

Preface

This volume is not a reader in the traditional sense of that word; rather, it is an interdisciplinary introduction to French cultural studies. The primary goal of the volume is not to teach students how to read in French but instead to provide students in introductory French courses with a series of questions designed to encourage them to think about issues of cultural identity in French and Francophone contexts. Too often, foreign-language curricula postpone the study of complex cultural questions until the students have become relatively fluent, thus divorcing the study of language from that of cultural substance. Such curricula prepare students to interact with the foreign culture on the pragmatic, day-to-day level of bus ticket and bank account yet do little to enhance students' global cultural understanding. Or again, students study French culture in history or art classes, detached from any appreciation of the linguistic roots of this heritage. This volume proposes a holistic approach, integrating texts and images that might be studied in fine arts, anthropology, sociology, or history with French. It is my hope that such an approach will encourage students to think across and between traditional disciplines, thereby developing, along with basic competence in the forms of the foreign language, an understanding of issues and questions relevant to Francophone society, past and present. I thank Elizabeth Emery, Montclair State University; Maureen Gillespie, University of Kansas; Catherine Jones, Univer-

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Échos does not present a systematic overview of Francophone culture from Charlemagne to Césaire. Rather, it supplements the elementary French textbook, giving teachers a point of departure for discussing questions of cultural definition and interaction in the French-speaking context. The book is organized into two parts. Part I, “The Self: Defining Cultural Identity and Collective Values,” invites students to analyze how the community constructs and transmits representations of self. Part II, “The Other: Exploring Cross-Cultural Interactions and Stereotypes,” focuses on representations of cultural difference and explores issues of stereotypes and racism. Texts are short to avoid overburdening already crowded syllabi. *Échos* is designed to be flexible: each discussion is independent from the others, so selections can be used in any order to fit the curricular goals of each class. To enhance the study of culture from the beginning weeks of class, each part includes two discussions designed to be presented in English, to facilitate the study of materials that are as yet beyond students’ linguistic abilities in the target language. (For those teachers using *Échos* later in the curriculum, alternate selections in French are provided in the Appendix.) Each unit also incorporates three topics presented in French, for use later in the first-year curriculum. For each image and text, a short “information” section presents basic reference material to orient the student’s approach to the selections. Images then serve as a springboard to cultural discussion by prompting students to analyze visual content first. Text selections include pre- and post-reading activities designed to encourage students to think critically about social and cultural issues. Expansion activities are presented in the form of research topics so that students can do inde-

pendent work; this work can then be posted on a class Web site, turned in as a paper, or presented as an oral exposé. Suggestions for discussion will encourage students to share their thoughts with others, either in the classroom or through computer-based forums. By encouraging students to integrate the study of beginning French with the study of culture, the interdisciplinary approach presented in *Échos* motivates students and teachers to explore the French-speaking world more fully.