

ARTS & LETTERS

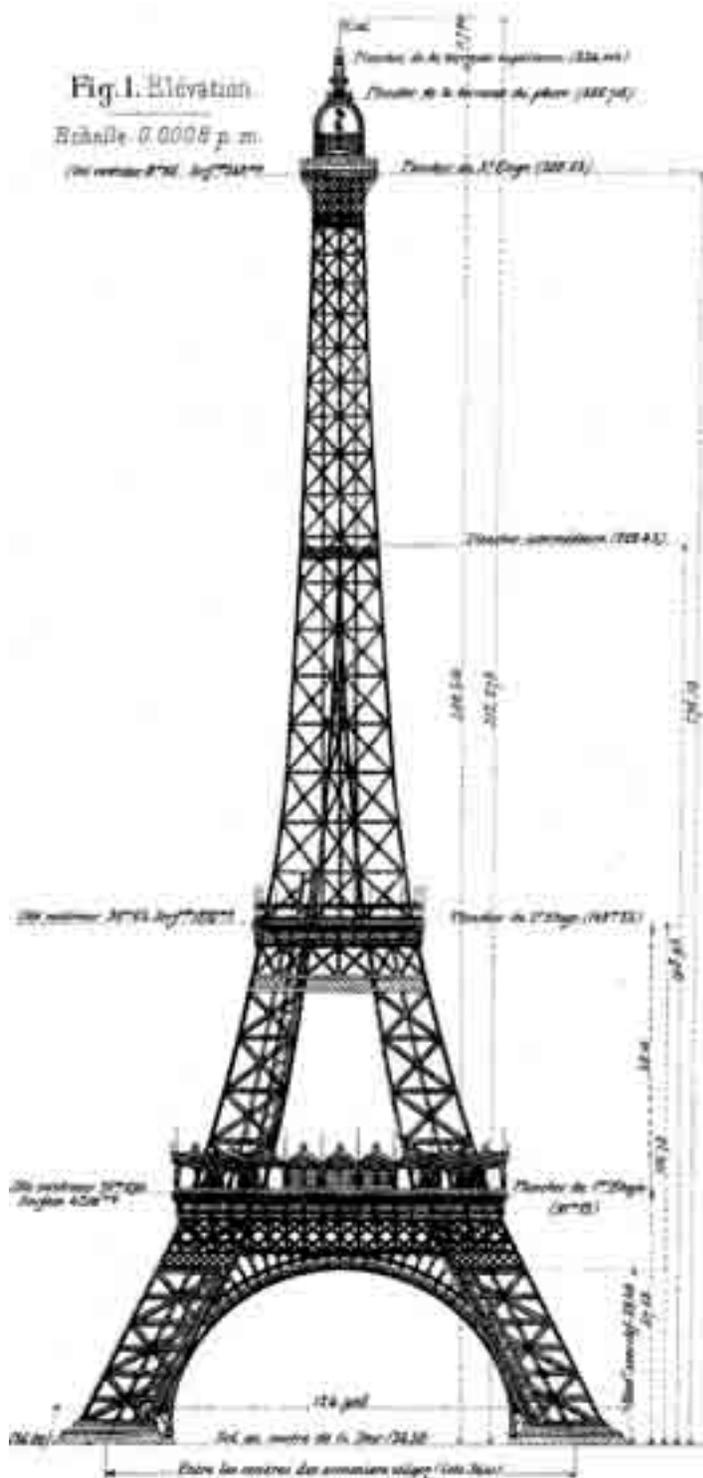
The Barbarous Black Skeleton

THE SOURCE: "Eiffel's Tower" by Frederick Brown, in *The New England Review*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 2008.

THE EIFFEL TOWER, UNIVERSAL symbol of Paris and destination of more than 200 million visitors, was almost as avidly hated by the French when it was built as it is beloved today, in part for a startlingly familiar reason—it was too American.

Gustave Eiffel reigned as one of France's premier engineers when French engineering set the standard for the world. Builder of soaring bridges, elegant train stations, and other works in iron from La Paz to Budapest, he was selected from 107 contestants to build a monument for the Paris Exposition of 1889. Before the Eiffel Tower had risen higher than its cyclopean feet, writes Frederick Brown, author of numerous books on French history and culture, a "Protestation des Artistes" was published in a leading newspaper. The 47 signatories attacked the tower as a "gigantic black smokestack beetling over Notre Dame . . . humiliating our monuments with its barbarous mass." So disgraceful was the tower that "even commercial America would not want [it] on its soil."

"Mercantile fantasies" of an engineer were fouling Paris, critics said. France was becoming "more American than America." Catholics called the tower the work of revolutionaries expounding secu-



Gustave Eiffel's plan for the tower crowning the Paris Exposition of 1889 was derided as too American, but it has become perhaps the most visited monument in the world.

larism with “phallic arrogance.” Nationalist zealots described the Eiffel Tower as a potential instrument of treason because optical telegraphy sent from its 1,000-foot heights could reach potential invaders in distant locales. Anti-Semites branded Eiffel a foreigner because his great-grandfather had emigrated from Westphalia nearly two centuries earlier. Foreigners, in the language of the time and place, meant Jews. Eiffel was not Jewish, but his tower was attacked as the product of a Jewish conspiracy that could be used by spies betraying Paris to “hordes from the East.”

EXCERPT

Farewell, Good Flick

I think that cinema has run its course. I think that in these hundred years the cinema really has been exhausted—as in the third law of thermodynamics, that the world is running down—everything has been tried, everything has been done, all that remains are a few technical changes. . . . What remains is repetition.

—PHILIP FRENCH, a British film critic who saw his first movie in 1937, in *Standpoint* (Feb. 2009)

The tower was twice the height of the world’s next tallest monument at the time, and held that record until the completion of the

Chrysler Building in New York City in 1930. A leading religious newspaper predicted that the hubris of an engineer who tried to be “the equal of He who made mountains” would be punished, and four years later Eiffel was caught up in a scandal surrounding the collapse of a French company that had set out to build a Panama canal. Eiffel’s reputation was damaged, and he was heavily fined, but he went on to a life of scientific experimentation in meteorology and other

fields. And, of course, he left his name on the monument that now represents the quintessence of all things Parisian.

OTHER NATIONS

Brazil’s Bold Experiment

THE SOURCE: “Brazil’s Bolsa Família: A Double-Edged Sword?” by Anthony Hall, in *Development and Change*, Sept. 2008.

ASIDE FROM MICROCREDIT—the system of small loans that won its creator the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006—few social initiatives have been embraced as enthusiastically as Brazil’s Bolsa Família (family grant) program. The payments of up to \$104 a month go directly to Brazil’s neediest, who earn less than \$73 monthly. The program covers 44

million people, or nearly one in four Brazilians.

The grants, which began as state-level initiatives in the 1990s and were expanded under President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, have helped to reduce

Brazil’s poor have enthusiastically embraced the Bolsa Família family assistance program.

poverty and inequality in South America’s largest country. They are made directly to mothers who agree to send their children to school, get them vaccinated, take them to health clinics, pay attention to proper nutrition, and take advantage of vocational training courses. Studies have shown that recipient families bought more food, educational materials, and children’s clothing than previously, and that school attendance among beneficiaries rose by 3.6 percent. Bolsa Família participants were more likely to be employed than other impoverished Brazilians, and their children were less likely to drop out of school.

So what could be wrong with a