H-France Review Vol. 25 (October 2025), No. 73

Sylvain Pattieu, Emmanuelle Sibeud, and Tyler Stovall, eds. *The Black Populations of France: Histories from Metropole to Colony*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021. 236 pp. Notes, index, and illustrations. $99.99 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781496228819; $30.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9781496228994; $30.00 U.S. (pdf). ISBN 9781496229984.

Review by Jean Beaman, CUNY-Graduate Center of New York.

Over twenty years ago, when I was a university study abroad student in Paris, I happened to stumble upon the Brentano's English-language bookstore in the 2nd *arrondissement*. While browsing, I found the late Tyler Stovall's *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Houghton Miffin, 1996). So began my decades-long appreciation of Stovall's work, including his detailed examination of race, racism, and Black communities in Paris and the rest of France. The latest, posthumous compilation with noted French scholars Sylvain Pattieu and Emmanuelle Sibeud is no exception.

Due to extant research by Stovall and other scholars on both sides of the Atlantic, it is no longer possible to intelligently suggest that race and racism are not relevant in a "colorblind" French Republican society, nor that Black populations and communities have not long been crucial to what France has been and currently is. Beyond research on these topics by scholars such as Pap Ndiaye, Mame-Fatou Niang, Fania Noël, Eric Fassin, Robin Mitchell, Maboula Soumahoro, Jennifer Boittin, Trica Keaton, Erik Bleich, Sue Peabody, among others, we have myriad artistic and cultural products and representations on these questions of race and blackness in France, including the 2025 exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, "Paris Noir: Artistic Circulations and Anti-Colonial Resistance, 1950-2000," which attempted to map Black Paris through an exploration of contributions from Black French, African, African American, and Caribbean artists.

A recent addition to this corpus is the edited volume, *The Black Populations of France: Histories from Metropole to Colony* (hereafter, BPF), by Sylvian Pattieu, Emmanuelle Sibeud, and Tyler Stovall, based on a co-led seminar at the University of Paris 8 beginning in 2011, on the history of Black populations in France. It is a notable volume for many reasons, including its broad historical and geographical scope. BPF includes chapters both on how blackness was constructed and Black populations have been understood historically in France, including in the colonies and overseas departments, and on how these are presently understood in contemporary France. France, here, is not limited to the metropole nor to a short period in time.

BPF is organized into three broad sections: Colonial France in Africa, Blacks in Metropolitan France, and the Politics of Race in France Today. Colonial France in Africa focuses on what the presence of

African soldiers, including the *tirailleur sénégalais*, in the French colonial order reveals for how race and blackness were understood in the French empire in Africa. Sibeud's chapter highlights the historical connection between race and citizenship through a detailing of Joachim Firinga's, a *tirailleur sénégalais*, demand for citizenship in 1910. Sarah Zimmerman's chapter also discusses the history of *tirailleur sénégalais*, addressing their presence in colonial Morocco before World War I. One way, therefore, to understand blackness, both historically and presently, in France is through the French state's active distinction between North Africans and West Africans. Zimmerman discusses how West Africans were positioned in order to make this distinction. She notes that, "Members of the colonial military assumed that West African soldiers were incapable of participating in the modern practices of the French military. The postcard images of the tirailleurs sénégalais 'en famille' on Moroccan campaign were incompatible with French ideals of male republican citizens providing military labor for a nationally defined state" (p. 41). The final chapter in this section, by Ruth Ginio, focuses on the experiences of African colonial soldiers serving in France during World War II by analyzing letters by French women to colonial administrators and discourse on racism in an African veteran's journal. Ginio deftly demonstrates how African veterans made use of French colonial racism in order to obtain equal military pensions for metropolitan and colonial soldiers. Yet the independence of French West Africa led to a 1960 law that redefined France's obligations towards its veterans in now former French colonies and froze their base pensions. Moreover, she discusses how African soldiers' involvement in the liberation of France posed challenges for a colonial France that saw itself as superior to its colonized subjects. Here, the reality of France is juxtaposed with France's idea of itself. Taken together, this first section demonstrates how the movement and circulation of Black populations throughout the French colonial empire both established and disrupted racial categories of difference and distinction. It illustrates how whiteness gets constructed as synonymous with being French, and blackness with its opposite.

The second section, Blacks in Metropolitan France, emphasizes the eighteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Pierre H. Boulle's chapter discusses three cases of Black families in France during this period. By 1782, metropolitan France had approximately eight thousand Black individuals, according to one estimate. He also details the implications of the interracial marriage ban of 1778, enacted amid growing concerns about the increase in the Black population. He cites Pierre-Victor Malouet, a Marine administrator who wrote the *Mémoire sur l'esclavage des nègres* in 1788, stating, "Blacks can never become part of our society…. If this prejudice is destroyed, if the Black man is assimilated to whites amongst us, it is more than probable that we will very soon see mulatto nobles, financiers, and merchants, whose wealth would then procure spouses and mothers to every order of the State. It is thus that individuals and nations are altered, degraded, and dissolved" (p. 70-71).
Minayo Nasiali's chapter analyses the presence of a racialized hierarchy of labor in the maritime industry in Marseille and how colonial sailors circumvented this hierarchy in order to be hired, including by pretending to be French. Therefore, both colonial sailors and shipping companies maneuvered around "competing systems of work that were both premised on racialized and hierarchical understandings of mariners and labor" (p. 99). The next chapter in this section, by Jennifer Boittin, examines how Black Francophone women spoke and wrote about their own sexuality and pleasure, and its relationship to existing racial and gendered hierarchies in France. Boittin specifically focuses on Suzanne Lascasade (who wrote "Claire-Solange: African Soul") and Roberte Horth (who wrote "A Thing of No Importance"), and how Black Francophone women's migration both visibilized and invisibilized their sexuality and pleasure in both Paris and Senegal. She argues that these migrant women "skirted a wavering line, alternatively constructed as sexual creatures by the men and women

around them and resisting [sic] their categorization as women of easy virtue(s)…[thereby] repositioning themselves within the racial and sexual hierarchies of empire" (p. 118). The final chapter in this section describes the Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les départements d'Outre-Mer, or BUMIDOM. Pattieu explains how BUMIDOM was created to increase migration from the Caribbean and Reunion to the metropole and details how migrants were selected and later received and accepted in the metropole.

The final section focuses on the politics of race in France today. Audrey Célestine provides a thorough overview of contemporary French Caribbean politics by analyzing the Interministerial Delegation of the Equality of Opportunity of Overseas French (or DIECDOM). DIECDOM was founded in 2007 to support the integration of Caribbean migrants in France, and yet, somewhat paradoxically, given the French Republican context, it served to construct and solidify a racial and ethnic category of "overseas French." In the next chapter, "Racially Imprinted Bodies: The Black Feminine Press in Contemporary France," Sarah Fila-Bakabadio examines the counterframing of blackness and the Black body in magazines such as *Amaina* and *Miss Ebene*. She argues this is a continuation with previous moments of Black recognition, such as the Negritude movement and the Harlem Renaissance, in which being Black was framed as a "positive categorization" (p. 170).

Next, Franck F. Ekué illustrates how the use of the English term "Black" instead of "noir" reflects both the history of African American expatriates in Paris and how Black French individuals circumvent French Republican and colorblind logics through, among other things, connecting to a global and transnational Black solidarity. In the final chapter of this section, Stovall compares Black France and Black America, or African American communities in Paris with Black French communities which are often separate from each other. The concluding chapter by the coeditors brings together myriad themes in the book, including the relationship between Black Americans and Black France, the relationship between Black communities and the French empire, the role of colonialism, understanding blackness as a recognized social identity, the role of gender, and the relevance of geographical differences. They conclude, "To conceive of France as a Black nation is to see Blacks not just as recent arrivals but rather as communities whose presence in the country has helped define what it means to be French in general" (p. 214).

This edited volume is an important addition to our knowledge on race, blackness, and Black populations in France as it provides new ways for thinking about the circulation of American and French ideas of blackness and of Black communities. Yet, I wish the authors had also considered how the comparison of France versus the United States can serve to overly simplify the nature of Black identity and history in both societies (for example, some mention of Black American history throughout this volume misses some of the nuance in how Black American identity has been historically constructed, which also involved different migration trajectories and histories). Moreover, it would be useful to consider how ideas about blackness circulated to, rather than just from, the United States, but perhaps that was beyond the scope of this project. Part of the struggle of blackness as a unitary and hegemonic project--in both societies--relates to how it eludes difference, rather than takes advantage of it. Yet these are minor quibbles that reflect how stimulating this volume is. *The Black Populations of France* is more generally an invitation to not just think about the centrality of Black populations for France – both historically and presently – but also the centrality of Black populations to Europe as a whole.

List of Essays:

Sylvain Pattieu, Emmanuelle Sibeud, Tyler Stovall, "Introduction: The Black Populations of France: An Historical Mosaic"

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Sylvian Pattieu, Emmanuelle Sieubeud, and Tyler Stovall, "Conclusion: Towards a History of Black France, and a Black History of France"

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ISSN 1553-9172