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Red, White and Bicycle: RVA, France and the Bike Race, Blog 2

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Bike Race 2015

NATIONALIST AGENDAS...THE TOUR OF FRANCE BY TWO CHILDREN PART 2

OCTOBER 20, 2015 | LEAVE A COMMENT

Is the nationalist program of this book unique to France?

The more I reflect on this, the more I realize my own education in primary school aimed to instill in children a sense of both national and state/local pride. In 4th grade we spent a whole week studying Virginia's geographical regions and their staple economic products.

In order to put the curriculum into practice, we were assigned a project: Replicate the state of Virginia in a pizza box, using colors and 3-dimensional materials to replicate the varied geography across the state. Nationalistic pride was a part of every school day through the enforced recitation of the pledge of allegiance. In both History (or "Social Science") and English classes, a uniquely "American" view was upheld to be the morally superior to all other nations.

Thinking about this book as a "tool for spreading the gospel of French industrialization," I am reminded of a film entitled "La Mise à Mort du Travail," which I watched for my French film class. This documentary demonstrates how far out of control the mechanization and industrialization of work has spun. Workers in the film are subjected to various injustices at the hands of their bosses, who in most cases have barely any more power than the workers, because in the end they all must bow down to the corporate rules and structures.

A lot of the professions depicted, such as factory workers and cashiers, require movements that are highly repetitive and without rest for long periods of time. This has led to increasing rates of "Troubles Musculaire Skélétaire" or TMS.

(Sorry, the video is in French without subtitles. But starting around 4:00, they mention TMS)

la mise à mort du travail



So, to get back to our two French children, perhaps these contemporary issues depicted in the documentary are the eventual or indirect result of France's 20th century agenda, prominent in this little red book, in which there is a strong emphasis on industrialization and the importance of hard work.

LE TOUR DE LA FRANCE PAR DEUX ENFANTS

OCTOBER 18, 2015 | LEAVE A COMMENT

The idea behind the creation of this "little red book" is very intriguing. I would like to explore a bit how a nationalist program such as this book has shaped the France we know today.

Whereas the United States prides itself on being a diverse nation, France has a strong unified national identity. Certainly, regional identities are important, as is said in Dr. Ozierski's blog post on the subject. However, based on my experience of a short study abroad in France, I found that the general expectations on how to conduct oneself in public did not vary from region to region. You are expected to say "bonjour" to shopkeepers and are expected to say "au revoir" and/or "merci" to the driver when you exit the public transport bus. However, I am not sure if these expectations should be attributed to the "nation" or to "la société," society.

As I read through "les Programmes officiels" with its list of "devoirs" for children, it is stunning how wide of a breadth of issues it covers. In the préface G. Bruno explains his goal: to teach children about their

country, its various regions and their riches. But this richness does not always come easy. There is a stress on “la noblesse du travail manuel” or “the nobility of manual labor.”

Of primary importance is to establish the scene, hence Chapter I is accompanied with a picture depicting the city gate (“la porte foritifiée” through which our protagonists leave. After which, there is a small introduction of the young brothers André and Julien. They are pretending they are not afraid and so must reassure one another of the fear they do not have.

We know that these two boys are on a quest to leave the city and deliver packages. But what do the small packages contain? All that is known is that these packages must be delivered. Already, the story takes on a morally authoritative tone. Through dialogue between the two brothers, it is revealed that to deliver these packages is a duty in which God will protect them and help them: “nous faisons notre devoir, Dieu nous aidera.” (“We are doing our duty, God will help us.”)
