All for One and One for All: Recasting Alexandre Dumas as a Popular Educator in France during the New Imperialism

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Abstract
Celebrated French writer Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870) had faced forms of racial prejudice in France during his lifetime because of his Caribbean family origins, biracial ancestry, and descent from a slave. During the late nineteenth century, the rise of scientific racism and aggressive European imperialism around the globe resulted in racial perceptions and worldviews that supported European superiority and equated "European" with being "white." Such developments complicated perceptions of Dumas and his works as part of the French patrimony, causing intellectuals and reformers to adapt various and often conflicting approaches to reconcile Dumas's heritage with dominant perceptions of French identity as "white," as well as search for ways to simultaneously praise and critique Dumas's literary works. This critique of Dumas paradoxically manifested itself during the French Third Republic. By separating his works from the more elite "world of letters" and reclassifying them as unsophisticated and suitable to the more rudimentary educational needs of the common working classes and adolescents for French nation-building purposes, intellectuals, policymakers, and of reformers of education found a way to simultaneously critique Dumas's "Africanness" indirectly while praising his Frenchness openly. Much of the French criticism levied at Dumas and his work had applied negative African stereotypes to the manner in which he lived and constructed his novels. As Dumas and his works became symbols of the French patrimony (and therefore France itself) at this time, criticizing his "Africanness" indirectly became preferred, as to do so openly would suggest that the French patrimony had "African" elements. This reclassification therefore prevented Dumas from being regarded as equal to other "great" French writers; this stigma lasted until the early twenty-first century.

Keywords
Alexandre Dumas; History of education; France; French education policy; National Identity

Introduction

In the preface to his 1883 book on French writer Alexandre Dumas's last years, Gabriel Ferry wrote that "true literary posterity began for Dumas the day after his death" (Ferry, 1883). Perhaps it took a bit longer. In December 1870, at the time of the death of Dumas, the famed author of *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, France was engaged in a war with Prussia that toppled French Emperor Napoléon III and established the French Third Republic (1871-1940). Dumas was buried without much ado in a cemetery in Neuville-lès-Pollet. In 1872, Alexandre Dumas *fils*, Dumas's son and also an accomplished writer, had his father exhumed and reburied in his birth town of Villers-Cotterêts in northern France. At the reburial, Dumas *fils* gave a moving speech in which he shared his hope that his father's funeral "be not so much one of mourning as of a festival, less a burying than a resurrection" (Glinel, 1884, pp. 501-502; Schopp, 1988, p. 476). Despite such lackluster beginnings, the 1870s did mark a "resurrection" for Dumas, a rebirth as a symbol of the French patrimony (see **Figure 1**). Consequently, Dumas can be analyzed as a French *lieu de mémoire*, or "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic

 Citation: Martone, Eric (2019). All for One and One for All: Recasting Alexandre Dumas as a Popular Educator in France during the New Imperialism. *Global Education Review*, 6 (4). 50-79.

element of the memorial heritage of any community" (Nora, 1996, p. xvii; Petit-Rasselle, 2011). The tangibility of this status took the form of a commemorative monument in Paris inaugurated in November 1883 (Ferry, 1883; Fabre, 1883). Thousands gathered for the event and many political, literary, and artistic notables attended (Glinel, 1883; Lang, 1891; Henry, 1999). Yet there was a hidden agenda behind this commemoration, as policymakers and intellectuals had a distinct role for the writer to play.

Figure 1: popular image of Alexandre Dumas *fils* at home. In the background is a small portrait of his father (Collection of the author).

Regarding public squares as a powerful extension to the classroom, this monument to Dumas was part of a broader era of French monument building seeking to promote the republic's political agendas by manipulating national history through the appropriation of monuments to instill a particular vision of France among the larger population (Best, 2010; Boime, 1987; Hargrove, 1989; Agulhon, 1975; McWilliam, 2005). The Dumas monument, as well as its inauguration, reinforced how Dumas's works of historical fiction and their readership made him a popular educator of the French nation and enabled the foundations for a common national identity, thereby alluding to the purpose contemporary French education policymakers had for the writer (*Le Monument d'Alexandre Dumas*, 1884). The monument's generally well-received design from Gustave Doré, inspired by a dream Dumas once had, included a large stone pedestal with four sides, on top of which was a bronze figure of Dumas, smiling and seated, with a pen in one hand and a book in the other (Glinel, 1883; "Edmond About on Dumas," 1883; Henry, 1999; Maurois, 1957; Leblanc, 1931). At the bottom of the front of the pedestal were three figures symbolizing Dumas's readership: a student, a young girl, and a worker. On the reverse side of the pedestal was a statue of d'Artagnan the musketeer. The other sides listed Dumas's major works (see **Figs. 2 and 3**).

Reimagining Dumas as a writer for the common working classes (which suggested those with limited formal educations) and adolescents, rather than the educated elite, reading Dumas was encouraged as a means to reinforce education policies regarding the teaching of French history and language as part of the French Third Republic's nation-building agenda. National educational reforms led to greater cultural homogenization within France as part of efforts to create a stronger nation-state. Historians studying these phenomena have been influenced by Eugen Weber, who, in his classic work on the French Third Republic entitled *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1976), identified "schools and schooling" as among his "engines of

change" driving the modernizing of rural France and forging a common national identity (Weber, 2007, pp. 303-338; Grew and Harrigan, 1992; Reed-Danahay, 2004). By the time of the French Third Republic, public schools had become compulsory and free, becoming the heart of the acculturation process that made the people of the French state "French" (See: Carter, 2011; Helmreich, 1961; Palmer, 1974; Anderson, 1971; Prost, 1968). As Weber argued, schoolteachers came to "appear as the militia of the new age, harbingers of enlightenment and of the Republican message that reconciled the benighted masses with a new world, superior in wellbeing and democracy" (p. 303). The French Third Republic consequently increased efforts to make adequate school facilities, its teachers more accessible, and better roads on which children could get to school. It also initiated efforts to make school more meaningful and beneficial to the larger population, thereby becoming important to those they had to teach.

Figures 2 and 3: Photographs of the Dumas monument in Paris, inaugurated in November 1883. At the bottom of the front of the pedestal are three figures intended to symbolize Dumas's readership: a student, a young girl, and a worker.

This article explores the French government's education policies to illuminate how Dumas and his works supported its agendas in its nation-building efforts during the late nineteenth century. However, Dumas proved to be a problematic choice. A notable aspect about Dumas that was not emphasized in the monument or its inauguration was that Dumas was the grandson of an Afro-Caribbean slave and a Norman noble. The speeches made at the inauguration omitted Dumas's Caribbean and

biracial heritage and connections to the institution of slavery. With only a few exceptions, the conception of Dumas presented at the inauguration—Dumas the patriot, Dumas the republican, Dumas the builder of the French nation, and most importantly, Dumas the popular educator of France—gained increasing hegemony and Dumas's biracial heritage and status as a descendant of a black slave became routinely obscured (For exceptions, see: Glinel, 1883, pp. 22, 18; Dorchain, 1895, pp. 213, 218-219). Such omissions, which coincided with the French Third Republic's renewed colonial agenda through the New Imperialism and growth of the intellectual current of scientific racism, marked a radical departure from Dumas's lifetime, during which his racial and colonial background were mentioned frequently. Dumas had faced forms of racial prejudice in France during his lifetime because of his Caribbean family origins, biracial ancestry, and descent from a slave, prompting contemporaries to describe him as exhibiting an "African" physical appearance or possessing stereotypical characteristics ascribed to his "African" ancestry (Martone, 2018). During the late nineteenth century, the rise of scientific racism and aggressive European imperialism around the globe resulted in racial perceptions and worldviews that supported European superiority and equated "European" with being "white." Such developments complicated perceptions of Dumas and his works as part of the French patrimony, causing intellectuals and reformers to adapt various and often conflicting approaches to reconcile Dumas's heritage with dominant perceptions of French identity as "white," as well as search for ways to simultaneously praise and critique Dumas's literary works. As we shall see, this critique of Dumas paradoxically manifested itself during the French Third Republic. By separating his works from the more elite "world of letters" and reclassifying them as unsophisticated and suitable to the more rudimentary educational needs of the common working classes and adolescents for French nation-building purposes, intellectuals and policymakers found a way to simultaneously critique Dumas's "Africanness" indirectly while praising his Frenchness openly. Much of the French criticism levied at Dumas and his work had applied negative African stereotypes to the manner in which he lived and constructed his novels. As Dumas and his works became symbols of the French patrimony (and therefore France itself) at this time, criticizing his "Africanness" indirectly became preferred, as to do so openly would suggest that the French patrimony had "African" elements. This reclassification therefore prevented Dumas from being regarded as equal to other "great" French writers; this stigma lasted until the early twenty-first century (Petit-Rasselle, 2011; Martone, 2018).

Education and Nation-Building in the Early French Third Republic

At the inauguration of the monument to Dumas, novelist and journalist Edmond About gave a rousing speech that emphasized Dumas as "a populizer of our history" who "has instructed or fascinated" generations of Frenchmen. His works had "lost none of the freshness" from when first written and he was the greatest teacher of the French past; in reading Dumas, one was not only entertained, but simultaneously gained a sense of Frenchness. Dumas's works "will be the delight of young people" for generations, he argued, sowing in their hearts and minds a love for France. About concluded with an anecdote, sharing, "I sometimes hear my children disputing with each other because the one has not yet finished the second volume of 'Monte Cristo' when the other, who is awaiting his turn, has arrived at the end of the first" ("Edmond

About on Dumas," 1883). At the time of About's speech, which encapsulated the educational role republican policymakers had for Dumas, the French Third Republic was concerned with fostering a French identity amongst its composite population; in particular, these efforts began to focus on the younger generations. Teaching them the French language and past were perceived as ways to creating a stronger French future. Dumas would play a role in both efforts.

The French Third Republic was a fragile reality, existing primarily because monarchists could not agree on whether to support the Bourbon or Orléanist claimant to the throne following the deposition of Emperor Napoléon III and defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (See: Brown, 1967; Kale, 1992). The French Third Republic based its unity as a collection of citizens and aggressively sought ways to create cultural hegemony within its borders to establish a collective French identity. While national identities are often taken for granted as having "always" existed, they are social constructions forged, maintained, and redefined through various fictional narratives that erase the incongruities by which national identity was formed into a linear and seemingly inevitable progression (Anderson, 2006; Balibar, 1991). Nations, as imaginary constructions whose authentication rests on a system of cultural fictions, also rely in part on popular media, including literature, to preserve stories of national origin and evolution. The Republic consolidated national identity in part by reconstructing and making hegemonic a collective memory (See: Hazareesingh, 1994 & 2009). Such politically and culturally motivated efforts in France encompassed the political spectrum, influencing national policy, including education policy (Schlesinger, 1987).

Reformers built upon gains made in public education by the mid-nineteenth century, as a greater percentage of the population had received some level of education since the French Revolutionary era. Despite rhetoric about the population as a whole, however, schools targeted boys. Since the image of a "student" became equated with the male gender, the Paris monument to Dumas featured a (male) student and a separate young female figure to demonstrate his relevance to both genders (See: Sohn, 2015; on education for girls, see: MacLeod, 2016; Rogers, 1994). Nevertheless, the quality of instruction then in place caused officials to question whether true learning was taking place (Weber, 2007).

In 1833, the government had issued an innovative education law to reorganize primary schools (Collins, 1971). A later decree in 1834 set the contours for an official curriculum. Children aged 10 and older "shall continue to practice reading, writing, arithmetic and French grammar; in addition they shall be taught elementary geography and history, especially the geography and history of France" (Collins, 1971, pp. 129-131). Such efforts revealed the government's existing preoccupation with promoting French, then not spoken by the entire French population, and French geography and history to help forge common foundations for a French cultural nation.

French Third Republic politician and reformer Jules Ferry (1832-1893) was a staunch advocate of French colonialism, arguably both externally and internally (the former while a member of the French senate and French prime minister, the latter while minister of public education and fine arts). Ferry, as Minister of Public Education, abolished all fees and tuition charges in public elementary schools in 1881. The following year, enrollment became compulsory. By 1885, the government established subsidies for building and maintaining schools and teacher salaries. During the 1880s, the government also reinvigorated

elementary teaching program and curriculum, along with provisions for inspection and control (Power, 1944; Chevallier, 1981). Efforts to increase teachers' professionalization accompanied these initiatives (Weber, 207). The government revamped teacher training colleges, and increased salaries and prestige, depicting teachers as missionaries of "civilization" (See: Alaimo, 1994; Delhome, 1980; Quartararo, 1995). Schools became expected to improve their students' manners and customs. Such perceptions convinced state leaders that people in general could be "improved" or "civilized" through education, prompting some historians to see a "quasi-colonial dimension" to these domestic policies (Weber, 2007, p. 486).

Educational reformers during the French Third Republic, however, faced many significant obstacles in their efforts to build a common French identity amongst the larger population. One was the population's aforementioned lack of knowledge of French. Literacy rates among departments were widely uneven. Rural populations generally had lower literacy rates than their urban counterparts. Schools helped increase literacy rates, but many also overcame literacy through self-education. Blocking schools' literacy efforts was the fact that nearly 20 percent of the population within the French state's borders in 1863 did not know French. Regional dialects, particularly in border areas, remained the primary languages. Further, the expansion of France's political borders and influx of immigrants brought residents whose native language was not French (Weil, 2009); Brubaker, 1992; Weber, 2007). Consequently, how to teach French to children who never or hardly knew it was a problem. Teachers for these parts of France had to learn how to teach French as a second language, and the government encouraged teaching methods to force the usage of French (Weber, 2007). Complicating matters was the issue that some rural teachers also struggled with French, and most had not read enough to teach much French literature. As France became more interconnected through increased transportation, communication, and information networks, the use of French became more prevalent; not knowing French ultimately forced one into isolation, prompting a greater interest in and need for learning the language. The spread of kindergartens in the late nineteenth century also helped teach French so that children entering primary school gradually became more familiar with it (See: Heywood, 2002; Brosterman, 1997; Stearns, 2016).

Throughout the nineteenth century, teachers, however, had difficulty getting students into their classrooms. In general, urban areas had more schools, better teachers, and were better attended. Nevertheless, in 1828, government officials estimated that as many as 4 million of 5.5 million children between ages 6 and 15 did not attend any type of school (Collins, 1971). Children were often required by their families for farm work or other needs and typically attended school for only a few months; schooling, promoted as an activity of cultural and intellectual value, was considered a luxury. One observer lamented that "ignorance still reigns undisputed over the countryside, and…one can place [little reliance] on the help of certain authorities in stimulating the zeal of children and their families when their own lack of education makes them incapable of appreciating it or pointing out its advantages" (Collins, 1971, pp. 131-134). The Third Republic gradually reframed the benefits of schooling for the larger population. Schooling had to be perceived as relevant and targeted at the population's needs. As one school instructor pointed out, "the remedy to this state of things lies in public opinion. Even the most ignorant portion of the masses begins to understand that instruction is useful to all…Country people know now that reading, writing, and arithmetic are

means of rising in the world." The key to changing public perceptions was financial gain, as a local mayor argued that his townsfolk lacked an interest in school because there was "no immediate or tangible relation to pecuniary profit" (Collins, 1971, pp. 325, 326). As jobs continued to expand and diversify during the industrialization of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, occupations beyond their rural communities became a reality. Combined with the growing need to learn French to take advantage of these opportunities, the government had a recipe for success. In 1880, a report happily revealed that schooling "is slowly being accepted. Families realize that this small diploma can be of use for several kinds of jobs; hence they consent ever more frequently to leave their children at school for a longer time" (Collins, 1971, p. 328).

Another significant obstacle facing educational reformers in their efforts to build a common French identity amongst the larger population was its lack of knowledge about French history. Part of teachers' duties under the French Third Republic included spreading national and patriotic sentiments, shaping individuals to fit into a society and culture broader than their local one, while persuading them that they were participants in this wider culture and society. The French state devoted substantial attention to children, seeking to "Frenchify" the provincial and immigrant populations when they were most impressionable. For example, nineteenth-century historian Jules Michelet had perceived the child as an image of an uncorrupted population. As he wrote:

> The child is the interpreter of the People. Nay, he is the People with their inborn truth before they become deformed, the People without vulgarity, without uncouthness, without envy, inspiring neither distrust nor repulsion…No, childhood is not merely an age or a degree in life, it is the People, the innocent People (Jan, 1969, pp. 62-63).

The primary means by which to accomplish this task was teaching French history and geography, which became recognized as instruments of indoctrination and patriotic conditioning. A school official observed, "when properly taught [French history and geography are] the only means of maintaining patriotism in the generations we are bringing up." Consequently, new teachers "must above all be told…that their first duty is to make [their charges] love and understand the fatherland." School is "an instrument of unity," an "answer to dangerous centrifugal tendencies" and a "keystone of national defense" (Weber, 2007, pp. 332-333). However, competence in French history was lacking among many teachers, slowing its implementation into the curriculum. An 1879 report noted that teachers certified from 1850 to 1868 had never studied French history and had only basic knowledge of it (Weber, 2007). When history was taught, teachers focused on reigns and dates and remote historical periods. To help remedy this situation, new textbooks were written to help bring history to life and instill patriotism (Maingueneau, 1979). The perception of teaching history as a means to promote national sentiments and unity was long lasting. An 1897 poll asking degree candidates about the uses and purposes of history in education revealed that 80 percent believed it was to exalt patriotism (Langlois & Seignobos, 1898).

Literature, particularly historical fiction novels, became a way to further both goals of teaching French language and history. Consequently, the French system of education was particularly successful "in instilling a love of literature in the students" throughout its curricula (Byrnes, 1951, p. 232). Boys in schools became fascinated by tales of a heroic French past and new works of historical fiction for younger readers became a booming business.

Contemporary Pierre Besson remembered acquiring the large history textbook required for his class, spending breaks reading nineteenth-century literature celebrating past French heroes (Ozouf & Ozouf, 1964; Besson, 1914). The nineteenth-century stabilization of bourgeois hegemony and the expansion of education produced a larger book-reading public of young people eager for knowledge. Even though addressed theoretically to the wider public, early literature for young people had a predominantly middle-class readership, particularly since many such books were published in lavish (and hence expensive) illustrated editions (Jan, 1969). However, publishing expanded rapidly by the end of the century due to improvements in printing, advancements in transportation and communication networks, and growing urban populations. Books were read and acquired across a wider social spectrum and new genres of literature for broader mass consumption developed (Byrnes, 1951). In addition, the term "adolescence" was applied increasingly to people in their teens in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, signifying the construction of a distinct developmental stage (Arnett, 2001; Hall, 2008).

In much of the nineteenth century, both adults and young people read Dumas's works, as symbolized by the figures on the monument to Dumas in Paris. The focus on historical fiction to further the Third Republic's nation-building education agendas and the cultivation of new works to meet this need prompted Dumas's work to be re-appropriated within this new genre of adolescent literature. As Dumas was increasingly presented as a writer for young people as the century progressed, and the line between adult and adolescent literature became more distinct, Dumas became viewed as a writer primarily for adolescents. As a writer of "popular" literature, Dumas had incorporated melodramatic episodes, romance, suspense, and comedic segments that could appeal to adolescent tastes. By the late nineteenth century, generations of readers had enjoyed Dumas's works. Pierre Durat's 1860s "*photobiographie*" of Dumas featured a cartoon that commented on Dumas's enormous literary output, but also his works' enjoyableness. The cartoon depicted rows of bookshelves, which contained the "Incomplete Works of Alex. Dumas," that continued beyond the illustration's frame. An accompanying locomotive bore the caption, "Take a Tour on the Pleasure Train." Even in the decades after his death, Dumas remained popular with the general public and other French writers composed sequels—such as *The Son of Porthos* and *The Son of Monte Cristo*—to his most famous works, which were published in the English-speaking world as works by Dumas himself (Compère, 2002 & 2003; Dumasy, 2008). The lack of formality and readability of Dumas's works made him an attractive writer to those learning French. In 1873, the writer Prosper Vialon commented on Dumas's popularity, noting that "everyone has skimmed through some of the prolific storyteller's books," even less-educated teachers in the French countryside largely ignorant in French literature (Schopp, 2002, p. 134).

Dumas's popular works were not just enjoyable, they also detailed the history of France; they were therefore useful for helping to instruct competency in French language and history (Bernard, 1996; Minott-Ahl, 2018; Harp, 1998). On occasion, Dumas declared his works as comprising a grand series entitled the "Drama of France," which presented a historical vision of French history with a republican slant. In *The Companions of Jéhu*, for example, Dumas articulated such an agenda:

> Perhaps those who read our books singly are surprised that we sometimes dwell on certain details which seem somewhat long drawn for the book in which they appear. The fact is, we are not

> writing isolated books, but… we are filling, or trying to fill, an immense frame. To us, the presence of our characters is not limited to their appearance in one book. The man you meet in one book may be a king in a second volume, and exiled or shot in a third. Balzac did a great and noble work with a hundred aspects, and he called it the "Comédie Humaine." Our work, begun at the same time as his…may fitly be called "The Drama of France" (Dumas, n.d., p. 482; Schopp, 2005, pp. 47-66; Peng, 2003).

The line between history and fiction was less distinct during much of the nineteenth century. The word for "history" and "story" in French, as in other Romance languages, is the same. Consequently, the line between a teller of stories, or "storyteller," and a teller of history, or "historian," was sometimes ambiguous. Historical methods were then closely aligned with literature and the humanities, and historians often incorporated literary devices in their works (Arnold, 2000; Storey, 2015; Howell & Prevenier, 2001). During the first half of the nineteenth century, French school books already incorporated romanticized accounts of the past. Intended for educational purposes, such accounts had already blended the line between fiction and the historical record in the interests of promoting national sentiments. An excerpt from an 1848 history textbook, in the form of a dialogue between a fictitious teacher and student, provides an example:

> *Johnnie:* Who was the greatest of all the kings of France, sir?
>
> *Teacher:* It is difficult to say. I have already mentioned Charlemagne….Alongside him one could place Louis XIV…But there was a third; one whom I have seen myself. I have heard his voice; I have stood on guard outside his tent. I can still see his small white hands, and his eyes shining as he passed us in review…I mean Napoleon. At first he was a simple artillery officer. He became a general, then First Consul of the French Republic, and finally Emperor of the French and King of Italy. He earned all these titles by his victories and by the good that he did to our country. He held out against all Europe leagued against him, and won the biggest and most terrible battles that had been fought for centuries. He put France on top again…The benefits of the Revolution, which had been bought at the price of so much blood, would probably have been lost forever if Napoleon had not come to power….He caused order and justice to reign everywhere, restored plenty, allowed exiles to return, put into full force the new laws that the Revolution had been made for, and became through his innumerable victories one of the greatest warriors that world has ever seen (Collins, 1971, pp. 125-126).

Dumas's particular (romanticized) accounts of the French past were in sync with the goals of the Third Republic. Dumas's view of history, articulated in his historical work, *Gaul and France*, regarded the spreading of democracy as synonymous with progress. He perceived events as part of a divinely-guided mission toward a republic, which he viewed as France's destiny (Dumas, 2002). Such a theme united his historical fiction, which sought to map this progress to his nineteenth-century present. Such themes made his work an extremely valuable tool in the Third Republic's efforts to construct a common French identity through education. Dumas also sprinkled his historical novels with references to historical sources, indicating that his accounts were rooted in research. Some examples occur in *The Red Sphinx*, set in seventeenth-century France, in which Dumas referred to a certain "journal, largely overlooked by historians" that he used to research the events in his chapter. Sometimes, he was more explicit, offering a narrative precursor to footnotes to document a specific source: "If you doubt this little detail because you hear it from a novelist instead of from the historians, read the dispatch of January 30, 1619 of the papal nuncio" (Dumas, 2017, pp. 76, 81). Further, Dumas sometimes presented himself as a

professional historian. In *The Red Sphinx*, he wrote, "We are sorry to have to reveal this petty weakness in such a great minister [as Cardinal Richelieu], but we are his historian, not his apologist." When he did present himself as a novelist, he often suggested he was more knowledgeable than his "professional" historian peers: "But there's no harm in learning about history from a novelist, especially those details that historians find unworthy to relate, assuming they even know them" (Dumas, 2017, pp. 159, 472).

Dumas's historical works were thus warmly embraced by the population and the portraits of the historical characters within his "drama of France" acquired a degree of authenticity that surpassed the factual record (Higonnet, 1989; Allen, 1987). *In La Comédie littéraire* (1895), for example, Adolphe Brisson devoted a chapter to Dumas and history, presenting the writer as a great chronicler of the dramatic story of "France." Critic Georges Pellissier declared in 1902 that there was an entire classroom contained within Dumas's works. Consequently, as French intellectual André Maurois declared in the 1950s, "it should be added that the world at large—and France in particular—has learned French history in the pages of Dumas" (Maurois, 1957, p. 183).

The longevity of Dumas's impact on teaching generations of Frenchmen the history and culture of the nation can be found in anecdotes from twentieth-century French intellectuals and politicians. For example, general and president Charles de Gaulle later admitted, "I love *The Three Musketeers*," which he felt helped inspire his love for France and appreciation for French history during his school-age years (Malraux, 1971). André Malraux, Minister of Cultural Affairs during the 1950s and 1960s, recognized that Dumas's readability, popularity, and focus on French history and republican values made the writer suitable as a primary instructor of French culture for adolescents and working-class individuals; Dumas could therefore potentially stimulate an interest in the "higher" French culture he sought to propagate. Malraux recalled how he had enjoyed Dumas's novels, such as *Georges*, in school as an adolescent, but moved on from *The Three Musketeers* to Balzac, regarded as a more urbane writer, as he grew older and continued with his education (Winegarten, 1991; Lebovics, 1999).

Dumas: Symbol of (White) French Civilization?

Encouraging young students to read Dumas to learn French history and praising Dumas for instilling in young minds a sense of French identity might superficially appear as a way to celebrate the writer. However, as the anecdote from Malraux implies, the issue was more complex. First, Dumas was an odd choice for children, especially in the predominantly Catholic country of France, considering that his works had been placed on the Vatican's list of "prohibited books" in 1863 for their immorality and depictions of the Catholic Church or Church authority figures (Martinez de Bujanda, 2002). Recent literary scholars have also argued extensively that Dumas's work incorporates mature themes and complexities (Net, 2008). As translator Lawrence Ellsworth points out, Dumas "writes in a disturbingly dynamic style [for nineteenth-century French language purists], propelling his story's action with vigorous language in sentences that are strangely short and direct. His theatrical dialogue is sharp, punchy, and concise, almost like the way real people talk." Further, "there's violence in…[Dumas's tales, often] sudden and brutal, and erotic thoughts and behavior are depicted in a frank and open manner quite unsuitable to a general audience [of Dumas's era]." Consequently, Victorian translators of Dumas's books into English regularly censored

his writings (Dumas, 2017, pp. 777-778; Atkinson, 2012). While Dumas became regarded increasingly as a writer for adolescents, his peers in the Romantic Movement that he co-founded did not suffer the same fate, even though his works were no less complex. A main difference between Dumas and his contemporaries, however, was his black ancestry and this became a significant factor in how he and his literary works were regarded.

Despite his successes, Dumas had faced forms of racial prejudice in France. Even though he was born in France, he faced difficulty in being accepted as "French" because of his Afro-Caribbean family origins. Contemporaries often described him as exhibiting an "African" physical appearance. Accounts focused typically on his skin color, hair, and lips (see **Figure 4**). For example, General Thiébault, who had served under Dumas's father, described the writer in 1834 as a young man "with skin like a *métis*, frizzy and thick hair like a *nègre*, [and] African lips" (Calmettes, 1893-1895, II, p. 32). Because of his "African" traits, Dumas was perceived widely at the grassroots level as "foreign." He once recounted an episode in *Adventures with My Pets* in which he took an anonymous ride with an "amusing" cabriolet driver. During the drive, the two happened to discuss the department of Aisne (where Dumas was born) and the driver listed famous men from there. However, he did not mention Dumas. When Dumas inquired about this omission, the driver replied that it was impossible for the writer to be from Villers-Cotterêts in Aisne. When Dumas asked why, the driver replied, "Dumas is not from Villers-Cotterêts…[because he] is a *nègre*!" As a result, he had to be from the Congo or Senegal (Dumas, 1868, pp.76-81).

Figure 4: An early 20th-century postcard depicting Alexandre Dumas as he appeared circa 1860 (Collection of the author).

Dumas also suffered from negative comments from both enemies and friends. In 1844, for example, Balzac expressed his contempt for the "*nègre*" Dumas after one of the former's poorly-selling serial novels was replaced with the latter's *Reine Margot* (Audebrand, 1888, p. 49). The classic actress Mlle. Mars, who starred in Dumas's early plays, disliked him because he was a Romantic as well as because of his skin color. She demanded that the windows be opened after Dumas left a room because she claimed he left an offensive "*nègre*" smell (Maurice, 1856, I, p. 428). Charles Nodier, Dumas's friend and mentor, once commented to him, "you Negroes are all the same; you love glass beads and toys" (Davidson, 1902, p. 45; Maurois, 1957, p. 80). Dumas was also the victim of racist cartoons in the press. Cham and Nadar drew Dumas as a grotesque figure by emphasizing his "African features" (i.e. lips, hair). Cham's most (in)famous cartoon portrayed Dumas as an African cannibal stirring

a pot (see **Figure 5**). Such depictions were not unusual (see **Figure 6**). Others include Dumas leading a parade of tribal Africans carrying his awards (Neave & Neave, 1991).

Figure 5: This caricature of Alexandre Dumas from popular nineteenth-century illustrator Cham that appeared in *Le Charivari* on March 31, 1858 was typical of those that appeared in newspapers during Dumas's lifetime. Such caricatures emphasize Dumas's hair, skin color, and lips, which were generally perceived as representative of his black ancestry (Public Domain Image/Wikipedia Commons).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Dumas's Afro-Caribbean heritage was often a source of criticism levied against him. Jean-Baptiste Jacquot (as Eugène de Mirecourt) published an infamous pamphlet, *Fabrique de romans: Maison Alexandre Dumas et compagnie* (1845), declaring Dumas a "*nègre*" who wrote none of the works attributed to him. Instead, Dumas presided over a writing-factory of lesser-knowns who produced works for him to ascribe his name. The pamphlet used the word *nègre*'s double meaning as a black slave and a ghostwriter to attack Dumas professionally and personally. Mirecourt went through each of Dumas's works to unveil the "true" author. Dumas, he argued, hired "intellectual deserters and translators" at wages that lower them "to the condition of *nègres* working under the whip of a mulatto!" (Mirecourt, 1845, pp. 33-47).

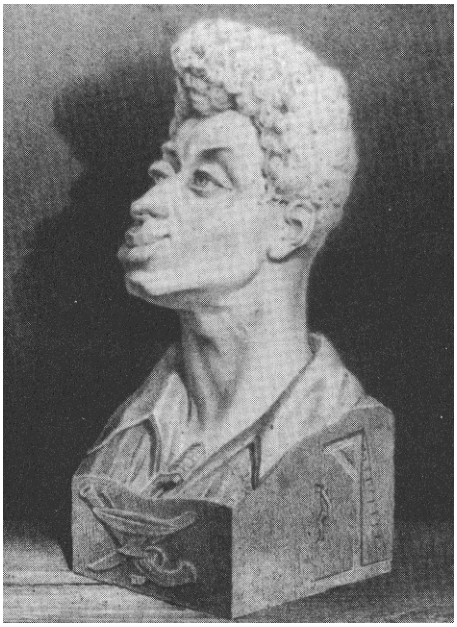

Figure 6: This image of a bust depicting Alexandre Dumas with stereotypical black African features appeared in *Le Charivari* on October 6, 1835 (Collection of the author).

Much ado has been made in traditional scholarship and biographies about Dumas's extensive use of collaborators, but this was common practice amongst the era's dramatists and was in itself not unique or scandalous (Mazzeo, 2007). As it was no secret that Dumas wrote with collaborators, the "scandal" was that white Frenchmen were laboring "under the whip of a mulatto," thereby upsetting the social hierarchy. Since the Enlightenment, *nègre* was used as a euphemism for a black slave. It thus had a pejorative connotation. *Noir*, or "black," was considered the more humanizing term, although being "black" was still associated with slavery (Féraud, 1787; *Dictionnaire de L'Académie française*, 1798; *Dictionnaire de L'Académie française*, 1835). Consequently, calling Dumas a *nègre* was to mock him as a

slave and colonial subject. In examining what was at stake in Mirecourt's pamphlet, it is important to take into account the era's "scientific" viewpoint as demonstrated in *L'Esprit des bêtes* (1847): "The animal is the mirror of man as man is the mirror of God…Man invents, the animal imitates" (Toussenel, 1847, pp. 2, 392). Therefore, denying Dumas's role in his works' creation was to argue that Dumas was an imitator, an "animal," primitive and backward to white Frenchmen due to his black ancestry.

Mirecourt's pamphlet also mocked Dumas's appearance, ancestry, and behavior to indicate his difference from other French people and similarity to inferior "savages": "Dumas's physique is well known: he has the stature of a drum-major, Herculean limbs at full stretch, protruding lips, an African nose, kinky hair, and a bronze face. His origin is written all over him; but it reveals itself even more in his character. Scratch the surface of Dumas and you will find the savage. There are elements of both the *nègre* and the marquis in him. However, the marquis is only skin deep. Remove some of the makeup, tear off the loose costume… [and under] the civilized surface, the *nègre* soon bares his teeth at you. The marquis plays his role in public, while the *nègre* betrays himself in private" (Mirecourt, 1845, p. 7). Mirecourt further indicated Dumas's backward, primitive nature in his pamphlet: "His garments inconvenience him, he strips and works in picturesque undress of our first ancestors. He stretches out on the floor like a dog from the New World; he lunches on potatoes taken burning hot from the ashes of the hearth and devours them without removing the skins – *nègre*!… Like the chiefs of Amerindian tribes, whom explorers persuade with baubles, Dumas loves everything that glistens, everything that shimmers. He has ribbons from various orders…he pins his decorations on his chest. The toys seduce him… – *nègre*!" (Mirecourt, 1845, pp. 7-8). Thus, some detractors perceived Dumas, as a copier of others, as being primitive, backward, or even sub-human. Victor Pavie declared that Dumas was foremost an African characterized "by the heat of his blood and the spontaneity of his nature" forged under the "rays of the black African sun." Consequently, Dumas was "a dramatic plagiarist, a compiler, not without verve, of Schiller, Shakespeare, [and] Goethe" (Schopp, 2002, p. 48).

Mirecourt's attacks, however, revealed a broader concern. Contemporaries were uncertain how to classify Dumas due to his biracial ancestry. Those who attempted to present Dumas as part of the French nation had to reconcile Dumas's Africanness with his Frenchness. Some described the "racial wars" fought within him. For example, Hippolyte de Villemessant declared that the French "race" had triumphed, for "the *nègre* had been beaten by civilized man; the impulsiveness of African blood had been tempered by the elegance of European civilization." Consequently, "what was repulsive in him had been transfigured by the clarity of his intelligence and his blossoming success" (Schopp, 2002, 186). Dumas's detractors argued the reverse. Pavie, for example, declared that "the refinements of an exuberant civilization have not been able to tame" Dumas's black blood (Schopp, 2002, 56).

Dumas's *bon vivant* lifestyle also became perceived as contrary to prevailing, normative middle-class sentiments of morality and thus indicative of his black African ancestry. Many reports focused on Dumas's alleged spending habits, style of dress, late-night carousing, lack of work ethic, and extreme fondness for food and women as signs of "Africanness." One periodical argued that "he displayed the Ethiopian's fondness for bright colors and dress-eccentricities" (*Every Saturday*, January 28, 1871). An 1871 obituary declared that Dumas reflected his black ancestry in being a man

without restraint, acquiring "scores of fortunes" that he ran through "by his unbridled luxury and dissipation" ("Editor's Literary Record," March 1871; Mathews, September 1881). Another similarly claimed that Dumas's "purse was open at both ends, yawning to be filled at one and running empty at the other. Gold burned a hole in his pocket, and he hated to be hot" (Browne, November 1873). Yet another article described his works as being written "with a carelessness, recklessness, and audacious pursuit of excitement." Dumas was criticized for using "scarcely any revision," which was attributed to his lack of reflective faculties due to his black ancestry. One 1871 article bluntly ascribed Dumas's excesses to his "Africanness," adding that he was sexually promiscuous, for "matrimony is an institution of which Dumas never comprehended the necessity or even the propriety" ("Editor's Literary Record," March 1871; Bigelow, April 1871).

By the time of his death, however, Dumas had achieved global fame and popularity within France based on his historical novels, which made him a symbol of French identity. Among those making speeches at the inauguration of Dumas's monument, discussed at the beginning of this article, was playwright Jules Claretie, who praised Dumas as an innovator of French theater, the "living personification of the drama—the drama incarnate." Most significant of all, however, was that he "diffused through the world the intelligence of the French race" ("Edmond About on Dumas," 20 November 1883). Edmond About praised Dumas's "genius of narration," arguing that the golden age of the serial novel was the "reign of Dumas the first." Consequently, his glory was a "patriotic glory" ("Edmond About on Dumas," 20 November 1883). As historian Michael Garval has argued, the French sought "cultural permanence" through the creation of monuments that "helped a nation in flux define itself, its relation to the past, and anticipated survival into the future." Such a context provided the basis for the literary field's growing conception of great writers' "immortality" through their works. The physical monument, like the one to Dumas, served as a metaphor for the lasting work of the great writer and fused the writer and his works in the viewers' minds as a symbol of France and its heritage (Garval, 2003, p. 83). Victor Hugo expressed this conception in a fragment for *Les Contemplations*: "What we write is our own flesh/ The book is to such an extent the author, and the poem/ The poet" (Hugo, 1964-1967, II, p. 853). Hugo's lines revealed the idea that the writer's work is, in a sense, the writer himself. As a result, great writers "became" their works and lived on through them, achieving a sense of monumental immortality (Garval, 2003, p. 92). Through this fusion, Dumas and his works were integral to the French patrimony and demonstrative of the French essence. As Hippolyte Parigot, an early Dumas biographer, suggested in 1902, the four musketeers embodied "a living sense of France":

> In that lies the secret charm of the four heroes: d'Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. Fierce determination, aristocratic melancholy, a somewhat vain strength, an elegance, at once subtle and gallant – it is these qualities that make of them… an epitome of that gracious, courageous, light-hearted France which we still like to recover through the imagination… D'Artagnan, the adroit Gascon, caressing his moustache; Porthos, the muscular and foolish; Athos, the somewhat romantic grand seigneur; [and] Aramis…the discreet Aramis, who hides his religion and his amours, able student of the good fathers… – these four friends…typify the four cardinal qualities of our country…If Danton and Napoleon were the professors of French energy, Dumas, in *The Three Musketeers* is its national historian (Parigot, 1902, pp.140-141).

This embodiment of the French essence by Dumas and his works/characters created a

problem for many French intellectuals and politicians.

The republican vision of France generally assumed an "essential" French nature that all "French" individuals shared, or, for outsiders, could assimilate to (Betts, 2005). Nevertheless, by the end of the nineteenth century, European and white became conflated identities of an exclusionary nature, making whiteness the epitome of civilization and morality (Bonnett, 1998). Consequently, the French patrimony was not recognized as including individuals of black African descent or black African culture; such elements, however, occupied a crucial part of Dumas's personal heritage and had provided the basis for much literary criticism against his work. Therefore, Dumas's low critical esteem, but high popularity, created a paradox. As we saw briefly, most of the "defects" ascribed to him and his works had been stereotypical of people of black African descent during the nineteenth century. As Spurr observed in 1902, Dumas was "dowered at birth with many of the [perceived] characteristics, good and bad, of the African race—the ardent, imaginative temperament, the levity of nature, the impulsive soul—a host of qualities which were strange to the comprehension of both friends and enemies in after-life; because side by side with them were all the [perceived] native characteristics of the Frenchman, existent in full vigor" (Spurr, 2003, pp. 4-5).

Three primary and ongoing events during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which was an era of cultural debates within French society, made Dumas's biracial ancestry an especially thorny problem in regard to his status as a symbol of France: the New Imperialism, Scientific racism, and an increase in immigration to France. The late nineteenth century was an era of renewed European imperialism during which the French republic grew a vast colonial empire focused in Africa and Asia. Ideas regarding race and civilization were used to justify these efforts. As politician Léon Blum declared in 1924, "We are too imbued with love of our country to disavow the expansion of French thought and civilisation…We recognise the right and even the duty of superior races to draw unto them those who have not yet arrived at the same level of culture" (Aldrichm 1996, p. 115).

Dominant racial thinking during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries identified human races' plural origins, associated races with Linnean species, and was skeptical toward racial hybridity's viability. Many believed that races were primordial, natural, enduring, and distinct. To Arthur de Gobineau, a writer and aristocrat who helped popularize scientific racism, civilizations were the accomplishments of "pure" biological races, which could degenerate over time by mixing with other groups. He created a civilizational hierarchy placing black Africans at the bottom. Such "biological" inferiority was irrefutable and unchangeable. As a result, the "lesson of history" supported the domination and subordination of certain races by others, since "all civilizations derive from the white race" and "none can exist without its help" (Gobineau, 1999, pp. 27, 56, 210). Others shared Gobineau's views. As social scientist Gustave Le Bon argued, "one can award a Negro a bachelor of arts degree, a doctorate, [but] one cannot make him civilized" (Mazlish, 2004, p. 63).

Charles Richet, a respected early twentieth-century physiology professor, argued that evidence provided "absolute" certainty that races possessed distinguishable hereditary characteristics (Richet, 1919, p. 23). Advocates held that colonialism was bringing the world together in a way that caused the violation of nature. Without colonialism, races would remain reciprocally exclusive. An explorer, Honoré Jacuinot, noted that "the Negro appears hideous

to each European, in the same way that our paleness will be regarded with disdain by the black man. For coupling to take place between these two species, there must necessarily be a perversion of the generative impulse" of nature. He criticized the "shameful exploitation" on the part of humankind by another, without which these mixings would "not or only rarely exist." A *métis*, or an individual of mixed-race, was an "abnormal, monstrous being, which persists under the influence of the conditions that presided at his creation" (Blanckart, 2003, p. 49). Such Frenchmen therefore perceived *métis* as shifting ambiguously and threateningly between Frenchness and foreignness (White, 2002; Steinmetz, 2007; Saada, 2012). Many holders of such views interpreted Dumas negatively, and in 1886, Dumas's Paris monument was desecrated because it celebrated a figure of racial hybridity ("The Statue of Dumas Blackened," 5 March 1886). Richet confessed that one could "assuredly" find "examples of mulattoes and *métis* intellectually well endowed." He noted that "Alexandre Dumas, whose father, General Dumas, was clearly mulatto…can be cited among the most intelligent men of the nineteenth century; but his case is unique," and moreover his "black blood" was minimal (Richet, 1919, pp. 82-83, 84). South America and the Caribbean were "contaminated by inferior races" because of such mixing between Europeans, indigenous populations, and blacks and provided an example of how France should not be. Mixing between blacks and whites in France would cause physical degeneracy, which was linked to the health of the nation (Richet, 1919, pp. 84-85, 92, 252).

By the late nineteenth century, France was also the largest recipient of immigrants in Europe and the French birthrate was declining. Contemporary ways of defining French citizenship crystallized during the Third Republic. The generally progressive opening of Frenchness to "foreigners" in legal terms did not necessarily equate to the opening of Frenchness to "foreigners" in social and cultural terms. Attacks on immigrant workers increased in times of uncertainty and economic slumps, and Jews and Algerian Muslims particularly had difficulty gaining acceptance (Brubaker, 1992; Weil, 2009; Weber, 2007). Therefore, legal acquisition of Frenchness often meant little when one moved "beyond legislative texts to interactions at the grassroots," thereby prompting debates about what it meant to be French and increasing concern about the protection of a distinct French identity (Boswell, 2009, p. 119; Brown, 2010). Journalist Charles Maurras, in his right-wing paper *L'Action française*, for example, explained the disparity between the true France, comprised of individuals imbibed with a surreal and uniting French essence, and the legal France, comprised of those who were technically French citizens or residents, but not French in spirit (Lebovics, 2006; Carroll, 1995).

French intellectuals had no universal answer to reconcile Dumas's "incompatible" black ancestry with his French ancestry. A few sought to avoid the issue by resurrecting Mirecourt's allegations that Dumas was not the writer of the works attributed to him; such a claim was used to imply that Dumas's works were authored by true "Frenchmen" and thus protect the "whiteness" of the French patrimony (see: Brunetière, 1905-1919, IV, p. 261). Most, however, perceived reconciliation as important to re-stabilize an exclusive French identity. Since Dumas was now an icon of Frenchnesss, intellectuals, journalists, and politicians tended to "forget" his biracial background, or at least marginalize it to the point of irrelevancy to preserve in a contradictory fashion a stable, white, and "modern" French identity. Through marginalization or avoidance, Dumas's

Africanness "disappeared" or was "irrelevant," thereby making him "French" in the process.

Henri Blaze de Bury's, Gabriel Ferry's, and Charles Glinel's popular 1880s books on Dumas all generally refrained from mentioning his multiracial background and at times purposefully obscured it (Bury, 2008; Glinel, 1884; Ferry, 1883). Glinel did include a letter from Dumas to the Haitian government asking them to erect a monument to his father. However, Glinel prefaced the letter by stating that it had "been brought to light in early 1883 through the efforts of researchers *of strange facts*," thereby marginalizing the importance of Dumas's relationship to the Caribbean (Glinel, 1884, p. 355; emphasis added). Ferry's account repeated Dumas's anecdote about the cab driver also discussed earlier. Yet, Ferry prefaced it as an "amusing" story that "proves that many people believe that the author of *The Three Musketeers* is indeed a man of color!" (Ferry, 1883, pp. 149-154). The exclamation point at the end and dismissive tone indicated that perceptions of Dumas as a "man of color" were quite incredulous. In another example, a journal argued that Dumas's father had been referred to "incorrectly" as a "mulatto," for Dumas's grandmother could "have hardly been a full-blooded negress" because she had the "education and energy" to manage Dumas's grandfather's estate ("The Dumas Lineage," January 1896). Such an account was one among many that sought to reduce Dumas's black ancestry.

As a flexible social construct, individuals perceived as reaching "whiteness," regardless of their descent, could be reclassified. Whiteness, as a category of identification, lacked geographic specificity, while "blacks" were more clearly perceived as people "of African nativity, or African descent" (Lopez, 1996, pp. 51-52). Therefore, whiteness "became a measure…of… modernity," and served as a means to exclude groups perceived as nonwhite from partaking in "privileges inhering in whiteness" (Koshy, 2001, pp. 156, 167, 168; Harris, 1993, p. 1736). As Dumas progressively became a symbol of French civilization, he came to be viewed increasingly as "white." During the peak of the New Imperialism and scientific racism, Dumas was depicted more frequently as "white" in portraits and his connection to the colonies and black ancestry was marginalized. Therefore, while admitting Dumas's black ancestry to some degree in the era's textual discourse, such as brief biographies that accompanied his works, the visual images generally portrayed a physically "white" Dumas that reinforced perceptions that he was not really a "black" writer at all. **Figures 7 and 8** provide examples of such images, which limited the physical characteristics contemporaries had described as "African," including the kinkiness of Dumas's hair, skin tone, and lips. Such images offered a radical contrast to the example provided earlier in **Figures 5 and 6**, which emphasized Dumas's African features to separate him from the "French" nation. The visualization of Dumas and his racial conceptualization are inexorably intertwined. In such depictions, we see how the perceived moral, intellectual, or cultural accomplishments (or defects) of individuals of black descent could influence how they were imagined physically as either black or white. If, as the adage goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words," such images negated whatever limited admittance of his black ancestry was made, inscribing in French viewers' minds a lasting conception of Dumas as a "white" writer, not just symbolically, but physically.

Figure 7: Several companies, such as Chocolat Lombart, used images of Alexandre Dumas to sell products during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this advertisement, Dumas's date of birth is incorrectly listed as 1803 instead of 1802 (Collection of the author).

Such trends continued in works of literary criticism. Dumas's literary reputation in the realm of French literature steadily declined as the nineteenth century progressed. From 1829 to 1830, Dumas was critically and publicly perceived as the creator, or, along with Victor Hugo as the co-creator, of the French Romantic Movement in the theater. Dumas began to lose this position as the decade progressed. In contrast, Hugo's critical reputation soared at Dumas's expense. As celebrated critic Sainte-Beuve wrote, after 1832, Hugo was considered the greater writer "by several lengths." While Dumas had some talent, there was "something about that talent which one could almost describe as physical." Dumas's work was thus perceived as a carnal overflow of his "tropical" Afro-Caribbean vitality rather than thought-out, serious pieces (Maurois, 1957, p. 136; Bassan, 1974, pp. 767-772). Similarly, critic Gustave Planche wrote, "Dumas is not in the habit of thinking. With him, action follows on the heels of desire with childlike rapidity. Consequently, he has rushed into doing battle without having considered the value of the monument which he has wished to tear down....Dumas has all serious artists against him" (Maurois, 1957, pp. 135-136; Berthier, 1998, pp. 55-65).

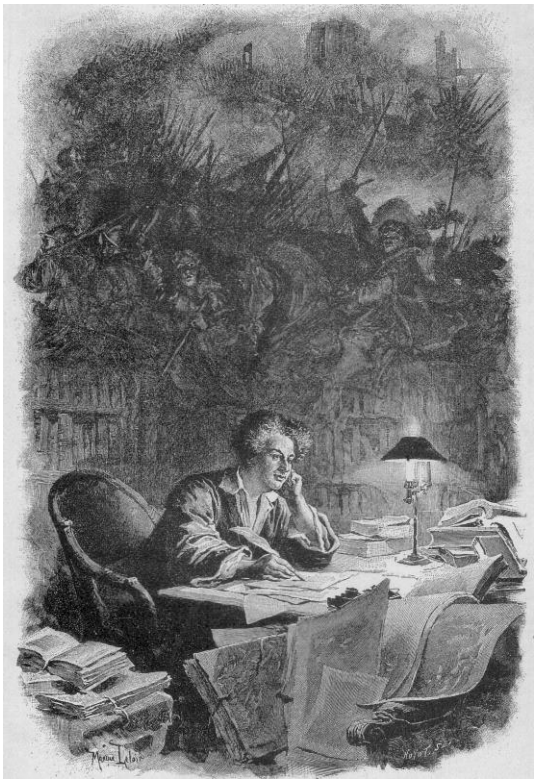

Figure 8: A version of a popular late nineteenth-century French illustration by M. Léloir and J. Huyot depicting Dumas at work (Collection of the author).

With such negative images of both blacks in general and Dumas in particular reinforced throughout French society, Dumas's literary reputation had hardly improved with the beginning of a new century. The seventh part of Glinel's book, entitled "Death and Posterity," included a 27-page defense of Dumas's character and literary worth (Glinel, 1884). Henry Spurr's

1902 biography admitted the need to defend Dumas against the allegations of Mirecourt, a "contractor for the gutter press," made in *Fabrique de romans*, even though it was "over sixty years since they were made," proved libel in court, and dismissed by Dumas and his peers in "the higher ranks of literature." Nevertheless, Spurr lamented, the charges "have been accepted almost universally as the truth" in reference and popular works in both English and French (Spurr, 2003, pp. vii-ix, 83). Similar to Glinel, Spurr felt the need to include lengthy sections entitled "His Character" and "His Genius: A Defense." Even factual inaccuracies about Dumas regarding his date of birth and parentage persisted throughout the nineteenth century (for example, see: Jeanroy-Félix, 1889).

As biographer A. Craig Bell noted in 1950, "Dumas is a river which academicians, critics and literary snobs have been fouling for half a century" (Bell, 1950, p. ix). As early as 1848, literary critics like Charles Robin could declare that Dumas "has been the subject of more interpretations, true and false, and of more literary battles than any other writer of the nineteenth century" (Bell, 1950, p. ix). The "historical novel *à la* Dumas" was in general considered an inferior literary genre by certain critics "from the point of view of creative power and originality of invention" (Haxo, 1933, p. 226). Yet, the nineteenth-century literary critic Joseph Marie Quérard was overly critical of Dumas. In his five-volume *Les supercheries littéraires dévoilées*, he argued that Dumas never wrote anything at all and merely rearranged the work of others (and not necessarily for the better). As journalist Philibert Audebrand wrote satirically in 1888, Dumas had written so much that "when old Quérard, that benedictine of our age, tried to take an inventory of the rich bibliography of the country, when he arrived at… [Dumas's] name, he could barely refrain from a slight shudder of fear. The very name on the works of this giant weakened his resolve. How could one man undertake such a task? In truth, he explained that 92 collaborators had cooperated to the realization of so many works" (Schopp, 2002, p. 114).

The critics of the generation of René Doumic and Ferdinand Brunetière also marginalized Dumas's literary accomplishments (Doumic, 1897; Rod, 1892). Brunetière wrote that Dumas's dramatic works "are not literature. They have no style and the form remains indecisive, imprecise, and banal. The psychology found in his work is without depth. They are poorly composed. The life of the man explains the character of his work" (Brunetière, 1905-1919, IV, pp. 247-261). Dumas's novels, he argued, possess "literary qualities" but they are "industrial novels" hastily composed (p. 261). Yet, unlike critics during Dumas's lifetime, Brunetière did not focus on Dumas's race or ancestry in his degrading account; this became the norm during the Third Republic. Other literary historians often overlooked Dumas, devoting chapters to writers such as Stendhal, George Sand, Sainte-Beuve, and Anatole France, but only brief coverage to Dumas. For example, Gustave Lanson's 1923 *Histoire illustrée de la littérature française*, while providing some detail on Dumas's dramas, clearly gave him a largely subordinate role to that of Hugo. Dumas's novels are dismissed in his chapter on the serial novels of the 1840s, the time during which Dumas was at his literary peak (Lanson, 1923). As Georges Pellissier, another critic, asked in the early 1900s, can Dumas be called one of the "great French writers"? According to him, while Dumas may be popular, his novels "are not much in way of literature (Pellissier, n.d., p. 232). In 1906, a monument to the "glory of Dumas *fils*" was inaugurated in Paris next to the one of Dumas ("Le monument de Dumas," 13 June 1906). Journalist Albert Marche argued that French genius "matured" within the Dumas family,

which became increasingly "French" each generation—and therefore implied they were increasingly less "African" (Marche, 12 June 1906).

Compliments for Dumas's literary works scattered the pages of academic works during the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Henri Blaze de Bury confessed that "Dumas is *popular*, but he is not *known*. His method of life and his occasional worthless books greatly damaged his literary position. He is usually looked upon simply as an 'amuser,' and yet…more than many others, he had his moments of lofty thought and philosophy" (Bury, 2008, p. 34). Most academics, like Jeanroy-Félix, preferred to limit any praise for Dumas to his dramas (Jeanroy-Félix, 1889). The great writer Anatole France also held a higher opinion of Dumas than most academics and regarded him as the sole founder of the Romantic Movement in the theatre and a great storyteller in his novels (Dargan, 1939; Lapaque, 2002). In addition, Adolphe Brisson confessed that, "to be fair, the author of *The Three Musketeers* had the gift of foresight, and a kind of instinct…guiding him in his compositions" (Brisson, 1895, p. 225). Yet many dulled their praise. For example, a 1904 review of Francis Miltoun's *Dumas's France* claimed that while Dumas made "certain passages of History…almost…his own," he was "not an archaeologist as was Victor Hugo…[nor] a critic or student of manners as was Honoré Balzac" ("The Paris of Romance," 3 December 1904).

As a result of lingering negative perceptions of Dumas's work and his association with adolescent (and hence "fluff" or "less sophisticated") literature, the centenary of Dumas's birth in 1902 was overshadowed by that of Hugo, who was born in the same year and whose literary reputation has soared during the late nineteenth century. *Le Petit Journal* expressed its opinion that Dumas's centenary was, in comparison, "with infinitely less pomp than the one for Victor Hugo." While the newspaper did not disagree with this emphasis, for Dumas "did not attain the same heights at the inspired poet [Hugo]," he nevertheless "spread throughout the entire world the honor of our literature." The newspaper therefore concluded with a petition to not honor Hugo less, but to honor Dumas "a little more" ("Centenaire d'Alexandre Dumas," 13 July 1902). Dumas's novels, while not lauded for their style or literary value, were commended for educating the nation, thereby helping forge a sense of a common national past. While Dumas took "liberties with history, he was also a great teacher" of the subject since he was able to mix learning with entertainment ("Centenaire d'Alexandre Dumas," 13 July 1902). The international press reiterated the common French view that Dumas was an "amuser" with no particular social message or complexity. They thus argued that he would "have been ashamed" to find himself taken seriously as a literary figure during his centenary ("The Centenary of Dumas," 26 July 1902). Dumas's multiracial background was routinely omitted or marginalized. *Le Petit Journal*, for example, made a sole reference to it in a sentence that stated his father was a "mulatto general" ("Centenaire d'Alexandre Dumas," 13 July 1902).

Since Dumas had become a symbol of "France," intellectuals were in general not keen on emphasizing his black heritage during the height of the New Imperialism. Some French intellectuals attempted to distance Dumas from his black colonial heritage. Nevertheless, the fact of Dumas's black heritage remained. Because of his usefulness for republican agendas, politicians and intellectuals did not wish to disparage Dumas openly; instead, they routinely emphasized his "whiteness" and downgraded his literary work. The development of adolescent

literature, however, provided a way to simultaneously praise while denigrating Dumas. Individuals in societies beyond the West that had never reached the level of European "civilization" were viewed as existing in a primitive state of evolution akin to "adolescence" in human development. Such "childlike" individuals passed on their impulsive, irrational, and simplistic characteristics from generation to generation. The racial images solidifying black Africans as inferior because of their "primitive" state, which was reflected in their "childish" behavior, were reinforced culturally (Schneider, 1982). Commercial trademark images, for example, were important media through ideas about extra-European peoples disseminated across the public because they were encountered in their daily home environment and therefore could shape racial conceptions. The images of colonial peoples adapted earlier representations, and used clothing, facial expressions, and other decorations to accentuate the exotic qualities of the colonial subjects that correlated to how they had been perceived visually as well as their (subordinate) role in Greater France. Africans were depicted often as primitive, or childlike (Hale, 2003 & 2008). In addition, literature reinforced existing racial images. Guy de Maupassant's 1883 short story "Timbuctoo" is representative of how. In the story, a French officer relates how Timbuctoo, an African colonial soldier, possesses the "characteristics of overgrown frolicsome children" (Maupassant, 1947; Martone, 2009). Consequently, Dumas, linked previously with the "primitive" colonial world, became connected with the state of adolescence. His work, criticized as lacking in depth, style, and refinement, were perceived as works that lacked the complexity of more "mature" pieces of literature that demonstrated the "true" complexity of French culture. Hence, Dumas's work was deemed suitable primarily for those of the same intellectual capacity as its writer. Re-categorizing Dumas's works as adolescent literature was, therefore, a way to carry on French racism through non-racial means. Adolescent literature emerged quickly as a tool to sanctify the nation in the minds of future generations, reinforcing a sense of French superiority and colonial perceptions (Dine, 1997).

Young readers were indoctrinated with what it meant to be French through mass culture. Dumas's novels became associated with the popular "boys' books" of the late nineteenth century (Bruzelius, 2007; Lerer ,2008). To be fair, romantic serial novels, like Dumas's, had been a prototype for this sub-genre, as they were often full of action and heroic figures, building tension around "cliffhangers" to create tales that fused duty to one's nation with adventure (Jan, 1969). Underneath the associations with adolescents, however, was the reclassification of Dumas's novels, intended for adult readers at the time of publication, as solely juvenile fiction to lessen their literary value. The implication was that Dumas's novels were less sophisticated, and that adults who read them did so as a way to reconnect with their childhoods, rather than engage in "serious" literary reading. Such perceptions disassociated Dumas from the most critically-praised French writers, in turn causing Dumas to be neglected by French scholars and intellectuals throughout the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. This veiled criticism was a way to simultaneously praise Dumas as a symbol of Frenchness while critiquing Dumas's and his work's "Africanness" without explicitly doing do, for the contrary would suggest that the French patrimony was not exclusively "white."

The growing perception of his works as adolescent literature was enough to bury Dumas in academic terms. In the 1990s, literary scholar Dorothy Trench-Bonett put forth several reasons to account for the lack of academic studies on

Dumas during the twentieth century. She placed particular emphasis on his status as a writer for young people, which had led critics to underestimate the complexity of his works (1991, pp. 26-27). While the French Academy held a respectable opinion of Dumas when it was under the influence of Dumas *fils*, who held sway over French cultural opinion during the height of his fame, the Academy in general during the Third Republic did not hold a high estimate of Dumas's literary value. The often-conservative Academies came to serve as unique government-sponsored intellectual authorities in France and issued supreme-court judgment over their intellectual domains (Crosland, 2001). As one historian summarized, "the French critic has difficulty in admitting that children's literature can be the bearer of poetry" (Jan, 1969, p. 71). Dumas's works might be readable and useful to instruct young people on French history, but as a result, no "respectable" scholar would herald them as "good" pieces of literature.

Conclusion

The French Third Republic based its unity as a collection of citizens and aggressively sought ways to create cultural hegemony within the state's borders to establish a collective French identity within its political borders. The Third Republic's attempt to forge a collective past through national commemorations led to the "statuemania" of the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Garval, 2003, pp. 91-95; Best, 2010; Rearick, 1986; Lehning 2001). Literature's commercialization during the century, which coincided with a rise in literacy and a mass press, transformed literary figures from notables in small intellectual circles to popular celebrities, or cultural icons (Lanfranchi, 1979; Garval, 2003). Events such as inaugurations for monuments to cultural heroes like those to Dumas linked such figures to the republic and the republic to the nation, and helped consolidate a French republican identity. Education played a seminal role in forging a new French nation and Dumas and his literary works occupied a crucial role in these efforts.

Following Dumas's death, Hugo wrote a sentimental condolence letter to Dumas *fils* that already articulated an image of Dumas as a global representative of French "civilization":

> During this century, there was no more popular figure than Alexandre Dumas…His dramas have been played throughout the entire world; his novels have been translated into all languages… Dumas is one of those men who can be called the sowers of civilization…He fertilizes the soul, the mind, the intelligence; he creates a thirst for reading; he penetrates the human genius and sows seeds in it. What he seeds is the French idea. The French idea encompasses a quantity of humanity which produces progress wherever it penetrates… From all his work, in such multiplicity, so varied, so vivid, so charming, so powerful, springs a kind of light which is France's very own (Schopp, 1988, pp. 489-491).

Hugo's letter implied that Dumas's works were part of the French patrimony, a part of France itself. Wherever and whenever they were read, they "sowed" the seeds of French culture in the hearts and minds of the readers. Dumas was thus an agent of French "civilization."

As a symbol of France, however, Dumas posed a conceptual dilemma because of his black ancestry. Being French became synonymous with being "white." How could Dumas be simultaneously French and black? French biographical studies on Dumas, particularly during the late-nineteenth century and first two-thirds of the twentieth century, generally downplayed the impact of his black ancestry to support the myth of a color blind French society and the perception of French culture as being the product of people of European stock, or "whites." Because of its French Revolutionary heritage, the French Third Republic conceived itself as the source of "liberty, equality, and

fraternity" (despite its colonialism) and as the birthplace of the rights of man. France thus harbored a myth that it was not "racist" like its Western counterparts. As a symbol of France, Dumas posed a conceptual dilemma during the rise of the New Imperialism and scientific racism because of his black ancestry and past experiences with racism. As a result, Dumas's portraits and caricatures generally reflect a departure from those during his lifetime. Rather than accentuate his "black" features, it became the norm to accentuate his Caucasian features. As a result, portraits and caricatures of Dumas during the Third Republic generally reflect a radical departure from those during his lifetime. Rather than commonly accentuate Dumas's "black" features, it became increasingly the norm to accentuate his Caucasian features. As art historian Jose Ortega y Gasset has noted, "a traditional painter painting a portrait claims to have got hold of the unfortunately real person when, in truth and at best, he has set down on the canvas a schematic selection, arbitrarily decided on by his mind, from the innumerable traits that make a living person" (Gasset, 1968, p. 38). Consequently, such portraits of Dumas reflect the artists' conscious or subconscious perceptions of him and suggest the view that Dumas was increasingly regarded as both "white" and "French." Dumas's status as "symbolically white" by virtue of being part of the French heritage cast him in a contradictory role (Koshy, 2001, p. 168). French intellectual elites generally praised Dumas as a popular, though not great, writer. The base lower classes may like Dumas, but no urbane French academic would praise him. Since black African stereotypes depicted them as "childlike," Dumas's work was rationalized as being written at a low intellectual level. As a result, his work, unlike that of other French Romantics, was denigrated as solely adolescent literature. This served dual (but conflicting) purposes: it encouraged young people to read Dumas, which they largely enjoyed, to instill in their impressionable minds the basics of, and love for, French history to help consolidate national sentiments. At the same time, it prevented him from being perceived as equal to truly great "French" literary figures, thereby allowing a means through which to criticize Dumas's "Africanness" without mentioning it directly to protect his symbolic whiteness bestowed as a symbol of France. In this sense, French school curricula fostered an unrecognized cultural bias that promoted a particular conception of Frenchness and racial hierarchies during the era of the New Imperialism.

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