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Raffael Scheck, *Hitler's African Victims, The German Army Massacres of Black French Soldiers in 1940*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 202pp. Sources, index. \$65 (hb). ISBN: 0-521-85799-6.

Review by Bertram M. Gordon, Mills College.

Anyone who has seen Marcel Ophuls' *Le Chagrin et la pitié* is unlikely to forget the scene of exotically dancing African soldiers who had been taken prisoner from the defeated French army and filmed for *Die Wochenschau*, the German weekly newsreel, during the German defeat of France in 1940. Neville Chamberlain's statement that the Allies were defending civilization against "Medieval barbarism" is recalled, then, in dripping sarcasm, the African troops are called "the defenders of civilization." The following sequence shows a column of marching German soldiers of the Wehrmacht, again sarcastically called "the barbarians." Nazi racial ideology could hardly have been expressed more succinctly. It is not surprising that France's African troops who fell into German hands during the 1940 campaign were often singled out for harsher treatment than the European French. In some cases, the African prisoners of war were massacred.

These massacres are the subject of Raffael Scheck's *Hitler's African Victims*, a richly documented analysis, based heavily on the records of the French army (SHAT) at Vincennes and the German military archives at Freiburg im Breisgau (pp. 11-12). The archival material available shows that, despite Nazi racial ideology, as in so many other aspects of their policy, the Germans' treatment of their African prisoners was by no means consistent. *Hitler's African Victims* is divided into four parts. Starting in part one with the narrower issue of the massacres themselves, Scheck assesses their extent and situates them in the context of the 1940 military campaign. In the second part of the book, he traces the origins of German anti-African sentiments in the colonial wars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The third part, which constitutes the main argument of the book, assesses ideological and situational factors in the massacres, and the last section discusses their implications.

Some 100,000 soldiers were recruited in French West Africa for the 1939-1940 army with about 75,000 seeing duty in France. Of these, approximately 10,000 were killed in combat in the spring 1940 campaign and thousands of others went missing. While white French prisoners of war were generally treated according to the rules of the 1929 Geneva Prisoners of War convention, on the night of 9-10 June, several massacres of black soldiers known as *tirailleurs sénégalais*, from the 4th Colonial Infantry Division (DIC), occurred. These and other massacres of African prisoners in 1940 "form a missing link between the limited Wehrmacht atrocities in Poland and the full-fledged race war it later conducted in the Balkans and the Soviet Union" (p. 11).

Not only did thousands of Africans fight in the French army, they often—despite propaganda images to the contrary—fought bravely and well. In one instance during the Somme campaign, a group of African soldiers fought effectively and suffered close to 90% casualties defending the village of Airaines (p. 28). Scheck argues, in the first section of his book, that German soldiers' rage, excited by the heat of battle and normal in any military confrontation, was directed on occasion against the French colonial troops. Perhaps German anger focused on them precisely because they fought so unexpectedly well. Altogether, Scheck determines that some 3,000 French African soldiers were killed in the heat of combat or immediately thereafter, in addition to many others hunted down before they had a chance to surrender (p. 58). Authorization for Wehrmacht field commanders to single out African prisoners for especially harsh treatment did not come from any legal documents or specific orders, Scheck observes. It was

endemic in the racial prejudices engendered by the Nazi movement with longer-term roots in German society (p. 74). In this sense, he might have added, it was simply part of the genocidal orientation of Nazi philosophy in general.

The second part of *Hitler's African Victims* traces the origins of the anti-black prejudice of 1940 to the German colonial expansion in the period from 1884 to 1918 and especially their excessively harsh repression of colonial rebellions between 1904 and 1907 (p. 81). Scheck describes the repression of local rebellion in German Southwest Africa, present-day Namibia, in which 75 to 80 percent (p. 83) of the Hereros living there were killed in a race war, followed by German anti-black sentiments in World War I, and most notably the propaganda campaign against African soldiers among the French troops occupying the Rhineland after World War I. The post-World War I "Black Horror on the Rhine," as it came to be known in Germany, was a propaganda campaign that selected a few incidents and blew them out of proportion, continually emphasizing the savagery of the African troops. The French repeatedly denied these accounts. Supported by virtually all segments of interwar German opinion, the racism of the "Black Horror" campaign was opposed only by the radical Left. Luise Zietz, a Reichstag deputy of the Independent Social Democratic Party, became the target of "a storm of abuse in the German National Assembly" when she denounced the campaign's racism (p. 101). Finally, the 1939-1940 war was accompanied by an orchestrated propaganda blitz by Joseph Goebbels depicting the French enemy as "negroized," to use Hitler's language in *Mein Kampf* (p. 101), and denouncing them for introducing Africans into Europe, thereby polluting the white race. By 1940, German soldiers had been steeped in anti-African prejudice, presenting blacks as subhuman and dirty, which, together with Goebbels' propaganda, created a mentality that dehumanized blacks. [1] Scheck's examination of the 1939-1940 propaganda campaign, which rightly focuses on the *Völkische Beobachter*, the official Nazi party newspaper, and the weekly newsreels, *Die Deutsche Wochenschau*, might have been rounded out with a discussion of what was taught in the school system and the Wehrmacht troop indoctrination centers.

Section three of *Hitler's African Victims* presents the heart of the argument, namely that despite the history of anti-black sentiment and Nazi propaganda in Germany, only a minority of the French African prisoners of war were killed after their capture. The author's problem is to sort out why massacres took place in some instances and not in others, given the limited and often fragmentary evidence available. Ideology played a role. The SS Totenkopf Division and the Großdeutschland Regiment, more heavily indoctrinated in Nazi beliefs than other Wehrmacht units, were more deeply involved in the killings (p. 121). Black soldiers about to surrender were also more vulnerable than their white French comrades, who could more easily escape into surrounding towns and blend with the local population. On the other hand, Scheck recounts the story of a German commander expressing his respect for an African soldier who had defended a foxhole for two days before being killed (p. 141). In this case, however, the African was already dead and that might have made a difference in the Germans' attitude. Scheck writes that Nazi ideology was not sufficient to explain the massacres. The range of German actions reflected, he argues, varying combinations of ideology and situational factors, the latter involving especially close combat, often in rearguard actions behind the advancing German lines, or the reports, often fabricated, of finding the bodies of German soldiers "mutilated" by the Africans (p. 142).

In section four, "Implications," the author addresses some of the longer-term issues in German-African relations underlying the 1940 massacres. The loss of their African empire at the Treaty of Versailles meant that Germany lacked an assimilated local elite that might have mediated between its people and the black population, in contrast to the English and the French (p. 148). The French also come in for a share of the blame as some French commanders, facing defeat, abandoned their African soldiers to their fate, though Scheck points out that many others tried to save their colonial soldiers from execution and some were successful (p. 159).

In conclusion, Scheck notes that the extensive French historiography concerning World War II barely mentions the 1940 massacres and that awareness of them is "practically nonexistent" in Germany (p.

165). This issue of memory, or relative lack thereof, is a subject that bears further investigation. Because there are so few studies directly addressing German treatment of the captured French colonial soldiers, Scheck refers to the more extensive literature on Nazi racism generally and the Wehrmacht experiences in the Polish and Soviet campaigns specifically. Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution* offers some context in debunking the myth of the "good" Wehrmacht soldier contrasted to the more violent behavior of the Waffen-SS. Additional studies include Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army* and a list of others, cited on page 10, footnote 18. African soldiers fighting for France in World War II are discussed in Nancy Ellen Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune: Ivorian Tirailleurs of World War II* and Julien Fargettas, "Le massacre des soldats du 25ème Régiment des Tirailleurs Sénégalais Région Lyonnaise, 19 et 20 juin 1940," the former based on French military archival research and interviews with surviving Ivorian veterans, and the latter focusing on a specific massacre. Both, however, use only French language source material. Addressing the longer history of African troops in the French army, Myron Echenberg says little about the 1940 massacres in his book *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa (1857-1960)*. In Germany, Peter Martin and Christine Alonzo, eds., *Zwischen Charleston und Stechschritt: Schwarze im Nationalsozialismus*, examines the history of blacks in Nazi Germany but says little about the 1940 massacres. While Scheck sees the 1940 massacres as a run-up to the German racial war in the Soviet Union, Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, in a reverse image, holds that Nazi rule in Eastern Europe was characterized by the use of imperialist methods of domination applied by the Germans to other white Europeans. [2]

Because *Hitler's African Victims* makes exhaustive use of both French and German sources and is so well argued, including a four-page table of recorded killing with details of perpetrators and numbers of victims in May and June of 1940, it is likely to remain the standard in its field for some time. However, the book's analysis of German attitudes toward Africans might have extended before the colonial expansion of 1884 for there is a longer history of ambivalence toward blacks that, as Allison Blakeley shows, goes back far beyond the late nineteenth century. Black saints were highlighted in the statue of Saint Maurice in Magdeburg's Saint Kilian chapel, as well as a seventeenth-century bust and older relics of Saint Gregory the Moor in Cologne's Saint Gereon Church, while negative as well as positive images of blacks may be found in Wolfram von Eschenbach's Medieval romance *Parzifal*, drawn from the legend of King Arthur and his court. Ambivalence was evident in figures such as Ruprecht and Black Pete, who accompany the Saint Nicholas figure in the Christmas celebrations in Germany and the Netherlands. In his "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime," Immanuel Kant wrote that: "(t)he Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling." [3] To Johann Gottfried von Herder, writing in the late eighteenth century, Africans were ape-like with "thick lips [that] are held to indicate a sensual disposition..." [4] In his *Philosophy of History*, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel held that "(t)he Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state." [5] There was clearly a long history of largely negative attitudes on the part of Germans toward Africans by the time they launched their colonial movement in 1884.

Another point warranting a second look is the argument made in Scheck's comparison of German and French perceptions of the African troops in 1940. He writes that German propaganda denounced the loss of their colonies in the Versailles Treaty as the "colonial guilt lie," which was related to the charge that Germany bore the blame for starting World War I. "By contrast [he adds], black Africa had received much more positive attention in France, not least because of its military contribution in the two world wars" (p. 149), an argument that seems anachronistic in the discussion of attitudes in 1940. Neither this point, nor that about the need to extend the analysis beyond 1884, however, should detract from what is an excellent book, thoughtfully argued, well documented, with relevant illustrations, and a good bibliography. Scheck has done the historical community a service in elucidating a previously little studied subject. No one who has read this book is likely to view the dancing Africans in *Le Chagrin et la pitié* in quite the same way as before.

NOTES

[1] In tourist literature for the Germans in occupied France during the war, the white French were also depicted as dirty and not fully human, as in the description of blighted areas in suburban Paris. See Dr G. B., "Paris wie es nicht im Baedeker steht," *Der deutsche Wegleiter*, 27 (1-15 September 1941), pp. 4-9.

[2] Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1992); Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Nancy Ellen Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune: Ivoirien Tirailleurs of World War II* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992); Julien Fargettas, "Le massacre des soldats du 25ème Régiment des Tirailleurs Sénégalais Région Lyonnaise, 19 et 20 juin 1940," (Mémoire de maîtrise, Université de Saint-Étienne, 2000); Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa (1857-1960)* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1991); Peter Martin and Christine Alonzo, eds., *Zwischen Charleston und Stechschritt: Schwarze im Nationalsozialismus* (Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 2004); Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000).

[3] Allison Blakeley, "Problems in Studying the Role of Blacks in Europe," Teaching column, Perspectives, published by the American Historical Association (May-June 1997), <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/1997/9705/9705TEC.CFM>.

[4] T. Churchill, *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man* (London, 1800), a translation of Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-1791), quoted in Cedric Dover, "The Racial Philosophy of Johann Herder," *British Journal of Sociology*, 3:2 (1952), p. 129.

[5] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, translated by J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 93.

Bertram M. Gordon Mills College bmgordon@mills.edu

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