

The Lamentations of Jameson and Clio's "Critical Eye"

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The year was 1912; the place was Boston, Massachusetts; the event was the annual meeting of the prestigious American Historical Association. All was not well in the fellowship of Clio. Among the conference presentations, a young professor, Carl Becker of the University of Kansas, testified that his colleagues' practice of "critical thought," as identified in "the reviewing of books," was not yet worthy of a professional disciplinary identity—either in the halls of academia or before the learned public.¹ Becker's particular dissatisfaction was with the two types of book reviewing: straight bibliographical information and, more to his liking, a critical discourse shaped by literary traditions. Becker wanted to cordon off the former in academic journals by compartmentalizing "non-critical data" into separate sections. Principally, analytical reviews would appear as "articles that treat important books in some detail, with intellectual discussion and appreciation of improving the historical art." Becker believed that too often historians hitched the informing of facts to "creative criticism" and that in trying to do both, they accomplished neither. Instead, he hoped that "the critical review should be occupied with the general trend of history to other branches of knowledge; it has to do with history as a part of the entire intellectual activity of the time and is concerned with the books therefore mainly as they illustrate aptly some aspect of this larger subject."² Otherwise, a strictly positivist account of publication lists or a bland summation of some books' topicality was insufficient to generate "critical thought" within the young profession. It required instead a sense of importance among the many "conversations" that publishers across the world produced about the past. Thus scholarship was about one's relationship of text and critique, framed within a wider nature of historical knowledge. The responsibility of "critical thought" was to mediate ideas in a process that involved editor, reviewer, author, and even implicit traditions of expression, from which readers would gain an appreciation, understanding, and inspiration for further interest in history.³

The response to Becker was led by John F. Jameson, the illustrious founding managing editor of the *American Historical Review*. In rather pessimistic tones, he admitted that, as an editor, one had to accept reviews that were of "frequent inadequacy...insufficient amount of penetrating thought, rareness of which higher levels of criticism are reached, and above all, the excess of leniency." As he characterized what was his function to print, Jameson warned that even book notices "could never do what they ought to for the improvement of our profession if the writers

¹ Summarized in *American Historical Review* 18 (1913): 453-4. For the original abstract from 1912, see Box 245, Papers of the American Historical Association, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.

² The full version of the paper is in the *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1912* (Washington, D.C., 1914): 129-136.

³ As Becker summarized in "On Writing History," *Saturday Review of Literature*, Aug. 15, 1925, 38.

of signed or unsigned reviews shirked their duty of setting forth deficiencies with an unsparing hand.”⁴ If Becker’s complaint was grounded in the movement of university historians to “professionalize” by creating standards of disposition and organizational practice, Jameson’s defense rested on the inherent difficulty of imposed behavior. His frustration could easily be understood because “critique” was inherently individual. American academic and governmental infrastructures that housed “professional history” (by which one is paid to teach or research) were so diverse as to confound any desire for uniformity of practice or goals.

Becker’s paper and the lamentations of Jameson are a useful starting point to discuss the evolution of an distinctly American “scholarly critique” of French history as it emerged during the founding years of the academic profession (from the 1880s to the 1950s). As single-country specialization was uncommon until the dramatic growth in higher education in the 1950s, my focus is on North American academics (Canadians often completed degrees and taught at this time in the United States) who defined themselves as specialists in medieval to modern European history, whose books, theses, or expansive essays examined the past of French-speaking peoples or regions. For the period addressed in this essay, the idea of “France” among historians in North America transcended a strictly bilateral vision. Americans always related Frenchness to the wider European continent of ethnicities, religions, and traditions, whether it was “Englishness,” *Deutschtum*, Catholic, or other European identities from which our historians identified themselves. Even if one settled on a continental concept of “France” in a chronological period, once the state (or nation) became an international empire it had to be conceived from afar by situating Paris, provinces, and *patrie* as part of a “French” imperial ideal.

What triggered Jameson’s lamentations was thus a problem as confounding as the Gordian knot. Beyond the object of study, the idea of “scholastic critique” can be understood as an important step in the process of “professionalization.” By the 1890s, academic historians sought to demarcate themselves from popular, “amateur” writers who crafted books, essays, and public talks as their principal source of personal income and without regard to peer review as a factor for their careers. American historians of Europe defined their status in the academy according to the claim that they held two strengths that grew from their unique transatlantic distance. First, our interests in Europe were seen as more cosmopolitan and transcontinental than a strictly national domestic focus of much European historiography. Second, Americans claimed that even if our research lacked the scholarly expertise of their own domestic works, as “outsiders” we were empowered with a “cognitive detachment” from the object of study—that is, Frenchness or its antecedents. Although Europeanists or Francophone specialists left the term undefined, generally this “detachment” was a relationship that was assumed to be:

1) **spacial**: by not being a citizen or subject within the French state (or empire) or the European continent, one could gaze upon the object without being bent by a gravitation pull of “domestic” politics, mythology, or divisiveness. The end of this gravitation pull was undefined.

2) **temporal**: by living in the present, one was independent of the pressures and limited vision of the era under study, yet fully armed with access to evidence that only the passage of time could yield. We could be *free* from the Hundred Years’ War or the French Revolution, with access to

⁴ See footnote 1.

precious documents in a way that we could not be from the First World War. But when did enough years pass, if the religious issues still divided Americans of their day?

3) **technical**: by becoming steeped in an ideal of historical method and research, one gained specific skills of language, of cataloguing, or other “auxiliary sciences” that served as keys to unlock treasures of historical evidence. They could only be learned through study, and they required continued practice. Only Americans who achieved these skills could enter the guild.

4) **ontological**: in order to be accepted as legitimate, American scholars of Europe required some kind of peer validation, which did not mean consensus or necessary final truth. Some entity of fellow “scholars” needed to bring some attention to one’s work and to verify that it passed as acceptable practice. This was a subjective self-identity for all historians. It however became more intensive for Europeanists, and especially “French specialists,” because that validation was increasingly seen to come not from an English-speaking fellowship, but rather from the comparable institutions within France itself. Americans came to want French validation. But what if the politics of key French scholars were incompatible to dominant interests in the United States or key identities of younger students who desired this affirmation?

The idea of “scholarly critique” evolved among Europeanists through the dual process of both “professionalization” and “internationalization.” As an overarching conception, these two long-term processes were increasingly intertwined after 1900; one could even consider them as mutually-reinforcing in the United States. “Professionalization” meant that the writing (or debate) about “Frenchness” and its meaning became bifurcated into what we might call “popular opinion” and the scholastic/educational.⁵ But within the years of this professional “process,” American historians practically never defined exactly what they meant by the term “critical history.”⁶ Peter Novick famously portrayed “critique” through an ideal for “objectivity,” a chore he labeled akin to “nailing jelly to a wall.”⁷ Beyond the domestic debate, historians were even more unclear about what “critique” might be in regards to European historiography.

Two basic views about “critical history” emerged by the end of the nineteenth century in traditions of “scientific” or “philosophical” historical thought. “Scientific” history was based on an idealized method of research as practiced by a distinctive group, following a path first set by the institutionalization of science from the fifteenth century to the Enlightenment. Historical

⁵ See Robert Townsend, *History’s Babel: Scholarship, Professionalization, and the Historical Enterprise in the United States, 1880-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History 1890-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); William Palmer, *Engagement with the Past* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001); Gabriele Lingelbach, “Die American Historical Review. Gründung und Entwicklung einer geschichts-wissenschaftlichen Institution,” *Historische Zeitschriften im internationalen Vergleich*, ed. Matthias Middell (Leipzig: Leipzig Akad. Verl.-Anst, 1999), 33-62.

⁶ Major publications about historical practice in the United States did not clarify “scholarly critique” or define “critical thought.” Compare James H. Robinson, *The New History* (New York: MacMillan, 1912); Allan Nevins, *The Gateway to History* (New York: D.C. Heath, 1938); and Edward G. Bourne, *Essays in Historical Criticism* (New York: Scribner’s, 1901).

⁷ Peter Novick’s introduction to *That Noble Dream: The ‘Objectivity Question’ and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1988), pp. 1-17.

critique was a social undertaking based on a group's specialization of expertise that legitimized a branch of knowledge as "professional" according to a status that was recognized within powerful state governments and their higher education ministries. By the end of the nineteenth century, French and German-language historians had developed a set of approaches to source material that became widely defined as "external" and "internal" criticism. In summary, "internal" critique was an evaluation of a source's content, or a *procédé de connaissance*, based on one's familiarity with the type of object (documents, art, archaeological sites) and the context of its creation or utility. One weighed a source's value and interpreted its specific function in order to establish a historical "fact." "External" critique reconstructed the wider existence of a source. Was it authentic? What role did the source as a type play, according to the full meaning of its value at the time of its use (or writing?)⁸ These methods empowered "experts" to condemn earlier generations of historians for haphazard interpretation and naïve adoption of source content, which was normally limited to texts that were related to public institutions of political influence. "Scholarly critique" thus became a way to police literature by guarding a world of "scholarship" from a more tempting, populist tradition that might range from Michelet to historical novelists.⁹

A more "philosophical" approach to history, by its own nature, lacked a homogeneous voice or consensual method. But in terms of "scholarly critique," Friedrich Nietzsche famously defined "critical method" as one of three choices among historians that co-existed with antiquarian and monumental approaches to the past.¹⁰ This was "history which sits in judgment and passes judgment," and, in doing so, it "break(s) a past" before a "court of justice," often to condemn it according to knowledge or values held by people in the present. One's values, or "life," for Nietzsche was a "dark, driving, insatiable self-desiring force." By its dethroning of the tradition, an author's execution of writing could never arise from "a pure spring of knowledge." Historical critique was therefore a discourse of negation. It implied a dialectal justification to expose falsity and weakness, even as that critique was a product of subjective and ultimately ephemeral values. As influential as this definition might be today, Nietzsche did not argue about how one reviewed work from another society (as Americans would of France). Ultimately his main concern was how critical method dangerously threatened to break the present away from past traditions that still enchained people in the present to their forbearers' "aberrations, passions, mistakes, even crimes."

From this international discussion, American historians from the 1880s to the 1930s tended to consider ideas of "scholarly critique" from the perspective of scientific history and literary

⁸ Ernst Bernheim, *Lehrbuch der Historischen Methode und der Geschichtsphilosophie*, 1st ed. (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1889); Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Hachette, 1899); Louis Gottschalk et. al., *The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology and Sociology* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1945), pp. 28-47.

⁹ Langlois and Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques*, see section II, chapter seven, pp. 130-162. In these years the *Revue Critique d'Histoire et de Littérature* became a principal means for "calling offenders to account."

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben." The useful edition in English is the "Stanford translation" by Richard Grey in *Unfashionable Observations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 83-169. And Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History for Life*, trans. Ian Johnson (2010), accessed August 11, 2015, <https://records.viu.ca/~Johnstoi/nietzsche/history.htm>.

traditions of general criticism. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the lines between academic scholarship and “literary historians” were blurred in historical writing about French topics. Some writers such as Ferdinand Brunetière attempted to itemize principals that defined artistic endeavors in literature. Other novelists such as Anatole France dismissed critical objectivity as impossible; critique was a self-expression that revealed the mind of the critic more than the object under review.¹¹ European and American writers did not distinguish “scholarly critique” of foreign books as needing anything different than how they treated domestically-written materials.¹² But “scholarly critique” in America was further complicated by a public that tended to regard English-language history largely from the pens of non-academic writers.¹³ These “women and men of letters” ignored concerns about “critical” distance, whether as physical from a foreign country or their own ontological awareness. If they lacked in self-reflection, as individuals their “validity” came from public sales or public attention. A president of the American Historical Association, Theodore Roosevelt, considered critical judgment only by listing works of history from a mere catalogue of “good or bad” books.¹⁴ A European specialist like William Thayer believed that criticism was a method that could only bring about insight into dramatic “character” and literary quality, not by a scientific community that imposed a professional exclusiveness, and was so addicted to facts (or internal critique) that “they would cross the ocean to certify a comma.” His colleague Joseph Schafer asserted that when “reviewing history books,” the historian was undertaking a personal art form.¹⁵ There were no rules to control a verdict, other than some broad “common sense” guides such as avoiding minutiae, keeping to length, and showing necessary credit or empathy for the author’s effort.

For American academics, “scholarly critique” was embedded in the need for status and “scientific expertise.” Professional historians who led academia, such as Frederick J. Turner, exhibited neo-positivist devotion to methodological “standards” that would ferret out factual errors or unpersuasive argument through an exercise of “external criticism” (perhaps with a

¹¹ Anatole France’s preface of *La vie littéraire*, 1st ed. (Paris, 1888), which begins with his much-quoted idea that “objective criticism no more exists than does objective art.” On Ferdinand Brunetière, see his *La Critique Impressionniste*, which was in part a response to Anatole France.

¹² See Michel Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung. Der Ansatz der Histoire croisée und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28 (2002): 607-636; and “Penser l’histoire croisée: entre empirie et réflexivité,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 58 (2003): 7-36. Michel Espagne’s *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands* (Paris: PUF, 1999) did not address the role of “critique” in this idea of distance and reviewing.

¹³ Popular historians often produced large books on dramatic events or general syntheses. For French history, see (from Britain) George P. Gooch, Alistair Horne, Guy Chapman, Dorothy Pickles, or Alexander Werth; Americans included Henry Adams, Henry O. Taylor, Herbert A. Gibbons, Dorothy Thompson, and notably William Shirer. A significant number of central European refugees between the wars also wrote as independent public historians.

¹⁴ His essay “The Books I Have Read,” was published in the April edition of *The Ladies’ Home Journal*. See it reprinted in *Backgrounds of Book Reviewing*, ed. Herbert Samuel Mallory (Ann Arbor: G. Wahr, 1923), pp. 1-7.

¹⁵ William R. Thayer, “The Outlook in History,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 96 (July, 1905): 656; James T. Adams, “Reviewing in America,” *Saturday Review of Literature* (Feb. 7, 1931): 582-3; Joseph Schafer, “Reviewing History Books,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 9 (1926): 448-452; and Edgar Wesley, “In Defense of Historical Research,” *Minnesota History* 14 (1933): 192-193

salute to the destructive zeal that Nietzsche identified).¹⁶ Civic-minded democrats like Louis Gottschalk feared that popularity too often allowed for dubious “patriotic history,” which either fragmented historiography into self-interested “sainthood” or splintered public interests. This encouraged falsehoods or anachronism, which he considered dangerous to education in an age of extremes.¹⁷ Although each case might be distinct, in general the most prominent academic historians appeared to see “critique” as separate from how “interpretation” might function in book reviewing. One “critiqued” based on a Platonic ideal of factual truth; interpretation could mean the fitting of a book about “France” or Europe within a wider narrative of development that might be Catholic, Marxist, liberal modernization, “the Western world,” imperial, or a Weberian centralized state.¹⁸ European specialists in history thus had to lead a two-front effort to define themselves against populist writers who lacked “critical expertise,” even as they sought to prove to their Americanist department colleagues that they shared equal credibility by emphasizing a strict “critique” of positivist facts. The challenge for Europeanists was that their lives, education, and careers kept them far from developing the needed familiarity with what we might call “exchange warehouses” of facts, source documents, or other scholarly objects circulating far away in Europe.¹⁹

Until the 1950s, most American historians who wished to study Europe could hope for a rare research trip, often limited to a foreign capital, for quick readings of secondary literature from which they would write a monograph. Until World War II, even directors of graduate research at leading American universities tended to concentrate on the publication of document translations or a seemingly endless series of high school and undergraduate textbooks. These realities led American Europeanists, and especially those of French-language societies, to emphasize their capacity to interpret “critique” as one of objectivity and distance. This physical separation from France in the early twentieth century was an asset. By their “otherness,” Americans could umpire conflict within European countries, shielded from accusations of inherent ethno-political conflicts of interest from across the spectrum of overseas historical professions.²⁰ In works on France, the civil division over modern history meant a second power to arbitrate within that country’s deep ideological tension, as shown in the assertions of Harvard historians such as

¹⁶ Martin Ridge, “A More Jealous Mistress: Frederick Jackson Turner as Book Reviewer,” *Pacific Historical Review* 55 (1986): 49-63. Turner’s “critique” was a didactic drive to separate expertise from “buffs.” It was based less on “critical interpretation” than it was on specialized knowledge of sources, just as Seignobos and Langlois prescribed.

¹⁷ Louis Gottschalk, “The Evaluation of Historical Writings,” *The Practice of Book Selection: Papers Presented Before the Library Institute at the University of Chicago*, ed. Louis R. Wilson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), pp. 101-115.

¹⁸ Dorothy Leggitt, “Reviewing Historical Books,” *The Social Studies* 41 (1950): 63-65.

¹⁹ This concern has ranged from David Pinkney in “The Second Newberry Library Conference on French History,” *The Newberry Library Bulletin* 4 (July, 1958): 281-301; up to Michael Breen, “Vu d’Amérique: les historien(ne)s et l’histoire de la France modern en Amérique du Nord,” *Histoire, Économie et Société* 30 (2011): 3-13.

²⁰ Compare examples such as Frederick Fling’s review of Augustin Cochin in *AHR* 15 (1910): 415-6, in which as an American he is “in a position to judge independently of Taine and his method” in order to read Cochin’s value; Stanley Idzerda, “The Revolution,” *Journal of Modern History (JMH)* 29 (1957): 89-90; Samuel Osgood, “Le Système D,” *French Historical Studies (FHS)* 1 1960, 482-86, esp. p. 485. Thayer, “The Outlook in History,” p. 77 declared, “foreigners often make the best historians, because race traditions and party prejudices don’t hamper them.”

Donald McKay and Donald Greer in their critical perspectives on the French revolutions.²¹ To an extent, the Americans assumed that domestic and international division was the natural condition for Europeans, driven by the industrial revolution, traditions of great-power warfare, and imperial dreams among member states. Because these decades were times of ceaseless crises, Americans asserted that distance immunized them to provide a balanced, legitimate pedagogy in the education of our own ethnically-diverse citizenry on foreign matters.²² Following World War I, Americans could arbitrate degrees of “war guilt;”²³ political division that paralyzed the Third Republic;²⁴ and early estimates about the nature of the Vichy regime.²⁵

The reality of executing professionalism in European and French history based on “scholarly critique” and distance proved far more difficult to achieve. Expertise required room to specialize and a vibrant society to instill peer-driven standards. Even before issues of philosophy or personality, there was real institutional resistance among American historians to any specialization of a distinctive “European” identity within our academy. This battle was manifested in the tortured effort to create a review and society in the United States dedicated only to European history. Beginning about 1915, a group of historians lobbied for a new professional association of Europeanists. As envisioned, they could meet on distinctly Continental topics and could publish new research and critical reviews in their own exclusive journal. The effort triggered an institutional battle within the American Historical Association.²⁶ Leading Americanists, with support from Europeanists such as Harvard’s Charles Haskins and Archibald Coolidge feared that secession would bifurcate the American profession into dual

²¹ Donald McKay’s foreword to *The National Workshops. A Study in the French Revolution of 1848* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1933), p. vii; and his Harvard colleague Donald Greer’s *The Incidence of the Terror during the French Revolution. A Statistical Interpretation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935), p. 3. At North Carolina, James L. Godfrey similarly underscored his ability to be value-neutral in *Revolutionary Justice: A Study of the Organization, Personnel and Procedure of the Paris Tribunal 1793-1795* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), pp. 3-5.

²² Ralph Catterall of Columbia asserted that the American advantage of detachment as being our unique pedagogical advantage over Europeans who were “consciously or unconsciously partisan.” See *The Study of History in Schools: Report to the American Historical Association by The Committee of Seven* (New York, 1899), pp. 69-70.

²³ A set of studies have summarized aspects of this debate, especially by Novick, *That Noble Dream*, chapter eight.

²⁴ R. A. Winnacker, “The Third French Republic: 1870-1914,” *JMH* 10 (1938): 373, 393. Charlotte Muret of Barnard College summarized the era’s argument for American objectivity in regards to French political thought. See the document dated March 21, 1937, Charlotte Muret Collection, Barnard College Archives, Lehman Library, Barnard College, New York. Through her marriage, Muret had ties to the Maurras circle of the French right.

²⁵ Compare Leo Gershoy and Cyril Black, in “Vichy Puppet Show,” *Current History* 1 (1941): 57 to David A. Bell, “The Spoils of War,” *The New Republic* 210 (Feb. 28, 1994), p. 43; Colin Nettelbeck, “Getting the Story Right: Narratives of the Second World War in Post-1968 France,” in *Collaboration in France: Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation, 1940-1944*, eds. Gerhard Hirschfeld and Patrick Marsh (Oxford: Berg, 1989), p. 271.

²⁶ Compare the pre-war critique of the AHA with its *Final Report of the Committee of Ten on Reorganization and Policy* (Washington D.C., 1939), at <https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/aha-history-and-archives/archives/final-report-of-the-committee-of-ten-on-reorganization-and-policy>. Both sides complained that neither got their fair share of space.

societies, dual publications, and dual networks of job placement (as jobs were offered usually by word-of-mouth.)²⁷

By arguing for a unity of national identity, their early efforts succeeded. It proved a temporary success, however, because individual Europeanists such as Haskins were ultimately unwilling to sacrifice the professional growth of *their* own specialized fields when they could gather sufficient interdisciplinary allies to break away from the Association, as accomplished by the Medieval Academy of America and its review, *Speculum*.²⁸ Eventually, enough Europeanists had been trained to launch *The Journal of Modern History*—notably without its own meeting society—by arguing that the profession could only grow if expertise was allowed its own institutional independence. Yet the journal also underscored the difficulty of defining “scholarly critique.” Its emergence in 1929 did reflect a stronger “esprit de corps” among Europeanists, who however were largely cross-trained in British and German university systems, if they were fortunate enough to take classes abroad.²⁹ *The Journal of Modern History*’s founding editor, Bernadotte Schmitt, was an Oxford-trained diplomatic historian who emphasized the “scientific” importance of individual documents, catalogues of lists, and critical book reviews.³⁰ Launched in part on the claim of distant detachment, many (or most?) of its essays until the 1950s lacked deep interpretation.³¹ It was especially deaf to how European historians were expanding the range of their history in the early twentieth century with interdisciplinary work on economic and social topics and to regional historians who combined geography, demographics, and the concepts from

²⁷ See the *Annual Report of the AHA for the Year 1916*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1919), pp. 62, 64; and Coolidge to Jameson, Nov. 30, 1927, Box 5 “1927”, JMH Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, Special Collections, University of Chicago. Opponents justified their stance on a supposed inadequacy of quality European scholarship in the United States, as expressed by Jameson to Charles Chapman, Dec. 11, 1916 in *An Historian’s World: Selections from the Correspondence of John Franklin Jameson*, eds. E. Donnan and L. Stock (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956), pp. 203-204.

²⁸ Following *Speculum*, leading historians succeeded with their neighboring disciplines to create the *Hispanic-American Historical Review* (1918); *Agricultural History* (1927); *The Journal of Business and Economic History* (1929); *Church History* (1932); *Military History* (1937-1941); *Jewish Social Studies* (1939); *The Russian Review*, *Slavonic Yearbook*, *Far Eastern Quarterly*, and *The Journal of Economic History* (all 1941); *Journal of Near East Studies* (1942). History of the ancient period had reviews in philology, archaeology or classics that were launched from the late nineteenth century; George Sarton began *Isis* in 1912. In each case, interdisciplinary strength had to be combined with the name of an institutionally powerful scholar such as Edwin Gay, Haskins, or Sarton. Journals devoted to American topics of course were expanding in number, according to region (Mississippi Valley, Southern, New England, Pacific) or by state. Religion further divided the profession into Catholic and Protestant camps.

²⁹ Chester Higby, *The James Sprunt Historical Studies*. vol. 19: *Present Status of Modern European History in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926), p. 27. Only eighteen respondents listed experience with French higher education.

³⁰ For Schmitt’s guiding view, see “Victuri Salutamus,” *JMH* 1 (1929): 1-2.

³¹ As an example, the letter from William Langer (then at Clark) to Chester Higby (the driving spirit of its eventual birth), Jan. 22, 1926, in which he emphasized both the capacity for American impartiality and the need for outlets of critical publication, in UNC History Dept. Papers, Subgroup 3, Faculty Correspondence, Box 5.

the new social sciences. And until the 1960s, scholarly critique of French-language historiography faced real limitations.³²

Beyond the challenges of scholarly infrastructure, perhaps more importantly our Europeanists lacked at this time a consensual “crucial” narrative around which they could interpret evidence that was relevant to the present-day needs of university communities across the United States. In part, it was the historians’ bane of periodization. Scholars such as Haskins, James Thompson, and Dana Munro saw medieval history as a necessary foundation for modern state and social welfare, based on assumed continuities of historical processes or a view that the basic elements of societies stood unchanged across the centuries. From Columbia, James H. Robinson and his protégé James Shotwell “deprecated over-attention to the Middle Ages” compared to a contemporary history that spoke to conditions which simply did not exist in the past.³³ But the greater challenge of “scholarly critique” lay in the problem that objectivity, distance, and the necessary internationalization of “French” specialization were three goals at odds with one another or were simply unobtainable in practice. In some cases, Europeanists within America questioned the claim of distant detachment. The experience of propagandistic history in the world wars left some leaders of European history chary of any claim to “detachment” in the discipline.³⁴ Even before the Great War, Europeanists had voiced suspicion that “presentism” would undermine any capacity for real, legitimate scholarly criticism. They claimed that activist, progressive historians such as James Robinson might bend selection, interpretation, and emphasis only toward their own individual dreams of the future.³⁵ The same was even truer among the denominational schools, who still conceived of history under the shadow of the Reformation. The views were not unanimous. A few broadly-trained historians such as Eugen Weber believed that isolation from the politics of Parisian debate left Americans too ill-informed about current expertise. As a colleague earlier noted, “too much detachment can make one unaware of the social, psychological, and moral forces that shape political events.”³⁶ But from the interwar years to the 1960s, Europeanists noted an intellectual isolation of scholarship, a lack

³² Only when a work was translated into English could it receive significant critical review, particularly in newspapers and monthlies in which historians wrote. Longer reviews by specialists of France were in *The Nation*, *Saturday Review of Literature*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The North American Review*, *Yale Review*, *The New Republic*, *Scribners’ Monthly*, or Catholic journals such as *Commonweal*. Otherwise before the 1960s few places were attentive to French-language books.

³³ *Annual Report of the AHA for the Year 1907*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1908), 67-70. Before World War I, American tried to define “critique” through the particular focus of their desired period. Haskins placed medieval history as relevant in his “Introductory Course in History,” *The History Teacher’s Magazine (HTM)* 1 (Jan. 1910): 95-6 and “History,” *The Historical Outlook* 16 (May, 1925): 195-197.

³⁴ Frank M. Anderson, “The World War and the Historians,” *HTM* 7 (Dec. 1916): 328.

³⁵ On the presentism debate among Europeanists centered around Robinson’s *The New History*, see Sidney Fay, “Robinson and Beard’s Development of ‘Modern Europe,’” *HTM* 1 (Jan. 1909): 35-6

³⁶ Edward R. Tannenbaum’s review of *Twentieth Century Europe: A History*, by C. Black & E. C. Helmreich, in *JMH* 23 (1951): 290; Eugen Weber’s review essay in *Revue historique* 225 (1961): 354-6 stated that Americans were worse off by NOT being a part of the intellectual give and take in Paris, which left one reliant on second-hand impressions.

of interpretative coherence, and an overarching “textbook style” that marked too many works.³⁷ It bled into “scholarly critique” because these animadversions focused on book reviews that either were uncritical or lent too much attention to bland, quickly-written English-language populist works and that ignored large areas of sub-fields in Europe which remained outside the traditionalist scope of editors’ interests.

If one scholar related to the growth of “French history” in America could embody these tensions, it was Charles Haskins, the great medievalist and dean of Harvard’s Graduate School from 1903 to 1922. On the one hand, Haskins has been correctly praised as a foundational figure in the “professionalization project” of European and medieval history in the United States. He pressed colleagues to develop ties with western Europe and to deepen all critical facilities in university scholarship, including original research, familiarity with European archives, and intimate knowledge foreign specialists.³⁸ Even before his arrival at Harvard, counterparts in Paris such as Charles Seignobos admired his call to integrate expertise and civic pedagogy.³⁹ With his unrivalled reputation of “scholarly critique,” Haskins worked to promote a growing interest in French history in the United States to his skeptical colleagues in Paris, even as he emphasized that Americans had to overcome obstacles of remoteness, languages and familiarity if they were to establish a distinctly national contribution to European history, respected abroad and relevant to civic priorities at home.⁴⁰ And yet, as much as Haskins privileged critical independence and scientific expertise, in truth his most productive years of scholarship on France were tainted clearly with nationalism and even propagandistic uses of history to support the anti-German, Franco-American alliance.⁴¹ These expressions were often made outside of mainstream American historical publications, but they were vivid apologia for French interests.⁴² As he

³⁷ John Higham, Leonard Krieger, Felix Gilbert, *History* (Engelwood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 279-281. See as an example the strong comments by Preserved Smith in a review on historiography in *JMH* 1 (1929): 141-2.

³⁸ For Haskins and medieval history in America, see Bruce Holsinger, “Medievalization Theory: From Tocqueville to the Cold War,” *American Literary History* 22 (2010): 893-912; Julia Pavon, “Charles Haskins,” in *Rewriting the Middle Ages in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Jaume Aurell and Fransisco Crosas (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005): 87-104; and, more critically, Paul Freedman and Gabrielle Spiegel, “Medievalisms Old and New: The Rediscovery of Alterity in North American Medieval Studies,” *AHR* 103 (1998): 677-704.

³⁹ See his postcard to Haskins, May 18, 1898 and a letter, undated (est. March 1899), Charles Seignobos praised his work as “remarquablement exact et intelligent.” They shared real interests in the promotion of “external critique” at a level equal to the École des Chartes and shared thoughts about instruction of young women in secondary education. In Box 2, “Professional Correspondence,” Charles H. Haskins Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

⁴⁰ See “Les études relatives à l’histoire de France aux États-Unis: Le moyen âge français aux les États-Unis,” *Revue de synthèse historique* 29 (1919): 251-256; “Co-operation in Research in the Humanities,” *The Association of American Universities. Papers of the Annual Conference* 22 (1922): 35-44; and especially “European History and American Scholarship,” *AHR* 28 (1923): 215-227.

⁴¹ Especially in his role at the Paris Peace Treaty against Germany in 1919. See his “Franco-German Frontiers,” *Foreign Affairs* 3 (1924): 199-210, which defended the settlement new western border for Germany, which he claimed to be based on the legitimate historical reality of the frontier, and a proper contrast of the spirit of 1789 against an illiberal Junkerism of northern and eastern Germany.

⁴² Examples include “France and America,” *The Phi Beta Kappa Key* vol. 3, no. 10 (Jan. 1919): 434-455; and “L’histoire de France aux États-Unis,” *Revue de Paris* 27 (1920): 654-672.

admitted to Louis Halphen, his major work, *The Normans in European History*, was written, “*con amore*, at a time when my natural feeling for France was intensified by actual events.”⁴³ With his American counterparts, Haskins did not wish to limit pluralism of viewpoints. He encouraged interpretations contradictory to his, if they were underpinned by research. But in private, he was sensitive to the clear inconsistency between his francophilia and his efforts to promote distinctive American “detachment” and trusted expertise.⁴⁴

A further challenge to international distance was that “critical thought” for American academic historians of Europe, unlike domestic critique, could never be a national endeavor. If one was a writer for the general public, only access to a local library was necessary. But for academic scholarship based on original research, Americans required workable contacts with a network of archivists, historians, or other academic administrators from the country which they intended to study. Obtaining archival knowledge and access, or references for scholarships to fund foreign travel, all required personal ties to leaders of French scholarship.⁴⁵ Often, a glaze of politics was implicit. If French scholarship was neutral to American research, then one might freely engage in critical works to challenge interpretations, methods, or values in the Continent’s academic world.

French scholars, journals, and sites of research in contrast considered America as a battleground for loyalty to their nation, to the Republican heritage, or a contested political tradition (such as Catholicism, socialism, or economic liberalism).⁴⁶ To the degree that French representatives could exert leverage, aside from access to private sources, they had the ability to guide or to police advice and access in religious matters (Catholic or Calvinist organizations), and, of course, key figures could protect the interests of Vichy and the Third and Fourth Republics. It was never a question of outright censorship because the influence of Americans rested on their position to choose between interests of “Frenchness” (national, imperial, socio-economic) and competing perspectives either within France itself (Right or Left, Catholic or secular) or across the Rhine and the English Channel. But French historians sought to co-opt American historians or to attract them to take positive views on issues of controversy that spoke to matters of the present. For this reason, figures such as Louis Eisenmann and Jules Isaac believed that American distance and relative dispassion required special recognition for “scientific scruples”

⁴³ Haskins to Louis Halphen, July 19, 1917, in Box 22, Dean of the Graduate School, Charles H. Haskins. Transfer File, Correspondence 1910-1924, UAV161.10, Pusey Library, Harvard University. Frederick Turner debated his loyalty to France during the Ruhr crisis, in Turner to Haskins, Dec. 23, 1923 and his response, Feb. 6, 1924.

⁴⁴ By the end of 1921, Haskins also admitted to Herbert Gibbon that he was “pulling back” on public comments, and no longer wished to speak about his contemporary interests with France politics. See Haskins to Gibbon, Dec 7, 1921, in Box 26, Papers of Herbert B. Gibbons, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

⁴⁵ See as one of many examples, Leo Gershoy to the archivist-historian Pierre Caron, Oct. 16, 1935, in the Fonds Pierre Caron, AB XIX 4404, Archives nationales. Gershoy presented to Caron his Guggenheim application, in which he needed a French expert reference to his competency for carry out research. Alphonse Aulard, Georges Lefebvre, or Henri Berr played comparable roles with young American historians.

⁴⁶ See John Harvey, “Propaganda within an Atelier des Recherches: Refashioning the Société d’Histoire Moderne, 1918-1939,” *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History* 32 (2004): 346-367; and “Conservative Crossings: Bernard Faÿ and the Rise of American Studies in Third-Republic France,” *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques* 36 (2010): 95-124.

which our specialists were to possess.⁴⁷ Even if French historians were less supportive of an American advantage for contemporary history, they still sought to develop positive ties to counterparts who sided with them on the fundamental controversies of the years.⁴⁸ Thus, the directors of historical reviews—*Revue historique*, the *Annales*, *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française*, *Revue d'histoire modern et contemporaine*—all sought fresh American contributors more than from any other non-francophone country, even by 1920.⁴⁹ In general French strategies were to appropriate political friendships in America that they considered compatible with “scientific,” critical study. American interpretations especially of contemporary Europe were considered properly critical if their interpretations could reflect loyal compatibilities with vital interests of the French nation, especially in international matters.

How did Americans respond? Each case is its own unique biography, but in general, American historians who wrote about Europe divided themselves with remarkable consistency along ethnographic and religious lines. The cleavages were strongest by national heritage. American specialists related to Scandinavian and Central European backgrounds were consistently more critical of French and eastern European positions than those of central European states. Those from a British or Jewish heritage could adopt empathy for “Frenchness” if it was not in contradistinction with Anglo-American interests. Because Americans defined scholarly critique of “Frenchness” within its European political and cultural contexts, research was also heavily influenced by the “loss” of balanced continental perspective due to the warfare, political extremism, and lack of academic freedom that defined the years from 1914 to the Cold War. Thus France assumed more prominence among Europeanists in the United States because academic relationships with Western Europeans could be defended as “critical and constructive scholarship” in ways that were not possible in central and Eastern Europe, aside from exiles.⁵⁰

The experience of World War II was central to the growth of French studies into a significant feature of European history within the American academy. The resulting expansion of American university education, propelled especially by the G.I. Bill, made the overall environment of

⁴⁷ André Kaspi, *Jules Isaac, ou, La passion de la vérité* (Paris : Plon, 2002), 119, 125. Although Haskins again is archetypical, see for example Louis Eisenmann (of the Sorbonne) to Bernadotte Schmitt, Nov. 5, 1929, in which the editor of the *Revue Historique* made a special effort to recruit the Chicago professor’s service for critical book reviews. Schmitt was a lifelong critic of Imperial Germany and a close ally of those wishing to defend the Versailles settlement, including German war guilt. In Box 3, Schmitt Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁸ See the Sorbonne professors who guided the *Bibliothèque et Musée de la Guerre* and its journal from Vincennes. Renouvin stated, “le jugement d’une publication où la France est doublement intéressée par un étranger impartial,” in his letter to Bernadotte Schmitt, March 15 and June 6, 1930, and equal praise by Camille Bloch, in Box 3, Schmitt Papers. On Renouvin’s use of Schmitt to argue a pro-French history, see Renouvin’s “Les historiens américains et les responsabilités de la guerre,” *Revue des deux mondes* (Apr. 15, 1931): 886-903.

⁴⁹ A significant list of American historians were asked to offer original research or historiographical critique for leading French reviews up to 1941, including Arthur Dunham (Michigan); Frederick Artz (Oberlin); Louis Gottschalk and John Nef (Chicago), Henry Hill (Wisconsin); Carl Pegg (North Carolina); Shepard Clough (Columbia); A. P. Usher and Haskins (Harvard); Melvin Knight (Berkeley); and Frank Manuel (Western Reserve).

⁵⁰ Richard Kuisel, “American Historians in Search of France: Perceptions and Misperceptions,” *FHS* 19 (1995), esp. 318-9; Peter Jackson, “Post-War Politics and the Historiography of French Strategy and Diplomacy before the Second World War,” *History Compass* 4 (2006): 870-905.

European history a very positive factor for the professoriate's overall expansion. The lessons of the World War needed to be understood, and historians were able to make the claim that their skills were instrumental in educating young citizens in the new global position of leadership that the United States would have to bear. Most of all, the powerful barrier of "France vs Germany" was dramatically settled with the new ideal of a culturally and politically unified "Western heritage" that absorbed earlier antagonisms into a unified front against the new long-term military threat of the Soviet Union and communist revolution.⁵¹ Americans could defend French state or national power as part of this transatlantic alliance; we could emphasize a synthetic history of continued democratic empowerment across the continent "east of the Oder"; and we could request for Franco-American professional cooperation at new levels as both sides presented historical study to promote the ideal of the democratic-republican society. Many historians offered a "critical scrutiny" of French national calamities since the nineteenth century, not only to identify endemic weaknesses that led to failures, but as an implicit means to guide reforms that would strengthen the state against internal unrest and foreign intimidation from the U.S.S.R.⁵² A French non-socialist republic in a united "West" solved problems of British and German francophobia. Now American historians would no longer have to choose. A new historiography could be produced that praised emancipatory traditions in French history, which the center-left and moderates could welcome, within a renewed, positive "Western Experience."

This new alliance also hid underlying cleavages. Religious issues did not vanish in America, as Catholic systems remained suspicious of the socialist-republican tradition in France. Once women received the right to vote, race and empire became central issues of division that would burst forth more fully in the 1960s with the dual horrors of Algeria and Vietnam. But most of all, as the French historical profession became cemented in the political Left following the Vichy experience, socialist and communist ideals took on much greater prominence throughout the Parisian centers of academic power. Americans wanted a democratic partner across the Atlantic. Could they both demonstrate support for Cold War containment after 1946 and welcome the socialist-revolutionary tradition that became so emblematic in the principal areas of research related to the Revolution or its modern historical counterparts? Self-identity meant that Frenchness exerted an influence on historians because Americans wanted their overseas counterparts to acknowledge their progress and work as acceptable expertise. The postwar boom of academic production and the new era of "Western" identity resulted in the establishment of the Society for French Historical Studies between 1953 and 1956. Its goals were to act both as a bridge for improved transatlantic relations and critical historical research. The Society wanted to promote provocative discussion about contemporary France in order to secure its intellectual attractiveness, even as its members first envisioned Franco-American intellectual exchange as a

⁵¹ Corine Defrance, *Les Alliés occidentaux et les universités allemandes 1945-1949* (Paris : CNRS, 2000); and for the interwar precedent, see Hans Manfred Bock, "Les relations culturelles franco-allemandes entre Locarno et Vichy. Un champ de recherches spécifique," *Entre Locarno et Vichy: Les relations culturelles franco-allemandes dans les années 1930*. vol. 1, eds. Hans Manfred Bock, Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus, and Michel Trebitsch (Paris: CNRS, 1993): 19-23.

⁵² Jeremy Popkin, "The American Historian of France and the 'Other'," *Objectivity and its Other*, eds. Wolfgang Natter, Theodore R. Schatzki, and John P. Jones III (New York: Guilford, 1995): 93-110, esp. p. 99. Popkin found that, at its worst, American history of France after 1945 bordered on hubris in its contrast to American power.

means to “create favorable publicity for France.”⁵³ In the 1950s, its founders groused about ubiquitous “anti-French” sentiment in the general public, particularly when the average American was thought to “inveigh against France or defends Germany, lately Nazi, versus France.”⁵⁴ As a welcome to Paris, the first issue of *French Historical Studies* was dedicated to Georges Lefebvre, setting aside his current loyalty to revolutionary socialist change.

Scholars at the most prestigious schools tended to be the most outspoken proponents of the new strategic yardstick for gauging a national past. “Amateur” historians such as William Shirer were treated with disdain if they claimed the foreigner’s “objectivity” without the “discernment” that one only received with “the [academic] historian’s eye, understanding, and discipline.”⁵⁵ Yet our leading historians often saw France precisely through the political eyes of American strategic interests that seemed little removed from the attitudes of Shirer. Shepard Clough at Columbia observed that a new view was needed because France was “the chief Continental ally of the United States in its power arrangements to prevent Russian aggression, and bastion in the defense of those values which are the very foundation of Western civilization.”⁵⁶ Henri Peyre of Yale linked historical crises to “the dilemma through which France, as a pivot of Western Europe, is struggling, between Communism and anti-Communism, the East and the West.”⁵⁷ Joel Colton of Duke cast France as the “key country in the Western bastion” which was “still the most reliable foothold we have on the Continent [with a history that includes] Verdun as well as that of Sedan.”⁵⁸ Crane Brinton was optimistic about French power because Western Europe’s global empire was “a factor of major importance should there break out shortly a war between coalitions headed respectively by the United States and Russia...Our side would have, in spite of the presence of thickly populated China on the Communist side, a very great advantage in population, area, and total material resources.”⁵⁹ In a survey for the general public, Donald

⁵³ See Evelyn Acomb’s form letter of Dec. 16, 1954, that laid out five goals, one of which was positive publicity. She planned the informal gathering at Cornell in 1955 by declaring, “we might also help create some favorable publicity for France. Even the *New York Times* writes very patronizing editorials on the country.” Acomb to Ed Fox, Nov. 18, 1954, and Acomb to Rockwood, Nov. 30, 1954, in the Evelyn Acomb Collection, Ohio State University, Dept. of Special Collections, Columbus.

⁵⁴ The quote comes from its first official president, Beatrice Hyslop, in a letter to David Pinkney, Nov. 3, 1956, Box 22, Papers of the Society for French Historical Studies, Ohio State University, Dept. of Special Collections. Hyslop continued by explaining, “it seems to me that the US, for all its lip service, has done a good many things that have complicated French problems and shown anti-French bias.”

⁵⁵ See the response by historians such as John Cairns and James E. Ward to William Shirer’s monumental *The Collapse of the Third Republic* (1969). For Cairns, see *International Journal* 26 (1971): 803-807; for Ward, *International Journal* 26 (1971): 803-807. Shirer was grouped with other popular historians, Alistair Horne and John Williams.

⁵⁶ Shepard Clough, “A New Look at France,” *World Politics* 4 (1952): 274; Jean-B. Duroselle, “France: Decline or Renewal?” *The Review of Politics* 14 (1952): 125-126; and the political scientist Henry W. Ehrmann, “France between East and West,” *Western Political Quarterly* 2 (1949): 74-76.

⁵⁷ Henri Payne, *History in Modern Culture* (New York, 1950), p. 6.

⁵⁸ Joel Colton, “Problems of Modern France,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 51 (1952): 130, 139.

⁵⁹ Crane Brinton, *The Temper of Western Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 15; and Ernest J. Knapton, “France’s Role in Europe” *Current History* 19 (1945): 437-438.

McKay framed the recent past of France through the country's halting realization of "Russian aggression" against the Free World.⁶⁰ But the readiness to "counteract the communists" centered politics directly within professional exchanges. It could easily alienate the visiting professors who wished to see Franco-American friendship on terms preferred by Paris.⁶¹

Thus by the 1950s, Americans had achieved two goals in their study of the French state, society, empire, and culture. They had created official bodies of professional study and were armed with an increasing number of peer-reviewed journals and academic presses in which to present their growing body of work. With the emergence of a European Union and NATO, there now was a sense of political unity, based on the ultimate triumph of an Enlightenment project defined by general appreciation for traditions of liberal democracy. Becker's concerns now seemed fully redeemed. Jameson's lamentations had faded out of existence. Still, were the tensions of critique, cognitive distance, and "politics" really ghosts of the past? Even up to the 1960s, American historians of "Frenchness" still identified professionalism with a scientific critique based on separation from European "partisans," yet they also yearned for validation from French counterparts embedded in these political settings and who had considered, since the 1890s, transatlantic exchange as an auxiliary of national policy or domestic ideologies.

In a period when American historians could not live in France, historians such as Carl Becker, Carlton Hayes, or Crane Brinton applied scientific traditions of scholarly critique and philosophical dispositions of interpretation as self-reflection on their own country. France was an object, and "critique" of the research object was unanchored by direct experience. It is not that Americans were entirely free to imagine a past of "Frenchness," or at least without a defense of their views if questioned, but it assumed a universality of "reason" that tended to mask for these years deeply different national and institutional contexts. The American historiography on France rested on a "scholarly critique" that proposed universal reason, but was inherently practiced through a widely kaleidoscopic set of emphasizes, suppressions, and universal ideals. In the end, Americans truly privileged the philosophical nature of university-based historiography as their rationale to wonder about the European past. For even as he had critiqued the quality of American reviewing, Carl Becker again left us with these enduring thoughts:

The value of history is, indeed, not scientific but moral: by liberating the mind, by deepening the sympathies, by fortifying the will, it enables us to control, not society, but ourselves—a much... important thing; it prepares us to live more humanely in the present and to meet rather than to foretell the future.⁶²

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⁶⁰ Donald C. MacKay, *The United States and France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951), esp. 2-6, 20-21, 246; and McKay, "De Gaulle and Louis Napoleon," *Current History* 16 (1949): 267-268.

⁶¹ Hyslop to Evelyn Acomb, Jan. 29, 1956, Acomb Collection, Ohio State University.

⁶² Carl Becker, "A New Philosophy of History," *The Dial* 59 (Sept. 2, 1915): 148.

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