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ABSTRACT

France, in the years following the First World War, was a bruised and battered country. Out of the political, economic, and social confusion sprang up a number of political and social movements on both the left and the right. Following France's dubious involvement with the invading German presence during World War II, many scholars have turned their attention to these inter-war movements to better understand the period of the Vichy Regime and German collaboration. Of the organizations on the right, the most numerous was the Croix de Feu, originally a movement of veterans. For years, scholars have debated the true character of this organization, almost always asking the question: was it fascist? In an attempt to contribute to the answer to this still unanswered question, this article studies the youth branch of the Croix de Feu and compares its essential characteristics to those of the fascist counter parts in Germany and Italy. In comparing and contrasting the characteristics of violence, the cult of the leader, the subjugation of the individual to the whole, racism, and the authenticity of youthfulness in these movements, this article makes the argument that the youth movement of the Croix de Feu was not fascist, merely conservative.

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Sons and Daughters of the Croix de Feu

An Inquiry into the Role of Youth in French Fascism



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I. 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 an 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 and 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. Pétain 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 it was, “the stability of social structures and the relative importance of the middle classes that saved France from the fascist adventure.”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 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 his remarkably controversial book *Neither right nor left*, Sternhell 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

¹ René Rémond, *The right wing in France from 1815 to De Gaulle*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966) 293.

² Philippe Machefer, *Ligues et fascismes en France: 1919-1939* (Vendôme: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974) 74. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

³ Rémond, 293.

⁴ Serge Berstein, “La France Des Annees Trente Allergique Au Fascisme: A Propos D'un Livre De Zeev Sternhell,” *Vingtieme Siecle. Revue d'histoire*, no. 2 (1984): 83-94.

⁵ Robert Wohl, “French Fascism, Both Right and Left: Reflections on the Sternhell Controversy,” *The Journal of Modern History* 63, no. 1 (1991): 91.

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

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 Sternhell's influential contribution 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 Jacques 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 These movements, even if they were fascist, do not disprove Bernstein 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 *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

⁶ Zeev Sternhell, *Neither right nor left: fascist ideology in France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

⁷ Bernstein, 92

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 its leader, François 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 1936.⁸ 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 and restore peace, thereby appearing as forces of order.⁹

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 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

⁸ Pierre Milza, *Fascisme français: passé et présent* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), 136-139.

⁹ Philippe Burrin, *La dérive fasciste: Doriot, Déat, Bergery 1933-1945*, L'Univers historique (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986).

¹⁰ Robert Soucy, *French fascism: the second wave 1933-1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 113, 158-167.

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.”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 *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:

¹¹ Gilbert Allardyce, “What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept,” *The American Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (1979): 373.

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.¹²

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, 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.

¹² Robert O. Paxton, “The Five Stages of Fascism,” *The Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 1 (1998): 6-7.

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* (FFCF – 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 FFCF. 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, *Le Flambeau*, survives. In addition to the central edition of *Le 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 *Le Flambeau*. *Le 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 *Le Flambeau*, called *L'Appel* (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 *Hitler-Jugend* (HJ – Hitler Youth), the Roman-inspired monuments dedicated to 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.

II. The Croix de Feu and France in the 1930s

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 were fought. The war's toll on human life was even more enormous and painful. 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 reference to 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 France's Third Republic political parties since 1876, won the majority of seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Its success was a result of lingering allegiance to the *Union Sacrée*, a wartime anti-German political coalition, and the fears of French communism sparked by the 1917 Russian revolution.¹³ 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 parties.¹⁴ While the *Cartel des Gauches* government only lasted two years, 1924 to 1926, 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 laid the groundwork for the conservative 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 Alfred Dreyfus, an innocent Jewish soldier, on charges of treason, unearthed anti-Semitic and conservative sentiments that had long been lying dormant in the French public. The Dreyfus affair, as it has come to be known, created a deafening uproar from both the Dreyfus supporters and accusers and marked the beginning of a lasting division between the French political left and right. The *Action Française* 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.¹⁵ He also rejected anything he considered “anti-French” which included people he referred to as *les mètèques* (an offensive phrase, similar to the English “wog”) meaning anyone who was un-French by ancestry or belief, such as Jews, Freemasons, and Protestants.¹⁶ The AF also expressed a willingness to use violence to achieve their goals. The *Camélots du Roi*, originally the newspaper

¹³ Nathanael Greene, *From Versailles to Vichy: the Third French Republic 1919-1940* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970), 55, 32-38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55, 39.

¹⁵ R. E. Balfour, “The Action Française Movement,” *Cambridge Historical Journal* 3, no. 2 (1930): 195.

¹⁶ Balfour, 184.

delivery boys in charge of dispersing the organization's journal, later became a roving paramilitary force, starting violent riots and brawls.¹⁷

While the most powerful period for the AF was before the Great 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.¹⁸ 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 R dier formed the first of these leagues, called the *L gion*, just one month after the election of the *Cartel des Gauches*.¹⁹ Soon after, Pierre Taittinger formed a similar group called the *Jeunesses Patriotes* (JP). Georges Valois, a former member of *Action Fran aise*, 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 they all included a paramilitary branch which signaled their acceptance of the use of violence as a tool to promote rightist ideology and 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.

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 *L gion*. 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."²⁰ It refused any connection to parliamentary politics and demanded that no member hold any role in parliament.²¹ In addition, the choice of the name *Faisceau* showed a willingness to be compared to the

¹⁷ Sean Kennedy, *Reconciling France against democracy: The Croix De Feu and the Parti Social Fran ais, 1927-1945* (Montreal, Ithica: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 19.

¹⁸ Balfour, 201.

¹⁹ Soucy, 27.

²⁰ Soucy, 87.

²¹ Soucy, 91.

fascists of Italy and Germany, which was compounded by paramilitary instructions that mimicked Mussolini's black shirts.²²

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 empowered left, decreased quickly and significantly.²³ The leagues rebounded in the 1930s and gathered more support, but the rightist heyday of the 1920s ended in 1926.

Early Growth of the Croix de Feu

Interestingly, the Croix de Feu was founded in 1927, after the decline of the rightist leagues. In 1927, following the well-publicized execution of the American anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, the French communists held a protest in Paris that ended at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, where they trampled flowers and spit on the flagstone.²⁴ A group of war veterans, angered by the show of disrespect to one of the most important WWI monuments, decided to join together in a movement dedicated to reviving the brotherhood and bravery of the front lines in opposition to the left. François Coty, the owner of *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 from the exclusive ranks of decorated war veterans. In 1929, the membership profile was expanded to include *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.²⁵

The *Croix de Feu* grew steadily between 1928 and 1931, achieving a membership base of around 18,000 by March, 1931.²⁶ However, it was not until a well-known WWI colonel, François La Rocque, 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 *Le Flambeau*, the organization's newspaper. La Rocque rose to a leadership

²² Ibid., 89. The word "fascist" comes from the Italian *fasci*, from the Latin *fascis*, both meaning "a bundle of rods" is translated into French as *faisceau*. Therefore, the name of Vallois' movement was a direct translation of the Italian Fascists.

²³ Kennedy, 21.

²⁴ Jacques Nobécourt, *Le colonel de La Rocque (1885-1946), ou, Les pièges du nationalisme chrétien* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 102.

²⁵ Philippe Rudaux, *Les Croix de Feu et le P.S.F.* (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1967), 42-43.

²⁶ Kennedy, 37.

position began in late November 1927 when he led the *Croix de Feu* in a very successful protest against a pacifist gathering. Édouard Herriot, radical leader of the 1924 *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 the stage to capture the microphone and deliver a short speech. Because of the enormous press coverage, the incident introduced the *Croix de Feu* and La Rocque into the public awareness.²⁷ During his term as vice-president, Genay pointed to La Rocque's fiery newspaper articles and firm denunciations of parliamentary politics, and claimed that he represented "the active spirit of [the] association."²⁸ 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 reins 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 they lived, even though they associated with France and French values.²⁹ The RN, while important for including non-veteran adults, never achieved the same level of success or importance as the third new branch the *Volontaires Nationaux* (VN). In October 1933, La Rocque announced the formation of the VN, which recruited the oldest members of the FFCF and the youngest members of the RN, none of which had fought in the war.³⁰ In explaining their purpose La Rocque stated the CF demanded, "nothing of you, except to serve the tricolor flag, to love your profession, to protect the French family and to want an honorable peace."³¹

²⁷ Rudaux, 47-48.

²⁸ Kennedy, 29.

²⁹ Rudaux, 51-52.

³⁰ Kennedy, 36.

³¹ Nobécourt, 242-243.

Women attended CF meetings and events from the founding 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 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.³² This new style for modern women was, as the pro-natalist doctor François Fouveau de Courmelles labeled it, “the fashion of non-nursing...the fashion of non-motherhood.”³³ This woman contrasted with the traditional French woman and was anathema to the CF’s perception of femininity, which was caring, matronly, and domestic. Women were also included in domestic social work; they gave out food and clothing to relieve the effects of economic depression, set up children’s camps, and organized social outings. They were included in small-scale propaganda missions, but 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 entirely to the men.

Finally, in addition to the four sub-branches of the CF, there were the *dispos* (and abbreviation of *disponible*, or ‘available’), a quasi-paramilitary force made up of members recruited from the *Croix de Feu*, RN, VN, and FFCF. The *dispos* 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.³⁴ 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 *Camélots du Roi* from the *Action Française*, or the *Jeunesses Patriotes*. However, they appeared at rallies and protests in order to protect and supervise.³⁵ In addition to service as security guards, the *dispos* were prepared to become a paramilitary force for the right if the need arose. They had trial runs, where they would be unexpectedly summoned and transported to an unknown location, where they would find a regiment of other *dispos*. These practices were intended to prepare them for what La Rocque referred to as D-Day and H-hour, or the moment when a violent face-off with

³² Mary Jane Green, “The Boubole Novels: Constructing a French Fascist Woman,” in *Gender and fascism in modern France*, Contemporary French culture and society, eds. Melanie Hawthorne and Richard J. Golsan (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 55.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Nobécourt, 243.

³⁵ Nobécourt, 191-192.

the communists would become necessary.³⁶ When the VN was founded in 1933, it added a volunteer corps to the *dispos*.³⁷ 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 of the 1930s.

Croix de Feu Ideology

In November 1929, *Le Flambeau* was launched as the CF monthly newsletter and propaganda organ. At this point, the CF had existed for two years and already included an impressive 10,000 members.³⁸ 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”³⁹. The CF clarifies that they are not militarists, but that they do emphasize the values and lessons they learned on the front. In fact, they claimed that the experience of the war was the glue that held 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 including, “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.”⁴⁰ The CF members felt very strongly that these values were going to be essential in the fight to save France from the threats of Communism and Socialism. This positioned the CF veterans as a new elite in French 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.

In the CF, the cult of the veteran developed mythic proportions. In certain cases, catch-phrases like “Unus comme nos pères” were given the status of a prescription for the ills of the country, which, at the time, were many. One *Le Flambeau* article proclaims that they

³⁶ Soucy, 109.

³⁷ Kevin Passmore, “Boy Scouting for Grown-Ups? Paramilitarism in the Croix De Feu and the Parti Social Français,” *French Historical Studies* 19, no. 2 (1995): 543.

³⁸ 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.

³⁹ *Le Flambeau*, “Manifeste de Croix de Feu,” November 1929, 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

needed to be “‘united like we were at the front’ and ‘united like our fathers’ in order to realize the national recovery of moral, familial, social, economic, financial, and international order.” The same article later calls for people to be “‘United like at the front’ and ‘united like our fathers’” to renovate the spirit of the family.”⁴¹ These hyperbolic, mythical statements demonstrate how crucial the WWI values were to the CF and FFCF members; they were not only the basis of the CF ideology, but the key to the protection and continued success of France.

The CF manifesto also addresses the troubling question of fascism, though in terms that are vague enough to avoid any firm 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.⁴² This is an interesting insight both into the lack of a consensual understanding of fascism in the 1930s and the CF's 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.

During the early 1930s, La Rocque elaborated 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. In his statements, La Rocque does not discount violence in general, only unorganized, undirected, mob-like violence. In 1936, La Rocque, published a propaganda book about the CF entitled *The fiery cross: the call to public service in France*, wherein he reiterated that the CF was not a rabble-raising organization. La Rocque writes that, “[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; namely, the maximum of permanent results with the minimum of losses.”⁴³ Despite his characteristically vague rhetoric, La Rocque emphasizes that the CF refrained from rabble-raising, 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.

⁴¹ Alexandre Loex, “Un esprit nouveau,” *Le Flambeau*, November 1929, 3.

⁴² *Le Flambeau*, “Manifeste de Croix de Feu,” 1.

⁴³ François de La Rocque, *The fiery cross: the call to public service in France* (London: Lovat Dickson, 1936), 19.



François de La Rocque leading a Croix de Feu march in Paris.

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.”⁴⁴ The CF manifesto states “What is our politics? Our politics is France, that is all and that is plenty,” clarifying that the glorification and protection of France was the underlying theme of the CF. The manifesto also explains that the CF was formed in reaction to a series of threats to France. In the CF, WWI veterans were joined together to fight against common enemies: “The wogs, the post-war free-loaders, the worthless politicians, the wheelers and dealers of doubtful patriotism...the ringleaders of trouble and discord, the beneficiaries of a war even more terrible and painful than the revolution.”⁴⁵ The nationalism of the CF was also decidedly traditionalist. “Travail, Famille et Patrie” (Work, Family and Fatherland), the motto of the Vichy government during WWII, was taken directly from the pages of *Le Flambeau*. These values represented the three traditional values of France, which the CF sought to

⁴⁴ La Rocque, *The fiery cross*, 24.

⁴⁵ *Le Flambeau*, “Manifeste de Croix de Feu,” 1.

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 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.”⁴⁶ The extra-parliamentarianism of the CF became 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 both the authenticity and the depth of the transformation are questionable. It is unclear if La Rocque actually accepted parliamentary politics, or merely pretended to so that his movement could survive.

The CF ideology is often expressed in vague terms, posing a major hurdle for scholars of the CF. However, at the same time, 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 people who clung desperately to the memory of the war as a moral compass to guide them through the difficult post-war years. They relied on the relationships of brotherhood they developed on the front, as well as the values and morals of sacrifice and duty. Along with these positive war-time traits, there is also a sadness and confusion that underlies much of the CF ideology. This sadness, the memory of WWI, and the frustration over the condition of France in the 1930s, shaped and propelled the CF ideology.

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 the growth was also due to national conditions, including the state of the economy,

⁴⁶ Passmore, “Boy Scouting for Grown-Ups?” 535.

the faltering third republic, the falling birth rate, blurring gender roles and the perturbation of France's standing on the international political scene. These problems contributed to the sense that France had become “decadent” and weak. Most people traced the appearance of these problems to the war, which prompted a tendency to idealize the pre-war period 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 effects of the global depression. This was later than most countries and the French people even imagined for a couple years before 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.⁴⁷ By 1932, overall production levels were down 27 percent since from those of 1930.⁴⁸ The level of unemployment never reached the highs that it did in the United States or Germany, but France took longer to recover from the economic downturn; 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 look for help from other sources.⁴⁹ The CF’s displays of order, discipline, energy, and its promise of a restored France, made it an appealing alternative to the government. This is part of the reason that a large proportion of the CF members came from the middle classes of French society.

France's difficulties were not just economic; 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.⁵⁰ There was marked political division between the left and the right ; the conservative leagues on one side, the Communists and

⁴⁷ Greene, *From Versailles to Vichy*, 50.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

Socialists on the other, and a seemingly cavernous ideological valley between them. Unsurprisingly, this bred a combative and divided atmosphere in the government.

The falling birth rate was another much-discussed threat in the 1930s. Concern over the number of French babies being born was by no means new or unique to the 1930s, but WWI and the faltering family structure made the issue more pressing. WWI killed over a million young Frenchmen, leaving a whole generation of widows and unmarried women. The new wave of modern women who were uninterested in motherhood and the economic decline that strained family budgets compounded the problem. Between 1931 and 1936, the French population grew by only 100,000 people.⁵¹ The idea of a dwindling and aging population terrified French people into thinking that the entire French race was disappearing, 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."⁵² 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, camaraderie, and patriotism of the WWI. In the 1930s, the "disease" of decadence seemed as if it could morally and economically infect the country that the veterans had fought so hard to save. This sense that France was afflicted made the *Croix de Feu* and its traditional values all the more appealing. The *Croix de Feu*'s glorification of the war veterans and the importance it placed on WWI 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 had obligingly fit themselves into their traditional roles.

Finally, in addition to the myriad domestic woes, France's international status had suffered after the war. Essentially, 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 slip 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

⁵¹ Greene, *From Versailles to Vichy*, 57.

⁵² See Eugen Joseph Weber, *The hollow years: France in the 1930s* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1994), 111-146.

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.

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 6th 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 the riot, CF membership, power, and influence grew, catapulting it above and beyond the other participating leagues.

The issue that provoked the February 6th riot 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 officials 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.⁵³ However, by early 1934 when the Stavisky affair was revealed to the public, the Great Depression had started to affect France, exacerbating the people's 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 the *Jeunesses Patriotes*, prepared for a

⁵³ Rudaux, 60.

demonstration condemning the third republic and calling for a change in leadership.⁵⁴ 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 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, “You don’t add us, you follow us,” which later became the banner quote of *Le Flambeau*.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ On February 6th, 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 provincial sections were in Lyon, Marseille, and Rouen, but could only claim between 200 and 300 members each. Significant cities such as Bordeaux and Lille had fewer than 100 members.⁵⁷ Therefore, even though the *Croix de Feu* was a strong influence in the Paris region, there was a slim chance in February 1934 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, “We are demonstrators, not rioters.”⁵⁸ 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, even if 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, “a mass jolt, disciplined, tenacious, effective, but not agitated.”⁵⁹ These stipulations

⁵⁴ Nobécourt, 259.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁵⁶ Kennedy, 46.

⁵⁷ Nobécourt, 256.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

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 6th satisfied La Rocque's demands. On the day in question, 8,000 CF members 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. Throughout the day, the *Croix de Feu* ranks successfully maintained order and sustained only a few injuries and no deaths.⁶⁰

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 CF had arrived with, "empty hands and pockets."⁶¹ He went to so far as to state in the following issue of *Le Flambeau* that "The *Croix de Feu* and the National Volunteers are horrified by violence."⁶² 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 6th. Some scholars suggest the riots amounted to a conservative coup while others are convinced there was no pre-mediated plan to take over the government. In large part, the truth depends on the group in question. *Action Française* and the *Jeunesses Patriotes* engaged in more violence and perhaps had different motives than the CF. 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.

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

⁶⁰ *Le Flambeau*, "Le Journée de Février," March 1934, 3.

⁶¹ Nobécourt, 264.

⁶² *Le Flambeau*, "Le Journée de Février," 3.

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.⁶³ February 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. The riots sparked fears of a fascist coup among the left. Six days after the riots in Paris, the left responded with a "Confédération Générale du Travail" 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.⁶⁴

In addition to the increasing tension between the left and right, the Third Republic was further destabilized by inefficiency and rapid transitions. 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.⁶⁵ Only six months later, Albert Sarraut ousted Laval. Throughout this rapid succession of leaders, the CF continued to emphasize its extra-parliamentary character, reiterating its disapproval of and distance from the various leaders.⁶⁶ The CF positioned itself as the only option remaining for the French people who were faced with both 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.⁶⁷ In the summer and

⁶³ Nobécourt, 256.

⁶⁴ Kennedy, 56.

⁶⁵ 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.

⁶⁶ Kennedy, 67.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

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:

The current parliamentarism is forfeit... Nothing sound will be gained without a preliminary cleansing of committees, journalist, and other headquarters where anonymous powers exercise their absolutism over a blinded universal suffrage... As for the Croix de Feu's 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.⁶⁸

These intimations of H-hour and the increased threat from the left gave energy to the radicalization of the CF after 1934.

However, this period of the CF's history was relatively short lived. As early as the fall of 1934, Doumergue threatened the CF with dissolution if it did not rein in its paramilitary activities. When Flandin took over, he reiterated Doumergue's threat.⁶⁹ In addition to the threats of dissolution, La Rocque found the developing CF violence troublesome because it was increasingly difficult to control and to balance with his continued emphasis on defensive, necessary, and orderly violence. 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 *Mouvement Social Français des Croix de Feu* (MSF), which underscored the new focus of CF activity and created a more familial group image.⁷⁰ 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*.⁷¹ This move was not

⁶⁸ Kennedy, 69.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

unexpected and La Rocque already had a plan to reform as the *Parti Social Français* (PSF). He instructed the members to remain calm and to join the new organization, which he stated was simply the *Croix de Feu* plus electoral politics.⁷² 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 longtime leader in 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.⁷³ 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 indicate that the seemingly tempered position of the PSF was more palatable to many people on the French right. Whatever the reason, the PSF was monumentally popular and expanded the movement significantly.

There is some debate over how moderate the PSF really was. Kevin Passmore argues that the CF, because of its paramilitary activities, was fascist, whereas the PSF was merely authoritarian.⁷⁴ Others argue that the PSF was still 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.⁷⁵ 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.

End of the Croix de Feu

In April 1938, Daladier, the pre-February 6th Prime Minister, took over for the position from Leon Blum. This marked a significant governmental shift towards the right, immediately diminishing the sense of threat from the left. Similar to the fate of the first round of rightist leagues in 1926, without the pressing sense of urgency and danger from the left, the right, which gained most of its momentum through its reactionary

⁷² *Le Flambeau*, "Dissolution?" June 20, 1936, 1.

⁷³ Kennedy, 81.

⁷⁴ Passmore, "Boy Scouting for Grown-Ups?" 531.

⁷⁵ Soucy, 113.

character, lost some of its dynamism and power. Despite the overall weakening on the French right after 1938, the PSF continued to operate 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, 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 ideology emerged paramount. Germany's occupation had become a threat to France and therefore La Rocque, as a nationalist above all, worked to undermine the occupying force. Some members followed La Rocque's lead while others became an active part of the collaboration government.⁷⁶ By the middle of the war, the PSF had become a disintegrated movement.

In March 1943, the Gestapo arrested La Rocque, along with another 152 other PSF activists. The reasons for arrest are unclear, but most likely were linked to La Rocque's power and potential as a "trouble-maker."⁷⁷ 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.

⁷⁶ The exact moment when de La Rocque began working for the resistance is unclear. The estimates range from December 1940 to November 1942.

⁷⁷ Kennedy, 248.

III. The Fils et Filles de Croix de Feu

The camaraderie of the trenches is a flower which grew in misery, in blood; the fleas of politics have tried to cut it down, they have not succeeded,. Cultivate this flower in order to assure the grandness of France; continue to give the example to our 'Sons of the Croix de Feu' who, in picking up the torch that has fallen from our failing hands, can continue the pious national work which we have started.⁷⁸

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*, and some were spontaneously created by youth, for youth. The most notorious example of an early 20th century youth movement is the Hitler Youth (HJ), 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 Hitler Youth. There are more innocuous examples of youth organizations; 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 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 the valorization 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

⁷⁸ *Le Flambeau*, "Assemblées générales ordinaires et extraordinaire du 14 Février 1932," March 1932, 2.

process, the children were constructed into a set of “symbolic veterans”, a new generation that empathized with and extracted the values from the experience of WWI . 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.

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 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 *Le 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:

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 trembling 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.⁷⁹

One year later, as the idea of the FFCF became more solidified, a *Le Flambeau* article reiterated the need for youthful invigoration. “Through the direction of youth,” it states, “one can be directed by them towards a France more ardent and new.”⁸⁰ Two years later, once the FFCF became an operational organization, La Rocque said in a speech directed at the youth, “your enthusiasm will extend ours.”⁸¹ The FFCF 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:

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.⁸²

Reflecting on the number of CF who passed away in 1930, 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) wrote that it was, “necessary to envision the moment when the torch falls from our hands; it’s you (the youth) who will pick it up and carry it to future generations.”⁸³ 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 frequently referenced the passing of the *flambeau* or torch. In another example of di Borgo’s rather unoriginal imagery, he states that he was comforted

⁷⁹ *Le Flambeau*, “Le Manifeste de Croix de Feu,” 1.

⁸⁰ *Le Flambeau*, “Fils De Croix De Feu,” November 1930, 3.

⁸¹ *Le Flambeau*, “Assemblée Générale,” August 1932, 3.

⁸² *Le Flambeau*, “Fils De Croix De Feu,” November 1930, 3.

⁸³ Pozzo di Borgo, “Parmi Nous,” *Le Flambeau*, April 1931, 2.

that, “this admirable effort is not lost and that behind us there are young people who, in turn, will pick up the torch we let fall.”⁸⁴ 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, 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.

Structure

The FFCF was organized in much the same way as its parent organization. The adults were assembled into regional sections, based on *arrondissement* in Paris or province, depending on the size of the membership and the location. Each of these sections had the option to create an associated FFCF, 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 President 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 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 statutes of the FFCF, published in *Le Flambeau* in 1932, children had to fit into one of four categories in order to be eligible to become a FFCF member.⁸⁵ First, the sons and daughters of CF or *Briscards* were automatically eligible and encouraged to join. 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,

⁸⁴ *Le Flambeau*, “Parmi Nous,” April 1931, 2.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

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 an 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.⁸⁶

The boys and girls of the FFCF has 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 tie. 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.⁸⁷

FFCF members were also expected to pay 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 to contribute to growth of the French population. Anyone with more than three children only paid the full cost for two of them and 2 francs for each of the rest.

⁸⁶ *Le Flambeau*, "Parmi Nous," April 1931, 5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

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 *Le Flambeau* stated, “The fundamental base will be, above all, moral, intellectual, and physical education.”⁸⁸ One year later, M. de Villeneuve, who was the secretary general of the FFCF at the time, said:

[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.⁸⁹

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 was meant to develop, in some way, a principle or a value that was important to the CF. For example, 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, “Thought is the mother of action” and “The surest action is the action that is reflected upon.”⁹⁰ It follows that the more advanced the intellectual level of the group members, the better the resultant communal action. By developing intellectually, the younger generations would be able to follow their fathers’ leads; they would behave with order and discipline, two characteristics La Rocque considered paramount. In a message that bears striking

⁸⁸ *Le Flambeau*, “Parmi Nous,” April 1931, 2.

⁸⁹ *Le Flambeau*, “Dix-Septième Section: Réunion du 10 décembre,” January 1931, 4.

⁹⁰ *Le Flambeau*, “Être commandé,” October 1932: L’Appel.

similarity to La Rocque's speeches to the older generation, an article written for the children reminds the FFCF that "we are not agitators or rabble rousers, but the strong. Our thoughts will be clearer, our actions more effectual."⁹¹ 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 *Le Flambeau*, a frequent contributor who identifies himself simply as 'Trézien' (actually La Rocque writing under a pseudonym) writes:

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.⁹²

Another article states that, "Often, we reproach young people for being too absolute in their ideas and too blinkered in their sentiments."⁹³ This opinion of the younger generations is prevalent in CF writing. However, these negative characteristics, when directed towards the right aims, were viewed as positive. As one author says, "The fact of youth is to dare with confidence, a little wildly sometimes, but to act."⁹⁴ Another writes, "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."⁹⁵ These authors and CF leaders recognized the utility of youthful energy and enthusiasm — here 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.

⁹¹ *Le Flambeau*, "Être commandé," October 1932: L'Appel

⁹² Trézien, "Imagination Et Jeunesse," *Le Flambeau*, May 1933: L'Appel.

⁹³ *Le Flambeau*, "La mission des 'Jeunes'," February 1934: L'Appel.

⁹⁴ Trézien, "Imagination Et Jeunesse": L'Appel.

⁹⁵ *Le Flambeau*, "Mystique de la jeunesse," March 1934, 2.

The Memory of World War I

World War I 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.

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 led the veterans to see themselves as an elite and pure group surrounded by decadence. Alexandre Loex, a CF member, wrote that 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."⁹⁶ 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 *Le Flambeau*, which stated, "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."⁹⁷ 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 subjecting them to a war. As one article states, "It is, in sum, the mentality of their father that M. Arnoult wants to give to

⁹⁶ Loex, "Un esprit nouveau," *Le Flambeau*, 3.

⁹⁷ Trézien, "Pour les jeunes," *Le Flambeau*, October 1932, 1.

the Sons of the Croix de Feu. He wants to raise them in the tradition which is theirs: the cult of memory and patriotism.”⁹⁸ 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 in passing on the values of the front was 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 morally exalted thanks to their time on the front and the sacrifices they had made for France. 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.”⁹⁹ 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. Pozzo di Borgo, in an article addressed to the FFCF wrote, “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.”¹⁰⁰ 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

⁹⁸ *Le Flambeau*, “Notre Manifestation,” September 1932, 3.

⁹⁹ François de La Rocque, *Service public* (Paris: Grasset, 1934), 19.

¹⁰⁰ Pozzo di Borgo, “Parmi Nous,” *Le Flambeau*, June 1932, 3.

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 walked 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 an article published about the outing in *Le Flambeau*, one boy writes, "Like our fathers did on the front, we put everything in common, which is the general idea of our association. We help each other."¹⁰¹ By sharing food and marching as if they 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.¹⁰² A *Le Flambeau* article authored by 'Trézien,' (La Rocque) states that, "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."¹⁰³ Trézien stresses the necessity of kindness and understanding on the part of a leader. He claims that a, "leader needs to know how to experience and how to understand in order to make experiences and be understood." Later he states that, "The generosity of kind leaders reveals their intelligence. A leader who understands his followers with his head and his heart is understood by them."¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, Trézien'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 meant that the leader had to understand the emotional burden of the war.

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 "frightful" 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.

¹⁰¹ *Le Flambeau*, "Les fils de 'Croix de Feu'," July 1930, 4.

¹⁰² 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.

¹⁰³ Trézien, "Le commandement et la bienveillance," *Le Flambeau*, February 1933: L'Appel.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

The CF's treatment of WWI is surprisingly dichotomous. It was simultaneously a moment of French glory and one of the horrific and trauma. Along these lines, *Le Flambeau* does not hesitate to give gory details about the war. For example, an article written for the FFCF which celebrated and honored 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 gangrene.¹⁰⁵ The article simultaneously salutes the doctor's excellent work (he lost only 6 percent of his patients from the battle of the Marne) and points out that he personally treated 929 wounded men in that battle. The article also 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.

It is interesting that the CF members made no effort to hide the terror of war from their children. They glorified the sacrifice of the soldiers and the unity the war created in France, but not the act of fighting the war itself. There are two explanations for this shockingly honest portrayal of war's 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 was an effective leader because he understood his followers. This implies some sort of CF collective emotion to which La Rocque was connected. In many ways, the *Croix de Feu* behaved 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 exclusively war veterans, there were strong emotional undertones to the rhetoric and propaganda. *Le Flambeau* articles from that period frequently tell stories about the hopes and dreams of the young brothers who fell during the war and whose spirits command the living veterans to carry out their wishes. The CF organized trips and

¹⁰⁵ *Le Flambeau*, "Aux fils d'un Héros," October 1932: L'Appel.

parades to the monuments to the Unknown Soldier. Interestingly, they visited 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:

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.¹⁰⁶

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

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

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 descendants of such men.¹⁰⁷

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. These efforts also connected the children to their fathers emotionally and gave them further respect for the sacrifices and horrors of war. There was also a practical application for this deeper understanding and empathy. As Tréxien 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

¹⁰⁶ *Le Flambeau*, "Glans autour du défilé," December 1932: L'Appel.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

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.

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.¹⁰⁸ 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 by far 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 for which the CF was aiming. 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.”¹⁰⁹ 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.”¹¹⁰ Even though La Rocque avowed that a physical return to the past was impossible, he advocated 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

¹⁰⁸ *Le Flambeau*, “Les Fils de Croix de Feu,” July 1930, 3.

¹⁰⁹ La Rocque, *Service public*, 98.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

generation about the war. The FFCF taught and imbued the children 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 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 *Le 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 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.¹¹¹

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* states that, “To clearly see the destiny of France, it is essential to study its history. Our decisions will then be more firm and rational.”¹¹² 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

¹¹¹ *Le Flambeau*, “La plus belle France,” October 1932: *L'Appel*.

¹¹² Pierre Ferasse, “Le grand rôle de l’histoire,” *Le Flambeau*, January 1933: *L'Appel*.

past, and learn from former French leaders. A *L'Appel* article gives a clue as to one potential use for history: practical applications and imitation:

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.¹¹³

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.

Pierre Ferasse's article, "Le Grand Rôle de l'Histoire" — a title that is emblematic of the importance of *history* to the FFCF — states that:

A generation cannot accomplish original work if it 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 through study in order to remember. The time is near, we hope, when a team of young, well trained, enthusiasts, will narrate some grand act, borrowing from a grand era of the past, with all the freshness of their fascination and pride.¹¹⁴

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, "to describe Normandy in two columns of a newspaper is like trying to put the Seine in bottles."¹¹⁵ *Le Flambeau's* 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

¹¹³ *Le Flambeau*, "La personnalité," June 1933: *L'Appel*.

¹¹⁴ Ferasse, "Le grande rôle de l'histoire": *L'Appel*.

¹¹⁵ *Le Flambeau*, "Les provinces Françaises," December 1932: *L'Appel*.

with this line, written by a “fils” of Normandy: “Cider has conquered crowns.”¹¹⁶ 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 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 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.”¹¹⁷ 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. “My ancestors, orchard workers, have cultivated their vines, from father to son, since the beginning of time”¹¹⁸ 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 the 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:

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

¹¹⁶ *Le Flambeau*, “Les provinces Françaises,” December 1932: *L'Appel*

¹¹⁷ *Le Flambeau*, “Nos provinces: la Champagne,” January 1933: *L'Appel*.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

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.¹¹⁹

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 “the French soul” which has been passed through the ages. In a speech to the FFCF, he says, “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.”¹²⁰ Much like the song of 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.¹²¹ From Lorraine, the painter Claude Gelée and the sculptor Ligier Richier are remembered as using the region’s beauty to inspire their art.¹²² Essentially, the *L’Appel* history lessons were 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.

¹¹⁹ *Le Flambeau*, “Nos provinces: la Champagne,” January 1933: *L’Appel*.

¹²⁰ *Le Flambeau*, “Assemblée,” August 1932: 3.

¹²¹ *Le Flambeau*, “Nos provinces: L’Île-de-France”: *L’Appel*.

¹²² *Le Flambeau*, “Nos provinces: La Lorraine,” April 1933: *L’Appel*.

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: "We were deeply moved by the art of war from [Vaubaun's] era, imagining a defensive system which could still serve as a model."¹²³ 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, "The élan which he gave our troops did not cease. At the end of two years, they had achieved their conquest."¹²⁴ This account of Rivière serves the many purposes of the FFCF education: it inspires patriotism, it 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 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.

¹²³ *Le Flambeau*, "Vauban: L'Esprit Français pendant la guerre," April 1933: *L'Appel*.

¹²⁴ *Le Flambeau*, "Le commandant Rivière," June 1933: *L'Appel*.

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 mission statements states that the education of children will happen “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.”¹²⁵

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:

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, extinguishing individual constitutions, producing good students, eliminating leaders.¹²⁶

A further reason for the aversion to classroom learning is hinted at by a WWI veteran who states, “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.”¹²⁷ 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 *Le Flambeau* occurred in the close vicinity of Paris and invited FFCF members of all ages 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

¹²⁵ *Le Flambeau*, “Parmi nous,” April 1932, 5.

¹²⁶ *Le Flambeau*, “Et les jeunes? Pour les fils de Croix de Feu,” November 1931, 2.

¹²⁷ *Le Flambeau*, “Assemblée amicable,” August 1932, 3.

the Exposition Coloniale, with the Commissioner General of Indochina. The museum visits supported the lessons of France and French history that were taught in *L'Appel's* regional articles and gave the children further exposure to France's glorious past. Similar to the *L'Appel* articles, 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, "paid us the honor of explaining, in somber and capturing terms, the tragedy that unfolded throughout four years in this location."¹²⁸ 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 for the 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.

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 as well as for the CF, the boyish, decadent, *femmes modernes*, so wholly unconcerned with raising a family, were partly responsible for the falling French birth rate.¹²⁹ 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,

¹²⁸ *Le Flambeau*, "Les F.F.C.F. à Reims et au front de Champagne," June 1933: *L'Appel*.

¹²⁹ See section II (above) for a discussion of WWI gender roles.

cowardly, homosexual men. Interestingly, the CF conception of gender did not position men and women as opposites.¹³⁰ Rather, *real* men were compared to effeminate, “unmanly” men and *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.”¹³¹ 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; it was also updated. The most notable example is the expansion of the feminine domestic sphere to include social work, propaganda, and 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. Women 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, propaganda, and recruitment not as political but as an extension of the domestic sphere.¹³² 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. Therefore, women’s contributions to the CF were still within the traditional female domestic domain and did not contradict the traditional feminine gender role.

The CF also preoccupied itself with preparing the children to fulfill their predestined gender roles. As explained earlier, most of the FFCF educational activities (the

¹³⁰ 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, no. 4 (1999): 823.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 826.

¹³² Passmore, “Planting the Tricolor,” 826..

informational articles and lectures, the trips to museums, etc.) were targeted to both the boys and girls. However, the majority of the regular, monthly activities of the FFCF divided 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, “We want to associate our sons, more and more, with our work; we want to interest them; we want them to aid us with propaganda.”¹³³ 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:

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.¹³⁴

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; subject 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

¹³³ *Le Flambeau*, “Assemblée général ordinaire,” March 1933, 1.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

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.

This boys-only propaganda training took place at the bi-monthly “propaganda preparatory circle,” meetings. The first propaganda “circle” was called a “study session” or an instruction session. A *Le Flambeau* article states that the study sessions’ subject will be:

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.¹³⁵

The second kind of meeting was the general monthly meeting which served as a forum for “oratory exercises” or, as *Le Flambeau* describes it:

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.¹³⁶

Essentially, the young men would be given a topic such as, “Why are the post-war generations attracted to the Croix de Feu?” and they would give a speech in front of all the FCF members explaining their answer.¹³⁷

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, “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 event.”¹³⁸ Characteristics 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 encourage

¹³⁵ *Le Flambeau*, “Réunion des F.C.F.,” March 1933: L’Appel.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Le Flambeau*, “Réunion du mois: fils,” May 1933: L’Appel. This was the topic for the reunion in May 1933.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

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.¹³⁹ 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, the most significant part of which was physical, was reserved for only the oldest boys of the FFCF. 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, "to allow our young people to choose their arm and to accelerate more rapidly to the level of corporal or officer."¹⁴⁰ 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 FFCF towards the VN becomes even more pronounced after the February 6 demonstrations. In the March issue of *Le 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.¹⁴¹ While it would be excessive to say that the girls were an afterthought, their role in the FFCF was always

¹³⁹ *Le Flambeau*, "Visite à l'aéroport du Bourget," January 1933: *L'Appel*.

¹⁴⁰ *Le Flambeau*, "Section des fils des Croix de Feu," February 1932.

¹⁴¹ *Le Flambeau*, "Les fils des Croix de Feu," December 1930, 3.

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 with activities for the children.

When the girls did have FFCF activities, they were of a very different nature from those for 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 *Le Flambeau* article makes the destined role for women explicit in the statement, "this program (les filles 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."¹⁴² The energies of the FFCF that were directed at the girls were meant to shape them into housewives, ready to take over for their mothers as the caregivers for a traditional family.

Even though boys took top billing, girls still participated in many of the FFCF activities, especially those targeted at younger children. The girls went on trips to museums and historical sites, and they were allowed to attend the FFCF sponsored summer camp at Plainfang.¹⁴³ However, they also had their own set of courses and activities, most of them domestic in nature. As a *Le Flambeau* article explained, "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."¹⁴⁴ 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.¹⁴⁵

The older girls 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

¹⁴² *Le Flambeau*, "Dix-septième section: reunion du 19 décembre," January 1931, 6.

¹⁴³ See next section for a discussion of the summer camps.

¹⁴⁴ *Le Flambeau*, "Parmi nous," April 1931, 5.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

girls. The lecturers made sure to remind the girls that, “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.”¹⁴⁶ During a different meeting, the lecturer tells the girls that their role in the *Croix de Feu* was that of *propagandiste*, *auxiliaire*, and *éducatrice* (propagandist, assistant, and teacher).¹⁴⁷ 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.¹⁴⁸

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.

Colonies de Vacances or Summer Camps

The most successful program the FFCF set up a series of summer camps. The camps were, essentially, the coordination and implementation of moral, intellectual, and physical 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.¹⁴⁹ 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

¹⁴⁶ *Le Flambeau*, “Réunion du mois: filles,” July 1933: L’Appel.

¹⁴⁷ *Le Flambeau*, “Réunion du mois: filles,” March 1933: L’Appel.

¹⁴⁸ *Le Flambeau*, “Réunion du mois: filles,” July 1933: L’Appel. In July 1933, M. Lerambert-Potin, in a lecture to the Filles de Croix de Feu, made an effort to “demonstrate the primordial interest in teaching children to love their country.”

¹⁴⁹ *Le Flambeau*, “3.000 enfants dans nos camps de vacances,” July 13, 1935, 1.

of 7 and 13.¹⁵⁰ 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.¹⁵¹

The schedule of the daily activities for the campers was equally strict and demanding.¹⁵² 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*¹⁵³, once a week. At 3:45, 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, of course, was not permitted. A spirit of brotherhood was encouraged and any violence between the campers was 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.¹⁵⁴

Because the camp kept the children for more than a week, the parents were asked to send a paper with instructions for their children's religious needs.¹⁵⁵ Interestingly, this is one of the few times that the CF or the FFCF mention religion, a subject which is noticeably

¹⁵⁰ *Le Flambeau*, “Colonie de vacances de Plainfaing,” July 1933: L'Appel.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Couture dirigée* is a sewing class and *leçon de repassage* is an ironing lesson.

¹⁵⁴ *Le Flambeau*, “Colonie de vacances de Plainfaing”: L'Appel.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

absent from La Rocque's rhetoric and other FFCF activities. There were times when the FFCF holds an activity in a church, but it was always in the context of a WWI memorial, rather than a religious ceremony. Religion was simply not an important part of the CF. This is particularly interesting given that most French people identified 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 was 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.

Le Flambeau did not publish 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 instruction at Plainfaing 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 *Le Flambeau*. The speaker told them:

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 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 your hearts the sublime example that they have given you by staying truly French, worthy of your leaders.¹⁵⁶

The article was meant to reassure the parents of FFCF members that while their children were living in the woods, "They have not forgotten their highest duty: a tribute to the war dead, their brothers in arms, and the Croix de Feu." Even in the wilderness of the Vosges

¹⁵⁶ *Le Flambeau*, "Colonie de vacances," September 1933: L'Appel.

Mountains, surrounded by fir trees 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, *Le 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, La Rocque's daughter and a faithful CF member who died in 1933. The all-girls camp promised to instill them with, "the spirit of the family, love of France, making each and every one of the girls worthy of the invisible and constantly present godmother (France)."¹⁵⁷ Other camps were reserved for boys only. For example, the camp at Guethary, in the Basque region 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. The Normandy camp and the original camp at Plainfaing continued to accept boys and girls together, 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.

Fading of the FFCF

February 6, 1934 marked the beginning of the *Croix de Feu* ascent, and the descent of the *Fils et Filles de Croix de Feu*. After February 6, the CF paramilitary operations took on more importance, La Rocque focused less on veteran's issues, and the movement became more political. In many ways, the *Croix de Feu* became a more active organization; the members held more marches, made more speeches, and wrote more articles. In 1935, *Le 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

¹⁵⁷ *Le Flambeau*, "Pour les joies de l'été," June 8, 1935, 1.

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 camps. The more adult tasks, like military training and speechmaking, were transferred 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 *Le Flambeau*, completely overshadowed by the pages upon pages of VN updates and propaganda. When Leon Blum came to power in 1936 and forced the *Croix de Feu* to rename itself the Parti Social Français (PSF) and disband its paramilitary branch, there was no replacement for the FFCF. At that point, the youth branch of the CF, which had been slowly fading since 1934, disappeared entirely.

IV. A Comparison of the FFCF with Other Fascist Youth Organizations

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, certain characteristics of the FFCF will be compared to those of the Hitler youth and Italian youth groups, which represent established European 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.

Methodology

The task of comparing the FFCF to the Hitler Youth (*Hitler Jugend* in German or HJ) 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 indeed 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.¹⁵⁸

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 dissent 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.¹⁵⁹ To resolve this dissonance, another scholar, Alan Cassels posits two distinct forms of fascism:

¹⁵⁸ See Paxton, “The Five Stages of Fascism,” 8-9, for an explanation of fascism, which was a particularly useful guide in analyzing the youth groups.

¹⁵⁹ Allardyce, 372.

one industrial, the other pre-industrial.¹⁶⁰ 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 *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialist Democratic Party or NSDAP) were 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 true that youthful vigor and athleticism were encouraged as an antidote to what was perceived as a weak, decadent, and liberal lifestyle. However, 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.¹⁶¹ 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

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 373.

¹⁶¹ Aline Coutrot, "Youth Movements in France in the 1930s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no.1 (1970): 32.

role was very interesting and in many ways similar to the FFCF, it will not help guide us to a discriminating definition of fascism.¹⁶²

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.

The Myth of Youth: The Origins of Fascist Youth Organizations

Both the Italian and German fascist movements are often referred to as ‘movements of youth.’¹⁶³ 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 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.

¹⁶² For further reading on the role of women and girls in fascist movements, see: Martin Durham, *Women and fascism* (New York & London: Routledge, 1998); Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004); Melanie Hawthorne and Richard J. Golsan, ed., *Gender and fascism in modern France* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1997); and Victoria De Grazia, *How fascism ruled women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1992).

¹⁶³ Robert O. Paxton, *The anatomy of fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 49. See also Kater, *Hitler Youth*.

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.¹⁶⁴ 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’Annunzio, who emphasized the virility of youth along with the cleansing qualities of war and violence. In 1919, the Futurists, under the command of D’Annunzio, seized the city of 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’Annunzio’s action as the moment when his budding fascist movement first gained significant popular support.¹⁶⁵ 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 vitality and the utility of violence.¹⁶⁶ 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’Annunzio’s Fiume adventure and who still demanded a youthful revolution in Italy. Within five months of the founding of the first *Avanguardia*, there were 30 similar groups across Italy, with membership totaling 3,700 or 12 percent of fascists.¹⁶⁷ 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.¹⁶⁸ 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.¹⁶⁹ 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

¹⁶⁴ Bruno Wanrooij, “The Rise and Fall of Italian Fascism as a Generational Revolt,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 22, no. 3 (1987): 401-418.

¹⁶⁵ Michael A. Ledeen, “Italian Fascism and Youth,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 2 (1969): 137.

¹⁶⁶ Wanrooij, 406.

¹⁶⁷ Tracy H. Koon, *Believe, obey, fight: political socialization of youth in fascist Italy, 1922-1943* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 92.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 270. “Balilla” was the nickname of the legendary boy Giovanni Battista Perasso who supposedly threw stones and launched the revolution against the Austrians in 1746.

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.

The earliest of the Italian Fascists were, according to Robert Paxton, young above all else.¹⁷⁰ 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.¹⁷¹ 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 a significant transformation in the late 20s and early 30s.¹⁷² 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.¹⁷³ Thanks to Mussolini's emphasis on the myth of youth to reinvigorate Fascism in the 1930s, despite other shifts in the party rhetoric, 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.¹⁷⁴ 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 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.¹⁷⁵

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 19th century, although the

¹⁷⁰ Paxton, *The anatomy of fascism*, 49.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁷² See "The Second Wave of Fascist Youth" [page 307 below] for further discussion of this transformation.

¹⁷³ Wanrooij, 401.

¹⁷⁴ Koon.

¹⁷⁵ The Fascist national anthem was "Giovinezza" meaning boyhood or youth, and is a perfect example of the primacy of youth to Italian Fascism.

ideas that united the German youth (like the concept of *Volk*) can be traced back to the late 18th century.¹⁷⁶ 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.¹⁷⁷ These young people, fed up with the effects 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 *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."¹⁷⁸ Walter 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."¹⁷⁹ These young men wore a uniform of shorts, dark shirts, a rain jacket, and thick boots, perfect for tramping through the woods.¹⁸⁰ These largely harmless yet 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 *völkisch* 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

¹⁷⁶ H. W. Koch, *The Hitler Youth: origins and development, 1922-45* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1975). 4

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁷⁸ Koch, 25.

¹⁷⁹ Walter Laqueur, *Young Germany: a history of the German youth movement* (Transaction Publishers, 1984).

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

mobilization in the younger generation and an interest in regenerating Germany along new and different lines.

Without a doubt, the HJ took inspiration from the German youth organizations of the early 20th century and post-WWI. The specific inspiration for the 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 1926.¹⁸¹ However, at the time, 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 *Jugendbund* or the Young Alliance which eventually evolved into the HJ. It is significant that it was a member of the younger generation who started the youth group, 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.¹⁸² The boys and girls were led by other youths 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.¹⁸³

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 France or that authentically youthful organizations did not exist. The *Jeunesses Patriotes* (JP), 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. 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.

¹⁸¹ Gerhard Rempel, "The Misguided Generation: Hitler Youth and SS, 1933-1945," Ph.D. dissertation □ The University of Wisconsin (1971), 22.

¹⁸² Rempel, 190.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 191.

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, *Le Flambeau* frequently reminded parents to sign their kids up and encourage their interest. For years, there was limited participation in 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 of the CF would have to wait their turn.

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 was *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. This idea is anathema to what the adult members of the CF tried to teach their children about respecting, honoring, and imitating their parents, the WWI veterans, and their historical French predecessors.

In the 1930s, Mussolini faced a generation of young 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.¹⁸⁴ 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."¹⁸⁵ 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 a consolidation of youth indoctrination systems through educational reforms and youth groups.¹⁸⁶

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

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.¹⁸⁷

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 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 and the original members of the CF, were embodied a hopeful future and their children were simply supposed to emulate their example. This difference might be explained by the fact that the NSDAP and Italian Fascist party had existed long enough to produce a second generation and that they were in power, automatically giving them more means to exert 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

¹⁸⁴ Ledeen, 139. Mussolini left the doctrine of Fascism vague prior to the late 1920s because he wanted to emphasize action over ideas.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁸⁷ Rempel, 1.

of the trenches and formed the CF. The vision for the younger generations is indicative of a larger ideological position. The fascists were looking to the future and trying to break with the older generations and reinvent their respective countries. The CF stood apart from 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.

Community Membership, the Cult of the Leader, and Racism

Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany both stressed the importance of membership and belonging 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 essential components of the indoctrination process in the fascist youth organizations.

Additionally, the youth were also taught to revere their respective leaders (Hitler or Mussolini) who embodied the larger community to which they belonged. The devotion to these leaders developed into adulation or 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.”¹⁸⁸ While the cult of the leader is in no way specific to fascism, it is an important characteristic overall and one that exerted powerful influence in the youth groups.

One of the more confusing doctrines of fascism is racism or, more infamously, 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 important pillars of the Nazi education. 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

¹⁸⁸ Paxton, *The anatomy of fascism*, 126.

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.”¹⁸⁹ 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.”¹⁹⁰ German boys and girl were taught, in no uncertain terms, that they were members of the *völkisch* 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 shape of a 6, always on the lookout for blond German maidens to seduce.”¹⁹¹ 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.”¹⁹² 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.¹⁹³ This hatred extended to other foreigners such as the Romas, commonly referred to as Gypsies, Slavs and Sinti people.¹⁹⁴

Nazi racism was complicated. It was based, in part on the theory of Social Darwinism, which applied Darwin’s theory of the survival of the fittest to groups within society. According to these beliefs, the *Volk* had to strengthen itself and crush the weaker races in order to ensure its survival. While Nazi racism also had its roots in long-founded historical anti-Semitism in Germany, anti-Semitism and racism became much more extreme under the Nazis. This was in part because of heightened fears of “Jewish

¹⁸⁹ Rempel, 23.

¹⁹⁰ Koch, 3.

¹⁹¹ Kater, 63.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 117. 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.”

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 62-69.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

Bolshevism”, but also because the more clearly defined *Volk* made it easier to target and vilify the Jews and foreigners who were outside the community. Because the Nazis demanded complete belief in and allegiance to the *Volk*, the already present racism and anti-Semitism in Germany became significantly more dangerous. The extreme racism in Germany was, therefore, a by-product of the totalitarian demands for individual subservience to the larger group.

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 played a negligible role in Italian Fascism. However, just like in Germany, Italian fascists demanded individual subservience to the larger community. However, in Italy, this larger community was not typified by race, but was the Italian Fascist state. In Fascist Italy, the state represented 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 over-tones in Italy, resulting in what Emilio Gentile has called the sacralization of politics.¹⁹⁵ 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 completely subservient subscribers and blind followers of ‘religious dogma’.¹⁹⁶ 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.”¹⁹⁷

In Italy, boys and girls were taught to believe in and obey the state like a church and they were included 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 strength.”¹⁹⁸ 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.

¹⁹⁵ Emilio Gentile, “Fascism as Political Religion,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, no. 2/3 (1990): 229. Mussolini frequently uses the word “faith” to refer to fascism. In *The political and social doctrine of Facism*, 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.” See Nathanael Greene, ed., *Fascism: an anthology* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), 45.

¹⁹⁶ Gentile, 229.

¹⁹⁷ Denis Mack Smith, “The Theory and Practice of Fascism,” in *Fascism: an anthology*, ed. Nathanael Greene (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), 97.

¹⁹⁸ Gentile, 239.

It is this sense of belonging to a larger community that is key to resolving the confusing question of racism, which is commonly viewed in terms of blood and genetics, but can also be understood in these terms as the vilification of those who are outside a prescribed 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. Therefore, it makes sense that extreme genetics-based 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 and participation in 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. Consequently, by the beginning of WWII in 1939, there was almost complete youth membership in the HJ.¹⁹⁹ In 1938, 99 percent of Italian youth were enrolled in the youth organizations, although this does not necessarily imply active participation.²⁰⁰ 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.

The success of the youth organizations in Italy and Germany and the complete subservience they exacted were due to the fact that they controlled the state and therefore could wield control over the schools and youth groups. This is obviously different from the CF which never took control of France and never became a regime. The CF as a mere movement among many 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.

¹⁹⁹ Rempel, 189.

²⁰⁰ Alexander J. De Grand, *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: the 'fascist' style of rule*, Historical Connections, ed. Tom Scott (London: Routledge, 1995), 66.

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 or racial 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 much of conservative French society at the time. 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.²⁰¹ 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.²⁰² 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 "like father, like son," 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

²⁰¹ Richard Millman, "Croix-De-Feu et L'antisémitisme," *Vingtieme Siecle. Revue D'histoire* 38 (1993): 47-61.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 50.

membership in a community that demanded complete individual subservience. 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.

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; it was a force they thought they could mobilize to regenerate a purer society. The Fascists adopted a large part this violent 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*.²⁰³ While the early Fascist violence died down after the March on Rome and Mussolini's ascension to power, militarism and 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*, Mussolini writes 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.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Koon, 42.

²⁰⁴ Greene, *Fascism: an anthology*, 41.

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".²⁰⁵ 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. Importantly, the HJ was also a training ground for future Nazi soldiers.²⁰⁶ 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 *Volkisch* 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 willingly.

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

²⁰⁵ Smith, 97.

²⁰⁶ Koch.

its entire education primarily not at pumping in mere knowledge, but at the breeding of absolutely healthy bodies.²⁰⁷

Many of the HJ activities were intended to develop the necessary skills for a boy to become a soldier.²⁰⁸ Like the Italians, the HJ boys played violent “war games” which 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.²⁰⁹ 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 automatically 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.”²¹⁰ 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. For example, while HJ participation in *Kristallnacht* has been questioned, the children were most likely exposed to the violence and forced to watch the unfolding terror.²¹¹ 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 trains bound for concentration camps. Others were taken on visits to the camps see their Jewish enemy in person.²¹² The individual accounts of HJ violence are wide-reaching: some point to the pressure put on younger boys to become mentally and physically prepared for violence, some concern violence against the Jews, and some focus

²⁰⁷ Edward J. Kunzer, “Education” Under Hitler,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 13, no. 3 (1939): 142.

²⁰⁸ 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 Navy. Similarly, the Fliers’ HJ, which exposed the boys to model airplane building, was a clear pre-cursor to becoming a member of the German Air Force.

²⁰⁹ Kater, 29-31.

²¹⁰ Julius Gould, “The Komsomol and the Hitler Jugend,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 2, no. 4 (1951).

²¹¹ Kater, 62.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 64.

on the impact of youth empowerment, which resulted in instances of general terrorization of German society.²¹³

La Rocque viewed violence 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 6th demonstrations. He proudly stated that the CF members had maintained order and had marched with determination and discipline. Unsurprisingly in an organization of its kind, 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 *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 acceptable only when it was the sole 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 attitude to violence in the CF was affected by the fact that the members were originally united in their shared mourning and distress over the trauma and violence of WWI. 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. The differing dominant themes, humiliating defeat and a need for revenge on the one side, and emotional trauma and sorrow on the other, can help explain why the German and Italian fascists were so much more willing to accept the necessity of violence than the French CF.

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 *Le Flambeau*, a

²¹³ Kater, 62-65.

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 for war 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 always praising the bravery of soldiers, made abundantly clear the terror, horror, and sorrows of war. 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.

While I have 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; similar views on nationalism, the role of women, anti-communism, similar practices such as the use of parades and military pomp to mobilize followers, etc. As explained earlier, these similarities are attributes that are not specific to fascism. Therefore, they are not useful in this 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, which makes the absence of the early 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 a classification as a fascist group. The FFCF did not possess the characteristics that distinguished the Hitler youth and the Italian groups from other youth movements of the 1930s. Based on their absence of these characteristics in the FFCF, one can reasonably conclude that the FFCF was not a fascist youth group.

V. 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, “To clearly see the destiny of France, it is essential to study its history. Our decisions will then be more firm and rational.”²¹⁴ 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 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 percent of

²¹⁴ Ferasse, “Le grand rôle de l’histoire,” *Le Flambeau*, January 1933: L’Appel.

the votes.²¹⁵ 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 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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²¹⁵ Peter Davies, *The National Front in France: ideology, discourse and power* (London: Routledge, 1999), 3.