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Author(s): Stacey Renee Davis

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TURNING FRENCH CONVICTS INTO COLONISTS: THE SECOND EMPIRE'S POLITICAL PRISONERS IN ALGERIA, 1852–1858

Stacey Renee Davis

En 1852, le gouvernement français établit une colonie pénitentiaire pour ses prisonniers politiques en Algérie dans l'esprit du système Australien. Face aux politiques coloniales contradictoires et à l'opposition des prisonniers eux-mêmes, cette tentative de colonisation forcée prit fin en 1858. Tandis que l'administration française en Algérie avait pour directive de traiter les transportés comme des colons libres potentiels, Paris continuait d'insister sur une politique dure d'isolation des prisonniers, ce qui coûtait cher à la colonie. Simultanément, Napoléon III commençait à grâcier les transportés comme preuve de sa générosité, mettant ainsi sa popularité avant les nécessités de la politique coloniale et les considérations de sécurité nationale. Une telle confusion ne fit que renforcer le desir des prisonniers de quitter l'Afrique.

On 27 February 1852, several hundred Frenchmen stumbled onto the docks of Algiers, sore from seven days spent in the cramped hold of a steamship, dazed by the sudden brightness of the African sky.¹ These men were the first wave of six thousand political prisoners sent to newly-established penal colonies in French North Africa that year. *Transportation*, as Parisian administrators called such punishment, was designed to solve two problems at once: on the one hand, the measure rid mainland France of the republican insurgents, mostly small-town merchants, notaries, lawyers, and artisans, who had been the most active participants in the December 1851 insurrection sparked by Louis Napoleon's

Stacey Renee Davis is Assistant Professor of European History at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington.

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coup d'état; on the other, the creation of an Australian-style system of forced colonization promised to remedy the chronic population shortage which plagued France's newest territory.² For, although the political prisoners began their Algerian sentences building penal camps, constructing roads, draining swamps, and performing other infrastructure-enhancing tasks under the watchful gaze of military guards, colonial officials hoped the *transportés* would metamorphose into permanent agricultural colonists, thus forming the backbone for a future "Algerian breadbasket."

Visions of thriving African farming communities, populated by former political prisoners and their families, quickly proved illusory, however, as conflicting colonial policy, the Emperor's divergent personal agenda, and staunch opposition from the deported republicans themselves combined to doom the *transportation* experiment within the decade. By the time of Napoleon III's general amnesty in 1858, all but a handful of the Algerian prisoners had already returned home; indeed, colonial Governor Jacques-Louis Randon had closed the last penal camp two years earlier for lack of inmates. So quickly did the Second Empire's African penal colonies fold, that modern-day historians have all but ignored their existence. Although the identity and motivations of Louis Napoleon's 1851 republican foes have triggered a rich historiography, the fates of the *transportés* after their sentencing and the story of their punishment in Algeria have received only scant mention in general colonial histories, and little specialized study.³

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Leaving aside the melodramatic pull of a tale set in a land barely wrested from native Arab and Berber tribes, the romance of midnight escape attempts, and the bonus of a happy ending in France for nearly all the miserable deportees, the story of the *transportés* deserves attention because it reveals a French regime struggling at mid-century to define its relation to and goals for its colonies. When Parisian administrators and their Algerian subordinates clashed over the theory behind transportation, arguing whether to treat the newly arrived insurgents as dangerous criminals to be confined in prison camps or as potential free colonists whose labor could help ensure the success of the as-yet unstable African colony, they exposed fundamental tensions in the Second Empire's colonial policies. Were France's overseas acquisitions primarily military outposts which existed to thwart the expansion of her European neighbors, or were they valuable possessions to be nurtured in their own right? Was Algeria a mere dump-

ing ground for unwanted French citizens, or a potential agricultural powerhouse that needed the proper economic and demographic resources to flourish? As long as top-level French administrators in Paris and the colonies could not agree upon Algeria's purpose, ambitious but ill-defined experiments like the transformation of several thousand republican insurgents into productive colonists were destined for failure.

In early 1852, French Algeria was itself still an experiment. North Africa had become French almost by mistake, after mutually exchanged Franco-Turkish insults wounded French pride and sparked the 1827 French conquest of Algiers. For twenty years after the nominally Ottoman government had abdicated, France's constitutional monarch, Louis Philippe, left North Africa in the hands of largely autonomous generals, who waged brutal warfare against the local Arab and Berber populations. Algeria's economic and colonial possibilities only began to whet the interest of the French civil administration during the early days of the Second Republic.

The rural colonization of Algeria was also in its experimental phase in 1852. Before the fall of the Ottoman *dey*, Algeria's European populace had been largely confined to cities, where it was characteristically a trading and commercial people. Once native rebels led by Abd-el-Kadir had been eradicated in a series of bloody military confrontations during the 1840s, France's new control of vast lands in the fertile coastal plains opened up the possibility that agricultural communities populated by European settlers could transform military territory into thriving farms. Under this assumption, the Second Republic encouraged large capital investment in North Africa, and sponsored the emigration of urban poor who became the first generation of *pièdes-noirs*.⁴ However, by the time Louis Napoleon staged his *coup d'état*, the model Algerian villages of 1848 lay all but deserted; most of the ill-prepared, under-supplied colonists lured to Africa by promises of land and quick prosperity had already died of yellow fever, or fled back to France to escape starvation.⁵ Since no new wave of free colonists could be enticed to take over the isolated farming colonies, the half-built dormitories and mess halls would serve as penitentiaries instead.

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Louis Napoleon and his advisors turned to transportation because their December 1851 *coup d'état* had sparked unexpectedly large resistance throughout central and southern France. Loyal police and army regiments had quickly defeated the republican artisans, peasants, and small-town

merchants who gathered to defend the “violated constitution”; but this victory crammed more than seventy thousand captured “insurrectionaries” into provincial prisons, the forts ringing Paris, and even a monastery-turned-detention center. To solidify the gains of their *coup*, the President and his Ministers needed to act firmly to dispense with the republican opposition once and for all. However, Louis Napoleon neither wished nor dared guillotine his enemies, since such a bloody and illegal act ran counter to his claims to represent a unified France, and, in any case, would make him vulnerable to charges of arbitrary dictatorship since it conjured up images of the violent Jacobin excesses of the great French Revolution. Neither could he risk the certain folly of housing thousands of republicans in the nation’s decaying and inadequate prison system. To the contrary, Louis Napoleon and his *coup* conspirators quickly decided that many of the of the captured peasants and artisans could be freed under police surveillance, or perhaps exiled, as long as the administration found a way of separating the more dangerous and influential ringleaders from their naïve followers. A penal colony across the Mediterranean would serve such needs nicely.⁶

Although no French regime had ever before attempted to deport the bulk of its political opponents, Louis Napoleon’s decision to remove republican insurrectionaries from France was not a wholly original one. Various French governments had toyed with the concept of transportation as punishment since 1718, when Louis XV signed a decree sending thieves, beggars and paupers to Louisiana in imitation of Britain’s successful transfer of petty offenders to Virginia and Georgia.⁷ After the Revolution, the new republic transported several hundred refractory priests to French Guiana, where most died of various tropical diseases; twenty years later, the Napoleonic Penal Code of 1810 included deportation as a punishment for common crimes, though the measure was not implemented during the first Empire.⁸ Most importantly, in December 1851, when Louis Napoleon mulled over the appropriate punishments to mete out to his vanquished opponents, more than four hundred political prisoners already languished in the cramped quarters of the Casbah at Bône. The presence in Algeria of these *transportés de juin*, republicans captured during the failed June 1848 socialist uprising in Paris, made Louis Napoleon’s post-coup decision an easy one: simply by following precedent, he could banish captured republicans to African penal colonies.

The proposal to ship the rebels of June 1848 to Algeria had been the brainchild of two Second Republic generals, Louis-Christophe Léon de

Lamorcière, then Minister of War, and Louis-Eugène Cavaignac, who was the nation's temporary chief executive and the hand behind the brutal suppression of the June revolt. This proposal fit right in with the two generals' Algerian plans. Both men had served in Algeria throughout the July Monarchy, and each had briefly acted as governor-general of the colony. Both firmly believed that France needed to populate the territory quickly to cement her North African military victories. Furthermore, the two already viewed Algeria as a receptacle for unwanted French citizens. In the fall of 1848, influenced by numerous proposals to build government-supported agricultural colonies, including one by the deputy Alexis de Tocqueville, Lamorcière and Cavaignac had implemented the none-too-successful scheme to populate Algeria with thousands of France's problematic poor. Thus, the generals' October 1848 decision to deport captured insurgents simply extended the government's current Algerian policy to include "guilty" insurrectionaries as well as the merely threatening poor.

Barely two years later, Louis Napoleon and his advisors quickly adopted this new use of colonial lands to solve their own "insurgent problem." Only six days after the *coup d'état*, with pockets of resisters still at large throughout France, the President announced that captured insurrectionaries faced possible "transportation to Africa."⁹ The extralegal *commissions mixtes* convened in each French department the next January and February would eventually hand out nearly 8,000 such punishments, although subsequent commutations and pardons reduced the final number of *transportés* to just over 6,000. But along with the colonial solution to the excess of political opponents, France's post-*coup* administration also inherited the early Second Republic's contradictory attitudes towards North Africa. For all the talk of transportation's benefit to Algeria, Lamorcière, Cavaignac, and the Second Republic's legislators alike had cared little for the fate of their deported opponents the moment those prisoners reached Algeria's shores; in 1851, the remaining June insurgents remained imprisoned, idle and largely forgotten at Bône, because plans for an agricultural penal camp at Lambessa to house them had been all but abandoned for a lack of funds. The gap between rhetoric and reality would soon undermine the Second Empire's transportation plans as well.

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The responsibility for determining what sort of life awaited the 1851 rebels banished to Africa lay in the hands of two of Louis Napoleon's top admin-

istrators: the Minister of War, General Leroy de Saint-Arnaud, and his subordinate, the Governor of Algeria, General Jacques-Louis Randon. These key figures clashed repeatedly over the type of penal regime to implement, in a feud that mirrored the larger tensions inherent in the nascent Second Empire's larger colonial policies. On the surface, both men seemed to share the same general vision of the goals behind transportation to Algeria: they professed the measure would ensure political stability on the continent; reshape the political opinions of the transported men themselves, thus "moralizing" them; and further French efforts to improve the Algerian infrastructure by creating thriving European agricultural communities on lands recently wrested from hostile Arab and Berber tribes.

However, Saint-Arnaud, a general with as much African experience as Lamorcière and Cavaignac, was also a key *coup d'état* conspirator with primary allegiance to the future Emperor and the stability of the regime. He realized that transportation could benefit both the deported insurgents and the colony which would be their prison-home: "So that the measures taken against these individuals will have a moral result, it is important to find agricultural work, clearing, etc. . . . of a nature to be a profit to the colony. . . ." ¹⁰ Such work would focus the prisoners' thoughts on honest labor, divert their attention from political theorizing, help establish the roads and farms necessary for further European colonization of Algeria, and provide some tangible return for the heavy governmental expense of feeding, housing, and guarding the transported men. Nevertheless, for Saint-Arnaud, *transportés* were primarily dangerous criminals who needed to be confined to military establishments far from population centers. He felt prisoners could contribute to Algeria's economy, by working under heavy surveillance in common fields during the day, only if they slept in individual locked cells each night. Such precautions would render escape difficult, and the isolated republicans would not "taint" free colonists with their radical ideas.

The Algerian governor, Jacques-Louis Randon, had a different top priority: rapid, stable, and economically viable French colonization of rural Algeria. Right from the start, Randon saw the transported men as colonists-in-the-making. This opinion meshed with the governor's general personality and interests. By 1851, Randon had amassed nearly fifteen years of experience in Algeria, where, besides the usual campaigns against rebellious natives in the 1840s, he had worked in a military unit charged with agricultural projects, then commanded the army's efforts at Bône to construct a functional African road system. Once governor, Randon continued to pur-

sue his interests in agriculture and colonization. Unlike many of Louis Napoleon's administrators, he believed that small-scale individual farms, rather than large capitalist ventures, were the key to a permanent French presence. As governor, Randon commissioned studies on exotic agriculture, prioritized projects to improve roads to established villages, pushed for the creation of new rural communities, and even backed research on sheep farming.¹¹ In many ways, Randon's enthusiasm for colonization led him to see the transported 1851 insurrectionaries as *colons*, pilgrims whose manual labor and mere presence would help cement French control in North Africa. Instead of keeping the *transportés* under lock and key, Randon wished to use only the precautions absolutely necessary to ensure their obedience while he worked to mold them into farmers as quickly as possible.¹² Although the republicans sent to Algeria had been sentenced to two categories, *Algérie plus* and *Algérie moins*, Randon told colonial officers to ignore these distinctions.¹³ Rather, dock-side lieutenants divided up the newly-arrived prisoners into groups destined for different agricultural villages-cum-penal colonies or roving work gangs, based on the *transportés*' skills and economic backgrounds.¹⁴ The majority of the prisoners, those without outside incomes from rents, inheritances or other financial means, were sent to villages or camps to earn their living, through physical labor.

Randon instructed his subordinates to treat *transportés* with agricultural experience preferentially. Cultivators, especially married men who indicated they might wish to bring their families to Africa, were to live in villages abandoned by the inexperienced Parisian colonists of 1848, on "land which might be later transferred to them." Artisanal work would be the exception: French Algeria possessed houses and barns aplenty; she needed farmers to occupy them, not builders to construct more. According to Randon, artisans could quickly learn to plow, hoe, and harvest.¹⁵

Thus, most *transportés* moved to penal agricultural villages run by military commanders, or marched into uninhabited regions to build roads as mobile work gangs, as Saint-Arnaud expected. Yet Randon also lobbied for the power to "intern" men ready to become independent farmers or self-sufficient businessmen: as early as March 1852, the governor planned to release a large group of political prisoners from the rigors of the communal penal colonies. Interned men would live under light police surveillance in assigned towns alongside free European colonists, where they would be responsible for finding their own employment and shelter. Such a program would save the state extra room and board expenses, and hasten the prisoners' transition into permanent colonists.¹⁶

Saint-Arnaud refused, since these plans ran counter to the Minister of War's national security concerns. He could not permit hundreds of Louis Napoleon's sworn enemies to mix with European colonist populations, set up private artisanal shops, live and work as if they were free men.¹⁷ But Algeria was far from Paris, communication was inefficient, and Randon had too much drive to back down. He ignored Saint-Arnaud's orders. By the end of June, the governor had interned over seven hundred of the six thousand arriving *transportés*.

The governor's stubbornness served him well. Between March and July, the Paris administration's attitudes towards convicted insurgents softened. In mid-March, Louis Napoleon was ready to forgive the least dangerous condemned republicans, and authorized three roving *commissaires extraordinaires* to issue pardons in his name. An official Pardoning Committee reviewed hundreds of cases each week and brought extensive lists of submissive prisoners deserving indulgence before the President for ratification. Bureaucrats in the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior had begun to plan mass pardonings scheduled for 15 August, a proposed national holiday.¹⁸

Even the war department bowed to this trend. In a late July internal note, the head of the War Ministry's Office of General Correspondence, one of Saint-Arnaud's main advisors, urged the Minister to allow Randon to intern at will. After citing the usual arguments about the lack of appropriate space and the necessities of colonization, the bureau chief added: "In truth, these *transportés* are not all evil-doers properly speaking, but, for the most part they are men led astray by political passions, and who it was only necessary to remove from metropolitan France." Most political prisoners in Algeria were inoffensive pawns manipulated by a few crafty leaders, Saint-Arnaud's assistant continued. Even those republicans originally full of idealist hatred and anarchistic dreams were now repentant, beaten and disillusioned. "Don't they deserve a little indulgence?" the bureau chief queried. Compassion combined with practicality; Randon now had both the needs of the colony and the demands of humanity on his side.¹⁹ Saint-Arnaud finally agreed. On 17 July 1852, the Minister of War authorized Randon to intern "provisionally," as long as Louis Napoleon later officially approved the internments. Now, transported political prisoners could rapidly become supervised-but-free colonists.

In the end, then, Randon's plan to populate thriving rural communities with former *transportés* had full administrative support, or so it seemed. But had Randon's desire to gain new colonists for Algeria really

won over a central administration more concerned with stability on the mainland than growth in North Africa? Not at all. Saint Arnaud's attitudes changed because his view of the *transportés*, not his fundamental assessment of Algeria's importance, had altered. Furthermore, the Emperor himself, not the distant Algerian governor, had proved the impetus for this shift. By mid-1852, Louis Napoleon had begun to use the individual pardons he issued to republicans in exile, under surveillance, or languishing in Algeria, as a means of boosting his personal popularity; for a soon-to-be Emperor basking in the glow of an overwhelmingly supportive plebiscite, the lure of such ready-made propaganda weighed more heavily than either the needs of France's colonies or the regime's possibly exaggerated security concerns.²⁰ Thus, Saint Arnaud agreed to Randon's internment scheme—partially because the plan saved the administration surveillance costs, but mainly because any action which de-emphasized the *transportés'* identities as dangerous revolutionaries fit right into the Emperor's goals of presenting those very prisoners as contrite, newly-submissive men ready for pardon.

Seen in this light, the official acceptance of "Algerian internment" signaled not a move towards permanent colonist status for the *transportés*, but rather a step towards home. Coupled with a chronic lack of adequate funding for Algeria's agricultural colonies, Louis Napoleon's increasing pardons eventually toppled Randon's plans for the repopulation of African farming villages by political prisoners. But a third factor, the determination and strong group identity of the *transportés* themselves, also helped speed the demise of the governor's dreams of forced colonization. With the Emperor pardoning hundreds of political prisoners every month, each *transporté* could afford to patiently wait his turn. In the meantime, the *transportés'* negative experiences in Algeria, coupled with the support they received from their fellow prisoners, cemented their resolve to reject Randon's vision of their colonial future.

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Nineteen locations—some abandoned farming villages built for the 1848 Parisian immigrants, some undeveloped military garrisons near established towns, and even a few empty plains—served as penal colonies for the 1852 *transportés*.²¹ Most lay in the fertile Metidja plain south of Algiers, or on the southwest road linking the capital with Miliana. In addition, four larger work camps—Douéra and Birkadem near Algiers, the fort at Mers el Kebir outside Oran, and the Casbah of Bône east of Constantine—acted as pro-

cessing centers, regional hospices, disciplinary jails, and homes for invalid or infirm prisoners.

Separated from their loved ones by hundreds of kilometers and the Mediterranean Sea; exiled to a hostile land of alternately scorching days and frigid nights; housed in crude barracks often built near malaria-infested swamps; forced to work long hours for little pay; subjected to gruff army commanders, strict military rules, and meager rations; the transported republicans nevertheless managed to survive. Despite their fears that Algeria's tropical climate would surely kill them, over ninety percent of the political prisoners eventually returned to France.²² By the spring of 1856, when Randon closed the remaining penal colonies, only 451 of the 6,247 political prisoners sent to Algeria, or seven percent, had died on the African continent.

Louis Napoleon's transplanted opponents survived mentally and emotionally as well. The available sources, trimestral reports from the agricultural colony commanders, medical certificates of infirmity penned by camp doctors, surveillance records filed by colony guards, surviving letters *transportés* sent their loved ones, and prisoner memoirs written long after the fact, all indicate that the transported insurrectionaries suffered little from intense depression or unremitting despair. To the contrary, most *transportés* remained optimistic, certain that either a general amnesty or individual pardons would soon open the passage home.²³

The Emperor's increasingly-liberal pardoning policies helped bolster these hopes. So did the support the prisoners gave each other. Governor Randon ordered his generals to respect the insurgents' wishes to be placed in penal villages together with transported friends, neighbors, and other men from their home departments.²⁴ But even *transportés* who had never met, from departments as distant as the Hérault and the Yonne, shared beliefs in their rights as political prisoners and as Frenchmen. In addition, collective republican ideals and mutual Algerian experiences forged bonds between men from widely different social backgrounds.

Appalled by their meager rations, rotten meat, and flea-infested straw mattresses, a group of *transportés* imprisoned at the *Maison-carrée* outside of Algiers nominated a delegate to bring their complaints to the fort's commander. "We are here because of the victory of a crime," the delegate protested. "As the vanquished, we deserve at least to be treated like prisoners of war."²⁵ The anonymous delegate voiced a sentiment shared by many *transportés*. For them, the swift downfall of the anti-*coup* insurgent columns had been an inglorious but heart-wrenching defeat at the hands

of a scheming despot and his minions, not a squashed, anarchistic pillaging spree, as Louis Napoleon's supporters claimed. Sure of their noble motives, transported insurgents felt no shame. Unlike the beggars, thieves, and murderers confined in regular French jails or the decaying seaport *bagnes*, the transplanted republicans felt they had striven to uphold, not defy, their nation's fundamental laws. They were political prisoners, not common criminals.

Official policies underscored this difference, since the *commissions mixtes* had sentenced previously-convicted criminals arrested during the insurrection to Cayenne, not Algeria. Additionally, insurgents accused of theft, pillage, or wanton property destruction—along with men who had physically harmed soldiers, police, or civilians during the anti-*coup* movement—had been sentenced by War Councils to prison or execution. Thus few, if any, of the men transported to Algeria had previous arrest records for non-political crimes. Furthermore, Louis Napoleon's minister of justice, Jacques Pierre Charles Abbattucci, insisted transportation was a purely "administrative and political measure."²⁶ Under French law, only criminals serving a *peine afflictive ou infamante* [a corporal or "infamous" penalty] forfeited basic civil rights. Since no regular judicial condemnations had been applied to transported insurrectionaries, such men continued to receive military pensions and to exercise civil privileges forbidden *forçats* [convicts], like the right to practice law.²⁷ This legal distinction further cemented the insurrectionaries' identities as political captives.

Randon's colonization plan itself hinged on the *transportés*' political status. According to the governor, given the proper incentives, firmly policed *transportés* would eventually forget their radical pasts and become well-rooted, family-oriented landowners—precisely because these men were wayward, ideological dreamers, not hardened criminals. Furthermore, throughout the 1850s, Randon rejected plans to transfer common *forçats* to Africa.²⁸ This anti-*forçat* policy, like his general colonization strategy, provided ample proof that the governor readily admitted a difference between political and criminal prisoners. The *transportés* themselves could not help but perceive this reality.

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Thus pride in their status as political prisoners, the shared ordeal of transportation, and common republican values bonded the *transportés* together. When groups of political prisoners met on the road or in towns, they

greeted one another as close companions: "Better than all the grand spectacles of this savage land . . .," wrote one *transporté* on a trip his work gang took from Blidah to Aïn Sultan, "all of a sudden we saw, running down from a mountain top, . . . our friends, our comrades in misfortune from the colony of Aïn Bénian who came to shake our hands!"²⁹

Imbued with this sense of brotherhood, transported prisoners worked together to improve their lot in small ways. They shared money and supplies, and they helped each other write letters back home and requests for pardon. In the fall of 1853, men at Douéra lobbied for a study room, chose professors from their ranks, and purchased textbooks with their own cash.³⁰ Relying solely on voluntary contributions, prisoners at Guelma organized a discount food hall to supplement their rations at prices well below those at the official colony canteen.³¹

Although they felt united as political prisoners, *transportés* rarely engaged in open acts of political defiance. To the contrary, work camp commanders repeatedly commented that the men under their watch seemed uninterested in politics.³² Throughout 1853 and 1854, the eighty prisoners at Ben Ncoud committed no overt political acts and spoke no obviously republican words within earshot of camp guards ready to punish the slightest offense.³³ Of nine men punished at the agricultural colony Gueleat-Bou-Sba during the winter of 1854, only three had committed political infractions: they "manifested their opinions by singing political songs," and so received several days in solitary confinement.³⁴ For the rest of the year, guards punished not one of the sixty-odd men at Gueleat-Bou-Sba for ideology-based crimes.

This lack of outspoken republican defiance did not mean the *transportés* were meek lambs before their captors. Transported republicans did not risk mass defiance or attempt rebellion on a foreign soil guarded by troops used to brutal tactics, commanded by generals with dictatorial tendencies, and inhabited by hostile native tribes. Individual acts of symbolic resistance only got *transportés* thrown into cells, locked in chains, or deprived of rations. Rather than cause themselves undue pain, political prisoners saved their protests for quotidian issues. They complained about rotten food, inadequate clothes, and buggy bedding. Whether protesting excessively harsh punishments or complaining about vermin-infested meat, insurgents in Algeria emphasized their rights, both as political prisoners and as Frenchmen. By insisting on fair, humane treatment, the *transportés* pursued their egalitarian values in a highly practical way. Most military commanders, however, saw only arrogant defiance in such

demands. For example, the Douéra camp commander reported in the summer of 1854 that he had sentenced four *transportés* to a month of solitary confinement “for having excited the others to refuse bread under the pretext it was bad.”³⁵

Most importantly, their self-image as prisoners of war led many *transportés* to refuse to work. From the moment the first convoy docked in Algiers, Randon had ordered the *transportés* to work. France’s penal tradition of prison labor, reformist notions about labor’s power to moralize, and the needs of the colony made this choice an obvious one.³⁶ *Transportés* who farmed or built roads received, on average, one *franc* per day; while those working as secretaries, doctors, land surveyors or cooks in penal colonies made twenty-five to fifty *centimes* more, still a good deal less than they would have been paid for comparable work in France.³⁷ Wages would serve as an impetus for labor, Randon believed, since prisoners could use their salaries to support their families back in France and to improve their meager diets with food purchased at camp canteens.³⁸

In reality, *transportés* saw little of their “wages,” since the repayment of state expenses absorbed the majority of their salaries. Three-fourths of each man’s paycheck was deducted to cover his food and clothing, and to reimburse the cost of general camp upkeep. Only twenty *centimes* of each *franc* earned reached the laborer’s pocket.³⁹ Thus, instead of sending money to their families in France, most prisoners relied on funds from home to pay for their expenses in Africa.

Even before *transportés* realized they could not support their families on their prison wages, many would not work. The prisoners at the *Maison-carrée* in Algiers “wanted in no way to help the government in its hypocritical project of forced colonization.”⁴⁰ Similarly, the first batch of insurgents sent to Bourkika categorically refused to begin road work outside the camp.⁴¹ They knew the departmental *commissions mixtes* had sentenced them to transportation, not to forced labor. As far as they were concerned, only common criminals toiled for the state.⁴² As political prisoners they were exempt from such menial duties.

Threats to send idle men to enclosed forts or work camps on the edge of Kabyle-held territory did not sway the determined *transportés*.⁴³ Officers attempted to shame prisoners into working by conjuring up visions of starving children in France; but as long as *transporté* wages remained low, such arguments carried little weight.⁴⁴ Furthermore, men from bourgeois backgrounds used personal savings to support their families and supplement their own rations. One *franc* wages did not entice such *transportés*,

many of whom felt above the rude physical labor required of them.⁴⁵ Indeed, the resolution to buck work orders ran so strong among all classes of prisoners that twenty years later, when the aging Napoleon III lifted censorship laws, one of the first books published in Paris by a former *transporté* about his comrades' experiences in Algeria focused primarily on tales of defiant republicans who had refused to labor for the colony.⁴⁶

Naturally, this opposition frustrated Randon's colonization plans. Furthermore, his resource-strapped colonial administration could not afford to feed and house thousands of idle *transportés*. To rectify the situation, Louis Napoleon signed a 31 May 1852, decree which declared work mandatory for all Algerian political prisoners not yet interned. If solitary confinement, iron chains, or other punishments normally employed in military prisons failed to persuade insurgents to pick up their hoes, camp officers could request a final measure: they could send *transportés* across the Atlantic to Cayenne penal colonies previously reserved for common criminals and 1851 rebels accused of insurrectionary violence.⁴⁷ By exiling obstinate prisoners to Cayenne, the 31 May decree sent the message that disobedient prisoners had crossed the line between political and criminal opposition. Given Cayenne's notoriety as a tropical death camp and the *transportés*' pride in their status as political prisoners, this threat carried weight.

In most cases, *transportés* did indeed yield to the newly-codified work obligation. By the fall of 1852, agricultural villages from Aïn-Schougga to Mascara contained active and docile road builders and field hands.⁴⁸ But it is difficult to determine whether fear of Cayenne influenced previously idle *transportés* more than did their need for cash and their desire not to sabotage the possibility of pardon by their blatant refusal to obey a written law. Furthermore, Randon realized insurgents would not work without the promise of fair wages. In May 1853, the governor reduced the deductions taken from prisoners' salaries to fifty percent; by the end of the year he stopped withholding even these sums.⁴⁹

Once Algerian officers curbed their wards' distaste for work, hardly an incident interrupted the smooth functioning of the penal colonies. *Transportés* did not even attempt to escape in great numbers. By May 1856, when Randon closed the last agricultural colony, only forty-two men, roughly one percent of the political prisoners sent to Algeria, had escaped their military guards.⁵⁰ Evasion tempted two overlapping sets of political prisoners: a few desperate men, convinced that the Algerian climate or the rigors of forced labor would kill them; and the most obstinate republicans,

men unwilling to beg for their freedom by swearing loyalty to the Emperor.⁵¹ For most prisoners, escape into the unknown African countryside seemed too difficult, especially since Arab and Berber tribesmen earned bounties for capturing escapees.

The rewards of evasion were simply too small. Escape brought freedom of mobility for individuals lucky enough to reach Tunisia or sneak aboard boats bound for England or the Italian states. Such a homeless, fugitive existence enticed few political prisoners precisely because they were insurgents, not criminal outcasts. Married men and widowed fathers comprised over sixty percent of the insurrectionaries in Algeria. Most wanted nothing more than to see to their wives and children. Yet escapees who returned home risked immediate capture by local police and deportation to Cayenne. Besides, *transportés* could gain the same type of relative liberty escape offered without the risk of permanent exile. Long before their pleas inspired imperial pardons, political prisoners bartered vows of submission and hard work for the freedom to live outside agricultural villages and work camps as *internés*.

True to his belief that small European farmers would become the backbone of a truly French Algeria, Randon planned to intern primarily men with agricultural backgrounds. According to the decree regulating the treatment of the anti-*coup* insurgents in Algeria, the colonial administration would furnish well-behaved *transportés* with farmland and equipment to speed them on their way towards self-sufficiency. After three years, a farm would become the private property of the man who worked it.⁵² Randon assumed such land grants would bind *transportés* to the African soil, and that property-holding *transportés* would quickly call their wives and families to Algeria. Back in Paris, Saint-Arnaud supported the idea of ridding France of republican families, and agreed to ship the kin of interned prisoners to Algeria free of charge.

Unfortunately, the governor miscalculated his own resources. When the first convoys of prisoners arrived in the spring of 1852, the colonial administration did not have the means to parcel out individual bits of land. Worried that landless farmers would quickly sink into poverty, Randon instructed his generals to intern only men "who can survive off their personal resources, or by exercising their profession."⁵³ In any case, prisoners with agricultural backgrounds were needed in the penal villages during the upcoming planting season. Thus, from the start, most *internés* were doctors, lawyers, and businessmen who could live off their savings, or artisans who could theoretically find work as craftsmen in Algerian towns.

The 1600 men Randon eventually interned led relatively unrestricted lives.⁵⁴ Each week, *internés* presented themselves at the local army headquarters to sign an affidavit of their continued presence in the village. To be sure, local civil and military police watched their every move, reporting on such benign events as *internés*' dinners together in the local pub.⁵⁵ Other than this constant scrutiny, however, interned men lived and worked as they pleased.

In general, interned men gave their watchers little to report: they were too busy trying to feed and house themselves to devote time to republican plots. Outside the safety net of daily rations, forced labor, and dorm-like barrack homes provided by the military for *transportés* in agricultural villages and penal work camps, *internés* struggled to survive. This task proved easiest for independently wealthy individuals and certain groups of educated insurgents. Men with mathematical skills quickly found lucrative jobs with the army's engineering corps or working for private construction firms. Other white collar workers like Etienne Rocher, a notary from the Allier, transferred their accounting and secretarial skills into stable Algerian jobs: once interned, Rocher found "modest employ as a merchant's assistant."⁵⁶ The few agricultural laborers Governor Randon interned nearly always secured work on farms run by free colonists; in many cases Randon specifically interned such men to satisfy free *colons*' requests "for good workers, which they lack, or for men to help cut and gather grain."⁵⁷ But for interned artisans, it was "almost impossible to find the least honest work," since Algerian cities usually had all the craftsmen and small merchants they needed before the interned *transportés* arrived.⁵⁸ The lucky working few usually held unskilled and miserably-paid jobs cleaning lanterns, fetching well-water, or carting trash. To save money, *internés* crowded into unfurnished, cramped apartments with only straw for beds.⁵⁹

Such miserable conditions did not tempt many interned men to send for their families. No official statistics survive, but correspondence between Randon and Saint-Arnaud indicates that perhaps a dozen *transporté* families migrated to Africa in 1852.⁶⁰ With artisanal jobs scarce and rents high, transplanted families quickly sank into poverty. Believing strict measures could remedy the situation, Randon forbade Algerian officials from distributing charity to the new immigrants.⁶¹ To prevent any more needy families from arriving in the colony, the governor declared in October 1852 that only interned prisoners who sank "a minimum capital of 800f[rancs]" into Algerian agriculture deserved to have their families join them in Africa.⁶²

Few of the thousands of prisoners in Algeria were “transported cultivators with resources”; of those who were, most remained confined to work camps or agricultural villages, and were thus unable to transplant their families. Contrary to Randon’s original intentions, the government had interned artisans and businessmen, not farmers. Hence the only men technically able to colonize rural Algeria had no interest in doing so. In March of 1856, when Louis Napoleon guaranteed automatic pardon for any *transporté* willing to sign a letter of submission, only twenty-one of the 795 political prisoners left in Algeria indicated they would remain there as free men.⁶³ Most of these twenty-one were white-collar workers (like the Allier notary, Etienne Rocher), who had found posts in Algerian cities, or entrepreneurs with new businesses in Africa.⁶⁴ The governor’s grand colonization plan had failed miserably.⁶⁵

The realities of transportation to Africa shattered Randon’s vision of an Algeria colonized by hard-working, prosperous *transporté* farm families. The strict system of military-run penal camps that Saint-Arnaud required quickly sapped the colony’s coffers, as the Algerian administration struggled to feed, house, and guard six thousand prisoners. The sheer numbers of *transportés* led Algerian generals to place men willy-nilly. This highly ineffective policy forced skilled artisans to farm and farmers to build roads. Instead of interning the farmers, potential future *colons*, as in his original plan, Randon ignored the long-term needs of the colony in his rush to lessen transportation’s financial strain. The governor miscalculated badly when he interned artisans; they simply filled the ranks of Algeria’s urban poor.

Transportés resented the penal system in which they were treated like common criminals. Most had family and roots calling them back to France. But impoverished *internés*, the very group Randon expected to make Africa their home, had even less reason to stay in Algeria. To them, the colony was not only a prison far from home, it was also a land of hunger, unemployment and deprivation.

The compromised system Randon cobbled together to satisfy Saint-Arnaud, and the financial constraints of his own administration, soured the insurgents on Africa, and did nothing to prepare them for an independent colonial future. With such factors against it, there was only one way Randon’s colonization scheme would have worked: had *transportés* lost all hope of ever regaining France, perhaps they might have resigned themselves to an Algerian existence. But as early as March 1852, Louis Napoleon indicated he planned to pardon any transported republican humble

enough to beg for mercy. To a President-soon-to-be-Emperor, concerned with his own popularity and the nation's support of his policies, the political usefulness of frequent and generous pardons greatly outweighed the *transportés*' desirability as Algerian colonists. After all, until the 1860s, the Emperor showed no interest whatsoever in France's Mediterranean territory, whereas long before he entered the Elysée Palace, Louis Napoleon had made his love of popularity abundantly clear. In an administration that lacked a unified colonial agenda, the Emperor's personal plans naturally eclipsed those of the Algerian governor. In the end, then, the *transportés* returned to France because both they and Louis Napoleon wanted it that way.

NOTES

1. List of Individuals Who Have Arrived in Algeria, 1 June 1852, Service historique de l'Armée de Terre, Château de Vincennes [hereafter Vincennes], JM AB 83 262.
2. Although French administrators rarely mentioned Australia, Britain's successful use of common criminals as colonists in the South Pacific must have served as an encouraging example for the French. In many ways the French failure to transform political prisoners into Algerian colonists must be measured against this British success. For discussions of convicts in Australia, see Lloyd Evans and Paul Nicholls, *Convicts and Colonial Society 1788–1853* (Stanmore: Cassell Australia, 1976); Margaret Hazzard, *Punishment Short of Death: A History of the Penal Settlement at Norfolk Island* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1984); and Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).
3. Ted Margadant, *French Peasants in Revolt: The Insurrection of 1851* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), is a fascinating study of the insurrection and its participants, which includes analysis of the sentences handed out to captured republicans. The authoritative study of early Algerian policy, Charles-André Julien, *Histoire de l'Algérie Contemporaine: La conquête et les débuts de la colonisation, 1827–1871* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), mentions the penal camps in the context of Second Republic military victories and colonization efforts. Gordon Wright, *Between Guillotine and Liberty: Two Centuries of the Crime Problem in France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), briefly analyzes the penal camps in relation to the newly-created *bagnes* in French Guiana and the more general history of French criminal theory and modes of punishment.
4. Julien, *Histoire de l'Algérie Contemporaine*, is the best comprehensive study of early French activity in Algeria.
5. Michael J. Heffernan, "The Parisian Poor and the Colonization of Algeria During the Second Republic," *French History* 3 (1989): 384.
6. Margadant, *French Peasants in Revolt*, contains an excellent summary of the final sentences given the insurgents. All but 26,855 prisoners were eventually freed without fur-

ther punishment. Of those sentenced, the majority were “interned” (forcibly relocated within France), placed under police surveillance, or exiled. Transportation to Algeria was saved for 6,201 insurrectionary leaders and other republicans deemed influential; another 239 men were sent to Cayenne because they had previous arrest records or had been accused of revolutionary violence. Only those republicans accused of murder or attempted murder during the revolt faced military tribunals, and the possibility of a death sentence; less than 100 men were so tried.

7. The deportation of vagabonds and common criminals to Louisiana in response to the colony's need for an increased white population did not outlast John Law's Company of the West, although convict laborers did help engineers lay the foundations for New Orleans; *Mississippi Provincial Archives, 1701–1729, French Dominion*, ed. Dunbar Rowland, II (Jackson, Miss.: Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1929), 177, 221, 253, and III (1932), 235, 281; John G. Clark, *New Orleans, 1718–1812: An Economic History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 23, 32.
8. Wright, *Between Guillotine and Liberty*, 31, 44, 46.
9. Letter from Minister of the Interior to Minister of Justice, 10 December 1851, Archives Nationales, Paris [henceforth AN], BB30 403. Although the original suggestion to transport the 1848ers had been Lamorcière's and Cavaignac's, the law passed in 1850 with then-President Louis Napoleon's support. Furthermore, in a November 1850 address to the Assembly, Napoleon recommended that the common criminals then housed in crowded seaport galleys should labor for the good of France's overseas colonies. Thus, a year before the *coup* the president had already embraced the general concept of prison colonies. Decrees on Transportation, Vincennes, JM AB 81 283; *Moniteur Universel*, 13 November 1850.
10. Saint-Arnaud to Randon, 14 January 1852, Vincennes, JM AB 83 262.
11. Julien, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, 389, 403, 405.
12. Randon to Saint-Arnaud, 7 March 1852, Vincennes, JM AB 83 262.
13. Randon to the General at Oran, 25 March 1852, Archives Nationales, Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence, Fonds d'Algérie, Département d'Oran [hereafter FA], 3060. Even in France the categories had no specific meanings. Some of the sentencing bodies, the *commissions mixtes*, had assumed that an *Algérie moins* sentence indicated a shorter transportation term, or that A+ men would live in enclosed prisons while A- men would have more freedom. Saint-Arnaud himself waffled, then declared the only difference was between the “more and less dangerous.” See Saint-Arnaud to Randon, 12 March 1852, and to the Director of Personnel, Office of Military Justice, 7 April 1852, AN, F7 12710.
14. See Margadant, *French Peasants in Revolt*, for analysis of the *transportés*' backgrounds. Wealthier, educated insurgents (considered more dangerous because of their status and connections) and artisans were more likely to receive transportation sentences than rebellious farmers and day laborers.
15. Randon to the General at Oran, 25 March 1852, FA, 3060.
16. Director of Algerian Affairs to Director of Military Justice, War Ministry, quoting a letter from Randon to Saint-Arnaud, 31 March 1852, Vincennes, JM AB 83 262.

17. Office of Military Justice to Office of Algerian Affairs, War Ministry, 13 April 1852, Vincennes, JM AB 83 262.
18. Letter from Quentin-Bauchart, *commissaire extraordinaire* working in the Gard, 28 April 1852, AN, BB22 129A; Comité des Grâces, AN, BB30 462 and BB22 133.
19. All quotations from an internal Ministry of War note, July 1852, Vincennes, JM AB 81 283.
20. Louis Napoleon's use of pardons as propaganda forms a main theme of my dissertation, "Transforming the Enemy: Algerian Colonization, Imperial Clemency and the Rehabilitation of France's 1851 Republican Insurrectionaries" (Ph.D. diss., Yale, 1999).
21. Randon to Saint-Arnaud, 30 June 1852, Vincennes, JM AB 83 262.
22. Pauline Roland, Arthur Ranc, and Gaspard Rouffet, *Bagnes d'Afrique: Trois transportés en Algérie après le coup d'Etat du 2 décembre 1851*, ed. Fernand Rude (Paris: François Maspero, 1981), 67.
23. Randon to Saint-Arnaud, 30 June 1852, Vincennes, JM AB 83 262.
24. Randon to Saint-Arnaud, 25 March 1852, AN, F7 12710.
25. Charles Ribeyrolles, *Les Bagnes d'Afrique: Histoire de la transportation de décembre* (London, 1853), 95.
26. Minister of Justice to the Minister of Finances, 8 June 1852, AN, BB30 955.
27. Minister of Justice to Saint-Arnaud, 12 April 1853, Vincennes, JM AB 87 279.
28. Randon to Saint-Arnaud, 5 May 1854, Vincennes, JM AB 81 283.
29. Ribeyrolles, *Les Bagnes d'Afrique*, 127.
30. Trimestral Reports for the Colony of Douéra, Third and Fourth Trimester 1853, First Trimester 1854, Vincennes, JM AB 84 263.
31. Ribeyrolles, *Les Bagnes d'Afrique*, 152.
32. Trimestral Reports from Mascara (1855), Ben Nchoud (1853–54), Douéra (1853–54), Aïn-Schougga (1853–54), and Gueleat-Bou-Sba (1854–55), Vincennes, JM AB 84 263.
33. Trimestral Reports from Ben Ncoud, 1853–54, Vincennes, JM AB 84 263.
34. First Trimestral Report from Gueleat-Bou-Sba, 1854, Vincennes, JM AB 84 263.
35. Fourth Trimestral Report, Douéra, 1854, Vincennes, JM AB 84 263.
36. Randon to the General at Oran, 28 March 1852, FA, 3060.
37. Randon to generals of the Algerian divisions, 22 June 1852, FA, 3060.
38. Randon to Saint-Arnaud, 15 January 1853, Vincennes, JM AB 83 262.
39. Randon to Saint-Arnaud, 14 May 1852, Vincennes, JM AB 81 283.
40. Ribeyrolles, *Les Bagnes d'Afrique*, 99.
41. Randon to the Minister of War, 10 June 1852, AN, F7 12710.

42. General at Oran to Randon, June 1852, FA, 3060.
43. Ribeyrolles, *Les Bagnes d'Afrique*, 138.
44. General at Oran to Randon, June 1852, FA, 3060.
45. Saint-Arnaud to Abbatucci, 12 November 1852, AN, BB30 406.
46. Benjamin Gastineau, *Les Transportés de décembre 1851: Les suites du Coup d'état, dossier du Deux-Décembre* (Paris: Librairie Centrale, 1869).
47. Minister of War circular to military division commanders, 1 February 1852, AN, F7 12710. Between 1853 and 1855, while French Guiana was temporarily closed to new political prisoners, unruly *transportés* were kept in a special Algerian penitentiary at Lambessa alongside the remaining June 1848 prisoners.
48. Trimestral Reports, Vincennes, JM AB 84 263.
49. Randon to the General at Oran, 14 April 1853, FA, 3060.
50. Randon to Saint-Arnaud, 12 May 1853, Vincennes, JM AB 83 262.
51. List of escape attempts, 30 June 1853, Vincennes, JM AB 83 262; reports for Jean Baptiste Bolland, Joseph Sourd, Arthur Ranc, and Gaspard Léonce Rouffet, 30 June 1856, Vincennes, JM AB 85 277.
52. *Moniteur universel*, 29 March 1852.
53. Randon to Algerian generals, 16 April 1852, Vincennes, JM AB 81 283.
54. Randon to Algerian generals, 17 April 1852, Vincennes, JM AB 81 283.
55. Head of Algerian Police at Oran to the General at Oran, 7 November 1854, FA, 3060.
56. Dossier for Etienne Rocher, AN, BB30 463.
57. Randon to the Minister of War, 20 May 1852, Vincennes, JM AB 81 283.
58. General at Mostaganem to the General at Oran, 13 April 1852, FA, 3060.
59. Ribeyrolles, *Les Bagnes d'Afrique*, 168, 169.
60. See the dossier from Joseph Chaussard, AN, F15 3979, for one family that did migrate.
61. Randon to the Algerian generals, 16 September 1852, FA, 3060.
62. Randon to the General at Oran, 18 October 1852, FA, 3060.
63. Randon to Vaillant, 5 July 1856, Vincennes, JM AB 87 279; Situation as of 1 April 1856 of the 1852 *transportés* in Algeria, Vincennes, JM AB 83 262.
64. Dossier for Etienne Rocher, AN, BB30 463.
65. Randon realized he had failed. In 1858, when the government sent 380 former *transportés* back to Algeria as a precaution after the Orsini assassination attempt, Randon did not pretend these prisoners were anything but temporary residents of Africa. They were free to live where they wished under light police surveillance, and Randon made no attempt to push them towards agricultural work. See FA, 3060, Folder, "Transportés politiques de 1858"; Vincennes, JM AB 83 262.