

The legacy of the French

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You've probably noticed this yourself, but since September of 2001, there's been a resurgence of appreciation for the French here in the U.S.A. The most obvious way that this manifests itself is of course the colors of the French flag—Blue, White, and Red—absolutely everywhere. The second is renewed chatter about the values of the French Revolution such as representative democracy.

But amid all this excitement which the U.S. press calls 'patriotism' and the rest of the world calls 'nationalistic fervor', there's one more result of the French Revolution which is often overlooked: the Metric system. Instead we continue to use what is known as the Imperial system, in honour of our former benevolent ruler, the Queen, and her majestic empire, upon which the sun never set (until one day it did).

For those of you unfamiliar with the Metric system, let's review: the distance from the equator to the North Pole is 10,000 kilometers. A kilometer is 1,000 meters, and a hundredth of a meter is a centimeter. If we fill a cube which is ten by ten by ten centimeters with water, that water would weigh one kilogram. That same water boils at 100 degrees Celsius and freezes at zero degrees Celsius.

The fact that this is all based on things with which we have day-to-day experience, like water and the North Pole, makes converting from one thing to another easy. For example, a two liter bottle of Pepsi is, in metric, exactly two liters in volume. Pepsi, being mostly water, would boil at around 100 degrees, give or take, but it would leave a sticky residue on the pot so you're best off not testing this—and anyway, how would you know when it's boiling and not just enthusiastically carbonated? When driving, if the littler set of numbers on the speedometer tell you that you're going 100 kph, and you're at the Equator, then that means it'll be 100 more hours of driving at that speed before you reach the North Pole, assuming that you're going North, you take infrequent bathroom breaks, and road conditions are favorable in Saskatchewan.

So you see, conversions which would be intolerably annoying in the system of our proud nation's former oppressors are easy in Metric. For example, the British to this day weigh people in stone (which is the plural form of one stone). Converting from stone to a more familiar Imperial measure, such as degrees Fahrenheit, requires complex mathematics involving the speed of light (300,000 kilometers per second, or 186,282 miles per second) and squaring things—no easy task for those not trained in special relativity.

Hopefully, our country will one day finally shed this last vestige of our dark,

painful history, perhaps after Congress passes a bill to rename the Metric system as the Freedom system. Those who point out that Congress now lacks scruples (=1/24th of a fluid ounce) will be labeled as terrorists and indefinitely relegated to Guantanamo Bay, and the U.S.A. will finally be free of its chains, rods, gills, and fluid drachms.