

Earl Raab

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HINKEY DINKEY PARLAY VOO

France has been uncivilized more often than most of us are willing to admit.

What, France? How about Lafayette, Moliere, Voltaire, Renoir, Gertrude Stein, the Ritz Bar, the can-can and the Left Bank? "France, famed in all great arts?"

France has certainly made significant cultural contributions to Western life, although that line by Matthew Arnold reads, in full, "France, famed in all great arts, *in none supreme.*" Arnold was, after all, an Englishman.

Nevertheless, in the light of everything else, Arnold's allusion to French dilettantism is interesting. France -- or, rather, Paris -- became everybody's sentimental favorite because of the great bohemian spirit that flourished there. Artists, writers and intellectuals from around the world gathered in Paris and expressed themselves in free and *avant-garde* ways. This was good for the world. But it may have been a positive benefit partly resulting from a dubious quality. For, to the extent that it is possible to generalize about national character, France has often not had much. And that lack of character has stained France's political life.

But what about the French "liberation" of the Jews, after the French Revolution? Even that was significantly flawed. Clermont de Tonnere summarized the French approach with these words: "To the Jews as individuals, everything; to the Jews as a group, nothing." At best, the French line was xenophobic: the Jews could be free if they would assimilate. This ethnic monism marked European liberalism, and distinguished it sharply from American liberalism. It was no accident that the Dreyfus case took place in France, or that Herzl finally decided at the Dreyfus trial that the Jews could never have a home in Europe.

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Of course, France is basically a free country, and part of the free world. Over a hundred thousand Jews marched in Paris recently to protest French government policy, and none of them had to worry about the police harassing them because of that activity. That kind of political freedom is a blessing, and a less frequent one, in the modern world. But there is still reason for one to worry about -- and occasionally to be sickened by -- France's character, or lack of it. Obviously this is not a quality that afflicts all Frenchmen, but the corporate French nation seems to be notably subject to serious character deficiencies.

Among other things, there was the Vichy government, much too cooperative in exporting large numbers of Jews for extermination. There was the French government which decided to renege on its contract to sell planes to Israel. And now there is a French government which is going to sell Iraq the capacity to build nuclear bombs. Iraq! That is about as irresponsible as selling the nuclear bomb to Idi Amin.

France originally agreed to sell a nuclear capacity to Iraq in 1975. There was some understandable embarrassment about it in French circles, but they went ahead. The project, you will remember, was blown up a year ago by persons unknown. Now France promises the replacement before the end of the year, without any evident embarrassment.

France, by the way, had prohibited any Jews from working on the project, an indication of how quickly they are willing to violate citizenship rights, if the price is right. France gets 20 per cent of its oil from Iraq, and has other trade deals working with that country.

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In World War I, American soldiers returned from France with a ditty entitled, phonetically, "Madamazel from Armenteers, parlay voo?" It had many verses, mostly unprintable, which largely featured a lady of easy virtue and questionable character. Once again it is demonstrated that France *is* Madamazel from Armenteers -- although increasingly less attractive, less amusing and more commercial.

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