

H-France Review Vol. 4 (February 2004), No. 15

**Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, Eds.,** *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*. Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2003. v + 384 pp. Acknowledgements, forewords, introduction, notes, contributors, and index. \$74.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-8223-3130-6; \$24.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-8223-3117-9.

Review by Kim Munholland, University of Minnesota.

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A number of valuable collections of essays have provided historians of Europe, but of France in particular, with convenient access to much of the postcolonial scholarship on matters of empire and national identity. Yet essay collections pose a double challenge. It is an economic challenge for the publisher, as such works are difficult to sell beyond the limited academic market. Duke University Press is to be commended for having undertaken this important publication of sixteen essays by leading experts in the fields of race and French colonialism. The second challenge is to the reviewer, who must provide some sense of the depth and complexity of the arguments in each of these essays. A multi-layer work such as this can only be sampled.

The editors have clustered these articles around four sections: Part I: "Race, the Evolution of an Idea;" Part II: "Representations of the Other;" Part III: "Colonial and Global Perspectives;" and Part IV: "Race and the Post-colonial City." While there is almost by definition no unifying synthesis, there are certain themes that connect these rich and challenging essays. The overall theme is that of French identity and the role that race has played in its formation and ongoing redefinition. The idea for this project emerged from a panel of the Western Society for French History that discussed how research and writing about race and racism over the past twenty-five years could be introduced into the teaching of French history in the United States. Although there are French contributors, the perspective is overwhelmingly North American, which raises issues of perception and perspective. Franco-American differences over race and racism and its place in the national cultures of America and France appear in several places, reflecting different historical trajectories. The editors recognize this Franco-American difference in the introduction where they ask why the French reject the application of American standards to France (p. 5). When William Cohen's *The French Encounter with Africans*[1] was translated into French in 1982, French critics such as Emmanuel Todd accused him of being anti-French, for arguing that French attitudes toward Africans were racist.

Within the broad category of race, other issues emerge that have been at the heart of the postcolonial analyses of French identity politics. There is the matter of citizenship and of French ideals of universal rights that has been subjected to critical scrutiny with regard to the application of these values to the peoples of the French empire. The boundaries of citizenship and dividing lines of inclusion and exclusion reappear in several of the essays, either explicitly or implicitly. A number of essays discuss the impact of World War I, reflecting the reexamination of the inter-war years as a moment of challenge to traditional conceptions of French identity and citizenship. A number of essays look at the ways in which race has been defined, constructed, and manipulated. Above all, these essays reveal the complexity of race and hierarchy based not only upon color, but also upon issues of class and gender. The issue of racism is more than simply a dichotomy between ruler and ruled. There are, instead, hierarchies of race and difference. In this nuance to the category of race, the collection marks an important contribution and a useful introduction to the complexity of the problem.

Pierre Boule opens the discussion with a look at the emergence of modern race theory as found in the work of the neglected François Bernier. Bernier questioned sixteenth-century ideas of race associated

with nobility of family lineage by stressing difference based upon physical characteristics. His description of racial differences came from observations made during travels in Southeast Asia and an eight-year sojourn as a doctor at the Mogul court in Agra. Upon his return to France he published an article (1684) in which he outlined a new global geography based not upon region but upon race. He concluded that differences in features and skin color were more determined by inheritance than environment. Boule notes that, while Bernier was ignored at the time, he established a basis for the shift toward a scientific racial discourse of the eighteenth century.

Both biology and culture informed attitudes of French military medicine, according to Richard Forgarty and Michael A. Osborne, which could be seen in the military's attitude toward the *tirailleurs sénégalais* during the First World War. Military doctors recognized that a fixed scientific racism, often used to justify a policy of association, coexisted with environmental and cultural influences to produce two "logics" of racism within the military. Ironically, both arguments were used to justify the use of indigenous colonial troops in the trenches of the western front.

Debate over racial mixing provides the basis for Claude Blanckaert's essay in which he notes the ways in which Buffon's categorization of humans as of one species produced conflicting interpretations on the matter of miscegenation in the nineteenth century. Miscegenation came to be feared as leading, if not to sterility, exemplified in the breeding of mules, at least to degeneration. By the 1850s, polygenists were claiming that the mulattos of the colonies were "monstrous" and unnatural. Challenging a call for racial purity, which had emerged by the 1850s, was Broca's use of natural history to argue for a "republican" view that racial mixing would have a civilizing effect. *Métissage* would produce whitening of the races and would be a source, not of decadence, but of regeneration. Obviously such a conception reflected a perceived hierarchy of color with whiteness at the top. By this time, though, the scientific discussion of race and racial purity had entered the discourse.

The issue of *métissage* emerged in independent Haiti, where it had failed to produce a color-blind republic. John Garrigus notes how the crown allowed property to be left to wives, mistresses and children, producing a mulatto class of substance, but that a black/mulatto division still persisted and divided Haiti after independence. With emancipation mulatto and black rule obtained, but a subtle hierarchy remained. Using the evidence of literature, Garrigus concludes that independence and emancipation did not remove racial or gendered divisions. *La mulâtre* revealed the way "Haiti's independence was built on racial, cultural and gendered separations" (p. 89). And Laurent Dubois notes that there was a republican racism at work in the Antilles during the revolutionary era with republicans categorizing citizens according to race, which the author contends was used as a means of social control. From the time of the Revolution onward the issue of race was part of a French and Caribbean identity.

Racial hierarchy provides the basis for Michael Vann's analysis of French perceptions of race in colonial Indochina. The colonizers effectively ranked the various races, placing the Japanese at the top of the hierarchy. The derogatory "Annam" was employed to stress Vietnamese inferiority. The Chinese were considered venal money-grubbers, and the fourth category of Chetty, immigrants from the port cities of South Asia and few in number, were held in low esteem despite their usefulness as money-lenders. While Vann effectively undermines the view that racial categorization was of a piece, differentiated racism is still racism. It also might have been useful to explore the hierarchies of race that existed among the peoples of Indochina, such as Vietnamese contempt for Montagnards.

Hierarchy may also be found in Lynne E. Palermo's analysis of how the exotic was employed at the Universal Exposition of 1889, itself a celebration of the republic and its empire. A façade of authenticity decorated what was basically a French foundation. Whether the colonial exhibits were intended to inform or to entertain, Palermo argues that the purpose was to publicize the empire and its republican, civilizing mission. Within the exhibit, though, there were racial hierarchies that suggested differences within "the other" as seen in Paris.

Hierarchy may also be detected in Dana S. Hale's critical analysis of the way race has been projected on commercial products. Exotic images were associated with the products of the empire, and the racial images were geared to entice the buyer. North Africans were most frequently represented with blacks portrayed as childlike, such as the smiling *tirailleur* on the Banania label. This image was reassuring in the aftermath of World War I. Asians were the least represented and their image was that of an undifferentiated generic category. Hale notes the way in which such images were part of the emerging culture of entertainment and consumption of turn-of-the-century France and as such part of a new sense of French identity. The underlying message reaffirmed stereotypes that still may be seen in Parisian curio shops, suggesting that French insensitivity to racism still must be confronted.

A difference in sensitivity forms the basis for Leora Auslander's and Thomas C. Holt's response to racially offensive images to be found in the many examples of black sambos in Paris. Here Franco-American differences surfaced when the two Americans, one black and one white, raised the issue with their French friends. They discovered that, while they shared political values of the left, they did not share the same sensitivity to the message embodied in statuary in front of restaurants or on sale in antique stores, icons that would not be acceptable in the United States of the early 1990s. From the French perspective, such objects or names for pastries, such as *tête negre*, did not bear a racist message. The symbolism for the Americans derived from the legacy of slavery while the French had a colonial past, which was presumably less central to a French identity. The American perspective, however, apparently had an impact. The authors conclude with a return to a Marais pastry shop a few years later to discover that the *tête de nègre* had become a *méringue au chocolat*. The American point had been made, but does this mean the emergence of a new kind of universalism made in America in the name of multiculturalism? This is not certain. Jean-Philippe Mathy argues, in his work on the French-American culture wars, that the differences between French and American attitudes toward race still persist.[2]

A major issue has to do with French ideals of universalism set against the diversity of cultures found in the empire and in the legacy of empire in a postcolonial world. Universalism is not necessarily multicultural and the revolutionary standard of equality has long been questioned. Even the tolerance advocated by Abbé Gregoire was driven by a kind of universalist agenda that is not multicultural, as Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall makes clear. By insisting upon racial equalities, she argues, Abbé Gregoire's assumption was that oppressed groups, Jews, and people of color, liberated under the Revolution's commitment to *égalité* would abandon their particularity in favor of catholicism to which all would convert willingly. From the outset, then, there was a problem with assimilation, a fundamental conflict and dilemma that became apparent under the Third Republic's civilizing mission.

Alice Conklin has argued that the ideals of assimilation, already questionable in their application to pre-World War I France, definitely yielded to a policy of association as colonial rulers sought stability, not change, after 1918. Yet expectations had been raised among the colonized who expected to be rewarded for their contribution to France's defence. However, hopes for admission to French citizenship for African veterans went unfulfilled. In her contribution to this volume, Conklin examines the René Maran v. Blaise Diagne trial to illustrate the problems of reconciling French and African identities. Diagne defended the ideal of a common *patrie* in which there would be a place for Africans of the empire, and he pointed to the African soldiers' commitment during the war. For Maran, the French had simply exploited the Africans as cannon fodder. As Conklin notes, both argued for an African identity, one in terms of the nation and the other in the context of a kind of pan-Africanism.

The destabilizing impact of the war forms the basis for Patricia Lorcin's excellent analysis of two women writers in North Africa who, using very different styles, raised troubling issues of identity and hierarchy. She notes the ways in which tensions and anxieties emerged in the aftermath of World War I when relationships, particularly issues of gender as well as race, were destabilized. For neither the women nor the peoples of the empire, particularly those of North Africa, did the wartime sacrifices result in either equality or citizenship. Yet women writers were not silent in inter-war Algeria where

they became part of a culture that challenged taboos and hierarchies. Rhais' tales involved issues of sexuality and violence, which Lorcin sees as symptomatic of the social upheavals in France and Algeria that erupted as women asserted themselves in the postwar years. Ultimately, though, order is restored in the colonial setting after these emotional disruptions. Favre was a realist, in contrast with the romanticism of Rhais. As someone from the French working class in the metropole, she brought an outsider's perspective to the colonial situation. For her, class was as central as race or gender. In sober fashion she exposed the abuses of colonial society, including its racial and gender hierarchies. Her message was that the way out of cultural repression was to become "more French" (p. 123), in keeping with the notion of the civilizing mission. Both authors recognized the instability of the colonial relationship, but both ultimately opted for the status quo. Lorcin's use of literature to illustrate the tensions of identity during the inter-war years is imaginative and effective, anticipating exciting work that will enable a broader understanding of the complexities of French identity in relation to the imperial context in Algeria.

For Gary Wilder, the inter-war years brought an expansion of the nation-state into what he calls the imperial nation-state. While recognizing the ambiguities that existed within the pan-African movement, he argues that during the manifestations of the Popular Front the message was both republican and pan-African. He calls for a rethinking and reconfiguring of the national history of France within the context of a globalized imperial history. But will this new approach yield a better understanding of race as a category of analysis within the context of French "national" identity? Wilder has little to say about the issue of race and its place in French history. Wilder's approach is primarily a theoretical construction that may not have been perceived by the French of the inter-war years. As such it imposes a current perception upon a past in which identity was fluid and in the process of formation. In revising our notion of the nation into the imperial nation, we need to see how this identity evolved among the French and how just the idea of what it meant to be French was and remains contested.

While a number of contributors, such as Conklin and Wilder, have stressed the impact of the First World War upon a reconsideration of what it meant to be French in the interwar years, Dennis McEnnerney's article on Frantz Fanon reveals the way in which Fanon's experience in the Second World War affected his sense of identity. McEnnerney tries to liberate Fanon from critics who claimed he was anti-French. Fanon sought a French identity, but the wartime experience in the French army caused him to feel betrayed by the republican ideal (p.264) and turned him into an advocate for violent resistance to the colonial order. French claims to universal rights obscured an underlying racism, evidenced by his marginalization as a member of the French forces involved in the Liberation. McEnnerney claims that Fanon prepared the way for an identity politics based on multiculturalism in response to this experience. Yet there is a problem in reading Fanon as both resister and a searcher for an ideal that the republic had abandoned. The author's dismissal of the French intellectuals' critiques of Fanon is at least open to challenge.

Finally two essays on race in the cities conclude the volume. Both are concerned with the relationship of race to class. Yaël Simpson Fletcher's study of working-class Marseille concludes that the hope for working-class unity and solidarity, whether Communist-inspired or Christian social, ultimately had little room for the African dock worker, who remained outside either path toward even an expanded French identity. Race clearly prevailed over class in this context.

For Tyler Stovall, there was nothing inevitable about the conversion of the suburban red belt of Paris into a black belt. He sees both as evolving phenomena that produce a reordering of social and national identities. Under the rubric of either class or color, though, the danger is at the gates, from the perspective of a frightened and anxious middle-class living within the symbolic walls of the city. The suburbs represent a place of danger beyond the "civilized" urban core. He concludes that "both race and class are crucial to the experience of metropolitan spatial marginality, neither dependent on the other but both interacting in different ways at different times" (pp. 362-363). Yet race has transformed the

outlook of the proletariat in the Parisian suburbs, as well as in Marseille. The “French” identity of the proletariat has been challenged by the presence of those perceived as “different.” All of this suggests again the importance of race in the ongoing debate over French identity and points toward a multicultural approach that would open the way toward an acceptance of diverse, but overlapping identities. If so, this revaluation will be more likely to follow a distinctively French rather than an American model in light of Franco-American cultural differences. Nevertheless, these essays, with their American perspective, offer new insights into race in French history and may contribute to a French re-examination of race and racism within the land of universal human rights.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

- Pierre H. Boule, “François Bernier and the Origins of the Modern Concept of Race.”
- Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, “Eliminating Race, Eliminating Difference: Blacks, Jews, and the Abbé Grégoire.”
- Claude Blanckaert, “Of Monstrous Métis? Hybridity, Fear of Miscegenation, and Patriotism from Buffon to Paul Broca.”
- John Garrigus, “Race, Gender, and Virtue in Haiti’s Failed Foundational Fiction: *La mulâtre comme il y a peu de blanches* (1803).”
- Laurent Dubois, “Inscribing Race in the Revolutionary French Antilles.”
- Patricia M.E. Lorcin, “Sex, Gender, and Race in the Colonial Novels of Elissa Rhäis and Lucienne Favre.”
- Dana S. Hale, “French Images of Race on Product Trademarks during the Third Republic.”
- Leora Auslander and Thomas C. Holt, “Sambo in Paris: Race and Racism in the Iconography of the Everyday.”
- Michael G. Vann, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Variation and Difference in French Racism in Colonial Indochine.”
- Richard Fogarty and Michael A. Osborne, “Constructions and Functions of Race in French Military Medicine, 1830-1920.”
- Gary Wilder, “Panafrikanism and the Republican Political Sphere.”
- Dennis McEnerney, “Frantz Fanon, the Resistance, and the Emergence of Identity Politics.”
- Lynn E. Palermo, “Identity under Construction: Representing the Colonies at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889.”
- Alice L. Conklin, “Who Speaks for Africa? The René Maran-Blaise Diagne Trial in 1920s Paris.”
- Yaël Simpson Fletcher, “Catholics, Communists, and Colonial Subjects: Working-Class Militancy and Racial Difference in Postwar Marseille.”
- Tyler Stovall, “From Red Belt to Black Belt: Race, Class, and Urban Marginality in Twentieth-Century Paris.”

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#### NOTES

[1] William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980; pb. ed. 2003)

[2] Jean-Philippe Mathy, *French Resistance: The French-American Culture Wars* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002): ch. 4.

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*H-France Review* Vol. 4 (February 2004), No. 15

ISSN 1553-9172