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CultureShock! Paris

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A Survival Guide to Customs and Etiquette

Paris

Frances Gendlin

Marshall Cavendish Editions

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ABOUT THE SERIES

Culture shock is a state of disorientation that can come over anyone who has been thrust into unknown surroundings, away from one's comfort zone. *CultureShock!* is a series of trusted and reputed guides which has, for decades, been helping expatriates and long-term visitors to cushion the impact of culture shock whenever they move to a new country.

Written by people who have lived in the country and experienced culture shock themselves, the authors share all the information necessary for anyone to cope with these feelings of disorientation more effectively. The guides are written in a style that is easy to read and covers a range of topics that will arm readers with enough advice, hints and tips to make their lives as normal as possible again.

Each book is structured in the same manner. It begins with the first impressions that visitors will have of that city or country. To understand a culture, one must first understand the people—where they came from, who they are, the values and traditions they live by, as well as their customs and etiquette. This is covered in the first half of the book.

Then on with the practical aspects—how to settle in with the greatest of ease. Authors walk readers through topics such as how to find accommodation, get the utilities and telecommunications up and running, enrol the children in school and keep in the pink of health. But that's not all. Once the essentials are out of the way, venture out and try the food, enjoy more of the culture and travel to other areas. Then be immersed in the language of the country before discovering more about the business side of things.

To round off, snippets of basic information are offered before readers are 'tested' on customs and etiquette of the country. Useful words and phrases, a comprehensive resource guide and list of books for further research are also included for easy reference.

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FOREWORD

'*Fluctuat nec mergitur*—It tosses on the waves but does not sink.'
—Paris motto

This book is designed for anyone who loves Paris. Loving Paris is not hard, as even cold statistics attest, for each year it is rated as the most visited city in the world. It's true that many world capitals have ardent admirers, but there seems to be something unique, something almost palpable about Paris that inspires love. It's not about you or me, this love, nor about anyone else; it is about the city itself and how being here makes us feel about our own lives. But why Paris? Certainly its charms are not unique. Rome is as historic and Venice as beautiful, Hong Kong is as bold and Marrakech as exotic. But somehow Paris has it all, including an ability to insinuate itself into our souls, demanding so much of us—and giving so much in return. Yet the spirit of this magnetic city is hard to convey: its impressions are so personal and its offerings so varied that each person who arrives for the first time ultimately seems to discover it anew. Perhaps it's best that way.

A tourist who comes to Paris for a week or two is fortunate, to be sure. There is so much atmosphere to soak up in the city's streets and there are historical monuments to stop and admire, outstanding works of art to appreciate and parks landscaped so beautifully that they take one's breath away. And what about the food and the wine? There are too many opportunities and not enough time. Yes, such visits are necessarily short, so before departure, before anything can be forgotten, people often jot down in the back of their guidebooks the museums to include for the next visit, a few restaurants to recommend to friends and which neighbourhoods remain to be explored. Unfortunately, these must be left until the next time.

So imagine, as many tourists do, actually living in Paris—having the Louvre nearby every day of the year and the world's temples of gastronomy to satisfy any culinary whim... how wonderful that must be! Fortunately, life here is as good as one imagines, even if few residents go to museums every day or—if they are at all concerned about their budgets—frequent restaurants on a daily basis. Yet Paris truly is a city

in which it is ultimately better to live than visit—for the reasons above to be sure, but also for deeper, more lasting reasons that are understood little by little, as life in *la Ville Lumière* (the City of Light) unfolds. Immersion into any new culture takes some effort, but this is Paris after all, the most entrancing—and yes, romantic—city in the world and worth whatever effort it takes.

Think of the thousands who have come before who thought the same. Pablo Picasso painted his masterpiece *Guernica* while living on rue des Grands-Augustins, around the corner from rue Christine, where the American writer Gertrude Stein lived for a time. Farther north, at Square d'Orléans, the Polish composer Frédéric Chopin settled near his lover, writer George Sand. Artist Amadeo Modigliani, the 'king of Montparnasse', died young and broke in Paris, but composer Virgil Thompson (who claimed that if he had to starve to death, he would prefer to do it where the food was so good) found fame in time. Ultimately it was Ernest Hemingway who summed it up: "There is never any ending to Paris and the memory of each person who has lived in it differs from that of any other... Paris was always worth it and you received return for whatever you brought to it."

Actually, much about being in Paris is easy. It is easy to get around and to find out what is going on, no matter how deplorable your spoken French. The city has one of the most efficient public transportation systems in the world, reaching into every hidden nook you would want to explore. Everything you need or want is available somewhere within the city's confines. Both the Tourist Office and City Hall provide more information about the city than you would think possible—from brochures you can pick up to information on the Internet that is updated daily. In addition to museums, tours, monuments and interesting current events, you can find every sports facility and municipal pool, get advice on how to raise and educate healthy children, and even an explanation of why the city's water is so good. Descriptions of public gardens, suggested walks through historic neighbourhoods and schedules for cultural and entertaining events are available to visitors and residents alike. Shops sell guides, history books and

restaurant critiques, and you can find directions to intriguing shops and compendiums of helpful advice from what is open on Sunday to what can be delivered to your door. There are also several locally produced English-language publications—and more on the Internet—to keep you updated on the area's events. Actually Paris may well be the most comprehensively covered city in the world.

So, what is it that takes an effort? It's moving. Moving to any new city, settling in, getting used to manoeuvering and finding the things you need when you descend upon a city not yet your own. Don't underestimate the time required to get your bearings, or to begin with, to cram the furniture you had shipped into a space that turns out to be too small. Or to deal with the fact that there is no hot water tap to hook up to the washing machine you brought from home. Or that the documents you were told to bring were not the right ones after all. Or that you cannot get a bank account without proof of domicile, but without a bank account you cannot get an apartment... These difficulties are wearying to be sure, but they can be overcome with dispatch—we hope—by using the information in this book.

USING THIS GUIDE

The first guidebook to Paris was published in 1685 and hundreds have been published since. Today, guidebooks for tourists recount the city's history and describe in their own ways its remarkable sights and sensations. In varying detail, they review restaurants and suggest hotels of all categories. Each tries to present the material in a more eye-catching manner than the others, and each has its own approach to capturing the glory of *la Ville Lumière*. All, however, have one thing in common: they are designed for people visiting for a short while, tourists who think that what they see in a week is what they would get every day of the year.

This book, although encompassing information for the short-term visitor, is different in approach. Its main purpose is to offer specific advice and assistance about daily life in Paris for those who are planning to stay longer, for people who have the time for byways rather than straight paths, for

sojourners who want to get into the deeper Parisian life that is often hidden from the tourist's eye. Whether your stay is for a month or a year, the type of information you need for a successful stay is different—deeper and more detailed than that found in standard tourist guides: where and how to look for appropriate housing, how to manage finances, how to stay healthy and where to get fit, how to access the Internet and where to buy a computer, where to get a fun meal for your kids, etc. are just a few examples of basic information that should help you move with minimum discomfort into the Parisian scene.

Of course, there is a difference between learning how a city works and adapting yourself to its cultural rules. In Paris, this is what takes the real effort, requiring more adjustment than you might suspect. How much you want to adapt is up to you, for Paris is flexible above all. You can spend all your time with English speakers—some 100,000 live in the Greater Paris area—and learn just enough French to ask a grocer if the melons are ripe. Yet, if this is the route you choose, you'll never really feel at home. If you don't understand why your colleagues or new friends act as they do, you'll always be an outsider to them. This book will come in handy in this regard, with cultural tips, some do's and don'ts—and there are many of them—and even a quiz to see how many of the 'Paris Rules' you've absorbed.

Your success at this will depend for the most part on your expectations. Preconceived ideas about an unfamiliar society may not always prove true, and it's best not to assume that life in Paris will more or less be like life at home, except for the language—it isn't. Start from scratch and take Paris as it is, appreciate its remarkable beauty, explore its delicious novelty, enjoy its agreeable differences, cope with its difficulties and try to laugh (if only to yourself) when your own cultural assumptions collide head on with the differing assumptions of the French.

LIVING WELL

Parisians have long felt that they have mastered *l'art de vivre*—the art of living well. Tourists who stroll the length of

the beautiful Champs-Elysées may get a whiff of the French traditions of elegance, culture and poise, but it is the total absorption of *l'art de vivre* that truly enriches the soul. It is the habits of everyday life—walking down the city's beautifully designed historic streets on your way to work, passing graceful apartment buildings and landscaped squares, shopping in the bustling markets, or lingering in the spring sunshine at a sidewalk café—that continually remind you of how gracious Parisian life can be. Watching a film under the summer stars at La Villette, hearing organ music soar to the high reaches of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame, or gathering with new Parisian friends at a neighbourhood bistro where you have become known as an *habitué* (regular customer)—these will remind you of the fullness of life in Paris as well. Make no mistake: appreciation of experience is what Paris is about, whether you are here for a day or a year. And this never stops as long as you are here. No, it doesn't stop, even amid the uncertainties that currently exist here and around the world.

Eventually you'll find your way—everyone does after a while. As your Parisian life unfolds, you'll come to discover which neighbourhood *fromagerie* (cheese store) is your favourite and which teller at the bank goes a little out of the way for you, and so you will be dealing less with strangers and more with people you know. You will walk down the streets and suddenly realise that those byways and hidden nooks are familiar, that they're become your own. The essence of your life will seem more vibrant, your conversation more animated, your days fuller. Now you will be developing your own *art de vivre*, keeping the best of your own culture and traditions while adding on those of the French. This is the beginning of *la belle vie*, the good life you could only imagine at first, but now coming true in ways you had not expected. And when these things happen, you'll understand—almost without thinking about it—that you're at home.

Be patient, for it will happen,with openness to new ideas, observation of life around you and even a little assistance. In this regard, we hope this book will help guide you and perhaps even keep you on course. *Bienvenue à Paris*. Welcome home.

This book was originally researched in 1996 and I had a lot of encouragement from long-time Parisians who knew more of the hidden and unusual than I did at the time. Colette and Claude Samama read every word of the manuscript and saw me through the project from beginning to end. My stalwart friend Jean Coyner offered invaluable advice, her humour often sorely needed. The late Jean and Warren Trabant loved Paris every day for their fifty years here, and conveyed that to me. And Virginia Crosby, who remained my closest ally, as for years we sailed through and around Paris, taking it all in. Thanks still go to legal and cultural consultant Jean Taquet, whose monthly report is always helpful, as well as to John Zaugg, who created the elegant maps in Chapter 2. To all of you I was grateful then and remain so now. *Je vous en suis très reconnaissante*.

Over the years we have updated information and have published new editions. This one, though—in both physical book and e-book formats—almost twenty years after the original book was published, brings you access to information that wasn't even dreamed of back then, with content updated, modernised, expanded. And even now, after all these years in Paris, I still needed some feedback on the new material created, so I relied once again especially on Jean Coyner, whose knowledge of Paris seems limitless. Of course, now as over the years, readers should understand that any mistakes herein are mine alone and not of anyone else.

A FEW NOTES ON FOREIGN WORDS

Throughout the book, foreign words are shown in italics, even those that have been assimilated into the English language and appear in the Oxford English Dictionary. This includes the word '*anglophone*', which is how the French refer to native English-speakers, and which is used here occasionally in the appropriate context. When listing services or shops (e.g., bakeries) in the vicinity, they are listed by *arrondissement*; where the services might be needed regardless of their location (e.g., churches), they are listed alphabetically. Where full addresses are given in the text, including the entire number of the *arrondissement* (e.g. 75012), the word Paris has been omitted; if writing to these addresses, be sure to include the city name.

DISCLAIMER

For a citizenry that resists change, Parisians must often be confounded these days. Change on all levels is on the air. Readers should understand that information here about regulations, addresses and Internet websites were current as of December 2015, to the best of our knowledge, but that doesn't mean they will be in another week or month. So, please note that the sites and links are informational only; most of the Internet sites listed have English language options, but the information there may not be a complete as in the French version. With all this streamlining and the current uncertainty in Paris, the author and publisher can bear no responsibility for any misunderstanding or inconvenience that might arise or for unexpected changes: in immigration laws (which seem always to be under review), closings, or even the sometimes unhelpful service, discrepancies in rates or prices, quality of products or accommodations, the disappearance of a shop, or the occasional bad meal (yes, even in Paris). Nor can we be responsible for websites that come and go or their own suggestions or recommendations which may be different than ours. As the French say, "*C'est la vie*"—that's life.

La Palette is a well-known café in Paris. Parisians flock to outdoor cafés as soon as the spring weather permits.

Paris as far as the eye can see—
a city awaits your exploration.

MAP OF FRANCE

IMPRESSIONS

CHAPTER 1

'If every soul left it one day and grass grew in the pavements, it would still be Paris to me, I'd want to live there.'
—Katherine Ann Porter

Do first impressions endure? Is love at first sight a reliable indicator for the future? Perhaps not, but then we wouldn't be talking about Paris. If Paris is the most visited city in the world, it is because those who pass through, again and again whenever they can, understand something that reaches their hearts as soon as their feet touch the first cobblestone or their eyes soar to the spire of a medieval church. Paris has something special, and what makes it so is plain to see.

Paris is, in fact, a city of impressions. When you first arrive, you can't help but take in the beauty right away, even if you can't quite define it—the open squares with charming cafés, the landscaped parks and verdant esplanades, the ancient palaces turned into museums, the gracious stone buildings vibrantly alive with pots of red geraniums on so many windowsills. And the colour of the sky—why does no one call it 'Paris blue'?

Then, as you look around, you notice that except for the Montparnasse Tower that looms large and rather out of sync, the city is of a human scale. It's just the right size for walkers. The boulevards are broad enough for several lanes of cars to zoom along, but the residential streets are narrower and welcoming to those who stroll, curving in unexpected directions and lined with small shops and outdoor tables that beckon you to stop for a moment to take it all in. The buildings are low—few extend beyond five stories—windows are tall and doorways are wide. Occasionally there's a door ajar, allowing you to peek in. You see a courtyard, perhaps. Or a bicycle propped against the wall. Sometimes there's a stone cherub looking down on you as you pass. Or an antique streetlight, curved and ornate, waiting for dusk. And just around the corner there's a church with a fountain, where a dog is splashing itself and everyone else along with it. Paris is constantly a surprise.

And suddenly you notice the noise, or at least, the quality of it. Paris is a city with some dignity, is it not? Certainly there are automobiles rushing about, but they rarely honk their horns, and some *métro* trains have only whooshing rubber wheels. There's no music intruding on your dinner in restaurants or in elevators, no one interrupting or shouting in stores. There's just a bustle and hum as the city works. And without thinking, you relax and take it down a notch yourself, hearing each sound for what it is.

Hungry, you stop at a fruit stand and browse through the artistically displayed produce: fresh, colourful and abundant fruit in season. Or you decide to drop in at a bistro and you choose one of the specials of the day written on a chalkboard propped up next to your table, the selections also in season and carefully prepared. Or perhaps you rest your feet at a café, where the waiter dressed in black allows you to sit with your coffee, accessing Wi-Fi or writing postcards until you're ready to take on the city once again.

And then you walk some more and finally back to your hotel. The concierge greets you quietly, but he asks you nothing about your day. He does not want to intrude on your privacy, on those thoughts that are swirling around in your head. You nod back and say "Good evening" in French, if you can. You understand though, that he is letting you know that he is there, ready to help if need be. But you are fine, if a little overwhelmed. A few minutes later, you have your shoes off, ready to run a bath and replay those hours that even now seem too short.

"Yes," you think, at the end of this first day awash with your first impressions, "Yes, I could live here, and quite well." And this is an impression that turns out to be true.

OVERVIEW

CHAPTER 2

'It is the only city in the world which understands the world and itself.'
–Henry Adams

PAST AND PRESENT ENTWINED

Paris is, without a doubt, the most beautiful capital of the world, and it should well be. For more than a millennium, kings, emperors and presidents have devoted their patriotic, religious and imaginative energies to creating their capital. The result is Paris, a city of splendour unmatched on the world's stage. Yet it is a city designed to be lived in as well as admired, and it is the almost seamless weaving of the city's intricate history into everyday life that makes the Paris experience so rich.

It is hard not to think about Paris' history wherever you go. Every street name is a voice from the past, from rue Vercingétorix, which recalls the Celtic warrior who fought against the conquering Romans in 52 BC, to boulevard Haussmann, named after the man who, 150 years ago, designed much of the structure of Paris today. If you are stuck in traffic on the 36-km beltline highway, the *périphérique*, remember that your slow path traces the city's final fortress walls of almost 200 years ago. And as you stroll, plaques on buildings will remind you of historical events and the people who shaped them. Wherever you are, the saga of Paris is in plain view.

The Beginnings

It's hard to say when the city was 'founded'. A small band of Gauls called the Parisii lived in the hills of the Paris Basin as

long ago as the 7th century BC and on what is now the Île-de-la-Cité from about 250 BC. From this island in the middle of the river Seine and surrounded by the rivers Oise, Aisne, Ourcq and the Marne, the Parisii plied a lucrative river trade by commanding a strategic stop for all travellers.

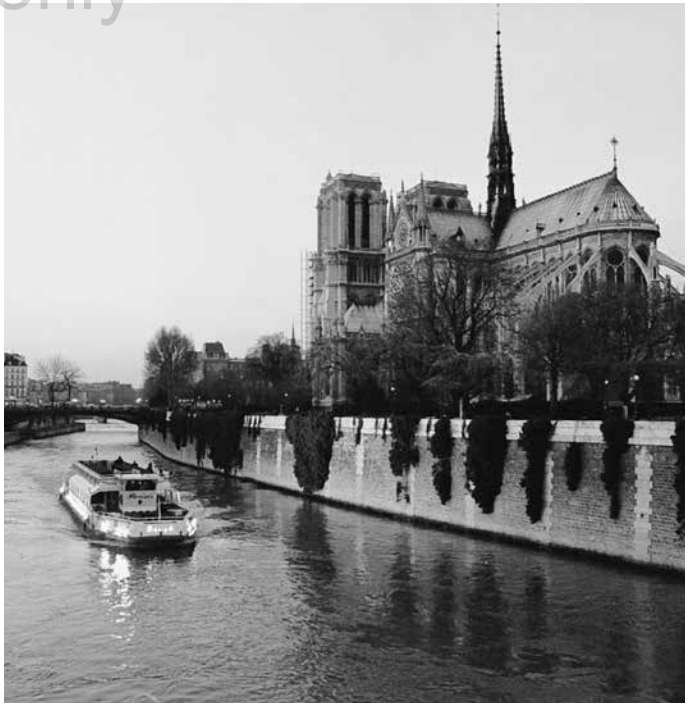
No wonder the Romans wanted it, taking it in 52 BC and staying some 400 years. They first established themselves on the island of the Parisii, then slowly expanded their city across the water to the south, into what is still called the Quartier Latin (named after the Latin-speaking students of the university quarter during the Middle Ages). North of the river was a marsh—a *marais*—and the trendy 21st century neighbourhood there still goes by that name, Le Marais.

Some 9,000 people lived in what was then called Lutetia, but by 212 AD, it was officially named Paris, after the displaced Parisii. Some ancient ruins from that time have survived, for example, those in the crypt in front of the Cathedral of Notre Dame and ruins in the Quartier Latin.

By the 3rd century AD, however, Christianity was spreading and the Pope sent his bishop Denis to Paris to convert the Gauls. To the displeasure of the Romans, he succeeded, so he and two fellow Christians were beheaded near the top of the region's highest hill, now called Montmartre or 'hill of martyrs'. Saint Denis became the patron saint of France.

The patron saint of Paris itself is Geneviève, a devout girl of the 5th century who convinced the Parisians to trust in the Christian God and saved the city from an onslaught of Attila the Hun in 451 AD. By then, the Romans had already lost control of the area and were replaced for 300 years by the Franks from Germania—a dynasty that fought among themselves but which managed to establish Francia as Christian once and for all, though not always peacefully, to say the least.

By the 9th century, Charlemagne (whose father Pépin III was the first of the Carolingians) was using harsh military conquest to expand the domain and to impose Christianity on the realm. He preferred the Germanic city of Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle) to Paris, so Paris declined over the decades, suffering from neglect and invasions by Norse Vikings.



Notre Dame sits along the Seine, which curves leisurely through Paris.

Charlemagne's descendants fought amongst themselves as well, so just before the turn of the first Christian millennium the time was ripe in Paris for a new king to emerge. Thus came Hugues Capet who founded the Capetian Dynasty that lasted in direct male lineage for more than 300 years.

It's important to remember that the territory of Francia then did not correspond to the map of France today. At the time of Hugues Capet, it encompassed Paris and more or less what is now the region of Île de France. In fact, Gaul was a feudal society marked by regions, each with its own dialect, culture and governance. But as the centuries rolled on, and as the Capetians expanded their domains into these regions, Paris, with a population numbering about 20,000, grew in importance.

It was around 1163, at the time of the Capetians, that the construction of the Cathedral of Notre Dame began. It took about 150 years to be completed and still stands, as does the

Conciergerie, as part of the Palais Royal. (The Conciegerie became a prison during the French Revolution, but is now a national monument.) It was under the Capetians that the magnificent gothic Basilique Saint-Denis and the exquisite Sainte-Chapelle were built, and the Sorbonne founded in 1253. It was also under the Capetians—King Philippe-Auguste—that the fortress of the Louvre was built and the larger streets paved with stone. The city marketplace of Les Halles was also constructed under the Capetian reign. It remained on the same spot for some 800 years, but was razed in 1969 to make way for an enormous shopping and entertainment mall called, of course, Forum Les Halles.

Medieval Paris

But what was daily life like in this beautiful city we revere today? By the beginning of the 14th century, its population had reached more than 250,000, cramped in an area perhaps one-quarter of the city's size today. It may have had an awe-inspiring cathedral and other impressive churches and palaces, and it may have become a renowned centre of learning, but crowded and dank as most cities were at that time, Paris stank. The rich, of course, lived well regardless of the conditions, but with no indoor plumbing or underground sewers; with horses traversing the streets; rubbish piling up and trenches for excrement running open in the middle of many streets—life in the city was not easy for the masses. Houses were heated by fireplaces that smoked and built up soot inside and out; food spoiled quickly; and insects and bugs thrived in bedlinens, clothes and on the people themselves, who went mostly unwashed. In addition, disease was rampant. The Black Death (bubonic plague) that hit Europe in the mid-14th century took more than 25 million people, including some 70,000 in Paris, decimating its population and its economy.

And so came civil unrest and war. As the Capetians' direct male line died out, the English king figured he was next in line for the French throne—after all, it was the Normans (from Normandy in northern France) who, long before their 1066 conquest of England, had owned and ruled northern France. Having lost much of their holdings, these 'Anglo-Normans' wanted them—and France—back. The French barons said "*non*" and put a Valois (a non-linear descendant of Hugues Capet) on the throne in Paris, beginning a dynasty that lasted about 250 years. Think of their rule however, and what comes to mind initially is the disastrous plague and a 116-year war against England.

It's hard now to imagine a war that could last so long, but the Hundred Years' War (1337–1453) saw decades of victories and defeats on both sides in brief skirmishes and major battles, intrigues and fluctuating allegiances. It saw Joan of Arc initially victorious at Orléans, then burnt at the stake by the English as a witch. It also saw Paris being occupied by the English for some 15 years, allowing Henry VI to be crowned king at Notre Dame. And finally, in 1437 it saw Paris retaken by the Valois king Charles VII, who ultimately regained the rest. And so, through the nascent nationalism that united the disparate regional forces to defeat the English, France started to become a nation with Paris as its major cultural and administrative force.

The Early Modern Age

The Valois dynasty lasted until 1589, reigning through the Reformation and the flowering of the Renaissance. In the century after the end of the war, Paris' population grew to about 400,000 and magnificent churches and mansions were built, including the Hôtel de Cluny, now the Museum of the Middle Ages. The Louvre began to be transformed into the magnificent palace of today, and French officially replaced Latin as the language for administrative and legal acts throughout the realm. The first printing press appeared and more people could read and write. Under François I—a poet and patron of the arts—Leonardo da Vinci came to France bringing with him the Mona Lisa, which visitors to the Louvre now flock to see. In fact, the bulk of the art in the Louvre today is from the collection of the Valois. François also established the Collège de France, the first humanist (non-religious) university, which is still going strong. Paris was a city of culture and learning under the last Valois kings.

By now, Parisians were solidly identifying themselves with the side of the river on which they resided. From the Middle Ages, the Right Bank (*rive droite*) became the mercantile focus of the city, because boats could moor easily, servicing the aristocrats who had settled near the palace of the Louvre. The Left Bank (*rive gauche*), home to the Sorbonne and other institutions of learning, was inhabited by artists and intellectuals. Till today, the modern city continues to divide itself thus, with headquarters of banks, the largest department stores and much of the city's major commerce clustered on the Right Bank, while the Left Bank holds the universities and artists' galleries in a vibrant atmosphere of creativity and ideas. And so the Paris of today is still somewhat reminiscent of the city under the Valois.

But it was also a city of persecutions and strife. In response to the harshness of Catholicism, the Huguenots (followers of the French reformer John Calvin), who spoke out against the Pope in Rome, began converting part of the French population, including Parisians. After fluctuating degrees of tolerance, Parisians witnessed the massacre of about 3,000 Protestant 'heretics' in Paris on Saint Bartholomew's Day in 1572. (All told, some 70,000 Huguenots were later slain.) Eventually—after intrigues and the assassination of King Henri III—Henri IV of Navarre was crowned king. Henri IV set out to build a more efficient town. In 1605, he began the construction of what is now called La Place des Vosges, near Place de la Bastille, which some say is the most beloved square in all of France. He also built the exclusive Place Dauphine and, to better connect the two banks, finished the Pont Neuf, which 400 years later, is still called the New Bridge.

Henri IV began the Bourbon dynasty, and the Catholic Bourbons—periodic uprisings and unrest aside—ruled for the next 200 years, until they were overthrown by the French Revolution. Wars were waged to extend the monarchy's realm, while the arts flourished in Paris, literacy increased for both men and women, literature and publishing expanded and the Luxembourg Palace (now the Sénat) was built.

"Paris is well worth a mass."
These were the famous words of the Huguenot Henri IV of Navarre who was crowned king only upon his conversion to Catholicism.

We've all heard of Louis XIV, the 'Sun King' who abandoned crowded and filthy Paris in 1682 for his newly built opulent palace at Versailles, one of the most visited palaces in the world today. Paris had some 600,000 residents at that time, and although the streets were paved with stone and somewhat lit at night, and in spite of its expansion to the north and south, it was still a city of overcrowded slums. Despite such beautiful oases as the Place Vendôme and the Place des Victoires, and despite the flourishing of the arts and such amenities as the first true café, Procope (which still stands at the same spot today), the city hadn't changed much overall. Disease and crime were rampant, and so for the rich and powerful, it was best to be at Versailles.

The Revolution

And thus we come to poor ill-fated Louis XVI and his Austrian wife, the pampered and hated Marie Antoinette. Actually, by the end of the 17th century, the ideas of the liberal, anticlerical Enlightenment were taking hold, and Paris had assumed its place as the cultural centre of the Age of Reason. Learning and the arts were esteemed, and life was lovely—for individuals who could afford it. But in 1788, the French treasury was almost bankrupt, owing to costly wars (including the support of the American Revolution), the lavish lifestyle of the French royalty and a disastrous harvest. People were starving all across France. Unfortunately, Louis XVI, rather a simple, well-meaning man, only indecisive and conservative, yet ultimately willing to accept some reforms, did not react. And so, the Parisians decided that they had had enough: the Bastille—a prison near the present-day ultra modern Opéra National Paris Bastille—was taken. The active revolution had begun. Paris—and France—would never be the same.

"Let them eat cake."
It was during a bread shortage in Paris that Marie Antoinette is reputed to have uttered those famous words, "Let them eat cake". It's not clear if she really did so, but the populace blamed the Austrian-born queen for France's troubles, no matter that Louis himself might have been a scapegoat for the tyrannies and excesses of his predecessors.

All the regions of France came together in a meeting in Paris to pledge their allegience to a single, common nation. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen was adopted. The country was divided into *départements* and in 1792, the First Republic declared the birth of La France. It wasn't an easy birth. Over the next five years, there were civil war and clashes with other European states. After a period of moderation and constitutional monarchy came the Reign of Terror led by the infamous Robespierre, during which some 17,000 'enemies of liberty' (including Louis and Marie-Antoinette) were beheaded by the guillotine. The major site of the executions was Place de la Révolution, now the beautiful and much more serene Place de la Concorde.

Napoléon

Despite the ensuing 75 years of instability and the revolutions of 1830 and 1840, which caused governments to swing from republic to empire to monarchy and then to republic, the legacy of the French Revolution was the power given to the citizens, who became—and remain—the country's dominant political force.

Napoleon, who seized power and had himself proclaimed Emperor, made lasting changes to France that are still felt today. In Paris, his legacy is seen everywhere. His successful military battles are honoured by street names—Iéna, Friedland, Wagram—and he has left his mark on the Madeleine Church, the Arc de Triomphe and the arcaded rue de Rivoli. He built the Pont des Arts and what is now the revitalised Canal Saint-Martin. He also systematised the city's districts by designating 12 *arrondissements* (they number 20 today) and even creating a uniform system for the numbering of buildings. He established the *lycée* educational system and most importantly, he devised a new civic legal code that was almost revolutionary in codifying the rule of law throughout the land. Military defeats brought all this to an end: the Russians entered Paris and Napoleon abdicated into exile on Elba. He returned to Paris for 100 days but was defeated once and for all by Wellington at the Battle of Waterloo.

A City of Unrest

With Napoleon's exile to the island of Sainte-Hélène, a series of unpopular governments ruled for the next 60 years, culminating finally in the 1871 establishment of a republic, once and for all. But it was a tumultuous period in teeming and seething Paris, whose population had now reached 900,000. First the Bourbons—two brothers of Louis XVI—took power one after the other, but they and Charles X, who was too reliant on the Church and too authoritarian, didn't last long. After a riot in which some 5,000 workers were killed ended the short-lived republic, Louis-Philippe ruled as the 'bourgeois monarch' from 1830–1848. However, intolerable conditions brought the city to bursting point, and explode it did.

By about 1848, the Industrial Revolution and the rise of science and reason were taking hold in Europe. Railroads were being built and ports expanded. French workers were flocking into the small city and its growing suburbs. Paris now held more than a million people, and it was still dark and dense, with warrens of narrow alleyways running with rats and filled with filth and disease. Fresh water was still rare and a crowded tenement stood directly in front of the Louvre. The streets were open sewers as in medieval times, the Seine was part of the sewer system and in 1848 alone, some 19,000 people died of cholera. Factories overworked their employees and there was a high rate of unemployment. Paris may have been the world capital of culture, but the air was polluted with smoke and soot, and crime was uncontrollable.

First came what was meant to be a peaceful demonstration near the Madeleine. But troops on the boulevard des Capucines (in the 8^{e}) started a riot by firing into the crowd. Revolution became the order of the day. Barricades shot up in the streets, the king abdicated and fled, and finally some 50,000 poverty-stricken citizens marched in protest in June. This was too much for the new conservative government, and in putting down the rebellion, some 1,500 Parisians were killed and another 5,000 deported.

As his name was known thoughout France, Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, Napoléon's nephew, was elected president in 1848. In 1852, he changed his mind and named himself Emperor

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fran Gendlin has held leadership positions in both magazine and book publishing. She was Editor and Publisher of the magazine *Sierra*, and was the Sierra Club's Director of Public Affairs. As Executive Director of the Association of American University Presses, she helped foster the interests of scholarly publishing worldwide. Through her own business, The Right Word, she helped writers with their projects and taught English and business writing to foreign professionals. In 1997, she wrote *Living & Working Abroad: Rome*, and in 2001, *Living & Working Abroad: San Francisco*, two widely read guides to understanding and living in those cities. *CultureShock! Paris* also has had several new editions over the years, as important changes occurred.

While she was growing up, her family moved several times to different areas of the United States, each with its own characteristics and culture, climate and cuisine. This has led her to appreciate new cultures, to wonder about their differences and similarities, and to seek to understand them. All her life she has enjoyed travel and new adventures, meeting people she might otherwise not have done, and making new friends.

Fran has lived in Paris for more than a decade, and life there is just as agreeable as she has conveyed in his book. Her fictional memoir, *Paris, Moi, and the Gang: A Memoir… of Sort*s can be ordered at bookshops and on online sites. Currently she also spends winter months in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, and is pleased with the sunny climes.