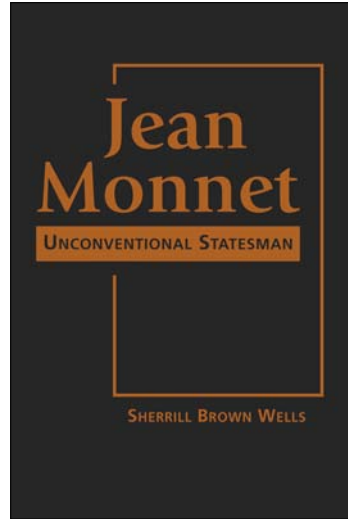


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Jean Monnet:
Unconventional Statesman

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Introduction

How did a brandy salesman from a small French provincial town, who left school at age sixteen, become one of the most influential European statesmen of the twentieth century? Jean Monnet never held an elective office, never joined a political party, and never developed any significant popular following in his native France. Yet, this unlikely Frenchman not only had a major impact on European politics and transatlantic relations, especially between 1945 and 1954, but was the single most important architect of European integration.

This political biography of the entrepreneurial internationalist demonstrates Monnet's significance in four realms: (1) reconstructing France, (2) effecting Franco-German reconciliation, (3) creating the European Union, and (4) constructing the transatlantic community. Monnet's role was central to each of these developments.

Monnet's accomplishments were numerous, diverse, and pathbreaking even before 1945. As a young man in his twenties, he demonstrated an ability to design innovative solutions to international problems. During World War I, he helped to create a program that enabled the British and French governments to coordinate their purchase of Allied supplies. After the war he became deputy head of the League of Nations, where his method of identifying obstacles and confronting problems enabled him to devise solutions to international disputes. He worked with European banks as an investment banker in the 1920s and helped Austria, Romania, and Poland to acquire international loans. In the 1930s his reputation as an international financier motivated Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek to invite him to China to help with reconstruction. During his six months in China, Monnet created a development bank designed to inject long-term Chinese and foreign public and private capital into the country's commercial and industrial ventures.

In the years just before and during the World War II, three heads of state sent Monnet on special diplomatic missions. French Prime Minister Edouard Daladier asked him in 1938 to go to Washington to negotiate the purchase of US planes to bolster French airpower. After France fell to the Germans in 1940, Monnet went to London, where British Prime Minister Winston Churchill sent him to the United States with a British passport to work with the British Purchasing Commission. Churchill believed that Monnet's experience in World War I could be valuable in hastening the acquisition of weapons and supplies needed to fight the new war. In 1943, President Franklin Roosevelt asked Monnet to go to Algiers to offer US support to France's General Henri Giraud. The president hoped that General Giraud could provide much-needed leadership for the French armed forces in North Africa. And with the help of his French colleagues exiled in Algiers, Monnet masterminded the negotiations between Giraud and the rival leader of the Free French, General Charles de Gaulle. These assignments from the French, British, and American heads of state helped to propel Monnet, by 1945, into the governing circles of Paris, London, and Washington and earned him the respect and reputation as a man of action and a skilled negotiator.

Monnet's international experience and the contacts he made prior to 1945 among French, British, and US statesmen, politicians, and civil servants enabled him to make his most important contributions to European peace after the end of World War II. He was the chief engineer of France's postwar recovery and the key architect of the European economic integration. He designed the two plans upon which the eventual European Union (EU) was built—the Monnet Plan to rebuild the French economy and the Schuman Plan to establish the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)—and then persuaded the leaders in power, de Gaulle in 1945 and Robert Schuman in 1950, to adopt his bold concepts. Once he was given the responsibility for implementing both these plans, he proved he could assemble teams of French and international civil servants to create effective organizations. As head of the Monnet Plan and later as president of the High Authority of the ECSC, Monnet continually pushed often reluctant French politicians to take the lead in economic integration. Even the failures of the two subsequent communities he designed and promoted—the European Defense Community (EDC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom)—helped spur European leaders to move forward with integration. By the end of 1954, his efforts had helped France reconstruct its economy and regain its influence on the continent, shape the use of Marshall Plan aid in Europe, recast Franco-German relations through the Schuman Plan, and moderate German recovery. All this positioned France to take a leading role in the Western Alliance and European integration. In 1955, Monnet and the Belgian Prime Minister Paul-Henri Spaak initiated the plans that brought the foreign ministers of the six ECSC countries together at Messina, Italy. This meeting in turn helped motivate the leaders of these

nations to continue discussing forms of economic integration, which led to the Rome Treaties creating the common market, the forerunner of the EU.

This study captures a period in Franco-American relations between 1945 and 1954, when Monnet was a key interlocutor between France and the United States and an influence within each government. It demonstrates that French ministers often relied on Monnet to learn what US policymakers were thinking. American leaders in turn depended to a great extent on Monnet to sustain the progress toward European integration that they believed was essential to post-war peace and stability in Europe. Monnet's work contributed to the construction of the transatlantic community, which came to life in the 1945–1954 period with the general cross-Atlantic drive that included the Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). His use of the Marshall Plan funds to rebuild the French economy illustrates this transatlantic cooperation.

Beginning in 1954 and culminating with de Gaulle's ascent to power in 1958, Monnet's influence in Paris rapidly declined. However, while his leverage and influence on Western European leaders had significantly diminished by 1958, his influence on US policymakers continued through the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations until the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963. His close friendships with many prominent Americans lasted until his death in 1979.

The pages that follow demonstrate why, in order to understand European integration—one of the most significant achievements of the twentieth century—it is essential to understand Jean Monnet's contribution to the process and to the events that influenced it.