Introduction

On 10 May 1940 the German army rolled into France, setting in motion one of the most spectacular and least expected military defeats in modern history. In six short weeks, the French were forced to surrender Paris to the Nazis. No sooner had France's new collaborationist government installed itself in Vichy than its leader, Marshal Philippe Pétain, denounced the group he believed most responsible for France's catastrophic state: public primary schoolteachers. Unpatriotic schoolteachers, Pétain complained to the American ambassador, had forsaken the nation by cultivating antipatriotism, paving the way for eventual defeat. To Pétain, it was no surprise if the nation's reserve officers had "shown no fighting spirit whatsoever"; after all, what could one expect from a generation of men whose teachers had failed to inculcate in them a proper love of the fatherland?[1]

Granted, as a conservative career officer, Pétain had made no secret of his animosity toward the left-leaning teaching corps throughout the 1930s, and his accusations could well have stemmed from political malice; yet, similar underlying concerns can be found in the writings of Pétain's bitter opponent, the leftist historian and Resistance hero, Marc Bloch. In his famous analysis of France's "Strange Defeat," written in 1940, Bloch took fellow professors and teachers to task for having unintentionally cultivated a "race of cowards" in the interwar years. Unlike Pétain, Bloch had no doubt that once war broke out, teachers called up to fight had defended France valiantly. "When it came to the point," Bloch wrote to his colleagues, "you did, for the most part, put up a magnificent fight." Nonetheless, Bloch also believed that his fellow teachers' courageous performance on the battlefield did not absolve them of responsibility for earlier mistakes in the classroom. "Do you not think," he asked, "that, having learned from an experience so dearly purchased, you will find much to alter in the things you were teaching only a few years back?"[2] Though they shared little else, both Marc Bloch and Philippe Pétain believed that the schoolteachers of France had much to answer for in one of the darkest hours in the nation's history.

Accusations of defeatism like those described above have had a lasting influence on how scholars have assessed the cultural impact of public education in interwar France. While teachers of the early Third Republic (1870–1914) have been widely celebrated for contributing to the nationalist enterprise of converting "peasants into Frenchman," their interwar counterparts have been just as readily condemned for abandoning the nation for an illusory dream of world peace.[3] Did France's primary schoolteachers, lauded for their dedication to the Republic and fatherland before World War I, renounce their patriotic mission in its aftermath? What impact did republican education have on French political culture from the end of the First World War to the outbreak of the Second? In the chapters that follow, I tackle these questions, challenging both contemporary critics and subsequent scholars who equate teachers' pacifism with national betrayal. From 1914 to 1940, I argue, patriotism and pacifism were inextricably linked and lay at the moral center of republican education; both played a decisive role in shaping the values and beliefs of the French nation in the turbulent era of the two world wars.

During the four years of World War I, the vast majority of schoolteachers were loyal supporters of the national war effort. From 1914 to 1918, this book recounts, teachers mobilized their students to aid their beleaguered fatherland and to embrace the values and assumptions of the war culture that engulfed them. In these years, only a tiny fraction of teachers openly criticized the militarization of education, and for several years after the armistice school lessons continued to resound with nationalistic and militaristic assumptions. "Little French Children, Do Not Forget!" admonished one typical postwar textbook, encouraging young students to associate their own wartime memories with narratives of German barbarism and French valor. Most teachers shared the conviction that educators had a vital role to play in shaping a national memory of the Great War, but as the years passed they also expressed growing discomfort with textbook narratives that celebrated the nation's victory without commemorating its loss. In the 1920s, a complex blend of socialist internationalism and republican humanism, promoted by a new and powerful national teachers' union, the *Syndicat national des institutrices et des instituteurs de la France et des colonies* (National Teachers' Union [SN]), played a role in shaping teachers' emerging critique of militaristic education. So too did feminist and feminine pacifism, both of which exerted a strong influence over the predominantly female teaching corps.[4] Increasingly, teachers around the country called upon children to remember the war, not to exult in national triumph, as their textbooks insisted, but to mourn the fallen and share in the nation's bereavement.

By the mid-1920s, scores of French primary schoolteachers began readily identifying themselves as pacifists, and they sketched out a new pedagogical mission for the nation's public schools: the moral disarmament of France. "*Désarmement moral*" was a term just gaining cultural currency in the mid-1920s, as hopeful internationalists across Europe began to lay the cornerstones for a more peaceful world order. Proponents of moral disarmament insisted that no amount of international arbitration or economic cooperation would effectively prevent the return of war unless the peoples of the world first abandoned their chauvinistic impulses and embraced cross-national understanding as the keystone of global stability. Such a project of "cultural internationalism," as historian Akira Iriye has termed it, was largely driven by European cultural elites who, in the 1920s and 1930s, actively sought to promote intellectual cooperation across national boundaries.[5] At the same time, however, the project had an important populist component, as evidenced by the recommendations of the Committee on Moral Disarmament, which met as part of the World Disarmament Conference in Geneva in 1932. There committee members recommended using the new mass media of radio and cinema to advance the cause of mutual understanding, but they also maintained that the most important work of moral disarmament would have to be conducted in the schools. Education, the committee concluded, was "the key to all other measures."[6]

Inspired by such rhetoric, shaped by their own wartime experiences, and guided by the SN and by feminist and feminine pacifist organizations, the vast majority of French teachers came to share the conviction that as educators, they had a crucial role to play in helping to establish a new, peaceful world order. Even as they disagreed over other ideological issues – not least of which included the political ramifications of pacifist commitment – teachers were broadly united around the goal of moral disarmament through education. To them, the term did not imply moral weakening, as some contemporary critics and later scholars have maintained. Pacifist teachers adopted the term as convenient shorthand for the cultural demobilization of their nation, and others, after the chauvinistic and militaristic excesses of the Great War.

In pursuing moral disarmament, the teachers of the late Third Republic sought to use their authority in the classroom to destroy the mental arsenal of concepts and beliefs that had made war imaginable and, ultimately, acceptable. They focused on purging classroom lessons of the images, symbols, narratives, and values that had led their generation to accept war without question in 1914, in particular those that dehumanized Germans, applauded military heroism, and romanticized war. To such ends, the SN launched a vast campaign against "bellicose"

textbooks, and by the late 1920s, it already bore fruit. In revised textbooks, once-epic narratives of the Great War were recast as tragedies. A new moral message of the events of 1914 to 1918 began to emerge, one capably summarized by a young schoolboy in a 1935 school composition written for his teacher: "War is atrocious for all fatherlands."[7]

At the same time, this book insists, even the most pacifist of school lessons offered a fundamentally patriotic message. Revised textbook narratives portrayed the Great War as a tragedy, but it was a tragedy set on French soil, with French soldiers as its protagonists. For all their broad humanitarian implications, revised scholastic lessons of the Great War continued to reinforce students' nascent sense of national identity, insisting that patriotism is forged not only in the shared moments of national triumph but also through the long, dark hours of common suffering.

Moral education lessons regarding *la patrie*, international solidarity, and national defense further demonstrate that France's republican schoolteachers never repudiated patriotism between the wars. Interwar French teachers, like their predecessors, rooted their ideological beliefs in the revolutionary tradition of 1789, and they taught students to equate love of country with democratic progress. They continued to teach that the French nation was endowed with a unique civilizing mission, a belief that led most teachers to celebrate the French empire with their students even as they presented France as a beacon of peace in an unruly world. Pacifist teachers recognized that peace-loving nations had gone to war in the past. France's own revolutionaries – the famed volunteers of 1792 – did not hesitate to take up arms when they perceived that their fatherland was threatened. While a fringe of teachers on the conservative right accused the pacifist majority of denigrating the army and preaching outright defeatism in the event of war, in fact, only a small group of teachers on the far left ever questioned whether France should defend itself if attacked. As convinced pacifists, most teachers worked hard to foster international solidarity, to cultivate support for the League of Nations, and to teach their students to work for peace, but as devoted republicans, they also made certain children appreciated that when all else failed they, like all French citizens, should be prepared to lay down their lives for their country.

For much of the interwar era, loyal devotion to the fatherland and a fervent hatred of war were not incompatible. By the late 1930s, however, with fascist powers on the rise in Europe, circumstances had changed. This book concludes by examining the impact of teachers' pacifism on interwar French political culture: the contested concepts, images, beliefs, and rituals that French men and women drew upon in deciding how to face the mounting threats on their borders and, eventually, the return of war. I demonstrate that throughout most of the 1930s, teachers' union

leaders remained firmly attached to their pacifist principles, arguing against military intervention in the Spanish Civil War and celebrating the conclusion of the 1938 Munich Agreement with Hitler. Yet below the surface and with each mounting crisis, dissension grew within teachers' ranks. This ideological transformation became manifest by early 1939, by which point most teachers had resigned themselves to the necessity of war. While in a few notable cases pacifism led to defeatism and eventually collaboration, nearly all teachers proved willing to support a war against the Nazis, and a large number joined the Resistance. Moreover, memoirs of former students influenced by teachers' moral disarmament campaigns lend credence to historian Pierre Laborie's conclusion that "in popular milieus, urban and rural, attachment to peace coincided with an internalized, but real, patriotism."[8] Contrary to what others have claimed, this patriotism did not exist *despite* the efforts of pacifist schoolteachers in the 1920s and 1930s; it existed, in no small part, *because* of them. For nearly two decades, in classrooms across the country, schoolteachers sought to inculcate the values of patriotism, republicanism, and pacifism, and, in doing so, helped to mold the complex political culture that characterized interwar France.

Education and the legacy of the Great War

In the 1920s and 1930s, French teachers' ideological priorities were influenced by a number of factors, but underneath all of them lay the haunting experience of the Great War. In proclaiming moral disarmament to be their foremost priority, *institutrices* and *instituteurs* of the late Third Republic explicitly sought to shape the cultural and political legacy of the conflict for generations to come. Deciphering the causes and consequences of their efforts is integral to understanding the impact of the First World War in France.

For the past several decades, historians and other scholars have argued that World War I left profound scars on all major combatant nations, permanently transforming some of the most crucial beliefs and cultural norms that helped structure daily existence in these countries. Indeed, a number of scholars contend that modernity itself – with its loss of innocence, its self-reflexive irony, and its rejection of bold ideas of progress – was born in the trenches of the First World War. Reflections of modernity, they argue, can be seen in the prose and poetry, painting and sculpture inspired by the events of 1914 to 1918, which reveal a Europe culturally and morally adrift, unwilling to return to the facile certainties of earlier eras and unable to shake off the horrors of the war years.[9]

Few dispute the war's transformative effect on European society; yet, not all scholars are convinced that modernity was the war's most

direct or widespread legacy. For the tens of millions of Europeans who survived World War I, some historians have insisted, surrealist poetry and disjunctive art brought little consolation. Bereavement, not irony, was the universal response to the bloodshed of 1914 to 1918, and traces of memory and mourning could be found everywhere in postwar European cultural production, from the endless cemeteries that lined northern France and the war memorials that arose in villages and cities across Europe to the ghost-like images of lost soldiers that haunted films of the 1920s and 1930s. Religious imagery and traditional motifs, these scholars argue, served as the common cultural ground out of which collective memories of the war flourished and grew.[10]

Mourning, in itself, was an apolitical act, but as other scholars have pointed out, it was an act that could and did have direct political consequences. Some argue that the violence of the war years irrevocably brutalized European national values, paving the way for the triumph of fascism and, eventually, the return of war.[11] In the case of France, however, there is little evidence that memories of the Great War fed fascistic fantasies for more than a very limited minority of the population. In the immediate postwar era, historian Daniel Sherman argues, French war memorials and commemorative ceremonies facilitated the development of a wide variety of narratives about the experience of the Great War: some were nationalistic and vindictive; others were overtly critical of the institution of war and the suffering that it generated.[12] At the same time, virtually all memory production in France, whether expressed through monuments, novels, memoirs, or other cultural means, served to reinforce traditional gender roles by praising men for actively risking their lives for their country while venerating women for stoically accepting their suffering.[13]

As time passed, however, French national memory of the Great War coalesced around another, equally ubiquitous political theme: pacifism. Indeed, political scientist Stanley Hoffman argues that west of the Rhine, World War I engendered a pervasive antiwar sentiment, a sentiment that is the key to understanding the *mentalité* of the French people between the wars.[14] France had already become a center of pacifist, intellectual thought even before 1914, but after World War I, both new and old pacifist organizations gained in strength and worked diligently to fulfill the promise repeated so often during the years of fighting: the Great War would be the "*der des der*," the last of the last.[15] Many of these groups promoted a legalistic vision of world peace, and they rooted their hopes in international law and organizations. Others adopted a more absolute or integral pacifist line, rejecting all foreign wars under any circumstances.[16]

French antiwar sentiment also left its mark well beyond the elite and limited world of pacifist organizations. In particular, French war

veterans often spoke publicly and openly about the need to prevent the return of war. In his seminal study of the nation's *anciens combatants*, historian Antoine Prost reminds us that nearly six and half million French men who were mobilized during the First World War survived to see the return of peace in 1918. Concentrated in several large veterans' organizations, the "generation of fire" exerted a broad influence over French culture and society. Veterans wrote memoirs, served on war monument committees, and participated in commemorative ceremonies. Through their words and deeds, war veterans helped shape how their compatriots came to understand and assign meaning to the experience of the First World War. In emphasizing the horror of war, Prost argues, French veterans contributed to an interwar culture that valorized the preservation of peace even as it reinforced civic cohesion.[17]

Much evidence thus exists to suggest that one of the most important legacies of World War I in France was a strong antiwar current that exerted a potent influence over political culture in the interwar years. Nonetheless, scholarship to date leaves several puzzling questions unanswered, questions that this study seeks to resolve. First, in the 1920s and 1930s, pacifist organizations and war veterans' associations were predominantly controlled by men.[18] Did French women in fact share their male compatriots' concerns regarding the prevention of war? *Institutrices* (female teachers) comprised the single largest group of educated, professional women in interwar France, and, as I demonstrate here, these women helped make pacifism a national, pedagogical priority by the 1920s. Though pacifist schoolmistresses, like all French women, could not vote, by actively promoting moral disarmament through the schools, female teachers sought to influence directly their country's diplomatic future. The history of teachers' pacifism is one of the most explicit records we have of French women's pacifist commitments and political activities in the interwar era.

Second, most studies to date have focused on the generations of French citizens who lived through World War I and whose own personal memories helped to shape the war's collective cultural legacy for the nation. By the outbreak of World War II, however, many of the men who were mobilized to fight – and many of the women asked to step in and fill their shoes – were too young to harbor any distinct memories of 1914 to 1918. Did antiwar sentiment span the generations born before and after 1914? If so, how did it pass from one generation to the next? Already by the mid-1920s many French schoolchildren were too young to remember personally the events of 1914–1918. For their teachers, who were eager to impress upon the nation's youngest citizens the duty of collective remembrance, the passage of time proved to be a formidable obstacle. Certainly, this is not to say that children in the interwar era were insensible to evocations of the Great War. On the

contrary, scarred landscapes, disabled veterans, and mourning relatives all made the conflict tangible and personal for those born after 1914. War stories, passed down within families, recorded in literature, and brought to life in film, permeated their childhoods. Many narratives thus helped children to imagine a war they were too young to remember; nevertheless, scholastic narratives, more than any other, purported to carry the authoritative power of truth and constructed the past in national terms. The stories, images, and assumptions of war held by the post-1914 generations, I argue, came second hand and in no small part from their schoolteachers.

Schoolteachers' influence, moreover, reached far beyond the children educated in their classrooms. Indeed, public primary schoolteachers enjoyed nearly unrivaled social and cultural prestige in the interwar decades, a time when France remained a predominantly rural society, and traditional social patterns associated with villages and small towns remained vibrant.[19] In 1922, two-thirds of all public primary schools still housed just one class.[20] Because they taught the same children year after year, *instituteurs* and *institutrices* maintained an ongoing influence in families' lives. Outside of school hours, teachers often coordinated village and neighborhood cultural life. They sponsored sporting clubs, mutual aid societies, and associations of former students; they hosted public lectures and evening classes, and often they doubled as secretaries to the mayor. Even though 1931 marked the demographic turning point when France's urban population finally outnumbered its rural population, French villages and the teachers that helped to animate them retained tremendous moral authority, in many cases until World War II.[21] In the 1920s and 1930s, this book argues, schoolteachers drew upon this authority, first and foremost, in order to forward the goals of republican humanism and international peace. In doing so, they came to play a central role in shaping the cultural and political legacy of the First World War in France.

Schoolteachers and the "strange defeat" of 1940

For many scholars, understanding the impact of World War I on French cultural and politics is a critical historical task, not least because the legacy of 1914–18 is seen to be indelibly linked to the causes of France's defeat in World War II. Certainly, the debacle of 1940 was, at its heart, a military defeat, and few disagree that the French high command committed grievous strategic errors in preparing for war with Hitler's Germany.[22] Marc Bloch insisted on as much in his 1940 essay. Yet, as Bloch also asserted, France's military weaknesses did not arise in a vacuum; responsibility for the defeat, he insisted, was deeply rooted in the social, cultural, and political order of interwar France.[23]

Numerous historians have since followed Bloch's lead. While much of their work has focused, understandably, on questions of foreign policy and diplomacy, a small but growing group of scholars has begun to cast its investigative nets farther afield in an effort to better grasp French political culture in the 1920s and 1930s.[24] Their assessments, though divergent, leave us with a bleak image of the late Third Republic as a society haunted by the experience of 1914 to 1918 and beset by indecision, helplessness, and fear. For historian Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, this was an era of "decadence," when the victors of Verdun succumbed to timidity and weakness.[25] For Eugen Weber the 1930s appear as "hollow years," a time when "those who worked hardest to avoid [another war] did most to make it come."[26] Others have continued to build on this thesis, arguing that the French were paralyzed by their victory in 1918, beleaguered by memories of that horrific conflict and torn over the proper response to the threat of another.[27]

Finally, for some scholars, French schoolteachers' moral disarmament efforts of the 1920s and 1930s provide clear and persuasive evidence of the degradation of French national and republican values in the interwar decades. Stanley Hoffman, for example, argues that "the public school that, prior to 1914, still fulfilled its role as propagator of a national faith and, hence, of civic integration, no longer did so and turned toward pacifism."[28] In a similar vein, French historian Olivier Loubes contends that the interwar years witnessed "the strange defeat of the fatherland by the schools."[29] In the eyes of both of these scholars, after World War I, public schoolteachers ceased to function effectively as caretakers of French national identity and civic cohesion. Eugen Weber and Barnett Singer are even more critical. Weber labels French schoolteachers of the 1930s the "assault troops" of intransigent pacifism, and he accuses them and their sympathizers of failing "to face the German menace" and of "dress(ing) up amoral self-indulgence in moral sounding arguments."[30] Singer claims, in turn, that teachers underwent a conversion "from patriots to pacifists" in the interwar era, leading him to conclude: "it is therefore advisable to consider the *instituteurs* as one among many of the causes of the 'strange defeat'."[31] Ultimately, these scholars argue that teachers' pacifism contributed to a degeneration of national values under the late Third Republic, which in turn paved the way for the Republic's own demise in 1940.

Did pacifist schoolteachers help to create in interwar France a moral and political climate hostile to war under any circumstances? The historical record does not bear out such damning accusations. For all the passion that issues of war and peace elicited among French teachers in the 1920s and 1930s, rare was the *institutrice* or *instituteur* who did not define her or his pacifism within a specifically republican and patriotic framework. Moral disarmament did not come at the expense of

civic unity or national values. On the contrary, schoolteachers of interwar France did much to buttress the ideals of democracy, freedom, and patriotism in an era when those values were very much under attack across Europe. The origins of France's "Strange Defeat" of 1940, I argue, do not lie in the classrooms of the late Third Republic.

Assessing the history of education under the late Third Republic

Historians of education have been relatively slow to analyze the significant ideological transformations that distinguish French public primary schooling in the 1920s and 1930s from the preceding era. Far more frequently, their attention has been drawn to the landmark educational advances of the early Third Republic when, under the guiding hand of Minister of Public Instruction Jules Ferry, republicans passed a series of laws that rendered public primary school education obligatory, secular, and free for all French children up to age thirteen.

The Ferry laws of the 1880s, scholars have noted, were explicitly tied to republicans' own ideological agenda as well as to broader concerns with nation building that defined so many aspects of late nineteenth-century political life. As democratic-minded politicians were well aware, repeated revolutions throughout the previous century had failed to establish a lasting republican regime. That failure, moreover, was widely seen to be tied to the cultural hold of the Catholic Church, as manifested through the large network of private, parish schools throughout France.[32] Indeed, on the eve of World War I, slightly over 20 percent of all French children remained outside the reach of secular teachers, as a minority of parents continued to place their children into private and often religious schools.[33] In championing public primary schooling, the founders of the Third Republic explicitly sought to undermine the dual power of the crown and the Church.

The entire revolutionary history of nineteenth-century France thus inspired the republican education laws of the 1880s; so, too, did events in the more recent past, in particular the nation's disastrous military defeat by Prussia in 1870–71. Determined to restore French greatness after the debacle of the Franco-Prussian War, leaders of the early Third Republic established mandatory military service in the army, pursued colonial expansion in Africa and Asia, and, most of all, looked to the nation's teachers to engender national loyalty through the schools. Armed with flags, maps, songs, and textbooks, and deeply imbued with a sense of their own patriotic mission, schoolteachers rose to the occasion. From the 1880s until 1914, the "Black Hussars of the Republic" – as poet Charles Péguy aptly dubbed the teaching corps – fanned out into the countryside, determined to spread the dual gospels of patriotism and