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French Cities in the Nineteenth Century

Edited by
John Merriman

Routledge Revivals

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Originally published in 1981, *French Cities in the Nineteenth Century* analyses large-scale processes of social change, and looks at how this affected the growth of towns and cities of nineteenth century France. The book addresses how this change affected the politics of life in France during the nineteenth century, as well as how the city was organised. Urbanization created new uses of space, and new concerns for the people that lived among them and the book looks at how social change was a collective experience for the people of France and how this transformed the societies in which they lived.

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John Merriman

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Edited by John M. Merriman

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11 Rue François Miron
15 September 1980

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Maps

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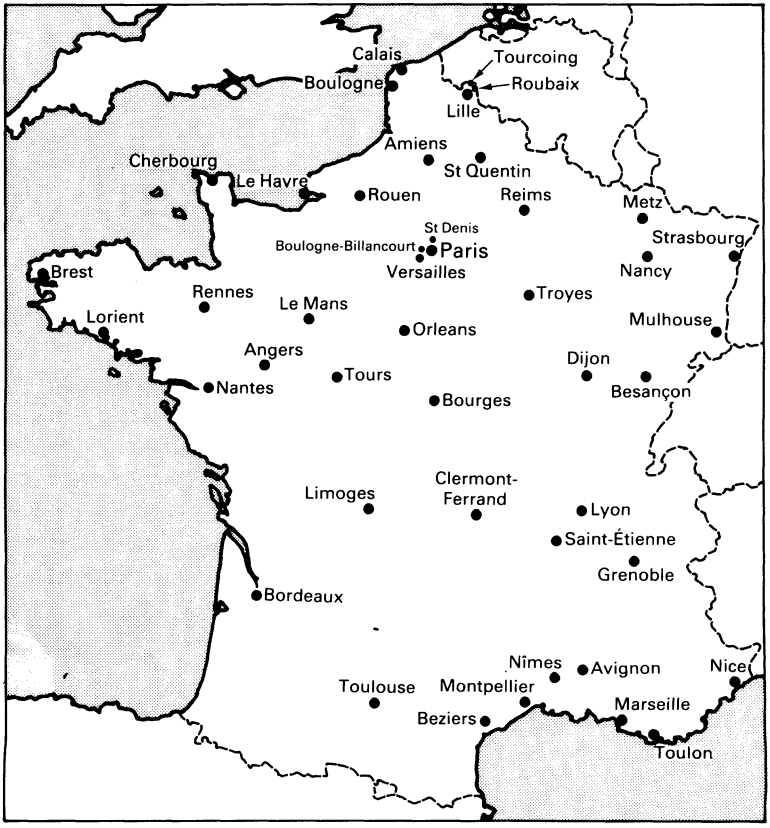

French cities with at least 40,000 inhabitants, 1896

1 Introduction: Images of the nineteenth-century French city

John M. Merriman

France, like England, Germany, Belgium, the United States and other western countries, urbanized during the nineteenth century, but France alone remained essentially a nation of peasants at least until well into this century.[1]* In the familiar movie scene of August 1914, peasants, hearing the rapid ringing of church bells, leave their fields to go to the village to be mobilized into the army. But urbanization had profoundly changed the economy, society and politics of France in the nineteenth century for both urban and rural dwellers; as a process its impact was as great in France as in the other seemingly more urbanized nations that fought in the first world war.

The growth of Paris dwarfed all other French cities and has dominated the awareness of contemporary observers and historians, just as Paris dominates France. The population of the capital swelled by five times from 548,000 in 1801 to over 2.5 million at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its suburbs, hardly more than villages in 1800, became large towns by the *belle époque*: Asnières grew from 1200 to over 23,000, Boulogne–Billancourt from 2400 to almost 40,000. Montmartre had long ceased to be a rural village on a hill characterized by its famous windmill. The urban experience of Paris has been described frequently and unforgettably: one cannot think of the capital without recalling Balzac's Rastignac waving in challenge towards the financial quarter of the Chaussée-d'Antin from the heights of Père Lachaise cemetery; Zola's Gervaise and her wedding-day trip to the Louvre from the slum of the Goutte d'or, and her eventual drunken prostitution on the boulevards to the north; Delacroix's highly romanticized but still stirring painting of Liberty leading the people in 1830; or the Goncourt journal, describing the astonish-

*Superior figures refer to the Notes and references on pages 247–85.

ing contrast between the glittering literary and artistic life of the capital, and the grim hunger, desperation and, finally, massacre of the Communards in May 1871. Adeline Daumard's analysis of the collective psychology of the Parisian bourgeoisie and Louis Chevalier's description of its perceptions of its social inferiors bring to life again a complex social class captured by the rapier-like pencil of Daumier and, later, by the camera of Nadar and the brush of Degas. Georges Duveau's study of *La vie ouvrière* in the Second Empire contrasts with the sparkling new department stores of the capital. Beyond the shine of Proust's Paris and that of Jarry and Apollinaire during the so-called 'banquet years' of the *belle époque* lay the strikes and May Day parades and demonstrations of the working class during the same period.

Corot's painting, *The Belfry of Douai* (plate 1), could symbolize the placid stillness of nineteenth-century French provincial towns and cities, juxtaposed against the heroic Parisian revolutionary turbulence so often depicted by painters, novelists and historians. Douai, despite being the seat of the appellate court for the rapidly industrializing Nord and Pas-de-Calais departments, seemed to stir only in early July during the annual raucous festival when its five carnival 'giants' in sixteenth-century costumes stalked through the streets. The image of the soft yellow light of a Sunday morning and leisurely strollers going to the *boulangerie* for croissants seems to fit the preoccupation of historians with the urban politics of the capital and with the scanty literature of French provincial cities. But the growth of Paris was only part of the process of French urbanization during the nineteenth century. For the capital was not and is not France, and the urban experience of those who have lived in Paris is not necessarily that of most Frenchmen and women. Lyon and Marseille approached half a million inhabitants in 1900; the small towns of Tourcoing and Roubaix in the shadow of Lille and the Belgian border became large industrial cities by the end of the century, while towns like Montceau-les-Mines, Le Creusot and Decazeville seemed to have grown out of nothing. But the changes brought by even more slowly growing urban centres were just as profound (see Table 1).

It is the task of the urban historian to chronicle and analyse, but also to evoke, the urban transformation of France and to gauge and understand the impact of the process of urbanization on the political life of the nation. Three recent bibliographic essays, all written with the booming English and American 'new urban

Plate 1 Corot, *The Belfry of Douai*

Table 1 *Population growth of the twelve largest cities in France at the end of the nineteenth century* (in thousands, except for 1896)

Cities	*1801*	*1811*	*1821*	*1831*	*1836*	*1841*	*1846*	*1851*	*1856*	*1861*	*1866*	*1872*	*1876*	*1881*	*1886*	*1891*	*1896* *Total population*	*1896* *Agglomerated population*
			en 1817															
Paris	548	622	713.0	785	900	935	1053	1053	1174	1696	1825	1851	1988	2269	2344	2447	2,536,834	2,536,834
Lyon	109	106	149.0	134	150	190	221	234	256	318	323	323	342	376	401	436	466,028	398,867
Marseille	111	102	109.0	145	146	147	186	198	215	261	300	312	318	360	376	403	442,239	332,515
Bordeaux	91	93	89.0	99	99	99	125	131	140	162	194	194	215	221	240	252	256,996	239,806
Lille	54	61	64.0	69	72	71	75	75	89	131	154	158	162	178	188	201	216,276	160,723
Toulouse	50	51	52.0	60	77	76	94	94	92	113	127	124	131	140	147	149	149,963	124,187
Saint-Étienne	16	18	19.1	33	41	46	50	56	91	92	96	110	126	123	117	133	136,030	120,300
Roubaix	8	8	18.0	33	41	46	31	34	91	49	65	75	83	91	100	115	124,661	113,900
Nantes	73	82	68.0	78	76	76	94	96	101	113	112	118	122	124	127	122	123,902	107,137
Le Havre	16	17	21.1	23	25	43	31	28	62	74	75	86	92	105	112	116	119,470	117,009
Rouen	87	87	86.7	88	92	90	99	100	94	102	100	102	105	106	107	112	113,219	106,825
Reims	20	31	31.0	36	38	39	44	45	48	55	60	72	81	93	97	104	107,963	99,001
Total	1155	1175	1420.0	1550	1716	1772	2103	2144	2360	3164	3431	3425	3735	4186	4356	4590	4,793,491	4,457,104

Source: Paul Meuriot, *Des agglomérations urbaines dans l'Europe contemporaine* (Paris 1897), p. 93.

history' in mind, have made clear that the urban history of nineteenth-century France remains relatively disappointing. François Bédarida lamented that the past fifty years had produced little of interest:

> [the] urban past has long remained the province of the erudite, tenacious lovers of local history who patiently collected material..... They did not really bother to connect their own town, studied with such loving attention, with the development of other towns, or the evolution of the country as a whole, and even less with the universal movements of history.

Bédarida, participating in the important conference on urban history organized in 1967 by H. J. Dyos, was concerned that the new urban history, stressing studies of class composition and social mobility using quantitative methods, seemed to lag behind in France.

By 1974 the nineteenth-century French city was emerging, in the words of Louis Bergeron and Camille Rancayolo, as 'the central character in a new generation of research', at least in part because of the new urban history.[2] But they cited the failings of this history, which had helped define social classes in towns and cities without really telling us how a city is organized and how it works. They faulted urban historians for largely leaving aside the political evolution of France and ignoring the social and political uses of urban space. The new urban history, then, had amounted to little more than 'social theory in an urban context', leaving the city, in the words of Jean-Claude Perrot, 'empty and seemingly indifferent to any action'.[3] The new urban historians had borrowed and helped refine the techniques and methodologies of social history, but like the old human geographers, who offered excellent systematic studies of the economic functions of cities, they had entirely omitted the interaction between urban development and politics.[4] Daniel Roche's 1980 essay also criticized the new urban history, insisting on the necessity of relating the experiences of the individual towns and cities to the large-scale economic and social processes that characterized the nineteenth century. Roche urged urban historians to consider the town and its space as a social phenomenon shaped by the 'contradictions which interact within urban space'. Indeed, recent Marxist scholarship has stressed that the growth of towns and cities accelerated the social contradictions inherent in the development of a capitalist economy. Roche left unstated the importance of identifying the relationship between

urbanization and the political transformation of France, while the Marxists have emphasized the economic and social bases of political conflict in the nineteenth century.

The time has come to combine the large brush-strokes of conceptual theory with the detailed analysis of the individual French town and city to begin to understand what effect urbanization had on the political development of modern France.[5] By comparing the experiences of individual towns and cities and their people over time we can understand how, and to what extent, urbanization as a historical process transformed the lives of French men and women in the nineteenth century. We must link the individual city and its people, the French national experience and the global processes of social change. Urban history is not a separate discipline that stands by itself; the study of the city cannot be divorced from the fundamental dynamics of change themselves – industrial capitalism, state-making, bureaucratization – any more than the city can be divorced from its region and its own past. The urban experience changed the lives of people who lived in the countryside as well as in the towns and cities, bringing about a political transformation of France. The historian of the nineteenth-century city has the sources available to evoke the urban experience of ordinary people, relating everyday routine – *la vie quotidienne*, as the popular series of French historical studies is called – to larger historical changes. The study of the individual city and urban traditions, neighbourhoods, faubourgs, festivals, associations and people over time with reference to the larger questions of social and political change is the task of urban history, and the subject of this collection of essays. This introduction presents a *mise en scène* which will underline some of the distinctive aspects of French urbanization and raise several themes that are as crucial to the urban historian as they were to the lives of those who lived in nineteenth-century towns and cities; it will also point to several of the most significant and distinctive features of French urbanization. Among the points that must be made are the following:

1 French urbanization proceeded at a much slower pace than that of England, the United States or Germany. While the urbanization of France was also linked to large-scale industrialization, the pattern of this industrialization did not fit the British model of heavy industry's booming coke towns and necessitates

some rethinking about French towns and cities in the nineteenth century.

2 The remarkable degree of state centralization and the domination of the capital, in contrast again with the German and English cases, greatly affected the political evolution of French towns and cities, often pitting municipalities and their inhabitants against the powerful state.

3 Although France remained to a large extent a nation of peasants, urbanization created new contenders for political power and thereby contributed to the emergence of mass political life. The organizations and conflicts of urban political life gradually became those of France. To take one significant example, the expansion in small towns and bourgs of large-scale economic activities, associated with the process of urbanization, altered peasant politics and underlines the importance of the study of relations between town and country.

4 Urban terrain became as hotly contested as the rich farmland of Beaune in Zola's *The Earth.* The growth of cities, their changing form and the increasing social division of space helped alter French political life. Patterns of residence and the way in which elites intervened in urban space have been little studied; and the use and symbolism of urban space remains a fascinating and relatively unexplored theme of research essential for understanding the process of urbanization.

Industrialization, urbanization and urban growth in nineteenth-century France

France urbanized in the nineteenth century, as its urban population doubled. It should be stressed that urbanization is not the same thing as urban growth, which is simply the increase in the number of people living in an area defined as urban. Conceivably, a country could have an increase in urban population but actually de-urbanize if, after a given period, a smaller percentage lived in urban areas than before; this may have occurred in seventeenth-century France. Urbanization is, most simply, a proportional increase in the number of people living in urban areas as opposed to rural regions.[6] To be sure, the statistical definition of what is urban is quite arbitrary. The census of 1846 first defined an urban

area as one with at least 2000 people living in an agglomerated settlement. Earlier censuses in the century had adopted 1500 as the minimum figure. Two thousand people hardly seems to constitute an urban area in the Anglo-Saxon world of conurbations but, as will become clear in this volume, such urban settlements often provided large-scale economic activities usually associated with a more functional definition of urbanization. Charles Pouthas, whose study of the French population in the first half of the century remains an essential source, had feared that the arbitrary decision to classify any agglomerated settlement of 2000 as 'urban' overestimated the degree of urbanization by counting a number of small bourgs of approximately that size 'whose animation and activity only awaken on market day'.[7] But the original choice does provide a reasonably accurate and consistent point for measuring the phenomenon of urban growth and the degree of urbanization in the nineteenth century. For market day revealed the economic and political function of bourgs, an essential part of the process of urbanization. Table 2, which begins with the census of 1846, clearly shows France's absolute urban growth and urbanization.[8]

Georges Dupeux's 1974 compilation of the French censuses, adopting the definition of 3000 inhabitants living in an agglomerated settlement as urban, allows us to include results from the earlier censuses and consider the entire century. His table (Table 3)

Table 2

Year	*Urban population* (millions)	*Per cent of total population*
1846	8.6	24.4
1851	9.1	25.5
1856	9.8	27.3
1861	10.8	28.9
1866	11.6	30.5
1872	11.2	31.5
1876	12.0	32.4
1881	13.1	34.8
1886	13.8	35.9
1891	14.3	37.4
1896	15.0	39.5

Source: Paul Meuriot, *Des agglomérations urbaines dans l'Europe contemporaine* (Paris 1897).

Table 3

Census date	*Number of urban communes*	*Total urban population*
1811	422	4,201,186
1821	455	4,593,345
1831	507	5,098,920
1836	532	5,450,364
1841	503	5,281,968
1846	589	6,068,945
1851	602	6,354,845
1856	627	7,078,438
1861*	653	7,771,574
1866*	690	8,479,787
1872†	641	8,249,437
1876	674	8,867,732
1881	707	9,776,612
1886	727	10,381,513
1891	732	10,901,774
1896	724	11,282,667
1901	792	12,375,147
1906	815	12,979,404
1911	851	13,816,689

*Not including urban population of Nice and Savoie; with annexed territories, the urban population reached, in 1861 (with 661 towns), 7,851,270 inhabitants, and 8,550,728 in 1866 (with 694 towns).

†Including Nice and Savoie, but not the territories annexed by Germany.

Source: Georges Dupeux, 'La croissance urbaine en France au XIXe siècle,' *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale*, no. 52 (1974), p. 180.

presents the number of urban communes, by his definition, and the total urban population. Dupeux's statistics modify Pouthas's insistence that only with the July monarchy did France's urban population break away from the general rise in population, showing at least a moderate rise in the number of urban communes and the total urban population in the Restoration. He shows the gradual, indeed almost perfectly linear growth of the French urban population throughout the century. Both Pouthas and Dupeux agree on the importance of the periods 1831–6 and 1851–61 – the beginning years of the July monarchy and the Second Empire – in the increase in France's urban population. (For example, the population of France's district capitals – *chef-lieux* of *arrondissements* – increased by 31 per cent from 1821 to 1841, just about

twice that of France as a whole.) The annual rate of increase of 2.18 per cent between 1851 and 1856 was never equalled in the century.[9] By Dupeux's statistics, the population of French urban areas increased by slightly over 300 per cent between 1811 and 1911, while the total population increase for all of France for approximately the same period was only 34.8 per cent. During the second half of the century, the urban population grew more rapidly than did the number of communes defined as urban, far faster than the total population. Impoverished rural departments, such as the Ariège, Aveyron and Pyrénées Orientales lost population to migration. Before the second world war, twenty-five of France's ninety departments had less population than they had had in 1801, and sixty-one – more than two-thirds – had less than in 1851.[10] Today in departments such as the Pyrénées Orientales, this depopulation may be seen: deserted churches, terraced hillsides long since abandoned and small villages where only old people remain. France's urbanization after 1850 seems even more impressive given the remarkable decline in the rate of natural population increase that worried Frenchmen and has offered a marked contrast with the experience of the rest of the world.

More than any other French city, Saint-Étienne seemed to replicate the British model of the nineteenth-century industrial city. The population of France's Manchester boomed from about 16,000 in 1801 to 33,000 in 1831 and to 56,000 in 1851, although it was still not even the departmental capital, that title was still retained by the small town of Montbrison. To visitors Saint-Étienne seemed to offer an awesome glimpse into the urban and industrial future. Flora Tristan, the utopian socialist, was little impressed. Saint-Étienne, she wrote,

> is the sister city of Lyon, but even blacker and even more dirty ... the town hall is hideous, a large pile of rocks ... the Cathedral of St. Étienne is ignoble ... [there are] no sidewalks, except for several in the nicer quarters; a dirty little stream they call a River passes through the town, furnishing the daily needs of 60,000 bodies, not counting the animals.[11]

The town had grown so precipitously that it seemed to have no history; an army officer ordered to draw up a plan for the city's defence in case of attack (it was already an important armaments centre) could find nothing to read on Saint-Étienne's past. In one generation, the small town (which indeed did have a long history)

had become a large city, with a population of 76,000, including its recent suburbs; it was a major centre for ribbon-making, metallurgy and arms manufacturing and not a single book could be found in the municipal library about agriculture. The small old city, 'badly built and chaotically organized', offered little more than the ruins of an old château now serving as a police post; the new town, many times larger, presented, in contrast with the small old town, no twisting or winding streets. One long boulevard stretched six kilometres, providing a central axis along the floor of the valley in which the city lay, met by cross streets at perpendicular angles, and paralleled by equally straight and long streets.[12]

The immediate hinterland only echoed the industry of Saint-Étienne. 'The environs of Saint-Étienne', wrote the visitor,

> are generally monotonous and without charm; the countryside is furrowed with railroads. One encounters factories of various kinds almost everywhere, and especially coal mines with smoking obelisks, forges of coke that give off a thick, black smoke which can be seen from afar; it paralyses all vegetation and gives everything a black tint. At night these *fours* offer a truly astonishing spectacle, infernal to all who see the city for the first time.

In the canton of Saint-Étienne alone in 1848, almost 13,000 ribbon workers, 10,000 looms, over 3000 metallurgical workers, 3500 miners and more than 3000 building workers represented a labour force that transformed the Stéphanois.[13] The region of Saint-Étienne, subject of the David Gordon and Michael Hanagan essays in this volume, was the 'cradle of the industrial revolution' in France.

Yet Saint-Étienne was not characteristic of the French urban experience in the nineteenth century precisely *because* of its size and concentration of industry. As Hanagan notes in his essay (Chapter 9) the rate of French urbanization pales when compared to that of England during the same period, or that of Germany after its unification. France did not have, with the exception of the capital and the Lille–Tourcoing–Roubaix region, a contiguous series of urban agglomerations comparable to Lancashire or the Ruhr. France did have several relatively heavily urbanized regions: the Île-de-France, Nord, Languedoc and Provence, but the number of large cities remained few throughout the century, each serving as a regional centre. Only Paris, Lyon

and Marseille had more than 100,000 inhabitants in 1841; they were joined that year by Bordeaux, in 1861 by Lille, Toulouse, Nantes and Rouen; in 1872 by Saint-Étienne, Le Havre in 1881 and in 1891 by Roubaix and Reims, for a total of twelve. France thus had twelve cities with a population of more than 100,000 in 1896, these at least one-fourth larger than Saint-Étienne. England, having had but London in 1800, claimed twenty-four. The urban population of France remained largely one of small towns and *bourgades.* More than half of that population lived in towns of less than 10,000 inhabitants. The level of urbanization, seemingly modest, none the less had great implications for the social and political transformation of France and reveals the significance of the process itself.

Nor were the large factories of Saint-Étienne characteristic of French industrialization. Hanagan's study of Le Chambon-Feugerolles, a small industrial town in its hinterland, stresses the persistence of artisanal production (the base for the development of most industries, including the ribbon manufacturing of Saint-Étienne) and rural industry. Louise Tilly's article (Chapter 7) also emphasizes the slower development of industrial capitalism in France; only gradually and with considerable variation across location and industry did small-scale service and craft production give way to large-scale development. Her comparative study of the impact of industrial capitalism in Paris, Lyon and Lille on women's work recalls the important part household and family continued to have in industrial production. In France's second city (first in gastronomy), Lyon, the manufacture of silk remained characterized by artisanal production.

Industrialization in France also retained its large rural component throughout most of the century; this, in turn, combined with the slow rate of natural population increase to limit the growth of French cities. A walk into the countryside of the textile (and champagne) centre of Reims in mid century would have convinced any British, American or German visitor of the continued importance of rural industry in France. The mechanization of the textile industry had begun during the First Empire and by 1828 there were 181 spinning factories, most powered by steam. But the mechanization of the production of merino cloth, having begun in Reims, spread into the surrounding countryside between the Suippe and Vesle rivers, employing a significant number of rural workers who produced thousands and thousands of metres of cloth

each year. By 1848, there were 8000 men, women and children spinning and weaving in the canton of Reims alone, many of them not living in the city.[14] As Yves Lequin has noted in his remarkable study of the formation of the working class in the Lyon region, industry moved toward its labour force as often as peasants migrated towards urban factories.[15]

Cities, then, often did not mark a sharp break with economic life in the countryside. Many migrants to urban areas arrived with considerable industrial experience obtained in rural regions, as cities concentrated industry that had previously been located in the countryside. The industrial revolution was first and foremost in France an expansion of existing forms of production, largely artisanal and rural. Even the growth of factories in towns and cities often changed little more than the locus of work for migrants; the concentration of a labour force into factories came slowly, and even then was not limited to urban areas. Ted W. Margadant's essay (Chapter 4) follows these themes. He examines the political consequences of the process of proto-urbanization, as small-scale production and marketing spread into the countryside in many rural regions during the July monarchy. Small towns, like Dieulefit in the Drôme, a centre of mobilization in the resistance to Louis Napoleon's coup d'état of 1851, were, like Le Chambon-Feugerolles in the Loire, more typical of the nineteenth-century urban experience than either Paris of Saint-Étienne.[16]

Just as French industrialization was not necessarily dependent on the growth of cities, so industrialization was not the only factor responsible for the growth of towns in France. The human geographers' classification of cities by function – agricultural, commercial, industrial, military, administrative and so on – unnecessarily simplifies the urban experience of France but reminds us that most cities had more than one economic function and that many developed without the assistance of industry. Perpignan, for example, an *agro-ville* with a large population of landless rural day labourers living within its walls, developed as a commercial and military centre with virtually no industrialization at all. The city's marketing function in the wine trade, as that of Béziers and Narbonne, had a great influence on the surrounding region, recalling the commercial functions of medieval cities. Other towns developed with the coming of the railroad: Laroches-Migennes in the Yonne; or Brive in the Corrèze, which thrived with the arrival of the railroad en route to Toulouse, while

the prefecture of Tulle eighteen miles to the east has today about the same population it had in the middle of the last century. The century also brought a new kind of town: thermal or 'cure' centres, such as Amélie-les-Bains, Aix-les-Bains, Bain-les-Bains, Contrexeville and others.

In the department of the Vienne, the small town of Châtellerault developed into a major producer of arms and cutlery in the nineteenth century, its population growing from about 8400 in 1801 to over 20,000 in 1896. A faubourg developed on the other side of the Vienne from the main settlement, across from the twisting and almost impassable streets of the old town. A resident contrasted the dynamism of Châtellerault with the departmental and former provincial capital of Poitiers, traditionally a great religious centre.

> The noise of its streets contrast with the silence of those of Poitiers, on which it depends. Châtellerault is still so young that it seems to grow from day to day, while Poitiers is like the cadavre of a large city. The old provincial capital has no more life. Its industry is nil, its provisioning difficult, its markets limited. It no longer exists by itself, but by the importance that it receives from its royal court, its law school, its medical school, and its administrative personnel. The town is thus political ... but its existence as the first city of the department quite forced. Its like Bourbon-Vendée, or in the Loire, like Montbrison, which is nothing in comparison with Saint Étienne or even Roanne.[17]

Yet Poitiers also grew rapidly, its population more than doubling in the course of the century – in other words, as fast as Châtellerault, which remained a sub-prefecture. The politics of the two towns varied enormously. Châtellerault, a city of workers, was always to the left of Poitiers, an ecclesiastical centre dominated during the Second Empire by Cardinal Pie, advisor to the Comte de Chambord. And both towns were active in the political struggles of the century, and not merely shaped by events in Paris to which they were to nod assent. However, the political evolution of provincial French towns, both those that were rapidly growing and those that were not, largely remains to be written.

Some of the essays presented here consider the evolution of political life in French cities from the point of view of the responses of elites and ordinary people to the two processes arguably transforming nineteenth-century France: industrial capitalism and the continued centralization of the French state.

This book asks, how did urbanization and the growth of cities and towns change political life in France? How did the special characteristics or properties of urban areas, including a greater degree of associational life, a concentration of different social groups and occupations, and the social division of space and concomitant patterns of residential differentiation, affect the political struggles of the new bourgeois elites and of the working class both at the national and the municipal level? How did the particular patterns of urban growth and social structure influence political development? What were the political consequences of the tension between the strongly centralized state and the municipalities? And how and when (or even did) urbanization and the growth of towns change the politics of the countryside and urban–rural relations in general?

State and city: Paris and its provinces

The centralization of the French government and the domination of Paris over the life of the nation greatly affected the urbanization of France and the development of its urban politics. After the women of the markets of the rue St Antoine helped initiate a march to Versailles in October 1789, to bring Louis XVI and the royal family to Paris, the government of France left Paris only twice for any length of time: during the Commune (with the people of Paris claiming power) and during the tragic years of Vichy. In some ways the capital has always remained an agglomeration of many urban villages; yet the presence of the government and its powerful and weighty bureaucracy has meant that the whole of Paris has been far greater than the sum of all its parts.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Paris and its immediate region comprised only slightly more than 2 per cent of the French population, far smaller a proportion, for example, than those of London in England or Glasgow in Scotland. But the capital came to dominate the rest of France – Paris and the 'French desert' in the words of J. E. Gravier in 1947. Where else but France would more than 97 per cent of the population have been condescendingly relegated to the category of 'provincials' – that is, not living in Paris? Gravier recalls for us the definition of the word 'provincial' given by the Larousse dictionary of 1900: 'provinçial, qui est gauche, dépourvu de distinction, manière: ex: avoir l'air provinçial'.[18]

De Tocqueville had insisted that this extraordinary centralization of power was well underway in the eighteenth century.[19] It was certainly accentuated by the revolution, particularly by the Jacobins and even more so by Napoleon, who, as everyone knows, like to brag that he could look at his watch and know what every school child in France was studying. Three of the most important changes that challenged traditional urban networks of influence (the kind examined by the old human geographers and their more sophisticated but often less interesting successors) – the creation of departments in 1790, the advent of the railroad in the middle decades of the nineteenth century and the creation of a banking network – all only further accentuated the centralization of power and authority in Paris and its domination, unlike England, where industrial rivals to the north of London challenged the capital for power and the political nation came to care what Manchester thought. Let us listen to Gravier's summary:

> Ignorant at the same time of decentralization (that is, local liberties) and deconcentration (that is, the delegation of real authority to the prefects), the unitary French system gathered all powers in a capital that became thus the single nervous center of the national life.... For all professors, for all savants, the hierarchy of honors and that of salaries offered one single supreme objective: Paris.[20]

Thus traditionally arrived in the capital all of the most talented and ambitious provincials, 'all of the Rastignacs of France'. Economic planning, decision-making and resources likewise clustered in the capital, a condition well illustrated by the almost inevitable transfer of the headquarters of the most important provincial bank, the Crédit Lyonnais, to Paris in the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century. Gravier bitterly concludes:

> Here it is, in every domain, France divided into two camps. On one side, Paris affirms its universal supremacy, gathers every power and refuses to delegate the smallest part. Around the 'enlightened city', its bureaucracy, its business set, and its intelligentsia, the provinces vegetate in its shadow. The supreme ambition of these citizens is to see their most gifted children 'arrive' in the capital and thus pass into the superior caste.[21]

Gravier suggested a series of reforms that would create true regional capitals with the ultimate hope of creating *l'Union française* to lead France from the impotence of the 1930s. His proposals, of course, were never implemented, any more than was