

Response Page

The following responses were posted on the H-France discussion list in response to Margaret H. Darrow's review of Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood*.

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The original review may be found on the H-France web page at:

<http://www.h-france.net/vol4reviews/vol4no81Darrow.pdf>

August 23, 2004

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On Masculinity and the Dreyfus Affair:

There may be some connection between masculinity and the course of the Dreyfus Affair but do these psychological analyses really help us to understand much about the movement of history? Psychological studies of Hitler and the attraction he had for the German people have not much clarified the nature and appeal of National Socialism. Perhaps we could see the current conflict over John Kerry's role in Vietnam and the Republican role in making it and not Bush's record (political as well as military) the focus of the campaign as yet another struggle over whether Kerry or Bush is a real man.

The feminization of Roman Catholicism in 19th-Century France may explain why Joan of Arc came to be such an icon for the Catholic Right in France. The anti-Semitic campaign on behalf of Major Henry during the Dreyfus Affair is replete with priests sending in their francs and sous with sado-masochistic and pseudo-masculine diatribes against the defenders of Dreyfus, as if those celibate gentlemen in skirts needed to portray their male genders more aggressively.

When all our thought becomes gendered have we really advanced anything along any road?

August 23, 2004

Karen Offen
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The resounding answer to Norman Ravitch's last question is : YES. It helps us get closer to what was really going on.

August 23, 2004

Pamela Stewart
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Ditto. Plus, our thoughts - and those of our historical subjects – are already gendered, whether or not we notice it. Unraveling the fact they are, as well as the ramifications of that unraveling, are the challenges.

August 24, 2004

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One additional question: if as the recently reviewed book held, both the dreyfusards and the antidreyfusards used similar gender references in their political rhetoric, how does this "fact" illuminate anything about the Dreyfus Affair, its importance in French history, or anything else.

I am reminded of Theodore Zeldin's claim that clericals and anti-clericals in 19th-Century France had the same mental horizons and used the same imagery.

One conclusion might be that the French think and feel alike, period. One sign of this is the great support for French missionaries working in the colonial world by both rightists and leftists, clericals and anti-clericals.

August 25, 2004

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One small point of fact regarding Professor Ravitch's latest comment:

From 1880 to 1914, French missionaries in the colonies did not enjoy "great support" from "both rightists and leftists, clericals and anti-clericals." In fact, the polemics of the Dreyfus Affair gave rise to virulent attacks by radicals, Freemasons, Protestant missionaries, and other commentators who insisted that Catholic missionaries sought the overthrow of French colonial authority.

Regardless of the notion that "anticlericalism is not for export," the presence of missionaries in the colonies was a hotly debated issue. And, in some possessions (Polynesia, for example), anticlerical critics successfully convinced the colonial regime to shut down Catholic schools and hospitals, and to confiscate missionary property.

August 24, 2004

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I have been following this discussion and felt it was important to send a word. I just reviewed Forth's book for the AHR and found it to be an exciting and provocative work that illuminates a great deal not only about the Dreyfus Affair, but about the French entry into the Great War more generally (its cultural basis). I would suggest that everyone currently discussing the review of the book read it before making assumptions based on a very interesting review. As Karen Offen noted in a different manner, by using gender, Forth actually helps us to understand anti-Semitism and French Republicanism in new ways. It's not clear at all to me why gender, any more than any other category of analysis, should necessarily be "reductive." It depends on how it is used. I would urge people to read the book. I think you will find it well worth your time.

August 24, 2004

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May I suggest that any historian who thinks that history discovers what is REALLY going on is fooling his or her gender?

August 24, 2004

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Is there not a danger here in conflating the Manichean structure that dominates so much controversy in nineteenth-century France with the array of views that were actually held?