

**Pardon My French**

by

Sterling Tipton

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An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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**Thesis Advisor**

Chris Flook

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christopher A. Flook". The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and flourishes.

**Ball State University  
Muncie, Indiana**

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## **Abstract:**

Aujourd'hui, la convergence des médias et la globalisation augmentent exponentiellement, et le statut des États-Unis comme puissance mondiale a donc mené à l'expansion de sa culture partout dans le monde. Grâce à ce pays, l'anglais est devenu la seule langue de communication et commerce international. On aspire à bien l'apprendre, et même ceux qui ne l'étudient pas savent quelques phrases courantes. Des pays innombrables ont été exposés à cette américanisation, et plusieurs entre eux ont développé des mauvaises opinions de ce pays à cause de son invasion de leurs cultures et de ses actions politiques. Malgré les efforts des pays étrangers de s'adapter à la domination anglophone, les américains ordinaires ignorent presque tout quant aux cultures étrangères, et les stéréotypes sont souvent l'étendue de leurs connaissances. Dans cette situation je vois une dévaluation de la culture américaine qui devient floue davantage, et je me demande comment trouver la vraie définition d'identité culturelle, surtout la mienne. Dans un dossier digital interactif de mes expériences en France et au Québec, j'examine des divers aspects de la culture francophone, et je découvre son influence sur mon identité.

*In today's world where media convergence and globalization are exponentially growing, America's status as a dominant world power has caused its culture to spread across the globe. Thanks to this country, English has become the language of international communication and trade. Many non-Anglophones strive to learn the language, and those who don't are still familiar with basic phrases. Countless countries have been exposed to this Americanization, and several have consequently developed negative views of the country due to its political actions and increasing invasion of their societies. Despite the efforts of other cultures to adapt to Anglophone domination, the average American knows relatively little about the outside world, and stereotypes are frequently the extent of foreign cultural knowledge. This situation has caused me to see a devaluation and blurring of the American culture and has made me question how to define cultural identity, especially my own. Through an interactive digital compilation of my experiences in France and Québec, I explore various aspects of francophone culture and discover the impact it has on my identity.*



## **Acknowledgements:**

*I dedicate this project to my grandfather, Ronald DeLap, who passed away during the writing of this document. He was a strong-willed man who always persevered. May his strength guide my journeys yet to come.*

I would like to thank Dr. John Dailey, my Telecommunications professor, for his invaluable help and advice and for the hours he has spent trying to figure out all of my technical problems. He has gone out of his way to ensure my success on this project.

I want to thank Chris Flook, my project advisor, for his helpful reviews and advice on piecing this project together. He has encouraged my creativity to become a reality.

None of this could be possible without the help of Dustin Sparks of the Digital Corps. His technical genius helped greatly in making my project functional.

I would like to thank Simon L. St-Onge for being my emotional support, my inspiration, and my “consultant”/ resident guru on all things Québec. I would thank equally his family for hosting me, introducing me to all the best parts of Québec culture, and making me feel like I belong. Without them, I wouldn’t have a great deal of the content and information that went into this project, and I would probably be a blubbering, unconfident mess.

I must also thank my parents and grandmother for supporting me and encouraging me to pursue my dreams and my studies. Also, an extra thanks to my grandmother for paying my airfare to France and lending me her camera to take a lot of the pictures used in my project.

I want to thank all of the friends I made back in France, be they French or other exchange students. They helped me adjust to and enjoy life in Lille and made me realize my ability to flourish even in tough situations. I want to especially thank Brian Stacy, who has encouraged my crazy Québec obsession and introduced me to new vocabulary and some great music. Mes remerciements aussi à Antoine Desseint, qui a été un bon rédacteur de mon français!

Lastly, I need to thank anyone and everyone who has ever been a victim of my sporadic use of French. Be it speaking, singing, or writing, you’ve smiled and nodded through my refusal to translate myself. Thanks for putting up with my bilingual mind.

### **Artist's Statement:**

As a freshman, I started my academic journey at Ball State in the Telecommunications department. I only had a vague idea of what I wanted to do, having joined the program because I saw video and audio production as an opportunity to combine my passion for music, art, and theatre. From my work in high school, I miraculously tested into the 300-level of French. French was something I had never really taken seriously, and even after receiving such a high placement, I didn't think much of it. I decided to minor in it, since it would only require a few more credits. In my mind I had always wanted to study abroad, and I also had the far-fetched dream, like many do, of becoming fluent in another language. A year and a half later, spending a semester in France became a real possibility. In doing some research on the exchange programs offered, I discovered it would be much easier to get credit in French than anything else. Not wanting to lose credit for my work, I then changed my French minor into a major. Thus began my infatuation.

For reasons unknown, I also began to research and absorb every bit of knowledge about Québec that I could find. I fell madly in love with it. As I found out more, I became increasingly disenchanted with America. I could sense already that French was quickly becoming an integral part of my life; something that others around me just couldn't understand. I didn't want to spend time in France only to come back to my Indiana existence and forget everything I'd learned. I wanted to *live* French. Québec became my only natural choice. It offered the opportunity to live in both French and English while staying in a North American society close to my family. About six months before my overseas journey, I made up my mind that I wanted to move to Québec, but there were still so many questions.

Until my semester in Lille, France, I had never been outside of the US, and I could hardly fathom what living in another country on another continent in another language would be like. I saw studying abroad as a trial: Would I be capable of surviving on my own? Would I be able to be comfortable and make friends? Would I actually improve my language skills? Did I really belong in a francophone society? If I couldn't succeed in France, how would I ever justify or realize my move to Québec?

The goal of "Pardon My French" was to combine my skills and passions in both my TCOM and French majors to create an interactive media piece where others



could discover my cultural journey and perhaps relate to it and reflect on their own journeys. The title itself is a play on the popular expression meaning “to excuse one’s cursing.” To me however, it means that I am asking you to *literally* pardon my speaking French. For this project, I wanted to let unconstrained creativity guide me in compiling various snapshots from my francophone experiences. Creating a piece in Flash (which, as my professor describes it, is “digital clay”) allowed me to mold a work of art in which I could not only present things in a visual manner, but I could also incorporate movement and audio. Flash allows my audience to interact with the piece and discover what they want to at their own pace.

The opening animation ends with a photo of me being stamped with a “Product of USA” label. This image was created shortly after my arrival in France. I felt as though I stuck out like a sore thumb and fully embodied the American stereotype of fat, lazy, and loud. I wanted to integrate and disappear into French society, and it took most of my three months there to come to the realization and acceptance that I am simply not European, nor could I ever force myself to live that kind of lifestyle. This image of my stamped forehead has since become an icon of my struggle to find my cultural identity, and as such, I chose it for the title screen of my project.

Each animated transition plays off the one before it, showing the connection between my experiences and demonstrating how the mind can take any two concepts and invent a link between them, even if none exists in reality. The main menu items (the beret, maple leaf, and kaleidoscope) were chosen because they are the iconic and stereotypical symbols of the sections to which they link. I wanted to have an aspect of my project that everyone could instantly recognize and relate to, regardless of the connections I would otherwise make in my mind (many of which are presented in the subsequent sections).

I made the decision to have all my buttons as hidden rollovers, so that the user would have to put a bit of effort back into the piece, and thus have more of a mental investment in it. In addition, it mimics the way I had to learn about the cultures. No clear path was presented to me, so the user won’t have one either.

Objects play a key role in “Pardon My French.” Each object displayed, no matter how briefly, has played some role in my discovery of the French and Québécoise culture. My project is in essence a series of snapshots and mementos that I have taken away from the experience. Each subject I discuss is something that I found to be a distinguishing feature of the respective cultures, and my reaction to these elements has helped me to better define what I like and don’t like about francophone society.

After having spent time in both France and Québec, I can now say with solidarity that French is a fundamental part of who I am. It flows through my veins like a powerful drug and inspires me. I still cannot put a label on what my cultural identity is, nor do I want to, since I know it will continue to be sculpted by my future experiences. What I can define is that my personal cultural identity does not fall with any one established group. It is mixed. I find it impossible to think, speak, or function solely in English or French; I need both. Because of this “cultural mutt” background and my soon-to-be immigrant status in Canada, I have developed a new appreciation for all immigrants. The immigrant’s feeling is one that most Americans have never experienced and will never understand. Through my reflections in the project, I attempt to explain what things like immigration, culture, and fluency mean to me.

My hope with “Pardon My French” is that it will be a unique, interactive memoir and tool for those who are curious about francophone culture, or who are interested in searching for their own cultural identity in today’s globalizing world. I hope to inspire others to break the mold of American stereotypes and explore the diversity around them.

## **Pardon My French**

This project is currently under construction. Working drafts will be uploaded to <http://www.sterberger.com/thesis/> as often as possible.

Missing information segments will follow the same format as those already in place within their respective sections.

The final version will be available at the same URL, and a burned CD version will follow.



## **Pardon My French**

Project can be found online at:

<http://www.sterberger.com/thesis/>

## **Image Sources:**

Baguette Image :

<http://shop.paniconcept.com/media/catalog/product/cache/1/image/5e06319eda06f020e43594a9c230972d/3/7/370851.jpg>

Beret Image :

<http://www.chapellerie-traclet.com/hat/images/french-beret-black.jpg>

Maple Leaf :

<http://www.publicdomainpictures.net/pictures/1000/velka/1-1192373997.jpg>

American Flag :

<http://www.woodbridgecert.org/images/American%20Flag.gif>

French Survival Kit :

<http://www.schemamag.ca/archives/survivalgreydetail.jpg>

Water Glass : <http://www.success.co.il/knowledge/images/History-Historiographies-Glass-of-water.jpg>

Picture Frame :

<http://cpando.co.uk/images/WR10-Low-open-bookcase.jpg><http://www.pointabout.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/leather-photo-frame.jpg>

Montréal Panorama :

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/47/Montreal Twilight Panorama 2006.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/47/Montreal_Twilight_Panorama_2006.jpg)

Grocery Cart :

[http://www.productionmobility.com/resources/wsb\\_288x217 Childs+Grovery+Cart.JPG](http://www.productionmobility.com/resources/wsb_288x217_Childs+Grovery+Cart.JPG)

Train Station : <http://bieresetchicons.files.wordpress.com/2009/06/gare-lille-flandres.jpg>

Reflections Background :

[http://www.geosmontreal.com/files/montrealpic\\_winter.jpg](http://www.geosmontreal.com/files/montrealpic_winter.jpg)

Kaleidoscope :

<http://www.toyday.co.uk/shop/images/uploads/tinkaleidoscope.jpg>

Wine Glass:

<http://www-users.york.ac.uk/~drf1/NPs/assets/images/red-wine.jpg>

Cigarette :

<http://www.dimensionsguide.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/Cigarette.jpg>

Coffee Cup

<http://www.autogrill.fr/media/cafe-tasse-54-1.jpg>

Hygiene - Toothbrush and Paste :

<http://www.enasco.com/prod/images/products/61/VC103422l.jpg>

Toilet Paper

<http://1.bp.blogspot.com/T1d2ZFAQwCs/SffOdBaDfaI/AAAAAAAAACk/gKciffBzIT8/s320/toilet-paper.jpg>

Sandwich :

<http://painsetviennoiserie.free.fr/11.jpg>

Handwriting:

<http://images.dexknows.com/cms/Person-Writing460x300.jpg>

Car:

[http://mayang.com/textures/Manmade/images/Vehicles/small\\_car\\_7070223.JPG](http://mayang.com/textures/Manmade/images/Vehicles/small_car_7070223.JPG)