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Alice L. Conklin, Sarah Fishman and Robert Zaretsky, *France and Its Empire Since 1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, xx + 425 pp. Maps, figures, notes and index. \$34.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-19-973518-2.

Review by Stephen A. Toth, Arizona State University.

In its initial formulation, *France and Its Empire Since 1870* must have posed a significant challenge for its authors: to not only synthesize scholarship covering nearly every aspect of modern French history but to situate what is a complex, convoluted and at times contested historical narrative within a much broader transnational framework. This is a truly daunting undertaking as there is arguably no other period in French history in which such profound changes took place during such a relatively short span of time: the transformation from an agrarian-based society to a modern, industrial state; the acquisition of a colonial empire and its violent dénouement; two world wars largely fought on French soil, one of which nearly led to the nation's demise; and the incorporation of France into the EU to name but only a few. Thus, the authors are to be commended for producing a work that is remarkably lucid and easily accessible for students and non-specialists alike.

While much of the material is well known to scholars, there are enough unique insights interspersed throughout the narrative to engage the specialist. Indeed, given its breadth and surprising depth this text surpasses other such treatments and is likely to serve as the text of choice for those engaged in the study and teaching of modern France and the Francophone world. Coverage of the latter is an important consideration as books of this genre can be rather insular, emphasizing *événements* within the hexagon at the expense of their wider European and global context. As one of this study's ostensible purposes is to "offer a truly global history of modern France," this review focuses on those points which most directly address this stated goal (p. xv).

The structure of the book adheres closely to France's fractious political history. Thus, the study commences with the dark days of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, a starting date that is not coincidental as it was from 1870 onward that France began to acquire a vast new colonial empire that would nearly rival that of the British in terms of geographic scope. Of little interest to Bismarck and the newly united Germany, Jules Ferry and the nascent Third Republic evinced a seemingly insatiable appetite for territory annexing Tahiti and several islands in the South Pacific in 1880 and taking control of Indochina (present day Vietnam, Cambodia, Annam and Tonkin) in 1883 (p. 65). Further conquests would take place in Madagascar and sub-Saharan Africa after 1885 although as the authors point out, such territorial acquisitions tapered off by the turn of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, by the onset of the First World War, the Third Republic comprised 100 million French citizens of whom 60 million were colonial subjects (p. 69).

France, as did other European colonial powers, justified the migration of settlers to the lands under its ostensible control for a number of reasons: security of strategic trade routes; the dispersal of unwanted peoples (a point which the authors fail to address is the forced migration and settlement of over 100,000 prisoners to the penal colonies of French Guiana and New Caledonia); and a belief in the economic advantage to be gained from the expansion of foreign markets.[1] The quest for empire was sold to a

rather ambivalent general public not on the basis of such pragmatic, albeit misguided, objectives but by virtue of France's so-called *mission civilisatrice*: a notion stemming from the Revolution that the nation had a unique obligation to share its newfound ideals of *liberté*, *égalité* and *fraternité* with the rest of Europe. This conceit, for that is what it certainly became in the colonial context, was transformed by geographers and an increasingly powerful colonial lobby from a European to a non-European plane and eventually emerged as the idea of a "civilizing mission," by which France would bring the moral, cultural and material advantages of "civilization" to the "primitive" peoples of the world.

Ironically, given the deeply acrimonious split between the Catholic Church and the stridently secular Third Republic, the emissaries of this mission were not colonial administrators but the "58,000 Catholic religious workers" living abroad (p. 92). As the authors point out, although some colonial officials welcomed these "emissaries of God" as a way to staff schools and hospitals, most considered them a hindrance and a threat to the French colonial mission because they attempted to inculcate a religious rather than a national identification among the various indigenous peoples of the empire. In theory, the *mission civilisatrice* would ultimately allow for the ascension of colonial "subjects" to the status of French citizens. In practice, however, officials were loathe to enfranchise those whom they considered "only 'half civilized'" and therefore ill-equipped for possessing modern political rights.

In chapters three and four, the quest for empire provides the backdrop for the continuing difficulties of administering Algeria, the long-held crown jewel of the empire, particularly as it pertained to increasing tensions among French settlers and the indigenous population. On the heels of the conquest of Algeria in 1830 a French and variegated European settler population would soon follow, eventually developing into something of a subordinate class, a colony within a colony. The pace of settlement accelerated over the last quarter of the nineteenth century as there was a "virtual land grab" in which over 600,000 *pièdes noirs* claimed coastal and fertile areas for themselves while reducing the indigenous population to "landless laborers" (p. 91). These individuals, as colonial "subjects," were bound to the *Indigénat*, the harshly punitive legal code which allowed colonial authorities to impose fines and imprison individuals for a wide variety of minor offenses such as not showing proper deference to a colonial administrator. It was not until 1946 that the odious code was finally abolished.

Entitled "The Imperial Republic," Chapter Four begins with an intriguing exploration of France's depopulation and the nation's increasing reliance upon immigrant labor in the late nineteenth century. Facing a united Germany whose population had increased by 60 percent to a total of 65 million from 1871-1911, the French population remained nearly static at only about 39 million (p. 76). Lacking unskilled workers, Italians and Belgians initially filled the void, followed by other immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe, particularly Eastern European Jews fleeing pogroms. Drawn by employment opportunities in the industrializing regions of northern and eastern France as well as in and around Paris itself, the foreign-born comprised nearly 3 percent of the total population and 7-8 percent of the working population by 1886 (p. 77). Not surprisingly, the presence of these "aliens" provoked resentment among native-born workers and a variety of cultural and racist xenophobes (a phenomenon which has a clear and unfortunate resonance in contemporary France as well). Nevertheless, the Third Republic would eventually shift the basis of citizenship--in a rather obvious attempt to increase the size of its standing army--from the parent's nationality to where their children were born. Thus, the children of immigrants who were born in France could acquire citizenship upon reaching the age of majority at which point the male offspring were rewarded with the "odious privilege" of military service (p. 77).

Chapters five and six cover the Dreyfus Affair, the diplomatic maneuvering in the years immediately preceding the Great War, and the war itself. Although much of this material covers well-worn ground--*revanche* for the loss of Alsace-Lorraine in 1871; Jean Jaures' prescience regarding a European-wide war and his assassination immediately prior to its outbreak; the implications of Total War for individual civil rights and liberties; and the pitiless slaughter associated with the Battle of Verdun--it is expertly told.

As the Great War was a truly “global” war, it also “opened up a new chapter in race relations by drafting not just colonial soldiers but colonial laborers, as well as low-wage Chinese workers, and bringing them to France” (p. 145). The authors emphasize that conscription in portions of West Africa was particularly brutal, harkening back to the “horrors of the slave trade” as young men were often “hunted down” by local French officials. Such behavior generated much anger and resentment and led to widespread revolts throughout the region. It was only in 1917 when the French began to offer “positive incentives such as greater access to citizenship” that young African men would begin to voluntarily enlist (pp. 145-46). Tragically, black Africans sustained the highest losses of all colonial soldiers: of the 78,000 colonial soldiers who died while serving France in the war, over 50,000 were African (p. 151).

The situation for the 220,000 foreign laborers during the First World War was quite difficult as they were poorly paid, subject to surveillance, and deprived of the same basic rights as their native-born co-workers. Despite such discrimination, France became “Europe’s foremost melting pot” in the interwar period, as there was a profound need for able-bodied workers given the grievous loss of 1.3 million men during the war. With immigrants—primarily single men—drawn from Italy as well as Poland, Belgium, Spain and to a lesser extent French North Africa, France surpassed the U.S. rate of foreign population growth in 1931 (p. 163). Most of these men found work in mining and heavy industry where they comprised nearly 40 percent of the labor force. Moreover, unlike in the United States, their path to citizenship was made easier by the passage of a more liberal naturalization law in 1927 which allowed immigrants to become citizens after only three years of residency rather than ten (p. 164). The authors are quick to point out, however, that this liberalization was not matched by rises in real wages or any marked changes in social and cultural attitudes toward their presence in France.

As in the chapters related to the First World War, those focused on the Second World War are handled exceedingly well and reveal Sarah Fishman’s mastery of these topics.[2] Chapter Eight outlines the diplomatic and strategic shortcomings of the French in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of war. Moreover, the authors convincingly locate the origins of Vichy in the rise of such extremist groups as the Action Française and the Croix-de-Feu during the 1930s. The virulent anti-Semitism of these groups helps explain the evident eagerness with which Vichy sought to deport 75,000 of France’s Jews to an almost certain death (p. 228). The authors also take great pains to outline Vichy’s racism in the colonial sphere. Since France’s colonies remained unoccupied—with the notable exception of Indochina, which Japan had invaded in 1940—colonial officials had free reign to enact a wide range of policies including “forced labor, excessive taxation and economic expropriation” (p. 229). Not coincidentally, this is also the period in which one sees a growing sense of nationalism in many parts of the empire, particularly in Vietnam and Algeria. These pro-independence movements were violently suppressed and pushed underground, although in Algeria support for the Free French movement was bolstered by the arrival of American troops in 1942.

The Algerian War and all of its inherent ugliness, particularly the widespread use of torture—the stripping of prisoners; the beatings of prisoners; the use of electric shock and what in modern parlance has become known as “water boarding”—is outlined in chilling detail. In this context, the works of Henri Alleg and Frantz Fanon are also referenced and even in this condensed, narrative form serve as powerful testaments to individual suffering and oppression.[3] However, this reader would have appreciated greater attention to the place of the war in French modern memory and the visceral response it elicited at the time from some of France’s most renowned intellectuals (e.g., Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Raymond Aron, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Pierre Bourdieu among a host of others).[4] In the midst of an eight-year long “conflict” which the government steadfastly refused to publicly call a war and with the memory of the long, bloody struggle in Indochina still very much alive, France divested itself of its remaining colonies in 1960. With the exception of a few far-flung islands in the Pacific such as New Caledonia—where anti-French violence would erupt in the 1980s—the colonial empire came to a rather inglorious end.

The volume concludes with an examination of the challenges currently facing France—the continued viability of a strong welfare state amid a highly competitive, globalized economy; an increasingly multicultural society in which racial tensions are high (as evidenced by the riots of 2005) and issues of identity politics increasingly complex; the persistence of a reactionary and rather racist right-wing impulse evidenced most dramatically by Jean-Marie Le Pen's defeat of Lionel Jospin in the 2003 elections—all of which are foregrounded in this comprehensive study. As with any work with such a broad sweep, however, some themes receive short shrift. For example, while the authors touch upon issues related to French high culture, this often appears as something of an afterthought. Thus, the discussion of Impressionism is limited to a mere paragraph as is Dada and Surrealism. Moreover, there is no bibliography or suggestions for further reading which would be helpful for readers wishing to explore certain topics in greater depth. Finally, a glossary containing key terms, important personages and concepts along with a timeline would help students who are only vaguely familiar with the contours of French history. These are minor quibbles, for this is a book that rewards its readers with a deeply nuanced understanding and appreciation of this fascinating country.

NOTES

[1] In this regard, see: Stephen A. Toth, *Beyond Papillon: A History of the French Overseas Penal Colonies, 1854-1952* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Peter Redfield, *Space in the Tropics: From Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

[2] For instance, see: Sarah Fishman, *The Battle for Children: World War II, Youth Crime, and Juvenile Justice in Twentieth-Century France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Sarah Fishman, Laura Lee Downs and Ioannis Sinanogl eds., *France at War: Vichy and the Historians* (New York: Berg, 2000).

[3] Henri Alleg, *The Question* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2006).

[4] For more in this regard, see: James D. Le Sueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria* 2nd ed., (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

Stephen Toth
University of Arizona
Stephen.Toth@asu.edu

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