

## From Liberation to Rejuvenation

In October 1957, *L'Express*, a weekly newsmagazine founded in 1953, set out to address the issue of what characterized the rising generation that would soon come to dominate France and its institutions. As individuals, perhaps, they represented no great thing. However, together, “they are going to build or destroy the future, give rise to or refuse dignified or disgraceful leaders, they will transform or perpetuate society. Nothing will be done without them, nothing will be done against them, because, together, they make up youth.”<sup>1</sup> *L'Express* and Françoise Giroud, the project’s director, named this postwar generation the *nouvelle vague*, or “new wave,” a term that evoked a sense of momentum, of volume, of a mounting undercurrent carrying forward an inevitable and unstoppable progression that appropriates and transforms all in its path. According to *L'Express*, this group of young people carried with it France’s aspirations and opportunities for change, renewal, and rejuvenation, and therefore merited extensive study.

The *nouvelle vague* became an inescapable topic in the public discourse of

the late 1950s. A proliferation of commentaries and articles flooded newspapers and magazines, seeking to confirm, deny, or interpret the study's conclusions. The postulation of this generation as being markedly different permeated French society, and, accordingly, the concept of the *nouvelle vague* was adopted by the public. "New Wave" became a term of common usage and was indiscriminately applied to anything having to do with the idea of youth or involving young people. This fixation with the postwar generation had not begun with Giroud's study, however; rather, her study had picked up on an existing preoccupation with young people, carrying it further, while also providing the postwar generation with an appellation that contributed to the public enchantment with all things "new."

Both coincidentally and intentionally, the postwar fixation with newness became identified with the young, indirectly and directly. As educator Jean-Marie Despinette argued, it was necessary to integrate the young into French society for the very newness they offered, because "in an old society, in a pre-constituted society, the new elements, the bearers of new ideas, of new possibilities, of new enthusiasms, represent in each instance the germ of regeneration, of reform, even of revolution for this society."<sup>2</sup> The postwar cultural phenomena of the New Novel, New Look, New Cuisine, New Europe, New Wave, and New Generation were conceptualized as different, innovative, novel, and youthful. This enormous yearning for newness was also a yearning for change, a yearning to break with the past and to seek a new legitimacy in the future.<sup>3</sup> At times, "new" and "youth" became synonymous, interchangeable terms, as French society worked to reinvent itself in the wake of the Second World War. It would be wrong, however, to credit this moment with the invention of "the new"; other eras have utilized semantics similarly to denote a sense of creation or momentous transformation or opportunity. Yet the sheer proliferation of *new*-ness in postwar France was indicative of a particular frame of mind, one that broadly emphasized innovation and change over tradition and convention. In fact, even before and after the First World War there had been calls for a rejuvenation of France through its young, but it was only after the Second World War and during the Fourth Republic that this sort of rhetorical articulation reached its apogee and pervaded the social discourse underpinning the country's postwar cultural reconstruction.<sup>4</sup> As a semiotic device, this conceptual blurring of "the new" with youth offered a discursive climate conducive to cultural reconstruction and renewal, the im-

plication of which posited the adult generation as outdated, outmoded, and in decline—a sign of the past as opposed to a sign of the future.

This book is about the idea of youth in postwar France, and about how the concept of youth operated as a mechanism of cultural reconstruction in the postwar period. It investigates the adult preoccupation with youth as a cultural concept and with young people as social actors, and considers what this preoccupation reveals about the way French society reimagined itself in the wake of occupation and collaboration. The postwar cultural category of youth was a point of convergence that provides insight, not only into the young but also into the adult, and, taken together, into the meaning of age in postwar French society. This book traces the political, social, and cultural emergence of the category of youth, and suggests how age categories can be analytic tools comparable to race, class, or gender for exploring social and cultural meanings. The concept of the “new wave,” then, was a product of the profound project of rejuvenation that dominated France’s cultural reconstruction as it dealt with the aftermath and terrible consequences of the Second World War.

Early on August 25, 1944, what would be Paris’s day of Liberation, crowds began to assemble on the city’s periphery, anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Allies.<sup>5</sup> A carnival atmosphere filled the streets as tanks rolled into the city from various points of entry. Clusters of young people gathered around the vehicles, forcing them to halt, as young women climbed aboard to kiss their liberators, French and American alike (Figure 1). Bottles of wine were thrust into the hands of the soldiers, who were toasted and cheered. By nightfall, the revelry had filled the streets. People hugged, danced, and kissed, sat down to celebratory feasts, toasted the victory, and feted their liberators. The merriment was widespread, continuing throughout the night and extending into many bedrooms. In fact, one Catholic group hastily distributed tracts bearing a caveat for the young women of Paris: “In the gaiety of the liberation do not throw away your innocence. Think of your future family!”<sup>6</sup> Despite such counsel, a sense of euphoria and unbridled optimism accompanied the Allied troops as they swept through France. By the end of September 1944, nearly all of France was free of the Germans. Although the war itself would not be over for many more months, in France the heady days of exultant jubilation continued, with gala balls, grand banquets, and late-night parties with dancing in the streets.



*Figure 1.* Liberation of Paris, 1944. Agence Keystone.

As exuberant as the revelry was, however, it could not simply erase recent history—the cold hard facts of defeat, collapse, occupation, and collaboration. In a matter of weeks in 1940 the Germans had captured Paris and forced the French government to flee. The terms of the 1940 armistice had left the entire Atlantic coast as well as the north of France in German hands. The new French government at Vichy maintained sovereignty over the remaining south and west of France, albeit only through the sanction of the Nazis. At the time, the Occupation was viewed as merely a brief and temporary wartime arrangement. The French fully expected the British to soon submit to Hitler's onslaught, just as most of Europe already had. Thus, the Occupation was a relief to many, since it promised to spare France the hardship of battle and the terrible destruction of war that it had experienced for the entirety of the First World War.<sup>7</sup>

But the reality of occupation and the complexity of collaboration were

not nearly as transitory or innocuous as many imagined them to be. Marshal Philippe Pétain, with the full approval of the French parliament, dissolved the Third Republic and established his new French government in the empty hotels of the spa town of Vichy. France became complicit in its own subjugation through its new government, which was eager to please its Fascist master. The Germans, as a result, were in the enviable position of having a conquered nation govern and police itself in the Nazi interest. France even financed the cost of its own occupation, through an imposed system of reparation payments.<sup>8</sup>

There were those who disagreed with France's easy capitulation, who denied Vichy's authority and who continued the struggle against the Nazis—most famously, the junior general Charles de Gaulle, who had fled France for London and eventually formed a rival government in exile. Resistance efforts inside France soon formed, in small, isolated pockets around the country, though not, at first, in significant numbers or with coordinated activity. As with collaboration, the resistance varied in its degree of commitment and took many forms. As the war progressed, however, both collaborators and resisters became more strident and pursued their goals more vigorously. Toward the end, a civil war was being fought, under cover and in darkness, between the collaborators' brutal police gangs, the Milice, and the resisters' roving bands of armed young men, the Maquis. A terrible experience for France, the war years were characterized as much by betrayal and treachery as they were by heroism and sacrifice.<sup>9</sup>

Consequently, the Liberation had a darker, vengeful side to its jubilant celebrations, as many sought to impose a severe justice. Collaborating shopkeepers were beaten and their stores looted and vandalized. Civil servants were abused and humiliated. Women who had engaged in sexual liaisons, or *collaboration horizontale*, with the Germans were stripped naked, their shaved heads marked with tar swastikas, and paraded around to suffer jeers and beatings. In some areas, mostly in the south and west, a near reign of terror ensued, as the Resistance executed its absolute justice by shooting known collaborators on sight.<sup>10</sup>

Four years of occupation had ended. The defeat had been overcome. The collapse had been reversed. While some sought vengeful satisfaction, most sought merry gratification. It was not merely the expulsion of the Germans that was being celebrated, nor the foreseeable end to wartime hardships, but

the open possibilities that the reconstruction period would offer. It was time to remake France, to renew and rebuild. The clear failure of Old France, and of the Old Guard, would provide the context for fundamental change, a chance to create a more equitable and just society, a New France. The elation and determination that accompanied the Liberation was not only a celebration marking the end of past troubles, but also an embrace of the future and the prospects it offered. As the masthead of the Resistance paper *Combat* declared, the end of the war was a chance to move “From Resistance to Revolution.”

Reconstruction represented much more than merely the repair of buildings or the construction of roads, bridges, and railways. True, the physical destruction of the war had been devastating, more than twice as severe as that of the First World War—and true, factories would have to be rebuilt, flooded coal mines drained, roads resurfaced, railways mended, collapsed bridges raised, harbors opened, minefields cleared, munitions disposed, telephone lines connected, housing erected, medicine distributed, and people fed. It was an awesome task. But the material destruction of battle had lasted less than a year in France. Much more damaging to the French psyche were the four years of occupation and collaboration that had followed the political collapse of 1940.

In 1944 France was faced not only with rebuilding its infrastructure, re-establishing its economy, and redesigning its government, but with rejuvenating its society. During the war, people from a variety of social and political backgrounds had begun to make wish lists of what should characterize the new France. They established goals, outlined ideals, issued programmatic statements, contrived a social revolution. But the reality of cultural reconstruction could not be planned or organized in the same way that a rail network could be diagrammed or an economy could be state-managed. The mechanisms of cultural reconstruction were more diffuse and defied simple centralization within a government ministry. Societal change tends to happen slowly and emerges from scattered, unforeseen sources. The passage of time and the advantage of hindsight allow the historian to identify patterns and find connections that perhaps went unrecognized by a society as it generated them. Looking back to postwar France, it becomes clear that the concept of youth became an organizing principle for the new society.

At the end of the Second World War, following the collapse of 1940, the crushing Nazi Occupation, and the need for Allied intervention, France

faced the daunting task of rehabilitating itself. As all of Europe rebuilt, young people as a group became the object of countless debates and innumerable government policies, as they represented the hope of a future unburdened by the devastation of the recent past. Youth, as a cultural category and a social group, became a pivotal point around which elements of the new society would be built. Young people were at the forefront of social and political discussions; they became the object of cultural reconstruction and the means through which the French state approached renewal. After the war, France reconsidered itself in terms of youthfulness; it socially reconstructed itself through the categories of age.

This is not, however, a history of the new wave or baby-boomer generations—yes, France too had a postwar baby boom and a very significant one at that. In the modern period, the term “generation” has become a part of the standard vocabulary when speaking of youth, and often the two concepts are conflated since a generation usually finds its definition or character while young.<sup>11</sup> Yet a generation is not always young, and the social category of youth itself carries meaning distinct from that of generation and merits exploration. Even as successive generations move through the social categories of age—such as childhood, youth, adulthood, and old age—the meanings of age categories are culturally defined within any particular moment’s historical context. This book is a history of the cultural category and social body of youth in the context of postwar France rather than a history of a particular postwar generation.

The idea of generation is an abstraction categorizing social groups by age; it is a means of breaking down society temporally into age cohorts of common historical experience. Like social groups based upon class,<sup>12</sup> the boundaries between generations are soft and blurred rather than hard and fast, and allow for the possibility that a particular individual may be a member of different generations, depending on the given set of parameters. Usually, a generation is defined by its core, with its peripheries left inexact and its boundaries unclear. The ongoing flow of births does not readily provide clear demarcations of generation—between which two births does the line get drawn?—so the strict distinctions between generations tend to be arbitrary.<sup>13</sup> A generation may be defined by an act of self-appraisal distinguishing a common identity in opposition to other generations, or it may be defined by an imposed definition from outside

the social grouping, or, more likely, by some kind of combination of these two circumstances.

Yet age cohorts do not necessarily gel into generations of common characteristics at all. They may lack a collective experience of sociohistorical significance, or may simply never achieve a sense of collective identity or self-definition. "Moreover, the variety of individual experiences among the members of a generation, as with other social groups, renders broad conclusions about that generation or its members reductive by glossing over diversity or eliding difference. Nonetheless, historians have made extensive use of generation as an explanatory paradigm because the concept of generation is a convenient one.<sup>14</sup> Some historians have seen the rhythm of successive generations as a key element in the historical process of change, as one generation supplants its predecessor in a teleological progression.<sup>15</sup> For example, the French baby-boomers have recently been described as the "palimpsest generation," erasing all that came before and redefining what generation is and can be as the quintessential generation.<sup>16</sup> But this assumes a cohesion of identity, like-mindedness, and purpose that is lacking among age cohorts from different classes, genders, races, and regions.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, generational histories tend to rely on the biography of articulate elites who are chosen for study as representative ideal-types.<sup>18</sup>

During the Fourth Republic, the French did at times refer to a postwar generation—a precisely identified social group with specific boundaries of age and characteristics, such as *la nouvelle vague* or *les baby-boomers*—but they much more frequently spoke of the young generally, as simply *la jeunesse*, as "youth," or literally, "the youth." As such, they were indeed using the term more broadly and more ordinarily to describe the young in a more general sense, invoking youth as a category of age and, significantly, in opposition to "adult" as a category of age. The word "generation" was usually used in its plural form—"adult generations" and "young generations"—implying that "adult" and "young" as age categories were large concepts capable of holding a multiplicity of generations. And when employing the term "young generation," it was used more as a contrast to "adult generation" than to identify a specific group of age cohorts whose membership exhibited a common identity. So the specificity of generational thinking, such as that of the new wave or the baby-boomers, needs to be considered a part or even a product of this more general fixation on youth and the young.



Indeed, as will be shown, “youth” as a term was used willy-nilly, flexibly applied to a broad range of ages, though sometimes to a narrow range. The parameters and definitions of who made up the postwar social group of “youth” varied according to the institutions or individuals making the determination. A 1951 study used the boundaries of seventeen and twenty-five, and estimated age twenty as the epitome of youth. The 1957 *nouvelle vague* investigation used the experience of the war to identify postwar youth as all those aged eighteen to thirty. Another study, in 1964, defined youth as those aged sixteen to twenty-four. The Youth and Culture Houses (MJC) used ages fourteen to twenty-five as a guideline, but in practice the age range of participants was even greater. The moral outcry that surrounded the “existentialists” of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Françoise Sagan, and Brigitte Bardot was in part about their youth, yet many of them were well into their twenties. Likewise, the ages of those who identified themselves as “young,” or as a part of “youth,” reached all the way up to thirty and sometimes beyond.

Meanwhile, the state’s definitions of the young after the war increasingly identified age eighteen as the threshold differentiating legal minority and majority. The 1945 establishment of the new juvenile justice system and the *rééducation* program set eighteen as the age limit for juvenile offenders. The 1949 law on juvenile publications set eighteen as the age minimum to purchase “adult” periodicals. Like the new 1961 film regulations, the 1953 and 1959 ordinances for the protection of the young from the immoral influence of bars, dance-halls, casinos, and cabarets, which initially excluded all those under sixteen, raised the minimum age to eighteen as well. Thus, the protection of the young from the pernicious amusements of adult entertainment and recreation, as well as the age for criminal prosecution, defined the legal boundary between youth and adult as the age of eighteen. Ironically, voting was still denied to anyone under age twenty-one. Notably, this would be one complaint of young protesters in 1968. Depending on the context, then, “youth” was alternately defined as children, adolescents, or everyone under thirty. Though the term, category, or idea of youth was applied flexibly, it was always understood as a definitive contrast to “adult.”

The relativity and reflexivity of this relationship is important in understanding not only the meaning of youth in the context of the postwar era, but also what the meaning of youth says about the adult in postwar France, and what they both reveal about French society. Like gender, age categories

are predicated upon a relationship to one another. The social category of youth is established only by a comparative juxtaposition to the adult or the infantile. As a stage of life, it is relative, defined by what sets it off from other life stages, and this relativity is significant because it is only vis-à-vis the adult that youth became so meaningful in 1945. Likewise, most of what French society thought of the young and about the young, how society considered and interpreted the young, was shaped by adults. Journalists, politicians, bureaucrats, social scientists, educators, writers, community leaders, priests, judges, editors, businessmen, administrators, scholars, filmmakers, and, of course, historians, were adult. Undoubtedly there were exceptions, but the people participating most in the organization, production, and distribution of information and ideas or in the management of society were, as a rule, adult. Like most marginal groups, the young were more imagined than understood, more represented than self-actualized. Consequently, adult France's interpretations reflected their concerns with the activity, attitude, morality, and character of the young and with the culturally produced category of youth and, to their mind, the future of France.

This discourse of youth was riddled with paradox, however. There was a tension between the ideas of "good youth" and "bad youth," between youth as hope and youth as threat, inspiring either praise or fear. On one hand, postwar adult France worshipped its young, and on the other, it condemned them. Various programs and initiatives in France sought to protect the young from the influence of adults, while others sought to protect adults from the influence of the young. The postwar obsession with youth was as much about potential disaster as it was about a messianic future. Thus, youth as an idea was employed inconsistently and characterized by instability. Indeed, as I show, invoking youth as a concept worked as a handy justification for all kinds of purposes. Since the turn of the century, the young had been increasingly conceptualized as a social group capable of provoking society's degeneration or regeneration, and even as far back as the French Revolution, the idea of youth had carried great symbolic weight. Perhaps most notoriously, the Fascists of the interwar period and the Vichy collaborators had made significant uses of youth as a social group and symbolic concept, and it is striking that the category of youth emerged from the Second World War largely untainted by this association. Because the concept was utilized by nearly everyone, it belonged to no one.

Still, the advantage to mobilizing around the idea of youth was its sheer convenience. Everyone, from all social groups, geographic regions, political ideologies, or religious backgrounds, had youth in common. Everyone was once young, and most adults had a vested interest in young people—their own children, grandchildren, or others in the community who would eventually grow to responsible adulthood. Youth served as the lowest common denominator that crossed other social categories and invited speculation about the future, particularly in the wake of the war and the long-awaited baby boom. Moreover, the category of youth was capable of incorporating other issues such as class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, criminality, sexuality, or morality. With the destructive antagonism of recent class and nationalist struggles still so fresh, the concept of youth was an agreeable matrix through which adult France could deliberate on its past, present, and future.

That is not to say that the young did not participate in this process. On the contrary, part of this story is about how the young increasingly participated in public life. In these postwar years, young people became a commercial, cultural, political, and social force, a postwar phenomenon that exploded in the sixties and has remained viable ever since. Particularly in the realm of popular culture, young people became a presence both as producers and consumers influencing the style and content of literature, music, and film. Politically, some protested against France's war in Algeria and participated in the premierships of Pierre Mendès-France. Socially, others experienced a newfound sense of independence and worried many by their love of jazz, all-night parties, and the bohemian lifestyle of the young "existentialists" in Saint-Germain-des-Prés. This book, then, is also a history of how the role of young people and their visibility in French society changed between the end of the Second World War and the 1960s.

This is also not a history of youth subcultures in France, such as the *zazous*, *blouson noirs*, or *yéyé*.<sup>19</sup> Studies of the young in Europe since 1945 have tended to focus on the sociological development of subcultures where the cultural practices of the young are interpreted as a defiant subset of society at large.<sup>20</sup> These studies richly detail and interpret the practices, behaviors, and belief systems of specific groups of young people. Where these studies tend to focus by necessity on the micro, this book seeks to consider youth in a more pervasive, macro approach. Though there are profound thematic parallels, postwar youth culture in France was distinct from that in other

Western societies. For example, rock 'n' roll and television did not really infiltrate France until after 1960. There was no 1950s French equivalent to the English teddy boy or rocker, nor to the American teenager or greaser. Likewise, there was no English or American equivalent to Brigitte Bardot or Jean Genet. Yet some similarities are striking, such as the English Angry Young Men, the American Beats, and the French "existentialists," though notably in France the most famous of these young, disaffected intellectuals tended to be women. In many ways, this work shows that the mid-twentieth century was a transitional period for a conceptual crystallization of youth, from the nineteenth-century emphasis on an individual's life-stage between childhood and adult to the late-twentieth-century distinction of youth as a culturally produced mass social group operating prominently within society.

Young people, then, lived within this sociocultural category of youth. I hope to show how youth, for the young, was a social experience of a cultural construction. One did not necessarily need to be young, nor did one who was young necessarily experience "youth." That is, the concept of youth was often deployed and enacted quite independently of actual young people; though, of course, they themselves articulated, inhabited, and utilized the idea and identity of youth for their own purposes. Thus, throughout this book I have tried to differentiate for the reader the distinction between "youth" and "young people." The first term refers to the concept or construct of youth as a cultural category, and the second to the actual social participants or actors who were young. I have chosen this shorthand as an imperfect solution to this semantic problem. In some ways, this is articulated in French as the difference between the terms *la jeunesse* and *les jeunes*. One way to think about it is that the first term is singularly (*la*) conceptual, articulating both a mass social group and a discursive concept, while the second implies a collective plurality (*les*) of individuals. Thus, youth and those who are young are not necessarily the same, despite significant overlap.

Youth—as an idea, as a concept, as an age category, and as a social group participating in society—has a history larger than the experiences of individuals or groups of young people, or even of a generation, although those experiences each play an important part in defining youth as a cultural concept and social group. To find the meanings of youth in society one must go beyond the investigation of cultural practices or idiosyncratic behavior that often fails to consider young people within the context of historical specific-

ity. Although some of the conclusions of the social histories of Philippe Ariès and John Gillis have been successfully challenged, their assertion that the meaning of childhood and youth is historically determined remains certain.<sup>21</sup> The changing societal role played by the social group of youth from 1945 to 1960, then, is grounded within the historical situation of the postwar period, and is therefore not simply about the young, but about France as well.

Because the time frame for this work roughly corresponds to France's Fourth Republic (1945–58), it is also a history of how the Fourth Republic dealt with the war's legacy and prepared France to be a more modern nation. Recent scholarship has suggested that government policies directed toward the young were absent during the Fourth Republic or, at best, typified by a "benign neglect," and that young people generally were socially "invisible" in this period.<sup>22</sup> Yet, as this study shows, young people and the category of youth were essential to the conceptualization of France's postwar cultural reconstruction in formal, official ways as well as in a more ephemeral, cultural manner. Jean-Pierre Rioux, historian of the Fourth Republic, has pointed to this period as a moment when new "mythologies which promoted a social model of youthfulness now underpinned the efforts of the people to come to terms with modernity," while "signs of French society's infatuation with the young were everywhere."<sup>23</sup> This modernity had a specific context that structured itself around the idea of youth: new issues of collaboration/resistance, wars of decolonization, Cold War power struggles, an expanding welfare state, a technocratic economy, and mass pop-culture consumerism. Thus, another element of this study is a reevaluation of the much maligned and often ignored Fourth Republic, and an acknowledgment of the programs, trends, and policies that formed the framework for the significant role youth and the young played in the decade that followed, the 1960s.

The Fourth Republic has been studied much less than the regimes preceding and succeeding it. Yet because it sits at the crucial juncture in French history between Vichy and the Fifth Republic, reconsidering the Fourth Republic helps us to understand better the significant continuities and ruptures in this remarkable period of transition. Because of the Vichy programs and ideologies of the 1940s targeting the young, and the ubiquitous youth culture of the Fifth Republic in the 1960s, focusing on youth offers a unique opportunity to evaluate how the Fourth Republic bridges these two distinct eras. This moment has its own unfolding developments, yet with significant

historical continuities that reach back to the Third Republic and forward to 1968. Looking at youth offers a valuable means to study the relationship of the Fourth Republic to the larger history of France.

This book explores the Fourth Republic's shifting concept of youth, through the combination of government policy, popular culture, and social discourse, in two parts. Part I, *The Promise of Youth*, topically explores the reconstruction's frameworks of rejuvenation, modernization, and citizenship, while Part II, *The Problem of Youth*, examines delinquency, sexuality, and censorship. Thus, the book is organized thematically and topically across the period, rather than by a narrative chronology. It has elements of an intellectual history that traces the idea of youth and its use as a discursive category, a social history that follows the lives of young people and their role in postwar French society, a cultural history of France's rejuvenation and reconstruction following the Second World War, and a political history of the programs and policies of the Fourth Republic welfare state.

The end of the war's tumult and the beginning of new political and social structures in France repositioned young people as a mass social group and reoriented their rank and place in French society. Set within the wake of the war and the Fourth Republic's efforts of reconstruction, this case study of popular conceptions of youth in tandem with government initiatives reveals how social and political institutions interacted with the production of social groups to redefine national identity in times of crisis. This history reveals youth, both as a concept and as a social group, to be a primary mechanism in France's postwar rejuvenation and its cultural reconstruction because the young, through their buoyant energy and dynamism, symbolically pointed the way to the future.

Although many of my conclusions arise out of the particularities of France, the West more generally was dealing with similar trends and issues: the meaning of democracy and government in the wake of Fascism, the role of the state in the welfare of its citizens, the material reconstruction and modernization of infrastructures, the extension of compulsory education, the expanding influence of the young in the marketplace as consumers and producers, a booming popular culture dominated by the young, the moral panic of juvenile delinquency, the worry over young libertines, the gap of understanding between generations, and the political and social mobilization of young people. Because the young have become such a visible

and viable presence, and because the adult preoccupation with the social group of youth has permeated society and politics since 1945, this analysis of the meaning of age is vital to understanding the postwar period in the West more broadly. Using France as a specific case study, this work should resonate with anyone interested in understanding the developing role and meaning of youth in the postwar West.