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Eric T. Jennings. *Free French Africa in World War II: The African Resistance.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 315 pp. $27.99 (paper), ISBN 978-1-107-69697-6.

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Recent decades have seen an increasing number of scholars who study the effects of World War II on the African continent.[1] Eric T. Jennings has already contributed to this literature by examining Vichyâs policies in French imperial African settings.[2] With his newest publication, Jennings fills a major gap in the historiographies of French, French colonial, and African history of the Second World War. In *Free French Africa in World War II: The African Resistance,* Jennings weaves an international tale of Free French Africaâs genesis and its ability to maintain its legitimacy from the Fall of France in 1940 to 1943âwhen Charles de Gaulle relocated his Free French capital from Brazzaville to Algiers. *Free French Africa* has two fundamental goals: to assess the degree to which Africans in French Equatorial Africa (AEF) contributed to the Gaullist cause and to measure the ways in which World War II and Free France mattered to Africans. In doing so, Jennings anchors his historical narrative to an important and groundbreaking ideaâFree France was African (p. 2).

Africanist scholars have long deployed the term âAfricanâ in order to disambiguate indigenous residents of the African continent from foreigners. As such, âAfricanâ was once central to writing the social history of the African continent and a means to acknowledge the experiences of African civil societies. This had the adverse potential of reducing diverse populations to a single category in order to cast them as the antithesis to historical actors ushering in the international exploitation and colonization of the continent. âAfricanâ also carried cultural connotations that conceptually reduced diverse African populations to one schematic racial category. Jenningsâs work innovatively deploys the label âAfricanâ as a means to reference a geographically circumscribed space, as well as all of the people living and working within French Equatorial Africa. Dispensing with the conceptually problematic polemics of African and European, *Free French Africa* uses âAfricanâ as an unracialized term that references a government administration and civil society committed to resistance. In Jenningsâs portrayal, the people making up French Equatorial Africa, irrespective of origin, title, or civil status, rejected Vichyâs mandate to take over occupied Franceâs imperial operations. Jennings illustrates how colonial administrators from French Guiana, metropolitan-born imperial administrators, and those born within Cameroon and French Equatorial Africa acted together to set the liberation of France from Nazi Germany into motion.

Free French Africa joins a growing field of publications that analyze fractures within imperial policies and

discourses as they manifest on the African continent and other regions of French empire.[3] By studying dissident politics in French Equatorial Africa, Jennings brings into focus the discordant nature of imperial systems. He deftly illustrates how minority discourses and actors in Equatorial Africa rallied against German dominance of French empire. Remarkably, Equatorial Africans blazed this trail by arguing for politics as usual, while contending that metropolitan France was no longer capable of fulfilling its role as a motherland. By studying the rejection of Vichyâs legitimacy, *Free French Africa* offers historians a unique opportunity to understand how dissidents within a colonial system tap the same discourses of colonial rule in order to reorient them towards a politics of liberation, a liberation circumscribed by the limits of a colonial imagination that continued to narrowly cast indigenous Africans in specific roles in the articulation of Free French Africaâs state power. Jenningâs portrayal of the dissident politics occurring in Equatorial Africa during World War II has great significance for understanding the nature of Free France and French colonialism in Africa. This work raises important questions about the legitimacy of âFrenchâ resistance, as well as the legitimacy of twentieth-century French colonialism. Further, *Free French Africa* provides a model for relocating political action from the margins of empire and argues for its primacy in the historiography of the French Resistance.

Free French Africa focuses on the three years bookended by the capitulation of France in 1940 and the relocation of Free Franceâs capital from Brazzaville to Algiers in 1943. The first section of the book focuses on the initial moments of maneuver, in which administrative officials in AEF, in thoroughly unmethodical ways, opt out of Vichy-ruled French empire. The chapters contained in âFree Franceâs African Gambitâ address the detachment of AEF from the metropole and its incorporation into the economic channels and diplomatic circles of the Anglo-American world. Jennings deftly illustrates how a handful of artfully willful administrators in central Africa inaugurated intercolonial cooperation between AEF and neighboring British colonies. This diplomatic episode reminds historians of colonial history that geostrategic exigencies led colonial African officials to collaborate with entities and actors outside of imperial/national channels. Jennings offers a useful counterpoint to historical narratives that read history through one imperial lens. Jennings also problematizes narratives of French resistance that focus on the rallying of metropolitan actors and entities towards England and de Gaulle, by focusing on French Equatorial Africa.

The birth of Free French Africa as a rogue entity within the Vichy French empire occurred through series of actions that ultimately called for its administrative self-determination. *Free French Africa* could be read as a diplomatic story of rebellion, which called the colonial social contract into question at a moment of international administrative crisis. Jennings demonstrates that the crises affiliated with World War II threw the fragility of French imperialism into relief, as well as exposed the diffuseness in the articulation of its power. Free French Africa espoused a moralizing discourse, which legitimated behavior that could be construed at anti-national and pro-decolonization. While Jennings may not have explicitly dealt with the historiography of the rise of African nationalism, his project similarly problematizes the degree to which World War II was a generative event for processes leading to decolonization in the 1960s. Fifteen years before African politicians strove to convince a global public of their ability to rule independently of metropolitan rule, AEF officials engaged in similar campaigns. In order to build an imagined, authentic Free French Africa, local officials required the allegiance of African political elites and evoluÃ©s, whose fidelity was coercively âforced, encouraged, or stagedâ (p. 70). Comparable processes were key in the validation of African political leaders and parties in the late 1950s and in the aftermath of African independence.

For all of its overtures of resistance and liberation, Free French Africa did not bring increased social liberties to indigenous Africans. Jenningsâs work provides insight into the functioning of new states in twentieth-century Africa. Dysfunctional from its genesis, local Free French African officials took over state functions like enfranchisement, printing currency, and militarization. These rebellious French officials maintained colonial traditions of inequality and racialized exploitation with little departure from the colonial policy playbook. Under the banner of righteous war, Free France pressed increasing numbers of native men and women into industries of war and mobilized thousands of colonial soldiers. Jenningsâs descriptions of recruitment practices reveals that AEF experiences of militarization during World War II were similar to what French West Africans endured during World War I. This should push historians to rethink the broadly accepted chronology of colonialism in Africa. World War I often demarcates a turning point in the consolidation of colonial rule across the African continent. Jenningsâs text makes clear that in Equatorial Africa, the systemic articulation of colonial rule occurred in tandem with militarization during the Second World War. If

Free Franceâs dependence on Equatorial Africa for military success was as significant as Jenningsâs text suggests, then its very existence balanced upon the men who served in its army. The âFree France in Armsâ chapter contributes to a historiography that reappraises Franceâs debt to its colonial African veterans.[4]

The third section of *Free French Africa* examines the ways in which most indigenous Africans experienced the imposition of French âliberationâ through increased abuses and exploitation. A series of photographs in this section of the book demonstrates how native Africans experienced the increased production of wild rubber, wartime rationing, and the shortage of basic goods. Here, Jennings draws upon the Africanist historiography of colonial labor exploitation in French Congo, as well as in neighboring Belgian Congo. In the name of Gaullist rule, âcolonial authorities stepped up production, and developed transport routes in a veritable binge of coercionâ (p. 218). In documenting this coercion, Jennings acknowledges FÃ©lix EbouÃ©âs (a black French Guianese colonial administrator in AEF) complicity in perpetuating inequality and increasing the governmentâs abuses of African colonial subjects. By offering a counternarrative to the literature celebrating EbouÃ©âs successful career and his commitment to Free France, Jennings breaks new ground in questioning the legacy of FÃ©lix EbouÃ© by connecting him to the escalation of exploitation in AEF during World War II. In the epilogue, Jennings examines how legacies of Free French Africa manifest in postcolonial Equatorial Africa. By ignoring the negative aspects of Free French Africa, independent African leaders have manipulated the esteemed values of French liberation and resistance. Controversial political leaders, such as Jean BÃ©del Bokassa, have reinforced their political legitimacy by linking themselves to the ideals of Free French Africa.

Eric Jennings has made a valiant effort in marshaling written colonial primary sources and a modest historiography on French Equatorial Africa in order to portray the complex creation and legitimation of a rogue French African colony during the Second World War. Jennings readily acknowledges the limitations of his sources (p. 6), yet this manuscript could have provided more background information on how French colonialism operated locally before the Fall of France in order to more definitively illustrate the degree to which Free French Africa was a departure from and/or continuation of historical processes in the region. This manuscript could have also benefited from more attention to the gendered nuances of militarization, mobilization, and resistance in Equatorial Africa. African women and households are central to histories of war and colonialism.[5] Despite these critiques, *Free French Africa* is a welcome addition to, and rallying call for, broadening and improving the historiography of twentieth-century Equatorial Africa and the historical literature on World War II. Jennings has once again depicted how profoundly entangled the histories of France and Africa were in producing the modern world. He has also convincingly argued that Free France began in Africa.

Notes

[1]. Judith A. Blyfield, Carolyn A. Brown, Timothy Parsons, Ahmad Alawad Sikainga, eds., *Africa and World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); David Killingray, *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War* (Rochester, NY: James Currey, 2010); Ruth Ginio, *French Colonialism Unmasked: The Vichy Years in French West Africa* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Catherine Akpo-VachÃ©, *LâAOF et la Seconde Guerre Mondiale: La Vie Politique, Septembre 1939-Octobre 1945* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1996); and David Killingray and Richard Rathbone, eds., *Africa and the Second World War* (Basintoke: Macmillan, 1986).

[2]. Jacques Cantier and Eric Jennings, eds., *LâEmpire Colonial sous Vichy* (Paris: O. Jacob, 2004); and Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: PÃ©tainâs National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[3]. Helen Tilley, *Africa as Living Laboratory: Empire, Development and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[4]. Armelle Mabon, *Prisonniers de Guerres âIndigÃ¨nesâ: Visages OubliÃ©s de la France OccupÃ©e* (Paris: La DÃ©couverte, 2010); Raffael Scheck, *Hitlerâs African Victims: The German Army Massacre of Black French Soldiers in 1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Gregory Mann, âImmigrants and Arguments in France and West Africa,â *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45 (2003): 362-385.

[5]. Michelle Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014); and Sarah Zimmerman, âMesdames Tirailleurs and Indirect Clients: West African Women and the French Colonial Army, 1908-1918,â *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 44 (2011): 299-322.