SPECIAL ISSUE
New Perspectives on Modern Paris

Introduction: Paris Revisited

Charles Rearick

Nearly three centuries ago, a guidebook to Paris marveled at the city's "infinite diversities" and its "prodigious number of inhabitants."[1] Early in the twentieth century, a Parisian boy named Julien Green expressed similar awe: How could such a small word, *Paris*, "designate so many things, so many streets and squares, so many parks, so many houses, roofs, chimneys"?[2] Historians today have even more reason to be awed—if not overwhelmed—when they take up Paris as the object of their study. How does one write and teach the history of the multifaceted, vast metropolis? How does one describe it, analyze it, and recount its formative events and development? How does one do justice to the sprawling "agglomeration" of current Paris, with its ten million inhabitants, its many ethnic "colonies," its varied *quartiers* and *banlieues*?

This special issue demonstrates multiple ways of answering such questions. The underlying premise is that Paris in all its vastness and heterogeneity calls for many kinds of historical treatment. Every account ends up incomplete in some way. (The twenty-one thick volumes of the *Nouvelle histoire de Paris*—more than fifteen thousand pages—are

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[1] Germain Brice, *Nouvelle description de la ville de Paris et de tout ce qu'elle contient de plus remarquable*, 8th ed. (Paris, 1725), 1:1. Brice estimated the population at more than eight hundred thousand, overstating it by several hundred thousand, according to the estimates of historians today. The seven earlier editions of Brice's guide, back to the first in 1684, all began by remarking on the great size of Paris.

[2] Julien Green, *Paris* (New York, 1991).

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no exception.)[3] Every writer and teacher of the city's history has to choose some limited number of themes and approaches, leaving others aside. Most historians also choose certain parts of the whole to treat in greater detail, and that opens up the problem of relating the parts to the larger entity called Paris. As guest editors for this issue, Rosemary Wakeman and I have given priority to work that illumines the city as a whole and widely shared facets of Parisian life over fairly large swaths of time. The varied approaches and topics chosen, we hope, will spark new research as well as offer fresh understanding.

One of the major themes of Parisian history since the last decades of the Ancien Régime has been the city's intractable problems and recurrent crises—*crises du logement,* crime and disease, street congestion and traffic jams, revolts and revolutions, insalubrious slums, and *banlieues* beset by anomie and delinquency. In our first article, Allan Potofsky gives us a close look at the capital's multilayered problems in the late eighteenth century, when Paris was already huge (for its time) and crowded. Housing was inadequate for the growing population, heightening worries about social unrest. The shoddy construction of many new buildings reflected the ramshackle system of conflicting authorities, regulations, and payoffs under which they were built. A "building boom" was bringing discontents and social antagonisms to the point of explosion. Dealing with these problems entailed resolving conflicts not only in the building trades but also in the larger social and political order. The complexity and political importance of the huge capital, as Louis-Sébastien Mercier emphasized, made reforms of the construction sector particularly difficult. A series of failed reform efforts, Potofsky shows, finally opened the way to the revolutionary approach, replacing the old institutions with new state supervision of construction combined with the liberated play of demand and supply.

In treatments of the following century, the motif of urban crisis has been a historiographical mainstay, particularly since Louis Chevalier's classic *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses*.[4] Bernard Marchand's excellent history, for example, begins with a chapter titled "Paris Grows Too Quickly (1815–1850)." His later headings "The Capital Becomes

[3] The collection *La nouvelle histoire de Paris* (Diffusion Hachette Livre) begins with Paul-Marie Duval's *De Lutèce oppidum à Paris capitale de la France* (Paris, 1993). The other volumes cover periods of varying lengths up to the present. The most recent is Jean Bastié's *Paris de 1945 à 2000* (Paris, 2000).

[4] Louis Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1958). Chevalier supported his use of the term *crisis* not only by providing quantitative and descriptive evidence of grave problems, but also by quoting contemporaries expressing their sense of alarm that Paris, "la ville malade," was suffering from widespread poverty, disease, and the "terror" of crime.

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Pathological" and "The Discovery of the Urban Crisis" make the point even clearer.[5] In recent years some historians have questioned the notion of crisis as an organizing frame, arguing that "catastrophizing" has obscured the positive, adaptive capacities of cities and the historical specificities of each period's problems and failings. For the nineteenth century in particular, some historians have worked to retouch the portrayal of a pathological city overwhelmed by rapid growth and immigration.[6]

In our second article, Alain Faure contributes to that revisionist work with a reexamination of the old notion of Paris as a deadly "abyss" for its inhabitants. Probing long-held assumptions about the adverse effects of city life, he focuses on the fate of provincials who migrated to the capital in the late nineteenth century. Specifically, his findings call into question the belief that the newcomers, often crowded in wretched housing and suffering from poor diet and overwork, therefore died at a higher rate than did native Parisians. Faure's fruitful investigation adds to the history of social myths and stereotypes of Parisians and provincials, enriching Alain Corbin's important survey of "Paris-province" representations.[7]

Besides reevaluating crises, recent scholarship has also shed light on urban renewal and modernizing in the nineteenth century, including efforts made *before* the famous works of Baron Haussmann in the 1850s and 1860s. Haussmann's accomplishments have often been overstated (his "rebuilding" or "transforming" Paris left untouched a large part of the capital).[8] Yet the magnitude of his projects was clearly extraordinary, and his contribution remains of primary importance in Paris history, as David Jordan's article explains in detail. Taking a long view, Jordan shows how Haussmann's blueprints guided alterations to the capital through more than half of the twentieth century. That changed, of course, with the large-scale operations and modernist showpieces (the Pompidou Center, for one) that Louis Chevalier de-

5 Bernard Marchand, *Paris, histoire d'une ville, XIXe–XXe siècle* (Paris, 1993).

6 Barrie Ratcliffe has been a leading revisionist and critic of Chevalier's argument, focusing on the first half of the nineteenth century; see, for example, his cogent summary essay "Visions et (révisions) des dynamiques de la croissance urbaine dans le Paris de la première moitié du XIXe siècle," in *La modernité avant Haussmann: Formes de l'espace urbain à Paris, 1801–1853*, ed. Karen Bowie (Paris, 2001), 41–55. Danièle Voldman has written primarily with the twentieth century in mind; see her article "Sur les 'crises' urbaines," *Vingtième siècle: Revue d'histoire* 64 (Oct.–Dec. 1999): 5–10.

7 See Alain Corbin, "Paris-province," in *Les France*, vol. 3 of *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris, 1992), 776–823.

8 On renewal before Haussmann, see Bowie, *Modernité avant Haussmann.* On the limitations of Haussmann's renewal, a few examples will have to suffice here: he did not transform or rebuild some central quarters such as the Marais or the newly annexed communes, and he did not "rebuild" Paris in the sense of constructing housing, especially housing for working people.

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nounced as the "assassination of Paris." Those iconoclastic changes in the 1960s and 1970s led to a new appreciation of nineteenth-century Parisian architecture. The scholarly work of François Loyer made a large contribution to that rediscovery, beginning in 1975. More recently, three French biographies of the prefect have generated "un véritable engouement pour le Paris haussmannien," urban historian Florence Bourillon has observed.[9] Working independently of those biographies, David Jordan, too, looks back with admiration for Haussmann's large-scale planning and ambitious accomplishments.

Rosemary Wakeman's article on twentieth-century planning helps explain why the city that was a centerpiece of modernity in the nineteenth century fell so far behind in the twentieth. Local authorities in Paris and the nearby communes were at loggerheads for decades, while the state (dominated by provincials) took no interest in the problems of the capital. The state finally began to engage in urban planning, Wakeman shows, not out of concern for Paris per se but with an eye to the nation's historic image, combined with political worries about leftist strength in the *banlieues* (the "red belt"). After producing an antigrowth regional plan in the 1930s, the state's urbanist efforts accelerated during the war years, a time of Vichy-directed urban planning and slum clearance, which was followed, after 1944, by long-overdue renewal projects as part of national reconstruction. In a spirit of what Wakeman calls "nostalgic modernism," professional planners through the 1950s sought to improve and update Paris while also preserving the core historical forms. They did not achieve unmitigated success on either score, leaving the "problem of Paris" an unending project and debate.

Another basic approach to Paris history is through representations of the city and its "subjective social space."[10] Poetic representations of Paris as a living being, sometimes male (notably in revolutionary periods), more often female, have received close examination, notably by Pierre Citron.[11] But the extent to which poetic representations entered

9 François Loyer presented some of his work in 1975 in an exposition organized by the Caisse des Monuments Historiques; Loyer's book was *Paris XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1985). See also Florence Bourillon, "Des relectures d'Haussmann," *Histoire urbaine* 5 (June 2002): 198. Bourillon expertly reviews books by Michel Carmona, Nicolas Chaudun, and George Valance. Pierre Pinon added to the vogue of Haussmannian Paris with the *Atlas du Paris haussmannien: La ville en héritage du Second Empire à nos jours* (Paris, 2002).

10 The term "l'espace social subjectif" comes from Paul-Henry Chombart de Lauwe, *La fin des villes, mythe ou réalité?* (Paris, 1982), 24. For a comparative treatment of memory, urban images, and representational forms in the contemporary city, see M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994).

11 Since the Middle Ages, writers and poets have produced hundreds of poetic images for the city as a whole; see Pierre Citron's masterful two-volume work, *La poésie de Paris dans la littérature française de Rousseau à Baudelaire* (Paris, 1961).

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the consciousness of ordinary people is a question that calls out for more research.[12] Two of our articles address other forms of the Paris imaginary, forms that *were* widely shared: the political and social identities of various parts of the city.

Danielle Tartakowsky illumines the symbolic political geography of Paris with a focus on the special role played by the Place de la Concorde. Her study is an indispensable coda to the pathbreaking article by Maurice Agulhon (in the *Lieux de mémoire*) that explicated the capital's east-west dialectic and placed Concorde in the territory of the Right. Here Tartakowsky shows that Concorde was not so neatly defined, either by its role in the Revolution as the site of regicide or by any commemorative monument. Rather, it was open to appropriation by diverse political groups and causes—workers' organizations, students, Dreyfusards, nationalists, and Rightist organizations. In the early Third Republic the Place de la Concorde became a prime site of patriotic demonstrations owing to the statue of Strasbourg, which the July Monarchy had erected there as a nonpolitical monument. Even more important, Tartakowsky demonstrates, was the large, open space of the Place and its proximity to the Chambre des Députés, the Champs-Elysées, and the Place de l'Etoile. Hence its role as a place of demonstrations of the Right in the twentieth century, particularly after the famous *émeute* of 6 February 1934.

Dominique Kalifa guides us on a quite different itinerary—through the dark parts of the *Ville lumière*, examining the topography of crime before and after Haussmann's operations. Renewal of the city center shifted a significant portion of criminal activity to the edges, and the scenes of some crime fiction followed suit. Yet, Kalifa shows, the areas identified with danger did not shift completely—in crime stories or in the imagination of Parisians. Long after Haussmann, some of the imagined dangerous quarters remained fixed where they had been in the time of Eugène Sue's *Mystères de Paris*—in the central city. Then, remarkably, in the early twentieth century, the geography of crime stories expanded far beyond Paris, extending to such sites of modernity as Chicago and New York.

Lastly, several of the articles in this issue shed light on one of the

[12] As a source of images of modern Paris, the kind of poetry that Citron examined has surely had less impact since Baudelaire than have popular song lyrics. See Jean-Louis Robert, "Paris enchanté: Le peuple en chansons (1870–1990)," in *Paris, le peuple, XVIIIe–XXe siècle*, ed. Jean-Louis Robert and Danielle Tartakowsky (Paris, 2000). For historical background on Paris songs (and movies) in the first half of the twentieth century, see Charles Rearick, *The French in Love and War: Popular Culture in the Era of the World Wars* (New Haven, Conn., 1997). Evelyne Cohen has published an admirably wide-ranging study of representations in her *Paris dans l'imaginaire national dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris, 1999).

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most neglected parts of Paris's history: the *banlieue.* Historians have long concentrated on *intramuros* Paris, where the crucial political and social dramas have played out for centuries. Scholars have also favored the center because of its aesthetic textures, monuments, and lively places of sociability and pleasure. Meanwhile, much of the *banlieue* has been scorned as a wasteland of ugliness and disorder—with sociability almost absent. The practice of excluding the suburbs from Paris's history has made the historian's task easier, but it no longer seems justifiable, especially since the 1960s when the outlying towns and semirural areas were brought into an encompassing administrative framework with Paris.[13] In recent decades, Greater Paris has finally found its historians. Annie Fourcaut, a leader among them, gives us a fresh look back at the decisions to build large housing blocks, or *grands ensembles,* in the *banlieue* after the Second World War. Her article reconstructs the historical context of those projects and challenges the commonplace judgment of them as misconceived and inadequate—with Sarcelles as the prime symbol. To provide better understanding of them, Fourcaut recounts not only the postwar housing crisis but also the planners' awareness of failed efforts to build individual dwellings for the many and their hopes for a richer social life in the *banlieues.* Fourcaut also brings out well the contradictory attitudes of state authorities as they grappled with Paris's problems: on the one hand, "Malthusian" attitudes of hostility to the capital as overgrown and too costly to the nation; on the other, reformist hopes of providing decent, modern housing for the urban masses.

The new insights to be found in these articles, of course, need to be placed in a larger framework of Paris history. The reader can find numerous frameworks as well as lengthy bibliographies in the published histories already cited, and this is not the place to duplicate them.[14] In concluding this introduction, I will merely note some examples of alternate paths taken in recent histories of Paris. First, there is the classic format of chronological narrative, still common despite postmodernist critiques of unifying ("totalizing") master narratives. Period-

13 The tendency to leave out the *banlieue* is still strong. Alfred Fierro's *Histoire et dictionnaire de Paris* (Paris, 1996), for example, draws the line around the historic center with the rationale that the *banlieue* requires a volume unto itself: "La banlieue après 1860 ne concerne plus ce dictionnaire consacré à Paris et justifierait à elle seule un autre ouvrage" (703). Jean Bastié's pathbreaking *La croissance de la banlieue parisienne* (Paris, 1964) is now a classic. Tyler Stovall's *The Rise of the Paris Red Belt* (Berkeley, Calif., 1990) is noteworthy as a pioneering study of the *banlieue,* as is Alain Faure et al., *Les premiers banlieusards: Aux origines des banlieues de Paris, 1860–1940* (Paris, 1991).

14 Fierro's *Histoire et dictionnaire de Paris* ends with a particularly large bibliography and an excellent, huge filmography as well. For an up-to-date online bibliography, see "The History of Paris: A Select Bibliography," compiled and edited for H-France by Philip Whalen: www3.uakron.edu/hfrance/bibliogparis.html.

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by-period accounts exist in short form (a Que-sais-je volume treating twenty centuries in about 120 pages) as well as longer volumes—by Pierre Pinon and Bernard Marchand, for example, in addition to the multivolume *Nouvelle histoire de Paris.* Pinon has gone so far as to cast his history as a "biography" in an effort to lend a unifying human character to it.[15] In contrast, Patrice Higonnet, eschewing the strict chronological approach, has given us a multifaceted, thematic study in his *Paris, Capital of the World,* which examines the myths of Paris and the (inauthentic) phantasmagorias that supplanted them from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century. Still another path is taken by Jean Favier, who offers a combination of narrative and structural history in a large volume titled *Paris, deux mille ans d'histoire* (942 pages). Some sections provide a "récit événementiel," and others present an analysis of structures (e.g., "spatial structures," daily life, and "social and economic dynamisms").[16]

To be sure, fruitful perspectives and insights also abound in monographs that focus on selected parts and functions of the city—one arrondissement, one social group, one form of entertainment, architecture, art, literature, religious life, and so on. A recent book on nineteenth-century Paris by night shows how encompassing and broadly instructive a (seemingly) specialized study can be: *Les douze heures noires*, by Simone Delattre, illumines a range of social types from prostitutes and *chiffonniers* to elite pleasure-seekers, their activities, and representations as well as authorities' efforts to control the dark hours.[17] Monographs that examine literary portrayals of the city have also greatly enriched our understanding, particularly by explicating the insights and panoptic views of such Paris connoisseurs as Honoré de Balzac, Charles Baudelaire, and Emile Zola.[18] Other important, eye-opening

15 The Que-sais-je volume is Yvan Combeau's *Histoire de Paris* (Paris, 1999). See also Pierre Pinon, *Paris, biographie d'une capitale* (Paris, 1999). Cf. Anthony Read and David Fisher, *Berlin: The Biography of a City* (London, 1994); and Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000). Another recent sweeping one-volume history is Alistair Horne's *Seven Ages of Paris* (New York, 2002).

16 Jean Favier, *Paris, deux mille ans d'histoire* (Paris, 1997).

17 Simone Delattre, *Les douze heures noires: La nuit à Paris au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 2000). Similarly, see Isabelle Backouche's remarkable *Paris la Seine, 1750–1850* (Paris, 2001). Also noteworthy for its scope (despite a focus on one church) is Raymond Jonas's *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart* (Berkeley, Calif., 2000). In a quite different register, Christophe Prochasson's *Paris 1900: Essai d'histoire culturelle* (Paris, 1999) ranges widely over representations of Paris and their workings in the cultural life and spatial arrangements of the capital. See also Christophe Charle's *Paris, fin de siècle (culture et politique)* (Paris, 1998), which focuses on a variety of elites and offers comparisons with Berlin.

18 See Karlheinz Stierle, *La capitale des signes: Paris et son discours* (Paris: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2001). Also notable are Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Paris As Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City* (Berkeley, Calif., 1994); Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth*

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works come under the rubric of urban studies and "modernity studies," which do not take the French capital per se as their subject.[19] Still another valuable kind of Paris history focuses on the city (its functions, distinctiveness, and meanings) in relationship with the provinces, with other European cities, and with other "global" cities.[20]

The articles in this special issue and the recent works they build on, in short, give us not only new understandings of Paris but also suggestive samplings of the historiographical possibilities. The *grand-ville* in all its "infinite diversities" surely calls for future special issues of *French Historical Studies,* and we look forward to them (just as we look forward to revisiting the French capital in person again and again). Perhaps more than anyone else, we historians understand how ever-changing Paris is and has been—or how unending it is, as Hemingway put it. Paris always beckons us to return, and (Hemingway again) it is "always worth it."[21]

Century (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); and Marie-Claire Bancquart, *Paris "belle époque" par ses écrivains* (Paris, 1997).

19 The wonderfully insightful scholar Walter Benjamin, for example, did not have in mind a history of Paris as he researched and wrote on Parisian arcades. His *Passegen-Werk* was rather "a materialist philosophy of the history of the nineteenth century" and a history of "culture in the era of high capitalism." See Rolf Tiedemann, "Dialectics at a Standstill," in *The Arcades Project, Walter Benjamin,* ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 929, 938. See also the overview by Vanessa Schwartz, "Walter Benjamin for Historians," *American Historical Review* 106 (2001): 1721–43. Schwartz's lengthy footnotes constitute a useful, recent bibliography of "modernity studies" and Paris.

20 A recent synthesis is Jocelyne George's *Paris province, de la Révolution à la mondialisation* (Paris, 1998). For a discussion of Paris in the international context, see the issue of *le débat* titled "Le nouveau Paris" (no. 80, May–Aug. 1994). See also the debate about the "global city" between James W. White, "Old Wine, Cracked Bottle? Tokyo, Paris, and the Global City Hypothesis," *Urban Affairs Review* 33 (1998): 451–77, and his respondents, Saskia Sassen and Michael Peter Smith.

21 Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (New York, 1964), 211.

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