
This is a book about both the promise and the shortcomings of French republican ideals. Richard Fogarty builds on extensive research in the archives of the French army, colonial ministry and foreign ministry—including everything from official doctrine to personal letters and photographs intercepted by wartime postal censors—to paint a vivid portrait of the questions raised by the use of colonial troops in the war. Fogarty organizes these issues intelligently around themes such as deployment, military hierarchy, language policy, Islam, sex and citizenship. A conclusion highlights the ‘paradoxical blend of tolerance and intolerance on display in French use of troupes indigènes’ (p. 287).

Previously used exclusively in colonial campaigns, troupes indigènes were deployed on European battlefields for the first time during the First World War, when some 500,000 colonial subjects served. Recruitment exemplified the two-faced nature of
colonial rule: On the one hand, republican ideology held that colonial subjects, like citizens, owed France a ‘blood tax’. On the other hand, while some populations were subject to systematic conscription, recruitment often abandoned standard procedures in favour of coercion, collective punishment and even bounty payments. Republican ideology was also compromised by the ways that ideas about race affected deployment. Soldiers were organized as *troupes indigènes*, rather than integrated into the French army, and assumptions about which populations were ‘warrior races’ also greatly affected deployment. West Africans and Moroccans were regarded as particularly fierce, and thus more likely to be used as shock troops, while Indochinese and Malagasy (whom Fogarty refers to as Madagascans) were perceived to have fewer ‘warlike’ qualities. One of the many consequences of such stereotypes was that over 80% of the Moroccans deployed in August 1914 were dead by September of that same year (p. 79). Despite a perceived need for segregation, military leaders also felt that ‘nonwhites . . . were incapable of withstanding the rigors of European warfare on their own’ (p. 72) and so required their accompaniment by whites.

Fogarty’s chapter on military hierarchy, and promotion to officer rank in particular, is one of the most illuminating of the book. Hardly surprisingly, racial ideas were allowed ‘to undermine the ideal of a purely merit-based military hierarchy’ (p. 119). More interestingly, Fogarty shows the military problems this posed. Officers’ difficulty communicating with their troops might have favoured colonial soldiers’ promotion to officer status were it not for the idea that the moral authority of whites was necessary to army discipline and effectiveness. Instead, quotas were placed on colonial officers, and natives had to defer to even equally ranked white officers. The chapter on the army’s linguistic policy is equally fascinating, as Fogarty explores the army’s institution of a sort of pidgin French as a response to the supposed ‘simplicity’ of African languages. Language policy thus instructed soldiers to drop articles before nouns and apply many other ‘simplifications’ that actually often proved more confusing. Both chapters do an excellent job of demonstrating the unexpected ways in which military leaders’ ‘solutions’ to assumptions about colonial troops’ capacity to either lead or communicate actually complicated the very issues the military aimed to address. The subsequent chapters on Islam, sexual relations of colonial soldiers with white French women and debates over whether citizenship should be granted to veterans, all examine in one way or another the unanticipated consequences of France’s use of colonial soldiers. Altogether, *Race and War in France* offers a well-researched and nuanced, if occasionally repetitive, account of what we might call republican racism.

It is perhaps too much to ask so richly detailed a book to do even more, but I sometimes found myself wanting greater contextualization of Fogarty’s findings. While Fogarty examines certain aspects of the First World War in detail—the German effort to incite desertions among Muslims is analysed subtly and at length, for instance—the discussion of the course of the war deserves a fuller integration into his analysis. Fogarty’s figures show a dramatic increase in colonial recruitment between 1915 and 1916, and again between 1917 and 1918, but too little is said about how these statistics relate to the war’s prosecution. There is no mention, for instance, of the 1917 mutiny among French troops, which may have provoked a desire within the high command for troops perceived as either more ruthless or more pliable—or even perhaps ‘dispensable’, an issue only touched upon by Fogarty. In general, there is less discussion of change over time than one might expect from a book about a war that dramatically altered the map of Europe and its colonies. Fogarty’s analysis of republicanism, similarly, would benefit from deeper contextualization. It is debatable whether in Third Republic France, a regime under
which women had no vote and during which colonialism reached its apogee, ‘republican ideals require a commitment to equality’ (p. 287). Indeed, Fogarty is at his best when he does not try to reconcile what the army leadership itself did not regard as contradictory. What is perhaps most surprising—and this comes out best in his discussion of the controversial deployment of colonial troops to occupy the German Rhineland after the war—is that there was any effort to be inclusive at all. Here, his occasional comparisons to other colonial powers (and Britain in particular) might have been expanded to highlight what Fogarty shows to be a truly exceptional story of race and war in republican France.

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