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Hilltopics Staff

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# HILLTOPICS

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## Not just another demonstration: Paris rioting reveals serious issues with modern French culture

by Dawn Jenkins

The first instinct of any red-blooded American upon hearing news of the recent rioting in France was probably a feeling of satisfaction: they are getting what they deserve. How could they have the nerve to criticize our response to terrorism when there are cars exploding left and right in cities throughout their nation? The typical Frenchmen, excelling in the art of argumentation, wouldn't miss a beat: the riots stem from problems with immigration, not terrorism, and by the way, aren't you Americans having a bit of trouble with your southern border?

The worst mistake one can make is to lump the French example in with the broader "war on terror," assuming that the uprising directly relates to the larger Muslim-fundamentalist terror movement. The real dilemma concerning Arab and North-African immigrants to France remains uniquely French in content and context.

Since the French Revolution, the Republican Model has predominated as a blueprint for integrating immigrants into society; it emphasizes rapid assimilation into "official" French national culture and radical, color-blind equality in the eyes of the law (note here the outcome of the headscarf debate). However, the lofty ideals of this model are often not borne out in practice. Immigrants remain residentially segregated, they lack opportunities, and they feel ostracized by a society that requires them to abandon their native culture to fit in; many North African immigrants have reluctantly changed their names to more French-sounding monikers simply to get ahead. Furthermore, mix large numbers of poor, unemployed young male immigrants with a sudden return of police presence to troubled neighborhoods, and you've got a recipe for disaster.

For too long, France has bought off its immigrants with

generous welfare payments rather than addressing the root problems of the inequality – the inadequacies of black-and-white cultural assimilation. Now, staggering from the widespread destruction, the government has been obligated to enforce the order it should have prioritized much earlier in the chronically ignored suburbs. Of course, they're throwing more money at these troubled areas, but until attitudes towards immigrants change, increased spending on government programs won't provide a solution.

Despite the fact that the riots have been conducted mainly by immigrants who, even though they may be first- or second-generation citizens, remain disconnected from mainstream society, the recent upheaval is suspiciously "French" in nature. Ironically, in a perverse way, the riots could symbolize a sort of success in immigrant assimilation into French culture. What does any good French citizen do when he is displeased with his government?

Take the riots to the streets. Could the riots of October and November 2005 somehow constitute a continuation of French tradition, one that began with the Revolution and extends all the way through May 1968? As the French respond and eventually adapt policy to address the riots, the implications of the Republican Model are one of several factors to consider. What they absolutely must not do if they wish for a solution, however, is to persist in treating immigrants as outsiders rather than citizens.

*Dawn Jenkins is a senior international studies and French major.*



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## Tired of the ordinary? University Honors Program's Richter Fellowships can take you places

by Rebekah Hurt

Applications for SMU's Richter Fellowships tenable for the coming summer are due by February 6, 2006. So, if you are not yet familiar with the fantastic opportunities these grants offer, the time to educate yourself and get started is now!

The Richter Fellowship is a unique resource that can truly change your life. In late May 2004, I suddenly found myself living in an international youth hostel in the middle of Accra, the coastal capital of the West African country of Ghana. My family became a Dutch film actress turned Kumasi-orphanage-volunteer and roommate, three MIT grad students investigating urban planning, a group of American freshmen doing AIDS work, a Danish man training local teachers in web-based classroom tools, and - my personal favorite - a Columbian student touring West Africa and just generally hoping to stumble upon the meaning of life.

During the day, I navigated unsigned dirt roads, marking down locations of upstart printers, publishers, and bookshops that no directory - either local or international - has ever taken inventory of. I peeked in display windows at laptops, avoiding passing herds of goats and escaped fowls. I careened through the night in a bus with no headlights making a four-hour excursion sandwiched between people wearing huge, colorful Kente robes, eating strange meat off a stick, and listening to Outkast blaring on the radio. I cashed my traveler's checks in national banks that keep their primary records by hand in notebooks divided by drawn grids and got back stacks of currency so inflated that I needed an entire shopping bag to hold a hundred dollars' worth. I landed myself in the hospital and experienced what it means to queue behind dozens of people all waiting to have blood drawn with the same dirty syringe. I collected seashells at dawn on the most beautiful beach I have ever visited. I grew deeply nostalgic for American bathrooms.

But mainly, I negotiated conversations in the native Akan, Ewe, Ga, and Twi to find out what the current state of textual culture and literacy is in Ghana. The results of my Richter efforts abroad, while far from perfect or ideal, have allowed me to make a major contribution to my field of study and have

irreversibly altered the way that I experience the world.

As the Honors Program website tells us, Richter Fellows receive funding to conduct one to three months of research over winter or summer break, generally abroad. Upon returning, Fellows write and submit a scholarly article based on their research with intent to seek publication (in academic journals, magazines, periodicals, etc.) The awards offer something in the neighborhood of \$5-8,000 and some 15-20 are available for SMU students per year. In the process of applying for a Richter, students (either working independently or, less often, in pairs) create a lengthy and detailed proposal containing the topic of study, a rationale for visiting their chosen location, an approximate timeline, and an itemized budget. A great deal of research goes into the proposal itself - think of it as a major term paper - so, while this should not intimidate potential applicants, it bears keeping in mind that to be successful in obtaining a grant you will need to get started well in advance of the deadline and take the process seriously. You can expect to make multiple consultations with (and get very valuable feedback from) Dr. Doyle along the way.

In 2004-2005, students were awarded fellowships to study solar power in Hawaii; cervical cancer prevention in Guadalajara; governments' national "emergency" policies and parallels to the Patriot Act in Montreal; sex-based-advertising in Costa Rica and Argentina; legalized prostitution in Amsterdam; the social adjustment of orphans in Moscow; and many more provocative issues in breathtaking places. The possibilities are truly endless.

Upon my return from Ghana, I presented a paper on "On-Demand Publishing in Ghana" at the International Conference on the United States and West Africa at UT Arlington in April and, more recently, I spoke on "The Historical and Contemporary Impacts of Religiously-Affiliated Publishers in Ghana" at the Reaching the Margins: Colonial and Postcolonial Lives of the Book Conference at the University of London. I am also pleased to say that, largely on the basis of this Richter-related research and activity, I have just been awarded SMU's

first ever Marshall Scholarship, which will allow me to continue studying African literature and creative writing for two years, all expenses paid, in UK master's programs. I can't say that I foresaw any of these tremendous opportunities at the time I made my Richter application - but I could sense from the moment I started dreaming up projects that I was being offered something special. My expectations have been far more than fulfilled, and I would fervently encourage all Honors students who have any sort of notion that they might like to embark on an adventure of their own to be in touch with the Honors office or myself (or the many other Richters past - incidentally, some of the most fascinating people you will meet on campus!)

Interested students should talk to Honors Program Coordinator Hershel Chapin (1st floor VS resident) or Dr. David Doyle in Clements Hall, or everyone can always visit [www.smu.edu/honors](http://www.smu.edu/honors) for program stipulations, sample proposals, and further contact information. Don't miss out!

*Rebekah Hurt is a senior English major.*



## Diary of a December graduate, part two: The real world begins to close in around me...

So I know John Mayer says there's no such thing as the real world, but I mean, really - this is coming from a guy who makes billions of dollars singing and goofing around with a guitar on stage. I think most people would agree that's not their real world. What does the real world mean to me? Paperwork. Bills. Insurance. Desk jobs. I try to imagine what it will be like: I picture myself alternatively in a stylish, trendy business-casual ensemble with an unfading Barbie-doll smile, militantly positive and cheery for my clients, and stern in a no-nonsense grey suit with a look of steely determination on my creased, world-weary face. The biggest hurdle in these scenarios seems to be deciding on the outfit.

People tend to take one of two views toward the inevitable onslaught of the real world. The first group devotes themselves totally to the pursuit of the American dream; these are the ones who do everything right. They attend every session offered by the career center, they meticulously write and re-write resumes, schedule endless rounds of interviews, seize upon every social encounter as a chance to "network," and then methodically evaluate the array of offers that comes pouring in. The second group rejects the whole concept of the real world. Some of them have four-year plans that consist of "win the lottery," "marry rich" or "be the next American Idol," while others simply choose their favorite substance to abuse and subsequently forget about everything else. This category also includes any hippies, starving artists, and other idealists. For my part, I've tried to ignore the real world altogether, even in the face of my looming graduation. I'm ashamed to say that the majority of the time I've spent in the

career center computer lab has been devoted to endeavors other than job-hunting.

All liberal arts majors dread this loaded question: "Hmm, an International Studies and French major. So what are you going to do with that?" they taunt, daring you to utter anything other than "teacher." If I had a dime for every time someone asked me that question! My first instinct is to snap defiantly, "Whatever I darn well please!" But instead, I usually respond sheepishly, "I'm keeping my options open." Or I try to keep things light-hearted with a bit of humor: "Well, I'm actually interviewing with Hooters right now," I'll answer (which in my case would require a significant investment in some non-emergency major surgery, but that's beside the point).

I think I've settled on the perfect analogy for my approach to life in the real world. Ever seen the Plinko game on "The Price is Right"? Basically, you drop a ball into a vertical peg board and watch as gravity pulls the ball downward, bouncing erratically off the various pegs as it gradually comes to rest in a particular position. That's my life: sometimes it's important to control, to plan, to initiate...but other times you've just got to go with the flow and see where the random (or not-so-random - dare I say providential?) circumstances of this crazy life take you. Inevitably, some things are simply out of your control, and all you can do is watch in suspense from the sidelines - hoping, waiting, and yelling, "Big Money, Big Money!"

*Dawn Jenkins is a senior international studies and French major.*

## Going to the chapel: Is it just us, or does it seem like everyone is getting married these days?

In August, I walked down the aisle.

Okay, so it wasn't my aisle. It was my first time as a bridesmaid, but the milestone is nearly as significant. It represents the coming of "that age," the time when your friends and classmates start taking their vows and you start wondering in romantic delight (or frantic horror), when it will be your turn to say, "I do."

My Facebook friends list is filling up with people who are engaged or already married. My high school class and the classes underneath have already produced many brides and grooms. At work, it's hard to miss all the twentysomethings' left-hand rocks and last name changes.

The first classmate wedding I attended was the summer after my first year at college. She was the kind of girl who never dated but suddenly found The One and tied the knot. She was an exception, though. It was okay to accept that, at 19, we had one friend getting married. Now, at nearly 22, the proposals are flying. My friend's first kiss just got engaged! My peers will barely have time to toss their caps and strip their gowns before donning something old, new, borrowed, and blue.

I do my best to remain rational and to maintain that there's no rush to get hitched. I wholeheartedly believe that your twenties are the time to really get to know yourself,

which you must do before you can fully know what you want in a partner. As of 2004, the Census Bureau reports that the median age at first marriage is 26 for women and 27 for men - that's light years away!

However, it's really no use. My biological clock is ticking. I've been bitten by the bug. I've caught wedding fever.

Butterflies every time I see a wedding party emerge from Perkins Chapel. The desire to ambush Bed, Bath and Beyond with a registry gun. Imaginary engagement rings on [adiamondisforever.com](http://adiamondisforever.com).

Who can argue with Harry's declaration to his beloved Sally: "When you realize you want to spend the rest of your life with somebody, you want the rest of your life to start as soon as possible"? Who can disregard the dreaded backward-counting calculation (kids before 30 + a few years of marriage without children = betrothal ASAP)?

Although my close-knit girl friends from high school have unofficially named me the first of our group to get married, it's still a few years away. In the meantime, I'll live vicariously through my more eager pals. I'll flip through bridal magazines, search online for the perfect dress, coordinate colors and floral arrangements in my head.

Who knows, maybe I'll even sneak in a stroll down Perkins' center aisle. A girl's gotta practice, right?

*Kasi DeLaPorte is a senior advertising and journalism major.*



## Students finally hear stories of fellow Mustangs' efforts at Gulf Coast Hurricane relief

by Eric Johnson

Despite the fact the DC sent an editor along with a group of fourteen other SMU students on a Fall Break volunteer trip to the New Orleans area, and despite the fact that their journalist took numerous interviews with victims, cops, and municipality leaders, no articles were ever written. Hmmm. So, taking matters into our own hands here is a smattering of experiences that describe what happened, the best way I know how to share them...

One's entrance into the damaged region is gradual. It begins with a salty taste in the gas station water fountains. A few trees are knocked down, and then the fast food restaurants start serving cokes in a can. From here on there is little change but a few more fallen trees and damaged signs. As you enter New Orleans, however, olive Hummers pass you on the streets and you see troops in their fatigues pausing outside Church's Chicken. Cars are tossed and small boats sit awkwardly in parking lots. Over these cars and across the lower level of most homes is a dusty white film, remnants of the now dried-up brew of water and sewage that sat over the city. We were told it was toxic to breathe in.

A friendly and decently drunk bayou-man told us at a gas station near Lafayette not to take girls into the city. "I have a black heart, as black as her hair," he said, "but I will never go back there." A painted wall in the Garden district read "Don't Try. I'm sleeping inside with a big dog, an ugly woman, two shotguns, and a claw hammer." A crumbling billboard on the way to the Superdome reads, "-hou shalt -ot kill." We were informed by a sheriff near the Tulane campus that the looting remained a problem despite the reports given by the media and politicians. The numerous "You Loot, We Shoot" signs seemed to testify to this fact.

But even in this difficult environment, not all signs of life had been lost. There was another sign in the Garden district from a Katrina victim who had lost most of his monetary possessions but needed an engagement ring. The sign stated he was willing to trade an early Mickey Mantle card for the small piece of jewelry. In the town of New Iberia, the annual Gumbo Festival continued as it had always before, full of music, dancing, and good food.

"With God's help it's going better, it's going better," said an 85 year-old woman of Delcambre, Louisiana looking over the inside of her flooded home and possessions. In a few days the Ship-to-Shore messaging office where she works

was to re-open. She still works 40-hour weeks. One of our guides on the trip regularly used her as an example of the spirit of the people in small-town southern Louisiana. While criticizing the response of New Orleans to the disaster, he would call our attention to the people in towns like Delcambre, who with their gritty determination didn't need government welfare to get back on their feet.

We arrived at the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) donation warehouse on Saturday morning. We were quickly informed that an earthquake had ripped through Pakistan and that they would be sending supplies in a few days. Although we came intending to aid the victims of the hurricane, we were directed toward the needs of Asia and Africa's more destitute. Our work was to go through donations of school supplies and package them for shipment to Sudan and Afghanistan. By the end of the weekend, we had prepared and packaged supplies for 1,300 students.

Most of the SMU students who traveled on this trip will comment on that final number. There was a widely experienced new awareness of the breadth of need in the world, but also of the power of many people working together in small ways to ease that pain.

Should you like to be a part of the Spring Break service trip led by the Wesley Foundation, contact Eric Johnson at [ejohnson@smu.edu](mailto:ejohnson@smu.edu) by Nov. 18th or visit [people.smu.edu/Wesley](http://people.smu.edu/Wesley).

*Eric Johnson is a senior marketing major.*

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