H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Richard Ivan Jobs. *Riding the New Wave: Youth and the Rejuvenation of France after the Second World War.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. 364 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-5452-1.

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Published on H-Childhood (December, 2008)
Commissioned by Patrick J. Ryan

French Youth

In the wake of the Second World War, after the Allies defeated the Nazis, it seemed that everything started anew in France. In 1947 fashion designer Christian Dior designed the "New Look," which emphasized the "feminine" silhouette; cooks launched the *nouvelle cuisine*, a new cooking style characterized by its purity and its simplicity; in the 1950s the "New Wave" became the trademark of movies filmed by young directors such as François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard; writers Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute, and Claude Simon invented the *nouveau roman* (New Novel), a technique capable of breaking the traditional narrative. Who could ride this new wave, as Richard Jobs puts it in the title of his book, more than the youth? Who could epitomize this cultural blooming more than the baby-boomers? The "newness of youth" (p. 28), which embraced change and progress as well as innovation and originality, is one of the main features of postwar French culture. Some institutions managed to embody this spirit: the *maisons des jeunes et de la culture* (cultural leisure centers and youth clubs), the first one being founded in Lyons in October 1944, as the Allies were liberating France; the *auberges de jeunesse* (somewhat like YMCAs), or the newsmagazine *L'Express*, founded in 1953 by two young editors, Françoise Giroud and Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber.

Richard Jobs shows how the concept of "new wave," full of dynamism, energy, and buoyant enthusiasm, became a prominent topic in the public discourse of the 1950s and 1960s. Young people and the very idea of youth were objects of debates, public policies, and expectations from the whole society. Yet the concept is anything but static: in its two parts, the book underlines the contrast between the "promise of youth" (through the trend of reconstruction and modernization under the Fourth Republic) and the "problem of youth" (delinquency and early sexuality being a deviant way to live one's youth). Then, the thematic organization of the book brings out the plurality of the notion, giving way to a fascinating portrait gallery.

The *jeune cadre*, manager and yuppie at the same time, alumnus of the École nationale d'administration founded in 1945, and his feminine counterpart, the fairy homemaker (*la fée du logis*), entered the spirit of things to modernize France, "to overcome the conflict of labor and industry, the rivalry of social classes, and the material rift of urban and rural life" (p. 89). If the youth were able to overcome the moral crisis, they could also bother and frighten. The necessity of redemption targeted juvenile offenders and wayward youngsters, from the *gang des J3* operating in southern France (J3 refers to an age category in the rationing system introduced during the war) to the characters of the movie *The Cheaters* (1958), by Marcel Carné, which depicts four youngsters committed to sex, parties, boredom, and nihilism. Reforming delinquent youth was a way to participate in the collective task of reconstruction and moral reform, a means to wipe out the murky past of collaboration: "If a delinquent could be reformed, then perhaps so could France" (p. 183). The fortune of Brigitte Bardot, the movie star who "was worth more to France as an export commodity than all the country's Renault automobiles combined" (p. 197), and of Tarzan, the jungle hero accused of hypnotizing and dulling the minds of young readers, showed that youth was at the same time a source of power, a tool of renewal, and a threat–like a rejuvenating cream whose use could be harmful.

Riding the New Wave does not provide a history of the postwar generation (the baby-boomers) or an interpretation of youth subcultures (for example that of the *blousons noirs,* the young louts in black leather jackets). A history of the category of youth in postwar France, the book studies how the role of young people drastically changed between 1945 and the uprising of May 1968,

"how the concept of youth operated as a mechanism of cultural reconstruction" after occupation and collaboration (p. 3). In this context, youth acted as a pivotal point around which France rebuilt itself. After the elation of the Liberation, reconstruction was more than repairing buildings, bridges, and factories. It did not only consist in rebuilding economy and redesigning the constitution. After the ordeals and the unworthy behaviors, France also had to rejuvenate itself: youth was a central feature in France's recovery–an asset to heal the wounds of the past and to embrace the future.

Richard Jobs is not the first historian to express preoccupation with French youth in the twentieth century,[1] and, before him, Kristin Ross showed how productivism, material prosperity, and consumerism swiftly transformed post-colonial France in the 1950s and the 1960s.[2] The originality of *Riding the New Wave* lies in its use of age as a category of analysis comparable to race, class, or gender. The author examines the birth of young people in postwar France, just as Jean-Pierre Gutton studied "the birth of the old men" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[3] After the Second World War, a broad array of voices, ranging from novelists and scholars to journalists and politicians, took benefit of "the ambiguous value of youth" (p. 51) to construct a performative discourse of revitalization, a powerful rhetoric of rejuvenation which expressed the hopes of French people while masking the complexities of the Liberation. Of course, this story is not over, and this is why *Riding the New Wav*e is a topical survey, which helps us to understand the promise of youth (and the disparaging of the old, if not the elderly) in today's world. As French sociologist Henri Mendras wrote two decades ago, "the rejuvenation that followed the baby-boom enhanced the value of youth, so that adults would like to be young longer."[4]

Jobs's analysis is rooted in the context of postwar France. This is a fair choice, and nobody can blame him for having set the focal length this way, since he makes clear that the dialectic between generation and regeneration goes back to the French Revolution: the revolutionaries attempted to erase the old while promoting juvenile figures such as Joseph Bara, Joseph Agricol Viala, Louis Antoine Léon de Saint-Just, and Napoleon Bonaparte.[5] As note 39 in chapter 1 states, "the Fascists managed to use youth very effectively, as both a metaphor and a tool" (p. 290). We can take for granted that the use of youth as an social institution is as ancient as the *paideia* in classical Greece. Nonetheless, Jobs establishes an organic link between the shame of the 1940 collapse, the hopes of the Liberation, the need for collective rehabilitation after the war and the redeeming value of youth, as if a new France had to arise on the ruins of the old one. Indeed, the book traces "the political, social, and cultural emergence of the category of youth" under the Fourth Republic (p. 3). But one can argue also that youth was an organizing principle for the new society which the Vichy regime intended to create in the 1940s. We see this in 1940 when Phillipe Pétain (though aged 84) expressed his will to rejuvenate the country through a "National Revolution." His policy was constructed though the categories of age, and institutions such as the *chantiers de jeunesse* or even the militia showed that France had not been totally given over to an "Old Guard" of old-fashioned graybeards.[6] There is more: many French writers and intellectuals admired Nazism precisely because it seemed to them that it would enable the rejuvenation of worn-out democracies. Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, who converted to fascism in 1934, worshiped the Nazi shock troops marching through the streets of Nuremberg because of their supposed vitality and youthful vigor.

After the war, this cultural and political sensibility did not come to an end. In 1947, writer Jean Genet composed for the French radio a text entitled *L'Enfant criminel* (The criminal child) in order to denounce the ongoing improvements to the juvenile justice system. According to Jobs, Genet adopted "the ridiculous position of advocating for the cruel abuse of juveniles" (p. 154). But Genet, who had extolled the beauty of young Nazis in his novels published during the 1940s, was still intoxicated by this sexual commitment, and *L'Enfant criminel* can be read as a neo-fascist manifesto, based on the heroism of young men who are not afraid "to live dangerously."[7] In the twentieth century, France (and many other countries in Europe) devised several ways of praising and using their youth. Even after the war, the democratic rejuvenation and the fascist rejuvenation coexisted. Perhaps, youth is a generic category which has to be filled with specific values.

Based on a variety of archival and printed sources, *Riding the New Wave* is an original book, giving interesting perspectives on postwar France. More generally, it constitutes a link in the chain of the history of the so-called French model of integration. Rather than punish the juvenile offenders, the ordinance of 1945 sought to convert them from social outcasts to productive, law-abiding citizens. Reeducation consisted not only in bettering the individual, but in contributing to a new France, "normalizing and homogenizing the anomalous adult while he or she was still impressionably young" (p. 182). Reform of juvenile justice, *mendésisme* (the political trend created by reformist Pierre Mendès-France), net-

works of *maisons des jeunes* and *auberges de jeunesse*, and the army in Algeria, could be used to mold the young into an idealized citizenry made up of healthy and educated youth that would take part in the life of the nation–even if voting age remained set at twenty-one until the mid 1970s.

Notes

[1]. See for example S. Fishman, *The Battle for Children: World War II, Youth Crime, and Juvenile Justice in Twentieth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); and L. Bantigny, *Le Plus Bel Âge ? Jeunes et jeunesse en Francede l'aube des "Trente Glorieuses" à la guerre d'Algérie* [The most beautiful age?-Youngsters and youth from the liberation to the Algerian war] (Paris: Fayard, 2007).

[2]. K. Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies. Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture (*Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995).

[3]. J.-P. Gutton, *Naissance du vieillard. Essai sur l'histoire des rapports entre les vieillards et la société en France* [The birth of the old man. Essay on the history of the relationship between old men and society in France](Paris, Aubier, 1988).

[4]. H. Mendras, *La Seconde Révolutionfrançaise, 1965-1984* [The second French revolution, 1965-1984] (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 206.

[5]. See for example M. Ozouf, "Regeneration," in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, ed. F. Furet and M. Ozouf (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989).

[6]. R. O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944 (*New York: Columbia University Press, 1972).

[7]. See I. Jablonka, *Les Vérités inavouables de Jean Genet* [The unavowable truths of Jean Genet] (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

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Citation: Ivan Jablonka. Review of Jobs, Richard Ivan, *Riding the New Wave: Youth and the Rejuvenation of France after the Second World War*. H-Childhood, H-Net Reviews. December, 2008.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=22821

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