American students at the Toulouse Faculty of Law

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Shoulder Arms, Charlie Chaplin's film, released in the United States on October 20, 1918, features Charlot trying to train in an army camp. When evening comes, he falls asleep and wakes up in a trench in France sharing the expectation and the idleness of his companions in misfortune. He volunteers for an espionage mission. Returning a hero, having saved a young French woman and captured Kaiser Wilhelm II, Marshal Hindenburg and the *Kronprinz*.

Chaplin was no stranger to the *poilus* when his film was released in France on April 20, 1919 under the name *Charlot Soldat*. In 1915 at the Bois de la Vache in Somme, Swiss

Frédéric Louis Sauser, alias Blaise Cendrars, while he was serving in the French army as a foreign volunteer, then in the Foreign Legion, told of his companions making him discover the burlesque of Charlot until he went on leave to Paris to rush “dans un petit cinéma de la place Pigalle […] [to a small cinema of Pigalle square […]]”:

“Je riais comme quatre… [I was laughing like four men…]

‘Hé ! soldat, on ne rit pas comme ça, c’est la guerre ! me dit en me frappant sur l’épaule un digne monsieur de l’arrière. [Hey now! soldier, don’t laugh like that, there’s a war!’ a dignified gentleman sat behind me said, beating me on the shoulder.]

Je me retournai pour lui envoyer mon poing en pleine figure. [I turned around to punch him in the face.]

Dieu ! quelle blague ! [Goodness! What a joke.]

Et je terminai ma nuit de permission au commissariat de Pigalle [And I ended my night of leave at the police station in Pigalle]”. (*Trop c’est trop*, Paris, Denoël, 1957, reprinted in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 8, Paris, Denoël, 1965).

In April 1919, the French who could watch Charlot’s film were also, as in Paris and Toulouse, in possible contact with demobilized American soldiers who then took classes between March and June. Two years earlier, on April 6, 1917, the United States had officially abandoned its creed of “He kept us out of war,” by declaring war on Germany. President Woodrow Wilson sent troops to the Old World under the command of General John Pershing. The Sammies were then decisive during the fighting in the spring of 1918, during the second Battle of the Marne, and then in the autumn of 1918 during the Meuse-Argonne offensive.

As soon as their country entered the war, American academics also mobilized to support those who had gone to Europe. The American University Union was established in early July 1917. In support of young Americans so that they could continue their education during and after the conflict, it also wanted to foster the development of academic relations. It expressed the wish in October 1917 (“Although organized to meet war needs it is the hope of its founders that the Union may prove a permanent institution helping, in cooperation with other organizations, to attract American college men to France for graduate study, and to serve as an agency for

cultivating a better understanding of the United States in France and other European countries"), and again in June 1918, eager to encourage "the attendance and advancing the welfare of American students at the representative universities of France, Great Britain and Italy". Starting in February 1918, the privileged French interlocutor was the National Office of French Universities and Schools (ONUEF) led by historian Charles Petit-Dutaillis (1868-1947). A graduate of the École des Hautes Études, a jurist and a professor of medieval history at the University of Lille, he was the head of this association from 1917 to 1936. He asked French universities to welcome future demobilized students.

The board of the University of Toulouse, in its annual report for the year 1918-1919, specified its response and its mobilization (University Library of Toulouse, 90 227). Some 20 pages describe all the preparations, lessons learned, student activities and the departure of demobilized soldiers. This commitment of the University of Toulouse allowed it to deliver itself a glowing report, as "elle avait fait tout ce qui dépendait d'elle, non seulement pour instruire des choses de notre pays ces représentants de la grande nation américaine, mais encore pour leur faire aimer la France, et elle avait le sentiment d'y avoir réussi [it had done everything in its power, not only to instruct these representatives of the great American nation in the culture of our country, but also to make them love France, and it had the feeling of having succeeded there]" so it "a semé [du grain dont] sortira une moisson dont profiteront la grandeur et la sécurité de la France de demain [sowed [the grain from which] will come a harvest from which will benefit the greatness and safety of the France of tomorrow]" (Rapport, 1918-1919, p. 70). It was then one of the manifestations of the collective will expressed by the board of the university to work "à […] l'expansion française à l'étranger [for […] the French expansion abroad]". The relations with foreign universities, the Toulouse section of the French Institute of Madrid, relations with Italy and Portugal, the projects of the French Studies Institute to train French teachers outside of France, the holiday courses for foreigners in Bagnères-de-Bigorre, the reception of foreign personalities and English and American missions were all taken into account. There was a question of "faire regagner à l'influence française à l'étranger le terrain que, dans presque tous les domaines, elle avait peu à peu perdu avant la guerre, l'étendre au-delà de ses anciennes limites [returning French influence abroad to the level that, in almost all fields, it had gradually lost before the war, and extending it beyond its old limits]". Invited by Petit-Dutaillis to make suggestions for the education offered to "soldiers-students",

the four faculties in Toulouse (Law, Humanities, Science, Medicine and Pharmacology) were congratulated by him on October 23, 1918 so much so that he considered “excellent” the project presented on the Toulouse site. It was agreed upon, in close cooperation with the American representatives (American University Union and the Army Educational Commission of the Young Men’s Christian Association), to send some 1,560 of the 5,000 soldiers concerned to Toulouse from February 1st to the end of May 1919. In the end, 1,223 students joined the benches of the Toulouse faculties, in addition to 1,163 French and 201 foreigners already present. These American students arrived “in small groups” between February 23 and March 10.

The report of the university board is full of details specifying the separate housing conditions of the officers and the company for whom barracks were reserved, four kilometers from the city center, the same ones that had been used to house “des ouvrières et des ménages d’ouvriers de la Poudrerie [the workers and households of workers of the gunpowder factory]”. It was also in preparation for the arrival and reception of the 167 American students at the Faculty of Law that the decision was taken to install electric lighting throughout the building (sessions of the Faculty’s assembly of January 24 and February 5, 1919). The report of the university board specifies the organization and content of the lessons as well as the modalities of examination before devoting a part to “pleasures”, the University of Toulouse having “considéré aussi comme son devoir de mettre de la joie dans leur vie [considered also as its duty to put joy in their life]” (receptions, excursions, clubs, sports). A final part of the report mentions their departure on June 30, 1919. During these four months spent in Toulouse, a double exchange emerged. On the one hand, the one from the Toulouse academics towards American students. The courses offered carried what they considered to be representative of the legal discipline or, at the very least, the elements necessary for the training of a foreign student. On the other hand, these young demobilized soldiers animated the “great village” of Toulouse and participated in this meeting of cultures. A testimony reached us with the student newspaper *Qu’est-ce que c’est ?*, published between March 19 and June 30, 1919.

A course common to all students was organized until April 5. Courses and practical exercises in French were given by a varied body of teachers (university professors, schoolteachers and some notables of the city). They focused on several fields: French literature; history, civilization, geography; prehistory; art history; philosophy; music. The

professors of the Faculty of Law participated in this education, dealing in one hour with various themes: “The feudal system and its disappearance” (Thomas), “French economic life in the Middle Ages” (Dugarçon), “Fundamental laws of the French monarchy” (Declareuil), “France in the war of American independence” (Fliniaux), “The political ideals of the French Revolution” (Hauriou), “French public freedoms” (Magnol), “Modern taxation” (Rigaud), “The French family structure in war” (Cézar-Bru), “Military justice. The French woman. The paternal power”(Gheusi), “The situation of workers in France “(Houques-Fourcade), “French military stewardship in war “(Perreau), “Origins of the Toulouse Faculty of Law” (Rigaud), “French expansion in Africa” (Rouard de Card) and “Commercial navigation” (Fraissingea). In addition to his 14 lessons, Achille Mestre gave musical lectures on Bizet and Déodat de Séverac. Then, starting on April 7, students joined the faculties for more specialized courses established after they have been, according to the report of the university board, “consultés sur leurs goûts et leurs besoins [consulted on their tastes and needs]”. Thus, they were offered, in the faculties of humanities, courses in French literature, history (notably by Paul Dognon on the “Territorial Formation of France”), Spanish, philosophy and sociology. Law courses of 15 hours per week had been decided in the assembly a week earlier, three hours per day: two in the morning and one in the afternoon. Each professor gave his own lessons in his specialty:

- M. Hauriou – *The French Constitution* (11 lessons)
- M. Rouard de Card – *Presentation of the various systems adapted by the legislation on nationality, the status of foreigners and the conflict of laws* (10 lessons)
- M. Mérignhac – *International Arbitration and the League of Nations* (11 lessons)
- M. Houques-Fourcade – *Credit and Banking* (9 lessons)
- M. Fraissaingea – *Commercial companies. – Merchant Navy* (11 lessons)
- M. Gheusi – *State and capacity of persons. Protection of the incapable and their property. Composition of a heritage* (11 lessons)
- M. Mestre – *The administrative organization of France* (7 lessons)
- M. Declareuil – *History of French Law from the Renaissance to the Revolution* (13 lessons)
- M. M. Thomas – *Family and Property in Roman Law* (11 lessons)
- M. Cézar-Bru – *The situation of women in marriage. – The bases of hereditary law. – The freedom to test* (11 lessons)

- M. Magnol – *Criminal courts. Individualization of sentences. The French prison system, juvenile crime, etc.* (12 lessons)
- M. Fliniaux – *Individual Liberties* (11 lessons)
- M. Perreau – *Transformations of contracts and the evidence system. Occupational accidents and diseases* (10 lessons)
- M. Dugarçon – *International Exchange and Trade Policy* (11 lessons)
- M. Rigaud. – *Risks, liability and insurance* (11 lessons)

Many of the American students obtained a certificate attesting to their regular attendance. Others, 27 out of 167, even took an examination to graduate from the Toulouse Faculty of Law. Of these teachings, it seems that only Alexandre Mérignhac took care to ensure the publication in 1919 (*Conférences aux étudiants américains sur l'arbitrage international. La doctrine de Monroe. La Société des Nations* [Lectures to American Students on International Arbitration. Monroe's doctrine. The League of Nations]). Other courses were published, later between 1920 and 1921, by professors at the Faculty of Law of the University of Paris. Thus Ferdinand Larnaude wrote the preface of a set of three courses: Gaston May, *Introduction à la science du droit* Introduction to the science of law] (12 lessons), Charles Lefebvre, *La famille en France dans le droit et dans les mœurs* [Family in France in law and in morals] (12 lessons) and Charles Gide, *Des institutions en vue de la transformation ou de l'abolition du salariat* [Institutions for the transformation or abolition of wage labour] (12 lessons). Others were organized by Joseph Barthélemy (*Comment la France est gouvernée* [How France is governed]), Émile Garçon (*Principes fondamentaux du droit pénal français dans leurs rapports avec les libertés individuelles* [Fundamental principles of French criminal law in their relationship with individual freedoms]), Henri Truchy (*Forces productives de la France* [Productive Forces of France]), Geouffre de La Pradelle (*Conception française et conception américaine du droit international* [French and American conception of international law]). Dean Larnaude, as he opened the classes on March 17, 1919, addressed American students to thank them for "avoir lutté pour sauver le droit et la liberté que symbolisait la France [having fought to save the law and freedom that France symbolized". The publication of these first three lessons was also for Larnaude a means of disseminating a "produit de la science française du Droit et de l'Économie sociale [qui] ont comme caractère commun les qualités de notre esprit […] la clarté et la mesure des développements, la finesse des analyses jointe à la largeur des points de vue, et avant tout la recherche dans les solutions de l'idéal de justice

[product of the French science of Law and Social Economy, which share the characteristics of the qualities of our spirit […] the clarity and the measure of the developments, the finesse of the analyses combined with the breadth of the points of view, and above all the research in the solutions of the ideal of justice]". He continued his foreword by evoking the foundation of a "culture juridique française [French legal culture]" under construction: "Justice individuelle, justice sociale, justice internationale, justice partout, c'est là, sans qu'il s'en doute toujours, le ressort caché qui fait penser, parler et écrire le Français de notre temps comme celui des temps anciens [Individual justice, social justice, international justice, justice everywhere, this is the hidden spring that makes the French people of the present and past think, speak and write]". »

The presence in Toulouse of American students is also known by the publication of a newspaper (the *Qu'est-ce que c'est ?* Published by the American Students of the University of Toulouse) from March 19 to June 30, 1919. The report of the university board mentions that they "donnèrent […] de nombreuses preuves de la fertilité et de l'ingéniosité de leur esprit, de la fraîcheur et de la verve de leur humour [gave […] many proofs of the fertility and ingenuity of their minds, of the freshness and verve of their humor]". An article by Rector Cavalier opens the first issue, specifying in particular the modalities of their university stay and also the discovery of France and its inhabitants. Written by a dozen students, the first issue was soon published. It encountered a great success, increasing from 4 to 12 pages, with a circulation of 15,000 copies in the last few issues. Mixing literary columns, sports chronicles, general information, excursion reports and drawings, this journal also recounts, sometimes in French, the main festive and commemorative events such as their reception in the Jacobins Church (March 9, 1919) and the celebration of Memorial Day (May 26, 1919). Focusing on the soldiers' daily lives, their cultural, social and sporting activities, or their excursions to the South, the newspaper made relatively little mention of political issues, although it very quickly reported on a debate regarding women's right to vote, and reproduced President Wilson's speech at the peace conference in Paris on April 27, 1919. The fourteenth and final issue of the newspaper lists the students who became Toulouseans for a few weeks before returning to their home states, which for most were California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Missouri, New York and Pennsylvania. This issue also makes it possible to discover faces behind these lists of names, with photographs of student groups split in Toulouse schools, faculties and institutes. This publication testifies to the Franco-American friendship. The town hall of Toulouse had renamed the

Place Lafayette as Place Wilson on July 4, 1918. To the “Here we are” pronounced on the tomb of the French marquis, July 4, 1917 now answers the “We have been there” of American students in Toulouse and in many other French cities.

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