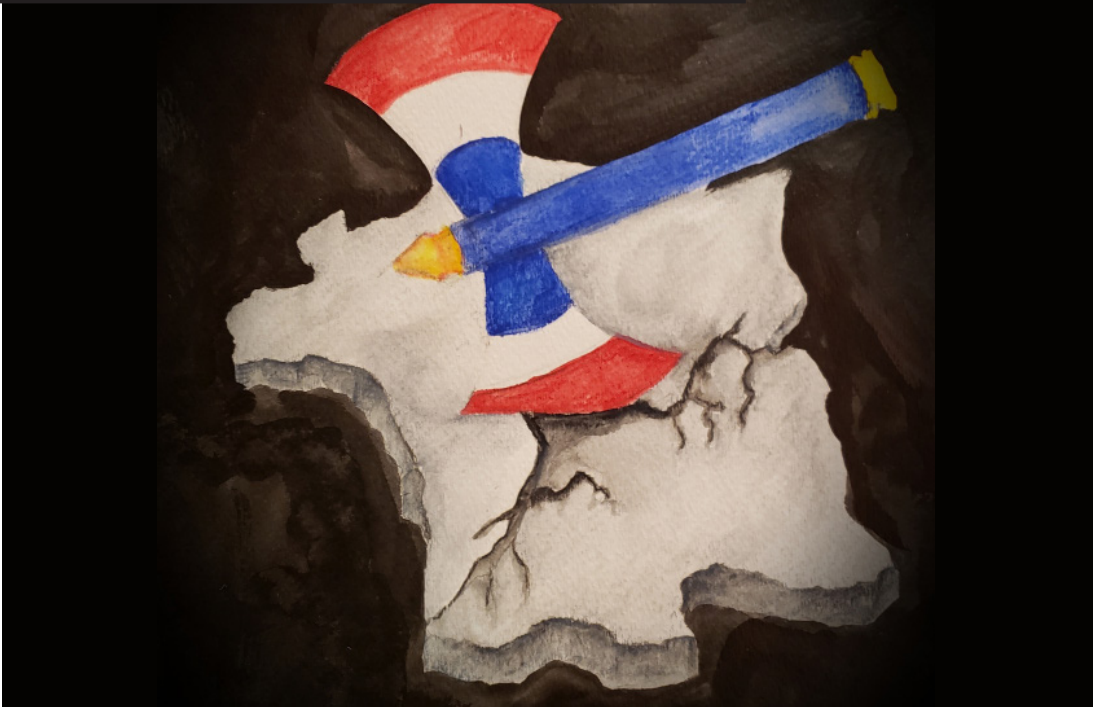


LEAR PRIZE WINNER



CONTESTED SYMBOLS:

VICHY FRANCE AND THE LEGACY OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

This paper examines how Vichy, the authoritarian government in France throughout most of the Second World War, reckoned with the legacy of the French Revolution. I investigate this relationship through the regime's treatment of four revolutionary symbols: the figure Marianne, the anthem "La Marseillaise," the national holiday of Bastille Day, and the slogan of Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité. Because these symbols were deeply embedded in French social and political life, I argue that Vichy could neither fully reject nor embrace them; instead, it pursued a middle ground by twisting the symbols' meanings and introducing alternatives in line with the traditionalism and ethnocentrism of its National Revolution. In doing so, Vichy attempted to replace the French Republic and the revolutionary values that it stood for with its own vision of the French past, present, and future.

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Since 1789, the themes and struggles at the heart of the French Revolution have been invoked and re-invoked at times of political crisis and change, from the empire of Napoleon to the brief Paris Commune of 1870. At the onset of the twentieth century, even as the Revolution grew more distant with the passing of time, its legacy remained central to the identity of both the French Republic and its citizens. This crystallization of French identity was made possible by the government's use of a repertoire of revolutionary symbols embodying the ideals of liberty, equality, and brotherhood. When the Republic ceased to exist, however, as it briefly did during the Second World War under the Vichy regime, what would become of these symbols? In other words, how did Vichy, by all definitions an authoritarian government, address the inescapable yet threatening legacy of the French Revolution?

Vichy's dismantling of the French Republic through its National Revolution served to undermine the revolutionary values that it stood for. These values were far from abstract in French society, however: they were embodied in countless monuments and festivals across France, as well as in widely-known songs and works of art. Thus, with the French Revolution present in so many aspects of French society, it was as impossible for Vichy to ignore its legacy as it was for the regime to embrace it. Instead, Vichy attempted to adapt revolutionary symbols to the ideals of the National Revolution by altering their meaning and introducing alternatives, thus conjuring an ethno-nationalistic myth of a "true" France obscured by modernity. This paper investigates Vichy's contentious relationship to the French Revolution through its treatment of several such revolutionary symbols: the figure Marianne, the anthem "La Marseillaise," the national holiday of Bastille Day, and the slogan of *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity).

Vichy's approach to these symbols furthers existing debates about both the regime and the French Revolution. In attempting to manipulate and transform revolutionary imagery, Vichy, by all means a nationalist government, demonstrated that its vision of the French nation diverged from that conceived of by the revolutionaries of 1789 as well as the bureaucrats of the Third Republic, the country's longest republican regime up to that point. While Vichy defined its cultural program as a "revolution" and mobilized many revolutionary images, it simultaneously defied the core values of the French Republic, and consequently drew attention to the contradictions inherent in its vision of France's past, present, and future. Whether a regrettable "parenthesis" in French history or a more serious "past that does not pass," Vichy and its treatment of the revolutionary legacy thus bear implications beyond the popular question of whether or not the regime was fascist: at question here is the meaning of the modern French nation and the values upon which it is ostensibly based.

Origins of L'État Français (The French State)

While Vichy put an end to the Third Republic, which had been in place since 1870, the France of the 1930s was by no means a liberal paradise. As in the rest of Europe, struggles between the left and right escalated steeply during this decade. With the economic modernization of the 1920s metered by the global economic crisis of the 1930s, the interwar period had brought a mixture of prosperity and strife to France. Trade unionism and immigration, both of which had ballooned in France during *les années folles* (the Roaring Twenties), met with increasing opposition in the form of conservatism and xenophobia. Extreme-right leagues like *L'Action française*, which existed before the war, and the *Croix de Feu*, created in 1927, attracted members and gained political clout through heated rhetoric blaming immigrants, Jews, and communists for France's economic woes. Bourgeois workers, veterans of the Great War, and devout Catholics were particularly drawn to these leagues and their demands to "return France to the French."¹

The victory of the Popular Front, a coalition of communist, socialist, and radical parties in the 1936 presidential election, marked a potential break from this apparent trend towards the far right in France and elsewhere in Europe. The Popular Front was formed in response to several separate crises, including the growth of fascism in Europe as well as a riot led by several French far-right leagues on February 6, 1934, which the left had viewed as an attempt at a fascist coup d'état. Following a large rally on July 14, 1935 and a campaign calling for "bread, peace, and liberty," the Popular Front brought together the French left during the following year's election and formed the country's first socialist government under the leadership of Léon Blum, a Jewish socialist. Once in power, Blum's regime appealed to working-class interests, introduced paid leave, and attempted to dissolve the extreme-right leagues. However, persistent economic troubles and divisions over international affairs like the Spanish Civil War weakened the Popular Front internally and in the eyes of the French public. Blum, a Jew, fell victim to a wave of antisemitism generated by the far-right leagues and ultimately resigned in 1937.²

In the aftermath of Blum's resignation, the Popular Front collapsed, leaving the French Republic in a "remarkably threadbare" state.³ In April 1938, Edouard Daladier, leader of the Radical party and Minister of War under Blum, formed his new government in a France in which "the whiff of war was strong."⁴ Despite inheriting the troubles of the preceding years, including massive strikes and dissent within the leftist coalition, Daladier enjoyed relatively high approval from the French.⁵ However, the circumstances surrounding Daladier's government made his popularity short-lived. By 1938, Hitler's invasion of Central Europe began and led to the Munich conference between France, Great Britain, Germany, and Italy on September 29-30, permitting the German annexation of the Sudetenland in return for a pledge of peace from Hitler. The majority of the French were relieved that the

conference resolved the conflict peacefully, but this relief did not last: less than a year later, Germany completely occupied Czechoslovakia and invaded Poland, prompting France and Great Britain to declare war on September 3, 1939.⁶

Following the declaration of war, the French military took on a defensive strategy as both an attempt to avoid repeating its great losses of WWI and a general underestimation of the German army's capabilities. Bearing in mind the heavy costs of the previous war, many French people, civilians and soldiers alike, did not favor entering another conflict. As a result, the German invasion in May 1940 proved quick and decisive, prompting a massive exodus of civilians towards the southern and western regions of the country and a series of military defeats on the eastern front.⁷ The armistice signed between France and Germany on June 22, 1940 signaled the effective collapse of the Third Republic. The French government, then in exile in Bordeaux, nominated Marshal Philippe Pétain, an eighty-four-year old hero of the First World War, to negotiate the terms of the armistice.⁸ The result was a France divided in two, between an Occupied Zone in the north and along the Atlantic coast, and an Unoccupied Zone in central and southeastern France. Excluded from occupied Paris, the French government relocated to Vichy, a town near the line of demarcation.⁹ There, the government swiftly consolidated its power and on July 9, the French parliament voted overwhelmingly in favor of abandoning the constitution of 1875. The next day, Parliament granted Pétain full powers to form a new government: the French State.¹⁰

La France Éternelle (Eternal France)

Vichy signified “not only a change in government but a change in regime,” as it quickly instituted an ideological program for national renewal.¹¹ Pétain, along with vice-premier Pierre Laval, used the French defeat to promote a rejuvenation of French society under the guise of a National Revolution. This “intellectual and moral recovery” was rooted in an ideology of ethnocentric traditionalism and rejection of the “decadence” of the interwar years in favor of a return to the spirit of the “true” French nation.¹² Many tenets of the National Revolution aligned closely with the pre-war rhetoric of the French far right, particularly that of writer Charles Maurras, who promoted causes such as the “centrality of the family” after decades of falling birth rates and a “return to agriculture” after the large-scale urbanization of the interwar period. To achieve these ends, large families were subsidized, legal restrictions limited access to divorce and abortion, and farming became heavily incentivized.¹³ Through these policies, Pétain's National Revolution capitalized on a “romantic nostalgia for an idealized past” that blamed modernity for the materialism and individualism of French society.¹⁴

However, the romantic vision of the French nation that Vichy championed was far from harmless. Reflecting German pressure as well as the pre-existing

xenophobia of the French right, the National Revolution entailed the exclusion of foreigners from France and increasingly intolerant policies towards the country's Jewish population. Indeed, the National Revolution was exclusionary at its core, its purpose being to "reassemble the dismantled components of the national body, to re-include in the national community the elements lost by 'bad shepherds.'"¹⁵ Implicit in this restoration was a definition of the French nation that excluded a wide variety of people, including the most vulnerable. This exclusion proved to be more than rhetorical and between 1940 and 1942, Vichy enacted a series of measures targeting foreign Jews. Beginning with a mandatory census and exclusion from public service, and culminating in deportations to Nazi death camps, Vichy's policy regarding its "Jewish problem" became increasingly intolerant over time.¹⁶ Despite post-war claims that these initiatives were entirely the result of German orders—and that the exclusion of foreigners prevented a worse fate from befalling French Jews—Vichy's role in the Holocaust is now officially accepted to have been one of active participation, and the National Revolution's efforts to "renew" the French nation have largely been recognized as a nationalist crusade of exclusion.¹⁷

Because Vichy did not fully adopt the rhetoric of the French far-right, it could not simply reject the Revolution and its imagery.

The National Revolution's message of the rejuvenation of the French nation and the exclusion of outsiders was transmitted throughout the Unoccupied and Occupied Zones. This was achieved primarily through propaganda—the government's "instrument for the control of civil society."¹⁸ Because parliamentary assemblies like the Senate had been dissolved upon the creation of the French State, thereby limiting the regime's contact with French citizens and their representatives, it was necessary for Vichy to have a "state apparatus" through which to convey the themes of the National Revolution.¹⁹ Vichy propaganda was therefore directed through the new Ministry of Information, headed from 1941 to 1944 by Paul Marion, a former communist.²⁰ With its own bureaucratic network of officers and task forces, the Ministry of Information disseminated propaganda in a variety of ways—from speeches given by Pétain himself to flyers posted throughout French towns.

The circumstances surrounding Vichy's existence, from its atypical rise to power to the types of programs that it instituted, make any classification of the regime rather difficult. Having ended the Third Republic and dissolved its representative assemblies, Vichy was far from a modern republic. It was certainly conservative, even authoritarian, but it was anti-republican in a manner different from previous reactionary French regimes. Unlike the Napoleonic empires or the

Restoration of the nineteenth century, Vichy was not counter-revolutionary in the sense of desiring a return to a monarchical order. Rather than a pre-revolutionary past, it called upon a mythic past rooted in ethno-nationalism, a past that hinged upon the notion that there existed an “eternal France” laying dormant, simply waiting to be rediscovered.²¹ This vision of the past, a past barely grounded in historical fact, owed itself greatly to the proliferation of fascist-style leagues in the decades before the war, which had encouraged rightists to “furnish themselves with a specifically anti-republican vision of French history with which to change the present and the future.”²² In this regard, it is clear that Vichy was no counter-revolutionary conspiracy; rather, it was the result of the collision of rising authoritarian currents, a loss of faith in democracy during the interwar period, and the shock of losing the war so suddenly.²³

The enigmatic nature of the Vichy regime is crucial when examining its relationship to the French Revolution. For better or for worse, any new regime had to define itself in terms of the Revolution due to it being the “foundational event” of the modern French state.²⁴ As Petain and other top Vichy officials dismantled the Third Republic, under which many revolutionary symbols and values had become entrenched in French political and social life, they faced a cultural lexicon that they had no choice but to address. At the time, members of the French right generally viewed the Revolution as a whole through the lens of the Jacobin dictatorship and the Terror: to Maurras, for instance, “the ‘liberty’ proclaimed by the Revolution destroyed the citizen’s respect for all law, state and natural.”²⁵ Others, such as Jacques Bainville of *L’Action française*, even linked the French Revolution to communism by claiming that the 1790s had given rise to a “Bolshevization of modernity.”²⁶ However, because Vichy did not fully adopt the rhetoric of the French far-right, it could not simply reject the Revolution and its imagery. Instead, Vichy attempted to pursue a middle path between acceptance and rejection of the Revolution by reading into it the values of the National Revolution.

Revolutionary Symbols Under Vichy

Marianne, the national allegory of the French Republic, was one revolutionary symbol with which Vichy had to contend. As is the case for many symbols dating to the revolutionary period, the origins of Marianne are complex, and her meaning has evolved considerably over the centuries since her inception. Marianne’s form was derived from the ancient allegory of Liberty, a woman draped in robes and wearing a Phrygian cap, itself a symbol of liberty under the Roman Republic.²⁷ Liberty was officially chosen as the allegory of the new French Republic on September 25, 1792 following a demand from Abbé Grégoire that “our emblems circulating the globe present to all peoples the cherished images of liberty and republican pride.”²⁸ Meanwhile in Languedoc, a province in southern France, the name Marianne circulated as a euphemism for the Revolution, and the question

of “How is Marianne?” became a way of inquiring about current events. This final association of the name Marianne with the Revolution came from a song, “La Guérison de Marianne” by Guillaume Lavabre, a Protestant shoemaker.²⁹ The song described Marianne’s recovery from a “great malady” due to the care of the “new executive power,” celebrated the storming of the Tuileries on July 10, 1792, and rejoiced in the official end of the monarchy shortly thereafter.³⁰

The union of the name Marianne and the figure of Liberty did not occur in the revolutionary period; instead, it would take the inauguration of the Third Republic nearly a century later for the icon to attain its final form. In the interim, a reactionary period of empires and monarchies, Liberty became a symbol of republicanism and resistance, exemplified by Eugène Delacroix’s *Liberty Leading the People*, a painting completed in 1830 commemorating of the July Revolution of that year.³¹ When the brief Second Republic was founded in 1848, the need to replace royal emblems and effigies once again brought Liberty to the forefront of French national imagery. However, cleavage between right- and left-leaning republicans at the time ultimately gave rise to two separate visions of Liberty as a symbol for the Republic: the revolutionary Republic, popular icon of subversion and even combat, and the official Republic, a wise and matronly figure often without her Phrygian cap.³²

This double-image endured through the Second Empire and into the Third Republic, when it abounded at a time of widespread “republican affirmation via image.”³³ The name Marianne had been largely restricted to provincial use until a series of workers’ revolts in the 1850s in southern France brought it, and its code-meaning for the French Republic, to national attention. Thereafter, Marianne became the common name for the figure of Liberty-as-Republic, a fact epitomized in the Third Republic’s initiative to place busts of “the Marianne” in town halls across the country. This initiative ballooned into a veritable phenomenon of *la statuomanie* (statue-mania) by the end of the nineteenth century, with commemorative effigies—often of questionable artistic value—consuming nearly every inch of available public space.³⁴ In many ways, the proliferation of Marianne’s image was a banalization of her meaning and a betrayal of the revolutionary values that she originally stood for. As an allegory of the French state, Marianne became associated with order and governance and her link to the universal value of liberty became increasingly ambiguous, and even ignored.

It was this Marianne, an allegory of the French Republic with tenuous ties to the revolutionary struggle for liberty, that Vichy faced in 1940. Perhaps its best-known “strategy” towards Marianne was the destruction of bronze busts in town halls and other public spaces, though Vichy neither officially banned the image of Marianne nor explicitly ordered its destruction. Instead, a decree on October



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11, 1941 demanded that statues lacking “significant historic or artistic value” be removed and melted down for industrial use.³⁵ Given the abundance of Marianne busts under the Third Republic, it is possible to argue, as Elizabeth Karlsogdt has, that these busts were recycled for practical and aesthetic reasons rather than as part of a concerted attack on republican symbols.³⁶ Indeed, of about 1,700 dismantled statues, only six percent were republican allegories.³⁷ However, many of the representations of Marianne, from busts to postal stamps, were replaced with the image of Pétain, indicating that political symbolism was indeed an important factor in Vichy’s decision-making process. The regime’s hesitancy to erase Marianne’s image from public spaces and her replacement by symbols of the National Revolution demonstrate Vichy’s inability to fully reject or accept the revolutionary legacy, and ultimately attest to the regime’s ambiguous self-definition.

Another strategy Vichy adopted towards Marianne was the distortion of her meaning—what Maurice Agulhon has termed “killing by effigy.”³⁸ Caricatures in the far-right press had long depicted Marianne as either a hideous, obese old woman or an exaggeratedly seductive youth, thereby portraying the Republic and its professed values as corrupt.³⁹ Although official Vichy propaganda tended to avoid these depictions of Marianne, her vilification in the press primed the regime to propose an alternative feminine icon more in line with the values of the National Revolution: Joan of Arc. Long venerated by monarchists and nationalists, she emerged between 1940 and 1944 as “the emblem of eternal French resistance against the English.”⁴⁰ While Marianne stood for universal liberty, Joan of Arc was unambiguously nationalist, a figure from the mythic French past whose image could be used to embody Vichy’s ideal female citizen: Catholic, maternal, and anti-English. Indeed, as Joan Tumblety argues, in Joan of Arc the French right found “both a military prowess and a comforting maternal presence to rival the republican Marianne.”⁴¹ Through festivals, speeches, and other forms of propaganda, Vichy wholeheartedly embraced this “cult” of Joan of Arc. With Marianne quickly becoming a key symbol of the Resistance, Joan of Arc proved a safer pick for Vichy’s “it-girl” and allowed the regime to avoid overt confrontation with Marianne’s revolutionary and republican legacy while still using an undeniably French symbol.

Vichy adopted a similar approach towards “La Marseillaise,” the French national anthem. Like Marianne, “La Marseillaise” can be traced to the revolutionary period, though its significance and popularity evolved considerably between its first appearance in 1792 and Vichy’s inception in 1940. Composed by Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle on the night of April 25, 1792, the song, originally titled “War Song for the Army of the Rhine,” was written for the French troops garrisoned in Strasbourg following the revolutionary regime’s declaration of war against Austria on April 20.⁴² The song quickly spread to other French troops and earned the name “La Marseillaise” after being sung by volunteer soldiers from Marseilles who

had marched all the way to Paris by foot.⁴³ It was then sung at the storming of the Tuileries on August 10, thereby becoming “inevitably associat[ed] with the fall of the monarchy, and with the next step of the Revolution.”⁴⁴ The rapid popularity of “La Marseillaise” can be explained by its spirited rhythm as well as the universality of its lyrics. As Bernard Richard notes, it is a patriotic war song whose lyrics are “strongly ideological, but in which neither the homeland nor the enemy are explicitly named.”⁴⁵

After the French Revolution, the history of “La Marseillaise” followed a path similar to that of Marianne, one of “long silences interrupted by emergences or rediscoveries.”⁴⁶ Forbidden by the counter-revolutionary regimes of the nineteenth century, it nevertheless persisted in the collective memory of the French, often resurfacing as a symbol of resistance. Just as Marianne reemerged to beckon the French towards liberty, “La Marseillaise” and its call for citizens to rise against tyranny accompanied the popular uprisings of 1830, 1848, and 1870. Upon the establishment of the Third Republic in 1870, “La Marseillaise” reappeared permanently in the public eye, officially becoming France’s national anthem on 14 February 1879. In doing so, the Third Republic officially laid claim to the legacy of the French Revolution; adopting “La Marseillaise” was “a means for republicans, as opportunistic as they were radical, to reattach themselves to the French Revolution, [and] to establish themselves as children of the Revolution.”⁴⁷ As much as it marked the victory of republicanism against the previous regimes, the choice of “La Marseillaise” as national anthem proved paradoxical and once again represented the government’s banalization of a revolutionary symbol.

Despite the Third Republic’s claim on “La Marseillaise” and the implications therein, the national anthem was but one iteration of the song. Between the 1870s and 1940s, different forms of “La Marseillaise” abounded in France and elsewhere in Europe. Groups on both sides of the political spectrum created their own versions of the song, from an “Anti-Jew Marseillaise” during the Dreyfus Affair to the “May Day Marseillaise” penned by a socialist association.⁴⁸ During the interwar period, “La Marseillaise” and its spin-offs became increasingly associated with the radical left to the point of sparking dispute between French socialists over whether to sing “La Marseillaise” or “L’Internationale,” the actual anthem of the Second International.⁴⁹ Viewed as a hymn for the international left, “La Marseillaise” reached beyond the borders of its home country; it was sung upon Lenin’s return to St. Petersburg from exile in 1917, played in 1931 in Madrid during the ceremonies inaugurating the Spanish Republic, and even adopted and translated by several socialist parties in Latin America. As these connections to the radical left intensified, the French right, which had never favorably regarded “La Marseillaise” because of its revolutionary origins, treated it with growing hostility.

The dual function of “La Marseillaise” as an official anthem and a subversive hymn explain its complex trajectory during the Vichy period, under which it simultaneously functioned as a nationalist anthem and a symbol of resistance. Although it was forbidden in the Occupied Zone, Vichy continued to use “La Marseillaise” in an official capacity and played it at various ceremonies and festivals across the Unoccupied Zone. Essentially ignoring its revolutionary origins and republican associations, Vichy presented “La Marseillaise” as a hymn for the eternal French nation that Pétain and his National Revolution claimed awaited rediscovery through the people’s return to traditional values and occupations. This was a “Marseillaise” onto which Pétain and his men heavily projected their own values, just as leftists and rightists alike had done for decades before them. They focused on lyrics of “La Marseillaise” that suited their purpose and drew attention to lines that emphasized the pride and protection of the homeland rather than the spirit of revolution and fight for liberty. The sixth stanza proved particularly useful for this purpose:

Sacred love of the Fatherland,
Lead, support our avenging arms
Liberty, cherished Liberty,
Fight with thy defenders!
Under our flags may victory
Hurry to thy manly accents,
So that thy expiring enemies
See thy triumph and our glory!⁵⁰

Referred to as the “Marshal’s couplet,” this stanza captured the patriotism of Vichy rhetoric and indicated that there was no need for Pétain to look beyond “La Marseillaise” for his national anthem, revolutionary as its origins were.

Although Vichy did not attempt to replace “La Marseillaise” with an anthem of its own, the regime introduced a number of original songs, most of which were taught at schools and performed by children. These new songs were nationalistic to an extreme, their lyrics often hailing Pétain as the great defender of the nation. In “Maréchal, nous voilà!” (Marshal, here we are!), for instance, a chorus of Pétain’s self-proclaimed children announced their willingness to serve their leader, “France’s savior,” who had given them hope that their country would be reborn.⁵¹ Pétain evidently took full advantage of his reputation as a hero of the Great War to cultivate this image of a benevolent father-figure. Indeed, according to songs like “Maréchal, nous voilà!” and “L’Hymne au Maréchal” (Hymn to the Marshal), Pétain had saved the nation by signing the armistice and collaborating with Germany. In combination with their selective interpretation of “La Marseillaise,” these new songs contributed to an ethno-nationalist re-reading of the French past that disregarded

many aspects of its revolutionary history while not fully refuting it. Music thus functioned as a major tool of Vichy propaganda, forming an “unrivaled catalyst of enthusiasm centered on Pétain” that spread across the country, from household radios to choirs of schoolchildren.⁵²

“La Marseillaise” and other patriotic songs were typically played on Bastille Day, the French national holiday occurring on July 14. As the Vichy regime had decided to “anchor its cultural identity in a nostalgic view of old France and its values” and “[treat] the Revolution as an unfortunate, finite episode,” it was forced to grapple with questions of whether and how to commemorate the unequivocally revolutionary holiday.⁵³ Compared to Marianne or “La Marseillaise,” the origins of Bastille Day are clearly rooted in the Revolution: the people of Paris stormed the Bastille on July 14, 1789.⁵⁴ While the sacking of the fortress was unplanned and its consequences unanticipated, the fall of the Bastille became a watershed moment in the Revolution, marking “the first manifestation of the French people to claim their liberty and their civic emancipation.”⁵⁵ The following year, the *Fête de la Fédération* (Holiday of the Federation) commemorated the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille and other events of 1789. Held at a time when many thought the Revolution had reached its natural end with the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, the festival celebrated the “rebirth of the nation, founded on the values of 1789 and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.”⁵⁶

Of course, the French Revolution did not end in 1790 and the violence of the Terror forever shaped collective remembrance of events like the storming of the Bastille. Under the reactionary regimes of the nineteenth century, commemoration of Bastille Day was predictably forbidden and replaced by more suitable holidays, although rebellious French republicans continued to celebrate in secret.⁵⁷ Once the Third Republic came to power, the legacy of the French Revolution was proudly reclaimed by the government but the choice of a date within it to commemorate as France’s national holiday proved contentious: would the Republic prioritize the “bourgeois” Revolution of 1789, or the “democratic” Revolution of 1792?⁵⁸ Acceptable to both radical and conservative republicans, and significant enough as the rupture between the Ancien Régime and modern French state, Bastille Day emerged as the only valid choice.⁵⁹ Indeed, because it represented both the popular fervor of the storming of the Bastille and the more tempered celebration of unity of the *Fête de la Fédération*, the choice of July 14 was ultimately a means for the Third Republic to create its own mythic past of sorts, a past in which the violence and division of the Terror was less important than the Revolution’s promise of universal liberty and equality.

The Third Republic’s official selection of the July 14 as its national holiday in 1880 did not absolve the date of controversy, however. The French right fervently

disputed the decision by arguing that it was a celebration of the scenes of carnage and cannibalism it associated with the Terror. Decades later, the holiday remained equally controversial. With the concurrent rise of extreme-right leagues and the Popular Front during the 1930s, the 150th anniversary of the storming of the Bastille in 1793 set the stage for a heated confrontation between competing visions of the Revolution and its legacy. During the interwar period, the prevailing accounts of the Revolution were “optimistic” and “firmly republican” thanks to historians like Georges Lefebvre and Albert Mathiez. In response, the French far-right seized the occasion “as an opportunity to deconstruct the national myths [...] and to offer instead a critique of French history that situated 1789 at the birth of a decadent modernity.”⁶⁰ The controversies surrounding Bastille Day’s sesquicentenary festivities thus implicated more than the national holiday alone: at stake was France’s relationship to its past and, by extension, how the country could define itself in the present.

Vichy’s establishment appeared to mark a victory for the far-right’s vision of the French past. This victory was tempered, however, by the regime’s refusal to fully repudiate the French Revolution. Whereas an explicitly counter-revolutionary regime would likely have abolished Bastille Day entirely, the July 14 holiday and its related festivities remained a part of the regime’s official calendar until 1942, when total German occupation of the country prohibited the celebration of all French holidays. According to Ethan Katz, this was “more by political necessity than by choice,” as Vichy’s first Bastille Day came only a month after the signing of the armistice.⁶¹ In true Vichy fashion, Pétain quickly endeavored to adapt the holiday to his own purposes by transforming it “from a celebration of republicanism and liberty into a solemn day for France’s war dead.”⁶³ Accordingly, the July 14 between 1940 and 1942 was accompanied by somber ceremonies and religious services, and the holiday’s revolutionary origins remained evident only from its date. Pétain’s status as a respected veteran of World War I lent him a great deal of authority in enacting this change and cementing him at the center of the newly revised national holiday.⁶² As a result, religion, order, and veneration of the French homeland replaced Bastille Day’s original values of liberty, unity, and – most threatening of all to the French State – popular demolition of state power. Once again, Vichy had taken a symbol of the Revolution and adapted it to suit its own vision of the French nation.

Along with its transformation of Bastille Day, Vichy also promoted alternative holidays in line with the National Revolution’s values. The November 11, when the French honored the fallen soldiers of the First World War, was promoted as a major holiday under Vichy. The reminder of the great losses suffered by the French during the war served to reinforce the notion that the French-German armistice, and indeed Vichy collaboration with Hitler, was a beneficial decision that had saved the nation from ruin and guaranteed it a place in the future European order. Vichy also endorsed the celebration of Mother’s Day, as it was a perfect occasion to endorse the

National Revolution's image of mothers as dutiful housewives responsible for the moral education of their children; in Pétain's own words, mothers were "the muses of our Christian civilization."⁶³ Similarly, the Festival of Joan of Arc was promoted as a holiday for Vichy's version of the saint—the Catholic, maternal, anti-Marianne—as children covered statues and churches with flowers each May.⁶⁴

Vichy even introduced new holidays, including a festival for workers on May 1. While the notion of a workers' holiday may seem rather leftist, Vichy ensured that the holiday was centered around the figure of Pétain, who "grasped the hand of the worker and explained that he was putting France to work and would keep his promises."⁶⁵ Through their labor, then, workers contributed to the rebuilding of a prosperous French nation, just as mothers ensured the continuation and education of the French people and veterans guaranteed the safety and integrity of the homeland.

Vichy's establishment appeared to mark a victory for the far-right's vision of the French past. This victory was tempered, however, by the regime's refusal to fully repudiate the French Revolution.

Perhaps the symbol that best summed up the vision of the National Revolution was its motto of *Travail, Famille, Patrie* (Work, Family, Fatherland) and its blatant opposition to the model upon which it was based, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*. Like Marianne, "La Marseillaise," and Bastille Day, France's original national slogan was irrefutably revolutionary. First popularized by Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau and Voltaire, the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity were included in countless maxims invoked during the Revolution, though they were often accompanied or replaced by others like unity and reason.⁶⁶ It is impossible to trace the emergence of the liberty-equality-brotherhood trio to an exact moment but it generally followed a three-part trajectory: liberty was present from the early days of the Revolution and equality joined it after the storming of the Tuileries on April 10, 1792. Finally, brotherhood was popularized in 1793 by the Montagnards, a radical group that controlled the French government at the time.⁶⁷ The slogan's ties to the radical current of the French Revolution, including the Terror, are undeniable. It allegedly appeared at a meeting of the populist Cordeliers Club in May 1791, where members proposed that *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* be inscribed on the uniforms and flags of the National Guard.⁶⁹ The trio emerged again in 1793, after which point the French were encouraged to paint "Unity, indivisibility of the Republic; Liberty-Equality-Brotherhood or death" on their houses.⁶⁸

The slogan was unsurprisingly suppressed during the empires and monarchies of the nineteenth century, but resurfaced with other revolutionary symbols during the republican interruptions of 1830, 1848, and 1870. In the short-lived French constitution of 1848, for instance, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* was defined as a principle of the Republic.⁶⁹ Under the Third Republic, the slogan and its revolutionary origins were officially recognized by the French government and the words were inscribed on the edifices of town halls across the country as part of the 1880 Bastille Day celebrations.⁷⁰ Despite its “canonization” at this time, the Republic’s official adoption of the motto did not spare it from controversy and outright opposition. While most accepted the slogan, and to an extent it became yet another banal symbol of the French government, the far-right continuously voiced its opposition even through the interwar period. In his 1931 *Dictionnaire politique et critique*, (Political and Critical Dictionary) Maurras summed up the far-right’s stance towards the motto: liberty was a “dream” and equality a “folly,” while fraternity alone deserved its place “on the façade of the national union.”⁷¹

On 10 July 1940, the same constitutional law granting Pétain full powers to form a government proclaimed that the new constitution must “guarantee the rights of work, the family, and the fatherland.”⁷² Vichy’s motto of *Travail, Famille, Patrie* (Work, Family, Fatherland) was thus introduced upon the very creation of the French State.⁷³

Adopted from the *Croix de Feu* and its successor, the *Parti social français*, the motto was an obvious nod to the rhetoric of the extreme-right movements of the interwar period and an explicit refutation of the legacy of 1789.⁷⁴ Implementation of the slogan therefore entailed more than the inscription of the words on public edifices: it demanded a serious reconfiguration of French ideals and a transformation of the existing social order. To that end, the policies of Vichy’s National Revolution were all constructed around the notions of work, family, and fatherland. Posters demanding that French men to do their part for the nation by working in Germany and the festivities on May 1 commended French laborers as a crucial pillar of support for Pétain. Laws and subsidies encouraging conception and festivals valorizing motherhood extolled the family as the “fundamental cell” of the national organism.⁷⁵ Lastly, Pétain’s countless speeches about the beloved yet neglected *patrie*, along with the regime’s exclusion of foreigners and Jews, cemented the fatherland as an ethno-national community whose importance vastly exceeded that of any individual. However, Vichy’s efforts to restructure French society and values through its new slogan proved incomplete and left the regime’s position vis-à-vis the French Revolution as equivocal as ever. While catchy, the three-part mantra of *Travail, Famille, Patrie* remained an inescapable reference to the revolutionary model that it sought to replace. Moreover, far from being banned from use, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* was even evoked in official Vichy discourse. On September 15, 1940, for

instance, Pétain himself called for the French to strive towards a “real Liberty,” a “real Equality,” and a “true Brotherhood,” though these were all accompanied by appropriately conservative disclaimers that one must defer to a “rational hierarchy.”⁷⁶ The revolutionary slogan evidently proved too deeply embedded in French institutions and society for Vichy to fulfill the far-right’s wish of its elimination, ultimately drawing attention to the failings of the regime’s strategy of simultaneous “investment in French continuity” and inspiration from the forward-looking mass dictatorships of the 1930s.⁷⁷

Conclusion: Vichy, the Revolution, and Modern France

The treatment of revolutionary symbols under Vichy demonstrates how contentious the legacy of the French Revolution was for a regime that had abolished the Third Republic without being explicitly counter-revolutionary. Because these symbols were deeply embedded in the French social and political fabric, and because Vichy failed to sufficiently define itself between republic and autocracy, it could neither embrace nor ignore a large portion of revolutionary imagery. Instead, as demonstrated, the regime pursued a middle ground by twisting the meaning of certain symbols and introducing alternatives in line with the values of its National Revolution, thereby attempting to replace the Republic and the values it stood for with “a neo-traditionalism tinged with paternalism, clericalism, and authoritarianism.”⁷⁸

However, Vichy’s mission was destined to fail. While the majority of the French viewed Pétain with a level of respect bordering on veneration, this *pétainisme* did not translate into the widespread success of his policies and wholehearted adoption of his traditionalist values. Decades of state approval of the French Revolution and the institutionalization of its symbols had stacked the odds against any attempts to take control of the revolutionary legacy and transform France’s relationship with its past. Moreover, many of the symbols that Vichy endeavored to reclaim and adapt to its own vision were appropriated by the Resistance. Marianne’s image abounded in the clandestine press,⁷⁹ political prisoners at Chateaubriant on October 22, 1941 defiantly sang “La Marseillaise” before their execution, and Resistance leaders rallied around July 14 as a source of motivation for their own movement.⁸⁰ Revolutionary symbols that had become commonplace under the Third Republic made a victorious comeback during the Liberation in 1944, and were proudly reclaimed by the Fourth Republic. Contrary to Vichy’s intentions, the National Revolution ignited a renewal of fervor surrounding France’s revolutionary past.

Nearly eighty years later, Vichy’s legacy remains surprisingly controversial for a regime that held power for only four years. Was it an “accidental, antirepublican parenthesis” in French history, or a deeper manifestation of political and intellectual

currents that had long been fermenting?⁸¹ The “parenthesis” theory remains the easiest to swallow: it holds that Vichy was an aberration, essentially absolving the French of any responsibility for its actions and excluding Vichy from discussions of France’s relationship to the Revolution and to itself. On the other hand, acceptance of the notion that Vichy was more than an anomaly requires a deeper engagement with its meaning and its relationship to the modern French identity. Over the last several decades, this approach has gained traction in scholarly and official circles, allowing for a more nuanced vision of Vichy’s place within French history to emerge— a vision in which the regime provoked “a series of military, political and cultural reckonings with the French past, present and future, that changed forever how the French people saw their Revolution, their country, and themselves.” Antirepublican and antirevolutionary as it was, then, Vichy has nevertheless provoked and encouraged a closer examination of the principles upon which the modern French state, identity, and memory are founded.

NOTES

- 1 Ariane Chebel d’Appollonia, *L’extrême-Droite En France: De Maurras à Le Pen*, Nouv. éd. mise à jour, Questions Au XXe Siècle 3 (Bruxelles: Editions complexe, 1996), 169–70.
Note: all translations unless otherwise noted were made by the author. For longer original quotes listed in the footnotes in French, only the italicized portion was translated and cited in the article directly.
- 2 Éditions Larousse, “Encyclopédie Larousse en ligne - Front populaire,” accessed December 9, 2018, http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/Front_populaire/120463.
- 3 Jean-Pierre Azéma, *From Munich to the Liberation, 1938–1944*, The Cambridge History of Modern France 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 17.
- 4 Azéma, 10.
- 5 Azéma, 15.
- 6 Azéma, 23.
- 7 Henry Rousso, *Le régime de Vichy* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2016), 9–11.
- 8 Rousso, 14.
- 9 Elizabeth Campbell Karlsgodt, *Defending National Treasures: French Art and Heritage under Vichy* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2011), 18.
- 10 Karlsgodt, 22.
- 11 Karlsgodt, 24.
- 12 Rousso, *Le régime de Vichy*, 24. “. . . un redressement intellectuel et moral.”
- 13 Azéma, *From Munich to the Liberation, 1938–1944*, 59.
- 14 Karlsgodt, *Defending National Treasures*, 25.
- 15 Philippe Burrin, “Vichy,” in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 333. “Il s’agissait de ressouder les membres disloqués du corps national, de réinclure dans la communauté nationale les éléments égarés par de ‘mauvais bergers.’”
- 16 Rousso, *Le régime de Vichy*, 79–82.
- 17 Julie Fette, “Apology and the Past in Contemporary France,” *French Politics, Culture & Society* 26, no. 2 (2008): 81.
- 18 Dominique Rossignol, *Histoire de La Propagande En France de 1940 à 1944: L’utopie Pétain*, 1re éd, Politique d’aujourd’hui (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1991), 9. “La propagande devient l’inéluctable instrument du gouvernement pour encadrer et contrôler la société civile.”
- 19 Yagil Limoré, “La Propagande et la Formation de l’homme Nouveau sous Vichy,” *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains*, no. 180 (1995): 109.
- 20 Limoré, 112.
- 21 Burrin, “Vichy,” 334.
- 22 Joan Tumblety, “‘Civil Wars of the Mind’: The Commemoration of the 1789 Revolution in the Parisian Press of the Radical Right, 1939,” *European History Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (July 2000): 393.
- 23 Burrin, “Vichy,” 327.
- 24 Burrin, “Vichy,” 322.
- 25 Bertram M. Gordon, “Revolution in the Rhetoric of Fascism: The Justification of the French Revolution in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Vichy France,” *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History* 16 (1989): 352.
- 26 Tumblety, “‘Civil Wars of the Mind,’” 405.
- 27 Maurice Agulhon and Pierre Bonte, eds., *Marianne: les visages de la République*, Découvertes Gallimard Histoire 146 (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 15.
- 28 Agulhon and Bonte, 16.
- 29 Agulhon and Bonte, 18.
- 30 Agulhon and Bonte, 19.
- 31 Agulhon and Bonte, 25.
- 32 Agulhon and Bonte, 31.
- 33 Agulhon and Bonte, 41.
- 34 Karlsgodt, *Defending National Treasures*, 153.
- 35 Karlsgodt, 145.
- 36 Karlsgodt, 164.
- 37 Karlsgodt, 162.
- 38 Maurice Agulhon, “Combats d’images: La République Au Temps de Vichy,” *Ethnologie Française* 24, no. 2 (1994): 209.

- 39 Agulhon, 213.
- 40 Rossignol, *Histoire de La Propagande*, 84. “. . . l’*emblème de l’éternelle résistance française contre les Anglais*”
- 41 Tumblety, “‘Civil Wars of the Mind,’” 417.
- 42 Michel Vovelle, “La Marseillaise,” in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 86.
- 43 Bernard Richard, “La Marseillaise, Chant de Guerre, Chant de Liberté,” Chemins de Mémoire - Ministère de la Défense, accessed November 1, 2018, <http://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/fr/la-marseillaise-chant-de-guerre-chant-de-liberte>.
- 44 Vovelle, “La Marseillaise,” 94. “. . . l’assaut des Tuileries au 10 aout, *qui associe ainsi indissolublement ce chant national a la chute de la royauté, et a une nouvelle étape de la Révolution.*”
- 45 Richard, “La Marseillaise.”: “C’est un chant patriotique contre l’ennemi, à texte *fortement idéologique mais sans que ni la patrie, ni l’ennemi soient explicitement désignés.*”
- 46 Vovelle, “La Marseillaise,” 102.
- 47 Richard, “La Marseillaise, Chant de Guerre, Chant de Liberté.” “. . . une façon pour les républicains tant opportunistes que radicaux de se rattacher à la Révolution française, de s’affirmer comme fils de la Révolution”
- 48 Richard. “. . . une Marseillaise antijuive” and “. . . la Marseillaise du Premier Mai.”
- 49 Vovelle, “La Marseillaise,” 126.
- 50 “La Marseillaise de Rouget de Lisle,” Elysee.fr, accessed December 11, 2018, <https://www.elysee.fr/la-presidence/la-marseillaise-de-rouget-de-lisle>.
- 51 Bernard Richard, “Approches de La Marseillaise Sous l’Occupation Allemande | Chemins de Mémoire - Ministère de La Défense,” Chemins de Mémoire - Ministère de la Défense, 2016, <http://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/fr/approches-de-la-marseillaise-sous-l'occupation-allemande>.
- 52 Ethan Katz, “Memory at the Front: The Struggle over Revolutionary Commemoration in Occupied France, 1940–1944,” *Journal of European Studies* 35, no. 2 (June 2005): 154.
- 53 Georges Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution*, trans. R.R. Palmer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 111.
- 55 “14 Juillet,” Chemins de Mémoire - Ministère de la Défense, accessed November 21, 2018, <http://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/fr/14-juillet>. “Le 14 juillet 1789 marque la première manifestation du peuple français pour conquérir sa liberté et son émancipation civique.”
- 56 “14 Juillet.” “La refonte de la Nation, fondées sur les valeurs de 1789, et la Déclaration des Droits de L’Homme et du Citoyen.”
- 57 “14 Juillet.”
- 58 Christian Amalvi, “Le 14 Juillet,” in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 423.
- 59 Amalvi, 425.
- 60 Tumblety, “‘Civil Wars of the Mind,’” 391.
- 61 Katz, “Memory at the Front,” 155.
- 62 Katz, 156.
- 63 Philippe Pétain, “Speech 25 May 1941,” quoted in Henry Rousso, *Le régime de Vichy* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2016), 56. “Vous êtes *les inspiratrices de notre civilisation chrétienne.*”
- 64 Rossignol, *Histoire de La Propagande*, 84–85.
- 65 Rossignol, *Histoire de La Propagande En France de 1940 à 1944*, 165. “Il empoigne la main de l’ouvrier, précise qu’il a remis la France au travail et qu’il tient les promesses.”
- 66 Mona Ozouf, “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité,” in *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 586.
- 67 Ozouf, 591.
- 68 Présidence de la République, “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité,” www.elysee.fr, accessed November 21, 2018, <http://www.elysee.fr/la-presidence/liberte-egalite-fraternite/>. “A partir de 1793, les Parisiens, rapidement imités par les habitants des autres villes, peignent sur la façade de leurs maisons les mots suivants: ‘*unité, indivisibilité de la République; liberté égalité ou la mort.*’”
- 69 République, «Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité.» “Lorsqu’*est rédigée la constitution de 1848, la devise ‘Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité’ est définie comme un “ principe “ de la République.*
- 70 République, «Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité.» “La devise est réinscrite sur le fronton des édifices publics à l’occasion de la célébration du 14 juillet 1880.”
- 71 Ozouf, “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité,” 620.
- 72 “Loi Constitutionnelle Du 10 Juillet 1940,” Digitheque MJP, université de Perpignan, 2004, <http://mjp.univ-perp.fr/france/co1940lc.htm>.
- 73 “La Propagande de Vichy,” La propagande pendant la seconde guerre mondiale, accessed February 28, 2019, <http://propagande-2eme-guerremondiale.e-monsite.com/pages/la-propagande-dans-le-camps-de-l-axe/la-propagande-de-vichy.html>.
- 74 Rousso, *Le régime de Vichy*, 2016, 26.
- 75 Burrin, “Vichy,” 332. “. . . cellule essentielle.”
- 76 Ozouf, “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité,” 623.
- 77 Rousso, *Le régime de Vichy*, 2016, 43–44.
- 78 Chebel d’Appollonia, *L’extrême-Droite En France*, 227. “. . . un néo-traditionalisme teinté de paternalisme, de cléricanisme, et d’autoritarisme.”
- 79 Agulhon, “Combats d’images,” 212.
- 80 Katz, “Memory at the Front,” 162.
- 81 Richard, “La Marseillaise, Chant de Guerre, Chant de Liberté.” “. . . parenthèse accidentelle et antirépublicaine.”

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