

## The Heart's Geography

by Thomas Fleming

I took out the atlas the other day to figure out the routes of the voyagers retraced by Jean Raspail on his first trip to the United States. In the event, it proved impossible to plot a French expedition on a modern map of the United States. Maps are political abstractions. They encourage us to take a god's eye view of where we are and who we are, a view that distorts the ungeographical realities of everyday life. My Anglophile wife, for example, drinks tea grown in India and imported from England. Ungeographically, she is more at home in London than in Chicago. Irish refugees from the potato famine settled in the United States, not in England, because to the Irishman's mind, "The shores of England are farther off in his heart's geography than those of Massachusetts or New York."

On a map, New York City is part of the United States (an absurd proposition), which are closer to Guatemala than they are to England and France. But England and France are part of me, not only of me as an individual but of me as American, whereas Guatemala is connected to us only by way of Spain, which is something of a detour. The American fondness for maps encourages us to devise such abstractions as "Western Hemisphere" and "Pacific Rim," and we are dazzled by these inventions of our own imagination. The reality is that we are part of Europe, and in cutting the ties that bind us to our mother, we are not growing up; on the contrary, we are acting like the spoiled adolescents who run off to New York and Los Angeles expecting to find themselves and end up as prostitutes and drug addicts.

Even in the best of times, it is hard to maintain the traditions of civilized life. Good manners and careful speech, decent food and well-crafted art all require work and discipline. It is easier to say the first thing that comes into our heads, and most of us are suckers for MSG-enhanced sweet and sour pork or "music" that is aimed directly at the glands below the belt.

Civilization is even harder to keep up when a Golden Age is

past. "Been there, done that" is our reaction to Mozart or monogamy. For colonists, especially, there is the ever-pressing temptation to go native—wear comfortable clothes to church or none at all to the beach, dine on Chicken McNuggets or grandmother's liver, slash tires for recreation—or count down the last episodes of *Seinfeld*.

Aristoxenus, the greatest music-theorist of antiquity, was complaining about musical decadence already in the late fourth century B.C. He compared the plight of the conservative music-lover with the fate of the unhappy people of Paestum who had lost their Greek identity but once a year celebrated a Greek festival during which "they recalled their ancient words and customs and after weeping and lamenting to each other they returned home."

Greeks from Sybaris (proverbial for its wealth and luxury) settled the colony of Poseidonia (modern Paestum) south of Naples about 600 B.C., but the pressures of immigration and assimilation gradually eroded the "Greekness" of the inhabitants of this and other Greek colonies planted in Hesperia (the West). More than one historian has pointed out the parallels between the Greek cities of the ancient West (Sicily and Southern Italy) and the British colonies of North America. Both became richer and more powerful than their mother countries, and both took a somewhat vulgar delight in their success. By the early fifth century, the western parvenus were picking up Olympic victories right and left (a very costly hobby), and the tyrant of Syracuse was bold enough to insist upon the supreme command of Greek forces as the price of his participation in the Panhellenic struggle against the Persians.

But Syracuse also became notorious for political instability: the opportunists who arrived from all parts of the Mediterranean world proved incapable of maintaining a settled political order. Their democracy quickly degenerated into mob rule, and tyrants like Dionysius and his son gave despotism a

bad name. Timoleon (a contemporary of Aristoxenus, who was himself a South Italian Greek) tried to restore the greatness of Syracuse and the other Greek cities of Sicily by defending them from the child-murdering Carthaginians, suppressing the tyrants, and replacing the multiethnic mob with authentic Greek settlers, but the task was too much even for Timoleon, and Sicily gradually dehellenized.

The problem of the Sicilian Greeks was moral as well as multicultural. Plato had dreamed of drafting a constitution for Syracuse, but he gave up in disgust, saying that nothing could be done with people who thought of nothing but food and sex. Syracuse or Santa Barbara?

North Americans, like the ancient people of Paestum, have a hard time remembering who they are. Torn up physically from the roots of our civilization, we run from one extreme to the other: weary from telling anyone who will listen that he belongs to an exceptional race that has transcended the old Adam and the Old World, the American lurches into uncritical admiration of all things foreign and becomes W.S. Gilbert's idiot "who praises with enthusiastic tone, all centuries but this and every country but his own." The chauvinist Mark Twain and the expatriate Henry James were equally American in repudiating and embracing Europe, almost simultaneously.

The people of Paestum, however, did have one advantage: they knew what they had lost and lamented the change. We, on the other hand, are doing everything we can to change the nature of our culture and our people. Through the massive importation of aliens from the Third World, we are transforming our old European stock into an ethnic jumble that would astonish the Syracusans, who were mainly Greek and Italic, and through "diversity" requirements and so-called multiculturalism, we are systematically cutting all our links with the civilizations that have formed our character: Greeks and Romans, Old Testament Jews and Medieval Christians, the British and other European peoples who settled the continent. When Peter Brimelow asks why we should do this, he is called a bigot. Self-destruction, say the liberals, is a moral duty.

Those of us in the "Anglo" community—the people whom the Cajuns call *americains*—have no excuse. We still speak a kind of English, our political and legal institutions are modeled (at least in theory) on those of Great Britain, and phrases from Shakespeare and the King James Bible are still proverbial in everyday speech—though we know Shakespeare only from the films of Kenneth Branagh and Leonardo DiCaprio and hear *Good News for Modern Man* in our post-Christian churches. The fact remains that ours is still a predominantly British culture, for the time being.

It is harder for other European communities to hold onto their historical memories. I am thinking not so much of the various immigrant communities who send their kids to Greek school or establish Polish cultural centers and Italian newspapers. These groups are, for the most part, fragments of a diaspora that have failed to create an enduring regional culture.

French and Spanish communities have a different story to tell. In many cases, their ancestors arrived in North America before the ancestors of most Anglos, and the Québécois and the Acadians, in particular, formed linguistic and cultural strongholds, where they preserved some memory of who they are (or were) down to the present generation. The Québécois are, for the present at least, experiencing a patriotic upsurge. The Creoles and Cajuns of Louisiana, however, have had to

deal with the more powerful assimilative engines of American mass culture and the nationalizing project of the public schools.

Like most *americains*, I know very little of the Louisiana French, and that little comes from recordings of Cajun dance music and from the cuisine touted by Justin Wilson and the oversold (and overrated) Paul Prudhomme. On my way to give a lecture in central Louisiana, I took a detour of several days through New Orleans and parts of "Cajun Country," and while the trip provided more food for the belly than food for thought, I came away with a few impressions that both confirm and amplify Jean Raspail's observations on the barbarization of America.

Arriving in New Orleans, my wife and I checked into a small hotel on the edge of the *vieux carré*. They were filming a movie scene, and from the looks of the actresses we spotted the next day walking poodles in Jackson Square, our hotel was probably playing the part of a bordello—a fitting symbol for a city that is now best remembered for cathouse piano players and the animal acts on Bourbon Street. We had lunch a block away. The low prices attracted people from the neighborhood, and the tourists were lured by a lavish display of praline candies, hot sauces, and authentic Creole/Cajun cookbooks. From a marketing standpoint, it's all the same.

I thought that after everyone in America had eaten blackened redfish and listened to Beausoleil on Prairie Home Companion, they had some idea of the Cajuns, if only as a mythical race invented by a Yankee poet trying to sell a love story. I had also thought that anyone who had been to college knew that "Creole" meant something like a European (especially French) born in the New World, and not a French-speaking mulatto, but I underestimated the invincible ignorance of the *New York Times*. Last fall (November 23) one B. Drummond Ayres, Jr., described Creoles as "the often light-skinned Louisianans of mixed African and other blood" and as "generally blacks with some white blood," which would include half the state of Louisiana. This definition might surprise Creole General Pierre Beauregard, whose attack on Fort Sumter signaled the start of the War Between the States.

I did not run into anyone in Louisiana who did not actually know the difference between Creole and Cajun, but New Orleans is doing its best to shed the finery of its French heritage in exchange for the dime-store fashion of multiculturalism. The museum housed in the Cabildo on Jackson Square does pay tribute to the Acadians, exiled by the British from Nova Scotia,

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as well as to the French settlers who came straight to New Orleans, but the French story is lost in the welter of diversity. New Orleans, it seems, is just like Brooklyn or Berkeley, a multicultural paradise.

As I looked at the section devoted to the Civil War, I began to wonder if anyone from Louisiana could possibly be involved. Beast Butler, who issued the infamous order to treat intractable Southern women as streetwalkers, is credited with preventing an outbreak of yellow fever by scrubbing down the buildings. (If anything, the extra water would have only bred more mosquitoes.) “Spoons” Butler is also exonerated from the charge that he pilfered household goods. He was cleared by a federal investigation after the war—which only proves that Janet Reno’s refusal to investigate her boss is not without precedent.

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We ran into French tourists everywhere in New Orleans, but if they were looking for a city where they could feel at home, they must have been disappointed. The food is still wonderfully un-American, and some of the architecture in the Quarter preserves a French-colonial air, but the only foreign language I heard spoken by a waiter was Spanish. There was no French programming on the television, and the first French I heard on the radio was a Cajun station I picked up 20 or 30 miles out on the road to Morgan City.

It is the same everywhere. Traditional cultures, which cannot maintain their fragile edges in the jostling of big city crowds, maintain a marginal existence in Appalachian mountain valleys or along the bayous of southwestern Louisiana. If New Orleans, for all its bedraggled charm, is slowly turning into Anytown U.S.A., the traveler who makes the round of Acadian tourist sites knows he is someplace else. Virtually everyone speaks a kind of English, probably as a first language, but the cadences and gestures—sometimes even a look in the eyes—betray a lurking Frenchness, even if the surname is Spanish or Irish.

We spent a day in St. Martinville and dutifully took photographs of each other under the Evangeline Oak, where the prototype of Longfellow’s heroine is said to have landed. The bed-and-breakfast we stayed in had been a hotel in the early 19th century, and despite the array of souvenirs in the gift shop, the food was remarkably good. If people care about what they put in their mouths, they hardly qualify (at least in these days) as American—and this is especially true of most so-called gourmets.

The real reason to visit St. Martinville is for the Church of St.

Martin (and the adjacent Presbytère). The ivory and cream tones of the interior are, perhaps, more charming than reverent, but if the colors are French, the simplicity and decency reflect a rural piety that should not offend the most bigoted Puritan. There may be no more than a dozen churches in the United States that are the equal of St. Martin’s, which was constructed on a grander scale than a village of this size should warrant, but the parishioners hoped that by building a cathedral, they would lure a bishop. Some of them were the children of royalist refugees who gave St. Martinville the high tone that earned the nickname, “Petit Paris.”

Behind the cathedral on the Bayou is an information booth with the sign, “*Ici on parle français*,” and a similar announcement greets visitors to the B&B, but I did not put the claims to the test of my wooden French. The young lady who served us breakfast had a puzzling accent, more French than Cajun, but the mystery was solved when I learned that, although a local girl, she had lived in France for much of her life.

How interested the Acadians are in “the other French,” I do not know. Their own language is a pungent dialect, and some people have protested against teaching standard French to Cajuns, but a similar complaint might be made against teaching Shakespeare to Louisiana *americains*. French is an international language of European civilization, the language of one of the two greatest literatures since the fall of Rome.

Louisiana schools, Catholic as well as public, did their best to obliterate French in the years following World War II. In his wonderful Cajun novels (published recently as *Marshland Trinity*), Chris Segura tells tales of schoolchildren forbidden to speak French on the schoolgrounds. Segura’s second volume, *Les Perdues*, is ostensibly about lost cattle but it also tells the story of lost Cajuns. As a powerful appeal to historical memory, it was favorably reviewed in *Chronicles* some 15 years ago by a literary scholar (at work on a life of Andrew Lytle) who saw it as part of a Southern regional renaissance. It is that and perhaps more, as the third novel of the trilogy, *In a Kingdom of the Moon*, makes clear, in portraying the results of cultural homogenization: a Cajun couple living outside their home territory refuses to teach the children French, but despite all their efforts to be fully American, they cannot help feeling different, and the boys—who scarcely know any of their ancestral tongue—introduce more and more French into their private conversations.

The period is the Korean War, when the country was in the grips of an hysteria of “Americanism.” Anticommunists like poor Joe McCarthy are blamed these days for the leftist nationalism—or rather, national socialism—which American liberals had been drumming into us since the 1930’s, but the sterility of life in the 1950’s was due not to anticommunism but to the liberal quest for conformity in which all particularities of region and culture, race and religion had to be suppressed: Cajuns and Catholics, Southerners and right-wingers—even principled leftists—all represented threats to the ideological regime that a series of “liberal” Presidents—Roosevelt, Kennedy, Johnson, of course, but also Eisenhower and Nixon—were constructing on the ruins of the Old Republic.

In Segura’s tragic *dénouement*, the oldest brother is taken prisoner by the Red Chinese and brainwashed into denouncing the United States for its treatment of the Cajuns. The novel does not defend the boy’s action, and Segura is not joining the horde of minority-whiners who justify robbery and murder as forms of political protest. His tale does, however, expose the

hollowness of the artificial Americanism that first suppressed the authentic European cultures that had held on in this American Hesperia—French and German, Southern and Midwestern—and now is attempting to turn the United States into a Pacific Rim economy with a black and Mexican underclass, a nightmare Erewhon, in which we are free to take drugs, molest children, and kill ourselves whenever keeping our carcass alive becomes too costly—to do anything but good, to be anything but European Americans.

Jean Raspail sees us perhaps more clearly than we do ourselves. He is like his own creation, the retired professor in *Camp of the Saints*, who watches the savages as they land. Many decent Americans who read the book reacted with fear: “Disgusting—what if it happened to us?” But there is a far more frightening scenario to be played out, when de-Europeanized Americans lead their Third World comrades in an assault on the last bastions of our civilization.

South Africa. Bosnia. New Orleans. Then on to St. Petersburg, to London and Paris, and to Rome, where even now an Italian government is being forced by ordinary Italians to turn back the invasion of Albanian Muslims. The Italian press, it goes without saying, is playing out the script that M. Raspail has written, and the Lega Nord’s Umberto Bossi is among the few political leaders to speak the truth. Gianfranco Fini and the ex-fascists spend their time getting even with Bossi and winning points with the leftists who own Italy as their friends own the United States.

It is time to draw a line in the sand, dividing those who will defend Europe and America from their enemies: multiculturalists on the left flank and corporate multinationalists on the right. The multiculturalist flank attacks openly, replacing Shakespeare not with Cervantes but with courses on black Chicana lesbian writers. The multinationalists are more powerful and more subversive. Speaking the language of liberty and democracy, they dream of a global society populated by faceless worker-consumers who never learned the names of their grandparents. If Attila were at the gates of Paris, they would be selling their daughters to the Huns and haggling over the price.

In taking our stand as American Europeans, we must avoid the god’s eye view abstractions put forward by neoconservative defenders of a “Euro-American” civilization that has never existed. We are not generically European, any more than we are generically white. Generic Europeans do not write *villanelles*, drink beer, or eat pasta. They do these things as Frenchmen, Germans, and Italians. This neonationalist vision of a Euro-American Union has the harsh, mechanical smell of another artificial union manufactured in Brussels, not the honest stink of Hampshire, Normandy, or Calabria.

The best way to defend Europe in America is to preserve the distinctive regional and ethnic cultures that Europeans created on this continent. “Oh,” say the neonationalist neoconservatives, “that means dividing the nation.” Nonsense. So long as we have common enemies, we can never overlook the common foundations that underlie the cultures of St. Martinville, Louisiana, and Martinsville, Virginia.

Quite apart from the political task that confronts us—limiting immigration, taking back our schools and universities from the vandals with Ph.D.’s and Ed.D.’s who have destroyed them—we must never forget that our primary task is to exemplify the civilization we are trying to defend. Before they succumbed to barbarism, the people of Paestum constructed a set

of temples which even today make their town one of the most beautiful spots in Italy. It is up to us—Louisiana Cajuns, Vermont Yankees, Minnesota Squareheads—to preserve and repair the odd bits and pieces of civilization that our hometowns represent.

Once upon a time America was the land of Romantic Babbitts, who dreamed of making Zenith City more beautiful than anything their social superiors would see on the grand tour of the Continent. Depression, war, and over a half-century of Marxist bureaucracy destroyed that dream, and the current crop of anti-European race-baiters and self-hating whites are busily pithing our frontal lobes and implanting false historical memories to keep us stupid and servile. We have become a race of serfs and helots with no recollection of who we were and could be again.

Living well, so the saying goes, is the best revenge, and our most terrible vengeance against the system is to have children (our rulers hate life) and to teach them the love of liberty and a proper contempt for the alien political system that is robbing them of their birthright.

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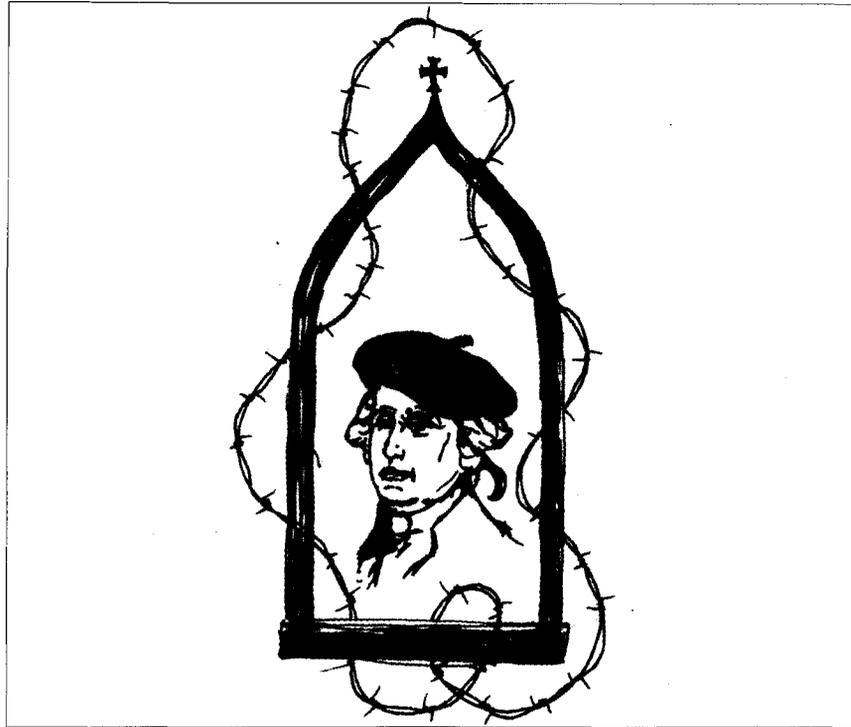
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27 JULY–1 AUGUST

# Defending Civilization

by Jean Raspail



H. Ward Sterett

Allow me to begin with a personal recollection. I first came to know the city of Chicago and the region of the Great Lakes almost 50 years ago, in 1949, when I was 23 years old. Nothing then destined me for a literary career. I am a writer who developed late. Having regrettably neglected my university studies, I traveled. During the long war, we felt smothered in France. It was necessary to seek out fresh air elsewhere. I undertook with three friends of the same age to retrace by canoe and paddle the same route as that followed by Father Marquette, who setting out from Trois-Rivières, in French Canada, discovered the Mississippi in 1673. I called my team, the Marquette team. We traveled up the Saint Laurent, crossing the rapids of the Ottawa River and the French River, passing through Lake Huron, Lake Michigan, Green Bay, Lake Winnebago, traveling down the Wisconsin and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans.

I will not go into detail about the welcome we received: it was fantastic. We were greeted by dozens of mayors, brass bands and majorettes, cheered by thousands of schoolchildren who had never heard French spoken in their lives, and interviewed by dozens of newspapers and radio stations. I have the

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*Jean Raspail—novelist, journalist, filmmaker, adventurer—was the 1997 recipient of The Ingersoll Foundation's T.S. Eliot Award for Creative Writing, for which this was his acceptance speech. The award ceremony was held at the Newberry Library in Chicago in November 1997.*

great privilege of being an honorary citizen of 20 of the towns through which we passed. The keys to these towns still hang on a wall in my study. This rugged and historic journey, which lasted almost a year, was not without a spiritual side. It was the foundation of the unfailing friendship I feel for the United States. With, it must be said, ups and downs, I was, am, and will remain a friend of the United States. I want this to be firmly understood in case, during the course of my little speech, you might come to have doubts about my feelings toward your country.

Throughout this voyage, I had spread out on a rucksack in front of me, in my canoe, two maps of the route to be followed. The first was a modern-day map of America. The second was a facsimile of the map made in the 18th century by officers of the King of France. I set up our evening camps in French historical sites, such as Fort Bourbon and Fort de Chartres, though Belle-Fontaine had become Bloomsdale; Rivière-la-Saline, Flat River; Cabaret, Crystal City; etc. Happily, Prairie-du-Chien was still called Prairie-du-Chien; La Crosse, La Crosse; and St. Louis, the small French capital at the end of the 18th century, was still called St. Louis, the birthplace of T.S. Eliot whose memory, immense work, and poetry, which is almost liturgical in its praising of the transcendence of man, I would like here to honor.

I like to imagine that St. Louis, which was French until 1803, still had in 1888, when Eliot was born, a few palpable memories of its first inhabitants. I know that history moves