The Franco-American Alliance: a Century After

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1. *Introduction*

The defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) ushered in an era of profound reform. Gradually, France parted ways with monarchism and adopted a republican form of government. Industrialization and urbanization questioned the nation's deeply entrenched agrarian outlook, while the first foundations for a welfare state were laid. In the early decades of this period known as *La Troisième République* (the French Third Republic[1]), reform extended to numerous other fields including schools, universities and the very subjects they taught. For France's defeat was attributed in part to its education system, which had supposedly failed to prepare its leaders for the conduct of war.

This is why, shortly upon entering office, Education Minister Jules Simon commissioned a report on history and geography in secondary schools. Its findings were released in 1871; the teaching of these subjects was found to be generally "quite weak"[2].

Geography fared particularly poorly, a finding supported by numerous observations as well as anecdotal evidence; when asked about the main harbor of Germany, French students would answer "Kiel", "Bremen" or even "Frankfurt"[3]. Adding to the chagrin of the report's authors, those students could not name a single member of the Capetian royal dynasty. To improve the teaching of the two subjects, no less than twenty-three recommendations were made; besides the purchase of books, maps and world globes, the report called for a thorough reform of school curricula and teacher training. In short, history and geography needed to be taken seriously. That plea for reform echoed numerous others to regenerate education in France.

All scholarship on French historiography underlines the significance of the last three decades of the nineteenth century. The very nature of history as scholarly pursuit was redefined in those years,

GIORNALE DI STORIA COSTITUZIONALE / *JOURNAL OF CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY* 49 / I 2025, pp. 115-129
ISSN (print) 1593-0793 / ISSN (online) 1827-7950 / ISBN 978-88-6056-998-1 (print) / ISBN 978-88-6056-999-8 (online) /
eum - Edizioni Università di Macerata

as William R. Keylor observes in *Academy and Community*: "methodological issues dominated the discussions and debates among historians in the formative decades of the French Historical profession"[4]. The stakes were high, for French historians were "determined to employ the tools of their trade to help deliver France from her national inferiority complex and heal the psychological wounds inflicted by the invader"[5]. In fact, Germany was both a rival and a model, admired for its renowned universities, well-endowed academic libraries and most importantly, its seminar method of teaching[6].

The men who strove to reform the historical profession were familiar with, and inspired by, German higher education: Gabriel Monod, Ernest Lavisse and Charles Seignobos to name but a few all attended university in Berlin, Göttingen or Munich in the 1870s. Their efforts bore fruit in the late 1870s and early 1880s. A decisive step was taken when Education Minister Jules Ferry instituted a Bachelor's degree (*licence*) and competitive examination (*agrégation*) in history. Besides a solid command of the discipline, candidates needed to demonstrate an aptitude for scholarly research[7].

Charles-Olivier Carbonell's study of the ideological mutation of French historians deals with the 1865-1885 period. Along with Keylor one year before him, Carbonell stresses the achievements of academic (trained) historians, Monod and the like. Unlike Keylor however, he includes in his study amateur historians: members of the clergy, aristocrats, archivists, lawyers, etc. Carbonell devotes a distinct chapter to each group, in order to strengthen his main argument, namely that the "ideological mutation" of French historians was not a top-down phenomenon, but an all-encompassing one instead[8]. Regardless of their rank and occupation, all participated in that mutation. Carbonell's approach is also quantitative; his calculations yield several valuable results for our study. For instance, in academia, non-historians (professors of law, of literature, etc.) wrote nearly as many history books as historians (22 cf. 29)[9]. Another interesting finding from Carbonell's *Histoire et Historiens* is the very low percentage of books (2%) devoted to other countries' histories. The post-1871 historians were primarily interested in publishing local histories (20%), church histories (20%), biographies (13%) and compendia of historical documents (13%).

Regardless of the merits of Carbonell's inclusion of amateur historians in his study, the institutionalization of history in France was largely the product of a well thought-out campaign led by academic historians. In this process, they asserted their primacy over historical studies and carved out for themselves a professional identity, as Gabriel Lingelbach stresses in *Klio macht Karriere* (Clio makes a successful career)[10]. A case in point is the creation of one of France's most authoritative history journals *La revue historique* (The historical journal) in 1876 by Gabriel Monod and Gustave Fagniez. This journal, along with several others launched in those years, enabled academic historians to advance the study of particular periods and topics. This is how the study of the nineteenth century came to prevail over that of the Middle Ages; economic and political topics prevailed over intellectual or military histories[11]. These

Allegory of the Franco-American alliance, 1778

journals equally influenced how history was written; the use of a single citation format, the inclusion of a bibliographical essay, the reproduction of primary sources gradually became standard features of doctoral dissertations over the 1870-1900 period[12]. Editors of academic books and journals adopted these citations rules in turn. Thus emerged what Lingelbach aptly calls a "*Glaubenscredo*" (creed) that determined who counts as a true historian and who does not[13]. This creed was codified by two prominent figures of that generation, Charles-Victor Langlois and Charles Seignobos in an 1898 textbook entitled *Introduction aux méthodes historiques* (An introduction to historical methods).

Overall, the campaign to institutionalize history did not attempt to repudiate previous generations of historians. Instead, the goal of such reformers was to underline the steady progress of French historians towards this "positivist" or "methodical" stage. The three authors of the most comprehensive and up-to-date survey of French historiography, *Les courants historiques en France* (Schools of history in France), opted for the latter word[14]. Their close reading of Monod's introduction to the first issue of *La revue historique* reveal that Monod actually praised the diversity of French historiography. The task of any historian should be from then onward, Monod argued, to highlight the continuity between different periods, while acknowledging the inevitability of change. His understanding of history was very much consistent with the nationalism of his age; the very essence of the reform of historical studies in the last three decades of the nineteenth century resides precisely in this attempt to create a his-

tory of the entire nation for itself, in order bring it to peace with its own past[15]. Two other takeaways from this survey deserve our attention; along with Carbonell, Dosse, Delacroix and Garcia point out to the marginal interest of French historians for other countries' histories[16]. Secondly, the three authors note that changes in the historiography of the French Revolution provide unique insights into the transformation of academic history over the 1870-1900 period[17].

In short, institutionalization, standardization as well as popularization transformed history in France over the course of three decades. A focus on particular historiographies would probably qualify this view, however. For instance, we do not know whether this transformation equally affected the historiography of countries other than France. That only but a few have asked this question so far seems easy to explain, given the negligible proportion of historical work (2%) published by French historians on countries other than their own. Yet, as low as this percentage may be, these monographs were printed by the dozens. A simple search on France's national library catalog yields nearly 200 entries for books about German history over the 1865-1900 period, some by the most prominent historians of the time like Ernest Lavisse. A similar search yields some 40 books each for Russia, Italy, Great Britain or the United States.

That the French have long been interested in American affairs is manifest; Guillaume Thomas Raynal's *Philosophical and Political History of the Two Indies* (1770) or Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835-1840) are prominent examples of this. In the post-1870 period, the French interest for American history continued to grow, although at a modest pace. Books about the French colonization of Florida, French Louisiana, or the American Civil War appeared on the bookstores' shelves. The American Revolution was another topic of interest. This warrants our attention for two reasons: the first is, quite obviously, the foreignness of the American Revolution. From the viewpoint of nineteenth-century French historians however, that revolution was also a chapter in France's *domestic* history, as a consequence of the Franco-American alliance of 1778. Second, the proximity of the American Revolution to the French will allow for new insights into French historiography. As noted by the three authors of *Les Courants Historiques en France*, the French Revolution was the starting point for a new historicity régime[18]; that the American Revolution preceded the French and presumably, had an influence upon it, makes the former a particularly valuable topic of enquiry into the state of French historiography in the last three decades of the nineteenth century.

How did French historians of the period write about the American Revolution? Does their work shed new light on the transformation of history in France under the Third Republic? To answer these questions, two books from these transformative decades will be analyzed: *Une histoire de l'action commune de la France et de l'Amérique pour l'indépendance des États-Unis* (A History of the joint action of France and America for the Independence of the United States) published by Count Adoplphe de Circourt in 1876, and *Histoire de la participation de la France à l'établissement des États-Unis d'Amérique.*

Correspondance diplomatique et documents (A History of France's participation to the establishment of the United States of America. Diplomatic correspondences and documents) published in 1886 by Henri Doniol. These books were selected for their authoritativeness and commemorative significance: Circourt's book came out one hundred years after the Declaration of Independence of 1776, while Doniol's was exhibited at the Paris's world fair of 1889, which marked the centennial of the French Revolution.

2. *The Naturalization of George Bancroft*

In France, the historiography of other countries followed a necessarily different trajectory for two main reasons. The first is, quite obviously, distance. Doing archival work – a hallmark of academic history – required time and money. This was particularly true for French historians of the United States. Theirs was a small community who happened to lack both. Academic historians could not rely on any institutional support to cover their travel expenses, while amateur historians could not afford to spend time away from paid work. Often, poor health and the fear of a perilous transatlantic voyage acted as additional deterrents. The second reason is equally obvious: language. Knowledge of English was a rare skill in those years indeed; only the members of a learned circle could speak it fluently, chiefly men and women of letters, businesspeople and diplomats. Concerning these two constraints, Alexis de Tocqueville was an exception: the French Ministry of the Interior paid for his nine-month tour of the United States, thereby giving him to access primary sources, among other things. As to his knowledge of English, his courtship of and eventual marriage to an Englishwoman certainly helped become conversant in that language.

This is not to say that French historians could not tackle American history at all. Like Tocqueville on his guided tour of the United States, they relied on intermediaries. A case-in-point was Édouard de Laboulaye, a man often known as the "father of the Statue of Liberty", who was also France's most prominent historian of the United States in the 1850s and 1860s. As he was writing his three-volume *Histoire politique des États-Unis* (Political History of the United States), Laboulaye befriended Robert Walsh, a scholar who had settled in Paris in the 1830s and served as U.S Consul to France from 1844 to 1851. Walsh owned a well-stocked personal library which doors were opened to anyone with an interest for American history or literature; in other words, Walsh's library served as a modern-day cultural institute. The way Laboulaye overcame the second obstacle is equally revealing; like many students of his generation, he had attended German universities in the 1830s. It is very likely that his command of German later helped him acquire strong reading skills in English. In short, Laboulaye's work methods highlight some of the strategies used by nineteenth-century French historians to access American history. They had no choice but to rely on intermediaries (another person, another language) to fulfill their goal. In that sense, their American history was by necessity a second-hand history.

Under these conditions, secondary sources (history books) published in the United States came to play a major role in the growth of French interest for American history. The work of George Bancroft was a milestone in this regard. In turn schoolteacher, Secretary of the Navy and diplomat. Bancroft devoted much of his personal time to American history. The first volume of his *History of the United States from the Discovery of the American Continent* was published in 1837, the tenth (and last) in 1874. Bancroft's *History* was a milestone in the United States and beyond, for he was the first to cover American history comprehensively, from its colonial beginnings to the Treaty of Paris 1783. Another reason why Bancroft's *History* was held in high esteem at home and abroad was his use of primary sources. The authoritativeness of Bancroft's history led to the publication into French of his *magnum opus* in 1861 by France's most renowned academic publisher Firmin-Didot.

What was Bancroft's understanding of the American past? "Progress" and "providence" are the two words characterizing it. In other words, Bancroft argued that from colonial times onward, Americans – endowed with unique moral qualities – marched towards liberty at a steady pace. As such, they had set in 1776 a precedent:

> The American Revolution, of which I write the history, essaying to unfold the principles which organized its events, and bound to keep faith with the ashes of its heroes, was most radical in its character, yet achieved with such benign tranquility, that even conservatism hesitated to censure. A civil war armed men of the same ancestry against each other, yet for the advancement of the principles of everlasting peace and universal unity. A new plebeian democracy took its place by the side of the proudest empires[19].

As much as Bancroft celebrated the American Revolution, he was critical of the French one. In his characterization of France, one finds the usual "Gallic stereotypes" used by, among others, the English propagandists of the 1790-1830 period[20]. Credulous masses misguided by irresponsible speculators is one of them. Implicit in those lines is that the French should have emulated the British Monarchy, but were incapable of doing so:

> The French king was absolute; yet the teachings of Montesquieu and the example of England raised in men of generous natures an uncontrollable desire for free institutions; while speculative fault-finders, knowing nothing of the self-restraint which is taught by responsibility in the exercise of office, indulged in ideal anticipations, which were colored by an exasperating remembrance of griefs and wrongs. France was the eldest daughter of the Roman church, with a king who was a sincere though not a bigoted Roman Catholic: and the philosophers carried their impassioned war against the church to the utmost verge of skepticism and unbelief; while a suspicion that forms of religion were used as a mere instrument of government began to find its way into the minds of the discontented laboring classes in the cities[21].

Fifteen years after the first publication of Bancroft's *History* in France, a second one came out. This 1876 edition was markedly different. First, only the three volumes dealing with the Franco-American alliance were published. Second, its title was a quite free translation of the original: *Une histoire de l'action commune de la France et de l'Amérique pour l'indépendance des États-Unis* (A History of the joint action of France and America for the Independence of the United States.) Third, a 100-page essay plainly entitled, *Conclusions historiques du traducteur* (Historical conclusions of the translator) were added

as an appendix in the second volume. In other words, this 1876 edition was not a mere translation, but an interpretation of Bancroft's work by a French historian who had chosen to "naturalize" Bancroft for the French soil, that is, to make Bancroft popular with French readers.

That historian was Adolphe de Circourt. Born in 1801 into a family of French monarchists, Circourt embarked on a successful career in government at a very young age, thanks to personal connections to the House of Bourbon. A personal friend of Alphonse de Lamartine, he was also a prolific correspondent with Alexis de Tocqueville. By virtue of his marriage to a Russian countess, he was an active member of a European intelligentsia, popular with Italian, Swiss, and German literati. In 1848, Circourt was appointed French ambassador to the German Confederation and befriended Friedrich Wilhelm IV in that capacity. His appointment ended prematurely, however, because of the upheavals that marred the French Second Republic. A widower at 62, he spent most of his remaining years outside of Paris, writing[22]. In many regards, Circourt was a typical amateur historian of the nineteenth century: a well-connected member of the high society, conversant in several languages with easy access to (primary and secondary) sources. The similarities between Circourt and Laboulaye are great; their understandings of American history were very similar too.

What was Circourt's view of the two late eighteenth-century revolutions? Why did the American succeed, when the French one (supposedly) failed? Concurring with Bancroft, Circourt argued that the root of the problem lay in the miscomprehension of American revolutionary ideals by a small faction, i.e., the philosophers and their followers:

> The American school roughly turned aside the course of received opinions, introduced into the glowing and fickle imaginations of a witty rather than reflective generation's foreign ideas, recommended by their novelty (…) History was abandoned for romance; calm reflection, for fantastic enthusiasm. In avoiding beaten paths they hurried towards abysses; but if such were (as we believe) the extreme consequences of the revolution in America, it is only just to repeat that the example of the Americans ought to have produced wholly different effects[23].

A French historian writing for a French readership could not contrast the two Revolutions as starkly as Bancroft did, however. Why? There are three complementary explanations for this. First, "the psychological wounds" of 1871 were still very much open and any harsh criticism of 1789-1799 by a foreign historian, with German sympathies to boot (Bancroft had served as US ambassador to Berlin from 1867 to 1874), would have hurt the feelings of French readers, regardless of their own opinion of the French Revolution. Second, as Delacroix, Dosse and Garcia observed, historians in the 1870s-1900s sought to reconcile the French with their past; to hold the French Revolution to be an absolute counter-model would have been counter-productive[24]. In this regard, the title that Circourt chose for his translation is quite telling: "A History of the joint action of France and America for the Independence of the United States". In other words, the French contributed to the success of the American Revolution and ought to take pride in it. The third and most important explanation lies in the fact that, in the nineteenth century, the French regarded

American history as a source of learning and inspiration. Émile Boutmy (another prominent amateur historian of the period) encapsulated that belief in a clever figure of speech; with regard to American history, Boutmy concluded, "*nous n'avons rien à y prendre, beaucoup à y apprendre*" (there is nothing for us to take there, but a great deal to learn)[25]. Tocqueville, Laboulaye, and many of their contemporaries, shared that view.

Circourt "naturalized" the American Revolution in France, that is, praised it to an acceptable degree for the French reader, by glorifying individuals, as opposed to people. Men such as Benjamin Franklin and, in the following lines, George Washington were portrayed as heroes; they had long been quite popular with the French:

> The grand lesson of all these glorious but painful experiences, of increasing prosperity and immense dangers, of passionate debates and hasty conclusions, only brings out more clearly the excellence of the character of Washington and his immortal coadjutors in the task which they succeeded in accomplishing at the end of fifteen years of struggle, of war, of effort, and agitation[26].

In Circourt's account, the French aristocrats who fought in the Continental army (Lafayette, Rochambeau, and Chastellux) were hailed in similar terms. Besides their bravery on the battlefield (that Bancroft himself acknowledged), Circourt underlined their efforts to steer the French Revolution in the "right", i.e. moderate direction in its early stages: "all subscribed to the King's reformist agenda; they were inclined to support measures to alleviate the plight of the poor, promote universal education or limit arbitrary powers. "On all these matters," Circourt argues, "they were in free and affectionate interchange of thoughts and wishes with their former brothers-in-arms in America"[27]. The French nobility split into two camps when the Estates General convened in 1789, Circourt goes on to explain. A factious old French nobility took up arms in an attempt to restore its pre-Louis XIV status and power, while a forward-looking one chose to defend, "under new colors the institutions which the body of the people had accepted, and which their makers believed to be models from antiquity, or copies of the American Republic"[28].

That Circourt, the son of a former officer in the émigré army of the Prince of Condé, considered himself to be the heir to such enlightened aristocrats becomes all too clear, when he exhorts his (French) readers to pay tribute to the memory of all protagonists in the French Revolution:

> Let us be just in offering respect, without invidious distinction, to the memory of those brave antagonists. They all thought they obeyed the command of duty; most of them sacrificed for that all their private interests. […] Let us cease, let us cease, from condemnation and recrimination! The study of this age, so full of tragic incidents, ought, apart from the higher considerations to which we have alluded, to touch our hearts with respectful pity for the actors in those terrible scenes[29].

Circourt's translation of Bancroft's *History* advanced the reputation of the American historian in France. Of equal importance was the retrospection it allowed; his take on the American Revolution was meant help the French come to grips with their own history and find their own way forward.

3. *A Tribute to Vergennes*

Circourt identified the fundamental question raised by the Franco-American alliance of 1778: "In France, one of the striking inconsistencies of the time was, that admiration for English institutions, curiosity about English thought, [and] a passion for English customs, were the fashion with the upper classes, at the very time they eagerly took part against England[30]". Circourt held that, in spite of its Anglophilia, the whole nation was just "fond of war"[31], i.e., quite anxious to avenge its defeat in the Seven Years' War. A more elaborate answer to that question had yet to be written. It came under the form of a six-volume publication, *Histoire de la participation de la France à l'établissement des États-Unis d'Amérique. Correspondance diplomatique et documents* (A History of France's participation to the establishment of the United States of America. Diplomatic correspondences and documents).

What we know about its author Jean-Henri Doniol boils down to a few dates and facts. Born in 1818 in a mountainous region of central France, Doniol belonged to the local upper middle-class: his father Claude was a public prosecutor; his mother Rosalie Constance née de Murat was a member of the nobility. Her own father François had served in Louis XVI's army as a cavalry officer. François de Murat was also an early lexicographer of the dialects of his native Auvergne. Jean-Henri Doniol shared his grandfather's interest for languages; interestingly, his own study of *Les patois de la Basse-Auvergne* (The Dialects of lower-Auvergne) reveals his aptitude for methodological innovation. In a 2020 unpublished thesis, Dr. Jean Roux notes that Jean-Henri Doniol was the first to adopt a methodical approach to the study of such dialects, classifying them based on their phonological features and geographic distribution, decades before the birth of linguistics (69)[32]. Besides his gift for the study of languages, Doniol knew how to identify historiographical blind spots. His 1874 *La Révolution française et la féodalité* (The French Revolution and feudalism) was noted more than a century later for being the first book to integrate feudalism into the study of the French Revolution, before Hippolyte Taine and Philippe Sagnac published their seminal works on that subject[33]. Similarly, Doniol was the first to tackle head-on the problem of the Franco-American alliance.

He did so as the director of the *Imprimerie Nationale*, the French government publishing office. Doniol was not a historian by training; before his appointment to the *Imprimerie* in 1882, he had had a career as a high-ranking civil servant, working as *préfet* (regional prefect) in various places. His personal memoirs published in 1897 provide us with valuable information about the genesis of his *magnum opus*: *Histoire de la participation de la France à l'établissement des États-Unis d'Amérique*. His position as director of the *Imprimerie* allowed him to pursue personal projects. In the 1880s, he was eying a permanent seat at the *Académie des sciences morales et politiques* (Academy of Moral and Political Sciences). To achieve that goal, he perused the archives of France's ministry for foreign affairs in search of a topic. He quickly set his mind on the Franco-American alliance.

> At the Quay d'Orsay archives, I only had to leaf through the first volumes of ministerial correspondences to understand that, in those pages,

> laid a great accomplishment of French history, one that had been lost in the drama of our modern life, an accomplishment that should be credited to France as well as to the old Monarchy in its final years[34].

On the next page, Doniol proceeds to explain how his book would become the typographical "master piece" put on display by the *Imprimerie Nationale* at the Paris World's fair of 1889. He convinced, quite easily, Justice Minister Félix Martin-Feuillée to let him prepare an annotated edition of the diplomatic correspondence written at the time of the War of Independence. From 1884 to 1891, he devoted all of his personal time to that project. The first three volumes were ready for the 1889 Paris World's fair.

In his memoirs, Doniol recounts how his *Histoire de la participation de la France à l'établissement des États-Unis d'Amérique* received the best history book award from the *Académie française* (The French Academy) in 1890. He candidly admits that the backing of the Duke of Broglie, a prominent monarchist leader of the 1870s, did help a great deal. Broglie was particularly keen to see Louis XVI's Foreign Minister Comte de Vergennes rehabilitated under Doniol's pen: "I shall not reproduce here the words of praise addressed by Duc de Broglie" (166), Doniol writes:

> my greatest satisfaction was to see that I had given the character of Vergennes the depth that he deserved; until now, he seemed to have been forgotten by history. I took the greatest pride in having revealed, so to speak, this great Minister, just as great as many of his predecessors, and in different respects [...] It is Mr. de Vergennes who wins in this book[35].

The rehabilitation of Vergennes made it possible for Doniol to underline the role of other historical figures who, along with Lafayette, were key protagonists of the Franco-American alliance: Count de Rochambeau and Count d'Estaing, "as I am writing these lines, President Roosevelt, in the presence of a French delegation, is inaugurating a statue of Rochambeau outside the White House: could it be that I have something to do with it?"[36]. Doniol concludes that Americans may now acknowledge a debt not only to Lafayette, but also to Rochambeau, d'Estaing and Vergennes. The latter is the most important of all, Doniol contends: "Without him, the United States would not have seen the light in 1783"[37].

Like Circourt, Doniol wrote a history that aimed at reconciling the French with their past. Their messages to their readers are similar: the French contributed to the success of the American Revolution and this should bolster their national pride. Yet Doniol also dispelled a number of myths about the Franco-American alliance. Chief among them was "Lafayette's myth", namely that Lafayette had ventured to America to support an abstract ideal of liberty. Indeed, "for most nineteenth-century historians, Lafayette served as a preeminent symbol of personal and public virtue" historian Lloyd S. Kramer observes, adding, "Americans used the Lafayette image to define their national character as lovers of liberty and to develop the notion that republican government must depend on virtue"[38].

Doniol's work reveal that before Lafayette set sail for Boston, years of intensive diplomatic negotiations occurred. In this campaign, Vergennes stands out from the other members of the King's cabinet as the diplomat-in-chief. As such, his decision to

throw in his lot with the American revolutionaries was the result of a prudent evaluation of the balance of power in the North Atlantic. On January 7, 1778, he sent Louis XVI a memorandum recommending that France finalize negotiations for a treaty of alliance. The next day, the King sent a letter to his cousin Carlos IV of Spain, to give him his assessment of the situation:

> America is triumphant, and England cast down. But the latter has still a great unbroken maritime force, and the hope of forming a beneficial alliance with her colonies; the impossibility of their being subdued by arms being now demonstrated. All the English parties agree on this point. Lord North has himself announced, in full Parliament, a plan of pacification for the first session; and all sides are assiduously employed upon it. Thus, it is the same to us whether this minister or any other be in power. From different motives, they join against us, and do not forget our bad offices. They will fall upon us in as great strength as if the war had not existed. This being understood, and our grievances against England notorious, I have thought, […] that it was just and necessary to begin to treat with them, to prevent their reunion to the mother country[39]

The influence of Vergennes' *realpolitik* on the King's analysis is manifest here. In a letter sent on the same day to the French ambassador to Spain, Vergennes couched his own analysis in those terms, "the question boils down to this: is it better for us to be at war with America on our side, or at least with America as a neutral power, than to be at war with America allied to England?"[40].

4. *Conclusion*

Circourt and Doniol addressed the topic of the Franco-American alliance from different angles. Circourt chose to translate Bancroft in tribute to him, but this was not his only goal; after all, Bancroft's *History of the United States from the Discovery of the American Continent* had already been made accessible *in extenso* to the French readers fifteen years earlier. Circourt's translation of Bancroft was different, for it was selective and included a lengthy piece, by Circourt himself, on the events that led up to the alliance. The very nature of Circourt's work is somewhat problematic; it is neither a translation, nor an original work. What it is an attempt by a French historian to write history at a distance; it is, most importantly, an attempt to write a history that reconciles the French with their past. In that sense, Circourt was a typical French historian of the 1870-1900 period.

Although not a historian by training, Doniol chose to conform to the *Glaubenscredo* of his age and studied the Franco-American alliance through diplomatic archives. His personal ambitions (a seat at the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, an award from the French National Academy) may explain his choice to some extent. What stands out from his prior works is a personal interest for methodological inventiveness and scientific rigor; that Doniol strove to write a history in conformity with academic historians' standards cannot be disputed. His verbatim reproduction of selected pieces of correspondence, each referenced rigorously and accompanied with his own comments may very well make *Histoire de la participation de la France à l'établissement des*

États-Unis d'Amérique, the first "scientific" book on American history published in France, as Claude Fohlen suggests[41]. Like Circourt, Doniol sought to reconnect his readers with a somewhat distant past, the reign of Louis XVI. One historical figure stands out: Count de Vergennes hailed by Doniol and his friends as the true "hero" of the Franco-American alliance.

A paradox emerges here: Doniol's archival work dispelled the very myth of that alliance, namely that the French fought for American independence for the sake of American independence, when they were in fact fighting the British in North America. Yet, Doniol's work was hailed by Americans and even led to an interesting historiographic *rapprochement*. When Doniol started publicizing his project, the United States Ambassador to France Henry Vignaud became enthusiastic; he sought to get Doniol's future book published into English by G. P. Putnam's Sons. Other Americans wrote to Doniol to express their interest for his project: a prominent jurist with the Department of State Francis Wharton had himself worked on a similar project ten years ago, to publish *The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*. Another tireless editor of primary sources to correspond with Doniol was Worthington Chauncey Ford, an archivist and historian who was working in those years on a fourteen-volume edition of *The writings of George Washington*. He and Doniol corresponded extensively. In a letter dated 4 December 1891, Ford expressed his great satisfaction to Doniol; not only had Washington been rehabilitated by their respective publications, but the "villains" – John Jay and John Adams – had been exposed, "The myth of Jay will be dispelled", Ford wrote to Doniol, "The truth is that Jay and Adams were narrow-minded and consumed by a single idea, that of their own importance"[42]. Doniol agreed; the works of Wharton and Ford rightfully contested the glorification of Yankee Federalists, at a time when their heirs held a moral and political high ground as a result of the victory of the Union.

Unsurprisingly, Circourt's work was praised by the members of learned societies the United States too. The Massachusetts Historical Society, of which Circourt was a member, sponsored the translation into English of his 'Historical Conclusions'. In the preface to this translation, the Society's secretary made the following introductory remarks:

> This Paper, which occupied nearly a hundred pages of the second volume of the French publication, had been thought worthy of special notice in France [...] It is a philosophical resume of the memorable American Revolution ; a skillful review of the causes which led to it, and of the events which marked its progress; an elevated judgment of the position and spirit of the men most distinguished in it, and a clear indication of the consequences which were to follow it, — 'a true picture, in short, drawn by a firm hand'[43].

This is how, a century after the sealing of the Franco-American alliance, works by two French historians contributed to the emergence a new conversation on the nature of the American revolution. That transatlantic conversation would grow considerably in the twentieth century and continues to this day, as the two-hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence approaches.

[1] All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.
[2] P.E. Levasseur, A. Himly, *Rapport général sur l'enseignement de l'histoire et de la géographie: adressé à M. le ministre de l'Instruction publique et des cultes*, in « Bulletin administratif du Ministère de l'instruction publique et des cultes », n. 265, 1871, p. 332.
[3] *Ibidem*.
[4] W. Keylor, *Academy and Community: the Foundation of the French Historical Profession*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1975, p. 6.
[5] Ivi, p. 41.
[6] Ivi,p. 56.
[7] Ivi, p. 67.
[8] C.O. Carbonell, *Histoire et historiens: une mutation idéologique des historiens français, 1865-1885*, Toulouse, Privat, 1976, p. 588.
[9] Ivi, p. 267.
[10] G. Lingelbach, *Klio Macht Karriere: Die Institutionalisierung der Geschichtswissenschaft in Frankreich und den USA in der Zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003, p. 214.
[11] Ivi, p. 376.
[12] Ivi, p. 383.
[13] Ivi, p. 386.
[14] C. Delacroix, P. Garcia and F. Dosse, *Les Courants historiques en France: XIX^e^-XX^e^ siècle*, Paris Folio histoire, 2007, p. 97.
[15] Ivi, p. 122.
[16] Ivi, p. 168-169.
[17] *Ibidem*.
[18] Ivi, p. 15.
[19] G. Bancroft, *History of the United States from the Discovery of the American Continent*, vol.1, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1834, v.10, pp. 12-13.
[20] G. Newman, *Anti-French Propaganda and British Liberal Nationalism in the Early Nineteenth Century: Suggestions toward a General Interpretation*, in « Victorian Studies », vol. 18 n.4, 1975, pp. 389-390.
[21] G. Bancroft, *History of the United States*, v.10, cit., pp. 12-13.
[22] A. Tocqueville de, A.P. Kerr (edited by), *Correspondance d'Alexis de Tocqueville avec Adolphe de Circourt et avec Madame de Circourt*, Paris, Gallimard, 1983, pp. 12-21.
[23] G. Bancroft, *Histoire de l'action commune de la France et de l'Amérique pour l'indépendance des États-Unis, traduit and annoté par A. de Circourt*, Paris, F. Vieweg, 1876, p. 43.
[24] C. Delacroix, P. Garcia, F. Dosse, *Les Courants historiques*, cit., p. 122.
[25] É. Boutmy, *Éléments d'une psychologie politique*, cit., p. 109.
[26] G. Bancroft, *Histoire de l'action commune* cit., p. 8.
[27] Ivi, p. 46.
[28] Ivi, p. 47.
[29] *Ibidem*.
[30] Ivi, p. 23.
[31] Ivi, p. 24.
[32] J. Roux, *De la renaissance d'une langue occitane littéraire en Auvergne au début du XX^e^ siècle, au travers des œuvres de Bénezet Vidal et Henri Gilbert*, Diss. Université Paul Valéry – Montpellier III, 2020. 12 August 2022. <https://theses.hal.science/tel-03264341>, p. 69.
[33] H. Krierser. *La Révolution française et le thème de la 'Féodalité': bilan du thème de l'abolition dans l'historiographie française (1815-1914)*, in « Annales Historiques de La Révolution Française », n. 265, 1986, p. 255.
[34] H. Doniol, *Histoire de la participation de la France à l'établissement des États-Unis d'Amérique, Correspondance diplomatique et documents*, vol. 1, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1886, p. 62.
[35] Ivi, p. 166.
[36] Ivi, p. 170.
[37] Ivi, p. 171.
[38] L. S. Kramer, *Lafayette in Two Worlds: Public Cultures and Personal Identities in an Age of Revolutions*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996, p. 377.
[39] Doniol, *Histoire de la participation de la France*, v.2, cit., p. 714.
[40] Ivi, p. 721.
[41] C. Fohlen, *Les débuts de l'histoire américaine en France*, in « Revue Française d'Études Américaines », n.13, 1982, p. 28.
[42] W. C. Ford, *The Writings of George Washington*. New York City, G.P. Putnam's son, 1889, p. 169.
[43] Bancroft, *Histoire de l'action commune* cit., p. 4.

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