THEORIES AND METHODOLOGIES

“Is God Still French?”: Racecraft, States of Exception, and the Creation of *l’Exception Française*

CHRISTY PICHICHERO

“Et si Joséphine Baker entrait au Panthéon? / What If Josephine Baker Entered the Pantheon?” In 2013, this title of the philosopher Régis Debray’s opinion piece in the newspaper *Le monde* was meant to be provocative, but it ended up being prescient. To the surprise of onlookers inside and outside France, on 23 August 2021 President Emmanuel Macron announced that indeed, Josephine Baker—an African American entertainer who subverted colonial tropes as she embodied them, a global anti-racist activist, and a heroine of the French Resistance during World War II—would be memorialized as a national hero in the Panthéon, one of the country’s most hallowed patriotic mausoleums.

Reactions to Josephine Baker’s *panthéonisation* (entry into the Panthéon) in print and conversation proffer a privileged insight into the stakes and structures of *l’exception française*, French exceptionalism. Debates on “the Baker issue” converge on the ideological bedrock of French exceptionalism: republican universalism and the spread of Enlightenment “progress” and the Revolutionary values of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.[1] In a televised speech to the nation on 11 March 2007, the French president, Jacques Chirac, articulated the customary formulation that “France is a country unlike any other. It has special responsibilities inherited from its history and the universal values that it has helped to forge” (qtd. in Drake 187). While the jingoism, ideological suppositions, and whiff of white man’s burden of this statement may seem outmoded and far-fetched, their historical and present power must not be underestimated.[2]

How does Baker’s immortalization in the Panthéon square with this national dogma and its constituent forms of domination? In positive political appraisals, some hope that it represents another important

CHRISTY PICHICHERO (she/her) is associate professor of French and history at George Mason University, where she also serves as the director of faculty diversity in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. She is the author of *The Military Enlightenment: War and Culture in the French Empire from Louis XIV to Napoleon* (Cornell UP, 2017) and a finalist for the Oscar Kenshur Book Prize, and her recent articles on critical race theory, feminism, and African diasporic identities have appeared in *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, and *H-France Salon*. She is the president of the Western Society for French History.

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Modern Language Association of America

PMLA 137.1 (2022), doi:10.1632/S0030812922000025

step in the process of reckoning for a country whose vociferous devotion to secular, color-blind universalism has relentlessly shouted down competing accounts of structural and cultural discrimination at the intersections of gender, race, class, religious affiliation, immigration status, sexuality, and ability or disability. Similarly, from a cultural standpoint, some see this moment as the syncretic apotheosis of universalism as it fuses with global postmodernism in this age of anti-racism and Black Lives Matter.[3]

Others condemn Baker's entry into the Panthéon as the nadir of French exceptionalism, though their demurrals stem from opposing stances on the political spectrum. On the left, some view it as a most egregious manifestation of an instrumentalist "move to innocence," which Janet Mawhinney defines as "strategies to remove involvement in and culpability for systems of domination" (17). In hopes of pacifying a citizenry that accuses its government of *racisme d'État* (state-perpetrated racism), the state now elevates Baker in a superficial palliative gesture by which it washes its hands of its slavery, colonialism, and neocolonial domination. More cynically still, other leftists see this as a racial capitalistic exploitation deployed by Macron for purely self-serving purposes as he works to boost his approval ratings and signal supposed French color-blindness in a reelection year. Those leaning toward or seated firmly on the right are no less incensed as they cling tightly to a traditional view of French political, socioeconomic, and cultural exceptionalism that they aver has been slipping away. Such individuals are alarmed to see what Tony Chafer and Emmanuel Godin describe in their introduction to *The End of the French Exception? Decline and Revival of the "French Model"* as the "French state increasingly forced to negotiate a passage between pressures 'from above' (globalisation, Europeanisation) and 'from below' (civil society, public opinion)" (10). Along these lines, Debray predicted the inevitable reactionary backlash to Joséphine Baker's becoming an official national hero: "From the Folies Bergère cabaret to the supreme sanctuary? From the banana skirt to the laurel wreath? *Profanation!*" Such complainants would agree with the businessman and former state social affairs adviser Raymond Soubie's 1991 exhortation against the "banalization" of France and end of (a certain) "French model": "have we fallen into line, after our loss of power, of our illusions, and a part of our soul? Are we condemned to be a middle-size nation like any other? Is God still French?" (qtd. in Collard 23).

The question is not whether God is still French but whether the French can still play God. In order to rethink French exceptionalism, I argue that we must retheorize it ontologically, genealogically, and structurally. This means interrogating *l'exception française* as a discursive phenomenon in the contemporary context, but also historicizing it as a mental construct and praxis. In this, I contend that exceptionalism is fundamentally coextensive with empire, an existential imbrication that Edward Said long ago affirmed in *Orientalism* and to which Chirac's statement faintly alludes. If, as Achille Mbembe has claimed, postcolonial studies "examine the work accomplished by the categories of race, gender, and sexuality in colonial imaginaries and seek to evaluate their role in the very process of producing colonial subjects" (86), I submit that we must consider these same categories and others to shed light on the often stealthily obfuscated negative space of colonial subjection—the production of Frenchness and its professed exceptionalities.

L'Exception Française: A Discursive House of Cards?

Discussions of France's uniqueness, and ostensible superiority, have centered on socioeconomic, political, and cultural spheres. Socioeconomically, France's prioritization of social welfare and solidarity quadrate with the nation's putative position against globalization and "the ravages of liberalisation *à l'anglo-saxonne*" (Chafer and Godin, Introduction 4; see also Milner). Politically, "the notion of the French exception has its roots in a distinctive republican model, attaching central importance to the prestige of the State, the primacy of politics and the active propagation, at home and worldwide, of certain values that are perceived, rightly or wrongly, to be enlightened and progressive" (9). Within France, this has translated to the persistence of the Napoleonic code and assimilationist policy that "only recognises individuals and not communities within the nation-state. Thus the existence of minority groups, whether religious, ethnic, regional, or linguistic, is not acknowledged" (9). Culturally, "apart from the pervasive and—to the French at least, attractive—idea that French culture is somehow inherently 'superior,'" writes Hugh Dauncey, France's notions of cultural exceptionalism are founded on a "privileged relationship with a voluntarist and culturally interventionist State, which promotes and encourages culture" with both internal subsidies and external protections (72). This state-driven cultural enterprise dates back to the sixteenth century, with the cultivation and promulgation of the French language standing at the epicenter of the construct of prestige from the reign of King François I (1515–47), to Cardinal Richelieu's founding of the Académie Française, in 1635, to Macron's ambitious neocolonialist linguistic "Francophonie" program aiming to make French surpass English as a world language by 2050.[4]

Familiar to many, these tenets of French exceptionalism—which like all such contentions are born of hierarchical thinking, competition and domination, uneven application, and selective memory—beg to be assessed and contested. And they have been.[5] A deep and equally familiar tradition of francophone artistic production and transversal anthropological, feminist, and postcolonial critique has harmonized with voices of the Frankfurt school and others to unpack and challenge the edifice of French exceptionalism.[6] Together, these critiques posited what I would characterize as a rhizomatic epistemology à la Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Édouard Glissant, eschewing Eurocentric atavism and the French exceptionalist monolith by insisting on principles of multiperspectivalism, heterogeneity, and interconnectivity.[7] Unsurprisingly, the French state and proponents of *l'exception française* perceive these perspectives as a threat and try to suppress them in what Mbembe calls an "imperial winter": "a series of disconnections, anathemas, and grand excommunications that culminated in the relative provincialization of French thought and its regression on a planetary scale" (87). In this French version of "postcolonial melancholia," the state joins forces with certain public intellectuals and members of the French academy to mount counterattacks designed to undermine the legitimacy of artistic productions and critical research (especially critical race theory and before that postcolonial studies).[8] These reactionaries not only strategically foster "a stark provincialism of the knowledge produced and disseminated in the Hexagon," as Mbembe has noted, but foment a discourse of political emergency and cultural crisis, painting a chimera of the French nation infiltrated by individuals imputed to be terrorists, wayward Americanophiles, "Islamo-gauchistes" (Islamo-leftists), or some other phantasmagorical moniker (87). I shall return to this question of the state of emergency shortly.

Despite political and institutional headwinds, in the past ten years, research by sociologists, cultural anthropologists, and historians has joined the work of philosophers, creative writers, artists, and filmmakers to expand the narrative countering French exceptionalism. The first group includes Abdellali Hajjat and Marwane Mohammed's book *Islamophobie: Comment les élites françaises fabriquent le "problème musulman"* (*Islamophobia: How the French Elites Fabricate the "Muslim Problem"*), which was the first major analysis of Islamophobia in France, from its historical precedents in French colonialism and anti-Semitism to its current-day discourses, cultures, and related policies of state-sponsored racism against French Muslims.[9] Hajjat and Mohammed uncovered state maneuvers to engender a "national consensus" construing the idea of Islam and the presence of Muslims in France as a "problem." Pap Ndiaye's *La condition noire: Essai sur une minorité française* (*The Black Condition: Essay on a French Minority*) was a similar watershed work concerning the racialization and minoritization of African-descended peoples in France and is viewed by many as a founding work of modern Black French studies. In her 2019 study *Identités françaises: Banlieues, féminités et universalisme* (*French Identities: Suburbs, Femininities, and Universalism*), Mame-Fatou Niang advanced this intellectual project by studying the minoritization and exclusion from Frenchness of communities of color, especially African-descended women, in representations of the grandes banlieues—neighborhoods of chiefly (and poorly) state-subsidized housing where many such communities reside.[10] Crossing class boundaries, Jean Beaman's 2017 ethnographic study *Citizen Outsider: Children of North African Immigrants in France* was the first to examine educated, middle-class second-generation French citizens of North African descent fixing on their "experience as an ethnic minority, including the processes embedded within that experience, in a national context that does not recognize minorities based on ethnic origin or have a language or framework for making sense of them."[11] In adopting this methodology, Beaman took aim at *l'exception française*. Her research "lay to rest the notion of a French exceptionalism regarding distinctions based on race and ethnicity," demonstrating "how a population that is legally and technically French is not considered culturally French, and is therefore excluded from popular imaginations of who a French person is" (4).

Since the new millennium, critiques have increasingly attended to the varied dimensions of what Elsa Dorlin aptly labeled the "matrix of race" as a foundational force in the French empire and nation.[12] In the past decade especially, scholars have advanced granular analyses of French slavery; colonial and neocolonial abuses (Joseph-Gabriel; Johnson; Daughton); Haiti and the Haitian Revolution (Daut; Popkin; Dubois; Sepinwall, *Haitian History*); whiteness (Stovall, *White Freedom*); gender, anti-Blackness, and the legacies of chattel slavery (Keaton et al.; Mitchell; Vergès; Fleming; Germain and Larcher); urban minoritized populations in cities like Marseille (Nasiali); and the "ambiguous citizenship" of French citizens of continental France, the Antilles, former colonies, and overseas France (Thomas, *Africa and France*, *Noirs d'encre*; Niang; Hajjat; Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*, *Undesirable*; Cain; Saada; Marker, "Obscuring Race" and *Black France*; Semley; Celestine; Larcher; Soumahoro; Davis). Among artistic productions, Caroline Guiela Nguyen's 2017 play *Saigon*, Bintou Dembélé's celebrated 2019 critical choreography of Jean-Philippe Rameau's eighteenth-century colonialist opera *Les Indes galantes*, and Afro-feminist documentaries by Amandine Gay, Isabelle Boni-Claverie, and Mame-Fatou Niang and Kaytie Nielsen show "France's need" not only "to tell its story from beyond its own frontiers" ("*Saigon*") but also to tell homegrown stories that French exceptionalism leaves out.

In aggregate, these works and many others remove, through reductio ad absurdum, the shiny veneer of French exceptionalism, showing it to be, as Helen Drake appositely put it, "a strategic edifice whose foundations have stiffened into a discursive house of cards, and whose exceptionalism is very much in the eye of the beholder" (201). It would be erroneous, however, to reduce French exceptionalism to the discursive realm alone. The phenomenon is far more ontologically complex.[13] A more substantive theorization engages the interconnected dimensions in which it unfolds as a psychological construct, social pathology, and political praxis whose primary modality can be found in the Latin root of the word itself: *exceptio*, from *excipere*, "to take out."

Racecraft, *Exceptio*, and States of Exception

In the genealogy of French exceptionalism, the first thing metaphorically excised from a broader body for the purpose of differentiation was, of course, France or Frenchness itself. Specialists of the early modern era have elucidated the ways in which French elites worked to construct a grand, independent, even essentialist identity for France—geographically, politically, intellectually, culturally, and linguistically.[14] This undertaking did not unfold in a European bubble. Scholars have unearthed the ways that French identity and notions of superiority were cobbled together in an orientalist manner in direct relation to conceptualizations and policy making regarding chattel slavery, colonization, global trade, and war.[15] The language, values, and policies of French refinement and order associated with neoclassicism and absolutism were created in the seventeenth century and then expanded during the eighteenth century in order to ensure French domination over any number of peoples fantastically fashioned as Others—Indigenous peoples in North America and the Caribbean, "Turks," Jews, Muslims, enslaved Africans, South Asians, and more.

This othering is a form of what Barbara Fields and Karen Fields term "racecraft": an operation by which derogatory ideations of essentialized difference are concocted then deployed as a smoke screen to simultaneously disguise and justify domination and oppression. As such, it is racism—understood as a set of discriminatory social, civic, and legal practices—that produces the social construct and supporting discourses of race. In *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, Fields and Fields write that this "transforms *racism*, something an aggressor *does*, into *race*, something the target *is*, in a sleight of hand that is easy to miss" (17).[16]

The cognitive process of racecraft must be underscored as a part of how French exceptionalism operates. The fervent insistence on the "problematic" differences of racialized Others acts on two self-reflexive levels. First, it powerfully exculpates the perpetrator(s) since it displaces the logical emphasis away from their own actions and toward the alleged faults of the victim(s), providing justification for racialized abuses. At the same time, this hierarchical framework elevates the self-image of the perpetrator(s) in any number of ways—morally, physically (including sexually), and so on. This psychological move attending racist discrimination operates at individual and collective levels, forming a social pathology. Could there be more salient examples than the prevalent discourse by which white colonists and slaveholders blamed their serial raping of mixed-race women on what Médéric-Louis-Elie Moreau de Saint-Méry referred to as these women's seductive nature and erotic "cult" (81–82)? Or slavers describing the servile nature of the African enslaved? Need we state that these mixed-race women were often the *result* of the rape of Black women by white men or that white slavers could not speak to the (implausible) servile temperament of the enslaved until after enslaving them? The temporal disorder hiding behind these claims makes clear that legal and cultural structures surrounding chattel slavery, ones that treated sentient human beings as what Hortense Spillers refers to as "flesh," predated these articulations.

This process cannot be simplified as a unidimensional phenomenon of discourse or speech act lest we lose track of the political praxis that precedes it. Labeling people as culturally, racially, and morally anathema was part of a tautological system that justified already-in-motion policies and practices that accomplished a dual movement of inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, they ensured that the labor (including sexual and reproductive labor) of the othered could be brought into and made to profit the empire. On the other hand, they shut out the othered from being "French" or from accessing the rights, privileges, and dignity associated with "Frenchness," an endeavor enacted through myriad forms of degradation, annihilation, or assimilation (often another form of annihilation).[17] This configuration is a clear and most extreme precursor to the status of the "citizen outsider" that Beaman examines as well as the experience of millions of colonized peoples in the former and current French empire.

If, as our structural analysis reveals, policies of domination and oppression in support of France's global empire were key drivers in the building of French exceptionalism, it is imperative to trace their roots and urgency back into colonial spaces.[18] It was in frigid forests of the Omàmiwinini and Wyandot nations that the dwindling French colonist population imagined a policy of assimilation that would convert and Frenchify Indigenous peoples during the seventeenth century. It was in the tropics of Haiti (then Saint-Domingue)—where the enslaved (eighty-nine percent) and free colored (five percent) populations dwarfed that of white French colonists (six percent)—that the most flagrant racialized exclusions and fantastical racial categorizations took root. It was from this underlying sense of alarm and insecurity in their would-be domination, the constant state of emergency on the part of colonists and slavers in these spaces at critical moments, that draconian methods and mentalities came into being. The racecraft that structured French exceptionalism in its early instantiations was born of an Agambenian state of exception that “marks a threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without *logos* claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference” (Agamben 40).[19] In this formulation, violence and oppression precede discourse.

The dynamics of crisis and authoritarianism of the state of exception traveled from the colonial frontiers back to the metropole and forward through history. This is evident in a plethora of examples such as the grossly exaggerated claim in 1762 by Guillaume Poncet de la Grave (the king’s representative to the Admiralty court) that “a deluge of negroes appeared in France” and that “there is not a bourgeois or a worker who doesn’t have his negro slave.” Poncet de la Grave attributed the “deluge” to ineffective, unregistered laws controlling the transport of enslaved people to France (qtd. in Peabody 72). This claim, and others like it, must be fact-checked. While there was an increase in the Black population in France in 1762—Peabody reports that 159 individuals were registered in Paris that year compared with no more than thirty in any other year between 1738 and 1776 (72)—this was hardly a “deluge,” and the numbers were still infinitesimally small. In a French population in the environs of twenty million in the mid–eighteenth century, historians estimate that Black people totaled around five thousand, roughly 0.025% of the population (Peabody 4). Yet this state-of-emergency discourse regarding the Black presence in France had its effect: the Paris Admiralty tightened its fist by creating even more comprehensive criteria for controlling the movement of Black bodies in France. Instead of targeting the enslaved, the ordinance adopted a broad phenotypic language of race encompassing all people of color, enslaved or free, who were to be tracked. This cycle repeated in 1777, culminating in the passing of the *Police des Noirs* (“Policing of Blacks”) edict.

Analogous phenomena—too many to be listed and more still to be brought to light—have been pursued throughout French history ensuring the exclusion of those excepted from French exceptionalism.[20] *L’exception française* cannot be understood as divorced from these processes.

Conclusion: Josephine Baker, Cultural Appropriation, and Franco-American Exceptionalisms

In her 2020 book *Vénus Noire*, Robin Mitchell argues that the French have long defined themselves in opposition to fantasies of Black women, individuals “such as Josephine Baker both acting as an exotic Other and highlighting the foreignness of any black body within the French body politic” (16). My analyses in this essay clearly support this statement. Yet, on 30 November 2021, Josephine Baker was interred in the Panthéon as a national heroine. Prima facie, this may cause some to say that Mitchell’s comment and my own arguments have been proven wrong. However, the reality is far more complex from the perspectives of both French exceptionalism and comparative exceptionalism, in this case Franco-American.

First, it is clear that the structural elements of *l’exception française* are fully operative in Baker’s *panthéonisation*. A “citizen outsider,” her valiant service to France and her sexualized image are once again consumed and instrumentalized by the nation and she, long dead, never lived a full sense of inclusion into normative Frenchness during her lifetime. What is more, it is more than a little bit eyebrow-raising that Macron chose Baker, whom Jennifer Boittin refers to as “a safe version of the other” (*Colonial Metropolis* 3) and whose political valence is less threatening than that of great Black and Brown French citizens like Paulette Nardal and Jeanne Nardal or, dare I say, Frantz Fanon (“*Profanation!*”). It is remarkable that in 2021, mainstream French politicians and sanctioned narrators of French history are still so excluding of the country’s own minoritized citizenry that they would prefer to enshrine an American expatriate tenuously adopted through marital naturalization. With this in mind, and given the political context, it is tempting to view Baker’s entry into the Panthéon as an archetypal “move to innocence,” a spectacular papering over of past and present racecraft, from the lived and historiographical oppression of figures like the Nardal sisters and the refusal to make reparations to Haiti, to current-day fabulations regarding "Islamo-gauchisme." By invoking the latter false concept through the modality of the state of exception—especially following the murder of the French teacher Samuel Paty in 2020—members of Macron's administration are broadly targeting (again) Muslims in France, the political opposition on the left, and any intellectuals and educators who are engaged in the study of race or who have otherwise been pointing to the unsavory hypocrisies and failures of *l'exception française*.[21]

Furthermore, analyzing this moment through the framework of comparative exceptionalisms reveals the convolutions of their relationality and possible (co)operationalization. From the vantage point of mutualism, French and American exceptionalisms have been declaredly coconstitutive since the first republics of both nations, the French having supplied a full complement of support to the (white, male, elite) American causes of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" during the War of Independence (1775–83). For centuries and for the purpose of pursuing conjointly beneficial imperial interests, France and the United States have deployed the public image of Franco-American friendship in exceptionalism as beacons of freedom in the world. These nations have long conspired to make sure that the symbolic instantiations of their shared exceptionalism—the Statue of Liberty, American landings on the beaches of Normandy in World War II, and so on—dominate national political imaginaries far more than the darker sides of their imperial alliance, especially in foreign interventionism that includes the Vietnam Wars (1946–75) and the backing of the recently deceased former dictator of Chad, Hissène Habré, convicted of crimes against humanity in 2016. The *panthéonisation* of Josephine Baker could be seen as another sanitizing celebration of Franco-American exceptionalism and a friendly act of cultural appropriation by which France tips its hat to the American-born Black Lives Matter movement (while conveniently ignoring parallel French activism), thereby bolstering the cultural and political capital of both nations and perhaps even healing French-American political ties after the destructive years of Trump's presidency. Alternatively, rather than signaling respect, the state could be seen to be smugly asserting the superiority of French exceptionalism over that of the United States, recalling that African American intellectuals, soldiers, and artists like Baker who suffered under racist policy and culture of the Jim Crow era in the United States found freedom in the French republic during the twentieth century.[22] Uplifted as a heroine of France, Baker becomes proof that French "liberté, égalité, fraternité" stands supreme and encompasses the world over, transcending racial, gender, and national lines with its purported color-blindness and universalism.

However, if we leave these political machinations aside to embrace Baker's *panthéonisation* through the lens of her own agency, we might say she would have the last laugh. Baker lived firsthand the hypocrisies of both French and American exceptionalisms and boldly paved a path toward triumphing over them both. It was, after all, *her* strategy to leave segregated America for France in order to escape the deadly intersectional oppressions of the "land of the free and the home of the brave." So, too, was it *her* strategy in Paris to fashion herself as what Boittin calls a "colonial woman"—a "primitive" turned grande dame embodying the potential for success of the French civilizing mission—so that she could cement her career and place in France (*Colonial Metropolis* 1). Judging by her outstanding life achievements for which she deserves recognition, from her days at the Folies Bergère to her entry into the Panthéon in November 2021, *her* strategy worked.

NOTES

Many thanks to Emily Marker, Sandrine Sanos, and Jennifer Boittin for their generative feedback on this essay.

1. For a transnational history of French universalism, see Stovall, *Transnational France*; for an analysis of the "crisis of French universalism," see Schor.

2. On the coterminous relationship between French republicanism and the nation's civilizing mission, see Conklin.

3. This is plausible in view of Hall's earmarking of the global postmodern as an uplifting marginality and popular culture fueled by a "deep and ambivalent fascination with difference," especially with Black bodies (105).

4. For more on French exceptionalism and the French language, see Merlin-Kajman; Gueye 230–34. On Macron's Francophonie plan to promote the French language, especially on the African continent, see his 20 March 2018 speech at the Académie Française.

5. In *La république du centre: La fin de l'exception française* (*The Republic of Centrism: The End of the French Exception*; 1988), the French historians François Furet, Jacques Julliard, and Pierre Rosanvallon advocate for the end of French exceptionalism as it relates to the political heritage of Jacobinism, state interventionism, and violent polarization (Furet et al.). Furthermore, scholars such as those who contributed to the Chafer and Godin volume have shown that since the founding of the European Union, in 1993, the uniqueness of French political, socioeconomic, and cultural policies has drastically diminished.

6. Many know well Émile Zolà's "J'accuse!" and his stance against anti-Semitism, the corpus of French feminisms from Poullain de la Barre to Beauvoir to Vergès, and the francophone postcolonial, pan-African, and Négritude movements driven by Paulette Nardal and Jeanne Nardal, Aimé Césaire and Suzanne Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and others. On the Nardal sisters and Suzanne Césaire, see Sharpley-Whiting; Edwards, *Practice* and "Unsettled Legacies." See also foundational works of history (e.g., Verschave on "Françafrique"), literature (poetry, novels, essays), and performance including works by Beti, *France*, *Perpétue*, *Main*, *Roi, Ville*, *Pauvre*; Bugul; Schwarz-Bart and Schwarz-Bart; Glissant, *Tale*; Schwarz-Bart, *Hommage*, *Mulâtresse*, *Pluie*, *Ton beau capitaine*; Sembène. See also Horkheimer and Adorno.

7. See Glissant, *Poétique*, especially the chapter on errantry and exile (23–34). See also Deleuze and Guattari.

8. On postcolonial melancholia, see Gilroy.

9. A critical precursor work was Keaton, *Muslim Girls*.

10. On race, racism, immigration, and the *grandes banlieues*, especially in relation to Blackness and African diasporic identities, see also Keaton et al.; Stoval and Peabody; Thomas, *Africa* and *Noirs*.

11. The landmark study of first-, second-, and third-generation immigrants and assimilation in France was written by Noiriel in 1988. For a more recent study, see Alba and Foner. On immigrants and French citizens of North African descent, see also Bleich, "Constructing" and *Race*; Amara; Fernando.

12. On race, racism, and their intersections, see also Stovall and Peabody; Fassin and Fassin; and Marker and Pichichero, vols. 1–3.

13. As a discursive formulation, *l'exception française* is a rather recent invention, dating to 1988, which is why a strict chronology and ontological framework are neither interesting nor accurate.

14. See, e.g., Rule, as well as Phillips; Mukerji; DeJean; Stewart; Greenberg; Foucault; Melzer and Norberg; Stanton.

15. See also Dobie; Mokhberi; Heng; Bennett. Building on the work of Merlin-Kajman in *La langue est-elle fasciste?* (*Is Language Fascist?*), Melzer analyzes the quarrel of the ancients and moderns in conjunction with French *relations de voyage* (travel narratives) and assimilationist policies in North America in order to argue that "France's elite carved out their nation's emerging cultural identity in relation to *both* the New World and the Ancient World, situating it between barbarism and civilization" (21). She describes this as a double movement by which France channeled Rome in its imperial, colonizing (and enslaving), "civilizing" posture in North America and at the same time, interactions with Indigenous people fueled insecurity and the fear of a regression into France's own "barbaric" and colonized history as Gauls conquered by Rome.

16. Given that race is a fictional and damaging social construct, Fields and Fields argue that it may be most beneficial to eliminate race as a category of sociopolitical analysis. Many, including myself, disagree with this conclusion since racism and race making continue without signs of subsiding, thereby necessitating analysis in historical and contemporary time horizons.

17. Sepinwall has examined the racialization of Black people and Jews during the French Revolution and the Abbé Grégoire's proposals to "rehabilitate" Jews in France through forms of assimilation—conversion, intermarriage with French people that would "soften" physical characteristics, and through cultural change including alimentation—that would effectively eliminate Jewish identity altogether (*Abbé Grégoire*). See also Amselle's analysis of "assimilative regeneration" policies. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this also involved internal colonization of peasants who were viewed as "savages" in need of civilizing and absorption into the normative, elite view of "Frenchness" (Weber).

18. Patton contends that this is, by definition, the structure of all national(ist) exceptionalisms. "Exceptionalism is the conviction that a particular nation is both unique and superior to other nations. By glorifying a country's uniqueness, exceptionalism transforms the entire polity into a 'city on the hill' and its citizens into agents of a superior civilization. In its more extreme version, the city is not merely on a hill but is in fact sacred, chosen by God for an exclusive people to carry his mission on earth. Exceptionalism is thus an unforgiving narrative legitimizing expansion and conquest in the name of a divine mandate" (x). On colonial encounters, see Singaravélou; Bertrand et al.

19. Though I employ this concept, I fully concur with recent critiques of Foucault's and Agamben's theories as ignoring, diminishing, disqualifying questions of slavery, race, and its intersections. See Weheliye.

20. For discussions on the normalization and increasing permanence of the state of emergency and exceptional measures it permits, see Lambert; Ghabrial; and Kempf. See also Robcis; Sanos; Shepard; and Mendes-Flor and Reinharz.

21. Paty, a history and geography teacher in a school near Paris, was beheaded by a stranger for having allegedly shown images of the prophet Muhammad to his class during a lesson about freedom of expression. His murder sparked widespread

protests regarding free speech and the “unassimilability” of French Muslims on one side and continued discriminatory policies, cultures, and acts against Muslims in France on the other.

22. It is interesting to note that in recent times, Afro-French intellectuals have sought refuge in the United States in an effort to escape the erasures of French universalism and discover African and African American studies as well as their own Black identities in both personal and international dimensions. See Soumahoro.

WORKS CITED

Agamben, Giorgio. *State of Exception*. Translated by Kevin Attell, U of Chicago P, 2005.

Alba, Richard, and Nancy Foner. *Strangers No More: Immigration and the Challenges of Integration in North America and Western Europe*. Princeton UP, 2015.

Amara, Fadela. *Breaking the Silence: French Women's Voices from the Ghetto*. U of California P, 2006.

Amselle, Jean Loup. *Affirmative Exclusion: Cultural Pluralism and the Rule of Custom in France*. Cornell UP, 2003.

Beaman, Jean. *Citizen Outsider: Children of North African Immigrants in France*. U of California P, 2017.

Bennett, Herman L. *African Kings and Black Slaves: Sovereignty and Dispossession in the Early Modern Atlantic*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2019.

Bertrand, Romain, et al., editors. *Cultures d'empires: Circulations, échanges et affrontements culturels en situation coloniale*. Karthala, 2015.

Beti, Mongo. *La France contre l'Afrique: Retour au Cameroun*. La Découverte, 1993.

———. *Main basse sur le Cameroun: Autopsie d'une décolonisation*. Éditions François Maspero, 1972.

———. *Le pauvre Christ de Bomba*. R. Laffont, 1956.

———. *Perpétue et l'habitude du Malheur*. Bucher-Chastel, 1974.

———. *Le roi miraculé: Chronique des Essazam*. Bucher-Chastel, 1958.

———. *Ville cruelle*. Présence Africaine, 1956.

Bleich, Erik. “Constructing Muslims as Ethno-racial Outsiders in Europe.” *European Studies Newsletter*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 3–7.

———. *Race and Politics in Britain and France: Ideas and Policymaking since the 1960s*. Cambridge UP, 2003.

Boittin, Jennifer. *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris*. U of Nebraska P, 2010.

———. *Undesirable: Passionate Mobility and Women's Defiance of French Colonial Policing, 1919–1952*. U of Chicago P, 2022.

Boni-Claverie, Isabelle. *Trop noire pour être française*. Quark Productions / ARTE France, 2015.

Bugul, Ken. *Le baobab fou*. Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1982.

Cain, Artwell. “Ambiguous Citizenship as an Impediment to Social Mobility in the Netherlands: The Case of Afro-Caribbean Dutch.” *Journal of Contemporary Thought*, vol. 32, 2010, pp. 141–56.

Celestine, Audrey. *Une famille française: Des Antilles à Dunkurque en passant par l'Algérie*. Textuel, 2018.

Chafer, Tony, and Emmanuel Godin, editors. *The End of the French Exception? Decline and Revival of the “French Model.”* Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

———, editors. Introduction. Chafer and Godin, *End*, pp. 1–16.

Collard, Sue. “The French Exception: Rise and Fall of a Saint-Simonian Discourse.” Chafer and Godin, *End*, pp. 17–35.

Conklin, Alice L. *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930*. Stanford UP, 1997.

Daughton, J. P. *In the Forest of No Joy: The Congo-Océan Railroad and the Tragedy of French Colonialism*. W. W. Norton, 2021.

Dauncey, Hugh. “L'exception culturelle.” Chafer and Godin, *End*, pp. 72–84.

Daut, Marlene. *Tropics of Haiti: Race and the Literary History of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World, 1789–1865*. Liverpool UP, 2015.

Davis, Muriam Haleh. “'Incommensurate Ontologies'? Anti-Black Racism and the Question of Islam in French Algeria.” *Lateral*, vol. 1, no. 10, spring 2021, csalateral.org/forum/cultural-constructions-race-racism-middle-east-north-africa-southwest-asia-mena-swana/incommensurate-ontologies-anti-black-racism-islam-french-algeria-davis/.

Debray, Régis. “Et si Joséphine Baker entrait au Panthéon? / What If Josephine Baker Entered the Pantheon?” *Le monde*, 13 Dec. 2013, www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2013/12/16/josephine-baker-au-pantheon_4335358_3232.html.

DeJean, Joan. *Literary Fortifications: Rousseau, Laclos, Sade*. Princeton UP, 1984.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Mille plateaux*. Éditions du Minuit, 1980.

Dembélé, Bintou, choreographer. *Les Indes galantes*. By Jean-Philippe Rameau. Opéra Nationale de Paris La Bastille, Paris, France, 26 Sept. 2019–15 Oct. 2019.

Dobie, Madeleine. *Trading Places: Colonization and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century French Culture*. Cornell UP, 2010.

Dorlin, Elsa. *La matrice de la race: Généalogie sexuelle et coloniale de la nation française*. La Découverte, 2006.

Drake, Helen. “France, Europe, and the Limits of Exceptionalism.” Chafer and Godin, *End*, pp. 187–202.

Dubois, Laurent. *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*. Picador, 2013.

Edwards, Brent Hayes. *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Harvard UP, 2003.

———. “Unsettled Legacies.” *PMLA*, vol. 136, no. 5, Oct. 2021, pp. 681–95.

Fassin, Eric, and Didier Fassin. *De la question sociale à la question raciale?* La Découverte, 2006.

Fernando, Mayanthi. *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism*. Duke UP, 2014.

Fields, Barbara J., and Karen Fields. *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in America*. Verso, 2012.

Fleming, Crystal Marie. *Resurrecting Slavery: Racial Legacies and White Supremacy in France*. Temple UP, 2017.

Foucault, Michel. *Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines*. 1966. Gallimard, 1996.

Furet, François, et al. *La république du centre: La fin de l'exception française*. Calmann-Lévy, 1988.

Gay, Amandine. *Ouvrir la voix*. Bras de Fer Production, 2017.

Germain, Félix, and Silyane Larcher. *Black French Women and the Struggle for Equality, 1848–1946*. U of Nebraska P, 2018.

Ghabrial, Sarah. "Reading Agamben from Algiers: The Racial Metonymy of Permanent Exception." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2020, pp. 237–42.

Gilroy, Paul. *Postcolonial Melancholia*. Columbia UP, 2004.

Glissant, Édouard. *Poétique de la relation*. Gallimard, 1990. Poétique 3.

———. *Tale of Black Histories*. Translated by Andrew Daily and Emily Sahakian, Institute of Martinican Studies, 1970–71.

Greenberg, Mitchell. *Subjectivity and Subjugation in Seventeenth-Century Drama and Prose: The Family Romance of French Classicism*. Cambridge UP, 1992.

Gueye, Abdoulaye. "A View from the South: France in African Eyes: Universalism and Francophonie Reassessed." Chafer and Godin, *End*, pp. 223–36.

Hajjat, Abdellali. *Les frontières de l'identité nationale: L'injonction à l'assimilation en France métropolitaine et coloniale*. La Découverte, 2012.

Hajjat, Abdellali, and Marwane Mohammed. *Islamophobie: Comment les élites françaises fabriquent le "problème musulman."* La Découverte, 2013.

Hall, Stuart. "What Is This 'Black' in Black European Culture?" *Social Justice*, vol. 20, nos. 1–2, 1993, pp. 104–14.

Heng, Geraldine. *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*. Cambridge UP, 2018.

Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by E. Jephcott. 1947. Stanford UP, 2002.

Johnson, Jessica Marie. *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2020.

Joseph-Gabriel, Annette. *Reimagining Liberation: How Black Women Transformed Citizenship in the French Empire*. U of Illinois P, 2020.

Keaton, Trica D. *Muslim Girls and the Other France: Race, Identity Politics, and Social Exclusion*. Indiana UP, 2006.

Keaton, Trica D., et al., editors. *Black France / France Noire*. Duke UP, 2012.

Kempf, Raphaël. *Ennemis d'état: Les lois scélérates, des "anarchists" aux "terroristes."* Fabrique, 2019.

Lambert, Léopold. *States of Emergency: A Spatial History of the French Colonial Continuum*. Premiers Matins de Novembre, 2021.

Larcher, Silyane. *L'autre citoyen: L'idéal républicain et les Antilles après l'esclavage*. Armand Colin, 2014.

Macron, Emmanuel. "Transcription du discours du président de la république." *France Diplomacy*, Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, 20 Mar. 2018, www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/21_03_transcription_du_discours_du_president_de_la_republique_a_l_institut_de_france_cle8b8911.pdf.

Marker, Emily. *Black France, White Europe: Youth, Race, and Belonging in the Postwar Era*. Cornell UP, 2022.

———. "Obscuring Race: Franco-African Conversations about Colonial Reform and Racism after World War II and the Making of Colorblind France." *French Politics, Culture and Society*, vol. 33, no. 3, winter 2015, pp. 1–23.

Marker, Emily, and Christy Pichichero. *Race, Racism, and the Study of the Francophone World Today*. Vol. 1, *H-France Salon*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2019, h-france.net/h-france-salon-volume-11-2019/#1102.

———. *Race, Racism, and the Study of the Francophone World Today*. Vol. 2, *H-France Salon*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2020, h-france.net/h-france-salon-volume-12-2020/#1201.

———. *Race, Racism, and the Study of the Francophone World Today*. Vol. 3, *H-France Salon*, vol. 13, no. 18, 2021, h-france.net/h-france-salon-volume-13-2021/#1318.

Mawhinney, Janet. *"Giving Up the Ghost": Disrupting the (Re)production of White Privilege in Anti-racist Pedagogy and Organizational Change*. 1998. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, MA thesis.

Mbembe, Achille. "Provincializing France." Translated by Janet Roitman. *Public Culture*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2010, pp. 85–119.

Melzer, Sara E. *Colonizer or Colonized: The Hidden Stories of Early Modern French Culture*. U of Pennsylvania P, 2012.

Melzer, Sara E., and Kathryn Norberg, editors. *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France*. U of California P, 1998.

Mendes-Flor, Paul, and Jehuda Reinharz, editors. *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*. Oxford UP, 2010.

Merlin-Kajman, Hélène. *La langue est-elle fasciste? Langue, pouvoir, enseignement*. Le Seuil, 2016.

Milner, Susan. "Social Policy and France's 'Exceptional' Social Model." Chafer and Godin, *End*, pp. 55–71.

Mitchell, Robin. *Vénus Noire: Black Women and Colonial Fantasies in Nineteenth-Century France*. U of Georgia P, 2020.

Mokhberi, Susan. *The Persian Mirror: Reflections of the Safavid Empire in Early Modern France*. Oxford UP, 2019.

Moreau de Saint-Méry, Médéric-Louis-Elie. *A Civilization That Perished: The Last Years of White Colonial Rule in Haiti*. Translated, abridged, and edited by Ivor D. Spencer, UP of America, 1985.

Mukerji, Chandra. *Territorial Ambitions and the Gardens of Versailles*. Cambridge UP, 1997.

Nasiali, Minayo. *Native to the Republic: Empire, Social Citizenship, and Everyday Life in Marseille since 1945*. Cornell UP, 2016.

Ndiaye, Pap. *La condition noire: Essai sur une minorité française*. Calmann-Lévy, 2008.

Nguyen, Caroline Guiela. *Saigon*. Théâtre de l'Odéon, Paris, France, 5–22 June 2019.

Niang, Mame-Fatou. *Identités françaises: Banlieues, féminités et universalisme*. Brill, 2019.

Niang, Mame-Fatou, and Kaytie Nielsen. *Mariannes noires*. Round Room Image, 2017.

Noiriel, Gérard. *Le creuset français: Histoire de l'immigration XIXe–XXe siècles*. Le Seuil, 1988.

Patton, Robert. *The Guise of Exceptionalism: Unmasking the National Narratives of Haiti and the United States*. Rutgers UP, 2021.

Peabody, Sue. *"There Are No Slaves in France": The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime*. Oxford UP, 1996.

Phillips, Henry. *Church and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France*. Cambridge UP, 2002.

Popkin, Jeremy. *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution*. 2nd ed., Wiley-Blackwell, 2021.

Robcis, Camille. *The Law of Kinship: Anthropology, Psychoanalysis, and the Family in France*. Cornell UP, 2013.

Rule, John. Preface. Stewart.

Saada, Emmanuelle. *Empire's Children: Race, Filiation, and Citizenship in the French Colonies*. U of Chicago P, 2012.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books, 1978.

"*Saigon*." *Odéon: Théâtre de l'Europe*, www.theatre-odeon.eu/en/Plays/saigon_1. Accessed on 10 Sept. 2021.

Sanos, Sandrine. *The Aesthetics of Hate: Far-Right Intellectuals, Antisemitism, and Gender in 1930s France*. Stanford UP, 2013.

Schor, Naomi. "The Crisis of French Universalism." *Yale French Studies*, vol. 100, 2001, pp. 43–64.

Schwarz-Bart, André, and Simone Schwarz-Bart. *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes*. Éditions Seuil, 1967.

Schwarz-Bart, Simone. *Hommage à la femme noire*. Éditions Consulaires, 1989.

———. *La mulâtresse solitude*. Éditions Seuil, 1972.

———. *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*. L'Harmattan, 1972.

———. *Ton beau capitaine*. Seuil, 1987.

Sembène, Ousmane. *La noire de*. . . . New York Video, 1966.

Semley, Lorelle. *To Be Free and French: Citizenship in France's Atlantic Empire*. Cambridge UP, 2017.

Sepinwall, Alyssa. *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism*. U of California P, 2005.

———, editor. *Haitian History: New Perspectives*. Routledge, 2012.

Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean. *Negritude Women*. U of Minnesota P, 2002.

Shepard, Todd. *Sex, France, and Arab Men: 1962–1979*. U of Chicago P, 2018.

Singaravélou, Pierre, editor. *Les empires coloniaux, XIX^{e}–XX^{e} siècle*. Le Seuil, 2013.

Soumahoro, Maboula. *Le triangle et l'hexagone—Réflexions sur une identité noire*. La Découverte, 2020.

Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *Diacritics*, vol. 17, no. 2, summer 1987, pp. 64–81.

Stanton, Domna. *The Aristocrat as Art: A Study of the Honnête Homme and the Dandy in Seventeenth- and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Columbia UP, 1980.

Stewart, David. *Assimilation and Acculturation in Seventeenth-Century Europe: Roussillon and France, 1659–1715*. E-book ed., Praeger, 1997.

Stovall, Tyler. *Transnational France: The Modern History of a Universal Nation*. Routledge, 2015.

———. *White Freedom: The Racial History of an Idea*. Princeton UP, 2021.

Stovall, Tyler, and Sue Peabody. *The Color of Liberty: The History of Race in France*. Duke UP, 2003.

Thomas, Dominic. *Africa and France: Postcolonial Cultures, Migration, and Racism*. Indiana UP, 2013.

———. *Noirs d'encre: Colonialisme, immigration et identité au cœur de la littérature afro-française*. Editions La Découverte, 2013.

Vergès, Françoise. *Le ventre des femmes: Capitalisme, racialisation, feminisme*. La fabrique éditions, 2017.

Verschave, François-Xavier. *La Françafrique: Le plus long scandale de la république*. Stock, 1999.

Weber, Eugen. *From Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*. Stanford UP, 1976.

Weheliye, Alexander. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Duke UP, 2014.