

**Emily Marker, Black France, White Europe.  
Youth, Race, and Belonging in the Postwar Era,  
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Historians seek to interpret change over time; therefore, their arguments often take on a narrative form. The story that Emily Marker, an assistant professor of History at Rutgers University, tells in her first book »Black France, White Europe«, deftly weaves together the histories of French post-war reconstruction, West and Central African decolonization, and European integration in the 1940s and 50s. Marker's tale reveals the conflicting sequels of a post-catastrophic moment. The war experience inspired a desire for both change and restoration that was channeled into zealous but inadequate reforms which led to frustrated hopes, but also new departures. Politicians, educators, and activists wished to mobilize French, African, and European youth to further both European integration and a deeper integration of France with its sub-Saharan African colonies. They suffered failure when their »entangled initiatives to turn African subjects into French citizens and national citizenries in Europe into ›Europeans‹ [...] did not produce the desired effects« (p. 218). Instead, despite attempts to the exact contrary, their actions resulted in an increasing distance between Europe and Africa. This distance, Marker implies, was eventually consummated through the independence of most of France's former colonies in 1960. While Marker contributes most directly to scholarship on the colonial dimensions of post-1945 European reconstruction and on the implosion of France's imperial project in Africa, her analysis also gives historical depth to recent discussions about France's supposed »colorblindness«, or the refusal of Africans to accept a »neocolonial« role for the French on their continent.

Marker bases her account on primary sources from French state archives, the Historical Archives of the European Union (Florence), the European Commission Archives (Brussels), and the UNESCO archives, as well as on the memoirs of activists and officials and periodicals published by Africans on the continent or in exile. Her reading of these sources shapes an »entangled history« (p. 8), in which both renovators of empire and builders of Europe pursued »generational projects« (p. 21): African and European students, youth leaders, educators, scholars, and politicians shared a preoccupation with youth and education, which they saw as drivers and transmission belts for societal change. Accordingly, using talk about »youth« as an analytical lens, Marker scrutinizes »curricular and pedagogical reforms, textbook revisions, institutions of higher education, and youth and student exchange programs« (p. 217). Chronologically, she approaches the attempts to refurbish France's empire in the French Union and to connect Western Europe



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through new institutions as an »extended postwar moment« (p. 23) spanning from ca. 1940–1960.

Although there is chronological overlap between them, the book's chapters move forward in time. Chapter 1 looks at the war time debates among Free French planners from London to Brazzaville. Their projects for post-war youth and education policies in France, Western Europe, and Francophone Africa entangled those spaces in new ways. The expansion of education in Africa was meant to democratize but also to legitimize colonial rule, including in the eyes of external observers, but it was riddled with tensions and faced opposition from local officials. Concurrently, a conceptual shift dissociated French *laïcité* from its traditional anti-clerical thrust, opening the door to an idea of Frenchness as simultaneously based on Republican and Christian values. This recalibration of *laïcité* emerged in tandem with the idea of Western Europe as culturally Christian, an idea soon solidified through post-war initiatives like the College of Europe in Bruges, as Chapter 2 shows.

Chapters 3 and 4, in my view the strongest in the book, trace how new ways of talking about race shaped policies and institutions. After two world wars and the Holocaust emerged what Marker calls »a new, specifically postwar kind of racial common sense« (p. 103). Older notions of European races were erased and, in their place, the idea of a united European civilization that was nonetheless linguistically and culturally diverse, was promoted. With race thus recast »as existing somewhere else beyond Europe's borders«, a »new boundary between Europeans and non-Europeans« was produced: »race itself« (p. 117). Perversely, this reinvention of Europe as both raceless and implicitly white allowed French commentators to discredit the critiques by Africans who saw their demands for racial equality within the framework of the French Union frustrated. Their calls for better schooling and an end to anti-African bias in curricula and institutions were dismissed as anti-white racism, while »postwar racial common sense encouraged French officials to attribute the abysmal state of colonial education to natural incompatibilities between Africans and ›European‹ education rather than to French administrative practice, material investments, and policy choices« (p. 138). Similarly, even as the minimally expanding education in Africa was meant to help build an integrated Franco-African community as part of a reformist »Eurafricanism«, and as the European Youth Campaign strove to mobilize African students in France, racist restrictions were placed on educational mobility. Students who did make it to the French metropole suffered surveillance and were met with negative stereotyping by the local population. Marker masterfully unveils the perfidy of everyday racism that dared not speak its name but transformed what were supposed to be »African student-citizens« into racialized »foreign students in Europe« (p. 180).

The final Chapter 5 portrays the participation of Francophone Africans in youth exchanges and Third-Worldist mobilizations that



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went beyond the regional dynamics of the »France-Europe-Africa nexus« (p. 182). It centers the global Cold War and the broader post-war push for decolonization, both of which had been a more implicit context of the previous chapters.

Marker's narrative of failure defies two conventional stories: one that sees the end of empire as an inevitable development after 1945, and another that construes European integration as a history disconnected from Europe's colonial project. The first story has been challenged by others, among them Frederick Cooper and Gary Wilder, and so successfully that some, in fact, consider the revisionist view the new mainstream. Yet, even as Marker builds on these works, she does indeed tell a different tale, »one that shifts the focus away from the formal politics and political forms of postwar empire to the social and cultural policies that accompanied them« (p. 12). As for the second story, again Marker is not the first to challenge the conventional wisdom that »first there was empire, then there was Europe« (p. 8). Nonetheless, her focus on the entangled visions and policies in the field of education throughout France, its African empire, and Western Europe is both innovative and compelling.

Throughout the book, Marker's granular reading of the sources reveals discourses and policies that are complex, often contradictory. Her close engagement with them is both a huge strength and a minor weakness of the book – at times, it felt as if the broad lines of the ideas historical actors advanced were obscured by the detail and variety of the sources discussed, and that making these visible required a considerable amount of interpretive comment by Marker. Some of the book's arguments inspired but did not fully convince me: Is the portrayal of Europe as white and raceless after 1945 as new and pervasive as Marker suggests? How does it relate to a longer history of European ideas of whiteness? And how do we fit in the fact that from the 1950s onwards, guest workers from Southern Europe were indeed not accepted as white in various Western European countries, but instead treated as racial Others? Finally, why is the book called »Black France, White Europe«, when the post-war quest of reformers, which they failed to turn into a reality, was to build a multiracial and religiously inclusive society that would comprise Black Frenchmen from Africa, but was certainly not intended to become a »Black France«? Such questions only testify to the richness of Marker's account which is warmly recommended to anyone interested in African and European post-war history – and especially to those who seek to connect both, as Marker so skillfully does.



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