

Mona Ozouf - L'idée républicaine et l'interprétation du passé national - XX^e Conférence Marc-Bloch, 17 juin 1998

Conférence publiée in : *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales*, 53 (6), 1998, p. 1075-1087 ; archive numérique sur [Persée](#).

Abstract

The republican ideal and the interpretation of the national past. – The republican ideal, which has today, once again, been given a place of honor, which is considered entirely coherent and invoked as the unique cure for all this era's evils, continues to illustrate the difficulties that French people have with their past. From the time of its revolutionary birth, the French republican ideal was meant to be a promise of humanities eternal renewal and was thus defined by a break with time and a contempt for tradition. In order that the republican regime might, after a century of hesitating, establish itself finally in France, the founding fathers of the Third Republic had to erase the revolutionary origins of the republican ideal, reintegrate all of the national past and reject the imaginary break: these efforts resulted in a much more complex, more problematic and also more pragmatic republican ideal, than that which is magically invoked today.

Retracing this itinerary is a manner of persuading ourselves that our era can no longer believe in the coherence and integrity of the model of the Third Republic. It is also a means to seize upon that which the republican ideal still offers as a rectification to democratic drifts, be they despotic or prosaic.