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# Building a Media Celebrity: the Marquis de Morés and the Gilded Age

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#### Introduction

Media critics often judge negatively the criteria though which people turn themselves into media celebrities in free-press Western societies. A distinctive style of dress (or undress) attracts attention of celebrity-oriented media; an ability to contribute outrageous hyperbole or "sound-bites"; an ability to concoct unexpected, even wacky, projects and stunts. Wealth fascinates the mass-media audience, as does the hopeful celebrity able to embody a cultural value, whether it be beauty, athletic ability, royal connection, country charm, "exotic foreigner," or even Old West lore.

Yet variations of this popular 1990s recipe reach back far into the history of Western mass media, in fact, back to the beginning of the mass circulation press. At the beginning of the last century there was no popular press; presses couldn't print more than a few thousand at a time, telegraph news wasn't available, and literacy was too low to offer a mass readership.

But after the U.S. Civil War, advances in technology and education fed the strong growth of the mass-circulation press, which attracted an audience as influential as that of today's dominant mass media, television. With this growth came the development of the celebrity formula so familiar today.

Historic early celebrities made by the media include P.T. Barnum, the showman who succeeded using hyperbole, Buffalo Bill (William Frederick Cody), whose Wild West show captivated Europe and America's East, and internationally-famous actress Sarah Bernhardt.

What might happen if one person were able to wrap many of these celebrity building blocks into a single public-relations package? A mass audience might read of a well-heeled, handsome, aristocratic, foreign-born, sword- and gun-slinger whose colorful hyperbole matches his stupendous projects in America's Western frontier. Such a formula was embodied in the Marquis de Morés, North Dakota's first international media celebrity.

As a case study in the last century's styles of self-public relations, personal communication and celebrity status, Morés offers an edifying example spanning two continents. Like Barnum, he was a huckster easily drawn to hyperbole. Like Bill, his Wild West antics captured an audience both in America and in Europe. Like rich socialites, his manners and pocketbook interested all kinds of press, from *The New York Times* to *Le Temps*. Morés was an early entrepreneur who seemed to understand the use of "celebrity status" to promote himself, to make sure his endless projects were well-covered by the dominant mass media of the day.

Also like some of today's celebrities, Morés was violently controversial during his short lifetime. What is more, the controversy extended far beyond his century, through 70 years of partisan historiography. The complex and multi-faceted Morés has been used in turn to impugn a government, create a martyr for antisemitism, sustain a tourist industry, add to Old West lore, and in strongly-worded Jewish re-interpretations, create a sinister proto-Nazi ne'er-do-well.

For a general study of a more objective nature, we wait until 1972, when D. Jerome Tweton published *The* 

Marquis de Moré s. Dakota Capitalist, French Nationalist. Unfortunately, this carefully-researched account, now more than two decades old, is hard to find outside North Dakota libraries. Saum's (1969) account illustrated Morés as symbol of progress for nineteenth-century America, and his later account (1972) illusrated Morés as symbol of revolt against nineteenth-century realism. No accounts have appeared since.

As we approach another *fin de siécle*, it may be worth while to take a fresh look at the life of this aristocratic adventurer, but this time focusing on the man as early self-publicist and media celebrity. In the work below, the author has returned to primary sources whenever possible, including Morés' own publications collected at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. Unfortunately, Morés left few primary sources for historians and, as Tweton (1972) noted, valuable sources also include biographies published by friends after his death. Of course, newspaper accounts are abundant, as Morés was a major media figure of the era. But newspaper accounts may be unreliable. Because newspapers often form the only primary source of information about Morés, however, this study limits most newspaper references to the two most reputable of the era: *Le Temps*in Paris and *The New York Times* in the United States. Morés' friend Droulers (1932) published a useful if biased biography; most of the references here to Dresden (1970) are nearly identical in Droulers' early account, and used instead for convenience of the English translation. This study also tries to use sources in French not easily accessible to American researchers. (All translations are by the author.)

Especially in French, biographical accounts of Morés between his death in 1896 and the end of World War II are highly positive in tone, even adulatory. He is the "Sahara martyr" (Thé rol, 1942) or "one of the West's most colorful, if obscure, frontier figures." (Goplen, 1946). In contrast to this is critical material focusing on Morés' antisemitism. All of this was published after World War II. Byrnes (1950) called Morés "not only the first national socialist, but also the first storm trooper."

# From the beginning

Aristocratic connections of Morés are attributed to Spanish genealogy (Byrnes, 1950; Dresden, 1970; Tweton, 1972), the family gaining the title through their military action for the Spanish crown. An obituary published on page one of *Le Temps* of Paris, June 20, 1896, declared that Antoine Amédée Marie Vincent-Amat Manca de Vallombrosa (he took the Marquis title as an adult) was of a feudal family from Sardinia, the Manca family. Moré s, born June 14, 1858, in Paris, eldest son of the Duc de Vallombrosa, "a rich nobleman of France," entered Saint Cyr at age 18. (*The New York Times*, June 22, 1896, p. 26). He resigned his commission in 1881, and married Medora, only daughter of Louis Von Hoffman, "the well-known banker of Wall Street." (*The New York Times*, June 22, 1896, p.26). He had met Medora at a society affair in Cannes, France, where the Morés family maintained an estate.

Morés was quoted in *the Sioux Falls (S.D.) Press* as as saying that he had planned to make money in his American ventures to finance a coup d'état and mount the throne of a new French monarchy (quoted in Dresden, 1970, p. 14). This style of colorful hyperbole was characteristic of Morés; his actions in America seem to support the suggestion that many of Morés' comments to the press were exaggerations designed to produce good copy by a man who enjoyed celebrity status. This comment was formulated only after Morés' operations had failed, and is representative of a pattern of exaggerated communications by Morés which seemed not to have been borne out by his subsequent actions.

But a later historian must not dismiss too quickly all of Morés' statements as exaggeration for effect. In this case it can be noted that Morés had been attached to MacMahon's military command in France, and possibly was influenced by this last leader of the aristocratic "notables"; the new and shaky French Third Republic was opposed by royalists with considerable influence through the turn of the century. Nevertheless, Morés left for western North Dakota in the spring of 1883 with plans the scale of which seem to suggest his operations were not meant to be of short duration.

It is during this spring that reporters and biographers interested in Morés as cowboy celebrity pick up the real thread of their narrative, and indeed here that the Frenchman began to attract attention of the American press

of the time. (Saum, 1969). Morés' plan in itself was not particularly noteworthy: rich European aristocrats, along with rich young opportunists from the East, migrated in number to Americas's trans-Missouri west to seek adventure and, more importantly, fortune. These young men from moneyed society looked toward adding to their family's wealth in the booming cattle industry at the beginning of the 1880s. (Gressley, 1966; Tweton, 1972). Morés seems to have attracted attention of the era's popular press more for his style, using many of the tools used to build celebrity status.

Acknowledging Morés in the United States "occupied prominent attention in this country" (June 21, 1896, p. 26), The New York Times had described him as "a fine specimen of manhood" in an article published Aug. 22, 1885 (p.1). "He is a brave fellow, inured to hardship, and enthusiastic in all the daring exploits that hunting in the wilderness affords," the newspaper added in a Dec. 19, 1887, article (p.1) describing Morés' tiger-hunting trip to India. "Tall, slender, with flashing black eyes and the lithe grace of a polished fencer, he might have stepped from the pages of an Alexandre Dumas novel," wrote Nelson (1946). Even detractors admit he was a "dashing" figure. (Byrnes, 1950). Having bought a total of 15,000 acres of land in the North Dakota Badlands around the Little Missouri River (The New York Times, Aug. 22, 1885), Morés moved in with a large retinue to build a 28-room mansion for himself and Medora, staffed with French servants (Nelson, 1946). The town was named after Morés' wife, 84 buildings raised between February 1883 to January 1884 (R. Wilkins & W. Wilkins, 1977). Medora's newspaper, *The Bad Lands Cowboy*, was published by Arthur Packard under the intriguing masthead, "Not for fun, but for \$2 per year" (Tweton, 1972; R. Wilkins & W. Wilkins, 1977). Morés' activities in North Dakota, were huge and diverse, all established in 1883. He apparently extended his operation as far as Kansas City; according to *The New York Times* (Dec. 19, 1887, p.1) he was "identified with" the Western Dressed Beef Company there: "The Marquis invested only \$5,000 or \$6,000 in it, but his gleaming personality permeated it through and through, and it wasn't long in business before the public was insisting on putting it down as his own." According to the article, as "General Western Manager," New York investors gave Morés a line of credit up to \$7,000, but "one unhappy morning the trustful New Yorkers with financial interests at stake woke up and had a fine reason for rubbing their eyes open to an amazing spectacle. There were bills payable confronting them for close to \$50,000." In fact, New York investors, led by Morés' father-in-law, had supported a number of the Frenchman's ideas, including the National Consumers Meat Company, announced in New York at Manhattan College in 1886, New York mayor W.R. Grace and other prominent bankers attending the meeting (Bynres, 1950; Dresden, 1970.

The scale of this operation seems as expansive and wildly optimistic as Morés' public boasting, but it is not out of place for the era. Enormous eastern North Dakota bonanza farms of up to 75,000 acres established during the "second Dakota boom" of 1878-85 attracted worldwide attention (Cashman, 1984; R. Wilkins & W. Wilkins, 1977); expatriot ranchers such as Baron Walter Von Richthofen set up monstrous cattle operations in the west (Gressley, 1966). The boom era of western range cattle industry coincided with Morés' activities, 1882-85, and optimistic wealthy businessmen from the East expected great profits from their substantial investments. Railroads heavily promoted North Dakota as a great land of opportunity, attracting thousands of new settlers (Gressley, 1966; R. Wilkins & W. Wilkins, 1977). A cattleman with 10,000 to 20,000 acres was considered small, while a large holding typically totalled 60,000 to 75,000 acres (Gressley, 1966; Tweton, 1972).

By these standards, the scale of Morés' activities was average, grounded on business wisdom of the era, and not the crackpot scheme it might seem to later entrepreneurs. But Morés' offered a new twist on the standard plan: instead of raising and shipping cattle on the hoof to meat packers in Minneapolis and Chicago, Morés proposed to do the slaughtering himself at Medora, then ship the meat in ice-boxed rail cars "from ranch to table," as he called it, avoiding the middleman, the slaughterhouses (*The New York Times*, Dec. 19, 1887, p. 1). This bold plan attracted press attention; U.S. meat packers had by 1883 clearly formed a trust then so common in corporate America, and the power of their monopoly was to be illustrated in later events, culminating in Upton Sinclair's thinly-disguised novel, *The Jungle* (1906). It was not, however, unique in itself; western cattle growers had tried several times to form a cooperative from range to table in opposition to

the meat packers' trust. They failed (Gressley, 1966; Tweton, 1972). Morés said he would cut ice from the river at a cost of 20 cents a ton, slaughter animials in Medora, and pack the meat into refrigerator cars. "The time will come, said Morés, "when it will become the meat of the world, and there is no region that can compete with ours" (*The New York Times*, Aug. 22, 1885, p. 1). This quotable statement is one example of a pattern of colorful boasts Morés set in his American interviews, quotes which helped establish Morés' as a source of colorful media stories. Within two years of arriving in the United States, he had become a celebrity.

Also being set was a pattern of boast followed by failure. Morés' failures cost investors an estimated \$1.5 million for the Medora operations, and \$135,000 for the New York operations (*The New York Times*, Dec. 19, 1887).

To explain the failure of Morés' operations, some writers have pointed to the public personality of the man. This may be unfair; speculators in the cattle industry lost appalling amounts of capital in an industry hazardous even at the best of times, and easy prey to bad weather, poor management, railroad and business duplicity, and market price fluctuations (Dykstra, 1968). Theodore Roosevelt himself may have taken inspiration from his ranch alongside that of Morés, but he hardly took any profit, losing \$75,000 (Nelson, 1946).

The vagaries of the operation, then, likely provide the most compelling arguments for Morés' failure. "His boundless energy, buoyant optimism, and endless enthusiasm could not offset the strength of the well-established Chicago meatpackers," observed Tweton (1972, p. 49). But more local reasons also can be considered. Morés' dashing demeanor and indefatigable self-promotion may have enchanted journalists, but they aliented local folk. Only weeks after his arrival to the Badlands in early spring 1883, he was subject to threats and abuse, culminating in a shootout with three men on June 26. One of the attackers, William Riley Luffsey, was killed, another wounded. Tweton (1972) noted that the anti-Morés attackers were hunters who protested Morés' fencing part of his land.

Morés was tried three times for the murder, finally being acquitted in a trial in Mandan. Morés again was able to offer a show worthy of his celebrity status, a bubbly stew of desperados, aristocrats, shysters, and suspicious judges. Morés' actions, even those not apparently made for media consumption, fed the press with good stories, part of a Western saga made for popular consumption by a world already fascinated with the western myth (Cashman, 1984; Saum, 1969). Wrote *The New York Times* (June 21, 1896, p. 26), Morés was different from other western fortune-seekers, "combining with the social polish and elegance of a courtier the recklessness of the cowboy, the courage of the frontiersman, and the grim determination of the western pioneer." Good copy.

He was also, suggested the article, a failure among the cowboys, regarded there as "a blanked foreigner, secondly as a tenderfoot, and thirdly as extremely officious." Most biographers describe him as at the least haughty, at the most, arrogant and hot-tempered. In contrast, Theodore Roosevelt, while also being a tenderfoot much ridiculed for his Eastern upper class manners, was able to ingratiate himself with the cowboy population, and suffered less than Morés from hostility.

As for Morés' enthusiasm for public duels and gun-slinging, this, too, captured imagination of a mass public to enhance his status as celebrity. "When a man is attacked he generally defends himself," Morés was quoted as saying in *The New York Times* (Aug. 22, 1885, p. 1) in response to his indictment for murder. The tone of the article suggested the reporter approved of Morés' readiness to use his gun; *The New York Times* obituary (June 21, 1896, p. 26) reiterated, "He has crowded into his few years the experience of a lifetime, and shown in a hundred ways his daring, force, and utter lack of fear." The article also ennobled Morés for having been "an excellent shot," and again, a "daring" man, whose experiences "were enough to furnish material for the wildest of the dime novels." While an obituary in *Le Temps* was more sober, it was hardly critical, calling Morés' death a "catastrophe" (June 20, 1896, p. 1), and in an obituary reporting his duels without negative reflection. As was the case many times, Morés had become a symbol of a Gilded Age cultural ideal.

# Morés and the Chivalric Ideal

The last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed a renewed interest in bravery, action, patriotism, and chivalric ideals. The idea of "honor" enjoyed an "extraordinary revival" in France after the Franco-Prussian war, (Nye, 1990, pp. 366-7). Nye observed that a French author influential to the rebirth in fashion of the duel, Lucien Prevost-Paradol, urged young men "to draw our swords if we would not lose our rank, lest our weapons remain in their scabbards out of a misguided conviction that they no longer play a role in regulating human affairs." Chivalric themes crept into primary school texts; duels increased from about 100 a year in 1860 to 400-500 a year after 1880, which "put a premium on personal courage and preparation for revenge" (Nye, pp. 367, 371-2, 375).

Morés' colorful pronouncements and subsequent actions fit squarely into this fashionable ideology. At a time when a new generation of thinkers were writing odes to action (R&eacutemond, 1982; Saum, 1972), Morés affirmed in numerous interviews, "Life has value only through action" (Winock, 1982, p. 59). His numerous admirers in France claimed the Marquis "seemed to have stepped right out of a chivalric novel" (Pierrard, 1970, p. 138). Like athletes, actrices, and rock musicians today become celebrities by embodying contemporary cultural ideals, Morés embodied the *zeitgeist* of the waning 1800s.

Morés returned to France for good in 1887, visiting his ranch in North Dakota only once more. His family did control the property until 1936, when it was donated to the state historical society. The Morés mansion is now open to tourists. It stands on the edge of Theodore Roosevelt National Park, memorial to the other important resident of the Badlands. Nothing is said in Medora of Morés' antisemitic activities in France. Schwarzschild (1960, p. 3) found it peculiar that the state would maintain "an extensive memorial to one of the most vicious antisemitic propagandists and activists of recent times," yet allows in a footnote that government ownership of the site is acceptable, as it "perpetuates a legitimately significant episode in American history." It really is not an "antisemitic memorial," commemorating activities of a man who exhibited no evidence of antisemitism while in Dakota territory.

Still, after Morés' return to France, he attributed his conversion to his personal brand of socialism to his North Dakota projects. "The experience made me a socialist. As a producer, I battled against the middlemen, and I could realize the needs of consumers" (Droulers, 1932, p. 106). Further, he claimed his antisemitism was based on his failure in America, which he blamed on the "mostly Jewish" meat packing trust (Dresden, 1970, p. 181).

Morés made these claims long after he left America, however. It does seem probable that Moré learned in America the dangers of nineteenth-century predatory capitalism, and this may have influenced his later socialistic writings. In a brochure signed "Morés" published Oct. 30, 1894, he makes an argument for "free silver" which would "permit all French producers to work for a fair return," a theme echoing American populist sentiment of the era. It is also true that North Dakotans shared Midwestern distrust of Britain, and that antisemitism was growing everywhere in the United States, (Cashman, 1984) no doubt not excepting North Dakota. Morés wrote extensively on these two issues. But to attribute Morés' antisemitic conversion to United States influences seems to require a fair leap of faith. Considering Morés' extensive absences from North Dakota, and his haughtiness, it is doubtful he could have been greatly influenced by the populist politics of the average settler. More likely, it seems, Morés was persuaded to his new point of view by his own background combined with events in France at the time. In fact, again, Morés was able to maintain his celebrity status by capitalizing on yet another newly-fashionable ideology.

# Antisemitism in the Gilded Age

Antisemitism in France saw its renewal twinned with the new taste for action and a sort of 1880s chivalric code. Along with the "théorie du moi," a certainty that "destiny belongs to the powerful individual...able to impose the law of their thought on what is around them" (Sternhell, 1972, p. 232), the publication of Edouard Drumont's *La France Juive* in 1886 gave immense force to the argument of those who blamed the Jews for France's supposed moral decadence (Winock, 1960). Drumont was able to crystalize modern French

antisemitism in this and in his newspaper, *La Libre Parole*, established in 1894, at a time in France when influence of the partisan press could rival influence of politicians and their loosely-organized political parties. Moreover, Drumont "contributed largely to the scandal of assimilation of Catholicism to antisemitism" (Pierrard, 1970, p. 18). Only a few years before, in 1878, the failure of the anti-Jewish Union G&eacuten&eacuterale bank in Paris cost the investments of some of France's most influential aristocrats, along with a long list of Catholic investors. Its failure was widely, though most historians believe falsely, blamed on Jewish sabotage (Boussel, 1960; Hanna, 1951). By the 1880s antisemitism was widespread even in the most respectable of French families (Byrnes, 1950; Sternhell, 1972).

In this context it is hardly surprising that Morés, aristocrat, strongly Catholic in Jesuit education and influence, and committed to the chivalric fashion of the period at the margins of anti-Jewish ideology, would launch a well-publicized antisemite crusade. *La France Juive* was said to be his major influence (Byrnes, 1950; Sternhell, 1972). But, characteristically, Morés gave his antisemitism an unusual twist clearly designed to attract attention of a mass-media audience.

Morés had returned to France in 1888 after his second failed attempt to make a fortune, this time in French-controlled Indochina, by proposing a railroad from the Tonkin Gulf to China (*Le Temps*, June 20, 1896). Blaming French government machinations for his failure, he plunged into politics, supporting the anti-parliamentarian "Boulangist" fight against the Third Republic, as did many French notables. His timing for public criticism of the government was perfect, reflecting the popularity of anti-government attacks during a critical time for the young republic. But Boulangism failed, and anti-republicanism waned in popularity. As it lost usefulness for public appeal, Morés too abandoned it in his public pronouncements.

Morés turned to antisemitism in 1889 (*Le Temps*, June 20, 1896). He began his political self-publicity efforts by communicating in his characteristically flamboyant way, speaking in public and writing. In 1890 he declared himself a candidate for political office in Paris. The year was significant: between 1886, when France's trade unions first met in national congress, to 1890, when workers' groups first took up the idea of a general May Day strike, the power of the socialist working class had burgeoned around the country (Anderson, 1977).

Yet again, Morés was there to appropriate the fashion of the day for his own self-promotion. One of the earliest of Morés' publications extant is entitled *Worker's Holiday, May 1, 1890. To the Workers of France*. It proposed a relatively conventional socialism, advocating credits and accident insurance for workers, a "convocation of a popular high court" to try "thieves of the people's fortune," "democratic and social revision of the constitutional code," and concluding, "it would be good if the first of May, date of the workers' holiday, were a peaceful holiday for the nation." This contradicted Morés' later calls to revolt. The brochure did not mention antisemitism, although according to various stories in *Le Temps* and other sources the Marquis clearly had embraced the concept by 1890.

Later publications by Morés unwound a more complex and idiosyncratic approach to socialism, especially a 48-page pamphlet published in 1892, *Rothschild, Ravachol, et Cie.* Here Morés launched immediately into an attack upon the Jews, "the conscious or unconscious agents of Rothschild, the king of Jews," identified as "freemasons, the press, the stock exchange, and the red menace." In this publication Morés claimed freemasonry allied with English and Jews. His economic theories were presented in byzantine detail, such as this free silver-style argument which declared,

The English and their allies, Jewish bankers, controlling the extension of commercial operations, the extension of credit, and the scarcity of gold, have made the following calculation: if silver is demonetized, and if we oblige workers' groups to pay our interest, to pay for our merchandise, and our cargo, in gold, as we possess nearly all the gold and all our credit is valued in gold, we will sell that gold to them at the price we want and thus we will obtain their raw material and their work at a price whatever price will want. This was done.

In convoluted arguments, Morés claimed resources of France were being delivered to "Jewish parasites" who were preparing a stock market crash "in which the greatest losers will always be the Christian workers, and which after the storm will permit Jews to buy dirt cheap everything that isn't already theirs." The "red menace" of Morés is explained to be "the Jews and specifically the Rothschilds," who were "always in touch with revolutionaries." He concluded that Rothschild and Jewish actions will be "Le fin de la France." (Morés' italics.) Interestingly, as Tweton (1972) noted, Morés also denounced Jewish control of the press, arguing it could hardly be relied upon to treat French economic questions fairly. Yet Morés consistently relied on the press in the United States and France to promote his ideas, and newspapers repeatedly were attracted by his colorful statements.

The zealous tone of Morés' writings is seen today mostly in marginal extremist publications. But in Morés' time, this violent journalistic style was credible journalism, not only in France, but in frontier North Dakota. The state's territorial press was well known for "booming" diatribes and screeching attacks (Schmidt, 1964; Saum, 1981). Morés' writing reflected accusations common in the publications of Drumont, Barrés, and other prominent French antisemite writers at the century's turn.

But Morés, with his ever-present thirst for celebrity-building activities the press might cover, took a step beyond other writers. He formed an antisemite group called "Morés and his friends." Wearing cowboy shirts and hats no doubt reflecting Morés' North Dakota years, and pandering to the Old West myth current even in Europe, Morés and his gang of ruffians loitered around the stock market area of Paris to intimidate Jews they might encounter. Alongside Morés' somewhat Proudhonistic brand of "socialism," which emphasized respect for private property, the army, and Catholicism (Tweton, 1972), this gaudy show was the Marquis' new twist. Arendt (1971, p. 111) observed that Morés "lost his fortune in America, and became famous for organizing the butchers of Paris into a manslaughtering brigade." It is a nice turn of phrase, if only half true. No one was apparently physically harmed by this group, although Jules Guérin, who had helped Morés form his group and who continued its activities after the Marquis' death, set up antisemitic shock troops which in 1898 violently broke up pro-Dreyfus meetings.

Morés' attachment to this group was too much for his more restrained father, who asked his son in a letter dated March 28, 1890, to dissolve his ties with "the rubbish of society." But the attraction of celebrity status apparently oveshadowed need for family approbation. Morés responded that these people were "more honest than the many of those who frequent the salons....I am convinced of the justice of my cause and will not retreat. Perhaps adieu" (Droulers, 1932, pp. 147-8).

Drumont, on the other hand, supported Morés, who in turn wrote a series of anonymous articles in *La Libre Parole* in May 1892, violently attacking Jews in the French army (*Le Temps*, June 20, 1896). The series provoked outrage, but it was not the first time Morés' writings had gotten him into trouble: he was jailed for three months in 1891, for "a series of articles in the newspaper *L'Assaut* and brochures against the Jews" (*Le Temps*, June 20, 1896, pp. 1-2; *The New York Times*, June 19, 1986). The articles in *La Libre Parole*, however, brought not the threat of prosecution but challenges to four duels: Morés against Camille Dreyfus, editor of *Le Matin* (pistols), against under-prefect Isaac from Avesnes (swords), against Captain Crémieu-Foa (swords) and Captain Armand Mayer (swords). The challenge seemed to have played into Morés' wish to appear as the dashing celebrity. Unfortunately, the showman went too far. Crémieu-Foa was wounded, and Mayer, an Alsacian Jewish artillery captain, was killed "by unfortunate chance" (*Le Temps*, June 20, 1896, pp. 1).

In the journalistic outrage that followed Mayer's death, Morés admitted to the *Echo de Paris* on June 24, 1892, "I am profoundly sorrowful for this death that I did everything to avoid. I know full well that the public prosecutor's office is going to issue an arrest warrant against me and the witnesses." Then Morés decided to abruptly change tone to capitalize on the tragedy, continuing, "But what of it! The magistrates will not prevent the work of our undertaking to continue; matters of individuals are nothing; principles are everything, and we are just at the beginning of a civil war" (Boussel, 1960, p. 21).

This time Morés' bombast attracted more outrage than admiration. Paris newspapers condemned Morés' threat, writing editorials such as that of Charles Laurent in Le Jour, "You may still have religious duels. You will not have the civil war that you want, and that you announce!" Emmanuel Aréne wrote that Morés' actions had in one day "made the Jews more likeable than they had been made hateful by four or five years of daily attacks and abuse" (Boussel, 1960, pp. 21-2). Nevertheless, Morés was even more a celebrity.

Morés was again arrested, tried, and acquitted, and the episode seemed to have ended his political aspirations. His reputation was further damaged by Clemenceau who, after having been accused by Morés during the Panama Scandal of treason and associating with Jewish money, responded that Morés himself had borrowed money from a Jew. This, Morés was compelled to admit, was true: in a reply published by several Paris newspapers, Morés explained that he had borrowed 20,000 francs from Cornelius Herz, using as an intermediary Drumont, and that he had intended to make the transaction public as soon as he had paid the money back. Herz was notorious for having distributed Panama Company bribes to French officials, a collaborator with Jacques Reinach, who had given *La Libre Parole* a list of bribed officials before commiting suicide (Arent, 1951; Droulers, 1932). Morés predictably challenged the future prime minister: "If he wants to fight with pistols, I'm waiting." No duel took place, although Drumont himself duelled with Clemenceau in 1898 (Droulers, 1932; Boussel, 1960).

## Morés' Last Adventure

His political and economic fortunes in France at a low ebb, Morés lost no time in conceiving of a new attention-getting adventure, this one in north Africa. Returning from a trip to Algeria and Tunisia, Morés said he was struck by the "prosperity" of the region. "He convinced himself that commercial business there would soar if caravans from Sudan were sent by the Tuaregs toward ports in our territories instead of to Tripoli and Morocco" (*Le Temps*, June 20, 1896, p.1-2). This would be easy, Morés said, because the Tuaregs would be anxious to make an agreement with the French to stop the English from depriving the tribe of its traditional commerce transporting salt across the desert.

Morés' plan seemed to have been primarily economic, his third attempt to make a fortune overseas, and in a region he had long studied (Tweton, 1972). But his rhetoric was political: he said he hoped to deprive the English of its encroaching colonial power over African territory. In a pamphlet dated Nov. 1, 1894, and signed "Morés," he advised French president Casimer-Perier to wage war on England over its African policies: "Do justice to the Arabs in Algeria. Make an alliance between France and Islam. Then with the Muslims we will cross Africa, from Alger to the mouth of the Zambezi, to eastablish contact with Madagascar by land."

The French government demurring, Morés mapped out his own plan, an expedition from Tunis to the modern Libyan city of Ghadames, about 550 miles away. There seemed to be little reason to trust the desert tribe, however, proven time and again to be ferociously hostile to French expeditions into the region (*Grand dictionnaire encyclopédique Larousse*, Vol. 10, 1985). None the less, Morés, after a number of antisemite speeches in France and in French African colonies, and in opposition to advice from the local military authorities, set out on an itinerary through the desert on May, 29, 1896 (*Le Temps*, June 19, 1896). Precisely what Morés' aimed to do on this trek is difficult to ascertain. Schwarzschild (1960) contended he really did plan to reach Madagascar, across 4,200 miles of Africa. Byrnes (1950) believed that the Frenchman planned to arrive eventually at Bakr et Ghayal, where he could make a base to challenge British power in Egypt. This was a distance of some 2,000 miles across the desert. But Dresden (1970) contended the trip was to be only 1,000 total miles. *Le Temps* (June 19, 1896, p. 1) declared Morés' ambitions to be more modest: "to enter into business relations with merchants of Rhat (sic., probably Ghat) and to persuade them to route their merchandise through south Tunisia by using the services of the Tuaregs and Azdjer."

No biographer has suggested, however, that this plan may have had another goal: self-publicity. It seems clear that Morés as entrepreneur had not planned the trip very carefully. But as celebrity he did use it extensively to promote himself in public speeches and interviews. Could the entire project have been yet another

promotional stunt, another attempt to capture the imagination of the people through the mass media? Before this final journey, Morés made a number of hyperbolic communications in Africa, notably "declaring war on Britain" in a statement published July 19, 1895, by the Providence, R.I., *Telegram* (Schwarzschild, 1960; Dresden, 1970). While *Le Temps* glossed over Morés' political ambitions in Africa, *The New York Times*, apparently referring to this comment, observed (June 18, 1896), "Just how he hoped to thwart English schemes entirely by his own persuasive powers with the sons of the desert does not transpire."

Morés set out with a group apparently inadequate for such a dangerous and harsh environment, a party of eight, 45 camels, 40,000 francs in "merchandise." Wrote Bernard D'Attanoux, identified as a *Le Temps* reporter who in 1893-94 made a trip similar to that planned by Morés, no one in his party had thought their stock of 40 repeating rifles was excessive.

The facts of Morés' death were carefully authenticated by *Le Temps*, which declared that the witness, Ali ben Zmerli, a member of the party, was vetted and reliable (*Le Temps*, June 21, 1896, p. 3; June 20, 1896, pp. 1-2; June 19, 1986, p. 1). The party left El Ouatia, a city in modern Algeria 300 miles from Tunis, accompanied by a group of Tuareg tribesmen who had persuaded Morés to trust their presence, armed with five of Morés' own rifles. Morés' "absolute confidence" in the tribesmen was fatal, the newspaper contended, as the expedition was rumored to have "considerable treasure," including 10,000 francs in cash. Morés was persuaded to send back his original escort with their camels, in exchange for the Tuareg escort.

Shortly after leaving El Ouatia on June 8, 1896, the Tuaregs set upon the small group, killing Morés' two black servants immediately, and circling Morés and two other members of the group for one hour before the battle ended. One attacker was killed, and Zmerli, who had run away, was captured and forced to help the attackers divide the party's equipment between attackers, who stole even the clothes from the bodies, before fleeing.

Morés was dead, but had hardly lost his celebrity status. His body was returned to Paris for a huge public funeral at Notre Dame Cathedral July 19, 1896. Between 5,000 and 6,000 attended, spilling onto the square, including "Commander Humbert," representing the French president (*Le Temps*, July 29, 1896). The end of the celebrity, dead before 40, marked the beginning of decades of speculation on his flamboyant life and perversely colorful end.

Supporters of Morés predictably blamed his death on a plot, most likely one concocted by the British, "the Jew Arbib," or the French government (*Le Temps*, June 21, 1896, p. 2; July 20, 1896). Morés was a keenly able demagogue attracting followers who agreed with his overtly anti-government sentiments, and liked his swashbuckling manner of communicating with the press and in public. But did French authorities believe him dangerous enough to assassinate?

Morés' wife Medora thought so. She allowed politician Jules Delahaye, a conservative parliamentary deputy and later a senator, to take charge of the investigation. A number of French officials were accused by both Delahaye and Medora, but their attempts to persuade the French courts to bring indictments failed, and in fact, backfired: in 1903 both were forced to pay damages after losing a lawsuit brought by an accused military officer (Jolly, 1963).

Delahaye later published his three-volume account "to avenge the memory of Morés," but the politician's close association with Drumont, and his "violent, bitter" royalist and antisemitic sentiments (he was convicted several times of slander and defamation; Jolly, 1963) make his account unreliable.

At the end of 1897, Medora offered a reward of \$1,000 in Tunisia and Algeria for Morés' murderers, and several people were arrested the next year. In a 1902 trial, two of those arrested received sentences of life imprisonment. No French official was implicated, despite protests of Morés' friends.

Whether or not British or French authorities had a hand in Morés death seems as unprovable today as it

apparently was nearly a century ago. It is reasonable to allow the possibility that Morés' enemies in the government had a motive to orchestrate an assassination. As late as 1954, in a letter to Schwarzschild (1960), Morés' son Louis declared the death to be "the result of premeditated murder, which cannot be traced to the government itself but was abetted, however, by agencies of an official character." Barring real proof, however, this possibility seems to groan under the weight of idle conjecture. The alternative, that Morés, an easy target in a dangerous land for robbers proven many times over to be ruthless and hostile to colonial explorers, was simply victim of a tribal attack, requires on the other hand practically no complex and sometimes far-fetched hypotheses at all, especially as evidence showed the marauders to have greedily stripped the party of every item of possible value. (Tweton, 1972, came to a similar conclusion concerning Morés' death.)

Unflattering biographers have called Morés a proto-Nazi. (Byrnes, 1950; Schwarszchild, 1960; Winock, 1982). Even a supporter wrote, "the socialism of Morés is really a national socialism" (Montray, 1914, p. 7). It is interesting that Morés' antisemitic "Morés and His Friends" group seems to resemble later storm troopers. As well, his pseudo-socialist philosophy emphasizing nationalism, the cult of action, and workers' rights against the power of Jewish banking resembles in many ways later ideals of national socialism. But these activities simply capitalized on French zeitgeist. It is less certain that Morés explicitly subscribed to the notion of an Aryan master race, although Drumont certainly did in his *La France Juive*; the man and the book both patently influenced Morés who, like the Aryans described by Drumont, was "heroic, chivalric, honest, trustworthy to the limits of naiveté" (Pierrard, 1970, p. 38). It is also difficult to reconcile twentieth century fascism with Morés' strong Catholicism and royalism.

## Conclusion

Morés clearly maintained his celebrity status in Europe and the United States for a decade and one-half; whether he really influenced turn-of-the-century politics and culture is another matter. Schwarzschild (1960, p. 4) adamantly concluded that he did, a "crucial role in the modern development of that country (France)." While he surely captured popular imagination with his aristocratic demeanor, good looks, ready bravura, and uncanny ability to appropriate fashionable trends for his own self-promotion, it seems less sure that in the long run his influence was more than fleeting. He was just another of many failures among U.S. cattlemen. He had no direct role in the Dreyfus Affair, and his "Morés and" group disbanded a few years after his death. His ideological mentor Drumont himself lost influence in France, and in 1917 he died in obscurity. That Morés' wider influence was limited seems to be shown by his failure to win elections, the outrage which followed his duel with Mayer, and even by the pariah he became among his family and aristocratic associates. He did, however, give North Dakota a handy peg on which to build the state's most well-known tourist attraction.

Morés' death as a young man avowedly on a noble quest formed a logical end to his posture as a celebrity, also seeming to presage today's celebrity-building system. Like that of Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, or Jim Morrison, Morés' "tragic" death established his myth as martyr good for years of partisan mourning. But Morés could not have intentionally engineered this fitting end to a media celebrity's life. Or could he have? As the self-destructive behavior of the present era's mourned celebrities directly contributed to their early demise, Morés' quixotic behavior of a different nature seems almost as self-destructive. He repeatedly launched new schemes which inevitably attracted press attention, repeatedly talked and acted dangerously outrageous, and finally chose a risky trip where he could easily end his life as a martyr. Before leaving, Morés' wrote letters suggesting of his possible martyrdom to his family, and to Ben Larbey, identified as "town councillor" of Alger, he wrote, "Spread the word that if something happens to me, reprisals will be made against the Jews in Algeria. That should protect me." A similar letter was published in *La Libre Parole* (*Le Temps*, June 21, 1896, p. 3).

Gilded age journalists may have adored or despised Morés, but either way could not ignore his continually outrageous grabs for publicity. If the indefatigable Marquis failed many times in his projects, he seems to have succeeded admirably as a model for modern seekers of celebrity status.

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