Sons and Daughters of the Croix de Feu: an Inquiry into French Fascism

by

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AF</td>
<td>Action Française (French Action)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF</td>
<td>Croix de Feu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVP</td>
<td>Equipes de Propagande Volontaire (Voluntary Propaganda Teams)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FFCF</td>
<td>Fils et Filles de Croix de Feu (Sons and Daughters of the Croix de Feu)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FN</td>
<td>Front National (National Front)</td>
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<tr>
<td>HJ</td>
<td>Hitler Jugend (Hitler Youth)</td>
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<tr>
<td>JP</td>
<td>Jeunesses Patriotes (Young Patriots)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONB</td>
<td>Opera Nazionale Balilla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPF</td>
<td>Parti Populaire Français (French Popular Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSF</td>
<td>Parti Social Français (French Social Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RN</td>
<td>Regroupement Nationaux (National Regroupement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VN</td>
<td>Volontaires Nationaux (National Volunteers)</td>
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La naissance du "Flambeau"

"Je viens de l'allumer à l'Arc de Triomphe."

The Birth of the "Torch": I just lit it at the Arc de Triomphe

Image from Le Flambeau November 1929: 1.
Introduction

France in the 1930s was, by all accounts, a political, social, and economic mess. The memory of WWI continued to haunt the generation of young men who made it home from the fronts, while the older and younger generations struggled to cope with the loss of those that did not. Partly because of the death of so many young men in 1914-1918, the French birth rate was falling, provoking fears that France would slowly shrink away. The great depression hit the country in the 1930s, not with the devastating force seen in Germany or the United States, but with enough strength to destabilize the economic and social functions of France. Politics were confusing, divided, and ineffectual. The Third Republic in the 1930s was characterized by rapid turnover of leadership and almost complete inability to accomplish anything. The public was evenly divided between left and right, with half the people supporting socialists or communists and the other half favoring the traditional catholic right or even some fascist groups inspired by Italy and Germany. The extremity of the political divide, coupled with the sense that something needed to change, made for an extremely volatile political scene. On the whole, France in the 1930s seemed like a damaged place; it no longer had the international prestige it enjoyed before WWI and it seemed to have lost some of the clarity of vision that had made it intellectually important in the 19th century and earlier.

Enter WWII and the invasion of France by Hitler in May 1940. The French, poorly prepared to fight, quickly surrendered and spent the next five years of the war under German occupation. This is one of the darkest times in French history. Under
the German occupation, the third republic was voluntarily disbanded and replaced with the Vichy regime. Throughout the war, the terms of German occupation became increasingly strict and demanding. The head of the Vichy government, Maréchal Pétain, accompanied by a sea of conservative cronies, complied with the German demands, sometimes with the eagerness of a student trying to please a teacher. Collaboration, the term used to explain Pétain and the Vichy government’s willingness to comply with the Nazis has become a four-letter word in WWII history, symbolizing the weakness of France at the time. However, despite French complicity in some of the most shocking activities of WWII (including the mass deportation of French Jews to concentration camps) the victorious allies treated France with forgiveness after the Germans lost the war. Petain was accused of leading a rogue government that disavowed the French people’s interests and desires. While the leaders of the Vichy government were condemned for their behavior, France itself was exonerated. The brave acts of the French resistance and Charles de Gaulle were elevated to mythical status and came to represent the desires of the French people, despite the fact that the actual number of participants in the resistance was extremely small. The consensus seemed to be that the French had been forced, against their will, into compliance by the Nazis.

One of the challenges to the theory of French innocence was the suggestion that the French had some indigenous fascist movements in the 1930s and therefore the Nazi demands were perhaps not entirely foreign impositions. In response to this suggestion, René Rémond, the earliest of French fascism scholars, argued that France did not have any significant, indigenous fascist movements and that the French were,
in fact, immune to fascism. Rémond bases this view on the argument that French society was stable enough to resist fascism and that fascism is a movement of the déclassés or “down and outs”.¹ Both Italy and Germany were suffering from economic and social turmoil as a result of the depression and the legacy of WWI. Therefore, these cultures were primed for the incursion of fascism. France, Rémond argues, had suffered only superficial social trauma from the war and the depression, and “c’est la stabilité de ses structures sociales et l’importance relative de ses classes moyennes qui préservent la France de l’aventure du fascisme.”² Additionally, Rémond argues that the exceptional quality of the French people, their wisdom and political maturity, was the source of French immunity.³ Essentially, he argues that the ‘French Exception’ is the reason that France never saw a significant fascist movement.

Serge Berstein, who used the term “allergy” to explain France’s aversion to fascism, supported Rémond’s findings.⁴ He points out that the countries that became fascist had either superficial democracies or a short history of democratic rule, whereas countries like France, with long traditions of democracy, did not become fascist. In short, Berstein supports Rémond’s belief that France’s culture and tradition explain why France did not see a fascist movement ascend to power. Interestingly, Berstein is not as quick as Rémond to deny any existence of French fascism, admitting that there were “fascist germs” like antiparliamentarianism, paramilitarism

² It is the stability of social structures and the relative importance of the middle classes that saved France from the fascist adventure. Philippe Machefer, Ligues Et Fascismes En France: 1919-1939 (Vendôme: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974) 74.
³ Rémond, The Right Wing in France: From 1815 to De Gaulle 293.
and anti-Semitism, in France. However, he agrees that France was strong enough to resist fascism and to prevent the germs of fascism from developing. While more temperate than Rémond’s adamant and slightly emotional argument, Berstein comes to many of the same conclusions. France, because of its history and culture, was immune or “allergic” to fascism.

Berstein wrote his article about the French allergy in 1984, in response to a book published by Zeev Sternhell, an Israeli scholar, educated in France. In Sternhell’s remarkably controversial book, *Ni Droite, Ni Gauche*, he traces the origins of all fascist ideologies to France, in a move that shocked and angered many contemporary scholars. In fact, his book was inflammatory enough to provoke a lawsuit based on charges of defamation from one of the men featured in the book.⁵ Sternhell’s main argument is that French fascism was not imported, but was an indigenous product that can be linked to Boulangism in the 1880s. Sternhell also emphasizes the importance of left-wing ideology as an influence on fascism. He argues that fascism was a rebellion against democracy because of its intimate ties to the bourgeoisie and can therefore be considered a revision of Marxism. As evidence, Sternhell points to the many fascist leaders, like Mussolini, who began their career on the left and then converted to fascism once they saw the failures of socialism. Sternhell’s argument is in direct contradiction to the earlier arguments about French exceptionalism or immunity to fascism.⁶

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Unfortunately, there is no consensus about the presence of indigenous and significant French fascism. It is a heatedly debated topic, one that often appears to be striking an emotional nerve with some of the French scholars who weigh in. Despite the lack of consensus, since Zeev Sternhell’s influential contributions to the field, there has been more acceptance of arguments about French fascism and more scholars who wonder if, in fact, some of the rightist leagues that proliferated in the 1930s were fascist.

During the 1920s and 30s, about half a dozen rightist leagues developed in France, some more extreme than others. Most scholars accept that Jacque Doriot’s *Parti Populaire Français* (PPF) was fascist, as well as George Vallois’ *Faisceau*. However, they also acknowledge that these movements were relatively limited in terms of public appeal, membership, and political impact. For example, the PPF had at most 300,000 members, too small a number to have changed the face of French politics.\(^7\) Theses movements, even if they were fascist, do not disprove Berstein and Rémond, because it can be argued that these were fringe movements; they were unimportant to the broader political scene in France at the time and their limited membership is indicative of the lack of appeal of fascism to French people.

However, not all scholars agree that the fascist movements in France were fringe movements. The basis of an argument for significant, indigenous fascism in France hinges on the the *Croix de Feu* (CF), the largest and most important of the rightist leagues in the 1930s. The CF is key to the question of French fascism. With over 1,000,000 members as well as parliamentary representation, the CF was a mass-
movement that made an undeniable impact on France. Given its size and
prominence, if the CF can be rightly considered fascist, then France had a significant,
indigenous, fascist movement and France was not allergic to fascism, nor did the
French people overwhelmingly reject it. On the other hand, if the CF was not fascist
but rather authoritarian conservative, then it is true that fascism in France in the 1930s
was a fringe movement and the immunity theories of Berstein and Rémond carry
some real weight.

Some authors, like Robert Paxton, make a strong case for the classification of
the Action Française as a fascist movement (albeit, an unsuccessful movement), but
tend to classify the CF and its later incarnation, the Parti Social Français (PSF), as
conservative rather than fascist. Pierre Milza writes that the CF was more in the
tradition of nationalist anti-parliamentarianism than fascism because of La Rocque’s
professional association with liberals, the fact that he made no attempt to over-haul
the economic and bourgeois systems, and the popularity of the more moderate and
parliamentary PSF, formed to replace the CF after the disbanding of all paramilitary
organizations by Léon Blum, the Socialist prime minister in 1936. Philippe Burrin
points to La Rocque’s temperate use of street violence as an indication of his
conservatism. La Rocque abhorred unnecessary violence and disorder, unlike
Mussolini and Hitler who encouraged roving bands of armed men to terrorize the
streets, only to have the fascists swoop in to restore peace, thereby appearing as
forces of order.

9 Philippe Burrin, La Dérive Fasciste: Doriot, Déat, Bergery 1933-1945 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil,
1986).
As with every historical topic, there is debate and disagreement. The conversion to the PSF is an oft-cited reason for the CF’s classification as conservative, not fascist. However, some scholars, like Robert Soucy, question the sincerity of this transformation. Soucy points out that La Rocque’s acceptance of parliamentary politics was at odds with his earlier posture and is therefore suspect. He also suggests that it was unlikely that all of the followers of the CF/PSF simply forgot La Rocque’s former convictions, especially in the wake of Blum’s well publicized law forbidding the CF. Therefore, La Rocque’s statements should not be taken at face value. In all likelihood, he was being politically prudent, much like Hitler had been in 1923, before he was elected into power. Soucy also points to both Mussolini and Hitler’s legal ascension to power and argues that temporarily accepting parliamentary politics in order to gain prestige and power is not necessarily anathema to fascist behavior.\(^{10}\)

There is a host of other very convincing points in the case against CF/PSF fascism. These range from the personality of La Rocque, which was too “austere” to provoke a cult of the leader, to the fact that the CF/PSF was not violent. In response to these proposed pieces of evidence, the scholars who argue that the CF/PSF was fascist unvaryingly present valid and convincing counter-arguments. The fact of the matter is that both sides make a very good case. Some things about the CF/PSF are consistent with fascism and others are not. The disagreements sometimes arise over misunderstandings about the CF, but more often they are based on the confusion over

what exactly fascism was and what constitutes ‘minimal fascism’, the base characteristics that qualify as fascism.

The heart of the confusion is the fact that fascism is incredibly difficult to define. The doctrine of fascism is less clear than many ideologies, in part because there was no foundational thinker; there was no Marx or Lenin to lay the groundwork and clarify the base characteristics and values. Plus, fascism took different forms; Nazi Germany had a lot in common with Fascist Italy, but there were some key differences that make a definition hard to determine.

In addition, the issue is complicated by the fact that fascist rhetoric was not always consistent with fascist action. This leads to confusion over some important and yet abstract values, like modernization. Were the fascists pro or anti-modernization? Is the pre-fascist industrialized status of a country important to the development of fascism? Alan Cassels argues that Hitler was anti-modernization. His regime can be defined by “a blind, nihilistic fury directed against modernism in nearly all its forms.”\textsuperscript{11} At the same time, Mussolini led a pro-modernization movement and was highly praised for his success in industrializing Italy. It is extremely difficult to reconcile these opposing attitudes into one coherent definition of the fascist ideology.

Without a definitive fascist doctrine, any attempt to define fascism has to happen \textit{a posteriori}, meaning that scholars tend to focus on fascist actions. Robert Paxton derives his definition of fascism from a series of “mobilizing passions,” or the ideological drives which prompt action. These are:

1. The primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether universal or individual.

2. The belief that one’s group is a victim, a sentiment which justifies any action against the group’s enemies, internal as well as external.

3. Dread of the group’s decadence under the corrosive effect of individualistic and cosmopolitan liberalism.

4. Closer integration of the community within a brotherhood (fascio) whose unity and purity are forged by common conviction, if possible, or by exclusionary violence if necessary.

5. An enhanced sense of identity and belonging, in which the grandeur of the group reinforces individual self-esteem.

6. Authority of natural leaders (always male) throughout society, culminating in a national chieftain who alone is capable of incarnating the group’s destiny.

7. The beauty of violence and of will, when they are devoted to the group’s success in a Darwinian struggle.  

Extracting some of the themes of fascism from these “mobilizing passions”, one sees the importance of unity, violence, authority embodied by a leader, the subjugation of self for membership in a larger community to which one is wholly loyal, and a sense of superiority of that community. For the purposes of this work, I am going to accept these themes as a working definition of fascism, with one addition: the importance of youth.

According to Nolte, Mosse, Paxton, Koch, Kater, and countless other scholars, fascism was a movement of youth, in both attitude and age. In Italy and Germany,

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the ideological underpinnings of fascism can be linked to earlier youth organizations and movements, which paved the way for the development of fascism. The earliest fascists, in both countries, were young, a fact which contributed to the development of a myth of youth or the conception of youthfulness as a divine ideal. Both countries developed extensive youth organizations, the most famous of which is the Hitler Youth, a notorious example of the impact of fascism on young minds. Youth was absolutely essential to the development, consolidation, and success of fascism in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s.

Looking back at the working definition of fascism derived from Paxton’s mobilizing passions, most of these characteristics have already been explored with regards to the Croix de Feu. The notable exception is the role of youth, both in terms of the youth organization and the development of the CF values. No study has performed more than a cursory analysis of the youth branch of the CF, the Fils et Filles de Croix de Feu, or the Sons and Daughters of the Croix de Feu. Because of this, no study of the CF has been fully completed. This is not to say that a study of youth is the only missing link that will end any debate about CF/PSF fascism. Rather, youth is an essential piece of a larger puzzle, a piece that needs to be included if there is any hope of solving the puzzle and seeing the full picture.

I intend to explore the role of youth in the CF/PSF, principally through an examination of the Fils et Filles de Croix de Feu (FFCF), the youth group organized under CF auspices. Unfortunately, there is relatively little information about the CF that survived WWII. Nearly all of the official books and records were destroyed. However, the organization’s newspaper, the Flambeau, survives. In addition to the
central edition of the *Flambeau*, published monthly up until 1935 and then weekly after that, there were regional editions published across France. However, the regional editions are far less informative than their Parisian counterpart. Therefore, the information about the FFCF and the importance of youth in the CF is derived entirely from the central newspaper, the Parisian edition of the *Flambeau*. The *Flambeau* is an extremely informative newspaper, one that, in addition to many other articles, regularly documented the activities of individual sections of the CF across France, published speeches and articles by La Rocque and other CF leaders, and recorded the activities of the FFCF. From 1932-1934, one section of the *Flambeau*, called *l’Appel*, or “the Call” was dedicated to the youth of the CF and was a forum for announcements about youth activities, instructions for proper behavior in the younger generations, a steady source of propaganda, and a means to instill CF values. A large part of the information about the FFCF comes from the pages of *l’Appel*.

The first task of this study is to place the CF in its historical context, both among the other rightist leagues and in the tumultuous social, political, and economic climate of the 1930s. The first chapter will be devoted to a brief history of the CF. The second chapter provides a detailed description of the FFCF, the education it attempted to provide the younger generations, the importance it placed on the memory of WWI, as well as the regular activities and summer camps it organized for children. Finally, the study of the FFCF, while interesting and informative does not contribute to the broader question of CF fascism without reference to its contemporary fascist youth groups. For that reason, the final chapter of the FFCF study will be devoted to a comparison with the Hitler youth and similar Italian youth
groups. This comparison is the means of assessing the fascistic qualities of the FFCF and will be used to determine whether or not it was a fascist youth group. Through this analysis and comparison, it will be argued that the FFCF was not a fascist youth group.

The so-called fascist era was over 60 years ago. Scholars agree that fascism was specific to the time period, it was a phenomenon inextricably linked to the post-WWI experience, the depression, and feelings of disorder that had existed since the late 19th century. All of this suggests that we in the 21st century are somehow safe from fascism. However, the importance of studying fascism is not to stop a repeat performance, where all the costumes, the banners, the symbols and the rhetoric are the same. The surface details and even many of the ideological, doctrinal values of fascism are things of the past. Fascism is important because of what it teaches us about mass political mentality and the way a political movement can influence individual actions, erasing previously held morals and ethics. The thousands of marching young boys of the HJ, the roman-inspired monuments dedicated Mussolini, and, most terrifying of all, the death camps of the holocaust, all teach valuable lessons about political manipulation, about the ability of a skilled dictator to turn political rhetoric into action, and about the relative unimportance of individuals in the face of a crowd. These are lessons that can be removed from the historical context and applied universally. Recognizing and understanding the origins and power of fascism helps with this task.
Chapter 1: The Croix de Feu and France in the 1930s

I. WWI and the early rightist leagues

Any and all discussion of the interwar period in France has to start with WWI. WWI enveloped all of France’s human, economic, military, and emotional energy for four years. The war left a physical scar on the country, particularly in the north where some of the worst battles had been fought. The war’s toll on human life was even more enormous. Almost one and a half million young men died, and twice as many returned home wounded or maimed. Even the satisfaction of victory in 1918 could not make up for the physical and emotional wounds of WWI. It is impossible to discuss anything between WWI and WWII in France, be it political, economic, or cultural, without referencing the impact of WWI. The memory of WWI was the most powerful force in the interwar period.

In 1919, immediately following the end of war and the signing of the Versailles treaty, the Bloc National, the most conservative of French Third Republic parties since 1876, won the majority of seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Its success was a result of leftover allegiance to the Union Sacrée, a wartime anti-German political coalition, and the fears of French communism sparked by the 1917 Russian revolution.¹ By 1924, however, the fear of Bolshevism and allegiance to the Union Sacrée were not powerful enough forces to sustain the Bloc National, which lost power to the Cartel des Gauches, a coalition of the Socialist, Radicals, and other left

While the Cartel des Gauches government only lasted two years, it was long enough to stir up fears of a rising left. In response to the Cartel a series of rightist leagues formed, modeling themselves loosely on the Action Française (AF), a pre-WWI league that lay the groundwork for the leagues of the 1920s and 30s.

The AF developed out of a tradition of conservatism that began in the early 20th century, although some ideological elements can be traced as far back as the French revolution. At the very end of the 19th century, the arrest of an innocent Jewish soldier, Alfred Dreyfus, on charges of treason, unearthed anti-Semitic and conservative sentiments that had been lying dormant in the French public. The response to the Dreyfus affair was a deafening uproar from both the Dreyfus supporters and accusers and marked the beginning of a prominent division between the French political left and right. The rightist Action Française (AF), which preceded the beginning of the most notable flurry of rightist leagues in the 1920s and 30s by more than 20 years, was formed by anti-Dreyfusards in the wake of and in response to the Dreyfus Affair.

Charles Maurras, the founding ideologue of the AF and a crucial figure on the French right, advocated abandoning democracy in favor of a traditional royalist state founded on Catholic values of discipline, hierarchy, and order. He also rejected anything he considered “anti-French” which included people he referred to as les métèques (an offensive phrase, similar to the English “wog”) meaning anyone who was un-French by ancestry or belief, such as Jews, Freemasons, and Protestants. The AF also expressed a willingness to use violence to achieve goals. The Camélot du

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2 Greene, From Versailles to Vichy: The Third French Republic 1919-1940 55. 39.
Roi, originally the newspaper delivery boys in charge of dispersing the organization’s journal, later became a roving paramilitary force, starting violent riots and brawls.\(^5\)

While the most powerful period for the AF was before the war, it remained an important player on the right until 1926 when Cardinal Andrieu, Archbishop of Bordeaux, denounced the writings of Charles Maurras and the AF as anti-religious and heretical.\(^6\) This was a fatal blow to the AF, which was soon eclipsed by other, similar rightist leagues that sprung up in 1924.

This second round of rightist leagues developed in direct response to the election of the *Cartel des Gauches* in 1924. Antoine Rédier formed the first of these leagues, called the *Légion*, just one month after the election of the *Cartel des Gauches*, the leftist coalition government.\(^7\) Soon after, Pierre Taittinger formed a similar group called the *Jeunesses Patriotes* (JP). Georges Valois, a former member of Action Française, formed the third of these early leagues, the *Faisceau*, in 1925.

These leagues had very similar ideological goals. They were all based on authoritarian, nationalist, anti-Communist principles and included a paramilitary branch which signaled their acceptance of the use of violence as a tool to prevent the rise of communism in France. In addition, WWI veterans played a crucial role in these leagues. They were cast in a repeat performance of their WWI role as the defenders of France. The cult of the veteran or the idea that the WWI veterans embodied certain admirable qualities that they had developed on the front such as bravery, strength, patriotism and sacrifice, played a crucial role in all of these leagues.


\(^6\) Balfour, "The Action Française Movement," 201.

While these three leagues had very similar ideological foundations, there were some important differences. First of all, they were not equally successful. In 1926, the JP, which had as many 65,000 members, absorbed the smaller and less-successful Légion. Additionally, the Faisceau displayed more extreme characteristics than the other two. It declared its intention to “overthrow parliamentary democracy and establish a government of war veterans under an authoritarian leader.”8 It refused any connection to parliamentary politics and demanded that no member hold any role in parliament.9 In addition, the choice of the name Faisceau showed a willingness to be compared to the fascists of Italy and Germany, which was compounded by paramilitary instructions that mimicked Mussolini’s black shirts.10

In 1926, the Cartels des Gauches lost power to Raymond Poincaré, a conservative. As a result, the power of the leagues, which had been largely derived from the sense of urgency and threat from the left, decreased quickly and significantly.11 The leagues rebounded in the 1930s and gathered more support, but the rightist heyday of the 1920s ended in 1926.

II. Early Growth of the Croix de Feu

Interestingly, the Croix de Feu (CF) was founded in 1927, after the decline of the rightist leagues. In 1927, following the execution of the American anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, the French communists held a protest in Paris that led them to the

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8 Soucy, French Fascism: The First Wave 1924-1933 87.
9 Soucy, French Fascism: The First Wave 1924-1933 91.
10 Soucy, French Fascism: The First Wave 1924-1933 89. The word “fascist” comes from the Italian fasci, and from the Latin fāsces, both meaning “a bundle of rods”, which is translated into French as faisceau. Therefore, the name of Vallois’ movement was a direct translation of the Italian Fascists.
tomb of the Unknown Soldier, where they trampled flowers and spit on the flagstone.\textsuperscript{12} A group of war veterans, angered by the show of disrespect to one of the most important monuments to the memory of WWI, decided to join together in a movement dedicated to reviving the brotherhood and bravery of the frontlines in opposition to the left. François Coty, the owner of \textit{Le Figaro} and a perfume magnate, offered them headquarters in the same building as the newspaper. They elected Maurice d’Hartoy, a WWI veteran, politician and writer, as the first president and began to recruit members exclusively from the ranks of decorated war veterans. In 1929, the membership profile was expanded to include \textit{les briscards}, or non-decorated war veterans. In December 1929, after an affair between d’Hartoy and Coty’s secretary, d’Hartoy was expelled from the organization and replaced by Maurice Genay, an active army captain.\textsuperscript{13}

The Croix de Feu grew steadily between 1928 and 1931, achieving a membership base of around 18,000 by March 1931.\textsuperscript{14} However, it was not until François La Rocque, a well-known WWI colonel, took over the presidency in December 1931 that the movement really took off. La Rocque had acted as vice-president under Genay and had contributed articles to the \textit{Flambeau}. La Rocque first rose to a prominent position in late November 1927 when he led the Croix de Feu in a very successful protest of a pacifist gathering. Édouard Herriot, radical leader of the 1924 \textit{Cartel des Gauches}, was conducting a meeting on disarmament in the Salle du Trocadero when 1,500 Croix de Feu members stormed in and La Rocque rushed to

\textsuperscript{14}Kennedy, \textit{Reconciling France against Democracy: The Croix De Feu and the Parti Social Français, 1927-1945} 37.
the stage to capture the microphone and deliver a short speech. Because of the enormous press coverage, the incident launched the Croix de Feu and La Rocque into the public awareness in a significant way for the first time. Based on his fiery newspaper articles and denunciation of parliamentary politics, Genay recognized that La Rocque represented “the active spirit of [the] association.” Because La Rocque had already made such an impact on the movement, when Genay was recalled to active military duty, he amicably turned over the reigns to La Rocque.

The combination of La Rocque’s leadership skills and the political and social conditions in France led to considerable success for the CF in the three years following La Rocque’s ascension to power. During this time, in order to accommodate the growing membership base, La Rocque created four new branches of the organization that accepted non-veterans. The first branch to be formed was the *Fils et Filles de Croix de Feu*, which was formed in 1931. This organization was intended for the children of the Croix de Feu members, and encouraged them to learn about and to honor their fathers’ sacrifices for France during the war.

The second addition to the Croix de Feu was the *Regroupement National* (RN), which was comprised of adult men who had not served in the war because they had either been too old or because extenuating circumstances had prevented them from participating. Interestingly, the RN included a population of Alsacien and Lorrainian men who had been forced to fight on the German side because of where

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17 This organization is the focus of the next chapter, where it will be explored in much more detail.
they lived, even though they associated with France and French values. The RN, while important for including non-veteran adults, never achieved the same level of success or importance that the third new branch the Volontaires Nationaux (VN) did. In October 1933, La Rocque announced the formation of the VN, which recruited the oldest members of the Fils de Croix de Feu and the youngest members of the RN, none of which had fought in the war. In explaining their purpose La Rocque stated, “Nulle condition n’est exigée de vous, sinon de servir le drapeau tricolore, d’aimer votre profession, de protéger la famille française, de vouloir la Paix dans l’Honneur.”

Women attended CF meetings and events from the start of the organization, but did not have their own sanctioned role until 1934 when the fourth branch, La Section Feminine was created. The role of women in the CF and other rightist and fascist leagues is fascinating. All the leagues idealized maternal women and underlined the utmost importance of the mother in the traditional French family. This was in direct opposition to the wave of femmes modernes or ‘modern women’ with their “short skirts, bobbed hair, and slim, boyish figure[s],” who popped up after WWI. This new style for modern women was, as pro-natalist doctor François Fouveau de Courmelles labeled it, “the fashion of non-nursing…the fashion of non-

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18 Rudaux, Les Croix De Feu Et Le P.S.F., 51-52.
19 Kennedy, Reconciling France against Democracy: The Croix De Feu and the Parti Social Français, 1927-1945, 36.
20 We demand nothing of you, except to serve the tricolor flag, to love your profession, to protect the French family and to want an honorable peace. Nobécourt, Le Colonel De La Rocque: 1885-1946 Ou Les Pièges Du Nationalism Chrétien, 242-43.
motherhood.” 22 This woman contrasted with traditional gender roles and was anathema to the CF’s perception of femininity, which was caring, matronly, and domestic. There is no question that the CF was most interested in women for their familial roles. However, women were also included in the CF social work; they gave out food and clothing to relieve the effects of economic depression, they dispensed propaganda, they set up children’s camps, and they organized social outings. Despite the crucial role women played in propaganda and recruiting, this was the extent of female participation, and, with the exception of a few notable CF women, the leadership and decision making roles were left to the men.23

Finally, in addition to the four branches, there were the dispos, from disposable or available. The dispos were, essentially, a paramilitary force made up of Croix de Feu, RN, VN, and FFCF members. They first appeared in July 1931 when 300 of them gathered to place a crown on the tomb to the American soldier. Their debut ended without a commotion, because they dispersed quickly, before the police could arrive.24 Paul Chopine, one of La Rocque’s advisors and the head of the dispos, announced that by autumn of 1931, the Croix de Feu would have several regiments of dispos who would serve to “assure the service of order.” The dispos were never armed, making them less menacing than the Camelots du Roi from the Action Française, or the JP. However, they appeared at rallies and protests in order to protect and supervise.25 In addition to service as security guards, the dispos were prepared to become a paramilitary force if the need arose. They had trial runs, where

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22 Green, "The Bouboule Novels: Constructing a French Fascist Woman," 55.
23 See page 69-78 of chapter 2 for further discussion of women in the CF.
they would be unexpectedly summoned and transported to an unknown location, where they would find a regiment of other dispos. They prepared for what La Rocque referred to as D-Day and H-hour, or the moment when a violent face-off with the communists would become necessary. When the VN was founded in 1933, it added a volunteer corps to the dispos. The dispos played a crucial role early in the CF history and their presence was paramount in the February 6, 1934 riots, which drew together members of all the rightist leagues in the most impressive display of paramilitary conservative power during the 1930s.

III. Croix de Feu Ideology

In November 1929, the Flambeau was launched as the CF monthly newsletter and propaganda organ. At this point, the organization had existed for two years and already included an impressive 10,000 members. In the first issue of the newspaper, the front page carried a manifesto attempting to detail the profile and purpose of the CF.

Because the CF had been around for two years without a clear, publicized agenda, the manifesto begins with a response to misinformed public perceptions of the CF. The first of these perceptions is that the CF members were “militarists, through and through.” The CF clarifies that they are not militarists, but that they do emphasize the values and lessons they learned on the front. In fact, the experience of

28 The figure of 10,000 comes from the manifesto itself. This number should be taken with a grain of salt, given the CF’s propensity for overestimating its membership. Nevertheless, a number anywhere in the vicinity of 10,000 displays impressive growth for a two-year old organization.
the war is the glue that holds the CF members together. As a result of the years spent fighting on the front, the men of the WWI generation developed common values and beliefs. These consisted of “l’esprit de camaraderie et de solidarité vraies, l’esprit de discipline nécessaire à la réussite de notre organisation, à l’exécution de nos idées; la sympathie que nos chefs ont méritée; le respect de l’ordre; l’amour du pays; le dévouement au drapeau.” The CF and WWI veterans drew a direct link between their time on the front and these values. They also felt very strongly that these values were going to be essential to the fight to save France from the threats of Communism and Socialism. This positioned the veterans (the only group to possess the all-important WWI values and therefore, the ability to defend France) as a new elite in society. This is the basis of the cult of the veteran, the immense esteem that was granted to the generation of men who had fought in the war.

Interestingly, the values from the front tend to take on mythic proportions in CF rhetoric. In certain cases, catch-phrases like “Unis comme nos pères” are given the status of a prescription for the ills of the country. One Flambeau article states “‘unis comme au front’ et ‘unis comme nos pères’ pour réaliser le redressement national dans l’ordre moral, familial, social, économique, financier, international” and later on in the same article, “‘unis comme au front’ et ‘unis comme nos pères’ pour rénover l’esprit de famille.” The idea that unity could solve all of the problems facing France, from the family level to the international, is an exaggeration.

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30 The spirit of camaraderie and of true soldiers, the sense of discipline necessary to the success of our organization, to the execution of our ideas; the respect which our leaders deserve; the respect for order; the love of country and devotion to the flag. Le Flambeau November 1929: 2.
31 ‘United like at the front’ and ‘united like our fathers’ in order to realize the national recovery of moral, familial, social, economic, financial, and international order. And ‘United like at the front’ and ‘united like our fathers’ to renovate the spirit of the family. “Un esprit nouveau,” 3.
Nevertheless, it demonstrates how crucial the WWI values were to the CF and FFCF members; they were the basis of the CF ideology and the key to the protection and continued success of France.

The manifesto also addresses the question of fascism, though in vague enough terms to avoid any conclusions. The CF declares that it could be considered fascist, but only so long as fascism means the partisan collection of energy and goodwill intended to defend the honor and prosperity of France or the unification of the defenders of order and discipline. However, if fascism means supporters of brutal repression, perpetual militarism of the nation, or limitation of ideas and opinions, the CF declared that it was not fascist.\textsuperscript{32} This is an interesting insight both into the lack of a consensual understanding of fascism in the 1930s and the CF sense of self. From this early date, they claimed to resist the brutal violence of the Italian and German fascists, preferring to fill the role of protectors of peace and true patriots.

By the early 1930s, La Rocque expanded on the role of violence in the CF, explaining that his followers would not be involved in petty, political squabbles and skirmishes. Rather, they were saving their force and energy for H-hour or D-day, the moment when a grand, violent showdown with the Communists would become necessary. La Rocque does not discount violence in general, only unorganized, undirected, mob-like violence. Colonel de la Rocque, published a propaganda book about the CF called “The Fiery Cross: The Call to Public Service in France,” in which he reiterated that the CF was not a rabble-rousing organization. He wrote, “[Our comrades’] incomparable worth forced me to hold them in reserve and to assume full responsibility for leading them on towards the sole objective worthy of their efforts;

\textsuperscript{32} “Manifeste de Croix de Feu,” 1.
namely, the maximum of permanent results with the minimum of losses.” With his characteristically vague rhetoric, La Rocque makes it clear that the CF refrained from rabble-rousing, not because of weakness or unwillingness to fight, but because they were focused solely on the larger task of defeating Communism when H-hour arrived.

The CF was, above all else, a nationalist movement. In “The Fiery Cross,” La Rocque sums up the goal of the CF as “the rehabilitation and preservation of France as a political, geographical, spiritual and traditional unit.” The CF manifesto states “Quelle est notre politique? Française, c’est tout et c’est beaucoup,” clarifying that the glorification and protection of France is the underlying theme of the CF. The manifesto also explains that the CF was formed in reaction to a series of threats to France. WWI veterans who had joined together to fight against common enemies: “Les métèques, les profiteurs d’après-guerre, les politicaillons, les politicards au patriotisme douteux…les meneurs de troubles etdiscords, profiteurs d’une guerre plus terrible et plus douloureuse encore que l’autre: la guerre civile, la révolution.”

The nationalism of the CF was also decidedly traditionalist. “Travail, Famille et Patrie,” the motto of the Vichy government during WWII, was taken directly from the pages of the Flambeau. These values represented the three traditional values of France, which the CF sought to maintain against the threats from the left, from modern ideas of femininity that upset the family structure, and from decadence.

Another tenet of CF ideology, at least in the early years, was an outspoken opposition to parliamentary politics. La Rocque argued that the Third Republic was

34 Rocque, The Fiery Cross: The Call to Public Service in France. 24.
35 What is our politics? Our politics is France, that is all and that is plenty. “Manifeste de Croix de Feu,” 1.
inept, inefficient, and decadent. La Rocque hoped that the Croix de Feu would form a “moral force concretized in material force which would rid us of a gangrenous government.”

The extra-parliamentarianism of the CF becomes more complicated in the later years. In 1936, in compliance with governmental demands, La Rocque abandoned his paramilitary activity and professed an acceptance of parliamentary politics. However, this transition should be viewed cautiously, because the authenticity and depth of the transformation is questionable. It is unclear if La Rocque actually accepted parliamentary politics, or merely pretended to in order for his movement to survive.

The CF ideology is often expressed in vague terms, posing a major hurdle for scholars of the CF. However, this provides important insight into the CF mentality. In many ways, the CF was the embodiment of sentiment, a movement based more on feelings than political platforms. These feelings included frustration with France’s decreased international position after WWI, fear of Communism, anger at the decadence and general weakness of French society, and an overwhelming sense of threat to the traditional French way of life. Above all, the movement is dominated by the memory of WWI. The war was a truly horrific experience and continued to haunt the French people for years. The movement was founded by WWI veterans who clung desperately to the memory of the war as a guide. They relied on the relationships of brotherhood they developed on the front, as well as the values and morals of sacrifice and duty. However, there is also a sadness that underlies much of the CF ideology. The memory of WWI, in combination with the feelings that

provoked frustration with the condition of France in the 1930s, shaped and propelled the CF ideology.

IV. France in the 1930s

The CF expanded significantly in the years following La Rocque’s ascension to power. La Rocque’s leadership skills were partly responsible for the increase in membership, but it was also due to national conditions, including the state of the economy, the faltering third republic, the falling birth rate, upset gender roles and the difficulties France was facing as a world power. These problems contributed to the sense that France had become “decadent” and weak. Most people traced these problems to the end of the war, which prompted a tendency to idealize the time before and to remember it as a time of personal and national valor and bravery. The frustration with France in the 1930s and the sense that it was faltering, made La Rocque’s vision of an ideological return to the WWI era, as well as his strident demands for order and discipline, extremely appealing.

Around 1932, France started to feel the affects of the global depression. This was later than most countries and the French people even imagined for a couple years that they would escape unscathed. French politicians declared that the French reliance on small businesses and agriculture would help it escape the economic storm that was raging in the rest of the world. Unfortunately, this turned out not to be an accurate forecast, and France was hit just like the rest of the world.37 By 1932, production levels were down 27% since from those of 1930.38 The level of

37 Greene, From Versailles to Vichy: The Third French Republic 1919-1940 50.
38 Greene, From Versailles to Vichy: The Third French Republic 1919-1940 53.
unemployment never reached the highs that it did in the United States or Germany, but France took longer to recover; it was the only country among the industrialized nations of out of Japan, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States not to have a net gain in production in the time between 1929 and 1937. The downturn in the economy impacted industrial workers and peasants most acutely. However, it also changed the lives of members of the middle class who had heretofore been comfortable. Because of the change in circumstances, the middle classes demanded more support from the government. When the fraught third republic was not able to respond, they began to turn to help from other sources. The CF’s displays of order, discipline, energy, and its promise of a restored France, made it an appealing alternative to the government. This explains the appeal of the CF and the fact that a large proportion of the members came from the middle classes of French society.

On top of the economic difficulties facing France, the government of the Third Republic was in a dire state during the late 1920s and 1930s. Between June 1932 and February 1934, the control of the government changed hands six times. There was marked political division between the left and the right and while there were plenty of moderates, the extreme factions dominated the public image of the left and the right: the conservative leagues on one side and the Communists and Socialists on the other. This bred a combative and divided atmosphere in the government.

The falling birth rate was another perceived threat in the 1930s. Concern over the number of French babies being born did not develop in the 1930s, but WWI and

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39 Greene, From Versailles to Vichy: The Third French Republic 1919-1940 56.
40 Greene, From Versailles to Vichy: The Third French Republic 1919-1940 64.
the faltering family structure made the fears more pressing. WWI killed over a million young Frenchmen, leaving a whole generation of widows and unmarried women. The new wave of *femmes modernes* who were uninterested in motherhood compounded this problem, along with economic decline that strained family budgets. Between 1931 and 1936, the French population grew by only 100,000 people. The idea of a dwindling and aging population terrified French people into thinking that the entire French race was dwindling, making them very receptive to the Croix de Feu’s message about rebuilding and protecting the family.

The economic, social, and political problems plaguing France in the 1930s were complicated by a general sense, on both the political right and left, that the French people had become “decadent.” This was a somewhat vague affliction that included anything from post-war feminism to government inefficacy. In essence decadence meant weakness of mind and body, materialism, and apathy. It appeared in contrast to the vigor, bravery, and patriotism of the WWI. In the 1930s, decadence seemed as if it could morally and economically undo the country the veterans had fought so hard to save. The sense that France was afflicted in the 1930s made the Croix de Feu, with its traditional values, all the more appealing. The Croix de Feu’s glorification of the war veterans and the importance of WWI memories in its ideology and rhetoric linked the movement to an idealized time when France had been stronger, when young French men had been brave and valiant, and when family members fit into their traditional roles.

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41 Greene, *From Versailles to Vichy: The Third French Republic 1919-1940* 57.
In addition to domestic woes, France’s international status had suffered after the war. Essentially, after 1919, France became a second-rate world power after 1919, when it was eclipsed by the United States and, in the 1930s, a rebuilding Germany. With governmental woes, economic decline, and a falling birthrate, it seemed conceivable to the French people that France would dwindle away until all that was left was a vague memory of glory. The Croix de Feu promised to restore that glory. It promised to revitalize the family and to remind the younger generations of the war and of France’s prouder moments. It also promised to protect against the threats of Communism and Socialism, not to mention the threat of Germany. The Croix de Feu was popular not just because of La Rocque’s leadership skills, but because of the overwhelming desire of so many French men and women to return to the normalcy of an idealized past.

V. February 6, 1934

February 6, 1934 was the beginning of a new phase of growth for the CF. The movement had expanded steadily between 1928 and 1934, but still had a long way to go before achieving the status of a mass movement of national importance. February 6, 1934 was the platform from which the CF jumped proudly into the public eye. On February 6 the rightist leagues joined together and marched through the streets of Paris, provoking fights and riots. The spectacle was sufficiently menacing to make Daladier, the Prime Minister at the time, imagine that he was witnessing a ‘fascist’ coup. He resigned the same day and Gaston Doumergue, a more conservative politician, took over his position. The riots marked the most important of the rightist demonstrations in the 1930s and naturally received an enormous amount of press. All
of the leagues benefited from the publicity, but in the months and years after, it became clear that the CF had gained the most. After February 6, the CF membership, power, and influence grew increasingly rapidly, launching it above and beyond the other leagues that had participated on February 6th.

The spark that lit the February 6 riots was the Stavisky affair. On January 8, 1934, Alexandre Stavisky, a conman and embezzler, was found dead in a chalet in Chamonix after apparently committing suicide. There were suspicions on both the right and the left that Stavisky, who had been part of a junk bond scandal that involved government deputies and funds, had actually been silenced by those implicated in the case. The Stavisky Affair was in no way an isolated scandal. A series of governmental scandals, as well as frequent governmental turnover and infrastructure failures (such as train wrecks) preceded the Stavisky affair. However, by early 1934 when the Stavisky affair was revealed to the public, the Great Depression had started to affect France, compounding the feeling of indignation at the government’s fraudulent use of money

Following the Stavisky affair, a collection of rightist leagues, including a regenerated Action Française, La Solidarité Française (a group that was ideologically similar to the other rightist leagues, but did not develop until the 1930s), and Les Jeunesses Patriotes, prepared for a demonstration condemning the third republic and calling for a change in leadership. La Rocque joined in the condemnation, publishing and distributing a series of letters to Daladier, but he was hesitant to join plans for a demonstration. He worried that the Croix de Feu would get lost in the

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43 Rudaux, Les Croix De Feu Et Le P.S.F. 60.
bustle of rightist demonstrators and would not be able to exert the influence he felt they deserved. This is the first time La Rocque used the phrase, “On ne nous annexe pas, on nous suit,” which later became the banner quote of *Le Flambeau*.\(^{45}\) This relationship with similar rightist leagues was a trend that continued throughout the existence of the CF. La Rocque always maintained independence in his movement and refused offers of coalition building from the other leagues. In addition to his desire for independence, La Rocque feared that the influence of the Croix de Feu had not spread far enough in early 1934 to make a rise to power viable.\(^{46}\) On February 6, before the riots, the Croix de Feu had between 30,000 and 35,000 members, with the largest concentration in the 90 sections surrounding Paris. While the movement had spread around the country, the provincial sections still had meager numbers compared to Paris. The largest sections were in Lyon, Marseille, and Rouen, but could only claim between 200 and 300 members. Significant cities such as Bordeaux and Lille had fewer than 100 members.\(^{47}\) Therefore, even though the Croix de Feu was a strong influence in the Paris region, there was a slim chance that its power could have spread nationally.

Despite La Rocque’s hesitancy to involve the Croix de Feu in the demonstrations, under pressure from leaders of other rightist leagues as well as his own councilors, he finally agreed to participate. However, his stipulations for involvement were strict. First of all, he specified that “nous sommes des manifestants,


The Croix de Feu marchers were commanded to join the marching in an orderly, disciplined, and regimented manner. They were to protest in front of the chamber of deputies, but they were not to enter it. They were not to mix in with protestors from other leagues. Essentially, La Rocque wanted his followers to be as calm as the eye of the storm, a concentration of orderly and intense power, while violence raged around them. He also stipulated that his followers were to be unarmed, so as to dissuade unnecessary violence. His idea was to have the CF be “un sursaut de masse disciplinée, tenace, agissante et non agitée.” These stipulations are entirely consistent with La Rocque’s approach to violence: it should be controlled, clearly directed, and used only in crucial situations.

The Croix de Feu’s involvement in the demonstrations of February 6 satisfied La Rocque’s demands. On the day in question, 8,000 Croix de Feu gathered into three columns in different parts of Paris. The columns purposefully stayed apart from the other leagues, maintaining their regimented and orderly columns. They refused to participate in the violence and rioting that occurred among the ranks of the other leagues. By days end, The Croix de Feu ranks maintained order and sustained only a few injuries and no deaths.

In reporting on the Croix de Feu’s role in the demonstration, La Rocque was proud to announce that they had accomplished their goal of demonstrating without violence or mob-like behavior. He said that the Croix de Feu had arrived, “les mains

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48 We are demonstrators, not rioters. Nobécourt, Le Colonel De La Rocque: 1885-1946 Ou Les Pièges Du Nationalism Chrétien 263.

49 A mass jolt, disciplined, tenacious, effective, but not agitated. Nobécourt, Le Colonel De La Rocque: 1885-1946 Ou Les Pièges Du Nationalism Chrétien 263.

50 “Le Journée de Février,” Le Flambeau March 1934: 3.
nues et les poches vides.” He went to so far as to state in the following issue of the Flambeau that “Les Croix de Feu et Volontaires Nationaux ont horreur de la violence.” La Rocque’s vision of an orderly and regimented demonstration was achieved.

Interestingly, there is still some debate over the real intentions and goals of the leagues that protested on February 6. Some scholars suggest it was a conservative coup while others are convinced there was no plan to take over the government. In large part, this depends on the group in question. The Action Française and Jeunesses Patriotes engaged in more violence and perhaps had different motives than the Croix de Feu. In all likelihood, the Croix de Feu participated to prevent losing face by not joining the other rightist leagues. Given La Rocque’s hesitation and concern over the national base of Croix de Feu support, it is unlikely that he intended to attempt a government take over.

VI. February 6-June 18, 1936

The February 6th demonstrations sparked a massive rise in CF membership. Thousands of people, attracted to the orderly and powerful image of the CF protestors, signed up. In the spring of 1934, La Rocque announced that at least 500 people joined the organization every day. By March, he claimed that there were 50,000 members of the Croix de Feu, 15,000 more than the month before. February 51

52 The Croix de Feu and the National Volunteers are horrified by violence. “Le Journée de Février,” 3.
6, 1934 marks the beginning of the Croix de Feu’s rise to the status of a mass movement.

February 6, 1934 also marked the beginning of a crucial phase of paramilitarism in the CF and as well as increased tension nationally between the political left and right, resulting in riots, strikes and demonstrations. On the left, February 6 sparked fears of a fascist coup. Six days after the riots in Paris, the left responded with a Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) strike across France. In June of the same year, the Communists and Socialists formed the Popular Front, a coalition party that created significant discomfort on the right. The Solidarité Française attempted to create a comparable coalition on the right called the National Front by courting the CF, the Action Française, and the Jeunesses Patriotes. The AF and JP were willing members, but La Rocque insisted that the CF retain its independence and refused membership.54

In addition to the increasing tension between the left and right, the Third Republic was plagued by inefficiency and rapid transitions, which further destabilized French politics. Gaston Doumergue, the Prime Minister who took power after Daladier resigned on February 6, was replaced in November of the same year by Pierre-Etienne Flandin. In turn, Flandin’s rule only lasted from November 1934 to May 1935, when Pierre Laval replaced him.55 Only six months later, Albert Sarraut ousted Laval. Throughout these successive leaders, the CF continued to emphasize

54 Kennedy, Reconciling France against Democracy: The Croix De Feu and the Parti Social Français, 1927-1945. 56.
55 Pierre Laval was a recurring figure in the Third Republic, but he is most famous for his role in the Vichy Government. He was second in power to Pétain, serving as Vice-Premier until he was thrown out of the government for his overly eager collaboration with the Germans. In 1945, he was put on trial for his complicity and became a public scapegoat for French collaboration. He was executed on 15 October, 1945.
its extraparliamentary character, reiterating its disapproval of and distance from the various leaders.\textsuperscript{56} The CF positioned itself as the only option left for the French people faced with an inept government and threats from the Popular Front.

The CF became increasingly paramilitaristic and radical in the months after February 6. The CF was involved in more demonstrations and violent riots than previously. La Rocque organized surprise CF gatherings, such as a parade in memory of the Battle of the Marne that brought 12,000 CF members together extremely quickly, and which looked suspiciously like preparation for more extreme measures to come.\textsuperscript{57} In the summer and fall of 1934, La Rocque hinted that the CF was coming close to H-hour. His language became more ominous, as exemplified by statements such as:

\begin{quote}
The current parliamentarism is forfeit…Nothing sound will be gained without a preliminary cleansing of committees, journalistic and other headquarters where anonymous powers exercise their absolutism over a blinded universal suffrage…As for the Croix de Feu movement, its path is clear…the bulk of our fellow citizens are waiting for us to organize, guide, and lead them in order to serve them better.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

The combination of La Rocque’s intimations of H-hour and the increased threat from the left drove the radicalization of the CF after 1934.

However, the radicalization and violence of the CF were relatively short lived. As early as the fall of 1934, Doumergue threatened the CF with dissolution if it did not rein in the violence and cease its paramilitary activities. When Flandin took over,

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\textsuperscript{56} Kennedy, \textit{Reconciling France against Democracy: The Croix De Feu and the Parti Social Français, 1927-1945}. 67
\textsuperscript{57} Kennedy, \textit{Reconciling France against Democracy: The Croix De Feu and the Parti Social Français, 1927-1945}. 69
\textsuperscript{58} Kennedy, \textit{Reconciling France against Democracy: The Croix De Feu and the Parti Social Français, 1927-1945}. 69
\end{flushright}
he reiterated Doumergue’s threat.\textsuperscript{59} In addition to the threats of dissolution, La Rocque found the developing CF violence inconvenient because it was difficult to balance with his continued emphasis on defensive, necessary, and orderly violence, thereby making it hard to accommodate the increasingly violent CF behavior. The combination of La Rocque’s hesitance and government disapproval was enough to prompt La Rocque to temper the paramilitarism of the CF.

By the end of 1935, the CF had pulled back significantly on paramilitary activity, instead emphasizing the social aspect of the organization. In November, 1935 the CF renamed itself the \textit{Mouvement Social Français des Croix de Feu} (MSF), which underscored the new focus of CF activity and created a more familial group image.\textsuperscript{60} La Rocque also retreated from his anti-parliamentary stance when he began to encourage the movement’s members to vote in elections and officially sanctioned candidates that represented the spirit of the Croix de Feu. La Rocque most likely hoped that this softer, more authority-friendly version of the CF would prevent its dissolution.

In June 1936, Leon Blum became the first Socialist and Jewish prime minister of France and leader of a Popular Front government. The same month that he came to power, he dissolved all paramilitary organizations, including the Croix de Feu.\textsuperscript{61} This move was not unexpected and La Rocque already had a plan to reform as the \textit{Parti Social Français} (PSF). He instructed the members to remain calm and to join

\textsuperscript{59} Kennedy, \textit{Reconciling France against Democracy: The Croix De Feu and the Parti Social Français, 1927-1945}, 54
\textsuperscript{60} Kennedy, \textit{Reconciling France against Democracy: The Croix De Feu and the Parti Social Français, 1927-1945}, 74.
\textsuperscript{61} Kennedy, \textit{Reconciling France against Democracy: The Croix De Feu and the Parti Social Français, 1927-1945}, 54
the new organization, which he stated was the Croix de Feu plus electoral politics. The *dispos* reformed as the *Equipes Volontes de Propagandes* (EVP), a much more temperate and restrained paramilitary group.

This transformation did not please all of the members. Pozzo di Borgo, a long time leader of the CF and variously Vice President and leader of the FFCF, declared La Rocque too timid and quit the movement in a dramatic and public fit. A couple other members went with him, but on the whole the PSF proved even more successful than its predecessor. At the time of dissolution the CF had 500,000 members. The PSF doubled that number between 1936 and WWII. This increase in membership may have been a response to the augmented threat from the left and the Popular Front government, or it may be an indication that the more moderate stance of the PSF was more palatable to the French right. Whatever the reason, the PSF was monumentally popular and expanded significantly.

There is some debate over how moderate the PSF really was. Kevin Passmore concludes that the CF, because of its paramilitary activities, was fascist, whereas the PSF was merely authoritarian. Others argue that the PSF really was an extension of the CF, with only some simple cosmetic adjustments in order to comply with Blum’s demands. Some scholars carry this idea to the point of using the names CF and PSF interchangeably, thereby denying any ideological alteration. It is true that La Rocque professed an acceptance of parliamentary politics after the PSF was formed.

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However, those who were familiar with his earlier anti-electoral rhetoric would have been hard pressed to believe in such a sudden transformation. It is impossible to say how much the PSF members believed about La Rocque’s claimed transformation. Regardless of the depth of the PSF changes, the post-1936 movement was wildly popular and, at least in terms of membership, was the most successful period in CF/PSF history.

VII. End of the Croix de Feu

In April 1938, Daladier, the pre-February 6th radical leader, took over for Leon Blum. This marked a significant governmental shift towards the right, thereby diminishing the sense of threat from the left. Like with the first round of rightist leagues in 1926, without the pressing sense of urgency and danger, the right, which gained most of its momentum through its reaction to the left, lost some of its dynamism. Despite the downturn after 1938, the PSF continued up until WWII. In fact, there are some suggestions that it would have gained a significant number of seats in the Chamber of Deputies had the war not intervened.

After France fell to Germany in June of 1940, the PSF, despite its similarities with the professed ideology of the Vichy government, the movement as a whole played a very small role in the collaboration. Interestingly, when the demands of the German armistice became more demanding in the early 1940s, La Rocque and some PSF members began working for the resistance. At this point, their nationalist sentiment trumped the conservative, German-sympathetic elements of the PSF ideology. Germany’s occupation had become a threat to France and therefore La
Rocque, as a nationalist above all, worked to undermine the occupying force. By the middle of the war, the PSF had become a disintegrated movement. Some members followed La Rocque’s lead while others became an active part of the collaboration government. 66

In March 1943, the Gestapo arrested La Rocque, along with another 152 other PSF activists. The reasons for arrest are unclear, but are most likely because of La Rocque’s power and potential as a “trouble-maker.” 67 An interim leadership committee ran the PSF, although La Rocque remained politically active from prison throughout the war. After the end of the war, the provisional government disbanded the PSF and on April 28, 1946, La Rocque died from health complications caused by his years in prison. When La Rocque died, the CF/PSF was finally put to rest as well.

66 The exact moment when La Rocque began working for the resistance is unclear. The estimates range from December 1940 to November 1942.
Chapter 2: The Fils et Filles de Croix de Feu

The Croix de Feu was not the first association to mobilize and organize their youth. Youth movements began popping up across Europe in the early 20th century, spanning the ideological and political spectrum. Some of these movements were youth branches of older organizations, like the Fils et Filles de Croix de Feu, the youth branch of the CF, and some were spontaneously created by youth, for youth. The most notorious example of an early 20th century youth movement is the Hitler Youth, the Nazi party’s youth branch that indoctrinated the children of Germany with Nazi values during Hitler’s reign. However, not all youth movements in the early 20th century resembled the Nazi Hitler Youth. There are plenty of more innocuous examples of youth organizations, like the Boy Scouts in England that taught boys essential military skills, the German Youth Movement, which was a harmless, nature-oriented predecessor to the Hitler Youth, as well as a host of political youth movements on both the right and the left. By the 1930s, the pattern of youth organizations was fairly well established. It was not a novel idea for the CF to create a youth branch of their organization.

Nevertheless, the Fils et Filles de Croix de Feu (FFCF) played a crucial role in the CF movement. The children who were members acted as torchbearers; assuring that both the movement and its ideology would continue in the future. Because of this special role, the FFCF was dedicated to teaching the children about the CF’s ideology. Through educational activities, summer camps, field trips, and other FFCF activities, the children learned the basic CF values. The most important of these included admiration of strong bodies and minds, patriotism, veneration of traditional gender roles and traditional French culture, and, above all else, the values that developed from the cult of the veteran. The children learned to respect and honor their parents for the sacrifices they made during WWI and the honor, bravery, and camaraderie they displayed on the battlefield. WWI was the most frequent and most important subject of the FFCF activities and education. Through this indoctrination process, the children were constructed into a set of “symbolic veterans”, a new generation that empathized with the experience of WWI and gleaned the benefits in the form of veterans' values. By teaching the children the important values of the CF, the adult members assured that there would be a future both for their movement and for their experience in the war. The WWI generation would live on through their children.

I. Purpose of the FFCF

Not surprisingly, the CF was concerned about its own future and the effectual and continuous transmission of its message. The CF had more to worry about with regards to its future than most movements, because CF membership was originally
limited to WWI veterans, automatically capping its potential growth. Additionally all of the members were of the same generation, a generation that, in the early 1930s, was quickly approaching middle age. The FFCF was a means of relieving the problems that come with such a limited membership profile; it expanded the membership, it introduced youthful vitality, and it secured the future of the movement.

First and foremost the FFCF provided a new set of recruits with which to expand the organization. In the early days of the CF, membership was limited to decorated war veterans or men who had spent at least six months in the trenches. This served the founders’ ideological purposes because they could claim to be a movement that was made up of the new French elite and that embodied the values of the front. However, there was a finite number of WWI veterans, which automatically limited the CF’s growth. In order for the CF to reach its full potential and achieve mass party status, it had to find a way to extend its criteria for eligible membership beyond WWI veterans and still maintain its ideological roots. The first group of non-veterans to be added to the CF was the Fils et Filles de Croix de Feu (FFCF). It was a logical choice for a first step towards expansion. The children of CF members were already closely linked to the war veterans and CF values, making them more likely to be sympathetic to CF goals. Additionally, the older generation had a vested interest in their children’s participation in the CF as well as the means to encourage their membership. In the first issue of the Flambeau, two years before the FFCF was officially formed, the manifesto references the importance of incorporating youthful energy into the organization with the children of veterans, stating:
Vous qui aurez à cœur d’apporter vos idées, vos énergies et votre amour à cette œuvre bien française dont l’avenir dépend maintenant de vous et qui, malgré la vieillesse aux mains tremblantes, restera toujours jeune et vibrante grâce aux fils et filles de Croix de Feu élevés dans nos idées et nos sentiments.²

One year later, as the idea of the FFCF became more solidified, a Flambeau article reiterates the need for youthful invigoration, “C’est pourquoi, en dirigeant les jeunes, on peut être dirigé par eux pour une France plus ardente et plus neuve.”³ Two years later, once the FFCF became an operational organization, La Rocque said in a speech directed at the youth, “Votre enthousiasme prolongera le nôtre.”⁴ The FFCF clearly brought youthfulness and reinvigoration to a middle-aged organization, ensuring its continued vitality.

The early limitations on membership also meant that, as the members aged together, they would all retire from active participation at around the same time and, unless there was a younger generation to step in the movement would cease to exist. The FFCF provided this essential next round of CF members who could take over when the time came:

Le commissaire général nous fait ensuite une causerie sur ce que sont les Fils de Croix de Feu, ce qu’ils espèrent faire, leur respect pour traditions, du drapeau ; l’étude de l’Histoire, puis il nous donne des directives pour devenir des directeurs et remplacer ceux qui deviennent trop vieux pour diriger.⁵

² You who have in mind to bring your ideas, your energy, and your love to this truly French task (the CF), the future of which depends upon you, and which, despite the tremblings of aging hands, will stay always young and vibrant, thanks to the sons and daughters of the Croix de Feu, raised with our ideas and our feelings. “Le Manifeste de Croix de Feu,” Le Flambeau November 1929: 1.
³ Through the direction of youth, one can be directed by them towards a France more ardent and new. "Fils De Croix De Feu," Le Flambeau November 1930: 3. Please note: the in-text quotation is taken directly from Le Flambeau, while my English translations will be featured in the footnotes, in italics.
⁴ “Assemblée Générale,” Le Flambeau August 1932: 3.
⁵ The general commissioner presented a discussion about what the Sons of the Croix de Feu are and what they hope to do, their respect for traditions and for the flag, and their study of history; then he gave them directions for how to become leaders and replace those who become too old to lead. "Fils De Croix De Feu," 3.
Pozzo di Borgo, a prominent member of the CF who passed back and forth from a position as director of the FFCF to Vice-President of the CF, in reflecting on the number of CF members who passed away in 1930 remarks that, “il faut envisager l’époque où le flambeau tombera de nos mains; c’est vous qui le relèverez pour le transmettre aux générations futures.”

The FFCF ensured that, when the veterans became too old to carry the movement, there would be a younger crop of CF members who would pick up and carry on.

CF articles and speeches, like the di Borgo quotation above, frequently reference the passing of the *flambeau* or torch. In another example of di Borgo’s use of this rather unoriginal imagery, he states “Il est réconfortant de se dire que cet admirable effort ne sera pas perdu et que, derrière nous, il y a les jeunes qui, à leur tour, ramasseraient le flambeau que nous laisserons tomber…”

This torch symbolized the ideology of the CF movement, not just its physical continuation. Therefore, the sons and daughters of the Croix de Feu would not only reinvigorate the movement and ensure that it continued to function after the older generation passed away, they would maintain the ideals of the Croix de Feu. The sons and daughters of the Croix de Feu, brought up and educated with CF values, would continue to light the way for France as they carried the torch into the future.

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6 *It is necessary to envision the moment when the torch falls from our hands; its you (the youth) who will pick it up and carry it to future generations.* "Parmi Nous," *Le Flambeau* April 1931: 2.

II. Structure

The FFCF was organized in much the same way as its parent organization. The adults were assembled into regional sections, based on arrondissement or province, depending on the size of the membership and the location. Each of these sections had the option to set up an associated Fils et Fils de Croix de Feu, which would carry the name of a hero who sacrificed himself for France during WWI. Even though each regional section had its own branch, the FFCF was a centrally controlled organization. This is not surprising, given the importance of continuity between the CF and the FFCF so that the youth would follow in their fathers' footsteps. La Rocque, as the Président Général of the CF, had ultimate control over the activities of the FFCF. La Rocque then selected a Président of the FFCF, who had significant influence in the FFCF, but still reported to him. There was also a secretary general, a treasurer, and a CF member who made up an advisory council for the FFCF. These positions also rotated among different members throughout the years. This organization mimicked the CF structure, which was based on military hierarchies. It was centrally controlled, with a clear descending order of authority, with La Rocque at the top.

Even though the vast majority of children who joined the FFCF were the children of CF members who had been recruited or encouraged by their parents, there were other ways for sympathetic youngsters to join. According to the statues of the FFCF, published in the Flambeau in 1932, children had to fit into one of four categories in order to be eligible to become a FFCF member. First, the sons and daughters of CF or Briscards were automatically eligible and encouraged to join.

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8 "Parmi Nous," Le Flambeau March 1932: 5.
Second, the children of soldiers who had “died for France” were offered membership. Third, having a parent who was a WWI combatant but had passed away since the end of the war guaranteed admission. Finally, anyone over the age of 16 who was sympathetic to CF values but was too young to have fought in the war could become a member. However, the process of membership for the fourth category of youth involved a pretty extensive review process. The youth in question had to be presented or endorsed by two CF members and then accepted by the leader of the local section. This final category of membership indicates that in 1933, the FFCF were still an exclusive organization that saw its connections to veterans as paramount.

The FFCF also set out specific rules for the behavior and activities of the FFCF. First, the members were to assist with every CF meeting, but only participate when expressly invited and only in limited ways. Second, the FFCF members were under the authority of the presidents of the regional section. Third, members of the Sons of the CF over the age of 16 were to attend CF meetings, but group themselves apart from the older members. Finally, boys and girls over the age of 13 had to separate themselves. The only exception to this rule was for outings, walks, and group visits. On these occasions when the boys and girls participated in the same events, they were to make two clearly distinct groups and remain physically separated from each other. The supervision of an adult CF member ensured that the separation was maintained.  

The boys and girls of the FFCF have specific uniforms that they were instructed to wear at all organization functions, events, parades, and at summer camp. The uniforms for boys consisted of navy blue berets, blue shorts, white shirt, and a blue

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9 “Parmi Nous,” March 1932: 5.
They were also instructed to keep their hair cut short. The girls wore similar white shirts and berets, but with blue pleated skirts instead of shorts. There was also a FFCF insignia, which was featured on pins the children wore with their uniforms. The insignia featured an enamel blue cross, with “F.C.F.” written in glowing white letters. Finally, two red torches were crossed beneath the cross.\footnote{“Parmi Nous,” \textit{Le Flambeau} April 1932: 5.}

FFCF members were also expected to pays dues. For members under the age of 13, the price was 5 francs. Anyone between the ages of 14 and 20 had to pay 10 francs and anyone over 21 had to pay 20. Fee waivers were given to especially large families, a policy that was both practical and morally based; it was considered a moral accomplishment to have a large family and contribute to the French population. Anyone with more than three children only paid the full cost for two of them and 2 francs for each the rest.

III. Education

Given that the primary purpose of the FFCF was to create a new generation of CF members who could maintain the movement when their parents became too old, it was absolutely crucial that the children learn about the values and goals of the CF. In order to be able to carry the torch into the future, the children of the FFCF had to learn what they were carrying, why, and how. Therefore, an enormous amount of FFCF time was dedicated to educating the younger generations.

The stated direction of the FFCF education was threefold. As the first article detailing the activities of the FFCF in the \textit{Flambeau} stated, “La base fondamentale
sera avant tout d’éducation morale, intellectuelle et physique.”¹¹ One year later, M. de Villeneuve, who was the secretary general of the FFCF at the time, said:

[on] développe ensuite le vaste programme particulièrement bien étudié ou la morale, la pratique des sports et l’éducation intellectuelle sont judicieusement amalgamées et assureront à nos enfants un bagage important leur permettant de se conduire fièrement dans le chemin de l’honneur.¹²

The implication was that these three characteristics: physical, moral, and intellectual strength, defined the CF members. By developing these traits in the younger generation, the CF prepared them to “follow the path of honor” or take charge of the organization. Importantly, the three forms of education were interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Very little of the education was overtly ideological, but everything the children learned taught them, in some way, a principle or a value that was important to the CF. Therefore, the intellectual and the athletic education contributed directly to the moral education of the youngsters.

Education was also significant to the FFCF because of La Rocque’s belief that carefully considered, deliberate, and educated actions were more efficient. As he put it, “La pensée est la mère d’action” and “L’action la plus sûre est l’action réfléchie.”¹³ It follows that the more advanced the intellectual level of the group members, the better the resultant action. By developing intellectually, the younger generations would be able to follow their father’s leads; they would behave with order and discipline, two characteristics La Rocque considered paramount. In a message that

¹¹ *The fundamental base will be, above all, moral, intellectual, and physical education “Parmi Nous,”* Le Flambeau February 1930: 5.

¹² *Next, we will develop a vast, well-thought program, which judiciously combines morals, the practice of sports, and intellectual education, assuring our children the tools which will permit them to proudly follow the path of honor “Dix-Septième Section: Réunion du 10 décembre,”* Le Flambeau January 1931: 4.

¹³ *Thought is the mother of action “Être commandé,”* Le Flambeau October 1932: L’Appel and *The surest action is the action that is reflected upon “Réalités,”* Le Flambeau January 1933: L’Appel.
bears striking similarity to La Rocque’s speeches to the older generation, a l’Appel article reminds the FFCF, “Ne soyons pas des agités, des révoltés mais des forts. Notre pensée sera plus claire, nos actes seront plus efficaces.”  

Basically, the more intellectually astute the young men were, the more efficacious and deliberate their actions would be.

The efforts to educate the younger generations were also an attempt to enhance the naturally positive qualities of youth (energy, enthusiasm, etc) and temper some of the negative qualities like impulsiveness and stubbornness. In an article in the Flambeau, a frequent contributor who identifies himself simply as Trézien, writes:

Ne reprochons donc pas aux jeunes d’être ce qu’ils sont. Ils ont les défauts, certes : ceux de la race, exagérés. Leur amour-propre est ombrageux. Mais, à côté de ces erreurs, que de véritable foi, de goût, de confiance ! Ils s’attachent avec dévouement à ceux qui veulent les commander, les former avec patience, bienveillance et fermeté. Leur conduite est la clef de voûte du commandement.  

Another article writes that “souvent, on reproche aux “jeunes” d’être trop absolus dans leurs idées, trop exclusives dans leurs sentiments.” This opinion of the younger generations is prevalent. However, these negative characteristics, when directed towards the right aims, can become positive. As one author says, “le fait de la jeunesse est d’oser avec confiance, un peu follement parfois, mais d’agir.”

Another writes, “Le plus beau privilège de la jeunesse est la spontanéité de ses

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14 We are not agitators or rabble rousers, but the strong. Our thoughts will be clearer, our actions more effectual. Le Flambeau. “Etre commandé,” L’Appel.

15 Do not reproach young people for being what they are. They certainly have faults: those of the race, exaggerated. Their self-esteem is shady. But, next to these errors, they have real faith, taste, and confidence. They devotedly attach themselves to those who would lead them and teach them with patience, kindness, and firmness. Their conduct is the keystone of commandment. Trézien, “Imagination Et Jeunesse,” Le Flambeau May 1933. L’Appel.

16 Often, we reproach young people for being too absolute in their ideas and too blinkered in their sentiments. “La mission des ‘Jeunes’,” Le Flambeau February 1934: L’Appel.

17 The fact of youth is to dare with confidence, a little wildly sometimes, but to act. Trézien, “Imagination Et Jeunesse.” L’Appel.
sentiments qui la place sans effort dans le grand courant de la vie et la port irrésistiblement vers l’action.” These authors and CF leaders recognize the utility of youthful energy and enthusiasm. Where the older generations might hesitate, the younger act with headstrong confidence. With moral and intellectual education the older generations could ensure that their children’s youthful energy was directed towards the right goals. Therefore, one of the underlying purposes of the CF education was to harness and direct the natural élan of the younger generation.

a. The Memory of WWI

WWI was, in many ways, the basis of the CF. The values the WWI veterans had learned on the front were the basis of the CF ideology. The war camaraderie still bound them together years later and made the movement cogent and powerful. The veterans also saw themselves as the new elite of French society, specifically because of their service to France in the war. Because the war was so crucial to the CF in so many ways, it seemed absolutely essential that the younger generations understand the war and their parents’ experiences and suffering. The children had to be included in the WWI experience in order for the movement to maintain its potency. Therefore, the most frequent subject of the FFCF education was WWI. The process of teaching the children about the war and imparting the WWI values was approached through imitation, experiential learning in group activities, and inclusion of the children in the emotional memory of the war.

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18 The most beautiful privilege of youth is the spontaneity of feelings, which places it, without effort, in the grand current of life and directs it, irresistibly, towards action. “Mystique de la jeunesse,” Le Flambeau March 1934: 2.
The veterans of the CF believed that the all-important values they had learned on the front were specific to their experience; they alone could understand and respond to the call of sacrifice, patriotism, and duty. This ideological loneliness made the veterans feel themselves to be an elite group, surrounded by decadence. In a *Le Flambeau* article, Alexandre Loex, a CF member, wrote, “Les vieilles générations que ne tenaillent plus les menaces de guerre et ses dangers ne nous comprennent pas. Les jeunes générations que les plaisirs trop faciles attirent et fascinent ne nous comprennent pas.”

La Rocque blamed the political failures of the Third Republic on leaders who came of age before the war and never experienced the call of sacrifice for their country, and therefore had forgotten the war as soon as it was over. The cultural decadence of the post-war era was a result of the ease and material comfort with which the younger generation lived. One WWI veteran wrote an article on regional patriotism in the *Flambeau*, which stated “L’alsace- Nos fils, nos jeunes ne savent pas ce que ce nom évoque en nous, qui avons connu l’avant-guerre et senti le poids de la botte prussienne.”

The younger generations, because they had not experienced the war and because they grew up in a time of material ease, did not understand the WWI veteran’s values, nor the sense of patriotism and camaraderie inspired by the front. Therefore, in order to preserve these values, it was an essential mission of the CF to find a way to transmit these values to the next generation without, however, subjecting them to a war. As one *Flambeau* article states, “C’est,

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19 The older generations, who no long remember the threats and the dangers of war, do not understand us. The younger generations, too easily attracted and fascinated, do not understand us. “Un esprit nouveau.”

20 Alsace-our sons, our children do not know what this name evokes in us, we who have known the time before war and the weight of the Prussian boot. Trézien, “Pour les jeunes,” *Le Flambeau* October 1932: 1.
A large portion of the physical, experiential and academic activities of the FFCF were intended to transmit certain values from the front into the younger generation.

The purpose of the FFCF was, in passing on the values of the front, to create a generation of “symbolic veterans.” The symbolic veterans were the children of veterans who, through the FFCF, would absorb the WWI experience from their parents, glean the values and ideals of the front, and finally fill the same role as the new elite in French society. La Rocque never wavered in his belief that the veterans were, thanks to their time on the front and the sacrifices they had made for France, a new elite; distinguished above and beyond all other parts of French society. He wrote in *Service Public*: “The past history of our comrades made it impossible for them to enter into the shady intrigues of the political groups. Their will to serve and their mettle as victors, marked them out, *par excellence*, as the instruments of national salvation.”

The CF members’ social position, so intimately linked to the status of veteran, would be passed on to their children who, through the FFCF, represented the new incarnation of the war experience and the WWI veterans.

One of the methods for transmitting the war experience and molding the children in the shapes of their parents was imitation. The children were encouraged to use their parents, specifically their fathers who had fought on the front, as role models.

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21 It is, *in sum*, the mentality of their father that M. Arnoult wants to give to the Sons of the Croix de Feu. He want to raise them in the tradition which is theirs: the cult of memory and patriotism. “*Notre Manifestation.*” *Le Flambeau* September 1932: 3.

models. Pozzo di Borgo, in an article addressed to the FFCF wrote, “Ayez toujours les yeux fixés sur vos pères, imitez-les, comptez sur nous pour faire l’impossible pour empêcher le retour des heures d’épouvante que nous avons vécu.”23 By imitating their fathers and by mimicking the bravery and patriotism they display, the children would directly learn about the war and the on-going duties of the veteran to France. The FFCF relied on catch-phrases like *Tels pères, tels fils,* or “like father, like son,” and *Unis comme nos pères,* or “united like our fathers,” to encourage this imitation. These catch-phrases were repeated by the children or by *Le Flambeau* in the reports on FFCF activities.

Another means of imbuing the children with the war experience was through the activities of the FFCF. The FFCF organized outings and events that would mimic the WWI experience, although, of course, to a much lesser degree. Through these activities, the boys and girls would be exposed to the circumstances that created the values that the veterans found so important. For example, the first recorded outing for the sons of the CF (this was before the girls’ sections were added) was a trip into a forest near Paris. The boys marched through the woods, marching like soldiers and mimicking the discipline of a regiment. When they stopped for lunch, they made careful note of the communal nature of the food. In the article published about the outing in the *Flambeau,* one boy writes, “Comme le faisait nos pères sur le front, nous mettons tout en commun, ce qui d’ailleurs est l’idée général de notre Association. Nous aider mutuellement.”24 By sharing food and marching as if they

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23 *Always have your eyes fixed on your fathers. Imitate them and count on us to do the impossible, to prevent a return to the horrible moments we lived through.* “Parmi Nous,” *Le Flambeau* June 1932: 3.

24 *Like our fathers did on the front, we put everything in common, which is the general idea of our association. We help each other.* “Les fils de ‘Croix de Feu’,” *Le Flambeau* July 1930: 4.
were soldiers, the boys had practical and experiential exposure to the atmosphere of the front, which encouraged the development of values like unity, brotherhood, discipline, and cooperation.

The absorption of the WWI experience also prepared the FFCF members eventually to become leaders within the movement. In an article from the February 1933 issue of Le Flambeau, at the head of an article called “Le commandement et la bienveillance”, which explained how to be an effective, disciplined, and yet kindly leader, La Rocque wrote, “J’insiste sur la nécessité, pour tous les Fils de Croix de Feu, de méditer cet article: chacun, parmi eux, doit se préparer à être un chef.”

Within the article, the author, Trezien, stresses the necessity of kindness and understanding on the part of a leader. He writes, “Le chef doit savoir sentir et savoir comprendre pour faire sentir et faire comprendre.” A couple of lines later, he states, “La générosité des chefs bienveillants éclaire leur intelligence. Un chef qui comprend ses hommes avec sa tête, avec sa coeur, est compris par eux.”

Interestingly, Trezien’s description emphasizes not only a kind leader, but one who is also emotionally aligned with his followers. This implies that the leader shares the emotional experience of the followers. In the aftermath of WWI, this means that the leader had to understand the emotional burden of the war.

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25 The preparation for leadership roles was exclusively for the boys in the FFCF. The CF firmly maintained gender roles, reminding the girls that they were bound for more domestic work. It was only boys who would eventually lead the movement.

26 I insist upon the necessity, for each Sons of the Croix de Feu, to meditate upon this article; each among them must prepare himself to become a leader. Tréxien, “Le commandement et la bienveillance,” Le Flambeau February 1933: L’Appel.

27 The leader needs to know how to experience and how to understand in order to make experiences and be understood. And The generosity of kind leaders reveals their intelligence. A leader who understands his followers with his head and his heart is understood by them. Trézien, “Le commandement et la bienveillance.”
The men who founded the Croix de Feu and who still made up the bulk of its members in 1933 had suffered through an incredibly traumatic war. They made no effort to mask the emotional suffering and the horrors they had experienced, but rather referred openly to the war experience as “épouvantable” and made frequent mention of their brothers who had fallen on the “battlefield of honor.” The CF members did not hide the realities of war from their sons and daughters. On the contrary, they presented war for what it is: appalling, dreadful, and traumatic.

The CF’s treatment of WWI is surprisingly dichotomous. It was at once a moment of French unification and glory and one of the most horrific and traumatic events in French history. The Flambeau does not hesitate to give gory details about the war. An article in l’Appel celebrating and honoring the life of a WWI doctor and CF member makes reference to the fatigue he felt after days of repairing fractured bones, operating on the worst wounds, and treating gaseous gangrenes.28 The article simultaneously salutes the doctor’s excellent work (he lost only 6% of his patients from the battle of the Marne) and points out that he personally treated 929 wounded men in that battle. The article praises this doctor for treating an amazing and shocking 12,296 men throughout the course of the war. This number serves dual purposes: it awes the children with the personal hard work and dedication of a patriotic man, and it shocks the young reader with the terribly high number of men wounded in the war. This article makes no secret about the devastating impact of war on human life, both the losses and the injuries. Another Le Flambeau article, one that was written specifically for parents to read to their children, gives a detailed description of the impact of war on France in terms of the economic woes as well as

the lives lost and damaged. It is crucial that the CF’s group memory of WWI is not glorified or presented as any less horrific than it really was. The *Flambeau* fully exposes the horrible, gory, and depressing details of war to the younger generations.

It is interesting that the CF members make no effort to hide the terror of war from their children. They glorify the sacrifice of the soldiers and the unity it created in France, but not the act of fighting the war itself. There are two explanations for the honest portrayal of wars destructive nature. As described earlier, the movement was interested in creating “symbolic veterans”; boys who absorbed the experience of WWI and reaped its benefits without suffering through an actual war. The detailed emphasis on the terrors of war imprinted the memories of their fathers into the young men’s minds in a more experiential way. They empathized with their fathers and therefore absorbed the lessons more entirely.

Another reason for detailing the terrors of war is hinted at in the article on leadership and kindness that La Rocque ordered all the young boys to read. The thesis of the article is that La Rocque is an effective leader because he understands his followers. This implies some sort of CF group emotion that La Rocque was connected to. In many ways, the Croix de Feu comes across as a movement of mutual healing and recovery for traumatized war veterans. In the early 1930s, when WWI still felt recent and when the members were almost all war veterans, there are strong emotional undertones to the rhetoric and propaganda. *La Flambeau* articles frequently reference the hopes and dreams of the young brothers who fell during the war and command the living veterans to carry out their wishes. The CF organizes trips and parades to the monuments to the Unknown Soldier. Interestingly, they visit
the monuments dedicated to American and Belgian soldiers as well as French, hinting at an emotional memory that extends beyond nationalism to a humanistic understanding of the general suffering of war. An article recounting one of those memorial parades comments that men came from all over France to participate. The article in *Le Flambeau* states:

> Et ces gens, certains venus de la plus lointaine province, isolés, s’ignorant, mais reliés par je ne sais quelles invisibles antennes, sentaient vibrer à l’unisson les résonances secrètes de leurs cœurs. C’était un peu l’âme de la France qui passait.  

It is undeniably clear in these accounts that there is some sort of communal healing that the CF facilitates.

This communal memory and healing is important for the FFCF as well. The same article cited above recounts the response of a young boy who witnessed the parade. He states:

> On peut avouer son émotion sans fausse honte, car elle est de celles qui vivifient et rendent fort : ce jour-là, nous, les fils, nous avons pleuré de fierté et d’orgueil devant le défilé de nos pères. Mes chers camarades, mes amis ; mes frères ; sachons toujours nous montrer les dignes descendants de tels hommes.

The young boy who witnesses the parade shares in the emotion of the older generation. This gives him the tools to understand and sympathize with the movement; skills that are essential to becoming a good leader. It also connected the children emotionally to their fathers and gave them further respect for the sacrifices and horrors of war. There was also a practical application for this deeper

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29 *These men, some of them coming from distant, isolated provinces, connected by I do not know what kind of invisible antenna, felt the secret resonances of their hearts vibrate in unison. It was the soul of France which passed by.* “Glanes autour du défilé,” *Le Flambeau* December 1932: L’Appel.

30 *One can admit his emotion without false shame, because it is one of those emotions that invigorates and strengthens one. Today, we, the sons, we have cried with pride before the parade of our fathers. My dear comrades, my friends, my brothers, we will always know and demonstrate that we are the proud descendents of such men.* “Glanes autour du défilé,” L’Appel.
understanding and empathy. As Trezien and La Rocque make clear, an effective leader understands his followers. Therefore, including the boys in the emotional spirit of the CF prepared them to become good leaders, not only of the CF, but perhaps of France as well.

By exposing the FFCF members to the emotional trauma of the war and teaching them the values of the front experientially and through imitation of their parents, the CF shaped their children into “symbolic veterans.” These children were prepared to fill their parent’s shoes and carry on the CF movement, both as followers and leaders.

b. Intellectual Education:

In addition to the WWI education, the FFCF tackled broader intellectual topics such as the study of history, archaeology, and science, all of which were specifically mentioned in a July 1930 FFCF mission statement.\(^{31}\) Importantly, the primary focus for all of these subjects was their relationship to France and the patriotism they inspired. Rather than simply studying geography, the boys and girls of the FFCF studied *French* geography. Of these general intellectual pursuits, the study of history was far and away the most important. The importance of the history of WWI has already been demonstrated. However, the FFCF history lessons often went back much farther than 1914. The children of the FFCF learned about thousands of years of French history and prehistory.

The most important reason for teaching the children history was that it inspired patriotism in a younger generation that was raised in a decadent and

decaying France, and made them feel connected to the glorious, proud France of old. As explained earlier, the CF was above all else, a nationalist movement. However, because of the dismal state of affairs in the 30s, France, as the younger generation experienced it, did not provoke the sense of patriotism the CF aimed for. The younger generations had to learn about and feel connected to a time when France was finer, grander, nobler, and more powerful. La Rocque makes frequent reference to the vague concept of “tradition”, which seems to mean the general past glory of France. In Service Public, he underlines the importance of passing on the respect for French tradition to the younger generations. He states, “the cult of tradition must be basic to every scheme of national education.”

La Rocque says “traditional conceptions must be explained to the younger generation, so that the past, to which they never can return, shall not be confounded with the urge that emanates therefrom and sustains them in their progress towards the future.”

Even though La Rocque avows that a physical return to the past is impossible, he advocates a spiritual and moral return to France as she used to be. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, he says, “What maintains tradition is the memory, kept perpetually alive, of the great lessons of bygone days.” This bears direct resemblance to the aim of teaching the younger generation about the war. The FFCF teaches and imbues them with the WWI experience so that the memory is not lost, thus ensuring the maintenance of tradition.

There was a strong sense among the CF leaders and members that WWI had been a turning point in the history of France and that the country was suffering in the

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32 Rocque, The Fiery Cross: The Call to Public Service in France 98.
33 Rocque, The Fiery Cross: The Call to Public Service in France 98.
1930s. The “decadence disease” had infected the government, the younger generations and French culture as a whole; France had lost face since the end of the war. This was another reason why WWI was emphasized so heavily in CF rhetoric and teaching. If the France of the 1930s did not inspire the kind of patriotic passion that the WWI veterans felt, perhaps teaching their children about a time when France was more powerful and more highly respected would teach them to love their country. In the first issue of the *Flambeau* that featured *L’Appel*, the section written for the younger generations, an article points to the glorious tradition of France. The article states:

Joachim du Bellay considérait la France comme la “mère des Arts, des Armes et des Lois”; et tout étranger se plait à la reconnaître comme une seconde patrie. Tout ce qui est noble et généreux, charitable et humain a pris naissance en France. Ecrire son Histoire, c’est souvent écrire l’Histoire de la Civilisation. Or, depuis la Guerre notre Patrie semble ne plus être, autant que jadis, le pole attractif des intelligences et des énergies.34

WWI marked the beginning of the fall from international glory for France.

Therefore, teaching about WWI and earlier history to the younger generations was also a means to teach them about the powerful country France once had been and inspire patriotism in them.

The concepts of learning from history and avoiding past mistakes surface in multiple CF speeches and publications. An article in *L’Appel* called “Le grand rôle de l’histoire”, the author states, “Pour voir clair dans les destinées de la France, il faut

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34 Joachim du Bellay considered France the mother of arts, arms, and laws; and all foreigners would be well served to recognize France as a second homeland. All which is noble, generous, charitable and humane was born in France. To write the history of France is to write the history of civilization. Now, since the Great War, our homeland appears not to be, as much as formerly, the attracting pole of intelligence and energies. “La plus belle France,” *Le Flambeau* October 1932: L’Appel.
étudier son histoire. Nos décisions seront alors fermes et plus rationnelles.\textsuperscript{35} The emphasis on history is evident in the activities, speeches, and articles aimed at the younger generation. They were heavily exposed to the history of France and the stories of key French leaders.

Learning the history of France was not an end in and of itself. The young men and women were supposed to adapt the history they learned to their own lives, avoid mistakes of the past, and learn from former French leaders. A \textit{L’Appel} article gives a clue as to one potential use for history: practical applications and imitation:

\begin{quote}
Il est utile, il est sage, et surtout dans la jeunesse, de chercher des modèles à imiter, de demander des conseils, d’obéir à un vrai chef et d’apprendre auprès de lui la manière de commander. L’imitation est un point de départ nécessaire.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

As explained in the previous chapter, one of the primary goals of the FFCF was to prepare the next generation of CF leaders. The great historical leaders of France provided important models for the young men to look up to and learn from.

The article \textit{Le Grand Rôle de l’Histoire} (the title itself is a good indicator for the importance of history in the FFCF) states:

\begin{quote}
Une génération ne peut accomplir œuvre originale, si elle ne s’est tournée auparavant vers le passé, passé d’hier, que les Croix de Feu et Briscards connaissent bien, passé plus lointain dont notre jeunesse doit prendre connaissance par l’étude, pour ensuite le rappeler à tous. Le temps est proche, nous l’espérons, où une équipe de jeunes enthousiastes, et bien entraînés, ira ici et la narrer quelque grand fait, louer quelque grande époque du passé, avec toute la fraîcheur de son émerveillement et de sa fierté.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{35} To clearly see the destiny of France, it is essential to study its history. Our decisions will then be more firm and rational. Pierre Ferasse, “Le grand rôle de l’histoire,” \textit{Le Flambeau} January 1933: L’Appel.

\textsuperscript{36} It is useful and it is wise, certainly in youth, to search for models to imitate, to demand advice, to obey a true leader and to learn from him the way to lead. Imitation is a necessary point of departure. “La personnalité,” \textit{Le Flambeau} June 1933: L’Appel.

\textsuperscript{37} A generation cannot accomplish original work if it is does not look to the past, the past of yesterday, which the Croix de Feu and Briscards know well, the more distant past which our children must learn
The history of France provided material for imitation as well as inspiration for future actions.

One of the most obvious ways the FFCF taught the history of France was through a series of educational articles in l’Appel. Starting in December 1932, every month’s issue featured an article outlining the history and culture of a region of France. The first article focuses on Normandy and starts out dramatically stating that “Parler de la Normandie en deux colonnes de journal, c’est vouloir mettre la Seine en bouteilles.”

The Flambeau version of Normandy’s history starts one thousand years ago with the arrival of “adventurers” in “frail Viking ships” from the north. The article later describes Normandy’s other claims to fame: it was the launching point for the Battle of Hastings in 1066 and is home to the beautiful Mont Saint-Michel. The article traces through the various kings and rulers of Normandy, gives credit to all of the artists, writers, and musicians from the region, and finally lands on Normandy’s pride and joy: cider. It ends with this lines, written by a “fils” of Normandy: “Le cidre a conquis des couronnes, A votre tour montrez les trônes, Où se sont assis vos héros”

This rather vapid lauding of Normandy becomes more consequential when one notices that it teaches the young FFCF members to feel a sort of allegiance with Richard the Lionhearted and William the Conqueror, the great rulers from Normandy. The current inhabitants of Normandy, by reading about the historical legacy of their

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38 To describe of Normandy in two columns of a newspaper is like trying to put the Seine in bottles. “Les provinces Françaises,” Le Flambeau December 1932: L’Appel.
39 Cider has conquered crowns, in your turn mount thrones, where heroes are seated. “Les provinces Françaises,” December 1932: L’Appel.
home, are meant to feel like the cultural descendents of these famous warriors and to look to them as role models.

*L’Appel* winds its way around France, highlighting a different region and its history each month. The article on Champagne draws a line all the way back to Charlemagne: “Charlemagne fut ici chez lui et, si le pays, séparé et rattaché au gré des remous du Moyen-Age, a successivement appartenu à des souverainetés différentes, son histoire est soudée au sol par l’origine et par la continuité.”

A link to Charlemagne means, even though his reign is in the distant past, he can still be a model for the future leaders of the CF. In other regions, like Île-de-France, the farmers and the peasants are the continuous line, connecting the inhabitants to the past. “Les cloisirs, mes ancêtres, y ayant cultivé leurs clos de père en fils, depuis toujours.” Whether it is a famous leader like Charlemagne or simply the everyday actions of peasants, the articles make explicit attempts to connect the past to the present with the goal of making France’s noble and grand history more accessible to the young readers.

The articles also inspire patriotism by presenting romantic, charming, and bucolic visions of France. This is France of old, France of songs and fairytales and legends. In the article on Champagne, the “hostess” or author leads a tour around the region, stopping in a village. The writer recalls the village and her stay there:

Il ressemble à ses frères. L’église est au centre, tassée, comme entrée dans le sol. Le clocher particulièrement fin s’élance vers le ciel…

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40 Charlemagne was at home here and, if this country, separated and reattached through the course of Medieval disturbances, belonged to a succession of different rulers, its history is linked through its soil by its origins and by its beginning. “Nos provinces: la Champagne,” *Le Flambeau* January 1933: L’Appel.

41 My ancestors, orchard workers, have cultivated their vines, from father to son, sine the beginning of time. “Nos provinces: L’Île-de-France,” *Le Flambeau* March 1933: L’Appel.
entrantons dans une grande maison grise, là-bas, sur la place. Elle est coiffée lourdement d’un toit Mansard…entrez avec moi. Diner robuste, vin du pays: Bouzy, couleur de framboise mûre, source de chaleur surgi de ce sol à l’aspect pauvre…La chambre est grande, froide, sur le lit la “couette” de plume est rassurante. A l’abri de sa douce chaleur, vous entendrez mieux la chanson de chez nous. Le vent plaque l’eau contre les murs…cette symphonie tragique enfante des visions. Est-ce la horde qui déferle sur les champs catalauniques? Est-ce le cor des compagnons de Charlemagne qui résonne vers Attigny?…Pour nous, cette rude chanson est une romance de berceau. Nous sommes nés sous le double signe de l’action et du rêve.\textsuperscript{42}

This charming and inviting, at once cozy and militaristic, description of a country village weaves the past into the present, implying a bond between the current residents of Champagne and its grand history. The “song” of Champagne is the battle cry of Charlemagne and the peal of village bells. It is an entirely romantic vision of France’s history.

La Rocque presents a similar idea of “L’âme Française” which has been passed through the ages. In a speech to the FFCF, he says, “L’âme Française! Elle est née depuis des centaines et des centaines d’années; elle a vu tous les régimes, elle a vu les plus grandes gloires; elle a vu les pires malheurs. Elle est restée intacte. Nous l’avons reçue. Nous vous la passons. Vous la passerez.”\textsuperscript{43} Much like the song of

\textsuperscript{42} The village looks like his brothers. The church in the center, massive, as if anchored in the soil. The bell, a particularly fine one, flies towards the sky…we enter into a large, grey house, down there, on the square. The house is topped with a heavy Mansard roof…come in with me. A robust dinner, country wine: Bouzy, the color of ripe raspberries, source of warmth stemming from this modest floor…the bedroom is large and cold. The feather duvet on the bed is comforting. In the shelter of its soft warmth, you can better hear the song of our home. The wind pelts the rain against the walls…this tragic symphony gives rise to visions. Is that the horde that unfurled on the battlefields of Catalonia? Is that the horn of Charlemagne’s comrades which resonates towards Attigny?…For us, this crude song is a nursery rhyme. We are born under the double sign of action and dreams. “Nos provinces: la Champagne,” L’appel.

\textsuperscript{43} The French soul. She was born centuries and centuries ago, she has seen all of the regimes, she has seen all of the greatest glories, she has seen the worst unhappiness. She has stayed intact. We receive the French soul and pass it to you. You will pass it on. “Assemblée,” Le Flambeau August 1932: 3
Charlemagne, the spirit of France creates a link between the younger generation and the history of France.

These mini-history lessons included well-known monuments, beautiful architecture, descriptions of everyday people, as well as famous painters, musicians, and writers. The Île-de-France gets credit for producing two of France’s most famous “pastoral poets”: the writer La Fontaine and the painter Corot. From Lorraine, the painter Claude Gelée and the sculptor Ligier Richier are remembered as using the region’s beauty to inspire their art. Essentially, the l’Appel history lesson are meant to provoke pride in all of France’s achievements. While the military and political leaders offer role models, the beauties and charms of France instill the young boys and girls with patriotic and romantic sentiments.

The FFCF also taught the military history of France. L’appel ran a series of historical articles, supplemented by lectures, which outlined the lives and accomplishments of famous French military leaders. The lectures were in a series called “Les Gloires Françaises” and were delivered by a variety of CF members, including Charles Goutry, the Secretary General of the FFCF.

The first of these lectures was about the life of Maréchal Vauban, a friend and advisor to Louis XIV. The boys and girls who heard the lecture were taught about Vauban’s miraculous ascension from a humble childhood to the post of Marshall of France. The article also reveals one of the two most important purposes of the lecture series in stating “Nous le vîmes bouleversant l’art de la guerre à son époque,

44 “Nos provinces: L’Ile-de-France,” L’Appel.
imaginant un système défensif qui peut encore servir de modèle.”  

Not only was the lecture a portrait of a historical figure, it was a lesson on military strategy. The lecture on Vauban was extremely successful and articles and references to Vauban continue to appear in the l’Appel for the next couple of months. One of these articles fills in details about Vauban’s naval career and the work he did to build up the French navy. Again, the article is meant to spark ideas and teach the children about the military. The other purpose of these lectures, much like the regional articles, was to give the boys and girls role models to guide them and to inspire patriotism and pride in the grand history of France.

L’Appel also ran historical articles about military leaders. One of the more lengthy articles is about Captain Rivière, a French commander from the late 1800s, who helped expand the French colonial empire by conquering Tonkin, thereby securing a trade path to China. The article explains that Rivière is killed in a battle with the Chinese before he accomplishes his mission. However, “l’élan qu’il a donné à nos troupes ne s’arrêtera plus. Au bout de deux ans, elles on partfait leur conquête.” This account of Rivière serves the many purposes of the FFCF education: it inspires patriotism, is gives the children role models to look up to, and the detailed account of troop movements teaches military strategy to the boys.

The history lessons in L’Appel and the lectures that boys and girls of the FFCF listen to have very specific purposes within the context of the CF values. First of all, they encourage a respect for tradition and they inspire patriotism. They teach the

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46 We were deeply moved by the art of war from [Vauban’s] era, imagining a defensive system which could still serve as a model. “Vauban: L’Esprit Français pendant la guerre,” Le Flambeau April 1933: L’Appel.

47 The élan which he gave our troops did not cease. At the end of two years, they had perfected their conquest. “Le commandant Rivière,” Le Flambeau June 1933: L’Appel.
grand history of France and encourage the children to feel connected to the famous French leaders. The lessons also provide applicable models for the children, sometimes in the form of military strategy, like in the article and lectures about Vauban, and in the form of role models. The history lessons are prime examples of the mutually reinforcing moral and intellectual education. Through the articles and lectures about WWI, the regions of France, and military history, the children of the FFCF learn about CF values.

c. Field Trips and Educational Outings:

The education the children received was not limited to reading articles and listening to lectures. They also learned experientially by traveling around the country to historical sites and to museums. One of the early FFCF missions statements states that the education of children will happen “par des visites de musées, de monuments, d’établissements divers, par des voyages en province et à l’étranger et par des conférences sur les Arts et les Sciences, la géographie, l’histoire, les religions, etc” 48

Much like the modern day field trip, the boys and girls of the FFCF went on educational excursions to sites all around France, sometimes venturing as far as Belgium. Most of these outings had a historic destination. The theory behind this form of learning is explained by one author’s critical response to the French school system:

La superposition des examens, des classements, la religion des grades et des brevets, l’abus de la paperasse, qui couvrent les responsabilités et entretiennent la défiance, transforment petit à petit les cerveaux les

48 By visits to museums, monuments, and diverse establishments, by trips to the country and abroad and by conferences about the Arts and Sciences, geography, history, religion, etc. “Parmi nous,” Le Flambeau April 1932: 5.
plus vigoureux en machines, éteignent les tempéraments, produisent de bons élèves, éliminent les chefs.  

A further reason for the aversion to classroom learning is hinted at by a WWI veteran who states, “L’histoire ! Nous ne nous sommes pas contentés de l’apprendre sur les bancs de l’école, nous l’avons vécue, mieux que cela, nous l’avons écrite de notre sang.” In order to absorb the lessons, lectures and articles alone would not suffice, the boys and girls had to experience as much as they could. Therefore, visits to battlefields and monuments were a means of teaching about and connecting the children to French history.

The FFCF educational outings had two main destinations: museums and battlefields. Interestingly, the museums that boys and girls visited were widely varied, ranging from military museums, like the Musée de Guerre in Vincennes, to the ultimate French museum, the Louvre. Most of the museum visits reported in the Flambeau occurred in the close vicinity of Paris and invited all ages of FFCF members to participate. The boys and girls went to the Ethnographic and the Architecture Museums in the Trocadero, the Museum at Versailles, and many trips to the Louvre. They also went on a guided tour of the Exposition Coloniale, with the Commissioner General of Indochina. The museum visits supported the lessons of France and French history that were taught in the Appel’s regional articles and gave the children further exposure to France’s glorious past. Similar to the l’Appel articles,  

49 The superimposition of exams, of sorting, the religion of grades and diplomas, the abuse of wretched papers, which protect responsibility and suspicion, transforming, little by little, the most vigorous brains into machines, switching off constitutions, producing good students, eliminating leaders. “Et les jeunes? Pour les fils de Croix de Feu,” Le Flambeau November 1931: 2.

50 History, We are not content to learn history by sitting on school benches, we have lived history. Better than that, we have written it with our blood. “Assemblée amicale,” Le Flambeau August 1932: 3.
the museum visits were meant to instill patriotism and to inspire the children to continue France’s tradition of greatness into the future.

The other destinations for the FFCF field trips were battlegrounds and military sites. For example, in April 1933, around 50 FFCF members visited the WWI front in Champagne. They held a moment of silence for the men lost and then J.F. de la Rocque (François de la Rocque’s son) placed a tri-colored palm on a monument to the WWI soldiers. After the small ceremony, General Feraud “fit l’honneur de leur expliquer en termes sobres et saisissants, la tragédie qui se déroula pendant quatre années en ces lieux.”

This trip, much like ones that involved a dedication in front of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier or a similar monument, gave the children an emotional connection to the experience of their fathers and taught them about WWI. Additionally, as could be expected, the guides of trip to Champagne took advantage of the opportunity to further instill some patriotism in the children by pointing out the beauties of the surrounding countryside.

d. Gender Specific Education:

Perhaps the best example of mutually reinforcing intellectual and moral educations is the separate activities for boys and girls. One of the staples of CF ideology is the emphasis on traditional gender roles. Gender roles had been in a state of flux since the end of World War I, particularly with regards to French women. For the fascist leagues, the boyish, decadent, *femmes modernes*, so wholly unconcerned

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51 Paid us the honor of explaining, *in somber and capturing terms, the tragedy that unfolded throughout four years in his location.* “Les F.F.C.F. à Reims et au front de Champagne,” *Le Flambeau* June 1933: L’Appel.
with raising a family, were partly responsible for the falling French birth rate.\textsuperscript{52} In order to combat the impact of these women on the French family, the leagues glorified the mother and homemaker as the ideal of proper womanhood.

The reestablishment of traditional gender roles was believed to be as necessary for the boys as well as for the girls. It was not only women who had stepped outside their traditional duties after the war; there was a perception after WWI that men were not as strong or virile as they had once been. Instead of “real” men, there were impotent, cowardly, homosexual men. Interestingly, the CF conception of gender did not position men and women as opposites.\textsuperscript{53} Rather, \textit{real} men were compared to effeminate, “un-manly” men and \textit{real} women were opposed to boyish, modern women. The fact that women were not the negative antithesis of men indicated that the CF ideal was not simply masculinity, but clearly delineated gender roles. As Kevin Passmore explains, “both the male soldier and the mother were viewed positively since they entailed clear gender identities.”\textsuperscript{54} Girls were taught to be feminine, caring, and domestic. Boys were taught to be brave, strong, and militaristic.

On the whole, the idealized gender roles of the CF provide another example of the CF effort to reverse the clock and regain the imagined simplicity of the pre WWI status quo. However, the CF conception of gender, especially femininity was not directly imported from 1914 without updates. The most notable example is the expansion of the feminine domestic sphere to include social work, propaganda, and

\textsuperscript{52} See Chapter 1, pg 28 for further discussion of post-WWI gender roles.
\textsuperscript{53} Kevin Passmore, ""Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism": Women's Social Action in the Croix De Feu and Parti Social Français," The Journal of Modern History 71.4 (1999): 823.
\textsuperscript{54} Passmore, ""Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism": Women's Social Action in the Croix De Feu and Parti Social Français," 826.
recruitment of new members to the movement. In fact, the CF created a paradoxical role for women, whereby they were confined to the domestic sphere and yet they did social and recruitment work. This role was not fully developed in the early 1930s, but became more important to the organization as a whole after the formation of the Section Feminine in 1934. Given women’s maternal instincts, the CF leaders considered them the most appropriate to carry out the movement’s social work. They helped relieve the effects of the depression by setting up soup kitchens and helping working-class families in need. Because of their access to the lower classes, women were also the most effective at propaganda and recruiting working class members to the CF. However, what seems like a contradiction (giving women a role in propaganda while demanding that they remain within the domestic sphere) is explainable by the fact that CF leaders regarded social work as an extension of the domestic sphere. Women cared for the lower classes the way they cared for their children, and any propaganda work they did was mostly on an individual level. This new organizational role for women was not as much of a departure from tradition as it seems. Rather than giving women influence outside of the domestic sphere, the CF expanded the domestic borders to include social work, propaganda, and recruitment. Therefore, women’s contributions to the CF were still within the traditional female domestic domain and did not contradict the traditional feminine gender role.

Most of the educational activities explained earlier (the informational articles and lectures, the trips to museums, etc) were targeted to both the boys and girls of the FFCF. However, the majority of the regular, monthly activities of the FFCF divided

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55 Passmore, "Planting the Tricolor in the Citadels of Communism": Women's Social Action in the Croix De Feu and Parti Social Français," 826.
the boys and the girls and taught them different skills in preparation for their different adult roles. The boys learned leadership and military skills, while the girls learned about nursing and childcare. These separate educations reinforced the importance of gender roles for the CF and ensured that the children would form traditional French families, consistent with CF values. Thus, the gendered education bridges the gap between intellectual and moral education. The material is intellectual, but the method by which it is taught is, in and of itself, a moral lesson.

One of the principle activities intended for boys was large-scale propaganda and recruitment tasks reserved for the leaders of a movement. As Pozzo di Borgo explains in a speech to the CF general assembly, “Nous voulons associer nos fils, de plus en plus, à notre œuvre; nous voulons les intéresser; nous voulons qu’ils nous aident dans la propagande.”

Large-scale propaganda work included the boys in the CF in a more active role and, most importantly, helped train them to become the future leaders of the organization. While most of the FFCF activities taught the children leadership skills in some form or another, the large-scale propaganda work was the most obviously intended to create future CF leaders:

Nous voulons apprendre à nos enfants non pas à être des « bavards » dans le sens péjoratif du mot, mais à connaître certaines questions, à savoir les exposer clairement et dans les réunions publiques, à faire, en quelque sorte, du noyautage, à créer l’ambiance.

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56 We want to associate our songs, more and more, with our work; we want them to interest them; we want them to aid us with propaganda. “Assemblée générale ordinaire,” Le Flambeau March 1933: 1
57 We want to teach our children not to be talkers in the pejorative sense of the word, but to know certain questions, to know how to clearly express them at public meetings, to make, in some way, an infiltration, to create ambiance. “Assemblée générale ordinaire,” Le Flambeau March 1933: 2.
Including the younger generation in the propaganda work taught them how to speak to crowds, how to direct a movement, and, as an extra bonus, helped recruit more youth to the FFCF.

Some clarification is necessary with regards to propaganda in the CF. The question of propaganda in the CF and FFCF is confused by the fact that the same word is used to describe two very different kinds of propaganda. The propaganda exercises for the boys in the FFCF can be referred to as large-scale propaganda. This involved speech making and leadership skills, rather than the more private tasks of talking to individuals or distributing fliers. Women were only involved in the second form of propaganda, the individual level propaganda. Given this fact, it is unsurprising that the young girls are left out of this part of the FFCF education. Women were not meant to give speeches or lead a large-scale propaganda event. They were essential to personal level propaganda efforts, but they were excluded from leadership positions. This explains why the propaganda training provided by the FFCF was limited to the boys. Only the boys learned the necessary skills to become leaders and figureheads.

The propaganda training took place at the bi-monthly “cercle préparatoire à la propagande” meetings. The first propaganda “cercle” was called a “séance etude” or an instruction session. A Flambeau article states that the séance etude will be:

> En quelque sorte une leçon de chores, une sorte d’exercice pratique afin d’apprendre à nos fils comment on suit une réunion et surtout comment on peut y participer, dire le mot qui porte à l’instant qui convient.\(^{58}\)

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\(^{58}\) A sort of natural science lesson, a practical exercise with an eye to teaching our sons how to lead a meeting and, above all, how to participate in one, saying the right words at the right moment. “Réunion des F.C.F.,” Le Flambeau February 1933: L’Appel.
The second monthly meeting was the general “Réunion Mensuelle” as well as a forum for “les exercises oratoire” or, as the Flambeau describes it:

L’exécution matérielle, la cristallisation du problème autour d’un fait, d’un texte précis, un quelque sort le cours pratique d’une homme qui veut apprendre à dépouiller un dossier, le classer ; l’étudier, le défendre et le faire triompher.  

Essentially, the young men would be given a topic such as “pourquoi les générations d’après-guerre viennent-elles aux Croix de Feu ?” and they would give a speech in front of all the FCF members explaining their answer.

Responses to the young men’s speeches are revealing. The older generations typically comment on the skill of delivery rather than the content of the speech. Compliments are along the lines of, “Il retient vivement l’attention de l’auditoire” or “[Il] s’est révélé orateur habile et assuré, à qui il ne reste plus grand’chose à apprendre pour se faire entendre dans une véritable réunion.” Characteristic such as confidence and charisma are highly praised by the CF members observing the speeches. While this does not automatically signify a primacy of appearance over content, it does suggest that the boys were being trimmed and trained for a symbolic position, a position as an inspirational leader capable of converting listeners to their cause.

The other activity that was reserved only for boys was military training. The military training had three components. First of all, the FFCF organized trips to

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59 The material execution, the crystallization of a problem around a fact, a precise text, in some respects the practical course for a man who wants to learn to scrutinize a project, catalogue it, study it, defend it and triumph it. “Réunion des F.C.F.,” L’Appel.

60 Why are the post war generations attracted to the Croix de Feu? This was the topic for the reunion in May 1933. “Réunion du mois: fils,” Le Flambeau May 1933: L’Appel.

61 He held the attention of the audience or he revealed himself to be a capable and self-assured speaker, who has nothing else to learn but to make himself heard at a real meeting. “Réunion du mois: fils,” L’Appel.
encourage militarism. Some of these were historic (like the visit to the battlefield in Champagne), while others took the children to current military posts. For example, in January, 1933, the FFCF went to the airport at Bourget, where they toured the facility with Air Force captains, saw the airplanes, and learned about the role of airmen in war time. These visits, supplemented by the military history lessons in L’Appel and at FFCF lectures, formed the academic part of the military training, which both boys and girls were allowed to participate in.

Active military training was reserved for only the oldest boys of the FFCF, the most significant part of which was physical. Physical education teachers and firemen taught the boys swimming, tennis, and other athletic skills that would help them become soldiers. The stated goal of the military preparation was “de permettre aux jeunes gens de choisir leur arme et d’accéder plus rapidement aux grades de corporal et sous-officier.” Interestingly, despite the importance of militarism in CF ideology, the military training for the FFCF never seems to have taken off. The schedule of FFCF activities often mentions a time and a date for military training, but without any details. Unlike all the other FFCF activities, there are no articles praising the successes of the program or the progress of the boys. The FFCF military training takes a backseat to the other activities, like the propaganda circles and fieldtrips.

In fact, military activity does not play an important role in the CF until late 1933 when the Volontaires Nationaux (VN), the paramilitary branch, is formed. At this point, boys over the age of 16 are encouraged to join the VN, pulling them away from the FFCF. Because of the new emphasis on paramilitarism, the shift from the

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63 To allow our young people to chose their arm and to accelerate more rapidly to the level of corporal or officer. “Section des fils des Croix de Feu,” Le Flambeau February 1932
FFCF towards the VN becomes even more pronounced after the February 6
demonstrations. In the March issue of the *Flambeau*, the first published after the
demonstrations, the L’Appel section is cut from the newspaper because of constraints
on space, but is quickly replaced with a log featuring updates about VN activities
across the sections. Any mention of the military training disappears after the L’Appel
is cut and the VN gains momentum.

While the boys were training to become leaders and military men, the girls of
the FFCF were learning the skills of a good French housewife. The Section Feminine
of the FFCF was created in December 1930, a full year after the boy’s section.64
While it would be excessive to say that the girls were an afterthought, their role in the
FFCF was always second to the boys. On the whole, there are fewer articles aimed at
the girls and fewer events specifically prepared for them. In many ways, the most
significant women’s role in the FFCF belonged to the mothers and older women who
helped run outings, organize charity functions, and assist activities for the children.

When the girls did have FFCF activities, they were of a very different nature
from their boy counterparts. By teaching girls different skills from boys, the FFCF
reinforced the idea that women had a different purpose. These different activities
taught the children what they would need to know in order to form a traditional
French family. The women would care for the children, cook, and be good mothers,
while the men raised money and dealt with the outside world. One *Flambeau* article
makes the destined role for women explicit in the statement “ce programme (les filles
de Croix de Feu) promet…de créer des ménages parfaits, pensez donc, des
demoiselles qui sauront faire de la bonne cuisine française, coudre, raccommoder les

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64 “Les fils des Croix de Feu,” *Le Flambeau* December 1930: 3.
“Vous fille sont donc maintenant les égales de vos fils, elles ont une programme idéalisé par l’avenir de ce qu’elles serons, et de ce qu’elles doivent être.”

Following this principle, the girls took infirmary classes, where they learned to become nurses, as well as classes in puériculture or nursery nursing, which were accompanied by trips to crèches, or nurseries.

The older girl had their own lecture series, comparable to the propaganda sessions the boys attended. However, unlike the boys’ meetings, which included historical discussions and propaganda presentations from the members, the girls’ meetings focused on one theme: the role of women in French society and in the Croix de Feu. In fact, based on Le Flambeau reporting, this theme seems to be the only one that arose during the lectures for girls. The lecturers made sure to remind the girls that, “Elles ne doivent pas prétendre à une rôle combatif, mais s’occuper de leur

65 This program (les fils de Croix de Feu) promises to create perfect housecleaners, think of it, young women who know how to make good French food, sew, darn socks, and, above all, love and care for their husband and children. “Dix-septième section: réunion du 19 décembre,” Le Flambeau January 1931: 6.
66 See next section for discussion of the summer camp.
67 Your daughters are now the equals of your sons, they have an idealized program for what they will be in the future and what they need to be. “Parmi nous,” Le Flambeau April 1931: 5.
68 “Parmi nous,” April 1931: 5.
foyer, consoler, panser les blessures physiques et morales, et surtout, enseigner aux enfants l’amour de leurs pays.\textsuperscript{69} During a different meeting, the lecturer tells the girls that their role in the Croix de Feu was that of \textit{propagandiste, auxiliaire,} and \textit{éducatrice}.\textsuperscript{70} On the whole, the female specific education consisted of constant reiteration of the domestic role of women in French society and discouragement of any behavior that would distract a woman from her “primordial” role of attending to her children.\textsuperscript{71}

The gender specific activities and teachings of the CF demonstrate how intimately entwined the dual goals of intellectual and moral education were. The intellectual education had underlying moral lessons and the two mutually supported each other. The boys had military training and learned to give speeches as leaders. The girls learned to be good housewives and care for their children and husbands. This training has obvious moral components and constantly reaffirmed the gender divide of the CF. The FFCF taught boys and girls the skills they would need to function in their socially predetermined roles in the traditional French family.

\textbf{IV. Colonies de Vacances or Summer Camps}

The most successful FFCF program was the series of summer camps it set up. The camps were, essentially, the coordination of moral, intellectual, and physical

\textsuperscript{69} She does not need to attempt a combative role, but occupy herself at home, consoling, dressing physical and moral wounds, and above all, teaching the children to love their country. “Réunion du mois: filles,” \textit{Le Flambeau} July 1933: L’Appel.


\textsuperscript{71} In July 1933, M. Lerambert-Potin, in a lecture to the Filles de Croix de Feu, made an effort to “montrer l’intérêt primordial à apprendre de bonne heure aux enfants à aimer leur Patrice.” of \textit{Demonstrate the primordial interest in teaching children to love their country. “Réunion du mois: filles,”} \textit{Le Flambeau} July 1933: L’Appel.
education. The idea for a country retreat for the younger generations appeared in 1930, but did not start to take off until 1932. What began as a group of 20 boys and girls on a piece of loaned property in the Vosges turned into a series of four camps, with as many as 3,000 participants. By 1935, the camps were the most successful and most important part of the FFCF.

The first and longest running camp was called “Plainfaing” after a nearby town. It was located in the Vosges Mountains, in the forest, a perfect location for the boys and girls to fill their lungs with clean air. The camp was open to both boys and girls, between the ages of 7 and 13. They met at the Gare de l’Est in Paris and traveled together to the mountains, where they stayed for a maximum of one month. The rules for travel were strict: they were not to yell, fool around, descend from the train, or do anything that might make them appear to be “mal élevés” or poorly raised.

The schedule for the daily activities was equally strict and demanding. The children woke up at 7:30, made their beds, used the bathroom, performed respiratory exercises, and had breakfast between 7:30 and 8:30. The next hour was spent doing chores, which would be assigned individually. From 9:30 to 10, gymnastique or physical exercises, followed by directed games or a walk from 10 to 11:45. At noon, the children had lunch and then took a supervised, silent, siesta. The time from 2:30 to 3:45 was free; the children were permitted to write letters, read, sing, exercise, or play games. For the oldest girls, the free time was reserved for couture dirigée twice
a week and a *leçon de repassage*\textsuperscript{76}, once a week. At 5:45, the children had afternoon tea, then a walk from 4 to 6:45. Between the walk and dinner, which started at 7, the boys and girls would go to the bathroom to wash up. After dinner was another hour of recreation. At 8:45 they would do respiratory exercises, wash up and then go to bed. In addition to the sewing and ironing classes, there were a few variations to the daily schedule. On Saturday afternoon, the children took showers and baths. Twice a week they would take a long walk from 2:30 to 6:45, with the afternoon tea in the forest. Finally, every Monday, the children would write to their parents.

Throughout their stay at Plainfaing, the children had to live up to Croix de Feu expectations. Lying was, of course, not permitted. A spirit of brotherhood was encouraged and any violence between the campers punished. The children were also expected to follow the daily schedule without argument, be polite, and keep themselves clean. Finally, and on a lighter note, they were instructed to amuse themselves and to take advantage of the clean air and the chance for better health in the mountains.\textsuperscript{77}

Because the camp kept children for more than a week, the parents were instructed to send a paper with instructions for their children’s religious needs.\textsuperscript{78} Interestingly, this is one of the few times that the CF or the FFCF mention religion. It is noticeably absent from La Rocque’s rhetoric and the FFCF activities. There are times when the FFCF holds an activity in a church, but it is always in the context of a WWI memorial, rather than a religious ceremony. Religion is not an important part of the CF. This is particularly interesting given that most French people identified

\textsuperscript{76} *Couture dirigée* is a sewing class and *leçon de repassage* is an ironing lesson.

\textsuperscript{77} “Colonie de vacances de Plainfaing,” L’Appel.

\textsuperscript{78} “Colonie de vacances de Plainfaing,” L’Appel.
themselves as catholic in the 1930s. There were other movements around the CF that were religious, but the CF and FFCF are pointedly secular. The sheet of paper with religious instructions for camp is also supposed to carry information about special dietary or exercise needs, and an indication of the child’s temperament, further indicating that religion was not given a special place in the FFCF or the camp.

The Flambeau does not carry any accounts of Plainfaing from a child’s point of view. However, every article reporting on the progress of the camp remarks that things are running smoothly, that the director is doing a fine job, and that the children are happy and healthy. The popularity of the camp and the rapid increase in inscriptions tend to support that assessment.

As one might expect of the Croix de Feu, the physical and athletic activities at Plainfang did not occur without their moral counterpart. A perfect example is a camp trip to the monument to fallen WWI soldiers from the Plainfaing area. The transcript of a speech that a CF member delivered to the boys and girls was published in the Flambeau. The speaker told them:

Mes chers enfants,
En venant ici déposer une simple gerbe au Monument aux Morts de Plainfaing, et en mettant quelques fleurs sur les tombes de poilus au cimetière, vous avez voulu continuer la noble tradition de vos pères, celle du Souvenir. Vous avez voulu honorer non seulement les enfants de cette commune tombés pour la défense du sol sacré de la Patrie, mais aussi tous vos ainés de France et des Colonies qui ont fait le plus grand des sacrifices. Ils sont morts pour que vous restiez Français. Que leur souvenir vive à jamais en vous. L’héroïsme dont ils ont fait preuve est le meilleur des enseignements, gardez en vos cœurs le sublime exemple qu’ils ont donné en restant de vrais Français dignes de vos chefs.79

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79 My dear children, In coming here to place a simple sheaf upon the Monument to the Fallen Soldiers of Plainfaing, and in putting flowers upon the tombs in the cemetery, you continue the noble tradition of your fathers, that of memory. You have honored, not only the children of this community, fallen for the defense of homeland’s sacred soil, but also all of your elders of France and the Colonies who have
The article was meant to reassure the parents of FFCF members that while their children were living in the woods, “[Ils] n’ont pas oublié leur plus haut devoir: l’hommage aux morts de la guerre, frères d’armes et Croix de Feu.” Even in the wilderness of the Vosges Mountains, surrounded by sapins and clean air, the memory of WWI pervaded the CF ranks.

The years between 1932 and 1934 saw a huge increase in camp participation. By 1934, children were turned away because too many people had signed up. In 1935, the Flambeau announced three new camps that would be open for summer. Unlike the early days of Plainfaing, the new camps separated the children by age and gender. For example, the camp at Auvergne was limited to girls between the ages of 13 and 25. This particular camp was named in honor of Nadine de la Rocque, Colonel de la Rocque’s daughter and a faithful CF member who passed away in 1933. The all-girls camp promised to instill them with “l’esprit de famille, l’amour de la Patrie, rendront toutes et chacune dignes de la Marraine invisible et sans cesse présente.”

Other camps were reserved for boys only. For example, the camp at Guethary, in the pays Basque was for boys under the age of 16. This camp boasted an excellent beach and instruction by swimming masters, all in the pursuit of physical education. Due to its enormous popularity, another camp, in Houlgate, Normandy, opened up as a second branch. Finally, the camp at Plainfang continued to operate.

made the greatest of all sacrifices. They died so that you could stay French. Nothing but the memory of them lives on in you. The heroism which they showed is the best of lessons, guard in you hearts the sublime example that they have given you by staying truly French, worthy of your leaders. “Colonie de vacances,” Le Flambeau September 1933: L’Appel.

80 The spirit of the family, love of France, leaves each and everyone one worthy of the invisible and constantly present godmother. “Pour les joies de l’été,” Le Flambeau 8 June, 1935: 1.
These last two camps combined the boys and girls, but only until the pubescent age of 13, when they were split up and sent to the older camps.

By 1935, the summer camps monopolize the press on the FFCF, suggesting that the other operations took a backseat to this more successful operation. In the summer of 1935, 3,000 children went to one of the Croix de Feu camps, where they learned physical education, reinforced by moral training.

V. Fading of the FFCF

February 6, 1934 marks the beginning of the Croix de Feu ascent, and, rather ironically, the descent of its youth branch, the Fils et Filles de Croix de Feu. After February 6, the paramilitary operations of the CF took on more importance, La Rocque focused less and less on veteran’s issues, and the movement became more political. In many ways, the Croix de Feu becomes a more active organization; the members held more marches, made more speeches, and wrote more articles. In 1935, the Flambeau transferred from a monthly newspaper to a weekly. The topics of the articles became more diverse and took on more political overtones, as the CF started to concern itself with labor, foreign policy, the state of agriculture. The new, more active incarnation of the Croix de Feu had less time for education, moralizing lectures, and history lessons.

The Croix de Feu never abandoned its devotion to the youth of France. The leaders continued to proclaim the importance of the French child, but more within the context of the French family. The activities of the FFCF mimic this shift. Through 1935, the FFCF became more and more trivial and more childlike. Instead of lectures
on the history of France and visits to battlefields, the main FFCF events were Christmas parties and summer camp. The more adult tasks, like military training and speechmaking, moved from the FFCF to the VN, a group of men mostly in their 20s and therefore no longer youths. By mid 1935, the FFCF is hardly mentioned in the *Flambeau*, completely overshadowed by the pages and pages of VN updates and propaganda. When Leon Blum came to power in 1936 and forced the CF to rename itself the PSF (Parti Social Français) and disband its paramilitary branch, there was no replacement for the FFCF. By 1936, the youth branch of the Croix de Feu, which had been slowly fading since 1934, disappeared entirely.
Chapter 3: The FFCF in Comparison

The Fils et Filles de Croix de Feu, while an interesting movement in and of itself, needs the context of other, contemporaneous youth groups in order to be fully understood. Given the presence of these other groups in France and the rest of Europe, and the fact that the CF leaders were well aware of them, how does the FFCF compare? For the purposes of this study, characteristics of the FFCF will be compared to those of the Hitler youth and Italian youth groups, which represent fascist youth groups. This comparison will be used to help determine if the FFCF was, like the German and Italian groups, a fascist youth group.

I. Methodology

The task of comparing the FFCF to the Hitler Youth and Italian youth organizations is a complicated one. First of all, any comparison will automatically be limited by the fact that the Croix de Feu never came to power in France. The Italian Fascists and German Nazis were able to consolidate their power, intensify their rhetoric and activities, and demand more complete allegiance from their followers. Consequently, they had more control over the education and indoctrination of their youth populations. The CF, as a movement and not a regime, never had this chance. Even though the basic values and goals of the CF were never institutionally realized the way they were in Germany and Italy, they were comprehensively developed and disseminated, so one can still evaluate and compare them to their German and Italian counterparts. In making this comparison, however, we must face again the challenge
of defining “fascism.” Questions such as "What attributes constitute minimal fascism, the base characteristics that indicate fascism as opposed to conservative nationalism?" pose significant difficulties. Instead of trying to answer these questions abstractly, I propose to let the groups speak for themselves. I will try to extract what the Hitler youth and the Italian youth groups consider their most important characteristics and use these characteristics as the basis for my working definition of a fascist youth group. In order for the FFCF to be considered a fascist youth group like the HJ and the Italian groups, I would expect it to have many of the same characteristics and display similar goals and values.

My method for defining and describing fascist youth groups is not inconsistent with other scholars’ studies. Any understanding of fascism is, without exception, based on an evaluation of the groups that are commonly considered fascist. The concept of fascism did not exist before the Italian fascists and the Nazis sprung up. Because these movements invented and determined fascism, if a definition for fascism exists, it has to be an *a posteriori* definition based on a reduction and synthesis of their doctrines and actions. Therefore, my task of crafting a definition for fascist youth groups based on the ideology, values, and activities of the HJ and the Italian groups is consistent with the methodology of fascist studies. However, my work is also not a shot in the dark; I referred to the writings of scholars of fascism as a guide, and I expected my definition to be consistent with whatever consensus there is in the field.¹

¹ See page 8-9 for Paxton’s explanation of fascism, which was a particularly useful guide in analyzing the youth groups.
This method rests on the assumption that both the HJ and the Italian youth groups were, in fact, fascist. As one could expect given the large degree of dissention in fascist studies, even this cannot be taken for granted. For example, A.F.K. Organski suggests that the classification of the Nazi party as fascist is inappropriate, primarily because the Nazis romanticized a pre-industrial world when the Italian Fascists were modernizing.\(^2\) Another scholar, Alan Cassels posits two distinct forms of fascism: one industrial, the other pre-industrial.\(^3\) As with the rest of fascist studies, there is no agreement on this issue. However, despite the dissent, the majority of scholars classify the Nazi party as fascist. For this reason and in the interest of preventing academic squabbling from deterring further study, I am going to accept that both the Italian Fascists and the NSDAP were, in fact, both fascist.

The task of crafting a minimum definition of a fascist youth group becomes more complicated when one takes into account that there were certain characteristics that were very important to both German and Italian youth groups that were neither specific to, nor indicative of fascism. For example, nationalism was one of the founding values of fascism, but it was not specific to fascists. Authoritarian conservative groups, Catholic groups, and even some groups on the left were vehemently nationalist without being fascist. Therefore, while it is important that the FFCF, the HJ, and the Italian organizations all inculcated their children with nationalist sentiment, it does not settle any questions of fascistic qualities. Another example of a non-unique characteristic is the emphasis on athleticism and sport. It is

\(^3\) Alan Cassels, quoted in Allardyce, "What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept," 373.
true that youthful vigor and athleticism were encouraged as an antidote to what was perceived as a weak, decadent, and liberal lifestyle, but Communist, socialist, and Catholic groups all encouraged their youth to be athletic, and organized outings, camps, and hikes. Finally, the use of processions, slogans, banners, flags, uniforms, and other militaristic and unifying devices was not specific to fascist organizations. In France, for example, the Socialist groups used the same tools to unite the youth and encourage pride in the organization.\textsuperscript{4} Nationalism, physical education, and militaristic devices were all distinctive, but not unique to fascism. For that reason, despite their high visibility in the activities and beliefs of the fascist youth groups, they will not be included in the comparison between the HJ, the Italian groups and the FFCF.

Another feature of fascist youth groups that is interesting but not distinct is their training and indoctrination of girls. In many ways, the German and Italian approach to female indoctrination in fascist youth groups was very similar to the tactics used by the FFCF and other youth groups. The girls were taught domestic skills like sewing, childcare, and nursing. They were separated from the boys and reminded of their supportive, but less active, position within the broader movement. There was nothing unusual about the treatment of girls in the German and Italian youth groups, so while admitting that their role was very interesting and in many ways similar to the FFCF, it will not help guide us to a discriminating definition of fascism.\textsuperscript{5}


\textsuperscript{5} For further reading on the role of women and girls in fascist movements, see: Martin Durham, \textit{Women and Fascism} (New York & London: Routledge, 1998); Michael H. Kater, \textit{Hitler Youth
My comparison between fascist youth groups and the FFCF will, instead, focus on characteristics that are more specific to fascism. This is not to say that they did not exist in other form in other groups, but rather that they are more unusual and therefore more indicative. The concepts of subservient membership in a community, the cult of the leader, encouragement of violence, and the myth of youth, are all unusual and significant to the fascist HJ and Italian groups. Therefore, for the purpose of comparison, these characteristics will make up the functioning definition of a fascist youth group. In order for the FFCF to be considered fascist like the HJ and the Italian groups, it should display these characteristics.

II. The Myth of Youth

a. The origins of fascist youth organizations:

Both the Italian and German fascist movements are often referred to as ‘movements of youth.’ In this context, youth means not just age, but also an attitude, a certain mode of thought and behavior that was vigorous, fresh, and strong. Youth as an attribute took on mythic proportions in both countries and came to represent, in large part, the ideals of fascism. Additionally, Italian and German fascism developed out of and were heavily influenced by pre-existing youth organizations and movements. There is a continuity that runs from these original movements into the fascist youth organizations; the ideas that developed with pre-fascist youth continued

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49. And Kater, Hitler Youth.

to be influential. Another important characteristic of Italian and German youth groups is that young people, based on their own initiative and enthusiasm, founded them. This is not true FFCF, which was created and supported by men who were middle-aged by the early 1930s. The fact that the German and Italian youth movements were connected to pre-fascist, spontaneous groupings of youth, and that young people founded them imbues them with an authentic spirit of youth that is lacking in the CF.

Bruno Wanrooij claims that Italian fascism was born out of a generational conflict between the young men that came of age in WWI and the older men that had sent them into battle. The WWI generation shared the bond of war and, upon returning home, joined together in common revolt against an aging and decrepit “old Italy.” One band of these young men called themselves the Futurists and were led by the writer Gabriele D’Annuzio, who emphasized the virility of youth along with the cleansing qualities of war and violence. In 1919, the Futurists, under the command of D’Annuzio, seized Fiume, which had been ceded to Yugoslavia in the Versailles treaty. The seizure was in direct opposition to the older generation of Italian politicians who had accepted the treaty’s shameful conditions. Michael Ledeen points to Mussolini’s praise of D’Annuzio’s action as the moment when his budding fascist movement first gained significant popular support. Futurists made up a small but influential part of Mussolini’s early fascist members after the Fiume attempt ultimately failed, and they carried with them some of their ideas about youthful

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vitality and the utility of violence. Above all, the Fascists and the Futurists agreed that a youthful revolution against the old Italy was necessary for the future of the country.

The first form of a youth organization associated with the Fascist party was called the *Avanguardia Studentesca dei Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* or the Student Vanguard of the Italian Combatant Fascists. This early fascist youth group was started in Milan in early 1920 by students, many of whom had been part of D’Annuzio’s Fiume adventure and who still demanded a youthful revolution in Italy. Within five months of the founding first Avanguardia, there were 30 similar groups across Italy, totaling 3,700 members or 12% of fascists. In late 1921, the Fascist party absorbed the Avanguardia, renamed it the *Avanguardia Giovanile Fascista* or the Juvenile Fascist Vanguard, which emphasized its connection and its subordination to the Fascist party. The Avanguardia was limited to boys between 15 and 18, but an even younger branch called the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* (ONB) was created in 1926 for boys 8-14 years old. Even though the Avanguardia and the ONB were clearly branches of the Fascist party and therefore lost some of the Futurists’ spontaneity because of the weight of the Fascist bureaucracy, the youthful origins of Italian Fascist youth groups are authentic; they developed out of a self-directed grouping of young men, inspired to revolt against the old Italy in a youthful rebellion.

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9 Wanrooij, "The Rise and Fall of Italian Fascism as a Generational Revolt." 406.  
12 "Balilla" was the nickname of the legendary boy Giovanni Battista Perasso who supposedly threw stones and launched the revolution against the Austrians in 1746. From Koon, 270 and Mack, 110.
The earliest of the Italian Fascists were, according to Robert Paxton, young above all else.\textsuperscript{13} The Fascists who came to power with Mussolini in 1922 were part of the young generation of WWI and maintained much the youthful spirit of the earliest, revolutionary Futurists and Fascists.\textsuperscript{14} The importance of youthfulness as a characteristic of the early Fascists and as the source of force against the older generations remained part of Fascist rhetoric until the end of Mussolini’s reign. Mussolini’s myth of youth, originally derived from the youthful power of the Futurists and early Fascists, evolved and took on new characteristics throughout his 15 years in power, with an significant transformation in the late 20s and early 30s.\textsuperscript{15} Nevertheless, Ledeen claims that youthfulness was the only consistent theme throughout the movement, starting with the early founders of Italian Fascism and running through to WWII.\textsuperscript{16} Thanks to Mussolini’s emphasis on the myth of youth to reinvigorate Fascism in the 1930s, youth remained an integral part of Italian Fascism, through Mussolini’s rule.

It is true that the Italian youth groups never became as influential or as powerful as Hitler youth did, despite the fact that Mussolini ruled for a longer time. Some authors have explained this with an argument about the character of Italian youth, who opposed regimentation and militaristic order and who saw themselves as lovers rather than fighters.\textsuperscript{17} Regardless of Italian willingness or opposition to militarism, the fact that youth groups were not as central in Italy does not mean that the concept of youth played any less a significant role. Mussolini’s rhetorical use of

\textsuperscript{13} Paxton, \textit{The Anatomy of Fascism}. 49.
\textsuperscript{14} Paxton, \textit{The Anatomy of Fascism}. 62.
\textsuperscript{15} See next section, “The Second Wave of Fascist Youth” for further discussion of this transformation.
\textsuperscript{16} Wanrooij, “The Rise and Fall of Italian Fascism as a Generational Revolt.” 401.
\textsuperscript{17} Koon, \textit{Believe, Obey, Fight: Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy, 1922-1943}. 
youth as the energy and spirit of Fascism delivered the same message that thousands of synchronized, marching young boys in Germany did. Fascism was a movement of youth and youthfulness in opposition to the older generations and the decrepit liberalism of bygone days.\textsuperscript{18}

Like Italian Fascism, the Nazi movement developed out of a tradition of youth rebellion. In fact, in Germany, this tradition started before the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, although the ideas that united the German youth (like the concept of \textit{Volk}) can be traced back to the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{19} However, the youth movement, as a cohesive unit of young people, did not develop until the turn of the century when German youngsters started to express concern over the deadening impact of industrialization on German society and culture.\textsuperscript{20} These young people, fed up with the effects of industrialization, looked for an expression of their rebellion and joined together in the German Youth Movement. The movement was made up of like-minded youths who were searching for ways to escape the dehumanizing effects of an industrializing society. One means of escape was quite literal; the German Youth Movement encouraged freedom from cities and a return to an idealized, pastoral Germany. The youth organized themselves into \textit{Wandervogel}, literally meaning ‘bird of passage,’ which were roving, self-lead bands of German youth who left the cities, roamed around the German countryside, and tried “to rediscover nature, the fields, woods, brooks, lakes, and meadows from which [they] had been alienated.”\textsuperscript{21} Walter

\textsuperscript{18} The Fascist national anthem was “Giovinezza” meaning boyhood or youth, and is a perfect example of the primacy of youth to Italian Fascism.
\textsuperscript{19} H. W. Koch, \textit{The Hitler Youth: Origins and Development, 1922-45} (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1975), 4
Laqueur describes these youths as apolitical, mostly harmless, and romantic. He says they were “long-haired, untidy bacchants and super-bacchants…who used to wander through the fields and woods, strumming on their guitars their collective revolt against bourgeois respectability.” These young men wore a uniform of shorts, dark shirts, a rain jacket, and thick boots, perfect for tramping through the woods. These largely harmless, but influential youngsters, turned their backs on German industrialization and searched the fields and woods for a better way of life based on the simplicity of the past.

When WWI rolled around, the members of the German Youth Movement were some of the first men to sign up, hoping that the war would be the opportunity they needed to reform German society and industrialism. Sadly, WWI did not turn out to be heroic and rejuvenating, but rather tragic and disheartening. It left many of the young generation, previously so idealistic and enthusiastic, either dead or disaffected. After the war, the youth movements of the early 20th century took a more serious and political turn. They became more interested in the Volksch community and were decidedly less romantic. The history of youth movements in Germany after the war and before the consolidation of power by Hitler is a confusing one. Hundreds of groups popped up, some religious, some political, and some based on the Wandervogel model. The history of these individual movements, while fascinating, is not significant for the task of tracing the roots of the HJ; it is enough to say that after WWI there was a considerable amount of energy and mobilization in the younger generation and an interest in regenerating Germany along new and different lines.

As we have observed, The HJ took its model from youth organizations of the early 20th century and post-WWI. The specific inspiration for a NSDAP youth group, however, can be traced to a man named Gustav Lenk, a Polish piano-polisher who became a zealous supporter of Hitler and the fascists and attempted to join the movement in 1926. At that point in his life, though, Lenk was under 18 and was told that he would either have to wait a couple of years or start a youth group. Lenk followed the first suggestion and formed a Nazi youth group called the *Jungendbund* or the Young Alliance. It is significant that it was a member of the younger generation who started the HJ, not the Nazi party bosses. As in Italy, the fascist youth organization came out of a demand from young people for participation. The position of a young leader in the HJ did not end with Lenk. Hitler’s famous tenet “youth must lead youth,” determined the structure of the leadership in the HJ. The boys and girls were led by other youth and, in some cases, there would be a difference of only a couple of years between leaders and followers. Even the head of the youth branch of the Nazi party, Baldur Von Shirach, was only 27 when Hitler assigned him the post. From the original leaders to WWI, the HJ had a long history of youth leadership in the HJ.

The authentic origins of youthful mobilization that were so significant to German and Italian fascism are absent in the CF and the FFCF. The CF did not develop out of a youthful rebellion or have ideological ties to earlier youth movements. This is not to say that the youth did not spontaneously mobilize in

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France or that authentically youthful organizations did not exist. The *Jeunesses Patriotes*, formed soon after WWI by young veterans is a natural example of such a group. However, the JP and similar youthful movements were separate from the CF. It is true that the founders of the CF were WWI veterans, men who came of age during the war and shared an emotional bond developed during the experience, much like the men of German and Italian Fascism. However, there is a crucial difference. The CF was formed in 1927, almost ten years after the end of WWI and it did not start to take off until 1931, a full 12 years after the WWI generation experienced the unifying and terrible experience of war. By the time they were joining the CF, these men were in their 30s or older. They were no longer the youth of France. They waited until middle-age in order to found their organization, automatically disconnecting them from the youthful qualities that were so important to German and Italian fascists.

Even more important, it was the middle-aged adults of the CF who founded the FFCF, not the children. In the early years of the FFCF, the *Flambeau* frequently reminds parents to sign their kids up and encourage their interest. For years, there was limited participation in the FFCF for years. Although membership numbers are hard to come by, the participation of only 3,000 children in the youth camps during the summer of 1935, when the organization was rapidly expanding, points to the limited success of the FFCF. In addition, unlike the HJ, the youth of the FFCF never played a significant leadership role. The leaders of the FFCF were adult men and women of the WWI generation and the parents of FFCF members. As explained in the previous chapters, the youngsters were being trained for eventual leadership
positions, but they were not expected actually to fill these roles until the older

generation needed them to. Until the older generation could no longer be effective

leaders, the youngsters would have to wait their turn.

b. The Second Wave of Fascist Youth:

The myth of youth in Germany and Italy involved an idealization of youth and
the young generations. Not only were the youth fresh, vigorous, and strong, the
younger generation were the means to a better society. Both Hitler and Mussolini
were in power long enough to see a new generation of youth grow up under the
influence of fascism and both of them insisted that this generation would be better
than the founding fascist generation. They would be free of adulterating influences;
they would be the true fascists. The possibility of a purely fascist generation was
only made possible because of the ability of Mussolini and Hitler to consolidate
power and restrict un-fascist influences on children. Accounting for the fact that the
CF never came to power and did not have the chance to see ‘true’ unadulterated
fascists grow under their influence, the idea that the new generation would be better
than the old is anathema to what they tried to teach their children about respecting
and imitating their parents.

In the 1930s, Mussolini faced a generation of youth men who had not fought
in WWI and were starting to grow disaffected with Fascism. He saw that his Fascist
government had failed to take complete control of the education system, that there
was too much freedom of the press, which allowed for grumbling and dissent. He
had to find a way to re-exert his control and reinvigorate the youthfulness of the
movement. His solution was to clarify the Fascist doctrine, formerly left intentionally vague, and to emphasize the importance of the next generation of fascists, those who came of age under Fascism and whose influences were unadulterated by the mediocre, liberal past.\textsuperscript{27} As Arnaldo Mussolini, the Duce’s brother, put it in 1928, “There is, particularly among the young and the very young, a new conscious force that will certainly make them better than us tomorrow.”\textsuperscript{28} These youth, free of corruption and raised under fascism, would assure the future and the continued strength of fascism. Mussolini’s clarified doctrine and declared faith in the purity of the next generation were accompanied by consolidation of youth indoctrination through educational reforms and control of youth groups.\textsuperscript{29}

By 1933, Hitler was well aware of the importance of youth, as exemplified by his statement to Hermann Rauschning, a Nazi party member. He said:

\begin{quote}
I am beginning with the young. We older ones are used up…we are rotten to the marrow. We have no unrestrained instincts left. We are cowardly and sentimental. We are bearing the burden of a humiliating past, and have in our blood the dull recollection of serfdom and servility. But my magnificent youngsters! Are there finer ones anywhere in the world? Look at these young men and boys! What material! With them I can make a new world.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

This sentiment bears striking resemblance to Mussolini’s view of youth by the 1930s. The next generation of fascist youth was like a lump of clay that would escape the adulterating fingerprints left by the mediocre liberalism of the past. These youngsters

\begin{footnotes}
\item[27] Ledeen, "Italian Fascism and Youth." 139. Mussolini left the doctrine of Fascism vague prior to the late 1920s because he wanted to emphasize action over ideas.
\item[28] Ledeen, "Italian Fascism and Youth." 140.
\item[29] Ledeen, "Italian Fascism and Youth." 142.
\end{footnotes}
could be shaped and molded into true fascists, with complete allegiance to the *Duce* or the *Führer*.

Unlike the Italian and German faith in a better young generation, this idea did not show up within the CF and in fact, would have contradicted the main principle of youth education. In the FFCF training, the war veterans, the original members of the CF, were exalted as representations of the hope for the future and their children were simply supposed to emulate their example. This difference could be explained by the fact that the NSDAP and Italian Fascist party had existed long enough to produce a second generation and they were in power, giving them the means to exert more complete control over the indoctrination of youth. However, this is not a sufficient explanation. It does not explain why the German and Italian movements, by idealizing the next generation, were looking forward, while the CF was constantly looking backwards, back to WWI and the men that came out of the trenches and formed the CF. The differences in hopes for the younger generation are indicative of a larger ideological position. The fascists were looking to the future and trying to break with the older generations and constantly reinvent their respective countries. The CF opposed pre-WWI generations, but they did not expect continued regeneration nor did they put their hopes in the children. Rather, they relied on themselves and encouraged their children to follow their example. They were less reformatory and revolutionary than the fascist groups of Italy and Germany.
III. Community Membership, the Cult of the Leader, and Racism

Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany both stressed the importance of membership to their younger generations. Children were made to feel that they were not just members of the youth organizations; they were part of the mass mobilization of people in the Nazi or Fascist party. They were part of a larger community, a community they were taught to serve without question. The demands of membership and the subjugation of the individual to the larger group were a constituent component of the indoctrination process in the fascist youth organizations.

Additionally, the youth were also taught to revere the leader who embodied the larger community to which they belonged. In Germany, this leader was the Führer, or Hitler, and in Italy it was Mussolini, the Duce. The devotion to these leaders took the form of a cult of the leader, meaning that party followers perceived Hitler and Mussolini as infallible, omnipotent, and nearly divine. The power of Hitler and Mussolini rested, in large part, on their public persona and what Robert Paxton terms their charisma, which “rested on a claim to a unique and mystical status as the incarnation of the people’s will and the bearer of the people’s destiny.”31 While the cult of the leader is in no way specific to fascism, it is an important characteristic and one that was particularly focused upon in the youth groups.

One of the more confusing characteristics of fascism is racism and anti-Semitism. The National Socialists of Germany exemplified a fiery racism and anti-Semitism that ultimately led to the “final solution”, the extermination of over 6 million Jews, Romas, homosexuals, and other people the Nazis believed were racially inferior. Nazi racism was absolutely essential to the HJ and was one of the most

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31 Paxton, The Anatomy of Fascism 126. 126
important pillars of the Nazi education. However, in Fascist Italy, racism did not become a component of fascist ideology until 1936 when Mussolini started to build closer ties to Hitler. From the beginning of Mussolini’s regime until 1936, racism plays a negligible role in Italian Fascism. Neither the racism of the Nazi party, nor its dominant role in the HJ, is in doubt. HJ leaders made it abundantly clear that one of the prime goals of the organization was to educate the younger generations about the importance of the volk (the German race) and its racial superiority. Even in the early days of the HJ, Gustav Lenk, the HJ founder, emphasized the importance of teaching about racial superiority and stated that the goals of the organization were to “awaken and nurture the characteristics originating in the German blood: love of country and people…reverence for all ethical and spiritual values and hatred for Jewish-mammonic ideal.”32 In Mein Kampf, Hitler explains his theory of education concerning racialism: “The crowning achievement of the entire educational work of the racial state must be to burn a sense of race and feeling for race instinctively as well as by the force of reason into youth entrusted to its care. No boy or girl should leave school without realizing the necessity and the nature of the purity of blood.”33 German boys and girl were taught, in no uncertain terms, that they were members of the Volksch community and race, that they should serve this race unquestioningly and that they were superior to all other races.

The HJ used overtly racist, stereotypical images and songs to reinforce the younger generation's hatred of Jews. From the age of 10 on, the boys and girls of the HJ were exposed to images of the “ugly Jew with curly hair and fleshy noses in the

33 Koch, The Hitler Youth: Origins and Development, 1922-45. 3.
shape of a 6, always on the lookout for blond German maidens to seduce.”

They were fed conspiracy theories about the international industrialists who were responsible for German economic decline and who were trying to enslave the German race through “Soviet tyranny.” In addition, the HJ boys and girls were taught to consider drastic solutions to the ‘Jewish problem’ as normal; they were told that they should treat Jews like a disease epidemic. This hatred extended to other foreigners such as the Romas, commonly referred to as Gypsies, Slavs and Sinti people. Racism and anti-Semitism were essential components of the HJ ideological teachings.

Nazi racism was complicated. It was based, in part on the theory of Social Darwinism, which extended Darwin’s theory of the survival of the fittest to groups within society. Therefore, the Volk had to strengthen itself and crush the weaker races in order to survive. Nazi racism also had its roots in long-founded historical anti-Semitism in Germany. However, despite this, anti-Semitism and racism became much more extreme under the Nazis. This was a result of the heightened fears of “Jewish Bolshevism,” and the consolidation of the Volkisch community. With a more clearly defined Volk, the Jews and foreigners who were outside the community were more easily targeted and vilified. Because the Nazis demanded complete belief in and allegiance to the Volk, the already present racism and anti-Semitism in Germany became significantly more extreme. Therefore, racism in Germany was, in part, a by-product of the totalitarian demands for individual subservience to the larger group.

34 Kater, Hitler Youth. 63.
35 In this context, “international” is a euphemism for Jewish. The link between Communism and the Jews was a commonly held belief throughout Europe in the 1930s, prompting fears on the right of “Jewish Bolshevism.” Koch, The Hitler Youth: Origins and Development, 1922-45. 117.
36 Kater, Hitler Youth 62-69.
37 Kater, Hitler Youth 62.
Like Germany, Italy demanded individual subservience to a larger community. However, in Italy, this larger community was not a race, but the Italian Fascist state. In Fascist Italy, the state signified more than the bureaucratic, governing body. It was a belief system and approached the status of a religion. In fact, signs of dedication and allegiance to the state took on overtly religious overtones in Italy, resulting in what Emilio Gentile has called the sacralization of politics.\textsuperscript{38} Rites, symbols, and obedience to the Duce were the expressions of faith in this Fascist political religion. Fascist monuments became either shrines to Fascist martyrs or temples honoring Mussolini. The sacralization of fascist politics helps explain the profound allegiance of the people to the Italian state. They were not simply citizens of a state, they were subscribers and blind followers of religious ‘dogma’ and completely subservient to the state.\textsuperscript{39} In expression of this, Mussolini wrote, “The fascist conception of the state is all-embracing, and outside of the state no human or spiritual values can exist, let alone be desirable.”\textsuperscript{40}

In Italy, boys and girls were taught to believe in and obey the state like a church, and they participated in the rites and rituals of the Fascist state. They took part in coming-of-age ceremonies where they received a party card and a rifle and stated that “the card is a symbol of our faith; the rifle is the instrument of our

\textsuperscript{38} Emilio Gentile, "Fascism as Political Religion," \textit{Journal of Contemporary History} 25.2/3 (1990). Mussolini frequently uses the word “faith” to refer to fascism. In \textit{The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism}, he writes, “Fascism has created a living faith; and that this faith is very powerful in the minds of men, is demonstrated by those who have suffered and died for it.” Quoted in Nathanael Greene, ed., \textit{Fascism: An Anthology} (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968). 45.

\textsuperscript{39} Gentile, "Fascism as Political Religion."

\textsuperscript{40} Greene, ed., \textit{Fascism: An Anthology}. 97. Denis Mack Smith quoting Mussolini in section 3, “The Theory and Practice of Fascism.”
Much like boys and girls learn to worship at church, the children of Italian Fascism learned to believe in and revere the state and Mussolini.

The sense of belonging to a larger community is key to confusing question of racism, which can be viewed in these terms as the vilification of those who are outside the community. In Germany, that sense of membership developed to an extreme and involved hatred and persecution of anyone who did not fit into the volkisch community. In Italy, where the larger community was based on the State, the excluded populations were socialists or communists, not members of a different race. Therefore, it makes sense that extreme racism did not develop in Fascist Italy the way it did in Germany.

Both Hitler and Mussolini were able to consolidate their control over the younger generations and demand complete allegiance to the fascist community. Hitler passed a law in the late 1930s stating that all German boys and girls had to join the HJ. Dissenters and non-members were punished and their parents, in some cases, lost their jobs or were imprisoned. Thus, by the beginning of WWII in 1939, there was almost complete youth membership in the HJ. In 1938, 99% of Italian youth were enrolled in the youth organizations, although this does not necessarily imply active participation. In both Italy and Germany, there was also an effort to coordinate the teachings of the youth groups with those of primary schools. The majority of elementary school teachers in both countries were leaders of the youth organization and reinforced the Fascist and Nazi lessons in school.

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41 Gentile, "Fascism as Political Religion." 239.
The success of the youth organizations in Italy and Germany and the complete subservience they exacted was in large part due to the fact that they controlled the state and therefore could wield more complete control over the schools and youth groups. The CF never took control of France and never became a regime. The CF as a mere movement could not control the schools or legally demand youth membership. Comparison must be made with this important distinction in mind.

The FFCF, like the HJ and the Italian groups made a clear effort to include the children in a larger community: the community of WWI veterans. However, there is an important distinction between the form of community solidarity in the FFCF and the kind seen in Germany and Italy. The children were taught devotion to the veteran community not as an end, but rather as a means and expression of their devotion to France. Therefore, the community that the FFCF members were actually taught to revere was France itself. Their participation in the community of WWI veterans was merely a means of supporting France. Therefore, rather than exhibiting totalitarian demands of individual subjugation to a specific fascist community, the FFCF can be more accurately characterized as nationalist.

This is further supported by La Rocque’s approach to anti-Semitism, a force that was rampant and fairly powerful in a lot of conservative French society. There was no overtly racist doctrine in the early years of the Croix de Feu, although La Rocque became more racist in the years leading directly up to Vichy. In the earlier days of the movement, Jews were accepted, if not welcomed into the CF ranks.\(^4\) In the cases where La Rocque does spout some mildly racist rhetoric, he criticizes the roles of some international Jews in French society. The word international is key

because La Rocque’s racism was not biological, like Nazi racism, but social. La Rocque was perfectly accepting of Jews who had assimilated into French culture and lived their lives by traditional French values that were consistent with CF teachings. La Rocque only viewed Jews as a problem when they were overtly “international” or had not assimilated into French society. In this circumstance, it was less of a complaint about their religion or race than it was a criticism of internationalism, which clashed with La Rocque’s nationalism. La Rocque also criticized other parts of French society that he considered “un-French,” like Protestants and Freemasons. His dislike and vilification of Jews, Protestants, and Freemasons was nationalistic, not racial or totalitarian. Additionally, the Croix de Feu never developed a cult of the leader, nor was there any suggestion that, even if La Rocque had come to power, he would have been as powerful a figure as Mussolini or Hitler. He was undoubtedly a very effective leader, one that was successful enough to form a mass movement. However, his position never approached anything like that of a ruler who was believed to be omnipotent and omniscient. The children of the FFCF were not taught, as they were in Italy and Germany, that La Rocque would solve all of their problems, nor that he could do no wrong. La Rocque was the leader, but not the mythical embodiment of the movement. The FFCF, instead of teaching the children to revere La Rocque, reminded them “tels père, tels fils”, and taught them to look to their own parents as role models.

The differences in community membership and in the role of the leader are extremely telling. The FFCF did not indoctrinate the children with a totalitarian sense of membership in a community that demanded complete individual subservience.

45 Millman, "Croix-De-Feu Et L'antisémitisme." 50.
The CF community simply saw itself as the most ably suited to serve France. Therefore, membership in the FFCF and in the community of veterans had nationalistic goals. The nationalism of the CF and FFCF is further supported by La Rocque’s approach to anti-Semitism and anti-internationalism. He was not opposed to Jews, Protestants, or Freemasons because of their biological makeup, but because they were un-French. Finally, the FFCF did not encourage the development of a cult of the leader. Rather than positioning La Rocque as the only authority in the CF, it encouraged the imitation and respect of parents.

IV. The Role of Violence

Violence is a frequently cited characteristic of fascism, one that many scholars use to distinguish fascism from other movements. Both Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy used violence as a means of controlling the population and terrorizing opposition. In Germany, violence was also directed towards Jews and foreigners. The Nazis and Italian Fascists also made a clear point of teaching their children militarism and violence.

Italian Fascism had its roots in the Futurist movement, which was notably violent. The Futurists believed that violence was purifying and cleansing; they thought that they could use violence to regenerate a purer society. The Fascists adopted a large part this doctrine and roving bands called the *squadristi*, better known as the blackshirts, who terrorized the countryside in search of power and influence, characterized the early days of the *fasci*.46 While the early Fascist violence died down after the March on Rome and Mussolini’s ascension to power, militarism and

46 Koon, Believe, Obey, Fight: Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy, 1922-1943. 42.
violence remained important characteristics of Fascism. Mussolini doubted that a peaceful society was even possible and was convinced that only weaklings denounced violence in favor of peace. In *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism*, written by Mussolini in 1935, he stated that

> Fascism…believes neither in the possibility nor the utility of perpetual peace. It thus repudiates the doctrine of Pacifism born of a renunciation of the struggle and an act of cowardice in the face of sacrifice. War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it.\(^{47}\)

Mussolini’s Fascism, while never approaching the level of violence seen in the Nazi genocide of more than 6 million people, never ceased to glorify violence as a sign of strength.

Mussolini’s praise of violence was taught to the younger generations, particularly through the Fascist youth groups. The groups emphasized militarism and organized activities that encouraged the youth to become more violent. Through the youth groups, the children learned war cries, played with toy guns, and repeated slogans like “Nothing is ever won in history without bloodshed” and “Better to live one day as a lion than a hundred years as a sheep”.\(^ {48}\) Even the motto of the youth organizations (“believe, obey, fight”) encouraged violence without reflection or remorse. Acclimating the children to violence and war was one of the main purposes of the youth groups.

Violence was also encouraged in the Hitler youth. In accordance with the ideas of Social Darwinism, one of the purposes of the HJ was to strengthen the


children of Germany so they could vanquish aggressors in the Darwinistic playing field that was Europe in the 1930s. Additionally, the HJ was a training ground for future Nazi soldiers. Therefore, militarism, war, and violence were highly praised. Developing physical fitness, both in preparation for becoming a good soldier and as a value in and of itself, was one of the major goals of HJ programs. The constant theme of militarism and physical preparation for war prompted an acceptance, even a glorification, of violence for the HJ members.

The violence of the HJ was also overtly racist. Physical violence against people of an inferior race was an acceptable means of purifying the nation and the Volksch race. Exposure to racist violence was also a means of steeling the children of the HJ and conditioning them to accept their adult role as a Nazi soldier more easily and complicitly.

Hitler made no secrets about the primacy of pre-military training for the HJ boys. In Mein Kampf he stated:

Education in a general way is to be the preparation for the later army service. The Army will not need, as has hitherto been the case, to give the young man a grounding in the simplest exercises and rules…it should rather change the young man, already physically perfect, into a soldier. The state…has to direct its entire education primarily not at pumping in mere knowledge, but at the breeding of absolutely healthy bodies.

Many of the HJ activities were intended to develop the necessary skills for a boy to become a soldier. Like the Italians, the HJ boys played violent “war games” which

51 There were different branches of the HJ that were explicitly geared to military groupings. For example, a ‘Marine HJ’ taught the boys how to sail, specifically preparing them to eventually join the
strengthened them physically and mentally for combat. They learned to shoot, they practiced reading maps and identifying oncoming enemies as well as holding military fanfares and flag ceremonies. Even Hitler’s preferred sport (and therefore the most common HJ activity) boxing, is demonstrative of the violent overtones in HJ physical training.

Pre-military training does not, in and of itself, indicate an acceptance of excessive violence. However, encouragement of violence was present in other parts of the HJ indoctrination process as well as the social realities of membership in the HJ. Importantly, the military training and physical strengthening of the boys made their tendencies towards violence more menacing. Hitler made it clear that his goals for the boys were more complicated than simple military training when he said that he wanted “a violently active, dominating, intrepid, and brutal youth.” Hitler achieved this by driving into the heads of all German youth that they were racially superior and that the problems of post-WWI Germany were due to the presence of foreigners and Jews. The boys of the HJ were exposed from an early age to what the Nazi’s considered proper treatment of the Jews. HJ participation in Kristallnacht has been questioned, but the children were most likely exposed to the violence and forced to watch the unfolding terror. In the late 1930s and during WWII, HJ members became more than observers; many were active participants in the terrorization and murders of Jews. In some cases, the HJ oversaw the process of boarding Jews onto

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Kater, Hitler Youth, 29-31.
Kater, Hitler Youth, 62.
trains bound for concentration camps. Others were taken on visits to the camps see their Jewish enemy in person.\textsuperscript{55} The individual accounts of HJ violence are wide-reaching; some of them point to the pressure put upon younger boys to become mentally and physically prepared for violence, some concern violence against the Jews, and some of them are about the impact of empower youth, which resulted in instances of general terrorization of German society, simply because they had the ability.\textsuperscript{56}

La Rocque viewed violence very differently. He abhorred hoodlum rioting and violent chaos. He prided his organization on their discipline, order, and controlled behavior. In fact, he advertised the lack of CF violence in the February 6, 1934 demonstrations. He proudly stated that the CF members had maintained order and had marched with determination and discipline. This order did not extend to all CF activities. There were instances of CF demonstrations against Communist or pacifist meetings that took a violent turn. However, the violence was usually on a small level and was discouraged by La Rocque. In addition, unlike the Italian fascists who developed out of violence, or the Nazis who included violent racial theories in their earliest doctrines, the CF was relatively peaceful. This is not to say that the CF lacked a militaristic tone. The \textit{dispos} (who evolved into the EVP after 1936) were essentially a paramilitary branch of the organization. They organized training sessions and practiced drills and marches. However, La Rocque maintained that they were only preparing for H-hour or D-day, the final showdown with the Communists, Socialists, or any other adulterating force in France. In fact, he thought violence was

\textsuperscript{55} Kater, \textit{Hitler Youth}, 64.
\textsuperscript{56} Kater, \textit{Hitler Youth}, 62-65.
acceptable only when it was the only effective course of action and only when it was controlled. This is a crucial difference from the Italian and German approaches to violence, both of which saw it as a purifying and invigorating force, not to mention a useful political tool.

No doubt, the fact that the CF did not glorify the war, but rather mourned the loss and violence of 1914-1918, had an impact on the movement’s level of violence. Perhaps, the different outcomes of WWI for Germany, Italy, and France were also significant. Italy and Germany came out of WWI with the crushing impact of defeat and humiliation. France won the war, but continued to suffer the consequences of fighting on French soil and losing French lives for decades. Perhaps the differing dominant themes, humiliating defeat, and a need for revenge on the one side, and emotional trauma and sorrow over lost lives on the other, can help explain why the German and Italian fascists were so much more willing to accept the necessity of violence.

La Rocque’s approach to violence had important implications for the FFCF. He had the boys participate in military training, but it never developed into a significant part of the organization. There was minimal discussion of the military training in the Flambeau, a notable fact given the CF’s propensity to praise the activities of their youth branch. The military training of the CF was more important for the older men. While the VN members were allowed in the dispos, and therefore some of the paramilitary ranks were not significantly older than the FFCF (they were between 18 and 30), they were beyond the classification of youth and children. What is surprising is that the younger boys were not indoctrinated with military rhetoric and
excitement before they were old enough to join the VN or the *dispos*. Unlike the HJ and the Italian youth groups, there was no effort in the FFCF to develop the violent and militaristic tendencies of youth. The boys and girls of the FFCF participated in relatively benign physical activities (tennis and ping pong tournaments, hikes, swimming etc), which lacked the vigor of pre-military training that was notably present in the HJ. The education of the FFCF members, while praising the bravery of soldiers, also made clear the terror and the sorrows of war. The horror of the wars violence was not hidden from the children. The role of violence and militarism in the CF is significantly different from the Italian and German fascist groups. Even though some of the programs are similar (military training and physical education) the goals, the approaches, and the emotional understanding of violence are crucially different.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the differences between the FFCF and the fascist youth groups of Germany and Italy. This does not mean that there were no similarities. In fact, there were quite a few, such as nationalism, the role of women, anti-communism, the use of parades and military pomp to mobilize followers, etc. However, these similarities, as explained earlier, are attributes that are not specific to fascism. Therefore, they are not useful in a comparison of the fascistic tendencies of youth groups.

The characteristics of totalitarianism and violence, accompanied by a cult of the leader and a myth of youth, were very important to fascistic nature of the HJ and the Italian groups. These characteristics also serve to reveal crucial differences
between the FFCF and the fascist groups. The FFCF did not have the true seeds of a totalitarian movement, nor a cult of the leader. The fact that the CF did not come to power is not enough to explain the absence of these attributes. It is unlikely that these characteristics would have developed out of nowhere, making the absence of the beginning seeds of totalitarianism and the cult of the leader significant. Additionally, the role of violence in the FFCF was much more temperate than in the Hitler Youth or the Italian groups. Violence as a political tool or a moral imperative did not appear in the CF ideology. Finally, the myth of youth and the origins of the youth movements are different. The Italian and German groups grew out of a tradition of youth movements and were founded by young people. The FFCF was founded and run by adults.

These differences are significant clues to the mystery of FFCF fascism; clues that point away from fascism. The FFCF did not possess the characteristics that distinguished the Hitler youth and the Italian groups from other youth movements of the 1930s. Their fascism is based on these characteristics. Based on their absence in the FFCF and the comparisons in this chapter, the FFCF was not a fascist youth group.
Conclusion

This study has been primarily concerned with exploring the fascistic qualities of the FFCF. Based on the analysis and comparison between the FFCF and contemporary fascist youth movements, it is clear that the FFCF was not fascist. The FFCF deviated from its fascist counterparts in significant ways: it did not make totalitarian demands about individual allegiance to a community, it was not racist, and it did not teach the children violence. Additionally, unlike its fascist contemporaries, the FFCF did not develop out of a generational revolt and it was not spontaneously created by youth, for youth. It was the product of zealous parents, eager to involve their children in their nationalist agenda. No doubt it held appeal for the youth, not all of whom were pushed into the organization by their parents. The summer camps, despite their ideological and moral agendas, were meant to be enjoyable for the children. There was also the appeal of uniforms, FFCF pins, and flags. However, despite these more enticing aspects, the FFCF was still the creation of adults. Given the importance of totalitarian demands, violence, the cult of the leader and the legacy of a generational revolt to fascist youth groups, the FFCF’s deviation with regards to these characteristics proves that it was not fascist.

This is not to say that either the FFCF or the CF was moderate. The unintended effect of this study of the FFCF may have been a recasting of the CF as a fairly temperate movement, especially in comparison with its more extreme contemporaries in Germany and Italy. The comparison revealed that the FFCF was not fascist and, most likely, neither was its parent organization, the CF. There will
always be dissenters, but the majority of scholars maintain that the CF and its youth branch were merely authoritarian conservative. However, because the CF was not fascist does not undermine its extremism. It did not display some of the more nefarious extreme conservative tendencies, like unnecessary violence and racism, but it was on the far right of the political spectrum and espoused strongly conservative, reactionary values.

The purpose of this study was, in some part to better understand the history of France in the 1930s, but it was also to learn the lessons of history and so that they can be applied to our world today. Just as La Rocque said, “Pour voir clair dans les destinées de la France, il faut étudier son histoire. Nos décisions seront alors fermes et plus rationnelles.” However, the lessons one can learn from the FFCF and CF are not about future recreations of the same movement. Because of the crucial role of WWI as a unifier, motivator, and educator for both the children and the adults of the CF, it is undeniable that the movement was specific to its time period. The necessity and the power of a movement like the CF is hard to imagine without WWI. The war, so destructive and horrendous, left millions of suffering, traumatized young men. The CF gave them the means to recreate the bonds of the front and pass them along to their children. It also allowed them to keep the memory of their suffering and their losses alive. Thanks to the CF, the sacrifices and pain of the veterans were given the respect they deserved, both from the younger generation and from France itself. It also allowed the CF members to recast the war as a time of unity, bravery, and patriotism, thereby giving their suffering some purpose. While never undermining

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1 To clearly see the destiny of France, it is essential to study its history. Our decisions will then be more firm and rational. Pierre Ferasse, “Le grand rôle de l’histoire,” *Le Flambeau* January 1933: L’Appel.
the terror of the war, the veterans managed to make it an experience with some positive aspects, namely the values they learned through their time on the front. All of a sudden, the veterans had something to teach their children, something that no one else could.

The CF was almost entirely a product of the 1930s; the legacy of the war, the recent history of relations between European countries, modernization, the Great Depression, and many other period specific factors were instrumental in shaping CF. However, while most of the attributes of the CF were products of the time period, many of the ideas were not. Nationalism, anti-parliamentarianism, and idealization of the past are all forces that still exist in France. Extreme right rhetoric and ideology is present and, in fact, a fairly powerful presence. The most notable example of the continued strength of the French extreme right is the *Front National* (FN), a political party led by Jean-Marie Le Pen. The FN, although bearing the same name as the attempted rightist coalition in the 1930s, was formed in the 1970s. It began as a fringe movement, but has been growing in fame and power (some would argue notoriety) since the 1980s and particularly since its first real sign of electoral success in the 1995 Presidential election when Le Pen won 15% of the votes.² Le Pen espouses extremely conservative, nationalist, anti-immigrant, anti-Fifth Republic, and xenophobic ideology. Not all of his ideas are synonymous with the ideas of the CF. For example, Le Pen’s racism and anti-immigrant stance is far more extreme than La Rocque’s. Nevertheless, Le Pen and the FN are, in many ways, the ideological

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successors of the CF and the extreme right in the 1930s. Therefore, while the CF has disappeared and will not reappear, some of its ideology lives on.

The FFCF was also specific to the 1930s. No modern youth organization will place the same emphasis on WWI or will teach the history of France in the same way. There will never be another movement with quite the same blend of ideas and activities. However, there are some similarities between the FFCF and modern youth organizations, most notably the Boy and Girls Scouts of France. It would be interesting to further investigate these linkages, as well as to explore any ideological inheritance from the FFCF. A study of this sort may reveal that the legacy of the FFCF is still fairly present in France.

The CF, despite being a powerful political and social force during the 1930s, is not a particularly well-known movement, especially outside of France. This is perhaps due to the misconception that it was an anomaly, a historical aberration associated with Vichy France and the embarrassing behavior of France in WWII. However, the FN is testimony to the lasting legacy of the tradition CF and FFCF. The continuity between the CF and the modern FN suggests that the CF was part of a larger ideological tradition in France, one that continues to prosper today and cannot be displaced exclusively to the 1930s. Because of this, the CF can teach us not only about the history of France, but also about France today.
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