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Collective memory of Vichy : Moulin, Pétain, and the Vél' d'Hiv'

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The Collective Memory of Vichy: Moulin, Pétain, and the Vél’ d’Hiv’
The Collective Memory of Vichy:
Moulin, Pétain, and the Vél’ d’Hiv’

Kathryn W. Bondy has completed the requirements for Honors in International Studies.

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Acronyms

ADMP  Association pour Défendre la Mémoire du Maréchal Pétain
CNR   Conseil National de la Résistance
FFL   Forces Françaises Libres
FN    Front National
RPF   Rassemblement du Peuple Français
RPR   Rassemblement pour la République

With the defeat of France in June 1940, Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain, the new head of France, was one of the most controversial figures in French history. He believed he was doing a service for France by ending its role in the war early, but in reality, the Vichy regime has become one of the most notorious periods in French history. The new French government, commonly known as Vichy because it was headquartered in the spa town of Vichy, subsequently collaborated on a period of collaboration with the Germans until France was liberated in 1944.

Say the word Vichy in France today and most people cringe. For the French, Vichy represents a dark period in their history...
Chapter One
Introduction

Following World War II, European countries that had been devastated by the war slowly began the task of rebuilding. This reconstruction did not only involve the restoration of buildings and governments, but also of national psyches, as most European nations had recently experienced a traumatic period in their history. France was no exception. Since the liberation of Paris in August of 1944, France had been attempting to regain a sense of normality that it had not had under the World War II government of Vichy. As a result of signing an armistice with Germany on June 22, 1940, France was divided into a northern, or occupied, zone and a southern, or free, zone. This armistice, however, was not signed by the leaders of the French Republic, but by World War I hero Marshall Henri Philippe Pétain, the new leader of France. Pétain, now one of the most controversial figures in French history, believed he was doing a service for France by ending its role in the war early, but in reality, the Vichy years has become one of the most contentious period's in French history. The new French government, commonly known as Vichy because it was headquartered in the spa town of Vichy, subsequently embarked on a period of collaboration with the Germans until France was liberated in 1944.

Say the word Vichy in France today and most people cringe. For the French, Vichy represents a dark period in their history that many remain unwilling to revisit. Since Pétain signed the armistice of 1940, the Vichy government has generated widespread controversy among the French. The fact that France, a country founded on the principle of the rights of man, colluded with the people responsible for engendering the Final Solution, has plagued the French like a virus for over fifty years. While there
were pockets of French resistance within France and even some outside of France during the Occupation, for the most part, the majority of French citizens quietly accepted Vichy’s laws and policies, which were tremendously influenced by the German Occupiers. As a result, Vichy has been a subject of national debate in France for over fifty years because of the guilt that many French citizens, especially those who lived through the Occupation, feel over collaborating with the Germans.

The French are not alone in these feelings of guilt, however, as other nations, such as Germany, Japan, and Switzerland, have also had a difficult time in coming to terms with their World War II past. According to Stanley Cohen, “To come to terms with the past is to know exactly what happened, to tell the truth, to face the facts,” and it is an essential part of creating a healthy collective memory and national identity.1 The Germans have arguably had the hardest time recovering from their past, as ultimately, their country was responsible for carrying out the Holocaust in Europe. As was the case in France, which will be discussed further below, the Germans experienced a form of amnesia where, “a collective consciousness had emerged that attributed solely to Hitler and his inner circle all responsibilities for the atrocities of the Third Reich.”2 Rather than confronting the emotional ramifications of the Holocaust, the Germans chose to focus on rebuilding national infrastructure. Beginning in the 1960s, Germans in the West slowly began to come to terms with their past. While World War II remains a popular news topic today, most Germans are now much more adept at dealing with their feelings, thanks to the promotion of a great deal of discussion, dialogue, and education by the

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German government. It is interesting to note, however, that in the eastern part of Germany, which was under communist rule for over forty years, the people have had trouble confronting their Nazi past. The communist leaders in East Germany claimed that only the West Germans were responsible for the Nazi years, which thereby absolved the East Germans of any feelings of guilt over actions committed by the government of World War II. After the reunification of Germany in 1990, the East Germans were finally forced to deal with these latent feelings of guilt that had remained undisturbed for so long. Consequently, there has been a greater time lag in East Germany than in West Germany about coming to terms with the past, especially as the East Germans are forced to confront not only their Nazi past, but also their Communist past.

This same phenomenon of ignoring a traumatic past also occurred in Japan. It has only been in the past few years that the Japanese government has acknowledged any wrongdoing committed during World War II towards the Korean and Chinese peoples. During the war, thousands of Chinese citizens were killed by the Japanese military by atrocious acts of violence, the most famous being the Rape of Nanking, and thousands of women, particularly Korean women, were used as "comfort women" by the armies. These women were often forced to have sex with Japanese soldiers several times a day and were held like hostages by the Japanese government. Although feminist groups from Japan and around the world have long been urging the government to make some sort of statement regarding these women, it has only been recently that Japanese officials have recognized the misdeeds of their military in World War II. While the situation is slightly different in Switzerland, as it was officially a neutral country during the war, the Swiss, too, have been forced to confront their past as of late. During the mid-1990s, allegations
arose claiming that many Swiss banks hoarded wealth, stolen from Jews by the Nazis, in
their banks. Several Jewish organizations demanded restitution for either the victims or
their families, and to settle the situation, the Swiss government set up a fund to distribute
monetary compensation to them. Made up of contributions from Swiss banks and private
companies, the fund totaled $179 million and was distributed to 309,000 people,
concluding its last payment in May of 2002. Clearly, France is not the only country
which has faced difficulty in coming to terms with its past. According to Adam Heribert,
at the end of the war, France, Germany, Japan, and Switzerland, all had “a fragile
collective identity—a weak ego—[and they] had to protect [themselves] against an
unbearable truth by repressing and rationalizing it.” In the long run, however, by
suppressing the truth, each nation has had a more difficult time in accepting the past, and
this has in turn made it more difficult to regain a truthful collective memory and identity.

To promote a healthy collective memory and identity there are several stages a
new government must make in order to overcome the past crimes of the previous regime.
This process is known as transitional justice and has only recently become a popular field
of study as more and more countries realize how essential it is to recover from the past in
order to ensure that the new government is provided with legitimacy from the people.
While Cohen, a transitional justice scholar, uses a framework of transitional justice that
best suits those countries recovering from an authoritarian or communist regime, his five
phases are also applicable to France, Germany, Japan, and Switzerland. He suggests that
to come to terms with the past it is necessary to first to establish the truth about the past.
The second phase should bring about justice and accountability, which can be

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4 Heribert.
accomplished through trials, compensation, or lustration. The third stage is impunity, whereby the new government exempts certain individuals from punishment in order to put an end to human rights violations. The fourth stage is expiation, in which the government makes amends for the sins of the past. Finally, the fifth phase of the process is reconciliation and reconstruction, which involves acknowledgement, forgiveness, and, most importantly, looking to the future. If a country embarks on these stages of transitional justice, the new government will not only be legitimized, but the country will also have engaged in a healing process that has allowed them to come to terms with the past.

Unfortunately, France, Germany, Japan, and Switzerland did not use Cohen’s transitional justice model after World War II. In fact, each country carried out very little transitional justice, which ultimately harmed the collective memory and identity of each nation. While France, Germany, Japan, and Switzerland have all carried out some of the steps of transitional justice in Cohen’s model today, the healing process has continued, despite the fact that World War II came to an end over fifty years ago, with some of the government’s making public acknowledgements of crimes committed or publicly apologizing for the crimes of the previous regime. In the case of France, upon the immediate conclusion of the war, the interim government did utilize the idea of a justice phase, in which there were series of trials and purges, but these lasted no more than a few years. Perhaps the most important phase, the truth phase, was completely ignored. It has

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5 Lustration is the practice of purging the government of those who participated in the crimes of the former regime. It is seen as a cleansing and purifying process of the new government, and was a type of transitional justice often used in several of the former Communist countries, such as the Czech Republic.

6 According to Cohen, lustration is a perfect example of expiation. He claims it is a process of “ritual cleansing” in which it is necessary “to remove impure elements or ways of thinking so that they will loose their power.”

7 Cohen 11-12.
only been since the 1970s that the French have actively pursued the truth phase and, most recently in the 1990s, the reconciliation and reconstruction phase. As a result of carrying out very limited transitional justice at the end of the war, the French have had trouble coming to terms their past and creating a healthy and truthful collective memory. Indeed, many French have remained wracked with guilt because of their Vichy past.

The guilt of the French has manifested itself over the past fifty years in a malaise known as the “Vichy Syndrome,” whereby the French national consciousness has been tremendously influenced by the Vichy years. Coined by the renowned French historian Henry Rousso in his acclaimed *The Vichy Syndrome*, the Vichy Syndrome can be divided into four different periods. The first, called “Unfinished Mourning,” came at the conclusion of the war when the French government tried and punished thousands of Vichy officials for collaborating with the Nazis. During this time there was no large public discussion about the role that average French citizens had played during the Occupation. To exacerbate the situation, the second phase, called “Repressions,” began in 1954. This period was one of the most formative of the Vichy Syndrome, as it was when Robert Aron, a French historian, published his *Histoire de Vichy*, which launched the idea that Pétain had been playing a double game during the war. This theory posits that Pétain collaborated with the Germans, but only to prevent them from taking complete control of France. Charles de Gaulle, the leader of a group of French people who were unwilling to collaborate with the Germans and formed their own Free French government, also published the first volume of his *Mémoires de Guerre* during this time. De Gaulle implied that his Free French government, not Vichy, had been the true government of France during World War II. This idea became known as the
Resistancialist myth, which de Gaulle had been slowly forming since before the end of the war. During this period, de Gaulle also began to suggest that most French people had participated in some form of resistance to the Nazi Occupiers, adding more substance to his Resistancialist myth.

On the other side of the spectrum, the third stage of the Vichy Syndrome developed in 1971 with the debut of a film by Marcel Ophuls called *Le Chagrin et la Pitié*. This film created a deluge of literature and films that dealt with the period of the Occupation. Coming on the heels of the student rebellions that occurred all over the world in 1968, this period was called the “Broken Mirror,” as it reminded the French that not everyone had been a member of the Résistance, as de Gaulle had led them to believe. The reminder worked almost too well, however, as soon the role the Résistance had played in helping end the war was almost entirely forgotten. Since the mid-1970s, in what is known as the Obsession phase of the Vichy Syndrome, a renewed interest in Jewish memory has surfaced as witnessed by the production of *Shoah*, by Claude Lanzmann, which recounts the Holocaust and the memories of its survivors in great detail. The Obsession phase has also seen the trials of several former members of the Vichy regime, such as Paul Touvier and Maurice Papon, for crimes committed against humanity. While many scholars believe the fascination with the Vichy past has declined in recent years, there are yet others who argue that the French will continue to be consumed by their past for years to come.

As a result of the French having difficulty accepting their past, the way they identify themselves as a nation has been profoundly affected by the Vichy Syndrome. It is through their collective memory, which can be defined as memories shared by a group
or nation, that their national consciousness is formed. Therefore, it becomes necessary to look to the past in order to see how Vichy has shaped the French collective memory and identity. As Stanley Hoffman says, “the French past and French culture play... as cements of French citizenship and national identity.” During the past fifty years, the French collective memory of Vichy has been manipulated by a number of different people and events, all of which have perpetuated the Vichy Syndrome. Three incidents in particular have helped mold the collective memory of France, with relation to Vichy, and have thus contributed to the way the French view themselves as a republic. Each of these incidents occurred in a different decade and deals with different aspects of France’s role in World War II, and thus shows the evolving reaction of the French nation to the Vichy years over an extended period of time.

The first event is the relocation of Jean Moulin’s ashes to the Panthéon, which took place during the 1960s. When the Occupation began, Moulin was a prefect of the Eure-et-Loir, a département in the northern part of France. He immediately embarked on a campaign of resistance against the Occupiers, and as a result was eventually discharged from his post by the Vichy government in February of 1941. After his dismissal, Moulin officially became involved in the Résistance, and he eventually made his way to London. In 1942, he was parachuted into southern France, as an envoy for de Gaulle’s Forces Françaises Libres (FFL). It was Moulin’s responsibility to unite the various Résistance

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10 Led by de Gaulle, the Forces Françaises Libres (FFL) was a relatively small organization of French people who fought with the Allies against the Germans during World War II. On June 18, 1940, de Gaulle made his famous speech calling upon the French to resist their Nazi Occupiers. The FFL went on to play a minor role in helping the Allies defeat the Nazis. De Gaulle, however, greatly magnified the part his organization played, especially with regard to the Liberation of France in August of 1944, which further added to his Resistancialist myth.
groups scattered throughout France into one, and he did just that by forming the Conseil National de la Résistance (CNR). As a result of Moulin’s successful efforts in France, the Résistance and de Gaulle soon became synonymous, because Moulin, as a representative of de Gaulle, became the figurehead of the entire movement. Even groups who did not agree with de Gaulle ideologically, such as the Communists, were placed under the wing of de Gaulle’s Résistance. This idea of a unified Résistance, led solely by de Gaulle, lasted until after the war, although Moulin would not remain the leader of the CNR for very long. After being captured for his Résistance activities in Lyon, France, Moulin was killed in 1943 by one of the most infamous members of the Gestapo, Klaus Barbie. Following his death, however, Moulin became the most famous and distinguished member of the Résistance due to his role in uniting the various bands of resistance in the CNR. He thus became a symbolic figure representing all of the men and women who had been members of the French Résistance.

The second incident deals with the controversy over flowers being laid at ex-Marshall Henri Philippe Pétain’s grave. Before World War II, Pétain was revered as the heroic general of the Battle of Verdun where he had halted the Germans in World War I. He was selected to be the leader of France in June 1940, and only a few days after his appointment, he signed the armistice with Germany that ended the fighting between the two powers. It was largely because of his venerated status that Pétain was chosen to lead the Vichy regime, as many French viewed him as a trusted figurehead. After World War II, however, Pétain’s status as a hero came into question because of his leadership of the Vichy government. Some of his loyal supporters believed it necessary to maintain the tradition of honoring his actions of World War I; but to many French, Pétain continues to
represent the Occupation. Despite the fact that flower arrangements had been placed on his grave at several different points over the last fifty years, it was predominantly in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, during the Obsession phase of the Vichy Syndrome, that debates over placing flowers at the ex-Marshall's grave developed.

Lastly, the Vél d'Hiv' commemorations occurred in the 1990s, and they correspond to the anti-Semitism that was prevalent throughout France during World War II. On July 16 and 17, 1942, approximately 13,000 Jews were taken from their Parisian homes and gathered into an indoor cycling stadium, known as the Vélodrome d'Hiver, or the Vél' d'Hiv', by French police. They were then transported by train to Drancy, Pithiviers, and Beaune-la-Rolande, internment camps in France. After remaining at the camps in squalid conditions, the Jews were taken by train to the Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz in Poland. Most of them never returned to France. Since shortly after the conclusion of the war, a memorial has existed on the spot of the former stadium.

Discussions surrounding the Vél' d'Hiv' round-up became a controversial subject under President François Mitterand, however, as he was reluctant to recognize the role that Vichy authorities had played in the deportations.

These three incidents did not merely occur spontaneously. As the leader of a state, a president typically plays a very important role in determining how the collective memory of a people is shaped. He or she is a symbolic figurehead for an entire country, and his or her actions, words, and character all contribute to the way a nation remembers. It is a president who is responsible for helping the public remember or forget the past. French scholar Dominique Schnapper has noted, "Collective debates on the past provide grounding for a democracy, whose obligation is to willfully acknowledge its mistakes,
faults, or crimes.... To acknowledge one's past—not in its entirety, which is impossible, but that part of it which still exerts its force on the present—is one of the preconditions for a working democracy.\textsuperscript{11} As the leaders of the country, presidents are in charge of preserving democracy and legitimizing the government's actions in France. Three French presidents, Charles de Gaulle, François Mitterand, and Jacques Chirac, have all played notable roles in each of the three tributes discussed above, and it has been their responsibility, as leaders of France, to help the French come to terms with their Vichy past in order to foster a healthy collective memory and identity. Through their leadership roles, each of the three presidents has affected the French collective memory and national identity with relation to Vichy. In order to understand how each president has influenced the French collective memory of Vichy, it becomes imperative to discuss the role that each has played in the three commemorations.

By looking at different time periods and these three singular incidents, as well as the role of the presidents, the manner in which the French collective memory of Vichy was formed will be shown in this project. As John Hellman has claimed, "what renders the Occupation so haunting to the French is not so much the 'crimes' (committed by a minority), but rather France's continued indifference to those crimes and difficulty in breaking with everything Vichy represented."\textsuperscript{12} Vichy has been described as "an internal struggle that set French against French. That Vichy was plural or diverse does not alter an image of a nation that remained bitterly contentious over what it meant to be truly

These three examples will also show the progress France has made in confronting its Vichy past, as with each president and with each event, the French, especially those from younger generations, have become more comfortable discussing what they have come to consider the Dark Years, and consequently, feel more at peace with their past. Moulin and de Gaulle, Pétain and Mitterand, and the Vél’ d’Hiv’ and Chirac will be discussed chronologically, making it easy to see how the three events and the three presidents have all influenced the post-Vichy collective memory and identity of the French.

Situated near the Latin Quarter and the Sorbonne, the Panthéon is one of France's lesser-known attractions, although it is remarkably beautiful and magnificent. Since its completion in 1789, the Panthéon has had a tumultuous existence. It was originally designed to be a church, but during the Revolution the French Assembly decided to convert it into a “Temple of Fame,” where the great men of the Revolution could be honored. After the Revolution, the Panthéon was then consecrated as a church again, but it was subsequently deconsecrated in 1885. Since then, it has been used as the resting place for France's non-controversial heroes. Famous Frenchmen such as Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Victor Hugo, and Emile Zola are all housed in the Panthéon crypt. The reverence with which the French hold these national heroes is evident from the phrase depicted on the façade of the building: “Aux Grands Hommes la Patrie reconnaissante,” which Patrick Marnham translates as “To its Great Men, their Country’s gratitude.”

Thus, to the French, the Panthéon is a national unifier that represents France’s greatness as a nation.

For many, it was only fitting that Jean Moulin, the great champion of the Résistance, should be entombed with the rest of France’s national heroes. It was first proposed in 1963 that his ashes be moved to the Panthéon. The idea was initiated by the Union des Résistants, Déportés, Internés, et des Familles des Morts (Union of Résistants, Deported, Interned, and Families of the Dead) of the Hérault, a region in France where Moulin was born. Both the Gaullist right and the Communist left, who themselves had
participated most heavily in the Résistance, approved of the idea. By making Moulin a national hero of the Résistance, the role that the Communists and the Gaullists had played in combating the Germans would be remembered.\(^\text{15}\) Furthermore, a national figure had not been buried in the Panthéon since the 1920s, and by reinstating the practice, it was hoped that Moulin's interment would evince feelings of unity and pride among the French. This event was also designed to be a national unifier as France had recently been experiencing some national crises, such as the creation of the Fifth Republic and the end of the Algerian War. De Gaulle recognized that the interment of a dead war hero, in this case, Moulin, provided the perfect confidence booster for France. Therefore, what had started out as a simple idea for a commemoration quickly took on a larger meaning as President de Gaulle became involved in the planning. Although 1963 would have been the twentieth anniversary of Moulin's death, de Gaulle adeptly delayed the ceremony by one year, as 1964 marked the twentieth anniversary of the Liberation of France.\(^\text{16}\)

Beginning with this delay, de Gaulle slowly began transforming the entire event from a commemoration for Moulin into a ceremony that would glorify the actions de Gaulle had taken to defend the notions of liberte, egalite, fraternite for France during World War II. Thus, the commemoration of Moulin was not organized for a nation to remember the dead hero, but rather for de Gaulle to promote a strong national unity for France.

As the leader of the Gaullists and the president of France, de Gaulle turned the interment of the dead Résistance fighter into a Gaullist ceremony. Through Jean Moulin, who represented the entire Résistance, de Gaulle contributed to the Resistancialist myth.

\(^{16}\) Marnham 16.
that he had been slowly developing since the end of the war. In reality, de Gaulle began forming the myth long before the war was over, but it became especially evident after the liberation of France. For example, on August 9, 1944, de Gaulle issued an ordinance stating, “France’s form of government is and remains the Republic. Legally, it has never ceased to exist.”17 This edict declared that any laws made by the Vichy government were to be declared null and void, thereby completely negating the authority of the Vichy government.18 By negating the existence of Vichy, however, de Gaulle made the opposite intended effect, as he only further entrenched the fact that the collaborationist government had been the true governing body of France during World War II.

Furthermore, following the liberation of Paris on August 25, de Gaulle made a famous speech from the Hôtel de Ville, where he implied that the FFL had been responsible for setting France free from the German Occupation. He fumed: “Paris outraged! Paris crushed! Paris martyred! But Paris liberated! Liberated by itself, liberated by its people with the cooperation of the armies of France, with the support and cooperation of all of France, of fighting France, of the only France, of the true France, the eternal France.”19 Through his Resistancialist myth, he downplayed the important role of the Allies in liberating France in 1944 and he further claimed that France had been a nation of resisters during the Occupation, and that the Vichy government had not been the true representative of France.20 As Rousso claims, de Gaulle's association with Moulin allowed him to further establish the legend that “the Résistance equals de Gaulle; de

18 Conan and Rousso 27.
20 Rousso 83.
Gaulle equals France; hence the Résistance equals France. Rousso further states “It was in 1964 that this new version of the Occupation—a version most comforting to French sensibilities—achieved its definitive form: France was now cast as a nation that ‘forever and always resists the invader.’ Thus, one of the first distortions of the French collective memory of Vichy was established as de Gaulle simply tried to marginalize the fact that the Vichy regime had ever existed. Rousse describes this as “comforting” because the majority of the French did not object to this new interpretation of the Dark Years. They simply accepted the idea that France had been a nation of resisters during World War II because it glorified a people who had recently been shattered.

Once the government had approved of the “Panthéonization” of Moulin, a small debate ensued as to whether or not such an honor needed to be conferred by presidential order or by parliamentary decree. Typically, the Parliament approved of acts of this nature, as Moulin would represent the entire nation, and therefore, it would be necessary to receive a majority vote to approve of the decision. Because this was not required by the constitution, however, de Gaulle simply issued an executive order that declared that the ceremony would take place on December 18 and 19, 1964. De Gaulle was unwilling to send this issue to the legislature, as any “vote would not have been unanimous, and thus symbolic unity would have been spoiled by factors of partisan political order.” Fortunately for de Gaulle, after he declared that Moulin would be buried in the Panthéon, there was no parliamentary discussion, and the plans for the ceremony continued unheeded.

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21 Rousso 90.
22 Rousso 82.
The first day of the ceremony, Friday, December 18, involved exhuming Moulin's ashes from the Père-Lachaise cemetery in Paris. The urn was wrapped in a French flag and placed in an unadorned casket simply bearing the name, "Jean Moulin," which was then moved to the Île de la Cité where it was put on display at the monument to the Martyrs of the Deportation from mid-afternoon until evening. This first day of the ceremony was designed for the people of Paris and former Résistance members, Communists and Gaullists alike, to offer their respects to the dead martyr. De Gaulle, however, was the first person to pay homage to Moulin—a small action that did not draw much attention, but further established a closer connection to Moulin that would serve de Gaulle well at the ceremony on the following day. After the Résistance groups had the opportunity to view the casket, a slow-moving parade of people, made up of Résistance members and the Garde Républicaine, a mounted troop of guardsmen who are used only in ceremonial occasions, began following the casket towards the Panthéon at 10:00 p.m. An account in *Time* depicts the ceremony as follows:

All lights on the mile-long route to the Panthéon were extinguished. One café attempted business as usual with gas lamps, but police entered and blew them out. The colonnaded Panthéon was also dark, but brilliant tricolor searchlights cast a V up into the sky. As a military band played Chopin's funeral march, the ashes were placed upon a catafalque to keep company with such other giants of France as Voltaire, Rousseau and Victor Hugo. 

This description clearly shows that de Gaulle was trying to invoke the military grandeur of World War II, and it is indeed reminiscent of his triumphant march down the Champs-

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23 Rousso 83-84.
24 Rousso 85.
Elysées, after the liberation of Paris, in August of 1944. Through subtle means, such as the “V” in the sky, which reminded the French of the FFL’s untruthful, but triumphant victory of liberating Paris, de Gaulle created a strong connection between himself and Moulin on the first day of the commemoration.

The second day of the ceremony, Saturday, December 19, was carried out with much pomp and circumstance, and as opposed to focusing on Jean Moulin and the Résistance, the day centered on de Gaulle. The Minister of Cultural Affairs, André Malraux, gave a short speech honoring Moulin in which he forever linked the Résistance to de Gaulle, which was just the sort of action de Gaulle wanted and what he had been intimating the day before. Through Malraux’s speech, de Gaulle came to represent the entire Résistance, even the communist bands. Although the Résistance was not entirely responsible for the liberation of France, as the United States had a major impact on the fate of France in 1944, Malraux continued to help de Gaulle perpetuate such a myth. In his speech, Malraux claimed that “to recognize the unity of the Résistance movement as the key weapon in our struggle to unite the nation—all this was perhaps to affirm what has since been given the name of Gaullism. It was without a doubt a proclamation of France’s decision to survive.” With this statement Malraux affirmed that the entire Résistance movement was Gaullist, and he subsequently ignored the role that the Communists, or any other group, had played in defending France. As Moulin, who had suddenly become a Gaullist and a representative of all of France, de Gaulle, too, equaled all of France. It was in small ways, such as Malraux’s speech, that de Gaulle continued

26 Rouso 86.
to perpetuate the idea that France had been a nation of resisters and “that the history of France from 1940 to 1944 had been made in London and Algiers” and not actually in Vichy.28

Finally, towards the end of the second day, which was being broadcast on a state-owned, French public television channel, a military parade featuring the Garde Républicaine of Paris, but also the army, navy, and the air force, dramatically marched past the Panthéon, saluting, simultaneously, Moulin’s casket, and the President of the Republic himself. This action further reinforced the idea that the Résistance equaled de Gaulle.29 Rousso eloquently summed up the importance of the ceremony by claiming that Moulin’s identity “was bestowed upon de Gaulle: the remains honored were those of a man described as the General’s spokesman, the leader, to be sure, of the people of the night but a delegated leader. The dead man was honored in such a way as to honor even more the living head of state.”30 By emphasizing through Moulin’s internment that the former leader of the Résistance was dead, de Gaulle became the living figurehead of the Résistance, and subsequently acquired all of the positive traits of such a leadership position, like being accredited with saving France from the Germans or saving France from internal destruction by creating the Fifth Republic, a topic that will be discussed more below.

For de Gaulle, the interment of Moulin’s ashes in the Panthéon was a complete success. As psychologist Nico H. Frijda says, commemorations “firm or enhance solidarity with others for whom the events or persons have similar meaning, and they

28 Rousso 72.
29 Rousso 88-89.
30 Rousso 95.
entrench the individual in the past and the group. Thus, for all of the French who had been alive during the war, de Gaulle, through the commemoration of Moulin, was able to remind them of the courageous actions of the Résistance, while at the same time ignoring the shady parts of the period from 1940 to 1944. British historian Ian Ousby notes, “By depicting resistance as a national activity, in effect retrospectively welcoming the whole nation into resistance, de Gaulle was belittling the real résistants.” This is exactly what happened to the Communist bands of the Résistance, as with Malraux’s speech they were suddenly swallowed under the identity of the Gaullists. Not only did the ceremony further surround de Gaulle with the nostalgia of the Résistance, but it also allowed him to suggest to the people of France that he had been the savior of the nation during the Dark Years. With Moulin’s commemoration, de Gaulle disregarded the collaborationist aspects of the Vichy past and focused on the efforts he and his FFL took to combat the Nazis. Frijda goes on to note further that:

Public commemoration...is a form of social sharing of emotions. It is perhaps its most complete, most explicit form, in that emotions are shared mutually and collectively. That mutuality or collectiveness has itself emotional implications. It creates or strengthens feelings of bondedness or solidarity; it gives, if only for a moment, the feeling or illusion of commonality....

Through the commemoration of Moulin, one of de Gaulle’s goal was to create a sense of unity among the French that allowed them to feel as if none of them had collaborated

33 Frijda 123.
with the Germans, but de Gaulle was also hoping to further unify the French during a turbulent period.

In one sense, the interment of Jean Moulin also allowed de Gaulle to glorify the Fifth Republic, which he had formed in 1958, and to forget the Algerian War, which had begun in 1954 and he had ended in 1962. These were both two events that had a profound impact on the fate of France during the twentieth century. Algeria was originally conquered by the French in 1830, but was officially declared a part of France in 1848. By 1954, there were over one million pieds noirs, the nickname for French settlers living in Algeria, as opposed to nine million Muslims, who primarily spoke Arabic. Conflict between the ruling white settlers, who thought of Algeria as their homeland but were the minority group, and the subjugated Algerians, who wanted to be free of French domination, increasingly grew during the 1950s, and eventually erupted into war in 1954. In 1958, the president of the Fourth Republic, René Coty, called upon de Gaulle to re-establish order in France and Algeria. After the war, the political situation in France was highly unstable due to the large number of political parties that formed coalition governments, and were then unable to agree on laws and policies. The political instability was further heightened because of the increasing tension over whether or not Algeria would remain a part of France. In an effort to save the Republic, de Gaulle was restored to the presidency by the National Assembly on June 1, as it was believed he was the only person who could unite France in the midst of mounting chaos—just as he had supposedly united the French during World War II. De Gaulle was more concerned with creating a new constitution than in solving the Algerian conflict, however, and by September, he proposed a new Constitution for referendum to the French people. While
only sixty-two percent of the electorate voted, an overwhelming eighty percent were in favor of the Constitution, and subsequently, the Fifth Republic was created.

As compared to the Third and Fourth Republics, the new Constitution strengthened the power of the President and limited the powers of Parliament, which was a long-term goal de Gaulle had finally achieved with the formation of the Fifth Republic. After the inauguration of the new government, the pieds noirs believed de Gaulle would turn his attention to preserving a French Algeria, but they were sorely disappointed when de Gaulle revealed he did not support the maintenance of the French département. On July 1, 1962, Algeria officially proclaimed its independence, and France was suddenly flooded with approximately 800,000 pieds noirs who decided to come to France rather than remain in Algeria under majority rule.34 Clearly, the early 1960s in France were marked by inner torment as the French struggled to rebound from such radical changes in their government and in their nation. The commemoration of Moulin provided de Gaulle with the perfect opportunity to reinstate the Resistancialist myth he had established at the end of the war, and to unify a divided country around a revered figure. De Gaulle used the ceremony to concentrate public attention on himself by relying on the resistance figure of Moulin, and through the ceremony the French were able to focus on, what was considered to be, a bright period in their history—the liberation of France. For a time, they were able to forget the instability of their government and the humiliation of losing their crumbling empire, and look to the future, which appeared to be very promising with de Gaulle as the head of the new Fifth Republic. Thus, by relying on the past, de Gaulle was able to unify France in the present.

It should be noted as well that the Resistancialist myth that de Gaulle formed allowed France to be a victor in World War II, as opposed to one of the vanquished, which in turn provided France with several other opportunities. France, like much of the rest of Europe, was a devastated country after World War II and was a country torn by numerous political divisions in the 1950s; because of these unstable conditions, it was imperative that de Gaulle emphasize French exceptionalism through the Resistancialist myth during this time. As A. W. DePorte notes, "France after 1940 was so manifestly not what [de Gaulle] proclaimed it to be. That, of course, was an important reason why he spoke as he did and why his words...addressed to both his countrymen and to foreigners, were such an important part of his effort to change an unacceptable reality by changing what people thought about it." After the liberation, de Gaulle made every effort to ensure that France maintained its status as a predominant global power, next to the United States, Great Britain, Russia, and eventually Germany. France was given a seat on the United Nations Security Council, whereas to this day Germany does not have a permanent seat on the council. In addition, when Berlin was divided into four different areas at the end of the war, France was given control of one sector, along with the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union; France was also given a part of Germany as occupation territory. With the advent of the Fifth Republic, de Gaulle continued to try to place France on equal status with the other three great powers. By inaugurating a tradition of strong leadership in the Fifth Republic, the role France plays today in international politics can be traced back to the way de Gaulle ignored the Vichy.

36 DePorte 254.
period throughout his stints as the leader of France and swiftly took control of the French government. There is no doubt that de Gaulle, both as a General and as a President, achieved a great for France. This makes it easy to see how Gaullism "through the miracle of de Gaulle, insinuated its memory deep into the French consciousness, there eliciting the most profound echoes and so becoming the central reference point of France's present-day collective and national memory, at once an indelible mark and an unavoidable influence." Even after the death of de Gaulle in 1970, the Gaullists were able to continue influencing the French collective memory, as there would be three more Gaullists as presidents who would rule France until 1981, when a Socialist was finally elected president.

It was then through Gaullism that de Gaulle shaped France's collective memory of Vichy; and it was the entombment of Moulin that definitively formed the way the French viewed their Vichy past. As Roy F. Baumeister and Stephen Hastings say, Probably the easiest and most obvious way to distort collective memory involves the selective omission of disagreeable facts. Events that make one's social group look bad can often be ignored or expunged from its memory. To the extent that a group can succeed in deleting the bad side of its past, what remains will be mostly positive, and this will provide a good foundation for a positive collective self-image.

37 DePorte 255-256.
38 Conan and Rousso 10.
39 Nora, "Gaullists and Communists" 207.
De Gaulle started doing exactly that before the war ended. By 1964, he had so perfected the art of exaggerating the French World War II past and emphasizing his own accomplishments, that when Moulin was entombed in the Panthéon, France had almost forgotten that the Vichy government had ever existed.\textsuperscript{41} It was critical that Moulin’s commemoration took place only twenty years after the liberation, and that only recently France had established a new government and disengaged itself from the Algerian War of Independence, which had been a disgrace for France. With the loss of Algeria, France’s empire shrank even more, and so, too, did French morale. During such times of change and transition, it becomes essential for a country’s leaders to be truthful about the past, especially for a country like France, which had been experiencing a series of unstable governments since the beginning of World War II. If the new government does not establish the truth, old wounds inflicted on the nation by the previous regime often arise that later cause conflict among the people. As Ruti G. Teitel quotes in his \textit{Transitional Justice}, “successor government[s] [have] an obligation to investigate and establish the facts so that the truth be known and be made a part of the nation’s history . . . . There must be both knowledge and acknowledgement: the events need to be officially recognized and publicly revealed.”\textsuperscript{42} In the case of France, because the truth of the past regime was repressed, it has subsequently made it more difficult for the French to accept and recognize their Vichy past, which is partly why the French have been consumed by Vichy for so long.

In their article on war memory and commemoration, T.G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson, and Michael Roper cite Benedict’s Anderson well-known \textit{Imagined}

\textsuperscript{41} Baumeister and Hastings 283.
Communities, in which Anderson argues that commemorations play an integral role in allowing people to identify with a country and subsequently be prepared to fight and die for it. Through the commemoration of Moulin, de Gaulle rallied the French around a common figure, respected by almost all of the French, which made it easier for him to unite and to maintain control of a nation that had been through much recent turmoil. Moulin will forever be inextricably linked with President de Gaulle, who changed the way the French viewed their Vichy past through his Resistancialist myth. With the commemoration of Moulin’s death, Moulin became the memorialized figure of the Résistance and of France. The French happily accepted this version of the past, as it was far easier to maintain the belief that only a few Vichy officials had collaborated with the Nazis, than to accept the truth that many French had collaborated and few had resisted. It was ultimately de Gaulle, however, who was responsible for manipulating the collective memory of France, as he has continued to have an enduring impact on the way the French view themselves as a people and as a nation since before the end of World War II.

Chapter Three
Henri Philippe Pétain: Mitterand’s Downfall

Upon the signing of the Armistice with Germany, France was a country of mixed emotions. On the one hand, many French were devastated by the fact that Germany had been able to defeat France in only six short weeks; but on the other hand, there was a general sense of relief that France would not face the devastation of its population and its northern regions as it had in World War I. Out of this mêlée of emotions emerged the triumphant leader, Marshall Henri Philippe Pétain. He was responsible for uniting the French during a troublesome period. Pétain had been a relatively unknown military leader before his actions at Verdun in World War I, but after France escaped defeat in 1918, he had remained in the spotlight. While his military background did not make him the most natural choice to be the political leader of the country in 1940, he was a perfect choice for those who thought it was time for France to break away from the rule of the Communists and the Jews of the Left. After being appointed as the new leader of France, Pétain brought about the National Revolution, with its motto of travail, famille, patrie, in which he wanted to return a sense of morality and conservatism to France. The groundbreaking historian Robert Paxton claimed that, “Pétain saw his mission in 1940 less in terms of finding the right policy than of instilling the right attitudes. He put immense effort and care into his role as moral tutor to the French people.” In order to instigate support for Pétain and his National Revolution, French government buildings were required to display busts of the Marshall; china, bearing Pétain’s visage, also

became widely distributed. Ultimately, France became obsessed with their heroic leader. Historian H.R. Kedward described it as follows:

The cult of the Marshal[1] was the nearest France came to unity in defeat. It cut across political divisions, it linked generations, and it appeared to bring town and country together. His tours round the unoccupied zone brought huge crowds into the city squares and lined the country roads with peasant admirers. He was welcomed in person by hundreds of thousands, and millions more displayed his portrait in their homes. It showed a handsome, kindly, military face with striking blue eyes which belied his eighty-four years, and it became an icon in the family religion of a France which had fallen back on Bonapartist values of the charismatic hero 'l'homme providentiel.'45

As the war reached its conclusion, however, the French had become disillusioned with Pétain. The once beloved busts and portraits that had adorned French homes and buildings quickly came down, and the French began to more strongly resist the implementation of Vichy's law and policies. By the end of the war, the majority of France was ready to follow the command of General de Gaulle instead of that of Marshall Pétain.

Following the liberation of France in 1944, Pétain was put on trial and sentenced to death for collaborating with the Germans. President de Gaulle subsequently commuted the sentence to life imprisonment, and in 1951, Pétain died on the Ile d'Yeu, an island off the coast of southern France to where he had been exiled. For the majority of the French, Pétain was forgotten, or more precisely, his legacy was ignored, as he

stirred up memories of the Dark Years that de Gaulle worked so hard to suppress.

Shortly after his death, however, a group called the Association pour Défendre la Mémoire du Maréchal Pétain (ADMP) was formed by a core group of his supporters. The ADMP had three primary goals: the first was to obtain a judicial review of Pétain’s trial and the second was to reinstate the ideas and values of the National Revolution. The third and most important objective of the ADMP was to relocate Pétain’s grave to Douaumont, a mausoleum for over 300,000 soldiers who had fought at Verdun. They believed the ex-Marshall deserved to be treated like a hero because of his actions during World War I and also because of his attempt to carry out the National Revolution, which would have rid the French government of the influence of the Left and would have given it a greater sense of, they believed, morality and integrity. Nevertheless, this request was never granted because of the collaborationist role Pétain had played during the Vichy years.46

Out of respect for his courage during World War I, however, Presidents de Gaulle, Georges Pompidou, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, and Mitterand each had flowers placed on his grave at certain points during their presidencies.47 De Gaulle placed a wreath of chrysanthemums on Pétain’s grave only once on November 10, 1968, for the fiftieth anniversary of the victory of France and its allies in World War I. He did not single out Pétain, however, as he placed arrangements on the graves of all of the French World War I generals. Some members of Pétain’s loyal faction were so enraged that de Gaulle dared to place flowers on Pétain’s tomb that they ripped off the ribbon bearing de

46 Rousso 43-47.
47 The most thorough and definitive version of the flower incidents can be found in Éric Conan’s and Henry Rousso’s Vichy: An Ever-Present Past, as they give detailed accounts of why each flower arrangement was placed on the Pétain’s grave.
Gaulle’s name. While some might think that a former rival placing flowers on the tomb of an infamous dead man would actually be an honor to Pétain’s followers, in reality they were incensed that de Gaulle, a man who completely opposed everything Pétain stood for, including his National Revolution, dared to desecrate the memory of the ex-Marshall. President Pompidou also only laid flowers on Pétain’s grave once. On February 20, 1973, Pétain’s coffin was stolen from the Ile d’Yeu in an attempt to bury the remains at Douaumont. The right-wing group that had taken the coffin did not succeed in transferring his remains, however, and after the tomb was found in a garage in the suburbs of Paris, it was returned to the Ile d’Yeu. Out of respect for his memory, Pompidou placed a collection of anemones and mimosas on his grave once he had been re-interred on the Ile d’Yeu. 48

While de Gaulle’s and Pompidou’s flower arrangements went largely unnoticed by the press and the public, this was not the case for Giscard d’Estaing and Mitterand. Valéry Giscard d’Estaing placed an arrangement on Pétain’s grave on the sixtieth anniversary of the signing of the armistice to end World War I, on November 11, 1978. Unfortunately for Giscard d’Estaing, Vichy had recently been in the press a great deal, and the media naturally stressed this event as well. The French newspaper L’Express had recently published an interview with Vichy’s former head of the General Commission on Jewish Questions, Louis Darquier de Pellepoix. 49 The headline, “At Auschwitz Only the Lice Were Gassed,” was only one of many sensational statements made by Darquier; he also claimed that the Final Solution was “Pure and simple invention—Jewish invention,

48 Conan and Rousso 21.
49 Conan and Rousso 21-22.
of course.'\textsuperscript{50} Furthermore, the Holocaust negationist, Robert Faurisson, was beginning to express his beliefs that the Holocaust had never occurred.\textsuperscript{51} As a result of these two incidents occurring around the same time, the French were very critical of Giscard d'Estaing placing flowers on Pétain's grave because they did not want to honor the memory of a man who had been responsible for collaborating with the Nazis. While the Obsession phase of the Vichy Syndrome was occurring around this time, it had not quite reached its apex. The affair of the flowers was relatively short lived, and as the outrage soon subsided, the public quickly lost interest in the topic.

Unlike his three predecessors, however, Mitterand had red roses placed on Pétain's grave at the Ile d'Yeu eight times—once on September 22, 1984, the day he and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl shook hands at Verdun, and then again on June 15, 1986, for the seventieth anniversary of the Battle of Verdun. Beginning in 1987 and continuing until 1992, Mitterand annually placed flowers on Pétain's grave on November 11. His reasoning for this remains unknown, but it can be speculated that he felt a great sense of devotion to the former leader, because of his ties to the Vichy government—a topic that will be explored further below. Although this tradition was not unknown, in the year 1992, the press chose to highlight this information, and there was a public uproar as people wondered what had prompted Mitterand to continue honoring the ex-Marshall. This was an especially pertinent issue, as 1992 marked not only the fiftieth anniversary of the Vél d'Hiv' round-up, but also the beginning of the controversy surrounding the Vél d'Hiv' commemoration, which will be discussed more below.\textsuperscript{52} By placing a wreath on Pétain's grave in 1992, Mitterand shocked France. He enraged Jewish and Résistance

\textsuperscript{50} Rousso 139-140.
\textsuperscript{51} Conan and Rousso 21-22.
organizations and embarrassed the Socialist party, as these groups believed that the symbolic nature of the flowers desecrated the memory of those killed, whether directly or indirectly, by the Vichy government. Jacques Chirac, who was then the Mayor of Paris, exclaimed that he thought Mitterand’s actions were wrong, saying, “Anything that seems to minimize the attitude of those who, while forming such a small minority in the beginning, had the honor of France in their hands is utterly repugnant to the values that we represent.” Eventually, Mitterand and his staff conceded that the issue of the flowers needed to be looked at more closely, and 1992 marked the last year that flowers would be placed on Pétain’s grave by Mitterand. Because the affair of the flowers generated such widespread controversy in France, particularly Paris, the French paid even more attention to the debate surrounding the commemoration of the Vél’ d’Hiv’. The disputes over the flowers, which occurred almost fifty years after the conclusion of World War II, also show that the French have been consumed by memories of Vichy and that their collective memory as a nation is inextricably linked to Vichy.

As a result of the affair of the flowers, however, Pétain has also become forever connected to François Mitterand. Indeed, there are many similarities between the two men: both were raised in a Catholic household in the country and each had a strong sense of tradition and a great deal of respect for the land. Thus, both men were often associated with the country and were often thought of as being provincial, a quality that many found endearing. Similar to Pétain’s tarnished past, Mitterand also had a shady past that plagued him particularly in the last few years of his presidency. Although Mitterand’s past had never been a secret, it became a subject of great debate when journalist Pierre

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32 Conan and Rousse 21-22.
33 Quoted in Conan and Rousse 32.
Péan published *Une Jeunesse française: François Mitterand 1934-1949* in 1994 that revealed that Mitterand had been involved in or closely related to several right-wing political parties during the interwar years and that he had also been a member of the Vichy government. Because of his political career and his frequent campaigns, Mitterand had worked hard at diminishing his brief stint of employment at Vichy. Péan’s book triggered a great deal of uproar, however, in part because Mitterand had granted Péan several interviews during the writing of the book to ensure that his past was conveyed correctly. In hindsight, Mitterand, who was dying of cancer in the last year of his presidency, realized that by participating in setting his past straight, he was damaging his reputation; but at the time, he believed it prudent to reveal the truth according to his terms, rather than die leaving unanswered questions about his past for historians to sift through and to decipher the truth. The public reacted violently to the interview excerpts in the book because it was the President of the Republic himself telling the French people that he had not always been the upstanding Socialist that people always saw in him; that he did not have a clean past. If Péan had simply published a thorough biography of Mitterand, perhaps the French would not have been so concerned with the more sordid aspects of Mitterand’s past. But because Péan did speak personally with Mitterand on several occasions while writing the biography, the press continued to talk about Mitterand’s controversial past for several weeks after the release of the book and thereby kept the scandal on the public’s mind.

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57 Golsan 110.
In contrast to his later political beliefs, as a youth Mitterand was a staunch Catholic with surprisingly radical political sentiments. He had been a member of the National Volunteers, the youth wing of the Croix de Feu, a nationalist, xenophobic political group, but only for a short time. After graduating from law school, he soon began fighting for France in World War II. He was taken to a prison camp in Germany on June 14, 1940, but after two futile escape attempts, he finally broke free on December 10, 1941. Like many French at the time, Mitterand was a Pétainiste, who staunchly supported the Marshall, and believed in the National Revolution that Pétain was trying to achieve. Therefore, after his escape Mitterand almost immediately went to Vichy. He quickly found a job working for the Vichy government, and from January to April he worked for a Vichy organization called La Légion des combattants whose maxim was “Contre la lèpre juive, la pureté française,” or Against Jewish leprosy, French purity. Ironically, in April, Mitterand began working for the Commissariat general des prisonniers de guerre, where he worked to free French prisoners from German camps, just like the one from which he had escaped. It was while he was working at the Commissariat that Mitterand was rewarded for his loyalty to Vichy. In the early months of 1943, the exact date remains unclear, he was decorated with the Francisque, the highest order one could receive in the Vichy government. Mitterand later justified his acceptance of the Francisque by claiming that it allowed him to work for the Résistance without the Vichy government or the Nazis being aware of his illegal activities. While it was relatively common for members of the Vichy government to become involved in Résistance activities, it is difficult to determine how heavily involved Mitterand was at the time he received the Francisque. By the end of 1943, however, it was clear that he

58 Tiersky 44.
was deeply committed to the Résistance, as de Gaulle requested that he be present at a meeting in Algiers, Algeria, on December 2.\(^59\)

It should be noted that Mitterand’s time at Vichy was relatively brief, and it was due to his work with French prisoners of war that he became involved in Résistance activities. Through the Commissariat, Mitterand sent packages to the prisoners, which was not an illegal activity according to the armistice; enclosed in the packages, however, were forged identity documents that enabled many French prisoners to escape from the German camps. Mitterand then gradually became involved in secret meetings with various Résistance groups. This slow transition eventually resulted in him resigning his post at Vichy and committing fully to the Résistance. He became a member of a group of former prisoners of war resisters, and subsequently began to lead a double life, acquiring a number of aliases, and making contacts with important members of de Gaulle’s FFL. According to Mitterand biographer Ronald Tiersky, Mitterand’s Résistance activities clearly shows that he was anti-German, both during and after his time at Vichy, but that his loyalty to the idea of Pétain as a great leader of France remained stalwart, as Mitterand was simply an ardent admirer of the Marshall. Mitterand was not alone in these sentiments, as during the Vichy years, or even after Pétain’s death, it was not uncommon for many French to look at the leader with feelings of esteem and respect.\(^60\)

After the war, Mitterand was reluctant to speak about his Vichy past. Similar to the way de Gaulle tried to ignore the Vichy interlude for France, Mitterand tended to gloss over his role in the Vichy government. In a short biography published in 1969 called *Ma part de vérité*, he even skipped over the time he spent at Vichy declaring,

\(^59\) Thody 93.
\(^60\) Tiersky 60-62.
“Once back in France, I became a resister, without going through any inner torment,” and he then goes on to describe meeting with de Gaulle in Algeria in December.61 This intentional forgetting even continued after his presidency was over, when in 1995, he published Mémoire à deux voix, which was a dialogue between Mitterand and the world-renowned philosopher and Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel. In their conversation on war, Wiesel states, “You returned to France [after escaping from the German prison camp] and France was occupied—but resisting.” Mitterand replied, “I went straight down to the so-called Free Zone, where the Vichy government was located.” He then proceeds to say that he “lived like an outlaw—false papers, false everything.”62 Through this exchange, Mitterand implies that he immediately became involved in Résistance activities. He again neglects to mention the role that he played at Vichy, as if it were a minor episode in his life. While to Mitterand, it certainly could have been a minor period in his life, the fact that he had recently been chastised by the media and the French public for failing to mention the time he spent at Vichy indicates that he should have spoken about his involvement with Vichy more openly with Wiesel.

Mitterand also remained consistently vague about receiving the Francisque. During an interview on French national television in January of 1987, he downplayed the event saying, “I wound up being a recipient of the Francisque as were many other important members of the R[é]sistance... It was very useful... as a good alibi.”63 While this is a plausible reason for accepting the honor, his claim that he was loyal to the Résistance is ideologically in conflict with the oath that the receivers of the Francisque

61 Quoted in Conan and Rousso 136.
63 Quoted in Conan and Rousso 141.
were required to take which asserted their loyalty to Vichy: “I offer myself up to
Marshall Pétain just as he offered himself up for France. I pledge to serve his teachings
and to remain faithful to him and to his work.”64 By declaring his allegiance to Pétain,
but at the same time to de Gaulle, and by also being unequivocally vague about his
actions during the war, Mitterand’s relationship with the past, specifically with Pétain,
can be seen in a different light.

Péan’s book further revealed some of Mitterand’s views on anti-Semitism and his
long-time friendship with René Bousquet, who was the former head of the Vichy police.
Because of the great controversy that Péan’s book developed, Mitterand decided to go on
television on September 12, 1994, to talk about his past, and specifically his Vichy past.65
Similar to the situation with the Francisque, Mitterand attempted to claim that he had not
paid attention to Vichy’s anti-Semitic edicts that were issued between 1940 and 1941 and
that he had been largely unaware of the round-ups of Jews that occurred in 1942. He
further made the distinction that Vichy’s anti-Semitic laws were directed only toward
“foreign Jews” and not native French Jews. Mitterand then proceeded to describe his
friend Bousquet, who had been in charge of executing the Final Solution in France, as a
person of “exceptional stature.” According to historian Richard J. Golsan, when looking
at these two statements “they falsely limit Vichy’s crimes by arguing that only foreign
Jews were discriminated against” and furthermore “they reverse moral notions of right
and wrong learned so painfully from the Vichy experience and the Holocaust.”66 As a
former member of the Vichy regime, Mitterand should have been aware of the French
policies towards the Jews. Furthermore, it was reprehensible of Mitterand to continue

64 Quoted in Conan and Rousso 140.
65 Golsan 103.
being friends with Bousquet, a man who was responsible for the death of thousands of Jews residing in France. In his *Vichy’s Afterlife*, Golsan cites Tony Judt who notes that:

Mitterand instinctively and unthinkingly distinguishes foreign Jews from French ones and finds it somehow comforting to believe that Vichy only persecuted the former. . . . His statement simply and tellingly confirms that François Mitterand was no different from the men of Vichy and that in fundamental respects he has not changed. That is why he cannot condemn the regime root and branch, because he would be condemning himself.\(^{67}\)

At the end of his statement Judt is referring to Mitterand’s inability to declare that the Vichy government of the time was ultimately responsible for amassing Jews who were first taken to French internment camps and later transported to concentration camps in Eastern Europe, where most met with certain death. This subject will be explored further in the next section on the Vél’ d’Hiv’.

In sum, the revelations about Mitterand’s past greatly influenced the French collective memory of Vichy. As President of France, Mitterand was respected and revered by the people. Because Mitterand held Pétain in such high regard, which he demonstrated on many occasions—the numerous wreathes of flowers and the inability to speak poorly of Pétain being two examples—many French continued to view Pétain as a man who had done something wrong during World War II, but only for the sake of France. With the flowers laid at Pétain’s grave and the publication of Péan’s book only highlighting Mitterand’s connections to Vichy and Pétain, Vichy became a topic of obsession in France during the early 1990s. As the public experienced disillusionment

\(^{66}\) Golsan 106.

\(^{67}\) Quoted in Golsan 106.
over Mitterand’s wrongdoings during the Occupation and during the late 1980s and early 1990s, the obsession with Vichy also provoked serious questions about French identity.

Perhaps this fixation can be explained because many French who lived through the Occupation, who were of Mitterand’s generation, could identify with the President. The French view him as a man who worked for the collaborationist Vichy regime for a short period, but then slowly realized that it was wrong to support a government committed to Nazi policies. Many French see themselves in Mitterand—the half-collaborator, half-resister figure, who is unlike the complete resister figure of de Gaulle or the complete collaborator figure of Pétain. Mitterand was more like the general French populace. At the same time, however, the French cannot help but be critical of Mitterand. They speculate that maybe he never was fully committed to the Résistance; that conceivably he remained a loyal supporter of the Marshall and through this bias continued to be sympathetic to Vichy. These are the questions that many French ask themselves, “Why did I not resist from the beginning?” or, “After I committed to the Résistance, did I continue to have sentiments of loyalty to Vichy?” It is easier for the French to be critical of a prominent figure, such as Mitterand, who has committed transgressions, like establishing a tradition of laying flower wreaths at the disgraced ex-Marshall’s tomb, than to be critical of themselves.

It is during this period of obsession, that not only did the Vél’ d’Hiv’ commemorations occur, but this was also when former high-ranking Vichy officials, such as Paul Touvier, were put on trial in an attempt to carry out some form of transitional justice. President Mitterand did not fare much better than de Gaulle, however, as Mitterand made only minor efforts to help the French deal with their past. It was largely
thanks to the efforts of historians, such as Henry Rousso, who drew awareness to the Vichy years, and the famous Nazi hunters Serge and Beate Klarsfeld, who brought Barbie and Touvier to trial, that France began to embark upon more visible forms of transitional justice. As more transitional justice has occurred regarding the Vichy years in France, it has brought dealing with the past to a new level; and finally, the French national psyche has begun to heal from the damage caused by only four years in their long history.
Chapter Four

Vél' d'Hiv': Chirac's Triumph

As stated earlier, it was largely because of President Mitterand that the Vél' d'Hiv' commemoration also became such a highly publicized event. With the advent of de Gaulle's Resistancialist myth, the role that the French had played in any wrongdoing towards the Jews had been forgotten, or rather, grossly ignored. In order to understand the controversy more fully, the facts surrounding the Vél' d'Hiv' round-up must be discussed further.

In 1791, France became the first country in Europe where Jews were granted full citizenship rights, coming only shortly after the French Constitution containing the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen had been created in 1789. Before the turn of the nineteenth century, however, France was arguably the most anti-Semitic country in Europe. One hundred years after emancipation, when many Jews had been fully acculturated and integrated into French society, France witnessed a period of strong anti-Semitism. The most notable case of anti-Semitism was the Dreyfus Affair, where Alfred Dreyfus, a French Jewish army officer, was arrested for treason in 1894. He later received a court martial, but was found innocent and cleared of all charges in 1906. Thereafter, anti-Semitism in France waned slightly, but France remained a country that was hostile to Jews.

With the Vichy regime, anti-Semitism in France would reach a fervor it had never before witnessed. Only a few months after Pétain came to power, Vichy began to enact several anti-Semitic laws. One in particular, promulgated on October 4, 1940, stated that
foreign Jews could be taken into “arbitrary custody” of the French police, who could in
turn place the Jews into internment camps. With this law it became easy for Vichy to
participate in deporting Jews to the East, where most of them died in concentration
camps. The Germans focused on deporting thousands of “stateless” Jews from France in
the early months of 1942, but they were not able, without the help of the French, to amass
the larger numbers that they wanted. Thus, the Germans began to speak with the Vichy
leaders about engaging the French police to help organize a large round-up of non-French
Jews living in Paris. On July 4, 1942, Pierre Laval, who was then the head of the Vichy
government, with the help of Bousquet, leader of the Vichy police, agreed to the German
conditions for bringing together the Jews. It is interesting to note, however, that Laval made a special request to the
Germans that enlarged the number of the Jews who would be arrested. The Gestapo had
originally proposed that Jewish women between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five and
Jewish men between the ages of fifteen and sixty be deported, but Laval asked that
children between the ages of two and fifteen also be taken with the rest of their families.
His primary reason for this was statistical in that he wanted to increase the number of
Jews gathered in order to prevent another round-up. Secondly, he did not want to have to
deal with the problem of housing and feeding all of the children that would be left behind
because their parents had been taken away. Therefore, the Gestapo sent out Laval’s
urgent request to Germany where Adolf Eichmann, the man responsible for carrying out
the Final Solution for the Third Reich, approved the demand. After being transported to

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69 Wiedmer 40-41.
70 Wiedmer 41.
Auschwitz, none of the children of the Vél' d'Hiv' round-up survived. Laval's request, which dramatically increased the number of Jews who were deported, shows the extent of French complicity with the Nazis. It demonstrates that the French were taking the initiative in gathering Jews and that the German Occupiers were not merely forcing the French to carry out the round-ups.

After the round-ups had been completed on July 16 and 17, 1942, an officer of the SS, which was an elite corps of Hitler's party, sent a message to Germany listing the number of Jews arrested: "—men: 3,031; —women: 5,802; —children: 4,051; —total: 12,884." The number of Jews arrested was actually far fewer than the Germans had hoped to deport, as several members of the French police took it upon themselves, perhaps out of a moral sense of obligation, to inform the more prominent members of the non-French Jewish community of the round-up; many Jews also went into hiding as news of the arrests spread by word of mouth. For the most part, however, the French police carried out the arrests that the Vichy government ordered them to perform without any qualms. As Caroline Wiedmer notes, "most of the 4,500 police involved in rounding up the Jews were quite diligent, and often the victims were removed from their apartments with considerable force." Their enthusiasm to participate in gathering these foreign Jews, many of whom had been living in France for several years, again demonstrates French willingness to help the Germans rid Europe and the world of the so-called Jewish menace.

During the round-up, the Jews were transported by buses to the Vélodrome d'Hiver, an indoor bicycle stadium, which at full capacity could only hold 2,000

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71 Quoted in Wiedmer 39.
72 Wiedmer 41.
spectators. According to Wiedmer, “The conditions at the Vélodrome were inhuman: no food or water was available, the toilets broke down on the first day, and the more than 8,000 prisoners were squeezed together in a space designed for less than a quarter of that number.” The majority of the adult Jews waited at the Vélodrome for six days before being transported to the internment camps of Drancy, Pithiviers, and Beaune-la-Rolande, but Laval’s request that the Jewish children accompany their parents had not yet been approved. The Germans wanted the trains transporting Jews to Auschwitz to be filled, and as a result of Laval’s request not being sanctioned, children were separated from their parents. After hearing about the separation of families, many French became concerned with the treatment of the Jews. A Parisian police station sent a message to police headquarters on July 17 saying, “the measures taken against the Israelites have troubled the public gravely. Despite the fact that on the whole the French public is reasonably anti-Semitic, it judges severely these measures, which it feels are inhuman.”

Fortunately, this demonstrated concern prevented the Gestapo from requesting more round-ups of foreign or French Jews, as even the Occupation leaders realized that they could not carry out further arrests “without the gravest consequences,” such as the French revolting against their Occupiers.

To honor the memory of the Jewish victims who were gathered at the Vélodrome and then deported to Auschwitz, a plaque has been on the former site of the stadium, which was destroyed shortly after the war, since 1946. The first plaque was erected by an

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73 Wiedmer 42.
74 Quoted in Wiedmer 42.
75 Wiedmer 43.
anti-racist association and was used only in private commemorations. While the date is unclear, an official plaque was installed on the site in the late 1940s, with the following statement:

On July 16, 1942
thirty thousand
Jewish men, women and children
victims of racial persecution
were confined in this place by order of the Nazi occupier,
al separated from each other,
they were deported to Germany and the concentration camps.
Free men, remember.

There are clearly several problems with this inscription, as both the dates and the number of Jews deported are false. The round-ups occurred over two days—July 16 and 17, 1942—and approximately 13,000 Jews were taken. Most importantly, however, the role that the French police played in organizing and carrying out the arrests and the deportations of the Jews is not mentioned. After remaining there for forty years, this plaque was removed in 1986, when Jacques Chirac, as Prime Minister of France, erected a new plate that named the square that the memorial rests on the 'Place des Martyrs Juifs.' Although there had been a memorial to the Jews of the Vél' d'Hiv' for almost fifty years, it was not until 1992, six years after the installation of Chirac's plaque, that the Vél' d'Hiv' began to generate widespread controversy in France. This newfound interest in setting the past straight was part of the fourth stage of the Vichy Syndrome—the Obsession phase—where France was consumed by Vichy. During this period, a number of French realized it was necessary to disavow the lies established by de Gaulle's Resistancialist myth. By doing so, a more accurate collective memory of the war years

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77 Wiedmer 44.
would be created, and there was no better way to do this than by speaking about some of
the most egregious crimes committed by Vichy.

The year 1992 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the round-up of Jews at the Vél’
d’Hiv’. As Conan and Rousso note, “This event has become a symbol of Vichy’s
complicity in the Genocide. Its fiftieth anniversary was expected to be a very special
occasion for the memory of the nation, and not just for the memory of the victims.”79 A
number of French, eager to proceed with the transitional justice that had started to be
carried out more vehemently in the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as the trials against
former Vichy officials, were eager for President Mitterand to make a “gesture” that
would recognize French complicity in carrying out the Final Solution. This desire for a
gesture of responsibility became so profound that on June 17, 1992, a group of concerned
intellectuals, calling themselves the Vél’ d’Hiv’ 42 Committee, published a petition in the
French newspaper Le Monde, demanding that Mitterand acknowledge the actions taken
against the Jews by the Vichy government. The petition requested that:

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Vél’ d’Hiv’ roundup next July
16 and 17, we ask that the head of state, the President of the French Republic,
officially declare and acknowledge that the Vichy French State is responsible for
persecutions and crimes against the Jews of France.

This symbolic act is demanded by the memory of the victims and by their
descendants. It is also a demand of France’s collective memory which suffers
from this silence.

78 Carrier 130.
79 Conan and Rousso 16.
Ultimately, it is the very idea of the French Republic, faithful to its founding principles, which is at stake.\textsuperscript{80}

It was the belief of the petitioners that Mitterand, as a representative of the French government, needed to set the past straight in order to help heal the collective memory of France and to reaffirm the fundamental human rights upon which the French Constitution is founded. The group surely realized that not all of the French would suddenly become aware of the realities of the Vichy years if Mitterand had made the gesture they so desired; but, by establishing the truth of the round-up, it would be understood that the French government found not only the Vél’ d’Hiv’ round-up, but all acts of anti-Semitism, morally reprehensible. Through the acknowledgment of French participation in the round-up, the government would be preserving the honor of the French Republic for the people of France.

Mitterand, however, refused to make any gesture. It was announced that he would attend the ceremony on July 16, but his presence was necessitated largely because of the controversy that had recently been in the press about his annual tradition of placing a wreath of flowers at Pétain’s grave. In a speech on July 14, 1992, two days before the commemoration, Mitterand declared “the French state was the Vichy regime, it was not the Republic,” an important differentiation that he claimed absolved the current French government of any responsibility for the Vichy regime’s actions.\textsuperscript{81} His speech further enraged the Vél’ d’Hiv’ ’42 Committee, and in a response to Mitterand, they again demanded that he acknowledge the role that the French had played in the Final Solution. To the surprise of the crowd, on July 16, Mitterand did make an appearance at the Vél’

\textsuperscript{80} Quoted in Conan and Rousso 18.  
\textsuperscript{81} Quoted in Wiedmer 47.
d'Hiv' commemoration, but it was nothing more than an appearance, and he was subsequently harassed by the crowd. According to Peter Carrier, "A verbal acknowledgement of 'debt' by the president, pronounced in the name of the Fifth Republic for acts occurring under the Vichy regime, would have evoked symbolically a moral, historical and political continuity between the Vichy government and the Republic of 1992, that is between the France of 1942 and the France of 1992." By creating this continuity, Mitterand would have disavowed de Gaulle's Resistancialist myth and he would have also stirred up his controversial past that he tried so hard to keep quiet. In a similar manner, if Mitterand had admitted Vichy's involvement in the Final Solution, he would have been declaring that he, too, as a former Vichy official, had participated in helping Vichy carry out Hitler's Genocide, which was a step Mitterand was not prepared to take for himself nor for the nation. Eventually, Mitterand would proceed to make a "gesture," although it would not be one that the Vél d'Hiv' 42 Committee desired.

To the surprise of everyone, on November 11, 1992, Mitterand once again made the grievous error of placing flowers on Pétain's grave. This was the same year that the controversy over the Vél d'Hiv exploded, and his advisors decided that he needed to assuage the public outcry over his decisions. After delaying any action for several months, it was finally revealed on February 3, 1993, that July 16 would become a "National Day for commemorating racist and anti-Semitic persecutions committed under the de facto authority of the so-called 'government of the French State.'" At the same time, a committee was also formed to create a new memorial to the Jews of the Vél d'Hiv', which would include a more accurate inscription than the previous memorial.

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52 Carrier 134.
53 Conan and Rousso 34.
This committee eventually decided on a phrase that was inaugurated on the monument on July 17, 1994: “The French Republic pays tribute to the victims of racist and anti-Semitic persecutions and of crimes against humanity committed under the de facto authority of the so-called ‘Government of the French State’ (1940-1944). Let us never forget.”

There had been much debate among Mitterand’s advisors about what kind of statement should be made, but the issue was finally resolved by settling on the commemorative day and the new monument. It did not openly acknowledge the actions the French police had taken in rounding up the Jews, but implied that the French State, not to be confused with the French Republic, had participated in some way in the Final Solution. However, as Conrad and Rousso point out, Mitterand’s gestures did not resolve the Resistancial myth that had come to haunt his Presidency: “[In 1992,] it was more the Vichy of the Collaboration than the anti-Semitic Vichy, more the accomplice of the Third Reich than the French tradition of authoritarian nationalism and xenophobia that were symbolically condemned.” But as much as the French still desired that the lies of the past be cleared and that the truth be told, Mitterand would not be the president to set the past straight.

In fact, it was not until July 16, 1995, the year President Jacques Chirac was elected, that the French saw any sort of acknowledgment for the complicity of Vichy in the Final Solution. Finally, after waiting for over fifty years, the French government took responsibility for its actions, and thus shattered the Resistancial myth that Charles de Gaulle had created. In a short, but moving speech, Chirac claimed that “France, land of the Enlightenment and of Human Rights, land of hospitality and asylum, France, on that

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84 Conan and Rousso 36-37.
85 Conan and Rousso 39.
day [July 16 and 17, 1942], committed an irreparable act."

He proceeded to affirm that the French should remember the Jews who were taken from their homes by the French police, and that "in acknowledging the sins of the past, and the sins committed by the State; in covering up nothing about the dark hours of our History, we are simply defending an idea of humanity, of human liberty and dignity. We are fighting against the forces of darkness which are constantly at work." Chirac also made sure to mention the role that the Résistance had played in fighting to preserve a French state free of German influence and control. By acknowledging the negative as well as the positive aspects of the period from 1940 to 1944, Chirac helped shape a more truthful collective memory for the French. He established the fact that Vichy had indeed existed and had represented the French during the Dark Years, but that at the same time, the Free French were also fighting to restore the honor of France.

As a Gaullist, it is ironic that Chirac was able to take such a step forward for France. He was an adamant follower of de Gaulle, and since his early beginnings as a politician he tried to mimic the greatness of de Gaulle. In 1976, he created the Gaullist political party Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) to remind people of the party de Gaulle had formed in 1947, the Rassemblement du Peuple Français (RPF), which was disbanded by de Gaulle in 1953. Historian Philip Thody notes, "[Chirac’s] intention throughout the presidential election campaign of 1995 had been to represent himself as the true heir of the Gaullist tradition." Thus, for Chirac to break so completely from the Resistancialist myth, only months after he had been elected president based on a Gaullist

86 Quoted in Conan and Rousso 40.
87 Quoted in Conan and Rousso 41.
88 De Gaulle decided to disband the RPF in 1953 as his popularity was waning and the RPF received a small number of seats in Parliament that year.
campaign, shows that he realized that the only way for France to contend with their Vichy years was to confront the truth of such a dark period in French history.

Chirac had clearly paid attention to public sentiment in the early 1990s, but his speech of July 1995 was also motivated by a recent increased interest in war commemoration. According to Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, several factors contributed to this new interest in commemorations. Firstly, with the emergence of the Shoah, which is the Hebrew word for holocaust and is a movement to remember the Holocaust of World War II, people, not only in France, began to feel the need to remember the Holocaust. New museums depicting the Holocaust have recently been created in countries such as Germany, France, and the United States; a number of films have been produced that deal with the history of the Holocaust; and the discussion of Nazi gold or other stolen property was one of many hot topics of debate in Europe and the United States. Secondly, groups, such as the Jews, have taken a new interest in wanting to be recognized as victims or survivors. This demand is not only coming from survivors of the Holocaust, but also from the grandchildren of the victims who are interested in World War II. Thirdly, there has been an increase in the media coverage of war anniversaries and commemorations that have made the public more aware of these events. This was especially true in 1995, as it marked the fiftieth anniversary of the conclusion of World War II. Finally, with the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, ethnic rivalries have become more pronounced, which in turn has contributed to an increase in the public concern with memory about the persecution of ethnic groups.  

89 Thody 124.
90 Ashplant, Dawson and Roper 3-5.
Another factor that made it easier for Chirac to admit the role the French played in the Vél’ d’Hiv’ round-up is his age. He was born in 1932 and is consequently part of a different generation than either de Gaulle or Mitterand, who both played active roles in World War II. At the time the war began Chirac would have only been seven, and by its conclusion he was only thirteen, making him too young to participate in either collaborationist or resistance activities. As a result he is more removed from the Vichy period than people who lived through the Occupation. Former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl refers to this younger generation of people as those who had the good fortune to be born too late to actively participate in World War II. Thus, it is because of his age that Chirac is able to detach himself from the inner guilt that people, such as Mitterand, may have felt over their actions or non-actions during the war. Because he did not experience the inner struggle that many did over whether or not to collaborate or whether or not to resist, it is easier for Chirac to admit that some French did indeed participate in rounding up and deporting Jews and that others helped save Jews. Consequently, Chirac is able to look to the future of France rather than to dwell on the past. By acknowledging French participation in the Vél’ d’Hiv’ round-up, Chirac decided to officially resolve the debates of the past, by publicly acknowledging the French complicity in the Final Solution, in order to look to the future.

The rise of France’s right wing made Chirac’s declaration an especially pertinent issue in the 1990s. Since the mid-1980s, the xenophobic Front National (FN) has seen a dramatic increase of support, as more and more French become concerned with issues relating to immigration, such as an escalation in crime. The leader of the FN, Jean-Marie Le Pen, has even made statements claiming that the Holocaust was only a minor detail of
World War II history. Moreover, Le Pen has also claimed "There has never been anti-Semitism in France," and, when asked about Vichy, he responded, "A particular case. The Vichy government was applying the orders of the German Occupiers." With more and more French supporting such a party and such a leader, it was important for Chirac to establish the truth about the Vel' d'Hiv' so that the French can remain true to their Constitution that claims France is a haven of asylum for all persecuted people.

While Chirac surely felt implicit pressure to participate in the Vel' d'Hiv' ceremony, he did not have to acknowledge officially the role that the French had played in the round-up. If he had continued to table the issue, however, he would have linked himself to the mistakes made by de Gaulle and Mitterand. By ignoring the commemoration of the Vel' d'Hiv', Chirac would have been implying, as Mitterand had done, that the Jews who died at the hands of the French police and the Vichy officials were not worth remembering. As Frijda comments, "the laying of wreaths, the newspaper articles and TV shows, the speeches and ceremonies [show that] the event was a true event, with a true emotional impact and true importance." By acknowledging French complicity in the Vel' d'Hiv' round up, Chirac made it explicit that the French should remember the Jews who died. Frijda proceeds to note, "Commemoration rituals, for a brief moment, dissolve the discontinuity between now and the past, between one individual and others, between those who are there and who are not there any more." Chirac created just such a connection to the past in 1995, and by bridging the gap of fifty years, he was able to help efface the wrongdoing of Vichy, de Gaulle, and Mitterand and to establish a new precedent for telling the truth about the Vichy regime.

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92 Frijda 111.
As a result, this acknowledgement has allowed the French to form a more truthful collective memory with regard to Vichy, which has in turn given the French a more positive national identity.
Chapter Five

Conclusion

De Gaulle, Mitterand, and Chirac have each created or recreated a certain version of the events of the past. Their positions of power, as Presidents of France, made it possible for them to determine how the French remembered, and for Chirac, as the current President, continue to remember, the Vichy years. According to Schnapper, "Powerful political figures, even when not deliberately manipulating collective memory, not destroying archives, or willfully making truth into travesty, nonetheless perpetuate and always use collective memory to construct the future; this may not be deplorable but it is no cause for outrage. Memory in political life obviously has a political function."\(^9^4\)

Furthermore, Adam Heribert believes that

Collective memory constitutes the accepted perceptions of past events in which the collective identity of a people is mirrored. This identity is influenced by the state’s official definitions, rituals, and laws. The memorials a state erects, the national holidays selected, the museums subsidized, the politicians’ speeches celebrating or mourning the past and defining a state’s self-perception, all contribute to a collective memory that changes over time.\(^9^5\)

De Gaulle, Mitterand, and Chirac have each used the commemorations of Moulin, Pétain, and the Vél’ d’Hiv’, respectively, to mould the French collective memory of Vichy.

While de Gaulle and Mitterand were both unwilling to confront the truth about the past, Chirac, a man from a younger generation, was able to help create a more balanced French

\(^9^4\) Schnapper 427.
\(^9^5\) Heribert.
collective memory of Vichy. While each commemoration and each President had a common goal—to establish a memory of the Vichy years—what was actually produced from the events were different versions of the past. It is through these commemorations, carried out by de Gaulle, Mitterand, and Chirac, that, just as Heribert states, the collective memory of Vichy has gradually evolved over the past fifty years.

De Gaulle, more than either Mitterand or Chirac, manipulated the past in order to further his Resistancialist myth. This allowed him to foster the idea that France had been a nation of resisters during World War II, and the interment of Jean Moulin in 1964 enabled him to perpetuate this scheme even more. It is in part due to his Resistancialism that France has had so many problems in coming to terms with their past. At the conclusion of the war, it would have been most beneficial for the French to embark on a period of national healing, whereby the interim government and the Fourth Republic would have acknowledged the sins of the Dark Years and created a public dialogue that would have allowed the French to discuss their feelings about Vichy in an open forum. While this public healing would have been an uncomfortable task, at the same time, it would have facilitated the French desire to move on from such a difficult episode in their history. Instead, however, de Gaulle provided the French with another option—that of selectively forgetting the past in order to create a strong, new government. As a result of his efforts, the French have only recently begun to learn how to face their history. Rousso comments, "the real issue is not so much 'confronting' the past as coming to terms with and accepting it. That is, we need to live with the loss of de Gaulle's 'certain idea of France' and instead live with the knowledge of the irreparable harm done by
crimes the nation of the ‘Rights of man’ committed.” Although de Gaulle certainly believed he was doing a service to France by allowing the nation to ignore the fact that many of them had collaborated with the Nazis, in the long run, he did the nation a great disservice, as it has made it much more difficult for them to accept the truths of their past.

Although Mitterand did not go as far as de Gaulle by manipulating the past to create a new history, he was reluctant to speak about his own past, and thus the Vichy years. By being vague about his past, Mitterand allowed the public to remain muddled about the truths of the Vichy years. By rejecting Mitterand’s continued efforts to honor ex-Marshall Pétain, the French began to demand that the truth about Vichy be known. In large part, however, the French were outraged at Mitterand not because of the flowers at Pétain’s grave, although this action displayed a great deal of disrespect towards the victims of Vichy, but because Mitterand was representative of so many French people. He was both a member of Vichy and a resister, and the French were still somewhat unwilling to identify with this type of figure. Previously, only two types of people had existed during the Vichy years—the resister and the collaborator. By completely exposing Mitterand’s past, however, the French slowly came to the realization that most people were not strictly divided into two groups. With this realization, came the gradual willingness to accept the truth about France’s role in World War II—the importance of acknowledging both Vichy and the Résistance.

In 1995, President Chirac took a profound step for French collective memory and identity by conceding France’s role in the Final Solution. Although this small measure did not cure the French of the Vichy Syndrome, Carrier argues that it definitively showed

that France was moving beyond the Obsession phase of the Vichy Syndrome and into a new phase that he refers to as "Reconciliation." He claims that, along with the trials of former Vichy officials, that "the Vél’ d’Hiv’ marks symbolically the historicisation of Vichy: the end of a pathological ‘obsession’ with this period and the beginning of its integration into a complex national legacy of both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ sites of memory." Carrier makes a good point, as since 1995, the French now appear to be confronting and learning to accept their past better than they were before. Most of the French are now more able to talk about the Vichy past, and they are demanding that the government and the media play a role in educating and helping the French deal with their traumatic past.

Because of this increased demand and because of the fact that de Gaulle and Mitterand, as well as Presidents Pompidou and Giscard d'Estaing, continued to ignore the actions of the French government of World War II, this makes Chirac’s apology all the more important. According to Teitel,

The profound implication of the revelation of knowledge is that it introduces the possibility of future change, through the potential of human action. Knowledge revealed somehow suggests that there is a logic to the madness, to the evil, and even intimates that there is something to be done. The notion is that had this knowledge been known, then matters would have been different and, conversely, that now that the ‘truth’ is publicly known, the course of events will be different.98

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97 Carrier 129.
98 Teitel 111.
With Chirac’s acknowledgement, he drew a line differentiating the past from the present and he implicitly stated that France is now aware of the knowledge of the past, which will help combat problems such as anti-Semitism in the future.

Since 1995, the French government has also taken more steps to help integrate the Vichy past into the present. In response to a growing number of lawsuits against French companies who were accused of aiding Vichy or the Nazis in carrying out the Final Solution, Prime Minister Alain Juppé created the Matteoli Commission in March of 1997. The Commission is responsible for looking into the lawsuits against French companies and “embodies France’s new political and public openness to facing the legacy of Vichy.” Made up of historians, Jewish community leaders, and government representatives, the Commission published twelve reports on what it was like to be Jewish during the Vichy years and they also created the Fondation de la Mémoire de la Shoah in April of 2000. The goal of the Foundation, currently the largest non-profit organization in France, which has an endowment of $342 million, is “[to improve] public knowledge of the persecution of Jews in France and [to raise] the awareness on crimes against humanity.” Both the Commission and the Foundation have been very effective in increasing understanding of the Vichy years and both have contributed to creating an accurate version of the past.

Through the commemorations of Moulin, Pétain, and the Vél’ d’Hiv’, it can be seen that the collective memory of Vichy has been significantly shaped by the three presidential figures of de Gaulle, Mitterand, and Chirac. Despite a more demonstrated concern about accepting the past, the Vichy years will continue to be a period of shame.

100 Dreyfus.
for France and a subject that the French, especially those from the older generation, are reluctant to talk about. In his recent *The Algeria Hotel: France, Memory, and the Second World War*, journalist Adam Nossiter encountered scores of people who were unwilling to talk about the Vichy past. One French woman finally told Nossiter, "Look, living with the past is fine when it’s a good past. But you are not going to live with a past that was more or less deplorable. When all’s said and done, you have to forget it. You have to go on living." While such a statement is true, the French do not need to dwell in the past, it is necessary for them to recognize the wrongdoings of the Vichy regime in order to come to terms with their past. The French collective memory has been distorted for so long, and it has only been in the past few years that it is beginning to be brought back into focus. Now, the French must come to terms with the fact that Vichy did exist, and that not all of the French were members of the Résistance, nor were all of the French collaborators. By accepting their past, the feelings of guilt many French feel over the Vichy years will lessen, and ultimately the French identity will be in good health.

Most recently, in November of 2000, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, a popular weekly magazine in France, published a special dossier entitled, "Vichy, la Résistance: enfin la vérité." The special issue covered several different topics, ranging from dispelling the collaborationist and the Résistancialist myths to a short biography of a woman resistant. In the introduction to the issue, one of the articles stated that the period 1940 to 1944 was "Les temps des héros et le temps des salauds," implying that the French were divided solely into two camps—the Résistance or Vichy. In an interview, the leading Vichy historian Jean-Pierre Azéma told *Le Nouvel Observateur* that during the Vichy years,
"Les Français n’ont été ni des salauds ni des héros." 103 This description is much more accurate and is a viewpoint that the French should adopt, as it does not place identities on the them, but rather allows them to realize the complexity of the Vichy years and the importance of accepting the truth about their past in order to create a healthier collective memory and identity.


Bibliography


