

17MCA0265-Masoud M. Hamad
Digital Assignment 1

French Culture and Civilization



Most people associate French culture with Paris, which is a center of fashion, cuisine, art and architecture, but life outside of the City of Lights is very different and varies by region.

France doesn't just have culture; the word "culture" actually comes from France. "'Culture' derives from the same French term, which in turn derives from the Latin *colere*, meaning to tend to the earth and grow, cultivation and nurture," Cristina De Rossi, an anthropologist at Barnet and Southgate College in London, told Live Science.

Historically, French culture was influenced by Celtic and Gallo-Roman cultures as well as the Franks, a Germanic tribe. France was initially defined as the western area of Germany known as Rhineland but it later came to refer to a territory that was known as Gaul during the Iron Age and Roman era.

Language

French is the official language and the first language of 88 percent of the population, according to the BBC. It is the dominant language of the country's 70 million residents, but there are a number of variants based on region. French is the second most widely learned foreign language in the world, with almost 120 million students, according to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development.

About 3 percent of the population speaks German dialects, and there is a small group of Flemish speakers in the northeast, according to the BBC. Arabic is the third-largest minority language.

Those living near the border of Italy may speak Italian as a second language, and Basque is spoken by people living along the French-Spanish border.

Other dialects and languages include Catalan, Breton (the Celtic language), Occitan dialects, and languages from the former French colonies, including Kabyle and Antillean Creole.

Religion

Catholicism is the predominant religion of France. In a survey by the French Institute of Public Opinion (IFOP), 64 percent of the population (about 41.6 million people) identified themselves as Roman Catholic. The other religions in France include Islam, Buddhism and Judaism. From 23 to 28 percent of people in France do not subscribe to a religion, according to the CIA.

Values

The French take immense great pride in their nation and government and are typically offended by any negative comments about their country. Visitors, particularly Americans, often interpret their attitude toward foreigners as rude.

"From around the 16th century, in Europe, culture became a term for the cultivation of the mind, the intellect, knowledge, learning, creative faculties and acceptable ways of behaving," said De Rossi. The French embrace style and sophistication and take pride in the fact that even their public spaces strike a regal tone.

The French believe in *égalité*, which means equality, and is part of the country's motto: "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité." Many say they place a higher importance on equality than liberty and fraternity, the other two words in the motto.

The French embody romance and passion, and there is an open attitude toward sex outside of marriage, according to a study by France's National Research Agency on AIDS. Even the country's top politicians have been known to carry out extramarital affairs without making an effort to conceal them. As a reflection of the country's secular nature, it is not uncommon for children are born to unmarried couples.

In addition to traditional marriage, French couples also have the choice of getting a *pacte civil de solidarité* (PACS). This is a union that has many of the same benefits of marriage, like tax breaks, but can be dissolved with a notice or by marrying someone else or instead of a divorce. Two-thirds as many French couples are in a PACS as are married, according to The Economist.

French cuisine



Food and wine are central to life at all socioeconomic levels, and much socializing is done around lengthy dinners.

While cooking styles have changed to emphasize lighter fare, many still associate French cooking with heavy sauces and complicated preparation. Some classic French dishes include boeuf bourguignon — a stew made of beef braised in red wine, beef broth and seasoned with garlic, onions and mushrooms — and coq au vin, a dish made with chicken, Burgundy wine, lardons (small strips or cubes of pork fat), button mushrooms, onions and optional garlic.

French fries, interestingly enough, may not be French. According to National Geographic, they may actually be from Spain or Belgium. The reason why Americans call fried potatoes French fries is because Thomas Jefferson discovered the treat while in France while serving there as American Minister from 1784 to 1789. He brought the idea back to the States.

Clothing

Paris is known as the home to many high-end fashion houses, such as Dior, Hermes, Louis Vuitton and Chanel. Many French people dress in a sophisticated, professional and fashionable style, but it is not overly fussy. Typical outfits include nice dresses, suits, long coats, scarves and berets.

The term *haute couture* is associated with French fashion and loosely means fancier garments that are handmade or made to order. In France, the term is protected by law and is defined by the Paris

Chamber of Commerce, according to Eva Domjian, a London-based fashion writer and editor. Domjian writes on her blog:

"To earn the right to call itself a couture house and to use the term haute couture in its advertising and any other way, a fashion house must follow these rules:

1. Design made-to-order for private clients, with one or more fittings.
2. Have a workshop (atelier) in Paris that employs at least 15 people full-time.
3. Each season (i.e. twice a year) present a collection to the Paris press, comprising at least 35 runs/exits with outfits for both daytime wear and evening wear."

French art

Art is everywhere in France — particularly in Paris and other major cities — and Gothic, Romanesque Rococo and Neoclassic influences can be seen in many churches and other public buildings.

Many of history's most renowned artists, including Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, and Camille Pissarro, sought inspiration in Paris, and they gave rise to the Impressionism movement.

The Louvre Museum in Paris is among the world's largest museums and is home to many famous works of art, including the Mona Lisa and Venus de Milo.

Holidays and celebrations

The French celebrate the traditional Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter. They mark May Day, also known as Labor Day, on May 1. Victory in Europe Day on May 8 commemorates the end of hostilities in Europe in World War II. Bastille Day is celebrated on July 14. This is the day the Bastille fortress in Paris was stormed by revolutionaries to start the French Revolution.

Political Life

Government. France operates under the constitution of the Fifth Republic, which was established in 1958. The government is highly centralized, although the 1982 act of decentralization transferred more power to the regions and communes. Paris is the capital city. The administration of the governmental system is organized through the levels of nation, region, department, arrondissement, canton, and commune. The commune is the smallest administrative level. This system of political administration dates back to the French Revolution. The state controls several state-owned companies in the areas of transportation, energy, and communications. Thirty percent of the workforce is employed by the state. The state bureaucracy is complex and is run by an administrative elite trained at the National School of Administration (ENA).

The executive branch includes the president and the prime minister. The president is elected for a seven-year term by popular vote. The prime minister is appointed by the president and serves as

head of the government. In recent years, a form of political "cohabitation" has developed, in which the president and prime minister come from different political parties. The prime minister selects the ministers and secretaries of state, with approval by the president. Legislative power resides in a bicameral parliament composed of the Assemblée Nationale (National Assembly) and the Senat (Senate). The deputies of the Assemblée Nationale are elected by popular vote for five-year terms; senators are elected through an electoral college system for nine-year terms.

The twenty-two metropolitan regions, which recently received a formal role in government, are each composed of several departments. A region is headed by a regional prefect and served by elected regional council members who represent the departments. The regional council elects a president of the council. The department is headed by a prefect, and each canton elects a council member to serve at that level. Communes elect a mayor and a municipal council. There are a little over 36,000 communes, and their populations can range in size from under one thousand to that of a large city. The vast majority of communes are in the countryside.

Leadership and Political Officials. France is politically divided between the right and the left. There are five major political parties. To the far right is the Front National (FN), which has been growing in power since the 1980s under the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen. The two major parties on the democratic right are the Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) founded by Jacques Chirac in 1976 and the Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF) founded by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in 1978. On the left, there is the Parti Socialiste (PS) and the Parti Communiste Français (PCF). In 1981, the PS replaced the earlier SFIO, led by François Mitterrand. The Communist Party was formed in 1920.

Political leaders rise to power by gaining election at the local level, and then accruing more political titles. It is possible for a politician to hold more than one office at different levels simultaneously, and this is a common method for gaining political support. Election to office depends on social networks, as well as on the personal charisma of the politician. The concept of "legitimacy" is crucial; to be viewed as a legitimate candidate is to have local roots and a strong social network. A successful politician must make good use of symbolism and ritual in order to embody various ideals. A high degree of formality is associated with political office, and interactions with elected officials require correct etiquette. One should, for instance, address a mayor as Monsieur or Madame le Mayor.

Social Problems and Control. The police are a noticeable presence, particularly in urban areas and transport centers such as airports and subway stations. Visibly armed, they have the right to stop any person to demand to see documents of identity. The police force is divided between those who work for the minister of the interior and those who work for the minister of defense (gendarmes). There is also a National Security Police force (CRS) that is called in during demonstrations and strikes, which occur frequently. An important form of political protest, demonstrations often disrupt urban streets and highways. Labor unions are strong, and striking workers regularly stop social services, such as trash pickup and public transportation, and access to public buildings, such as museums.

Major social problems include AIDS, homelessness, and terrorism. The rate of violent crimes such as homicide is low. Terrorist attacks and bombings occur randomly, infrequently and were at their height most recently during the Gulf War. The National Security Police justify their strong military presence as a deterrent to terrorism.

Military Activity. The president is the commander in chief of the military, and the minister of defense reports directly to the president. France has an army, navy, and air force. It also contributes to the United Nations military forces and is in the NATO alliance, although its relationship to NATO has been precarious at times. France was involved in several armed conflicts during the twentieth century. After the first and second world wars, it was involved in colonial wars in Algeria and Indochina. The draft is being phased out and will disappear in 2002. Universal compulsory military service for a period of at least sixteen months has been mandatory for all eighteen-year-old males and marked an important rite of passage into adulthood.