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Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870-1920*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006. xi + 277 pp. \$45.00 (hb). ISBN 0-8014-4464-0.

Response Essay by Judith Surkis, Harvard University, to the Review Essays of his book by Judith F. Stone, Florence Tamagne, Karen Offen, and Robert A. Nye.

I would first like to thank the reviewers and the editors of *H-France Forum* for the consideration they have given to my book. It is a rare opportunity and honor to receive such insightful and provocative commentaries from a distinguished group of colleagues. I greatly appreciate this occasion to respond to their thoughtful queries.

As the elegant synopses provided by these reviews explain, *Sexing the Citizen* explores the dynamics of “sexed citizenship” in the Third Republic. The book locates gender and sexuality at the heart of a familiar republican predicament: how to fashion and foster male citizens, who were capable of both autonomy and social responsibility. I take as my point of departure how, with universal male suffrage, masculinity was both constitutive of and conferred by the citizen’s status. Because all French men were citizens, all citizens were supposed to be properly masculine. Republicans hence worried over the “asocial” potential of men’s, and especially young men’s, desires. French men’s “sex” thus granted citizenship but also posed potential problems for it. It defined *and* threatened to disrupt men’s political and social capacities. My analysis does not, however, automatically associate this seeming contradiction with failure. In other words, and this is one of my principal conceptual as well as historical points, the apparent instability of masculinity was not necessarily delegitimizing. It could just as much underwrite republican endeavors as undermine them. What might at first appear to be “failures” helped to constitute republican masculinity, by giving normative regulation a reason for existing. My account of this dynamic exposes how citizenship entails social expectations or norms in providing a framework for political and social rights.

As a cultural and intellectual history of these politically salient norms, the book highlights the thought and writing of an array of academics, reformers, and professionals who were similarly preoccupied with the pedagogy of citizenship. I examine their meditations on masculinity and more specifically on the social significance of men’s (sexual) desires. This emphasis allows me to elucidate the presumptions, internal contradictions, and blindspots—regarding men and women’s social and sexual roles; cultural, racial, and class differences; the proper objects and orientations of sexual desires—which composed and complicated “sexed” citizenship as imagined by some of its most powerful proponents. In showing how a specific conception of cross-sexual or “heterosexual” desire socially regulated the male citizen, I also argue that an ideal of conjugally complementary femininity structured and stabilized conceptions of republican masculinity. In the process, I demonstrate how debates about sexual deviance and sexual norms expressed and addressed broader political and social concerns, including democratization, secularization, economic expansion, colonial government, and modern warfare.

Sexing the Citizen thus has a chronological, national, and thematic focus. As these thought-provoking responses illustrate, it also speaks to larger concerns about the history of French republicanism and the structure of “sexed” citizenship in other times and places, including today. The reviewers indicate as well how the book highlights questions of historical method, and of cultural history in particular, as well as the place of masculinity in studies of gender and sexuality. In this essay, I address these wider implications, in part by answering their specific concerns.

To begin with perhaps the most obvious question, what does a focus on the Third Republic tell us, given that republican citizenship was, as many historians have shown, already “sexed” in the Revolution? As Florence Tamagne notes, I shift to a different terrain of investigation in order to unsettle the assumption that the “sexed” character of citizenship was definitively fixed at one particular moment. Regime changes throughout the nineteenth century regularly reformulated the requirements and the meanings of citizenship. More pointedly still, even when, in the Third Republic, universal male suffrage was enshrined as an enduring and politically salient principle, the citizen’s presumptive masculinity remained problematic. This is one of my main points. How then did the citizen’s masculinity at this moment differ from those that preceded it? Robert Nye, for example, wonders how this sexed citizen may be related to earlier legal configurations or to longstanding medical and clerical emphases on procreation. Karen Offen, likewise, references prior religious precepts. My emphasis on how Republican politicians and pedagogues developed at once secular and social conceptions of morality (the two were, I suggest, intimately related) as part of their project of making citizens highlights what distinguished this model of masculinity, and also of marriage, from both religious and medical accounts. I’ll address these two cases in turn. But I would first add that at no point do I argue that the Third Republic represented a definitive break with previous (sexual) regimes and indeed argue against such decisive ruptures.

What made this vision remarkable, I suggest, was its overt emphasis on the regulatory role of marriage for men—a regulatory imperative that had clearly restrictive consequences for women. Marriage was conceived as an important way to manage the male citizen’s sexual desires over—and at times above—its place in preserving property or protecting paternal authority. The conjugality I discuss, while still legally structured by the Civil Code, was not reducible to the post-Revolutionary concerns that informed its redaction. By allowing for the affirmation and containment of men’s desires, conjugality was supposed to reconcile the libidinal and disciplinary aspects of the Republic’s universal male suffrage. It evidently depended on a normative conception of femininity to work. My account, while it does not focus on dissident or deviant women, does suggest why their non-conformity constituted a social threat.

This political and sexual arrangement was not the inevitable or self-evident extension of earlier constellations. And this is where I take issue with Karen Offen’s claims regarding the permanent and predictable ways in which ideas of marriage, reproduction, and heterosexuality are linked across time and place. She contends that, “In every human society of which I am aware, some notion of heterosexual marriage and family remains central to sociopolitical organization.” Given such assumptions, it is unsurprising that she finds little that is new in the Third Republic or in my argument. By contrast, many of the figures I address in my study, including most famously Emile Durkheim, viewed conjugality as a distinctively modern form of social and sexual regulation. This contemporary interest in “*la famille conjugale*” as culturally and temporally bound, rather than as a natural or timeless institution, is itself significant, contextually specific—and needing of explanation. I argue that it was an expression of a number of related developments, including secularization and a new emphasis on “society” rather than divinity as a source of morality. How and why was this the case?

In her commentary, Judith Stone recalls the centrality of Republicans’ commitment to anti-clericalism and further indicates its importance for their shifting models of masculinity. I could not agree more, even if I presume, rather than portray in detail, the passionate fervor of its advocates. Their “*foi laïque*,” to use the liberal Protestant Ferdinand Buisson’s expression, forms the backdrop for my account of how theories of secular moral education shaped and were shaped by conceptions of gender and sexuality. This secularization project posed the problem of sexual regulation—the principles on which it could be based; how it might be best achieved; who should be responsible for its administration—in new and decisive ways. And it accounts in large measure for why adolescence—its crises and hopeful resolutions—was such a touchstone of contemporary educational debate. The secular/clerical conflict, especially in the realm of schooling, explains how the simultaneous affirmation and government of young men’s desires emerged as a pedagogical problem and why the political stakes of properly resolving this

regulatory dilemma were so great. The model of liberal education elaborated by figures such as Buisson depended on depictions of Catholic schooling's perverse effects.

These political considerations also explain why committed anti-clericals such as Buisson and Emile Combes sought to show how secular primary schooling in Algeria could accommodate and eventually overcome the purported perversities of Islam. Their investment in Algerian reform pursued an ongoing battle with the Catholic Church on colonial terrain. They appealed to the Algerian case in order to affirm the universal import of their secular vision, including especially the moral value of the conjugal family. These "universal" values nonetheless operated as a double-edged sword. Depictions of native religious and family organization as deficient justified recourse to "adapted" schooling and the ongoing exclusion of the vast majority of "indigènes" from citizenship. In figuring the sexual regulation of Algerian adolescents as a "universal" rather than a particular problem, these reformers at once confirmed *and* conditioned their model of the male citizen and the importance of secular moral education.

Karen Offen is, however, certainly right to signal the extent to which the Catholic Church sought to reveal and regulate sexual desires (a point famously made by Michelet, as she suggests, and also notably by Michel Foucault in the *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1). Concerns with the promotion of marriage and normative sexual roles were, in other words, not *unique* to republicans. Indeed, it is for this reason that the new pedagogical projects addressed the problematic character of men's sexual instincts, while depicting their clerical adversaries as agents of perversion. Marriage and sexuality had deep political importance, and this is precisely my point. Offen's account of this "inevitably" shared concern, while less "narrow" in scope than my own, ultimately explains little, founded as it is on broad generalizations about "the French belief system" and "French understandings of how life should be ordered." Her explanation presumes a constant and coherent French national character. My approach interrogates such suppositions. I show how conjugality was a way to secure the republican citizen's masculinity and not simply a cultural--and historical--inevitability. Instead of seeing a seamless and successful transfer from one framework to another, I stress the difficulty involved in deriving the principles on which secular sexual morality could be based.

Scientific accounts of nature, of course, offered up one such ground. They clearly structured understandings of men and women's difference and complementarity. However, as Nye indicates, *Sexing the Citizen* emphasizes pedagogical and social theory rather than "sexology," in part because sexual science has been so well analyzed by others, including Nye himself.[1] I build on this prior work but also take it in new directions. First, I illustrate the currency of sexual concerns in arenas from which they might seem to be far removed. Second, I show how heterosexual relations were imagined as a powerful way to socially anchor the male individual, potentially set adrift by political and economic modernity. In this context, sexual deviance, and same-sex relations in particular, came to emblemize asociality.

I examine how social theorists saw the risk of sexual deviance to be a "universal" problem. My account hence complicates sexological interest in the diseased degenerate by paying attention to hesitations between "minoritarian" and "universalist" models of deviance. This hesitation haunted sexual science itself, in its endless efforts to clearly distinguish between inherent perversion and acquired perversity. As a result, without dismissing what Nye describes as the "slippage" between "nature" and "the social," I show how reformers, from demographers, to Durkheim, to venereal disease specialists, worried over "nature's" adequacy as a ground of sexual and social order (pp. 120, 156, 201).

This inability of "nature" to guarantee men's virility meant that "material" embodiments of masculinity, such as sexual potency, could always be challenged. While the privileging of honor over impotence was, in a sense, a "shared" value, as Nye's own work and that of Christopher Forth amply illustrates, the question of how these qualities were embodied and by whom was rather more vexed.[2] The competing

representations of Dreyfus Affair protagonists illustrate this contested status. The contemporaneous development of new physical and pedagogical “regimens” further demonstrates how men’s virility could not be taken for granted. This very instability made masculinity a powerful site of social and political inclusion and exclusion.

My point is not, however, that “social” arguments about sexual difference and desire were somehow less stable than natural ones, nor that they ever entirely broke from residual assumptions about nature, and the nature of sexual desire, in particular. I instead indicate how tensions between the natural and the social, and hence their mutual inability to fully secure masculinity, contributed to the regulatory dynamic of “sexed citizenship” that I describe.

Despite the seeming clarity of the masculine norm, and of the model of conjugality that was to serve as its conduit, contemporaries constantly questioned how this desirable end might be best achieved. Debates devoted to redesigning secondary schooling illustrated another aspect of this dilemma by revealing what diverse critics saw to be the potentially perverse effects of pedagogy itself, both its institutional forms (the same-sex *internat*) and “classical” versus “modern” curricula. While enacted on what Nye takes to be a largely abstract or symbolic terrain, the stakes involved in these debates were quite concrete.

Contemporaries themselves criticized the excessive “abstraction” of education and claimed proper relations between the sexes as a way to reconcile young men with “social reality.” In the process, they sought to address another concern raised by Nye, namely that of class and what they saw to be the perverse sexual and demographic effects of “*déclassement*.” The promotion of early marriage and critiques of extended “bachelorhood” aimed to counter the anomic effects of educational excess. In keeping with contemporary solidarist principles, the liberalizing reforms of 1890 and 1902 confirmed and calmed social differences, as did the model of conjugality that was supposed to serve as a model and expression of a harmonious body politic.

The debates surrounding bachelorhood suggest that reformers saw conjugal marriage as a way to preserve and temper class difference. Marriage nonetheless remained an evidently idealized means and metaphor of social harmony. Similar to invocations of “family values” today, it could not and did not always “work.” The contemporary scourge of syphilis was but one illustration of that failure. This very precariousness made conjugality, and the masculinity it shaped and secured, a powerful mode of social discipline and differentiation. It provided a mechanism and rationale through which supposedly socially deviant desires as well as related differences of class—and in the colonial context culture, religion, and race—were both distinguished and devalorized.

These dynamics appear, for example, in my account of the proposed medical regulation of civilian naval arsenal workers. As Judith Stone rightly suggests, the incident indicates the importance of class difference—and syndicalist politics—for competing constructions of the citizen’s masculinity. While the hygienists I study did not directly reference the struggle over workers’ rights, it surely operated as a subtext in this contest, which pitted citizens’ rights to privacy against a proposed imperative to monitor working-class men’s bodies in the name of sexual health. In formulating their proposal, advocates of regulation, and their military minded allies, countered working-class men’s autonomy by representing it as a sexual threat to “the family.” They further claimed sexual regulation as a logical extension of state-granted social rights. Their efforts illustrate how conjugality, as an instantiation of the citizen’s social responsibilities, could underwrite efforts to discipline men, and working-class men in particular. By contrast, those who defended the civilian workers’ privacy rights saw conjugality as a confirmation of the citizen’s masculinity and hence his political rights. This telling example illustrates how the contemporary model of marriage held conceptions of men’s autonomy and their social responsibility together and in tension. And it indicates, as well, that the meaning of masculinity—and of citizenship—was a site of ongoing political contest.

I argue that such efforts at syphilis prevention, in warning against the social and medical dangers of men's sexual desires, entailed a normative account of heterosexual masculinity. I here revisit a subject that has been previously studied, as Tamagne well notes.^[3] In contrast to this prior work, I argue that the apparently repressive intent of "moral prophylaxis" actually affirmed the heterosexual desire that it was supposed to oversee. And, in doing so, I locate these efforts within the wider regulatory problem of republican masculinity traced throughout the book. Hygienists thus expressed a fundamental ambivalence towards men's desires in viewing them as, on the one hand, natural and necessary and, on the other, as socially disruptive and deviant. Such ambivalence was captured in their dual commitment to "sanitary" and "moral" means of combating disease. And it shaped the ways in which the tactics of prewar venereal hygiene distinguished between men and women, adults and minors, citizens and colonial subjects, even as it spoke in the overarching language of "social" health.

My inclusion of World War I in this history is largely intended as a horizon, in which prewar problematics were at once sharpened and transformed. As a result, I do not treat the myriad ways in which, as Tamagne recalls, the war wreaked havoc on the conjugal couple, even if they are implicit in my account. I do suggest that the war's breakdown of conjugality as a protective and productive norm allowed for the generalization of the hygienic tactics that had previously applied to legal and social "minors" (youths, soldiers, colonial subjects, women who worked as prostitutes). In making hygiene into a moral imperative of its own, postwar prophylaxis framed men's sexual health as a social, familial, and "racial" duty rather than as a right. This duty, nonetheless, affirmed the hygienic citizen's masculinity and his "Frenchness."

I show in these instances—and throughout the book—that the "republican" conception of masculinity was neither coherent nor constant. The book examines, in other words, how the citizen's "sex" was continually imagined and reimagined" (p. 7) The contradictory meanings ascribed to men's sexual desires (as an expression of their masculinity, but also as a potential source of social deviance) were central to the regulatory dynamic that I describe. And I understand contests *between* "republicans" as evidence of the difficulties of securing the masculinity that they nonetheless saw to be definitive of citizenship. As my accounts of the secondary schooling debates or those between Durkheim and demographers and between moralists and hygienists illustrate, competing political and professional interests often underlay these disputes. Masculinity's internally conflicted character made it into a privileged terrain on which these contests could be waged—and sometimes resolved.

Karen Offen takes particular issue with these formulations. In her view, they "reek" of "sophisticated theories about sexual instability" and are hence haunted by the shadow of Foucault, not to mention "a homosexual undercurrent." She sees my account of the precarious status of heterosexual masculinity, and indeed of heterosexuality itself, as a symptom of a broader "postmodern" fluidity. Her critique misapprehends my argument while revealing the assumptions on which her own claims are based. My book does have Foucault as an interlocutor, and it critically examines how heterosexuality defined republican social and civil belonging. Offen, however, misconstrues its account of the instability internal to republican sexual norms as my own advocacy of anti-normativity (and even asociality). In confusing exposition with endorsement, she overlooks how, in my analysis, the supposed volatility of men's desires actually defined republican masculinity and its powerful effects, including its effects on women. My analysis actually reframes how we understand the political meanings and effects of the "instability" of identity categories, like those of gender and sexuality. By posing questions about what is at stake in the "deconstruction" of masculinity, I do not mean that we should no longer seek to understand the historical instability of identities (quite the contrary). I do suggest that the link between this flux and the fragility of power needs to be seen as itself unstable—and historically contingent.

Offen, by contrast, appears to reassert the inevitability, and perhaps invariability, of heterosexual norms as emblematic of socialization, of that is, "measures that might keep anyone in his (or her) place or constrain his (or her) choice of sexual object." In doing so, she reproduces the very logic and linkage

that I historicize in my exploration of how sociality, citizenship, and sexuality were associated in the writings and pedagogical policies of republican reformers.

I use strategies of reading familiar to intellectual historians in order to interpret not just texts, but the social and sexual meanings of republican citizenship. Often questions this approach and faults *Sexing the Citizen* for focusing on prescription and, hence, for failing to evaluate whether the “sexing” of citizenship ultimately “succeeded.” Deviations from conjugal gender and sexual norms obviously existed. However, Offen’s proposed comparison between idealized norms and socially real deviations would not address how, as I show, the potential deviance of men’s sexual desires shaped prescriptive efforts. “Failed” masculinity and sexual perversity were at the heart of republican thinking about the problem of prescription itself, and not simply independent or external “social facts.” Durkheim endeavored to discover and address just such facts in exploring the relationship between bachelorhood and suicide. In a different, if related vein, Alfred Fournier cited rising rates of syphilis among men in justifying his prophylactic programs. Evidence of men’s deviance structured these prescriptive arguments about the pedagogy of citizenship. A strict opposition between success and failure, ideal and real, does not adequately capture this dynamic and hence fails to understand its effects of inclusion and exclusion.

Despite her marked skepticism regarding the efficacy of prescription, Offen finds that *Sexing the Citizen* does not adequately establish how equitable and harmonious social and sexual relations might be achieved. As a historian, I offer a critical reflection on the past, rather than policy proposals. By critical here, I mean an examination of the concepts and practices which structured citizenship in the Third Republic, not a negative judgment on past actors and their “old-fashioned values.” I show that the management of sexual desire is a site of political investment and not a simple end in itself. As a result, my study also suggests how democratic citizenship is structured by gender and sexuality in other places and times, including the present.

The question of comparison, raised in all of the reviews, is a recurrent concern for historians. This is especially so for historians of gender and sexuality, who are well attuned to thinking about relations of sameness *and* difference (and not, their pure and simple opposition). It is for this reason that I devote my epilogue to the current discussions of republican secularism and the recent “headscarf” debates. I aim here to show a continuity of questions, rather than continuity *tout court*. While exploring themes that traverse the book as a whole, and which were, I suggest, reanimated by the headscarf issue—the meaning of *laïcité*, the role of schools in forming citizens, the relationship between republicanism and sexual difference, how the sexing of citizenship participates in its racialization—I also point to how sexuality is “a locus of historically specific problems” (p. 244).

The recent debates clearly recall Third Republic concerns, but they are not the same and neither are the solutions proposed by twenty-first century politicians and pedagogues. As I suggest in the epilogue, a new emphasis on *mixité*—in schools, swimming pools, and public life more generally—as the model and metaphor for properly secularized, and sexualized, republican citizenship is different from one based on conjugal complementarity, even if similarly structured by ideas about the social value of heterosexuality. For one thing, the privileging of *mixité* presumes women’s citizenship, acquired for metropolitan women in 1944. It valorizes their visible participation in the life of the polity in ways that were decisively *not* the case in the Third Republic. This new republican value emerged as one justification of the law on women’s political parity. Ségolène Royal’s recent candidacy illustrates that this public femininity has been, at least for some voters, integrated into a vision of the “modern” French nation (even as it also ultimately left her vulnerable to questions about her political capacities). In this new formulation, women’s public visibility represents modern “French” and more broadly European values. The discussions leading up to the 2004 law on *laïcité* depicted these values as under threat by insufficiently integrated—and implicitly perverse and ethnically marked—postcolonial population, and more specifically, its men. These men’s supposed deviance from “French” sexual norms symbolizes and explains their foreignness. My account of how citizenship was “sexed” in the past both reframes

contemporary invocations of gender equality as foundational to republican secularism and suggests how conceptions of masculinity and femininity structure French citizenship today.

In bringing this interplay of similarities and differences in the history of “sexed” citizenship to the fore, I make the case for the continued importance of critical gender analysis and of critically informed historical work. I am grateful to this forum, and the reviewers, for allowing me to elaborate and elucidate this ongoing project.

NOTES

[1] Robert Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[2] Christopher Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

[3] Alain Corbin, “Le péril vénérien au début du siècle: Prophylaxie sanitaire et prophylaxie morale,” *Recherches* 11, 29 (1977): 245-283; Jill Harsin, “Syphilis, Wives, and Physicians: Medical Ethics and the Family in Late Nineteenth-Century France,” *French Historical Studies* 16, 1 (1989): 72-95; Jean-Yves Le Naour, *Misères et tourments de la chair durant la Grande Guerre: Les mœurs sexuelles des Français, 1914-1918* (Paris: Aubier, 2002); and Claude Quézel, *History of Syphilis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

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