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# Sport and the French Right

by  
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The degree to which the French intelligentsia has taken an interest in sport is probably unique in modern intellectual history. Even more striking is the preponderance of interest on the political-cultural Right, suggesting a fundamental affinity between an interest in sport as a cultural issue and an interest in promoting a conservative or even reactionary interpretation of culture. The proposed paper discusses the relationship between the subject of sport and the French Right in terms of two historical periods: (1) The late nineteenth and early twentieth century period during which Pierre de Coubertin was most active, treating writings like *Essais de psychologie sportive* and *Un campagne de 21 ans* as texts which may be interpreted within the context of the intellectual history of their time. The *Essais*, for example, offer many themes: the notion of virility, the increasing complexity of civilization, a concern for a declining aesthetic capacity, an interest in “psycho-physiology,” an interest in combatting “decadence,” and even a hostility to Rousseau, among others, which should be treated within an overall theory of the nineteenth-century French Right. (2) The post-Coubertin period in France. Conservative *hommes de lettres* such as Montherlant, Paul Morand, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, and the neo-fascist Maurice Bardèche have carried this interest in sport well into this century. Their writings, and articles on sport in periodicals like *Écrits de Paris* and *Défense de l'Occident* offer valuable insights into the culture of the postwar French Right.