

## Visions of America: *Publicitaires* and the United States, 1900-1968

Clark Eric Hultquist, University of Montevallo, Montevallo AL, USA

*This article explores the world of publicitaires, those who worked in French advertising, and their views about the "America" and "Americanization." After a study of the French advertising world, 1900-1945, this article analyzes the responses of publicitaires to America in context to changes in the French economy and society in the periods 1945-1953, 1953-1959, and 1960-1968. Publicitaires saw the United States as both a model and menace and selectively adapted "American" advertising techniques to French business practices hoping to maintain French identity.*

In 1946, the French business consulting firm Paul Planus ran an advertisement in the advertising trade journal *Vendre*. The image shows American ships of war disgorging not troops, but a multitude of trucks laden with goods. The text announces, "The economic landing of massive American imports will soon begin." The copy continues by stating that French businesses will only survive by adapting to this new situation. A final Darwinist caveat reads at the bottom, "Adapt or Disappear." The Americans' military might had smashed Hitler's Festung Europa. How could the French resist the subsequent economic invasion? A tariff wall could be smashed as easily as the Atlantic Wall. The only way to survive the onslaught was for French industries to change their way of doing business. The United States was the obvious model but many French did not want to turn their nation into another "America." After a visit to the United States in 1947, one *publicitaire* (those who worked in advertising) realized the differences between the two countries and commented (Mendel 1947, 4):

It is rather difficult for the French to attain the rhythm of the Anglo-Saxon world. In this mechanical and atomic century, speed is more and more imposed upon us and one has to adapt to it the activity of a country of agricultural, peasant, and bourgeois traditions.

In the twenty-five years after the Liberation, French *publicitaires* looked to the United States as both a threat and a model. Other *publicitaires* saw the U.S. as a country

from which France could draw inspiration, not necessarily imitation. As a result, the French could pick and choose what they saw best from the American business world and modify/apply it to fit their own tastes. Claude Marcus, Vice-President of Publicis visited Madison Avenue in the 1950s and commented that the French rarely tried to copy directly American advertisements but instead preferred to adapt them to French values and the marketplace (Personal communication, February 13, 1992). What the French could easily adapt would be advertising techniques, be they marketing surveys, polls, or consumer research. Considering France's reputation as the cultural and creative heart of Europe one might expect that France would have had a highly developed advertising industry. This assumption is not true, at least for the first half of this century as evidenced by *publicitaires* themselves criticizing and questioning their own profession, French advertising was relatively "backward" compared to its Anglo-American counterparts until the 1950s. Save for creative and evocative *affiche* advertising, French advertising as a whole was rather uninspired and was in fact dominated by quack pharmaceutical advertisements that lowered the general impression of the trade. We see a renaissance in the French advertising profession after 1945 and affirm that, by 1968, French advertising matured (in the views of *publicitaires*) and became the equal of its Anglo-American analogues. This paper shall first examine the state of the French advertising profession before 1945 and then analyze the view of *publicitaires* toward the United States..

### THE FRENCH ADVERTISING WORLD, 1900-1945

Despite France's great artistic and cultural traditions the French advertising profession lagged in development compared to its American, British, and German counterparts until after the Second World War. Contemporary French and American business commentators noted the relative "retardation" of the French advertising business compared to that of its competitors (Chessel 1998; Martin 1989, 1992; Pope 1978). Save for artistic *affichage* (poster advertising) French advertising before 1945 often was simple, scarce, and ill-regarded by the general population. What were the

reasons for the world's fourth largest economy to be such a laggard in a creative, graphic, and visual industry? One can look to explanations for this slow development: the nature and structure of French business and consumption, public attitudes toward advertising, and problems with the media.

French business, especially in comparison to its Anglo-American and German counterparts, had relatively few large or medium-sized manufacturing firms. Instead, small firms dominated the French economy. Furthermore, most French enterprises relied on personal capitalism or family capitalism—few had moved on to managerial capitalism. As a result, France had few firms that mass-produced items and distributed them on a national level (Fridenson 1997). The shape and structure of the advertising industry itself mirrored that of the larger French industrial world: few large and medium-size firms and a plethora of smaller agencies. Before 1939, France had one large advertising agency, Agence Havas, which was the leviathan of the French advertising and news world. A few medium-size firms, such as Publicis, Damour, and Elvinger, competed with Havas, but on unequal terms due to Havas' longstanding advantages of serving as a news service, an advertising agency, and a seller of advertising space. Beneath this second tier of medium-size firms were literally hundreds of advertising firms, many of them one-person operations. Foreign firms had yet to take successful root in France and the "American Challenge" would have to wait until the 1950s. Even American advertising firms, particularly J. Walter Thompson, the world's largest agency, had little success in France before 1939 (Hultquist 2003). With a dearth of large manufacturing firms few national brand-name items existed. This lack meant in turn, that the demand for advertising remained low in the national and regional press and only one agency, Agence Havas, could truly mount a national campaign of substance. Why had France not moved faster toward a world of large firms and mass production as seen in the United States, Great Britain, and Germany? David Landes (1951, 345) noted the cultural reasons behind this divergence:

In its stress on individuality, it is aristocratically directed toward a personalization of the relationship between a producer and a consumer. The former works not so much for a large, amorphous market, as for a specific client or clients. There is a hint of servitude in all of this: this dress was made for *me*; this car was made to *my taste*. As a result, a significant portion of French effective demand is oriented toward the products of artisanal and semi-artisanal as against mass-production industry.

With such attitudes, the French economy skewed to the production of high-quality, luxury goods. The makers of such goods often deemed their products in no need of advertising, relying rather on the product's own merits. Furthermore, France had not yet reached the era (as had the

United States and Great Britain) of "mass consumption" where the French tended to spend more money on services as opposed to durable goods (Landes 1951). Before the Second World War France was still "the most peasant of all Western nations" with one quarter of the population engaged in agricultural labor (Mendras and Cole 1991, 15). Peasant societies value thrift and rely often on "making do" rather than consuming (Wylie 1974). With less demand for products one notes in France a corresponding dip the funds spent on advertising. While figures on French advertising spending before the Great War are not particularly reliable, some estimates go so low as to state the French spent one-fortieth as much on advertising as did the United States (Pope 1978, 119). Yet, while advertising was not as prevalent or as pervasive in France as in the United States, French skepticism toward advertising still existed.

The French public did not view the advertising profession as a particularly respectable industry in the first half of the twentieth century. During this period, most French used the word *réclame* (clamor) for advertisements, reflecting the public's hostility to advertising that limited the spread of the profession. The public was not only hostile to advertising, but also to big business and to capitalism: advertising was only a symptom. The economist John E. Sawyer noted that "Marxist and related movements and ideologies...mobilized deep and pervasive anti-capitalist sentiments against business and the businessmen" (Sawyer 1952, 14). As advertising moved to dubious products the French public became even more mistrustful. One obvious reason for this mistrust was that quack pharmaceutical producers were the single greatest advertisers between the wars, particularly promoting advertisements for patent medicines. By 1938, nearly thirty percent of the French advertising market was taken by drug producers (Martin 1992, 182). Robert Guérin, a post-1945 advertising journalist, commented on the interwar advertising world: "I once had an old uncle who subscribed to *L'Illustration*. Each week, his first action was to tear out all the advertising pages and to throw them into the waste-paper basket while grumbling 'Thieves! There is nothing but ads in there'" (*Vente et Publicité*, May 1956).

Beyond the general public, French cultural leaders denounced advertising. Intellectuals, such as Georges Duhamel, writer and member of the French Academy, criticized the profession. In his 1931 book *Scènes de la vie future* (translated into English as *The American Menace*), Duhamel wrote of "the ruses of advertising." Economists, Charles Gide wrote that advertising was "monstrously costly" and that it penalized the consumer. The sociologist and French Academy member André Siegfried, a later supporter of advertising, wrote after the stock market crash of 1929 that advertising "perturbed the natural functioning of the economy" (Martin 1992, 153).

French commercial organizations, particularly small retailers, resisted advertising as well. Francis Elvinger, a well-known *publicitaire* of this period and owner of his self-

titled agency, observed that retailers disliked advertising as the practice reduced them to being simple depositories for the manufacturers, depriving them of their independence (Martin 1989, 38). Larger firms also were skeptical of advertising. Marcel Bleustein-Blanchet, founder of Publicis, eventually France's largest advertising firm, noted that when he started in the profession in the late 1920s he went to an industrialist to convince him to advertise in the newspapers. The industrialist gave Bleustein-Blanchet a fifty-franc note and saying "Take this young man, and keep my name out of your newspapers" (Bleustein-Blanchet 1970, 51).

Beyond negative attitudes the profession had difficulty with the media. In terms of physical appearance of printed advertisements (save for posters), the advertising trade was poorly developed. *Publicitaires* had a number of concerns about the printed press and the quality of their advertisements in both newspapers and magazines, especially before the Great War. While major French papers had some of the largest circulations in the world their pagination remained limited from between four to six (and rarely over eight) pages. Advertisements were not plentiful. In a sample 1930s issue of *L'Illustration*, one of that nation's illustrated news weeklies, one could find a total of four to five pages of advertising out of a total pagination of forty. At the same time the American *Life* magazine could boast of issues with over ninety pages, forty pages which consisted of advertisements. Besides having less room for advertisements, the historian Daniel Pope notes that "illustrations were infrequently printed, and the low quality of the newsprint meant that images were badly reproduced." Furthermore, images often bled from one page to the next reducing both the clarity and the quality of the advertisements. Newspapers and magazines both commonly "segregated" advertisements toward the end of their publications rather than blending them with the editorial content. As a result, advertisements were neither very plentiful nor in a position to catch the attention of a potentially wary and skeptical audience. Finally, French newspapers were only beginning to recover the trust of their readers after a series of scandals in the financial press in the 1890s and the early 1900s. Pope comments that "reform-minded advertising men complained that financial scandals besmirched advertising in general and reader confidence in the papers they bought" (Pope 1978, 127).

However, this is not to say that French business in general or the advertising industry in particular was totally backward: within it existed pockets of dynamism and strength. Stanley Hoffmann and other authors have characterized France of the Third Republic as the "stalemate society" where social structures produced "timidity of entrepreneurial drives" (Hoffmann et al. 1963, 7). More recent scholarship has challenged this view. In fact, one could see a nascent or embryonic consumer culture forming in France before the Second World War. France was a pioneer in both the automobile industry and the

department store and had long created vivid and evocative poster advertising. Historians Marjorie Beale and Stephen L. Harp stress the "modernizing" impulses of French business in the early twentieth century. Beale and Harp demonstrate how French advertising agencies and businesses responded to the American challenge by simultaneously adopting American methods and developing "French" styles of commerce. An excellent example of this adaptation was the French tire company Michelin which was becoming the world's largest producer of tires; its marketing image through Bibendum, in turn, became well known throughout the world (Harp 2001). One can see another example of this dynamism with Andre Citroën and his automobile firm in the 1920s. Citroën was an early convert to the value of advertising and believed that its use would increase automobile sales. This sales increase would produce economies of scale thereby lowering prices in the long run. Citroën preferred the spectacular, sponsoring events such as a 1924 caravan of Citroën cars across Africa or the lighting of the Eiffel Tower with the letters "Citroën" in 1925. By 1930, Citroën became France's largest producer of automobiles (and single largest advertiser) and spent ten times as much on advertising as its rival, Peugeot (Martin 1992, 188).

Furthermore, the French *mentalité* about advertising was changing. Marie Chessel's work on advertising history before the Second World War stresses a "semantical evolution" in the 1920s and 1930s. *Publicitaires* made a concerted effort to replace the older, negative term *réclame* with the newer, more positive term *publicité*, which would help to establish advertising as a more acceptable profession. The French began to develop advertising associations and trade groups in the 1920s both to promote the industry and to police its advertisements. In addition, advertising began to leave its artisanal background behind as agencies paid more attention to education and training (Chessel 1998). Some French media also began to view advertising differently. Paris's evening paper, *L'Intransigeant*, was the first French newspaper to integrate advertising and editorial copy. Also, Jean Provoust's newspaper, *Paris-Soir*, in the 1930s duplicated the Anglo-American methods of advertising. *Paris-Soir* placed classified advertisements in one section and dispersed all other advertisements throughout the newspaper. The paper also rejected advertisements for quack pharmaceuticals, thus allowing the advertisements that remained to avoid the taint of guilt by association (Martin 1992).

One could also see evidence of the embryonic consumer culture in terms of French retailing. While Napoleon reportedly derided Great Britain as a "nation of shopkeepers" a century earlier, the shopkeeper was firmly part of French social identity by the nineteenth century, and they long dominated French retailing in terms of total sales (Nord 1986). These stores faced increasing competition, however, from a French invention—the department store (Miller 1981, Williams 1982). The department stores had

## THE “AMERICANIZATION” OF THE FRENCH ADVERTISING WORLD, 1944-1968

mostly a bourgeois clientele and they purposely limited their sale of mass-produced items (which might offend a bourgeois audience as being “common”). In the 1920s, shopkeepers and department stores both faced competition with the introduction of *Prix uniques*, the French equivalent of the American “Five and Dime.” These stores were an experiment in American merchandising processes, as these stores sold mass produced and uniform goods in a narrow price range. Their target audience was a “middle ground between consumers who relied on small shops for credit and small portions and seldom purchased non-subsistence items, and wealthy consumers who shopped at department stores or purchase custom designed goods.” As most of these new stores were in cities one imagines an urban working class flocking to such stores, especially during the hard times of the Depression. The success of these chains is readily seen as shopkeepers mobilized government restrictions against any new *prix uniques* opening for one year in 1936 (Furlough 1993).

Finally, social attitudes toward consumption and “modernization” were changing. While traditional historiography has painted the post-World War II France as the world of accelerated social change some authors have stressed how those seeds of “modernization” were “planted” long before. France had a long history of showcasing its own products and the products of the world at a series of World’s Fairs (*Exposition Universelle*) starting in 1855. Beginning in 1923 Paris hosted an annual *Salon des Arts Ménagers* that featured household appliances. By 1939, the Salon had over a thousand exhibits and a half million attendees. Obviously, an interest existed in consumer products. Robert Frost has argued that during the interwar period “a consumerist mentality developed in France without the goods ever really being delivered” in terms of household appliances. Appliances still resided primarily in the purchase domain of the bourgeoisie (Frost 1993). Ellen Furlough agrees with Frost, stating that *prix uniques* and the *Salons des Arts Ménagers* “prepared the way for a more tenacious Americanization of the post-World War II period” (Furlough 1993).

As a result of these changing dynamics, we see by the 1930s a French economic system developed, that while perhaps Malthusian in outlook and a “stalemate society” in certain respects, also had significant pockets of dynamism and experimentation imbedded within it. Daniel Pope has characterized *publicitaires* as looking towards the United States as the “promised land” of advertising (Pope 1978). For this “promised land” to be reached *publicitaires* required a true mass market, large national campaigns, higher discretionary spending for consumers, and a French populace more receptive to advertising but France would have to endure the ravages of another war and the immediate post-war recovery before those factors would coalesce to bring true changes to the French advertising profession.

Scholars have debated the “Americanization” of Europe in general and France in particular (Costigliola 1992; de Grazia 1997, 2005; Kuisel 1993, 2000; Pells, 1997; Wall 1991). It is a contestable issue for what can one define as uniquely “American,” “European,” or “French”? One can see Americanization as a path of socio-economic development of urbanization, mass culture and consumption, and a new material civilization, and that the United States simply “arrived” there first while other countries needed more time to develop fully into modern consumer cultures. Victoria de Grazia and her work on the Americanization of Europe describes this process differently (2005, 11):

More than a pace-setter or the first to get there, American consumer culture catalyzed discontents, produced ruptures, and pushed aside obstacles. In that sense, it acted much like the French and Bolshevik Revolutions in overthrowing old regimes that proved incapable of reform and were obstructive and reactionary.

As opposed to the “hard power” of military relations and foreign policy, the “soft power” of American consumer culture possessed enormous weight in transforming Europe after 1945. Kuisel (2000, 511) stresses that neither mass culture or consumer society are “uniquely American or that they originated here.” However, he continues that “they were perfected first in the United States, historically disseminated by Americans, and perceived by others as being American.” French *publicitaires* after 1945 saw consumer culture and its accompanying “modernity” exemplified by the United States. Americanization to them was both a model and a menace. What was essential to *publicitaires* was to harness those forces while retaining their own French identity and values. How did *publicitaires* view the United States?

Roland Marchand, in his book *Advertising the American Dream* (1985), discusses advertisements and their social role. Did advertisements reflect society “faithfully” or did they instead reflect the values of their creators? Marchand uses the analogy of a distorting funhouse mirror, a *Zerrspiegel*, where an advertisement “distorts the shapes of the objects it reflects, but it nevertheless provides some image of everything within its field of vision.” This mirror not only distorted, but also it selected. The advertising trade journals and *publicitaires* this paper discusses acted in a similar fashion, as a “distorting and selecting mirror” that took aspects of what they saw as “American” and then modified them for a French audience. This section shall consider this transformation and “Americanization” of the

profession by examining the historical record through the contemporary writings in French advertising and marketing trade journals (*Echo de la presse et de la publicité*, *Le Journal de la publicité*, *Publimondial*, *Vendre*, and *Vente et publicité*) and the written records left by select *publicitaires*. These trade journals acted as forums of professionalization, modernization, and “Americanization” of the advertising trade and the commentaries of the *publicitaires* within these publications acted as a *Zerrspiegel* with regards to the United States. We can nominate these *publicitaires* as experts “whose professional identities were tied to the changing rule and regulations of capitalist society” and for whom American “experiences offered solutions” (de Grazia 1997, 199). *Publicitaires* were not a uniform bloc. Their reactions and views toward the United States could differ because of education, age, social background, and their level of experience with America. Their reactions were also time contextual: France experienced significant social transformation between 1944 and 1968. These changes were so drastic that some authors have seen this transformation as a “new French Revolution” (Ardagh, 1968; Fourastié, 1979; Mendras and Cole 1991). As a result, these *publicitaires* not only reflected and mediated “American” ideas but they also reacted to changing French socio-economic (and political) circumstances. These changing circumstances provide the basis for a categorization of these responses to the United States into three loose time periods (as these are just “tendencies” amongst *publicitaires* and not universals): 1944-1953--America the Menace; 1953-1959—America the Model; and 1960-1968; the American Challenge.

### 1944-1953: America the Menace

At the conclusion of the Second World War French advertising had to awaken from a near hibernation as the Nazi occupation and Vichy government forbade the advertising of alcohol and also began to regulate the promotion of pharmaceuticals--two mainstays of advertising. Once awakened, *publicitaires* found the late 1940s difficult and one worried, “To speak of the vitality of French advertising would be a farce if one compared our production to that of America or even England. Statistics reveal that we are at only 8% of our volume of business as compared to that of 1938” (Grizeaud 1947, 27). During the immediate post-war period of economic malaise, rationing, and recovery, 1944-1949, French advertising agencies had difficulty simply finding space for advertisements, particularly in the press. Before the war the press had been the greatest revenue producer for agencies, providing an estimated 44% of total advertising receipts (Boudet et al. 1952). Due to the shortage of paper in the immediate post-war period, 1944-1946, newspapers were limited to printing two-to-four page editions. One observer noted that advertising revenue was “practically nil” then (Werth 1956).

An editorial column commented in *Vendre* (Et Patati et Patata 1948, 145):

Our daily press is in a bad situation. Its four measly pages does not give the reader what he wants nor does it produce enough advertising revenue...[newspapers in] Belgium, Switzerland, Sweden have at least eight pages. In the U.S., the average newspaper has 36 pages with 88 on Sunday.

Another *publicitaire* lamented, “Think of what is happening in America. The most recent edition of the *New York Times* had 420 pages and weighed more than a kilo!” (Herbin 1951, 5). R.L. Dupuy, owner of his self-titled ad firm, also counted the pages of the *New York Times* and enumerated two hundred and eighty-nine advertisements and nearly twenty-three thousand classified ads (Dupuy 1947, 10). With this discrepancy in size no wonder many *publicitaires* felt overwhelmed when contemplating the United States and its potential. How long would it be before French newspapers could deliver such an advertising stage? Unfortunately, for *publicitaires* post-war newspapers suffered turmoil as well due to Liberation policies that closed down the collaborationist press (Charon 1991). The French state also nationalized Agence Havas, the largest pre-war advertising firm, and stripped it of its news agency (this agency becoming Agence France Presse). With a limited press and the nationalization of radio (that forbade advertising) *publicitaires* grimly compared their situation to that of the United States and found their position sorely lacking. The United States was to them a giant, both in the production of consumer goods and in its advertising.

Certainly, it was possible, according to some Cassandras, for this giant to overwhelm France materially and end forever the traditional French way of business and life. Some cynical *publicitaires* saw Americans as cultural barbarians who prayed to Mammon no matter the cost or consequences (Herbin 1953, 1):

America is getting ready to celebrate Father’s Day on June 21. Is it really a true sentiment that one can express or is it simply a concept, an advertising trick? We don’t know...Western Union suggests a special formula for the event: “Remember Dad! Send your wishes to your “dad” by telegram.” And while you are at it, enlarge the market: think as well of your grandfather, your stepfather, and your uncles, and also you, Madame, to your husband, father of your children. Newspapers organize entire pages of advertising grouped to suggest all possible gifts: razors, ties, shirts, cufflinks, pipes, lighters, deodorizing soap. And why not make for him on this occasion, a roast chicken with strawberries which is the national meal of Father’s Day!

Herbin’s view seems little different than that of the writer Georges Duhamel some twenty years earlier. The forces of

consumerism and materialism had denuded Americans of “civilization” and the implicit fear Herbin expressed was that France might suffer the same loss.

While holding up the United States as a “mirror” *publicitaires* examined their own profession and found it lacking. One author examined the health of the trade and entitled his article as “The Seven Reasons for our Retardation in Advertising” (Burnand 1947, 125). These causes included “not enough *publicitaires*,” “the lack of advertising instruction,” “low pay for *publicitaires*,” “public distrust of advertising,” and “advertising’s lack of oversight.” He asked: “Are the Americans or the English more gifted for this profession than the French?” His response, of course, was “no,” but his article warns that if the French did not “catch up” to the Anglo-Americans the profession would face dire consequences.

But not all *publicitaires* responded with such negative diagnoses. Paul Nicolas, editor of *Vendre*, visited the United States in 1950 (mostly New York City and Washington, D.C.) and while as awestruck as the previous writers with the scale, scope, and enormity of America, he also saw a positive model for France’s future that did not necessarily have to be feared. America was:

Different than our Europe, more different than I had imagined. A boiling world seething with contradictions, where juxtaposed are the gigantic and the puny, rationality and the absurd, the marvelous and the plain...American civilization seems to be at an awkward age. Our Europe is composed of mature countries: the United States is becoming one. It has pimples on its face and an incoherent effervescence...but once mature it will deliver magnificent results...I believe one day humanity will be proud of this society which is transforming itself into a country of skyscrapers.

Nicolas was not the only commentator to see the United States in a different light. André Siegfried, a former critic of advertising and of American civilization visited the United States again in 1947. Upon his return he wrote that while once he believed a well-run business had no need of advertising he no longer made that claim. American mass production allowed mass consumption and advertising was a key ingredient in this equation. Advertising provided “information” to the customer, benefited mass production, and allowed “standardization which is the condition for moderately priced goods” (Siegfried 1947, 3). As post-war scarcity slowly transformed into post-war abundance the angle of the mirror reflecting the United States in the writings of *publicitaires* came to change: America the menace became America the model.

## 1953-1959: America the Model

The general tone of many of the *publicitaires* and their writings had been one of awe for the United States and France’s inability to “catch up.” These *publicitaires*, if they visited the United States, tended to visit the East Coast and its largest cities, and correspondingly, America’s largest media outlets and markets, giving them a slanted view of the United States that they reported back to their readers. Later, we shall see *publicitaires* visit other areas of the United States thus giving them a broader perspective. As *publicitaires* experienced a different America their views came to change as France indeed began to “catch up.” By the middle 1950s the French economy rebounded as the Marshall and Monnet Plans aided reconstruction of the primary and industrial sectors and infrastructure. Between 1945 and 1958 French industrial production more than quadrupled from a base indice of 50 to 213 (Rioux 1983, 169). French big business also enjoyed a renaissance with more large corporations with “significant development of organizational capabilities, first in production, and later, to a lesser extent in research, marketing and management” (Fridenson 1997, 243). Internally, besides the growth of big business, France underwent significant social transformation with increased immigration, a baby boom, and a rural exodus to the cities (Gildea 1996; Mendras and Cole 1991). Combined with increased discretionary spending, France by the mid-to-late 1950s had both the supply and demand base for a mass consumer culture.

The development and maturation of the French advertising profession paralleled that of industry. Some of this, doubtless, was home grown, as French advertising agencies reacted to changes in local conditions. The nature and shape of the industry faced drastic changes immediately after the war. The French government nationalized Agence Havas, originally the first mover in French advertising. Havas lost its news and press agency along with many of its pre-war clients and was nearly starting over. The medium-size firms that survived the war (Publicis, R.L. Dupuy, Elvinger, and Damour) could now compete with Havas as relatively equal competitors leading to vigorous competition in the 1950s with Havas and Publicis eventually emerging as the two largest and most successful French agencies. Examples of increasing professionalization came with the introduction of American-inspired institutions in France such as its first market research company ETMAR (1948), and L’Institut de recherches et d’études publicitaires (IREP), which documented and analyzed French advertising spending (1958). These institutions gave French agencies and advertisers a better sense of the market, how advertising revenues were dispersed, and where to spend them. As the 1950s progressed, many larger agencies established their own research departments (Martin 1992).

With an increasingly prosperous and confident France, *publicitaires* by the mid 1950s rarely wrote about an America out of France’s reach. While they regarded some

American values with suspicion *publicitaires* favored the nearly wholesale modeling of American advertising practices. They would do this within reason, of course, and adapt those models to their own needs. After the Liberation, *publicitaires* and other French business leaders had been visiting the United States informally to learn more about American business practices and to close what was called “the productivity gap.” This informality turned into French government sponsorship. Starting in 1949, as part of the Marshall Plan (the European Recovery Plan), France sent “Productivity Missions” to the United States in which over 500 missions and nearly 5000 “missionaries” spent time touring American businesses to learn the methods of modern production, management, and manufacturing to close the “productivity gap” with the United States (Kuisel 1993). Early on, French Mission planners did not view advertising and marketing as prime needs and not until 1953 did France institute an official Productivity Mission to study these professions.

This mission, entitled “Mission Publicité-Etudes du Marché” (Advertising and Market Research) spent six weeks during the summer of 1953 in the United States (Rapport Officiel de la Mission Publicité-Etudes du Marché 1954). It consisted of ten men and two women, and included advertising agency owners (R.L. Dupuy, for example) and upper management of advertising and marketing research firms. The Mission members had an active agenda, visiting seven American cities (New York, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Cleveland, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and Chicago) and nearly forty industrial and commercial firms (U.S. Steel, Westinghouse, Procter & Gamble, for example), advertising agencies (Young and Rubicam), marketing research firms (A.C. Nielsen), retailers (Kroger and Marshall Field), professional organizations (American Association of Advertising Agencies), the professional press (Advertising Age and Printers’ Ink), publishing companies (New York Times, Curtis Publishing), and U.S. Government agencies (Department of Labor and the Department of Commerce).

Their official report stressed the human element of American business in terms of relationships. American business and productivity had prospered because of their mastery of “industrial relations,” “dealer relations,” “consumer relations,” and “public relations.” The report noted that American business leaders “never miss a single instance to use propaganda favorable to their firms or any point of application which could ensure their success” (Rapport Officiel de la Mission Publicité-Etudes du Marché 1954, 5). What this report implicitly criticized was the French way of “doing business” that had too long relied upon the “desire to play it safe and eliminate so far as possible the elements of risk and competition” (Landes 1951, 348). The French writer and commentator Sanche de Gramont characterized the attitude of French storekeepers during this period as, “If you don't like our product, that's your hard luck.” The customer is “that barely tolerable

nuisance” (de Gramont 1969, 431). Similarly, the great Parisian department stores, notably the *Bon Marché*, had deteriorated into an “inertia that has chased thousands of small customers back into the small specialty shops.” The seller accepted no responsibility for the quality of goods. In case of a dispute, “the customer is always wrong” (Landes 1951, 342).

Given this attitude could the French adapt these (supposedly) American and very different elements to vitalize customer relations? A *Vente et Publicité* column reported on this Productivity Mission and noted that the “Cartesian principles of systematic research can certainly be applied in France, whatever the scale and scope of the enterprise.” However, what was needed was a “change of mindset” in “industrialists and retailers” to bring about “the satisfaction of the customer” (La publicité aux Etats-Unis 1953, 25). While it is not possible to measure the efficacy of the advertising Productivity Mission one does see many more articles within the professional advertising press on marketing research and public relations beginning in the mid-to-late 1950s. According to Claude Marcus, Vice-President of Publicis, his agency established its in-house public relations unit in 1955. Marcus noted that public relations struggled in France at this time saying firms “did not understand well what it was about. They thought it was a way of getting free advertising” (Personal communication, February 27, 1992).

Nonetheless, by 1959, *publicitaires* could evaluate their profession with some level of satisfaction. The advertising columnist Robert Guérin reflected on his forty years in the profession. When he joined the profession, advertising had been full of “one-man band” firms doing everything themselves. Now, he noted “fully-developed agencies” that no longer relied on chance “fireworks” for their campaigns. Instead, France had ordered and coherent campaigns relying on “science” by using demographics, sociology, and economics. Advertising had also become “more serious and more honest.” “Fraudulent” advertising of the past would no longer be possible (Guérin 1959, 5). Another columnist trumpeted that the profession now offered annual awards (an Advertising “Oscar” and a Packaging “Oscar”), improvements in color printing, and a ten percent per year increase in advertising spending per annum over the previous years. France also could look forward to a larger European market with the European Economic Community (Brunel 1950, 36). While *publicitaires* still often wrote about the United States one sees a change of tone by the late 1950s: France was still behind in a number of measures (*publicitaires* universally lamented the lack of television advertising in France) but technically it had caught up to the United States. By the 1960s, however, *publicitaires* (and others) saw the United States as once again a threat.

## 1960-1968: The American Challenge

In 1967 the French journalist and publisher Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber published the best selling book of the decade, *Le Défi américain* (translated a year later as *The American Challenge*) in France. France's greatest challenge would be the world's third greatest industrial power after the United States and Russia. This great power would "not be Europe but *American industry in Europe*" (Servan-Schreiber 1968, 3). In the preceding ten years the U.S. had invested ten billion dollars in Western Europe, more than a third of its overseas investments. After the creation of the European Economic Community American firms went on a shopping spree buying European firms and using them as outposts for increased American presence. Servan-Schreiber criticized Europeans for not taking advantage of the new market as "on the industrial level Europe has almost nothing to compare with the dynamic American corporations being set up on her soil" (Servan-Schreiber 1968, 7).

Servan-Schreiber's nationalistic call to arms paralleled that of the French President Charles De Gaulle's movement to a more American-independent French foreign policy. Ironically, De Gaulle's economic policy from 1958-1965 had closed French doors on some American investment that Servan-Schreiber had been warning about. Only after 1965 did De Gaulle choose a more "pragmatic" approach to allow more American investment into France. His motive was to "close the economic gap with France's competitors in order, one day, to possess the capacity to behave independently. The Americans could remedy the very weakness that made the French dependent." Fears about the United States resulted in anti-Americanism attaining "a virulence in the mid-1960s that had not been seen since the early years of the Cold War" (Kuisel 1993, 185). How did *publicitaires* view America now in light of this fierce reaction?

Anti-Americanism did not seem to have infected *publicitaires* but one does see a wariness and skepticism of the United States in the 1960s among this group. Robert Guérin writes of "Coca-colonization" in 1965 and notes the creeping influx of "Americanisms" into the language of French advertising. He criticized American-based advertising in France as being too heavily based on research, facts and numbers arguing that such an approach stunted originality. If French advertising (an art, not a science to Guérin) were to become more successful it would have to be based on French "individual genius, the gift of expression, [and] vivacity." The public's "indifference or hostility" to advertising would disappear if "we ceased to copy slavishly others and try to be ourselves" (Guérin 1965, 23).

Did *publicitaires* see this "American invasion" in terms of U.S. advertising agencies? As mentioned above, before the Second World War American advertising agencies had an insignificant presence in France. After the war's end

American agencies saw little immediate need to enter a French market due to the wounded state of the French economy. In 1949, the world's largest agency, J. Walter Thompson, reopened its Paris office but the firm found little success in France until the 1960s (Hultquist 2003). Only in the 1960s did other American agencies begin to set up shop in France: Young and Rubicam and Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn both opened independent agencies in 1960. Other American firms, such as Ted Bates in 1963, bought interests in French agencies as a way to enter the market (Martin 1992, 364).

Indeed, French agencies had previously been concerned about a potential American invasion and in 1957 the eight largest French advertising firms formed the Compagnie d'agences de Publicité (CAP) as an interest and lobbying group. Some French journalists labeled the CAP as an "anti-Yankee" league that "opposed the debarkation of powerful American or English agencies." These writers further state that in the late 1950s and early 1960s the CAP discouraged small French industrial firms from going to American agencies in France and instead routed them to French advertising firms (Boutelier and Subramanian 1990, 27). The French government certainly saw American agencies as a threat to French firms in the Government's Fifth Economic Plan (1966-1970). In the section on advertising, the plan outlined the strengths and weaknesses of the profession and focused on the fact that "an important fraction of advertising spending" was being "realized by foreign firms or French firms mostly controlled by foreign capital." The report concluded grimly that "the results of this massive foreign implantation risked being disastrous for French industry and commerce." It suggested that French agencies consolidate into larger firms to compete with American firms (Commissariat général du plan 1966, 396).

*Publicitaires* reacted more calmly to such gloom and doom pronouncements. No immediate movement toward consolidations started in the industry—these would not occur until the 1970s. American agencies made some traction, but the largest American firm in Paris, McCann-Erickson, barely had one-fourth the billings of either Havas or Publicis (French Agencies 1966). Jacques Mendel read the preceding report skeptically. In an editorial he stated that foreign agencies accounted for less than twenty percent of French advertising spending. He looked at other European countries that had quite different situations: the largest three agencies in Germany and the largest five in Italy were foreign controlled whereas in France the top five remained French. Furthermore, many American firms (General Foods and Chrysler, for example) confided their advertising budgets to French firms. "French technique was now equal to that of America"; the only difference at this point was "a matter of scale." The French knew their own market and people, and *publicitaires* believed that foreign advertisers should understand that it was in their best interest to confide their accounts to "national specialists" who knew their French audience most intimately (Mendel

1966, 1). So, as America “the menace” became increasingly an issue in the 1960s *publicitaires* reacted with a mixture of economic nationalism and a sense of confidence that French exceptionalism would allow them to weather the storm of the American challenge.

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper has argued an economically determinist model for the history of the French advertising profession: the state and nature of the French economy predicated the type of advertising the country produced. The late-nineteenth century French economy, protected and supported by a French government remained craft-based and Malthusian in nature leading to a French path of “industrialization that stressed the connection between bourgeois class structure, refined taste, craft, and nationhood (de Grazia 1997, 204). Advertising’s prime reflection of this type of economy was the poster trade. Artistic in nature, potentially politically powerful (Levin 1993), and produced at the craft level, the poster was a bulwark of the French advertising world, taking in an estimated quarter of total advertising revenue in 1901 (Martin 1992, 201). However, the poster did not produce the advertising revenues seen in the United States or Great Britain with their better-developed press. Before the Second World War we witness significant changes in the French economy: the introduction of Fordism and mass production, experiments in mass retailing, and an improved media. This transition from a craft-based economy to one of mass production generated an advertising profession that by the 1930s was on the cusp of “modernization” itself. Advertising spending increased in the printed media and on the radio waves and by 1938 the poster took in only eight percent of all advertising spending (Martin 1992, 201). This percentage would decline even more after 1945.

The post-1945 economic changes had a revolutionary impact on France. While the French government had previously promoted an economy based on small producers, post-war economic necessity produced a volte-face: French government economic planning “specified the desirability of mass consumption with a qualitative dimension as opposed to the U.S.’s standardized mass consumption” (de Grazia 1997, 204). France could still remain partially true to its cultural heritage and play to its strengths by producing high-quality, craft-based goods, but the country would also finally move to American-style “productivity” and world of consumerism. Advertising and *publicitaires* reflected these transformations. As America became increasingly powerful in Europe, militarily, politically, economically, and culturally, *publicitaires* looked to America for an advertising model that they could expropriate. As *publicitaires* viewed their profession in an American mirror they argued and pushed for a more “American” style of advertising, not in the finished product of advertisements themselves, but on their production through market

research, media planning, and public relations. Once the economy rebounded and metamorphosized in the 1950s French advertising positioned itself for transformation: mass production meant mass consumption which meant mass markets and mass advertising campaigns. Ironically, France comparably, had the weaker advertising profession compared to Great Britain and Germany before 1945, but because of French exceptionalism and economic nationalism, the French advertising profession by the 1960s remained strong and locally controlled, and resistant to the “American challenge.”

Thanks are owed to Ruth Smith Truss, James S. Day, and Howard R. Stanger, and the two anonymous reviewers for their comments. The author would also like to thank the University of Montevallo Special Projects and Sabbatical Committees for research funding and the time off to pursue this project.

## REFERENCES

- Ardagh, John. 1968. *The New French Revolution*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Beale, Marjorie. 1999. *The Modernist Enterprise: French Elites and the Threat of Modernity, 1900-1940*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bleustein-Blanchet, Marcel. 1970. *La Rage de convaincre*. Paris: Robert Laffont.
- Boudet, Jacques. 1952. *Le Monde des affaires en France de 1830 à nos jours*. Paris: Société d'édition de dictionnaires et encyclopedias.
- Boutelier, Denis and Dilip Subramanian. 1990. *Le Grand bluff: pouvoir et argent dans la publicité*. Paris: Editions Denoël.
- Burnand, Tony. 1947. Les Sept causes de notre retard en publicité. *Vendre* May, 125-129.
- Brunel, J.P. 1959. Advertising in France: A Retrospective Survey of the Past Two Years. *Publimondial* October-December: 33.
- Charon, Jean-Marie. 1991. *La Press en France de 1945 à nos jours*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.
- Chessel, Marie. 1998. *La Publicité, naissance d'une profession, 1900-1940*. Paris: Editions CNRS.
- Costigliola, Frank. 1992. *France and the United States: The cold alliance since World War II*. New York: Twayne.
- Dupuy, R.L. 1947. Un Kilog de lecture et de la publicité. *Publimondial* 7 (April): 10.
- Et Patati et Patata. 1948. *Vendre* February, 145.
- Fourastie, Jean. 1997. *Les Trente glorieuses ou la Révolution invisible*. Paris: Fayard.
- France. 1966. *Commissariat général du plan d'équipement et de la productivité. 5e Plan de développement économique et social. 1966-1970. Rapport général de la Commission du commerce*. Paris: la Documentation française.

- French Agencies. 1966. *Advertising Age* March 28: 83-86.
- Fridenson, Patrick. 1997. France: the relatively slow development of big business in the twentieth century. In *Big business and the wealth of nations*, edited by Alfred D. Chandler, Franco Amatori, and Takashi Hikino. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Frost, Robert L. 1993. Machine Liberation: Inventing housewives and home appliances in interwar France. *French Historical Studies* 18 (Spring): 109-130.
- Furlough, Ellen. 1993. Selling the American Way in Interwar France: *Prix Uniques* and the *Salon des Arts Ménagers*. *Journal of Social History* 26 (Spring): 491-519.
- De Gramont, Sanche. 1969. *The French: Portrait of a People*. New York: Putnam's Sons.
- de Grazia, Victoria. 1997. Americanization and Changing Paradigms of Consumer Modernity in France, 1930-1990. *Journal of the Twentieth Century Contemporary French Studies* 1 (Spring): 191-213.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2005. *Irresistible Empire: America's advance through Twentieth-Century Europe*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Grizeaud, Jacques. 1947. La Vitalité de la publicité française. *Publimondial* 6 (January-March): 27.
- Guérin, Robert. 1959. La Publicité est-elle en progress? *Vente et Publicité* March 1959: 5.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1965. Coca-colonisation. *Vente et Publicité* April 1965: 23.
- Harp, Stephen L. 2001. *Marketing Michelin: Advertising and Cultural Identity in Twentieth-Century France*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Herbin Pierre. 1953. Carte postale d'Amérique. *Le Journal de la publicité* July 3: 1.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1951. Tendances de la publicité 1951. *Le Journal de la publicité* December 28, 1951: 5.
- Hoffmann, Stanley, Charles P. Kindleberger, Laurence Wylie, Jesse R. Pitts, Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, and Francois Goguel. 1963. *In Search of France*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Hultquist, Clark Eric. 2003. Americans in Paris: The J. Walter Thompson Company in France, 1927-1968. *Enterprise and Society* 4 (September): 471-501.
- Kuisel, Richard. 2000. Americanization for Historians. *Diplomatic History* 24 (Summer): 509-515.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1993. *Seducing the French: the dilemma of Americanization*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Landes, David. 1951. French Business and the Businessmen: A Social and Cultural Analysis. In *Modern France, Problems of the Third and Fourth Republics*, edited by Edward Mead Earle, 334-353. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Levin, Miriam R. 1993. Democratic Vistas—Democratic Media: Defining a Role for Printed Images in Industrializing France. *French Historical Studies* 18 (Spring): 82-108.
- Marchand, Roland. 1985. *Advertising the American dream: making way for modernity 1920-1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Martin, Marc. 1988. Le Marché publicitaire français et les grands médias, 1918-1970. *Vingtième Siècle* 20: 79-90.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1989. Structures de société et consciences rebelles: les résistances à la publicité dans la France de l'entre-deux guerres. *Le Mouvement Sociale* 146: 27-40.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. *Trois siècles de publicité en France*. Paris: Odile Jacob.
- Mendel, Jacques. 1947. Publicité de demain...ou d'après-demain. *Journal de la publicité* August: 4.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1966. La Publicité française risqué-t-elle d'être colonisée? *Journal de la publicité*. February 25: 1-3.
- Miller, Michael Barry. 1981. *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois culture and the department store, 1869-1920*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Nicolas, Paul. 1950. Les Américains 1950 vus par un français. *Vendre* October: 567-578.
- La Publicité aux Etats-Unis: premières conclusions d'une mission française. *Vente et Publicité*. September 15: 25.
- Pells, Richard. 1997. *Not like us: How Europeans have loved, hated, and transformed American culture since World War II*. New York: Basic Books.