



ANTICOMMUNISM AND (IN)GRATITUDE IN THE EARLY COLD WAR: THE CASE OF THE FRENCH GRATITUDE TRAIN TO AMERICANS IN 1948-49

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Séance de séminaire organisée par le **Centre d'histoire (CHSP)**

1 Place Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin, 75007 Paris

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Intervention de :

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At the end of 1948, the French sent over 52,000 objects of thanks to Americans for their military aid in the Second World War, and their humanitarian aid ever since. The gifts were packed into 49 antique boxcars. They sent vases, handkerchiefs, books, drawings, ceramic figurines, dolls, knitted baby hats, silk wedding dresses, military medals, smoking pipes and much, much more. This Gratitude Train, as it was known, arrived in New York City in February 1949. It immediately drew in large crowds of politicians, journalists, and civilians across the country. Celebrations were organised to welcome the boxcars in every state capital, and the state boxcar and objects were displayed there for several weeks, sometimes travelling to different towns within the state. Afterwards, the gift objects were distributed to the public or preserved by state museums and archives.

Whilst initially appearing as a heartwarming tale of friendship between nations, the Gratitude Train in fact raises important questions about social groups, collective emotions, and Cold War politics. In this paper, I show how communities in France and the United States used the narrative of gratitude to strengthen international alliances and articulate messages of liberty, democracy, and anti-communism. Meanwhile, communists withheld their gratitude to the Americans, refusing to partake in the train. Through a history of emotions, we see how gratitude was mobilised, performed, and politicised in the early Cold War.

ACTEURS ET MOUVEMENTS SOCIAUX (CHSP)

SÉANCE 6

Christelle Gomis (EUI),
Daniel A. Gordon (Edge Hill University),
Zoe Grumberg (Université d'Angers),
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