

2013

## An American's Paris: Tourism and the American identity, 1947-1963

Margaret Nervig  
*University of Northern Iowa*

*Let us know how access to this document benefits you*

Copyright ©2013 Margaret Nervig

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/hpt>



Part of the [European History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Nervig, Margaret, "An American's Paris: Tourism and the American identity, 1947-1963" (2013). *Honors Program Theses*. 570.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/hpt/570>

This Open Access Honors Program Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Program Theses by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uni.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uni.edu).

**Offensive Materials Statement:** Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

AN AMERICAN'S PARIS:  
TOURISM AND THE AMERICAN IDENTITY, 1947-1963

A Thesis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirement for the Designation  
University Honors with Distinction

Margaret Nervig  
University of Northern Iowa

May 2013

This Study by: Margaret Nervig

Entitled: *An American's Paris: Tourism and the American Identity, 1947-1963*

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation  
University Honors with Distinction

5/1/13

Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Brian Roberts, Honors Thesis Advisor, Department of History

5/10/13

Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program

In 1957, Arthur Frommer released the surprisingly controversial guide to budget conscience tourism *Europe on 5 Dollars a Day*. Readers were shocked; was it possible that such a small budget could produce a positive vacation experience, particularly in such a traditionally expensive locale? *Europe on 5 Dollars a Day* was one of the first of what is now a common guidebook. But the revolutionary guide was only one of many places to spot low-budget travel ideas. European tourism was booming for post-war Americans, aided by the every-growing culture of consumption. In no place is it easier to see American consumption than in Paris.

Paris has been a place of American consumption since far before WWII and has remained so even to the present time. With such famous tourist sites as the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre Museum, Paris has long been believed to be a place of culture to be emulated and admired. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, aristocrats always included a stop to Paris on their grand European tour. Paris gained a reputation as an art and literary capital in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, labels which made Paris ripe for tourism. During the war, however, Americans were not in the market for leisurely travel to Europe. After the Allied victory, American consumers were excited to get back into leisure activities, even including visits to war-torn Europe. The post-war American economy was flourishing, and Americans wanted to make up for all the lost leisure time of the last several years.

American tourism is not a new topic among historians. It is a generally accepted reality that tourism increased exponentially after the war. Even so, the overwhelming focus of historians on this period is the automobile.<sup>1</sup> Travel within the United States, especially by automobile, was

---

<sup>1</sup> See Catherine Gudis, *Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles and the American Landscape* (New York: Routledge, 2004); See also Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); See also Roger B. White, *Home on the Road: the Motor Home in America* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution 2000); See also Kris lackey, *Road Frames: the American Highway Narrative* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); For more information on the American Highway, see also John A. Jackle and Keith A. Schule, *Motoring: the Highway Experience in America* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

a fairly new activity in the post-war years. While historians may focus on different aspects such as the rise of interstate advertising, motor homes, or the advantages of the car versus the train, there is a definite trend toward the automobile. Of the many historians who do discuss Americans in Europe, there is little focus on post-war travel. Most historians tend to focus on pre-war travel to Europe and any mention of post-war travel is fairly brief.<sup>2</sup> Other historians discuss American ex-patriots in the 1920s such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway.<sup>3</sup> Despite this lack of previous historiography, there exists a multitude of source material on Americans in Europe in the Fifties.

For my research I have decided to focus specifically on Americans traveling to Paris. In the realm of tourism, Paris is the epitome of American commodification. Americans who traveled to Paris could increasingly buy into a commodified version of Parisian culture, a culture that in many ways catered toward American tourists. The newly transnational period of the 1950s provides the perfect background for the examination of international tourism. Also interesting to this time period is the context of the Cold War and the great Red Scare that pervaded American thinking at this time. This thesis project will explain how the transnational culture of consumption played a role in the formation of a post-war tourist American identity of Un-Americanism. The post-war American tourist identity formed in the aftermath of WWII still influences the American tourist today. By examining the formation of this identity, one can gain better understanding of American and global culture.

---

<sup>2</sup> See Donna R. Braden, *Leisure and Entertainment in America* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1988). See also Foster Rhea Dulles, *Americans Abroad: Two Centuries of European Travel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964).

<sup>3</sup> See Gerald Kennedy and Jackson R. Bryer, *French Connections: Hemingway and Fitzgerald Abroad* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). See also Morley Callaghan, *That Summer in Paris; Memories of Tangled Friendships with Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Some Others* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1963).

For this project I have made abundant use of the primary media source of magazines. I have also analyzed a few films from the period and examined several travel guides that were used in the period. After much research, I have decided to concentrate specifically on the city of Paris. Paris has long been a source of fascination for the American public and consumerism here was at an all time high in the aftermath of WWII. Looking through secondary sources from other historians has led me to believe that in researching the American tourist identity as seen in Paris I will be presenting an original idea. This essay will focus on guidebooks, magazine articles and advertisements, and films produced to attract Americans to Paris.

In 1969 an English professor's book on American authors living in Paris began with a question, "Why Paris?"<sup>4</sup> This question, or statement as the case may be, appears often in source material from the period. What exactly was it about Paris that attracted Americans so fiercely? Perhaps it is because, as one guide book phrases it, Paris "cannot be adequately photographed. It cannot be reduced to statistics or even to words of unambiguous meaning...the appropriate mood is gaiety, fantasy, and a willingness to fall in love".<sup>5</sup> Another author suggests that charm "explains the prestige and attraction of Paris" and "sums up its art of giving pleasure and enjoyment".<sup>6</sup> Americans were undoubtedly attracted the Parisian way of life. This would seemingly be a contrast to the American high work ethic and money obsession typical of the period. Countless guidebooks, magazine articles, and even films were produced in response to the American interest in Parisian culture. Many of these were produced by and for Americans, but the French certainly catered to the American audience as well. The French National Tourist

---

<sup>4</sup> George Wickes, *Americans in Paris* (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Company, Inc., 1969), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Vincent Cronin, *The Companion Guide to Paris* (New York City: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1963), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Ed. Doré Ogrizek, *The Paris We Love* (Saint-Ouen, France: Gaston Maillet and Co, printers, 1950), 289.

Office frequently took out ads in American magazines, geared toward attracting Americans to their country.<sup>7</sup>

Some of the most popular guidebooks of the Fifties were those produced by Eugene Fodor. Fodor's Guides first appeared in the 1930s, when Fodor decided to make a guidebook which he felt would be more entertaining and helpful for the reader. These guides were wildly popular in the 1950s, as evidenced by the yearly republication of each country's guide. The guides to France always featured extensive sections on Paris. One such guide begins, "there is an old familiar saying, 'Everyone has two countries, his own and France.'"<sup>8</sup> It goes on to explain that this is probably because of the feeling that in France, every person can truly feel like an individual, an escape from the restrictions of home life. This freedom from reality was another commodity which could be purchased by a tourist. Paris naturally had its own political and economic issues after the war, issues which were hidden from tourists eager to escape their own problems. As Fodor says, "Isn't it partly that [France] is the land of escape, the place where you can take a vacation from what is irksome in your own country, without having to pay too much attention to what is irksome in the country visited?"<sup>9</sup> Because Paris received very little damage in WWII, it could more easily provide escape than a city like London or Berlin which were going through rebuilding. This was precisely what made Paris such an attractive tourist destination; it created itself as a destination for tourists.

In addition to country guides, Fodor also produced a Men's Guide to Europe and a Woman's Guide to Europe. These guides both featured various sections on activities tailored to each sex; the women's guide features fashion, the men's guide features the great outdoors. In the women's guide, a guest writer perfectly describes the commodity that Paris has become. He

---

<sup>7</sup> French National Tourism Office, "All this and more in France!" *Holiday* 7, no. 3 (March, 1950): 33.

<sup>8</sup> Eugene Fodor, *France* (New York: David McKay Company Inc., 1953), 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

describes the female American tourist as one who uses her guidebook to “check up on the various places to see whether all the statues, cathedrals, towers, and paintings are really in their proper places as advertised.”<sup>10</sup> He describes the many women in Europe he has seen “carrying their little guide-book and checking up on the inventory.”<sup>11</sup> For so many Americans, tourist sites were simply places to check off, places to which they went simply to say they had been. Destinations had become commodities as well. This new American tourist expected to buy culture as a consumer good.

Another popular guide, mentioned at the very beginning of this thesis, is *Europe on 5 Dollars a Day*. This guide claimed to do what no other guide before it had done: cater to American tourists who “a) own no oil wells in Texas b) are unrelated to the Aga Khan c) have never struck it rich in Vegas and who **still** want to enjoy a wonderful European vacation.”<sup>12</sup> However, the book distinguished itself from other guidebooks in other ways as well. Frommer focused primarily on food and lodging, saying that “it is precisely because I believe that the daily mechanics of European living should take second place to the art and culture of that continent, that this book tries so hard to render those mechanical details as effortless as possible.”<sup>13</sup> The guidebook attempted to make it easy to pay for a vacation to Europe. Though famous sites were less frequently mentioned, the focus on hotels and eating still attracted the American consumer. This book is an excellent demonstration of the democratization of travel by expressing the ideology that every American could now afford a trip to Europe. This suggests that even the poorest American was better off for being an American. The consumption of Europe was possible for Americans at any price point. America’s emerging identity as a super power stems

---

<sup>10</sup> Eugene Fodor, *Women’s Guide to Europe* (New York: David McKay Company Inc., 1953), 71.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Frommer, *Europe on 5 Dollars a Day* (New York: Pocket Books Inc., 1957), 13.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 16.



from Cold War philosophy. However, Americans in Paris did not seem to follow with this particular view, especially those who were struggling artists. This example will be further explained later in the essay.

There were several other more generic guidebooks to Paris as well. As mentioned earlier, *The Companion Guide to Paris* and *The Paris We Love* also provide Americans with what these authors consider to be the best of Parisian culture. The first focused almost entirely on site-seeing. The index was organized by sites and quarters of Paris, and the author makes note that the chapters can be linked together to form a full walking guide to all of Paris.<sup>14</sup> Particularly interesting in this guide is the chapter on Montmartre. The description of Montmartre is as follows:

“There are three Montmartres: the place itself, the myth and the place trying to live up to the myth. The first is a pleasant, largely self-contained cluster of streets, tumbledown houses, gardens and cafes on a wind-swept hill with sudden surprising views; the second is a Bohemian world of unrecognized geniuses and good-hearted can-can dancer, a village where everyone plays amusing practical jokes and sings half the night...the third is an artificial, self-conscious world where, for a fee, street-‘artists’ sketch the portrait of the passer-by in five minutes and certain cabarets stages ‘brawls’ by ‘apache dancers’...merely because this spurious world exists, there is no reason why we should not enjoy the place itself, in its unselfconscious aspects, and the myth.”<sup>15</sup>

This description is noted because of its acknowledgement of the myth, and the idea of the place living up to the myth. What should be questioned is the origin of the myth, and who is perpetuating it. This perpetuation could arguably be due to an American desire to experience what they believed to be the real Paris. Paris is never romanticized so much by the Frenchman as it is by the foreigner. Even today, Montmartre claims to retain its old world charm; but, as seen in this guidebook from the Fifties, much of the old world charm of Montmartre is simply an

---

<sup>14</sup> Cronin, *The Companion Guide to Paris*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 239.

attempt to live up to the myth. The small cafes, the Moulin Rouge, and the quaint shops exist because of the Americanization of the area. American influence was enough for the area of Montmartre to attempt to maintain the illusion of the myth, wanting to attract ever more tourists. Americans wanted this myth, and the French provided it, further aiding the conflict of simultaneous American corruption and salvation.

The second book, *The Paris We Love*, was printed in 1950. This book was less of a guidebook than the former books discussed, but rather reviewed more factually the places in Paris. The book was divided similarly to the previous book in that a majority of the book divides by sites or quarters within the city. Colorful illustrations and a whimsical narrative took the reader through Parisian history and immersed them in the French culture. Interestingly, of *The World in Color* book series, Paris is the only city which receives its own book, this in addition to the book titled *France: Paris and the Provinces*. The colorful drawings created a very attractive picture of Paris, one which any American would be interested in consuming. Portraits of women in long flowing dresses and men in suits create the vision of an elegant lifestyle which one could consume simply by traveling to Paris. Although this book was written by a Frenchman, it is clearly intended to attract tourists to Paris through its rich history and culture.<sup>16</sup>

Several periodicals featured Paris at least once at some point during the Fifties. The popular travel magazine *Holiday* featured Paris several times throughout their existence. In April of 1953, Paris was the feature destination. The editorial justified the decision to feature Paris:

“A decision by magazine editors to devote an entire issue of their publication to the city of Paris is not exactly a new one. It is cherished frequently and for two reasons: one, the innate desire of humankind to pay tribute to the city which, for years, has best represented the essential qualities of civilization in terms of culture and the attendant graces...And, two, the challenge to logic, discipline and good

---

<sup>16</sup> Ogrezik, *The Paris we Love*.

taste which Paris offers to the writers, artists, photographers and editors who know her and love her passionately.”<sup>17</sup>

This editorial suggests that Paris is constantly a place of focus for all kinds of different periodicals, namely because of its culture. The American consumer would feel cultured simply knowing that artists and writers called Paris home, the reason for tours featuring the former living and dining places of such artists and writers. This is an interesting point to consider within the context of the Red Scare which was occurring in the United States at this time. The House Un-American Activities Committee was going after people for anything that might suggest their loyalty was not absolutely to the United States. All this time, however, Americans living in Paris were criticizing the American way of life in appreciating the Parisian lifestyle.

In another edition of *Holiday* from the same year, a travel review features European travel. These travel reviews appeared in the January edition of each year of *Holiday* magazine. In 1953, this review predicted “that it will be difficult to stimulate a world of war if increasing segments of it persist in mobilizing to invite and entertain.”<sup>18</sup> In the postwar peacetime, Americans renewed their interest in travel, especially to Europe. This same article also predicted that “the transoceanic traffic of 1953 will be the biggest recreational adventure of all time.”<sup>19</sup> The main travel route which this article described as part of the European tour included London, Paris, and Rome. The article discussed the cheaper than ever travel packages one can get, describing how more Americans than ever will be able to make the journey abroad. Any American would be able to purchase a trip to Europe, easily able to consume the culture.

Paris was featured in non-travel specific magazines as well. These mentions include *Time*, *Life*, and *Commonwealth* among others. An article cleverly titled “The Sun Also Sets”,

---

<sup>17</sup> Editorial Staff, *Holiday* 13, no. 4 (April, 1953): 33.

<sup>18</sup> Carl Biemiller, *Holiday* 13, no. 1 (January, 1953): 50.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

playing on Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, was published in *Mademoiselle*. This article actually suggested that American culture was invading France. He says "Paris is becoming Americanized with a kind of furious passion. Every day witnesses the opening of a cafeteria, a snack bar, a drugstore."<sup>20</sup> This author suggests that "perhaps the role of the new American expatriates is just that: not to add to the American heritage, but to save 'the French heritage'."<sup>21</sup> One must ask then, is Americanization actually saving French culture while simultaneously corrupting it? Although the new French culture that emerged in the 1950s was corrupted by American influences, the American demand for authentic French culture actually contributed to the salvation of some traditional French concepts. Americans were bringing consumer culture to Paris, and Paris was simply responding to that demand. In 1949 over 200,000 Americans visited Paris, spending a combined total of about 45 million dollars.<sup>22</sup> The French author of this *Commonwealth* article describes what he thinks is a feeling of annoyance that the Americans have not done enough for the French. He says some of his fellow Frenchmen "honestly thought of the United States as prodigious enough to enforce a definitive *pax Americana* the world over."<sup>23</sup> This suggests that the French had embraced the incoming American culture, provided that American consumerism would help them recover from the war. The American tourist had become important to the Parisian economy, and Paris had become important to the American tourist.

An inset in *Time Magazine* features some cartoon caricatures of Americans in Paris. The description points out that numerous Americans will travel to Paris and many will stay permanently. These "will join the more or less permanent colony of American exiles in Paris

---

<sup>20</sup> Pierre Schneider, *Mademoiselle* 52, (December, 1960): 113.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Barrat, *Commonwealth* 53, (November 17, 1950): 137.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

who never cease staking out their claim to freedoms, insights, sins and inspirations they think they cannot find at home.”<sup>24</sup> This again can be taken as a critique of American life. The majority of these expatriates are former G.I.s, studying under the G.I. Bill and relishing the intellectual atmosphere of Paris. The description ends, saying, “America is changing and Paris is changing, but the American Paris goes on, if not forever, at least until his money runs out or his ship comes in.”<sup>25</sup> Despite, or perhaps because of, World War II, many Americans found Paris to be a desirable place to live. Paris’s reputation as an artistic capital proved irresistible to Americans.

An article in *Life Magazine* also discusses the expatriate existence in Paris. These G.I.s would have been “cut to the quick to be mistaken for a tourist.”<sup>26</sup> Many of them took classes in subjects such as cooking or wine making. They lived cheaply, using public bathhouses and eating in cafeterias when their funds were particularly low. But despite the pressures of a budget, these men loved living in Paris. One expatriate described his feelings on the matter: “In the States an artist in the family is a disaster...here we are all trying, and the very atmosphere of the place helps...you get respectful attention in the States only after you are a success—not before, when you need it.”<sup>27</sup> These are not exactly qualities that one would typically expect of an American, further suggesting that these Americans living in Paris could be seen as Un-American. The artistic atmosphere in Paris was enough to keep many men here after the war. And Paris accepted them. Although certainly not all Parisians were overjoyed to have Americans living among them, it became standard to see expatriates, especially G.I.s.

In regards to the living situation, an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* explained the apartment situation in Paris in the late 1950s. The market, much as it is today, was fierce and

---

<sup>24</sup> “Americans in Paris”, *Time Magazine* 54, no. 4 (July 11, 1949): 24.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>26</sup> John Stanton, “The New Expatriates”, *Life* 27, no. 8 (August 22, 1949): 75.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

competition was high for living space in the city. The article explains that the “French themselves [were] in the midst of an appalling housing crises that [had] already gone on for thirteen years...[the French] would dearly love to rent to the rich Anglo-Americans for those fabulous prices but...they must have first an apartment to rent, and second, housing for themselves.”<sup>28</sup> In spite of the sometimes perilous apartment conditions in Paris, Americans would still attempt to gain entry into the system. The apartments were not exactly up to normal American standards. Americans in the Paris after World War II still seemed to prefer living in these Un-American living conditions.

*National Geographic* featured an article on Paris in 1950, an article written by an American woman living in Paris. She concurs with the previous article, describing how difficult it was to find a proper house for her family. This article, interspersed with several full color photo pages, compares many things to the American way of life with an overwhelming focus on food products. The author describes the grocery shopping, comparing her one visit trip to a supermarket in America to her “individual social visits to the baker for bread, the pastry shop for cookies, the grocery for staples, separate stands for vegetables and fruit, and the butcher for meat.”<sup>29</sup> Here again is a critique of the American life, by way of grocery shopping. The author enjoys the social aspect of her shopping in Paris, as opposed to culture of shopping in the United States. In addition, the article primarily focuses on food, a consumer good, to describe the difference of French culture.

Advertisements are perhaps a more subtle way to spot the popularity of Parisian tourism. However, advertisements provide the best view of the culture of American consumption. In advertisements about Paris, it is easy to see how Paris had been commodified to fit the needs of

---

<sup>28</sup> Toni Howard, “So You Want to Live in Paris”, *Saturday Evening Post* (August 8, 1959): 77.

<sup>29</sup> Deena Clark, “Home Life in Paris Today”, *The National Geographic Magazine* 98, no. 1 (July, 1950): 45.

an American consumer. For example, an advertisement for the French Line cruise line puts its “accent on cuisine”.<sup>30</sup> French eating was one of the simplest ways for an American to consume French culture. The French are well-known for their food, so eating French cuisine is a must for any tourist. An interesting thing to note about French food, however, is that in this immediate period after WWII, there were still shortages of many food items. The importance of tourism to the French economy was such that Americans were generally able to buy any foods.

Another advertisement features Paris while recommending a certain airline. This advertisement is for Pan American airlines, who promise to be the “world’s most experienced airline.”<sup>31</sup> This particular advertisement focuses on the trip for two to Paris. It features the testimony of a woman who had never been to Europe. She and her husband flew to Paris for their wedding anniversary. The airline promises that “you don’t need a lot of time to go abroad these days!”<sup>32</sup> This can be interpreted as another instance in which Europe becomes a commodity. It no longer takes several days to plan a European vacation; a plane can get there overnight. The American ideal of efficiency became the model for tourism. It became easier for the average American to travel abroad and many Americans took advantage. An entire part of consumer was built around the American desire to travel and exert their freedoms in another country.

An advertisement in *Sunset Magazine* points out the famous Parisian Bateaux Mouches. This ferry company still performs tours in Paris today. Founded in 1949, the Bateaux Mouches is a fleet of boats which take tours down the Seine River. The advertisement emphasizes the low price of the boat ride as well as the option of a dinner cruise. Entitled “Under the Bridges of Paris”, the page displays photos of sites that one can see while on the tour.<sup>33</sup> Boat cruises made it

---

<sup>30</sup> French Line, “French Line: Accent on Cuisine” *Holiday* 13, no. 1 (January, 1953): 86.

<sup>31</sup> Pan American, “Wedding Anniversary in Paris” *Holiday* 13, no. 4 (April, 1953): 117.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

<sup>33</sup> “Under the Bridges of Paris”, *Sunset Magazine* 13, no. 5 (May, 1963) 76.

easy for Americans to consume Parisian culture. Buy a ticket for a boat ride and one can see many of Paris's most famous monuments in one trip. This reduction of Paris to a set of sights visible from the river is the best example of the concept of seeing with experiencing. Bateaux Mouches represents the ultimate tool of consumption for American tourists to Paris. These river tours were clearly created for tourists, and Americans took advantage of them.

Many magazines feature advertisements for European vacations which often include Paris as a prime destination. This advertisement, also for Pan American airlines, urges Americans to go on a grand European tour.<sup>34</sup> Prior to WWI, grand European tours were often done by those wealthy enough to afford them. This ad, however, makes sure to note that this grand tour can be done on a budget. As in the previous ad from Pan American, this advertisement also makes use of customer testimonials, this time following a couple from Connecticut. This grand tour of Europe advertisement features three anecdotes from Paris, more than from any other city on the tour. This whirlwind tour of Europe demonstrates the interest in consuming culture. This couple was able to become culturally enlightened in France, Italy, and England in only 21 days. They were able to explore the world and consume many goods because of their American nationality. This commodification of place is still how Americans do tourism today.

The American obsession with French culture also comes through in films of the period. The most obvious of these is *An American in Paris*. As if to corroborate the articles addressed earlier in this essay, this film follows a former G.I. who decided to remain in Paris after the war to pursue his lifelong dream of becoming a painter. The film opens with various shots of clearly Parisian sites underneath the voiceover of the main character: "This is Paris. And I'm an

---

<sup>34</sup> Pan American, "How You Can Make the Grand Tour of Europe", *Holiday* 13, no. 3 (March, 1953): 12-13.



American who lives here.”<sup>35</sup> Upon its release in 1951, *An American in Paris* won the Academy Award for Best Picture. This film further glorified the life of the American in Paris as Gene Kelly’s character was quite well-liked by his neighbors in France. In musical form, the life of struggling artists seems much less like struggling and much more like a constant party. Even the intentionally dreary apartments of Jerry Mulligan (Kelly) and his pianist friend seem delightful when Kelly tap dances around them. The pianist friend is both the cynic in the film and the comic relief, brushing off his realistic comments as merely humorous. Beyond creating further romanticism for the Parisian lifestyle, the film itself was a something an American could consume.

*An American in Paris*, though likely the most famous, was not the only film featuring a commodification of Paris. The film *Moulin Rouge* came out in 1952 and also enjoyed some success among the American public. In 1952 it was in the top ten highest grossing films. Though produced in Britain, this film provides an excellent example of the American love of Paris. This film is less about glorifying the life of the artist, but rather the artist’s struggle and ultimate success. The struggle to achieve greatness is another aspect of Paris which appeals to American artists. This film also helped to reenergize the love of the Moulin Rouge nightclub, perhaps even adding to the myth of Montmartre discussed earlier.<sup>36</sup>

Several other films can also demonstrate the American fascination with Paris. In the immediate aftermath of the war, 1948, three films covering French culture and history were released: *The Three Musketeers*, *Joan of Arc*, and *Arch of Triumph*. Although these particular films did not necessarily encourage tourism, they did bring the attention back to France and set up the future of tourism films. In addition to *An American in Paris*, 1951 also saw the release of

---

<sup>35</sup> *An American In Paris*, DVD, directed by Vincinte Minnelli (1951; Burbank, CA: Time Warner Entertainment Company, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> *Moulin Rouge*, DVD, directed by John Huston (1952; Culver City, CA: MGM Studios, 2004).

the film *On the Riviera* and then in 1952, *April in Paris*. These films may not have gained the popularity awarded to *Moulin Rouge* or *An American in Paris*, but they are still relevant because they represent consumer culture. Films are a form of consumed entertainment, and the popularity of featuring Paris contributed to the mass of American tourists traveling there.

By closely examining magazines, guidebooks, and films from the Fifties, it is clear that consumer culture was a huge part of the American tourist identity. The tourist culture in Paris is simultaneously a factor of salvation and corruption for French culture. Americans in Paris did not want to see the influence of their own Americanization. This aversion to the Americanized Paris was fairly Un-American considering the context of the Red Scare happening in the United States at this time. By examining the history of American tourism, one can better understand how the culture functions today. This reduction of tourist sites to mere commodities is still how Americans, and other Western countries, do tourism today. By analyzing the way Americans vacation, one can see that the culture of consumerism was very important to American life after WWII, even for those Americans who could be considered Un-American. Perhaps with a new perspective on the American culture of consumerism, one can look at Paris with a new frame of reference.