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Tyler Stovall, *From Near and Far: A Transnational History of France*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022. xiii + 261 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. $99.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9-78-1496232809; $30.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9-78-1496231505; $30.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9-78-1496233929.

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For many readers of H-France, Tyler Stovall needs no introduction. Throughout his distinguished career, he fundamentally shaped the field of modern French history by publishing widely on the histories of labor and Blackness from a transnational perspective (focusing especially on exchanges between France and the United States).[1] He also advised and mentored numerous scholars who went on to leave their own mark in the now-thriving field of Global France. *From Near and Far: A Transnational History of France* was the last monograph Stovall completed before his untimely death in 2021. The book is a testament to his wide-ranging interests and skills in creating coherent constellations out of seemingly incongruous material. After all, what do Karl Marx, Club Med, and French hip-hop have in common?

From Near and Far was an unexpected development. Stovall had planned to include "a series of vignettes…that illustrated the transnational and universal character of modern French history" (p. 1) in his excellent textbook *Transnational France*.[2] However, when the time came to add the finishing touches, he encountered that all-too-common obstacle: space limitations. Thankfully, these vignettes did not go to waste, and Stovall compiled them into a highly readable monograph that will be especially of use for undergraduate students in advanced seminars. Yet the work is more than that--one can read it as a final historiographical and political statement by one of our field's leading scholars.

The running threads connecting the vignettes ask two parallel questions: 1) how do we define modern France; and 2) what are the elements that constitute Frenchness? As Stovall explains in the introduction, there are no exact answers, for both the borders of the French nation and the meanings of Frenchness have always been contested and marked by indeterminacy. Yet the lack of precise answers for the ontological questions of France and Frenchness does not mean that we are precluded from a deeper understanding. Like the famous image created by Edgar Rubin, where one might see either a white vase or the black profile of two faces, the meanings may be multiple, but they emerge from a specific dynamic. For Rubin's vase, it is the Gestalten interplay between figure and background; for Stovall's France, it is how local and global stories shape one another through transnational exchanges (the introduction summarizes this relationship with a

brief discussion of the concept of glocalization). This approach allows for the telling of global histories while maintaining the French nation-state as a central player. In that sense, *From Near and Far* is not as radically decentering as other recent works, like the edited collection *Histoire mondiale de la France*, which became a *livre événement* by explicitly positioning itself against the *roman national*.[3] But there are virtues to Stovall's framing, for, if anything, what the political events of the past decade have shown us is that the nation-state--and the passions it elicits--remain forces to be reckoned with.

As such, it does not come as a surprise that the book is structured along a traditional chronology of French political history. Part One: The World of the French Revolution encompasses the period from 1789 to 1870; Part Two: The Rise of the Imperial Republic follows the early life of the Third Republic from 1870 until the eve of the First World War; Part Three: Transnational France in the Era of the World Wars traces the tumultuous and traumatic years between 1914 and 1944; and Part Four: The Rebirth of the Universal Nation follows the story up to the present. Each section begins with a brief introduction summarizing the major trends of the period in question. Although these framings will not offer the specialist much that is new, they help bring some coherence to the individual case studies and are evidence of Stovall's mastery in synthesis.

The chapters in part one address the French founding of Gallipolis on the banks of the Ohio River in the 1790s, Karl Marx's sojourns in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century, and Napoleon III's efforts to install an empire in Mexico. Part two tackles the rise of haute couture in Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Alliance Israélite Universelle's own experiments in a so-called civilizing mission with Jewish populations abroad, and Paul Gaugin's (mis)adventures across an expanding French empire. In part three, we read about American soldiers in France during the First World War, the significance of Paris in Ho Chi Minh's strikingly global life, and the importance of foreigners to the French Resistance. Part four begins with a vignette about Josephine Baker's experiment in raising a multinational and multiracial family in her castle Les Milandes (the Rainbow Tribe), follows with a brief history of Club Med, and concludes with the emergence of French hip-hop in the Paris banlieues. At its best, *From Near and Far* illuminates the central tensions of French republican universalism--an ideology that could be used as justification for colonial oppression through something like the civilizing mission but that could also be appropriated by marginalized figures in their own struggles for empowerment (the biographical chapters do this especially well).

While Stovall argues that the book's twelve case studies illustrate the complex dynamics that connect the local, the national, and the global, he does not justify why he selected them over other potential candidates. Obviously, much of this had to do with his own interests, and each reader will have quibbles about a key case study that should have been included, whether it be the Napoleonic Code, the Alliance Française, or the 1968 moment. But in their idiosyncrasy, the case studies offer a remarkable thematic range--from biographies of famous figures and histories of consumer culture to examples of institutional history and the history of art and music. That being said, despite some brief references to breakthroughs in Marx's and Ho Chi Minh's theories of revolution, one field that could have received deeper treatment is intellectual history, which, for instance, has seen a growing list of works exploring the transnational construction of what is called French theory.[4] The same could be said about the history of science and technology, given France's central role shaping the global landscape of fields like biomedical research and

nuclear technology.[5] But these are minor complaints that only testify to the promises of Stovall's transnational framings.

Since addressing each of the book's case studies in more detail would lead to an excessively long review, I will briefly summarize three. I found these to be the most insightful in tracing the tensions that emerged as visions of universalism were negotiated and redefined through transnational exchanges. Each of these chapters also tackle this phenomenon from a different angle--the institutional, the biographical, and the cultural.

While Stovall's chapter on the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) situates the organization's work within France's complicated Jewish history (the first modern nation to grant Jews citizenship was also home to the Dreyfus Affair), he adds an additional layer of complexity by framing it through the lens of imperial history. The AIU was founded in Paris in 1860 by a small group of Jewish leaders who sought to combat antisemitism and foster Jewish solidarity around the world to improve the lot of impoverished Jews. According to Stovall, the AIU, which made reference to the principles of 1789 in its founding manifesto, was a prominent example of how "universalism was not just imposed from the center, but also embraced from the margins of national existence" (p. 100). However, by championing the virtues of French republican universalism, the AIU also incorporated some of its pathologies. It opened Jewish schools across North Africa and the Middle East aspiring to contribute to the emancipation of Jewish populations in those regions, but it also believed that said emancipation was only possible if those populations embraced the French civilization that its leaders--assimilated Parisian Jews--had come to admire. The curriculum emphasized a modern secular education, using French as the primary language of instruction, which could lead to conflict with local secular and religious leaders. Ironically, this meant that while those educated in AIU schools developed a kind of French cosmopolitan identity, they also tended to be alienated from their own communities. Even so, Stovall judges the AIU's educational endeavors to have been a success, for it allowed the students who went through those schools to rise through the cadres of the white-collar professions that began to proliferate with the concurrent French efforts to modernize its colonies.

The book's richest biographical chapter focuses on Ho Chi Minh, an individual who Stovall argues "negotiate[d] two different visions of universalism during his years abroad: those of the aging Third Republic and of the young Soviet Union" (pp. 145-146). Nguyen Sinh Cung (the first of Ho Chi Minh's many names) was born in 1890, just three years after the establishment of French Indochina. As a child, he excelled in his studies of Confucianism and attended a French lycée in Hué (his scholarly aptitudes prompted his father to rename him Nguyen Tat Thanh--Nguyen the Accomplished). When he was twenty-one, Thanh spent a brief period in France before making his way to New York and London, where he was subsequently exposed to the ideas of Marcus Garvey and Karl Marx. He then settled in Paris in 1917, where he found a city with a sizeable Vietnamese population (who, like the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, had been recruited to serve France during the First World War). Radical activity was also brewing through the combination of anti-war and labor activism. Invigorated by exchanges with immigrants and labor activists, Thanh became a prominent figure in those circles and adopted the name Nguyen Ai Quoc (Nguyen the Patriot). Although Quoc initially entertained the idea of colonial reform, his involvement with Marxism convinced him that it would not be enough (he was a founding member of the French Communist Party). Quoc's growing realization that French republicanism

was unwilling to address its own contradictions led him to the Soviet Union in 1923. Ever the critical engager with universalisms, he did not buy into the Marxist orthodoxy that workers were the revolutionary class par excellence, instead emphasizing the role peasants in the colonized world could play in advancing Communism. After Moscow, Quoc spent a few years in China, where he helped found the Vietnamese Communist Party. He finally returned to Vietnam in 1941, after more than twenty years abroad. It was upon this return that he adopted the name Ho Chi Minh (he who has been enlightened). The chaos unleashed by the Second World War presented an opportunity: the guerrilla war against Japanese occupation was also to be an independence campaign against the French. What followed was a decades-long struggle for liberation against the Japanese, the French, and the Americans. In Stovall's portrayal, Ho Chi Minh's life is illustrative of how abstract universalisms--whether of the French republican or the Soviet variety--were insufficient, and how emancipation was only possible when those universalisms were adapted to local conditions.

Finally, on the cultural front, Stovall presents us with an analysis of France's hip-hop scene. Born in the Bronx in the 1970s, hip-hop made its way to France in the early 80s, when American musicians started touring France. The genre took root in the banlieues that had grown tremendously after the Second World War. Since the mid-1970s, these historically working-class spaces had also become defined by race, since immigrant families from the former colonies made their homes in the affordable *habitations à loyer modéré* that cluttered Paris's suburban belt. Given that this was also a period of deindustrialization and economic crisis, class and racial tensions converged, and the politicized language of hip-hop resonated with second-generation youths who did not find the same opportunities their parents had encountered during the *Trentes Glorieuses*. Contra the United States, hip-hop also found institutional support from the French Socialist government that took power in 1981 and promoted initiatives like the Fête de la Musique. Despite these symbolic gestures, the socioeconomic conditions in the banlieues saw little improvement, and artists like Suprême NTM used their lyrics to lay bare the "hypocrisy of republican universalism which didn't seem to have a place for them" (p. 220). As such, for Stovall French hip-hop remains a guiding light for new visions of republican universalism, no less because of its history of interracial unity cultivated through the marginalized experience of banlieue youths. Yet Stovall also surveys some responses to what he calls the postcolonial soundtrack that makes one wonder about that optimistic assessment. After all, since the mid 2000s hip-hop has become a lightning rod for the tantrums of a rising nationalist right increasingly comfortable with open racism and xenophobia.

Stovall's microhistories are both entertaining and enlightening, but one should approach them as brief excursions that illustrate how forces of transnationalism shaped French history (and vice-versa) rather than as in-depth studies. The endnotes are sparse and generally only reference secondary works on the topic at hand (likely a by-product of their original textbook purpose in addition to the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic posed to archival research). Yet these limitations present an opening for those who wish to use the book in a classroom, since each chapter can serve as an introduction to a topic that students could then go deeper into with their own research. The light scholarly apparatus also makes the book more accessible to lay readers--arguably the ones who would benefit the most from a transnational framing of French history that by now has gained much traction within the discipline.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the fact that *From Near and Far* is the work of a man who was deeply passionate about his own vision of France. "I want to emphasize how impressed I am with the richness of French culture and history, in the belief that one major explanation for this richness is precisely the openness the nation has shown in the past to foreign influence," Stovall writes in the introduction (p. 8). Certainly, this is what has drawn many non-French historians into the field.[6] Still, some of us might also wince at the prose's tone in certain sections, which can come off as exceptionally celebratory (Stovall is not parsimonious with the adjective great). One might also adopt a more critical disposition toward transnationalism itself, which the book tends to associate with progressive politics. Sure, it contributed to the French Resistance, produced Josephine Baker's Rainbow Tribe, and gifted us French hip-hop. But transnationalism and reaction are not antonymic. For instance, pan-European aristocratic ties were key in shaping émigré counterrevolutionary conspiracies, while the counterinsurgency doctrines developed by the French in Algeria and Indochina circulated through transnational military circuits that informed both American violence in Vietnam and the repressive techniques of Latin American dictatorships.[7] There is also much to be said about the rise of right-wing populism in the twenty-first century as a transnational phenomenon, despite the emphasis on nationalist rhetoric by the likes of Trump, Orbán, Bolsonaro, and the Le Pens.[8] One could therefore envision a counterpart volume that focuses more explicitly on vignettes from the dark underbelly of French transnationalism.

But at least from this reviewer's perspective, the transnationalism championed in *From Near and Far* certainly deserves celebration, for it is an open and generous one that reveals "the ways in which we all have multiple identities, as citizens of our own nations and as members of a global community" (p. 9). Open and generous, much in the way Stovall himself pursued his career.[9] It is only appropriate, then, that the book ends with a fragment from his own biography. In 1954, while still in his mother's womb, Stovall's parents traveled from West Virginia to the same Gallipolis he explores in the book's first case study. They did so for practical reasons (the nearest maternity facility to their home was located there), but also because his father wished for his son to be born on the free soil of the North (his parents were committed Civil Rights activists). While a coincidence, Stovall found it to be a very happy one. "I feel privileged to tell the tale of a nation whose history has been as grand as the French Revolution and at the same time as intimate as the place where I first saw the light of day," the conclusion reads (p. 230). Ultimately, that is one of the major powers of the historiographic enterprise--giving meaning to individual life stories no matter how grand or marginal. And in that, Stovall's final work certainly succeeds.

NOTES

[1] While Stovall's first book, *The Rise of the Paris Red Belt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) focused on how early twentieth-century local urban struggles contributed to the rise of the Parti Communiste Française in Paris's suburbs, he began adopting an explicitly transnational framework in subsequent monographs, which include *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Houghton Mifflin Press, 1996), *Paris and the Spirit of 1919: Consumer Struggles, Transnationalism, and Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), and *White Freedom: The Racial History of an Idea* (Princeton University Press, 2021).

[2] Tyler Stovall, *Transnational France: The Modern History of a Universal Nation* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2015).

[3] Patrick Boucheron, Nicolas Delalande, Florian Mazel, Yann Potin, and Pierre Singaravélou, eds., *Histoire mondiale de la France* (Paris: Seuil, 2017).

[4] François Cusset's *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Ian Merkel's *Terms of Exchange: Brazilian Intellectuals and the French Social Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

[5] Aro Velmet, *Pasteur's Empire: Bacteriology and Politics in France, Its Colonies, and the World* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2020); Gabrielle Hecht, *The Radiance of France: Nuclear Power and National Identity after World War II* (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 2000).

[6] Laura Lee Downs and Stéphane Gerson, *Why France? American Historians Reflect on an Enduring Fascination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

[7] Simon Burrows, "The *Émigrés* and Conspiracy in the French Revolution, 1789-99," in Peter R. Campbell, Thomas E. Kaiser, and Marisa Linton, eds., *Conspiracy in the French Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2024), pp. 150-171; Terrence G. Peterson, "Networking the Counterrevolution: The École Supérieure de Guerre, Transnational Military Collaboration, and Cold War Insurgency, 1955-1975," *Journal of Social History* 56, no. 3 (2023): 607-636.

[8] Justin Casey and Daniel Nexon, "The Vexing Rise of the Transnational Right: Lessons from Interwar Europe," *Foreign Affairs*, 19 January 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/vexing-rise-transnational-right.

[9] Michael G. Vann, "Tyler Stovall Was a Groundbreaking Historian of Modern France," *Jacobin*, 21 December 2021, https://jacobin.com/2021/12/historian-death-france-race-colonialism-empire. In honor of that career, the Western Society for French History chose to name its Mission Prize, which "recognizes teachers and scholars who are doing outstanding work to combat structural inequalities in the field of French History, the profession, and their home institutions," after Stovall (https://www.wsfh.org/mission-prize).

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