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When Champagne Became French: Wine And The Making Of A National Identity (The Johns Hopkins University Studies In Historical And Political Science)



Synopsis

Winner of the Outstanding Manuscript Award from Phi Alpha Theta, this work explains how nationhood emerges by viewing countries as cultural artifacts, a product of "invented traditions." In the case of France, scholars sharply disagree, not only over the nature of French national identity but also over the extent to which diverse and sometimes hostile provincial communities became integrated into the nation. In *When Champagne Became French: Wine and the Making of a National Identity*, Kolleen M. Guy offers a new perspective on this debate by looking at one of the central elements in French national culture—luxury wine—and the rural communities that profited from its production. Focusing on the development of the champagne industry between 1820 and 1920, Guy explores the role of private interests in the creation of national culture and in the nation-building process. Drawing on concepts from social and cultural history, she shows how champagne helped fuel the revolution in consumption as social groups searched for new ways to develop cohesion and to establish status. By the end of the nineteenth century, Guy concludes, the champagne-producing provinces in the department of Marne had developed a rhetoric of French identity that promoted its own marketing success as national. This ability to mask local interests as national concerns convinced government officials of the need, at both national and international levels, to protect champagne as a French patrimony.

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Customer Reviews

In light of persistent international debates over whether and how nations should protect geographical indications, I found *When Champagne Became French* a useful read. Guy tells the story of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conflicts over the definition of champagne and, in part, the definition of Frenchness as something connected to but distinct from the different parts of France. The concept of terroir, something like the soul of the soil, that supposedly gives certain foodstuffs their unique qualities was much up for debate during the period, whereas currently the EU and France in particular give unquestioned legal protection to terms like "champagne." Guy points out that, although often understood as a fight between capital and labor, the at-times violent disputes between vine-growers and winemakers in the Champagne region were more complicated than that. Vine-growers in the core areas of the Marne were opposed both to bottlers who wanted to use grapes from other places to make champagne and to fellow vine-growers in those other places who benefited from that practice. Meanwhile, Marne bottlers also argued that the designation champagne should be legally protected, but they wanted to limit the definition to sparkling wine bottled in the area, regardless of the source of grapes. Guy's story thus highlights champagne as an industrial product - not just because it requires a second processing to add the famous bubbles, but also because its production and consumption were profoundly affected by changes in transportation and modern advertising that helped make champagne the beverage of celebration and of Frenchness.

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