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Brooke Lindy Blower. *Becoming Americans in Paris: Transatlantic Politics and Culture between the World Wars.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 368 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-973781-9.

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In many ways France's Belle Époque marked a high point of French culture and influence. Yet a generation later, France's position in the world had changed. A combination of war damages, a long-running dispute between left- and right-wing extremists, coal rationing, and currency devaluation slowed French economic growth just as that of the United States appeared to surge ahead. This greater wealth allowed more Americans to travel to Europe and France than ever before. American soldiers' presence on the Continent further added to that same favorable exchange rate, as did perceived freedom from repressive American laws, enticing thousands more Americans to cross the Atlantic. Brooke Blower's *Becoming Americans in Paris: Transatlantic Politics and Culture Between the World Wars* describes this incursion of "triumphant arrivals" throughout the 1920s and 1930s. "Les Américains," flush with money, followed the increased migration of U.S. culture (Hollywood films and advertising) to Europe. For some of these visitors, Paris was simply a starting point for travel and business elsewhere on the Continent. For others it was a place to start anew. The vast majority, however, simply came as tourists. Even if France viewed itself as modern, most Americans came to see the country's nineteenth-century glory: art museums, cafés, picturesque streets, and wide boulevards. They disembarked off boats and trains with preconceived notions. In their minds, Paris "seems to have been what Broadway tried to be, what Greenwich Village yearned to be, what Fifth Avenue was determined to be" (p. 19).

The author divides *Becoming Americans in Paris* into three sections, all of which epitomize the intricate relationship between France and the United States. The first part, entitled "The Spectre of Americanization," examines the influx of these visitors and surveys the visited. The titles alone, "Triumphant Arrivals" and "Reluctant Hosts," accurately summarize the two countries' attitudes towards each other. Although there were many left-wing activists among the American expatriate community, we learn that on the whole the group was more conservative than progressive, a significant point that could be emphasized more to explain conflicts in the upcoming chapters. These visitors seeking Old World charm were not always enamored of the city. Many felt superior as they compared it to life back home. They "abhorred sanitary conditions and unapologetic displays of affection" (p. 41). Chapter 2, "The Reluctant Hosts," on the other hand, explains the Parisians' views of their guests. Established residents had long resented newcomers and these new arrivals were no exception (p. 61). Affected by their weakened economy many French also grew to hate the unfair advantage of the strong dollar, where the Americans' "massive spending smacked of exploitation" (p. 69). Blower describes how Parisians "deplored how visitors paraded brashly through the city center as if Paris existed solely for their own enjoyment" (p. 57). Perhaps most useful in this first section is her socioeconomic and geographic tour of the city. Blower explains how Parisian visitors understood and used the city. The large presence of Americans in the Opera district, for example, came across as "an insidious form of economic and culture control" (p. 72).

Throughout the book Blower highlights divisions between the two nations. The author's choice of the Sacco-Vanzetti riots in the second section, "Parisian Cultural Politics," builds on her previous economic and cultural discussion. Blower uses the execution in Massachusetts of Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco, two Italian immigrants, in August 1927 to reflect on the growing political differences between France and the United States. Her description of police prefect Jean Chiappe's role in maintaining control of the capital links up with the next chapter, "Prefect Chiappe's Purging of Paris," to delineate the role of authority in Paris during the Third Republic. Chiappe's constant efforts to rid the city of forces deemed subversive, such as communists and working-class foreigners, were intended to create a "clean" city for residents and visitors (such as an upcoming American Legion

convention) to enjoy. Blower's argument here is reminiscent of James Lehning's *To Be a Citizen* (2001) on the government's taming of early Third Republic Paris in order to demonstrate control over the post-Commune city.[1]

The third section, "American Political Culture," focuses on two different American groups in the French capital. "Legionnaires on Parade" examines a large influx of military veterans for a one-time event and their return to Paris ten years after victory in Europe. The government welcomed the Legionnaires in the hope that its goodwill towards this veteran's group would help France renegotiate its U.S. war debt. Business owners, too, hoped to profit from these visitors' time in Paris. As much as he tried, Chiappe could not eliminate all dissent. Organized labor, for one, protested the convention, which it perceived as supporting capitalism. In truth, many Americans and French singled out the Legion's alleged fascist tendencies and Blower's examination of the ensuing ideological battle portrays it as a precursor to the Left/Right debate that would take place throughout Europe in the next decade.

"Expatriates Revisited," on the other hand, describes Paris's role in the greater American "expat" experience in Europe. Blower examines many well-known expatriates (Sylvia Beech, Langston Hughes) as well as others who may be less familiar to wider audiences (John Dos Passos, Robert McAlmon). At first, Blower appears to concentrate more on the reasons why many of these people left their middle-class homes for distant shores than on Paris's allure itself. We learn of war and newspaper headlines on trains, and the more traditional literary reasons that drew young men and women to the Continent. Soon they were studying and living abroad. This section feels disjointed at first, with some subjects receiving only a paragraph or two of text. But as the chapter progresses, Blower's narrative convincingly demonstrates Paris's attraction for those expatriates "whose upbringing left them with a taste for far-flung exploits" (p. 219). It is not until later in the chapter that Blower explains the role of the expat community in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s and its influence on American and French culture when the Great Depression caused many to return home.

Blower's *Becoming Americans in Paris* is a worthy addition to historical scholarship on the interwar period. Equally of note, she proves how the uneasy relationship between the French and their American guests developed through confrontation as much as collaboration. The changing dynamics in the 1920s and 1930s play out well in her narrative. Economic collapse and war definitively ended the expatriate experience for many Americans in "Gay Paree" but their stories underscore, if not explain, the exceptional, dynamic, and sometimes rocky, rapport that exists between the two cultures today.

Note

[1]. James R. Lehning, *To Be a Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 58-86.

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