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ABSTRACT

Studies in French Cultural and Intellectual History

by

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Four topics in the cultural and intellectual history of France are presented. The first is a comparative study examining the relationship between seventeenth-century philosophy and literature. It argues that elements of scientific rationalism found their way into contemporary literature, as evidenced in the work of Molière. The second essay examines the writings of Hippolyte Taine and of Gustave Le Bon. The paper argues that the synthesis of their ideas and the popularity of their writings helped to transform the nineteenth-century French passion for "scientificity" into an obsession with race. The third study explores early twentieth-century French perceptions of race and demonstrates how media images of colonial peoples profoundly influenced the way in which ordinary French citizens understood race and difference. The fourth and final paper examines the importance of the department store in French women's lives during the interwar period and argues that it served as the crucial link between their public and private spheres.
A Testimony to *honnêté* in the Burlesque: Molière and the New Scientific Rationalism
Pour moi, (...) je trouve que toute imposture est indigne d'un honnête homme.

Molière, Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme

Modernity, as it emerged during the course of the seventeenth century, was a project not only concerned with man's existence but also with man's power. The center for most seventeenth-century intellectual activity concerning the project of modernity was Paris. There, a group that came to be known as the Cercle Mersenne acted as the central point of communication and debate between some of the most luminous intellectuals of the day, including: René Descartes, Galileo Galilei, Pierre Gassendi, the Abbé Mersenne himself, and even Thomas Hobbes during his period of exile from England.

It soon became evident that many intellectuals were far from agreeing unanimously on issues or theories inherent in the new scientific rationalism. At a certain point, two principal camps became distinguishable: the libertins érudits, best symbolized by Descartes and his followers; and the honnêtes hommes, who counted among their ranks Pascal, Spinoza, and Leibniz. Libertins érudits were "free thinkers" who set out to upset the status quo and overpower political and "moral" institutions with their new rational science. Honnêtes hommes, on the other hand, were more concerned with order and synthesis, their principal (and often unsuccessful) goal being to reconcile scientific knowledge and rational thinking with the "moral" aspects of religion and with the important humanistic issues of political and social institutions.

Although two groups existed, the boundaries between the two were rarely impermeable, and these men argued over the implications of their thought as

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well as agonized over the larger issues of power, truth, morality and religion.

Despite the tremendous importance of scientific rationalism in modern thought, this essay is more concerned with seventeenth-century humanism than with seventeenth-century science as an embodiment of a discourse on power, truth, and morality. However, it also argues that the two were often inextricably linked. One of the most interesting examples of this unseeming "marriage of ethics" concerns the work of one of the seventeenth century's most brilliant contributor's: playwright and actor Jean-Baptiste Poquelin or, Molière. Modern dramaturgy often treats current debates and situations in satirical and allegorical forms, and many of Molière's comedies are perfect illustrations of this practice.

In the following pages, I will show that Molière was very much a man of his times: in a century obsessed with power and morality, he used his comedies to portray and often mock many of the struggles and personalities found in scientific and philosophical circles. The first part of this paper presents a historiographical debate that has waxed and waned over three centuries, apparently unresolved, as to whether Molière was actually a disciple of Pierre Gassendi and would have therefore had a concrete connection to Paris's elite circle of philosophical and scientific intellectuals. Next, I will consider the problem in substantive and interpretive terms. Regardless of a personal relationship with Gassendi, definite intellectual affinities did exist between Molière and his scientific and philosophic contemporaries. In particular, I will show that the ideas and men involved in the new scientific rationalism permeated Molière's comedy, *L'École des femmes*, with allegorical and satirical representations of power, truth, and morality, often mocking the very

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1 I have chosen not to address the issue of religion in Molière's work, which in itself merits a separate study.
personalities involved in these debates.

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Jean Poquelin was born January 15, 1622 into an established bourgeois family in Paris. His father was the tapissier du roi, or upholsterer to the King, a family business that had already spanned four generations. Young Jean's mother died in 1632, and his father found himself overwhelmed with the responsibility of raising several small children himself while running a thriving business, and thus less than three years after his wife's death his father remarried. Young Jean-Baptiste, as he came to be called (Baptiste was added to his name after the birth of a younger brother named Jean) was expected to move right into the family upholstery business, and he learned his father's trade along with other young apprentices.

The Poquelin family was on a decidedly upwardly mobile tilt, and the elder Poquelin wanted to give his first-born son a good solid education as he himself had lacked. It was in this spirit that Molière\(^2\) attended the prestigious Jesuit-run Collège de Clermont, later known as the Lycée Louis-le-Grand. The Collège de Clermont had devised a teaching methodology and curriculum quite different from most other institutions. In addition to instruction in the traditional disciplines of mathematics, physics, chemistry, and philosophy, the school placed a tremendous importance on performing activities such as dance and fencing, as the Jesuits strove to form honnêtes hommes or "universal men" of their students.\(^3\) Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that from a relatively early age, Molière associated performing with the concept of honnêté.

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\(^2\) For reasons of clarity and consistency, I will refer to Molière as "Molière" for the remainder of this essay -- although he did not take this name until he officially became an actor in 1643.

In these formative years, Molière became acquainted and friendly with the sons of noble and bourgeois families. Among his school comrades was Chapelle, né Claude-Emmanuel Lullier Chapelle, the illegitimate son of wealthy magistrate, François Lullier. Unable to provide his son with his name, Lullier compensated by giving him the means to make a name for himself and bestowed upon him a most erudite of tutors, his trusted friend and confidant, philosopher Pierre Gassendi.⁴

It is at this point that Molière’s education becomes a subject of heated historiographical debate. Many critics have written that a small group of Collège de Clermont pupils joined Gassendi’s tutoring sessions with Chapelle and included: François Bernier (a future friend of John Locke), Cyrano de Bergerac and Molière himself. Jean Léonor Grimarest, an early eighteenth-century Molièriste, began the debate in 1705 by underscoring not only the certainty that Molière had attended tutorials with his classmates presided by Gassendi, but also that the elder Cyrano de Bergerac had used these occasions to pass on the wisdom of his experience and intellectual insight to Molière.⁵ Moreover, Grimarest contended that thanks to his early exposure to rationalist thought with Gassendi, "Molière n’était pas seulement bon Acteur et excellent Auteur, il avait toujours soin de cultiver la Philosophie."⁶ In many ways and despite its anecdotal quality, Grimarest’s text appears as the most reliable account on this subject, given the fact that he was a contemporary of both Molière and Gassendi.

⁴ See Louis Simon Auger’s “Vie de Molière,” the preface to Œuvres de Molière, vol. 1 (Paris: Th. Desoer, 1819) LXXXVI-XCI.
⁵ See the reprint of Grimarest’s La Vie de Monsieur Molière (Paris: La Renaissance du Livre, 1930) 8-9. The work was originally published in 1705 and is authentically reproduced in the 1930 version.
⁶ Grimarest 67.
Voltaire wrote in 1739 that Gassendi had sensed Molière's genius almost immediately and actively included him in the tutorials. However, Voltaire began his book by explaining that he wished to write a short biography of a famous man unspoiled by "détails inutiles, & des contes populaires aussi faux qu'insipides," and he warned that he had purposely omitted the "Contes populaires touchant Chapelle & ses amis; mais je suis obligé de dire, que ces Contes adoptés par Grimarest sont très faux." Thus, Voltaire maintained that Molière did engage in tutorials with Gassendi, yet he emphatically discredited Grimarest in terms of other experiences among the pupils that this historian had described.

Louis Simon Auger, an early nineteenth-century critic and the editor of an 1819 series of Molière's complete works, also confirmed Molière's early contact with Gassendi. He maintained that Gassendi's philosophy was of immeasurable influence on Molière's thought and subsequent plays but admitted to a growing debate as to the truthfulness of biographies written on Molière's life. Specifically, Auger sided with Voltaire in condemning Grimarest's work for its inventiveness.

In the mid-twentieth century, a collection of essays was published subsequent to a 1953 conference entitled, "Journées Gassendistes," in which Georges Mongrédien addressed this still unresolved debate as to whether or not Molière had been a disciple of Gassendi. Here, Mongrédien discussed not only the issue of the integrity of Grimarest's testimony, but also the rather heated nature of this debate, which had gone so far as to call into question Grimarest's capacity as a historian beginning with Voltaire in 1739:

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7 François Marie Arouet de Voltaire, *Vie de Molière* (Amsterdam: Jean Catuffe, 1739) 6.
8 Voltaire 3, 22.
9 Auger LXXXVI.
Que vaut le témoignage de Grimarest? Jusqu'à présent, il faut bien avouer que Grimarest jouit d'une assez mauvaise réputation d'historien, en particulier chez les moliéristes; l'un des plus fameux entre eux, M. Michaut, ancien professeur à la Sorbonne, s'est acharné contre ce pauvre Grimarest... \(^{10}\)

Here, Mongrédiéan was referring to Gustave Michaut, an eminent early twentieth-century critic who had launched among the most vehement denials of Molière's personal connection to Gassendi, aimed primarily at the long-deceased Grimarest, having armed himself with a meticulous chronology of both the future actor's education and Gassendi's travels to and from Paris. \(^{11}\) Michaut argued that although Molière had begun his formal studies at the Collège de Clermont at a slightly older age than most of his peers, Gassendi did not come to Paris and live at the Lullier home until 1641 when Molière would have been nearly twenty-years of age --an age when sources show he had most certainly finished his primary education. Mongrédiéan, however, attempted to vilify Grimarest and restore his reputation as a careful, thorough, and respectable historian by closely examining his study of Molière's life with particular attention to the possible influence of Gassendi, as the title of his essay suggests. In the context of this debate, his words are worth reproducing in full:

\[
\text{Je dois dire que je ne suis pas tout à fait de cet avis, ni d'accord avec le maître de la Sorbonne, M. Michaut. J'ai pour ma part beaucoup étudié l'ouvrage de Grimarest. Je l'ai étudié ligne à ligne... En l'examinant de très près, je me suis aperçu de deux choses: la première, c'est que Grimarest a fait une enquête--contrairement à ce qu'on a dit et cru longtemps--une enquête extrêmement sérieuse.}
\]


\(^{11}\) To fully appreciate the acrimonious tone of this controversy, see the chapter entitled "L'éducation de Molière" in G. Michaut, La Jeunesse de Molière (Paris: Hachette, 1922) 57-95.
avant d'écrire Vie de Molière. (...) et j'ai pu démontrer- 
- ce qui est important--qu'il avait été en relations 
personnelles avec la fille de Molière. (...) l'oeuvre 
n'est pas si fausse qu'on l'a dit, car beaucoup 
d'actes authentiques d'archives ou d'actes notariés 
qu'on a pu retrouver au cours du XIXe et XXe 
siècles, quand on les met à côté du texte de 
Grimarest, le plus souvent viennent le confirmer. Et 
etant donné ce que je sais de Grimarest, la confiance 
que j'ai en lui,--avec toutes les limites et les réserves 
que comporte un livre écrit en 1705 par un homme 
qui n'avait pas de méthodes de chartiste, bien 
entiendu,--je pense qu'il n'a pas écrit ce paragraphe 
sans qu'il ait eût quelque chose de vrai.12

It would seem here that Mongrédien was defending Grimarest not only against 
Michaut but against other critics as well. In fact, in 1944, a series of letters 
written by Gassendi to François Lullier were published with an introduction by 
Bernard Rochot, yet another critic, who emphatically denounced the possibility 
of a an intimate circle of collégiens around Gassendi and chastised his fellow 
critics for having upheld this preposterous "légende:"

On sait que Grimarest, en 1705, a soutenu que 
Molière avait reçu les "leçons" de Gassendi avec son 
ami Chapelle. M. Michaut a fait justice de cette 
légende qui paraît cependant avoir la vie dure, et 
que la thèse peu heureuse de d'Andrieux a depuis 
essayé de revigorer.13 (...) Quant à réunir Gassendi, 
Molière, Chapelle, and Cyrano dans la petite maison 
du faubourg, c'est de l'histoire romancée!14

12 Mongrédien 129-30.
13 Here, Rochot is refering to the 1927 doctoral dissertation by Louis Andrieux, Pierre Gassendi 
pp. 62-71, where the author upheld the idea that Molière, if not directly, then at least indirectly was 
heavily influenced by Gassendi's philosophy and especially in term's of the latter's opposition to 
Descartes.
14 Rochot in Pierre Gassendi, Lettres familières à François Lullier (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. 
Vrin, 1944) XVIIIln.
Let us return to Mongrédiens earlier defense of Grimarest. Here, two words in his text are quite striking: *ce paragraphe*. It would seem then, that for more than 250 years, critics had been debating the veracity of a *single paragraph* written by a single historian. In this regard, we must look further than the concrete issue of Molière's physical proximity to Gassendi and the men of the *Cercle Mersenne*. There is an interpretive question here as well. The attention of several critics over nearly three centuries to the possibility of Gassendi’s direct influence on Molière concerns primarily the undeniable influence of the new scientific rationalism on Molière's humanism and *morale*.

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Like many intellectuals of his time, Molière found himself caught up in the complexities of Baroque thought, which saw a conflict of wills in two radically different orders: between man and God in the universe and between individuals in society. In such a conflict, order is only maintained either by violent destruction of one will by another or by violent sacrifice of one will to another. In either case, the Baroque dialectic is only resolved—indeed if it can be resolved—by force alone. In this way, the divine and the human are similar in that both are marked by violence and power.

The work of Descartes represents one attempt to find an alternative to this violent resolution. Descartes, in particular, thought that reason could sufficiently empower man as to master this dialectic, and he was intent upon "closing the wounds that have opened up between power and truth, between will and reason, to substitute the imperialism of truth for the imperialism of
force."\textsuperscript{15} Descartes was certainly not the only seventeenth-century philosopher to attempt such an operation—the work of Spinoza and Leibniz is also concerned with finding an alternative to the solution of violence, albeit in very different manners. Yet, "as for Descartes, whose work Molière can scarcely have ignored, the failure to close this breach is most obvious in his case."\textsuperscript{16} In fact, it is precisely because of his "obvious failure" that Molière took such an interest in him. Moreover, Descartes's claims to sovereignty, as well as his own inflated ego seem to have been particularly important targets for Molière. Descartes was dictatorial and absolutist on the level of truth: he insisted that his science is the only true science—it claimed to be divine in its own right. It was the intrinsic direction of Descartes's thought, as many of his opponents realized, to attribute to man the kind of autonomy, self-sufficiency, certainty, absoluteness -- in short, divinity—that traditionally belonged to God.

Molière was keenly interested in these Cartesian concepts of the autonomy of the self as well as the absoluteness of truth, and his comedies are both allegorical and satirical representations of seventeenth-century preoccupations with autonomy, power, and truth. However, in Molière's scheme of things, this question of man's autonomy, as raised by Descartes, could only be answered in social rather than in metaphysical terms. Specifically, many of Molière's comical characters display, in Lionel Gossman's words, "a falseness and imposture of the Self that proclaims its independence and indifference to others."\textsuperscript{17} Thereafter, it is a relatively small step from Descartes's autonomy to Molière's indifference.

\textsuperscript{15} See Lionel Gossman, \textit{Mon and Menge: A Study of Molière} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963) 168. I have relied on Gossman's insights in his chapter entitled, "Molière in his Own Time" for much of this section of the essay.

\textsuperscript{16} Gossman 169.

\textsuperscript{17} Gossman 178.
The notions of autonomy and indifference were important ones for seventeenth-century drama in general, and it is essential to step back and see how Molière's conception differed from that of his contemporaries. Returning to the problem of the Baroque dialectic, Pascal saw no viable alternative to the solution of violence and thus adopted a tragic vision. It seems reasonable to suggest that this Pascalian tragic view was dramatized by Corneille and to an even greater degree by Racine.¹⁸ In Corneille's plays, God is conspicuously absent, and his heroes are first perceived as autonomous and proud; however, this is an illusion. Once the myth is exploded, we are left with a delicate situation: Corneille's hero is "unmasked" because he is seen to be dependent on others—at the very least for confirmation of his own identity and power.¹⁹ He has tried to be autonomous and indifferent but has failed. Racine's heroes, on the other hand never even feign autonomy but rather are obsessed by a world that is indifferent to them from the start. The Racinian hero's passion arises out of the indifference of the outside world in which God is either absent or silent and culminates in tragic abandon.²⁰

If Cartesian autonomy led to disillusionment in Corneille and tragic abandon in Racine, it found its most remarkable evolution in the comic indifference of Molière. He too conceded that there is no foreseeable non-violent solution to the Baroque dialectic, but rather than unmask it (as in

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¹⁹ See, for example, Le Cid (Act II, Scene 2) and many other instances in Corneille's plays where, as Lionel Gossman, points out: "These superb heroes reveal the chasm of nothingness behind them each time they ask 'Sais-tu bien qui je suis?'" Quoted from Men and Masks, 189.

²⁰ This is obviously only an abridged version of the origins of Racinian drama, in the context of my discussion of Molière and one of the many common yet divergent paths he shared with Racine. For a thorough discussion of the social and intellectual origins of seventeenth-century French tragedy, see Goldmann, The Hidden God, esp. pp. 3-142.
Corneillian drama) or mourn it (as in Racinian drama), Molière mocked it. He succeeded in bypassing the intransigence of the Baroque dialectic by turning it into a spectacle, and interposed, as Gossman has suggested, "the comic resolution as a pseudo-resolution." In many of Molière's plays, indifference becomes comical, often to the point of farce. Characters profess to be indifferent to the world, but in fact the world is indifferent to them. Autonomy, then, becomes absurd. Self-glorification--a mockery of Descartes's unabashed ego and deification of man--becomes, in turn, utterly ridiculous.

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The idea of autonomy, dramatized and caricatured by Molière as indifference, is one ingredient of a broader seventeenth-century concern, power, which includes another related component, absolutism. Molière's *L'École de femmes* (1662), is an excellent example of the comic deformation of the Pascalian tragic spirit and acts as a burlesque of Cartesian absolutism. Arnolphe, the main character, desperately desires to be distinguished yet refuses to follow the normal standards for social advancement because he wants absolute--not relative--superiority over others to whom he professes to be indifferent. Here, Molière is clearly mocking Cartesian absolutism and autonomy. The play becomes a true comedy in that all attempts to reach absolute superiority backfire. By the middle of the play, after his conquest of Agnès has failed, Arnolphe's professed indifference is no longer credible:

Qu'à ma suppression il est ancré chez elle;  
Et c'est mon désespoir et ma peine mortelle.

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21 *Men and Masques* 238.  
Je souffre doublement dans le vol de son coeur,
(III, v, 984-96)

In many ways, Arnolphe can be seen as satirical representation of Descartes's notorious ego. Burlesque-style absolutism and vanity are what make him a laughing stock of society. Arnolphe suffers, and although events do justify his pain, his tragic vocabulary seems displaced and turns burlesque.23 His vanity is taken to the extreme and becomes a principal source of his suffering:

On veut à mon honneur jouer un mauvais tour;
Et quel affront pour vous, mes enfants, pourroit-ce être,
Si l'on ait ôté l'honneur à votre maître!
Vous n'oseriez après paroître en nul endroit,
Et chacun, vous voyant, vous montreroit au doigt.
(IV, iv, 1095-9)

Molière mocks another Cartesian concept in the narcissistic character of Arnolphe: the divinization and empowerment of man. As J.D. Hubert has explained, "Arnolphe, poussé par un étrange orgueil, cherche à se diviniser..."24 Arnolphe unwittingly puts himself in God's role, giving himself almighty powers to create for himself a woman in his own image:

Chacun a sa méthode.
En femme, comme en tout, je veux suivre ma mode.
Je me vois riche assez pour pouvoir, que je croi,
Choisir une moitié qui tienne tout de moi,
(l,i, 123-6)

24 "L'École des femmes, tragédie burlesque?" 51.
In short, Arnolphe believes that through his own intelligence (or pedantry), not only can he conjure up the perfect mate, but he can also extend this intellectual project to nearly all of life’s questions. There is a recurrent and dynamic antithesis throughout the comedy between the strength of indisputable evidence and Arnolphe’s complete stubbornness and refusal to see the truth or at least entertain another point of view. Arnolphe seeks to substitute a system of reasoning—an intellectual and predictable structure—for life’s spontaneity. In this sense, we come very close to an articulation of one of the most formidable Cartesian ambitions: the concept that man’s reason and intelligence can eliminate the accidental, unpredictable side of human life. Molière mocks this concept, transforming it into the burlesque with the horns that are both a symbol of Arnolphe’s vanity and a testimony to the role of the inevitable in life.

It is at this juncture that we must turn to Chrysalde, the voice of reason (as opposed to Arnolphe’s "Reason") who aspires not to dogma but to honnêté. Antoine Adam, a noted critic of seventeenth-century French literature, has argued that Molière’s own personal morale was one of authenticity and honnêté as demonstrated in the combat he waged against imposture and mendacity. In this sense, Molière the moralist speaks through the raisonneur or the honnête homme, a role to found in several of his plays.

The initial argument at the opening of L’École de femmes concerns Arnolphe’s explanation as to why he has chosen an ignorant girl as his future spouse and Chrysalde’s attempt to convince Arnolphe that a liberal education is the basis for honnêté in a woman. Enlightenment and honnêté thus go hand in

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25 Hubert 47-8.
27 Other raisonneurs include: Cléante in Le Tartuffe (1664) and Philinte in Le Misanthrope (1666).
hand: "Mais comment voulez-vous, après tout qu'une bête / Puisse jamais
savoir ce que c'est qu'être honnête?" (l, i, 107-8). Chrysalde's principal lesson,
however, is that "a man's ultimate fate in marriage" (and in life, for that matter)
"is beyond his control and that true wisdom lies in accepting 'les coups du
hasard'."28

Chrysalde's arguments on behalf of the uncompromising nature of the
accidental and unexpected belie the influence of Stoic doctrines. The
seventeenth century clearly saw in the honnête homme a revival of the Stoic
thought of Epictetus. Stoicism teaches to accept that which cannot be altered
and states that human beings must learn to live with a certain amount of
disappointment in life.29 We can easily see how such a philosophy was
incorporated into Pascal's thought, as demonstrated by Pensée 72:

Ne cherchons donc point d'assurance et de fermeté.
Notre raison est toujours décue par l'inconstance
des apparences; rien ne peut fixer le fini entre les
deux infinis, qui l'enferment et le fuient.30

For Pascal, man is an average being and destined to remain in the middle,
equidistant from two extremes. Yet this is an unbearable position because man
is in a state of constant tension.

Molière accepts one side of Pascal's philosophy in that "the rationalist
cannot understand paradox."31 However, Molière bypasses Pascal's inevitably
tragic vision by making a comic spectacle of what Lucien Goldmann has called

29 William S. Sahakian and Mabel Lewis Sahakian, Ideas of the Great Philosophers (New York:
30 Blaise Pascal, Pensées, ed. Léon Brunschvicg (1897; Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1925)
84.
31 Goldmann 207.
"the co-existence in the seventeenth century of an extreme individualism and a form of pantheism within a philosophy which admits only one real substance."\textsuperscript{32} From there, it is but a short step to Chrysalde's reflections on the intransigent nature of the accidental:

\begin{quote}
Que des coups du hasard aucun n'étant garant,
Cet accident de soi doit être indifférent,
Et qu'enfin tout le mal, quoi que le monde glose,
N'est que dans la façon de recevoir la chose;
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{IV, viii, 1246-9}

Later in his monologue, Chrysalde reveals the essence of his \textit{morale} (and ostensibly of Molière's own \textit{morale}), calling for prudence:

\begin{quote}
Si je n'approuve pas ces amis des galans,
Je ne suis pas aussi pour ses gens turbulens
Dont l'imprudent chagrin, qui tempête et qui gronde,
Attire au bruit qu'il fait les yeux de tout le monde,
Et qui par cet éclat, semblent ne pas vouloir
Qu'aucun puisse ignorer ce qu'ils peuvent avoir.
Entre ces deux partis il en est un honnête,
Où dans l'occasion l'homme prudent s'arrête;
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{IV, viii, 1262-9}

It is easy to see here how Chrysalde's monologue mirrors Pascal's and other \textit{honnête hommes'} pleas for moderation and synthesis within the dogma and absolutism of the new scientific rationalism.

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\textit{L'École des femmes} thus serves as a remarkable allegory of some of the

\textsuperscript{32} The Hidden God 29n.
seventeenth century's most prominent thinkers and perplexing philosophical matters. As I have shown in the preceding pages, rather than fall into the tragic vision of Baroque thought like his contemporaries Pascal, Corneille, and Racine, Molière chose to turn drama into a burlesque comedy of the personalities that debated and agonized over questions of power, morality, and truth in elite intellectual and scientific circles, most notably in France's Cercle Mersenne. Specifically, he juxtaposed the dogma of the libertins érudits with the humility of the honnêtes hommes.

It is therefore enigmatic that so many critics over nearly three centuries argued acrimoniously over whether or not Molière was a pupil of Gassendi. Molière, as an intellectual in his own right, was busy constructing his individual morale and in this operation, would most certainly have considered the philosophical debates around the project of modernity—the question of his time.

Molière's work in general and L'École des femmes in particular represent an excellent example of the new scientific rationalism's cross-over into seventeenth-century humanist literature. Although they were dissimilar disciplines, both science and the literature were essentially seeking the same goal: the construction of a discourse on power, morality, and truth.

Molière's moral philosophy deprecated excess of all kinds, even in virtue. He admired the honnête homme, the sensitive and sensible universal man who patiently wove his way through life's tangle of competing absurdities and unforeseeable shortcomings. Seventeenth-century Parisian society undoubtedly had much to learn from Molière's unswerving honesty. He was and remains a great writer largely because he attempted to see and portray man and his world as they really were and in a philosophy, which, despite all its comic pretenses, had no room for imposture or illusion.
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Mad Scientists: Hippolyte Taine, Gustave Le Bon, and the Invention of Crowd Psychology
Nous ne sommes pas les maîtres des pensées qui naissent en nous. Elles ne viennent pas de notre intelligence; elles sont des façons de réagir où se traduisent de très anciennes dispositions physiologiques.

Maurice Barrès

As French scholarship modernized over the course of the nineteenth century, "scientificity" became a primary concern and a determined objective. In terms of the historical profession, "scientific" history evolved into an interdisciplinary field as the influence of social sciences became increasingly important.

In the decade between 1885 and 1895, a new discipline emerged: crowd psychology in the "scientific" writings of Gustave Le Bon, and an entirely new relationship between history and the social sciences was created. Unlike other social sciences, crowd psychology thrived outside of the French academic establishment for it was embraced by a wide popular readership, already familiar with many of its themes, images, and ideological preoccupations. Long before 1885, both French historical and literary canons had already popularized the vision of the crowd, witnessed in the fiction of Émile Zola and in the histories of Jules Michelet and Hippolyte Taine. Acting as precursors to Le Bon's "scientific" study of the crowd, these men and their work aided immeasurably in shaping the national psyche that was recovering from a century of upheaval (most recently the Paris Commune) and nursing its wounds from the devastating military defeat of 1870. As Susanna Barrows has shown, Le Bon borrowed from the works of Taine, Zola, and other crowd visionaries and blended their ideas with contemporary ideological concerns to transform a
fragmented project, scattered across several disciplines, into a cohesive subject of study.¹

The invention of crowd psychology did not come about in a haphazard manner. The final three decades of the last century were not only years of political and ideological upheaval but also ones of remarkable progress in the natural sciences—a perfect environment for the allegedly scientific study of crowds. Among the most far-reaching nineteenth-century intellectual movements to emerge was Darwinism. Darwinist determinism and its hierarchies of biological and physiological nomenclature permeated France’s social, political, and intellectual milieus in profound and provocative ways. Both Taine’s historical writing and Le Bon’s crowd psychology were inextricably tied up in the quest for “scientificity” in general and with Darwinist thought in particular, both of which served to set them apart from earlier visions of the crowd by adding a distinctly (pseudo-)“scientific” quality to their texts.

This essay examines the complex and reciprocal relationship between the growth of a “scientific” history, on the one hand, and the emergence and popularization of crowd psychology on the other. The omnipresence of scientific achievement and determinist theories in France was intimately related to the new vision of the crowd and ultimately to the rise of a radical, right-wing nationalism in French life near the turn of the century. Moreover, the reflections of crowd psychologists and visionaries had profound implications for history, as "... their writings offer us a set of mirrors, refracting the world of popular protest in late nineteenth-century France."²

² Barrows, Distorting Mirrors, 5.
The essay begins with an overview of the nineteenth-century educational reform movement that initially sought to render the historical discipline more scholarly and more objective—in a word, "scientific"—by emulation of the German model as well as by incorporation of the more empirical social sciences. The next section examines the historical writing of Hippolyte Taine, where one finds the origins of a "scientific" history, using psychological approaches and mediations. Finally, the essay will examine Le Bon's "scientific theories" of race, leading to his invention of crowd psychology as a bona fide social science. Le Bon's "scientific" writings show important departures as well as continuities from those of Taine and his other predecessors and reflect the growth of a distinctively popular ideology. The rise of crowd psychology as a scientific discipline was clearly informed and manipulated by the natural sciences and by the nineteenth-century French obsession with "scientificity." Ultimately, "scientific" crowd psychology became instrumental in the foundation of a radical political ideology that readily embraced the elements of psychodrama in Taine's histories and of pseudo-scientificity and racism in Le Bon's new discipline, nourishing a right-wing, xenophobic, and militant nationalism. In strengthening the new nationalism, crowd psychology helped to set and intensify the tone for ideological divisions that were to dominate French intellectual and political life throughout the remainder of the Third Republic—culminating in the convulsion of the Dreyfus Affair before finding political legitimacy during the years of the Vichy régime.

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The nineteenth century was a time of remarkable intellectual achievement in France in several academic disciplines, not the least of which
concerned the reforms in history undertaken by a handful of scholars who wished to transform the French historical profession. These men wished to build a thoroughly scholarly and objective discipline, and in this endeavor, invoked the principle of a "scientific" history. As William Keylor has explained, such a standard did not yet exist in France:

[H]istory writing in the mid-nineteenth century remained an avocation of amateurs—politicians, lawyers, journalists, clerics, and other free-lance littérateurs and armchair philosophes who had neither received formal instruction in the methods of historical scholarship nor displayed the least inclination to employ such methods in their work.  

The reformers' model of "scientific" history was a highly professional one, emphasizing an objective and scholarly methodology. Scholars across the Rhine practiced such history, where, as Gabriel Monod observed, "No country has contributed more than Germany to providing historical studies with a rigorously scientific character."  

The principle of "scientificity" was hardly the invention of France's historical establishment alone. In the mid- to late nineteenth century, "scientific" was an ideologically-loaded term and in many ways, the "order of the day." These were the years of extraordinary scientific achievement in France, including the work of Louis Pasteur and Claude Bernard in medicine and Charcot's studies in psychopathology. A veritable "scientific revolution" was taking place in the mid- to late nineteenth century and began to restore France

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4 Academy and Community, 51. On p.43, Keylor makes the interesting point that France's eagerness to learn and benefit from Germany—"a foreign nation. . . . that continued to be regarded as a hereditary enemy"—was virtually unprecedented in France.
to what it perceived as its rightful forefront position in the natural sciences—a position, like in other learned milieus, that had been taken over by Germany by the mid-nineteenth century.⁵

"Science," thus, connoted achievement—most notably and specifically French achievement—to a country badly in need of a regenerative and optimistic spirit since the devastating defeat of 1870. In this manner, the historians' pleas for "scientific" reforms in the field of history came at an opportune time and would serve to assuage France's ailing ego in a number of ways. Historical reformers noted and subsequently took advantage of the increasing prestige of French scientific discoveries and of the pride that science elicited from the public. To make history even more "scientific," it began increasingly to borrow from the social sciences, most notably from sociology. More and more frequently, the word "science" worked its way into the reformers' lexicon and hence, "was indicative of their growing realization that their proposals for academic innovation were more likely to receive sympathetic consideration if they were clothed in scientific garb."⁶ The reformers believed that a new, scholarly historical establishment would improve the country's prestige in academic circles. Most important, a "scientific" historical establishment would serve to contribute to France's national recovery—a fierce objective of France's political leaders after 1870 and a directive with which historians were only too happy to comply. Monod, Lavisse and other educators and intellectuals firmly believed that the way to restore French spirit involved a revival of patriotism via "scientific" history.

⁵ For a thorough and fascinating study of this subject, see Claude Digeon, La crise allemande de la française, 1870-1914 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), esp. 48-113 and 319-450.
⁶ Keylor, Academy and Community, 57.
A growing dissatisfaction became perceptible in both Left and Right circles, as neither the well-worn principles of Jacobinism nor a conservative alliance with the Church were enough to erase the stain of Sedan.\textsuperscript{7} Philosophers, historians, social scientists, and various other academics all concerned themselves with the national psyche and were acutely aware of the need to find a moral replacement. The problem of maintaining social stability and at least the semblance of harmony continued to plague France throughout the early 1880s. The Boulanger crisis came as a wave—as opposed to a ripple—on the deceptively smooth surface of the Third Republic. For their part, the reformers of the historical profession and of education in general plausibly hoped and continued to proclaim that "a scientifically accurate reconstruction of the past grandeur of their fatherland" and thus a revival of a historically viable patriotism would accomplish this task.\textsuperscript{8}

Here the irony begins: what was originally intended to be "scientific," scholarly, and objective resulted in a decisively patriotic and emotional discourse. Initially, reformers may have intended merely to provide their fellow countrymen with "... the lessons of history to revive the flagging spirits of a vanquished people."\textsuperscript{9} However, several developments—both intellectual and political—gave an altogether new meaning to the term "scientific." It seems fair to say that the reformers perhaps never realized the precise direction in which "scientificity" was taking not only the French academic and political communities but the country itself as well.


\textsuperscript{8} Kaylor, \textit{Academy and Community}, 54.

\textsuperscript{9} Kaylor, \textit{Academy and Community}, 54.
Ironically, the emergence of "scientific" history began not with the younger historians of the reform movement but with an old-guard historian, Hippolyte Taine. Although he was aware of the new methodologies and applauded efforts to "scientifize" the study of history, his interpretation of "scientific" history went much further than that of the reformers. For one thing, he would not content himself with the simple reconstruction of past events or even limit himself to one time or place. Taine had a much larger project in mind that involved no less than a complete rethinking of French civilization and the formulation of general laws on the behavior of different groups and peoples. He professed that in order to understand collectivities and individuals, one must study the "les forces prémordiales," or, as stated in the introduction to one of his early works, "Trois sources différentes contribuent à produire cet état moral élémentaire, la race, le milieu et le moment." Of the three forces, race was undoubtedly the most important for Taine. Race was a set of innate and genetic dispositions which

...varient selon des peuples. Il y a naturellement des variétés d'hommes, comme des variétés de taureaux et de chevaux, les unes braves et intelligentes, les autres timides et bornées, les unes capables de conceptions et de créations supérieures, les autres réduites aux idées et aux inventions rudimentaires ...

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10 In fact, Taine's very conception of "scientific history" was markedly different than that of Monod and most of the other reformers. Moreover, this difference was among the reasons for their loss of respect for his histories. This is an issue to which I will return later in the essay.


comme on voit des races de chiens mieux douées....\textsuperscript{13}

Thus, Taine's scientific category of race extended itself to an entire array of physiological and psychological traits of a given person or set of people. As a "scientific" historian, Taine believed that history should be based on scientific psychological principles. At this juncture in his career (1863), he had already taken the initial step towards an alliance between history and psychology, and in a slightly later work, he reaffirmed his position with increased vigor. After having briefly introduced his initial two sciences, psychology and physiology, he turned his attention to:

Deux autres sciences, la linguistique et l'histoire.... En effet, elles sont des applications de la psychologie.... Bref, celui qui \textit{étudie l'homme} et celui qui \textit{étudie les hommes}, le psychologue et l'historien, séparés par les points de vue, ont néanmoins le même objet en vue; c'est pourquoi chaque nouvel aperçu de l'un doit être compté à l'acquis de l'autre. — Cela est visible aujourd'hui notamment dans l'histoire.\textsuperscript{14}

Here, Taine permanently forged the link between psychology and history and hence, between science and history. Psychology was, without a doubt, the basis of his "scientific" history. History, though, would carry the work of psychology even further, by applying a similar approach to collectivities and episodes of the past. Taine's revealing distinction between the scientific study of \textit{man} and the historical study of \textit{men} implies that, from this point on, he

\textsuperscript{13} Taine, \textit{La Littérature anglaise}, I: xxii-xxiii.

associated history with the study of groups. In this sense, by 1870, Taine had already set the stage for his future psychohistory of the French Revolution and the drama of the crowd.

Taine's interest in the psycho-historical study of groups led to his obsession with a scientific discipline still in its infancy: crowd psychology. In fact, during the period in which Taine was writing his multi-volume masterpiece, *Les Origines de la France contemporaine* (1875-1893), Gustave Le Bon was busy constructing his own theories about crowd behavior, to be published within a few years.  

15 Of course, Taine was not the first historian to write about the crowd in the French Revolution. Michelet had already popularized a heroic image of the crowd vanquishing a repressive and autocratic régime and embodying the myth of republican ideology. Many of France's conservatives, like Taine, felt that this republican myth of the valiant crowd had "survived the Second Empire and had resurged during the Commune revolt" and needed to be exploded "once and for all."  

The root of the problem, in Taine's scheme of things, ran much deeper than simply a benevolent and glorified vision of the violent Revolution. Michelet believed that the Third Estate had led the Revolution; for Taine, the Third Estate had lost control to the mob—the lowest scum of French society. This erroneous understanding of the Revolution stemmed from the Enlightenment philosophers'

15 By 1875, the year of publication of Taine's volumes of *La Révolution* (the first six volumes of *Les Origines de la France contemporaine*), Le Bon had already published a number of articles and books including, *La vie—Physiologie humaine* (Paris: Rothschild, 1872). At the time of Taine's death in 1893, Le Bon was in the midst of writing his first best-seller, *Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples* (Paris: Alcan, 1894) and had already published at least two other books: *L'Homme et les sociétés* (Paris: Rothschild, 1881) et *Rôle des juifs dans la civilisation* (Paris: Les Amis de Gustave Le Bon, 1888; reprint 1985). Note that the ostensibly Jewish-owned publisher, Rothschild, ceased printing his work after 1901. One is left to speculate as to the nature of this lattermost work—whose title obviously suggests anti-Semitism— and whether Rothschild had refused to continue publishing Le Bon's work thereafter.

naïve utopianism and from their ignorance of the psychology of collectivities.

The crowd, therefore, was the primary actor in Taine's Revolution, and in order to unmask its true, horrific nature—and hence, produce the veritable history of the Revolution of 1789—crowd psychology, as the latest development in the scientific study of man and society, was to play a major role in Taine's account. One of the primary theories of crowd behavior to be discerned in Taine's text is what Susanna Barrows has called the laws of mental contagion that emanate from the crowd and infect a given individual who, under "normal" circumstances, would be able to control his bestial instincts.\(^{17}\) In his chapter entitled, "l'Anarchie Spontanée," Taine invokes the laws of mental contagion to explain the frenzied eruptions of crowd violence. First, misery, Taine explains, has driven the peasants from the countryside to the capital:

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\text{Ils viennent de trente, quarante et soixante lieues, de la Champagne et de la Lorraine, de toute la circonférence du pays ravagé par la grêle. — Tout cela flotte autour de Paris et s'y engouffre comme dans un égout, les malheureux avec les malfaiteurs, les uns pour trouver du travail, les autres pour mendier, pour rôder, sous les suggestions malsaines de la faim et des rumeurs qui s'élèvent dans la rue. Pendant les derniers jours d'avril, les commis voient entrer par les barrières, venus de tous pays.}\(^{18}\)
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But misery elicits little pity from this writer. Even hunger, "les suggestions malsaines de la faim," is seen as something of a contagious pathology.

Moreover, to make matters worse, the situation in Paris is already approaching

\(^{17}\) Distorting Mirrors, 77.

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its saturation point:

— Affamés, bandits et patriotes, ils font en corps, et d’ormais la misère, le crime, l’esprit public assemblent pour fournir une insurrection toujours prête aux agitateurs qui voudront la lancer. Mais déjà les agitateurs sont en permanence. Le Palais Royale est un club en plein air, où, toute la journée et jusque bien avant dans la nuit, ils s’exaltent les uns les autres et poussent la foule aux coups de main.19

At last, events take an abrupt turn for the worse. Individuals contaminated within this collectivity take complete leave of their senses and abandon themselves to uncontrollable frenzy and violence:

Le moment fatal est arrivé . . . Comme un éléphant domestique qui tout d’un coup redeviendrait sauvage, le peuple, d’un geste, jette à bas son cornac ordinaire, et les nouveaux guides qu’il tolère juchés sur un cou ne sont là que pour la montrer; dorénavant il marche à sa guise, affranchi de leur raison, livré à ses sensations, à ses instincts et à ses appétits.20

Essentially, Taine depicts mob violence as the terrifying result of a step backward on Darwin’s evolutionary ladder of civilizations: "... l’organisation sociale rétrograde de plusieurs degrés ... chaque homme retombe dans sa faiblesses originelle."21 Not surprisingly, Taine had a predilection for comparing mob participants in Revolutionary protests to more primitive forms of life:

Et vous comprendrez comment du paysan, de l’ouvrier, du bourgeois, pacifiés et apprivoisés par une civilisation ancienne, on voit tout d’un coup sortir

19 Taine, Les Origines, I: 335.
Such lower forms of life extended themselves to the human race as well; as Barrows has pointed out, the dregs of society notably included women and alcoholics—"metaphors of fear" for Taine.\(^{23}\)

In this sense, the degree to which biological determinism influenced Taine is evident, as he clearly believed that such regressive eruptions of violence occurred more frequently and more naturally (although not exclusively) in these lower forms of life. France needed to control such primitive beings—even through despotic means, if necessary—to prevent them from seizing control. In short, their degeneracy was an instinctive trait: a disorder of a biological, scientific variety, as opposed to an acquired behavior pattern that could be unlearned.

As a student of determinist thought, he aspired to categorically devise and define scientifically proven laws of human behavior, based upon the three forces he had previously identified and applied to literary criticism: race, milieu, and moment. Armed with a degree in philology and having begun his publishing career as a literary critic, language remained among the most important features of his historical writing as well. Despite his expertise in the areas of language and literature, Taine ultimately saw himself as a scientist—the pathologist of French society—and in this role, he compared the

\(^{22}\) Taine, Les Origines, I: 351.

\(^{23}\) See Barrows, Distorting Mirrors, 43-92. For an illuminating discussion of these images in nineteenth-century French fiction, see Barrows, "After the Commune: Alcoholism, Temperance, and Literature in the Early Third Republic," in Consciousness and Class Experience in Nineteenth-Century Europe, ed. John M. Merriman (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979), 205-18. For reasons of space and continuity, I have chosen not to elaborate on the persistence of women and drunks in Taine's historical writing, as such a discussion merits an essay in itself.
pathological behavior of mobs with any number of physiological and psychological disorders. For example, metaphors of disease and poison permeate Taine’s text, as he diagnoses the pathological nature of the crowd:

En 1789, les bandes sont prêtes; car, sous le peuple qui pâtit, il est un autre qui pâtit encore davantage. . . . Gens sans aveu, refractaires de tout genre, gibier de justice ou de police, besaciers, porte-bâtons, rogneux, teigneux, hâves et farouches, ils sont engendrés par les abus du système, et, sur chaque plaie sociale, ils pullulent comme une vermine.24

Barrows has suggested that much of his obsession with sickness and bodily imagery was related his personal struggle with tertiary syphilis.25 Essentially, however, mob participants suffer from psychological rather than physical ailments, as "... un flot de haine monte de l'estomac vide au cerveau malade."26

This synthesis of science and language, of determinism, biology, and psychology formed the principal intellectual model not only for Taine but for many subsequent conservative and reactionary figures as well.27 It was a formula that Taine applied as easily to history as he had to literature. Les Origines de la France contemporaine went on to become the most often cited source for a generation of international luminaries, those whom Zeev Sternhell has called the generation of 1890, including Maurice Barrès, Edouard Drumont, and Georges Sorel in France; Paul de Lagarde in Germany; and Gabriele

25 See Distorting Mirrors, 82-3.
27 Barrows, Distorting Mirrors, 91.
d'Annunzio in Italy. In addition, Taine stood as the hero and model for all prospective crowd psychologists, from Sighele in Italy to Le Bon and Tarde in France, each of whom produced "scientific analyses" that reflect nearly all of the characteristics of his mentor.

It was Taine's writing style, full of hyperbole and melodrama, that made his major works so compelling. As Barrows has observed, Taine's appeal was his "literary license not scientific vigor. . . . Taine the scientist had appropriated the tools and the prerogatives of the littérateur." There was, however, a flip side to Taine's literary genius: it was precisely as littérateur that latter generations of historians denounced Taine. Having largely succeeded with their considerable reforms to the historical profession, many younger historians condemned Taine's histories precisely for what they judged as a lack of "scientificity." Yet Taine, as France's self-proclaimed pathologist, prided himself first and foremost on his "scientificity"—be it in literary studies or in history. He even understood human morality in terms of science, as "le vice et la vertue sont des produits comme le vitriol et le sucre."

The key to understanding this tension between the self-proclaimed inventor and emphatic advocate of French "scientific" history, on the one hand, and the hostility of a self-proclaimed (and government sanctioned) scientific academy on the other, is to be found in the ideological complexities of

29 Barrows, Distorting Mirrors, 85, 91.
30 Barrows, Distorting Mirrors, 87-88.
31 Taine, La Littérature anglaise, xv.
32 See Barrows, Distorting Mirrors, 90. Supported by several sources, most notably, Taine's own Correspondance (vols. 3 and 4), she writes: "... Taine later was to devote much of his energies to the reform of the French educational system and the establishment of a more modern and practical institution such as the École Libre des Sciences Politiques."
the Dreyfus Affair. The Affair (which occurred only two years after Taine's death) and in particular, Émile Zola's article, "J'Accuse," forced France's entire academic and intellectual community to reconsider their ideological predilections and to choose between the two camps, Dreyfusard or anti-Dreyfusard. With the notable exceptions of Alfred Rambaud and Ernest Lavisse, the majority of the French historical establishment rallied to the side of Republicanism and to Dreyfus's defense. 33 Taine's writings clearly represented the kind of reactionary sentiment and racist diatribe that had so disgraced the nation; understandably, historians and other Dreyfusards wished to distance themselves as much as possible from this stain on their honor. 34

Still, Taine's multi-volume historical masterpiece retained much of its popular appeal; at least 12,000 copies were sold before the turn of the century. 35 In many ways, Hippolyte Taine's psychohistory is considered the starting point of "scientific" crowd psychology in France, but with an important limitation. Taine, as France's self-appointed pathologist, preferred to diagnose rather than to analyze. This latter operation was to be the special contribution of Taine's fellow countryman and aspiring crowd psychologist, Gustave Le Bon.

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Le Bon was first and foremost a physician. Born in 1841 in Nogent-le-

33 Keylor, Academy and Community, 144-45.
34 Alphonse Aulard, the Marxist historian who occupied the Chair in the History of the French Revolution at the Sorbonne since 1885, went to great lengths to discredit Taine's history of the Revolution. See Aulard, Taine, historien de la Révolution Française (Paris: Colin 1907). Keylor writes that Aulard "even went so far as to decree that any candidate for the doctorate at the Sorbonne who dared to cite Taine as an authority on a question of historical fact would be disqualified," Academy and Community, 176. For a general overview of historians' receptions to Taine's writings, see Van Ginneken, Crowds, Psychology, and Politics, 49-51.
Rotrou (Eure et Loire), the young provincial came to Paris in 1860, quite content to leave his rural origins behind. In Paris, he studied medicine, and after six years at the Hôtel Dieu, received his license. Rather than practice, Le Bon decided to capitalize on his thorough scientific training and devote himself to research and experimental work in a variety of scientific fields. It was also apparently at this early point in his career that Le Bon chose to become a *vulgarisateur* or popular writer on science, but it soon became clear that he also yearned for recognition specifically from the scholarly scientific community.

The 1860s were a time of broad scientific horizons as the first of a long series of important discoveries had already begun. People renewed their faith in science as they saw the foundations of microbiology being laid under Louis Pasteur's tutelage and Claude Bernard's work in experimental physiology. As the work and prestige of French practicing scientists proliferated, it had, in Robert Nye's words,

> the effect of reinforcing a tradition in French thought which had never really weakened since its apogee in the eighteenth century, the marriage, so celebrated in the century of light, between science and philosophy.

Le Bon fervently embraced this "marriage," and his writings clearly demonstrate his belief in the necessary relationship between what he termed "science" and thought—in particular, determinism.

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37 This is a puzzling paradox in Nye's book. He plainly states that Le Bon made a conscious choice to become a popularizer of science but was embittered throughout his life that the scientific academy refused to take his work seriously.

38 *Origins of Crowd Psychology*, 8.
Le Bon’s early years in the capital were difficult and lonely ones, and Nye has argued convincingly that much of his "characteristic pessimism and his lifelong belief in determinism were... in large measure the product of the shock of his early years in Paris, where he gradually accommodated himself to the bitterness of frequent frustration." Then came the catastrophic events of 1870-71, which depressed him even further but spurred him and others to action. The specter of France's terrible military defeat, followed by a violent internal disorder woke many French intellectuals from their slumber. The overall reaction of the intellectual, political, and even scientific communities was one of anguish, and various explanations for the disasters, as well as proposed remedies, proliferated in the two decades following the humiliation at Sedan. Le Bon had already published a number of articles and books on his experiments, as well as several anthropological mediations on his travels that the academic scientific and medical establishments had all but ignored. The time was ripe, he believed, to do what the historical academy and the other social sciences were already doing under the cloak of "scientificity": treat the national psyche.

Le Bon's study of medicine and his decision to devote his life to research and writing stemmed from early interests in physiology, biology, and anthropology. His medical training coupled with ensuing travels to countries such as India, Arabia, and Nepal had contributed decisively to his intellectual development and had spurred a burning interest in the psychology and behavior patterns of different peoples. Finally, the tumultuous events of 1870-71 provided him with an optimal patient: France's "health" was in serious decline, and the country was in desperate need of treatment. All of these

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39 Nye, Origins of Crowd Psychology, 16.
factors, he believed, gave him valuable insights and knowledge as both a physician and a scientist and made him particularly well-endowed to cure the nation. Unlike Taine, Le Bon did not content himself to merely diagnose; he ultimately aimed to analyze and to treat. As he proclaimed in what was to become science's biggest best-seller:

Notre grand historien Taine n'a examiné la Révolution qu'en naturaliste, aussi la genèse réelle des événements lui a-t-elle souvent échappé. Il a parfaitement observé les faits, mais faute d'avoir pénétré la psychologie des foules, le célèbre écrivain n'a pas toujours su remonter aux causes.41

For Le Bon, France's ailment was one that required psychological and scientific treatment. In light of the nation's military defeat, decline in international prestige, and depressed national psyche, the French needed to be convinced and reassured of their superiority as a people, or, in Le Bon's scheme of things, as a race.

In this spirit, Le Bon published Les Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples (1894), which became an instant and lasting best-seller. It was in this particular book that Le Bon explicitly laid out his "scientific" concept of race for the first time. Like Taine, Le Bon saw history and science (race) as related disciplines primarily associated with collectivities:

Chaque individu d'une race a, lui aussi, une vie individuelle très courte et une vie collective très longue. Cette dernière est celle de la race dont il est né, qu'il contribue à perpétuer, et dont il dépend toujours. Nous devons donc considérer la race comme un être permanent, affranchi du temps.42

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41 Gustave Le Bon, La Psychologie des foules (1895; reedition, Paris: Félix Alcan, 1930), 60.
In the name of science, the entire book argues for a psychology of race—the premordial force that governs human behavior:

Peu influencés par l'intelligence, les peuples sont surtout guidés par les caractères de leur race . . . . C'est la race en effet qui détermine la façon dont les peuples réagissent sous l'influence des événements et des changements de milieu.43

Le Bon's personal contribution to "racial thought" was considerable, and in this work in particular, he suggested an evolutionary model for the "psychology of peoples"—what Robert Nye has called, "a nineteenth-century version of a racial typology."44

By the early 1890s, many of the Republican government's educational reforms had taken hold, embodying the common commitment of all Frenchmen to redeem the national honor lost in 1870.45 In this sense, the revival of patriotism had become the primary popular concern. Many academics and educators sensed this perceptible shift to a predominately psychological emphasis on nationhood. While Taine, for example, had put forth his classifications of race, milieu, and moment in an earlier work, Les Origines de la France contemporaine, particularly in its descriptions of Revolutionary crowds, focused primarily on collective psychology and mentalités. The result of this emphasis was reflected in the continuing sales of his masterpiece for many years after his death in 1893.

Such lessons were not lost on Gustave Le Bon. A sensitive barometer of public sentiment and fashion, he took careful note of the evolving interest in

43 Le Bon, Lois psychologiques, 2.
44 Origins of Crowd Psychology, 53.
45 Keylor, Academy and Community, 89.
"scientificity." Given that even the most "scientific" of the historians involved in the reform movement (begun twenty-five years earlier) had become self-proclaimed curators of the national honor, it seemed perfectly plausible that science and patriotism ran no risk of being deemed incompatible in either academic or popular circles. In an attempt to join the "scientific" concept of race with that of nationalism, Le Bon explained in his preface to the twelfth edition of Les Lois psychologiques des peuples (1916) that:

La race est la pierre angulaire sur laquelle repose l'équilibre des nations. Elle constitue la limite psychologique assignée aux ambitions des conquérants, aux rêves d'hégémonie qu'ils peuvent former.46

Le Bon was only partially correct in his assessment: the scientific and scholarly establishment looked down their noses at his new book, but the public ate it up.47

The operating principle behind Le Bon's "scientific" racial theory put forth in the book was none other than Darwinist determinism. Le Bon's version of determinism drew from both biology (race) and psychology (nationalism).48 In his own words:

[I]l y a de grandes lois permanentes dirigeant la marche de chaque civilisation. De ces lois permanentes, les plus générales, les plus

46 Le Bon, Lois psychologiques, 3.
47 The book was an instant and lasting bestseller. By 1927, it was in its eighteenth French edition and was eventually translated into sixteen foreign languages. The first American edition was published in 1898 by Macmillan Co.. Le Bon had ostensibly already made a name for himself in the United States with, La Psychologie des foules (which must have been translated before Les Lois psychologiques des peuples), as the title page of the Macmillan edition reads, "By Gustave Le Bon, author of The Crowd."
Determinism, this ambitious man fully understood, synthesized into one compact and highly readable book on science, would convince the French of the need for preservation of their scientifically "superior race." Scientifically "superior races" were "civilized" ones, namely the white peoples of Europe and North America. "Inferior races" covered virtually the rest of the world, and he had particular disdain for those whom he labeled "latins." Le Bon's studies of different peoples cover most of the world, but his objective remained, geographically-speaking, quite limited: each example highlighted in his book was to be considered with respect to France. For example, it would be suicidal to allow in France the races currently immigrating to the United States, where they were posing tremendous problems:

Actuellement les États-Unis sont soumis à une gigantesque invasion d'éléments inférieures qu'ils ne veulent ni peuvent s'assimiler... Ils [the immigrants] ne se donnent même pas la peine d'apprendre la langue de leur nouvelle patrie et y forment de simples colonies, at par conséquent des ennemis.

L'Amérique n'est pas seule menacée par de telles invasions. La France l'est également.

However, the degree to which a "superior race" may be threatened depends on the race of the "invaders":

C'est aujourd'hui vers les États-Unis d'Amérique que se dirigent comme d'un commun accord ces

49 Lois psychologiques, 19-20.
50 Le Bon, Lois psychologiques, 138-39, 140.
nouveaux Barbares, et c'est par eux que la civilisation de cette grande nation est sérieusement menacée.

Tant que l'immigration étrangère a été rare, et composée surtout d'éléments anglais, l'absorption a été facile est utile. L'invasion des étrangers est plus redoutable encore du fait que ce sont, naturellement, les éléments inférieurs....

What is remarkable in this work is Le Bon's surreptitious introduction of a romantic notion to his "scientific" category of race: a certain "soulfulness" or "l'âme des peuples." For Le Bon, the "soul" of a people or race was the notion of a "unified racial mind." Ever conscious of his image, Le Bon always sought terminology with the widest possible appeal. The soul metaphor was a particularly brilliant example of Le Bon's sensitivity to language. In one word he managed to convey both a scientific connotation and a romantic sentiment, giving him near universal appeal—at least among the public-at-large. The soul of a people or race manifested itself in many ways; yet, "c'est surtout dans les institutions politiques que s'exprime le plus visiblement la souveraine puissance de l'âme de la race." This was a concept that he was to explore even further in his next book on the behavior of collectivities, announcing the official birth of crowd psychology as a "scientific" discipline.

In advocating a "scientific" view on the formation of different races, Les Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples remains largely a book on the history of their evolution. In this sense and given the book's enormous success, Le Bon's racial thought had profound implications for popular

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51 Le Bon, Lois psychologiques, 138, 140.
52 Nye, Origins of Crowd Psychology, 61.
53 Le Bon, Lois psychologiques, 116.
conceptions of history. In many ways, he picked up where Taine left off, taking the concept of scientific history further than ever before and certainly out of the realm of "scientificity" as envisioned by the original Republican reformers of the historical profession.

Ironically, the republican political system that Le Bon disdained, by virtue of its emphasis on égalité, was furnishing him with an excellent market for his products. In 1894, the year in which Le Bon published the first of four best-sellers, Europe's only republic was entering its nineteenth year, and the French had been enjoying a virtually unimpeded freedom of the press. Encouraged by the resounding popular success of Les Lois psychologiques des peuples, Le Bon set to work to expand his determinist theories of the crowd, and this project was to become one of the all-time, best-selling books in science. La Psychologie des foules represents a synthesis of all of Le Bon's scientific mediations thus far: race, biological determinism, anthropology, and even the power of the unconscious, all applied to a "scientific" study of the psychology and behavior of the crowd. Le Bon argues for a bona fide discipline dedicated to the study of crowds, given that there exist undisputable, "scientific" laws of crowd behavior that take over in special situations:

La personnalité consciente s'évanouit, les sentiments et les idées de toutes les unités sont

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54 Nye, Origins of Crowd Psychology, 59.
55 Nye, Origins of Crowd Psychology, 3.

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orientés dans une même direction. Ils se forment une âme collective, transitoire sans doute, mais présentant des caractères très nets. La collectivité devient une foule psychologique. Elle forme un seul être et se trouve soumise à la loi de l'unité mentale des foules.57

Once again, he applies the same metaphor of the soul to crowds, as he had to races. He admits, however, that this is a complex and nuanced concept:

L'âme des foules n'est pas facile à décrire, son organisation varient non seulement suivant la race et la composition des collectivités mais encore suivant la nature et le degré des excitants qu'elles subissent.58

Le Bon explores many types of collectivities and their behavior and makes dogmatic assertions, such as: "La foule est toujours intellectuellement inférieure à l'homme isolé" and "... les foules ne sont pas influençables par des raisonnements."59 Many of his "scientific" pronouncements on the crowd involve his typical racist dogma, and he seems, once again, to have particular disdain for "latin" peoples:

Dans l'irritabilité des foules, leur impulsivité et leur mobilité, ainsi que dans tous les sentiments populaires que nous aurons à étudier, interviennent toujours les caractères fondamentaux de la race. Ils constituent le sol invariable sur lequel germent nos sentiments ... La différence entre une foule latine et une foule anglo-saxonne est, par exemple, frappante.

L'autoritarisme et l'intolérance sont généraux chez

57 Le Bon, Psychologie des foules, 12. Emphasis in the original.
58 Le Bon, Psychologie des foules, 13.
59 Psychologie des foules, 20 and 50 respectively.

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toutes les categories des foules, mais il s'y présentent à des degrés fort divers; et ici encore reparaît la notion fondamentale de la race, dominatrice des sentiments et des pensées des hommes. L'autoritarisme et l'intolérance sont surtout développés chez les foules latines. 60

Never forgetting for a moment his role as physician, Le Bon diagnoses human instinct within the mob as automatically bestial: "Isolé, c'était peut-être un individu cultivé, en foule c'est un instinctif, par conséquent un barbare." 61 Moreover, his descriptions of the individual within a crowd take on the highly clinical vocabulary of a pathologist, when he writes that:

. . . . évanouissement de la personnalité consciente, prédominance de la personnalité inconsciente, orientation par voie de suggestion et de contagion des sentiments et des idées dans un même sens, tendance à transformer immédiatement en actes les idées suggérées, tels sont les principaux caractères de l'individu en foule. 62

Here and elsewhere, one sees the influences of Taine's laws of contagion, especially when Le Bon observes that:

Chez une foule, tout sentiment, tout acte est contagieux à ce point que l'individu sacrifie très facilement son intérêt personnel à l'intérêt collectif.

Pris séparément, les hommes de la convention étaient des bourgeois, aux habitudes pacifiques. Réunis en foule, ils n'hésitèrent pas, sous l'influence de quelque meneurs, à envoyer à la guillotine les individus les plus manifestement innocents; et contrairement à tous leurs intérêts, ils renoncèrent à

60 Psychologie des foules, 25 and 39 respectively.
61 Psychologie des foules, 19.
62 Le Bon, Psychologie des foules, 19.
leur inviolabilité et se décimèrent eux-mêmes.⁶³

Le Bon had at least three significant examples of crowd behavior to draw upon: the Paris Commune, Boulanger's attempt at a mass mobilization, and the current nationalist and anti-Semitic hysteria over Dreyfus. Only the Boulanger example elicits discernible references in La Psychologie des foules, but it is evident that all of these incidents were part of a "collective learning process of ceasarist and nationalist movements, ultimately leading them away from a Bonapartist to a protofascist formula of mass mobilization."⁶⁴ According to Eugen Weber, the Boulangist Paul Déroulède's Ligue des Patriotes was "...the first of many movements organized... for the mobilization and manipulation of crowds outside the established structure of parties and parliament, indeed, even against them."⁶⁵ With this in mind and with the tumultuous events of the Dreyfus Affair unfolding as he wrote, Le Bon observed firsthand the Far Right's manipulation of crowds and even foresew the national-socialist and fascist techniques of crowd exploitation and seduction yet to come:

Connaître l'art d'impressioner l'imagination des foules c'est connaître l'art de les gouverner.⁶⁶

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The waning years of the last century were precarious and volatile ones for the Third Republic, a period that Robert Nye has designated "the crisis of

⁶³ Psychologie des foules, 17 and 20 respectively. My emphasis.
⁶⁴ Van Ginneken, Crowds, Psychology, and Politics, 158. Also see Sternhell, La Droite révolutionnaire, 28, 35-39.
⁶⁶ Psychologie des foules, 55.
mass democracy." It is against this backdrop of French political and ideological unrest that one must analyze the implications of *La Psychologie des foules* and consider the importance of the first "scientific" book on crowd psychology. Once published in 1895, Le Bon's work took on an authoritative quality that no one, not even the elite scientific academy, could ignore any longer. Le Bon, as the supreme popularizer of science, fostered an ideology whose appeal was simultaneously popular and intellectual, despite the scientific and medical academies' refusal to admit him to their ranks. His writing was perhaps not of a standard that they respected, but Le Bon's reactionary, anti-egalitarian discourse and racist diatribe echoed the sentiment a generation of European intellectuals and leaders, giving rise to what Zeev Sternhell has called "organic" nationalism. In his smooth yet nuanced prose, Le Bon transformed the French passion for "scientific" into an obsession with race.

Yet he could not have accomplished this metamorphosis on his own. The reactionary intellectual tradition of "scientific" writing began with Hippolyte Taine and his horror of Revolutionary mobs. Having diagnosed the pathology of the crowd and put forth his formula of *race, milieu, and moment*, Taine acted as the necessary precursor to Le Bon's racist dogma and "scientific" analyses of crowd behavior. In his volumes on the Revolution, Taine the scientist dissected Jacobin patriotism, making room for the great experiment in a new nationalism. As a historian, he has left his mark as the architect of modern

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67 They had no choice but to at least acknowledge his immense popular success, yet they rejected his last formal bid for membership to the Academy of Science in 1921—a rejection that embittered Le Bon for the rest of his life. He even began showing clear signs of paranoia after this crushing disappointment. See Nye, *Origins of Crowd Psychology*, 155-57.

68 Even if the elite scientific communities had contempt for him, intellectuals and notables in other disciplines, such as Maurice Barrès, took inspiration from his work and ideas. See Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire*, 147-54.
French right-wing historiography.69

Historically a vehicle of the Left, the crowd, shaped by Taine's and Le Bon's insights, became a instrument of the Radical Right. Both of these writers helped to create a place on the Right for many conservatives, both popular and intellectual, who would have otherwise found themselves marginalized once clerical royalism became obsolete. Le Bon's "scientific" studies on the evolution of races and on the psychology of the mob attested to a new era of crowds in France and other European nations. Authoritarian, "organic" nationalists, who had already discovered the potential of caesar-type crowd mobilization during the Boulanger episode, discovered the power of racist agitation and "organic" nationalism during the Dreyfus Affair. Such exhibits of behavior exploited suspicion and hostility—sentiments that crowd psychology had "scientifically" proven more powerful than those of solidarity and tolerance. Hence, "science" had become a means of exploitation, on the one hand, and a path towards exclusion on the other.

As Hannah Arendt observed, the events in fin-de-siècle France acted as a blueprint of what was to come thirty and forty years later in other European countries.70 Le Bon's frightening prediction ultimately came true. Twentieth-century fascism offered an enticing vision of hegemony and racial superiority to crowds' imaginations and won in return their loyal obedience.

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69 Barrows, Distorting Mirrors, 83.
I: Primary Sources


II: Secondary Sources


From Battlefield Memories to Imperial Myth:
French Perceptions of Colonial Africans, 1914-1931
In 1931, France's Minister of Colonies published a book that was to have remarkable commercial success. Albert Sarraut's *Grandeur et servitude coloniales* is, without a doubt, a discursive celebration of French colonialism stressing the "noblesse et ampleur de la tâche que la colonisation s'est tracée...."1 By that same year, 1931, France's empire had reached its apex, covering in excess of 10 million square kilometers and incorporating over 50 million inhabitants.2

The book's tone is undeniably patronizing and self-aggrandizing. Sarraut celebrates French imperialism as a humanitarian, republican, and civilizing *oeuvre*. While he acknowledges the past glory of Asian and other "Oriental" civilizations, Sarraut deplores the fact that "les races noires de l'Afrique se presentent les mains à peu près vides devant la confrontation europénne. Leur contribution au progrès est pour ainsi dire inexistant."3 Interestingly enough, he denies that French colonial discourse is a dogmatic one. Imperialist dogma, he insists, is a thoroughly Anglo-Saxon invention, which characterizes both past and contemporary Anglo-American systems of oppression. Instead of these racist attitudes, France brought a civilizing presence and civilized culture to its colonies, particularly to black Africa where, as Sarraut asserts, episodes of African barbarity and savagery continue to haunt the indigenous memory.4

Sarraut's principal objective here is to forge an unbreakable link between republican nationalism and colonial imperialism in order to create a

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2 This latter statistic refers to people living under French authority outside the hexagon. Combined with the metropolitan population, most sources cite the total population of France at approximately 100 million in 1931.
"mythe colonial." Another way of expressing his purpose is as the attempt to extend "l'idée nationale" to "l'idée coloniale." *Grandeur et servitude coloniales* marked the culmination rather than the introduction of this attempted synthesis. Already by the early 1920s, Sarraut and other proponents of colonialism were lobbying for the application of a program of "propagande voulue" to inform and entertain French youth who were sadly ignorant of France's colonial empire.5 Sarraut and pro-colonialists embarked on an ambitious and concerted effort to raise public consciousness with regard to French colonial possessions and territories in Africa, the Far and Near East, the Caribbean, and Oceania.

Their point of departure was the memory of colonial participation in the First World War. As one prominent pro-colonial authority asserted, "La France au cours de cette guerre a appris qu'elle a des colonies."6 From the end of the Great War until the outbreak of World War II, French pro-colonialists7 used the popular memory of the "indigenous troops" fighting for France to increase public awareness of and appreciation for France's faraway colonies. During this period, colonial sympathizers produced an unprecedented quantity of pro-colonial—or at least what they perceived to be pro-colonial—propaganda and iconography. Hence, the "mythe colonial" represents pro-colonialists' attempted construction of an avowedly pro-imperialist national identity, which began and grew in the interwar period.

Whether or not their attempts were successful on the one hand, and whether the French public was convinced of the importance of France's colonial

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7 I am using the term "pro-colonialist" to describe French politicians and authorities of the interwar period who were dedicated to increasing public awareness of and support for the colonial empire.
mission on the other have become objects of heated historiographical debate since the 1960s. The purpose of the present essay is not to offer a single argument for the effect of French colonial propaganda on the metropolitan French conscience and imagination. Rather, it is an attempt to see how a series of discourses about colonial peoples emerged between 1914 and 1931 and to survey a number of the representations these discourses formed. In doing so, I will concentrate on three principal phases of colonial propaganda: during the Great War itself, during the 1920s, and during the 1931 Colonial Exposition.

In the enigmatic emergence and transformations of French colonial representation from 1914 to 1931, conventional historical methods are problematic because, as we will see in the following pages, ambiguities, ambivalences, and contradictions abound. Yet, as the work of Michel Foucault has shown us repeatedly, we stand to learn much from where continuities and causal relationships break down. "Foucault offers historians," says one critic, "a new framework for studying the past (knowledge/power), a new set of methods for doing so (archaeology/genealogy), and a new notion of temporality (discontinuity)." In many cases, ambivalence and ambiguity provide more interesting and far more ambitious historical problems than does certitude. Arguably, Foucault has given us the means to approach these kinds of predicaments we may encounter in the field of history, such as in the example of French colonial discourse.

As a novel type of cultural history, Foucault's work deals with "discontinuities, groups of notions, series, discourses." Foucault's idea of a power/knowledge nexus, embedded and revealed in layers of discourse, may

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provide a useful way into the ambiguities and paradoxes of French colonial representation, where we cannot neatly label and categorize the different types of messages and various forms of propaganda into logical or temporal schemas. As we will see, assorted representations of Africans and of other colonial peoples undoubtedly held different images and conveyed disparate messages for numerous French observers at different times. As Foucault reminds us, "What one is seeing, then, is the emergence of a whole field of questions...." ¹⁰

Foucault’s notion of genealogy may provide us with a helpful set of tools with which to probe the inconsistencies of French colonial discourse and representation, and hence, may help us glean important insights. "Genealogy," Foucault tells us, "does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things." ¹¹ In one sentence, Foucault managed to capture the dual problem of rupture and memory. Perhaps if there is little continuity in the body of pro-colonial French discourse, that is because the attempt to construct a continuous colonial memory in the minds of ordinary French people was in itself fragmented.

The study of such modes of representation cannot take traditional forms of historical inquiry and interpretation, for language and imagery are neither events nor "stable objects, they are discourses." ¹² Instead, we must adopt the tools of the genealogist who, in Foucault’s scheme of things, "must be able to recognize the events of history, its jolts, its surprises, its unsteady victories and

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unpalatable defeats—the basis of all beginnings, atavisms and hereditics."¹³ For the study of French colonial discourse and its attempt to create a nationalist myth with the idea of "la Plus Grande France," Foucault's words are welcome advice. As the following pages will demonstrate, such a study is replete with "jolts" and "surprises."

In this sense, the subsequent essay is an effort to work through the problematic construction of a colonial identity, as well as an occasion to examine the discursive forms and imagery colonial sympathizers presented to the metropolitan French public in these years. Whether or not the pro-colonialists' attempts to convert French metropolitan citizens to a colonial "consciousness" were successful concerns me far less than the nature of those attempts. The postwar efforts of pro-colonial authorities, like Sarraut, to popularize the "mythe colonial" met with questionable success because such efforts were based in large part on incompatible memories of colonial soldiers during the Great War. In constructing these colonial identities, the popular press had put forth images of colonial soldiers during the war that were inconsistent with each other. French people of all ages and walks of life thus found themselves confronted with these differing and often contradictory images of colonial peoples, which continued for the next two decades. If critics still argue today about the efficacy of such colonial propaganda, it is in large part because the propaganda itself sent mixed messages to its perceivers. In this sense, the dominant socio-political discourse ended up deconstructing itself, and a highly problematic relationship emerged between the pro-colonial myth of "la Plus Grande France" and the popular memory of the war.

¹³ "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History," 80.
I: The Depiction and Memory of African Soldiers in World War I

Historians' treatment of the French colonial period, particularly during and in the aftermath of World War I, has made this a controversial chapter in French history. Diverse scholars have interpreted the same evidence in different ways. Some contend that thanks to the Great War, French people were finally convinced of the necessity and importance of their empire. Raoul Girardet writes that

[l]'histoire morale de la France des années 1930 reste dominée, presque écrasée par le souvenir de la première guerre mondiale. Parmi les facteurs qui ont le plus contribué à élargir la conscience coloniale du public français, à stimuler et à développer l'intérêt et l'attachement porté aux pays d'outre-mer, il faut sans doute tenir compte d'abord du rôle considérable joué par les colonies, entre 1914 et 1918, au service de l'effort de guerre allié.14

Approximately 600,000 soldiers and 200,000 laborers from French possessions in Africa, Asia, and Oceania contributed to the French effort in the Great War. Some 75,000 of these men died for France—a country they barely knew.15 One critic has even estimated that colonial contingents formed a full

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15 There is much disagreement as to the number of people who actually came to Europe from French colonies and territories to participate either directly (in combat) or indirectly (as imported labor) during the Great War. Various historians and social scientists have estimated a total that ranges anywhere from 200,000 to 1 million. Estimates for war dead among colonial soldiers and labor also differs markedly, ranging from 70,000 to more than 200,000. The statistics I have offered here come from Charles-Robert Ageron, who documents his numbers form the French Ministry of War. However, Raoul Girardet cites 206,000 deaths among colonial troops in L'idée coloniale en France 1871-1962 (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1972), 118.
15% of the total number of French troops between 1914 and 1918. These troops played important roles in many of the war's bloodiest conflicts, notably the Battle of the Marne (1914) and the Battle of the Yser (1914). Colonial troops were also decisive in the outcome of Verdun, by virtue of their successful capture of the Fort of Douaumont in 1917.

French journalism seems unanimously to praise their role. Already in the early stages of the war, some of the most widely read French popular press lionized the participation of colonial soldiers. In August 1914, L'Illustration trumpeted the arrival of troops from different parts of Africa. A photograph of a train carload of "tirailleurs indigènes," adorned with traditional képis, are holding out cups to a white-clad French nurse or volunteer. The caption, "La France Entière Passe" pledges solidarity, while the accompanying text, on the other hand, emphasizes African otherness:

.....les tirailleurs indigènes, dans les rangs desquels marchaient coude à coude de blonds fils de la metropole...des Berbères au teint presque aussi clair, des Arabes au nez aquilin, et jusqu'à des noirs du plus bel ébène, enfants du torride Soudan.17

Such discourse is at the same time patronizing and celebratory in its treatment of Africans. A week later, the magazine features a drawing of a group of Zouaves (Muslim soldiers from Algeria), in a lively provincial café or restaurant.18 The Zouaves are mingling with the "locals," bouncing French

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17 L'Illustration, August 22, 1914.
18 L'Illustration, August 29, 1914.
babies on their laps. The drawing depicts the Muslim soldiers in exotic, Arabian Nights style flowing trousers, large cummerbunds, and short stocking caps with tassels. A mere three weeks later, L'Illustration features a drawing of dark-skinned "tirailleurs indigènes" running up a hill, bayonets poised, ready for the charge. This time the message is one of African bravery and mightiness. The accompanying text emphasizes Africans' particular talent for thrusting the bayonet—an image that purportedly sends fear into the hearts of the enemy. Their uniforms, in this drawing, appear identical to those of the poilus, except for the omnipresent képis on their heads. Less than a month later, L'Illustration displayed yet another image of African soldiers. Bearing the optimistic caption, "Les Bons Moments des Blessés," a large photo shows a French nurse reading the newspaper to a group of wounded soldiers, who are all, with the apparent exception of two French officers, North African and black African. While they appear relaxed and not gravely injured (a few bandages here and there, but no apparent amputees), and some are even standing and smiling, the incontestable message of the photograph is one of vulnerability.

Hence, in the space of a mere six weeks, a single magazine confronted French readership with four different images of African and North African soldiers that conveyed markedly different messages. From docile to fierce, from joyful to vulnerable, the image that one magazine presented to the French public of colonial soldiers was anything but consistent. The remainder of the war witnessed the continued multiplicity and incompatibility of L'Illustration's images of colonial participation in the war.

A number of images and accompanying texts hint at an interesting diplomatic issue that further embittered the war. Reportedly, the deployment of

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19 Ibid., September 5, 1914.
colonial, and in particular, **black African**, troops in the French and British commanded armies frightened and infuriated the Germans. Not insignificantly, the French press reported and made much of these negative German reactions. As one French newspaper boasted, "On sait la terreur que leur inspire le contacte de nos contingents africains....Et ce sera un spectacle d'une assez savoureuse ironie de voir ces prétendus sauvages porter au-delà du Rhin, à la pointe de leur baïonnette, la revanche de la civilisation sur la moderne barbarie...."\(^{20}\) German military reports in 1914 and 1915 accused African troops of savagery and atrocities, and they denounced French commanders for allowing such acts of brutality.\(^{21}\) Not only did they feel black Africans to be sub-human and hence less vulnerable to their attacks, German military authorities also considered Africans to be a limitless supply of manpower for the Allies.\(^{22}\) On the one hand, pro-colonial French officials took great pleasure, "la plus vive satisfaction et un bien légitime orgueil," upon learning "combien les tirailleurs sénégalais ont été remarqués par l'ennemi."\(^{23}\) Yet these same racist German sentiments caused consternation and even outrage among other pro-colonial French authorities and journalists. As Albert de Pouvoirville wrote in the same newspaper less than one month later:

> Je veux montrer seulement la stupidité des intellectuels allemands, qui se scandalisent que nous les fassions rosser, ici, par nos Noirs, là par nos Jaunes, et qui se déclarent les tenants et les martyrs de la race et de la civilisation blanches....\(^{24}\)

\(^{20}\) *La Dépêche Coloniale*, August 18, 1924.
\(^{22}\) *Ibid.*
\(^{23}\) *La Dépêche Coloniale*, October 14, 1914.
With the outbreak of the war, *La Dépêche Coloniale* adopted a discourse of fraternity in the name of the allied cause, calling for metropolitan French soldiers, civilians, as well as *coopérants* in the colonies to put aside their racial and cultural differences with the indigenous peoples, explaining that fraternity in arms against a common enemy was the first step toward civil brotherhood. Yet Pouvoirville’s article did not go so far as to proclaim all inhabitants under the French tricolor as equal. Instead, he cited the need for cohesion among people *in spite of* incompatible languages, races, and religions.25 One critic has suggested that many officers of the French military—some of whom were soon to become colonial administrators in peacetime—intended for the war to not only make a modern fighting soldier out of the colonial recruit, but also to make him a Frenchman in terms of language and culture.26 Given the fact that French was the only language of command within the colonial contingents, there is reason to believe colonial peoples’ language skills vastly improved. In this sense, French authorities’ goals for future cultural uniformity must have seemed well within reach.

Once again, we see how the openly pro-colonial discourse of popular publications sent a variety of messages to their readers, as did many of the photos and illustrations that accompanied those texts. A 1916 article in *L’Illustration* provides yet another excellent example of this ambivalence. Accompanied by one photo showing black-skinned "Vainquers de la Maisonnette" and by another of Senegalese soldiers crouched in a newly captured German trench, the text endows the African soldiers with special yet contradictory attributes: violent "énergie farouche," mature "sang-froid," and childlike "naïveté"—the latter evidenced by their marching songs. The

25 *La Dépêche Coloniale*, October 21, 1914.
26 Lüsebrink, "Les troupes coloniales dans la guerre," 78.
construction of a consistent colonial identity, hence, is conspicuously absent—this time in the space of a single page.

Despite France's avowed paternalism towards its colonial subjects and notwithstanding the French press's "mixed messages," France's involvement of colonial soldiers in the war and the imaginary picture of French and indigenous soldiers fighting side by side formed a strong impression on American blacks. Between April 1917 (when American troops entered the war) and August 1918, the United States sent over 200,000 black men to Europe. The American government's decision to send black Americans into combat within the European theater of operations formed the subject of an article in a 1918 issue of L'Illustration. The article reports that American military authorities called on French military personnel to explain the details of their use of colonial "troops of color," in view of their excellent results.27 Historian Marc Michel has discussed many of the reactions of American black intellectuals, notably W.E.B. Du Bois, who praised France's use of African troops alongside metropolitan French soldiers as a splendid example and display of France's commitment to the democratic ideals of liberté, égalité et fraternité.28 However, there are comparatively few images of and articles about colonial soldiers as compared to those concerning the poilus, and virtually none of these images show the two groups literally fighting side by side. Hence, there was a rupture between the press's discourse of brotherhood in arms and the overwhelming majority of the images actually presented to French readership. One exception, however, is a poster from the "Journée de l'Armée d'Afrique et des troupes coloniales" in 1917, showing French and African soldiers storming what appears to be a German trench.

27 L'Illustration, September 7, 1918.
28 Michel, L'Appel à l'Afrique, 347 and 391.
The same problem of "mixed messages" plagues advertising and other kinds of colonial imagery during the war, as well as later iconography evoking the memory of the colonial soldiers. Posters for rallies and other types of military bulletins portray Africans as determined and patriotic, sometimes fierce and warlike, or childlike and in need of paternalistic guidance. Implicit messages range from naïve foreigner to obedient, disciplined soldier to savage hunter of the Boche.

Marc Michel has argued that ordinary French people constructed their own "imaginaires" of the black soldier during the Great War, when he arrived in Europe for the first time from his exotic homeland, to fight with French poilus against German tyranny. The most enduring of these "imaginaires" is that of the "tirailleur sénégalais," a grinning, dark-skinned African soldier, dressed much like a poilu, but often (although not always) with a red képi covering his head instead of a helmet. It is a contradictory icon, paternalist and mocking on the one hand, friendly on the other. Michel acknowledges what he considers to be genuine French congeniality toward and sympathy for the African soldier, but he also warns against assuming that this interest signaled a true valorization of blacks. Instead, Michel sees the image of the black soldier as an ambivalent one, at once infantile, naïve, courageous, and loyal. Even more problematic is Africans' perception of the African soldier fighting for France. A symbol of fidelity for the French, he tended to represent a symbol of alienation of his fellow Africans. In any case, the "tirailleur sénégalais" represented in no way a

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30 Ibid., 87.
"personnage univoque." The discourse of solidarity in arms was not intended to and indeed did not transcend the concept of African "otherness."

The icon of the "tirailleur sénégalais" is to be found not only on military rally posters and bulletins. During and long after the war, the Senegalese infantryman became a key icon for cartoons, paintings, and product advertisements. In 1915, Banania began its famous advertisement for "déjeunner sucré à la farine de banane" (essentially a flavored breakfast drink) featuring a smiling "tirailleur sénégalais," sitting in the French countryside, eating a bowl of Banania. By 1920, the company modified the advertisement slightly, featuring only the head and shoulders of the black soldier who is still wearing his red képi and smiling broadly. These images replaced that of the exotic Polynesian woman, nestled in a field of banana trees, for Banania's initial 1914 advertisement. In contrast to German iconography and perceptions of the African soldier (which, not insignificantly, were widely reported in the French press), portraying him as a bloodthirsty, primitive being, the French image denotes a happy soldier—happy of course because he's enjoying a treat. The icon connotes a peaceful, obedient, childlike African, consuming a product itself often associated with children. In this manner, the image infantilizes the Senegalese soldier and reinforces the pro-colonialist idea of France as the "mother country." The infamous words, "Y'a bon," as well as the image of the Senegalese soldier himself became the company's product slogan for more

31 Michel, "L'Armée coloniale en Afrique occidentale française," in Coquery-Vidrovitch, ed., L'Afrique occidentale au temps des Français, 78. I have chosen not to consider in any greater depth Africans' perceptions of the African soldier here, as the subject merits a separate essay in and of itself.
32 Different examples of the Banania advertisements can be found in Images et Colonies, 1880-1962, pp. 90 (1915 advertisement) and 237 (1955 advertisement); and in Raymond Bachollet, Jean-Barthélemy Deboest, Anne-Claude Lelieur, and Marie Christine Peyrèse, Negripub: l'image des Noirs dans la publicité (Paris: Somogy, 1992), pp. 73 (1914 and 1920 advertisements), 75 (1957 advertisement), and 134 (1915 advertisement).
than fifty years, entertaining tens of thousands of French children at the breakfast table.\textsuperscript{33}

In adopting Maurice Halbwachs’s notion of collective memory, one could argue that the image of the Senegalese infantryman is part of French collective memory.\textsuperscript{34} Although Halbwachs barely mentions marginal groups, he insists upon the hegemonic nature of collective memories. There is strong reason to believe that the image of the “tirailleur sénégalais” has held a lasting place in the memory of many French people, who for generations associated this image with a particular product associated with children. In this sense, this particular and widely publicized portrayal of the Senegalese male has had a hegemonic effect on French collective memory.

Many critics argue that the experience of World War I rendered the colonies and their inhabitants tangible to most French people.\textsuperscript{35} Others, most notably Charles-Robert Ageron, believe this was only a temporary realization that did not significantly affect the postwar memory of the majority of ordinary French men and women. Historians long have argued as to whether these years represented, in the words of Raoul Girardet, a \textit{prise de conscience coloniale} as well. There has been, and continues to be, much historiographical debate as to whether the French embraced colonialism as a vital part of their national identity. Some historians have pointed to the importance colonialism held in the minds and political consciousness of the French and believe that by 1920, most French people subscribed to the "mythe colonial" described by

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesub{33} Bachollet et al., \textit{Negripub}, 72-73.
\footnotesub{35} Thomas G. August has a particularly thoughtful discussion of this phenomenon. See his \textit{The Selling of the Empire: British and French Imperialist Propaganda, 1890-1940} (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1985), esp. 13-51.
\end{footnotesize}
Sarraut and other pro-colonialists. Others contend that the majority of the metropolitan population, consumed by the memory of the Great War and by its human, demographic, and economic ravages and, after 1929, plagued by further economic crisis, were essentially indifferent to the colonial cause. One could say that in terms of this debate, myth and memory are constantly at odds with one another.

II: Postwar Colonial Propaganda in the 1920s

From 1919 to the eve of the Second World War, partisans of colonialism embarked on a particularly vigorous project of national conversion. Specifically, they employed several means in order to convert the French public to the imperialist myth of "la Plus Grande France," many of which were based on the exploitation and manipulation of French memories of colonial soldiers during the war. These officials saw their mission as a three-part process: 1) to bring France greater security by more than doubling its population (and hence if needed, by supplying a huge reserve of manpower); 2) to bring France's civilizing presence and material and moral progress to the indigenous peoples of the colonies; and 3) to bring metropolitan French people and particularly youth, to a heightened awareness of and an increased sense of pride in their country's colonial possessions.

They sought to accomplish these goals through specifically discursive and visual means in scholastic textbooks and by increasing the colonial peoples' visibility in popular literature. Notably, these pro-colonial officials shaped and subsequently used the memory of colonial troops fighting for the

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French cause during the Great War. However, as we have seen the images and rhetoric that helped to construct this memory were inconsistent and often contradictory. Building on such images of colonial soldiers already popularized in the press during the war itself, colonialists attempted, in the spirit of the mythical “Plus Grande France,” to construct a new, positive image of the French presence in colonial lands, particularly in black Africa. Pro-colonialists also presented the indigenous peoples to metropolitan French men and women in what they considered to be terms more complimentary than pre-World War I colonial images and rhetoric: France’s civilizing mission was a success and the improved lot of the peoples of French Black Africa, for example, were proof of that success.

The immediate postwar period and the 1920s witnessed a vast outpouring of images and iconography depicting Africans in many different forms: advertisements for products somehow associated with blacks (by virtue of the products’ origin, use, or composition); travel posters depicting scenes in Africa for the tourism industry; exotic cinema and fiction; and propaganda relating to programs undertaken by French administrators in Africa (e.g., epidemic control measures). Here, much to the traditional historian’s chagrin, inconsistencies abound. Postwar colonial discourse, as evidenced by these images and by other forms of propaganda, took on different tones and conveyed different, often contradictory messages. In the case of magazine advertisements, the nature of colonial representation depended not only on the enthusiasm of pro-colonial administrators, but also on the manufacturer of the product in question, the ideological predispositions of the magazine printing the advertisements, and the situatedness of the reader. Yet as Foucault points out, it is often more instructive to consider ruptures and discontinuity than discursive
uniformity.

Many product advertisements of the period make allegorical use of black Africans, linking ideas of race and exoticism to the products’ own aesthetic qualities. Félix Potin, for example, used iconographic illustrations of Africans to advertise chocolate products: childlike brown people are associated with brown chocolate, a treat for children and adults alike. A 1922 advertisement features a dark-skinned black male, dancing on one foot holding a bowl of chocolate batter or mousse in one hand and wielding a whisk in the other.37 His facial features are exaggerated to conform to predominant stereotypes of Africans: a huge mouth with big, red lips; large white teeth; a wide, flattened nose; and a shiny black, nearly hairless head. He looks like he’s laughing, and there is something distinctly clown-like about him. He is dressed in a burlesque but Western style: brown trousers, white shirt, bow tie, a jacket with tails, and most significant, white socks and white gloves. The only visible black skin is that of his exaggerated caricatural head. The advertisement as a whole promotes a message of African docility and gaiety. Most revealing is the slogan: "battu et content," which describes the African as much as the chocolate. Thanks to France’s civilizing colonial mission, Africans have been conquered and subdued, and they are content this way.

Even more pejorative advertisements include those for soap and bleach. One 1920 advertisement for a bleach product, Javel S.D.C., shows a young (presumably French), rosy-cheeked white woman lifting a miniature-sized African out of a tub of bleach. His legs, which have been dangling in the bleach, are now white—as opposed to the rest of his black body. The first phrase of the advertisement reads: "Avec JAVEL S.D.C pour blanchir un nègre

37 See Bachollet et al., Negripub, 70.
on ne perd pas son savon." The implicit message here of course is that being black is synonymous with being dirty. But the black, although dirty, is washable and hence, redeemable. France's civilizing mission is thus a "whitening power." This is both an extremely racist and paternalist (or perhaps "maternalist") image and message, reinforcing the idea of Africans as "grands enfants," who need to be bathed like children. It is a motherly, white woman who lifts the miniature black creature—with a child-sized body and an unsmiling adult face—out of the tub, toward humanity and toward adulthood.

However, other advertisements, those for shoe polish for example, "valorize" black skin. One example is a 1926 advertisement for Lion Noir shoe polish, featuring an elaborate cartoon of a young, very dark-skinned African woman, topless but with her back turned. She is surrounded by other Africans, some of whom are rubbing her arm and leg with shoe-shine brushes, polishing her skin as if it were leather. Part of the caption reads: "Mademoiselle Bamboula se marie aujourd'hui!...la fiancée se ravive le teint avec la merveilleux cirage qui équivaut, pour les cuirs de nos chaussures, aux crèmes de beauté pour les épidermes les plus délicats." The African bride is in "native" dress except for her shoes, which are Western-style, white dress pumps. The groom is also wearing Western-style accessories: top hat, white gloves, white cuffs, and a white stand-up collar. These accessories stand out in a puzzling manner, but they also serve as a constant reminder that Africans are not autonomous and "need" the mother country for certain things.

In each of these cases, the idea to feature Africans in advertising is supposed to "amuse" the reader. Yet various advertisements portray Africans in

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38 For an example of this and other similar ads, see Bachollet et al., Negripub, 90-103. This is a take on a nineteenth-century proverb: "À vouloir blanchir un negre, le barbier perd son savon." Cited in Ibid., 69.
39 Ibid., 102.
markedly different manners and easily convey diverse messages to different readers. Once again, French iconography featuring Africans was sending "mixed messages." For the majority of metropolitan French citizens, familiarity with blacks stemmed from the memory of colonial soldiers fighting on French soil to save the French fatherland. As we have seen, images of the colonial soldiers were hardly compatible. The press put forth a variety of images and rhetoric concerning the colonial soldiers: from realistic to romanticized, with many grey areas in between. It is hence no surprise that postwar representations of Africans abound with inconsistencies and send mixed messages, for they were based on previous mixed messages. James Fentress and Chris Wickham explain that the images that construct social memory are, by their nature, highly conceptualized and composite.\textsuperscript{40} In this sense, we should not even expect to find continuity and uniformity in the evocation of a collective memory that was in itself a veritable hodgepodge of representations.

This issue is further complicated by another phenomenon of the 1920s, namely the emigration of black American entertainers to Paris. Many black musicians and entertainers had resounding success among Parisian high-society, most notably Josephine Baker. In October 1925, Baker and a group of Harlem musicians opened the \textit{Revue Nègre} at the Champs-Élysées music hall. Overnight, Baker, who danced topless on stage, became the toast of \textit{le tout Paris}. As a reporter for the \textit{New Yorker} wrote in her column that year, Josephine Baker’s magnificent body created a new standard of beauty for the French: for the first time, they saw that black could be beautiful.\textsuperscript{41} Notwithstanding Baker’s physical attributes, it is significant that she was a black American and not an black African hailing from a French territorial possession.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Social Memory} (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA.: Blackwell, 1992), 47.
\textsuperscript{41} Janet Flanner, cited in Bachollet et al., \textit{Negripub}, 136.
If the Revue convinced French audiences that black could be beautiful, it perhaps did nothing to infer that African could be beautiful too. Once again, ambivalence abounds in the construction of a black African identity in the French imagination.

Despite all of these mixed messages, we may make a few observations. It seems clear that the war did engender some kind of change or turning point in French conceptions and perceptions of Africans, even if these ideas were not uniform to begin with. Before 1914, the French acquaintance with Black Africa was limited to the portrait of a disease-ridden Africa, populated by savage and immoral tribes, as described in the novels and writings of Pierre Loti and other popular authors and journalists.42 By the 1920s, most French people had some kind of familiarity with blacks, either direct or indirect. In all of the above-described advertisements, Africans are, in one way or another, childlike and in need of paternalist guidance. They may be dirty, simplistic, and naïve, but thanks to France's noble civilizing mission, they are redeemable. They are also deserving of redemption.43 Having sacrificed in many cases life and limb for the French cause in the war, it is now France's turn to "save" the Africans. The pro-colonialists' task shifted then from the prewar task of creating an African image shrouded in mystery and fear, to tailoring wartime memories to help develop and sustain the postwar imperial myth of "la Plus Grande France."

III: L'Exposition coloniale internationale de 1931

The 1931 Exposition Coloniale Internationale, like the effect of the Great War, is a much contested historical phenomenon, in terms of its importance for


43 For an eloquent and thoughtful discussion of this issue, see Philippe Dewitte, Les mouvements Negres en France, 1919-1939 (Paris: L'Hartmann, 1985), esp. 50-54.
the development of an imperial consciousness as related to French national identity. Many historians contend that the size, attendance, publicity, and prestige of the Exposition is proof of its paramount legacy in the French colonial consciousness. Other critics insist upon the unfoundedness of that assertion and maintain that most French people remained indifferent to or uninterested in the colonial cause. Ageron, for one, points to the fact that far fewer people attended this Exposition than the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1900 (approximately 50 million visitors) and cites speeches on the part of colonial authorities mentioning, much to their chagrin, the continued "indifférence" of French youth with regard to the colonies. It is, as he argues rather convincingly, quite difficult to know with any degree of certainty how important the Exposition really was for the French, and how much and to what degree its memory was powerful because polls and surveys were virtually nonexistent in France during the interwar period. Overall, however, he believes the influence of the Exposition to have been minimal.

The International Colonial Exposition, covering 272 acres in the Bois de Vincennes (just southeast of the capital), opened in April 1931. L' Illustration's special Spring issue on the Exposition begins with an open letter from Maréchal de Lyautey himself, Commissaire Général de l'Exposition Coloniale. In this letter, Lyautey evokes the memory of the Great War and the immense devastation it wrought on the French landscape, "[i]l reste encore sur la terre des vastes champs à défricher...", and he links the reconstruction of France with the continued construction of the colonial empire and the formation of the

44 The very number of visitors to the Exposition is, in itself, disputed. In his article, "L'Apothéose de la 'Plus Grande France,'" Raoul Girardet writes that some 34 million people attended the exposition (p. 1085). Charles-Robert Ageron explicitly challenges Girardet and documents only 7 million attendees in "Les Colonies devant l'opinion publique française," 52n. Ageron insists that Girardet must have been counting the total number of entry tickets sold, i.e., 33,489,902. 45 Ageron, "Les Colonies devant l'opinion publique française," 31-33.
imperial consciousness: "En montrant l'immense labou ré déjà accompli par les nations colonisatrices, l'Exposition montrera, par surcroît, qu'il reste beaucoup à faire." Moreover, if the war had been largely responsible for revealing the possibility of mobilizing the empire's considerable human and material resources, then the Exposition would be the perfect occasion to complete the metropole's colonial enlightenment.46 He then reaches out to readers so that they may grasp the true mission of the colonizer: "Coloniser," he exclaims with much passion, "ce n'est pas uniquement, en effet, construire des quais, des usines ou des voies ferrées; c'est aussi gagner à la douceur humaine les coeurs farouches de la savane ou du désert."47

Lyautey was not alone in his conception of colonialism as a "civilizing mission" nor in his desire that more French people embrace this mission. In fact, by 1931, colonial sympathizers had repeatedly insisted that the history, geography, and composition of France's vast and diverse empire play a greater role in primary and secondary school curricula.48 This instruction was intended to impart two principal messages: first, that the purpose of the French presence in these colonies was to bring them the material and moral progress that a only a modern, democratic country like France could provide; second, if France wished to continue playing a role on the world stage as a great power, it must

48 Although they do not agree as to whether such attempts were successful, both Charles-Robert Ageron and Raoul Girardet have both documented these attempts to change school curricula. See especially, Raoul Girardet, "L'Apothéose de la 'Plus Grande France,'" as well as his subsequent book, L'Idée coloniale en France 1871-1962. More recently, Charles-Robert Ageron has criticized, quite convincingly, many of Girardet's conclusions in Ageron, "Les Colonies devant l'opinion publique française," 31-73. Although he disputes the claim that French children were influenced by curriculum changes and that attendance to Exposition resulted in a "prise de conscience coloniale" on the part of the public, Ageron does acknowledge the committed nature of such attempts.
do so from a position of strength. In other words, it is its colonial empire that confers great nation status to France.

In 1929, *L'illustration* had first published a massive, richly illustrated Colonial Atlas, which was duly reprinted in the same year as the Exposition. This atlas represents yet another serious attempt on the part of pro-colonial authorities to instill a sense of awareness and pride in the French public-at-large. The atlas begins with another letter from Maréchal Lyautey. The purpose of the atlas, Lyautey explains, is three-fold: to better acquaint the French public with their colonies, to make the public love them, and to help contribute to the colonies' "essor économique," which, as he reminds his compatriots, is intimately linked to France's own prosperity. Reprinted three times in nine years (1929, 1931, and 1938), the 300 page atlas became the keeper of the pro-colonialist myth of "la Plus Grande France," long after the Exposition ended.

Lyautey's two letters as well as other texts point to one of the pro-colonialists' principal rallying techniques: to remind French people of the presence of the indigenous soldiers on French soil during the Great War. Here two "memory messages" are implicit: first, one should remember their sacrifices for the mother country; and second, should such an occasion could arise again, the constant reserve of indigenous soldiers was vital to France's national security. Little reminders of their wartime participation were omnipresent: drawings of the African exhibits, for example, depict natives in dress not so far

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removed from their wartime uniforms. Algerians and Moroccans are often shown carrying swords or standing at attention. Black Africans are always wearing their képis, now firmly linked in the minds of most French youth to the Senegalese infantryman of the Banania advertisements begun in 1915.

At the entrance to the exposition, maps and a guide book were furnished to visitors. In addition to providing "instructions" for browsing and reminders of colonial participation in the war, the guide book revealed much about prevailing French attitudes towards the colonized and the obsession with "otherness."

French authorities reserved the right to distinguish between good and bad taste:

Vous ne trouverez pas ici une exploitation des bas instincts d'un public vulgaire....M. le maréchal Lyautey, et avec lui, M. le gouverneur général Olivier et tous leurs collaborateurs, vous ont considéré, cher Visiteur, comme un homme de bon goût. Point de ces bamboulas, de ces danses de ventre, de ces étalages de bazar, qui ont discrédité bien d'autres manifestations coloniales; mais des reconstructions de la vie tropicale avec tout ce qu'elle a de vrai pittoresque et de couleur.\footnote{52}

In keeping with the pro-colonialists' imperial myth, the Exposition and the press surrounding it possessed a mythical quality. For example, an advertisement for Kodak Cameras begins like this: "Indo-Chinois, Sénégalais, Soudanais, Arabes... marchands, chefs de guerre, artistes, danseurs, toute la féerie coloniale s'offre à votre appareil."\footnote{53} Not only does the advertisement convey

\footnote{51 See, for example, Paul-Émile Cadilhac, "Promenade à Travers les Cinq Continents" in the special edition of \textit{L'Illustration}, May 23, 1931.}
\footnote{52 Quoted from the "Adresse au Visiteur" in \textit{Exposition Coloniale Internationale: Guide Officiel}, text by André Demaison (Paris, 1931), 18.}
the mythical character of the Exposition, it also stresses colonial "otherness" and the ability to possess such otherness in a photo. In this sense, to own a photograph of African huts or of an Oriental temple reinforced the feeling of French cultural dominance in Africa and Indochina because these marvels "belonged" to France.

The "vous" in the guidebook's passage as well as the "votre" in the Kodak camera advertisement attest to a deliberate "self" and "other" rhetorical device on the part of colonial sympathizers. "Vous," the visitor, a white man of good taste, is directly contrasted with dark-skinned African "bamboula"s and other undignified colonial specimens, especially women. Despite this pejorative rhetoric, pro-colonial authorities believed they could succeed in increasing public appreciation of the colonies and in creating a favorable impression of the indigenous peoples. Once again, mixed messages proliferate.

The French popular press gave the Exposition a great deal of attention, generating a vast amount of literature, and leaving behind a new set of "imperial memories." The 1931 issues alone of L'Illustration comprise three gigantic bound volumes, which include several "numéros spéciaux" dedicated entirely to the Exposition. Due in no small part to the immense amount of press it received, the Exposition quickly became a symbol both for proponents and for enemies of French colonialism. And it is precisely the confusion over the messages emanating from that symbol that resulted in a remarkably problematic construction of imperialist-nationalist identity.

One way of interpreting the value of the Exposition and the prodigious quantity of literature it inspired is to borrow Eric Hobsbawm's and Terence
Ranger's idea of the "invented tradition." Specifically, the 1931 Exposition marked the most conspicuous attempt yet of pro-colonial French authorities to invent a tradition of "la Plus Grande France" and to construct an imperial-national identity. One poster for the Exposition asked pointedly, "Saviez-vous que la France était si grande?" The same poster reminded potential visitors that Indochina was one and half times the size of metropolitan France and that French West Africa was ten times bigger than the hexagon. The idea was to create in the minds of ordinary French men and women an imperialist tradition of grandeur. Moreover, "the strength of European invented traditions in colonial Africa helped to produce soldiers and administrators...," which in turn would guarantee a continuation of France's ability to perpetuate and govern its empire.

The Great War served as a basis for such a tradition, upon which to build a valorizing image of France's presence in the colonies. Before the war, much of French representation of Africans was negative, similar to the German army's fiercely pejorative representation of France's colonial soldiers during the war. In 1920, the Allied occupation of the Rhineland, in which colonial troops participated, provoked further racist German propaganda—this time expressing German women's protests against black occupiers.

With the arrival of indigenous colonial troops on French metropolitan soil in 1914, "ready and willing" to sacrifice their lives for the tricolore, French negative colonial sentiment was suddenly very much in the minority. By the

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55 Advertisement printed in L'Illustration, May 9, 1931.
56 Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in Eric Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., The Invention of Tradition, 220.
57 For examples of this early iconography, see Images et Colonies, 1880-1962, pp. 12-72; and Negripub.
1920s French representations of Africans were still pejorative, but they had lost any savage and fearful qualities and were imbued with a strong sense of paternalism. Having served and sacrificed for the fatherland, African “grands enfants” were deserving of paternal protection and tutelage.

By 1931, French pro-colonial authorities were ready and willing to showcase their spoils and the effect of the progress they had brought to their colonies on a grand scale. In addition, by presenting Africans as childlike and helpless, French colonial authorities were securing an image that gave blacks a carefully designed, totally passive role within the French empire. Even other non-Western cultures, as Sarraut’s 1931 book explains, possessed significant cultural superiority over black Africans. In this sense, it seems reasonable to believe that pro-colonialists had some kind of fear—be it conscious or unconscious—of black Africans assuming any kind of identity outside of the role they prescribed. Although neither the French military or any other French authority lobbied for an American southern-style policy of segregation for blacks, they were still far from ready to see blacks as equals.

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Homi Bhabha has discussed the need to forget and the manipulation of memory in the conscious creation of the nation.58 We can also apply these concepts of memory and forgetting to the construction of a national consciousness in the case of France’s colonies. To successfully create and market their various discourses of solidarity, French officials needed to make colonial peoples “forget” the racism and violence they had encountered at the hands of the French in the past. It is indeed significant that French authorities

succeeded so well in recruiting indigenous soldiers to fight in the Great War, without noticeable protest. And despite the loss of life and tremendous hardship of the war, only one case of outright rebellion erupted among these contingents—far fewer than among the "regular" French troops. Furthermore, there were no major demonstrations for independence in the African colonies themselves between 1919 and 1931. In light of these facts, one could argue that pro-colonialists managed to form a sense of French nationhood and brotherhood among the indigenous populations. This was especially true of many of the African elites, educated in the French tradition, whom the French administrators appointed to positions of authority in the colonies. Despite the memory of their exploitation in the recent war and despite France's bloody imperial conquests of the latter half of the nineteenth century, by 1931, millions of people around the globe spoke French and seemed to "accept," at least superficially, French domination.

Pro-colonialists had other memories to counter as well: those of their own compatriots. From the end of the First World War through the duration of the Colonial Exposition, proponents of colonialism were attempting to create a nationalist-imperialist tradition—what they perceived as a positive notion of tamed lands and domesticated peoples in the hearts and minds of ordinary French men and women. For the pro-colonialists to succeed in this mission, the French public would have to forget earlier tales of bloody conquests, fierce natives, terrifying diseases, and inhospitable terrains. Colonial sympathizers were, borrowing Bhabha's words, "proposing this cultural construction of nationness as a form of social and textual affiliation" to both metropolitan French

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59 During this period, there was still little significant anti-colonial agitation in the colonies. The dissenting voices of black intellectuals and leaders, like those of Léopold Senghor and Aimée Césaire, did not manifest themselves until themselves until the late 1930s and early 1940s.
and colonized populations.\textsuperscript{60}

As another scholar has shown, nations are "imagined political communities;" that is, they are thought out or created.\textsuperscript{61} In the final analysis, the importance of French perceptions of colonial peoples during and after the Great War lies in the pro-colonialists' attempted creation of a new sense of imperialist-minded French community—and hence, a new type of nationalism—based on a carefully constructed albeit inconsistent set of memories of colonial troops during the Great War. The contradictions and ambiguities that plagued their attempts have constructed an ambivalent and contested, albeit fascinating, epoch in the French collective experience.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 292.

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Domestic Spaces and Exotic Places: Women, Department Stores, and Mass Culture in Interwar France
In 1928, a popular French magazine ran a series of articles urging household modernization. The journalist explained that due to the French woman’s “valiant efforts” and “sound judgment” in the absence of her husband during the war,

[L]ittle by little, the Frenchman has become cognizant of the high worth of his companion and has wished to relieve her as much as possible of the drudgery and toil of housework—labors that until now, his egoism and ignorance have prevented him from appreciating.¹

Despite the articles’ patronizing tone, they are nonetheless indicative of a new, positive perception of French women as independent, hardworking, and débrouillarde.²

The years 1914 to 1940 witnessed intense industrialization, modernization, and change within several areas of the French economy, including a dramatic expansion of the service sector. During and after World War I, women in France and elsewhere went to work in place of their deceased, disabled, or otherwise absent male counterparts. With the decline of agricultural work and domestic service jobs, French women in great numbers entered the service sector in general and retail in particular, thereby

² This is an untranslatable French adjective describing one’s ability to muddle through situations admirably.
“feminizing” a mass consumer society. During the period of recovery and growth between the two world wars, women also became the most conspicuous consumers of modern bourgeois mass culture, filling their days with shopping in the ever expanding department stores. We may thus speak of the years between the wars as a period in which a great number of French women occupied the realm of goods and services—this time, as employees as well as customers. In the absence of able-bodied men during and in the aftermath of World War I, French women finally entered the public sphere, en masse, and did so as specifically domestic actors. In other words, they "became visible,"³ as both breadwinners and consumers.

This essay focuses on the Parisian department store—a remarkable establishment where many economic, social, and cultural factors came together for French women, principally in the 1920s and 1930s. After some preliminary background on its origins and rise to fame in the nineteenth century, the following essay examines the interwar department store as a nexus and transition between French women’s private and public spheres, during a period in French history that itself was transitional in many ways.

Department stores had essentially three purposes. First, they simultaneously marketed and encouraged women’s long-private domesticity to become conspicuously public; in this sense, they acted as an institution that bridged the gap between the private and public spheres. Second, department stores sought to seduce women with lavish spectacles and intriguing merchandise. Much like the Paris Expositions of the early twentieth century, department stores created a dream world in which to browse. Finally, like the

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³ I have borrowed this expression from Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, eds., Becoming Visible: Women in European History (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).
expositions, department stores appropriated exotic cultures within the French colonial empire, creating a distinctly "feminized" colonial discourse. With these ambitions in mind, the department store became the locus of a particular kind of modern commodity fetishism. The very nature of women's selling and shopping both shaped and belied a society obsessed with pageantry, exoticism, and possession.

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In 1883, the much acclaimed novelist, Émile Zola, published *Au bonheur des dames*, the fictitious narrative of a recently orphaned young woman from Normandy, Denise Baudu, who comes to Paris in search of a new life and soon goes to work at the bustling department store, Au Bonheur des Dames. Once there, she quickly becomes immersed in the frenetic pace and dreamlike culture of the department store, and predictably, a romantic conflict ensues. Octave Mouret, the store's less than virtuous entrepreneur, repeatedly and unsuccessfully attempts to seduce Denise. The theme of seduction is omnipresent throughout the novel. Female shoppers, whom Mouret does succeed in seducing commercially, engage in a love affair with the store itself. All of the characters are entranced by and "subordinate to the store, which seems to overwhelm them and control their destinies."

In a similar fashion, Zola's dramatic and colorful descriptions of life at Au Bonheur des Dames, rich with exoticism and celebrations of womanhood, overwhelm much of Denise's personal story within the novel.

Despite the fact that Zola's book remains a work of fiction, many of his descriptions and recreations of department store culture were in fact quite

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authentic. Not wishing to rely on imagination alone, he spent several hours each day for a month observing and scribbling notes at two of Paris's earliest department stores, the Bon Marché and the Louvre. In fact, Zola even took a mistress whose apartment window directly overlooked the construction site of the new Printemps building where, unsurprisingly, he spent a great deal of time during the writing of the novel in 1882. With customary meticulousness, Zola researched the lives and habits of many of the people he met and observed at the department stores and fictionalized them into the caricatural personalities of his novel.

The store, in his scheme of things, was to be larger than life—a veritable "Ladies Paradise." In a letter dated October 1882, Zola himself pointed to the centrality of both the store and women within his narrative:

\textit{Au bonheur des dames} is the story of the creation of one of those big department stores like the Bon Marché or the Louvre, which have so shaken up and reinvigorated our commerce in France....Octave Mouret has based his business entirely on the exploitation of women: he speculates on their flirtatiousness; he flatters these customers, treating them like queens and making them at home in his store, to better empty their wallets.  

Fascinated by the alluring merchandise displays and mesmerized by the energy and "womanliness" of it all, Zola effectively transcribed the

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phantasmagoric atmosphere of department stores into words. Literary critic Kristin Ross has suggested that much of the melodramatic energy of Zola's novel can be explained by the fact that the author was condensing into the comparatively short five years of his story, what amounted to a veritable sexual, economic, and social revolution that actually spanned in excess of sixty years.8

Although his portraits of women are often unflattering—even of a bestial quality—Zola was the first critic to recognize and document the department store's special appeal to and implications for women. If we are to accept Claude Levi-Strauss's definition of ethnography as the study of human groups in their distinctiveness, then Zola's research techniques clearly resembled those of the modern ethnographer.9 In this sense, his work has come to represent an important historical artifact of the department store's early years of existence and holds a unique place in women's studies.

In the late nineteenth century, when Zola wrote and published _Au bonheur des dames_, French department stores were in their heyday. The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the construction and development of several Parisian stores: the Bon Marché (1852/1869), Au Printemps (1865/1881), Les Magasins du Louvre (1855/1877), La Samaritaine (1869/1904), Les Grands Magasins Dufayel (1890), and Les Galeries Lafayette (1895/1906).10 In most of these examples, two dates are provided. The first marks the founding of the business entity; the second denotes completion of the first major building. The stores did not really become _grands magasins_—that is, _department stores_ as

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8 Ross in Zola, _The Ladies Paradise_, vi.
10 Neither the Louvre nor the Dufayel department stores remain today. However, the Bon Marché, the Printemps, the Galeries Lafayette, and the Samaritaine are still thriving in the same locations. For information on dates, architectural designs, and construction, see Bernard Marrey, _Les Grands magasins_. (Paris: Picard, 1979).
we know them—until large structures had been built to house them.

The Bon Marché, owned and operated by Aristide Boucicaut\textsuperscript{11} was the world’s biggest, most frequented, and most profitable department store before 1914. While some stores claimed to have been in operation longer than Boucicaut’s and bazaars had existed for decades in France, the Bon Marché’s merchandising practices, variety of departments, and commitment to service served as inspirations to the establishment of department stores around the world. Soon after, similar large-scale retail outlets appeared in American cities like New York (Macy, 1858), Philadelphia (John Wanamaker, 1861), and Chicago (Marshall Field, 1866/1885); and in European capitals like Copenhagen (Magasin du Nord, 1893), Vienna (Neumann, 1895), and London (Harrods, 1897).\textsuperscript{12}

The Bon Marché’s novelty lay in the fact that it was the first store formally conceived of as a \textit{department store} with a totally new philosophy behind it.\textsuperscript{13} Boucicaut introduced four measures that were to change the face of retail merchandising forever: fixed, displayed prices; the idea of selling at high volume and low prices; a return policy; and the principle of \textit{entrée libre}.\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Entrée libre} signified that a shopper could come into the store under no obligation to buy merchandise. Looking was not only permitted, it was

\textsuperscript{11} He owned and ran the store personally from its inception in 1852 until his death in 1877. Thereafter, the Bon Marché was run by his wife for the next decade.

\textsuperscript{12} For a general history of these and other department stores, as well as for information on the influence of Boucicaut’s retailing innovations, see H. Pasdermadjian, \textit{The Department Store: Its Origins, Evolution and Economics}. (London: Newman Books, 1954).

\textsuperscript{13} This point forms one of the principal arguments in Michael B. Miller, \textit{The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920}. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981), 20. See esp. the first two chapters, 19-72.

\textsuperscript{14} Interestingly enough, it seems that the idea of returning goods has waned with time in France. Returning or even exchanging anything today is nothing short of a nightmare! For a thorough and fascinating study of Boucicaut’s revolution in merchandising and its effects on bourgeois life, see Miller, \textit{The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920}. 
encouraged, for even if the shopper did not buy immediately, chances were that someday she would—having had her desires stirred by beautiful articles presented in lavish displays. The *entée libre* policy was perhaps Boucicaut's most culturally significant innovation, earning him the de facto distinction as the inventor of browsing. Other entrepreneurs noted the resounding success of Boucicaut's practices and established their own department stores along similar lines.\(^{15}\)

What then made the rise of the department store, this very distinctive and gender-specific phenomenon possible in late nineteenth-century France? There are several social, economic, and demographic factors that helped to produce the department store. First and foremost, the idea of a successful, large-capacity, single-ownership retail center was made possible in large part by the "Haussmannization" of Paris.\(^{16}\) The baron Georges Eugène Haussmann had been an ambitious man with tremendous foresight. During his tenure as Prefect of the Seine Department from 1853-70, he enhanced and renovated the capital city by creating gardens, sewers, and water reservoirs. Most important, Haussmann widened Paris's main thoroughfares into grand boulevards, enabling for the first time intra-city travel on a large scale. For centuries, Parisians had been confined to their respective neighborhoods and had contented themselves with small shops and a limited choice of goods and services. With Haussmann's new city planning, it finally became possible to envision shopping via mass transit.

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\(^{15}\) In fact, many of the department store magnates of the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries—like Jules Jaluzot, founder of the Printemps, and Louis Jay, cofounder of the Samaritaine—got their start as employees of the Bon Marché. See Miller, *The Bon Marché*, 41.

The effects of "Haussmannization" were staggering for retail operations. Small neighborhood shops lost much of their appeal, and hence clientèle, while department stores sprang up largely on or around the new boulevards. Bus stops, tram and metro stations, and parking garages soon appeared, and crowds descended upon the stores. Now that transportation—and hence shoppers—were assured, shopping became an all-day activity. Department stores continued their extraordinary and rapid growth until 1914, when the First World war threw the French economy into shambles and nearly destroyed the country.

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November 1918 marked the end of the bloodiest war modern Europe had ever known. Nearly 20 million lives had been lost worldwide (those of soldiers and civilians), not to mention the hundreds of miles of devastation and destruction throughout Europe. In areas once occupied by thriving villages, only ruins remained. Huge craters yawned obscenely in the earth, surrounded by blackened tree stumps where thick forests had once been. And miles of muddy, bloodied trenches snaking through the plains served as a constant reminder of the horrors of trench warfare. Although recuperation from this great convulsion seemed a daunting task, slowly but surely France began to rebuild and return to "everyday life." The economy recovered and even began a new period of growth. The country's leaders, determined that their nation regain

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17 On this subject, see Nord, Paris Shopkeepers and the Politics of Resentment, esp. 60-142.
18 Both the Galeries Lafayette and the Printemps are situated squarely on the most symbolic of these "new" avenues—the boulevard Haussmann itself. September 1869, when the first phase of Haussmannization was well underway, Aristide Boucicaut lay the first cornerstone of his new, gigantic building for the Bon Marché, flanking the soon to be constructed Boulevard Raspail. It is for this reason that 1869 is considered by many to be the official birth of department stores as we know them. On the cornerstone ceremony, see Miller, The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 19-21.
strength, saw France as the ultimate victor of the First World War and as Europe's leader of a new modern era.

The interwar period, as it came to be called, was indeed novel in many respects. In terms of social changes, there was a tremendous shift in the popular perception of gender roles, due in no small part to the war's ghastly statistics. In the case of France, 8,400,000 soldiers went off to war. Nearly one and a half million never returned. One out of every thirteen Frenchmen returned disabled or severely wounded. As in several of the other countries engaged in the war, women in France came to fill roles traditionally occupied by their husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons. Women replaced men in many ways, from working in factories to assuming leadership roles within families, communities, and society-at-large. In the absence of their male counterparts, women were called upon to become primary providers: materially, socially, and emotionally; of the household, community, and nation. It is no wonder then that women benefited from a perception of strength—perhaps for the first time—in the specter of virtually an entire male generation that was either maimed, dead, or otherwise absent.

Post World War I demographic and economic changes dramatically affected French working women. Modern industrialization had penetrated the economy in two principal phases: from roughly 1880 to 1914 and then from 1914 to 1940.19 The years 1914 to 1940 profoundly altered the French economy and its labor force, witnessing a decline in agriculture, a rise in industry, and an increase in the overall service sector with a decrease

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specifically in domestic service work. The prospect of working as a servant in someone else’s (generally urban) home had traditionally been a promising one for little-educated, often single, young women from the provinces. Theresa McBride has argued that women preferred domestic work over factory jobs mainly because they sought personal relationships with employers and their families and because “it offered them a substitute home.” Domestic work, however, declined as industrialization progressed and did so most dramatically in the period between the two wars. Women who traditionally went to work as servants had to find themselves other means of employment.

For this reason, the service sector became increasingly “feminized” after World War I because like domestic work, retail and other service-oriented jobs either provided a more personal relationship with employers or at least exposed working women to other people on a daily basis, unlike factory jobs. In the dearth of servants’ positions, department stores often replaced the private domestic employer and his family as that “substitute home.” By 1920, women made up the overwhelming majority of department store employees. The stores gave jobs to women displaced from traditional domestic work, usually provided health and maternity benefits, and in some cases furnished single women with room and board.

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22 The decline in servants appears to be something of a “chicken and egg” phenomenon. The modernization of housework was one of the factors that made servants less necessary, but one popular publication stressed the need for domestic renovations in terms of heating, plumbing, cooking, and cleaning precisely because of the disappearing servant. See “Le Chez-soi Nouveau” in *L'Illustration*, January 7, 14 and June 16, 30, 1928.

Many department stores became paternalistic institutions for these single women in particular. Rules were strict: meals taken in single-sex cafeterias, rooms kept neat, hours and curfews strictly enforced, and no socializing with the opposite sex after hours.24 These paternalistic rules naturally served an important business purpose: the formation of loyal and obedient employees whose lives were inextricably bound up with that of the department store.25

On the other hand, department stores were liberating in that they provided women with the heretofore unheard-of possibility of a career path with a structured hierarchy. If she worked diligently (and was attractive enough), a woman could rise from a low-paid floorwalker or assistant to a sales clerk with more responsibility and better wages.26 By getting young women out of private homes, off the farm, and into the city and the work force, the stores promoted to the public a more positive image of women as hardworking and independent. Thus, department stores simultaneously challenged and reinforced traditional gender perceptions. In any case, they were instrumental in bringing women en masse into the urban working world and hence into the public sphere.

In examining French women’s entry into the public sphere, it is important to understand what is meant by the term *public*. Richard Sennett has argued that the French word *public* took on new connotations in the eighteenth century when “gradually ‘le public’ became also a special region of sociability.”27 More precisely, “public” came to be associated with the *urban* public and eventually with the word *cosmopolitan*.

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25 See Parent-Lardeur, Les demoiselles de magasin, 16-37. For a thorough interpretation of one department store’s paternalist culture, see Miller, *The Bon Marché*.
By the twentieth century, "public" had come to connote a life and area outside of one's family and close friends—in short, the existence of public space. The department store was a supremely public space: it was urban, cosmopolitan, and open to virtually everyone. Prices were set and displayed to the public. Furthermore, department stores occupied public urban space in a variety of ways, especially after the First World War when technological advances in transportation afforded new opportunities. In addition to advertisements in the daily and weekly press, posters were plastered in the metro stations and bus stops. Delivery trucks, bearing the names and addresses of the stores, roamed the streets of Paris in ever increasing numbers.  

By the mid-1930s, the notion of time and space for leisure activities had also worked its way into French life. Yet public space and leisure activities were hardly gender-neutral concepts. Department stores in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries exploited these notions of cosmopolitan, urban, public space and of leisure time in unprecedented and gender-specific ways. Gail Reekie connects this phenomenon to the history of sexuality from the turn of the century to 1930:

the commercialization of sex and an increased emphasis on consumption, gratification, and pleasure. New public spaces for courtship—theatres,

28 See Parent-Lardeur, Les demoiselles de magasin, 74-75.
29 Leon Blum's Popular Front government enforced the forty hour work week (originally voted in 1919) and passed France's first legislation mandating paid vacation time in 1936. The fact that paid holidays were "all that effectively remained" of Popular Front social victories by 1938 testifies to the importance the French attributed to their newly acquired leisure time. See Julian Jackson, The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934-38 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998; reprint 1990), 85-112. Quote taken from p. 112. See also Eugen Weber, The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 153-163.
30 This is Gail Reekie's principal argument in Temptations: Sex, Selling and the Department Store (St. Leonard's, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1993), esp. 27-43.
dance halls, restaurants, pleasure boats, amusement parks and movie houses—were all part of the same urban landscapes as the department store.  

Department stores sought and succeeded in melding the modern ideas of cosmopolitan "publicness" with women's domestic private lives. Notably in the years after the war, department stores increasingly sold things for the home—domestic articles that had long been part of women's private sphere: bedding, housewares, appliances, decorations, fabrics, rugs, and other furnishings. As literary critic Rachel Bowlby has argued, department stores acted as an escape for women from the drab monotony of their own household routines, luring them into a phantasmagoric second home. The interwar department store, in short, housed a dreamy domestic economy taken conspicuously outside of the private residence. It occupied urban space in physical ways as part of the public sphere and in psychological ways, probing the intimacy of women's domestic private sphere.

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Buildings housing department stores became public spectacles in and of themselves. In this sense, the department store became a celebration, a festival. Carnivals and street fairs became eagerly anticipated seasonal events. In addition, nearly every month afforded an opportunity for sidewalk sales and celebration days. Many of these celebrations featured themes, such as "Ladies' Day," "White Sale," or "Fall Festival." Window and floor displays became

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31 Ibid., xvi
32 Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing and Zola, 71.
33 For a rather impressive list of these thematic sales and celebrations, see Parent-Lardeur, Les demoiselles de magasin, 65.
more elaborate, with more unusual items, imbuing an aura of enchantment. Fixed prices eliminated haggling, and entrepreneurs realized that by displacing theatrics from the actors (buyers and sellers) onto the set....and by creating a spectacle out of the store itself....they could endow metonymically what were essentially nondescript goods with the fascination that was lacking in the merchandise.34

Of course, imported and unfamiliar goods were much coveted by Parisian department stores for purely business reasons; many managers believed that women who grew accustomed to seeing unexpected items would in time grow accustomed to making unexpected purchases.35

Moreover, it is precisely in these lavish displays and exotic spectacles that one perceives a greater fascination with France's colonies and possessions in faraway lands. Many displays were organized thematically around the mystique of the Orient, African safaris, and exotic tropical islands—areas of the world France "possessed" as a colonizing power. This phantasmagoric fascination with the unusual and glamorous, marketed by the modern culture of mass consumption, forms one of the major themes of Au bonheur des dames. Chapter 4 of Zola's novel perhaps best captures this spirit when he describes Mouret's magnificent "Arabian Nights" oriental display, simulating a harem. The spectacle stirred such a euphoric reaction among women shoppers that they could speak of nothing but the sumptuous rugs and decor they had seen:

34 Ross in Zola, The Ladies' Paradise, ix-x.
35 Ibid., x.
Then the ladies met once more in the oriental salon. They were leaving, but it was amidst a loquacious feeling of admiration. Even Madame Guibal became enthusiastic.

"Oh! delicious! makes you think you are in the East; doesn't it?"

"A real harem, and not at all dear!"

"And the Smyrnas! oh, the Smyrnas! what tones, what delicacy!"

"And this Kurdestan! Just look, a Delacroix!"\textsuperscript{36}

Here Zola foreshadowed the seductive ploy that was to become the basis for department stores' merchandising of the 1920s and 1930s—the period in which demand for and profits from home furnishings increased dramatically.\textsuperscript{37} Specifically, department store merchandising linked domestic personal possessions with foreign territorial possessions. The rise of the department store toward the fin-de-siècle matched the expansion and consolidation of the French colonial empire in South Asia, the Middle East, northern and equatorial Africa, the Caribbean, and the South Pacific. From 1880 to 1895, French territorial possessions increased from one million to nearly ten million square kilometers, encompassing a population that grew from five million in 1880 to fifty million only fifteen years later.\textsuperscript{38}

Moreover, these numbers increased even further in the 1920s and 1930s, when the French empire reached its \textit{apogée}. In this sense, to possess

\textsuperscript{36} Zola, \textit{The Ladies' Paradiso}, 104.

\textsuperscript{37} The Bon Marché, in fact, added the "Annexe de l'Ameublement" in 1923—an enormous building to house exclusively home furnishings. For a detailed description of the design and layout of the "annexe," see Marrey, \textit{Les grands magasins}, 200-207.

\textsuperscript{38} Raoul Girardet, \textit{L'idée coloniale en France de 1871-1962} (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1972), 45.
or simply admire a rug from the Orient reinforced the feeling of French cultural domination in Indochina, Syria, or Morocco because these marvels now "belonged" to France. Women shoppers could indulge in foreign delights while remaining on metropolitan French soil. Exotic colonial commodities were portable, as was France's own "civilizing" culture to the colonies. For some reason, the sands and colors of Morocco particularly fascinated the French imagination of the interwar period—much like the American fascination with the "Wild West."\[39\]

Although it is difficult to determine whether lavish and exotic department store displays were the cause or result of this fascination among French bourgeois women, store managers lost little opportunity capitalizing on it. Advertisements for white sales and window displays became recreations in Mediterranean scenery: pure white against deep blue skies. Home furnishing and fabric "days" alternated between Oriental, African, and Polynesian themes. One could argue that these tactics represented the "feminization" of a typically masculine colonial discourse. "Masculine" ideas of colonial wars, fierce natives, and savage animals were supplanted by "feminine" desires for intriguing places, rich colors, and soft textures. Men's colonial discourse emphasized domination and submission, while women's colonial discourse found expression in "the marvellous."\[40\]

This juxtaposition between feminine cultural fascination and masculine cultural mastery found expression in expositions as well. The design and marketing conceptions behind the expositions mirrored many of the


merchandising practices of the Parisian department stores. In her discussion of the 1900 Universal Exposition in Paris, Rosalind Williams describes the Trocadero section of the exposition (where the colonial exhibits were concentrated) as a distorted and demeaning celebration of colonialism “by appealing to the fantasies of the consumer.”

Even more significant was the 1931 Paris Colonial Exposition covering 272 acres in the Bois de Vincennes, just southeast of the capital. Herman Lebovic has observed that, "The Republic had been promoting a colonial consciousness at expositions for over forty years. The strategies of representation had been refined by 1931...." French colonialism was in its heyday during the interwar period and was celebrated in 1931 on a grand and unprecedented scale. Perhaps representational strategies, in Lebovic's words, had been refined, but the exposition itself was a study in self-aggrandizement and ostentatiousness and "played upon the usual rampant exoticism and the inevitable Orientalism." At the entrance to the exposition, a map and guide-book were handed out to each visitor. In addition to providing "instructions" for browsing, the guide-book revealed much about prevailing French attitudes toward colonized peoples. French authorities reserved the right to distinguish between good and bad taste and presented their own dream world for browsing and consumption:

[We] consider you, dear visitor, a person of good taste. You will see no blacks tastelessly throwing themselves about on stage (bambouls), no belly dancers, no seamy side shows, those vulgar displays

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41 Williams, Dream Worlds, 61-66. Quote taken from p. 64.
43 Ibid.
that have brought discredit upon many another
exhibition of the colonial sphere; but rather,
reconstructions of tropical life with all its color and
truly picturesque qualities.44

The 1931 Colonial Exposition was one manifestation of this "dream world
of the consumer"; department stores were another. Both were part of the same
phenomena of pageantry and possession, and both were part of the "cult of the
flâneur" (browser). Department stores and expositions were designed
specifically for browsing, for engaging in exotic fantasies, and for provoking
desire.

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The 1931 and 1937 Paris Expositions propelled Marxist, Surrealist, and
other critics of capitalism to reflect on colonialism and mass culture. In
Passagen-Werk, his unfinished interwar study of the Paris arcades, Walter
Benjamin concerned himself with the origins of consumerist mass culture and
with the politics of pageantry and possession in nineteenth-century Paris. The
arcades—once bustling, covered shopping and leisure areas of the nineteenth
century—had greatly influenced the design and planning of department stores.
All of the activities and vices associated with bourgeois culture could be found
there: commodity fetishism, reification, fashion, prostitution, and gambling.45
Arcades were by no means limited to Paris. By the fin-de-siècle, arcades had
become "the hallmark of a 'modern' metropolis" and could be found in many

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44 Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris en 1931: Guide officiel, text by André Domaiscon
45 Susan Buck-Morss, The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project
cities across the world, such as Naples, Moscow, Berlin, and Buenos Aires.46

Benjamin characterized the new, modern, urban, and phantasmagoric mass culture as "a 'dream-world,' in which neither exchange value nor use value exhausted the meaning of objects."47 Or, in the words of one contemporary critic:

> It is obvious how economic goods can satisfy physical needs such as those of food and shelter; less evident, but of overwhelming significance in understanding modern society, is how merchandise can fill needs of the imagination. The expression "the dream world of the consumer" refers to this non-material dimension.48

It would seem, then, that in the act of browsing itself, humans "recognize[d] [their] own consumerist mode of being-in-the-world."49 Once the flâneur's paradise, the arcades were deteriorated and long vacant by the 1930s, when Benjamin worked on his Arcades Project. "The department store," he sighed, "is [the flâneur's] last haunt."50

The contemporary definition of the French verb, flâner is literally to browse; hence, one who browses regularly is a flâneur. This word is rich with social, cultural, and sexual significance. The positive notion of flâner, that is, to browse, only came about with the department store. Before, flâner literally

46 Ibid., 40.
48 Dream Worlds, 65.
50 Quoted in Buck-Morss, "The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore," 105.
meant to loiter. Susan Buck-Morss has remarked that

sexual difference makes visible the privileged position of males within public space....the flâneur
was simply the name of a man who loitered; but all women who loitered risked being seen as whores, as
the term "street-walker" or "tramp" applied to women makes clear.51

There was thus a close and pejorative connection in the French imagination
between a woman's sexuality and her occupation of public space. In this
sense, the department store offered a welcome alternative to women: a
respectable public space in which to browse. Within department stores, being a
flâneur hence took on more positive connotations for women: from debased
potential prostitute on the streets, to elegant potential consumer in a commodity-
laden dream world.

Moreover, Aristide Boucicaut's invention of browsing created an entirely new climate for shoppers. Browsing, or in one critic's words, "the
democratization of luxury,"52 appealed to many bourgeois women who did not have to work—and hence had time on their hands—but whose means nonetheless did not permit indiscriminate buying habits. These women strolled languorously, enraptured by elaborate, exotic displays. Patriarchal French society had traditionally perceived women to be frivolous and more easily seduced than men.53 While they offered a new, more positive image of working women, department stores tended to reinforce age-old, less than flattering

51 Ibid., 119.
52 I have borrowed this term from Kristin Ross in Zola, The Ladies Paradise, x.
perceptions of women consumers.

Already by the late nineteenth century, the contemporary stereotype of the browsing female shopper had been born. Browsing, as Walter Benjamin argued, was a thoroughly modern notion and belonged to bourgeois, mass-consumer societies. Browsing also became intimately linked to the technologies of these modern societies, as they progressively industrialized. Department stores were among the first establishments to utilize new technologies involving color, light, glass and advanced metallurgy, and by the 1920s they were using them to great effect. Innovations in forging, die-casting, and molding techniques made winding staircases, panoramic elevator shafts, and ornate balconies possible. These attributes as well as fantastic domed ceilings, enormous galleries, and elaborate lighting conceptions all pointed to an architecture and interior design made expressly for browsing and people-watching.

Plate glass in particular became a necessary ingredient for browsing. During the interwar period, several of the Parisian department stores renovated or added new wings and buildings: the Bon Marché (1923), the Samaritaine (1929, 1933), and the Galeries Lafayette (1932). While each architect prided himself on the originality of his own design, one feature all of the structures shared was enormous windows. Elaborate displays lit by innovations in electricity and housed in state-of-the-art windows mediated a new relationship between browsing women and merchandise: they allowed for everything to be seen but at the same time rendered goods inaccessible. This "look but don't touch" tactic had the principle merit of creating desire—desire that, in the hopes

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55 Leach, "Transformations," 323. See also Reekie, *Temptations*, 95.
of store owners, would be indulged. In the best of worlds, the languid browser became an active consumer. On the other hand, the increased production of desire—as opposed to genuine need—corresponded to a distinct increase in shoplifting by 1920.56

By the 1920s, browsing had become a premier social activity and had completely revolutionized the seller-buyer relationship, by allowing shoppers to indulge in dreams without the obligation to purchase.57 As one historian has astutely observed:

The department store introduced an entirely new set of social interactions to shopping. In exchange for the freedom to browse, meaning the liberty to indulge in dreams without being obligated to buy in fact, the buyer gave up the freedom to participate actively in establishing prices and instead had to accept the price set by the seller....a striking example of how “the civilizing process” tames aggressions and feelings toward people while encouraging desires and feelings directed toward things. Department stores were organized to inflame these material desires and feelings.58

As Zola so effectively dramatized in the character of Octave Mouret, the shrewd marketing tactics employed by department store managers preyed upon specifically feminine fantasies. Department stores actively formulated a discourse of consumer culture, based almost exclusively on a model of female seduction.59 Department stores of the 1920s were clearly the locus of a

57 Williams, Dream Worlds, 67.
58 Williams, Dream Worlds, 67. See also Sennett, The Fall of Public Man, 141-49.
59 Bowlby, Just Looking, 20.
particular, feminine type of commodity fetishism, more concerned with exotic dreams, desires, and pageantry than with actual consumption. As Patricia O'Brien has explained, "The identifying characteristic in the new consumerist culture was not the purchase or even the use of goods—it was the possession of them." Possession therefore did not necessitate actual consumption. To consume, in the literal sense of the term, means to use up, to deplete. As the previous pages have demonstrated, this was not at all what shopping women had in mind.

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France, in the years between the wars, was well on its way to becoming a full-fledged, modern, industrial nation. Struggling to be simultaneously progressive and conservative, France found itself caught between progressing in the modern New World spirit and conserving its colonial domination in the familiar Old World tradition. These dilemmas all revolved around the single notion of possession. In the masculine vision, possession signified domination: men could possess faraway lands and state-of-the-art technologies—thereby dominating them. French women, like their male counterparts, also wanted to possess; but unlike men, they did not seek to dominate.

Many women felt displaced in this period of struggle and transition because old rules, beliefs, and practices were being challenged. Department stores gave French women a place to call their own. Almost immediately after its creation in the nineteenth century, the department store turned into a highly feminized space. By the end of the First World War, female employees overwhelmingly dominated the ranks of department stores, joining women

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60 "The Kleptomania Diagnosis," 72.
shoppers to create an almost exclusively feminized establishment.

In the final analysis, department stores were multi-faceted institutions. They were carefully crafted sites of seduction for women, built on gender-specific marketing tactics and spectacular representations of colonialism. In short, department stores became domestic spaces that housed exotic places. The culture of browsing simultaneously made shopping women feel at home in a public, urban space and carried them far away into a private, enthralling dream world, thereby bridging the gap between their public and private spheres. The stores' active production of desire for glamorous goods made women feel desired and alluring themselves. The stores provided bourgeois women with a fantasy and working women with a career. In this sense, women both possessed and were possessed by department stores.

Parisian department stores of the interwar period gave French women—as workers and as shoppers—a place to which they could belong that was both domestic and cosmopolitan. For this reason, women celebrated the department store, their own unique institution, on a grand scale. Émile Zola had been ahead of his time. The "Ladies' Paradise" he so vividly portrayed in the 1880s, in reality, only "became truly feminized after the First World War...."61

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