

Mademoiselle

March 1950 -

Étudiantes françaises

College Board Department

By Nancy Garoutte

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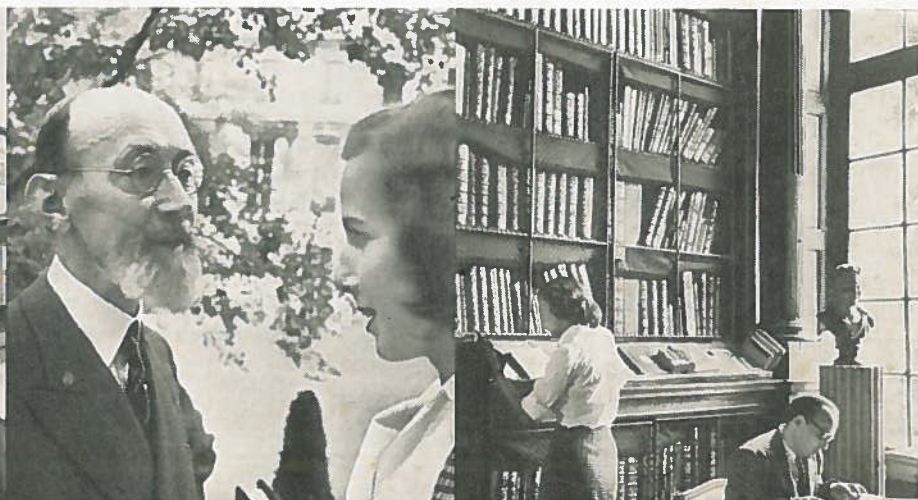
Claude de Renty is a nineteen-year-old student at the Institute of Political Science of the University of Paris. Except for the fact that she wears woolen jersey sweaters instead of cashmeres or Braemars, and stockings with her *après-ski* (ankle-length boots lined with fur) instead of socks and loafers, she wouldn't look out of place on any American college campus. As a matter of fact she wouldn't feel out of place at an American college. The salmon-like migration of thousands of U. S. students to Europe for foreign study has its European counterpart: Claude traveled Stateside in 1947 to study at Wellesley and Mount Holyoke.

But Claude de Renty is a French student—and proud of it. She is a Parisienne, and likes that too. For if any city can claim the title of student capital of the world, Paris is it. Over fifty thousand students are registered in the seven faculties and forty-seven institutes which make up the University of Paris. No city in the world has as many

7:30 A.M.: Claude de Renty, French student, pauses to read a poster on her way to The Institute of Political Science, University of Paris

Before lectures: shoptalk with Monsieur Pierre Rain, renowned professor of History of International Relations at "Science Po"

It's the Mazarine Library and research for Claude on *Origins of the French Revolution*





Claude and French student friends dance to the Paris-style New Orleans jazz of Claude Luter and his band at Le Vieux Colombier, popular student night club on the Left Bank

institutions of higher learning or as many students.

You can't sip an apéritif at a sidewalk café without rubbing elbows with French students—at the Dupont-Latin when lectures have just let out, at the Deux Magots or Café Flore where the *avant-garde* gather. You can't go to a concert, an opera, a play, an art exhibit that doesn't have students as an appreciable part of the audience—they get special rates for all cultural activities. Go to buy a book at one of the stalls along the Seine and three students are ahead of you—fingering a paper-bound edition of Voltaire or

Sartre. Because *cité universitaire* (the concentrated student housing and recreational center in Paris) cannot possibly provide room for all the students, they spill out over the entire city, living with their families, in rooming houses, small hotels and the clichéd Paris-garret-with-a-skylight. You can see them in the evening, shopping for their bottle of wine, loaf of bread and fruit and traveling back home, three or six or eight flights up. And the French accept this inundation of their First City. They are proud of France's national reputa- [Continued on page 194]

Meat and vegetables, cheese, fruit and wine, under 200 francs for lunch at Bouillons

Daydreaming along the banks of the Seine. Outdoor bookstalls, fruit markets, *vendeurs*, boats on the river provide the atmosphere

Skis, travel poster, books and records in a student room—five flights up—at La Maison des Lettres. Rent is a low three dollars a month



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[Continued from page 129]

tion in science, music, letters, and proud of the young scholars who will carry on the tradition. Life is often a tough and monotonous thing in Paris these days; the big *chahut* (sort of extemporaneous celebration) of a group of French students in the streets of the city reminds the older generation of youth and fun and the past.

Someone said that students are such a noticeable section of the Paris population because in France being a student is a full-time job. Education is virtually free. A student pays a little over two dollars a semester, and this includes the works. The many scholarships are in the form of allowances for room and board. Some rents are very cheap—room and three meals a day at *cité universitaire* cost less than a dollar a day. And it's sort of tradition for French students to live frugally. Almost chic, in an odd way. They buy few clothes, indulge in inexpensive recreation. Most of their money goes into rent, which is often overpriced because of the housing shortage. Malnutrition is the main cause of ill-health among the student population. But because costs are relatively cheap the young people have few financial responsibilities, seldom need outside paying jobs.

Being a student in Paris means different things to different people. To Claude, who has been studying at the Institute of Political Science since October 1946 (with one year's time out at Wellesley and Mount Holyoke), it means attending lectures in history, geography, economics, social and political science pretty regularly. It means research at the Mazarine Library for a paper, *The Origins of the French Revolution*. During the exam period, which continues for a longer time than in the United States—one's first exam is often taken a month and a half before the last one is finished—Claude gets up at 7 A.M. She reads excerpts from Voltaire or other French classicists if it's a written; takes a four-hour exam at the Institute. If oral, her recitation lasts about fifteen minutes, after which she is dismissed. Lunch is eaten with friends or fellow students taking the same or other exams, at Bouillons or a government-subsidized student bistro. Supper is light and bed is early; the object is to get as much sleep as possible. Exams over, tensions relaxed, night life begins again: the idea is to forget past months of arduous study.

Besides lectures, there are what are known as *répétitions*, practice groups conducted by a younger member of the faculty (like our assistants here) who, after the professor imparts his knowledge, sees that it gets pounded into the students' heads. Nothing is required. Lecture attendance isn't compulsory. *Répétitions* aren't compulsory. Often students work independently at the library for months without attending one class. If you feel it

important to go skiing for two weeks before an exam or to participate in eager discussions on the place of the Existentialists in French philosophy instead of attending a lecture on Racine or Molière, it's entirely up to you.

Claude says that because classes are large it is quite difficult to get to know your professor personally, but when you do have the opportunity the relationship is a friendship of individuals. Usually, however, the relationship between student and professor is that of disciple and master ("*mon maître de la Sorbonne . . . mon maître de l'Institute de Science Politique,*" spoken with reverence). Classes end with a more or less rhetorical question, "Is everything understood?" No response is really expected. None received. But this does not mean the students accept everything they are told. The French feel that the American student brashly challenges or questions the professor to confirm his own preconceived idea. Their way is to silently absorb a new idea, think it over later, worry over it for weeks and months and years to come. The theory is to develop *l'esprit critique*, to constantly examine, question, judge.

Madeleine Carayon of Science Po (The Institute of Political Science) says about American students she has met in Paris: "They have a certain *joie de vivre*, *optimisme*, *amour d'action réelle et efficace*. They like to be always occupied, always having new experiences as though they are in constant need of exterior stimulation. They throw themselves into things without hesitation beforehand or remorse afterward. We see all the complications, whereas Americans seem to see the way clearly and simply. I think all that action keeps them from reflection. They seem much less *tourmentés*—not exactly tormented, but deeply bothered by moral and philosophical considerations—than we."

Re French students and their interests in politics: ask twenty different people and you'll get twenty different answers. Claude feels that a French girl of nineteen is more politically mature and well-informed on contemporary political issues than an American college freshman, and that the Parisienne student in consequence participates more actively in the social crises, strikes and current causes célèbres of the country. A classmate of hers at the Institute of Political Science says, however, that she doesn't have time even to read the papers or follow current politics. "And I am just as happy that I don't. I would only read of narrow-minded people who don't try to understand. I am trying my hardest to form a happy life for myself. I cannot and do not want to think of all the confusion that exists now." Alongside of the ardent student radicals and the ardent student supporters of the RPF (De Gaulle's party) there is undoubtedly a large stu-



dent body which is sick to death of France's constant political crises and which seeks to ignore contemporary political issues entirely. Though there is probably less organized political activity in French universities than in American, in some ways party affiliations of students in France are more stratified: Les Auberges de la Jeunesse, the French equivalent of our Youth Hostel movement, for instance, issues different-colored cards for students with different political and religious associations. If you go on a hike through the countryside or an organized outing, you find Catholic with Catholic, Communist with Communist. . . .

Undoubtedly the favorite French recreation is talking. Talking about everything: the Meaning of Life, poetry, modern art the newest critique in *La Nouvelle Revue française*, the Marshall Plan. And they talk and argue with none of the self-consciousness of the American collegian who avoids anything that smells of the esoteric like the plague. Night clubs are too expensive for most students, but Left Bank places like the Gypsie, Le Vieux Colombe, Club Yves, the Tabou are fairly cheap and continually popular. Frantic "date" life is completely unknown.

The students at the University of Paris have none of the unified "school spirit" of Michigan, Texas or Ohio State. But among students of the different faculties of Paris—the Sorbonne, the School of Law, et cetera—there is a sort of esprit de corps which is comparable, though perhaps more spontaneous.

Since the war there has been in France a much greater emphasis on the higher education and the employment of women. This is due to some extent to increased economic necessity and to the fact that more women face the chance of spinsterhood. A university degree means a better-paying job. Most women go into offices and secretarial positions; some go into the schools, laboratories, hospitals, an increasing number in government jobs. But basically Claude and women students all over France aren't so different from coeds in America. Their ideal is still to *fonder un foyer*—get married, establish a home, raise a family