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Richard S. Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. Ix +374 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$60.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 13:978-0-8018-8824-3.

Review by Tyler Stovall, University of California, Berkeley.

*Race and War in France* is an excellent example of the new colonial historiography of modern France, and makes a major contribution to our knowledge of the multiple interactions between metropole and empire during the early twentieth century. In this important new study Richard Fogarty pursues two primary themes, and ultimately the relationship between them. First, he undertakes a comprehensive investigation of the history of the colonial soldiers deployed by France in unprecedented numbers during World War I. Second, and more ambitiously, he tackles the thorny question of racial difference and racism in modern France. His intelligent and original contribution to both of these questions makes *Race and War in France* an impressive achievement, offering important insights into the history of France in the twentieth century.

Between 1914 and 1918, the French government, desperate for military manpower, enlisted some half a million colonial subjects into the army and brought them to fight in France against the invading Germans. The introduction of this “exotic” population onto French soil, along with the roughly 300,000 colonial and Chinese workers that accompanied them, was a first in the history of France.[1] Never before had the nation played host to such a massive nonwhite population. In an important sense, their arrival signaled the true beginning of the postcolonial era in France. This event has not escaped the attention of historians, starting with Marc Michel’s seminal *L’appel à l’Afrique*. However, Michel and other historians of colonial soldiers in France have focused overwhelmingly on those from West Africa. In contrast, Fogarty looks at soldiers from throughout the empire, including North Africa, Indochina, and Madagascar.[2] He has thus written the first comprehensive treatment of France’s World War I colonial soldiers, an approach which allows him to make some interesting and useful comparisons. For example, in one fascinating chapter, Fogarty considers French stereotypes of different native populations, especially with regard to their suitability as soldiers. In the eyes of the French military, not all natives were equal. Madagascans and Indochinese were weak and docile, whereas black Africans were brutal and savage, thus fine warriors. North Africans generally rated highly on this military scale, but distinctions between them often followed the old Arabic saying that “Moroccans are warriors, Algerians men, and Tunisians women.” Here, and in many other respects, colonial ideas about race followed these soldiers to France.

This brings us to the second major theme in *Race and War in France*, Fogarty’s discussion of the soldiers’ experience as a chapter in the history of race in modern France. Few issues are more fraught in French history, and contemporary French life as a whole, than this one. In particular, the relationship between republican universalism, in many ways the heart of modern French identity and political culture, and racial difference has sparked massive and often bitter debates around the question, whether racism exists in France, and if so how? While this and similar issues have inspired much of the new work in French colonial history, scholars have differed as to how central race is to the history of France’s imperial ventures. More than some others,

Richard Fogarty makes racial difference a key aspect of his study. He starts off by noting the paradox between France's reputation for color-blindness, to an important extent due, not only to republican universalism, but the concrete experiences of African American soldiers in France during World War I and the frequently racist attitudes toward (and discriminatory treatment of) colonial subjects by the French. In grappling with this paradox, Fogarty rejects easy explanations of hypocrisy or military expediency to focus on the interactions between republican universalism and racism. In particular, he zeroes in on the idea of assimilation, which enabled the French to argue that colonial soldiers would earn all the rights of citizens once they had demonstrated their ability to understand and accept French civilization. As Alice Conklin and others have noted, assimilationist theory enabled French colonial officials to discriminate on the basis of race without considering themselves racist because all subjects could eventually become citizens in spite of their origins. As Fogarty is at pains to demonstrate, however, such racist stereotypes and practices could develop a life of their own, frequently contradicting the goals of assimilation and instead contributing to more fixed racial boundaries. Ultimately *Race and War in France* argues that, while the racial ideas confronted by France's colonial soldiers rejected absolute biological distinctions in favor of a cultural continuum, they were still notions of race that created racist policies of discrimination.

Fogarty also notes that republican traditions at times worked to challenge, or at least soften, racist stereotypes. The idea that colonial soldiers were fighting for civilization against German barbarism gave them a positive (albeit subordinate) identity within the tradition of republican universalism. The author correctly underscores the fact that France was the only European power to bring colonial soldiers to fight in Europe, a practice explicitly rejected by the British on racist grounds. At the end of his study, he contrasts France's embrace of colonial soldiers with the German campaign against their use in the postwar occupation forces, a campaign that targeted the "Black Shame" or "the Black Horror on the Rhine." Moreover, Fogarty notes that, not only did many French view colonial soldiers in a positive light, but also that many of them considered their experience a positive one. Philippe Dewitte has observed that the war changed the prevailing French stereotypes of Africans from bloodthirsty savages to genial *grands enfants*. It is worth considering the relationship between the ideal of assimilation and infantilization; like children, the natives can be treated as equals only once they have grown up. In general, Fogarty emphasizes the complexity of racist behavior and attitudes in France during World War I, showing how the combination of colonial practices and universalist beliefs reproduced the paradoxes of republican empire on French soil.

*Race and War in France* is organized thematically, with each chapter considering a different aspect of colonial soldiers' lives in wartime France. The first chapters discuss the recruitment of colonial subjects into the French army and the ways in which these new soldiers and units were organized to contribute to the war effort. In addition to detailing how racial stereotypes shaped French views as to the comparative martial merits of different colonial populations, Fogarty also explores the ambiguities about the very idea of the subject soldier. Noting the strong tradition inherited from the French Revolution of the citizen soldier (a tradition reaffirmed by the republicanization of the Army after the Dreyfus Affair), Fogarty considers how both military expediency and racialized discourse led France's military planners and political leaders to abandon this heritage and vastly expand the use of colonial subjects as soldiers. But if these soldiers were not citizens, then how should one categorize them? Were they mercenaries because they were paid, or were they slaves because they were conscripted? Did colonial soldiers owe France a *dette de sang* in payment of that nation's efforts to uplift and civilize them? Most important, did the logic of assimilation imply that colonial soldiers should receive citizenship as a reward for their service to the nation? In exploring how the French confronted such questions, Fogarty focuses on the latter issue, and shows how the logic of citizenship for

military service collided with distinctions about race and culture, so that ultimately few colonial soldiers were able to win citizenship and equality with their French brothers in arms.

The other major section of Fogarty's study addresses the colonial soldiers' culture and behavior in France, and French reactions to these behaviors. In a fascinating chapter, he looks at how the Army dealt with the language barrier between French officers and those soldiers who frequently spoke no French. Fogarty notes how assumptions of the soldiers' racial and intellectual inferiority led their commanders to teach them a simplified, pidgin version of French which only served to underscore their subordinate status. Given the central place of language in ideas of French civilization and the *mission civilisatrice*, this adoption of an inferior tongue for colonial subjects underscored the failure of the assimilationist project to overcome perceptions of racial difference. The issue of religion, especially Islam, was of greater concern to the French military command. As Fogarty notes, ideas of differing racial characteristics among colonial soldiers carried over into the realm of religion, with French officials routinely viewing black African Muslims as less "fanatical" and more open to French influence than their North African co-religionnaires. At the same time, Germany's alliance with the Ottoman sultan, spiritual leader of Islam, forced the French to defend themselves against charges of pursuing a holy war against the Muslim faith, charges eagerly fomented by Berlin. In consequence, many in the French Army added suspicions of disloyalty to their prejudices against North African soldiers, in spite of solid evidence to the contrary, and excluded them from the Dardanelles campaign. If the soldiers' religion was one issue of concern, their sexuality was another. French officials actively discouraged and even criminalized amorous relationships between colonial soldiers and French women, convinced of their immorality and danger to the French people. Ultimately interracial love posed a danger to white prestige in the empire, as the controversy over the soldiers' prurient interest in pornographic French postcards made clear. In a variety of ways, therefore, whether they distanced themselves from French norms or strove to embrace them, the activities of the colonial soldiers marked them as irredeemably Other in the eyes of their French commanders.

Throughout his study, Fogarty is attentive to the nuance of French racial attitudes and French colonial rule. There are very few villains in this book. Rather, one encounters military officials acting with good will to mobilize all possible resources to defend their country. Fogarty thus underscores the idea that the civilizing mission must be taken at face value, even as at the same time he graphically illustrates its limitations and inequities. Considering war and race in tandem offers both opportunities and challenges, not the least because it forces one to think about race as a trans-national phenomenon, to consider how ideas of racial difference are both shaped by and, at times, escape national cultures. It is worth considering the extent to which World War I and indeed all wars in the era of the nation-state, were in fact race wars. One paradox Fogarty mentions, but perhaps might have explored in greater depth, is that of France bringing colonial savages to civilized Europe to fight German barbarians. How did the racialization of the colonial subject interact with the racialization of the enemy? The fact that the French people in general, if not always the army, seem to have viewed colonial soldiers positively is also worth considering in the context of the racist treatment that Fogarty illustrates so clearly. This is especially true in light of Fogarty's argument that the aftermath of the war saw the decline of assimilationism and the hardening of racial boundaries. Fogarty starts his study by contrasting the treatment of African Americans and French colonial subjects in France, but it is worth noting that by the mid-1920s their images had merged to a significant extent, as demonstrated by Josephine Baker's numerous colonial roles on the Paris stage. Racism can at times wear a benign face and it would be interesting to see to what extent this was also rooted in the wartime experiences of colonial soldiers.

*Race and War in France* is a fine study of the paradoxes of what Gary Wilder has termed “the imperial republic,” of the ways in which the republican ideology born of the French Revolution interacted with and at times was subverted by the imperatives of national defense, imperial conquest, and racial difference.[3] It is an impressive achievement, one that both supports and advances the historiography of colonial and postcolonial France. Yet at the same time I can’t help wondering if it is time for those of us interested in such questions to move beyond talk of paradox and contradiction. Just as a state of affairs that lasts for a long time is usually not considered a crisis, so too should ideological imperatives that so consistently go together, such as imperialism and liberal democracy, be seen less as opposites or even *frères ennemis* and more as different facets of a political whole. By laying bare the interaction of republicanism and empire, *Race and War in France* forces the reader to think in such terms, and this may ultimately be its most important achievement of all.

## NOTES

[1] On the history of French colonial soldiers, see Marc Michel, *L’appel à l’Afrique: contributions et réactions à l’effort de guerre en AOF, 1914–1919* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982); Charles John Balesi, *From Adversaries to Comrades-in-Arms: West Africans and the French Military, 1885–1918* (Waltham MA: Crossroads Press, 1979); Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1991); Joe Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1999); Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

[2] Fogarty does neglect one colonial region, the Caribbean. Thousands of men from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana fought in France during the war, but since they were citizens, not subjects, they generally fought in French units and are thus difficult for the historian to trace. Here, as in many other respects, the French West Indies constituted the exception to the colonial rule.

[3] Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

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