

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and  
Chapters

University of Nebraska Press

---

2015

# Regeneration through Empire

Margaret Cook Andersen

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples>

---

Andersen, Margaret Cook, "Regeneration through Empire" (2015). *University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters*. 278.  
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/unpresssamples/278>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Nebraska Press at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Nebraska Press -- Sample Books and Chapters by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

# REGENERATION THROUGH EMPIRE

[Buy the Book](#)

**France Overseas: Studies in Empire and Decolonization**  
Series editors: A. J. B. Johnston, James D. Le Sueur, and Tyler Stovall

[Buy the Book](#)

# REGENERATION THROUGH EMPIRE

*French Pronatalists and  
Colonial Settlement in  
the Third Republic*

MARGARET COOK ANDERSEN

*University of Nebraska Press  
Lincoln & London*

[Buy the Book](#)

© 2015 by the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska

A version of chapter 3 was originally published as “Creating French Settlements Overseas: Colonial Medicine and Familial Reform in Madagascar,” by Margaret Cook Andersen, in *French Historical Studies* 33, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 417–44. A version of chapter 4 was originally published as “French Settlers, Familial Suffrage, and Citizenship in 1920s Tunisia,” by Margaret Cook Andersen, in *Journal of Family History* 37, no. 2 (April 2012): 213–31.

All rights reserved

Manufactured in the United States of America



Library of Congress Control Number: 2014952326

Set in Minion Pro by Renni Johnson.

[Buy the Book](#)

*To Brett, Katie, and Lexie*



## CONTENTS

List of Illustrations viii

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 1

1. France's "Supreme Chance": Migration and Pronatalist  
Visions of Empire 25
2. Recruiting Colonial Settlers: The Union Coloniale  
Française and the *Non-Classées* 61
3. Creating a "Labor Reservoir": Pronatalism, Medicine,  
and Motherhood in Madagascar 110
4. Voting for the Family: The Fight for Familial Suffrage  
in France and North Africa 159
5. A Colonial Fountain of Youth: Family Rights, Pronatalism,  
and Settler Politics in North Africa 200

Conclusion 237

Notes 251

Bibliography 291

Index 317

## ILLUSTRATIONS

### Figures

1. “Le péril jaune,” 1928 13
2. Fête des enfants in Madagascar, 1904 137

### Tables

1. Population by age in Madagascar and France, 1900 150
2. Numbers of births over deaths in the province of Itasy, 1901–1904 151
3. Numbers of votes in three electoral systems 171

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Since I began researching this book a decade ago, many people and institutions have helped me along the way with their generous intellectual, financial, and emotional support. In these pages I can only begin to acknowledge my appreciation for everything they have done to help make this book possible.

Funding from a variety of sources was indispensable. A Florence Gould pre-dissertation grant from the Council for European Studies and numerous grants and fellowships from the University of Iowa funded the first years of research. At the University of Tennessee, a Professional Development Award and a semester of junior faculty leave helped me move forward with my research and writing. Finally, a summer stipend from the National Endowment for the Humanities enabled me to undertake the final research and prepare the manuscript for publication.

My initial curiosity in French history was sparked at Occidental College, where I was privileged to have dedicated professors who believed in me and inspired me during my undergraduate years. In particular, I would like to thank Nina Gelbart and Annabelle Rea for supporting my decision to pursue graduate school and encouraging me to study abroad. In addition to being one of the most meaningful experiences of my life, my junior year in Rennes and Toulouse sparked my interest in the politics and culture of the Third Republic.

The University of Iowa provided a collegial environment that facilitated my early work on this project. In the first years of my graduate

career, Sarah Hanley advised me and provided warm encouragement. Classes with Jeff Cox, Jim Giblin, Sarah Hanley, Lisa Heineman, Glenn Penny, and Rosemarie Scullion provided insight and shaped my thinking. I am particularly indebted to my adviser, Jennifer Sessions. Always happy to answer questions about the odds and ends of doing research in France and to comment on my work, Jen gave me invaluable advice and pushed me to do my best work. She continues to be a supportive presence in my life, always available to talk about my project and read additional drafts. My friends at the University of Iowa are too numerous to list, but I would nevertheless like to thank Becky Pulju, who gave me sound advice about doing research in France, and Cari Campbell, who commented on drafts of each and every chapter. Other friends, including Annie Liss, Karen Ursic, Scott Perrin, Kristen Anderson, Mandy Trevors, Kathy Wilson, Anna Flaming, Melissa Moreton, and Dauna Kaiser, provided moral support through long months of writing and revising the dissertation.

When I arrived at the University of Tennessee as a new professor I was fortunate to find a vibrant intellectual community and supportive environment for my research. Along the way my work has improved thanks to advice from and conversations with my colleagues, including Vejas Liulevicius, Catherine Higgs, Lynn Sacco, Laura Nenzi, Shellen Wu, Marina Maccari, and Douja Mamelouk. In addition, the faculty and graduate students in the After Wars Seminar were particularly helpful by commenting on portions of the manuscript that I presented.

I would also like to thank the staffs at the Bibliothèque nationale, the Archives du ministère des affaires étrangères, the Archives diplomatiques, and the Centre des archives d'outre-mer (CAOM) for assisting me in carrying out my research. Daniel Gillies at CAOM was especially helpful in directing me to the collections I needed. My time in France was also enriched by conversations with friends I met along the way, including Renée Goethe, Farid Ameer, Amanda Shoaf, and Terry Young Hwa.

Feedback I received from colleagues I met at academic conferences, including the Council for European Studies, the Western Society for French History, and the Society for French Historical Studies, was

especially instrumental in pointing me in new directions and identifying ways I could improve my work. Particularly helpful were comments I received from Elisa Camiscioli, Michael Vann, Sue Peabody, Natalia Starostina, Naomi Andrews, and Stephen Toth. Judith Surkis, especially, helped me refine my analysis of the myth of the prolific settler. I particularly want to thank Christina Firpo for reading and commenting on the entire manuscript.

My revisions of this manuscript were aided by the detailed comments I received from Carolyn Eichner and the anonymous reviewer at the University of Nebraska Press. I also want to thank Bridget Barry and the editorial staff at the press for all of their hard work.

Finally, I certainly would not be where I am today were it not for my family. First, I would like to thank my parents, who were my first teachers. From an early age they encouraged me to read and learn. They sent me to college and supported my decision to pursue a PhD in history. My parents, along with my brother, Mike, have spent countless hours listening to me talk about my studies and for that I am very grateful. I would also like to thank my husband, Brett, who relocated with me from California to Iowa and finally to Tennessee. I know he made many sacrifices so that I could pursue this career. Throughout the process, Brett has read multiple drafts of this work. He has also patiently tolerated living apart so that I could carry out my research in France, something that was especially difficult after we started having children. Most of all, he has spent countless hours listening to me talk about my work and giving me love and support when I needed it most. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my daughters. Katherine was born while I was writing my dissertation, and Alexandra arrived while my manuscript was under review. Experiencing pregnancy and motherhood while working on this project gave me important insights into the history of pronatalism during the Third Republic. More significantly, my daughters serve as a constant reminder of what really matters in life.



# REGENERATION THROUGH EMPIRE

[Buy the Book](#)



## Introduction

The race is hardly responsible for French depopulation because, far away from the metropole and the artificial influence of civilization and customs, French people once again become prolific.

—CHARLES RAISIN, *La dépopulation de la France*, 1900

**F**rench defeat in the Franco-Prussian War was swift; in less than two months of war, enemy troops had encircled Paris, captured the emperor Napoleon III, and left the government of the Second Empire discredited. This humiliating defeat in 1870 resulted in the unification of Germany, the loss of Alsace and Lorraine, the establishment of France's Third Republic, and fears that France was on the brink of becoming a second-rate power in Europe. The crisis that gave birth to the Third Republic would influence its political history throughout its existence; in the immediate aftermath of the war, patriotic French men and women turned their attention to their empire, the declining birthrate in France, and the comparative demographic strengths of rival powers in Europe.

It was therefore in the early Third Republic that Malthusian arguments in favor of fertility restraint were eclipsed by the growing belief that victory over Germany in the next war would require a higher birthrate. This conviction was shaped by statistical studies revealing the relatively slow growth of the French population over the

course of the nineteenth century. For example, France's population grew by a mere 43 percent between 1800 and 1900; the population of the United Kingdom had increased by 164 percent during that same period.<sup>1</sup> One of the principal causes of this inferior population growth was France's modest birthrate, which, in 1888, stood at 23.1, in contrast to the birthrates of 36.7 and 36.6 reported in Germany and Italy that same year.<sup>2</sup> Growing numbers of pronatalists studied the causes and consequences of depopulation, pursued a vocal propaganda campaign, and convinced the government to pass legislation promoting population growth through a variety of means, including financial incentives, restrictions on women's work, and protection of motherhood. In the twentieth century, pronatalists would work closely with the government in extra-parliamentary depopulation commissions in 1902 and 1912; the Conseil supérieur de la natalité, formed in 1919 to advise the government on demographic matters; and the Haut comité de la population, created in 1939 to design new laws on the family and the birthrate.

As the trauma of the *année terrible* fueled the pronatalist movement in the first decades of the Third Republic, it simultaneously created a desire to overcome the humiliation of defeat by establishing a vast empire outside Europe. While commentators frequently described France's earlier colonial expansion as "accidental," there was nothing accidental about the colonial campaigns of the 1880s and 1890s when France acquired new territory in Africa and Southeast Asia, greatly expanding an empire that by World War I would be roughly twenty-five times the size of the metropole. In the late nineteenth century, colonial expansion and settlement enjoyed considerable support in France that extended beyond the usual colonial circles and impinged on political discussions that ostensibly had nothing to do with imperialism. Though representing distinct political movements with few prominent members in common, the colonial lobby and pronatalist organizations of the early Third Republic were nevertheless born out of the same crisis and reflected similar anxieties concerning France's trajectory and position in the world. As a result, the discourses of these two groups intersected and presented similar conclusions.

This book explores that intersection by showing, first of all, that pronatalist ideas were an integral part of how colonial propagandists and administrators pursued their goals of establishing a strong French presence overseas and making colonies profitable. Pronatalism influenced how the Union coloniale française recruited people for settlement; pronatalist thinking led governors in places like Madagascar to try to make their colonies more profitable through state-controlled population growth and managing colonial subjects' reproduction; in large settler colonies such as those in North Africa, colonial governments considered pronatalist policies designed to encourage reproduction and support settler families to be essential to establishing a strong and permanent French presence. Second, this book details how demographic thinking about empire shaped pronatalists' strategies and their proposed solutions to depopulation. In the early Third Republic, many social scientists saw colonial settlement schemes as a medical question based on a sophisticated understanding of demography, race, and acclimatization, a body of knowledge that would determine whether or not the French could reproduce adequately in the colonies. While many late-nineteenth-century experts outside pronatalist circles produced pessimistic assessments of French prospects for establishing large settler colonies, those prominent statisticians and demographers directly engaged in questions relating to depopulation were among the vocal advocates of French colonial settlement in the 1870s. As the pronatalist movement became more organized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, pronatalists increasingly understood their demographic crisis in terms that transcended the boundaries of the metropole and positioned their empire as a key component in their nation's regeneration. In short, not only were French pronatalists aware of France's empire, but they emphasized the potential demographic benefits of colonial settlement, studied the pronatalist initiatives of colonial governments seeking to make settler colonialism viable, and collaborated with analogous organizations in the settler communities. By incorporating sources from both the metropole and empire, including familialist journals from French settlers in North Africa as well as archival material specific to colonial

pronatalist policies, this book explores precisely why pronatalists came to believe that the maintenance of a large empire with settler colonies would be central to establishing demographic growth and strength.

Until recently, many historians underestimated the significance of empire in metropolitan France and instead posited that prior to decolonization the French public's interest in empire was fickle at best.<sup>3</sup> Along similar lines, other scholars have argued that over the course of the Third Republic, the French public became increasingly aware of their empire but rallied around it only in times of crisis, such as in 1914 and 1939.<sup>4</sup> More recently, as part of the "imperial turn," scholars such as Gary Wilder have discredited the image of Third Republic France as "simply a self-contained parliamentary republic that also happened to possess overseas colonies."<sup>5</sup> In particular, historians have been interested in examining the significance of empire to daily life in France, concluding that it was neither remote nor irrelevant but, rather, figured prominently in the French imagination. For instance, recent studies have analyzed the images of empire and the colonial "other" that flooded the metropole in films, the penny press, advertisements, and postcards.<sup>6</sup> Colonial exhibitions such as those of 1889 and 1931 speak of the popular fascination with the empire and its people.<sup>7</sup> In the twentieth century, the colonial encounter was no longer even limited to those travelers who ventured into the empire or visited colonial exhibits in the cities; it also occurred in factories, brothels, cafés, and the streets of cities as large numbers of colonial migrants arrived to fill the labor shortage, serve in the army, or attend university.<sup>8</sup> Collectively, these examples of colonial encounters and colonial consciousness ranged from the spectacular to the quotidian, revealing the interconnectedness of metropole and empire. They further suggest that, political and economic considerations aside, French people were not only aware of empire, but many encountered it on a regular basis.

Although historians have convincingly portrayed public interest in empire during the Third Republic in terms of its impact on mass culture, few studies explore how this phenomenon in turn affected political movements that lacked any direct connection to empire.<sup>9</sup> In his study of French imperialism between the world wars, Martin Thomas

explores public perceptions of empire among a group of people he dubs the “imperial community.”<sup>10</sup> Moving beyond official colonial circles, such as the colonial lobby, Thomas applies the label “imperial community” to a group of people consisting of “politicians, bureaucrats, colonial administrators, manufacturers, traders, media commentators, educators, missionaries, lobbyists and settlers that dominated the political discourse of empire after the First World War.”<sup>11</sup> This book demonstrates that while French pronatalists were concerned with political issues of a primarily metropolitan nature, namely, the national birthrate, their engagement with this question nevertheless brought them to discussions of empire that placed them clearly in the “imperial community.” Visions of empire were so pervasive in France during this period that pronatalists looked well beyond the borders of the metropole as they imagined solutions to what would, at first glance, be construed as a strictly metropolitan problem.

The first English-language historical study to address France’s crisis of depopulation was that of Joseph Spengler, written in 1938.<sup>12</sup> An economics professor at Duke University, Spengler began his study by situating this historical topic in the politics of his day. He argued that “within the next quarter century true depopulation—a persistent long-run excess of deaths over births—will manifest itself in nearly all the countries of Europe and in those non-European countries to which Western civilization has spread.”<sup>13</sup> Spengler detailed the demographic trends over the last few centuries, providing a number of explanations for the low birthrate and echoing the arguments made by French pronatalists. Like pronatalists, Spengler attributed the low fertility rate to many factors, including urbanization, military service, women’s work, and the desire for social mobility. More recent scholars have returned to Spengler’s work when considering pronatalism as part of their studies of sexuality, the woman question, feminism, the crisis of masculinity, nationalism, immigration, and the rise of the welfare state. These studies collectively reveal the persuasiveness and importance of pronatalist doctrine during this period and the fears that depopulation engendered.<sup>14</sup> Departing from Spengler, they rightly emphasize, moreover, that the anxiety surrounding

the birthrate reflected more than simply pronatalists' stated fears of military defeat and economic ruin; pronatalism was also a response to concerns about gender identities and the changing roles of women and men in society.

Though demonstrating the far-reaching implications of demographic thinking in Third Republic France, scholars have thus far analyzed pronatalism within a specifically European context, focusing on France's rivalry with Germany and making few references to the empire. The European focus most likely stems from the fact that fears of depopulation initially gained momentum following a specifically European conflict, the Franco-Prussian War. In many other European states, by contrast, pronatalism developed in the context of colonial expansion, and imperialism has consequently figured more prominently in historians' assessments of the topic in other national contexts.<sup>15</sup> Anna Davin's article on British pronatalism, for example, positions the Boer War as a key event that gave rise to concerns about depopulation in Britain.<sup>16</sup> In France, by contrast, the birthrate began declining at a much earlier date than in Britain and became a national crisis prior to the scramble for Africa and following a European conflict that had nothing to do with empire. As this book will show, French fears of depopulation, though born out of a European crisis, eventually evolved beyond such European rivalries to include empire.

When discussing French population growth, whether in France or in the colonies, race was central to how pronatalists made sense of the demographic crisis. In this respect, Alys Weinbaum's concept of the "race/reproduction bind" serves as a useful reminder that reproduction and race are intricately connected.<sup>17</sup> Applying this concept to France and French colonies, we can see that pronatalists were primarily concerned with the relative strength of their nation, something that they measured with data on French reproduction and population growth. A low birthrate among those they considered capable of transmitting French racial identity to the next generation would threaten the existing "social systems hierarchically organized according to notions of inherent racial superiority, inferiority, and degeneration."<sup>18</sup> Conversely, pronatalists would be inclined to interpret a high

birthrate among outsiders, particularly those residing on French soil, as the propagation of a rival social system with the potential to eclipse that of the French. It follows, therefore, that race and reproduction were intimately connected in these larger concerns about national strength and maintaining a particular social order.

Still, having established that French pronatalists saw reproduction in racial terms, it is necessary to consider what they meant when referencing “the French race.” Though seemingly self-evident in meaning, the concept of “the French race” that regularly appeared in pronatalist literature was an inherently unstable category, changing over time and subject to conflicting interpretations. As historians have shown, the notion of a coherent French racial identity was partly complicated by the legacy of the French Revolution, which established shared culture, language, and territory as the central elements of national identity. Nineteenth-century theorist Ernest Renan was famous for emphasizing that constructs like race and ethnicity had nothing to do with defining the French nation; this was a voluntary and subjective form of nationalism that could be contrasted with the more biologically or racially based nationalism of Germany.<sup>19</sup> Though willing to acknowledge the impact of universalism on French ideas of national identity and citizenship, historians no longer accept this idea uncritically and have instead assessed the importance of race as a social marker in modern French history, despite official proclamations to the contrary.<sup>20</sup> For the purposes of this study, it is essential to recognize that throughout the Third Republic race was an integral part of how pronatalists conceived of the French population as a unified entity and interpreted France’s demographic strength in relation to other populations. When discussing the need to increase the French population in France, pronatalists had very specific ideas about who was French, ideas that were guided by concepts of racial purity. For instance, after World War I, André Michelin, a pronatalist and major donor to the Alliance nationale, restricted family allowances to “French” employees at his company, denying such benefits to workers from elsewhere in Europe or the colonies.<sup>21</sup> This policy exemplifies how pronatalist-minded Frenchmen such as Michelin saw reproduction in racial terms.

Michelin had no interest in encouraging foreigners residing and working in France to have more children, despite the fact that French naturalization laws made it possible for some of these children to become French citizens, thereby adding to France's overall population growth.<sup>22</sup>

While this would seem to suggest a hostile attitude to immigrants and foreign workers, this was not universally the case, as pronatalists' ideas about who could be French or contribute to French demographic strength were malleable, changing over time and differing from one context to another. The research of Elisa Camiscioli, in particular, has enlarged our understanding of how ideas of race intersected with gendered anxieties to shape pronatalist views on immigration following World War I.<sup>23</sup> Camiscioli shows that despite the largely nationalist character of their movement, interwar pronatalists welcomed the assimilation of select European immigrants, most notably Italians, into the nation as a means of strengthening the race as a whole. Empire and, more specifically, colonized populations were not a central part of the immigration debate, as pronatalists vehemently opposed the immigration of people from Africa and Asia, whom they considered incapable of being assimilated and consequently adding to "French" demographic growth.<sup>24</sup> Tyler Stovall notes, moreover, that it was the very presence on French soil of workers from the colonies that shaped evolving French views of "white" European immigrants after 1914. Contrasting the "white" racial identity of the latter workers with workers from the colonies, French immigration reformers were more receptive to the arrival of Italians and other Europeans whom they believed to have the requisite racial characteristics needed for assimilation and absorption into the French population.<sup>25</sup>

This book will show that even as pronatalists saw a potential danger in interactions between France and its colonies (namely, in the form of migration of colonial workers to the metropole), they by and large supported imperialism. This is because pronatalists believed that it was not enough to encourage French population growth solely within France's borders; true demographic prowess entailed extensive French settlement of the colonies and support for French families both in France and in the empire. Ultimately, by imagining France's

regeneration within the larger context of empire, pronatalists moved toward more complex ideas about race and population growth more generally. For instance, pronatalist awareness of the superior birth-rates exhibited by French populations in the empire prompted them to think differently about the concept of French racial decline and the impact of gender on the larger phenomenon of “race suicide.” Also illustrating pronatalists’ evolving racial thinking were their responses to pronatalist measures introduced in certain colonies. In some cases, as in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, pronatalist policies were focused almost exclusively on the French settler population. In Madagascar, on the other hand, where the settler population was relatively small, the colonial government introduced a different set of pronatalist measures aimed at decreasing mortality rates and increasing fertility among Malagasy subjects. Although the policies developed in Madagascar were strikingly different from those in North Africa, both in terms of their nature and origin as well as the racial composition of the populations at which they were directed, metropolitan pronatalists demonstrated strong interest in and support for both forms of colonial pronatalism. Making sense of this response requires recognizing that colonial forms of pronatalism were premised on the idea that the future of the French empire depended on developing demographic resources, be it French settlers or select populations of colonial subjects. As establishing and maintaining a strong empire was an objective that had everything to do with the depopulation crisis, it is clear that French pronatalism extended beyond a simple desire to increase the “French” population of France through a uniform set of measures.

Consequently, one major contribution of this book is the evidence it offers showing that pronatalists understood their demographic crisis in global terms and positioned their empire as an essential part of the national regeneration they envisioned. That they thought about depopulation in global terms is also evident in their mixed response to fears of “race suicide” among their European rivals. While France’s population began declining at an earlier date than did the populations of neighboring European states, depopulation was not a uniquely French anxiety in the modern period. By the twentieth century most

states in Europe had likewise witnessed an appreciable decline in their population growths and developed policies aimed at improving the “quality and quantity” of their populations.<sup>26</sup> In some states, such as Germany and Great Britain, governments introduced a more selective form of pronatalism by encouraging higher birthrates in certain segments of the population and, in Nazi Germany’s case, actively preventing the population growth of those they considered social undesirables.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, in Italy and Spain, fascist leaders Mussolini and Franco pursued pronatalist policies that more closely resembled those of France.<sup>28</sup> Such distinctions aside, most European states in the twentieth century developed fears of degeneration and population decline that led to a variety of attempts to bring population growth under state control.<sup>29</sup>

Pronatalists were well aware of such demographic concerns elsewhere in Europe, and yet, for two reasons, this knowledge did little to assuage their fears of depopulation. First, pronatalists asserted that France remained at a numerical disadvantage because its depopulation crisis had emerged earlier than was the case elsewhere in Europe. Second and more significantly, pronatalists were well aware that birthrates outside of Europe remained strong and feared that Europe’s position in the world was weakened by its relatively small population. Initially, pronatalists’ extra-European demographic concerns were more focused on Asian populations than on African and American populations. Throughout the Third Republic, discussions of *le péril jaune* (“yellow peril”) were evident in pronatalist literature and typically took one of two forms. On the one hand were fears that Asia’s population was so large that it would inevitably “overflow” into Europe and inundate Europe’s population.<sup>30</sup> On the other were concerns that this demographic disparity left French and other European colonies in Asia particularly vulnerable.<sup>31</sup> In this respect, Japan, widely believed to have designs on French Indochina as well as other European colonies in Asia, was seen as the most formidable threat.<sup>32</sup> As both of these two responses to the “yellow peril” make clear, pronatalists presented this particular demographic threat both in terms of its implications for France and its threat to European or Western powers generally. Out-

side France, nationalists in other European and Western countries were equally concerned about the rise of Japan and the mass migration of Asian workers in the nineteenth century. For instance, policy makers in the United States, Australia, and South Africa evoked the “yellow peril” when crafting restrictive laws designed to limit or prevent Asian immigration.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the fact that this was a period of intense rivalry between major European countries and empires, and this competition represented much of the driving force behind French pronatalism, there was simultaneously a sense of a shared demographic crisis among rivals. Competitive impulses aside, French pronatalists identified with other Europeans as members of the same race and believed that inadequate “white” population growth in places like Britain or Germany had consequences for the race as a whole. One example of this sense of a shared “European” or even “white” demographic crisis is visible in a pronatalist brochure titled “The White Race in Danger of Death.”<sup>34</sup> Through graphs, illustrations, and statistical charts, the authors of this brochure sought to persuade the public that declining birthrates in other European countries gave French people little reason to celebrate; far from diminishing the nature of the crisis, this development only made it more severe.<sup>35</sup> Another revealing picture in the journal of the Alliance nationale depicted Japan as a large Asian man with an excess of 943,000 births over deaths in the year 1926; Britain, France, and Germany, however, had a combined excess of 823,000 births over deaths that same year and were depicted collectively as a smaller European man (fig. 1). Underneath the picture, the caption explains: “The true ‘Yellow Peril’ will be born of Western European countries’ insufficient birthrate.”<sup>36</sup> When considering the global ramifications of French depopulation, the editors of the journal considered it more relevant to present the birthrates of these three European rivals as a group. In this way, as they promoted awareness of French depopulation, pronatalists simultaneously educated the public about similar developments elsewhere in Europe and linked France’s fate to that of other European states. By studying French pronatalists’ interest in empire and support for colonial settlement, this book further elu-

cidates how pronatalists' anxieties about a shared European depopulation crisis could exist alongside the persistent demographic rivalry they felt with Germany and other European states. Once pronatalists expanded their vision beyond Europe's borders and conceived of the issue in global terms, they began to think differently about how they would strengthen the French birthrate. For one thing, this "imperial turn" in pronatalist thinking generated impassioned arguments in favor of developing colonies as a destination for French migration. Also, in various colonies this global perspective on French depopulation meant envisioning the growth of certain rival European populations and select groups of colonial subjects as part of larger efforts to safeguard France's interests.

Ultimately, by exploring French pronatalists' complex reasons for supporting empire, this study sheds new light on one of the many myths that was integral to French imperialism: the idea that the establishment of an empire made France's population one hundred million strong. As many scholars have pointed out, the empire represented more than vast expanses of land of geopolitical and economic importance; the empire brought some sixty million colonial subjects under the French flag, thereby representing a valuable population reservoir.<sup>37</sup> One early proponent of the "population reservoir" theory was Charles Mangin, who in his 1910 book *La force noire* argued that West Africa's abundant population, which he grossly overestimated, could provide much-needed soldiers for depopulated France's army.<sup>38</sup> Soon after, the benefit to the metropole of this population became readily apparent when large numbers of colonial soldiers fought in the French army during the Great War, filling the void left by those Frenchmen who had never been born.<sup>39</sup> During this same war, other men from France's African and Asian colonies arrived in the metropole to fill the labor shortages created by the departure of many working-class men to the front.<sup>40</sup>

While many contemporaries may have had their reservations about the demographic value that the colonies represented for the metropole in this respect, it is important to remember that few pronatalists regarded France's colonial subjects as anything more than a temporary solution to France's demographic troubles. In fact, the idea of

# LE PÉRIL JAUNE

Excédents des naissances sur les décès

En 1926



Japon  
943.000



Allemagne	491.000
Grande-Bretagne	279.000
France	53.000
Total	823.000

**Le véritable « Péril Jaune » naîtra de l'insuffisance de la natalité dans les pays de l'Europe occidentale.**

---

**Le nombre, c'est la force**

Fig. 1. "Le péril jaune," *Revue de l'alliance nationale contre la dépopulation*, July 1928, 208. Reproduced courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

being permanently reliant on colonial subjects to fill France's population void elicited numerous comparisons with ancient Rome. This comparison was not surprising given that, as Patricia Lorcin and Jonathan Gosnell have shown, French imperialists often presented the French empire as the next great Latin empire, continuing where ancient Rome had left off in not only Gaul, but also North Africa.<sup>41</sup> French pro-natalists made additional historical connections; the French empire

was not only “descended” from that of Rome but was threatened by a depopulation crisis similar to that which had weakened Rome.<sup>42</sup> Like France, Rome had been obliged to import foreign workers because of a labor shortage, the Roman countryside became subject to “peaceful colonization” by foreigners, and Rome increasingly relied on colonial soldiers to maintain the large empire that could not be defended with Roman soldiers alone. Drawing on the example of ancient Rome, French pronatalists were convinced that the loyalty of colonial soldiers could never be truly ensured and that being outnumbered by, and excessively reliant upon, France’s colonial subjects was a sign of weakness, not a solution to depopulation.<sup>43</sup> Even if pronatalists saw some advantages to drawing on the demographic resources of the colonies during times of crisis, occasionally filling the ranks of the army and supplying workers to factories, their racial views led them to reject any notion of depending on non-European populations to compensate for France’s low fertility. Instead, to pronatalists the demographic potential of empire resided in another myth, the myth of the prolific settler, or a belief that French settlers on average had a higher birthrate than their metropolitan compatriots. Ultimately, pronatalists saw the demographic potential of empire less in terms of offsetting France’s numerical inferiority by bringing millions of colonial subjects under the French flag, and more as an important step on the road to encouraging a more robust French population growth, both in the settler communities and the metropole.

### Methodology and Chapter Outline

Given the prevalence of demographic anxieties in Third Republic France and the sheer number of people who in one way or another engaged this question, it can be challenging to determine who was a pronatalist and what this label meant. Three considerations must therefore be kept in mind. First, it is important to recognize that the term *pronatalist* can be broadly applied to encompass individuals who, though not members of pronatalist organizations, were nevertheless involved in causes intersecting with demographic questions, something that led them to collaborate with such organizations or employ pronatal-

ist rhetoric in their own arguments. For instance, activists seeking the abolition of regulated prostitution saw their cause as a moral crusade against a practice that corrupted men and degraded women; moreover, they presented regulated prostitution as a cause of depopulation due to its association with adultery, the spread of venereal disease, and women engaging in non-procreational sex.<sup>44</sup> In addition to social-reform movements can be added the Roman Catholic Church, whose leaders, cognizant of the declining influence of religion in French society, presented depopulation as the consequence of a secular government and a less observant population. They joined many pronatalists in asserting that religious faith was critical to replacing decadence and individualism with notions of morality and duty. Although the pronatalist movement was by and large male-dominated, in that its leaders were men and its committees predominantly composed of men, feminists were very assertive in demanding that pronatalists consider women's opinions. They were quick to emphasize the absurdity of a group of men assembling to develop recommendations on breastfeeding, maternal health, and child care without including mothers in these discussions.<sup>45</sup> Many feminists became active members of the pronatalist movement, attending meetings and giving presentations at pronatalist congresses and, through their activism, emphasizing the social importance of women's political participation.<sup>46</sup> To this end they presented their own goals, such as state support for motherhood and reforming married women's legal incapacity, as conducive to improving population growth.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the multiplicity of voices engaging the demographic debate in the metropole, my research revealed that individuals who published books about depopulation, were active members of pronatalist organizations, or were directly involved in promoting colonial settlement were the most inclined to present imperialism as a solution to French demographic decline. The Catholic Church in France was an active participant in discussions about the birthrate, but it largely addressed this issue separately from that of empire. Catholic missionaries in the empire, though very important in establishing French influence in the colonies, seemed similarly disinclined to treat the two questions

simultaneously.<sup>48</sup> In addition to their active engagement of demographic questions, feminists were interested in empire, whether that meant investigating the condition of colonized women or attempting to carve out a greater role for women in the public sphere. Yet, with the exception of Mme Léon Pégard, whose work will be discussed extensively in chapter 2, feminists generally treated depopulation and imperialism separately. The most likely reason why feminists and Catholic clergy did not articulate the demographic question in this particular way is that the birthrate was only one of many issues with which they concerned themselves, and they generally only engaged this question insofar as it related to their primary objectives. Pronatalist organizations, on the other hand, established with the goal of devoting all of their energy to finding ways to improve population growth, were subsequently at the forefront of identifying a wide array of potential solutions to depopulation, solutions that included colonial emigration and drawing inspiration from colonial initiatives. It is for this reason that this book focuses mostly on those individuals and organizations primarily involved in either promoting colonial settlement or developing reforms to address French demographic decline.

Second, within the organized pronatalist movement there were many different organizations and approaches to achieving the mutual goal of stronger demographic growth. For instance, the *Ligue pour la vie* had Catholic roots, whereas the *Alliance nationale pour l'accroissement de la population française* had a strong secular and republican tone under the leadership of Jacques Bertillon, though it did move in more conservative directions during the 1920s.<sup>49</sup> Within these and related organizations there was a diversity of opinion as some activists focused their energy almost exclusively on finding ways to increase the birthrate and others, suspecting that such measures were not particularly efficacious, prioritized reforms that would reduce infant mortality. Most pronatalists developed agendas combining both approaches, and, as will be seen in this study, empire impinged on discussions about both decreasing infant mortality and increasing the birthrate.

Also crucial to this study are organizations that were familialist as opposed to pronatalist. According to Paul Smith, one of the

key differences between the two ideologies is that pronatalism was “quantitative,” in that its adherents sought measures that would boost population growth.<sup>50</sup> Familialists, on the other hand, were more concerned with the moral quality of the French family and with representing the interests of the *famille nombreuse* (large family). Familialist organizations typically restricted their membership to people with a designated number of children, something that distinguished them from the Alliance nationale, and were focused primarily on securing reforms intended to alleviate the financial challenges of raising a large family and to elevate the social importance of fathers of many children. These differences aside, familialists and pronatalists shared many of the same objectives and collaborated with one another during and after the Great War. Pronatalists considered policies extending financial assistance to large families an integral part of raising the birthrate, and they promoted the idea that people who had large families deserved to be respected and commended for their sacrifices. Familialists shared pronatalists’ concerns about the declining French birthrate and lamented how few French people were willing to follow their example and have numerous children. It is for this reason that in chapters 4 and 5, which focus on the decades after World War I, this study utilizes both familialist and pronatalist sources.

The third and final consideration is that pronatalism, as a concept and a program for political reform, evolved considerably during the seventy years examined in this study. In the first decades of the Third Republic, pronatalist reformers built on the existing impetus to reduce high rates of infant mortality and saw their greatest success in introducing legislation designed to protect young children, most notably two laws in 1874 that strengthened government oversight of the wet-nursing trade and placed restrictions on child labor. In the 1880s and 1890s, pronatalists increasingly advocated measures that would encourage a higher birthrate as opposed to simply reducing child mortality. Many of the proposals during this period reflected the growing focus on motherhood and aimed to limit how many hours per day women could work outside the home, restrict pregnant women’s work before and after the delivery, and assist indigent and unmarried mothers. The

focus on “protecting” mothers, regardless of the circumstances under which they became pregnant, is most evident in the 1912 law allowing *recherche de la paternité* (paternity suits), a measure that enabled unmarried mothers to seek financial support from their child’s father. The extreme loss of life during World War I, as well the war’s impact on gender roles and family life, marked a new phase in the pronatalist movement as it made the depopulation crisis more urgent and compelling to the French public and the nation’s leaders. In addition to seeing a growth in their memberships in the aftermath of the war, pronatalists and familialists in the 1920s increasingly asserted that the family, as a unit, had rights distinct from the individual, and with such arguments they successfully secured greater benefits and financial advantages for fathers and large families. The new concept of family rights was most evident in the campaigns for the family vote in the 1920s and 1930s. During this period there was also a renewed emphasis on discouraging family planning, most notably with the 1920 legislation banning the sale and advertisement of contraceptives and strengthening penalties for abortion.<sup>51</sup> Generally, the pronatalist movement moved in more-conservative directions during these years, particularly after 1934, when organizations such as the Alliance nationale increasingly worked with right-wing groups.<sup>52</sup>

Using these larger developments as a backdrop against which to assess the impact of imperialism on French pronatalism, the chapters that follow, organized chronologically, collectively demonstrate that pronatalists supported colonial emigration and settlement as solutions to French depopulation, studied the pronatalist initiatives of colonial administrators, and collaborated with analogous settler organizations. The first two chapters focus specifically on migration. Chapter 1 explains how and why settler colonialism became an essential part of the pronatalist agenda. It was the desire to establish healthy patterns of migration in order to trigger population growth that turned pronatalists into proponents of colonial expansion and settlement. This development had its origins in academic debates in the 1860s and 1870s about the impact of migration on individuals’ family-planning decisions. Prominent demographers, led by Louis-Adolphe Bertillon,

theorized that colonial emigration improved the demographic health of the nation but worried that France lacked a suitable destination for its emigrants because few French colonies were located in temperate zones where colonists acclimatized easily. This view changed in 1880 with the publication of Dr. René Ricoux's statistical study revealing that French settlers in Algeria had a birthrate exceeding that of the metropole. These findings not only produced more optimistic assessments of France's prospects for establishing a large settler colony in Algeria but also gave birth to the myth of the prolific settler. This image of colonial demographic strength was based on gendered ideas about individuals' family-planning decisions that ultimately shaped pronatalist arguments in favor of colonial expansion and settlement throughout the Third Republic.

Ideas about the causes of depopulation and the demographic benefits of colonial emigration resonated beyond pronatalist circles and influenced French efforts to recruit men and women for colonial settlement. As chapter 2 explains, relatively few French people migrated to the colonies in the late nineteenth century, a problem that the Union coloniale française (UCF) attributed in large part to the low birthrate. Focusing on the 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century when the UCF was active in encouraging migration to the colonies, this chapter explores how the UCF expanded the myth of the prolific settler by developing ideas about why it was in the colonies that the French were likely to achieve what seemed difficult in France: a more stable gender order and a higher birthrate. They constructed the male colonial settler as a symbolically powerful countertype to the urban, metropolitan man who displayed all the wrong qualities thereby contributing to both the low birthrate and France's failure to settle its colonies. Through this image of colonial masculinity, both imperialists and pronatalists expressed their class-based and gendered anxieties about modernity. Concerns about depopulation also impinged on the UCF's efforts to recruit more women for colonial settlement, leading them to focus on women who struggled to find husbands and employment. In contrast to how the UCF appealed to prospective male settlers, the Société française d'émigration des femmes (SFEF) presented

itself as a charitable organization that would provide women, who in this modern society struggled to fulfill their traditional roles as wives and mothers, with jobs in the empire. Although their first priority was matching these women with careers, it was expected that women would marry soon after arriving in the colonies and that their migration would contribute to the growth of French settler populations.

As these two chapters indicate, late-nineteenth-century pronatalists, like many French people, often thought about the empire in abstract terms, bringing together diverse peoples and administrative units into a single geographic space as they promoted the benefits of migration to “the empire.” This vision of the empire was not entirely fictional, as the government did take some steps toward centralizing the colonial administration in the late nineteenth century by establishing a ministry of colonies as well as the *École coloniale* to train civil servants for colonial posts.<sup>53</sup> In the twentieth century this unified, abstract idea of empire would be expressed in the term “greater France,” the notion of an expanded French nation of which both the metropole and colonies were integral parts.

That said, when it came to population policies in the colonies, pronatalists were well aware that methods of rule and administration varied substantially from one colony to the next. My research revealed that certain colonies were of greater interest and symbolic value to pronatalists than were others. This study draws on the example of recent studies that focus on the role of select colonies in shaping larger policy, rather than looking at the empire as a whole or studying a single colony in isolation.<sup>54</sup> To that end, chapters 3, 4, and 5 are structured as case studies focusing on population policies introduced in those colonies of particular interest to pronatalists and analyzing how, as they developed strategies to encourage French population growth, pronatalists understood colonial developments. Although there were French settlers all over the empire, and colonial authorities introduced pronatalist policies in a number of different places, the developments in colonies such as French West Africa seemed to generate relatively little interest among French pronatalists.<sup>55</sup> In fact, pronatalist discussions of empire mostly focused on four places: Algeria, Tunisia,

Morocco, and Madagascar. That Algeria would play a role in shaping French pronatalism is not surprising given that this colony was always exceptional in the French colonial imagination. Its conquest, initiated in 1830, marked the beginning of France's pursuit of a new empire. By the Third Republic the colony was seen as part of France due to its administrative assimilation, its large French settler population, and its proximity to the metropole. For the purposes of this study, Algeria was an important destination for French colonial emigrants, although pronatalists did envision French settlement of other colonies as well, and, even after French colonial migration declined in the early twentieth century, settlers in Algeria continued to shape larger debates about family rights in the 1920s and 1930s. Also significant to French pronatalists were Tunisia and Morocco. Joining France's empire in 1881 and 1912, respectively, these two protectorates were frequently associated with Algeria, as all three formed part of France's North African empire. Morocco and Tunisia were nevertheless seen in a different light, since they had fewer settlers and were administered indirectly, with residents-general reporting to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As that relationship suggests, these protectorates were never imagined as an extension of France or even as colonies properly speaking. Still, they, like Algeria, were considered suitable for more extensive French settlement and played an important role in interwar debates about family rights and suffrage reform. Madagascar, seemingly the outlier in this study, being much further away from the metropole and a less popular destination for French migrants, was nevertheless significant because of the pronatalist decrees introduced there in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This colony joined the empire in 1896 and was ruled directly, unlike Tunisia and Morocco, with an appointed governor-general reporting to the Ministry of Colonies.

Chapter 3 begins in the 1890s, a time when French pronatalists became more organized and sought to develop a comprehensive approach to encouraging population growth, one that initially focused on motherhood and protecting young children. For this reason, they took great interest in the work of colonial governments seek-

ing to increase their respective populations and pave the way for future French settlement. The first such colony to shape pronatalism in this way was Madagascar. Declaring the island “underpopulated” and lacking a sufficient labor force, Governor-General Joseph Gallieni introduced a series of decrees between 1896 and 1905 designed to increase the population of the Merina people who lived in the central highlands of the island. Like pronatalists in France, Gallieni thought about depopulation in gendered terms, targeting Merina men and women in different ways and positioning motherhood as a centerpiece of his pronatalist decrees. Yet his initiatives were also informed by the colonial context in which they developed as well as his racialized thinking. Pronatalists eyed developments in Madagascar with interest and saw in Gallieni a “man of action” who was willing to address depopulation in a way that their own government seemed disinclined to do. Moreover, they considered Gallieni’s reforms equally applicable to their efforts to confront the gendered causes of French racial decline. They therefore embraced Gallieni’s population policies, despite the fact that these efforts were designed to increase a population that was not French. This shows that French pronatalism extended beyond simple efforts to increase numbers of French people. Addressing depopulation required solidifying France’s position outside Europe, an objective that, it was believed, could only be accomplished by establishing demographically strong colonies.

By World War I, metropolitan pronatalists had become more successful at pushing proposed laws through France’s parliament and witnessed a significant increase in their memberships. Yet, despite these achievements, birthrates continued to decline, and the loss of over a million young French men during the Great War rendered the pronatalist movement increasingly desperate to address the crisis by whatever means possible. As chapter 4 explains, it was thus in the interwar years that redefining citizenship by introducing familial suffrage, a system of voting in which parents receive supplemental votes to represent their children, gained credibility and dominated the pronatalist discourse of the period. Although familial suffrage was never enacted in France, it was introduced in Tunisia in 1922 and Morocco in 1926.

In their decision to implement familial suffrage, French officials in Tunisia and Morocco made clear connections between the strength of the French settler family and the maintenance of colonial rule. In each context, French settlers were outnumbered by both colonial subjects and other Europeans. Chapter 4 illustrates how pronatalist objectives could be more powerful and politically expedient in a colonial context. To colonial officials, the maintenance of colonial rule required encouraging French population growth. Because of the importance of the French settler family to these objectives, officials were inclined to think about political participation in familial, as opposed to individual or egalitarian, terms. This shift in political thought was particularly significant for metropolitan pronatalists, who urged their government to distinguish between male citizens on the basis of their contributions to overall population growth.

In the interwar years, the concept of family rights dominated the pronatalist movement. As the French state increasingly extended benefits to French families, benefits that many pronatalists considered to be fundamental rights, the disparity between raising a family in France and raising one in North Africa became all the more evident and acute. Chapter 5 explores the emergence of familialist organizations in the North African settler communities after World War I and shows how these organizations were focused largely on acquiring the same family rights as their compatriots in France. While in the nineteenth century pronatalists viewed the settler colonies in North Africa to be models of demographic stability, this perception changed in the 1920s due to the activism of the familialist movement and studies revealing a relative reduction in settler population growth. Fears of French depopulation in North Africa represented a departure from the optimism that Dr. Ricoux's study had inspired decades earlier; yet, pronatalists in France continued to see settler colonialism as an important component of their efforts to improve French population growth. In fact, during this period, metropolitan pronatalists were more interested in empire than ever before. This transformation can in part be understood as a reflection of the general growth of interest in empire seen in French society during the interwar years. Yet, as this

chapter argues, metropolitan pronatalists' growing commitment to empire can be attributed equally to the emergence of settler familialist organizations. Despite many similarities between the groups, demographic concerns in North Africa differed fundamentally from those of the metropole. Nevertheless, because of the collaboration between these groups, the specific needs and concerns of the settler populations became part of the metropolitan pronatalist agenda. Studying this collaboration reveals, therefore, that French pronatalism should not be viewed as an exclusively metropolitan political movement that developed solely within France.

The conclusion explores the legacy of the myths, detailed earlier in the book, of the prolific settler and the influence of imperialism on individuals' family-planning decisions. It begins by looking at the introduction of the Code de la famille, a systematic approach to addressing depopulation that was introduced shortly before France's entrance into World War II and foreshadowed the efforts that Vichy officials would soon undertake to improve the birthrate and strengthen the French family. Following France's defeat in 1940, the French empire represented hope during these uncertain times, just as it had in 1871. While Vichy officials attributed French defeat to the inadequacies of the Third Republic and the decadence of French society, they saw settlers and colonial life in a very different way. Representing health and virility, colonial settlers were supposedly untainted by the decadence that characterized metropolitan life and were subsequently central to the national regeneration Vichy officials envisioned. Furthermore, despite France's defeat, many of the colonies were under Vichy's control and remained a symbol of French power. The history of colonial pronatalism and its interaction with that of the metropole thus sheds considerable light on why pronatalists in both France and the settler colonies later embraced Vichy's National Revolution. Ultimately, as this book demonstrates, pronatalists during and after the Third Republic believed that establishing and maintaining large settler colonies was essential to restoring demographic growth and safeguarding France's position in the world.