



Whitney Walton. *Internationalism, National Identities, and Study Abroad: France and the United States, 1890-1970.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010. xvii + 258 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-6253-3.



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Garner on Walton

In public pronouncements by diplomats and university presidents, educational exchange is routinely credited with impressive effects. Top of the bill is improved international understanding—one of those “vague phrases” mocked gently by one study abroad alumnus in Whitney Walton’s new book (p. 83). For anyone studying or engaged in exchange programs, the term “international understanding” begins to lose its shine, and more importantly its meaning, from overuse. How does study abroad advance international understanding, if indeed it does? Walton, a respected historian of nineteenth-century France, addresses this question directly in her study of educational exchange between the United States and France from the late 1800s through to 1970. Drawing on a range of sources, institutional and personal, she concludes that study abroad exemplifies a particularly powerful form of cultural internationalism—an “internationalism of difference,” as she calls it—often arising but also quite distinct from formal intergovernmental relations and one-way public diplomacy (p. 140).

There is a growing literature on educational exchange

as a form of cultural diplomacy. Its authors are primarily political scientists and international relations scholars, who focus on diplomatic and institutional relationships at key moments, and sociologists analyzing survey results. Although Walton draws on this literature, she takes the historian’s approach of synthesizing a wide variety of sources over a long time span. She notes that this is the first longitudinal history of the Franco-American exchange, the first to analyze the role of gender in the construction and dismantling of national stereotypes through educational exchange, and unusual in giving equal weight to individual experience and official policy.

Although this book is something of a departure from her established research interests, Walton brings to it a set of skills and preoccupations that make the content more engaging than the rather dull title promises. Walton must have spent long periods in French archives researching her two previous books, on mid-nineteenth-century French manufacturing, bourgeois consumption, and taste (*France at the Crystal Palace* [1992]) and

four women republican writers (*Eve's Proud Descendants* [2000]), and her own bi-national working life, though never discussed here, feeds the liveliness with which she describes students' efforts to cope with daily life abroad, negotiating another language and culture. She succeeds in drawing out the complexities and the textures of lived experience, in the context of intertwined political, economic, and social developments over time. And she constructs an idea of internationalism that recognizes fully its personal dimensions.

Drawing on government archives from both countries, records of private study abroad programs and of university administrations, as well as participants' letters, reports, and interviews, Walton discusses the educational and political context for the growth of exchange programs between the United States and France, beginning in an era when many U.S. citizens favored Germany for postgraduate education (from the 1870s through to World War I). This Germanophilia provoked French academics to work on luring U.S. citizens to their own institutions, efforts reinforced in the crucial periods immediately following both world wars, when U.S. soldiers (G.I.s) were encouraged to study while waiting in France to be demobilized. Walton explores French philanthropist Albert Kahn's Around-the-World scholarship scheme (1898-1930)—a program hitherto neglected by historians—as a model for later schemes, and one with simultaneous nationalist and internationalist aims and outcomes. She then traces the interwar creation of junior year abroad schemes by the University of Delaware and Smith College, the effect of the French-American Fulbright agreement in 1948, Cold War tensions, growing student unrest, and the university reforms of the late 1960s.

Weaving back and forth between official and personal records, Walton demonstrates that what government officials and program administrators wanted from exchange programs did not necessarily determine the actual lived experiences of participants who often broke free of institutional expectations. While students did usually fulfill the declared internationalist objectives of the programs, it was not always in the way that organizers envisaged. Students took their own idiosyncratic paths to relations with their hosts, sometimes rebelling against monitoring systems in place, but, in “penetrating quite deeply into the host society” over a significant period of time, they made meaningful connections and helped to break down simplistic national stereotypes (p. 192). Confronted daily with different ways of seeing and doing, participants were forced to examine and articulate

their assumptions about both home and host cultures, and the resultant appreciation of difference—what one alumna described as “‘a broadening of understanding, an increasing elasticity of spirit’”—was more effective in nurturing transnational understanding than contemporaneous official attempts at “indoctrination, homogenization, or conversion” through one-way governmental information campaigns, for example (pp. 111, 167).

The above finding may not be particularly newsworthy for readers familiar with the literature on (or the experience of) educational exchange but where Walton does offer some fresh insights is in her analysis of gender relations in the context of study abroad programs. Digging out figures for U.S. students traveling to France on the pioneering Delaware and Smith College programs from the mid-1920s, she found that over a ten-year period, women outnumbered men by five to one. Walton suspects that male French academics who created the Cours de civilisation française in response to the post-World War I influx of G.I.s, for an imagined body of male students, found this feminization of the foreign student population somewhat shameful. Fascinated by the imbalance, she examines letters and reports by students as well as official correspondence, to explore the contradictory gender constructions with which these women had to grapple.

In the 1920s, helped along by ex-G.I.s' lurid tales of Gay Paree, the popular image of the French capital was of a morally loose and dangerous place—hardly suitable for young middle-class women to visit alone. And yet over this same period, in the United States, women's growing presence in higher education and new opportunities to enter the teaching profession led to the creation of junior year abroad programs to enable undergraduates and teacher trainees to improve their French-language proficiency. Organizers of the Smith College study abroad scheme, which was open only to women, understood that parents would not allow their daughters to go to Paris unless they were strictly monitored and protected from French men, who were commonly represented as seducers and swindlers. At the same time, French families feared the influence on their own daughters of women visiting from the United States, who were stereotyped as too free, too forward, and too loud and flirtatious. This meant that, in the interwar period, these female students were required to live with French host families in the manner of the protected *jeune fille bourgeoise*, wearing modest clothing (a coat and stockings in all weather, for example) and never going out without a chaperone. These restrictions operated on two levels:

they reassured U.S. parents that their daughters would not be exposed to dangerous Frenchmen, and they would, organizers hoped, counter the prevailing French image of overly independent U.S. girls.

The problem was that participants in the program were supposed to be immersing themselves in the host culture to learn all they could about French society and improve their language skills. The *jeune fille* led a much more socially restricted existence than young women back in the United States, so female study abroad participants found that unless they were prepared to flout the rules, their world shrank quite dramatically. Meanwhile, their male counterparts enjoyed freedom of movement and cultural experiences that the women could only dream of. After 1945, restrictions loosened up considerably, with U.S.-style dating in couples gaining some traction and challenging French students' preference for group socialization, but there was still much room for misunderstanding. In one fascinating section, Walton reveals that a common area of confusion was the significance of a kiss.

Walton is particularly strong on this turf, unpacking the various forms of social constraint and young women's (and to some extent men's) efforts to operate within or circumvent them. She argues that the way gender relations were negotiated and discussed was not peripheral but central to the exchange experience and to the development of an "internationalism of difference"—particularly among younger participants (p. 140). In this area in particular she breathes life back into that overused term "international relations," figuring it as a multitude of individual encounters that were both shaped by and helped to reconfigure social expectations over different periods.

But while she spends a good chunk of the book on the gendered nature of exchange experiences, Walton also explores students' considered comparisons of French and U.S. educational philosophies and styles of teaching and learning. Negotiating a different system of tertiary education led many to reflect on the purpose and the culture of the university in their homeland, they weighed the merits of generalist versus specialist training, private ver-

sus state funding regimes, U.S.-college-style socialization versus French-style student independence, and interactive seminars versus lectures by impressive but remote professors. These reflections inevitably fed into the university protests and reforms of the 1960s, although Walton seems wary of making any strong causative claims here.

A sharpened political engagement and understanding often accompanied students' educational discoveries abroad. For many students, witnessing the devastating and long-lasting effects of the world wars on their French hosts prompted them to think deeply about foreign relations and war for the first time and to reflect on the United States' growing power and responsibility. Later, for grantees of both nationalities, French and U.S. policies on the war in Vietnam led to much soul-searching and argument. Letters home reveal that it was often in discussions with host families that study abroad participants found their assumptions about the other—and themselves—challenged most profoundly. A fruitful discomfort then led to a more critical nationalism, which Walton sees as a precondition for a genuine internationalism.

In tracing Franco-American student connections over the decades, Walton claims to reveal a more complex story behind the transnational relationship than appears in many political and diplomatic narratives preoccupied with anti-Americanism or Americanization. Participants in exchange programs spent long enough in each other's countries to begin to unravel the national stereotypes—their own and their hosts'—that tended to frame and limit shorter-term touristic or official encounters. And the numbers traveling in both directions have been impressive enough over the decades (and continue to be so) that the cumulative effect of their contribution to "international understanding" cannot be dismissed—if we, as scholars, understand this as occurring most powerfully at the individual level. As one Arkansas exchangee of the late 1960s put it, "perhaps my experience did contribute to international understanding if it is defined, as I think it should be, as the sense of multitudes of individual personal relationships" (p. 168).

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