nations. It suffered humiliating defeat under Germany. Then, when American and British liberators took charge, they did not always respect France’s desire for sovereignty. “FDR breezily assumed that with France prostrate, he had become custodian of France’s

\textsuperscript{17} Wall, 11-12, 21; Costigliola, 8.
\textsuperscript{18} This view is not unique to Americans. Some French, including Mark Bloch, shared the same opinion.
\textsuperscript{19} Wall, 21; Costigliola, 19-24.
future and its empire,” Costigliola notes. As a result, Americans often sensed a less-than-enthusiastic attitude from those they liberated and complained that the French were ungrateful. For example, G.I.’s commonly complained that the French were “lazy, inefficient, profiteering braggarts”—a reiteration of decades-old stereotypes. In a poll taken in July 1945, fewer G.I.’s had favorable opinions about the French (32%) than they did about the Russians (42%) or the British (43%). In language typical of Americans describing France, Brigadier General G. Bryan Conrad characterized French resentment towards America as a feminine illness: “The French are hurt, sensitive, suffering from a collective inferiority complex.... ‘La Grande Malade’ is flat on her back but hypersensitive to remedies suggested by U.S. doctors and unable, so far, to cure herself.” Coding France as feminine, helpless, and pathological allowed American decision makers to ignore its wishes. Costigliola comments: “Having liberated and aided France, Americans understandably expected gratitude. Yet such thanks were hard to express for a nation that still smarted from defeat by the enemy and dependence on its friends.”

**Strings attached: U.S. Economic Aid to France**

After World War II, French dependence on the United States shifted from military aid to economic assistance. This continuing reliance on the United States irritated an already wounded French pride, especially because the U.S. attached strings to financial assistance. One of the most contentious areas was what to do with Germany. France vehemently opposed the United States’ plan to rebuild the German economy, worrying that once economically powerful, the country might again become an aggressor and threaten France. The U.S. took the opposite view, arguing that weak Germany would

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20 Costigliola 9, 40-43.
pose a greater security threat. Because economic aid packages such as the Blum-Byrnes agreement and the Marshall Plan were contingent on France accepting the U.S.’s plans for Germany, France eventually had to relent.

The Blum-Byrnes agreement and Marshall Plan are typical examples of how the United States promoted its political goals as well as cultural values through economic aid. The Blum-Byrnes Agreement of 1946 promised France $650 million in loans to help the country out of dire financial troubles. Neither side was entirely satisfied with the agreement. France had initiated the agreement, then complained when the United States tied its aid to an economically strong Germany. During the war, the Lend-Lease law had supplied France with necessary arms and supplies. When the war ended, so did Lend-Lease, but not without significant protest from France. The American government agreed to continue shipping supplies that were essential to the French economy. In 1945, France proposed talks that led to the Blum-Byrnes agreement. It had hoped for $3 billion in aid in order to finance the Monnet Plan. (In 1944-45, Jean Monnet outlined an economic program that relied heavily upon imports from the United States, with the eventual goal of economic modernization.) But Washington refused to lend such a large amount because France remained unwilling to compromise over Germany. France’s need for financial assistance and fear of a powerful Germany remained a frustrating dilemma, since France’s largest lender insisted on rebuilding Germany. In particular, the United States’ insistence on a prosperous Germany increased as the United States grew increasingly suspicious of the Soviet Union.²¹

The United States used economic assistance to push its cultural values as well as

²¹ Wall, 35-39.
political goals. The Blum-Byrnes agreement had only one specific import request—that France allow more American films into the country. Such a minor issue became a major source of irritation in France, where an already struggling film industry perceived the move as “American cultural imperialism.” Although the Blum-Byrnes agreement did not actually cripple the French film industry, many French perceived the opposite—hence the rise of a “légende noire” (dark/black legend) that blamed Hollywood for hindering the recovery of French film. Both countries recognized the significance of a seemingly non-essential cultural item—hence France’s resistance to and America’s encouragement of Hollywood. Wall notes that American cinema “carried a symbolic importance as manifestations of the superiority of the American ‘way of life,’ which magnified their importance far beyond the few millions they were expected to earn.”

Like the Blum-Byrnes agreement, the Marshall Plan promoted American ideas and values through economic assistance. The Marshall Plan emerged soon after the war as the United States began to actively fight communism. Washington viewed France as a key element in preventing the rise of communism; a strong France could keep it from spreading farther, but only if the country’s economy and political systems were stable. Otherwise, “France appeared to be the first in a long line of dominoes.” After World War II, France wanted to remain free of excessive commitments to both the United States and the Soviet Union. It had hoped to remain a mediator between the East and West, rather than an ally of one of the countries. However, that position proved difficult to retain as the United States grew more hostile towards the Soviet Union and insisted that

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22 Wall, 56, 114-121.
23 Costigliola, 60.
France choose sides. Irwin Wall identifies 1947 as a “turning point of the postwar era.”

French and Italian communists fell from power, and the Truman Doctrine announced America’s commitment to fighting communism around the world. The same year, the Marshall Plan emerged. Its primary aims: fighting communism and reconstructing a Germany that other European countries would accept. France decided to ally with Washington, rather than remaining a neutral third party.  

Choosing the West gave France the necessary funds and supplies to rebuild the country. The Blum-Byrnes funds only carried France over for one year, so the Marshall Plan was desperately needed. Much of the Marshall Plan aid made basics such as fuel and food available. It also provided supplies that helped France execute the Monnet Plan for economic modernization. France was several decades behind the United States in terms of its economic structures. Mass production of goods and a consumer economy were just beginning to emerge in France after the war. As France stood poised to enter a modern market economy, the United States stepped in to lend aid and advice. The Marshall Plan promoted American-style business management and sent hundreds of French business people to the States on productivity “missions.” The visitors were supposed to learn organization and production techniques. This cultural indoctrination did not always work as planned, however. The missions to the U.S. were supposed to bring back enthusiastic French converts, but often the visitors found things to criticize as well as praise during their stay.  

How much influence did the United States have over France in the decade or two

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24 Wall, 63.
25 Costigliola, 70-102.
after the war? The Marshall Plan allowed Washington to have some say, but not overwhelming control in France. Costigliola comments: “the United States did not drive the French economy—but it did keep a hand on the steering wheel.” Irwin Wall argues that although the United States attempted to control French economics and politics, the French were usually successful at subverting and manipulating American directives. In fact, many of the tensions between France and the U.S. arose because the French were so adept at getting what they wanted despite being told what to do. Wall writes that: “American influence was both pervasive and ineffective at once.” American efforts to direct French social and political development were the “least successful, yet most resented” policies. Wall concludes that: “Americans were never able to create the suitable France for which they searched. Perhaps they were foolish even to try.” Although American attempts to directly influence France were largely unsuccessful, they nevertheless caused many French to resent American involvement. The impression of pervasive, hegemonic American influence overpowered the fact that the United States rarely accomplished any of its specific goals in France.

As France’s economy recovered, its dependence on the United States diminished. Between 1945 and 1954, France received an average of one billion dollars of aid per year from the U.S. After 1954, France’s “unusual dependence of the postwar period came to an end, and more or less normal international relations were resumed.” In this case, “normal” relations most often entailed the same tensions and disagreements that have typified Franco-American relations. But when France re-emerged as a strong world

26 Ibid., 63.
27 Wall, 5, 298-299.
28 Wall, 9.
power, it needed the United States less on a political or economic level. On the other hand, France’s exposure to American culture increased. After the mid-1950s, American cultural products became the next objects of French concern—and desire.

**American Culture in France**

Economic modernization came to France in full force after World War II. By the time France experienced the same social changes the U.S. had gone through when it modernized, many French already had formed a negative attitude about the changes beginning to take place. Life took on a faster pace. Items previously seen only in American films or magazines began appearing in French stores. Agricultural workers left their farms for big cities, hoping to find a more profitable occupation. A modern consumer economy encouraged the French to spend money on consumer goods such as refrigerators and stoves and washing machines, rather than to save their earnings. Through the Marshall Plan, the United States promoted American-style business management with its heavy emphasis on efficiency and increased production. Supermarkets and chain stores began to crowd out farmer’s markets and neighborhood grocery shops. In *Not Like Us*, Richard Pells notes that:

America’s imprint was certainly noticeable, particularly in Western Europe after 1945....The blue jeans and sneakers, the use of American slang, the pervasiveness of rock and roll, the popularity of American slang and television shows, the ubiquitous advertisements for Coca-Cola and Kentucky Fried Chicken, the debut of Euro Disney, each might well move a European to complain...that “the Yanks
have colonized our subconscious.”

Just because many French denounced America for its materialism and vulgarity does not mean that American products and ideas had no popularity in France. On the contrary. American goods and ideas received a sort of “forbidden” status, which made them all the more fascinating to consume and critique. A look at the influence of Coca-Cola, American cinema, and Euro Disney in France will illustrate why the French tend to be simultaneously wary and wild about these American cultural products.

**The Coca-Cola Wars**

Coca-Cola stayed within the United States and Canada for four decades. But during the 1920s, international markets beckoned. The product rapidly expanded overseas, especially in Europe, Latin America, and the Pacific. By the early 1930’s, the Coca-Cola Export Corporation (est. 1930) was operating in nearly thirty countries. The company devised a franchise bottling system in which all aspects of manufacturing except for the “secret” syrup concentrate, called a “magic elixir,” and advertising came from the host country.

First sold in France in 1919, Coke was scarce during the 1920s and 30s and nonexistent during World War II. When peacetime arrived, Coca-Cola intensified its efforts to cement its European presence. The company conducted massive advertising blitzes to win Europeans over to the drink. But these efforts did not result in a smooth courtship; Coke met opposition nearly everywhere in Europe in the form of bans, lawsuits, health scares, and political parties campaigning on anti-Coke platforms. Of all the countries to oppose the drink, France was by far the most recalcitrant. Coca-Cola

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29 Pells, 278.
30 Kuisel, 53; Pells, 199.
encountered technical difficulties—no sufficient bottling infrastructure existed—as well as massive public and governmental opposition. The company wanted to build a large concentrate plant in Marseilles and spent large amounts of money on advertising to prepare the French for the drink. But the Ministry of Finance blocked this investment, arguing that the plant would only worsen France’s balance of payments deficit. Coca-Cola offered to shoulder additional costs if allowed into the country, but to no avail.31

French concerns about the drink ranged from legitimate to ludicrous. Coca-Cola, its opponents argued, would harm wine growers, deepen France’s trade deficit, pose a threat to public health, aid the American espionage network and, worst of all, impose American culture upon France. As winegrowers encountered surpluses for the first time since the war during 1949 and 1950, competition became a growing concern, so many winegrowing organizations accused Coke of “endangering public health and domestic industry.” They posed leading questions such as: “Is Coca-Cola a poison?” and worried about addictions to the drink, comparing it to drugs and tobacco. Since the 1920s, Coca-Cola had been on trial in France for violating the health code and for deceptive labeling. These complaints reemerged when the company sought to expand in the late 40s. Coca-Cola faced ongoing legal battles about whether the drink violated France’s 1905 health code; winegrowers and Communists supported bans that would directly or indirectly prohibit the sale of Coke. America’s regulations on French wines and spirits especially irked the French, because American companies such as Coca-Cola simultaneously insisted on free entry into France. These debates raged in the National Assembly during the winter of 1949-1950. Finally, the government ruled that it could ban nonalcoholic

31 Kuisel, 54-55
drinks found to be dangerous to public health—an indirect method of prohibiting Coca-Cola.

When France rapidly modernized after the war, many worried that the flood of American products and ideas would completely overwhelm French culture. As a symbol of American values and consumerism, Coca-Cola was a prime target for these fears. *Le Monde* observed in 1949: “What the French criticize is less Coca-Cola than its orchestration, less the drink itself, than the civilization—or as they like to say, the style of life—of which it is the symbol.” To the French, Coca-Cola represented American economic and cultural imperialism.32

A de facto government embargo on Coke in February 1950 was the last straw for the company. After encountering numerous obstacles to entry, Coca-Cola Export flexed its muscles. Besides finding ways around French import regulations, the company hired legal and scientific experts to prove the drink’s safety, to insist that its advertising would be reasonable, and to show that most supplies would be purchased in France. Coca-Cola called upon its ties with Washington and requested aid from the State Department. It also brought its case to the American press, which heavily circulated the story. American newspapers were soon complaining about French ingratitude and insisting that the drink would help the global fight against Communism: “You can’t spread the doctrines of Marx among people who drink Coca-Cola,” proclaimed one paper. By April 1950, the French government relented under this pressure and quietly lifted its ban on the drink.33

Today, the beverage is very common in cafés and restaurants. Still, an awareness

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32 Kuisel, 65.
33 *Ibid.*, 54-63
of Coke’s cultural significance remains intact. After the WTO-endorsed tariffs, many French once again felt threatened by American imperialism—this time as Americans tried to force hormone-enhanced beef into French markets. Many areas hit by the retaliatory tariffs have chosen Coca-Cola as a target of protest by establishing a 100 percent “tax” on the beverage.

Philippe Folliot, mayor of St. Pierre-de-Trivisy (pop. 610), a town near Roquefort, authorized a 100% “tax” on Coke purchased at the town campground and recreation center. He claims that the beverage epitomizes the worst aspects of globalization: Coke “is a symbol of the American multinational that wants to uniformize taste all over the planet.” In contrast, “Roquefort is made from the milk of only one breed of sheep; it is made in only one place in France; and it is made in only one special way.” To Folliot, idiosyncratic, locally-produced products are far superior to standardized, homogeneous products the same around the world.34 The café Le Bowling du Rouerque in Rodez, part of the Roquefort-producing region, priced its Coke at around 100 francs per bottle. In the same town, Le Souquet’s Brasserie banned Coke from its establishment.35 In Dijon, where local mustard farmers are also feeling financial stress from the tariffs, Coke’s price has risen as well. One crêperie charged around 500 francs per bottle. Many other restaurants have taken similar steps, going well beyond the 100% “tax.” Even the Confédération Paysanne’s largest rival, the FNSEA,36 chose to boycott Coca-Cola, along

36 Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d’Exploitants Agricoles (Union of Farm Laborer’s National Confederation)
with bourbon and McDonald’s. Although the FNSEA and the CP are normally at odds, the two farmer’s unions agreed over their symbolic opposition to Coke and McDonald’s.

During José Bové’s highly publicized trial in Millau, Coca-Cola was noticeably absent in local cafés. Comments from bystanders and newspapers indicate a wide-spread awareness of the drink’s political implications. One paper describes the available drinks in Millau: “pastis, beer, Orangina as a rule, but ‘especially not Coke—we’re not crazy,’ venders explain.” Another media source notes that many Bové supporters refused to drink Coke: “The drink has visibly disappeared from the cafés” of Millau. One “indefatigable fifty-year old” Bové supporter shouted: “Away with God, masters, and Coke.” Although it will probably have no major financial impact, boycotting Coke signals solidarity with Bové’s cause and reflects France’s ambivalence about the drink.

**Out of the Spotlight: French Cinema**

During the 1930’s, France struggled to keep a viable film industry in the face of stiff competition from the United States. In fact, the German occupation of France, “so damaging in many ways to French industry, was a golden age for the French cinema.” All American film imports were banned, and both the Germans and the Vichy government strongly supported French cinematic talent. This period allowed France to “rival Hollywood in the scope and scale of its productions” for the first time. Film director Marcel L’Herbier comments that he and other directors had worked “in an atmosphere of

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37 Nundy, 1.
40 “Ni dieu, ni maître, ni Coca-cola” s’égosille une quinquagénaire infatigable: “Procès Bové : Dix prévenus et 15.000 ‘avocats’”, *Le Télégramme de Brest* 1 July 2000.
artistic slavery” (“dans un climat d’esclavage cinématographique”) since 1930 and that, ironically, film directors “regained the right to complete artistic freedom” only while the country was under German rule.41 French cinema boomed, and the number of film producers doubled during the occupation.

This golden age disappeared soon after France’s liberation. French studios had neither the financial resources nor the governmental support that American studios did. Hollywood had a huge inventory of films made during the war, whereas France’s studios suffered layoffs and shutdowns after the war. As a result, American cinema soon dominated French theaters. Hungry for an escape from the harsh realities of war, French audiences feasted upon the high-budget, sophisticated American films. American cinema not only had a strong French following, but also significant backing from the U.S. government. The 1946 Blum-Byrnes agreement on financial aid to France called for France to “modernize on the U.S. pattern with U.S. aid and accept American rules in its foreign trade.” During negotiations, Washington made only one specific demand: that France would lessen its restrictions on Hollywood movies. De Gaulle’s government, worried over the fate of French cinema, tried to re-establish more barriers, but failed. (Other countries, such as England, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union had fairly free access to the French market and never encountered such restrictions). But public demand for American movies was too strong.

American cinema sold very well in France, especially among young people. French cinema concentrated more on serious dramas, leaving the entertainment-oriented

market to Hollywood. This move turned out to have serious consequences for the future of French cinema. When Hollywood targeted younger audiences, it captured a segment of the market that grew up accustomed to American, not French, cinematic styles.

The Blum-Byrnes agreement dictated that four out of every thirteen weeks could be reserved for French features; cinema owners could show what they liked the remaining nine. Ironically, it was France, not the United States, that pushed for quotas, mostly likely because it wanted to guarantee at least some part of the film market for domestic films. While many French voted with their feet by attending American movies, others were unhappy with the erosion of French cinema. Less than two years after the Blum-Byrnes agreement, protests erupted against Hollywood’s “intrusion into the sacred culture of France.” Thousands of film workers and supporters marched in Paris in 1948. One actor commented that Hollywood “endanger[s] the very existence of dramatic art. The change in French taste may well be irreversible and fatal.” The actor then drew a parallel—not insignificantly—between Hollywood and Coke: “Accustomed to the wines of Burgundy and Bordeaux, our stomachs will now have to adjust to Coca-Cola. For a Frenchman this amounts to giving up his citizenship.” As with the Coca-Cola wars, French Communists and others disgruntled with America’s presence capitalized upon resentment with, in their eyes, force-fed American culture. Washington made some small allowances in 1948, granting an additional week of French-only showings and agreeing to limit its exports to 121 films per year.42

Although post-war American economic aid removed protectionist quotas on film imports, French cinema has benefited despite, or perhaps because of, stiff American

42 Costigliola, 54-57.
competition. One study of French postwar cinema remarks that “it was arguably the close study of American cinema which led to the renaissance of French cinema in the late 1950s which was known as the *nouvelle vague* (new wave).” Forced to define themselves against American film, French directors created this new approach to filmmaking that today “has been almost universally adopted.”

Today, ambivalence about American cinema still exists in France. American films continue to sell very well, because five decades of American cinema have changed French audiences’ tastes. Michel Ciment, editor of *Positif* magazine and long-time film critic, says that “The American cinema has imposed its rhythm and subject-matter on the young audience.” Promising young directors continue to leave France for more lucrative work in the United States. As of 2000, less than 30% of films shown in France were French, while Hollywood movies comprised nearly the rest. French films are difficult to export to the United States. Still, some producers and moviegoers fight to keep French cinema alive. Marin Karmitz, producer of *Code Unknown* and *Three Colors* Trilogy, states: “It’s important to maintain pockets of resistance by producing films that are different. It’s like food. Industrialists want everyone to eat McDonald’s—but we don’t have to accept that.” As with Coca-Cola and fast food, American cinema thrives in France, but still has significant numbers of detractors who resist the encroachment of American culture in France.

**Euro Disney: A Dream Come True?**

A tremendous uproar surrounded the park’s opening in the spring of 1992. As with Coca-Cola and cinema, Euro Disney had a direct French competitor, Parc Astérix,

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43 Kelley, 174, 177.
which opened in 1989 thirty-five kilometers north of Paris. When Disney announced its intention to build a large theme park near Paris a few years later, Parc Astérix worried that it might go out of business. It took action in the form of an extensive advertising campaign touting its educational and historical value as well as a lower ticket price. In the end, Parc Astérix thrived because of Euro Disney—forced to advertise heavily, Parc Astérix succeeded in presenting itself as a viable alternative to Euro Disney.

Opposition to Euro Disney was not merely limited to calls to save Parc Astérix. Some objections to the new Disney theme park were reasonable and expected—among them the increased traffic and noise of the fireworks held every night. People criticized the French government for giving too many handouts to the company—land, money, and services. The government did put up enormous amounts of assistance, lured by the possibility of 30,000 new jobs and tourists spending a projected $1 billion yearly. It gave Disney low interest loans, halved the usual sales tax required, extended the Paris subway system to the site, and enabled the company to purchase the required 4700 acres of prime real estate. Some labor unions objected to Disney’s strict regulations on appearance. Women could not dye their hair outlandish colors or wear inappropriate underclothing. Men could not wear beards or moustaches. These dress codes, unions claimed, “were an attack on the French sense of individual liberty and dignity.” One member from a communist labor union claimed that Euro Disney was becoming “the fifty-first American state.” Intellectuals, especially leftist ones, loved to hate Euro Disney. Ariane Mnouchkine, a theatrical director, called it “a cultural Chernobyl”—and that phrase became the most quoted criticism of the park. Other critics couched the park in equally doleful terms. Alain Finkielkraut called it “a terrifying giant step toward world
homogenization.” Max Gallo said it would “bombard France with uprooted creations that are to culture what fast food is to gastronomy.” Jean-Marie Rouart, writer and literary critic for *Le Figaro*, said it was “the very symbol of the process by which people’s cultural standards are lowered and money becomes all-consuming.”

Although many French writers and thinkers reveled in lambasting the park, others offered more balanced commentary. Jean-François Revel remarked, “If French culture can be squashed by Mickey Mouse, or more exactly by simply moving Mickey geographically, it would have to be disturbingly fragile.” He argued that French culture was not being colonized; indeed, Euro Disney was presenting European tales of Cinderella and Pinocchio to Europeans. Euro Disney president Robert Fitzpatrick defended the park by stating that “Diversion is also a form of culture, the French know it well. Have they forgotten?”  

The park was not an instant success. During its first three years, Euro Disney lost $1.5 billion. Park attendance and hotel occupancy rates were lower than expected. Many of the park’s financial troubles came from a failure to understand and market to European cultures. Park officials had assumed that European customers would behave like Americans. But Europeans did not flock to Euro Disney during the winter, nor did they spend as much money at the park as their American counterparts. They tended to insist on punctuality for entering, eating, and leaving, so long lines were a constant frustration. Finally, Euro Disney made some changes to suit its European customers. It lowered prices across the board, added a roller coaster ride that celebrated Jules Verne, served wine and beer at park restaurants. It adapted and it survived. In the fiscal year September

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45 Kuisel, 229.
1994-1995, Euro Disney turned its first profit of $24 million. It also changed the park’s name to Disneyland Paris. Disney chairman Michael Eisner explained that to Europeans, the former name had connotations with business and currency as well as with the park’s unsuccessful beginning. The Disney corporation chose the new name to reinforce the park’s connection with “one of the most romantic and exciting cities in the world.” Today the park does brisk business, and its future seems secure.\textsuperscript{46}

The Coke wars, cinema controversies, and Disney debates in France illustrate several prevalent themes in French-American cultural relations. First, the French resent American companies forcing their businesses and products into France, or even getting special favors, as was the case with Euro Disney. Second, many French perceive economic modernization as a very real threat to the French way of life. Many of the traditions valued in France—fine cuisine, artisanal rather than industrial production, long family meals—have eroded with the onset of modern consumer society. While Americans know how to make money, the French feel that they have superior knowledge about culture and civilization. Third, those on opposite sides of a controversy often talk past each other. Americans tend to focus on disproving tangible concerns—Coke’s health risks, for example—while the French worry more about intangibles, such as “the moral landscape of France,” its culture and civilization. Last, the notion of culture has two different meanings. Those who resist American culture characterize French culture as fragile and tenuous, while enthusiasts depict French culture as strong, resilient, and not easily erased.

Cultural Exchange or Cultural Imperialism?

The presence of American cultural products does not necessarily mean that France has become Americanized, or that American mass culture has reigned uncontested. Opponents and supporters continue to debate whether American culture in France has made the country more diverse and cosmopolitan (the “cosmopolitan” camp), or whether France has become Americanized and lost values and traditions in the exchange (the “preservationist” camp). The former group sees cultural interaction as an additive process; when cultures meet, they both remain largely intact and come out of the equation with more variety and richness. The latter group views cultural exchange as an exclusionary process in which cultures exist in competition, not cooperation, with each other.

The cosmopolitan argument portrays French culture and identity as strong, vital, and active. Richard Pells argues that although American mass culture has had an “undeniable impact” on Europe, “Western Europe did not become a miniature version of the United States.” He views cultural transmission between Europe and the United States as reciprocal. While the U.S. might have exported its technology and mass culture, European fashions and products affected Americans as well. In addition, when American culture went abroad, Europeans adapted it to fit their own tastes and traditions. In effect, they “Europeanized” American culture. Pells states: “Europeans adopted American customs only if these were compatible with their own experiences and expectations.” They have also heavily modified American culture, just as Americans have changed and adapted aspects of their European heritage, such as language, religion, music, and political theories. Increased cultural contact led not to an Americanized Europe, but to a
“hybrid culture, part American and part European.” Pells concludes that through “resistance and modification, each country in Western Europe was able to preserve its cultural distinctiveness no matter how strong were the temptations to imitate America.”

Others take a more pessimistic approach, arguing that American culture has had a primarily negative influence in France. Preservationists feel that American culture has denigrated, not enhanced, some aspects of French culture. Their arguments generally focus on the fragility of French culture; it needs to be protected, safeguarded, sheltered. For example, Bové and others state that fast food has not made France more culinarily diverse (a common assertion), but instead has bred a generation accustomed to bland, highly processed foods. Traditional French cuisine becomes less appealing to those raised on fast food’s small range of flavors. One interviewee from Nice noted that young French people tend to avoid the stronger flavors of French cuisine—especially in the South where garlic, anchovies, and extra virgin olive oil are staples—because they regularly eat fast food. Small food markets, local grocery stores, and the family farms that supply them struggle to survive with the entrance of “hypermarchés” such as Carrefour, Auchan, or Géant Casino, which are similar to a Super Target or Super Wal-Mart. American-style grocery chains do not coexist with small grocery stores, but instead force them to go out of business by offering lower prices and more selection under one roof.

One well-known preservationist movement in France has attempted to safeguard the French language through strict legislation. In 1994, Justice Minister Jacques Toubon helped pass a Communications Act (often called the Toubon Law) aimed at preserving the French language. The act requires all public communications—advertising,

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47 Pells, xv, 282-283.
government documents, public service providers, product labels, and so on—to be in French. It also restricts non-French language music by requiring at least forty percent of songs broadcast on the radio to be in French. Toubon has been an advocate for restrictive language laws for a long time, arguing that without protection, France will become an American “colony.” “Our language lies at the base of our values and identity,” Toubon argues. His solution to the “invasion” of foreign words was to strictly prohibit the use of any non-foreign words, especially franglais.

The Toubon law is very controversial. Those who disagree with it usually find ways around the requirements. Radio stations, for example, will often play the required French language music late at night, to leave room for more popular international music during the day. Some argue that the Toubon law has helped the music industry by supporting domestic artists; others say it has squelched creativity and lessened the international appeal of French music. Those supporting and opposing the Toubon law conceptualize French culture and identity in drastically different ways. They view French culture and language as fixed, as something to preserve from change. But those opposed note that French language and culture have always been in a state of flux. Even modern French is a recent phenomenon; 150 years ago, only four fifths of French people actually spoke French. France has borrowed from other languages and cultures to become what it is today, opponents argue; to try to freeze French identity is a futile and counter-productive measure.48

Anti-Americanism’s Decline

As France experienced the process of modernization after World War II, attitudes towards the United States shifted from hostility to pity. Anti-Americanism became less prominent and evolved into feelings of ambivalence towards globalization and a consumer economy, rather than only towards the United States. When France began struggling with the same issues the United States had decades previously, it realized that those problems were not necessarily exclusive to America, but common to any nation developing an urban, industrial economy. Kuisel states: “There is a kind of global imperative that goes by the name Americanization. Although the phenomenon is still described as Americanization, it has become increasingly disconnected from America. Perhaps it would be better described as the coming of consumer society.” As a result, depictions of America shifted from a menacing aggressor to a victim of the same forces accosting France. In fact, for a time during the mid-1980s, France even became enthusiastically pro-American. The intelligentsia had undergone a generational shift, with far fewer anti-American demagogues among them. Intellectuals lost their elite status as more people attended universities and formed their own opinions about American culture. This new love for America manifested itself in a proliferation of American-style grills, sweatshirts with American university insignias, and Napa Valley wines. Opinion polls found only a small portion of the French expressing dislike for the United States.49

One reason for the shift in attitudes towards the United States came from changes in French intellectual life. Immediately after World War II, intellectuals leaned heavily


49 Kuisel, 4, 185-186, 219-227.
toward the left and the French Communist Party. This strong Communist influence
turned many French against the United States. But both countries experienced drastic
social changes in the late 60s and early 70s. Many French became disillusioned with
communism after learning about atrocities such as the Khmer Rouge’s genocidal
slaughter in Cambodia and Soviet labor camps. The United States seemed much less of a
menace after its defeat in Vietnam and financial troubles. French intellectuals started to
praise rather than demonize American society; they also had a profound influence in
American universities.

In the 1970s and 80s, political and diplomatic relations between France and the
United States also changed, allowing the United States to see France more favorably and
lessening the intimate ties that often provoked animosity between the two countries. For
two decades immediately after the war, the countries had to work together in close
proximity to create the Western alliance. But when a new, younger generation came to
the scene in the 70s and 80s, they “saw less reason to accept Washington’s leadership,
particularly as America’s economic and military preeminence faded.” France and the
United States took interest in other countries and areas of the globe besides each other.
With more political and diplomatic distance between each other, the two countries could
re-evaluate their relationship in a more positive light. The United States began viewing
France as more of a cooperator than a competitor, and France lost some of its acrimony
towards America.\footnote{Costigliola, 189-192.}

**Making Sense of José Bové—and of Globalization**

José Bové’s widely publicized dismantling of McDonald’s led many to conclude
that anti-Americanism fueled his protest. John Lloyd of the Financial Times, for example, argues that Bové’s protest was a “pure and militant form” of anti-Americanism.\(^{51}\) But Bové would disagree; he has repeated numerous times that his demonstration was neither a form of anti-Americanism, nor one of exaggerated French nationalism. He states: “Our struggle is not with the American ‘Great Satan’—it’s with the multinationals. A lot of them happen to be American.”\(^{52}\) In fact, both interpretations are correct. While Bové might not have personally conceived the action against McDonald’s as anti-American, France has a long history of ambivalence towards America—sometimes restrained, and sometimes erupting in overt displays of anti-Americanism. Anti-Americanism is far less common today in France than it used to be. But contemporary French concerns about globalization evolve directly from worries about America. Bové’s protest fits squarely within the context of an ongoing love-hate relationship between France and the United States, one that has become more stable in the past few decades.

\(^{52}\) Bremner, “The New Astérix.”
A series of trade battles erupted between Europe and North America in the summer of 1999. After Europe refused to import hormone-enhanced beef from Canada and the United States, the two countries retaliated. With the World Trade Organization’s blessing, they imposed 100% tariffs on over sixty luxury European food items including Roquefort cheese, tomatoes, foie gras, and mustard. Just another trade war, one might be tempted to think. But José Bové brought global attention to these trade barrier battles when he led the “symbolic dismantling” of a McDonald’s under construction. The media loved the protest. Bucolic peasants asserting their independence against a global giant; children and villagers cheering them on—a perfect story of heroic peasant uprisings starring the media-savvy, radical farmer’s union spokesman Bové. Capitalizing upon the attention he received, he turned the dismantling and his trial a year later into a worldwide “trial on globalization.”

Unrest about globalization has been growing in France and around the world. Bové is one of many articulate opponents who argue that liberal free trade might not be the best way to promote human health, happiness, and well-being. Bové’s criticisms of globalization fall within four major themes. First, he fights against large multinational corporations that force their methods and products onto consumers. Second, he seeks “food sovereignty,” or the right of people to be agriculturally self-sufficient and to choose the foods they grow and eat. Third, he seeks to place people above profits; in other
words, he argues that human rights and ethics should stand before free trade. Last, he disavows “ultra-liberal” free trade in favor of “fair trade,” in which accountability and transparency guide market transactions.

Bové’s critiques of globalization deal mainly with intangibles—he resists unregulated globalization because it reduces people’s quality of life, even if it enriches their bank accounts. His ideas also echo past debates over American culture in France. As a cultural “preservationist,” Bové seeks to guard France from what he perceives as American cultural imperialism, facilitated by a globalized economy. On the other side of the debate, cultural “cosmopolitans” argue that globalization has enriched, not degraded, France.

José Bové and His Raging (Over) Hormones

To Americans, who regularly consume hormone-enhanced agricultural products, Europe’s reluctance to import hormone-enhanced beef might seem unwarranted. Americans have treated cattle with synthetic and natural hormones since the 1950s. European countries also used hormones in the past, until a scare over the hormone diethylstilbestrol (DES) sparked the decision to ban all hormones and hormone-treated imports in 1989. Today, Europeans tend to be more conservative about allowing hormones or genetically modified foods into their food supply. Hormones can stimulate muscle mass development, regulate fertility, and increase milk production. The synthetic hormone DES, used frequently since the 1950’s to build muscle mass in cattle, was found to be carcinogenic in humans in the early 1960’s. Even though the FDA and other
organizations banned the hormone,¹ its illegal use continued. After a scandal in Italy, where DES appeared in baby food and veal calves and “reports of infant girls growing breasts and menstruating” circulated, the EU banned all use or imports of hormones.²

American cattle-raisers have continued to object to this ban, insisting that hormones currently in use pose no threat to human health. But Americans and Europeans have different attitudes about the legitimacy of scientific evidence. To Americans, the issue “seems very black and white. You’ve got scientific evidence. Once you have that, you just follow it,” according to Shelby Matthews, director of economic issues for the Committee of Agricultural Organizations in the European Union (COPA). But Europeans “don’t see it quite that way. First of all, science is not always just black and white.”³ The Scientific Conference on Growth Promotion in Meat Production held in Brussels in 1995 found “no evidence of human health risk associated with use of growth-producing hormones used under ‘prescribed conditions,’” but those findings have still not convinced Europeans to allow hormone-treated products into their food supply.⁴ Europeans cite other studies that have shown growth hormones to pose health risks.⁵ They are not willing to risk health hazards and would prefer to raise cattle naturally, even though they could increase their profits by using hormones. In addition, European beef producers worry that if hormone-enhanced beef is allowed in, “it could turn consumers against beef products to the detriment of all producers. It could turn them against eating beef

¹ The FDA banned DES in 1979.
⁵ Rauber, 24.
altogether.”

The United States and Canada brought a complaint before the World Trade Organization, arguing that Europe’s ban violated current trade agreements. In 1997, the WTO ruled that the ban on hormone-enhanced beef was an illegal trade barrier. On 12 July 1999, the WTO authorized the United States and Canada to impose 100 percent tariffs on European luxury imports—the impetus for Bové’s protest. Numerous European officials expressed solidarity with Bové. For example, European Union spokesperson Nikolaus van der Pas remarked: “The Americans have said we’re wrong, and we disagree completely with the Americans.”

The WTO ruling estimated America’s losses due to the hormone ban at $116.8 million; in theory, the retaliatory tariffs should match that figure. The tariffs have been extremely unpopular with European farmers. French farmers protest that the items under tariff are unfairly singled out and that most have no relevance to beef products. To add injustice to injustice, the United States continues to ban British beef, citing the possibility of mad cow disease, even while England insists its beef is safe. Paul Rauber, writing for *Sierra*, notes that the U.S. “refuses to accept the risk of mad-cow disease, but accepts the risk of cancer from hormones—and insists that others do the same.” European countries resent that forced double standard.

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6 “Europeans Defend Ban,” 22.
7 See Appendix A for an abbreviated list of products affected by the tariffs.
8 Rauber, 24.
9 Ibid., 24.
Many French farmers besides José Bové opposed the WTO’s decision (see Figure 10). In early September 1999, 500 fruit and vegetable farmers threw apples at riot police. At the same time, around 200 farmers gathered in Deauville, Normandy, during the annual American film festival. They set up a makeshift farm, complete with cows, pigs, geese, and horses, to show their frustration with globalization and American economic hegemony. One protester in Deauville remarked, “The Americans came to help us 50 years ago. But that doesn’t mean they can tell us what to eat and how to film.” Most of
the protesting farmers belonged to Bové’s radical farmer’s union, the Confédération Paysanne.¹⁰

**Hegemony and Dictatorship**

Globalization is a complex and sometimes problematic concept. Anti-globalization can sometimes mean a generalized opposition to capitalism and commerce, or it can be specific criticisms of economic, political, or cultural structures—depending on the speaker. Critics and supporters alike often use it as a catch-all term, one that signifies either an exciting new world order or a global menace. Tony Royle, author of *Working For McDonald’s in Europe: The Unequal Struggle?*, comments that the term’s meaning is constantly being contested: “Even a cursory review of the subject would quickly reveal that there are disagreements about when globalization began, what form it is taking and even whether it is really taking place at all.”¹¹

In his book *The Globalization Syndrome*, James H. Mittelman identifies two main definitions of globalization. The first points to an “increase in interconnections, or interdependence, a rise in transnational flows, and an intensification of processes such that the world is, in some aspects, becoming a single place.” In this definition, globalization causes national borders and identities to become much less fixed as international exchange of products and ideas becomes easier. The president of the Ford Foundation explains globalization in these words:

> The term [globalization] reflects a more comprehensive level of interaction than has occurred in the past, suggesting something different from the word

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“international.” It implies a diminishing importance of national borders and the strengthening of identities that stretch beyond those rooted in a particular region or country.

The second conception of globalization emphasizes a “compression of time and space.” In other words, globalization has shortened our conception of space by reducing the time required to exchange commodities throughout the world. Globalization causes people to rethink their notions of time—“seasons or sunup and sundown in agrarian societies”—and to disassociate time from space. Anthony Giddens phrases this new understanding of time and space as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.”

Mittelman proposes a new definition of globalization that goes beyond the two usual concepts. In his words, globalization:

*means a historical transformation: in the economy, of livelihoods and modes of existence; in politics, a loss in the degree of control exercised locally…and in culture, a devaluation of a collectivity’s achievements or perceptions of them.*

*This structure, in turn, may engender either accommodation or resistance.*

(emphasis his)

Mittelman’s framework of globalization takes several factors into account, including economics, politics, society, and culture. A good paraphrase of his definition would be that globalization is a “political and social response to the expansion of market power.”

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José Bové’s rhetoric against globalization deals mainly with how globalization affects economic structures, culture, and health. He does not oppose all forms of globalization. He recognizes that global trade is inevitable and can yield some positive effects. Yet he argues that globalization must go hand in hand with regulation.

Bové’s discontent falls into four major areas. First, he claims that globalization has facilitated a dictatorship of corporations and multinational trade organizations. Second, he argues that globalization privileges profits over ethics. His third criticism of globalization states that it undermines food sovereignty—the right of people to choose how to produce their food and what to eat. Last, he presents “fair trade” as an alternative to the practice of free trade.

In the first of his critiques, Bové portrays large corporations as players in a “worldwide dictatorship.” He says that because private companies stretch across national boundaries, they often take over the role of governments in regulating commerce. “We no longer live under conditions of traditional management and interstate conflicts, but in the middle of a war between private powers, with the market as the battleground.” This claim might appear extreme—remember that radicals like Bové gain popularity by avoiding the middle ground—but France has had several negative experiences with large American-based businesses, such as Coca-Cola, Hollywood, and Euro Disney. In addition, France’s decline as a world leader has left the country particularly sensitive to threats to its sovereignty. Its “innate mistrust of globalization. . . is equated by many with American hegemonism and a whittling down of French sovereignty.”

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13 Bové and Dufour, 146.
José Bové argues that the WTO has overstepped its proper sphere as a mediator of global trade. According to François Dufour, fellow CP member and witness at Bové’s trial, “The WTO has extended its sphere of intervention beyond the regulation of trade to the imposition of the free-market model, requiring some countries to deregulate.” For example, the World Trade Organization will not allow countries to ban agricultural or food produce for health reasons—something Europe attempted to do with hormone-enhanced beef. The WTO quickly approved punitive tariffs on many specialty food items, clearly signaling that Europe’s actions were out of line. Bové’s response exemplifies French resentment over being told what to import and eat: “We are going to denounce the excesses of the WTO—the way it works, the way it imposes the rule of the market with all the consequences that the people then have to endure.”

In the eyes of the French, many American corporations as well as trade organizations have entered France despite strong resistance. Coca-Cola, Hollywood, and Euro Disney are fascinating examples of American companies that have encountered widespread criticism along with financial success in France (see Chapter 3). Coca-Cola and Hollywood exercised their political and economic muscles to gain entry into French markets, despite intense protests from citizens and government. The Disney Corporation opened Euro Disney outside Paris amidst great concern that the theme park, an “omnipresence of American mass culture,” would further erode French culture. Critics of Euro Disney complained that the company received too many handouts from the French government. In all three cases, critics complain that the French had too little say about

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15 Bové and Dufour, 149.
whether or not to allow the product into France.

**People Above Profits**

When Bové rejects the “global model dictated by the multinationals,” such as the one promoted by the World Trade Organization, he objects specifically to the practice of placing profits above any other considerations. His second platform against globalization resists the notion that “the entire planet should submit to market laws.” He outlines two different views of society. The first, often practiced today, is that the market and its rules should run everything, where capital is more important that all human activity. The other, which he supports, is that “people and their political institutions—not to mention issues such as the environment or culture—are at the forefront of society’s concerns.” François Dufour agrees and adds that globalization facilitates trade that completely disregards people’s needs and that erodes “all fundamental rights.”

Certain ideas and institutions have an intangible value and should never become “mere commodities,” such as culture, food, health, and education. Bové wants those considerations, and not money, to be the bottom line of international trade. He supports globalization, so long as it is regulated and “based on equality of rights, not on the dominance of the economically strong.” During the trial in June 2000, the CP produced T-shirts for supporters that read: “The World Is Not For Sale—And Neither Am I!” These shirts aptly summarize Bové’s stance against placing a price on people and their values.

Bové suggests several tangible measures that would encourage ethical trading

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17 Bové and Dufour, 146-47.
practices. To begin with, he wants the World Trade Organization to adopt the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Human Rights Charter outlines fundamental human rights, such as freedom from slavery, oppression, and discrimination; basic political and legal rights; and freedom of thought, assembly, and speech. Bové poses the question: “Why should the global market escape the rule of international law or human rights conventions passed by the United Nations?” Then, when global capitalism fails to ensure basic human rights, the WTO could enforce those rights through economic incentives or punitive trade barriers. José Bové also calls for an independent, international court of justice to hear appeals about WTO decisions. Bové argues that this court would break the WTO’s “monopoly of power” and allow political consensus to be “built from the local to the international, from citizens to the state, not the other way around.”

Bové’s conception of ethical trade includes agriculture. To ensure ethical marketplace behavior in agriculture, farmers must respect the natural limits of plants, animals, and the earth. Bové disapproves of practices such as intensive agriculture or enhancing livestock with hormones, whose sole purpose is to bring a higher yield at lower cost, without regard to the consumer’s or animal’s health or to the quality of the meat. He notes that cows pushed to produce too much milk are weaker and more susceptible to health hazards than are normal cows. Similarly, overly large pig herds have more health problems than do small ones. Globalization has enabled the world-wide exchange of products that in the past would have remained closer to the producing

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20 Accessible at www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm.
21 Bové and Dufour, 165-66.
country because of prohibitive shipping costs. Thus intensive agriculture has become widespread because it allows farmers to remain competitive against cheaper imports. Bové explains that: “the free market pays little heed to the need for caution, still less to social and environmental consideration.” He feels that ethics, not profits, should dictate behavior.\(^{22}\)

**Food Sovereignty**

The third of Bové’s four main platforms against globalization is “food sovereignty”: the right of farmers and their countries to be agriculturally self-sufficient. Farmers should be able to choose which crops to raise, and should have the power to enact tariffs to protect domestic production. Bové explains that food sovereignty “enables people to think for themselves, without any imposed model for agriculture or society . . . . This sovereignty means independent access to food: to be self-sufficient and to be able to choose what we eat.”\(^{23}\) The Farmer’s Confederation supports tariffs on agricultural imports to protect domestic products from competition. Without protective measures, countries with lower labor costs and fewer environmental controls can flood foreign markets with cheap imports, a process called dumping. Dumping destroys domestic markets by offering products at low prices.

Bové and the CP believe strongly in food self-sufficiency—producing native agricultural products sufficient to feed a country’s own people. Starting in 1957, the European Community formed the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to promote European agricultural self-sufficiency. Its goals were to: “raise productivity, achieve a fair standard of living for agricultural workers, stabilize markets, guarantee regular

\(^{22}\) Bové and Dufour 79, 82-83.

\(^{23}\) *Ibid.*, 159.
supplies, and ensure reasonable prices to consumers.” It achieved these goals through price guarantees and protective customs barriers that enabled European farmers to provide domestically-grown food, rather than relying upon imports.24

After European farmers gained food self-sufficiency in the late 70’s, they did not keep production at stable levels, but continued to increase yields in an effort to gain a larger share of the world market. Hugh Raven explains that “in practice, high levels of domestic production mean more is exported than imported”—a move Bové strongly disapproves of.25 Bové argues that a country should produce goods suited to its particular geography and climate and should keep production at levels that do not jeopardize the livelihood of other farmers. When countries do export products, they should do so responsibly. France, for example, excels at the production of wines, spirits, cheeses, mustard, and foie gras, to name a few. These products command the world market, without having to rely on subsidies, because of their quality.26

Bové argues that producing to export, rather than producing to feed domestic markets, is problematic for several reasons. First, it undermines other countries’ efforts at food self-sufficiency. Also, agricultural surpluses usually come at a great environmental cost. Intensive monoculture relies upon taxing the soil beyond its normal capacity. To make up for the detrimental effects of intensive agriculture, farmers must rely upon fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and irrigation. Also, intensive farming relies upon a very small number of plant varieties, often not suited to the particular climate or soil. As a result, biodiversity decreases. Bové remarks that “in most instances we’ve turned our

25 Raven 22, Bové and Dufour, 75.
26 Bové and Dufour, 154-55.
backs on traditional farming’s respect for biological rhythms.” Monoculture has caused “demographic, economic, and ecological disequilibrium...Consolidation of farms, draining of the land, cutting down hedges and leveling of hills have all taken place in the name of economic gain, without any heed...to geographical, hydrographic and climatic considerations.”

Bové denounces “la malbouffe” and other forms of industrialized food for “impoverish[ing] the rural world.” How? McDonald’s and other fast food chains contract their food supplies out to large corporate farms, not from local, smaller farms. Small farmers like Bové who produce Roquefort cheese in the Larzac plateau face increasingly stiff competition against large farming corporations that crowd out competitors. Large farms frequently practice intensive agriculture and thus can afford to charge less for their products than smaller sustainable farms can. Feeding livestock grain costs less per head than free range animals, for example, because farmers can raise many more animals per acre. Using herbicides and pesticides is less expensive than organic farming. Not only do fast food restaurants buy their supplies from farms that practice environmentally harmful intensive agriculture and that crowd out smaller operations, restaurants rarely use the kinds of traditional products that farmers like himself raise—specialty cheeses, homegrown wines, or high quality foie gras, for example.

To support food sovereignty, Bové and the CP—like the World Trade Organization—oppose export subsidies. But their agreement goes no further. The Farmer’s Confederation, unlike the WTO, also supports the right to establish customs

27 Bové and Dufour, 60-68.
28 Ibid., 66-68.
Barriers according to the country’s needs. Without such barriers, a liberalized economy forces farmers to lower prices and to focus on quantity rather than quality.  

Bové claims that globalization undermines food sovereignty in a cultural as well as economic sense. He criticizes the globalization of fast food because of the unhealthy eating habits it promotes. Bové has ample grounds for that complaint. Although France has a smaller obese and overweight population than the United States, the numbers are beginning to rise. As of 1999, 6.2% of the French were obese, compared to 25% in the United States. However, more and more French are becoming overweight and obese and have corresponding health problems such as high cholesterol and blood pressure. Twelve percent of French children between the ages of five and twelve are obese—twice the number as twenty years ago. An article in Adweek notes that globalization has facilitated the spread of fast-food and unhealthy American eating habits around the world: “More often than not, ‘globalization’ is a code word for ‘Americanization,’ and food is no exception. Fat is as American as eating a double portion of apple pie.” A recent study in the Journal of the American Medical Association confirms that globalization has had a terrible impact on world-wide obesity levels.

What is it about American fast food and eating habits that has caused the French to become more overweight in the past few decades? Several factors come into play. Europeans typically have eaten smaller portions of food, while the opposite is true in the

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29 Bové and Dufour, 148-155.
United States. Michael Fumento, author of the study on obesity *Fat of the Land*, notes that American restaurants serve very large portions. This custom is becoming more common in France, especially in fast food establishments.\(^\text{34}\) In addition, a faster-paced lifestyle leads to poorer nutrition. First in America and now around the globe, fast food has become temptingly convenient for working parents. Children watch television and snack more frequently than ever—another American custom now carried abroad.\(^\text{35}\) In addition, American diets are much less varied than those of the French. A study of French and American eating habits revealed that 90 percent of French subjects scored high on the variety of foods they ate, compared to 33 percent of Americans. Even though high-scoring French subjects ate foods high in energy and fat, they were slimmer and had fewer obesity-related health problems than their American counterparts. This study suggests that a highly varied diet leads to greater health.

Fast food, then, is a culprit in promoting obesity because it relies on a limited number of ingredients (mostly starches, fats, and sugars, with little fresh produce), offers large portions, and markets itself as a convenient food for people on the go. Rose Prince, writing for the *Independent*, comments that “the drive to standardize, merchandize and cheapen food production in the US is literally killing people.” Eric Schlosser, author of *Fast Food Nation*, would agree. He argues that fast food companies have fuelled the worldwide epidemic of obesity.\(^\text{36}\)

Fast food’s entry into France has done more than offered another kind of food choice to the French consumer. It has played a very malignant role in undermining

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\(^\text{34}\) “Global Citizens.”
\(^\text{35}\) Greenberg et al, 60.
people’s appreciation for good food, cutting down on the time people spend at the table, and destroying the central place that food has held in French culture. Bové states: “Apart from the odd Sunday, or special occasions, the meal is no longer the focus of the day, a time for conviviality and sharing.” With the encroachment of fast food, prepared foods, and modern lifestyles, the “art of cooking and eating together will soon not be passed on to new generations; this has resulted in a loss of family cohesion, and of the ties that bind us to the land or place where we live,” Bové warns.37

Food occupies a sacred space in French culture—which explains why Bové’s struggle for food sovereignty has been so popular. Even in a country that has modernized and is a large player in the global market, some parts of the culture remain “sacred cows” that raise French hackles when disturbed.38 Food is one of them. In an article for the Observer, Stuart Jeffries explains that France expresses “its national identity through cooking and eating well, and [has] a culinary heritage that has for centuries commanded international respect.” In Bové’s words, many people eat to live, but the French live to eat: “We have remained a culture where the time spent at the table is not just for consuming food. It’s a social and family movement.”39 So when the quality or safety of food is at stake—mad cow disease, chickens laced with dioxins, contaminated oysters, to name a few recent French food scares—national identity as well as public health is at stake.40 In France, Bové explains, “Cooking is culture. Every nation, every region, has its own food cultures. Food and farming define people. We cannot let it all go, to be

37 Bové and Dufour, 56.
39 Bremner, “The New Asterix.”
replaced with hamburgers.”

Bové recognizes the central role that food plays in France and uses it as a powerful rhetorical tool in his arguments against globalization. In a country with long-standing traditions of farmer’s markets and three-hour meals, the pace and tastes of contemporary culture pose a very real threat to French identity.

**Fair Trade, Not Free Trade**

Another of José Bové’s arguments against globalization centers on the concept of “fair trade.” Liberal free trade, he argues, helps some groups at the expense of others. He proposes an alternative system of commerce, which he terms “fair trade,” that would correct some of these inequalities. In fair trade, goods are purchased at their real production cost, rather than at artificially low prices made possible by government subsidies. Thus dumping—flooding a foreign market with underpriced goods—would be inimical to fair trade. Protective customs barriers would keep prices fair and allow domestic producers to stay in business. Bové notes that powerful companies often dump agricultural goods onto other countries. Then, after overpowering local competitors, “they raise prices again.” France has been both victim and perpetrator in this scenario. It has rapidly lost farmers—300,000 between 1992 and 1998—partly because of consolidation of farms and partly to inexpensive imports. On the other hand, France and other European countries have also heavily subsidized frozen meat exports, which halved Sub-Saharan livestock production.

Fair trade also would ameliorate inequality in the distribution of wealth by breaking up companies that command enormous amounts of resources and power. For example, Cargill’s merger with Continental gave the company control over 20 percent of

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41 Kingsnorth, 40.
42 Bové and Dufour, 153.
world wheat cultivation, 30 percent of soya, and over 40 percent of corn. In addition, Cargill is allied with Monsanto, a seed and chemical giant. In many areas, Cargill controls “the whole food chain, from seed to plate.” Corporations like these exacerbate resource distribution and exercise inordinate control over agriculture production and pricing.43

Fair trade embraces corporate responsibility, accountability, and transparency. Companies and organizations should be responsible to consumers, as well as to the environment. One of Bové’s main complaints with the WTO is its lack of transparency. Trade agreements take place behind closed doors, rather than allowing the public to participate.44 Enron’s recent fall from grace illustrates the perils of corporate secrecy; because decision-makers were unwilling to inform employees and investors of the company’s dire financial situation, thousands of people lost their investments and retirement plans.

José Bové’s campaign against unregulated globalization has attracted many followers. His charismatic personality, media-ready slogans, and well-articulated arguments have sparked interest in what some people think will be the next major social movement.45 But Bové’s ideas do not stand unopposed. For all the enthusiastic Bovistes, there are also those who cheer globalization and free trade. Pro-globalization arguments attempt to address issues that Bové has raised, but they usually attack the questions from a different set of assumptions. While Bové worries most about the intangible social and environmental costs of liberalized free trade, globalization enthusiasts tend to rely upon

43 Bové and Dufour, 154.
44 Ibid., 155.
tangible economic data to support their positions. Those who do address matters of culture and identity argue that globalization has made cultures more heterogeneous and varied.

**Calling Bové’s Bluff**

Some proponents of globalization argue that it increases wealth and makes corporations more, not less, accountable to the consumer. People are better off, supporters of globalization say, because globalized free trade brings tangible monetary benefits such as a higher standard of living, greater agricultural productivity, and rising GDPs. But for all of its volume and quantity, pro-globalization rhetoric often dismisses concerns about globalization and talks past its opponents, rather than entering into a dialogue with them.

Supporters of globalization often cite the success of the American business model in France. An article in *Business Week* profiles several large French corporations—Vivendi, Alcatel, LVMH—that recently purchased American giants such as Seagram Company, Universal film and music, and MP3.com. These French companies have benefited from “U.S. management knowhow and technical savvy,” the article claims. In fact, they “look more American than French.” The article quotes Vivendi’s new CEO Jean-Marie Messier. He disagrees that globalization will “make everything uniform and just Americanize it all....Globalization does not erode cultures. It rejuvenates them and makes them communicate with each other.”

This article argues that globalization must be a good thing because it has helped French businesses become competitive global players.

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In a thirty-page survey about globalization, published in the fall of 2001, The Economist magazine concludes that globalization, “far from being the greatest cause of poverty, is its only feasible cure.” Every article in the survey argues strongly for globalization. When it does bring up critics’ arguments, the survey only briefly addresses them, preferring to focus the majority of the argument on supporting globalization. In a way, such defenses of globalization only fuel critics’ fire because they fail to address certain intangible issues head-on.

The Economist argues that the quest for profits is a good thing, because businesses will behave in order to gain a competitive edge. It states, “If firms have to compete with rivals for customers and workers, then they will indeed worry about their reputation for quality and fair dealing—even if they do not value those things in themselves.” However, this statement assumes that consumers know about the company’s ethical and environmental records. José Bové would contend that this argument avoids the question of accountability and transparency; many corporations deliberately hide this knowledge from consumers, for the very reason that ethical and environmentally friendly practices often cost more money.

To prove that liberalized free trade is good, especially for developing countries, The Economist relies upon economic data, showing that globalization lowers prices and raises the standard of living around the world. Even so, The Economist admits that there are some losers in the equation; richer countries lose jobs to poorer countries that have lower labor costs, for example. While The Economist dismisses this situation as relatively

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48 Ibid., 4
49 Ibid., 5-7.
inconsequential, critics like José Bové regard it as extremely urgent. Farmers in wealthy nations such as France struggle to make ends meet because agricultural producers tend to move operations to less developed areas. So while the overall results of global capitalism might be financially positive, many individuals suffer.

The survey lumps together all critics of globalization into the monolithic catch-all term “the skeptics,” instead of considering individuals and their arguments. Specific critics of globalization are rarely mentioned, so we do not know whether the criticism came from a misinformed protester in love with catchy slogans or from a well-informed, experienced activist like José Bové. True, many opponents of globalization do spout nonsense and end up sounding ridiculous. But by lumping them together with more articulate, reasonable dissenters, The Economist discredits all critics and thus can get away with taking only a cursory look at many of their concerns.

Other supporters of globalization in France have similarly dismissed Bové. A pro-globalization article in The Financial Times portrays Bové as a vandal who succeeded on the strength of his dumbed-down slogans. As evidence that globalization has been positive for France, the author notes that French youth wear Nikes, use American slang, and watch American films. Bové would likely interpret French youth’s love of American culture as a disturbing, not reassuring trend. An editorial in The Seattle Times castigates Bové for “gorging” himself on agricultural subsidies and implies that Bové is primarily concerned about money, more than he is about health or the environment.\(^\text{50}\)

Other pro-globalization arguments in France center on specific issues, such as

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genetically modified organisms. While Bové opposes GMO’s, citing their potential health risks, others see them as the solution to many of the world’s hunger and agricultural problems. Bové’s father, José Bové Sr., is one of them. Former director of the French National Institute for Agronomic Research near Bordeaux, Bové Sr. supports biotechnology. He helped develop a genetically modified orange tree immune to a disease that affected 300 million orange trees in Brazil. The elderly Bové compares his son’s destruction of GM crops to witch-burning: “In the Middle Ages, they burned witches; today they burn transgenic plants.” Dennis T. Avery, author of an article that quotes the elder Bové, argues that opponents of biotechnology have no good reasons to fear GMO’s or the economic structures that made those advances possible. He states that globalization “has helped make us the longest-lived, richest, freest, best-educated population in history.” Bové Jr. would agree, but would also state that those advances have not come without a price.\(^5^1\)

Those who claim that globalization’s influence in France has led to positive results often talk past Bové. Supporters cite financial data and show how countries have become wealthier because of globalization. Opponents do not deny that. Bové, for example, acknowledges that liberalized trade increases wealth, but he argues that other factors besides money should determine the overall benefits of free trade. Have the country’s quality of life, culture, traditions, and environment suffered during times of financial growth? To Bové, these issues are just as important as whether one’s income increases.

The disagreements over globalization’s role in France also echo earlier debates

\(^{51}\) Avery.
about the meaning of Americanization. Preservationists such as Bové want to guard France from organizations and economic structures that pose a threat unless strictly regulated. The underlying assumption is that left to itself, globalization would overwhelm local cultures and erase national identities. On the other hand, cosmopolitans argue that globalization strengthens and rejuvenates cultures by exposing them to new ways of living and thinking. Francis X. Rocca argues that globalization has made the world “more like America, but that does not mean homogeneity—rather, the opposite. Americans have never had more cultural choices.” Rocca’s argument takes a strong cosmopolitan approach; every country touched by globalization faces more, not fewer, cultural choices. He notes that McDonald’s restaurants around the world have customized to fit local cultures and needs. Another “cosmopolitan” argues that cultural exchange between France and the United States in no way threatens French culture. He notes that “the French do not just attack American symbols like Disneyland. They take them over and improve them.” An editorial in The Plain Dealer states, “The French have nothing to worry about. There is no way, for instance, that we could even influence their impeccable taste—not just in fashion, but in everyday life.”52 These arguments all treat culture as an active force and the French as capable of maintaining their values and ways of life. Individual actors fuel and control the process of globalization; when cultures change, it is by choice and not by coercion.

So which is right—preservationism or cosmopolitanism? Rick Fantasia, author of “‘Everything and Nothing’: The Meaning of Fast-Food and Other American Cultural
Goods in France,” explains that both can be correct. He argues that culture is more than a pattern of consumption and taste; the production of culture is just as important as its consumption. In the case of fast food in France, its consumption and production have very different implications. He argues that “In terms of the consumption of culture, fast-food represents no threat to haute cuisine, any more than blue jeans are a threat to haute couture or Tupperware a challenge to Limoges porcelain china.” The markets for these goods are unrelated and non-competitive. However, the production of fast-food has had a tremendous impact on French food manufacturing. Mechanized, standardized, non-artisanal food manufacturing, first introduced by American fast food restaurants, is increasingly becoming the norm in France. Fantasia states:

The fast-food industry advances the computerization, rationalization, and de-skilling of the service-sector labor process, and has introduced the widespread use of low-wage, non-union, part-time and student labor, the effects of which on general labor market practices may prove substantial in the longer term. It is in this sense that American popular culture means ‘everything’ to the French.53

By looking at how globalization has affected the production as well as the consumption of culture, the polarized attitudes begin to make sense—they are often two sides of the same coin. Both arguments can be correct, even if contradictory. Fantasia’s analysis also suggests that there is hope for resolution, or at least compromise, over the fierce debates about globalization in France.

Changing the Terms of the Debate

Globalization has become a highly controversial and widely publicized issue in

the past few years. Just a few years ago, columnists like The New York Times’ Thomas Freidman could call protesters “a Noah’s ark of flat-earth advocates, protectionist trade union and yuppies looking for their 1960s fix.” But now, many misgivings about globalization have begun to attract widespread attention. Madeleine Albright said that “Some of them are anarchists, but a lot of them have some very legitimate complaints.” Bill Clinton noticed that “All these protesters from Seattle to Genoa are on to something.” Governments, trade organizations, corporations, and international banking groups have begun to incorporate ideas from critics of globalization. For example, Shell’s chairman Sir Mark Moody-Stuart stated in 2000: “we, too, are concerned at the requirement to address those in poverty who are excluded from the benefits that many of us share in the global economy.” He announced that Shell shares “the objective of the recent demonstrators in Seattle, Davos, and Prague.” German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin have expressed support of protesters’ platforms on unequal trade.

Many people are beginning to realize that the best way to deal with anti-globalization protesters is to take them seriously, because many of their complaints are legitimate. Fortune magazine notes that they have “already achieved their main goal: fracturing a consensus that, in retrospect, looks almost as silly as the protester’s puppets.” Now, “the conversation really has changed,” according to Harvard economist Dani Rodrik. The idea of “trade über Alles” has succumbed to the realization that most successful countries “do not simply fling open their markets and wait for trade to work its magic.” Free trade is not the panacea for all ills, as the Economist argues; it can even increase income disparities inside countries. Mexico, for example, has experienced a
wider gap between the rich and the poor as a result of NAFTA.\textsuperscript{54}

Debates about globalization in France and around the world will likely continue undiminished well into the twenty-first century. John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, authors of \textit{A Future Perfect: the Essentials of Globalization}, note that globalization is such a controversial issue because “the losers tend to be concentrated and visible while the winners are widely dispersed.”\textsuperscript{55} In France, many predicted that the issues Bové has raised would be quite prominent in the upcoming 2002 elections. Several government officials, from the Prime Minister to the President to cabinet officials, have expressed solidarity with Bové’s concerns.\textsuperscript{56}

Globalization has also become such a charged issue because opponents and supporters often speak past each other. As illustrated in the case of José Bové, his concerns lie primarily with the cultural and economic repercussions of unregulated free trade. So when free trade enthusiasts make their case for globalization, they fail to address Bové’s most urgent concerns. Instead, they too frequently make a laughingstock of protesters—some of whom probably deserve it—without giving credibility to those who have valid concerns. Supporters of free trade focus on the financial gains of globalization: increases in GDP, income, and standard of living. But opponents would argue that supporters have missed the point. More money does not necessarily equal a richer lifestyle. In France, for example, higher farm productivity has come at a great social cost, one that is difficult to measure in financial terms. Small farmers struggle to stay competitive and often resort to farming methods that wreak havoc on the

\textsuperscript{56} Zablit.
environment. McDonald’s outlets in France have produced jobs and supported large industrial farms, but at the cost of undermining appreciation for the cultural role of food. In Bové’s eyes, “la malbouffe” has destroyed precious cultural traditions, even if it has enriched certain segments of the population.

Tensions in France over globalization, as with earlier worries about Americanization, remain unresolved. The cosmopolitan argument states that globalization will make France a more diverse, heterogeneous society. On the other hand, preservationists point to undesirable social changes that are often a part of globalization. A central issue is whether French culture and identity will suffer or succeed in a globalized society. Richard Kuisel explains that the tensions about Americanization and globalization in France focus on the question of identity: “The process of modernization that has swept across postwar France threatens to homogenize the nation and forces the French to try to discover, preserve, or invent what has been, and is, unique about their national community. Understandably the French have become preoccupied with the question of who they are.”

José Bové roots French identity in the past, evoking nostalgic images of paysans in a bucolic surrounding and calling for a return to simpler lifestyles. His message asserts that France has traditions worth keeping, a culture different from and preferable to the United States’. Although his protest against McDonald’s made national headlines, his message was really not news at all, but a very old, very French reaction to American culture.

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57 Kuisel, 4.
Chapter 5
Legitimacy vs. Legality, Demolition vs. Destruction:
Interpreting Bové’s Protest

On a warm mid-summer day in late June 2000, tens of thousands of people flocked to Millau, a small southern village in the heart of Roquefort country. Vendors hawked food, drinks, and t-shirts. Crowds of people attended educational booths, joined political discussion groups, or sat on the grass, basking in the strong sunlight and waiting for the real action to start: José Bové’s trial. As he and his co-defendants rolled into town, cheers and cries of support filled the air. The day proved eventful for those in and outside the courthouse. Inside, the farmers managed to prove that their protest against McDonald’s had not caused extensive damage as the prosecution insisted. But they were unable to convince the judge that their actions were legitimate. Outside the court, a parallel trial took place. The scores of Bové supporters put globalization on trial that day—and won. While the court ruled that laws, even flawed ones, must prevail, the crowds outside chose a different verdict.

Bové Chooses McDonald’s

In January 1996, the United States registered a complaint with the World Trade Organization against Europe’s ban on hormone-treated beef. In February 1998, the WTO condemned the ban and gave the European Union fifteen months to reopen its frontiers, setting the deadline for 13 May 1999. Europe refused to budge. The North American decision to pursue retaliatory tariffs starting on 29 July 1999 “came as no surprise” to Europeans. Still, the tariffs evoked a tremendous amount of hostility and protest.
French agricultural officials could do nothing about the tariffs. Agriculture Minister Jean Glavany had informed the professional association of Roquefort producers that: “he was unable to obtain direct financial compensation...Europe was powerless and there was no other way out.” All he could do was contribute funds to advertising campaigns for affected products. After the United States and Canada enacted the tariffs, the Farmer’s Confederation learned that a new McDonald’s was under construction in Millau and decided that the building would be a suitable location for a demonstration. To the Farmer’s Confederation, protesting against a highly visible U.S. symbol seemed an effective way to show dissatisfaction with the WTO-endorsed tariffs.¹

Millau was already the site of activism against the U.S. embargos, since the town and nearby areas are the only sites of Roquefort production. The tariffs significantly affected cheese producers; the United States is the third-largest Roquefort importer after Spain and Germany, consuming 460 metric tons per year.² In American stores, the tariff caused the price of cheese to double, effectively prohibiting its purchase in many areas. The Roquefort association distributed 10,000 pamphlets around the region as well as posters and banners that signaled dissatisfaction with the tariffs, reading “No to the US embargo on Roquefort.”

Since February 1998, Bové and others had considered McDonald’s as a possible target of protest against the WTO. After discussing the idea for a while, the CP publicly announced their intention to target McDonald’s after meeting with Minister of Agriculture Jean Glavany. On the steps outside the Ministry, members of the CP told

¹ Bové and Dufour, 4-5.
² Annual Roquefort production is 18,250 metric tons. The US market comprises 2.5% of total Roquefort sales. Christina White, “Something is Rotten in Roquefort,” Business Week (December 31, 2001): 4 A2.
journalists: “If no changes are forthcoming in the next few days, we will have no option but to take on McDonald’s, the symbol of industrial food and agriculture.” McDonald’s was not the most obvious or logical target. The company has no direct ties to the WTO or to the U.S. decision to lodge a complaint against France. But McDonald’s high visibility in France led the CP to focus on this quintessential American symbol.

Throughout all of the controversy following the protest against McDonald’s, Bové and his Farmer’s Confederation have repeatedly stressed the transparency of their actions. The CP announced its intention to dismantle the restaurant in advance to police, public authorities, and the media, through a “non-violent but symbolically forceful action, in broad daylight and with the largest possible participation. [It] wanted the authorities to be fully aware of what was going to happen.” The local police notified the regional government, which suggested that the McDonald’s manager should provide a billboard for the farmers to demolish. The CP did not like that idea and again “signaled their intention to dismantle the doors and windows of the building.” The farmer’s union also asked the police to ensure that no workers or tools were on the site the day of the protest.³

In the South Aveyron region, “solidarity on the issue of ewe’s milk is taken for granted.” Roquefort production is a major part of the local economy, employing about 1,300 people. So when the Farmer’s Confederation called for the protest to demonstrate anger over the Roquefort tariffs, many people from Millau and the surrounding region appeared. Some were long-time activists who participated in the Larzac movement in the 1970s. About three hundred people showed up for the demonstration—a large number especially in the middle of August, when most of France goes on vacation. Many

³ Bové and Dufour, 5-6.
protesters brought their children.\footnote{Bové and Dufour, 3-4.}

From the start, Bové’s account of the McDonald’s protest has clashed with media reports. He described the protest as a “symbolic dismantling,” a good-natured demonstration with a “festive atmosphere.” The group entered the construction site, took apart prefabricated sections of the restaurant, and spray painted some anti-WTO slogans on the site. Bové insisted that the group took care not to destroy the partially-constructed restaurant. The language he used implies that very little damage occurred. He argued that he and the other three hundred demonstrators took apart pieces of the building, much as one would take apart a structure made of building blocks—the underlying implication is that the dismantling was easily reversible and caused little damage. He described the event in these words:

The demo took place and people, including kids, began to dismantle the inside of the building, taking down partitions, some doors, fuseboxes, and some tiles from the roof—they were just nailed down, and came off very easily; in fact the whole building appeared to have been assembled from a kit. The structure was very flimsy.

Protesters placed parts of the structure onto tractor trailers and drove to the prefecture. Children sat on top of the wagons, banging sticks on the sides. While the train of tractors rolled through town, “the festive atmosphere was further heightened by the cheering of local people who had gathered to watch us go by,” Bové recalled. The demonstrators then unloaded the wagons in front of the prefecture. Many celebrated the day at local restaurants. Bové stated: “It was a beautiful day, everyone was having a good time.”
When media attention began pouring down upon the protesters, farmers distributed leaflets explaining that no vandalism had occurred. While Bové and supporters characterized the protest as a “dismantling” with minimal damage, the media most often described Bové’s actions as destructive ransacking. This question of the extent of the damage continued into the trial of ten farmers arrested for their participation.

As news of the demonstration against McDonald’s spread, José Bové found himself the focus of a new media storm. He had not anticipated any unusual publicity over the protest, so he was “quite unprepared for the way in which the media began to report the protests.” He made a live TV appearance the following day, August 13, then left for vacation on the Atlantic coast on Saturday. He only had a few days of undisturbed holiday. On Tuesday morning, he learned that five participants in the protest had been arrested. Around forty detectives were investigating the protest and had raided participants’ farms, including Bové’s. He also discovered that there was a warrant for his arrest. Bové managed to smuggle himself back into the Aveyron, where he held a last-minute press conference with François Dufour, his lawyers François Roux and Marie-Christine Etelin, and Alain Soulié, head of the Union of Ewe’s Milk Farmers (SPLB). He called the press conference to “explain that we were not criminals. I was not on the run!” Only then did he present himself at the courthouse in Millau at midday. After some questioning, he was sent to prison.

Eventually ten participants were arrested, charged with the intent to cause criminal damage, and tried a year later. The other nine farmers were Jean-Paul Delaitte,
Gilbert Fenestraz, Raymond Fabrègues, Frédéric Libot, Léon Maillé, Richard Maillé, Christian Roqueirol, Jean-Émile Sanchez, and Alain Soulié. Jacques Barthélémy, president of the Federation of Grands Causses, was also arrested and released the same evening, with orders to stay in the Millau area for the next two months. Bové pointed to several factors that contributed to what he feels was an “exaggerated reaction.” The Prefect in Millau was a recent appointee, inexperienced, and under a great deal of political pressure. In addition, the local police chief was “fed up with demonstrations,” as was right-wing deputy mayor Jacques Godfrain. According to Bové, Godfrain nursed a grudge against the Farmer’s Confederation because the group threw his desk from his office onto the pavement in 1994 after he voted in favor of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT). These factors combined to create a group of local officials who frowned upon the demonstration.8

Bové spent three weeks in prison in Villeneuve-lès-Maguelones, a suburb of Montpellier. He watched the controversy spread throughout France from his prison cell. The action against McDonald’s continued to be the primary news items on TV. Public opinion was strongly on Bové’s side, especially as news of his protest reached more people. Most residents of Millau, of course, favored the farmer’s cause from the start. After the arrests, hundreds of people signed a petition to bring all of the signers to trial; participants in the demonstration wanted all people involved, not just the ten farmers, to face charges if officials were going to insist on criminalizing the attack. Leading political figures around the country began to voice their support for Bové’s cause with “sentiments along the lines of ‘He shouldn’t be inside. I may not agree with him, but he must be

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8 Bové and Dufour, 174, 8-9.
freed, because the issues he raises are pertinent.’” According to Bové, even those who had initially criticized the action against McDonald’s began to think about the issues raised and to demand Bové’s freedom.9

José Bové remained in prison from 20 August to 7 September. The other four farmers who had spent prison time left on bail the day he arrived. Bové described his stay in prison as an “intense experience,” one where “you end up alone, with your conscience, facing the acts that have led to your prison sentence.” He made acquaintances with the other inmates and received support from prison wardens who were in the middle of demonstrating for their own causes. When the judge finally granted him bail on 31 August, Bové refused to accept bail, stating that “you can’t buy trade union freedom.” This action, he felt, would “underline the fact that a legitimate protest movement could not be stifled.”

The decision to stay was difficult for him. He watched on television as his lawyer announced his intention to refuse bail, then was “badly shaken” when the TV cameras focused in on one of his daughters who was crying. At the same time, he took comfort from all of the support he received after his decision. Prisoners tapped on their windows to show support; some hung sheets out their windows, burned paper, and shouted “Free José!” Friends of his from the CP and the Larzac drove around the prison honking their horns. Bové’s decision to stay in jail helped enhance “his image as a ‘martyr’ to the country’s growing revolt against industrialized food production.” It also sparked people from around the world to write checks for his bail. Hundreds of people, including American farmers and consumers, sent checks to “free the French farmer.” Bové finally

9 Bové and Dufour, 10-11.
decided to accept bail because, as the director of the Confederation of Roquefort Producers had told him, Bové “was more useful on the outside” where he could continue to organize protests and work for Roquefort producers.\footnote{Bové and Dufour, 11-17.}

Always mindful of the public eye, Bové made a dramatic exit. As he left jail, he raised his fists in a gesture of defiance and triumph. He also sponsored a picnic (read: press conference and publicity stunt) following his release, in which he shared baguettes, wine, grapes, and Roquefort cheese (see Figures 11 and 12).

Figure 11: Fist in the air, Bové leaves jail.
7 September 1999. AP Photo Archives.
French Farmer Protests

José Bové’s method of protest comes from a strong French tradition of militant and sometimes violent farmers’ protests. The French in general take to the streets more readily than Americans. French farmers in particular are a highly vocal, highly visible segment of the population and generally the French public sympathizes with their causes. As Janice Valls-Russell notes in *The New Leader*, “Angry farmers are part of the French
landscape. Destroying truckloads of Italian tomatoes or barrels of Spanish wine, and emptying tons of unsold fruit and vegetables in city centers is almost a hobby for some of them.” José Bové’s action against McDonald’s was no more extreme than many other farmers’ protests, but just more widely publicized.  

James Thomson explains that in France, farmers have been a highly vocal group since the Revolution. After the Bastille fell, fears about the future conglomerated into a peasant mobilization known as *La Grande Peur*. Thomson states, “What was primarily a defensive movement fairly soon became an offensive one—chateaux burnt and feudal documents recording peasant obligations destroyed.” In an attempt to pacify the peasantry, the National Assembly initiated land reforms and abolished feudalism. Similar changes took place throughout Europe, but only in France did peasants take so much initiative, “liberating themselves rather than having terms dictated to them.” Thus the French peasantry has wielded great influence from the revolutionary period onward, especially after World War II. When the Common Market emerged in 1957, France used its position as the leading European agricultural nation to negotiate for a Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Agricultural lobbies were very powerful at the time. The FNSEA and JAC in particular have played influential roles since their inception after World War II. Most contemporary farmer’s unions, including Bové’s Farmer’s Confederation, evolved from these early organizations.

Farmer protests range from constructive demonstrations to destructive riots. The more benign demonstrations focus on consumer education and capitalize on French love

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11 Valls-Russell, 6.
12 Raven and Thomson, 23.
13 Jeunesse agricole catholique, or Young Catholic Farmers.
of high quality produce and meats. For example, the National Center of Young Farmers (Centre national des jeunes agriculteurs, or CNJA) hosted a four-day agricultural fair in Champagne in late September, 1999 to convince consumers that “tomorrow’s farming methods are rooted in tradition.” Farmers reconstructed landscapes such as vineyards, orchards, and grain fields that resembled different regions of France. During the American Film Festival in Deauville, Normandy in September 1999, members of the Farmer’s Confederation built a makeshift farm complete with noisy pigs, cows, geese, and horses. 200 farmers carried signs signaling their discontent with the WTO tariffs: “Hormone Beef Go Home,” and “Vive le Camembert.”

Farmers do not always rely on pastoral recreations of French agriculture to get their point across. More often, they resort to direct actions such as blockades, boycotts, and pickets. In 1980, for example, the Worker-Farmers’ protest against using hormones in veal led to a boycott on hormones sponsored by the UFC, a consumer organization. On 7 September 2001, Calais farmers picketed eight department stores to find out what profits supermarkets made on their beef. Upon José Bové’s suggestion, hundreds of farmers blockaded the McDonald’s in Millau two years after the attack. This action
protested the continuing American tariff on Roquefort cheese. Bové used this blockade to gain leverage from European Union trade commissioner Pascal Lamy, who agreed to meet with the farmers and discuss the situation. This protest, held on the second anniversary of the infamous McDonald’s dismantling, featured between 1,500 (police estimate) and 3,000 protesters (demonstrators’ estimate). Tractors and other vehicles blocked the entrance to the McDonald’s restaurant, which stayed closed throughout the blockade. Although farmers did not touch the restaurant, riot police surrounded the site to prevent any possible damage.\textsuperscript{15}

A favorite technique of protesting farmers is to use agricultural products as part of their protest (see Figures 13 and 14). Robert Menzies of Simon Fraser University notes: “Primary producers (fishers and farmers) in France have developed a peculiar penchant for destroying food products as an expression of their displeasure with a variety of social ills, ranging from government regulations to the market price of sardines or cabbages.”\textsuperscript{16}

Farmers have bombarded their targets with tractor loads of fruit and vegetables and, at times, manure. In October 1992, for example, farmers throughout France coordinated simultaneous protests, dumping soil, trash, and manure in front of public buildings. They wanted France to retain a strong stance in trade talks with the United States.\textsuperscript{17} Only days after the McDonald’s incident in Millau, approximately 100 farmers dumped ten tons of nectarines in the center of Montauban, blocking the entrance to a local McDonald’s. The


\textsuperscript{17} David Crary, “Farmers Dump Dirt At State Offices, Demand Tough Trade Stance,” AP release October 14, 1992.
same day, similar incidents involving fruit, vegetables, and manure occurred in front of McDonald’s in Arles and Martigues. In Gers, a southwestern town and major producer of foie gras, farmers occupied a McDonald’s restaurant. Although the produce-yielding farmers in these southern towns remained peaceful, other similar protests have taken a violent turn. On 4 September 1999, hundreds of Farmer’s Confederation members in Marseille loaded up on fruit and vegetables from the supermarket chain Carrefour and began to throw apples. Riot police responded with tear gas.\footnote{Agence France-Presse, “French Farmers Target McDonald’s in Fresh Demonstration,” 21 August 1999 (24 January 2002 GNB); AP, “Anger of Over U.S. Trade Sanctions.”}

![Figure 14: Carts loaded with fruit, French farmers head to a demonstration. 4 September 1999. AP Photo Archives.](image)

Other protests have been even more violent. In 1994, French fishermen burned down a historic parliament building in Rennes, Brittany. In the same city five years later, approximately 100 farmers gathered to protest their desire for more government
subsidies. They set up a roadblock into the center of the town and began burning tractor tires and pallets. Nearby farmers in Saint-Brieuc held a simultaneous protest, which turned ugly after they clashed with police. Around five hundred demonstrators threw eggs and bottles, dumped loads of earth in front of the police building, and set fire to trash cans and wooden pallets. When police responded with tear gas, some protesters unearthed slabs of pavement. The town’s mayor Claude Saunier also got a dose of the protests—literally. When he arrived at the demonstration, protesters threw a pail of water on him. The various farmers’ unions often engage in small acts of destruction to underline their cause. For example, in August 1998, about 100 cereal farmers destroyed the office of Dominique Voynet, the Minister for the Environment. While many of these more violent demonstrations have not gained the popular support that Bové’s protest did, they still went unpunished.

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It is axiomatic in France that some group will always be demonstrating—airline workers, postal carriers, ATM suppliers, and even lawyers are just some of the many groups who have recently gone on strike. Many French tolerate radical protests; John Lichfield of *The Independent* notes: “The official view is that politics and social unrest in France is traditionally played out in the street. It is better to let such protests work themselves out than to inflame them by opposing them.” The fact that José Bové was even prosecuted for his actions signals a significant departure from the usually passive
reactions of French officials.20

The Two Trials of José Bové

The trial of the ten Millau farmers turned into a festival against globalization and the WTO. Tens of thousands of Bovistes flocked to Millau on 30 June 2000 to witness the highly publicized court proceedings and to enjoy the spectacle. The trial was not short on entertainment, with a star-studded cast, dramatic speeches, parades, and a rock concert. For all its feel-good, power-to-the-people atmosphere, the gathering also addressed some significant issues, both in and outside the courtroom. Inside, the ten farmers and their international cast of witnesses attempted to open up a dialogue about globalization. Outside, the public carried on that conversation as it held an informal “trial.” Bové and the nine other farmers did not succeed in convincing the judge that their action was justified. They did, however, persuade the public.

Estimates of demonstrators were varied. Some guessed 100,000 people were present. Whether the more conservative police estimates (50,000) or the larger numbers supplied by Bové supporters were the most accurate, the crowds exceeded everyone’s expectations. Organizers of the mass protest on the date of the trial had expected perhaps 30,000 people to show up and were overjoyed when crowds of Bovistes thronged into Millau. Anticipating large numbers of fans, SNCF (the national train network) scheduled several extra routes into Millau for the trial weekend.

José Bové and other accused farmers from the Farmer’s Confederation turned their 2000 trial into what the French call a spectacle, complete with speeches, rallies, and rock concerts. Outside the courthouse, a carnival-like atmosphere prevailed. Throngs of

20 Lichfield, 3.
supporters basked in the summer sun and the charged political atmosphere. Attendees ranged from young college students hoping to see some action to farmers to environmentalists. Families came with their young children from all over Europe. Members of several left-wing political parties, including the Green and the Communist Parties, attended. Festive banners adorned the streets of Millau, while vendors sold food, drinks, and propaganda to the crowds. Gilles Luneau, who interviewed Bové and Dufour for the book *The World Is Not For Sale*, remarks: “It was a fête, where a highly motivated new social movement was struggling to get to grips with the basics. The whole town was in a festive mood.” Participants could engage in a number of political discussion groups; topics ranged from poverty to environmental quality to substandard working conditions.  

T-shirts proclaimed slogans for all sorts of “bonnes causes.” One French account sums up the dual functions of the public gathering: entertainment and political change. “All over the place, people were sitting on the ground, to get a drink or to change the world.”

The ten farmers held a press conference on a local farm immediately before entering Millau for their trial. A flock of sheep bleated in the background as they spoke. Then Bové and his co-defendants boarded the back of an open cart meant to invoke memories of the French Revolution. With a gigantic wheel of Roquefort suspended in front of the cart and a slogan with the words “Bill, gardez votre malbouffe;” the accused made a dramatic entrance into town. Several French accounts picked up on the Revolutionary symbolism. *Le Télégramme de Brest* wrote: “They arrived at the

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21 Bové and Dufour, 172-73.  
22 Vermare.  
23 Partout, on s'assied par terre, pour boire un verre ou refaire le monde: Charette.  
24 Bill (Clinton), keep your foul grub: Lloyd “The Trial” 13.
courthouse perched on two carts, likes the ones used to drive the condemned to the scaffold” (see Figures 16 and 17). Unlike the Revolution, the crowd at Bové’s trial cheered the accused and condemned the accusers. Many sported t-shirts playing on the title of Bové’s book: “Le monde n’est pas une marchandise, moi non plus.” (The world is not for sale—neither am I.)

Figure 16: The Millau Ten enter town. Bové, front left, is smoking his pipe.

30 June 2000. AP Photo Archives.

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26 Lloyd “The Trial” 13; Charette.
As the Millau Ten made their way through the town into the courthouse, they took time to shake hands, mingle with the crowds, and eat locally produced foods: Roquefort tarts and sheep’s cheese, washed down with wine—an action meant, of course, for the public eye. Bové assured the crowds: “We are here to reject the dictatorship of money.” Loud applause, mixed with cries of “We will win!” and “Go José,” ushered the ten defendants into the courtroom. Rings of barriers and police surrounded the courthouse. Inside the courthouse, the atmosphere was, in Bové’s words, “simultaneously serene and intense, as if everything that had happened in the previous year was condensed.” And it was very warm. All of the windows were closed to shut out the noise from the protesters.
in the streets, so the air was stifling.  

The defense brought a star-studded cast to serve as witnesses and lawyers. Sixteen witnesses from around the world, including Bill Christensen of the American National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC) and secretary general of the *Via campesina* Rafael Alegria, represented farmers’ movements. François Dufour spoke on behalf of the Farmer’s Confederation. Experts on globalization joined the defense to set Bové’s cast in a global context, including Lori Wallach of “Public Citizen;” Susan George, a political scientist, co-founder of ATTAC, and director of a watchdog group on globalization; and Vandana Shiva, director of the Research Foundation for Science Technology and Ecology. Paul Ariès, who authored *Petit manuel anti-McDo* (The Little Anti-McDonald’s Manual) arrived in court dressed as Ronald McDonald. Other witnesses included several trade union representatives.

All of these luminaries came together to defend the McDonald’s protest not as an incident of physical destruction, but as a legitimate, symbolic protest against unethical economic structures. They hoped to raise larger issues such as concerns about globalization and its negative effects, unfair trade structures, and the quality of food. Their focus during the trial was one of legality versus legitimacy. While the farmers’ protests might have been illegal, the defense argued, they were a legitimate response to

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27 Nous sommes là pour refuser le diktat de l’argent: Vermare ; Charette ; Bové and Dufour, 175.
28 Other notables included Piotr Dabrowsky of Poland, ex-Minister of Agriculture; Rafael V. Mariano, representing Philippine farmers; and Mamadou Cissoko, spokesman for the CNCR of Senegal. Louis Kotra Ureguie of the Union of Workers’ Unions and Exploited Kanaks; Gilles Sainati, general secretary of the Magistrates’ Union; and Hiro Tefarere, former general secretary of the Polynesian union A-Tia-I-Mia were present; French ambassador Paul Tran Van Tinh, who had served as a negotiator on GATT; Pierre Laur, from the Roquefort industry. Guy Durand represented the 1999 demonstration. The Millau Ten engaged six lawyers to defend their case: husband and wife team Marie-Christine and Christian Etelin came from Toulouse. Jean-Jacques de Félice and Henri Leclerc arrived from Paris; François Roux of Montpellier and Maaroufa Diabira of Mauritania also assisted.
tangible threats.

The defense and the prosecution took antipodal approaches to the trial. The farmers and their attorneys had decided to focus their presentation on the issues that led the farmers to dismantle McDonalds—issues such as globalization, people’s right to eat as they choose, and fair trade practices. In line with these arguments, the defense asked for an acquittal. In his book, Bové remarks, “Our lawyers pleaded for this as the only answer to people who had taken symbolic action to defend a legitimate cause, even if this action was technically illegal.” Bové has frequently used the example of the Boston Tea Party to justify his motivations. When American colonists found British trade laws unfair and overly burdensome, they opted to defy the law and throw English tea in to Boston Harbor, just as Bové and fellow farmers took apart a McDonald’s restaurant to signify their discontent with unfair tariffs.

In order to convince Judge Mallet of their motivations, the farmers tried to engage him in a dialogue about the larger issues at hand, not about the smaller details of the dismantling. Doing so was hard to accomplish. Judge Mallet and the prosecutor were not very sympathetic to the farmers’ arguments. Dufour’s impression of Judge Mallet was “a man spoiling for a fight.” The prosecutor commented: “The whole world seems to approve last summer’s action against McDonald’s.” But not the judge. Legitimacy did not equal legality in his eyes: “José Bové friend of the people cannot stay an enemy of the law.” Judge Mallet was not swayed by this question of whether the dismantling was

29 Bové and Dufour, 179.
30 Ibid., 156.
31 “Tout le monde semble approuver cette action de l’été dernier contre le McDonald’s, » a ainsi noté le procureur. Mais la légitimité, expliquait-il encore, ne vaut pas légalité. « José Bové l’ami des peuples ne peut pas rester l’ennemi de la loi. » Gilbert Laval “La justice,” 16.
legitimate or illegal. Instead, he focused on the narrow question of how much damage the protesters caused McDonald’s.  

Still, the witnesses, lawyers, and defendants adhered to their original plan to present their action against McDonald’s in a larger context. Witnesses and defendants spoke of how globalization has negatively affected consumers as well as farmers. They discussed their positions on genetically modified crops. Witnesses came from around the world in order to give the defense’s arguments an international perspective. Most significantly, they continually insisted that the protest against McDonald’s was a collective action, with all participants equally responsible.

The farmers and their lawyers argued that the McDonald’s demonstration was legitimate because it was a communal expression of public wishes. They explained that legality is no longer an issue when rules and laws go “against the public interest” for the sole benefit of a few. Attorney Henri Leclerc, former president of the League for Human Rights, expressed the idea that “the world is right to rise against injustice.” Bové argued that his action was the only way to express dissatisfaction with the WTO’s decision, since all legal routes were closed. He stated, “What would you have done? All we could do was sit and do nothing or react. When there is a violation of the public interest, you must know how to go beyond legality.” However, these arguments did not resonate with Judge Mallet, who was more interested in how the defendants used

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33 Bové and Dufour, 175-78.
34 Laval, “La justice,” 16.
35 Le monde a raison de se lever contre l’injustice.
screwdrivers and crowbars than in the larger issue of legitimacy. *Libération* noted: “He was in no hurry to hear the defendants justify their action.”\(^{37}\) While witnesses spoke, he made a point of seeming uninterested: “He moved his papers around a lot and often looked at his watch while the witnesses from five continents passed in front of the bar.” He often interrupted them, saying: “Have you finished? Thanks. Call the next witness.”\(^{38}\)

![Figure 18: Post-trial press conference.](1July2000.APPhotoArchives)

In the end, Judge Mallet rejected the defense’s argument. He assigned harsher punishments than anticipated. José Bové received a three-month jail sentence, minus the days he had already spent in prison. Three farmers received two months’ suspended

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\(^{38}\) Il a beaucoup feuilleté ses dossiers et souvent regardé sa montre pendant que les témoins des cinq continents défilaient à la barre: Laval, “La justice,” 16.
sentences and five had to pay fines between 2,000 and 3,000 francs. Only one farmer escaped punishment. When the verdict was announced on September 13, 2000, supporters present at the courthouse caused such disturbances that riot police forced them out with tear gas. Bové attributed the ruling to the judge’s wish to set an example. Bové disagreed with his sentence, but found it no surprise. Dufour, another spokesman for the Farmer’s Confederation, criticized the sentences. He pointed out that other farmer’s protests—the trashing at the Ministry of the Environment and the destruction of the Town Hall in Brest—have never been prosecuted. But to Dufour, the verdicts had a silver lining; they would give the CP another chance to appeal and to gather even more international support for its causes.39

A parallel people’s trial took place outside the courtroom walls. After the witnesses left the courtroom, they repeated their arguments on a nearby stage to enthusiastic crowds. After the trial, the ten accused mounted the podium to present their arguments to the public, who gave them ovations. The strength of support during the trial led Bové and several newspapers to comment that, outside the courtroom, the crowds had put globalization itself on trial—and won. Public support for Bové’s cause was so strong that many people compared the trial to the 1999 Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization. In Seattle, demonstrators effectively shut down the World Trade Organization’s talks by blockading the streets and hotel entrances. Participants regarded Seattle as a success, as they did the Millau trial. Journalists called the trial “another Seattle,” or a “Seattle-on-the-Tarn.” The public at the trial agreed that globalization, not José Bové, was the guilty party. This informal tribunal succeeded in indicting

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39 Bové and Dufour, 181-82.
globalization where the formal trial did not.

A giant evening concert finished off the day. Francis Cabrel was the most well-known of the musicians. Noir Désir, Zebda, and Rude Boy System also performed. The defendants made brief appearances between acts. Bové gave a short speech, thanking the crowd for their support and reiterating his opposition to unfair trade practices. He said: “We’re here to tell Chirac and Jospin: ‘You can’t just do what you like without consulting us. We will not accept the selling of citizens’ rights to the multinational or the WTO. We are here to resist, to construct, to reclaim power at the base, and not let ourselves be manipulated by the world’s powerful people.””

Other accused farmers shouted to the crowd, “You are the sentence.” Groupies at the trial witnessed a full program of showmanship and entertainment. With careful planning and a sense for amusing the public, Bové successfully turned a farmer’s protest into something “cool.”

**Dismantling vs. Destroying: Did Bové Tell the Truth?**

Although public sentiment was largely on Bové’s side at the time of the trial, the debate over the nature of the McDonald’s protest remained unresolved, especially in the news media. Was it really just a harmless dismantling, as participants insisted, or did the demonstrators do more damage than they like to admit? During the trial, after the judge scrutinized photos that showed a supposedly “trashed” building, an informal consensus arose that the action had been merely a dismantling.

A news release from Agence France Presse (AFP, a news service similar to the Associated Press) soon after the August 1999 demonstration reported that McDonald’s was “ransacked.” Other media sources followed suit and used similar language. Other

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40 Bové and Dufour, 171-72.
41 Vermare; Charette; “Nuit de fête à Seattle-sur-Tarn,” Centre France 2 July 2000 (all from CP archives).
words used to describe the protest include:

“démontage musclé”\textsuperscript{42}  
“‘démonter’—lire démolir”\textsuperscript{43}  
“wrecking”  
“attacked the construction site”  
“McVandalism”  
“destruction”  
“trashing a McDonald’s”  
“vandalizing”  
“pillaging”  
“violent demonstration”  
“assault...that partly destroyed a McDonald’s”  
“sacking”  
“commando raid”

Some news sources used the language that Bové chose—dismantling—though many placed the word in quotation marks. Was Bové’s protest really a violent demonstration, resulting in the destruction of a McDonald’s restaurant? Bové insists that it was not, but many media sources use more extreme language. Part of the discrepancy might come from the nature of news reporting; stories catch more attention with words that convey action and controversy. “Pulling apart” or “symbolically dismantling” a restaurant does not sound nearly as dramatic as a “sacking” or “commando raid.” On the other hand, Bové has an interest in making the protest seem as benign as possible, since his action was illegal. He notes that depending on the newspaper, the reports of the protest were vastly different: “If you were to read the reports in 	extit{Midi Libre} and 	extit{Le Monde} the next day, you wouldn’t think they were describing the same demonstration. It’s really pretty amazing.”\textsuperscript{44}

Soon after the protest against McDonald’s, newspapers quoted an estimate of the

\textsuperscript{42} Beefed-up dismantling.  
\textsuperscript{43} “Dismantling”—rather, demolishing.  
\textsuperscript{44} Bové and Dufour, 9.
damage done to the restaurant: between 720,000 and one million francs. Bové’s close friend François Dufour (also National Secretary and spokesperson of the Farmer’s Confederation) heard the estimate and was very surprised. When Dufour contacted participants in the Aveyron, “they were astonished at the allegation, and challenged the sum. They told me they had removed some tiles, torn some boards, twisted some drainpipes, which they had filled with sand and gravel.” Dufour worked quickly to investigate the source of this figure and whether it was accurate. As far as Dufour has been able to determine, the managing director of McDonald’s announced the 720,000 franc figure to journalists the evening of the protest. This number seems to be arbitrary, since McDonald’s did not send assessors the day of the protest. When José Bové turned himself in on August 20, Dufour accompanied him and watched workers put the “finishing touches” to the restaurant. That the building was almost completed eight days after the dismantling/demolition confirmed to Dufour that the estimate was far off.

Insurance assessors from McDonald’s were scheduled to assess the extent of the damage the same day, but they cancelled the visit and to this day have never produced an estimate.

Next, Dufour went to the Aveyron prefecture, which had estimated the damage at 400,000 francs, and asked to see the assessors’ report. But, as Dufour notes, “of course, no one could produce it; it didn’t exist.” He met with some McDonald’s construction workers, who told him: “There was 30 or 40,000 francs’ worth of damage. There’s been no delay in the rebuilding and the McDonald’s will open, as scheduled, on 21 September.” Based on the evidence—or in this case, the lack thereof—Dufour concluded that the estimate was completely overblown. Still, the debate over the extent of the
damage continued into the trial of the Millau Ten a year later.  

José Bové recalls the court debate over the extent of the damage as an amusing and rather absurd part of the trial. Several plainclothes policemen present at the original demonstration took pictures of the protest and supplied them as evidence during the trial. The photos failed, however, to support the high damage estimate and instead worked against the prosecution. Bové remembers: “When the judge presented the photos of the dismantled McDonald’s supposedly proving the damage done, all they showed was a construction site with some graffiti here and there, not the ruins of a ransacked building.”

The audience and journalists present seemed to side with the farmer’s argument—”that the action had involved a dismantling rather than a wrecking.” The first photo depicted a roof missing three rows of tiles. Attorney Henri Leclerc commented: “Sure, there are a few rows of tiles missing, but who said they were even installed in the first place?” The second photo showed a corner of the building that was untouched. Again, Leclerc focused on the lack of evidence for a “ransacking”: “You can clearly see that there is nothing, you can clearly see that no windows were broken.” Picture after picture failed to reveal any substantial evidence of serious damage.

No one—including magistrates—could remain serious when the photos were shown. Each photograph was accompanied by mocking narration from the defendants and their lawyers. In fact, even Judge François Mallet began joking towards the end of the trial.

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46 Bové and Dufour, 179.
48 Et lorsque plusieurs dizaines de photos prises au McDonald’s sont projetées, la salle devient hilare, magistrats compris: “démontage ou destruction.
the photos, even though he had focused almost exclusively on the “acts of destruction and degradation committed during the gathering.” To barely restrained laughter, he commented about some wires: “Those electric wires that are hanging there, I suppose they’re a result of the terrible negligence of McDonald’s workers. They weren’t torn out very well, that’s for sure.” Leclerc added that the lines hadn’t even been laid yet, let alone torn up. Le Figaro reported: “The audience...helped create a festival of ironic commentary to the confusion of the accusers.”

When the judge asked defendants to describe their specific actions on August 12, 1999, their testimonies highlighted the benign nature of the supposed demolition. Each of them denied nothing; in fact, they took pride in detailing their actions. Frédéric Libot took apart a lock with a screwdriver and gave up there. Raymond Fabregues was equipped with a pickaxe “for taking down a sign without damaging it.” Léon Maillé, who had a chainsaw, added that he used it to “cut the supporting beams of the said sign.” Some of the accused touched no part of the building.

After viewing all of the pictures, José Bové added that the demonstrators could have caused serious damage, but did not: “With five tractors, if we had wanted to break everything, McDonald’s would have been reduced to smithereens. But that was not the case.” In the end, photographs supplied as proof of the “ransacking” ended up proving the opposite: that the demonstration was, in fact, merely a dismantling. The lack of

49 Devant les rires mal contenus que le tout provoque dans la salle, c’est maintenant lui [Mallet] qui se met à plaisanter: “Ces fils qui pendent, là, ne doivent être qu’une conséquence de la terrible négligence des ouvriers de McDonald’s, n’est-ce pas? Ils n’ont pas été arrachés, bien sûr.” Gilbert Laval, “Héros.”
50 Bois.
51 L’essentiel de l’audience est là, car on assiste alors à un festival de commentaires ironiques qui tournent, il faut le reconnaître, à la confusion des accusateurs: Bois
52 Pour démonter un panneau sans l’abîmer: Bois.
53 Avec cinq tracteurs, si on avait voulu tout briser, le McDo se serait retrouvé en miettes. Ça n’a pas été le cas: Bois.
evidence supplied during the trial also suggests that the estimate of 720,000 francs of damage was a gross exaggeration.

Indeed, although a McDonald’s official had quoted the number the day of the demonstration, McDonald’s never pressed charges for the action. Part of that was doubtless a wish to avoid being labeled the “bad guy,” since public opinion was already against the company in France. Still, the company’s decision not to pursue legal action suggests that the damage was not as serious as initially suggested.

**Conclusion**

The central issues of José Bové’s protest and trial remain unresolved. The French judicial system proclaimed legality the highest standard of conduct, while Bové supporters decided otherwise, declaring that some illegal actions are still legitimate. Although Bové and his co-defendants made a persuasive argument that they had dismantled, and not destroyed, the McDonald’s in Millau, most media sources continue to refer to the protest as a “ransacking” or “vandalism.” In this sense, Bové’s heavy reliance on the media has been a double-edged sword. Without the news media, his demonstration would have remained a local and relatively obscure event. But the media has shown a mind of its own in how it has presented his protest. Although he organized and led the demonstration against McDonald’s, José Bové has played only a small role in disseminating and interpreting the event.
Chapter 6

French Food, Facelifts, and façades: McDonald’s France Gets a New Look

In June 2001, McDonald’s France launched a nation-wide advertising campaign—”Une Touche de Région Dans Votre Hamburger” (A Regional Touch in Your Hamburger). Clients could buy anything from a Norman hamburger to Deluxe Potatoes with Provençal Sauce to a Sundae made with Rhône Valley pears. For a culinary tour de France, the campaign implied, one need only walk or take the métro to the local McDonald’s. McDonald’s France has not just offered French items on its menu. Over the past three years, it has also aggressively promoted itself as a French company from the bottom up. Why all the changes? Alongside its meteoric expansion in France, the restaurant has encountered intense and often hostile criticism that has caused a major overhaul of the company’s image. A series of food scares and radical farmer protests over McDonald’s in France have pressured the company to de-Americanize its image. Still, the changes are only face-deep.

With its new public façade, McDonald’s hopes to convince the French that it is not an American menace, but a bastion of French culture and cuisine. The company now faces the Herculean task of making its rhetoric become reality. McDonald’s France is caught in a double bind. It must make changes to assuage recent public concerns. But to truly de-Americanize would obviate the restaurant’s existence. McDonald’s would not be McDonald’s without its American menu and philosophy of eating. As a result, McDonald’s France can refurbish its public image, but can not realistically alter the fundamental values and lifestyle it promotes as an American-born fast food restaurant.
For the first fifteen years of its corporate life, McDonald’s stayed within North America. After Fred Turner became the president in 1968, McDonald’s consistently brought in at least 20% profit margins per year. With all the extra cash flow, the company faced two choices: diversify or expand. McDonald’s went international after some unsuccessful experiments in diversification, including purchasing a German beer garden chain, a chain of pie shops, and an amusement park. It was one of the first large American corporations to go overseas, predating stores such as Neiman-Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, J.C. Penney, and Sears. On 28 December 1970, McDonald’s opened its first restaurant outside of North America in Costa Rica. Soon, new outlets began dotting the globe. Six years later, twenty-one countries had McDonald’s restaurants. Ten years after that, in 1986, the number had more than doubled to forty-five countries. By 1998, 110 countries had McDonald’s restaurants. Today, 120 countries host over 28,000 McDonald’s restaurants.\(^1\) International markets provide the majority (nearly 60%) of McDonald’s revenues.\(^2\)

McDonald’s’ international expansion was a pioneering effort, and introducing the concept of American fast food to European consumers presented a challenge. To succeed in foreign markets, McDonald’s had to choose whether to change itself to adapt to local eating habits, or to change the local culture to adapt to McDonald’s. Interestingly enough, the latter proved far more successful. The company’s debuts in Holland, Australia, and Japan are excellent case studies in how McDonald’s has succeeded in changing local eating habits. McDonald’s worried about capturing the local market in Holland, so it

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modified its menu to include traditional Dutch foods such as applesauce and deep-fried chicken croquettes. Then-president Turner remarks, “We got spooked into thinking that we had to have indigenous foods.” Those early marketing efforts turned McDonald’s Holland into a financial disaster. In Australia, when McDonald’s opened, it offered regional items such as fish and chips and hamburgers with different condiments. But eventually, Australian managers changed to the standard American menu and began turning a profit after eight years. In Japan, McDonald’s decided to adhere to the formula so successful in the United States, down to the menus, franchising system, and staff management. Den Fujita, President and CEO of McDonald’s Japan, predicted that a culture accustomed to eating fish and rice would take to McDonald’s food if it were marketed correctly. He sponsored advertising campaigns that characterized hamburgers as a remarkable, “revolutionary” product. He targeted youth and families with small children. His plan worked extremely well. In only twelve years, McDonald’s Japan had larger revenues than Japan’s largest native restaurant chain, Sushi Company. In 1988, it became the leading international chain. The success in Japan taught the company that it “had better luck changing local eating habits than adapting its menu to fit them.”

Still, the company has had to make certain concessions to local cultures. Japanese McDonald’s kept the American fundamentals, but its staff was one hundred percent Japanese. The restaurants had a Japanese flavor. Fujita changed the name to make pronunciation simpler for Japanese speakers. Fujita realized that Japanese anti-foreign sentiments would accept an American restaurant if its products were not positioned as an

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3 Love, 415-416, 422-433.
American import, but rather as a Japanese restaurant serving American food.\textsuperscript{4}

McDonald’s entered France in 1979, as part of a larger trend of international expansion. McDonald’s has experienced great success in France, opening over 900 outlets (including franchises) during its twenty-two-year existence. The first franchise opened in Strasbourg, in the region of Alsace, near the Swiss border. In honor of the host country, the first hamburger grilled was tricolored blue, white and red, to represent the colors of the French flag.\textsuperscript{5} The interior featured half-timbered walls, an architectural feature common in Alsace. McDonald’s was trying, however superficially, to appear French from the start.

Such an auspicious beginning did not guarantee universal acceptance of the restaurant or its practices. Criticism against McDonald’s in France has centered around two major issues: the quality and origins of the restaurant’s ingredients, particularly its beef; and the restaurant’s role as an agent of globalization and transmitter of American eating habits and values. Following each wave of criticism, the restaurant chain has sponsored major advertising campaigns and attempted to revise its public image, to convince the French public that it is a predominantly local French company, not an international American fast food giant.

**Mad Cows and Mad Farmers**

McDonald’s France experienced several serious setbacks in 1999 and 2000. Mad-cow disease, dioxin-laced chickens, and contaminated Coca-Cola products have made the

\textsuperscript{4} Love, 423-426.
French increasingly uneasy about the quality of their food. And as 1999 turned into 2000, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), or mad cow disease, began emerging in French cattle at alarming rates. In response to these food scares and José Bové’s highly publicized protest, McDonald’s launched several advertising and public relations campaigns revising the restaurant’s image as a local, French restaurant.

First discovered in Britain in 1986, BSE infected French cattle in the late 1980’s, although the disease never reached the magnitude that it had in Britain. Numbers of infected cattle rose drastically in France during 2000, affecting beef consumption around the country. Mad cow disease destroys nervous tissue and causes large, sponge-like holes in the brain. To a cattle farmer, news of an infected cow is devastating, because the entire herd, along with the sick animal, must be destroyed. The disease also poses a very serious health risk to humans. In 1996, scientists discovered a positive link between BSE and a fatal human form of the disease, called a new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (nvCJD). Scientists still are unsure of the mechanism of transmission between cattle and humans, but they know that eating meat from an infected cow puts humans at risk for contracting nvCJD.

In France, relatively few cattle had contracted the disease, compared to Britain. Britain has reported 176,800 cases of BSE, compared to 92 total in France as of May 2000. However, the numbers of infected cattle in France are rising, while Britain’s numbers are falling. The very fact that infected cattle even exist in France worries health

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6 Martin.
officials, since France has banned all British beef since 1996 and established stringent preventative measures since then. But in early 2000, a sudden rise in the infection rate seriously unsettled scientists, cattle ranchers, and consumers alike. By the end of the year, 162 cases of BSE were reported, compared to 31 in 1999 and 13 in 1998. Part of the rise in reported cases came from a new program to test cows that died after exhibiting strange behavior. Still, the number was higher than expected, and French consumers became increasingly uneasy about eating beef. In November, a father and son were arrested for knowingly selling an infected cow for slaughter. Hundreds of pounds of the infected meat entered the shelves of a major supermarket chain, Carrefour. Just a month before, two other supermarkets, Auchan and Cora, announced that they had unknowingly sold beef from an infected herd.

Already feeling vulnerable, consumers further reduced their consumption of beef. In November 2000, sales fell over forty percent in just ten days. The French government enacted bans on animal-based feed, T-bone steaks, and other meat products suspected of transmitting the disease. It also established even more rigorous testing programs for healthy as well as sick cattle. By the end of 2000, all cattle over 30 months old had to be tested for BSE before entering the slaughterhouse.

McDonald’s did not escape from French consumers’ temporary aversion to beef products. During the fourth quarter of 2000, McDonald’s Corporation reported a seven percent drop in earnings—its first quarterly decline in more than a decade—partly

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10 “France Widens.”
attributed to European fears of eating tainted beef.\textsuperscript{12} This trend continued into the first quarter of 2001. McDonald’s chairman and CEO Jack M. Greenberg noted: “The effect of consumer concerns regarding the European beef supply has persisted longer than we expected.” Declining European sales hurt the overall company, not just McDonald’s in Europe, since roughly thirty percent of the company’s operating profits come from Europe. Peter Oakes, a Merrill Lynch & Company advisor to McDonald’s, noted that the company’s “first priority is to do what they can to get the consumer comfortable.”\textsuperscript{13} McDonald’s response to the decline in beef consumption came in the spring of 2001, when it began a campaign outlining step-by-step how it raises, monitors, processes, and cooks its beef. Assurances of the beef’s safety came simultaneously with rhetoric emphasizing that in France, McDonald’s was a local French company, from the base (produce and meat production) upwards.

\textbf{You Are What You Eat (Or Buy)}

Although McDonald’s has made some direct statements denouncing the actions of Bové and others like him, most of the company’s rebuttals have concentrated on giving tangible evidence that the restaurant is not a tyrannical American menace, but rather a French company concerned about serving good food in an aesthetic environment. Statements about Bové have been limited to brief comments by corporate officials such as Denis Hennequin, who is responsible for all of the outlets in France: “The CP and its allies…[made] the aggressors out to be victims and, paradoxically, the victim,

\textsuperscript{12} John Tagliabue, “Mad Cow Disease (and Anxiety),” \textit{The New York Times} 1 February 2001: C1.
McDonald’s, for the aggressor.” The company has been much more willing to make statements about the quality and origins of its food than to address its role as a transmitter of American culture.

To convince the public of the quality and safety of its food, the company initiated a four-pronged campaign: pamphlets about its ground beef; extensive internet material devoted to its produce; open houses of its restaurants, suppliers’ factories, advertising agencies, and corporate offices; and full-page advertisements in major French newspapers. The company took a more indirect approach to complaints about its role as cultural transmitter. Rather than refuting Bové’s critiques head-on or pressing charges against him for the attack, it redecorated its restaurants and revised its menus to include more French influences in its architecture and recipes. Both public relations strategies heavily stressed the local, regional nature of McDonald’s France.

In May 2001, McDonald’s published a pamphlet called “Our Ground Beef: We Make Hamburgers and We Make Them Well,” which provides detailed information about the beef used for hamburgers, from the farmyard to the slaughterhouse to the hamburger. On the front of the pamphlet, a red seal overlaid on a large hamburger reads: “100% Muscle. Controlled by an independent agency. Conforms to regulations.”

The inside cover states that McDonald’s has “always brought you optimal quality along with a maximum guarantee. And because you have the right to receive precise information about the origin and processing of the meat that you eat, we want to inform you candidly

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14 Pons.
16 100% Muscle. Contrôlé par un organisme indépendant. Conformément à la réglementation.
about the beef that you consume in your hamburgers.”

The pamphlet reassures the reader that McDonald’s’ beef is of high quality and very safe. In addition to providing eight pages about the safety of its ground beef, the pamphlet also subtly emphasizes the French nature of McDonald’s France. While informing the reader about the kinds of cuts used for the ground beef, the pamphlet notes that such cuts “are often used to prepare traditional dishes such as ‘pot au feu’” — a hearty beef stew. This allusion attempts to create a connection in the reader’s mind between traditional French cuisine and McDonald’s food. The pamphlet draws upon French familiarity with their butchers when it states: “To make our ground beef, the whole pieces of meat are put through a grinder, like a butcher does.” Eating a hamburger at McDonald’s, the pamphlet implies, is no different than purchasing meat from one’s local butcher. Most important, the booklet reminds readers that McDonald’s relies principally upon 48,000 French ranches for its beef.

McDonald’s also devotes a large portion of its internet site to its produce and meat products. Information exists about the origins and quality of the major ingredients—ground beef, buns, potatoes, lettuce, ham, chicken, fish, cheese, and beverages. Besides emphasizing the quality and freshness of the ingredients, the website also stresses their places of origin. For example, McDonald’s’ cattle “represent all breeds

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17 Depuis toujours, l’exigence de McDonald’s vous apporte une qualité optimale assortie d’un maximum de garanties. Et parce que vous êtes en droit de recevoir des informations précises sur l’origine et la fabrication de la viande que vous mangez, nous vous informons en toute transparence sur la viande de boeuf que vous consommez dans nos hamburgers.

18 Nous utilisons du muscle, rien que muscle, sans gras ajouté. Les morceaux choisis proviennent essentiellement de l’avant des bovins. Ils servent habituellement à préparer des plats traditionnels tels que le pot au feu.

raised in France—Holstein, Normande, Montbéliarde, Charolaise, Limousine.” Their potatoes come mostly from the northern departments of France, while lettuce originates in Spain and western France. One hundred and ten French pork farms supply all ham products.20 The website often makes references to typical French products while advertising the quality of its own food. For example, the website reads: “Our bread is based on yeast, which many artisan bakers use.”21 Although the McDonald’s bread would by no means qualify as artisanal, the company tries to insinuate the opposite.22 As with the pamphlet, the website stresses that McDonald’s is essentially French, because—so it claims—the company uses products from French farms and follows traditional French methods of food preparation.

McDonald’s France also sponsored an open house of unprecedented scope from 25 March to 5 April 2001. A promotional internet flier read: “Parents, children, grandparents, students…will be able to discover the restaurant like they’ve never done before. Visits to the kitchens and discussion forums will give the visitors the opportunity to ask any questions they wish: hamburger preparation, origin of the products, food safety, employee training, day-to-day work.”23 Principal suppliers for McDonald’s also opened their doors. McKey (ground beef), McCain (fries and potatoes), and EB Boulangerie Française (hamburger buns) organized factory tours, children’s programs,

22 In order to qualify as an “artisan boulanger” (artisan baker) in France, one must adhere to very strict standards of quality and must make all products on location by hand.
All information about open houses appeared on McDonald’s France website (www.mcdonalds.fr) during the open house dates.
and adult forums to educate the public about how they create their products. McDonald’s advertising agency, Euro RSCG Corporate, hosted a public forum on 5 April, explaining how they conceive of an advertising campaign and how they manage a crisis. Lastly, McDonald’s France’s corporate offices in Guyancourt hosted a presentation about product conception, restaurant staff training, and architectural development. These open houses attempted to demystify the operation of McDonald’s France. Exposing the detailed functions of all the restaurant’s operations is a powerful rhetorical argument that McDonald’s business practices are completely benign. See for yourself, the open houses suggested: McDonald’s France is no predatory multi-national, but just another business enterprise staffed by French people and supplied with French products.

McDonald’s France’s strategies also included full-page newspaper advertisements in leading French newspapers, including *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, and *Libération*, during December 1999. A series of three advertisements poked fun at Americans, while proclaiming the quality and freshness of the French produce that makes up McDonald’s food. In one, an overweight American in overalls, camouflage jacket, and baseball cap says, “Salads at McDonald’s? I don’t get it.” The copy continues: “Ah, but in France we like salads. And, dear sir, food isn’t about ‘getting it.’ It’s about taste, choice, and health. Salad is an essential nutritional element, which is fortunate because the French love it. And, contrary to popular opinion, they have taste.” The other two ads followed a similar theme, with scruffy American men complaining about the food at McDonald’s France. In one, a double-chinned man wearing a cowboy hat roars into his cell phone: “McDonald’s France products come from the farm? And they eat them?”—shocked that food does not come from a laboratory or factory. In the other, a cowboy in a ten-gallon hat complains:
“What I don’t like about McDonald’s France is that it doesn’t buy American beef.” The copy rebuts each complaint, explaining that McDonald’s France uses only the best French-raised produce and meats. Each ad finishes with these words: McDonald’s France was “born in the United States, but made in France.” In a statement about the advertisements, McDonald’s stressed that their purpose was to “reinforce the message that McDonald’s in France is a local French company with local employees, local franchisees, local suppliers and products.”

In its effort to appear more French, McDonald’s assumed that a company is French if it buys French products and hires French employees. Though this argument has logical inconsistencies—after all, McDonald’s still sells an American cultural product—McDonald’s France continues to believe in it. A similar reasoning resides in its recent redecorating effort—a restaurant with that looks French and offers French items on the menu equals a French restaurant.

McDonald’s Gets a Face Lift

After showing that the restaurant chain was French on a structural level, McDonald’s France updated its public persona—restaurant design and menus—to reflect local tastes and architectural influences. From its inception in France, McDonald’s has not always followed its American parent in architecture and menu offerings. For example, the first McDonald’s in France featured half-timbered walls and murals of men in lederhosen, decorations that reflected its Alsacian location. And the company has offered particular French products, from wine to Evian to special “local” burgers, at

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25 Tagliabue, “The Unamericanization.”
various times before José Bové’s attack. However, after the incident in Millau, McDonald’s accelerated its transformation.

![Image of a rough-hewn stone staircase leading to a fake door.](image)

**Figure 19: Stairway to Nowhere.** A rough-hewn stone staircase leads to a fake door.

*Photo by author. McDonald’s Nice, 20 Ave. Jean Médecin.*

Restaurant outlets around the country, especially those in major city centers or tourist locations, often feature local architecture and decorating schemes. In all of these restaurants, McDonald’s has had to *create* an “authentic” French look, since the company is a recent American import. In the center of the papal city of Avignon, a McDonald’s features crenellated marble walls and Gothic and Roman arches, reflecting the
architecture of the nearby Palais des Papes (Palace of the Popes). Ceramic tile murals and large paintings show scenes of medieval Avignon (see Figure 20). 

McDonald’s outlets often portray an idealized and very artificial France. On the Avenue Jean Médecin in Nice, a McDonald’s features three-dimensional sculptures of the streets of Old Nice, wall-length tile murals of the Baie des Anges and Promenade des Anglais (the most frequented area of Nice), rough-hewn Provençal stone walls, and heavy medieval wooden doors. But in this restaurant, the doors are really new ones made to look old, the intriguing stone stairways lead nowhere, and stone walls are non-structural (see Figure 19).

Figure 20: Medieval murals, gothic arches, and crenellations decorate a McDonald’s in Avignon.

Photo by author. 23 rue de la République.

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26 23 Rue de la République.
Like a Disney theme park boasting a stereotypical Small Town USA or Wild West, McDonald’s France packages local architecture, geography, or history into a restaurant outlet. One restaurant in Marseille features murals of the films of Marcel Pagnol, a famous author from the region (see Figure 21). Another restaurant has a two-story mural of the old port of Marseille. The entire restaurant resembles a boat. Round chrome portholes serve as windows, while a huge mast doubles as a chandelier. Stylized murals of the 1930’s appear to overlook the sea, while the painted characters gather round the (real) grand piano on the second story balcony.

McDonald’s France began intensifying its redecorating scheme after Bové’s attack in Millau. Libération, a national newspaper, noted in June of 2000 that “since last year, the enterprise has accelerated the renovation of the impersonal décor in some of its
restaurants with an irresistible ‘French touch.’”27 Several restaurants have received a new touch of “local color.” McDonald’s outlets now include a Savoyard châlet with sturdy timbres, local stone, and heavy wooden tables in Briançon; a Basque auberge in Biarritz; and a “library” housing fake books near the Sorbonne in Paris.28 Again, authenticity is a commodity McDonald’s lacks; it compensates by creating façades that look real. Other newly renovated restaurants focus less on regional stereotypes and more on design and aesthetics. For example, restaurants in Andelnans, Val d’Europe, and Créteil Soleil are decorated with a “nouveau monde” theme that “privileges space and modernity.” The restaurants feature brick walls, light furnishings, and large arched hallways (see Figure 22).29

![Figure 22: Nouveau Monde.](from www.mcdonalds.fr)

To draw attention to this new trend, McDonald’s France devotes a section of its website, called “McStyle: A Restaurant, A Place, A Design,” to its renovated restaurants.

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27 Pons: depuis l’été dernier, l’entreprise accélère le renouvellement du décor impersonnel de certains de ses restaurants d’une irrésistible “French touch.”
28 Pons.
29 Murs de brique, meubles clairs, ce style privilégie l’espace et la modernité. Les grands comptoirs disposés en arc de cercle s’ajoutent à la convivialité de ce lieu.
The slogan reads: “Quality—it’s also in the ambiance and the design.” The site highlights thirteen new decorative schemes. Grouped into two major categories, “Classic” and “Thematic,” the restaurants feature the work of architects and landscapers who have integrated new restaurants into existing urban styles and done drastic remodeling in older restaurants. The site explains, “In the past several years, McDonald’s has been busy attending to and diversifying the design of its restaurants, in order to make them more lively, more personal, more warm, or more intimate.” Each of the schemes, with titles like “Blues,” “Spring,” “Rothko” (see Fig. 23) and “New World,” features several artistic photographs of the restaurant as well as commentary explaining the design.

Some particular designs are worth noting. In the “Rouille” design (see Figure 25), the description claims that the restaurant is “proof that a fast-food restaurant can have style.” The text continues: “White and earth-colored tiles, married with fresh colors (light blue, yellow, and…rust) make the restaurant authentic without seeming old-fashioned.” The website also features three restaurants with American themes. One is a Hawaiian surf shop (see Fig. 24). Another is an upscale American restaurant in the style of a New York loft. The third recreates the original McDonald’s in Des Plaines, Illinois. By including American-style restaurants in its redecorating campaign, McDonald’s sends the message that the generic restaurant design is not American, that the company had to make special efforts to create an American style. Such a move is subtle, but significant. It

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30 La qualité, c’est aussi dans l’ambiance et le design qu’elle se note.
31 Depuis plusieurs années, McDonald’s s’emploie à soigner et à diversifier le design de ses restaurants, afin de les rendre plus vivants, plus personnels, plus chaleureux ou plus intimes.
32 Referring to American painter Mark Rothko.
33 Rust, or rust-colored. The restaurant is located in La Flèche.
34 La preuve qu’un fast-food peut avoir du “cachet.” Les briques en terre cuite et blanches, mariées à des couleurs fraîches (bleu pâle, jaune et… rouille), rendent le restaurant “authentique” sans paraître vieillot.
reveals the assumption that McDonald’s France is not fundamentally American. And more generally, the renovations present the argument that in France, McDonald’s cares about individuality and aesthetics—not about imposing the same generic style onto every outlet.

Figure 23: It's a Jungle Out There. A Rotho-inspired restaurant boasts vivid reds and pinks, with zebra-patterned bar stools.


Figure 24: Surf's Up. A McDonald’s in Anglet features bleached wood and surfing paraphernalia.

McDonald’s has also been quite willing to revise its menus, although usually on a temporary basis. The franchise system, in which the local owner purchases franchise rights, allows great flexibility in menus, decorating, and advertising. Although a franchise must keep the “core elements of the brand,” explains McDonald’s CEO Jack Greenberg, there is an “enormous amount of local freedom to add additional menu items.”

One restaurant in Agen, faced the possibility of farmer protests following Bové’s attack. The manager’s solution? Serving “McDuck” and “Roquefort burgers” that used local produce because he “decided it would be nicer to do that than have them (Bové and friends) dump three tonnes of manure in the restaurant.”

McDonald’s France has also coordinated nation-wide changes in the menu, such as the “A Regional Touch in Your Hamburger” campaign this summer (see Figure 26). This month-long promotion featured seven different regional hamburgers, one for every day of the week. The types of hamburgers offered were: Auvergnate, Alsacienne, Béarnaise, Dijonnaise, Savoyarde, Normande, and Provençale. One could also find a “regional touch” in the Deluxe Potatoes, served with a

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36 Kingsnorth, 40.
Provençal sauce, or in a Sundae Poire Belle-Hélène, with pears from the Rhône Valley.

Figure 26: “A Regional Touch in Your Hamburger.” Posters, cards, and tray liners featured these regional hamburgers.

Card courtesy of McDonald’s France, June 2001.

Just a Façade?

McDonald’s responses to criticism over the past few years show a willingness to adapt to consumer preferences. A question that remains is whether this pattern of “glocalization,” when a global brand adapts itself to local needs and tastes, is the future of globalization. Some feel it is. A recent article in The Economist argues that multi-national corporations are not all-powerful, but in fact very vulnerable to the whims of consumers. The amount of effort McDonald’s France expended to change its image shows that it took recent public fears and criticism very seriously.


But will McDonald’s’ new image satisfy Bové and his supporters? Probably not. The restaurants might be pleasing to the eye, and the food may come from French farmers, but the underlying American concept of fast food lies unchanged. Changing the interior façade, putting “regional” sauces onto a hamburger, or buying from French farmers do not alter McDonald’s role as a place for eating a meal on the run. Still, McDonald’s France has made some improvement to its restaurants. Andrew Jack, writing for *The Spectator*, argues that “the French do not just attack American symbols…. They take them over and improve them.” Dining in a Rothko-inspired restaurant is certainly more exciting than in a generic cookie-cutter restaurant so common in suburban America.

No clear consensus about McDonald’s exists among the French. Some agree with parts of Bové’s concerns, but found him too extreme. Others feel no conflict of interest frequenting both McDonald’s and more traditional restaurants. And others’ views closely reflect Bové’s ideas. A restaurant manager in Nice said that Bové’s attacks were misplaced, but she admitted that they made sense. Farmers, she continued, have a right to defend their way of life if they’re feeling threatened. She also stated that except for the name, the restaurant is “one hundred percent European,” and about 80 to 90% French.

Others frequent the restaurant often, but still appreciate French food. Jean Xavier Brager, director of a study abroad program in Aix-en-Provence and native of Marseille, eats frequently at McDonald’s, about four times a week. His 93-year-old grandmother likes the restaurant as well, because she has difficulties sitting down for long periods of time at more traditional French restaurants. He agreed that in order for McDonald’s to survive in France, it has to regionalize. Jean found it quite ironic that the morning before

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39 Jack, 18.
I interviewed him, he went into McDonald’s to eat and had a kind of moral dilemma, trying to decide whether to buy one of the regional sandwiches or something from the normal menu. Violetta, a Spanish immigrant and divorcée in her mid-thirties, visits McDonald’s for its convenience, such as when she is with a group of friends and needs something cheap. She agrees that the food is not very healthy, but that it has its place in certain situations. McDonald’s fills a niche in the lives of Jean and Violetta, allowing them to obtain food quickly and easily.

Other French hold attitudes that closely coincide with Bové’s complaints. Antonia Houdin, a single mother of two grown boys, refuses to allow her younger son Jonathan to work there because she feels that McDonald’s exploits its workers. Jonathan half-jokingly replied, “Yeah, but where I work exploits me worse than McDonald’s would.” Antonia stated that the food is disgusting, bad for one’s health, and just bad in general.

It is relatively easy for McDonald’s France to advertise that it is an essentially French company, because of its organization, suppliers, food, and decor; it is more difficult to convince the public or to make those claims real. McDonald’s France argues that buying French supplies, naming certain meals after French regions, and redecorating its restaurants make the company genuinely French. But it cannot completely hide its true nature. The company has made intense efforts to revise its image, but in the end it is still an American-style restaurant that serves American food and an American way of eating. Although the company is “made in France,” it was still “born in the USA.”

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40 Jonathan works at “Tout à 10 Francs,” which is similar to American “Everything’s a Dollar” stores.
41 These interviews were conducted during from 7-16 June, 2001 in Nice and Marseille.
I’ve had many opportunities to tell people about my thesis project. It’s hard to avoid talking about it. After the usual inquiries into what my thesis is about, this question invariably arises: “So, what’s your opinion of José Bové?”

It’s hard to answer. When I started this project, it was easy for me to dismiss him as an amusing, if overly militant, character. That response was indicative of the first accounts I came across, usually ones that emphasized Bové’s “vandalism” and “destruction” and gave little discussion of the issues behind the protest. When I dug a little deeper, I discovered that not every source agreed on how to interpret Bové. I began
to read more accounts that sympathized or contextualized Bové’s (in)famous action against McDonald’s. After I read Bové’s book *The World Is Not For Sale*, I was enchanted for a while with his articulate defense of a small farmer’s life. Still, I’m not entirely won over. When he gained international fame in 1999, Bové lost the time to remain a farmer. He’s been globe-trotting for the last few years to attend major anti-globalization rallies, and I worry that he’s spreading his message too thin. If he becomes another Naomi Klein, who uncompromisingly denounced globalization in her book *No Logo*, his message will cease to be nuanced, carefully researched, and thus so convincing.

Many of the issues Bové raises deal with what it means to be French in a modern consumer society. His protest was ultimately an assertion of French identity. He posed the questions: Are the French in danger of becoming like Americans? Is this even possible?

In some ways, France is eons away from becoming another America. Every summer, as I direct a study abroad program in Paris for American high school students, I am reminded of how very different France is from the United States. My students often go through a difficult transition period when they arrive. France, on first glance, appears so friendly and familiar. The people share a similar mix of ethnicities—mostly Caucasian, with other nationalities represented in small numbers. People drive on the same side of the street. Supermarkets and large department stores have different names, perhaps—Carrefour and Auchan and Galeries Lafayette—but operate on roughly the same principles. Fast food is not as readily available as in the United States, but is still easy enough to come across. Sure, most French buildings are several centuries old, rather than several decades. Cities are more compact. But, when my students come off the
plane, they are confident. France feels like an exotic America, a fantasy land that’s almost too beautiful (in places) to be true.

This feeling lasts a few hours, until they meet their host families and realize that they truly are in a foreign country. Their families talk quickly, seem to interrupt each other, reprimand their children in public, eat with their arms and elbows on the table. The French don’t respect lines at amusement parks and other public places like Americans do. Strangers do not readily smile at each other, or strike up conversations while waiting in line. Waiters don’t chat with their customers; they seek to serve without being noticed, place drinks on the table with great speed yet take time to set out each course. Public restrooms are scarce. Soon these cultural differences become a litany of complaints from my students, until they stop expecting things to be like they are at home.

While my students wade through the intricacies of French culture that often evoke feelings of alienation, I revel in the differences. Two years ago I met a beekeeper near Mont Ventoux whose honeys are celebrated around the world. Instead of expanding his operations (and thus his profits), he and three generations before him have chosen to remain a family operation and to focus on the quality of their twenty-odd varieties of honey. Last summer, some of my most lengthy conversations about food were with bus drivers. One, about twenty-five years old, rhapsodized for half an hour about tomatoes: how to eat them, where to find the freshest ones, why a ripe tomato from a farmer’s market is infinitely preferable to ones from supermarkets. Another in his sixties detailed the pleasures of cuisine from the Midi, the south of France. I once stayed with a family who had a wonderfully French dilemma about windows. They live in a tall, narrow house in a Parisian suburb. The mother had ordered new vinyl windows to replace the old,
single-paned ones. But then her conscience struck. How could she dare replace the beautiful, if old, windows and ruin the aesthetic integrity of her house? She lost sleep. Finally, she phoned the window company and cancelled her order.

These everyday incidents, experienced on a very personal level, give me hope that France is still very far away from becoming like America. In that sense, José Bové and other cultural preservationists’ portrayal of French culture and identity as weak and fragile is misguided. Instead of celebrating the beauty, strength, and endurance of their culture, preservationists depict it as easily overwhelmed. But surely, if such a culture is worth saving, it should also be strong enough to hold its own. Unlike Bové and others like him, I view culture and identity as active, not passive, forces. Cultures change and adapt—sometimes for the better, sometimes not—but they usually do so of their own choosing. In France, that is largely the case. French consumers, after all, have chosen to support the 900 McDonald’s outlets. They also continue to value more traditional kinds of food—Bové himself is a wonderful example of the tenacity of more “traditional” ways of life, even in a modern, fast-paced society.

Preservationists often fall into the trap of nostalgizing culture and identity, of presenting the past as fixed, stable, and unchanging. Their message is very appealing, but also misleading. French identity has never been fixed, nor is the culture monolithic through time and place. Even the notion of a French-speaking nation in its current borders is relatively recent. An article in *The Economist* discussing the development of the French language notes that “the hexagon, which excludes defiantly (often violently) un-French Corsica, has always had its cracks.” Beginning with the battles between Gaul and the Roman Empire, France has been a nation more divided than unified—politically,
linguistically, and culturally. Only the past few centuries have seen the establishment of what we know as France.¹

In addition, France has had a long history of massive immigration, sometimes on the same scale as Australia and the United States. Widespread immigration to France first began in the mid-1800s as urban industrial centers needed workers to power factories. Because so many native French left agriculture to work in the cities, immigrants also filled those agricultural vacancies.² In 1851, the foreign population in France was around one percent of the total population; by the turn of the century, three percent of French inhabitants were foreign-born.³ In the three decades following 1886, immigrants and their children accounted for half the population growth in France.⁴ Influences both within and outside France have created a highly heterogeneous culture.

Although I disagree with Bové’s conception of French identity and culture, I do agree that some of the changes happening in France are not desirable. Each summer I spend in France intensifies my conflicting feelings about American influence. I find cases for optimism from the people with whom I interact and share ideas. And there is something incredibly comforting about visiting a grocery store that has at least one full-length aisle (both sides) devoted entirely to cheese. But I also find many reasons for pessimism. France has undeniably begun to change rapidly in the past few decades. Patterns of consumption are looking more and more like those in the United States. For

¹ “How Multilingual is France?” 46.
example, the *centre commercial* is a recent phenomenon in France. These commercial centers closely mirror American strip malls and large commercial areas. Unlike older parts of French cities, these areas are only accessible by car, feature large parking lots and nondescript concrete block box stores, and generally are an eyesore. Rick Fantasia has captured the drastic Americanization of France in this passage:

As one drives westward toward Geneva from the small city of Thonon-les-bains, with its stately perch on the Southern shore of Lac Leman, its fading Victorian-era hotel spas and 17th century château, and its remarkable views of the French Alps, one comes upon a stretch of road that, to an American, appears perfectly familiar and thus seems completely “foreign” in its French context. Quite suddenly, from both sides of the road, one’s view is seized by the intrusion of brightly-colored placards, dazzling neon signs and coarse structures that signal a steady string of auto dealerships, gas stations, furniture outlets, garden supply stores, a kitchen appliance store, a bowling alley and a sprawling supermarket complex. Over two kilometers in length, it is a commercial strip that is about as shrill and tawdry as any to be found along urban America’s peripheral roads....there is little within one’s visual field to suggest that one is in France or anywhere outside of the United States for that matter.  

Clothing styles are becoming more casual and more American, so that it’s harder to tell the French apart from tourists by their dress. French television now abounds with mindless soap operas and reality shows, such as last year’s Survivor spin-off called “Loft Story.” New housing developments look increasingly like American suburbia. And, of

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5 Fantasia, 57.
course, fast food is on the rise, with French chains such as Quick competing with Burger King, Dairy Queen, Wendy’s, Pizza Hut, and the inevitable McDonald’s.

I feel encouragement along with despondency, because France is a complex country, and the people who create and consume culture emerge from forces that do not yet flow in one direction only. Certainly many of the visible parts of French culture—clothing styles, commercial areas, restaurants—have taken on a decidedly American hue. But it is my hope that the core of French culture and identity has not really changed all that much. And as long as people like José Bové exist, those transformations will not go unnoticed.\(^6\)

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“Mad Cow Disease in French Herd,” The Independent 21 February 2000: 12.


Martin, Michelle, “French Food vs. Fast Food,” Environmental News Network 22


“McDonald’s Targeted in Anniversary Protest by French Cheese Producers,” *AFX European Focus* 10 July 2001 (17 January 2002 LN).


“Protesters Lift Blockade on McDonald’s Outlet in Southwest France,” *AFX European Focus* 14 August 2001 (17 January 2002 LN).


“WTO Ministers Cut off From Reality, Might as Well be on the Moon—Bové,” AFP 9 November 2001 (4 February 2002 LN).


**McDonald’s Restaurants Visited:**

**Avignon**
23 rue de la République

MARSEILLE
79 La Canebière
15 Quai des Belges

NICE
1 Promenade des Anglais
47 bis avenue Jean Médecin
3 Boulevard Jean Jaurès
20 Avenue Jean Médecin
20 Cours Saleya

PARIS
20 Boulevard Montmartre
84 Avenue des Champs Elysées

PAMPHLETS:


WEBSITES:

McDonald’s France: www.mcdonalds.fr
McDonald’s Corporation: www.mcdonalds.com
Confédération Paysanne: www.confederationpaysanne.fr
World Trade Organization: www.wto.org

INTERVIEWS:

I conducted oral interviews from 7-16 June, 2001 in Nice and Marseille. I also had a written internet interview with Bénédicte Brabant on 22 February 2002.

DOCUMENTARIES:

McLibel: Two worlds collide, Franny Armstrong, Producer/director (London: One-Off
Productions) 1997.

Appendix A:

Items Affected by the 1999 WTO Ruling

Condensed from the WTO document
“European Communities - Measures Concerning
Meat and Meat Products (Hormones)”
WT/DS26/19
18 May 1999
(99-2091)

- Animal feed ingredients
- Chestnuts
- Chewing gum
- Chocolate and other cocoa preparations
- Cough drops
- Cut flowers, flower buds, foliage, branches and other parts of plants
- Dried carrots
- Fatty substances derived from wool grease (including lanolin)
- Fruit juices
- Glues or adhesives
- Hair clippers
- Lingonberry and raspberry jams
- Meat Products:
  - Meat of bovines, swine, and poultry
  - Sausages and similar products
  - Livers
- Mineral waters and aerated waters
- Motorcycles
- Oats
- Onions
- Paprika
- Pears and peaches (excluding nectarines)
- Prepared mustard
- Roasted coffee substitutes and extracts
- Roquefort cheese
- Rusks, toasted bread and similar toasted products
- Satsumas
- Soups and broths
- Tomatoes
- Truffles
- Yarns