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Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944*. Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2001. vii + 311 pp. Maps, photographs, notes, bibliography and sources, and index. \$55.00 US (cl). ISBN 0-8047-4179-4.

Review by Kim Munholland, University of Minnesota.

The parenthesis around the Vichy period of twentieth-century France has long ago fallen away, yet a bracket within a parenthesis persists. We now know a lot about the Vichy government, its official policy, its anti-Semitism, its conflicting objectives, its precedents, and its legacies. Far less is known about Vichy and the empire or, more precisely, Vichy's project for a "new order" in the empire, which has received scant attention from historians. The impact of the 1940 defeat is acknowledged as important for weakening French authority in the eyes of the peoples of the empire, a loss of prestige that set the stage for decolonization, but the impact of Vichy policy itself has been overlooked. Robert Paxton, preoccupied with revealing the true nature of Vichy, had little space for the affairs of empire.[1] Julian Jackson's impressive synthesis, *France: The Dark Years 1940-1944*, recently reviewed on H-France by Robert Zaretsky, is a thorough, detailed, and up-to-date account of the many facets of the Vichy experience but scarcely mentions the empire, and the edited collection *La France des années noires* has only a brief chapter on the empire.[2] Recent histories treat the empire as "contested territory" in a Franco-French war.[3] On the one hand, the empire was a "bargaining chip" in Vichy's dealings with Nazi Germany. On the other hand, de Gaulle used those parts of the empire that had rallied to his cause as the basis for legitimacy in his dealings with the Allies.

What Eric Jennings' fine study provides is a look inside Vichy's empire, exploring the ways in which Vichy's ideology played out in three tropical settings. By exploring sources available in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Vietnam, as well as the colonial archives at Aix-en-Provence, Jennings is able to provide a picture of Vichy in the tropical empire, revealed in detail in three case studies. This was, Jennings claims, "pure" Vichy unclouded by any German occupation, although there was a Japanese presence in Indochina. What emerges is a common Vichy project that produced different results and had unexpected consequences in each.

While the Third Republic only hesitantly and very imperfectly exported its republicanism to the empire, the men of Vichy, mostly admirals, exported the National Revolution with enthusiasm and determination. As in metropolitan France the imperial message was directed against the sins of the Third Republic. Pétainism in both locales was an "explicitly anti-democratic, ultraconservative, and essentialist regime" (p. 17). In the empire as in metropolitan France, Vichy sought to abolish the pernicious legacy of republicanism. Vichy stressed the positive virtues of a renewed France under authoritarian auspices. Emphasis was upon hierarchy, discipline, respect for tradition, and the authority of the leader, Marshal Pétain, which contrasted with the presumed "decadence" of republican values embodied in the preceding regime. Vichy in the colonies was militantly anti-democratic and hierarchical, anti-Popular Front and authoritarian, anti-Masonic, anti-Semitic, anti-Communist, and ardently Catholic. Jennings argues that in these tropical colonies, even in Indochina under the gaze of Japanese troops, Vichy officials enjoyed extensive autonomy to apply their remedies for a recovery of France.

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Symbolism and ceremonies became important as ways of glorifying the values of Vichy's National Revolution. Portraits of Marshal Pétain and essay contests to honor the Marshal occurred throughout the empire, as in metropolitan France, as a way of stressing the cult of the leader and respect for the wisdom of age. Bastille Day ceremonies disappeared, but the cult of Joan of Arc gained prominence as a symbol of *la patrie*. May 1, traditional Labor Day, became recast into a day of social reconciliation and imperial unity. All of these days of celebration were reconstructed to supplant republican festivals. "*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*" gave way to "*travail, famille, patrie*" in the colonies. In Indochina, for example, values of work, family, and country were associated with local traditions in order to stress a parallel between Vichy and Confucian values. There was even a Uriage for the empire with stress upon uniforms, regimentation, physical education, moral development, and subordination of individualism to a common cause. In matters of theory the universal ideal behind republican assimilation, which already was well on the way to abandonment under the Third Republic, was specifically rejected in favor of association, which favored working with local hierarchies and respecting local customs in the interests of cooperation and stability.[4] Jennings cites examples of republican colonial officials readily adapting to the National Revolution's program for the empire, most dramatically seen in the career of Jules Brévié, who easily made the transition from Governor of Indochina under the Popular Front to Colonial Minister under Vichy.

Vichy's colonial project emphasized a return to the soil and nostalgia for authentic traditions. A major contribution of the study is to show how important the export of Pétainism was for Vichy, or the ways in which Vichy propaganda flowed to the empire, reversing the direction of Third Republican imperial festivities, which were designed to showcase the empire for the people of France. What Jennings notes is the irony in these outbound messages, which could be read subversively even by conservatively oriented indigenous peoples, who would rediscover "their own" cultural legacies to authenticate eventual resistance to "foreign" domination. This was the supreme irony of the National Revolution in the empire. By turning to reconstructed folkloric traditions and traditional elites, particularly in Indochina, Vichy's project inadvertently provided ammunition to be used after the war against the colonizers. Some Vichy supporters, such as Pierre Lyautey, warned that Pétainism in the empire was a risky idea, and indeed the Vichy message had the unanticipated consequence of promoting anti-colonial nationalism.

The ways in which the National Revolution played out in the three tropical colonies differed significantly. This contrast shows the ways in which "the empire" was not of a piece and was diverse in character. Curiously, the Third Republic and Vichy both applied methods that were highly centralized, even when they differed in their underlying, ideological assumptions. For the administrators of the Third Republic, the universalistic message of republican ideology at first informed their colonial project. Although this attempt was abandoned, approaches to colonial rule remained similar through the colonial service. While rejecting republican ideology, the assumption of Vichy was that the values of the National Revolution could be applied throughout the empire it controlled. Yet the responses to this Vichy message varied in each of the three examples that Jennings examines, and the contrast in responses are as important as the common message and goals that emanated from Vichy France.

Jennings has structured his analysis of Vichy in the empire in sets of two parallel chapters for each example. A first chapter establishes the background and context for a subsequent analysis of the way in which Vichy applied its program in each of the colonies under consideration. The reception of the National Revolution varied according to the local circumstances, which provides the subjects of the second chapters.

In Madagascar the offensive against republicanism began at the outset of the war. Any tendency toward continuing the war was harshly repressed and suspected dissidents were jailed. The tough-minded Vichy Governors Léon Cayla and Armand Annet established a strongly authoritarian order and set themselves the task of overcoming republican "decadence." They promoted the cult of Pétain, purged the educational system of dangerous ideas, stressed traditional hierarchies, and brought back a brutal

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system of forced labor. The result of these repressive measures was not to stifle dissent but to provoke an underground resistance that would erupt in the 1947 revolt and its bloody repression at the hands of the Fourth Republic. Jennings argues that the seeds of national resistance were planted in the wartime Vichy garden in Madagascar. Although short-lived (British forces invaded in May 1942, taking four months to wear down Vichy resistance), the legacy of two years of Vichy rule was critical, fostering both Malagasy resistance and a bitter Anglophobia and Pétainist hostility to Gaullism and postwar republicanism among the colony's hard-line French community.

Vichy rule in Indochina was of the longest duration, not ending until the Japanese coup in March 1945. Admiral Decoux ruled the French colony with an iron fist and with considerable autonomy, Jennings suggests, despite the Japanese military presence. Jennings questions, though, the "liberal" side of Decoux's administration, which some historians or Decoux supporters have found in his recruitment of Vietnamese elites into the administration.<sup>[5]</sup> He argues these steps resulted more from the need to find administrators in the absence of qualified French personnel than from any desire to give a measure of authority to even loyal Vietnamese (p. 163). What Decoux, supported by staunchly anti-republican colonists, achieved was to strip away all pretense at assimilation in favor of association with emphasis upon Vietnamese cultural heritage and a return to past traditions of work, hierarchy, and family. Curiously the Decoux regime associated the history of Trung sisters' resistance to the Chinese in Tonkin with Joan of Arc's role in expelling the British from France, conveniently ignoring the ways in which Vietnamese nationalist writers extolled the Trung sisters as anti-colonists (p. 154). This misuse of a Vietnamese tradition exemplified the way in which Vichy naively reduced "tradition" to a simplistic definition. Vietnamese nationalists had little difficulty reconverting these traditions for their own purposes after the war. Jennings argues that Ho Chi Minh quickly appropriated the national symbolism that emerged from this Vichy project in his resistance to French domination.

In Madagascar and Indochina, Vichy had little difficulty implementing its project, in good measure as a result of support from the French colonial population. In Guadeloupe the legacy of republican values was much more firmly entrenched, which required an active dismantling by Vichy authorities. There was strong enthusiasm for the republic and a policy of assimilation in the old colonies, such as Guadeloupe and Martinique, where citizenship had been granted to male adults. Although the island had ethnic and class divisions, "liberty, equality and fraternity" still had meaning when war broke out, and male Guadeloupeans rushed to the tricolor as they had in the Great War. When it appeared as if Guadeloupe might rally to de Gaulle, following the defeat, Admiral Georges Robert sent another admiral to bring the colony into line. Confronted with local support for established republican practices, Vichy faced the need to dismantle these institutions and enforce the values of the National Revolution. Potential resistors were arrested and all elected assemblies in the colony were suspended (p. 88). This political repression had a racist component, for blacks and creoles occupied positions of importance in the administration, and they often provided strong voices of resistance.

Implementation of the National Revolution in Guadeloupe fell to Admiral Rouyer and a one-time "liberal" governor of empire, Constant Sorin, who abandoned thoughts of resistance and rallied not to General de Gaulle but to Marshal Pétain. Once in power the crackdown began with republican institutions swept aside and suspected dissidents forced underground, into exile, or jailed. The Vichy revolution failed to take hold in Guadeloupe, but the memory of Vichy's trampling of political rights and its social exclusionism was a powerful one. Republican assimilation triumphed at the end of the war when Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion, and Guiana became French departments.

The history that Eric Jennings provides is one of a single vision, Vichy's, and reactions that are as diverse as the territories of the French Empire. He has made a good case for Vichy's impact upon the history of French colonialism and de-colonization, a history that takes us beyond the facile view of the 1940 defeat as the key element in generating resistance to French domination. Yet there is an element of the history that needs further exploration. A comparison of the response of the three colonies to the

Vichy moment reveals something about the shallowness of the Third Republic's "civilizing mission" in the political sense. That is, the one colony where republican values proved most resistant to the Vichy alternative was the colony that had gone through the upheavals of the French Revolution and the struggles, particularly 1848, of the nineteenth century to define citizenship and political rights, however imperfectly. This historical legacy needs to be placed alongside Jennings's claim that Vichy's rejection of "republican discourse" propelled the French empire both toward the "ultraassimilation" that created departments in the old colonies and an inadvertent impulse toward independence movements in Madagascar, Indochina, and elsewhere. Although beyond the impressive scope of *Vichy in the Tropics*, an important assignment would be to see why and how these different paths were taken during the early years of postwar decolonization. Here Jennings's comparative methods show the way toward a new approach to decolonization.

## NOTES

[1] Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982 ed.).

[2] Julian Jackson, *France: The Dark Years, 1940-1944* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Jean-Pierre Azéma and François Bédarida, eds., *La France des années noires*, 2 vols. (Paris: Seuil, 1993).

[3] Martin Thomas, *The French Empire at War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Paul Marie de la Gorce, *L'empire écartelé, 1936-1946* (Paris: Denoël, 1988); Christine Levisse-Touzé, *L'Afrique du Nord dans la guerre, 1939-1945* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998).

[4] See Raymond Betts's path-breaking study, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

[5] Jennings cites, for example, Charles Robert Ageron, *La Décolonisation française* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1991), p. 65 and Claude de Boisanger, *On pouvait éviter la guerre d'Indochine: Souvenirs, 1941-1945* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1977), pp. 119-21.

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