

The Final Colonial War

French Identity, Colonial Historiography and the Law of February 23, 2005

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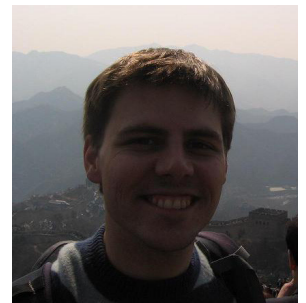
Introduction

In 2003, French President Jacques Chirac inaugurated the *Mémorial des Guerres en Afrique du Nord*. Prominently located in Quai Branly near the Eiffel Tower, the memorial is a high-tech shrine to the harkis, former colonial soldiers and others who died for France during the country's administration of North Africa. Three towering digital panels, each baring either the red or white or blue of the Tricolor, scroll the names of the fallen soldiers, nurses, doctors, teachers, colonial administrators, and harkis across their faces. [1] The establishment of *Mémorial des Guerres en Afrique du Nord* was part of a larger process currently taking place in France to rehabilitate the historical image of repatriated French, including the *harkis* and the *peids noirs*.

The Gaullist inclination to honor those who died and have been repatriated as a result of French colonialism has become a prominent feature of the UMP political agenda. While not a point of political contention on its face, it inspires incredulity on the part of certain

groups who worry that this historical face-lift touches on the more controversial debate of French colonial memory, itself. By conflating the restoration of the reputation of France's harki and repatriated communities with the historiographical restoration of the French colonial experience in general, the law of February 23, 2005 embodies this dynamic. The law of February 23, 2005 ostensibly intended to help transform the image of repatriated Frenchmen from former colonies. It was amended to include a provision mandating that the positive role of the French in their former colonial holdings be recognized in the teaching of French history at the primary and secondary levels.

More generally, the question over how France should portray its colonial past has injected itself into the ongoing debate in France about the role of the state in legislating memory. So-called *lois mémorielles* have become politically fashionable in recent years and the number of such laws has correspondingly grown. Beginning with the 1990 *Loi Gayssot* (which outlaws questioning the existence of crimes against hu-



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manity upon which Holocaust charges were based), the French National Assembly has since followed with the law of January 29, 2001 (which recognizes the Armenian genocide) and the *Loi Taubira* (which recognizes slavery and transatlantic slave trade as crimes against humanity). Most recently, the French National Assembly adopted a law forbidding the denial of the Armenian genocide. This law has led to strained diplomatic relations with Turkey including the suspension of military relations between the two countries.

This paper examines this episode of how France continues to process its colonial past, particularly in the context of the long and sometimes contradictory republican tradition of public education and the role of the state in shaping national history. The first section of this essay will give a brief outline of the role that education has played in creating a national consciousness in France since Jules Ferry's development of the *école républicaine* at the end of the 19th century. France has historically been faced with the daunting task of creating French citizens out of disparate ethnic groups (Celtic, Italian, German, Basque) spanning across Western Europe's largest territorial state. France's success in creating a cohesive nation based on a set of common Republican values is a testament to the traditional effectiveness of public education in conveying a sense of common belonging rooted in a strong historical narrative. This section will examine the foundations of Republican education, particularly in light of colonialism and its legacies.

The second section will chronicle the controversy over the French law of February 23, 2005 from its passage to the ultimate removal of the contentious "rôle positif" clause of article four by the Constitutional Council on January 31, 2006. This section will open with a short description of the law. It will then trace the how opposition to article four gradually mounted over the course of 2005, eventually wielding enough political pressure to coerce President Chirac to indirectly call on the Constitutional Council to repeal the amendment. This section will demonstrate that resistance to Article four came primarily from three concentric fronts – the intellectual community, political elites in

former French colonies, and much later, the Socialist Party establishment. The development of opposition to Article four demonstrates a unique dynamic of periphery to center politics in which both the territorial center (Parisian elites) and the organizational center (party leaders in both the PS and the UMP) proved the most reticent to removing the clause expounding the positive role of French colonialism.

The third section will identify new political cleavages that emerged in the course of this controversy. As post-materialist issues become more prominent in French political discourse, traditional ideological fault lines are often giving way to more *ad hoc* political coalitions. The debate over teaching French colonial history reveals a particularly interesting political fissure, in which level of education trumps party or ideological affiliation as the most obvious



War memorial for the harkis, former colonial soldiers and others who died for France during the country's administration of North Africa in Paris, 7th near the Quai Branly.

determinant of opinion.

This essay will conclude with some remarks on similar phenomena in other post-industrial countries that are currently grappling with similar struggles regarding ambiguous historical legacies. It will also consider the indirect effect that Article four had on the already charged relations between France's growing Muslim youth population and the country's majority culture.

The Origins of Memory and Education

Creating national citizens with a common sense of identity and purpose has been at the heart of the French pedagogical mission since the inception of public education in the 1880s. As Jules Ferry's famous 1883 letter to teachers illustrates:

"...Mais il y a autre chose dans la loi du 28 mars : elle affirme la volonté de fonder chez nous une éducation nationale, et de la fonder sur des notions du devoir et du droit que le législateur n'hésite pas à inscrire au nombre des premières vérités que nul ne peut ignorer." [2]

Over the past 126 years, France has crafted a history to serve this purpose.

The modern French education system traces its origins to the set of French laws known as the *lois Jules Ferry*, named after the former Minister of Public Instruction and two time 3rd Republic Premier. These laws were partially inspired by the French defeat at the hands of the Prussians, whose superior level of education had impressed French officers during the Franco-Prussian War. In 1880, Ferry created a committee on public education that pro-

posed to seize the monopoly on public education and degree conferment from the clergy. He followed through with the recommendations in a series of laws passed between 1881 and 1882 that made primary education for both boys and girls free, secular, and mandatory. Ferry used the public school system as a means of consolidating Republican values in the face of resurgent Catholicism, which brought with it the specter of the *Ancien Régime*. For this, Ferry is most often credited for creating the secularism of the French public school system.

But there were other motives behind the creation of a universalist education system in France, ones

that were tied to creating a more thoroughly defined sense of republican-based Frenchness. The mandatory education system played a key role in spreading a Republican set of values (*laïcité*, patriotism, civic duty, etc.) and became the main instrument for the diffusion of standard French throughout metropolitan France.

Republican notions of French values were underscored by a specific interpretation of history, one with its historical point of departure deeply rooted in the events of 1789. France has traditionally harnessed the power of historical myth as a means of reinforcing national identity. Robert Gildea accurately describes the function of historic myth-making in France:

"They are not myths in the sense of fiction or fairy-tales but of narratives of the past which serve to give an identity to...a nation, bind it together and legitimate policy decisions taken on its behalf." [3]

The rich body of rituals, symbols and images of French history has acted as tools for accruing political will for ambitious policies. Histories are written and rewritten to serve contemporary political interests. The role of the Cross of Lorraine by the FFL during World War II is one example of how the French have drawn on this canon of historical symbols to rally to a dramatic political change of course. For the Free French Forces fighting against the German occupation, the Cross of Lorraine served three purposes; (1) it linked the historic destiny of the annexed territories of Alsace and Lorraine to France, (2) it invoked the patriotic heroism of Joan of Arc, (3) it claimed that the weight of French history was

on the side of the resistance, not the collaborators of Vichy.

Yet the Colonial era is tinged with an ambiguity that has been particularly difficult to process. French colonialism feeds into two, somewhat opposing, myths. On the one hand, colonialism affirms the French claim to *grandeur* by giving credence to the myth that France was meant to stand above (and rule over) others. On the other hand, the colonial experience, at least superficially, contrasts the Republican myth that France renounces the pursuit of vain conquest at the expense of liberty. This facet was written into the French Constitution of 1791

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and echoed in the 1946 Constitution of the IV Republic. [3] France was able to reconcile these two divergent strains of national myth in the Enlightenment notion that genuine liberty only comes as the product of cultivation. France could merge its desire for colonial *grandeur* with its Republican distaste for conquest on the grounds that it was bringing the gifts of literacy, medical knowledge, administration,

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and modernity to its colonial holdings. The *mission civilisatrice*, thus, was born out of a need to pacify would-be critics of Colonialism. Belief the sanctity of the *mission civilisatrice* amongst French intellectuals, liberals and moderate socialists was so endearing as a means of defending civilized values of rule of law, secularism, and individual liberty that it maintained support among these groups well into the 50s and 60s. In one of history's great ironies, Jules Ferry's other notable political contribution to the III. Republic was his ambitious policy of colonial expansion. During his premierships (1880–81, 1883–85), France cobbled together the major pieces of its empire. Tunisia became a protectorate of France; French presence was established in Tonkin and Madagascar; and French explorations penetrated into the Congo and Niger regions.

In contemporary France, the connection between the mission of education in creating national cohesiveness and France's colonial legacy has resurfaced with renewed urgency in the minds of policy-makers. The role of education in defending French values and identity has grown over the past two decades as many French perceive French culture as increasingly threatened by EU integration, economic globalization, Muslim immigration, and cultural Americanization. Some prominent scholars such as John Ambler have linked the increasing perception that French values are under attack with France's increasing education budgets. Between 1980 and 1995, expenditures on education as a proportion of GDP rose from 6.4% to 7.3% [4].

The classroom has become a front line in the battle to win the hearts and minds of French children,

particularly the children of immigrants of African origin. Some French politicians, particularly on the Right, perceive the coherence of French national identity as under serious threat whether through historical relativism or through Muslim religiosity. The 2004 law prohibiting public school students from wearing "ostentatious" religious symbols was passed in this light. The mission of maintaining the

French school system as the incubator of republican values, free from the distraction of religious or ethnic identities has taken on a new urgency. The *affaire du foulard* can be seen as a twin phenomenon with the French Law of February 23, 2005 paralleling its logic.

Mission Civilisatrice Redux

The law of February 23, 2005 came in the context of a wider effort to process the history of the dark legacy of colonialism in French collective memory. The law was originally designed to contribute to the historical rehabilitation of the *harkis*, the 200,000 ethnic Algerians who fought alongside the French during the Algerian war of independence and had been shunned in both Algeria and France. In 1999, the French parliament passed a law reclassifying the conflict in Algeria as a war, rather than merely a peace keeping operation. This acknowledgement had two effects. First, it was the first step in an effort to honor the contribution of the *harkis* to the French military by allowing them to claim veterans' benefits and paving the way for future recognition in memorials and public ceremonies. Second, the law was an acknowledgement that the Algerian conflict was, in fact, an international conflict rather than a domestic one.

This law of February 23, 2005 was seen as complementary to the 1999 legislation. The law contained provisions to memorialize the contributions of those who died aboard in the service of France including those killed in the former French territories of North Africa and Indochina. It also contained a provision

that research departments in French universities should focus a more substantial amount of research on the activities of France overseas and one calling for the establishment of an academic foundation to look into the history of the Algerian war. Moreover, the law forbids both discrimination against *harkis* and justification of crimes committed against *harkis*.

But the international debate that swirled around the law was centered primarily on the law's somewhat obscure article four which spoke of the need to emphasize the "positive role" of French colonialism in its former colonies. The law was amended to include the "positive role" clause introduced by UMP MP Christiane Vanneste without much fanfare just prior to being passed by the National Assembly. But the amendment changed the tone of the law from a piece of legislation aimed at restoring the battered reputation of the *harki* to a piece of legislation aimed at rehabilitating French colonialism.

The way in which opposition to the law amassed was surprising. Rather than a torrent of resistance, opposition started as a trickle. Opposition to the law came in three fronts. The first front came from the French intellectual community and began several weeks after the promulgation of the law. Claude Liauzu, professor emeritus of the University of Paris VII and prominent French historian whose stud-

ies focused mainly on Algeria, rallied critics of the law from across France's intellectual landscape. On April 25, 2005, Liauzu published a petition entitled "*Colonisation : non à l'enseignement d'une histoire officielle*" which contained the signatures of over 10,000 prominent French historians and intellectuals including Gérard Noiriel, Gilbert Meynier, and Frédéric Régent [5]. The historians' petition laid out the intellectual groundwork for the critique of the law. It centered on three of the law's implications:

1. The law imposes a specific interpretation of French history, a type of "histoire officielle," that constrains free development of thought and goes against the spirit of the public education in France;
2. The law could propagate a distorted interpretation of history that minimizes the crimes of French colonialism;
3. The law could validate colonial nostalgia and civilizational chauvinism and reopen rifts in French political culture between pro- and anti-colonialists that had long been healed. [5]

The critique was elegant in its multifacetedness. It was founded not only on ideological grounds—that slavery, forced labor and property confiscation had been realities of French occupation. This argu-



French Tunisian-born Dorsaf Damak is seen at parliament as French deputies vote to ban the wearing of headscarves in schools, February 10, 2004 in Paris, France.(Photo: Pascal Le Segretain/Getty Images)

ment could be dismissed by the UMP as leftist. But the historians also framed an element of their critique on Republican values, namely that Article four violated Ferry's sacred pedagogical creed: "d'assurer la liberté de conscience et des maîtres." [2] This argumentation could be considered transideological grounds in the French context and was one with which the Gaullist right felt more comfortable. Liauzu took his offensive to the pages of pamphlets, newspapers, and journals throughout France arguing that "the creation of this national mythology will generate separatist counter-mythologies." [5]

The second front of opposition to the law of February 23, 2005 came from former French colonies, especially Algeria, and French territories overseas. The law set off a maelstrom of indignation in Algerian political and intellectual circles. Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika took particular offense with the implications of the law comparing the law to an attempt to whitewash German history under Hitler and threatened to pull out of talks regarding a Franco-Algerian Friendship Treaty. When it became clear that article four threatened to derail the Friendship Treaty between the two countries, Chirac became more personally involved in the controversy over article four. The stakes for the Chirac government were high. The French president had invested greatly in reestablishing normalized ties with Algeria. His overtures had paid off once before in March 2003 when Chirac became the first French president to visit the North African former colony since independence in 1962. Chirac wanted to use improved relations with Algeria to bolster French standing in an enlarged European Union, where relations with Maghrebian North Africa would be less of a prior-

2005. It was not until the summer of 2005, months after the law's promulgation that the Socialists began to display the first pangs of dissatisfaction with the law. This dissatisfaction came from groups outside the party who were directly implicated, either professionally (historians and French intellectuals) or personally (political representatives of former colonies), by the new standards for teaching colonial history. Soon, Socialist MPs from the periphery of the party and the country began to swell with indignation. Victorin Lurel, a Socialist MP from Guadeloupe and Alfred Marie-Jean of Martinique, were instrumental in bringing the abrogation of article four to the front of the political agenda of the Socialist opposition, not only on Republican grounds but also on the grounds of historical revisionism [6]. At the highest levels of French politics, tensions between politicians representing metropolitan France and public intellectuals and politicians representing the periphery grew. This center-periphery cleavage cut through the UMP, itself. Most notably, UMP politician Leon Bertrand, himself from French Guiana, sent a letter to Sarkozy calling for the revocation of Article four.

In November 2005, the National Assembly revisited the law for the first time since its promulgation in February 2005. Members of the PS, the Communists, and other left-of-center and centrist parties supported a reopening of debate on the letter of the law, particularly the usage of the phrase "positive role" in article four. Political pressure on the Socialists to challenge the merits of the law finally forced them to reopen the issue of the article four on the floor of the National Assembly in November, 2005. These pressures from outside the Parisian political

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ity. He also saw Franco-Algerian reconciliation as a way of deflating domestic antagonism between a growing Maghrebian immigrant population and the native French majority. For Chirac, the road to the *banlieues* of Paris, Marseilles and Lyon led directly through Algiers.

The PS MPs were markedly silent during the debates over the initial passage of the Law of Feb. 23,

class had mobilized a coalition of Socialists, Greens, and some members of the Orleanist UDF behind the law's revision. The plan of attack drew heavily on the three points critique leveled at article four by the group of historians led by Claude Liauzu, whose sustained criticism of article four had kept the issue in the pages of *Le Monde*, *La Libération*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *L'Humanité*, and other prominent

French news publications. Amending the law was criticized with particular fervor by UMP Deputies of Southern France. Gaullist MPs like Loannel Luca and Jean-Claude Guibal contended that the spirit of the law was merely an attempt to reestablish some degree of balance in the historical narrative of France's colonial experience: "rétablir un équilibre dans la représentation de la colonisation française en particulier en Algérie" [5]. The move to revise the law in the National Assembly ultimately failed but it raised the law's profile in the mainstream press.

In early December, 2005, the de Villepin administration launched a tactical political offensive that would allow the government to jettison the tainted

from article four. This left Nicolas Sarkozy as the last prominent defender of article four within the government who defensively declared: "un certain nombre de parlementaires ont voulu dire qu'il y a eu des instituteurs qui ont alphabétisé, qu'il y a eu des médecins qui ont soigné". Sarkozy's remarks proved particularly poorly timed. The Interior Minister was planning a trip to the French Caribbean Antilles as the visit began to develop into a potential platform for protest against the law. Aimé Césaire, renowned poet of *Négritude*, turned down an invitation to see Nicolas Sarkozy during his visit out of protest for what he saw as the promotion of a false history which downplayed the systemization of slavery and

"Are you in favor or opposed to the law stating that school curriculums recognize the positive role of the French colonial period?"

	Total (%)	Those without Diplômes (%)	Those with Diplômes Higher than Bac. +2 (%)
In favor	64	71	45
Completely in Favor	15	20	13
Somewhat in Favor	49	51	32
Opposed	29	19	50
Completely Opposed	16	12	25
Somewhat Opposed	13	7	25
No Response	7	10	5
Total	100	100	100

Table 2. Trans. From: "Etes-vous favorable ou opposé à ce que soit indiqué dans la loi que les programmes scolaires reconnaissent le rôle positif de la colonisation française ?

article four while salvaging the remains of the law of February 23. Jean-François Copé, press speaker of the government, stated publicly that "there is no official history..." in France. Defense Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie echoed this sentiment: "It's not the job of politicians to write history." Other government officials such as education Minister Gilles de Robien quickly followed suit. With each declaration, the Chirac government seemed to be distancing itself further from the increasingly untouchable article four. On December 12, 2005, President Chirac himself weighed in: "Dans la République, il n'y a pas d'histoire officielle."

By mid-December, the weight of the government was behind the removal of the "positive role" clause

forced labor in France's overseas holdings. Sarkozy realized that he was becoming a symbol for critics of the law and cancelled his trip to Martinique and Guadeloupe.

In a communiqué issued at the dawn of 2006, Chirac instructed French Prime Minister de Villepin to use his constitutionally given powers under article 37 to convene a Constitutional Council to review the law. The Council's decision is not controversial – the body finds that the normative thrust of the "positive role" clause of article four falls outside of the powers of the national law and should instead be the domain of administrative regulation. But the means of the change was a political masterstroke on the part of President Chirac. By using the Consti-

tutional Council, the president was able to swiftly remove the controversial clause, satisfying a majority of critics while leaving the remainder of the law in tact. Moreover, it allowed the National Assembly to avoid another protracted and potentially embarrassing debate on the issue and excluded Sarkozy from the political capital that article four's removal produced. Finally, the decision of the Constitutional Court removed the law as a potential obstacle in the signing of the French-Algerian Friendship Treaty.

instated a type of "*histoire officielle*"), rather than the more ideologically driven arguments of colonial oppression and French civilizational chauvinism.

The soft majority of left-leaning Frenchmen could also partially explain why the Socialists arrived so late to the issue, long after the spring and summer of 2005 during which time French historians and the political elite in former French colonies had already refined the arguments against article four. This soft majority could also clarify why late attempts made by the Socialists to rally popular support behind the

"Evidence suggests that the debate over French colonial history might be one political issue in which opinions do not fall along traditional political cleavages. [...] the primary variable upon opinion was not region- or ideology-based, but rather based on the level of education attained."

New Political Cleavages in French Public Opinion?

Evidence suggests that the debate over French colonial history might be one political issue in which opinions do not fall along traditional political cleavages. The previous section attempted to demonstrate how opposition to article four evolved on three fronts from the periphery to the center of the French political system. This section demonstrates that the primary variable upon opinion was not region- or ideology-based, but rather based on the level of education attained.

Before addressing the primary fault line of French public opinion regarding the "positive role" clause of article four, two possible alternative fault lines must be addressed. In November, 2005, at the height of the high-profile return to debate over article four in the National Assembly, polling service CSA conducted a national poll gauging the country regarding the validity of teaching the positive role of French colonialism in school curriculums. When stratified by political affiliation, the poll showed that a majority of people of both left and right ideological leanings supported the "positive role" clause of article four. While left-leaning French citizens (58%) were less likely to do so by a margin of 18% and the minority opposed to article four was much more substantial on the left (38%) than on the right (19%), the poll demonstrates that a purely ideological fault line was not sufficient to rally a majority behind support for overturning the article. Perhaps this partially explains why opponents of article four tended to emphasize the Republican argument (that article four

abrogation fizzled. One example of this is the Socialist-inspired *La Pétition Unitaire: Abrogeons l'Article four*, which was launched in the fall of 2005. The petition attempted to mobilize wide swaths of the web-savvy by capitalizing on an initial group of spokespersons comprised of prominent left-of-center stalwarts like Francois Hollande and Dominique Strauss-Kahn, *La Pétition Unitaire* invited French citizens to electronically sign the petition which was then to be delivered to President Jacques Chirac on December 30, 2005. Despite the campaign's high profile and the relative ease with which one could electronically sign the petition¹, the campaign was not able to gain over 50, 000 signatories by the time of its delivery. [8]

A second political cleavage that failed to emerge was one based on region. Given that a sizeable number of the high-profile proponents of the law come from the South of France, one might expect this to be reflected in the degree of support for the law in the South. The South of France had been somewhat of a hot bed of resurgent colonial tensions. It has served as a primary settlement region for both *pieds-noirs* and North African immigrants. Many *pieds-noirs* harbored a mixture of colonial nostalgia and resentment towards the Algerians for having unceremoniously robbed them of their livelihood. One might expect that popular support for article four would be higher in the South than other regions of the country. This is not the case, however. According to the CSA poll, regional variability was extremely

¹ The person merely had to enter his or her name and the department in which he or she lived.

low ranking only from 63% in favor (Ile de France) to 67% (North East). Moreover, the regions of the South (the South East and the South West) rated average to below-average in their support for the law, although the margins of difference were slight [7].

The clearest political fault line to surface in the course of the public debate over article four pivoted on level of education. When stratified for education, the CSA-*Le Figaro* poll reveals a remarkably wide level variance. Those with the lowest level of education (without *Diplômes*) were also those most likely

the transition of the character of colonial history to the wider French public. [10] Those with higher levels of education will have had greater exposure to the problems of colonial history and will correspondingly have a greater aversion to espousing colonialism's virtues. Whether or not level of exposure to French history is the lurking variable affecting public support cannot be conclusively deduced from this data. It is clear from the data, however, that level of education is negatively correlated with the support for article four of the Law of February 23, 2005.

“Are you in favor or opposed to the law stating that school curriculums recognize the positive role of the French colonial period?”

	Total (%)	Those with left-leaning political affiliations (%)	Those with right-leaning political affiliations (%)
In favor	64	57	75
Completely in Favor	15	16	16
Somewhat in Favor	49	41	59
Opposed	29	38	19
Completely Opposed	16	18	14
Somewhat Opposed	13	20	5
No Response	7	5	6
Total	100	100	100

Table 1. Trans. From: “Etes-vous favorable ou opposé à ce que soit indiqué dans la loi que les programmes scolaires reconnaissent le rôle positif de la colonisation française ?”

to support the law (71% support to 19% opposed). By contrast, those in the highest category for education were the only sub-cohort in the poll in which a majority opposed the law (50% opposed to 45% in favor). The education-based trend can also be observed when stratifying the data based on profession. Managers and professionals are the groups least likely to support the law. These professions are the only ones in which an absolute majority of the cohort opposes the law with 54% opposed to 45% in favor. By contrast, the profession-based cohorts most likely to support the law herald from low-skilled professions requiring a lower level of education. These include petit-bourgeoisie (73% support), low-level employees (72%) and housewives (70%) [7].

French colonial historian Benjamin Stora offers hints into the divergence of opinion along educational lines. In an interview with the BBC at the height of the controversy, Stora localized France’s dilemma on

Conclusion

The controversy surrounding the Law of February 23, 2005 raised a number of existential questions about the role of history and education in French national identity formation. To what extent do *lois mémorielles* limit the organic development of collective memory and serve state interests?² Is placing emphasis on the positive aspects of colonialism an attempt to whitewash history or rather a corrective measure meant to balance an overly guilt-laden interpretation of events? And to what extent do nations, particularly those with rich but often ambiguous

2 At the apex of the controversy in December, 2005, a group of 19 prominent French historians including René Rémond and Marc Ferro published an open letter in *La Libération* entitled “*Liberté pour l’Histoire*” in which they called for the abolition of all *lois mémorielles*.

ous pasts like France, have the right to shape history to serve contemporary political agendas?

These questions are not unique to France. They reflect a transnational phenomenon amongst colonial legacy powers. In an interview in *Le Monde* in August of 2005, historian Pascal Blanchard noted that France has fallen far behind other former colonial powers ("*La France souffre d'un retard evident*")

"The spirit of article four was being executed in the classrooms of suburban lycees around Paris, Lyon and other major French cities where the majority of students were the children of immigrants. [...] These were the countries and territories about which French school teachers were supposed to emphasize the "positive role" of French colonists. It undoubtedly compounded a sentiment already reflected in employment and income statistics –that they were on the wrong side of history."

in coping with its colonial past. He was undoubtedly referring to the UK, above all, which has made great strides in institutionalizing the intellectual processing its colonial past. Post-colonial studies departments comprise both a prism through which to understand the developing world and a means of reorienting British national history. [5] By contrast, Japan has been tempted more greatly by historical revisionism. In modes that parallel those in the French case, the Japanese have rewritten textbooks and paid homage to war dead in a manner that have raised questions regarding their perception of their actions during World War II. One could argue as to whether or not the degree of French crimes during the colonial era and Japanese crimes during its occupation of much of East Asia during World War II are comparable. Certainly, the Japanese have been less willing to systematically acknowledge the violent transgressions committed by Japanese soldiers during the imperial era. Nevertheless, unsavory parallels between the two countries' attempt to cope with their colonial pasts do exist and unfavorable comparisons with Japan became one of the most effective polemic devices employed by the opposition at the height of the debate.

Finally, the Law of February 23, 2005 had a significant contribution in the mutual estrangement between the Muslim youth and the majority French population, an estrangement that was not expressed on the op-ed pages of *Le Monde Diplomatique* or *L'Humanité* that eventually led to its repeal, but on the streets of the Parisian *banlieues*. The article four portrayal of history fed into an environment in which

France's already marginalized immigrant population were once again confronted with their role in history as "the colonized." The spirit of article four was being executed in the classrooms of suburban lycees around Paris, Lyon and other major French cities where the majority of students were the children of immigrants. Most of their parents had come from former colonies of France. These were the countries

and territories about which French school teachers were supposed to emphasize the "positive role" of French colonists. It undoubtedly compounded a sentiment already reflected in employment and income statistics –that they were on the wrong side of history. In this sense, the French Law of February 23, 2005 added to the sense of alienation that immigrant youths harbored, the sense of alienation that ignited in November 2005 in the *banlieue* riots.

[1] Aldrich, Robert. "Colonial Past, Post-Colonial Present: History Wars French-style." *History Australia*, Volume 3, No. 1, June 2006.

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