“Ready to Fight”: Veterans of the Algerian War
Take the Battle to France, 1958-1974

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In 1958, four years into what would become known as the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), the faltering French Fourth Republic called for General Charles De Gaulle to return to power, sharing the widespread conviction that he would “fix” the Algerian situation. But De Gaulle’s Algerian politics evolved toward withdrawal, and by 1962, French society and the state were eager to move on. Yet even as the Fifth Republic cultivated the forgetting of the war, young veterans back from Algeria carried on fighting, and forged a political role for themselves in the Gaullist era.

During the war itself, French veterans formed associations to harness the vitality of the generation serving in North Africa and give meaning to its

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2Gaullist memorial policies tended to favor “abstract and elitist” commemorations rather than supporting “the cult of veteranism as a social movement,” a precedent established by World War I veterans in France. Pieter Lagrou, Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965 (Cambridge UP, 1999), 38.
sacrifices. The months surrounding De Gaulle’s return to power saw the creation of the pro-war Union nationale des combattants d’Afrique du Nord (National Union of Soldiers of North Africa, hereafter UNCAFN) and the antiwar Fédération nationale des anciens combattants d’Algérie (National Federation of Veterans of Algeria, FNACAJ. In 1961 the Union démocratique des anciens d’Algérie (Democratic Union of Veterans of Algeria, UDAA) emerged, presenting itself as a third way between the “Communist dominated” FNACA and the “fascist” UNCAFN. The FNACA and the UNCAFN have continued in varying forms to the present day, but the UDAA vanished by 1964.

While scholars have produced a vast literature on the Algerian War and its memory, research on the postwar lives and engagements of French veterans of the Algerian War remains “practically nonexistent.” The French state did not

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3The UNCAFN was founded in December 1957, combining attempts by the Defense Ministry and nationalist veterans’ associations to create a group to promote the effort in French Algeria. “Regroupement des associations,” François Porteu de la Morandière Papers, Union nationale des combattants (UNC) headquarters, Paris, “Divers” folder, undated communiqué draft; Gérard Le Marec, “Plus d’équivoque: UNC-AFN,” La Voix du Combattant 1234 (5 February 1958): 1, UNC headquarters, Paris; “Une Union nationale des combattants d’Afrique du Nord,” Le Monde (14 December 1957): 6. The FNACA was founded in September 1958, federating three small anti-war associations. “La FNAA: «non» à la politique du gouvernement et des autorités militaires en Algérie,” Le Monde (23 September 1958), 3. Originally called the FNAA (Fédération nationale des anciens d’Algérie, National Federation of Those Who Have Experienced Algeria), the group took the name FNACA in 1963, to highlight its demand for veterans’ status, and to distinguish its members from repatriated French colonists, who also referred to themselves as “anciens d’Algérie” L’Ancien d’Algérie 17 (April 1963): 8. In print at the FNACA headquarters, Paris, and online: http://fnaca.org/le-journal-de-la-fnaca/archives-du-journal. For clarity’s sake, the association will be referred to simple as the FNACA, its name during the majority of the chronology examined here.


5The FNACA exists independently today, while the UNCAFN officially merged with the Union nationale des combattants (National Soldiers’ Union, UNC) in 1985, before then existing independently but in close alliance, often with overlapping leadership. “Historique,” La Voix du Combattant 1345 sup. (1988): 5.

officially recognize combatants of this war as veterans until 1974, following years of militancy by veterans’ associations. My research, through an examination of the postwar experiences of soldiers, demonstrates that years before the Fifth Republic deigned to recognize them as such, veterans of Algeria were actively politically engaged as veterans, both to promote their group interests, and to reshape French society based on lessons they brought from the war.

Through this approach, this article contributes to two major discussions in contemporary French history: the fractured memory of the Algerian War, and the role of veterans in modern society. Benjamin Stora argues that no collective memory of the war was possible in France, in part because President Charles De Gaulle diverted the Fifth Republic’s gaze, refusing to acknowledge the Algerian War through words, laws, or commemoration. This article examines how veterans’ associations in the Gaullist period cultivated narratives of the war that would resurface in later decades, when the taboos surrounding the war remained, but Gaullist memorial politics no longer existed. As for the role of veterans in twentieth century French society, my research finds that it took longer for veterans of Algeria to gain political influence than for previous generations of

du contingent (Paris: Autrement, 2000). Claire Mauss-Copeaux used oral history to uncover how local culture influenced veterans’ war memories, in Appelés en Algérie: la parole confisquée (Paris: Hachette, 1998). Andrea Brazzoduro’s work, Soldati senza causa: memorie della guerra d’Algeria (Gius: Editori Laterza, 2012), cautions against exaggerating the degree of French “amnesia” of the Algerian War, and seeks instead to analyze the cacophony of competing memories (29). This book traces veterans’ memory through debates between the UNCAF and the FNACA over portrayals of the war in commemoration, literature, and film. Aside from relying on different kinds of sources for these associations, our contributions differ in that Brazzoduro’s work analyzes the rhetoric of the associations and frames veterans’ memory within postcolonial French society, whereas I study veterans’ memory and their associations to understand the impact of veterans’ politics in France during and after the war.

I examine the campaign for veteran status in my article “Monsieur le Ministre, we’re waiting for our veterans’ card”: the struggle for recognition of French combatants of the Algerian War, 1956-1974,” Perspectives on Europe 42(2) (Fall 2012): 117-121.

My dissertation, “Home from the Djebel: Veterans of the Algerian War in French Society, 1956-1974,” examines the postwar experiences of French soldiers who fought in Algeria: their social integration, the development of their memory and identity, and their political activism. I would like to thank the Council for European Studies for the Pre-Dissertation Research Fellowship in 2012, and the Fulbright Foundation for the U.S. Student Fellowship in 2013, both of which allowed me to complete my research.

veterans, because there was no initial consensus on their moral authority, as combatants of a deeply divisive war.\textsuperscript{10}

Associations representing veterans of Algeria often insisted they were ‘apolitical,’ yet all those examined in this article made significant political claims, the first of which was to elevate veterans as witnesses bearing crucial perspectives for the nation. Veterans of Algeria, who did not automatically receive the same moral authority granted to veterans of earlier wars, faced an uphill battle to position themselves as worthy political actors. In this article, I examine why only the associations with the most polarized politics could thrive after the war. Evaluating the lasting political impact of this veterans’ movement, I argue that despite Gaullist efforts to repress the memory of the war and constrain political participation, veterans’ associations cultivated narratives of the war already formed by 1958, forging space for political engagement by young French citizens deeply marked by their Algerian experience.

\textbf{An invisible generation}

Service in the Algerian War affected almost an entire generation of Frenchmen. From 1956 onward, all men born between 1932 and 1945 faced being drafted, producing a coherent generational experience, despite differences in

\textsuperscript{10}Antoine Prost, himself a veteran of Algeria, began the conversation on the role of veterans in contemporary French society, arguing that the World War I veterans’ movement was the moral bulwark of democracy in the Third Republic. \textit{Les anciens combattants et la société française: 1914-1939} (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1977), 3 vols. Chris Millington challenges Prost’s long-dominant thesis with \textit{From Victory to Vichy: Veterans in Inter-war France} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), which depicts the World War I veterans’ movement as a crucible for political ideas that permeated broader society because of the moral authority conferred to veterans. Millington argues that the movement’s political actions and gradual discursive shift to the right helped erode “the perceived legitimacy” of the Third Republic, and facilitated public acceptance of the Vichy regime (18). The literature on the role of World War II veterans in French society necessarily paints a more complex picture, because of the competing claims of deportees, Resistance members, combat veterans, and victims of persecution. Olivier Wieviorka argues that the state’s politicization of these various identities “tended […] to amplify the balkanization” of France’s memory of World War II, \textit{Divided Memory: French Recollection of World War II from the Liberation to the Present}, trans. George Holoch (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 6, 7. Pieter Lagrou emphasizes a central paradox of the French experience: the dominant figures in French society after the war were former Resistance members and those deported to concentration camps, rather than the combat veterans of 1940 or 1944-45, \textit{Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945-1965} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3.
location, time, and branch of service. This was the last time France deployed conscripts into war in the twentieth century: over one million young Frenchmen were drafted between 1956 and 1962, combining with enlisted soldiers to make a total of two million troops in North Africa. A quarter of all families in mainland France had a son "down there.”

Yet these soldiers formed an invisible generation for several reasons. First, the war itself existed in an uncertain space: over one million French citizens lived in Algeria, which was administratively divided into French departments, and the French state considered the conflict a "rebellion" rather than a "war." Second, many veterans of the World Wars—who held great moral and often, political authority—did not regard the "kids" of Algeria as "real veterans," because they served in unconventional warfare and police operations against "rebels," rather than fighting an existential threat, like a German invasion. Third, metropolitan French society, seeking tranquility after World War II and wary of colonial conflicts after the loss of Indochina in 1954, was ambivalent toward the war and its veterans, moving from indifference to outright disdain.

Most significantly, however, the state’s self-conception was at stake—not least because it had violated its own laws in “implicitly” authorizing torture. Both the "conception and the conduct of the war were incompatible with the laws of the Republic.” It was politically expedient for President De Gaulle to portray French Algeria as having been “an unfortunate colonial detour,” and

12In 1986, the Ministry of Defense numbered just over 1.1 million conscripts deployed in Algeria between 1952 and 1962, with just over 120,000 each being sent to Tunisia and Morocco. However, veterans’ associations still dispute these figures, claiming 2.5 million conscripts or more. Benjamin Stora, Appelés en guerre d’Algérie (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 12.
14Michel Sabourdy, Editor-in-Chief of the FNACA’s newspaper since 1970, interview with the author, FNACA headquarters, Paris, 11 May 2014; Branche, “La dernière génération du feu?”, 6. Indeed, associations of the celebrated veterans of World War I had often “hesitated to open their ranks to the new generation, for fear of devaluing their own criteria,” a generational conflict that reproduced itself in the reluctance many World War II veterans felt acknowledging veterans of Algeria. Lagrou, 42.
15Stora, Appelés en guerre d’Algérie, 13.
independence a foregone conclusion, although he had returned to power backed by officers and activists who believed he would “save” French Algeria. For all these reasons, Gaullist ministers forcefully rejected the notion that Algeria was in a state of war, and thus that the young Frenchmen sent there for military service were veterans.

**Establishing moral authority**

Against this backdrop of ambivalence and silence, veterans’ associations framed their missions in competing moral imperatives. The UNCAFN emerged in 1957 to defend the dignity of the Army and its cause. Co-founder François Porteu de la Morandière explains that he and his colleagues were “ready to fight, to defend French Algeria, to defend the memory of our dead comrades.” The UNCAFN’s founding goal of “continuing combat for the Franco-Muslim community” meant that its solidarity with the Army and French Algeria would last “to the end.” But the FNACA, consciously “confronting the UNCAFN,” opposed the war on moral grounds.

At its first Congress, led by founding President Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, the FNACA declared that the war “strongly prejudices the prestige of France,” and it urged “peace in Algeria” in order to “save the traditions of France and its army.” The lines in the sand were already drawn in 1958; these associations would never significantly deviate from their mutually exclusive moral visions of the war.

The UDAA, formed in 1961 by former FNACA members displeased with this association’s cooperation with Communists, likewise considered it a moral duty to end the war. However, this group also warned against the manipulation of veterans by either the UNCAFN, which it claimed had tacitly sided with the generals’ putsch in April, or the FNACA, which ostensibly collaborated with the French Communist Party. The leaders of the UDAA hoped to group all

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23 It was a major quandary for the antiwar, non-Communist left in France to decide whether or not to actively cooperate with Communists who were fighting to end the war. Catherine Brun and Olivier Penol-Lacassagne, *Engagements et déchirements: les intellectuels et la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), 17.
24 Somewhat like the story of the blind men touching the elephant, the associations projected their worst fears onto the putsch. The UNCAFN saw in it the peril of a
“unengaged” veterans into a “union of democrats,” to face the double peril of fascism and communism. Numerically, the UNCAFN posed the greatest threat; by 1961 it claimed around 200,000 members. The FNACA struggled to recruit until the early 1970s; even in 1967, it had no more than 20,000 members. Fighting perceived ideological threats on the right and the left, the UDAA expanded rapidly, opening committees in forty-one departments in France by spring 1962.

Confronting societal indifference and governmental neglect, these associations appropriated the “veteran mystique” established by World War I veterans to position veterans as political witnesses with moral authority. Initially optimistic, the UNCAFN’s appeals grew increasingly strident as it became apparent that Metropolitan society did not care to keep Algeria French. In a 1961 editorial, the President implored nationalist veterans to speak up in defense of French Algeria: “the future of the Country depends on your bearing witness.”

But the group’s rhetoric became bitter and confrontational when it became clear that De Gaulle would “abandon” French Algeria. A few months later, the President’s pleas turned to threats: “Wait another couple of years and you will see communist coup, while the FNACA and the UDAA labeled it a fascist coup. François Porteu de la Morandière, “La bonne voie et l’ordre,” Djebel 19 (May 1961): 4; “Communiqué de presse,” L’Ancien d’Algérie 6 (May 1961): 7; “Démocratie et formation civique,” La Tribune des Anciens d’Algérie 1 special (February 1962): 2, BNF, FOL-JO-12655.

As for the FNACA’s alleged communist ties: one of the founders of the UDAA, who left the FNACA after three years, reported that the FNACA “fights side by side with Communists and non-Communists on the basis of a contract of non-communist majority in the Executive Committee of the organization,” and specifies that when he warns of “Communist domination,” he refers to a potential, not current, state of affairs. “L’UDAA a été présentée à la presse le 18 décembre 1961,” La Tribune des Anciens d’Algérie, 1 special (February 1962), 1.

28“L’UDAA grandit vite!”, La Tribune des anciens d’Algérie 2 (May 1962): 1. I have not been able to determine the number of members of this association, as I only found two internal documents, and neither the press nor the police reported on membership numbers for the UDAA, as they did for the other two associations. What is important, as we will see, is that the UDAA promoted a veterans’ politics that distinguished itself aggressively from those of the UNCAFN and the FNACA, but that this vision did not persist long after the war’s end.
29Millington, From Victory to Vichy, 3.
the Generation of the Djebels rise up. But, make no mistake, we will be merciless.”

The UNCAFN portrayed the generation of veterans as true believers in French Algeria who had been betrayed by the government, and who thus had earned a corrective role in politics.

The rhetoric of the FNACA also depicted veterans as a generation of wronged citizens, but the wrong was having been drafted to fight in an unjust conflict. The association urged veterans to turn the tide of public opinion, noting that since the Algerian War “too often marks the soldier because it implies contempt for human life and racism,” veterans should “join with all those who act for Peace, and bring them the contribution of those who lived the war.” Accordingly, as mainland France came to oppose the war, the FNACA’s rhetoric became more confident. In 1961, the association insisted that the generation “marked” by the war had “the right and the duty to make its voice heard, to play a role in the future of the country.”

The UDAA sought “identical goals [to those of the FNACA] such as a negotiated peace in Algeria” and “the defense of rights.” The UDAA also emphasized the value of veterans’ testimony, insisting that “all those who served [...] have the duty to bear witness.” However, its political program was significantly more ambitious, proposing that “an action of education and civic formation must be undertaken for the veterans of Algeria [and] those who are leaving for military service, along with youth movements, students, and conscripts.” On top of this, the association sought a comprehensive restructuring of the armed forces, the transformation of national military service into a civic corps and perhaps its eventual abrogation, and Franco-Algerian technical cooperation. Born in a moment when France seemed on the edge of civil war—generals had launched a coup in Algiers and the Organisation armée secrète (OAS) militia sought to hold onto French Algeria with the power of plastique in Algeria and the Metropole—the UDAA felt empowered to propose a radically different France, and believed that this vision would be appealing in the midst of chaos.

34“L’UDAA a été présentée à la presse le 18 décembre 1961,” 2.
36Union Démocratique des Anciens d’Algérie: Programme,” UDAA pamphlet, 1961, 1. BDIC, 4 delta 0880.
Once the war ended in March 1962, the associations moved beyond their initial goals, but all presented the generation of veterans as victims of betrayal or neglect. The FNACA launched vigorous mass campaigns for “rights and recognition,” arguing that the state owed veterans’ status and material benefits to young citizens sent to fight a war against their will.\(^{38}\) The FNACA often used pathos to convey this injustice. For instance, a special series in its newspaper, entitled “The Great Misery of Demobilized Veterans,” presented first-person testimonials illustrating how “the state, after having used us for many months, refuses to recognize the extent of harm caused by the Algerian War.”\(^{39}\)

Moving beyond its program for civic formation, after the war the UDAA held that “the problems posed by the reintegration of conscripts dominate all others.”\(^{40}\) In spring 1962, the association created a special bureau to help mediate between the Ministry of Labor and unemployed veterans, who were often “shuttled between one office and another” when they came seeking help with professional reinsertion.\(^{41}\) The UDAA also published a book in 1964 portraying conscripts as victims of an indifferent Metropole.\(^{42}\) This book argued that veterans were robbed of their youth for the preservation of a colonial order in which they had no stake, and now faced reintegration into a society where “their fellow citizens ignore them” and a modernizing economy where “every undereducated man will be out of work.”\(^{43}\)

After the loss of French Algeria, its raison d’être, the UNCAFN turned primarily to commemorations, inviting other nationalist associations and patriotic figures, such as the wife of Marshall Alphonse Juin, to its remembrance masses.\(^{44}\) The association relied on such connections to elevate veterans of Algeria as a civic elite who deserved to speak on national matters. As one member explained in the association’s newspaper, France’s future “obviously” depended on those “who passed through the crucible of Algeria [...],” who now must “impose [...] their way of seeing things [...]”\(^{45}\) As these associations redirected

\(^{38}\) Sabourdy, interview.


\(^{43}\) Ibid., 140, 143.


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their efforts at war’s end, they maintained their founding narratives of the war, while insisting that society owed respect and aid to citizen-veterans, because of what had been done to them.

**From moral authority to political engagement**

In qualifying veterans as political witnesses, these associations followed a precedent established by veterans of the Great War, many of whom had used their moral stature to castigate the parliamentary politics of the Third Republic.\(^4^6\) The French Army was highly politicized through the Algerian period, and remained so until De Gaulle purged it in the mid-1960s.\(^4^7\) Conservative officers and career military dominated the UNCAFN, which was founded by nationalists.\(^4^8\) But the leadership and often members of the FNACA were quite politicized as well in this period, as leftist veterans of various stripes self-selected into an antiwar and anticolonial association. Thus, it was not unusual in itself that associations for veterans of Algeria should engage in political matters; more noteworthy is how they navigated a highly forbidding context to do so.

For several decades, veterans’ politics in France had required delicate navigation. With the February 1934 antiparliamentary riots still in living memory, veterans’ groups were wary of seeming too closely involved in politics.\(^4^9\) On top of that, in August 1940, Marshall Philippe Pétain had dissolved all state-recognized veterans’ associations and ordered their incorporation into a *Légion française des combattants* (French Legion of Soldiers).\(^5^0\) In retribution for this collaboration, Charles De Gaulle had “personally opposed” the creation of a Veterans’ Ministry in 1946, and generally distrusted veterans’ associations and their demanding attitudes.\(^5^1\) The most immediate obstacle to the Algerian War veterans’ movement, however, was the constitution of the Fifth Republic itself, which placed executive power with the President rather than the legislature.\(^5^2\)

This constellation of power deprived Algerian War veterans of natural allies in government. During the war, President De Gaulle sought approval of his decisions by referendum, and afterward instituted universal suffrage for the presidency.\(^5^3\) In creating this “dialogue” between himself and the French people,

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\(^4^6\)Millington, *From Victory to Vichy*, 12.


\(^4^9\)Porteu de la Morandière, interview.

\(^5^0\)Millington, *From Victory to Vichy*, 216.

\(^5^1\)Lagrou, *Legacy of Nazi Occupation*, 182.


\(^5^3\)Ibid., 260.
De Gaulle diminished the power of traditional intermediaries and especially elected deputies. The government could veto deputies’ proposals for the order of the day in the National Assembly. This new dynamic located the source of political change in De Gaulle and his ministers, who were not keen to listen to the appeals of young soldiers who fought a war they would rather forget.

These considerations compelled the right-wing and left-wing associations to deny the political nature of their activities. “Apolitical by statute,” but “national in its form, spirit and action,” the UNCAFN reserved the right “to take an interest in state affairs [...]” as it frequently would. Similarly, the FNACA emphasized that its statutes “affirmed its independence from civil and military authorities and all political parties,” but asserted it could not be neutral, since that precluded defending veterans’ rights. But the UDAA, emerging as the generals’ putsch and the rise of the OAS “transform[ed]” the war “into a subject of interior French politics,” did not face the same pressures. The association was unabashedly political. As one of its members noted, in such divisive times, “being apolitical does not mean anything. What must be avoided is being ‘partisan.’”

**The disappearing center**

In 1964, *Le Monde* listed the UNCAFN, the FNACA, and the UDAA as “the three associations of veterans of Algeria,” but this seems to have been the last year of the UDAA’s formal existence. The UDAA had neither a discrete mobilizing ideology, like the UNCAFN’s pro-French Algeria nationalism, nor a concise, easily explained campaign for concrete results, like the FNACA’s fight for veterans’ status. Presenting itself as a bulwark of democracy during chaos, the UDAA was intended to be “transitory”—it sought to “give youth the taste for social and political engagement,” and would disband “once the war is over, once democracy is reconstructed.” Yet its goals, including restructuring both the armed forces and national military service, certainly aimed far beyond the end of the war, to a fundamental transformation of civil and military relations in France.

The UDAA’s major existential challenge was that it proposed a political vision of veterans to a rapidly vanishing audience. This association joined a wave of political and civic movements emerging around 1958 amid much optimism in

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58 “Union Démocratique des Anciens d’Algérie, Programme,” 1.
61 “L’UDAA a été présenté à la presse le 18 décembre 1961,” 2.
renewing national life. But its idealistic politics courted a democratic center that no longer existed after eight years of an extremely polarizing war, when politicized veterans had already chosen their sides. All three associations proposed a veterans’ politics, and the UDAA’s was the most ambitious, but only the FNACA’s and the UNCAFN’s politics could find an audience and ensure the survival of these associations. This polarization of the Algerian War veterans’ movement allowed the rhetorical space for veterans to transmit only two, mutually exclusive narratives of the war in society: the antiwar, anticolonial view of the FNACA, or the nationalist, colonial nostalgic view of the UNCAFN.

Veterans of this generation frequently distrusted party politics, and “invested themselves little in the state [...].” But when members of the “Algerian generation” did stand for office, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, the associations representing them had been disseminating a specific memory of the Algerian War for decades. The extreme right wing National Front party, founded in 1972 by former paratrooper Jean-Marie Le Pen and former OAS members, found a particularly receptive audience among nationalist veterans of Algeria who shared the aggrieved memory of betrayal cultivated by the UNCAFN. The UNCAFN President François Porteu de la Morandiére quit his post in 1985 to stand as a National Front candidate, being elected to represent the Pas-de-Calais. The Front co-opted the right’s bitter memory of French Algeria and nationalist veterans’ sense that their Algerian experience had given them the political insight necessary to save a dangerously misguided country. The party claimed a direct filiation with the OAS and offered veterans the chance to continue their combat in a mass political movement.

As for the FNACA, it transmitted an anticolonial narrative of the war that held particular resonance because of its source. Yet because this group counted among the “victors” of the Algerian War, supporting decolonization from the beginning, it did not have to rigorously defend its politics. Instead, the FNACA turned its energies toward lengthy mass campaigns for veterans’ status, eventually gained in late 1974, under the first post-Gaullist government of Valéry Giscard d’Estaing. In the 1980s the association cultivated a reconciliatory view of veterans, reframing the experiences of conscripts as a “permanent warning to

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62Stora, La gangrène et l’oubli, 224.
65Stora, Le transfert d’une mémoire, 56.
future generations,” and creating a committee to study how the Algerian War was being taught in schools.

While French society and the state sought to forget Algeria, these veterans’ associations kept alive specific narratives of the war that later re-emerged to fuel political rhetoric in the post-Gaullist period. And in elevating veterans as political witnesses and actors working toward commemoration and recognition, these associations introduced many members of the Algerian generation to politics, during a period that was particularly challenging for civil society groups. Gaullist memorial politics, as well as the nature of political power in the early Fifth Republic, obliged the UNCAFN and the FNACA to deny the political nature of their organizations in order to establish a foothold in politics for veterans. Yet eight years of a divisive and traumatic conflict had rendered impossible the democratic, reconciliatory center sought by the UDAA, and thus only the anticolonialist and nationalist extremes of the veterans’ movement survived, contributing to the polarization of France’s collective memory of the war.

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