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David Beriss, *Black Skins, French Voices: Caribbean Ethnicity and Activism in Urban France*. Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 2004. xx + 156 pp. \$22.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-8133-4254-6.

Paul Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004. xi + 284 pp. Notes. \$19.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-253-21712-1.

Review by Tyler Stovall, University of California, Berkeley.

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One anecdote from Paul Silverstein's *Algeria in France* underscores a key difference between anthropological and historical research. In his discussion of public transportation, race, and crime in the Paris suburbs, Silverstein relates his own experience of having his dissertation notes stolen by a group of suburban youth while riding the Metro. I doubt that any historians have ever been mugged by their own data, at least not literally.

As historians have displayed a renewed interest in European colonial history recently, so have anthropologists turned increasingly to the study of postcolonial Europe.<sup>[1]</sup> For anthropology, which has long specialized in the analysis of colonized societies (and at times been criticized for complicity in the colonial project), the study of migration from the former colonies to contemporary Europe offers several advantages. It forces anthropologists to come to grips with urban cultures in the developed world, while at the same time it emphasizes continuities with earlier traditions of Third World anthropological research. It provides an excellent example of both the complex relationship between affluent and disadvantaged societies, and enables researchers to consider the manifold interactions between traditional local societies and global culture. Finally, by emphasizing the legacy of the colonial past, it provides a model for the use of historical concepts in anthropological study. For these and other reasons, anthropologists have taken the lead in studying postcolonial Europe. Their work has much to offer historians, not only those concerned with questions of immigration and race in modern Europe, but also those interested in different disciplinary approaches to the study of the past.

David Beriss' *Black Skins, French Voices* and Paul Silverstein's *Algeria in France* represent this new school of anthropological studies of postcolonial France. Focusing on two different groups, with two strikingly different colonial heritages, Beriss and Silverstein consider not only the lives of nonwhites in France, but also how their experiences shape and reflect what it means to be French today. Ultimately, both suggest that immigrant activists are engaged in a seminal project of redefining the parameters of the French nation rather than simply assimilating into traditional models of national identity.

David Beriss concentrates upon immigrants from the French Caribbean to France, squarely addressing the paradoxical nature of their history and experience. As he makes clear, not only do Antillean migrants possess French citizenship, but they come from places that have been part of the French nation since the early seventeenth century, longer than Alsace, Savoy, or other parts of metropolitan France. Moreover, because most of the population of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana is descended from African slaves imported by the French, one cannot really speak of an opposition there between "native" and "French" cultures. As Beriss and his Antillean informants note, this shapes even the language used to describe Antilleans in France: are they immigrants, internal migrants, or something else? And yet, in spite of their long history as French subjects and then, after 1848, citizens, Antilleans are still not considered French by many, nor are their home territories seen as really a part of France (although they are now full-fledged departments). Beriss relates how, during a historians' seminar in

Paris, his suggestion that the emancipation of the slaves in 1848 played an important role in nineteenth-century French history was rejected as more appropriate for the Americas. Similarly, during a recent H-France discussion on historical languages of France, no one thought to mention Creole. In particular, young Antilleans living in the suburbs of Paris are often lumped together with Africans and North Africans as “second generation immigrants,” foreign and incapable of assimilating into French culture. This ambivalence has been a key factor in the Antillean experience in the *métropole*. In migrating to Paris and other cities, they saw themselves as asserting their French identity, only to find themselves viewed as blacks and outsiders.

This disillusionment constituted a key theme of the book that inspired Beriss’ title, Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, and Beriss explores its implications for the contemporary Caribbean community in France.[2] As he points out, historically the reaction of French Antilleans, both in the Caribbean and in the *métropole*, to their ambivalent position has been to embrace French identity and demand full inclusion as equals into the national community. For example, Ernest Chénère, the middle school principal who triggered the first of many controversies over the veil by expelling three Muslim girls from his school in 1989, was an Antillean who had come to France from Martinique in the 1950s. However, the bulk of Beriss’ text considers the ways in which Antilleans in France have begun to assert their own specific sense of identity, going beyond the desire to be “more French than the French” to new ways of conceptualizing, not just their own identity but “French-ness” as a whole. He considers the kinds of cultural associations Antilleans have created in the Paris region, making the important point that, in spite of its universalist rhetoric, the French state has recently played a major role in acknowledging and supporting ethnically-based communities. In exploring the implications of Antillean community organizing, Beriss turns to the Martinican literary theory of *créolité*, which emphasizes hybridity as the key to French Caribbean identity.[3] He concludes by arguing that, as a result of the changing views of Antilleans and other postcolonial communities, “France is being creolized” (p. 133).

Paul Silverstein arrives at a similar conclusion by considering the experience of a very different group of postcolonial immigrants, Algerians. If the Caribbean represented the height of the first wave of French colonial expansion, Algeria became one of the most important colonies of the second and, like Beriss, Silverstein places great emphasis on the ways in which colonial history has shaped the postcolonial present. Like *Black Skins, French Voices, Algeria in France* explores different aspects of Algerian life in the *métropole*, ranging from sports to literature to spatial organization. In this study, Silverstein endeavors to complement anthropology’s traditional concern with local cultures with an exploration of globalization and the ways in which immigration as a social and cultural phenomenon illustrates both macro and micro aspects of the human experience. In particular, he challenges the idea of the nation-state as the privileged site of immigration, embracing instead the concept he labels “transpolitics.” Drawing upon the transnational theories elaborated by scholars like Arjun Appadurai and Nina Glick Schiller, Silverstein contends that the ways in which immigrant identities and political struggles transcend the nation-state constitute a fundamental characteristic of the postcolonial era.[4] Similar to historians of French colonialism who have argued that *métropole* and colonies constitute one internally variegated unit, Silverstein argues that the Algerian immigrant experience “...unites Algeria and France into a single transpolitical space” (p. 2). From this perspective, he considers the relationship between increasing anxieties about immigration and national identity in France, and Islamic fundamentalism, dictatorship, and civil war in Algeria, during the 1990s.

Silverstein starts his book with chapters addressing the relationship between immigration and national identity in France, and with the ways in which the French colonization of Algeria fostered ideas of ethnic and racial identification for the peoples of both countries. He prefaces each chapter with a case study of an individual whose life history concretely illustrates some of its central themes. In one of the book’s more fascinating sections, for example, Silverstein contrasts the role of sports and of religion in Algerian life in France, with particular attention to the way each is used to embody images of Algerians

and of France as a whole. He shows how the French state has deliberately promoted an interest in sports as an alternative to Islamic fundamentalism, opposing the positive image of the male soccer star with the negative one of the veil-wearing schoolgirl. The author also gives an excellent analysis of Beur culture, noting how the idea of the “second generation immigrant” arose in the 1980s and created its own cultural and political space on both sides of the Mediterranean. Most French historians will probably be less familiar with the decline of Beur culture in the 1990s and its succession by the new third generation, popularly known as “Rabeus” (an inversion of “Beur” just as “Beur” was of “Arabe”) with its own agenda.

Silverstein’s discussion of the contrast between second and third generations is one of the most intriguing parts of the book. Finally, Silverstein places great emphasis on the experience of Kabyle immigrants and their descendants in France, noting how both civil war in Algeria and immigrant experiences in France have led to a new assertion of Berber culture, one that rejects Arab hegemony and at times draws upon the “Kabyle myth” of the colonial era. After the 1830 conquest of Algeria, French colonial theorists consistently argued that the “good” Kabyles were braver, more civilized, and easier to assimilate into French culture than the “bad” Arabs; contemporary Kabyle rejections of post-independence Arab national hegemony at times seems to resemble this earlier tradition. Like Beriss, Silverstein concludes by arguing that the transpolitics of Algerians in France will ultimately redefine what it means to be French.

In addition to their emphases on new modes of French identity, *Black Skins*, *French Voices* and *Algeria in France* have much in common. Both authors take a participant-observation approach to their subjects, crafting relationships both professional and personal. David Beriss joined an Antillean theater troupe, for example, and Paul Silverstein lived in the Paris suburbs and wrote parts of his book while listening to the sounds of Beur FM radio. Anthropologists and other social scientists have long been aware of both the advantages and pitfalls of participant observation research. In these two books, it enables the authors to present detailed, vibrant portraits of complex communities without abandoning a broader theoretical perspective. Both studies deal with communities that are united less by spatial proximity than by cultural and political networks. The relative absence of homogeneous ethnic and racial communities in Paris represents a key aspect of postcolonial French life, so that even the poorest suburban neighborhoods have not only a mixture of different immigrant groups, but large white French populations as well.

Both authors—and Silverstein in particular—emphasize the importance of history to anthropological inquiry in general, and their own research in particular. This takes two main forms. First, like a growing number of French historians, Silverstein and Beriss see France’s colonial heritage as key to its contemporary national identity. Both explore the ways in which French colonialism has shaped attitudes toward ideas of race and toward nonwhites in French society. Second, the two authors consider the question of history and memory in the elaboration of postcolonial identities. Silverstein discusses how Beur literature has sought to remember the experiences of earlier generations of Algerians in France, for example, addressing the massacre of 17 October 1961, as well as memories of the Algerian war. Beriss shows how Antilleans reacted to both the 1989 bicentennial of the French Revolution and the 1998 sesquicentennial of the final end of slavery in France, experiences which for many underscored their sense of difference within France. Perhaps the most important similarity between these two books is the emphasis both place upon immigrant activism, cultural and political. Ultimately, both *Black Skins*, *French Voices* and *Algeria in France* address the issue of community formation, showing how France’s postcolonial populations have asserted identities as distinct French communities in the context of a republican political culture traditionally hostile to the segmentation of the nation.

These two fine studies raise a number of important issues about the state of modern France and some would benefit from additional exploration. One limitation of the authors’ deep involvement with their

chosen communities is a relatively lack of attention to comparison with other communities, or a broader consideration of the nature of postcolonial life in France. This is all the more important because of the manifold contacts between different nonwhite groups in France, notably their common presence in the nation's suburban housing projects. While Silverstein in particular does place the history of French national identity in trans-national perspective, more comparisons with other postcolonial experiences would also be useful. The authors tend to shy away from something that has become traditional in studies of postcolonial Europe, direct comparisons with the United States, and it makes sense to avoid structuring one's analysis of postcolonial France in a narrow trans-Atlantic comparative framework.

Yet attention to the American case can nonetheless prove fruitful, all the more so in that nonwhites in France routinely make it themselves. For example, the fact that Antilleans can be citizens of France and yet suffer racial discrimination would hardly surprise most African Americans. This parallel appears most notably in an area of postcolonial French culture that both authors curiously neglect, hip hop music. France is now the second largest producer of rap music in the world. Its practitioners not only constitute a multicultural community of their own, but draw their musical inspiration from both African American models and their own cultural traditions.

Finally, while both authors have lots to say about racism in contemporary France, a more profound sense of the meaning of race remains elusive. David Beriss makes some interesting points about this issue, arguing that France lacks a tradition of racial discourse and that, therefore, culture has come to serve as a stalking horse for race. Yet the idea that racism can exist without a clear notion of race, while plausible, should inspire the researcher to elaborate what that notion of race is and how it has survived in spite of strong republican hostility to articulating it. It would be useful, for example, to see more of a discussion of the racialization of immigrants as a social category, for example. Questions of race have become central political issues in France today, and anthropological studies of postcolonial society and culture can make a major contribution to our understanding of them.

*Black Skins, French Voices* and *Algeria in France* are richly nuanced and informative analyses of France at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Their central conclusion, that there are many different ways of conceptualizing what it means to be French, not only offers important insights into the postcolonial condition, but is also useful for historians to consider in their own research into French identity.

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## NOTES

[1] See, for example, Ann L. Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood, eds., *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism* (London: Zed Books, 1997); Gisèle Bousquet, *Behind the Bamboo Hedge: The Impact of Homeland Politics in the Parisian Vietnamese Community* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); Jacqueline Nassy Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail: Geographies of Race in Black Liverpool* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[2] Fanon's book was originally published as *Peau noire, masques blancs* in Paris in 1952 by Seuil and translated into English and published by Grove Press in New York in 1967.

[3] Edouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil, 1981); Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la créolité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989); Michel Giraud, "De la négritude à la

créolité: Une evolution paradoxale à l'ère départementale", in Fred Constant and Justin Daniel, eds., *1946-1996: Cinquante ans de départementalization outre-mer*, pp. 373-403 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997).

[4] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton-Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Langhorne PA: Gordon and Breach, 1994). See also Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds., *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

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