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Dana S. Hale, *Races on Display: French Representations of Colonized Peoples, 1886-1940*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008. Black and white illustrations, notes, and index. 215 pp. \$24.95 US (pb). ISBN: 978-0-253-21899-5.

Review by J. P. Daughton, Stanford University.

Dana Hale's *Races on Display* makes a relevant contribution to the sizeable body of historical and literary scholarship on the representations of colonized people in the age of "new" imperialism. The book focuses on commercial trademark images, as well as state-sponsored colonial and international expositions, which, Hale argues, "revealed the heart of the colonizer" (p. 172) during the Third Republic. By offering a detailed history of how businessmen and colonial officials represented the inhabitants of French possessions in North and West Africa and Indochina, she aims to "demonstrate the prevalence and complexity of ideas about 'race' and empire" (p. 2) commonly held by officials and businessmen. The result is a book that charts the continuities, shifts, and contradictions inherent in the representations of colonial "others" at the height of France's imperialism.

Races on Display is divided into two parts. The first section provides a brief account of French colonial expansion and the significance of race as a category during the Third Republic, followed by three chapters on representations of sub-Saharan Africans, North Africans, and Indochinese up to the First World War. In each of these chapters, Hale examines trademark images and then shows how these colonized peoples were portrayed in the 1900 Exposition universelle in Paris. The second part of the book, which mirrors the structure of the first, continues the story after the First World War, covering trademarks and the colonial expositions of 1922 and 1931, as well as the 1937 World's Fair. A final chapter offers some concluding observations about the contradictory nature of colonial ideology and the impact of racial representations on both colonial and French identities.

According to Hale, until 1914, sub-Saharan Africans were regularly portrayed as "uncivilized," while North Africans were seen as "mysterious" and Indochinese "gentle" and acquiescent. The exposition of 1900 used spectacle and social science to highlight the many ways in which French civilization could improve the economic and social lives of its colonial populations. Live "specimens" of colonized people were exhibited at the fair, expected to parade, sing, dance, and make crafts for the curious public. Exhibits on individual sub-Saharan groups often highlighted the allegedly ruthless, savage habits of people without civilization; the Indochinese, by contrast, were portrayed as docile and hardworking. In both instances, Hale argues, the message was the same: further colonization was necessary for France to help its subjects improve their moral and material well-being. In return, local populations, with their potential as laborers and producers of raw materials, would help enrich French businesses and bring grandeur to the nation.

Such impressions of France's colonized populations changed somewhat, though certainly not dramatically, after war. The sacrifices of about eight hundred thousand colonial soldiers and laborers during the Great War meant that post-war expositions often celebrated the service of colonial subjects and increasingly defined them in terms of kinship—especially as *filles aînées* (North Africans) and *filles douées* (Indochinese). But, Hale argues, while these later expositions stressed Africans' and Southeast Asians'

continued potential, they did not abandon their older prejudices: sub-Saharan Africans continued to be portrayed as “primitive”; North Africans remained an exotic “enigma”; and Indochinese were “gifted” children, but ones who were “incapable of charting their own future” (p. 141). Indeed, Hale shows that in some instances images of French subjects became more derogatory, rather than less, after the war. For example, in Hale’s opinion, the use of hapless *tirailleurs sénégalais* to sell Banania and other products “mocked and belittled” black troops. (p. 95)

Hale explains the continuities of representations before and after the war by pointing to both the durability of the civilizing mission as a cornerstone of French ideology and the increasing difficulty of defending colonial rule. The stereotypes of backward subjects displayed at colonial and international expositions in France, Hale argues, provided a moral justification for further consolidating French colonial rule. Family or not, the rhetoric went, colonial subjects needed more civilizing. This leads Hale to the book’s central contention: the French “were unable to recognize the inconsistencies” (p. 161) inherent in an ideology that claimed fraternity between colonizer and colonized while pursuing a policy of domination based on a racial hierarchy of civilized Frenchmen and inferior Africans and Asians.

The main strength of *Races on Display* is its detailed descriptions of the expositions. Hale is particularly strong in her discussion of the exhibition of human subjects, mainly performers, artisans, and soldiers brought in from the colonies to add a dash of authenticity to the reconstructed villages erected at the fairs. There are also colorful accounts of just how far some organizers and concessionaires would go to capture the exoticism of the empire, such as the English woman who, dressed as an enslaved North African, paraded around the 1901 exhibition screaming in order to attract attention to her employer’s diorama, or the near riot that broke out when the Miss d’Outre-Mer beauty pageant, in which daughters of Frenchmen and indigenous women vied for the crown, did not take place according to schedule. The second half of *Races on Display* is particularly valuable for its focus on the 1922 colonial exposition in Marseilles and the 1937 World’s Fair, which have drawn less scholarly attention than the 1931 expo in the Bois de Vincennes.

Readers might leave *Races on Display* wishing Hale had pushed her conclusions a little further. That expositions portrayed subject populations in ways that justified further colonial rule is not particularly surprising. Broader questions, such as why the French state chose the exposition as the means of making its case, and why they remained so popular throughout the Third Republic, might have allowed Hale to reflect on larger issues about nature of the modern democratic state and the allure of the “exotic” in more detail. Hale might have accomplished this through engagement with the sizeable literature on expositions—a literature cited but rarely engaged in any productive way. There is also very little here on the popular reception of the expositions, positive or critical. But for the documentation it does present, *Races on Display* is a solid work of research. Anyone preparing a lecture on the subject or wishing to assign a vivid reading on how Europeans exhibited their colonies will find this a valuable book to consult.

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