

The Nation, Europe, and the World

Textbooks and Curricula in Transition

Edited by

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Contents

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Chapter 3

What Counts as History and How Much Does History Count? The Case of French Secondary Education

Jacques E.C. Hymans

World Society and National States

Sociology's world society school argues that global cultural and associational processes promote isomorphic nation-state rationalization in line with universally unquestioned "world models" of development and democratic justice (Meyer et al. 1997). The case of educational curricula has proven one of the most stunning confirmations of the power of world models (Meyer et al. 1992). In spite of major variations in levels of development, cultural heritage, and political ideology, nation-states around the world have chosen to structure students' school days in strikingly similar ways. World models have also exerted a profound impact on the nature of particular academic disciplines such as history. In their study of "what counts as history" in university curricula around the world over the entire twentieth century, Frank et al. (2000: 29-53) find that the history discipline has undergone a steady *social-scientization* (an increasing focus on contemporary history and on society as opposed to the state) and a steady *globalization* (an increasing focus on peripheral regions, transnational processes, and supranational units).

On the topic of education as on others, the world society approach has tended to focus on establishing correlations, instead of using case-study methods to trace the precise ways in which free-floating world models are connected to actual national educational practices.¹ Case study methods are particularly valuable for understanding the evolution of history teaching in advanced countries, as the world history school's expectations for such countries are ambiguous. On the one hand, advanced countries have the resources and the international legitimacy to set educational trends and might therefore be expected to be ahead of the world society curve (Meyer et al. 1992). On the other hand, the same countries tend to have entrenched educational professions

and ideologies that can best resist the changes that world society demands (ibid.). How do these tendencies interact, and in what contexts does one outweigh the other?

This chapter attempts to answer these questions in the case of French secondary school history education. It presents evidence that the basic content of French history curricula and schoolbooks has been rather slow to evolve toward the predominant world model. It then digs deeper into French educational practice as opposed to official policy preferences, through a study of 100 years of essay questions from the history entrance exam to the *École Normale Supérieure* (ENS), the most academically prestigious of France's elite *grandes écoles*. The slow evolution in the content of these questions generally parallels that of the secondary curricula. Finally, the chapter attempts to find clues to the persistence of French distinctiveness through a study of the largely stillborn history curriculum reform effort of the 1950s. This study suggests a hypothesis for further testing: that the 1958 return to power of Charles de Gaulle renewed the domestic legitimacy of the secondary school history teachers' traditional, "Jacobin" vision of history against the social-scientizing, globalizing push of the *Annales* school.²

Should France have been the Engine or Caboose of History Curriculum Change?

When we add the national level of ideas and institutions to the basic world society framework, the expected evolution of the French secondary school history curriculum becomes ambiguous.

From one perspective, France appears a perfect candidate for a vanguard role in the social-scientization and globalization of history education. Intellectually, France has been at the forefront of the evolution of the discipline of history since at least Jules Michelet. More recently, it was the French *Annales* school in history that did much to initiate the worldwide trends toward social-scientization and globalization. If French historians had such an impact on world society, one might expect them to have had at least as much influence on French society. Moreover, institutionally France is the ideal-typical strong state, with a tradition of professional and technocratic state administration and intense centralization of policy making, not least in the education field.³ All of these factors would seem to provide a perfect context for the clear reception and quick implementation of world norms.⁴

On the other hand, other general characteristics of the French nation-state might lead it to resist evolving world society norms of history. On the level of ideas, a national, "Jacobin" vision of history has long been seen as a crucial support to the French republic's legitimacy claims.⁵ Indeed, the study of history (along with the French language) was the key to Jules Ferry's dramatic drive to

use universal, free, and compulsory education to produce a unified, rational, secular, and republican citizenry.⁶ One might therefore expect French politicians, if not technocrats, to resist any shift away from this tradition. Moreover, on the level of institutions, the venerable age of history teaching and of history teachers' associations in France—the professional *Société des Professeurs d'Histoire et de Géographie* [History and Geography Teachers' Society] was founded in 1910—might be expected to contribute to a certain inertia. And more broadly, the same strong state/weak society mix that can lead to rapid and major shifts in policy can also diminish the effects of world models if the state opposes them.

Both hypotheses are convincing: which is right? It is time to turn to a description of the actual evolution of "what counts as history" in France. I begin with some evidence from secondary school curricula and textbooks.

French Secondary School History Curricula and Textbooks: plus ça change...

In this section I offer some evidence from France on the four main world society expectations given above: increasing focus on contemporary history; increasing focus on "social" rather than "political" topics, increasing focus on "peripheral" regions, and increasing focus on transnational processes and supranational units. I focus in particular on the history "*programmes*" [curricula] that are produced by the Ministry of Education for general (as opposed to technical) secondary schools.⁷ I also present some evidence from a close analysis of Hachette's *Malet-Isaac* series of textbooks (see Hymans 1998), which held a market position that approached monopoly for most of its run from the 1920s to the early 1960s.⁸

First of all, it is important to note that in France, unlike many other countries (Meyer et al. 1992: 124–38), the subject "social studies" has not eclipsed the subjects "history and geography" as the primary mechanism introducing secondary school students to the human sciences.⁹ Most students in France are currently required to study three hours per week of history, geography, and civics, rather than "social studies," in the early secondary years from *sixième* to *seconde*. Then, for *première* and *terminale*, their last two years of secondary education, students can choose one of three different tracks: "literary," "scientific," or "economic and social." In the first two, again only history and geography are required: four weekly hours for both years of the literary track, and 2.5 and then 2 weekly hours for the scientific track. The economic and social track is the only one in which "economic and social sciences" is required subject matter, accounting respectively for four and five hours in *première* and *terminale*. But this requirement is in addition to, not instead of, four hours of history and geography both years.

So overall, it is fair to say that what French students learn in school about history, they learn in history class. On the other hand, the total time allotted to the study of history in French schools has declined substantially over the past decades. It is important to ask not only "what counts as history" but also "how much history counts" among national educational priorities. Indeed, the end of the chapter puts forth the hypothesis that the centrality of history in French education has waned in part as a *consequence* of the history teachers' failure to maintain the discipline's fit with world models. But first it is necessary to make the case that French history education is indeed a laggard in terms of its acceptance of these world models.

History: How Contemporary?

The first finding of the world society school is that there has been a shift toward contemporary history and away from earlier periods. Is this true of the history taught in French secondary schools? On the evidence of the *programmes*, it is not.¹⁰ For most of the twentieth century, the French *programmes* simply asked students to plod their way chronologically through the story of civilization. Thus Ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, and the beginnings of Christianity were covered in *sixième* and never again, and by *terminale* the students would finally arrive at the contemporary era. French history education's obsession with maintaining chronology—a topic to which I will return below in my discussion of the attempted reforms of the 1950s—may have been "old-fashioned," but in one sense it led to a "progressive" result. Younger students learned about classical and medieval history too early in their schooling for these topics to be covered with any sophistication. The more mature students focused uniquely on the modern and contemporary periods.¹¹ By contrast, starting with the *programmes* of 1995 there was a break with this tradition of respect for chronology (*Bulletin Officiel de l'Éducation Nationale* 1995). Since then, after first covering the entire history of the world chronologically between *sixième* and *troisième*, students in *seconde* are treated to a "greatest historical hits" tour that covers fifth century Athens, the birth of Christianity, and the Mediterranean of the twelfth century, as well as the Renaissance, the French Revolution, and Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century. Finally, *première* and *terminale* go back over the contemporary period (the mid-19th century to the present).¹² In short, because of the decision to break with the traditional respect for chronology, for the first time students are being exposed to ancient and medieval history in *seconde*, part of the intellectually weightier *deuxième cycle*. So although today's French secondary school history curricula are certainly very heavily weighted toward contemporary issues as the world-society school would expect, the contemporary bias is arguably less severe than it was fifty years ago. Thus France clearly bucks the world trend on this dimension.

Political versus Social History

The second world society finding is that "political" history (broadly construed to include diplomatic and military history) has been eclipsed by "social" history (broadly construed to include economic and cultural history). Is this true for secondary education in France? The French *programmes* of today do offer significantly more emphasis on social history than was the case in the early twentieth century. The *programmes* of the late 1940s, for instance, still offered little respite from the traditional steady diet of war, revolution, and political institutions. But a quite strongly social dimension was already instituted beginning in the mid-1950s, and the more recent *programmes* have in fact not moved very far beyond those landmark reforms.

It is difficult to determine precisely the balance between "political" and "social" topics in today's history classrooms, because much depends on the preferences of individual instructors. However, we can make some general assessments from the *programmes'* descriptions of the broad teaching units. On this evidence political topics appear still to have the upper hand in French secondary school history education. For instance, in *collège* (from *sixième* to *troisième*), the balance between "political" and "social" topics is roughly as follows. In *sixième* the balance of time is roughly two-thirds on the political side (e.g., "Alexander the Great"), versus one-third on the social side (e.g., "The Beginnings of Christianity"). In *cinquième*, the balance of time is roughly one-half on the political side (e.g., "The French Kingdom of the 16th Century: the Difficult Affirmation of Royal Authority") and one-half for the social side (e.g., "Humanism, Renaissance, Reforms"). In *quatrième*, the balance of time is roughly three-quarters on the political side (e.g., "The Absolute Monarchy in France") and one-quarter on the social side (e.g., "The Industrial Age"). Finally, in *troisième* the balance of time is also roughly three-quarters on the political side (e.g., "The Second World War") and one-quarter on the social side (e.g., "Economic Growth, Demographic Evolution and their Social and Cultural Consequences").¹³

The fact that France appears to be lagging behind world trends on this indicator is surprising. As early as the 1930s, French history teachers and textbook authors were going beyond the official *programmes* to inject a strong socioeconomic dimension into the study of history. The most spectacular example of this is the 1930 edition of the Malet-Isaac *Histoire Contemporaine* (Malet, Isaac et al., 1930), written for the final year of high school. Jules Isaac chose to open that book with a major chapter on the economic and technological revolutions of the twentieth century, explaining in the preface, "It may surprise to find the last volume of the *Cours* (course of study) begin with a chapter that is not mentioned in the *programme*. But it seemed to me impossible, in discussing contemporary history, to be silent on the capital fact that dominates it and all of its avenues: that is the economic revolution, which is itself the product of scientific progress" (*ibid.*: vii). Isaac's focus on socioeconomic factors was not limited to that first chapter, but

rather was carried throughout his books, increasingly so in later editions.¹⁴ As was mentioned above, in the 1950s the ministry's *programmes* finally caught up with the teachers and textbook authors. But subsequently this movement slowed.

The West versus the Rest

The third finding of the world society school is that there has been a shift away from a focus on the West and toward other world regions. Does French secondary school history education reflect this trend? As a former colonial empire with continuing world responsibilities and a major immigrant population, one might expect France to be far ahead of the curve in terms of the globalization of history taught in schools. But in fact, one of the remarkable aspects of French secondary school history is how little it has opened up to the world beyond the West.

In the currently operative *programmes*, in *sixième* we find the same ancient civilizations (Ancient Egypt, Biblical peoples and the origins of Christianity, Greece, and Rome) that have been covered in that class for decades. This list has not expanded to include, for instance, ancient pre-Colombian or Chinese civilizations. *Cinquième* is almost entirely devoted to European history through the Renaissance, with only a brief excursion to the Muslim world. *Quatrième* and *première* concentrate on European history in modern times, only taking in other world areas as part of the history of European imperialism. *Troisième* and *terminale* do devote about one third of the total time to the study of broad world trends since 1945, but the bulk of their focus is on twentieth century Europe and North America. Finally, the whirlwind "greatest hits" tour of *secondaire*, described previously, includes a doff of the cap to Braudel ("The Mediterranean in the Twelfth Century") but otherwise has a traditional Eurocentric focus. In sum, French students, almost as much as in 1920, study European and not world history.

The most marked shift in emphasis over time has been the greater attention paid to the United States. This increase was already occurring during the lifetime of the Malet-Isaac series. A laborious paragraph-by-paragraph count of the number of references to the U.S. shows that such references as a percentage of total references to external actors doubled from 5 percent in the 1920s Malet-Isaac edition to 10 percent in the 1960s edition.¹⁵ It is hard to make such precise comparisons across different textbook series, but to all appearances the focus on the U.S. has continued to increase in recent decades. This suggests that it is not just geographical proximity, but also perception of power that determines the level of focus on various external actors. If the French books were and still are largely Eurocentric, it is not simply because France happens to be located in the continent of Europe, but also because world power has been historically focused in Europe. Again, as will be detailed below, the "Braudelian" reform effort of the 1950s would have radically changed this state of affairs, but the effort was snuffed out.

National versus Supranational Frames

The final general finding of the world society school is the growing use of transnational and supranational frames to analyze the course of events. In the European Union context, clearly the most interesting question under this heading is the extent to which national educational systems are beginning to move beyond the national to a European frame. Since the implementation of the 1995 *programmes*, French secondary curricula have, indeed, very much begun to reflect this. In particular, Europe is the dominant frame of reference in *quatrième*, which covers the period from the seventeenth century to 1914. After *quatrième*, the European frame remains fairly prominent. For instance, the *programme* for *terminale* that goes into effect in the fall of 2004 is divided into three sections: the world (22 hours), Europe (10 hours), and France (18 hours). Clearly, then, Europe is not dominant, but it is much more present than it was in earlier decades.

Do these increasingly "European" *programmes* reflect a mere relabeling, or do they really suggest some significant change in the way that history is conceived and taught? The evidence suggests the former rather than the latter. For instance, in the apparently highly "European" *quatrième*, one of the main topics is the "Revolutionary Period, 1789–1815." Under this seemingly denationalized heading, however, we find the traditional French concern with the French Revolution (which is allotted 7–8 hours of the 9–10 total hours for this unit). Even a "mere relabeling" has significance, of course, in that it demonstrates how apologetic a European state must be nowadays when it chooses to focus on national history. Nevertheless, French secondary education seems not to have pushed beyond relabeling.¹⁶ Such is the conclusion of a report on "Europe in the Teaching of History, Geography and Civic Education" (Inspectorate-General of the Ministry of Education 2000). Indeed, not only does the report strongly argue that history education's discursive turn to Europe has so far reflected mere "intentions that cost nothing"; it also does not view this as problematic. For the report stresses that from a political and a scientific perspective, the jury is still out on the reality of "Europe," and therefore teachers cannot be criticized for showing a reluctance to reorient their teaching around it. In sum, the French state is clearly not pushing "Europe" on sullenly national-minded teachers. Rather, there is a minor rhetorical shift that seems to be having little effect on the ground.

The Ecole Normale Supérieure Concours

The previous section demonstrated that progress toward adoption of world models in French secondary school curricula has been sluggish. But I have previously indicated that history teaching, even in France, does not necessarily reflect

the dictat of the education ministry. Textbook writers and individual teachers choose to emphasize some subjects and to deemphasize others according to their tastes and to the tastes of the "market." Might it therefore be the case that while on the official level France is digging in its heels against the globalizing and social-scientizing world model of the history curriculum, inside actual classrooms this model is nevertheless having a powerful effect on "what counts as history"—and would have a greater effect were it not for those bureaucrats?

To study the actual French practice of history teaching would require the use of anthropological techniques involving the close observation of individual classrooms. However, we can gain some insight into the mind of the French history profession by looking at the essay questions in history that are given in the written entrance exam (*concours*) for the most academically prestigious undergraduate institution in France, the *École Normale Supérieure* (ENS) of the rue d'Ulm in Paris.¹⁷ The questions for this exam are set by the exam "jury," typically made up of professors from the ENS and other ENS alumni who teach at prestigious academic institutions. Prospective candidates study in special preparatory classes (*classes préparatoires*) for two or more years after finishing high school to prepare themselves for the ENS exam. The course of study for the *classes préparatoires* is driven entirely by the expectations of what will be asked in the exam. These expectations are based on the vague *programme* set by the ENS—not the Ministry of Education. Since 1992 that *programme* for the subject of history has been "France since 1848, and the US, USSR, China, and Germany since 1918."¹⁸ Within those broad parameters, any question is fair game.

In short, looking at ENS exam questions allows us a separate test of the power of world models in France. Whereas the content of secondary school curricula and textbooks is heavily dependent on education bureaucrats, the ENS *concours* is largely independent of such interference. So if the evidence from the *concours* parallels that from secondary curricula and textbooks, this would suggest that the resistance to world models in history education is shared both by French educators and by the state.¹⁹

At the ENS library I located approximately 100 years of ENS exam questions: from 1852–1860 and from 1891–1988, with only eight missing years over that latter time span. Prof. Gilles Pécoat of the ENS also provided me with the questions from the years 1992–2003. There is one question for each year.²⁰ The exam questions are very broad and give little indication of how they should be analyzed by the student. Often the question is a mere statement of the historical event that the student is to discuss (sometimes a short list of key sub-topics is also offered). For instance, in 1894 the question was "The Congress of Vienna and its handiwork." In 2003 the question was "French society and economic growth from the end of the Second World War to the start of the 1980s." This limited data clearly does not allow us to perceive the evolution in standards for a good answer. But through it we can nevertheless develop a first-cut analysis of "what counts as history" at the ENS. I consider the same four hypotheses as in the previous section.

History: How Contemporary?

The first world society finding is that there is a shift toward contemporary history and away from ancient history. On the level of curricula and textbooks France seems to have resisted this trend to some extent. What about the ENS *concours*? I carried out a simple quantitative study of this issue. For each exam question I took the date the exam was given and subtracted it by the latest historical date the student was being asked to cover. For instance, in 1963 students were quizzed on "French Catholics under the Third Republic (1871–1914)." So in this case, there was a gap of 49 years between the exam date and the latest historical date covered by the exam (the interested reader can refer to the appendix for complete coding rules). Looking across all the exams, then, has there been a trend toward smaller gaps? Figure 3.1 answers this question.

Figure 3.1 Average Difference in Years between Date Exam was given and latest Historical Date covered on Exam



Data (count of questions): 1851–60: 8 (2 missing); 1891–1900: 8 (2 missing); 1901–10: 6 (4 missing); 1911–20: 9 (1 missing); 1921–30: 10 (0 missing); 1931–40: 9 (1 missing); 1941–50: 11 (1 extra: different questions for females and males in 1950); 1951–60: 11 (1 extra: different questions for females and males in 1951); 1961–70: 10 (0 missing); 1971–80: 10 (0 missing); 1981–1990: 8 (2 missing); 1991–2003: 12 (1 missing).

Source: Exam questions on file at the Bibliothèque des Lettres de l'École Normale Supérieure, rue d'Ulm, and Prof. Gilles Pécoat.

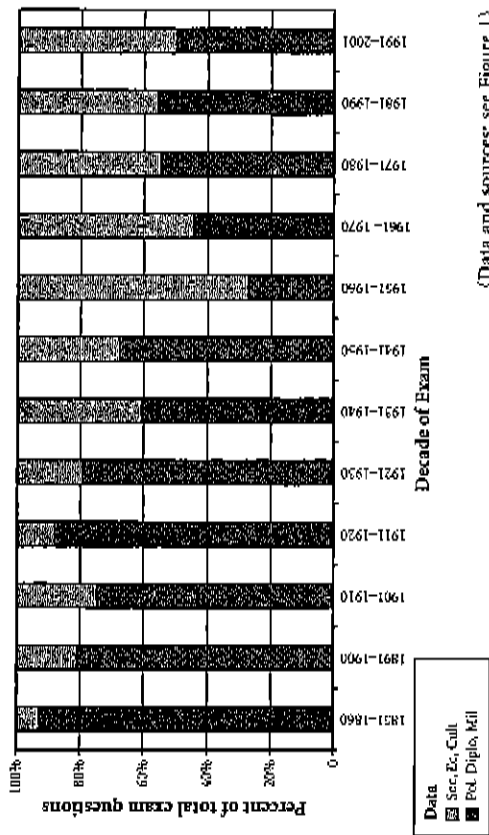
Figure 3.1 contains mixed support for the notion of a growing "contemporization" of the exam questions in recent decades. World society trends toward social-scientization and globalization should be most prominent since the Second World War. But this figure demonstrates that as far as the ENS *concours* go, the fields of ancient and medieval history had already died out by 1900. At no point since 1891 has an exam question covered the period before 1328, and at no point since 1897 has a question been given on the period before 1715. On the other

band, in support of the world society school, throughout the twentieth century there has been a continuing trend toward ever more contemporary questions. For instance, although even as early as the decade 1911–1920 80 percent of the questions already focused on the post-1789 period, not since 1977 has a question even reached back as far as 1789 (the question in that year was “Progress and problem of national unity in France 1789–1914”). Meanwhile, one has to go as far back as 1964 to find a question that actually focused on the revolutionary period (the question in that year was “Theory, utopia and realism in the work of the French Revolution 1789–1799”). In sum, although contemporization has been a reality for over a century, the shift toward the present has not abated. This is in line with current world models of what counts as history, and it stands in contrast to the continuing strong presence of antiquity in secondary school curricula.

Political versus Social History

The second world society finding is that there has been a shift from political to social topics as the focus of historical research and education. On the level of curricula and textbooks, France seems to have been a leader in this shift until the 1950s, but then progress in this direction slowed. What about the ENS *concours*? I have divided all exam questions into one of two categories, “political, diplomatic, and/or military history” on the one hand, and “social, economic, and/or cultural history” on the other. For instance, I count the 1941 exam question, “Characteristic traits of Napoleon III’s foreign policy,” in the former category, whereas I count the 1951 question, “Show how the economic evolution from 1850 to 1914 favored the development of cities in Western Europe,” in the latter category (see appendix for complete coding rules). The results are summarized in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 “Social” versus “Political” Questions on Exams



(Data and sources: see Figure 1)

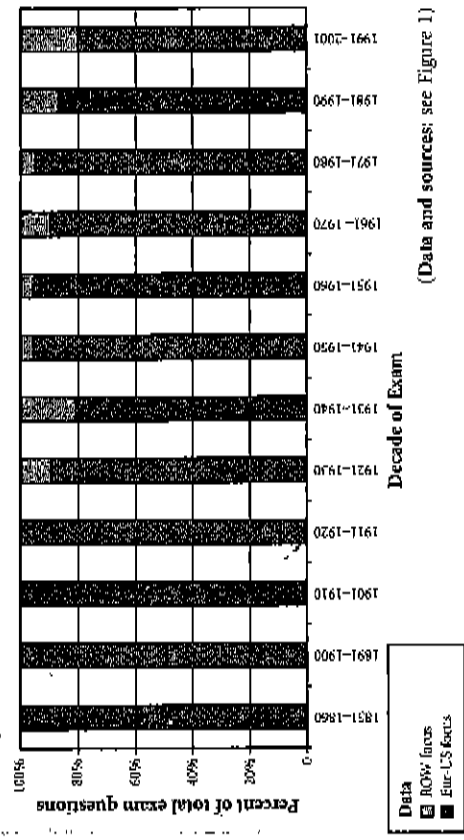
As can be seen, the story of the ENS *concours* is quite parallel to the general story of French secondary school curricula and textbooks on this dimension. Questions covering social, economic, and/or cultural history arrived in abundance in the 1930s, accounting for approximately 40 percent of the total questions in that decade. There was another forward surge in the 1950s, with such questions accounting for nearly 75 percent of the total. But after that decade, political, diplomatic and/or military history staged a comeback. Since the 1970s, the exam questions have struck an approximately even balance between the two areas. The authors of the 1948 question “English power on the eve of 1914,” would have been completely comfortable with the question selected for the 1993 *concoeurs*: “The power of the United States in the world, 1945–1980.”

It is certainly possible that the seeming similarity of the 1948 and 1993 questions is misleading, for the juries in those different decades may have had very different ideas of how best to analyze those questions. Ostensibly “political” topics may well require a more “social” analysis today than they did in 1948. But even if this is the case, the fact that about half the questions in the ENS *concoeurs* focus on political history offers further evidence of France’s resistance to world models.

The West versus the Rest

The third world society finding is that there is a shift away from a focus on the West and toward non-European peoples great and small. On the level of curricula and textbooks, France has not made such a shift. What about the ENS *concoeurs*? I have surveyed all of the exam questions for whether their explicit references are limited to Europe and the US or whether they look beyond there to the rest of the world (see appendix for complete coding rules). The results are summarized in figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3 Exam Questions Focusing on Europe/U.S. versus Questions Including the Rest of the World (ROW)



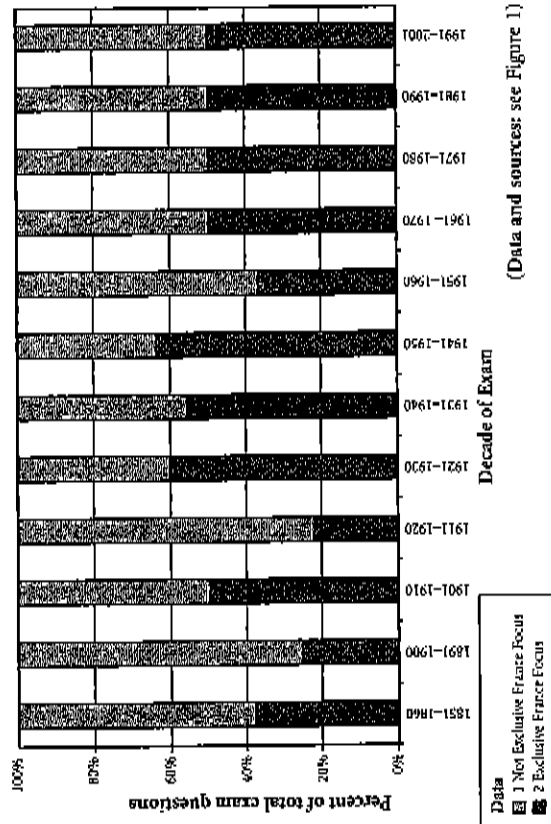
(Data and sources: see Figure 1)

This figure shows very clearly that just as in the case of curricula and textbooks, countries dominated by people of European stock continue to serve as the focus of questions for the ENS *concours*. There has been, admittedly, some evolution in the last two decades toward a greater focus on the rest of the world, but this evolution has been quite timid. It is not too much to say that the *concours* are as Eurocentric today as they were in the 1930s. As noted previously, the broad *programme* set for the exam by the ENS focuses uniquely on great powers and includes only one non-white state, China. Unless that is changed, the Eurocentrism of the *concours* will persist.

National versus Supranational Frames

The final general finding of the world society school is the growing use of transnational and supranational frames in describing the course of events. In the cases of curricula and textbooks, France has taken only moderate steps to move beyond its traditional focus on the national framework. What about the ENS *concours*? To answer this question I have divided the relevant exam questions into two groups: those that focus exclusively on France, and those that do not focus exclusively on France. So, for example, the 1945 question "The Girondins" counts as focused exclusively on France, whereas the 1956 question, "National idea and national sentiment in France and Germany from 1848 to 1914," does not (see appendix for complete coding rules). The results are summarized in figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4 Questions Focusing Exclusively on France versus Questions not Doing so



This figure shows that the ENS *concours* have not tended to move away from the French national framework. Since the 1960s, the jury has been consistent in giving precisely 50 percent of the *concours* over to "Franco-French" questions. Indeed, purely French topics are more prominent now than they were in the decades leading up to World War I.

Nor has the *concours* jury begun to request that students apply a European frame of reference. Indeed, the last exam question to use the word "Europe" was in 1976 ("Public opinion in Europe 1914-1945: formation, expression, influence in international and internal relations"). Even in the few cases where the term "Europe" does appear, it is not clear that it represents anything more than a geographical expression. One can find the word "Europe" in the exam questions as early as 1854, probably not because the *concours* jury at that time was looking forward to supranational integration.

To summarize this section, in general the ENS *concours* appear even more resistant to contemporary world models than French secondary school curricula and textbooks. This indicates that if anything, the world society tide is being resisted in France even more by the history profession than by state elites. The evidence from this broad quantitative approach is reinforced by my case study of the 1950s efforts to reform the secondary school history curriculum, to which I now turn.

The 1950s Reforms and their Aftermath

This chapter has on a number of occasions made reference to a 1950s surge in French conformity to the worldwide social-scientization and globalization of history teaching—a surge that subsequently faltered. What happened? Who were the actors for and against these trends, and why did the forces favoring the world models stall in France? A historical study of the reform efforts of that era, seen through the lens of the journal of the professional Société des Professeurs d'Histoire et de Géographie (henceforth SPHG) can shed some light on these questions.

As early as 1951, a strong movement was afoot in the Ministry of Education to promote an evolution of secondary school history toward the new world model promulgated internationally by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and at home by the *Annales* school and its most prominent exponent, Fernand Braudel.²¹ This move was strongly opposed by the legendary textbook author Jules Isaac. Isaac warned in an open letter to the SPHG—of which he was one of the founding members and a permanent member of the executive committee—against any move away from the traditional narrative history, known as *histoire événementielle*. Strict adherence to the chronology of historical events was, in his eyes, the "backbone" of history teaching, "all that gives it movement and life" (*Bulletin* 1951: 216-19). To dilute

this with the proposed focus on "civilizations" in the upper grades, Isaac warned, would undermine the teaching of French political history and even the jewel in the crown, the history of the French Revolution: "The role, the place of the French Revolution must not in any way be diminished. The event—[and especially] *that* event—must remain at the core of our teaching. It is complex, it is turbulent and tragic; one cannot simplify it excessively without running the risk that the students will understand nothing and retain nothing" (ibid.: 219). In sum, in this letter, Isaac neatly summarized the two rallying cries—to maintain the principle of chronology and to produce a patriotic and republican citizenry—that would be central to the actions of the SPHG in the 1950s and 1960s, and even into the 1990s.²² He also identified the key republican symbol or *lieu de mémoire* [site of memory] that the SPHG would invoke to defend its position: the teaching of the French Revolution.

Despite Isaac's early objection, the ministerial intention to introduce the study of "civilizations" into French secondary education was concretized in a ministerial draft for a new history *programme*, sent to the SPHG for comment in November, 1955 (*Bulletin* 1955: 138). This draft—already a big step away from Braudel's much grander initial vision—envisaged devoting *seconde* to a social-scientized and globalized study of great world "civilizations." The other grades would remain focused on the traditional chronological sweep from Greece and Rome to the present day. This idea received a negative reception from the SPHG. Its members countered with three alternatives, authored by professors Schwab, Marc-Bonnet, and Alba (*Bulletin* 1956: 167–76). The Schwab project was merely cute—it said, in essence, that we will teach your civilizations if you give us a bigger share of classroom hours. The Marc-Bonnet project admitted the utility of a focus on "civilizations" but worried about the violation of the principle of chronology. It therefore proposed a strange hybrid between the two, which would have undoubtedly left students reeling had it ever been inflicted on them. The Alba project—the best reflection of the weight of SPHG opinion—flatly rejected the idea of studying "civilizations." After first tarring the proposal as being essentially a return to the failed Vichy France curriculum reform project of 1941, Alba (who was one of Isaac's coauthors) offered a stirring defense of the principle of chronology. In particular, Alba wrote, the very juncture at which the ministry was proposing to introduce the study of "civilizations" was the point of inflection of the whole curriculum—the study of the French Revolution. Alba wrote:

I said that [in the ministry's proposals] the principle of historical continuity is broken and one must, I think, insist on this important fact. Having arrived, at the end of *troisième*, at the convocation of the *États généraux* [Estates General], the student will not study that history until fifteen months later, after first going backward several millenniums. What will he retain of the long eighteenth century prelude when he studies the Revolution? (*Bulletin* 1956: 170)

By 1957, a compromise had been reached (*Bulletin* 1957: 131–32). The study of "civilizations" was to be included in the *programme* but limited to the last two trimesters of *terminale*, too late to be included as a topic for the *baccalauréat* (and besides that, consigned to a period in which most students could be expected to have what Americans call "senioritis"). As a parting shot, to Braudel's great consternation the SPHG annual assembly unanimously approved Alba's proposal that the study of "civilizations" be limited to a "precise historical time period, from 1914 to the present" (ibid.).²³

The new *programmes* for *terminale* were published in the ministerial *arrêté* [order] of 9 June 1959 (*HOPJ* 1959: 11). One trimester would be devoted to the "Western" civilization and one to the "European Communist" civilization; the other trimester would cover "the Muslim world," "the world of the Indian and the Pacific Oceans," and "the black African world." Partial as it was, the reform represented a beachhead that reformers expected to expand throughout the curriculum. And it had one quite dramatic, immediate, practical consequence, which was to sound the death knell for the long-dominant "traditionalist" history textbook series: Hachette's Malet-Isaac. Jules Isaac was too old to undertake personally such a significant revision as demanded by the reforms, and his editor at Hachette told him that, in any case, times were changing and the market was demanding a fresh approach.²⁴ Braudel himself jumped into the void, penning a twelfth-grade text, but it failed to win much market share and was finally remaindered in 1970 (Daix 1995: 350).²⁵

In fact, Braudel's personal failure mirrored the broader failure of his reform vision. A notable change in 1965 was the deleting of the black African world (as well as Indonesia, Indochina, and Madagascar) from the study of "civilizations" in *terminale* (*HOPJ* 1965: 61). Braudel was livid about this: "In the middle of decolonization, when the new independent states tried, not without courage, to write their own history, an *arrêté* eliminated purely and simply the African world" (Braudel 1987, cited in Daix: 349). The real disappointment for Braudel, however, was not this minor setback, but rather the more general failure of social-scientizing and globalizing history to make a more profound penetration into the curriculum. The proponents of the old chronological and national vision had been able to contain these newfangled notions to the last two trimesters of the twelfth grade. It was only with the 1995 *programmes* that a semblance of the original 1955 proposal for *seconde* was implemented. Why did the reformers' momentum evaporate in the late 1950s?

The obvious hypothesis that presents itself is that the reform momentum was stopped by the return to power of Charles de Gaulle and the regime change to the Fifth Republic in 1958. This hypothesis, which certainly requires further research to be confirmed, would run as follows. While Braudel was clearly important in providing the intellectual framework for the

1950s reform effort, the real powers pushing the effort were the state technocrats, who undoubtedly were also heavily influenced by the world society through such mechanisms as UNESCO and Council of Europe education conferences (Schüdekopf et al. 1967). These technocrats were in the drivers' seat in the fractious and unstable parliamentary system of the Fourth Republic.²⁶ In such an institutional framework, the generally Jacobin teaching corps could not rely on its natural allies, republican politicians, to provide much political heft against the technocratic carriers of the new world model of history education. But the political balance of power was altered by the Fifth Republic's return to a strong presidency and more stable parliaments under de Gaulle. The technocrats' political chiefs were once again their masters. In addition, de Gaulle himself incessantly articulated the traditionalist narrative of the French Republic's distinctiveness and destiny (Hoffmann and Hoffmann 1973: 63–70). A powerful alliance with the traditionalist *professeurs* was in the cards, and therefore by the early 1960s the technocratic momentum on curricular reform had been stopped.

But the Fifth Republic technocrats have taken their pound of flesh nonetheless, by drastically cutting the amount of time dedicated to the teaching of history. It is not so much in "what counts as history" as in "how much history counts" that we see the real impact of world models on the French case. History and geography have ceded ground to more "useful" skills, especially in math and science. As mentioned previously, repeated reforms have significantly reduced the traditional four classroom hours per week devoted to history and geography. The most striking case is the "scientific" track in *première* and *terminale*, which grant the subjects only 2.5 and 2 hours per week respectively. For scholarly observers of the Fifth Republic, this paradoxical mix of a fierce rhetorical maintenance of old traditions combined with a gradual undermining of their real place in French society is an old story. The Gaullist state's fervent desire to protect the core elements of French national self-definition led into a frightened chase after the saviors of science and technology, which eventually became in fact more central to French reality than the increasingly hollow rhetoric commemorating the revolutionary and republican past. As Philip Cerny (1980: 272) has written: "[De Gaulle] industrialized France while arguing the evils of machine civilization. He presided over an era which effectively fitted France for participation in the interdependent world of advanced industrial societies, while calling for national pride and consciousness." This Gaullist paradox is all too evident in the fate of the discipline of history. History may still be the monarch of the human sciences in France, but it rules a vastly diminished kingdom.

Appendix: Coding Rules for Figures 3.1–3.4

Figure 3.1 Average Difference between Date Exam Was Given and Latest Historical Date Covered on Exam

How far back do exam questions look?

1. Assume each exam question to be temporally bounded. First look for explicit bounds (e.g., the 1895 question "Religion in Holland 1648–1713").
2. If there are none, then some interpolation is necessary. If a group or individual is listed, their birth and death dates may be taken as the temporal bounds. For instance, the 1944 question "Portrait of Victorian England," can be said to end with the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. If the end date of a question seems open ended, for instance the 1987 question "French and Germans facing peace and war from the 1920s to our times," then the end date is the date of the exam (1987 in this case).
3. Having constructed the data base, take the date of the exam and subtract it by the latest date covered in the exam question. Then group these by decade and calculate the means.

Figure 3.2 "Social" versus "Political" Questions on Exams

Proportions of exam questions by issue area.

1. Look for keywords to code the questions as "political/diplomatic/military" or "social/economic/cultural." Keywords indicating a "political/diplomatic/military" focus include references to states, empires (including decolonization), state institutions, political parties, wars, revolutions, foreign policy, domestic policy, kings, politicians, state bureaucrats. Keywords indicating a "social/economic/cultural" focus include references to religion, the Church, social classes and relations (including their "revolutionary potential"), high and low culture, ideas and ideologies (including political ones), trade and commerce, and socioeconomic "development."
2. For each exam question, assign one point to either "political-diplomatic/military" or "social/economic/cultural" category. In some cases the vagueness or complexity of the question makes it difficult to assign it to one or the other category. In such cases, give a half-credit to each.
3. Having constructed the data base, group it by decade and calculate the means.

Figure 3.3 Exam Questions Focusing on Europe/U.S. versus Questions Including the Rest of World (ROW)

Proportions of exam questions by geographical placement.

1. Assume that every question has a definite geographical focus. Look for explicit mentions of geographical entities or their inhabitants (e.g., reference to "Girondins" counts as a reference to France).

2. The category "Europe-US" includes all of geographical Europe, Russia and the Soviet Union, and North America. The category "Rest of World" includes all other regions and the world taken as a whole.
3. References to broader geographical entities than nations or states are counted only if they are more than mere foils for the primary focus of the question. For instance, there are two such entities (West and Far East) in the 1954 question "Reciprocal influence of the civilizations of the West and the Far East," but only one (USSR) in the 1985 question, "Strategy of the Soviet Union facing the outside world."
4. For each exam question, count the mentions of the various geographical entities. Then for each question, divide 1 point between "Europe-US" and "Rest of World" according to the balance of explicit mentions. So, for instance, for the 1954 question, 0.5 points would be assigned to each category, whereas for the 1985 question, 1 full point would be assigned to the "Europe-US" category.
5. Having constructed the data base, group it by decade and calculate the means.

Figure 3.4 Questions Focusing Exclusively on France versus Questions not Doing so

1. As for Figure 3.3, assume that every question has a geographical focus. If only France or its inhabitants are explicitly mentioned, then assign a score of 0. If areas or inhabitants from outside France are mentioned, assign a score of 1. The only exception to this is questions relating exclusively to the French empire prior to decolonization, which receive a score of 0 (N.B. this exception turned out to have almost no effect on the overall results).
2. For instance, the 1942 question "Evolution of the Napoleonic Regime in France from 1799-1814" receives a score of 0, but the 1987 question "French and Germans facing peace and war from the 1920s to our times" receives a score of 1.
3. Having constructed the data base, group it by decade and calculate the means.

Notes

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1. An exception is Yasemin Nuhoğlu Soysal (1998:53-61). She argues that the unique German historical experience, particularly the "collective guilt" over the Nazi period, combined with domestic corporatist educational structures can explain why Germany has been so much in favor of the social-scientizing and globalizing world model of history education.
2. The *Annales* school of historiography emerged in mid-twentieth century France. As Michael Harsgor puts it, the *Annales* approach enshrined a "secular trinity of serialism, structuralism, and functionalism" (Harsgor, 1978: 3).
3. On the notion of strong and weak states and societies, see Katzenstein (1978).
4. In general, the world society school argues that states should generally be more "progressive" than societies because of the material and normative pressure placed on them by the anarchic nature of the international system. See Meyer et al. (1997: 163-64).
5. For more on the persistence of Jacobinism in the French study of history, see Jean-Pierre Rioux (1987: 195-212).
6. For a panoramic view of French educational history, see Prost (1968).
7. It is true that Frank et al.'s "What Counts As History" is based on a study of university curricula, not secondary education. However, their hypotheses are not limited to higher education.
8. The *Mallet-Isaac* series of textbooks went through many editions in its long lifetime. The final 1960 edition was recently reprinted (Isaac et al., 2002 [1960]).
9. Although the subjects of history and geography have for many years been deeply intertwined in French secondary education, this chapter chooses to focus more narrowly on history alone.
10. The most efficient way of collecting French *programmes* starting from the 1930s is to look at the privately published *Nouveaux Horaires et Programmes de l'Enseignement du Second Degré* (Paris: Librairie Vuibert), referred to subsequently as "HOPE". The *programmes* were also published in the state *Bulletin Officiel de l'Éducation Nationale*. The "return to antiquity" was paradoxically an argument used in favor of the "progressive" 1950s reforms of the *programmes*. See below in this chapter, and also *Bulletin* 1956.
12. The secondary *programmes* have gone through another round of updating since the major reforms of 1995. Links to the currently operative *programmes* can be found at <http://www.histoire-geographie.org/programmes.html>.
13. The *programme* revisions of 2002 (*Bulletin Officiel de l'Éducation Nationale*, 2002a, 2002b) for higher secondary education (*lycée*) are not as explicit as their 1995 counterparts about the time allotments within each unit. The 1995 *programmes* for the upper grades were heavily weighted toward political history: 2/3 in *seconde*, 2/3 in *première*, and in *terminale* (*Bulletin Officiel de l'Éducation Nationale*, 1995).
14. Hymans (1998) reports many quantitative measures of the evolution of the Mallet-Isaac books.
15. References to "external actors" include countries other than France, plus larger units such as the world as a whole.
16. Soysal and Bertilotti (2001) point out that this relabeling is particularly easy in the French case, given the long tradition of universalism at the heart of French national identity.
17. It would also be of interest to consider the questions given in the oral exam that follows the written one. Unlike the written exam, however, the oral exam questions are not standardized across all students. Moreover, the written exam is more relevant to the study of French history education, for most students never make it beyond the written exam.

18. Previously, the list also included the United Kingdom and Italy. Thanks to Thomas Lienhard, an ENS history alumnus, for this information.
19. Of course, teachers in higher and in secondary education are not necessarily like-minded (see Prost, 1968).
20. Except for two years in which there were different questions for boys and girls.
21. As will be noted below, Braudel himself was heavily involved in the curricular reform movement throughout the 1950s.
22. Indeed, even the 1995 programme reforms were a compromise after a more thorough-going reform proposal was beaten back by the SPHG, now known as the *Association des Professeurs d'Histoire et de Géographie*.
23. For Braudel's reaction to this vote, see Daux (1995: 349).
24. For more on the end of the Malet-Isaac series, see Hymans (1998).
25. Part of Braudel's textbook was later republished as a mass-market history, under the title *Grammaire des civilisations* (Braudel 1987).
26. For one of the clearest arguments for the primacy of technocrats in the Fourth Republic see Hitchcock (1998).

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