

Finally, America is the subject of a theme popular among French intellectuals of the post-modernist period: the end of history. “The homogenization of thoughts, tastes, and behaviors by mass production and mass consumption leads to a systematic erasure of all differences between individuals and cultures” (p. 219). American economic hegemony is seen as the harbinger of a post-historical universe devoid of cultural distinctions.

This dense and eclectic work draws on philosophy, political theory, poetry, novels, autobiographical writing and literary criticism to shed light on the web of interactions connecting an influential social group in one country to another country that, since it came into existence, has always been a privileged “other.” Mathy’s book is relevant to study abroad because it reminds us of the complexity of cross-cultural interactions between the perceiver and the perceived. Further, for Americans whose first foreign experience was in France, and whose views of their own country and the world were irrevocably affected by French sources, this work offers a fresh perspective on those influential ideas and their cultural context.

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*The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in
America*

Louis Menand

New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. 2001. (546 pages)

Louis Menand’s *The Metaphysical Club*, daunting in its choice of subject matter, closely aligns itself with the ancient sense of the word ‘history’ as a fluid, almost epic narrative. The Metaphysical Club of the title was a conversation group that met in Cambridge for a few months in 1872. Its membership roster listed some of the greatest intellectuals of the day: Charles Peirce, William James, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Chauncey Wright, amongst others. There is no record of the Club’s discussions or debates—in fact, the only direct reference to the Club is made by Peirce in a letter written thirty-five years later. Menand utilizes the Club as a jumping-off point for a sweeping analysis of the beliefs of the day. The subtitle

of the book belies its true mission: 'a story of ideas in America.' Menand discusses the intellectual and social conditions that helped shape these men by the time they were members of the Club. He then shows the philosophical, political, and cultural impact that these men went on to have. In doing so, Menand traces a history of ideas in the United States from immediately prior to the Civil War to the beginning of the Cold War.

The ideas that Menand highlights are legion: Ralph Waldo Emerson's views of morality, Louis Agassiz's biological theories of race, Charles Darwin's materialism and the metaphysical musings of the Club itself. Menand makes multiple readings of the United States in the late 19th century, and it is through these that he can speak with authority on the ideas that emerged from the Metaphysical Club.

In addition to Emerson, Agassiz, and Darwin, Menand incorporates discussions of John Brown, *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward*, W.E.B. DuBois, the Transcendentalists, Eugene Debs, pacifism, George Pullman, to name only a few. Many of the vignettes may seem unnecessary, serving solely as devices for narrative discourse. However, through these snippets a thorough overview of Antebellum and Postbellum United States society emerges, particularly in regard to those issues of continued relevance (such as States' rights, questions of race, the nature of being 'American'). Further, by avoiding a linear narrative, Menand rounds out the philosophy of the enigmatic Club, a 'before and after' effect that gives the Club its identity.

If Menand opens *The Metaphysical Club* with discussions of Emerson and his 'American Scholar' lecture in a way that presages the Club, then the description of the Club in the middle of the book serves to introduce John Dewey, the intellectual inheritor of the group's philosophy and the focus of most of the remainder of the book. Though it was Peirce who named the philosophy 'pragmatism,' it was Dewey who carried that philosophy onward, both in his writings and through his long academic career.

Menand closes his book by drawing broad comparisons between the intellectual environs of the United States in the post-Civil War and post-Cold War eras. In both 'worlds,' there are 'many competing belief systems, not just two,' with skepticism about 'the finality of any particular set of beliefs [becoming]...to some people an important value again' (441). Given the monumental events that have occurred internationally since the

publication of *The Metaphysical Club* in early 2001, perhaps Menand's Epilogue is especially important: '[D]emocracy is the value that validates all other values. Democratic participation isn't the means to an end, in this way of thinking: it is the end. The purpose of the experiment is to keep it going.'

What, then, is the importance of this book to the field of international education? In short, it would appear to draw attention to three deficiencies in the field:

The need for pedagogy. As demonstrated by the last issue of *Frontiers*, the influence of the pragmatists on pedagogy is monumental, not only in terms of experiential education, but also (and by extension) for education abroad. However, whereas the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE) has set 'Principles of Good Practice' based on learning theory (See Lynn Montrose's article "'International Study and Experiential Learning: The Academic Context,'" in *Frontiers*, 8(Winter 2002), no equivalent emphasis on student learning appears in 'NAFSA: Association of International Educators' resources or workshops.

The need for history. Menand never fails to situate his subjects historically, incorporating elements of politics, cultural studies, socio-economics. Though chronologies of 'study abroad' have been compiled, the field might benefit from a Menand-esque historical analysis, not a list of dates important to NAFSA's Section on U.S. Students Abroad, nor a roll call of those government policies that have facilitated SECUSSA activities. Instead, we stand to gain from an integrative history of the field.

The need for discourse. The discourse facilitated by the pragmatists was done without an appeal to higher absolutes. As mentioned above, such discussions (taking place socially) lead to 'better' ideas, allowing a trajectory that benefits society or a subgroup. Can such a discourse take place within the field of education abroad? In discussions, can we identify programs that are better educational opportunities for students than others? Can we agree to criteria and standards for the field that go beyond the current 'Statement of Professional Competencies?' whose focus is student learning, both personal and academic? Most importantly, can we have such a discussion (say, through the SECUSSA listserv) in a professional manner with the strongest influence on such a discussion being the promotion of education and not fear of liability?

Menand demonstrates that despite pragmatism's dormancy for the

last fifty years, as a school of philosophy it stands to make a real impact in the contemporary 'story of ideas.' Those same historical factors that permitted pragmatism's reemergence (according to Menand, the end of the Cold War, democratization, and globalization) have given a new impetus to the field of international education. Let us hope that in true pragmatic fashion we have the ability to both 'think' and 'do.'

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First Great Triumph: How Five Americans Made Their Country a World Power

Warren Zimmermann

New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002. (576 pages)

A century ago, Americans across the country—rich and poor, black and white, urban and rural—engaged in a grassroots debate over whether their country should acquire colonies and become a global power on the European model. Warren Zimmermann's book examines American imperialism in this age, weighs its positives and negatives, and suggests that this history has relevance for our own age in which "American empire" is again controversial.

The study centers on the "fathers of modern American imperialism" (p. 8): John Hay, Captain Alfred T. Mahan, Elihu Root, Henry Cabot Lodge, and Theodore Roosevelt. Together, these men theorized and executed a strategy of naval building and territorial acquisition that thrust American power southward into Latin America and westward into Asia. Between 1898 and 1903 the United States acquired a formal empire consisting of Guam, Hawaii, Midway, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Samoa, and signed protectorate treaties with Cuba and Panama. It established coaling ports for naval and merchant vessels across the Pacific and in the Caribbean Sea. The Panama Canal, Roosevelt's proudest accomplishment, would link both halves of the country's new transoceanic sphere of influence.

Zimmermann's book begins with a description of the careers and "elements of character" (p. 14) of its five central protagonists. They are all