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TRIANGULATING RACISM: FRENCH AND FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN REACTIONS TO THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT (1954-1968)

by

ALLYSON TADJER

Under the Direction of Denise Davidson, PhD, and Michelle Brattain, PhD

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the meanings and significance of the African American freedom movement for the French and Francophone Africans at the momentous juncture of decolonization. By analyzing the French and Francophone African press, as well as the writings of French and Francophone African intellectuals, this project demonstrates that American racial events of the 1950s and 1960s allowed both communities to begin a reflection on the phenomenon of French racism. In particular, the French historical traditions of universalism and egalitarianism, important pillars of French colonial discourse, shaped the French and Francophone African responses to American racism. French and Francophone Africans’ frequent comparisons between the American racial context and the French colonial and national contexts reveal that while American racial events were evocative of French racial prejudice, a deep
attachment to the France of 1789 precluded the two groups from assessing French racism fairly. Marxism, a political theory that found its way in French colonies in the late 1930s and a major intellectual current in postwar France, largely influenced French and Francophone African reactions to the African American freedom movement. The French and Francophone Africans’ adherence to a Marxian metanarrative of oppression especially allowed them to build parallels between American racism and French colonial and racial oppression. However, the global and systematic dimensions of a Marxian, if not Marxist, analysis of these phenomena also precluded the French and Francophone Africans from engaging in a particularistic evaluation of French racial prejudices. By highlighting the ways in which the French nation-state shaped both the French and Francophone African responses to American racial events and reflections on French racism, this dissertation adds a line in the scholarly story of the “French imperial nation-state.” In addition to offering a revisionist take on French popular and academic narratives regarding the rise of French racial awareness, which those narratives locate at the turn of the 21st century, my analyses and conclusions shatter the mythical, and still widely held, assumption that the global “race war” of the 1950s and 1960s had created a powerful sense of racial identification among blacks of Africa and the African diaspora.

INDEX WORDS: African American civil rights movement, Black Power Movement, Racism, French colonialism, Francophone African decolonization, Black diaspora
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DEDICATION

Although many more people have played an important role in the completion of this dissertation, I wish to give a special dedication to my parents and my husband for their financial and moral support throughout this process.
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To begin, I want to express my utmost gratefulness to my parents, whose support and sacrifices have allowed me to attend Georgia State University and successfully complete this dissertation. I also wish to give a special thanks to my husband for his patience and his valuable help in this, at times, trying intellectual experiment. Without my parents and husband’s financial and moral support, this task would have been far more arduous, if not impossible. I was also fortunate to work with wonderful scholars and fellow graduate students. I would like to start by acknowledging my academic advisor and chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Denise Davidson. Her availability and intellectual and professional guidance have played a monumental role in this enterprise. Dr. Davidson has been far more than an academic mentor; her kind encouragements throughout this process have allowed me to keep faith in my project and to brave some of the psychological discomfort that is more often than not a part of this experiment. I also want to thank the co-chair, Dr. Michelle Brattain, and members of the dissertation committee, Dr. Jacqueline Rouse and Dr. Tyler Stovall. Through seminars and various discussions with Dr. Brattain and Dr. Rouse, I have obtained precious insights on the subjects of racism and the African American freedom movement and enjoyed their kind support. Finally, I want to express a special thanks to Dr. Stovall who kindly accepted to serve as an external member of my committee and whose scholarship significantly inspired my own research.

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INTRODUCTION: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT AND THE FRENCH “RACIAL QUESTION”

In 1957, African American author James Baldwin, who had resided in France for almost a decade, decided to return to the United States. Like black American authors Richard Wright and Chester Himes, Baldwin’s exile to France was largely motivated by the desire to escape racist America.\(^1\) The onset of the Algerian war of independence quickly transformed Baldwin’s view of French racial exceptionalism. Observing Frenchmen’s treatment of Algerians in Paris, Baldwin concluded that the latter were France’s “niggers.”\(^2\) The shocking presence of racism in France and the ongoing struggle his black compatriots were waging in the U.S. in the name of racial equality ultimately convinced Baldwin that his place was across the Atlantic.\(^3\) The story of Baldwin’s exile in France and later return to the U.S. is symbolic of the changing racial context in France in the 1950s and 1960s. Following World War I, when African American soldiers experienced France’s supposed color-blindness, a number of black Americans made France, especially Paris, their home. With decolonization four decades later, however, this mythic perception of French exceptionalism suffered a few bruises.

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As William B. Cohen asserted in *The French Encounter with Africans*, “Frenchmen have traditionally asserted that their country-men, unlike their neighbors and the white inhabitants of the United States, have upheld the principles of racial equality overseas and at home.” The “myth” of French exceptionalism therefore emerged through a French comparative perspective on the treatment of people of color in different national contexts. In turn, the simultaneity of French decolonization and the African American freedom movement allowed for a comparative assessment of racial dynamics in the French and American contexts. In the years following World War II, the rise of the American superpower and the related decline of French prestige on the international scene seemed to further substantiate French intellectuals’ existential concerns. The scale and pace of Americanization after the Second World War resulted in a rekindled wave of French anti-Americanism; an effort to protect French national identity against foreign “contamination.” The U.S. thus held a significant place in the postwar script of French national anxiety, and concerns about American influence went well beyond Coca-Cola. Carrying the Wilsonian legacy, American advocacy for national self-determination also threatened the last pillar on which French grandeur seemed to rest: “Greater France.” By supporting colonized peoples’ claims for national independence, the U.S. further antagonized many Frenchmen who regarded their empire as the last material proof of their national accomplishments. In this dissertation, I examine the intersections between French anti-Americanism and the French

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experience of decolonization in French treatments of the African American freedom movement and the American racial issues it brought to light.

Moreover, the contacts between blacks of Africa, the Caribbean, and North America that a city like Paris cradled contributed to the formation of what Tyler Stovall refers to as “a black diasporic identity.”7 At the momentous juncture of decolonization, one may therefore expect Francophone Africans, who were themselves engaged in a project of emancipation, to have related to African Americans’ struggles. Didn’t the onset of African independences trigger a renewed sense of identification with the Motherland among black Americans? If the decolonization of Africa inspired the African American freedom movement, how did black Americans’ struggle against American racism influence the colonized peoples of Francophone Africa, and later Francophone African nationals? Through its triangular dimension, this dissertation therefore proposes to reappraise French and Francophone African experiences of decolonization as well as the global meanings of the African American freedom movement. My project thus probes the extent to which the contemporaneity of the black American struggle for racial equality and the French process of decolonization shaped the French and Francophone Africans’ reflections on racism.

As a transnational project cutting across the momentous historical processes of decolonization, the Cold War, and the African American freedom movement from the perspectives of the French and Francophone Africans, this dissertation engages a multitude of historical literatures. Because it is what inspired me to enquire into French and Francophone Africans’ responses to the African American freedom movement, I will start by positioning my project within the recent historiographical trend to explore the global dimensions of the black American struggle for racial equality. On the one hand, this scholarship examines the ways in

7 Stovall, “The Fire this Time,” 184.
which the global context, especially decolonization and the Cold War, shaped the American government’s domestic and foreign policies during the 1950s and 1960s. On the other hand, historians have shed light on African Americans’ relations to the African experience of decolonization. Placing American relations in the global context of the Cold War, Borstelmann claims, “the issue of race is one that can illuminate the ways in which American history in the second half of the twentieth century was also international history.” This statement largely characterizes the literature on the global dimensions of the African American freedom movement—scholarship that takes the American historical context as its point of departure. Recent scholarship, especially on international offshoots of the American Black Power movement, has begun to examine the global meanings of the African American freedom movement, discussions for which Black Power activists’ efforts to internationalize their struggle certainly paved the ground. Borrowing from the editor of Black Power Beyond Borders, Nico Slate, my project proposes to tell “more than the story of the overseas diffusion of an American movement;” it explores the meanings of black Americans’ freedom movement for the French and among Francophone Africans, who were renegotiating the nature of their relationships.


This dissertation therefore contributes to scholars’ new efforts to “de-imperialize” the historiography on transnational freedom movements.

By examining French reflections on the American racial drama of the 1950s and 1960s, my dissertation also directly addresses scholarship on French anti-Americanism and French racial exceptionalism. As a few scholars have documented, the growing Americanization of French society, starting in the 1920s and 1930s, significantly impacted the French emotional context in the years following World War II. In *Extrême Occident: French Intellectuals and America*, Jean-Philippe Mathy points out that the waves of anti-Americanism at different stages of French history were contingent on the French historical contexts from which they emerged. In other words, to understand the French phenomenon of anti-Americanism, one has to look both inside France and outside to the U.S. In my analysis of French and Francophone Africans’ representations of the African American freedom movement, I will therefore consider “judgements passed on the U.S. from France…as discourses about France.” The French postwar brand of anti-Americanism had significant roots in interwar anti-American sentiments in France. Rejecting the growing mechanization of culture, which they perceived as a central aspect of Americanization, French intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s “created a mental world where France could fight a spiritual war against America, and thus rediscover what about this spirituality was so essential to French identity.” Whereas interwar anti-Americanism was articulated by French intellectuals on both the left and right side of the French political spectrum, the liquidation of collaborationists and fascists from the French intellectual scene after the war

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left an intellectual arena where ideas were almost exclusively debated among leftists.\textsuperscript{15} That French intellectuals of the 1950s and 1960s “centered [their] criticism on economic, political, and racial issues in the context of American capitalism and imperialism” is therefore no surprise. If historians have acknowledged the existence of a racial component to postwar French anti-Americanism, they have nonetheless relegated it to the periphery of their analyses.\textsuperscript{16} As I will show in this dissertation, by examining French reactions to the American racial events of the 1950s and 1960s, a whole new facet of French postwar anxiety emerges, one that testifies to France’s difficult confrontation with the “racial other.”

By exploring French discourses on American racial relations, I will add a chapter to Philippe Roger and Jacques Portes’ discussions of the relevance of American racial diversity and racism for the French. As Jacques Portes points out in \textit{Fascination and Misgivings}, the French domestic context shaped French concerns with and opinions on the American racial context.\textsuperscript{17} The late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, which saw the advent of the Third Republic and colonization, was one such moment when the French turned their attention to “the negroes.” Philippe Roger highlights connections between French commentaries on American racism and their colonial subtexts more explicitly. He explains that at the turn of the century “the discourse on America’s ‘racial question’ was a two-stage rocket;” while condemning American racism, French commentators also expressed their disdain for the multiculturalism of American society. In a Sartrean fashion, Roger claims that in this discourse “the ‘bad faith’ lay in the silences, and particularly in the deafening silence concerning French colonization and the status of the colonized.” The historian further argues that the ambivalence of this discourse mirrored the French nation’s “own worries:

\textsuperscript{15} Mathy, \textit{Extème-Occident}, 36.
managing a multi-ethnic empire and assimilating ‘foreign’ elements into the national community."\(^{18}\) The process of decolonization and the migration of individuals from former colonized territories certainly increased those concerns. How, then, did the French react to the American racial drama of the 1950s and 1960s? Through a thorough analysis of French reactions to American racial developments, I examine how French ambivalence toward the racial question in America fared at a time when their rapports with the colonized and later African nationals were undergoing significant transformations.

As Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall have pointed out, French scholars’ reactions to William B. Cohen’s *The French Encounter with Africans*, which debunked the myth of color-blind France, revealed French attachment to a national identity constructed around the universalism and humanitarianism of the French Revolution, an attachment that precluded “any discussion of race as a factor of [French] national life.”\(^{19}\) If this ideological disposition has considerably delayed French scholarship on racism in France, the Anglo-Saxon’s recognition of the “racial fact” has allowed for a vibrant historical enquiry into French racism.\(^{20}\) Three important and closely related trends characterize this scholarship. First is a rethinking of national


histories in the larger imperial context, which is exemplified by Gary Wilder’s theorization of the
“French Imperial Nation-State.”\(^{21}\) Understanding the phenomenon of French racism requires
consideration of French colonial and postcolonial relationships with the “other.” Secondly,
historians have discussed French racism as a phenomenon that emerged from French conceptions
of national identity and that operated as a protective shield for the nation. In her relatively recent
study of “the politics of the veil,” Joan Scott demonstrates how the definition of French
Republican identity gave birth to Islamophobia, a sentiment that she affirms dates back to the
beginning of the colonial conquest of Algeria in 1830, and how French racism protected a sense
of national unity.\(^{22}\) This focus on the meaning of racism for the French nation-state has also led
scholars to debate the intersections between the universalism of French Republican rhetoric and
French discriminatory practices towards the colonized and later migrants from former French
colonial possessions.

Even though French scholarship on racism in France dates back to the late 1980s, Didier
and Eric Fassin locate the emergence of a “racial” question in the French public sphere at the
turn of the twenty-first century. Pap Ndiaye’s *La Condition noire* testifies to the growing
relevance of the “racial question” in France. While his study focuses on the black diaspora in
France, he uses this historical account of Francophone blacks in the French metropole to
demonstrate the validity of race and the limitations of class in analyses of social relations.\(^ {23}\)
Ndiaye’s contention is that French incorporation of racism in the larger category of class
relations has largely prevented a fair assessment of French racial dynamics.\(^ {24}\) Because of their
institutional character, however, one cannot simply dissociate expressions of racism from their

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\(^{21}\) Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*.
\(^{24}\) Didier Fassin and Eric Fassin, *De la question sociale à la question raciale? Représenter la société française*
structural contexts. I concur with Etienne Balibar who asserts that understandings of racism need both historical materialism and a psychological or psychoanalytic dimension. By highlighting the successes and limitations of French discussions of racism during the 1950s and 1960s, I particularly hope to contribute to the recent scholarly effort to conceptualize “linkages in Marxism and critical race theories.”

A common aspect of Francophone and American scholarship on French racism is its insistence on examining French racism in a global or transnational context, which mostly involves the U.S. Peabody and Stovall affirm that comparisons between France and the U.S. are particularly relevant because France “resembles the United States not only in its level of socioeconomic development, but also in possessing a strong universalist tradition in its politics and culture, as well as persistent contradictions between republican ideology and racially discriminatory practices.” Comparing French and American racial prejudices would therefore allow scholars to determine what the unique forms and expressions racism take in a particular national context. Scholars’ analyses of French reflections on racism have also pointed out the relevance of the American racial context. In his study of French racism towards indigenous soldiers in World War I, Fogarty points out that witnessing American segregation in France and contrasting it with “the social intermingling of races” in Paris, the French were comforted in the “idea that the rights of man were more fully realized on that side of the Atlantic.” Commenting on the 1989 debate surrounding headscarves in France, Scott pointed out that “in many op-ed pieces, commentators warned that tolerating displays of Islamic affiliation would lead France to

28 Fogarty, Race and War in France, 6–7.
the disastrous path of American multiculturalism…”29 These brief examples provide hints as to the relevance of comparative analyses of French and American racisms, not simply on the count of the similarities between French and American political ideologies and their inherent contradictions, but in so far as French reflections on their own racial prejudices have historically entailed a comparison with their American nemesis. By looking at the evocative power of the American racial context on French minds and hearts at the time of decolonization, my project underlines the significance of American racism in French assessments of their own racial problem.

In so doing, I also engage with the scholarship on French anti-colonialism. As a number of scholars have shown, intellectuals on the left of the French political spectrum, many of whom participated in the Resistance during World War II, were the most outspoken anti-colonialists.30 Issues related to French colonialism became a central preoccupation for some of these engagés, like Sartre and the intellectuals gathered around him in the magazine Les Temps Modernes. Unsurprisingly, the Algerian war for independence was the event which most galvanized French intellectuals’ political commitment. As James D. Le Sueur powerfully demonstrates in Uncivil War, “the French-Algerian war was a crucible for intellectuals.” French intellectuals’ engagement with the Algerian war, which they conceived of in Marxist revolutionary terms, resulted in their reconfiguring of violence which “implied a (re)definition of the state (and republican ideologies) and, by default, of the intellectual’s relationship to the state (and the republic).”31 As Jonathan Judaken underlines, the American racial context partly shaped Sartre’s

theorization of colonial racism. Through the same comparative lens, this project helps us understand how the colonial situation, especially the Algerian war, in turn shaped French intellectuals’ views on the African American freedom movement.

In 2001, Routledge published a translated version of Sartre’s 1964 *Situations V* under the title *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*. In the preface to the collection of Sartre’s reflections on these phenomena, Robert J. C. Young declared that “few accounts of Sartre’s work have grasped the significance of black cultures and anti-colonial struggles in his life and thinking.” The publication of this book triggered an unprecedented wave of scholarly interest in Sartre’s anti-colonialism and antiracism among Anglophone academics. In addition to analyzing the formation of Sartre’s anti-colonialism, those studies also look at the French philosopher’s engagement with the Thirdworldist ideology championed by the French New Left in the 1960s. If French intellectuals’ anticolonial discourse was largely shaped by the war in Algeria, so was their 1960s Thirdworldist rhetoric; anti-imperialists were quick to adopt Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* as their bible. The “dialectical basis for anti-colonial struggle” that Sartre had established, which “was characterized by the coincidence of the systematic and existential accounts,” was instrumental in Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, which itself played a major role in the elaboration of radical politics among black American activists of the late 1960s. If American racism fueled Sartre’s reflections on racial colonialism, Sartre’s thought indirectly

provided ideological ammunition to black American radicals of the Black Power movement. It is thus necessary to examine French anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism in a comparative framework that includes the African American freedom movement. This dissertation seeks to demonstrate the significance of these linkages.

Analyzing Francophone Africans’ responses to the African American freedom movement, which strongly mirrored those of French Thirdworldist intellectuals, should also help to revise what seems to be a common misconception among scholars: that “Sartre’s influence on black Francophone intellectuals was in certain respects greatest from the period before his political radicalization.” Young does mention the relevance of Sartre’s preface to *Wretched of the Earth* for Francophone African intellectuals. However, he presents Sartre’s “Black Orpheus,” and his introductions to Léopold Sédar Senghor’s *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre* and Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Mask*, which testified to “a synthesis of the philosophy of Négritude with Sartrean existentialism,” as the apex of Sartre’s ideological influence on Francophone Africans. Sartre’s existential analysis of the phenomenon of Négritude, which found expression in Fanon’s seminal work, certainly had a notable impact on the evolution of black Francophone thought. Nonetheless, the widespread adoption of a Thirdworldist stance on the African American freedom movement among Francophone African intellectuals suggests that Sartre, both indirectly through his influence on Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, and directly via his publication *Les Temps Modernes*, continued to exert a significant influence on Francophone African intellectuals during the 1960s.


Finally, this dissertation engages with the growing scholarship on the black diaspora in France. Until recently, most of the literature concerning the African diaspora in France has revolved around the emergence of “negrophilia” and Francophone African and Antillean cultural productions between the two world wars. Fewer works have stretched the strictly cultural boundaries of this scholarship to encompass the political dimensions of the black presence in France during the interwar period. Similarly, with the exception of Philippe Dewitte’s *Les mouvements nègres en France*, historical analyses of the contacts between Francophone blacks and African Americans at this time largely emphasize the artistic dimensions of those encounters. However, I would suggest that these narratives are more representative of the nature of Francophone Africans and African Americans’ connections than the result of scholarly oversight. In parallel with the emergence of French scholarship on the black diaspora in France, American scholars have started to examine the Francophone African diaspora in the transnational framework proposed by Paul Gilroy and Brent Hayes Edwards. My examination of the ways in

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which African American experiences of racism translated for Francophone Africans at the decisive movement of decolonization therefore fits within ongoing research on “the black Atlantic.” Pointing out the limitations of both Afrocentric approaches to global black experiences, which are structured around the assumption of a black essence, and the diasporic model celebrating the variety of black experiences, Stovall rightly calls for the re-introduction of the nation-state in analyses of the black diaspora. Examining both French and Francophone Africans’ responses to American racial issues during the 1950s and 1960s allows us to get a glimpse at “what is particularly French about blacks [not only] in France,” but also in newly emerging Francophone African countries.43

My examination of French and Francophone African reactions to the American racial context reveals the centrality of the nation-state in the former’s reflections on race and racism. Indeed, my dissertation shows that the Marxist vogue that influenced France in the years after World War II and French discourse of humanitarian and universalist exceptionalism shaped both French and Francophone Africans’ attitudes towards American racism and black Americans’ struggle for racial equality. French humanitarian discourse established a basis for French and Francophone Africans to engage with the problem of racism, while Marxism provided the theoretical framework allowing them to make sense of the phenomenon of racial oppression. While these two ideological currents allowed for French and Francophone Africans’ reflections on the phenomenon of racism, they also hindered these reflections. By framing their observations


43For an analysis of afrocentrism, see Tunde Adeleke, The Case against Afrocentrism (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009); and Tyler Stovall, “Race and the Making of the Nation: Blacks in Modern France,” in Diasporic Africa, 200-2.
on American racism according to the French tradition of humanitarianism, French and Francophone Africans failed to question the validity of the humanitarian and universalist discourse central to the French “imagined political community.”\(^\text{44}\) Marxist analyses of the global phenomenon of racism, which constituted the basis for French support of the African American freedom movement and Francophone Africans’ identification with their black American counterparts, prevented a particularistic approach to racism that would have focused on the nature and expressions of French racism. The contemporaneity of American racism and French decolonization offered a perfect opportunity for French and Francophone African reflections on the French phenomenon of racism, but for the reasons mentioned above both communities missed this opportunity. As it relates to Francophone Africans both inside and outside of the French metropole, the nation-state takes on yet another fundamental dimension in making sense of Francophone Africans’ attitudes towards the black American freedom movement. The process of Francophone African nation-building also determined Francophone Africans’ attitudes towards the black American experience of and struggle against racism. The nation-state is indeed instrumental not just for our understanding of the Francophone black experience of racism but for both French and Francophone Africans’ engagement with the realities of racial prejudices.

My dissertation points towards larger conclusions regarding ongoing discussions of French racism and antiracism as well as black diasporic studies. Following in Kristin Ross’s footsteps, I contend that superimposing the story of decolonization over that of French anti-Americanism allows us to see how the French “tendency to ‘keep the two stories separated’” has led scholars to mistakenly locate the emergence of a “racial question” in the late 1980s or late

Even as 1950s and 1960s French discussions of racism now appear sterile, the parallels French journalists and intellectuals drew between French and American racisms all testify to the presence of race and racism in the French public consciousness. In a recent book, Daniel A. Gordon, argues that “the rise and fall of a cross-fertilization between immigrants and the French Left” during the 1960s and 1970s is “the vital ‘missing link’ in the history of antiracism in France.”

In contrast, I contend that it is abortive French efforts to conduct a substantial analysis of the parallels between French and American expressions of racism that truly constitute a significant gap in historical narratives of French antiracism. My investigation into Francophone Africans’ representations of and reactions to the African American freedom movement also reveals the epistemological trap of America’s hegemonic hold on Africana studies, which posits as an unquestioned premise the racial identification of blacks across the diaspora. Indeed, as my dissertation demonstrates Francophone Africans’ identification with black Americans’ condition primarily hinged on a common experience of economic oppression; race was epiphenomenal to Francophone Africans’ solidarity with African Americans, not a condition for it.

Although I use archival material to gain insight into American diplomats’ assessments of the influence of American racial issues on the foreign policy of Francophone African countries towards the U.S., I largely focus on journalists’ and intellectuals’ accounts of the African American freedom movement. Because I am investigating the meanings of American racial issues and black American activism in the French context of decolonization, the concept of translation is my major analytical tool. Unlike Brent Hayes Edwards, however, my use of the term translation does not refer to linguistic translation nor does it denote participants’ efforts to engage in a global community of discourse. Rather, I examine how a foreign situation translates

into various national contexts. From this perspective, historical contextualization serves as a mode of textual interpretation that allows me to detect the subtexts behind French and Francophone African representations of the African American freedom movement. In addition, an intertextual approach to French and Francophone African discourses on black American activism and American racial issues allows me to decipher the meanings of silences as well as the salience of recurring ideas. My analyses of these discourses is also sensitive to the emotional character of the French experience of decolonization and anti-Americanism and of Francophone Africans’ experience of identity building and national independence. To enquire into the sentimentalism of French and Francophone Africans’ commentaries on the American racial context, I pay close attention to the authors’ uses of terminology as well as to their tones.

The French and Francophone African construction of race largely hinged on Marxist theorization. Although the authors whose texts I analyze rarely refer to Marxist theory explicitly, their perceptions and representations of the phenomenon of racism rely on the Marxian concepts of historical materialism, relations of production, base and superstructure, class struggle, and Revolution. Marx’s materialist conception of history is based on his assumption that “the mode of production of material life, [the base], conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general [the superstructure].”47 Transformations of material conditions entail a reorganization and a redefinition of the relations of production which reshape the superstructure, that is the social, political, and intellectual fabric of society. This aspect of Marx’s philosophy is central to French and Francophone Africans’ conceptualizations of racism and power. In turn, their approach to antiracism revolves around Marx’s theorization of class consciousness. For Marx, class consciousness emerges in the context of a class struggle whereby “the material

productive forces come in conflict with the existing relations of production.” French and Francophone African intellectuals and journalists with Marxist leanings perceived the concurrent liberation movements around the world through the lens of Marx’s class struggle and revolutionary destruction of capitalism. A close reading of French and Francophone Africans’ writings reveals that the Marxian components of their thoughts shaped their readings of American racial events and African American activism, often distorting the nature of American racial dynamics and the political agendas of black American activists.

For a brief overview of the dissertation, chapter one explores the intersections between leftist French intellectuals’ discourses on colonialism/neo-imperialism and the American racial context. I show the potency of American racism on French discussions of colonial racism as well as the significance of the experience of colonialism and neocolonialism in French interpretations of American racial developments. This chapter lays the groundwork for making sense of Francophone Africans’ solidarity with the black American struggle for racial equality. Chapter two analyzes French antiracists and nationalists’ treatments of the African American freedom movement in their respective publications, Droit et Liberté and Rivarol. The parallels both groups drew between the American racial context and the nature of racial relations between the French and the colonized—later the African from both the North and South of the Sahara—illustrate their perceived need to protect the French nation, either against American-like expressions of racial prejudice or against the threat to white supremacy exemplified by black Americans’ claims to racial equality. Chapter three examines the coverage of American racial developments in the French mainstream press. Looking at French journalists’ treatment of American racial events in L’Humanité (left), Le Monde (center-left), and Le Figaro (right) further illustrates the significance of those events for French reflections on colonialism and its

legacies. An intertextual analysis of French journalistic discourses also helps to point to the limitations of French racial egalitarianism, even as they more or less strongly supported the legitimacy of African Americans’ calls for racial equality. Chapter four takes us to the African continent and explores the treatment of the African American freedom movement in the Francophone African press. Focusing on Guinea, Senegal, and Ivory Coast, I discuss Francophone Africans’ diverse attitudes towards the black American experience. I demonstrate the relevance of a Marxian worldview in Francophone Africans’ solidarity with black Americans. This chapter also suggests that Francophone Africans’ projects of nation-building shaped official reactions to American racial events. Finally, through reflections on the black American experience of racism, chapter five enquires into Francophone African intellectuals’ engagement with the black American struggle for racial equality. In addition to revealing a generational gap between the contributors to the postwar vehicle of Négritude Présence Africaine and Francophone African Catholic publication Tam-Tam, this chapter further underlines the importance of Marxism in shaping the dimensions of Francophone Africans’ interest in the experiences of their black American counterparts.

This dissertation explores French and Francophone African journalists’ and intellectuals’ perceptions and representations of the African American struggle for racial equality. I analyze French and Francophone African reactions to American racial issues in the momentous era of decolonization, which reshaped French and Francophone Africans’ relations to one another. Investigating the meanings the French and Francophone Africans ascribed to American racial developments, this dissertation shows that the colonial and postcolonial contexts determined both groups’ perceptions of American racial tensions. Even though the simultaneity of decolonization and the African American freedom movement allowed for both French and Francophone
Africans’ reflections on the phenomenon of French racism, these reflections were largely aborted with the rise of neo-imperialism in the 1960s, which led both communities to regard black American racial oppression as a domestic symbol of U.S. imperialist ambitions. The emergence of a “racial question” in France was arguably short-lived, but it took place. Ignoring it may ease current French discomfort at the realization that France, indeed, has a racial problem. However, uncovering French and Francophone African’s early attempts at grappling with the French “racial question” can hopefully shed light on the conditions which seem to have unfortunately cut these efforts short.

CHAPTER 1: FRENCH LEFTIST INTELLECTUALS AND THE AMERICAN RACIAL CONTEXT: FROM A THEORIZATION OF COLONIAL RACISM TO A REVOLUTIONARY THIRDWORLDISM

The years following the Second World War proved traumatic for the French. The ascension of the United States to the position of superpower and the process of decolonization both contributed to blowing French grandeur to pieces. In this postwar script of French decadence, the U.S. occupied a central place. Echoing French interwar criticism of American materialism, postwar French commentators expressed their resentment for what they perceived as the “colonization” of France by the U.S., especially in the economic and cultural domains.¹

The Second World War also awakened a generation of French intellectuals to the evils of racism. The French collaboration with Nazi Germany and the participation of the Vichy government in the “Final Solution” especially sensitized many French intellectuals to issues of racism. This

postwar brand of antiracism would, in turn, inform French intellectuals’ anti-colonialism. As Paul Clay Sorum notes in *Intellectuals and Decolonization in France*, the French intellectuals who would become engaged in the debate about colonialism were individuals who had rejected collaboration with Nazi Germany under the Vichy government. “This experience convinced them to involve themselves as writers in the postwar struggle for liberty and social justice in France and in the world.”² This new commitment to social justice led French intellectuals to condemn not only Western colonial oppression, but also American racism, whose ugly face the concurrent African American freedom movement shockingly unveiled.

By exploring French intellectuals’ treatment of the African American freedom movement, this chapter lies at the intersection of the historiographies on French leftist intellectuals’ postwar Anti-Americanism and French intellectuals anticolonialism. My analysis of discussions of American racial issues and the black American movement for racial equality in the Marxist-Existentialist magazine directed by Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Temps Modernes*, and in the writings of Marxist-turned-Anarchist Daniel Guérin will be guided by the following interrogations: To what extent did American racial tensions of the 1950s and 1960s inform French intellectuals’ reflections on colonialism and neocolonialism? In turn, how did French colonialism and the new wave of imperialism in the 1960s influence French intellectuals’ understanding and reactions to the African American freedom movement? Finally, what role did French postwar anxiety about Americanization and the global Cold War context play in French intellectuals’ views on the African American struggle for racial equality and the American problem of racism it brought to light? In the introduction to *Extrême Orient*, Jean-Philippe Mathy writes, “Judgments passed on the United States from France should be read as discourses

about France.”

French leftist intellectuals’ commentaries on American racism and the African American freedom movement certainly illustrate this claim. As this chapter will demonstrate, however, in the context of French colonialism French intellectuals’ reflections on American racism were far from subliminal. Explicit analogies between American racism and French colonial racism demonstrate the significance of the former in the theorization and evaluation of the latter. I also argue that it was in the 1960s, when French leftist intellectuals’ anti-Americanism combined the old French anti-capitalist grief with a new anti-imperialist concern that the African American freedom movement became relevant to French leftist intellectuals.

French intellectuals’ ideological foundations, which generally incorporated Marxism with Fanonian Revolutionary violence, either precluded their engagement with the nonviolent civil rights movement or generated a distinctively French reading of the movement. While that ideological construct drew French leftist intellectuals to the Black Power movement, it also led those intellectuals to mold black American radicalism to fit their political agendas.

A good place to start our discussion of French intellectuals’ engagement with the black American freedom movement is Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre was among a generation of French intellectuals whose participation in the Resistance transformed their approach to writing. As Sorum clearly put it, “This experience convinced them to involve themselves as writers in the postwar struggle for liberty and social justice in France and the world.”

French colonialism, particularly French colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria, was one of the postwar issues with which French intellectuals became actively involved. Before the war in Algeria, which was the backdrop for Sartre’s theorization of the system of colonialism, Sartre had already addressed issues of colonialism and racism in “Black Orpheus,” his introduction to Léopold Sédar

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3 Mathy, Extrême Orient, 7.
4 Sorum, Intellectuals and Decolonization in France, 13.
Senghor’s 1948 *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*. In this piece, Sartre expressed his support for the Négritude movement arguing that Africans’ quest for a strong sense of African identity was necessary to free them from the “structures of perception” imposed by the colonizer.\(^5\) Sartre had also lent his intellectual stardom to the Francophone black icons of the Négritude movement by joining *Présence Africaine*’s patronage committee and contributing an article, “Présence noire,” to their first issue of the magazine.\(^6\) Sartre would also tap into his intellectual weight on the French public scene to denounce the war in Algeria and support the efforts of the Algerian National Liberation Front. In 1956, Sartre condemned the war in Algeria and the colonial system it was trying to preserve in a speech at a meeting of the *Comité d’Action des Intellectuels contre la Poursuite de la Guerre en Algérie*.\(^7\) Four years later, he was among the first French intellectuals to sign the “manifesto of the 121,” also known as *The Declaration of the Right of Insubordination in the Algerian War*, which argued for the right of French people to “refuse to accept the acts of war which the state purported to carry out in the name of the people.”\(^8\) Sartre’s anticolonialist engagement was part of his life-long commitment to “take up the cause of individuals wrongly accused or unjustly treated.”\(^9\)

As one of the most famous French anticolonialist intellectuals, Sartre’s writings on the subject of colonialism and its intrinsic system of oppression constituted a hallmark of the French anticolonial literature. By placing racism at the core of the French colonial system, Sartre especially shattered the French fiction of racial egalitarianism. Sartre’s encounter with anti-

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\(^7\) Arthur, *Unfinished Projects*, 75-76.


\(^9\) Arthur, *Unfinished Projects*, 64.
Semitism and American racism would play instrumental roles in the formation of his analysis of racism in the colonial context. The French intellectual’s theorization of racism originated in the 1930s with his analysis of anti-Semitism which he famously laid out in his 1946 work of social philosophy *Réflexion sur la question juive*, translated in English as *Antisemite and Jew*. Central to Sartre’s understanding of anti-Semitism was existential phenomenology, a philosophy which he developed during the 1930s.\(^\text{10}\) At the heart of his analysis is the notion that people exist in relation to others, which Sartre referred to as “being-for-others.” As Gary Cox clearly puts it, “The anti-Semite exists in relation to the Jew he hates and the Jew exists in relation to the anti-Semite who hates him.”\(^\text{11}\) The Jew’s experience of racism thus materializes in his objectification through the prejudiced “look” of the anti-Semite. Although the Jew cannot escape this objectification, he is irrevocably free to choose his response to the objectifying “gaze” of the anti-Semite. In other words, he can regain control over himself by devaluing the meaning ascribed to him through the anti-Semite’s look. This very simplified account of Sartre’s existential analysis of racism establishes concepts that would be constitutive of his understanding of colonial racism, i.e. the unavoidable reality of “being-for-others,” which is always conflictual, and the freedom to choose one’s response to the objectifying gaze.\(^\text{12}\) Sartre’s observations on American racism after World War II constituted the other major component of his theorization of


race and marked Sartre’s philosophical transition from existential phenomenology to existential Marxism.

In 1945, Albert Camus chose Sartre to represent *Combat*, a clandestine Resistance newspaper of which Camus became the editor-in-chief in late 1943, in a four-month advertising tour financed by the American government.\(^\text{13}\) Sartre’s physical encounter with American racism helped him build on his 1930s theorization of anti-Semitism by placing economic institutions at the core of racism. Soon after his return from the United States, Sartre shared his observations regarding the lives of African Americans in “Retour des Etats-Unis: Ce que j’ai appris du problème noir” published in *Le Figaro* in June 1945.\(^\text{14}\) In this article, Sartre places a heavy emphasis on the economic discriminations suffered by the black minority in the United States, as well as the housing and health issues resulting from their overall state of destitution. For Sartre, the contemporary condition of African Americans had to do with “the economic structure of the country.”\(^\text{15}\) With this new Marxist insight, the liberation of the racialized other would not simply depend on his response to the objectifying gaze of the oppressor, but also on the transformation of “the structures of oppression, which themselves condition structures of perception.”\(^\text{16}\) This theoretical synthesis shaped Sartre’s criticism of colonialism and what he understood to be its intrinsic component, racism.

Sartre drew attention to the racist nature of French colonialism in his 1956 speech, “Colonialism is a System,” which he delivered in 1956 in opposition to the Algerian war and which later appeared in the collection of Sartre’s anticolonialist writings *Colonialism and...*


\(^\text{15}\) Jean-Paul Sartre, “Return from the United States,” in *Existence in Black*, 87.

Neocolonialism. Sartre explained that the colonists’ dehumanization of the colonized allowed the former to resolve their dilemma between their “economic interests” and the French political tradition of liberalism. By denying humanity to the colonized, colonialists removed obstacles to their greedy quest for economic gains. In Sartre’s words, “one of the functions of racism is to compensate the latent universalism of bourgeois liberalism: since all human beings have the same rights, the Algerian will be made a subhuman.”

This understanding of the intersection between colonialism and racism also appeared a year later in Sartre’s preface to Albert Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. In this piece, which along with “Colonialism is a System” and his preface to Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, is the most influential iteration of Sartre’s theory of colonialism, the French intellectual more forcefully placed racial prejudice at the heart of the colonial experiment. Highlighting the influential role of Marxist theory in his understanding of racism and colonialism, he affirmed, “In fact, racism is inscribed in the system... [...] Racism is inscribed in the events themselves, in the institutions, in the nature of the exchanges and the production.”

Because racism was inherent to it, the colonial system had to be destroyed.

In his preface to Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, which became the “bible of decolonization” and the “handbook” for black American revolutionaries of the 1960s, Sartre gave his full support to Fanon’s advocacy for “liberatory violence.” As mentioned earlier, the concept of freedom was a central aspect of Sartre’s existential philosophy. The Sartrean concept of freedom “consists in [a person’s] constant responsibility of having to choose who he is

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17 Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*.
18 Jean-Paul Sartre, “Colonialism is a System,” in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, 44-45.
19 Jean-Paul Sartre, “Albert Memmi’s The Colonizer and the Colonized,” in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, 49-50.
through the actions he chooses to perform in response to… his concrete situation.” Although a
person’s situation imposes limits on his range of actions, “there is no limit to the responsibility of
having to choose an option in every situation.” 21 Although Fanon was critical of certain aspects
of Sartre’s existential philosophy, he was nonetheless inspired by the French intellectual’s
existentialist notions of alienation and freedom. 22 Despite the concrete limitations placed on the
colonized through the colonial system, the colonized nonetheless held the freedom, in fact the
responsibility, to challenge their dehumanization at the hands of the colonizer. Fanon therefore
envisioned decolonization as “the creation of new men… The ‘thing’ colonized becomes a man
through the very process of decolonization.” 23 By challenging the colonial system, the colonized
would also challenge their objectification by the colonized. Especially influenced by Sartre’s
Critique of the Dialectical Reason, Fanon would come to see the colonial “oppression of human
freedom” as absolute violence that could only be addressed with violence. 24 The intrinsically
violent dehumanization of the colonized and the colonizer’s brutal opposition to the nationalist
aspirations of the colonized, as was the case in Algeria, led Fanon and Sartre to conclude that
only “violence, like Achilles’ spear, can heal the wounds it has inflicted.” 25 Not only did the
liberation of the colonized lay in the destruction of the colonial structure of oppression, but it
also required revolutionary violence. The appeal of the Fanonian concept of revolutionary

22 On Fanon’s disagreements with aspects of Sartre’s existential philosophy, see Haddour, “Being Colonized,”
78-89.
23 In this quotation, Fanon borrows Aimé Césaire’s concept of “thingification” which, echoing Sartre’s
existential analysis of the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed, referred to the objectification of the
colonized. Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, Franz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression (New York: Plenum Press,
1985), 187; Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 2; Miguel Mellino, “Notes
24 Ronald E Santoni, Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State
University Press, 2003), 68–69, 72.
25 Jean-Paul Sartre, preface to The Wretched of the Earth, lxii.
violence exposed in *The Wretched of the Earth* will be further illustrated in *Les Temps Modernes*’ treatment of the Black Power movement.

Despite Sartre’s postwar intellectual engagement with the black American experience of racism, between 1955 and 1968, there is surprisingly little about the events unfurling in the United States in Jean-Paul Sartre’s own writings. African Americans’ concerted effort to challenge the system of racial oppression in the United States remained unexplored by Sartre. However, as the following analysis suggests, American racial dynamics were relevant to Sartre’s discussions of French colonial policy, particularly as it pertained to Algeria. In “Colonialism is a System,” Sartre’s first major pronouncement against the war in Algeria, he crushed the noble myth of the French *mission civilisatrice* and French pretensions to incarnate the ideal of racial egalitarianism. Sartre especially highlighted the failure of integration in Algeria where the French settlers lived economically, socially, and culturally isolated from Muslim Algerians. A significant aspect of the *mission civilisatrice* consisted in bringing French cultural values to colonial subjects. In this piece, Sartre demonstrated that the French colonial administration had failed to live up to the ideals of their colonial mission—while recognizing that Muslim Algerians may not have been too enthralled with “our famous culture.” Indeed, he pointed out the disproportionate amount of illiterates among Muslim Algerians which, he argued, resulted from a conscious desire to keep Muslim Algerians below the French and other European settlers.

It was this example of French colonial hypocrisy that drew Sartre to compare the French treatment of Algerians with the treatment of African Americans. With the Algerian illiteracy rate

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reaching 80%, Sartre claimed, “I will not go as far as to say that we were as cynical as in that southern state of the USA where a law, maintained until the beginning of the nineteenth century, prohibited people from teaching black slaves to read—offenders would be fined. But we did want to make our ‘Muslim brothers’ a population of illiterates.”

Although Sartre tempered his criticism by stating that French colonial policy could not fully be compared to racial policies of the American South, the comparison remains telling. Indeed, his analogy with the American South ascribed racial characteristics to the French colonial system in Algeria; a system that, in his words, “infects us with racism.” Additionally, it is important to note that Sartre grounded his comparison between French and American racism in the racial context of the Antebellum South. Two years before this address, the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka case brought to light the issue of illiteracy and educational underachievement among the African American community as a result of the de jure system of segregation in the South. Certainly, Sartre could have rooted his analogy in the contemporary system of segregation, which sought to maintain African Americans as a lower racial caste. Why then did he choose to draw a parallel between colonial Algeria and the Antebellum South? A simple reason may be his familiarity with racial dynamics of the Antebellum South, as one of the essays gathered in the posthumous Notebooks for an Ethics focused on the black American experience of slavery in the U.S. South. It appears reasonable, however, to suggest that Sartre may have used this analogy to underline the outdated character of colonialism, just like Alan Albert would do a few years later in “Study in Brown (II): De la mentalité coloniale,” article published in Les Temps Modernes which I will analyze in the following pages. As my analysis of the French mainstream press demonstrates in chapter

28 Jean-Paul Sartre, “Colonialism is a System,” in Colonialism and Neocolonialism, 41.
29 Jean-Paul Sartre, “Colonialism is a System,” in Colonialism and Neocolonialism, 47.
30 This essay, which had also appeared in Combat in 1949, Sartre applied his existential philosophy to the relation between the master and the slave and explored the institutional nature of oppression. Arthur, Unfinished Project, 67-70; Judaken, “Sartre on Racism,” in Race after Sartre, 30-31.
three, comparisons between Algeria and the U.S. South were familiar to the French public. Thus for Sartre, as for other critics of French colonial policy, the American racial scene could be used as a backdrop to dramatize the nature and effects of the racialized system erected in colonial Algeria.

In the introduction to Albert Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Sartre opened his commentary on Memmi’s analysis of the colonial situation with another reference to pre-Civil War North America. To legitimize Memmi’s portraits of the colonizer and the colonized, Sartre began by presenting what he called “a criminal line of reasoning,” or “blackmail:” “Only the southern Confederates are qualified to talk about slavery: that is because they know the Negro, the Yankees of the north, abstract puritans, only know Man, who is an entity. This fine reasoning is still employed in Houston, in the New Orleans Press, and also, since one is always somebody’s Yankee, in ‘French Algeria’”31 Like the previous example from Sartre’s “Colonialism is a System,” this reference also contributed to his effort to dramatize the long-denied existence of racism within the French colonial experiment. As I mentioned earlier, the introduction to Memmi’s book constituted one of Sartre’s major contributions to the theorization of French colonial racism. His reference to the American history of racism in the opening lines of the introduction suggests how important American racism was to his thinking on French racial prejudice in the colonial context. Starting the discussion with nineteenth-century North American racial issues undeniably set the tone for Sartre’s condemnation of the French colonial system in Algeria. In particular, his discussion of the Confederates and the Yankees directly served the purpose of discrediting the pieds noirs’ claims that only their perspective on the colonized should

31 In Howard Greenfeld’s translation of Sartre’s introduction to *The Colonizer and The Colonized*, he referred to “the criminal line of reasoning,” whereas in the text published in *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, the same fragment is translated as “blackmail.” Jean-Paul Sartre, Introduction to *The Colonizer and the Colonized* by Albert Memmi (New York: Orion Press, 1965), xxi; Jean-Paul Sartre, “Albert Memmi’s The Colonizer and the Colonized,” *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, 48.
be accepted as valid. As I will discuss in the following sections of this chapter on *Les Temps Modernes* and on Daniel Guérin’s *La décolonization des noirs américains*, American racial history inspired French comparisons with colonialism, especially in Algeria.

As my previous analysis illustrates, the American racial context both informed Sartre’s reflections on the colonial system and fueled his anticolonial critique. If American racial prejudice and the black American experience shaped his understanding of racism, the African American struggle for racial equality does not appear to have received the same degree of attention by the French intellectual. Sartre’s “The Philosophy of Revolution,” published in *Les Temps Modernes* in June 1946, nonetheless allows us to imagine what Sartre’s views may have been on the subject of the integrationist phase of the civil rights movement. In this article, Sartre expressed his conception of a revolution and its actors. Sartre posited that being in a situation of oppression was a sine qua non for revolutionary action. But he added that belonging to an oppressed group did not necessarily result in an individual’s readiness to work towards a revolution, especially if this individual enjoyed privileges denied to the majority of the group. Taking the example of the Jews, Sartre asserted that because the Jews were oppressed within the bourgeoisie and, as they share(d) the privileges of the class that oppress(ed) them, they (could not) without contradiction work towards the destruction of those privileges.”

Sartre moved on to encompass African Americans in his description of the non-revolutionary oppressed: “What black Americans and bourgeois Jews want is equal rights, which in no way implies a structural change in the regime of property rights. They merely wish to share in the privileges of their oppressors, which is to say that they are, ultimately, seeking a more complete integration.”

The middle-class African American leaders of the civil rights movement, with their focus on racial

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33 Ibid., 195.
integration, were unlikely to bring about the kind of structural changes Sartre deemed necessary for the liberation of man. This is likely why Sartre and *Les Temps Modernes*, the magazine he directed, did not engage with the nonviolent civil rights movement. French intellectuals’ Marxist ideology therefore prevented them from engaging with the racial character of the movement.

Unlike the French antiracists discussed in the next chapter, Sartre and the intellectuals gathered around *Les Temps Modernes* missed the opportunity to prompt a comparative analysis between American and French expressions of racial prejudice. On the other hand, as my analysis of *Les Temps Modernes*’s treatment of the Black Power movement will illustrate, black American radicals’ conceptualization of African Americans’ conditions within the framework of American capitalism—and their readiness to use violence—proved far more appealing to Sartre and other intellectuals who both opposed capitalism and supported the use of revolutionary violence.

*Les Temps Modernes*, a monthly journal founded in October 1945, has its roots in the French Resistance. Sartre’s war experience had convinced him, as it did many other intellectuals of his generation, that the writer had to actively engage with the issues plaguing his time. Along with friends who had joined his Resistance group, *Socialisme et Liberté*, like Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sartre set out to create a magazine that would place literature at the service of politics. In *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, Wildfrid Desan provides an overview of the magazine’s political, cultural, and philosophical character: “It was avant-gardist, leftist in the world of politics, existentialist in the realm of philosophy, socially minded, though without a definite program in the domain of literature.” The ideological orientation of the magazine predisposed it to become one of the most forceful anticolonial voices in the French public sphere. In fact, as Paige Arthur points out Sartre drew attention to the racist

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nature of French colonialism in his 1956 speech. Between 1945 and 1951, “Les Temps Modernes published thirty-one articles whose explicit subject was colonialism, and a further seven whose content was indirectly related to that theme.”36 Engaging with discussions of French colonialism mainly as it pertained to the war in Indochina, but also to the colonial situation in Madagascar, the Ivory Coast, the French Caribbean islands, and Algeria, Les Temps Modernes quickly earned its anticolonial accreditation. The assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1961 and the success of the Cuban and Algerian revolutions resulted in a heightened interest in Third World countries among many French intellectuals. This interest notably translated in “Les Temps Modernes’s myriad of articles analyzing events in the Congo, Portuguese Guinea, South Africa, Rwanda, Angola, the United States (in particular, the Civil Rights and Black Power movements), China, India, Laos, Vietnam, Egypt, Algeria, the Antilles, the Dominican Republic, Latin America (treated as a whole), Brazil, Cuba, Guatemala, and Haiti—all before the events of 1968.”37 As Arthur mentions, the racial oppression of African Americans in the U.S. received coverage in Les Temps Modernes. However, as the following analysis will demonstrate, not all aspects of the African American freedom movement proved of interest to the magazine.

As my previous analysis of Sartre’s comparison between French colonialism and American racism and the following two chapters show, French intellectuals and journalists’ reflections on the Algerian war often resorted to analogies between the French colonial context and the American racial context. Alan Albert’s article, “Study in Brown (II): De la Mentalité Coloniale,” published in the August 1962 issue of Les Temps Modernes provides a further example of the appeal of American racism for French intellectuals’ cogitations on the French colonial situation in Algeria. A few words on the life and work of this fascinating intellectual and

36 Arthur, Unfinished Projects, 48.
37 Ibid., 125, 129-30.
politician will illustrate the potency of the African American experience of racism for French understandings of racism and colonialism. Almost exclusively known as the French Jew who considered himself “100 per cent a Jew, 100 per cent an Arab,” Ilan Halevi/Alain Albert/Alan Albert served as an adviser to Yasser Arafat and was an influential member of the Palestine Liberation Organization. As his older brother recalled, Blanche, their mother, delivered Albert in a Lyon post-office which served as a hide-out for the city’s Resistant. Jewish in a Nazi-occupied city, the Lévin family changed their last name repeatedly. After the war, his childhood in Normandy continued to be marked by racial discrimination. These traumatic experiences and his encounter with the vibrant Jazz scene in Paris led him to identify with blacks, as the first part of “Study in Brown,” written from an African American perspective, testifies. 38 His encounter with Richard Wright’s wife, Ellen Wright, allowed Albert to meet with Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir: “Study in Brown” was a perfect fit for Les Temps Modernes’s intellectual enterprise. 39

In his article, Albert established a parallel between colonialism and the racial system of oppression in the American South. Specifically, Albert presented what he saw as similarities between the colonial situation in Algeria and the history of racial relations between white and black Americans. First, it is worth noting that Albert presented the Jim Crow South as a colonial setting: the attitude of Southern whites testified to their colonial mindset. Albert proposed to study the colonizer from a psychoanalytic perspective, à la Fanon. Albert portrayed Southern whites as mentally deranged individuals who “suffer(ed) from a collective madness so easily noticeable that it would be laughable if the burden of life and death which it drags along with it

did not make it a much more serious issue.”\textsuperscript{40} Having established the colonial and psychopathic character of southern white American racists, Albert drew a parallel between Southern white Americans and French Algerians whom he considered “the last maladjusted type of colonizers.” He explained that their comparable inadequacy stemmed from their sharing “a kind of pathological mental perversion whose similar symptoms develop according to a same process in Mississippi as well as in Constantine.”\textsuperscript{41} According to Albert, mental illness was a commonality shared by both southern white Americans and the pieds noirs, whose most fervent representatives in the \textit{Organisation de l’Armée Secrète} had started to be a serious cause of concern among French metropolitans at the beginning of 1962. Weary of the conclusions of the negotiations between President Charles de Gaulle and representatives of the National Liberation Front, these extremist partisans of a “French Algeria” resorted to acts of violence both in the metropole and in Algeria to demonstrate their uncompromising stance on the question of Algerian independence.\textsuperscript{42}

To ground his analogy, Albert offered an original historical analysis of both the U.S. South and Algeria. The author identified the major turning points of the Civil War and the Algerian War as the beginning of southern white Americans and French colonists’ madness. As Albert put it, “BEFORE, everything was fine. Before the crisis. Before Eve (the woman, so the Other) bit the apple, before the North, driven by lowly political motives, caused the Civil War, before the metropole, corrupted by the Communists, contributed to transforming the Algerian rebellion into a political conflict.”\textsuperscript{43} Through this biblical allegory, the author underlined—and mocked—white Southerners’ and French Algerians’ beliefs that “foreign” interventions were

\textsuperscript{41} Constantine is an inland city of Algeria. Before Algerian independence in 1962, it was the capital of the French department of Constantine.
\textsuperscript{43} Albert, “Study in Brown,” 334.
responsible for the downfall of their respective “paradise on earth.” Alarmed by the election of Republican Abraham Lincoln in 1860, whose party had consistently opposed the expansion of slavery in western states, Southerners claimed to have been constrained to secede from the Union. That Lincoln was elected to the White House without carrying any southern state heightened white Southerners’ concerns regarding the very survival of their society, of which slavery was central. The Northern Republican Party was to white American southerners what the French Communist Party was to French Algerians. The French Communist Party only tardily supported the National Algerian Front and their national aspirations—and was among the other elements of the French political scene whose desire for peace had led them to embrace Algerian independence. But in light of French leftist intellectuals’ loud and repeated calls for Algerian independence, it is easy to imagine how French Algerians would come to blame French communists for the turn of events in Algeria.

Pursuing his psychoanalysis of white Southerners, Albert affirmed that the Civil War was the event that led whites to “remember a mythical past in which they loved blacks and blacks loved them.” Having shattered slavery and the “affectionate” system of relationships that united whites and blacks (in the minds of white Southerners), the Civil War gave way to segregation: whites’ retribution towards blacks for a vanished “love.” The paternalistic justification of slavery, which conceived of the master as a caring, and even loving, father figure and of the slave as an eternal child contributed to the erroneous belief that slaves were pleased

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with their position in the Southern order.\textsuperscript{47} The desertion of slaves and newly emancipated slaves to the Union army gave southern slave owners a rude awakening. It was then, according to Albert, that "slavery appeared in the South, no longer as a cynical justification of blacks’ exploitation and slavery, but as a true psychological passion."\textsuperscript{48} The Civil War and Northerners’ efforts to impose a “moral” order in the South during Reconstruction contributed to alienating white Southerners, who reinvented a collective memory of the days of slavery, particularly as it pertained to their relationships with blacks. Quite similarly, the intervention of the French metropole in the conflict in Algeria, especially after the French government approved Algerian independence, was experienced as a violation by French Algerians who responded by transforming the collective memory of the colonial situation in Algeria.\textsuperscript{49}

Like white Southerners who seemed to believe that slaves were too infantile to wish for their emancipation, French Algerians perceived Muslim Algerians as too immature to start a war. For French Algerians, this war had to have been engineered by the French metropole, which, Albert granted, tried to impose their moral upper hand over the colonial government in Algiers, much like the American North did over the South. But, the author warned that unlike African Americans, for whom years of experience have destroyed the myth of a more humane North, Muslim Algerians may find themselves believing in the moral superiority of the French metropole. “Illusion,” he said; Albert’s experiences of racial discrimination in France had taught him to believe otherwise.\textsuperscript{50} Like Sartre who was adamant to condemn the French from the


\textsuperscript{49} On the subject of the Algerian war and collective memory, see Jo McCormack, \textit{Collective Memory: France and the Algerian War (1954-1962)} (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007); Sheppard, \textit{The Invention of Decolonization}.

\textsuperscript{50} Albert, “Study in Brown,” 337.
metropole about their responsibility in the war, Albert pointed at Frenchmen’s silence and inaction as signs of their tacit complicity with the colonizer and of their “cheap moral superiority.” Moreover, the fate of Muslim Algerians in the metropole did not fare better as the “terrific” violence unleashed by Parisian authorities against peaceful Muslim Algerian protesters on 17 October 1961 ghastly demonstrated.  

To offer a more concrete analysis of the “colonial mentality,” Albert relied on the literary figures of William Faulkner, who had passed away a few months earlier, and Albert Camus, who had died in a car accident in January 1960. To establish the validity of his analysis, Albert argued that “the attitude of colonizers, to the extent that it represents a complete refusal of the real world and that it depends essentially on the survival of an imaginary world, is naturally and profoundly conducive to literary creation.”  

Although not colonizers themselves, in the eyes of Albert, Faulkner and Camus could nevertheless be perceived as representatives of their respective communities. In order to emphasize the irrational character of the “colonial mentality,” Albert underlined the inconsistencies in the professed liberalism of both Faulkner and Camus. As he stated, “it is significant that both consider having liberal ‘ideas,’ even leftist ideas, except when it comes to their respective issues, that is racial integration and colonization.” Both authors managed to reconcile the contradictions inherent to their worldviews by stressing the unique nature of their environment, “thereby more or less implicitly lending it a mystical and irrational value.”  

By establishing the exceptionalism of their respective systems, the American and French Algerian authors placed those systems and their actors outside of the operative realm of

53 Ibid., 339
morality. The following quotation clearly exposes Faulkner and Camus’ respective views on white Southerners and European-Algerians, the pieds noirs:

White Southerners are wrong, they are killers and savages, but their way of being wrong is particular: by essence, they are right because their actions respond to an internal logic, the Spirit of the South has to be just. Pieds noirs are fascists and backward, but, Camus says, they belong to this privileged race of human beings who experience life under the Mediterranean sun, which enables them to live happy, and a happy man cannot be wrong.54

While Faulkner had criticized segregationists, like other white American liberals of his time he had also called for changes in the racial climate of the United States to take place at a moderate pace. For Albert, this stance allowed him to be shielded from the blame incumbent upon white segregationists while holding on to the racial status quo. Camus’ silence on the horrors of the Algerian war as well as his failure to recognize the Algerian uprising as a true Socialist revolution also betrayed his pretense to be the voice of the workers, the colonized and the oppressed.55

The simultaneity of the American civil rights movement and the Algerian War led intellectuals and commentators to draw parallels between the two situations. Albert’s “Study in Brown” is a powerful example of such an analogy. His Fanonian approach allowed him to present southern white Americans through colonial lenses and to categorize them alongside French Algerians as mentally unstable colonizers. As he stated, “the situation of black Americans cannot but be compared to the situation of colonized, especially as there exists such a blatant confusion in the minds of white Southerners who go as far as to refer to them as “indigenous.”56 Unlike many people, who thought of Native Americans as the only colonized

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54 My English translation does not accurately translate Camus’ notion of “mesure méditerranéenne” which Albert compares to Faulkner’s “Esprit du Sud.”
56 “Study in Brown,” 333.
people in the U.S., Albert believed that African Americans also belonged to the category of the colonized. In this way, Albert laid the ground for a legitimate comparison between white American Southerners and French Algerians. While Albert mocked white southern Americans and French Algerians’ complaints about “foreign” interventions and the subsequent destruction of their respective societies, he nonetheless relied on the parallel between the U.S. North and the French metropole to formulate a sharp criticism of French responsibility in the crimes suffered by Algerians, both in Algeria and in the metropole. The honorable Northerners, as the decades following the Civil War had proved, had failed to live up to the moral standards that “supposedly” drove them to emancipate slaves in the South. As for French people from the metropole, their complete indifference towards the plight of the colonized made them as responsible as French Algerians for the horrors perpetrated during the war in Algeria. By likening American whites to French colonizers, Albert’s analysis delivered a clear message to French people: colonizers and their mute accomplices in the metropole were just as morally reprehensible as the white American proponents of segregation, a system which the French especially condemned.  

Although the publication of “Study in Brown” in Les Temps Modernes testifies to French intellectuals’ interest in issues of racism and racial segregation in the United States, the subject of the African American freedom movement remained largely untouched until the magazine’s November 1962 issue, which featured an article about black American activist Robert Williams. Admittedly, Ronald Fraser, the writer of “A Black Who Fights: Robert Williams,” was not a French intellectual; he was an English oral historian who notably published a well-received oral history of the Spanish Civil War and later co-author of a book on the 1968 student

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demonstrations which took place in various parts of the world.\(^\text{58}\) But the publication of an article on the North Carolinian “freedom fighter” in a magazine that had tended to overlook the American civil rights movement is certainly relevant. Just as relevant is Williams’ place in the margins of the non-violent civil rights movement. American journalists and commentators had disingenuously portrayed Williams’ advocacy for self-defense as a call for purely avenging violence. This characterization expelled Williams from the pantheon of respectable black civil rights leaders. The rise of the Black Power movement in the latter half of the 1960s would bring Williams out of the shadow for he became, like Malcolm, one of the young black radicals’ main sources of inspiration. In publishing this article on Williams’ activism, *Les Temps Modernes* fulfilled its avant-gardist mission.

Since few other African American activists would receive such attention in *Les Temps Modernes*, it is appropriate to start by placing Williams in the context of the African American freedom movement. Although he had long stood up to white racists’ violence, his official entry in the black freedom movement occurred when he took the lead of the NAACP chapter in his native town of Monroe, North Carolina. The economic pressures imposed on individuals affiliated with the NAACP, an association deemed subversive by Southern authorities, made Monroe NAACP members unwilling to take risks. As Timothy B. Tyson explains in his book covering the life and activism of the North Carolinian activist, prior to Williams’ involvement with the NAACP members of the branch were almost exclusively from the Black bourgeoisie.\(^\text{59}\) With the intensification of whites’ resistance following the 1954 *Brown* decision, members of the Monroe branch became increasingly unwilling to speak against racial discrimination; their jobs


and economic prospects were on the line. It was in this context of white racial hostility and inaction of the NAACP that Williams joined the organization and soon became president of its Monroe chapter. Under Williams’ leadership, Monroe’s NAACP chapter came to represent the black working class. The class tensions inherent to the story of Williams’ leadership in the black community of Monroe was certainly an aspect of the black American racial struggle that was of interest to the leftist editorial board of *Les Temps Modernes*.

Williams’ fearless challenge to southern racial iniquities, through an armed struggle if necessary, echoed Sartre and Fanon’s adhesion to the use of revolutionary violence. After yet another young black boy drowned in a local lake, Williams and his fellow NAACP activists demanded a separate pool for blacks or access to the white public pool. Williams’ radicalism became notable when he staged “stand-ins” in front of the public swimming pool with a group of young African Americans. Williams was not just trying to integrate a public facility but was simultaneously transgressing the taboo of interracial sexuality. His bold action resulted in heightened activity of the local Ku Klux Klan. Unlike nonviolent civil rights activists who refused to arm themselves for potential confrontations with whites, Williams and Monroe’s local activists were more than ready to pick up guns to defend their properties and loved-ones.

Williams’ advocacy for self-defense resonated louder still after the Union County Courthouse dismissed two cases regarding the physical and sexual abuse of black women by white men. Williams, who had accompanied the two women to court, was outraged. The lack of legal protection for African Americans became obvious. It was time, as Williams said, “to meet violence with violence.”

Even though Williams was not professing gratuitous violence, his radicalism was enough to get him demoted from his position of leadership in the NAACP.

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The straw that broke the camel’s back was the arrival in Monroe in the summer of 1961 of Freedom Riders who were eager to demonstrate the effectiveness of nonviolent methods. The protests led by the Monroe Nonviolent Action Committee fueled the hostility of Monroe’s whites. One night, as the climate of violence seemed to have reached its peak, angry and armed black men organized under Williams’ order to prevent white locals from staging an attack in his neighborhood. It was then that a white couple drove through the neighborhood. Reporting Williams’ words, Tyson explains that Williams feared that the anger of his fellowmen would turn towards the couple who happened to be there at the wrong moment. To protect the Stegalls, Williams made them take shelter in his home; for the white authorities of Monroe Williams had kidnapped the Stegalls. With the police looking to arrest him, he and his family fled Monroe, first for Canada and then for Cuba.

This short overview of Williams’ activism provides clues for understanding the appeal of “Un noir qui se bat” for Les Temps Modernes. First, the magazine’s interest in this article can largely be explained by the role played by the black working class in the movement led by Williams in Monroe. As a matter of fact, Fraser’s article opens with a description of the despicable housing conditions reserved for blacks in the South. His trip through the South revealed the utmost isolation of black Americans. As Fraser’s depiction suggests, time seems to have stopped in the black sections of the towns he traveled across: what he saw there was not the America of brand new cars and modern household appliances marketed in the world in the 1950s. Instead:

City houses were just as bad as country houses. […] Those in Atlanta were the worst, and that is with Atlanta having a good “racial” reputation. The wooden houses in black neighborhoods brought to mind these set pieces whose function is

Tyson, Radio Free Dixie, 279.
to create an immediate impression of misery. [...] one has to see them to believe such houses still exist in the United States.\textsuperscript{62}

It is this utmost poverty that, according to Fraser, legitimated the advocacy for self-defense. The unbearable material conditions in which black Americans were forced to live and the whites’ constant efforts to exclude them from progress explained the radicalism of men like Williams. In turn, Williams’ dedication to challenging the existing order by rallying Monroe’s black working class was deserving of coverage in \textit{Les Temps Modernes}.

This spectacle of poverty reminded Fraser of Williams’ words: “To be pacifists is to act like beggars and to submit to the white man’s morality and conscience. But if we do consider that white blood can flow just as much as black blood, then we can entertain the hope for a compromise and a negotiation.”\textsuperscript{63} This logic, which the author accounted for by the trials Williams and other black Americans had endured in the past, is reminiscent of the position adopted by Fanon and Sartre regarding the path towards decolonization. In the preface to Fanon’s \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}, Sartre defended violent tactics on the part of the colonized.

I believe we once knew, and have since forgotten, the truth that no indulgence can erase the mark of violence: violence can eliminate them. And the colonized are cured of colonial neurosis by driving out the colonizer by force. Once their rage explodes, they recover their lost coherence, they experience self-knowledge through reconstruction of themselves; from afar we see their war as the triumph of barbarity; but it proceeds on its own to gradually emancipate the fighter and progressively eliminates the colonial darkness inside and out.\textsuperscript{64}

Sartre’s existentialist/psychoanalytic understanding of the resort to violence by the oppressed partly explains the interest shown by \textit{Les Temps Modernes} in Williams’ path. In fact, in 1961, the magazine published \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}’s chapter entitled “On Violence.” This is not to say that the situations of the colonized and black Americans are entirely comparable, since

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  \item \textsuperscript{62} Ronald Fraser, “Un noir qui se bat: Robert Williams,” \textit{Les Temps Modernes}, November 1962, 919.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 920.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Jean-Paul Sartre, preface to \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}, by Frantz Fanon (New York: Grove Press, 2004), iv.
\end{itemize}
even some of the most radical black Americans tended to call for complete social, political and economic integration within the United States. What the colonized wanted, on the other hand, was to get rid of the colonizer altogether. Nevertheless, the analogy stands since in both cases violence appeared to be a means towards social justice and a regained sense of humanity. Unlike the turn-the-other-cheek black advocates of the civil rights movement, Williams’ readiness to aim the guns of freedom towards the agents of racist America more readily fit with the anticolonial theorization spelled out by such intellectuals like Sartre and Fanon in Les Temps Modernes.

In addition, the story of black activism in Monroe, as recounted by Fraser, puts in perspective the class divisions within the black American community as well as the significant role played by the black working class in the success of the movement. Before the Brown decision fueled whites’ anger and resistance towards integration, the NAACP’s Monroe chapter was in the hands of the local black bourgeoisie who had never considered inviting working-class blacks alongside them. When the former’s economic security seemed in jeopardy, they abandoned the ranks of the NAACP, leaving the black working class and black entrepreneurs to continue the fight for a more egalitarian society. In this article, Fraser quoted Williams discussing the class tensions among African Americans:

I have discovered something during our fight: black workers are the ones who hold fast in moments of crisis because they have less to lose than the bourgeoisie. All the battles we will win in the South will be won thanks to the activism of the working class […]. The black bourgeoisie don’t care a straw about us; they are nothing more than an instrument which the whites use to keep us down.66

Similarly in The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon brought readers’ attention to the divisions existing among the colonized. In “On Violence,” the first part of The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon points

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65 Fraser, “Un noir qui se bat: Robert Williams,” 932.
66 Ibid., 931-932.
out two different approaches to the colonial problem which reflected the social divisions among colonial subjects. Fanon identified three important reformist actors among the colonized: political parties, the intellectual elite, and the business elite. His description of their objectives and methods was, to an extent, reminiscent of the careful attitude of the black bourgeoisie in the United States as presented in Fraser’s article:

They are strong on principles but abstain from issuing marching orders. During the colonial period the activities of these nationalist political parties [...] amount to no more than a series of philosophical-political discourses on the subject of the rights to self-determination, the human rights of dignity and freedom from hunger, and the countless declarations of the principle of ‘one man, one vote’. The nationalist political parties never insist on the need for confrontation precisely because their aim is not the radical overthrow of the system.

While Williams and his men did not organize around an agenda aimed at overthrowing the American capitalist system, their militant approach distinguished them from the more timid activists whose rhetoric of rights and reliance on the political system echo the national political parties described by Fanon. As Fanon explained, the favored position these individuals enjoyed within the colonial system explained their reluctance to follow a more radical course of action towards national independence. More importantly for the present discussion, both in the colonized world and in the segregated United States, the struggles of the oppressed were tainted with socio-economic divisions. In addition, in the colonies as in the United States, whites could count on the most advantaged stratum of the oppressed to maintain their supremacy.

In his article, Fraser couched the racial struggle taking place in the U.S. South in Marxist terms. One can thus easily understand why Williams’ brand of activism appealed to the editorial board of Les Temps Modernes. As historians of the black freedom movement know, Robert Williams has been granted but a small—and controversial—place in the story of the movement.

67 Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 21.
68 Ibid., 22.
The morally laden dichotomy between the non-violent civil rights movement and the black power movement contributed to castigating militant calls for self-defense as the unfortunate pet peeve of an otherwise glorious struggle for human rights. But for the Marxist/existentialist magazine, Williams’ activism echoed Third World struggles against oppression, which would become an increasing subject of concern for French intellectuals of the left.\textsuperscript{69} To an extent, the militancy of the black working class of Monroe, which replaced the more moderate reformism of the local black bourgeoisie, fit within the paradigm dominating the anti-colonial literature featured in \textit{Les Temps Modernes}. So did the stance adopted by Black Power activists who traced the source of their ideological inspiration back to Williams and Malcolm X. It is thus no surprise that the more militant phase of the black freedom movement would receive special coverage in this leftist magazine.

In the mid-1960s, a new brand of African American activists came to the forefront of the black American struggle. Unsatisfied with their elders’ calls for peaceful integration and civil rights, the young militants increasingly denounced the systematic exploitation of the black minority and the resulting economic destitution suffered by the majority of African Americans. In the analysis of many Black Power activists, American capitalism and American racism came to be deeply intertwined.\textsuperscript{70} Moreover, as Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton put it in \textit{Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America}, black Americans “stand as colonial subjects in relation to the white society,” and it was on this ground that they “see themselves as part of a new force, sometimes called the ‘Third World.’”\textsuperscript{71} “The emergence of the intellectual battle

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\textsuperscript{69} Arthur, \textit{Unfinished Projects}, 121-137.
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against neocolonialism as a key site of moral and political struggle in the 1960s,” largely fueled by opposition to American imperialism, provided the historical and ideological contexts within which black American radicals’ activism would take on its full relevance on the French intellectual scene.\textsuperscript{72}

Jean Monod’s “Watts Happening,” published in the December 1967 issue of \textit{Les Temps Modernes}, illustrates this last point. Indeed, Monod’s treatment of the racial unrest taking place in inner-city neighborhoods in the spring and summer of 1967 allowed him to formulate a critique of American imperialism and its driving force, American capitalism. Unlike a number of French commentators and journalists who had stressed the efforts of the American government to better the lot of the black American minority despite white popular resistance, Monod forcefully expressed his complete disillusion with the White House. Under his pen, President Lyndon B. Johnson was not the man who had passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, but rather the politician whose “war on poverty” failed to bring any progress to black ghettos and whose concern lay more in Vietnam than in Watts. Even worse, “Johnson inaugurate(d) in black ghettos a policy of extermination similar to the one he (was) currently undertaking in Vietnam.” In this context, Monod affirmed that there was “no reason to contest Stokely Carmichael, Rap Brown, and other American leaders when they tie their cause to that of colonized, exploited, and exterminated people in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.” Not only did Monod support black Americans’ characterization of themselves as colonized, but he believed that it was their awareness of belonging to a larger struggle waged by peoples of the Third World that allowed them to “form a collective consciousness ready for action.”\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{72} Arthur, \textit{Unfinished Projects}, 131; Mathy, \textit{Extrême Occident}, 11-12.

condition symptomatic of the American imperialist impulse but their radical protest against American oppression also held the key to bringing down the imperialist giant.

Monod’s discussion of the American climate of racial unrest was also the occasion for him to bring light on the economic roots of racial oppression and the overall evil of American capitalism. He explained that the complete alienation of blacks in the United States stemmed from white capitalism; race and class formed a symbiotic relationship in the American nation. He conceded that not all whites enjoyed a fair share of the fruits of American capitalism, but that they all partook in the capitalist ideal, the foundation of American national identity. The incommensurable influence capitalists exerted in the American government allowed them to lure white workers into believing that they shared more interests with the white bourgeoisie than they did with their fellow black workers:

Such ends up being the state of the mass where the dominated and the dominating merge with one another in the same confusing frenzy where status and power contaminate people as a whole and particularly workers, to the point where they don’t really know what they want anymore. And this is because certain words have ceased to bear meaning in a language that was imposed upon them. They fail to see that they are even more robbed and humiliated, even more exploited and enslaved the richer they get.

American blacks could thus not form an alliance with white workers on the basis of a general class consciousness. Moreover, since white Americans, regardless of their socio-economic conditions, identified capitalism as the core of American national identity, black Americans were the only ones who “could be willing to destroy American wealth.”  

Finally, echoing French interwar and postwar criticism regarding the human alienation brought by technological development, Monod praised black Americans for unleashing “a human energy in a country where energy deserted men for machines.”

75 Mathy, Extrême Occident, 2, 19; Monod, “Watts Happening,” 1034.
For Monod, the conditions for a black American “Revolution” lay in “the continuing growth of the black urban underclass [that] largely contributed to destroying the inhibitions which hampered the black protest movement in its post-slavery, rural phase.” Black Americans’ new audacity resulted from the material depravation that African Americans continued to suffer even after the significant gains obtained during the civil rights movement. It was because of African Americans’ continuing socio-economic exclusion that the “ghettos’ revolution” was taking place. Because African Americans’ growing proletarianization led them to formulate a “criticism of a system, and not of men,” they were the only social force on the American scene capable of challenging the American capitalist structure. Black American youth, whose evolution echoed that of the youth across the world, were characteristic of a “generation which tries to create its own society by forcing open the doors of the future instead of moving backward and integrating themselves in a framework fixed by others for its maturity…” Monod contrasted his New Leftist praise of the black youth with his stringent criticism of the white youth, or “hippies.” According to him, the hippies, whose condemnation of their bourgeois parents did not make them any less bourgeois, had mistakenly portrayed black Americans’ goal as the quest for material goods and wrongly assumed that their revolutionary ideology was outdated. In a sharp comment, Monod sarcastically concluded that the hippies could “judge humanity and avoid understanding the transitory world in which others struggle to survive, while they themselves indulge in drugs.” To the extent that they belonged to the American underclass and their youth partook in the global youth movement to create new societies, black Americans constituted the social force that Monod and other leftist French intellectuals hoped would revolutionize the

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United States. Only they could crush “the American obstinacy to live in a dream,” a dream that “ended up birthing a nightmare that threatens the planet.”

The concerns driving Monod’s analysis of the Black Power movement, i.e black Americans’ “determination to build a new anti-imperialist front” in the U.S. and their domestic challenge to the American capitalist system, also justified the magazine’s publication of speeches by Malcolm X and writings, addresses and interviews by Black Power activists. Published in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1966, the extracts from the illustrious leader’s speeches, “Message to the Grass Roots” (1963) and “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1964) brought up themes around which Monod would structure his discussion of black American radicalism a year later. As “victims of Americanism,” of the “American system,” facing a political structure fundamentally opposed to their full political and economic equality, the 22 million black Americans, Malcolm claimed, should join their “Asian, African and other colored brothers” in their liberation struggles.

Similarly to Monod, who would assert that “violence is efficient, even if it alienates whites,” Malcolm encouraged violence to challenge the American system of oppression. He notably used as a model “Algerians, who were nothing but Bedouins, [and] took a rine and sneaked off to the hills, and de Gaulle and all of his highfalutin' war machinery couldn't defeat those guerrillas.” The black American activist’s disposition for revolutionary violence, of which Third World Revolutions like that of the Algerian FLN proved the necessity, and his systemic framing of American oppression explain his relevance for French radical intellectuals.

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79 Ibid., 1029.
Two years later, the writings and interviews from six Black Power activists published in the May-June 1968 issue of *Les Temps Modernes* further illustrated French intellectuals’ ideological affinity with black American radical activists. The magazine’s introduction to the document further anchors the relevance of the Black Power movement within the parameters of French intellectuals’ anti-Americanism, one that connected imperialism with capitalism: “Against American imperialism, Che Guevara called for the emergence of other Vietnams in other parts of the world. One already exists within the United States itself: the “Black Power” movement.” For French intellectuals, the Black Power movement was all the more significant in that it constituted an internal threat to American imperial power, one that was ready to rally to the oppressed peoples of the Third World.

Inspired by the writings of Karl Marx, Lenin, Mao Tse-Tung, and Frantz Fanon, black American radicals had come to grasp the systemic nature of African Americans’ racial oppression and the necessity for revolutionary action against this system. As “one of the best theoreticians of ‘Black Power’” James Boggs affirmed, the concept of “Black Power” was born out of “a systematic analysis of American capitalism.” Unlike some African American nationalists who attributed their activism to their African cultural heritage, Boggs argued that the Black Power movement did not emerge because of blacks’ “moral value.” Rather, it was the “historical and dialectic development of the U.S. that drove black Americans on the path to radicalism.” Disillusioned with American radicals’ “repeated promise… that white workers would unite with them (blacks) to defeat the “capitalist enemy,” black American radicals had

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86 Ibid., 2044, 2046.
realized that their “war” is “what would bring socialism” in the U.S.\textsuperscript{87} Similar to the conclusion Monod drew in “Watt’s Happening,” Boggs believed that “only black political power will bring not only blacks’ liberation, but also the advent of a new society that would allow for the economic emancipation of the masses in general.”\textsuperscript{88} To the extent that “they have nothing to lose since they already are the wretched of the earth,” black American radicals thus appeared to be “the sole revolutionary force” in the U.S. willing and capable of dealing a blow to the American capitalist and imperialist system, a conviction that Monod had expressed.\textsuperscript{89}

Black American radicals’ Marxist analysis of their condition of oppression allowed them to acquire a level of “political maturity” that facilitated the inscription of their struggle within the global imperialist context. Herman Ferguson, then member of the Revolutionary Action Movement who had served for twenty years on the New York Board of Education before being arrested for anarchy, clearly expressed this point: “We begin to understand what imperialism, colonialism, neocolonialism, exploitation, and oppression really are. We understand that we have been used to upset the legitimate aspirations of all peoples of color.”\textsuperscript{90} Americans’ reliance on disproportionate numbers of black youths in the Vietnam War allowed them to kill two birds with one stone; fight an imperialist war in Southeast Asia and “get rid of black youths by sending them to their death in Vietnam.”\textsuperscript{91} In his article entitled “Preparation for a Genocide,” Ferguson even went as far as to suggest that with industrial automation making blacks useless to the

\textsuperscript{88} Boggs, “La seule force révolutionnaire,” 2048.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 2046.
\textsuperscript{90} Ferguson was arrested along with Max Stanford, leader of the Revolutionary Action Movement, for illegal possession of firearms and anarchist conspiracy. To train a “guerilla youth force,” Ferguson had helped establish the Jamaica Rifle and Pistol Club, which actually operated legally since chartered by the National Rifle Association. Under close FBI surveillance, Ferguson and Stanford were arrested in June 1967 for allegedly conspiring to assassinate NAACP director Roy Wilkins and Urban League director Whitney Young. Ferguson, “Un genocide en preparation,” \textit{Les Temps Modernes}, May-June 1968, 2078; Sugrue, \textit{Sweet Land of Liberty}, 321, 335-36, 351-52.
American economy, it was in Americans’ interest to get rid of the black American population. The war in Vietnam was part of American genocidal plot “to establish a system that will compensate the loss of revenue resulting from [blacks’] extinction,” by essentially acquiring Southeastern markets.\textsuperscript{92} The “organic link between the war in Vietnam and what we call the movement for civil rights” had become clear to Black Power militants, so much so that former SNCC president James Forman (1961-1966) affirmed that “an independent political action and opposition to the war in Vietnam are inseparable elements of ‘Black Power.’”\textsuperscript{93} Forman’s internationalist perspective also encouraged African Americans to support liberation struggles in Africa. In his speech delivered in 1967 at the black caucus of the National Conference for New Politics, Forman called for black Americans to organize against a possible American intervention in South Africa in favor of the “white Nazis” to protect the millions of American dollars invested in South African plantations. Just like black American opposition to the Vietnam War was inherent to Black Power politics, support for revolutionary action in South Africa was part of black radicals’ new brand of politics.\textsuperscript{94}

From Williams, who fled to Cuba, to Forman, who made the opposition to American imperialist war in Vietnam an integral part of Black Power politics, the figures of black American leadership who captured the attention of the intellectuals associated with \textit{Les Temps Modernes} testified to an ideological radicalism which best reflected these intellectuals’ philosophies and agendas. The Marxist dimensions, however loose, of black American radicalism, reflected in the movement’s working-class constituents, their understanding of oppression as a systemic phenomenon, or their revolutionary blueprint, appealed to the French intellectual left. It is worth noting that the magazine chose to mainly feature black American

\textsuperscript{92} Ferguson, “Un génocide en preparation,” 2078-2079.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 2053-54, 2061.
radicals whose adhesion to Marxist philosophy was not only reflected in their understanding of the economic roots of racial oppression but also in their revolutionary ambitions. Moreover, black Americans’ identification with the colonized of the Third World, which French intellectuals embraced, and the internationalization of their struggle, made those activists an essential component of the anti-imperialist struggle for which *Les Temps Modernes* advocated. French intellectuals’ Marxist philosophy and Thirdworldist political agenda therefore shaped the former’s perceptions and representations of the Black Power movement and its ideological forefathers. For French intellectuals like Monod, African Americans’ role was even more significant in so far as their struggle took place within the belly of the beast.

Scholars of the French postwar intellectual landscape inevitably stumble upon Sartre and *Les Temps Modernes*. French intellectual and activist Daniel Guérin “has himself been the victim of unwarranted neglect.” Although he is probably best remembered for his theorization of anarchism, this “eternal opponent,” a prolific writer, wrote influential books on subjects as varied as the French Revolution, European and American labor movements, French colonialism, and the American Black Power movement. The ideological journey of this other engaged writer will help shed light on his intellectual engagement with the African American freedom movement. His intellectual curiosity, shaped by Marxist and, later, Anarchist currents, was matched by his activism in campaigns such as antiracism, anticolonialism, and homosexual

95 Joseph describes Boggs as a “freewheeling Marxist theoretician” whose “analysis of race, class, and revolution influenced young activists increasingly committed to both black nationalism and anticapitalist struggles.” As for Max Stanford and Herman Ferguson, Joseph pointed out that their adopted “a blueprint for political revolution drawn from Chinese, Marxist, black radicals, and guerilla struggles.” Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour*, 60-63.


97 Berry notably points out Jean-Paul Sartre, Aimé Césaire, and Noam Chomsky’s praise of Guérin’s works on the French Revolution, French colonialism, and Anarchism respectively. Berry, “‘Un contradicteur permanent,’” 149-50.
liberation. In the early 1930s, Guérin was on the side of the “Marxist extreme-left.” Although Guérin came to distrust Trotskyism in the late 1930s, during the war he would rally to the Trotskyists in the French Resistance. However, Guérin’s two-year stay in the U.S. (1947-1948), where he came in contact with American Trotskyists of the Socialist Worker’s Party and the Workers’ Party, played an instrumental role in his ultimate rejection of Trotskyism. Despite his opposition to Soviet authoritarianism, the publication of Guérin’s book, *Où va le peuple Américain?*, condemning Big Business, resulted in the U.S. denying him a visa to visit his wife and daughter residing in the U.S. It was also Guérin’s Marxist ideology that led him to be one of the most vocal and elaborate critics of French colonialism. Along with Sartre, he was notably among the group of French intellectuals who signed the Manifesto of the 121 that condemned the use of torture by the French government in Algeria and legitimized conscientious objection. In the mid-1950s, however, Guérin’s ideological affinity shifted to anarchism. Increasingly disgruntled with the authoritarian character of Leninism and coming into contact with the works of Russian Revolutionary Anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, Guérin became an emblematic figure of Anarchism on the French scene. When the student revolt broke in France in May 1968, Guérin rallied behind other French intellectuals like Sartre and Simone De

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98 Berry explains that Trotsky’s authoritarianism did not align with Guérin’s desire to see, in the latter’s words, the “full development of the spontaneity of the working class.” Berry, “‘Un contradicteur permanent,’” 149-50.

99 What Guérin witnessed among American Trotskyists was the mindless, uniform adaptation of “old formulae” to various contexts. Although Berry speaks of Guérin’s three-year tour in the U.S., Guérin himself affirmed that his postwar stay in the U.S. lasted only two years. Ibid., 154; Daniel Guérin, *Décolonisation du noir américain.* (Paris: Éditions du minuit, 1963).9.

100 After the publication of his book, American authorities believed he was a Trostkyist and an anarchist. Berry, “‘Un contradicteur permanent,’” in *After the Deluge*, 155; Daniel Guérin, *Où va le peuple américain?* (Paris: Julliard, 1950-1951).


103 Berry, “‘Un contradicteur permanent,’” 163.
Beauvoir and encouraged workers and intellectuals to follow on the students’ footsteps.\textsuperscript{104} Guérin’s relentless commitment to human liberation, be it social, racial, or sexual, and his familiarity with the United States, both explain his interest in the African American freedom movement.

Guérin’s engagement with the black American condition was first and foremost inscribed within the postwar context, which saw the ascension of the U.S. as a global superpower and the growing threat of human annihilation in a nuclear war. His Décolonisation du noir américain, published in 1963, was to an extent a revision of his 1950-1951 analysis of the potential role of the black American community in America’s path to socialism. In the introduction to the first volume of Où va le people américain, Guérin clearly established the parameters of his study: “Today, the entire world is looking toward America. It is not, or rather no longer out of curiosity, enthusiasm, or fashion, but out of fear. The world looks toward and interrogates America because it is scared. It shivers in front of this giant which owns the power to make the planet explode… The world also trembles in front of America because of its power, its flying fortresses and its money.”\textsuperscript{105} Guérin framed his discussion of the future of the U.S. within the context of American imperialism and of the nuclear war that threatened to eradicate human life on the planet. It was because the U.S. had become the “new center of gravity of the so-called ‘western’ civilization” that its destiny deserved serious attention.\textsuperscript{106} Perhaps one of the leftist intellectuals Mathy referred to in Extrême Orient, who oscillated between a Marxist condemnation of the U.S. and a fascination for its peoples’ visionary impulses, Guerin’s Marxist orientation did not


\textsuperscript{105} Daniel Guérin, Où va le peuple américain, Volume 1 (1950), 9.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 10.
translate into an uncompromising condemnation of the U.S. Rebutting French and American accusations following the publication of the first volume of his book, Guérin claimed that it was “not at all ‘anti-American’” and that he simply “tried to decipher the future of a great people whose destiny captivated him and inspired in [him] an imperishable confidence.” Guérin rightly understood the misinterpretation of his intentions and the rejection of his book as a product of French and American acute anxiety over Stalinism. His characterization of Big Business as a “cancer” and its actors as “monsters,” who managed to establish a degree of economic concentration that was not even matched in Hitler’s Germany, understandably frightened the advocates of the so-called Free world. At the same time as the U.S. was being “annihilated, contaminated by this cancer,” Guérin affirmed that “thanks to its mass production and the sophistication of its technique, [the U.S.] was creating the material foundations of...a civilization of the masses, a civilization for all, unlike that in the old Europe which is reserved to a small privileged minority.” It is within his analysis of the revolutionary potential of America that Guérin anchored his discussion of the black American community.

Believing that “the American society (although it still rejects the socialist credo) was moving towards socialism, in an empiric and pragmatic, if blind, and slow manner,” the French theoretician, like Monod, argued that black Americans had an essential role to play in this progression. According to Guérin, the “recent emergence of industrial unionism in the U.S.” constituted “one of the major events of the history of the 20th century.” Indeed, he “consider(ed) that it was in the big fight of the American people against their own trusts that the fate of

107 Mathy, Extrême Orient, 6.
108 Daniel Guérin, Où va le peuple américain, Volume 2 (1951), 12.
109 Ibid.
humanity laid.”111 It was also among labor unions that black Americans were to play a
fundamental role in guaranteeing the establishment of a socialist democracy in the U.S. Guérin
therefore dedicated the fourth part of his two-volume study to “The Negro Revolt,” which he
perceived as “the most explosive progressive force” in the U.S.112 Because white American
industrial and agricultural workers and black workers were all subjected to the capitalist
domination of American monster trusts, they needed to overcome the racial animosity that
prevented them from attacking Big Business with a united front. His two-year tour of the U.S.
and his research had left him optimistic.

Twelve years after the publication of *Où va le peuple américain*, Guérin dedicated an
entire book to the “decolonization of the black American.” The trip he had taken to the U.S.
fifteen years earlier had allowed him “to get to know the black community,”113 and in this book
he set out to explore the history of this community as well as its contemporary struggle for racial
emancipation. Echoing Guy Thorel who, in the French magazine *Esprit*, had “mocked” Guérin’s
“naiveties” in the first volume of *Où va le peuple américain*, Guérin conceded that he “had let
(himself) be hypnotized by an overestimation of the labor movement in the U.S.”114 He added
that the “fallacious perspective” on which his whole analysis had relied could be excused on two
counts: “first, a confidence, perhaps excessive but legitimate, in industrial unionism as a superior
mode of social emancipation… then, an obstinate attachment to proletariat internationalism that
grants preference to fraternal union of all exploited people, without racial or religious
distinctions.”115 For Guérin, the Congress of Industrial Organizations’ (COI) integration of black
workers and the liberalizing attitudes of the leadership of the black bourgeoisie towards

114 Guérin, *Décolonisation du noir américain*, 14; Où va le peuple américain, Volume 2 (1951), 10.
unionism had foretold a soon-to-come alliance of all workers, transcending long-lived racial divisions. A little over a decade after his first analysis of American labor, Guérin still believed in the future alliance of black and white workers but conceded that it would take a lot longer than he had first imagined.

As could be expected, Guérin’s Marxist ideology shaped his understanding of American racial relations. For this French author, the ultimate culprits in the long history of racial hostility between white and black Americans were the capitalist “monsters who delayed the fusion of races by playing them against one another.” The legal system of racial segregation in the South, Guérin explained, was born out of the fear of the “Bourbons of the South” in front of white populists’ alliance with blacks. In order to protect Southern social hierarchy and guarantee a cheap source of labor in the industrialized New South, the Southern white ruling class, with the complicity of the Northern “Big Business yankee,” threw the legal bases for a strict system of racial regimentation known as Jim Crow. Like other French intellectuals and commentators of his time, Guérin identified the “poor whites” of the South as the bearers of racial hostility towards African Americans. However, unlike most of his French peers, his view on the Southern white laboring class was considerably more sympathetic. Rejecting the blame placed on Southern “poor whites” for the Southern evil of racism, the author regarded them as “the victims of the Bourbons’ fraud.”

Borrowing white liberal Southern writer Lillian Smith’s

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117 Guérin, Décolonisation du noir américain, 14.

118 Guérin, Où va le peuple américain, Volume 1 (1950), 13.

119 Guérin, Décolonisation du noir américain, 42.

120 Guérin is borrowing Edward C. Smith and Arnold J. Zurcher’s analogy between White Southern democrats and the French Bourbon Dynasty in A Dictionary of American Politics. The Bourbon Restoration after the fall of Napoleon in 1814 signaled a conservative return to pre-Revolutionary France, at least as divine-monarchy was concerned. Guérin, Décolonisation du noir américain, 92; J.H Shennan, The Bourbons: The History of a Dynasty
interpretation in her 1949 novel *Killers of the Dream*, Guérin wrote that for the “poor white,” his skin color was essential to his individual validation and that “racial prejudice was a ‘drug’ given to them to intoxicate them and keep them from becoming aware of their exploitation.” He also relied on the Freudian concept of transfer to argue that these whites “kill a ‘negro’ to abandon the idea of killing a rich.” As he had affirmed in *Où va le people américain*, the key to blacks’ emancipation lied in their alliance with their white “brothers of misery” in a united labor effort.  

It is through the same Marxist lens that Guérin approached the African American freedom movement. In his own version of the “long civil rights movement,” Guérin identified the 1930s greater integration of blacks in the ranks of the American Communist Party as the roots of the black American freedom movement. He explained that it was the communists in the CIO that taught blacks how to use mass direct action, which blacks notably resorted to in Chicago to prevent the eviction of black renters and to combat racial discrimination in employment. For he made a real effort to “foster the pro-union mood among African American workers,” A. Philip Randolph held an instrumental position in Guérin’s narrative of the “decolonization” of the African American. Labor organizers like A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters, and E.D. Nixon, president of the Montgomery branch of the union, as well as other black workers the author met in 1948
constituted, in his words, an emerging “generation of black leaders… realistic and modern, formed in the tough school of unionism.”

Not only did Guérin perceive black workers as the new brand of black leadership but he also believed that they “played an avant-garde role” for “the whole of American society.” He explained that “while the workers’ movement trudge in the still water of liberalism, the movement of black liberation is rejecting gradualism and is taking a pre-revolutionary character.” For Guérin the black American working class held the key not only to blacks’ racial emancipation but also to Americans’ socio-economic emancipation.

In line with the revisionist historiography of the civil rights movement emerging much later—without the Marxist dimension of Guérin’s analysis—Guérin gave the black masses their due credit in the life of the African American freedom movement. He contended that it was the masses who were forcing the black conservative leadership, like that of the NAACP, to adopt a more radical stance towards the American racial issue and involve the masses in direct-action protests. Focusing his critique of the “small black bourgeoisie” almost entirely on the NAACP, Guérin argued that as the former’s “instrument of struggle,” the NAACP long avoided the participation of the masses by all means. Because the “small black bourgeoisie” was “linked to whites by a community of interests,” they were reluctant to organize the masses upon whom the black elite’s position in society rested. In order to avoid being replaced by much more radical organizations, however, the black bourgeoisie of the NAACP needed to appear more mass

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124 Guérin, Décolonisation du noir américain, 128.
125 Ibid., 130.
127 Guérin, Décolonisation du noir américain, 135, 138, 141.
128 Guérin argued that E. Franklin Frazier’s reference to the black American “elite” as a “black bourgeoisie” was inadequate in so far as its businessmen, “of mediocre stature,” and its professional class “did absolutely not compare with the superior class of the white community.” Guérin therefore referred to this black “elite” class in terms of “small bourgeoisie.” Ibid., 135, 139.
friendly. As mentioned earlier, Guérin credited black union leaders with the radical tradition of the African American freedom movement. He notably presented the “ardent plebeian” Randolph as the “tribune of the mass movement,” who “transposed the techniques of industrial unionism to the domain of racial struggle.” He particularly cited Randolph’s famous call for a March on Washington on 1 July 1941 to force President Franklin D. Roosevelt to ban racial discrimination in American defense industries, which he did before the march could take place. Although the march did not happen, its organization, the author recalled, launched the first mass movement in the U.S. since Marcus Garvey. Guérin added that “the grandiose March of 200,000 blacks on Washington on 28 August 1963…was a repetition, if at a larger scale, of the other March, that of 1 July 1941.” In Guérin’s narrative, the man of the 1963 March on Washington was not so much King as it was Randolph. Nonetheless, the French author did identify King as “the leader of the masses.”

The pastor’s familiarity with Hegel and Marx had made him aware of social injustices and his method of nonviolent direct action required the participation of the masses. Although this would become clearer in the post-1965 phase of King’s activism, Guérin claimed that the civil rights leader was motivated by what he understood to be the “essential cause” of segregation: economic exploitation. Unlike contemporary American radicals, like Malcolm, who blamed King for working too closely with the American government, Guérin blamed the White House for “using him so as not to lose control of the masses.” Hegel and Marx’s writings did constitute part of the pastor’s philosophical grooming. As Marshall Frady concedes in his autobiography of King, the latter “contracted what was to be a life-long antipathy to capitalism’s cold and Moloch-like qualities.” However, King rejected the material determinism central to

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129 Guérin, Décolonisation du noir américain, 140, 145-46, 148, 186.
130 Ibid., 188.
Marxist philosophy. It is difficult to know whether Guérin was aware that King’s ideology was not branded with a Marxist stamp. King’s reliance on the masses in his challenge to the southern racial status quo may have had a Marxist consonance for the French intellectual, who equated black Americans’ mass movement with a class struggle.

The French intellectual’s belief that “there existed no possibility for the black [American] condition to change without a complete transformation of the American political and social structure,” as well as his “fascination with violent action,” explain his interest in the Black Power movement. Not long after the student revolts erupted in Paris in May 1968, which may have also played a role in the author’s attention to young black American radicals, the Francophone African magazine *Présence Africaine* published an article by Guérin on the revolutionary potential of the Black Power movement in the U.S. In this article, Guérin located the rise of the Black Power movement within the context of the American Vietnam War. Sent in great numbers to fight an imperialist war for America while their own condition in the U.S. remained appalling, the African American youth’s patience was wearing thin. Led by a young generation of black American activists who were formed in the ranks of organizations like CORE and SNCC, the Black Power movement appealed to the black masses. The Black Power movement differed from the former strand of the African American freedom movement not only in the youth of its leadership, but also in its demands and character. As Guérin pointed out, the leadership of this militant brand of black American activism “no longer hesitates to call the capitalist system into question.”

Young black men like Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown,

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133 The fourth chapter of this dissertation provides a detailed analysis of the magazine’s treatment of the African American freedom movement.
figureheads of the movement, were not only calling for economic equality for the African American community, but also for a restructuring of American economic institutions. Like Malcolm, who was on the path to “internationalist socialism,” these young black militants understood that “American economic foundations must be disrupted for black liberation to be effective.” They had come to realize that there existed “no true solution within the capitalist system, which always goes hand in hand with racism, exploitation, and war. It has to be destroyed; private property in the U.S. must be abolished. A totally different America must emerge.” Guérin therefore saw in the Black Power movement not only the key to black Americans’ racial liberation but also the potential for an assault on the American capitalist system. The reliance on “armed insurrection” to achieve their goals also justified Guérin’s interest in the young black American militants. As his daughter noted in the biographical article published in the 2010 version of Guérin’s *De l’Oncle Tom aux pantheres noires* (originally published in 1973), Guérin “would never participate in an armed struggle, but would sometimes be fascinated by violent action.” Marxist literature undeniably had a significant influence on the formation of Black Power ideology, especially as it pertained to the economic roots and structure of racial oppression. However, black American radicals did not all embrace the Marxist revolutionary blueprint, which aimed at the destruction of the capitalist system. While the intellectuals of *Les Temps Modernes* selected the most radical voices of the African American community as representatives of the Black Power ideology, Guérin undermined the dimensions of black Americans’ adhesion to the Marxist philosophy to make the Black Power movement more readily fit within his Marxist vision of an American Revolution.

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137 On the Black Power movement and Marxism, see for example Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour*.
As I previously mentioned, Guérin explicitly situated his study of the forces of capitalism and labor in the early 1950s within the context of the Cold War and the growing influence of the U.S. in the world. In fact, echoing French concerns during the interwar, Guérin claimed that the West had become so Americanized that they had become an “American colony.”

In 1963, Guérin’s treatment of the African American community and the African American freedom movement resorted to a more traditional form of colonialism, the one that the West had imposed on African and Asian peoples. The title of Guérin’s book, Décolonisation du noir américain, powerfully highlights the author’s conviction that the African American freedom movement could best be understood within the global colonial context. For one, Guérin underlined the important influence of the “new Africa, free of the colonial yoke…defying white colonialism” on the awakening of African Americans.

Guérin further affirmed that

the struggle against racism in the United States was no longer a domestic matter. It was part of a global phenomenon: decolonization. The racial conflict currently taking place in the United States could only be adequately understood, or indeed resolved, under the light of the experiences of liberation of the former colonized, be it in Africa, Asia or in the Caribbean.

As this quotation clearly indicates, the author envisioned the African American struggle for emancipation as one sequence of the global script of decolonization. Concurring with New Zealander professor Keith Buchanan’s analysis of the “Negro problem in the U.S.,” Guérin added that Frantz Fanon’s Wretched of the Earth was the key to understanding black American nationalism.

This French author therefore contended that Fanon’s insight into the psychology of the colonized and his analysis of national liberation also applied to the dispossessed and rejected black American minority. The quasi-biblical virtue that Fanon’s Wretched of the Earth

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138 Guérin, Où va le peuple américain, Volume 1 (1950), 10.
139 Guérin, Décolonisation du noir américain, 11.
would have among leaders of the Black Power movement certainly adds credence to this analysis.

The rejection of black Americans in a country that was essentially theirs, as much as it was that of other American natives or naturalized minorities, inspired another parallel with the colonial experience. Pointing to the example of French colonialism in North Africa, Guérin noted that “Algerians have been the victims of such an ‘acculturation’ that for a long time, the status of nation was denied to their Algerian majority by the most liberal European historians, and the former remain, even after winning their independence, almost as much French in certain acquired character traits as African Americans are American.”141 The “specific drama” suffered by African Americans, i.e. their marginalization in American society despite their American-ness, found equivalents in parts of the colonized world, as in Algeria. Proposing to rely on his recollection to explore the realities of American racial segregation, Guérin compared the conditions of segregated black American neighborhoods to those occupied by the indigenous population under colonialism: “The black city is to the white city what the ‘indigenous’ neighborhood was to the ‘European’ neighborhood in the cities of Maghreb, black Africa, or Indochina in the days of colonialism.”142 Not only was spatial segregation central to the American racial apparatus and the European colonial system, but this physical separation of the “races” was accompanied by a socio-economic hierarchy that kept both African Americans and French colonized subjects in an utter state of destitution. With this comparison, Guérin debunked the popular French assimilationist myth and pretensions to “color-blindness.” In fact, in the introduction, the author explicitly denounced French hypocrisy. Criticizing Gunnar Myrdal’s extensive, somewhat “pedantic” study of the American racial dilemma for overlooking the

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141 Guérin, Décolonisation du noir américain, 12
142 Ibid., 46.
“material and historical causes of” the American racial illness, Guérin nonetheless added: “But let us not be too critical. Us Frenchmen, who have almost never dared facing our own scandals, who have contented ourselves with depicting a general overview of our colonial domination and who have been waiting for the demise of the “Empire” before trying to discourse on colonization—we are definitely not the ones to criticize Gunnar Myrdal’s work.” By likening French colonial practices to American racism, Guérin thus partook in French intellectuals’ efforts, during and after decolonization, to shed new light on French colonialism.

In conclusion, during the 1950s and 1960s, French leftist intellectuals’ understandings and representations of the colonial and postcolonial contexts were fueled by their observations of American racial developments, and vice-versa. It is certainly significant that Sartre, whom Judaken argues has had an instrumental “influence on the critical theories applied to “race,”” partly elaborated his theorization of racism according to his understanding of American racism, notably in its economic and institutional dimensions. If the meaning of French colonial racism directly descended from the American racial context and its critical dimensions were exposed through analogies with American racial prejudice, so did the colonial context fuel French intellectuals’ conceptualization of the black American condition and African Americans’ contemporary struggle against racial oppression. In view of these constructs, it is no stretch to contend that American racism and, to an extent, the African American freedom movement, were constitutive of postwar French anticolonialism. In the 1960s, French leftist intellectuals constructed the meaning of black Americans’ challenge to the American racial status quo according to their Marxist political agenda, which fused anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism under their larger brand of anti-Americanism. Overlooking the nonviolent, integrationist

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143 Guérin, Décolonisation du noir américain, 21.
144 Le Sueur, Uncivil War; Sorum, Intellectuals and Decolonization in France.
145 Jonathan Judaken, introduction to Race after Sartre, 1.
elements of the civil rights movement, French intellectuals embraced the version of Black Power that identified with and supported Third World liberation struggles, embraced the Fanonian concept of Revolutionary violence, and sought the dismantling of American capitalism. French intellectuals’ selective, and at times misappropriated, approach to the radical brand of the African American freedom movement reveals that black American activism was only relevant in so far as it fit within their anti-Americanist scheme. In 1970, Sartre would warn the French public that France’s ghettoization of its immigrant population was similar to American internal colonization.146 For most of the 1960s, however, French intellectuals’ anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist agendas largely precluded a reading of the American racial upheaval in light of the French domestic racial context. As the following chapter demonstrates, it is notably among French antiracists and extreme-right advocates that such a reading can be found.

CHAPTER 2: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN ANTIRACIST DROIT ET LIBERTÉ AND NATIONALIST RIVAROL

The geopolitical scene of the Cold War contributed to bringing international attention to many countries’ domestic problems. Racism was one of these issues which came to captivate the world’s attention in the 1950s and 1960s. Particularly, the Cold War rhetoric of democracy and the raging pleas of anticolonialists helped position racism as a worthy object of international scrutiny. In the context of the Cold War, the contradiction between the U.S.’s self-proclaimed position as leader of the “free world” and American domestic racial policies propelled American racial tensions to the forefront of the world stage. In the French context of decolonization, anticolonialists’ theorization of colonial oppression shed light on the dynamics of racism in the colonial order. Through their opposition to French colonialism, a generation of Francophone intellectuals challenged the French official narrative of enlightened and benevolent colonialism. No longer upholding the myth of French exceptionalism, those intellectuals suggested that when it came to racial matters, the French were not that different from other Western powers after all. They may have even been more similar to their white American counterparts than they could have ever suspected before. This new awareness of the existence of a French racial problem pushed French antiracists to sensitize the French public to the dangers of racism. In the opposite camp, former French collaborationists who had actively supported the Vichy government publicly fought against the erosion of whites’ racial primacy.

This chapter explores representations of the African American freedom movement in the French antiracist periodical Droit et Liberté (official organ of the Mouvement contre le Racisme, l’Anti-Sémitisme et pour la Paix [MRAP]) and in the French extreme right weekly Rivarol. The coverage of the African American freedom movement in those two publications reveals the relevance of American racial developments both for French antiracists, who were committed to
eradicating French racism, and for French nationalists, who were determined to preserve the
global racial order. As my analysis shows, 1950s and 1960s American racial issues triggered
French antiracists and French nationalists’ reflections on French colonialism and racism. On the
one hand, the parallels French antiracists drew between French and American expressions of
racism served as a warning against letting France follow in the footsteps of the U.S. in matters
pertaining to race. On the other hand, French nationalists’ connections between the American
racial drama and French colonial and post-colonial events served to emphasize the damage
cau sed to whites in general, and white French in particular, by postwar humanitarian ideals.
However, Droit et Liberté and Rivarol’s comparisons between the African American freedom
movement and the French colonial and racial contexts also reveal French antiracists and French
nationalists’ common fight to protect French national identity.

Before exploring French antiracists’ representations of the African American struggle for
racial equality, some background information regarding MRAP is in order. MRAP shared the
scene of French antiracist activism with other antiracist organizations, notably the Ligue
internationale contre l’antisémitisme (LICA). MRAP was founded by members of the
Mouvement national contre le racisme (MNCR) in 1949.1 During the war, MNCR focused on
protecting French and non-French Jews from the anti-Semitic actions and policies of the Vichy
government. Immediately after the war, MNCR sought to create a unified antiracist front in
France. In 1946, MNCR created the Alliance Antiraciste, which united members of the MNCR
and of the LICA. However, political dissension quickly emerged within the new alliance
between former LICA members, socialists affiliated to the SFIO (Section de l’Internationale
Ouvrière Française) and former MNCR members, tied to the French Communist Party. In an

1 The Mouvement National contre le Racisme was founded in 1942 in order to help the Jewish population in
13, 2014).
article on the creation of MRAP, Caroline Andréaní explains that the desire among some members of the Alliance Antiraciste to “untie the antiracist action from ‘contemporary political events’” lay at the heart of the dissolution of the short-lived organization. Indeed, for members formerly affiliated to MNCR, those events “were the determining cause for their antiracist engagement […] : the violence of racism, anti-Semitism and anticommunism which hit in the United States; the liberation of German war criminals by Americans; Germany’s rearmament; the violence of colonial conflicts and international political conflicts; racism in France resulting from economic conditions.”

Disagreements among members of the Alliance Antiraciste regarding those national and international concerns ultimately led to the demise of the organization and the foundation of MRAP.

Since my analysis relies on MRAP’s reactions to the African American freedom movement, it is important that I briefly explore the relationship between MRAP and the French Communist Party. Soviet propaganda focusing on the American racial drama must have influenced the organization’s leaders’ sentiments towards the U.S. Most of the leadership of MNCR, who helped found MRAP, were themselves affiliated with the French Communist Party. In fact, even though the origins of MRAP date back to its first convention on May 22, 1949, it only acquired its legal status to actively collaborate in the Pro-Soviet campaign launched by the French Communist Party. It is in this context that, on May 2, 1950, MRAP filed its statutes with the Police Commission. Moreover, as Yann Moncomble signals in Les professionnels de l’anti-racisme, “MRAP would participate in all the campaigns inspired by the French Communist Party.”

The communist affiliation of MRAP undeniably played a large role in the organization’s

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condemnation of the American red hunt during the Cold War as well as the ever more widely publicized instances of American racial prejudice.

As early as 1951, MRAP’s stance towards American racial issues was strongly shaped by its communist affiliation. As part of a global communist effort, MRAP organized campaigns to protest against the death sentence of Willie McGee, an African American man accused of raping a white woman. MRAP also actively protested against the wrongful condemnation of the Martinsville Seven for raping a white woman and the Trenton Six for killing a white storeowner. MRAP joined their voices to those of other communists around the world to protest against the unfair trials which led to the sentencing of all 14 men to death.4 To show their support for McGee, the Martinsville Seven and the Trenton Six, and to pressure American officials into revisiting the cases, MRAP published tracts calling the French people to denounce American racial injustice, notably through letters and telegrams to President Truman, the American ambassador in France, and even the U.N.5 MRAP also organized public meetings in Paris as part of their efforts to save the black American men, whose lives were unjustly threatened by the racially biased American justice system.

4 According to the facts described by the Civil Rights Congress, Mrs Troy Hawkins, the white woman allegedly raped by Willie McGee, had been in a consenting relationship with the latter and only cried rape because McGee wanted to end their relationship. The all-white jury which condemned McGee to the electric chair, as well as the death threat towards McGee’s lawyers fueled global protests. See Civil Rights Congress, “The Case of Willie McGee: A Fact Sheet Prepared by the Civil Rights Congress,” file:///C:/Users/Allyson/Desktop/Research/Microfilm%20Research/MRAP/MRAP%20Droit%20et%20liberte/Mac_g ee_1_opt.pdf (consulted on March 17, 2014). Similarly, a tract written by the French Temporary Committee for the Defense of the 7 Blacks from Martinsville condemned the unfair trial which resulted in the death sentence for the seven black men accused of raping white Ruby Stroud Floyd. See Le Comité Provisoire de Défense des 7 Noirs de Martinsville, “Projet d’une affiche,” file:///C:/Users/Allyson/Desktop/Research/Microfilm%20Research/MRAP/MRAP%20Droit%20et%20liberte/Martinsville_opt%201951.pdf (accessed on March 17, 2014). Finally, the death sentence befalling the Trenton 6 despite the clear lack of evidence led MRAP, and other organizations in the U.S. and in the world, to protest against the wrongful sentencing of the six black men. See MRAP, “Les 6 de Trenton,” file:///C:/Users/Allyson/Desktop/Research/Microfilm%20Research/MRAP/MRAP%20Droit%20et%20liberte/1951_Trenton_opt.pdf (accessed on March 17, 2014).

5 See for example, Secrétariat du Mouvement contre le Racisme, l’Anti-Sémitisme et pour la Paix, “Résolution,” file:///C:/Users/Allyson/Desktop/Research/Microfilm%20Research/MRAP/MRAP%20Droit%20et%20liberte/Mac_g ee_1_opt.pdf (accessed on March 17, 2014).
Although one might be tempted to place MRAP’s loud criticism of American racism within the confines of the ideological Cold War, MRAP’s focus on racial inequality in the U.S. also needs to be examined in the context of the French racism. The rhetoric used by MRAP in their protests against Willie McGee’s death sentence pointed towards two important contextual elements. First, as an organization born out of the recent horrors of World War II, members of MRAP were extremely sensitive to violent manifestations of racism (here the prospective legal murder of innocent black men). The recent memory of Nazi crimes, in which the Vichy government partook, occupied a large place in MRAP’s condemnation of racism in France, in the U.S. and in all other places where racial prejudice threatened human dignity. In a report delivered at the May 4, 1951 meeting to save Willie McGee, MRAP Secretary Charles Palant connected what he perceived as the recrudescence of racism in the U.S. to a parallel phenomenon in France. With Nazi horrors still fresh in Frenchmen’s minds, a commitment to fight against American and French racist practices was necessary:

The degree of bestiality unleashed by racism under the Occupation helped to make all organizations and Frenchmen attached to liberty and peace responsible for the current fight against racism. Our combat against racism is not limited to the U.S. If we are presently carrying out this campaign to save McGee and other black Americans, it is because it is in the U.S. where these sad events are taking place. It may be because they happen at a quicker pace in the U.S. that they tend to multiply in our country. We have had to carry out vigorous press and signs campaigns and raise vigorous protests against profiling raids taking place at the heart of Paris against North Africans, using the anti-Semitic raid techniques of Hitlerism and Vichyism.6

The global consequences of Hitlerism explain the international scope of MRAP’s antiracist action. In turn, MRAP’s global awareness predisposed French antiracists to think of French racial issues in the backdrop of international racial developments. The American racial atmosphere of the 1950s and 1960s proved especially relevant to French antiracists.

The French colonial and postcolonial contexts also informed French antiracists’ relation to contemporary American racial issues. As anti-colonial spokesmen, MRAP leaders saw a direct parallel between the racial prejudices which put innocent men to death in the U.S. and the racial prejudice which kept people subjected to a colonialist order both in French colonies and in the metropole. In a report appearing to be related to the May 4, 1951 meeting organized by the MRAP to protest against McGee’s death sentence, the parallel between the African American and the French colonial situations of oppression is evident. Speaking for the French youth, this plea for the commutation of McGee’s death sentence established a clear connection between American cases of racial injustice and the treatment of the colonized:

In black Africa, many youths are in prison, without judgment or with scandalous judgments which make respectable people shudder in anger. Their crime: wanting to get rid of the chains that hamper them and of the colonial justice which oppresses them, kills them. Same thing in Madagascar, Algeria and everywhere in the world. Same thing in France. Police brutality against the Algerian workers who demand better salaries is one such proof.7

In the same vein, MRAP’s resolution following the May 4, 1951 meeting claimed French antiracists’ “outraged protestation against the racist profiling raids organized by the police on May 1 and against police brutalities suffered by North Africans,” most of them workers.8

MRAP’s communist affiliation clearly influenced its members’ understanding of racism as an epiphenomenon of capitalism. But if MRAP’s communist allegiance forced them into condemning white American racism, in the French context, their leftist leanings also positioned them in the forefront of the struggles against colonialism and racism. My interest thus lies in the relevance of American racial developments for French antiracists in the French racial context of the 1950s and 1960s.

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7 See untitled document, http://archives.mrap.fr/images/8/88/Mac_gee_1_opt.pdf (consulted on March 18, 2014). The author(s) of the document may have been affiliated to the Union Française Universitaire.
With anti-Semitism outliving France’s liberation, memories of the tragic consequences of Hitler’s racial policies kept the threat of racism alive in postwar French society. In the 1950s and 1960s, the growing presence of immigrants from former French colonies, most of whom formed part of the proletariat, forced the French people into an uneasy cohabitation with colonial subjects or former colonial subjects. France’s new experience of pluralism quickly made French racism a significant object of concern for French antiracists. At a time when American democratic pretensions were being undermined by the obstinate resistance of white Americans to black calls for racial equality, the much cherished French humanistic tradition was also being threatened by France’s resistance to decolonization, especially in Algeria, and by the growing visibility of racism in the metropole. In such a context, French antiracists found in American racism a perfect lens through which to reflect on, but more importantly, to condemn French racial prejudice. In the 1950s and 1960s, MRAP’s official organ Droit et Liberté closely followed the events taking place in matters of race relations in the U.S. During this period, MRAP would use American racial events to discuss manifestations of French racial prejudice, both in the metropole and in French colonies. More specifically, French antiracists drew on the infamy of white American segregationists in an attempt to counteract the multiplying instances of racial discrimination on the French soil. The African American struggle for racial equality and white Americans’ vicious defense of the racial status quo provided a powerful set of images readily employed by French antiracists in their condemnation of French racism.

“No Racist Verdict in this country!,”9 “Paris is not Little Rock,”10 “Pigalle…ou Chicago? […] Since when is racial segregation allowed in France?,”11 “None of this in our country!,”12

12 “Piscine : Ceci nous amènera-t-il cela?,” Droit et Liberté, July-August 1964.
“But it’s not the Mississippi which runs next to Notre-Dame!” All these catchy phrases figured in articles describing instances of racial discrimination in France. While they established parallels between French and American expressions of racism, they also insisted on the uncharacteristic nature of racism in France. For these antiracist writers, racism simply did not belong in the France of the Rights of Man. In fact, in the 1950s and 1960s, Droit et Liberté frequently published articles on the lives of thinkers and activists who were known to have played a role in the emancipation of Jews and black slaves as well as in the later struggles against anti-Semitism. For MRAP, men like Diderot, Victor Schoelcher, abbey Raynal and Emile Zola were the embodiment of the true spirit of France. Never mind the fact that Arthur de Gobineau, one of the most influential racial theoreticians, who was rarely ever mentioned in the periodical, was also a product of France. MRAP’s reference to the tragic illustrations of American racial prejudice in their coverage of French racism represented an attempt to defend French humanistic and universal ideals, which French antiracists perceived as the very essence of French national identity.

French antiracists’ commitment to keep the “France of the Enlightenment” alive is illustrated in an article by Roger Maria, writer for Droit et Liberté, in the February 1959 issue of the periodical. Commenting on James Baldwin’s statements in the literary supplement of the New York Times, Maria rejected Baldwin’s claim that France, where the African American author had lived for almost a decade, was color-blind. For Maria, Baldwin’s affirmation that “nobody harbors racist prejudice” in France betrayed “an exaggerated sense of optimism” which certainly did not account for the insulting treatment many African and West-Indian students

13 “Ce n’est pourtant pas le Mississippi qui coule près de Notre-Dame,” Droit et Liberté, September 15-October 15, 1964.
suffered in Paris. However, Maria conceded, “we agree that anti-black racism in the U.S. and in France are incommensurable. And we will make sure that this gap remains.” This quotation sheds light on French antiracists’ comparative perceptions of French and American racism, at least as it related to blacks in this case. For French antiracists, making sure that France did not become another America was a strong motivation to think of and portray French racial incidents in light of the American racial atmosphere.

Even though MRAP had already taken a clear stance in opposition to the treatment of North African workers in France, the war in Algeria placed the issue of French racism towards Algerians, both in the metropole and in Algeria, at the top of MRAP’s agenda. In the interwar period, France had already witnessed a substantial increase of the population of Algerian migrants, but it was especially during the two decades following World War II that the largest wave of Algerian immigrants arrived to France. Between 1954 and 1962, upon Algeria’s independence, the population of Algerian migrants in France increased from 211,000 to 350,000 (and reached 710,000 by 1975). The largest majority of these migrants moved to France to meet French needs for miners and industrial workers. As in the interwar period, when a significant number of Algerians migrated to France, Algerians were subject to racial hostility and discrimination. Nonetheless, the Algerian War of Independence intensified French racist sentiments towards Algerians. A 1963 survey conducted by MRAP on the subject of racism in

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18 For analyses of the treatment of Algerian immigrants in France from the interwar to the 1960s, see…
France revealed the origins and manifestations of French racism towards the Algerian population. For a number of respondents, the Algerian War contributed to exacerbating French racial hostility towards Algerians. As a school teacher explained: “Racism seems to have re-emerged because of the Algerian War. The French have treated all Arabs, all Muslims as *fellaghas* (Algerian fighters).”¹⁹ The stereotypes which the war spread in France regarding Algerians thus played a large role in the recrudescence of racism towards the North African minority. In fact, as I will later discuss, those respondents who identified the Algerian War as the main impetus for French racism towards Algerians also tended to believe that French anti-black racism was not as visible in France because French Sub-Saharan colonies acquired their independence peacefully. Nevertheless, along with blacks and Jews, Algerians constituted the minority most likely to suffer from acts of violence, exclusion and insults on the part of the French population. To denounce what seemed to be Frenchmen’s increasingly aggressive racist attitude towards Algerians, French antiracists frequently discussed anti-Muslim Algerian racial incidents in light of the infamous racial context of the U.S.

As early as 1954, *Droit et Liberté* capitalized on the controversial nature of American racial issues to denounce French instances of racial prejudice. In the same issue where a journalist discussed white American resistance to the Brown decision, *Droit et Liberté* published an article about the exclusion of North Africans from Parisian cafés. The juxtaposition of these two articles served to dramatize French manifestations of racism against North Africans. The editor’s clever exploitation of the stigma engrained in many French minds regarding white American segregationists served to strengthen and amplify French antiracists’ condemnation of racist practices in France. While the periodical chose to present French and American racism as

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parallel, it was also adamant to defend the idea that racism had no place in France. Indeed, to conclude the article regarding racial practices in Parisian cafés, the writer claimed “we would not tolerate that such practices take root in our country!” Almost seven years later, in a short article intitled “Pigalle… or Chicago?” the periodical denounced the racial discrimination practiced in a snack-bar where three Muslim Algerians were refused service at the bar. The waiter asked them to take their sandwiches outside or pay an exorbitant price to consume their food at a table. Echoing the title, the article closed on the question: “Since when is racial segregation allowed in France?”

As would be the case in most of the parallels drawn by Droit et Liberté between French and American forms of racial prejudice, the periodical always insisted that, in matters of racism, France was not America. While many Frenchmen probably perceived the U.S. as a country built on racial prejudice, French antiracists constantly reiterated the idea that France was built on humanistic values and that, therefore, French expressions of racism ran counter to the French national traditions.

On multiple occasions, MRAP’s organized protests against racial incidents in the U.S. also represented opportunities for French antiracists to denounce French manifestations of racism, especially as it pertained to Muslim Algerians. On November 4, 1955, after the acquittal of the young Emmett Till’s murderers, MRAP’s leaders organized a public meeting in Paris to express their outrage at this blatant example of racial injustice. Many of those who took the floor that night, and whose addresses were subsequently published in Droit et Liberté, situated their protest against white Americans’ raging racism within the context of the French metropole and its colonies. For example, Maria Rabaté, a Parisian deputy, placed American and French racism on the same footing. For her, French racism was “the same racism, the same racial discrimination

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which expresses itself in less violent but still painful forms.” Algerian workers received lower pay than French workers while not enjoying the same social benefits, and the French media complacently cultivated racial hatred against those immigrants.22 Another speaker, Yves Dechezelles, invited his audience to remember that while “such crimes are still possible in the United States, nearby [France] there existed territories inhabited by men who are our brothers, and against whom similar crimes are committed.”23 In this context of racial hostility both in France and in North Africa, French antiracists saw their outcry against American racism as a general statement against racism, abroad and at home.

Two years later, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus’ resistance to a federal court order to integrate Little Rock’s High School also fueled MRAP’s discourse about French racism in the metropole as well as in its colonies. On the cover page of the September-October 1957 issue, Albert Lévy, the editor-in-chief, explicitly connected the political entanglements brought about by the Algerian crisis to the tragic beginning of the school year in the United States.24 After underlining the absurd nature of white racism in the U.S. as one that targets children, Lévy bridged the two situations by affirming that “if the dramatic beginning of the school year in the United States is a subject of passion for the antiracists, the convulsions marking the reopening of parliament in France should not leave them indifferent.”25 Here, Lévy clearly suggested that the political debates surrounding Algerians’ political power within Algeria and the French Union could not be understood without acknowledging the racial component of the issue at stake.

24 In this editorial, Lévy was referencing the French parliamentary debates which were taking place around the question of a Loi-Cadre for Algeria. This piece of legislation was meant to define the parameters of Algerian political autonomy within the French Communauté. The Loi-Cadre constituted one of the last efforts on the part of French officials to keep Algeria French. On the subject of the 1957 Loi-Cadre, see Samya El Machat, Les États-Unis et l’Algérie: De la méconnaissance à la reconnaissance, 1945-1962 (Paris: Editions L’Harmattan, 1997).
For Lévy, “be the victim of racism a black child, an Algerian or a Jew, it is equally reprehensible and harmful.” Despite this affirmation, Lévy distinguished between American and French racism. The author presented the U.S. as an extreme reminder of the ugliness and senselessness of racism. In the United States, racism created “fanatics whose minds (were) kept in the dark by clinging to outdated prejudice.” Certainly, Lévy did not spare French racists in his heated condemnation. He even put a few French officials on the stand for “sadistically stamping on democratic principles, celebrating hatred among men with ever more violence … [and for] the recurrence of unbearable discriminations which cost the lives of so many innocent people.”

While casting French and American racists in somewhat the same light, Lévy nevertheless pointed out a crucial difference between France and the U.S. in racial matters: the racist expressions manifested at Little Rock were emblematic of a long history of white American attitudes towards African Americans, whereas the violence unfolding in Algeria signified a novel departure from “the most beautiful traditions […] of our country.” Just as the Second World War encouraged the anti-Semitic policies of the Vichy government, the human and economic costs of the war in Algeria contributed to fueling a growing racist sentiment towards Algerians.

As was the case during the meeting organized to protest the acquittal of Emmett Till’s murderers, MRAP’s event to condemn the actions of Governor Faubus and Little Rock’s white segregationists also inspired comparisons between American and French situations of racial oppression. Pastor Vianney, for example, claimed “We, French people, we have not imported slaves in our country, but we went in theirs in the context of colonialism. That’s the opposite, but it’s the same thing.”

Aware of the French finger pointing which resulted from American criticism of French actions in Algeria, Emile Khan, the president of the Ligue des Droits de l’Homme (Human Rights League) condemned the attitude of Frenchmen who “tell Americans:

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‘You have no right to blame us for our racism in Algeria because yours is worse.” He added that “by protesting against the outrageous events of Little Rock […] we will not let this be used as an alibi for the racism of other countries, including France.” Finally, speaking for MRAP, Marcel Manville affirmed: “Our experience has taught us that the racism of Faubus and his henchmen is not different from that of a Poujade or Le Pen which finds its origins in pseudo-scientific theories, which make it possible to torture more merrily the dark skinned one—be they Algerian, Malagasy or African—before torturing one of their own.” At a time when French colonialism was increasingly criticized, at home as well as abroad, MRAP could not contemplate raising their voices against American racial prejudice without denouncing French racism. The violent spectacle of American racism during the 1950s and 1960s did not simply provide rhetorical ammunition to French colonial apologists; it also occupied a central place in the anticolonial and antiracist discourse of MRAP.

Attached to the universalistic and humanistic tradition of their country, French antiracists deplored the intensification of racial hatred towards Algerian immigrants in France. MRAP’s 1963 survey reveal the French arsenal of racial stereotypes concerning Algerians. Filth and venereal disease were two of the most cited stereotypical characteristics which the French

27 “Ibid.
28 Pierre Poujade (1920-2003) was a French politician who became the head of a movement known as Poujadism in the early 1950s. His entry on French political scene occurred in 1953 when he led a revolt of small business owners against taxes (he, too owned a small shop). His populist movement quickly rallied those Frenchmen who were suffering from economic modernization. However, what had started as a populist movement quickly evolved into “a racist nationalist movement reminiscent of Vichy.” Jean-Marie Le Pen is a French politician whose career started in the Poujadist ranks. In 1956, Le Pen resigned his seat in the parliament to go serve in Algeria as a paratrooper. In 1972, Le Pen took the lead of the extreme-right party Front National created by members of the Ordre Nouveau movement before the legislative election of 1973. Le Pen presided over the Front National from its creation to 2011 when his daughter Marine Le Pen succeeded him. A central component of the Front National’s ideology was—and remains—the protection of French identity which, in their view, was threatened by the influx of immigrants, especially those from North or Subsaharan Africa. Alice Conklin, Sarah Fishman, and Robert Zaretsky, France and Its Empire Since 1870 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 253-254, 310; “Front National,” Larousse, http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/Front_national/120460 (accessed August 31, 2014); “Jean-Marie Le Pen,” Larousse, http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/personnage/Jean-Marie_Le_Pen/129543 (accessed August 31, 2014).
associated with Algerians. This common representation of Algerians helps us understand why, in May 1964, the city council of Saint-Claude decreed that to enter the small town’s new swimming-pool, Algerian immigrants would have to present a medical certificate to a town clerk. As one of the main voices of antiracism in France, Droit et Liberté heavily criticized the town’s blatant racial prejudice which was strongly reminiscent of segregationist policies regarding public pools in the American South. Until then, the links which the paper had drawn between French and American racisms had essentially been rhetorical. This time, to accentuate what French antiracists saw as the growing intensity of French racial prejudice, the editors of Droit et Liberté resorted to a powerful visual appeal.

On the front page of the July-August 1964 issue, Droit et Liberté published an extract of the new Saint-Claude swimming pool’s regulation defining the conditions upon which Algerians would be allowed on the premises. It also displayed press clippings and tracts which testified to the same racial tensions regarding Algerians’ “invasion” of Parisian public pools. Under these documents, the paper printed a picture showing the forceful removal of African Americans from a beach reserved to whites by local authorities in St. Augustine. Another picture depicted a motel owner pouring acid into a pool where African American activists had made their way to protest against the establishment’s segregationist practices.30 Droit et Liberté thus asked “Will this bring us that?”31 In other words, will the racial hostility which drives Frenchmen to call for the exclusion of Algerians from public pools lead to the kind of racial violence employed by Southern white Americans to maintain segregation? By establishing a direct link between French racial discrimination against Algerians in Saint-Claude and in Paris and white American racial discrimination against African Americans in St. Augustine and in the South, Droit et Liberté emphasized the similarity of French and American racisms.

30 See figure 1.
31 “Piscine: Ceci nous amènera-t-il cela?,” Droit et Liberté, July-August 1964.
violence in St. Augustine, MRAP thus sought to warn its readers of the increasing similitude between French and American racisms and of the urgent need to fight against this closing gap.

Although, arguably, French racial discrimination was most ostensibly and most violently directed towards North Africans, especially Algerians, blacks from Africa and the Caribbean were also victims of French racism. According to a Parisian professor who participated in the 1963 survey organized by MRAP about racism in France, the relatively peaceful accession to independence by French colonies of sub-Saharan Africa largely explains the lesser visibility of anti-black racism in France. If the Algerian war forced the French to crystallize the image of Muslim Algerians as “others,” unassimilable in the French Republic, the absence of such conflict in the process of decolonization in Sub-Saharan Africa did not shelter black Africans from French racial prejudice. The survey conducted by MRAP regarding French racism indicated that blacks represented the group who suffered the most from French racial prejudice. Indeed, the respondents’ testimonies suggested that more Frenchmen refused to have contacts with blacks than with any other minorities (that included Algerians, Jews, Foreigners, pieds noirs and Gypsies) and that blacks were the most likely to suffer Frenchmen’s insults and mockeries. The authors of Les Français et le racisme suggested that the Algerian war of independence, while it triggered French hostility towards Muslim Algerians, also contributed to a French sense of “esteem” towards Algerians for their will to fight. Conversely, the peaceful independence of Francophone African colonies led to a French representation that cast the black African as

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32 Maucorps, Memmi, and Held, Les Français et le racisme, 29.
33 Todd Shepard, The Invention of Decolonization. In this book, Todd Shepard discusses the ways in which the French re-invented the Algerian as a racial “other” during the long process of decolonization in Algeria.
34 Maucorps, Memmi, and Held, Les Français et le racisme, 42. In the interviewees’ testimonies, blacks and Algerians were often put on an equal standing when it came to French people’s refusal to enter in contact with minorities. However, the survey suggests that blacks constituted the minority group with whom the French were the least likely to want to come in contact with. For the authors of Les Français et le racisme, this could be explained by the fact that, the Algerian war being over, the French were trying to knit closer ties with Algerian immigrants (later developments proved otherwise). The other possible explanation was that Algerians had excluded their community and had therefore limited the contacts with the French population.
“pacific and loyal but dependent upon the help of Western Europe, more especially France.”

The paternalistic attitude which characterized French rapports with African blacks outlived colonialism and was one of the most representative expressions of French racism towards this minority:

> The racist mythology has not been shaken by upheavals yet. It seems that the “good black,” the Uncle Tom, does not have the great idea to rebel against the kind paternal authority (of France). He has not conquered hostility, he has not imposed fear and he has not reaped the salutary hatred. The absence of distrust is trust, but it is a negative form of trust, which comes with a smile of contempt … And all of this is because the blacks from former French colonies did not have to fight in the bushes like the Algerians did in the mountains.

But the French reluctance to associate with blacks also stemmed from French fears of sexual intimacy between blacks and whites, or more especially, as was the case in the U.S., between black men and white women. For example, a student who took the survey related the story of a young black man who was beaten up by a Parisian crowd for being accompanied by a young white woman. On the subject of interracial marriage, the survey revealed that of all the minorities in France, blacks disproportionately suffered from French racial prejudice: “Not all minorities are equally able to trigger the ambivalent anxiety over interracial marriage. … Black Americans certainly know this. In France, a black man’s life would not be threatened for simply looking at a white woman. And yet, parents who are finally able to come to terms with seeing their daughter marry a Jew, or even an Algerian, would never accept that she marry a black man.”

Although French racism towards Algerians, and more broadly North Africans, has often stood for French racism as a whole—in the same manner as white American racism towards black Americans came to embody American racism—the conclusions of MRAP’s survey suggest

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35 Held, Maucorps and Memmi, *Les Français et le racisme*, 44.
36 The expression “Uncle Tom” was in the original text.
37 Held, Maucorps and Memmi, *Les Français et le racisme*, 45.
38 Ibid., 104, 124.
that French anti-black racism was also importantly constitutive of the postcolonial surge of racism in France.

In the 1950s and 1960s, *Droit et Liberté* often reported discriminatory practices towards blacks in France; these expressions of French racism were almost always presented in light of the racial developments taking place in the U.S. For example, in November 1955, *Droit et Liberté* published an article denouncing the racial bias of the French justice system. Although the journalist made no explicit allusions to the Emmett Till’s murder trial, the extensive coverage of MRAP’s event to protest against the acquittal of the young Till’s murderers in the same issue could not have failed to suggest a parallel between both racial situations. In its next issue, however, *Droit et Liberté* directly drew the reader’s attention to the analogy between the racial bias tainting the integrity of both the French and the American justice systems. The title of this article, “The Lamine Traoré’s case: No racist verdict in this country!” while insisting on the uncharacteristic nature of this racial incident in the French context, nonetheless unmistakably echoed the Sumner court’s racist verdict. Lamine Traoré, a young Guinean studying in Paris, was sentenced to a year in prison for slapping a French civil servant, while in the U.S. the murderers of a fourteen year old boy were graciously acquitted. As a student, Traore received financial aid from Guinea, his home country. On May 16, 1955, after multiple failed attempts to get the Ministry of France Overseas Territory to process his financial aid, Traore made yet another trip to the Ministry’s office. There, he was received by an impatient official who distastefully advised the young man to return to his country if he was not happy with how things worked in France. Under dire economic pressure and upset by the French official’s disrespectful remarks, Traore slapped the official in the face.

For the writer of this article, it was clear that the criminal court’s sentence of one year in prison for such a minor offense reflected racial bias. Had it been a white French student who had slapped a French civil servant, his case would have most likely been handled by the police court instead of a criminal court, as was the case for Traore’s offense. However, if French justice was unfortunately not colorblind, Traore could have fared worse had he been in the U.S.: “(There), he would have been lynched. In France, it is disappointing to witness the tenacity with which the justice system went after this Guinean who dared defend his human dignity in the face of the disrespectful and racist attitude of this civil servant.” For the writer, not only was this clear example of racial prejudice paling in the face of American racial violence, but it was also unrepresentative of the “conscience of the French people, whose generous traditions towards all people, regardless of their skin color, religion or origins, are well alive.” The article’s final comment deserves our attention: “In this country, everybody is equal under the law, when it protects as well as when it punishes.”

The journalist’s assertion that French justice was essentially racially blind—in an article reporting and condemning an obvious case of racial prejudice in the French justice system—clearly demonstrates French antiracists’ unconditional attachment to a mythical idea of France as unprejudiced.

Another parallel which French antiracists drew between French and American racisms revolved around the tension lying at the intersections of race and sex. The sense of anxiety brought by the idea of sexual promiscuity between black (especially male) and white (females) in the American context found a potent mirror in the French context. As mentioned earlier, the survey conducted by MRAP in 1963 revealed French fears of sexual relations between black men and white French women. In May 1959, Droit et Liberté published a short article denouncing the attack of a young black writer by members of Jeune Nation, a French nationalist

The young members of Jeune Nation stabbed Ferdinand Oyono in the back and hit him in the head multiple times with a club simply because the young Cameroonian was accompanied by a white girl. In the article’s concluding sentence, the author expressed his desire to see justice prevail and hoped that this would “teach the racists that Paris is not Little Rock.”

The author’s choice to establish a parallel between the beating of a young Cameroonian for being with a white woman and Little Rock is interesting for it reveals the somewhat sensational function of French antiracists’ comparisons between French and American racial contexts. Indeed, beyond the fact that both situations represented expressions of racial prejudice, little else seems to justify their association. Had the writers and editors of Droit et Liberté really wanted to demonstrate similarities between French and American racism, they could have referred to the beating and murder of the young Till for “behaving inappropriately” with a white woman, or the Willie McGee and the Martinsville Seven convictions for supposedly raping white women.

The fact that the Little Rock crisis happened less than two years earlier, and was possibly fresher in French minds, appears to be a plausible explanation for the journalist’s analogy. The contents of Droit et Liberté’s May issue also provide another clue: Right above the article informing the readership of Oyono’s beating, the periodical published an article entitled “Faubus’s phobias” which discussed the Arkansas governor’s support for segregated blood banks. It is likely that the journalist’s reference to Little Rock in the article exposing French racial prejudice towards blacks was meant to echo Uncle Tom’s discussion of Faubus’s racial

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41 “Jeune Nation” is a French nationalist organization which was founded a few years after the Second World War. On the history of the French extreme right, see Ariane Chebel d’Appollonia, L’Extrême Droite en France: De Maurras à Le Pen (Bruxelles: Complexe, 1996); Peter Davies, The Extreme Right in France, 1789 to the Present: From De Maistre to Le Pen (London: Routledge, 2002); and James Shields, The Extreme Right in France: From Pétain to Le Pen (London: Routledge, 2007).


43 Although there undeniably was a sexual component in the Little Rock crisis (since white parents were scared of having their daughters at school with black students), the crossing of race and sex was not as prevalent in the Little Rock crisis as it was in the Till case, for example.

This example illustrates an important function of French antiracists’ references to the American racial context in their denunciation of French racism. Indeed, *Droit et Liberté*’s analogies between French and American expressions of racism seem to have primarily allowed French antiracists to sensationalize French racial issues. By evoking parallels between widely publicized instances of American racial violence and racial incidents in France, French antiracists sought to dramatize French racial tensions. Because of its evocative power, American racism occupied an important place in French antiracist discourse.

Another example will further illustrate this last point. In its June-July 1960 issue, *Droit et Liberté* printed an article condemning yet another French café owner (this time in Lyon) for the practice of racial discrimination. The title, “The racist café owner from Lyon refuses to serve blacks,” clearly announces the target of racial discrimination to be black. The content of the article, however, shows that other minorities were also affected by the business’s racist policy. The situation of racial discrimination this article was referring to involved three Africans and two Moroccans, all students, whom the café manager refused to serve. Moreover, as reported in the periodical, in an altercation the café manager shouted that he was not serving the blacks, the Algerians or the Jews. Unlike the title of the article, which supposedly announced a story of white v. black racism, the article itself revealed that it was not just blacks who were discriminated against, but also North Africans and Jews. Although it may not be possible to formulate a definitive explanation for the omission of these two other minorities in the article’s title, the fact that the title announced the topic to be white v. black racism may point to the author’s desire to echo the American racial context. In this likely scenario, by subtly evoking

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45 “Oncle Tom”’s column first appeared in the November 1955 issue of *Droit et Liberté*. Serving the role of a controversial messenger, the column of Oncle Tom served the purpose of informing readers of facts unreported or misrepresented in the French mainstream press.

American racial tensions, the author of the article managed to sensationalize the subject of racial discrimination in France. In other words, one may easily see in this example proof that French antiracists utilized the strongly evocative American racial context to manipulate readers’ reception of news regarding the spread of racial discrimination in France.

French antiracists’ easy resort to contemporary American episodes of racial violence to shame French people away from racism poses the question of the relevance of those episodes for French antiracists. Even though antiracist journalists relied on sensational analogies between French and American racial events, for French antiracists these sensational analogies served the precious function of protecting French national integrity. Indeed, most of the connections drawn between the French and American racial contexts in Droit et Liberté tended to use the American racial context to reinforce the idea that France was not the U.S., and, therefore, that racism had no place in France. Those examples suggest that references to American racism served to sensationalize French racial incidents and, more importantly, to warn the French of the harm racism could cause to the country. Even as French antiracists denounced the multiplication of racist acts in France, defending French national integrity was of great importance to the writers of Droit et Liberté. Evoking similarities between French and American racism was a means for French antiracists to keep France from following in the path of the U.S. From this perspective, it is possible to place French antiracists alongside many of their fellow Frenchmen who resented the growing Americanization of French society. In the words of Richard F. Kuisel, “America functioned as a foil that forced the French, especially after the Second World War, to assert what was distinctively French. Beginning in the interwar years and reaching a climax in the first postwar decades, America served as the other that helped the French to imagine, construct, and
refine their collective sense of self.” French antiracists’ parallels between French and American racism thus denote an important tension in postwar French society: the need to protect French national identity in the midst of important demographics and cultural transformations.

But French antiracists’ racial analogies between the U.S. and France also served another important purpose: thinking of French racial events in light of racial developments in the U.S. allowed French antiracists to reflect on the evolution of racism in France and the larger Francophone world. More specifically, French antiracists’ reading of French racial incidents in light of the American racial context provided them with a reference point against which to measure the level of urgency of the racial problem which continued to spread in France. Even though, like Roger Maria, most French antiracists must have certainly believed that the French racial record was in no way as alarming as that of the U.S., French antiracists’ comparative reading of racial developments did at times lead them to believe that the French racial atmosphere was, perhaps, considerably more concerning than they had imagined so far.

Commenting on white resistance to James Meredith’s attempt to enroll in the University of Mississippi, Jean-Claude Merle, president of the Union des Etudiants de France (U.N.E.F.), affirmed: “the problem of racism concerns all of us. If racism is alarming in the U.S., a country which has reached an incredible level of technical development, it is as alarming in our country.” Here, Merle had in mind the events which took place in Paris on October 17, 1961. To protest against the curfew which prohibited them from going out after 8:30pm, thousands of Algerians decided to lead a peaceful march in the streets of Paris. Responding to this act of

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defiance, the Parisian police brutally attacked the marchers and went as far as throwing some of them, still alive, in the Seine. For Pierre Vidal-Naquet, instances of French and American racism were comparable, but there was one particular lesson that the French could learn from the Meredith story: “The third lesson is French: a year ago, on October 17, 1961, in the heart of Paris, Algerians asked for their own right to human dignity. We know how the police responded: two hundred Algerians died of strangulation, drowning and beating… General Walker is now in an asylum. Where are those who are responsible for the massacre of October 17?” 49 Indeed, whereas General Edwin Walker had been arrested and sent to a mental hospital for leading an insurrection on the University of Mississippi campus, the crimes committed by Parisian authorities went unpunished. Vidal-Naquet thus measured the gravity of the racial problem in France by looking at the American racial context, especially the government’s response to white American racism.

Finally, the analogies drawn by French antiracists between the French and American racial contexts allowed them to reflect on the global phenomenon of racism. In its February 1967 issue, Droit et Liberté reprinted a section of Robert Piétri’s interview of four antiracist militants for the French radio France-Inter. Piétri set up the importance of the international context of racism for French reflections on their own racial issues:

Beyond our borders, the alarming rise of neo-nazism in Germany, the permanence of the painful racial problem in the U.S., the presence, in the Middle-East, of xenophobic demons who may trigger a debacle at any moment, in Rhodesia, Angola and South Africa, everywhere, racial hatred, apartheid and segregation are common practice. What about here (in France)? The decolonization of Africa and the end of the Algerian war did not put an end to racism. 50

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As I have shown thus far in this chapter, the American racial context loomed especially large in the minds of French antiracists who were reflecting on the intensification of racism in France. One of the interviewees, S. Agblemagnon, a black professor at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes-Etudes*, identified at least two commonalities between French and American racial prejudices. The first revolved around the question of mentalities: “there is a psychological factor which we have to keep in mind and that is the rigidity of mental structures and the inability to adapt to a new situation. I have noticed this phenomenon throughout U.S. history, and I have also observed it in France.”51 The second point of convergence between French and American brands of racism hinted at the intersections of race and class in both national contexts: “There is a class dimension but one that does not use the traditional weapons of a class struggle. Instead, as was the case with the American proletariat, people use the idea of racial difference to justify the need to punish the racial ‘other’ or to uplift themselves.” Agblemagnon’s socio-economic understanding of racial tensions allowed him to identify a common dimension between the racism that took place both in France and the U.S. Agblemagnon’s socio-economic analysis of racism was representative of the French understanding of racism. Since most French anticolonialists and antiracists were situated on the left of the French political spectrum, it is not surprising that the French theorization of racism would include a strong Marxist underpinning. In turn, French Marxist understanding of the racist phenomenon largely explains the fact that French antiracists, like French intellectuals, expressed their deep sympathy towards the black American urban community whose despair exploded in cities across the U.S in the latter half of the 1960s.

Robert Piétri’s interview of French antiracists for *France-Inter*, which I briefly discussed earlier, corresponded to a moment of growing awareness among the French who realized that racism posed a larger problem to France than they had realized. Even though French antiracists

clung hard to the idea that France, unlike the U.S., was a country whose national traditions precluded the possibility that French people could be racist, French antiracists’ blind belief in the myth of French racial liberalism eroded in the 1960s. The Algerian war of independence and the increasing presence of immigrants from North and Sub-Saharan Africa forced the French to grapple with the myth of a non-racist France. For French actress Héléna Bossis, French people’s reactions to Jean-Paul Sartre’s *La putain respectueuse* constituted a good indicator of the growing awareness among Frenchmen that racism existed in France, a racism which increasingly placed France alongside the U.S. in racial matters. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote the play *La putain respectueuse* about American racism upon his return from a trip to the U.S. in 1945. First performed in French theaters in 1946, the play received a different reaction from audiences when it was staged again in 1961. Héléna Bossis, who played the role of the prostitute in Sartre’s play, confided to the journalist of *Droit et Liberté* that she noticed that the play had taken on a new dimension for the French public:

> This is not because all the actors have changed but me; I have a feeling that the play has more weight, that it concerns all of us more. In fact, the public behaves differently. They laugh, of course, at the expected times, but I find this smile to be more tense, not as relaxed; as though beyond comical situation or words, each spectator took the drama unraveling before their eyes as their own.  

Bossis’ observations show that, although by the mid-1940s the French still considered themselves immune from the kind of racial prejudice which reigned in the U.S., in the early 1960s the French had become well aware that racism was also a French problem.

A close look at the 1960s issues of *Droit et Liberté* shows that French racial developments shook antiracists’ conviction that the French were not racist. Despite repeated assertions that the French people was not racist, by the mid-1960s French antiracists started to question this long-lived assumption. The survey conducted by MRAP in 1963 to better

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understand the roots, conditions and forms of French racism undoubtedly constituted a first step in French antiracists’ reevaluation of the myth of color-blind France. We can also find signs of this reevaluation in MRAP’s official periodical. In its March 1965 issue, *Droit et Liberté* published the conclusions of a survey conducted by Nicole de Boisanger-Dutreil on the subject of racism in France. The title of the report, “Are the French Racist?” clearly suggests that the racial climate in France forced French antiracists to grapple with the reality of French racism.

Although French prejudice towards minorities has often been presented, by the French themselves, as the result of immigrants’ failure to adopt French culture, Boisanger-Dutreil’s study shows that French racism also rested on biological factors. Asking a manager in a public works company what he would do if his daughter married a black or an Algerian man, he responded that he would prohibit the wedding. This French manager would not allow his daughter to marry a man of color. Far from being an isolated example, Boisanger-Dutreil explained that more than 50% of the French homeowners who rented rooms to students would not allow their property to be rented to a person of color. Perhaps even more revealing of the importance of skin-color for the French, the option to rent or not a room to a colored student already figured on the form homeowners were to fill out to rent their rooms. Reporting the words of a Young Christian Workers representative, Boisanger-Dutreil illustrated the belief among some Frenchmen that the French racial issue drew France closer to the U.S. than many French people might have allowed themselves to realize:

> The whole country is racist, says Pineau. We look for workers, happy to get their labor, but not to welcome them, to do work in the steel and construction industries and in the mines that French people do not want to do. We fill positions in

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difficult jobs by using foreigners who are hungry for freedom, or simply hungry. If we continue down this path, we will soon resemble American racists.\textsuperscript{54}

For this author, French economic exploitation of immigrants, which both stemmed from and nurtured the racialization of the “other,” was symptomatic of French racism and could possibly turn France into another America.

As part of their effort to counteract anti-Semitic sentiments and the rise of racism in France, \textit{Droit et Liberté} frequently put French press organs on the stand in its columns. Particularly, \textit{Droit et Liberté} often reported statements and excerpts from the French extreme right weekly newspaper \textit{Rivarol}. \textit{Rivarol}, which remains one of the main press publications of the French extreme right, was founded in 1951 by René Malliavin and Maurice Gaît.\textsuperscript{55} This publication, along with others like \textit{Aspects de la France} and \textit{La Nation Française}, were inscribed within the postwar “revisionist movement of nationalist or royalist inspiration.”\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Rivarol}'s name was inspired after Antoine de Rivarol, an eighteenth-century French writer known for his strong opposition to the \textit{Déclaration des Droits de l’Homme et du Citoyen}, in particular, and to the French Revolution in general.\textsuperscript{57} As Jeremy Jennings states in \textit{Revolution and the Republic}, Rivarol’s writings announced the “central themes raised by theorists of the counter-revolution from the 1790s onward… All republics, all political systems resting upon a spurious and unrealizable doctrine of popular sovereignty and natural rights, were doomed to collapse.”\textsuperscript{58} The founders of and contributors to \textit{Rivarol} similarly believed democracy and equality to be harmful principles. As the following pages will illustrate, French nationalists perceived and represented

\textsuperscript{54} Nicole de Boisanger-Dutreil, “Les Français sont-ils racistes?” \textit{Droit et Liberté}, March 15/April 15, 1965.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 44.
the movements for emancipation led by the oppressed around the world as the tragic consequences of an inexorably destructive and fallacious liberal discourse.

In the decades following World War II, if French nationalists energetically condemned democracy, which they associated with decadence, they also actively participated in the international anticommunist crusade. Perceiving communism as a major national and global threat, Rivarol came to support Atlanticism (alliance between Europe, the U.S. and Canada). However, as a July 1963 editorial of Rivarol clearly expressed, Rivarol’s support for American foreign policy resulted solely from the necessity to curb Soviet growing influence: “America is what it is, and nobody more than us deplores that Europe failed to organize as a continent and to create, by relying on Africa, a force unrivaled in the world. But this era has passed… We have to face today’s situation: the Europe of 1963 cannot be self-sufficient if it wants to victoriously resist the threat of communist imperialism.”

Four years later, in a four-part article discussing French dependency on the U.S., Jean Clary expressed his desire to see Europe combat the “American economic invasion” by instituting a European system of economic cooperation. Clary nonetheless insisted that this project of European economic independence should not occur in a climate of hostility between Europe and the U.S.: “Let’s add—for it is what really matters—that this emulation will be all the more salutary to the extent that it will develop in a climate of trust and friendships which shall reign among countries which defend (with a few exceptions) the same values against a common enemy.”

French nationalists’ ideological affinity with American anticommunism was thus accompanied by a sense of resentment at French growing dependency on the U.S. But French nationalists’ grudge towards the U.S. for harming French power also

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stemmed from American attitudes towards colonizaton. Echoing other French voices, French nationalists’ pointed at episodes of American history to discredit American anticolonialism.

*Rivarol*, and the French nationalists in whose names it spoke, was one of the most fervent pro-colonial publications on the French scene. The French of the extreme right believed in the legitimacy of their presence in “dark” parts of the world. Not only did French nationalists perceive French grandeur to be largely dependent on its Empire, but they also insisted on the basic necessity for the White Man to put order in remote lands where ignorance and barbarity reigned. Their belief in Caucasians’ superiority and the White Man’s important function in the colonial enterprise led French nationalists to dismiss anticolonialist arguments as the product of a fundamentally flawed democratic ideal. For example, in *Rivarol*’s February 10, 1955 issue, Cousteau mocked priest Michel who had given a talk to students of French colonial territories a few days earlier at the Sorbonne on the topic of “The Duty of Decolonization.” Cousteau noted the irony that the Catholic Church would embark on a crusade against colonialism for “these past centuries, the Church has rather tended to favor colonial enterprises which allowed its missionaries to cross the iron curtain of the pagan world.” Having noted this contradiction, Cousteau concocted a rhetorical mix of colonial and anticolonial arguments to ridicule the advocates of decolonization:

> The state and action that are contained in the term “colonization” are of such baseness that they are no longer conceived of as honorable… In fact, how couldn’t the whites blush at the thought of having ventured into the heart of the bushes and assaulted the human *natives* by spitefully preventing them to eat each other up? And of being so malicious as to worry them with vaccines and reading lessons? And of having spoiled their landscapes with roads and railways? And of

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61 Cousteau’s hostility towards priest Michel was not simply fueled by his active denunciation of colonization, but was also fueled by a wave of resentment on the part of French nationalists towards the Catholic Church. Indeed, while many of them had rallied in the National Right during the war in the defense of Christian civilization, the process of Épuration which started in August-September 1944 was strongly supported by French Catholics. François Duprat, *Les mouvements d’extrême-droite en France depuis 1944* (Paris: Les Editions Albatros, 1972), 15–16.
having topped all of this indiscretion by speaking of some Jesus Christ, without whom they had been absolutely fine before the arrival of those colonial brutes? 62

This abstract, which mirrors the general tone of the article, highlights French nationalists’ belief in the positive nature of the French “civilizing mission.” According to Cousteau and like-minded Frenchmen, without the colonizer’s intervention, cannibalism, lack of hygiene and education, and paganism would have kept the indigenous prisoners of a vile existence. However, French nationalists’ conviction of the innate inferiority of the peoples living under colonial rule precluded the evolution of those races who, as a consequence, permanently needed the administration of the colonizer. Eight years later, in an article entitled “The Whites Do Remain the Masters of the World,” Lucien Rebatet saw in the problems of under-nutrition and mal-nutrition in the Third World a clear proof that decolonization had been a mistake. Commenting on the “postcolonial” assistance to newly independent nations, Rebatet clearly demonstrated his belief in a world order in which whites were the natural rulers:

It is impossible to do without the White Man, anywhere. Everywhere, under the aegis of cooperation and technical assistance, people want his return, that of his machines and his money. Neo-colonialism was inevitable and is now fulfilled. If the Russians and the Yankees—the new “carpetbaggers” who played the card of independence to replace us—are the main beneficiaries of this new form of colonialism, it does not take away from the fact that, as far as I know, they are whites. They are simply a little less stupid, but also a little more hypocritical than Europeans. 63

This quotation not only reveals French nationalists’ belief in the innate superiority of white men, but also their frustration with having lost their colonial position to Americans and Russians. Both, in the manner of Northern opportunists in the aftermath of the

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American Civil War, took advantage of the European vacuum in newly independent nations.

French nationalists were the strongest supporters of the French colonial enterprise which they believed to be an essential pillar of French grandeur. Consequently, like many of their fellow Frenchmen, they resented the U.S. for its anticolonial advocacy, and they expressed their resentment towards American anticolonialism in the columns of *Rivarol*. In the September 8, 1955 issue of *Rivarol*, with the sarcasm characteristic of the periodical, Pierre-Antoine Cousteau debunked the legitimacy of American anticolonialist discourse. In an article entitled “Let’s Listen to the Voice of America,” Cousteau mocked Americans’ presentation of their own liberation from the English colonial yoke as a model for the colonized to follow:

> Americans were the first to set the tone when they shook England’s colonial yoke. And since then, they’ve known an inexpressible bliss. This example must be followed always and everywhere. In light of this truth, we can appreciate how much the French position in North Africa is unbearable and how justified the critiques of the Baltimore Sun are. The poor Arabs, denied access to the polls, cannot but be economically weak. ‘Enrich yourselves through the vote,’” shout the neo-Guizot of Oklahoma. They specifically advise them not to settle for fatally meaningless reforms but to fiercely conquer their independence—to do, in short, what the ‘Pilgrim Fathers’ did when they pushed the English towards the snowy border of Canada.

Cousteau pursued his sarcastic critique of American anticolonialists by pointing out what he presented as the incongruous association of men like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington to “thugs of Berber tribes.” This comparison, he disingenuously remarked, was a “noble sign of humility” which signaled “the beginning of an act of contrition or, as we say today, an auto-critique.” Americans’ moral dismay at France’s continued presence in North

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Africa, explained Cousteau, would naturally result in Americans’ realization that they, also, had to vacate North America and restitute the land to its initial inhabitants. Speaking of Native American tribes, Cousteau claimed: “They are the ones who must receive internal autonomy: first step towards total independence and final eviction of the palefaces. And as soon as Americans have left America, we will start—we promise—taking their sermons seriously and packing and leaving North Africa.”

In this article, Cousteau strongly expressed his sentiment towards Americans’ position on the French colonial situation in North Africa by underlining the hypocritical nature of American anticolonialism. But his allusion to North African Muslims as “thugs of Berber tribes” is also revealing of his prejudiced views on the North African colonized. In fact, Cousteau’s suggestion that Americans leave America to Native Americans simply served as a way to stress the absurdity of American anticolonialist claims. In “America Back to Indians,” an article published in Rivarol a few months earlier, Albert Paraz denounced what he saw as the stupidity of French anticolonialism through a parallel with the situation of “Indians” in the U.S.. Paraz especially criticized an article by Alfred Sauvy in L’Express, to which a reader responded by asserting that Sauvy’s arguments turned him in favor of granting independence to Algeria. On the subject, Paraz wrote, “M. Sauvy is the most disingenuous man one can ever imagine. As deceitful as a statistic, he would find a way to prove that Americans must abandon America to Indians.”

As fervent believers in the superiority of the White Man, French nationalists such as Cousteau and Paraz dismissed contemporary humanitarian ideas of equality and self-determination as pure folly. In both examples, the authors used the idea of restituting

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North America to its native inhabitants as a means to ridicule either French or American anticolonial advocates.

About a year later, Cousteau turned again to the Native American experience but this time to comment on the French treatment of the pieds noirs in Algeria. Especially, Cousteau deplored French representations of “the French of Algeria” as the ones who had created the tensions ultimately erupting in the Algerian war and who were forcing the French to continue fighting this war. With a satirical tone, the author suggested that the French—with the exception of French nationalists—were looking at three equally “constructive and satisfying” solutions to deal with the “hopeless French of Algeria.” The “Muslim solution” consisted in Muslims’ enslavement of the pieds noirs. The “Soviet solution” consisted in relocating the pieds noirs to another part of the world. As Cousteau explained, they could not plan on sending the pieds noirs to other parts of the French empire since “the Fourth Republic was fully determined to give away this intolerable empire to its last piece… Repatriating the French of Algeria in the metropole, where they would cast disastrous votes for Poujade…is out of the question.” In addition to expressing his dismay at the French failure to cling to their colonial possessions and their rejection of extreme right politics, Cousteau also condemned French ties to communism by suggesting that Siberia could very well be the pieds noirs’ destination: “If we don’t have a Siberia, our Russian friends have one. It would most likely be the right moment to invoke our pact of alliance and ask them to welcome our excess of useless French.” Finally, Cousteau presented the “Anglo-Saxon solution: biblical and democratic.” Following the example of the colonists of North America, this solution would consist in the relocation of the pieds noirs in

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67 In this quotation, Cousteau is probably referring to the military, political and economic alliance which the French and the Russians instituted in the early 1890s to protect themselves against Germany and Austria and that remained in place until 1917. “Alliance franco-russe,” Larousse, http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/alliance_franco-russe/120210 (accessed August 24, 2014).
reservations: “It is precisely the one that the pious pioneers who cleared America applied to the redskins. By their very existence, the redskins hampered the development of the Anglo-Saxon genius. And let’s not pretend that the number of French Algerians is such that this clean-up operation would be impossible.”

Cousteau’s association of the pieds noirs with Native Americans did not reflect the kind of prejudice shared by many of his French contemporaries who perceived the French of Algeria as inferior to their counterparts in the metropole. In fact, French nationalists’ faith in the superiority of the White Man made it unlikely that Cousteau harbored any qualms over North American settlers’ treatment of the natives they encountered. Rather, Cousteau sought to formulate a powerful critique of French officials and the French people as a whole. He feared that the French of the metropole would have no problem treating their fellow Frenchmen from Algeria in the same manner North American settlers treated the “redskins.”

The African American freedom movement also evoked the French colonial situation among French nationalists. In October 1957, Cousteau’s commentary on the crisis surrounding the racial integration of Little Rock drew a parallel between the French situation in Algeria and the American racial context. Cousteau used the Little Rock crisis to condemn the French liberal press for supporting American military action in Arkansas while deprecating the French “paras” fighting in Algeria. With his characteristic sarcasm, Cousteau affirmed, “Like all the good Frenchmen freed from feudal superstitions, I was obviously convinced that the paratroopers were, without exception, atrocious and awful people…My astonishment was thus great when I read the first line of a title in bold characters in France-Observateur: ‘Long live the paras…’ Was it possible? It was. But the second line somewhat corrected the absolute character of the

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69 See my discussion on the symbolism of the “paras” during the Algerian war in chapter 2, pp 32-33.
first: ‘…of Little Rock.’

By 1957, accounts of the use of torture by the French military and the growing unpopularity of the war had contributed to staining the image of the French paratrooper within France. As an adamant supporter of French Algeria (l’Algérie française), Cousteau deplored the lack of national support for the men who were fighting to preserve the French empire. Moreover, French nationalists like Cousteau resented the fact that intellectuals and commentators’ critiques of the French conduct in the war obscured the violent actions of the FLN: “Sent to Algiers to protect those bad people with pale faces against the joyful pyrotechnicians of the FLN, the para nauseates the honest man. Sent to Little Rock to escort a colored kid to a white school, on the other hand, the para becomes the blazing sword of the human Conscience.” The pages of Rivarol highlight French nationalists’ disdain for the panoply of democratic ideals championed in the wake of World War II, especially as they applied to non-whites. For French nationalists, liberal attempts to emancipate oppressed peoples around the globe and to combat racial prejudice translated into a reverse form of discrimination against whites. Suggesting that the French paratroopers fighting in Algeria be sent to the U.S. to further the completion of racial integration, Cousteau expressed French nationalists’ sense that the tide had turned against whites: “By removing these young men from Algeria where they have no reason to be (once and for all, the protection of whites is of no interest to anybody who has a heart), we’ll kill two birds with one stone.”

Throughout the period covered by this study, Rivarol frequently portrayed whites as victims. For French nationalists like Cousteau, the new

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interest in and support for oppressed people of color around the world necessarily came with the unjust vilification of the White Man.

Almost two years after Algerian Independence, *Rivarol*’s treatment of the American racial situation continued to provide grounds for commentary on French colonialism. In a January 23, 1964 article on the issue of racial segregation in the U.S., Raymond Sereau sarcastically proposed a “liberal” solution modeled after that chosen by France to deal with its colonial problem. Although, Sereau suggested, “blacks’ power of proliferation” was likely to lead eventually to reverse segregation,

it was not too early to think of the solution which would respect both the laws of democracy and antiracism. In fact, in the last few years, France has provided an example which Americans have always approved of. Why wouldn’t the Union yield to blacks a few of the Southern states with, naturally, their equipment and industrial structure. As for the whites who live there, they would go, as refugees, to the Northern states where their compatriots would happily welcome them as brothers. As we have seen, such an exodus is not at all impossible.\(^{72}\)

As this example illustrates, French nationalists’ resentment towards the U.S. for pressuring France to abandon its empire remained potent even after Algerian independence. In the same vein as former articles published in *Rivarol*, however, Sereau’s suggestion that blacks be granted autonomy within the U.S. was meant to underline what he perceived as the absurdity of humanitarian ideals. Furthermore, Sereau’s reference to the American government in terms of “Union” betrays the author’s perception of a victimized U.S. South whose fate remained in the hands of American Northerners—much like the fate of the pieds noirs had rested with the French metropole. In fact, through this comparison, Sereau also criticized the French for their treatment of the pieds noirs who returned in mass to France upon Algerian independence. Indeed, in the years following the end of the war, *Rivarol* featured many articles on the difficulties the pieds

noirs of the exodus encountered in France. By discussing American racial issues in parallel with the legacy of the decolonization of the French Empire, especially in Algeria, Sereau expressed his resentment both towards the U.S. and its anticolonialist stance and the French metropole for giving away Algeria to its Muslim natives at the expense of Algerians of European descent.

French Nationalists’ strong belief in the racial superiority of whites led them to differentiate themselves from the majority of the French press in its treatment of the African American freedom movement. If from a different perspective, however, Rivarol’s writers did not fail to stress certain similarities between the French colonial situation and contemporary developments in the African American community. In a June 15, 1961 article entitled “Racisms,” an anonymous author sought to dismiss the “extremely simplified” and “manichean” version of the violence surrounding the Freedom Rides in Birmingham as depicted by the French press. Not only did French newspapers and magazines fail to underline the Freedom Riders’ provocative acts—by violating the “southern social laws of ‘segregationist’ inspiration,”—but they also remained silent regarding another important phenomenon: the rise of black racism. As the author of the article explained, Elijah Muhammad, the head of the Nation of Islam, preached hatred against whites and invited his fellow black men to “shake off the yoke of white domination, not to replace it with racial equality, but to ‘re-establish’ (?) black domination.” By placing the word “re-establish” between quotation marks and adding the following parenthetical question mark, the author highlighted what he and his readers would have probably agreed to have been black Americans’ delusional belief that there ever existed a world order where blacks enjoyed racial supremacy. His following commentary, regarding black Muslims’ call for the creation of a black state, underlines the author’s perceived connections between developments touching the black American population and the French colonial situation in Algeria: “Within the U.S., the White-
haters advocate for the creation of a ‘black state’ endowed with sovereignty and territorial independence—something like a ‘Black Palestine’ or like… an Algerian Algeria.”73 For the author, the idea of black national sovereignty within the U.S. appeared as ludicrous as the idea of Algerian national independence. The author also compared the trajectory of the Black American freedom movement to that of the Algerian nationalist movement. While both started by calling for reform and equality, they ended up asking for “the disappearance of a lot more than some racial ‘discriminations.’” The author continued, “We shall follow closely the evolution and developments of the ‘racial’ problem in the U.S., where we will quickly see, as in other places, the ‘big tide of history’ rising and blowing—with the disastrous consequences it always implies…”74 In this quotation, the author borrowed a phrase from President de Gaulle’s September 16, 1959 speech which famously recognized the existence of a distinct Algerian identity and Algerians’ right to self-determination.75 This Rivarol writer thus conflated what they perceived as the tragic prospect of Algerian sovereignty with the fearful possibility of black sovereignty in the U.S. For French nationalists, emancipation could not bear any positive consequences for anybody, whites and non-whites. In the wake of the Little Rock crisis, Edith Delamare’s characterization of African Americans illustrates French nationalists’ perception of the former’s inferiority: “In general, their physical resistance is considerably inferior to that of whites. Their mind is slow and, overall, they have a low appetite for learning and lack a spirit of initiative.”76 Just as colonized peoples’ inferiority and barbarism made them unfit for autonomy, African Americans lacked the necessary qualities for successful emancipation.

73 The English italicized expression “White-haters” appeared in the original version: “les White-haters revendiquent la constitution d’un “état noir…”
The language of equality and the wave of emancipation that took over the world in the aftermath of World War II constituted real threats for French nationalists. As one of the previous examples evokes, French nationalists, who saw non-whites as inferior to the White Man, dreaded the impact of decolonization and emancipation. In his article, “Where are the racists?” P.-R. Leclercq clearly expressed French nationalists’ sense of doom at the advent of the “coloured” rebellions around the world. As many issues of Rivarol demonstrate, French nationalists resented French liberal-minded intellectuals and journalists for demonizing those whites who believed in their innate racial superiority and for unjustly portraying racism as solely a white evil. Being racist, Leclercq corrected, was not to want the death of the black, the yellow and the red, but rather to maintain one’s superiority while serving other, inferior, peoples: “Being racist does not consist in defending one’s race, but in defending one’s race and [emphasis added] saving the others at the same time.” Adding onto his definition of racism, Leclercq substantiated the legitimacy of racism by pointing out whites’ achievements: “Being racist, as the traders of Empire fail—or refuse—to understand, means becoming aware that, in this era, a race, the white race, has reached a degree of civilization beneficial to Humanity. And that it is the duty of this race to maintain for itself, and to communicate to others, what 2,000 years of Western Civilization have brought from Rome to Oslo, London to Budapest.” For colonial apologists like Leclercq, recognizing the existence of a racial hierarchy proved to be more beneficial to all than succumbing to deceitful humanitarian ideals. French nationalists’ belief in the necessity to maintain a racially stratified world order was accompanied by a sense of dread. Indeed, Leclercq and fellow French nationalists “felt the danger the white race was in since some demagogues have given their independence to peoples who did not ask for it, much like one would give a knife to an infant instead of a rattle.” Just as many African Americans connected their struggle
for racial equality to the worldwide movement to shake off the yoke of European colonialism, French nationalists placed African Americans alongside other “colored races” for they were all signs of and responsible for the “decadence” of the white race. The African American freedom movement was thus relevant to French nationalists in so far as it was emblematic of whites’ doomed destiny.

As Henri Lèbre explained in a September 16, 1963 article, the American racial context and the situation in Africa contributed to undermining the conclusion of some “experts” in the U.N. who popularized the idea that race was “less of a biological phenomenon than a social myth.” For him, “the facts betray the vanity of this affirmation.” Almost a year later, in an article entitled “Blacks of Africa and America,” Lèbre compared African and black American developments. Lèbre turned towards recent events in the political life of a number of African countries to illustrate the veracity of French nationalists’ predictions regarding Africans’ innate inability to rule themselves:

December 1962: coup d’état in Senegal, arrest and conviction of Prime Minister Mamadou Dia; January 1963: assassination of M. Sylvanus Olympio, Togo president; April 1963: monstrous trial in Ivory Coast where the “exemplar” African leader, Houphouet Boigny, bravely sent 85 of his fellow citizens in front of a national security court… The following August, the “priest” president Fulbert Youlou was overthrown in Brazzaville. In October 1963, unrest in Dahomey culminated in the removal of president Maga, placed under house arrest.

Lèbre continued making his point by hinting at the political unrest currently taking place in Ghana, Kenya, Cameroon, Uganda and Rwanda. For him, these examples of political instability, sometimes resulting in civilian massacres, confirmed French nationalists’ theses as to the infantile and barbarous character of Africans. But, in the U.S. too blacks exhibited their violent temper. In a manner characteristic of Rivarol, which always sought to highlight the racism of the

non-whites, Lèbre reported the story of “about 50 young blacks of both sexes who, armed with bicycle chains, knives, clubs and bottles, attacked a group of young Jewish students, accompanying their blows with anti-Semitic vociferations.” As Lèbre explained, this act of violence was not isolated and mirrored the general radicalization of the African American freedom movement. The violent events triggered by blacks in Africa and in the U.S. forced Lèbre to conclude: “But apart from that, as some experts have decided in a rush, the racial question does not exist.” As Lèbre put it in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King, the “democratic myth of equality,” product of disillusioned humanitarians, “killed those it pretends to be freeing.” In his view, and more generally that of French nationalists, the murder of King, one the one hand, and the “bloody chaos” which overtook Africa upon independence, on the other hand, illustrated the “absolute silliness” of the idea of racial equality.

French nationalists’ conception of the African American freedom movement is well exemplified in Robert Anders’s article regarding American racial riots, notably that of Chicago which took place in the summer of 1966. For Anders, that this most recent episode of black racial unrest happened in a region where “blacks and whites are LEGALLY equal,” ought to “make the representatives of the politics of integration think twice.” While African Americans could, or could hope to, enjoy racial equality, social equality nonetheless remained out of their reach. Betraying a purely racial vision of black Americans, Anders affirmed that African Americans’ status within American society stemmed from their inability to adapt to a foreign civilization: In the United States, blacks do not fight for their civil rights but to feed themselves. However, they believe—and people try hard to make them believe—that social equality will come with civil equality. But in reality, they will always remain foreign to a world where one’s productive capacity is foremost. In this domain, they are far inferior to the most primitive of European immigrants.

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Anders conceded that many blacks managed to be economically successful, but he argued that they falsely led their fellow African Americans to believe that the struggle for civil rights would ultimately bring them the “same purchasing power as that of whites.” According to Sanders, because King was part of this “small minority of blacks turned bourgeois,” he was not qualified to speak for the majority of African Americans. Anders presented King as the “spokesman of internationalists,” those “fake humanitarians” who encourage the “interbreeding of the American continent … to ultimately colonize the world with a population of modern slaves, machines programmed to consume and produce without thinking. A single race, weakened since completely mixed racially, will then people the earth and the caste of internationalists will get to reign in peace—they won’t need to worry about uprisings anymore.” Much like Malcolm X and other Black American leaders championing the Black Power ideology, Anders perceived King as nothing more than a tool in the hands of American capitalists. In fact, through their call for the separation of the race, Anders suggested that “Black Muslims may be offering the whites of North America a last chance to solve the black problem once and for all.” While French antiracists and other liberal-minded commentators deplored the prejudiced and extremist views of the Nation of Islam, French nationalists like Anders, convinced of the impossibility of racial integration, found Black Muslims’ separatism more acceptable than moderate leaders’ struggle for racial equality. Finally, Robert Anders warned, “If the American government refuses to talk with the true representatives of the blacks of America (Black Muslims), we can predict with certainty that the riots, which are multiplying today in the North of the U.S., are but a prelude to a racial war, likely to run over the American territory and to spread over the whole world.”

81 A year later, anti-Apartheid activist Ronald Segal spoke of current global dynamics in terms of a “race war,” a phrase that “is a strong one, but not stronger… than the steadily increasing hostility between white and non-white
it economic imperialism by American capitalists or global racial unrest, the international prospects of the black racial situation in the U.S. explained French nationalists’ interest in the African American freedom movement.

*Rivarol’s* coverage of racial events in the U.S., as suggested by Anders’ brief discussion of racial-mixing, also revealed French nationalists’ fears of miscegenation and what they likely thought of as the contamination of white blood. In its August 29, 1963 issue, *Rivarol* printed the picture of the 1963 March on Washington pin, illustrating a white hand shaking a black hand, and the picture of white marchers with a white on black equal sign, along with that of a mixed couple with their baby. The black man, residing in Paris with his white, likely French, wife, was preparing to sign a notice of support for the March at the American Embassy.\(^{82}\) The famous March on Washington was thus an opportunity for the periodical to present racial equality as the first step towards the unfortunate mixing of the races. But, as the photo suggests, it was the union of black men with white women that French nationalists particularly targeted. In fact, the preceding issue of *Rivarol* featured an article entitled “Black men and white women.” In this article, Mermoz discussed relationships between black men and white women, like that of Senegalese president Leopold Senghor with a Norman woman. But Mermoz argued that, fortunately, the union between black men and white women, which were frequent in the Quartier Latin and in St. Germain-des-Près a few years back, were now on the decline. White women had come to realize the incompatibility between whites and blacks.\(^{83}\) However, the author remarked,


\(^{83}\) *Rivarol*, August 29, 1963. See figure 2.

\(^{83}\) The Quartier Latin refers to a part of Paris situated on the left bank of the Seine. Surrounding the Sorbonne, the Quartier Latin was especially known for its lively community of intellectuals. To French nationalists, the Quartier Latin represented a hotbed of communist subversion and interracial mingling. St. Germain-des-Près is a neighborhood of Paris associated with the existentialist movement of which Jean-Paul Sartre was a central figure. As another locus of intellectual dynamism, St. Germain-des-Près represented another threat to French nationalists’ conservative politics. Mermoz, “Noirs et blanches,” *Rivarol*, August, 22, 1963.
“there exist exceptions,…which often concern young female students who fall into the trap of exotic literature or who still believe that ‘Africa is on its way.’” African men could also get “unfortunate single women desperately looking for a husband and easy ‘girlfriends’ who were eager to put an end to a ‘career’ that is made more and more uncertain by the weight of the years and the arrival of younger generations on the market.” In other words, for Mermoz, spinsters, prostitutes, and naïve young women, who likely studied liberal arts, kept the threat of racial mixing alive. This unflattering portrait of white women likely to engage in a mixed relationship reinforced the idea that racial hierarchies mattered, since only youth, disillusion, and depravity, could lead a white woman to seek the embrace of a black man.

Mermoz’s comments on Malcolm X in Rivarol also testified to French nationalists’ fear of the consequence of miscegenation. Like some of his contemporaries, Mermoz compared the late African American activist to Patrice Lumumba, the Congolese leader assassinated three years earlier by Katangan secessionists. However, the whiteness which ran in Malcolm’s blood—his maternal grandfather was a white man—differentiated him from Lumumba: “Unlike his Congolese counterpart, Malcolm was certainly not insane. He simply showed this versatility common to all mixed people.”

A few months later, connecting the Watts race riots to the black nationalist’s past profession of hatred for the white man, Henri Lebre claimed that miscegenation made mixed individuals “formidable agents of subversion.” Mermoz and Lebre’s characterization were reflective of French nationalists’ perception of racial mixing as a threat to white societies. Even though Mermoz argued that the interracial threat was taking a step back, at least in Paris, the influx of migrations from former French colonies kept French nationalists weary of the impact of interracial cohabitation on the French stock.

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If French nationalists regarded Malcolm as a powerful embodiment of the threat of miscegenation, they saw the racial violence inflaming American cities in the years following his death as a scenario likely to erupt in the French context. Like other French commentators, Mermoz identified joblessness as one of the original causes of the racial riots which marked the second half of the 1960s. But, he also noted that the standard of living of the majority of blacks was superior to that of most Frenchmen. He concluded, “No need to cry on black Americans’ material conditions.” Mermoz probably directed his comment to other French journalists who tended to emphasize the correlation between black Americans’ state of indigence and racial violence. In fact, Mermoz condemned those “stupid anti-American political commentators” who blamed the American government for the current racial unrest and were guilty of shortsightedness: “The situation is not proper to the U.S. We have experienced it in the Casbah and in the neighborhood surrounding the Grand-Alger… We will know it again tomorrow when the sons of the 600,000 Algerian immigrants will come down from their ‘ghettos’ to ask for better housing and better paying jobs, which we won’t be able to give them.”

For the author, the presence of Algerian immigrants was likely to cause France to know the same kind of trouble as that taking place in the U.S. In an issue published a few months earlier, Rivarol had warned that the “oil slick” had arrived in Pigalle denoting their sentiment of being invaded by African immigrants. That Mermoz singled out Algerian immigrants as a potential future threat for the French public order is therefore interesting. To account for African Americans’ lack of economic success, Mermoz argued that it was their “ancestral psychology, turned towards dances, music and momentary pleasures” which decreased their ability to fare well in an economy centered on

87 “OHE!” Rivarol, April 20, 1967.
productivity.\textsuperscript{88} Despite black Americans’ outburst of violence, which was the topic of Mermoz’s article, his description of blacks was nonthreatening. Long standing portrayals of Arabs as blood-thirsty and the recent exhibition of violence by the Algerian nationalists of the FLN largely contributed to Mermoz’s identification of Algerians as future trouble-makers.\textsuperscript{89}

The racial events which were challenging the American racial status quo in the 1950s and 1960s triggered French reflections on the state of French racism, both during and after the process of decolonization. World War II and its aftermath reopened a tragic chapter in the history of French anti-Semitism and sensitized the French public to the topic of racism. As this chapter has shown, French antiracists’ discussions of French racial prejudices often drew parallels to the American racial context. While comparing Paris to Little Rock, for example, was certainly a journalistic strategy to sensationalize French racial discriminations, such analogies also testified to a genuine reflection on and concern over French racism. The parallels \textit{Droit et Liberté} built between French and American expressions of racial prejudice helped French antiracists gage and portray the gravity of French racism. French antiracists rooted their advocacy in the French political and cultural traditions of humanitarianism and universalism. By comparing French and American racism these antiracists hoped to protect the French nation of the Rights of Man by preventing it from turning into another racist America.

At the other end of the political spectrum, French nationalists were on a mission to safeguard France’s “racial purity.” Unlike their antiracist counterparts, French nationalists lashed onto the U.S. for its hypocritical anticolonialism. Perhaps the most fervently attached to Greater

\textsuperscript{88} Mermoz, “Anarchie noire aux USA.”

\textsuperscript{89} Lorcin explains that after the conquest of Algeria, the idea that Muslim Algerians were “warlike and violent” consolidated in French minds. At the Exposition Universelle de Paris in 1900, organizers decided to display “the exotic… North African warrior” to attract the French crowd. Representations of Algerians as warmongering and violent have thus long been part of the French collective mind. Hale, \textit{ Races on Display: French Representations of Colonized Peoples, 1886-1940} (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 55; Patricia M. E Lorcin, \textit{Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria} (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 20.
France, French nationalists’ references to the American tradition of racism, especially towards Native Americans, should be understood as an outlet that allowed the former to vent their resentment towards the U.S. Moreover, for French nationalists, the black American struggle for racial equality was evocative of the French colonial context. By placing the French colonial and postcolonial contexts alongside American racial developments, *Rivarol* offered frightening snapshots of a white world being taken over by “hordes of colored savages.” French nationalists’ anxiety in the face of changing racial dynamics crystallized in their special interest in Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. While black nationalism epitomized the threat of a world no longer run by whites, the racial separatism advocated by NOI proved a tantalizing solution for French nationalists wary of preserving racial purity. French Enlightenment ideals allowed French antiracists to raise the “racial question” in France. However, their conviction that French racial prejudice was an anomaly, completely antithetical to French national and political culture, largely prevented them from conducting a deeper comparative analysis between French and American racisms and simultaneously dissecting the roots and mechanisms of French racial prejudice. Interestingly, French nationalists’ continued embrace of biological determinism allowed them to see in American racial riots of the late 1960s a prequel to future urban violence in France. As the following chapter demonstrates, the French colonial and racial contexts also played a significant role in the French mainstream press’s treatment of 1950s and 1960s American racial developments.
Figure 1: “Piscine: Ceci nous amènera-t-il cela?” Droit et Liberté, July-August 1964.90

90 http://archives.mrap.fr
In the aftermath of the Second World War, France experienced a surge of anti-Americanism. The roots of French resentment towards the new global superpower were multiple.
Probably the largest component of French anti-Americanism stemmed from French anxiety over the influence of Americanization, characterized by “social conformity, economic savagery, and cultural sterility,” on French identity.  

1 During the interwar period, French intellectuals had already warned the French public against American economic culture of mass-production and mass-consumption.  

2 But growing American influence in French society and the economy after World War II revived and intensified French resentment towards what Richard Kuisel calls the American “social model.”  

3 The perceived American threat to French identity also derived from American anticolonialism, a position which, if not always officially embraced by Washington, further eroded whatever was left of French global standing nonetheless. Finally, U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War also fueled French post-war debates. Although France agreed to be a beneficiary of American economic assistance under the Marshall Plan and joined NATO in 1949, French frustration grew along with its increasing sense of being dependent on the U.S.  

4 Scholars have explored these tumultuous postwar Franco-American diplomatic relations as well as French reactions to growing Americanization.  

5 Historians have also analyzed French reactions to American anticolonialism and to U.S. relations with territories within the French 

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3 Kuisel, Seducing the French, 2.


Empire. These literatures have briefly acknowledged the role played by American racism, especially towards its black minority, in French anti-Americanist discourse and in French responses to American anticolonialism. But the functions of French representations of postwar African American activism and racial incidents during the process of decolonization and the larger Cold War context deserve to be more thoroughly explored. By analyzing French mainstream press representations of the African American freedom movement and the racial upheaval it unleashed during the 1950s and 1960s, this chapter seeks to determine the functions of these representations in the French context of anti-Americanism and decolonization.

Particularly, I will focus on the ways in which French journalists’ representations of American racial events translated in the French contexts of anti-Americanism and decolonization. I argue that far from simply allowing the French to get back at their American nemesis for their critique of French colonialism, the African American freedom movement and American racial violence also triggered French journalists’ reflections on the French colonial situation and its actors, especially in Algeria. Moreover, French treatment of the African American freedom movement also provides us with a window into largely unrecognized French racial prejudices. As this chapter will demonstrate, French anti-Americanism did not always translate into a categorical condemnation of American racism and an unconditional embrace of African American activism. I would suggest that these reactions betray a French sense of a predominantly white world order.

If French journalists more or less embraced the idea that racial equality was a moral necessity, they saw no objection to delaying its application were domestic or international peace to be

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disrupted through the process. Only French communists, whose anti-American propaganda was fueled by the African American freedom movement, regardless of how short it fell from a Marxist revolution, fully embraced black American activism throughout its duration.

Before analyzing representations of the African American freedom movement in the French mainstream press, I will present the three newspapers examined in this chapter as well as briefly discuss their positions on the U.S. and on colonialism. In 1944, upon the request of General Charles de Gaulle, Hubert Beuve-Méry founded the French newspaper *Le Monde*, a direct descendant of the newspaper *Le Temps*. As French scholar Patrick Éveno points out in his general history of *Le Monde*, from the outset Beuve-Méry envisioned the newspaper as “the reference newspaper of the (French) republican elite.” Indeed, its targeted audience was the political, diplomatic and economic elite of the country. To appeal to this readership, Beuve-Méry insisted on the quality, exhaustiveness, and accuracy of the information. Because Beuve-Méry’s ambition was to “captivate readers’ attention by appealing to their intelligence and culture,” *Le Monde* offered a multiplicity of viewpoints. The diversity of opinions expressed in *Le Monde* made it an indispensable reference for the French readership across the political spectrum. As Éveno notes, Beuve-Méry’s desire to enlighten the readership on important contemporary issues, both national and international, makes it hard to “define the implicit doctrine of the newspaper.”

Although *Le Monde* opened its columns to a variety of opinions, Beuve-Méry and the newspaper’s contributors nonetheless shared a number of common values. Even though Beuve-Méry allowed considerable leeway to the newspaper’s contributors, he still “surrounded himself

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9 Ibid., 58, 67, 68, 78.
with individuals who shared common values and the will to defend freedom, democracy and a
certain humanism. The newspaper accepts liberal society as long as it is tempered by values of
Christian inspiration.” This disposition is especially relevant for the present study as it influenced
*Le Monde*’s position towards the United States in the postwar era as well as towards the French
colonial question.

The newspaper’s position towards the United States was generally reflective of the anti-
American current which took over France after the end of the Second World War. In fact, with
its intellectual character, *Le Monde* largely shaped the French elite’s anti-Americanism.\(^\text{10}\) The
newspaper’s hostility towards the new American superpower primarily stemmed from the
promotion of a materialistic culture which the writers of *Le Monde* perceived as “a loss of
identity and a submission to a mercantile culture.”\(^\text{11}\) As Beuve-Méry wrote for fellow résistants
in 1944, “Americans constitute a true danger for France. … (This danger) is of an economic and
moral kind. … Although they maintain a veritable cult of the idea of Freedom, not one minute do
they experience the need to free themselves from the bonds of their capitalism.” *Le Monde*’s
brand of anti-Americanism thus primarily rested on the capitalistic socio-economic model of the
U.S.\(^\text{12}\) The newspaper’s promotion of social justice, which directly derived from its fidelity to
Christian humanism, did not, however, translate into a pro-Soviet position in the ideological
battle between the East and the West. If *Le Monde* rejected the American capitalist model, it also
condemned Soviet totalitarianism, thus explaining the newspaper’s position of European “armed
neutralism.”\(^\text{13}\)

\(^{10}\) Kuisel, *Seducing the French*, 107–08.
\(^{12}\) Here, Éveno quotes from a text Beuve-Méry wrote and distributed to French résistants during the spring of
journal Le Monde*, 78.
Although *Le Monde* strongly opposed Americanism and the U.S. conduct in the Cold War, its coverage of the African American freedom movement did not translate into the kind of harsh, uncompromising and demagogic condemnation of the U.S. one might have expected. In fact, *Le Monde*’s correspondents would often blame African American activists, even the proponents of non-violent direct actions, for creating unrest in the country and putting the American administration in delicate positions. When racial riots broke out in urban areas around the mid-1960s, *Le Monde* embraced the official American representation of black rioters and their motives as purely criminal—even as it acknowledged African Americans’ socio economic conditions. The newspaper’s legalist tradition partly explains its rejection of the civil disorder and violence unleashed during the African American freedom movement. But France’s colonial history and *Le Monde*’s ambivalent stance towards French colonialism can possibly shed light on the newspaper’s representations of African Americans and their actions.

Engaging with the big debates of the time, *Le Monde* inevitably positioned itself with regards to French colonialism and, more specifically, decolonization. Although *Le Monde* would come to posit itself as a proponent of decolonization, one of the functions it was to assume upon its creation was to “ensure France’s prestige in the colonies and abroad.”¹⁴ Moreover, the newspaper’s allegiance to the Christian tradition of humanism far from translated into an outright condemnation of colonialism. According to Paul Clay Sorum’s categorization of French attitudes towards the colonial issue, it seems possible to posit *Le Monde* as anticolonialist, but not as an anti-imperialist. Indeed, if the newspaper voiced its disapproval of the treatment of the colonized, it did not necessarily oppose the retention of French colonial possessions.¹⁵ Besides its

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¹⁵ Paul Clay Sorum argues that anticolonialism and anti-imperialism are not to be confused. He makes this distinction by observing French intellectuals’ attitudes towards the “treatment” and the “possessions” of French colonial territories. While some French intellectuals deplored the exploitative treatment of French colonies, which
promotion of neutralism during the Cold War, *Le Monde* obtained its status of intellectual independence as a result of its position regarding the Indochinese War (1946-1954). As early as 1946, in an article promoting the autonomy of Indochina, Jacques Guérif, expert on colonial questions, exposed what he saw as the impossibility for French military troops to re-conquer their Indochinese territory after the Japanese invasion. It thus seems that Guérif’s advocacy for decolonization in Vietnam primarily stemmed from his perception of the French war effort in this territory as a lost cause. In fact, Eveno points out that in the first years of the conflict, *Le Monde*’s special correspondent Pierre Voisin expressed an opinion on the war which “reflects the narrowest colonialist, military and administrative thought.” Only towards the end of 1947, did *Le Monde*’s writers increasingly condemn French violence against the native population and more unanimously called for Indochinese autonomy.

Just as for the Indochinese War, *Le Monde* sought to provide thorough information on the Algerian War of independence which erupted in the same year as the French loss of Indochina. And “because it (*Le Monde*) called for a negotiated solution in Indochina, it was categorized, a little too fast, among the anticolonialist press organs, which it was not yet in 1954.” The frailty of the French position in Algeria had already been demonstrated through the events which took place in Sétif, a town in Northeast Algeria, on May 8, 1945. Algerian nationalists chose to capitalize on the French celebration of Allied victory to express their desire for liberation by brandishing banners advocating for decolonization and what would later be adopted as the F.L.N’s nationalist flag. Although accounts of the events disagree as to who fired the first shot, the violent repression of the demonstrations resulted in what historians refer to as the Sétif

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17 Ibid., 184.
massacre.\textsuperscript{18} Although ten days later the newspaper would condemn the excessive use of violence to repress the riots, it did not, however, support the nationalists’ calls for independence. Similarly, during the Algerian war, \textit{Le Monde} would express its opposition to French military practices during the war (although it would not oppose the war itself), but only late in the conflict did it support Algerian independence. Like most Frenchmen at the time, \textit{Le Monde} was in favor of keeping Algeria French but it also promoted socio-economic reforms to better the conditions of the Algerian Muslim population.\textsuperscript{19} According to Sorum’s categorization, then, \textit{Le Monde} could be qualified as anticolonialist, to the extent that it promoted colonial reforms, but it remained imperialist in so far as it shied away from calling for Algeria’s independence. Even when the newspaper got close to supporting Algeria’s independence, it did so on the grounds that the French empire was too expensive to maintain and hindered French economic modernization and, subsequently, its standing in the world economy. \textit{Le Monde}’s ambivalent sympathy for the plight of the colonized falls in line with its nuanced support for the African American freedom movement during the 1950s and 1960s. Although it condemned white fanatics of the U.S. South, it also found African Americans’ actions reprehensible and sympathized with Washington’s ordeal. To an extent, \textit{Le Monde}’s representations of American racial events of the 1950s and 1960s mirrored those which the French public could find in \textit{Le Figaro}.

\textit{Le Monde}’s main competitor was \textit{Le Figaro}, which is located at the right of the French political spectrum. Maurice Alhoy, a songwriter and singer, and Etienne Arago, a Vaudevillian, founded it on January 15, 1826 in opposition to French regime of the Restauration.\textsuperscript{20} The strongly satirical character of the newspaper, however, would gradually disappear as it became

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Éveno, \textit{Histoire du journal Le Monde}, 185-87, 193.
\end{itemize}
an organ more tightly associated with the government. Like Beuve-Méry, Hyppolyte de Villedessant, who revived Le Figaro in 1854, envisioned and shaped the newspaper as a cultural and intellectual reference. Under his direction, Le Figaro would prove surprisingly mindful of the quality of the information it offered its readers, an attention uncharacteristic of its times. When Villedessant changed the frequency of the publication from weekly to daily in 1866, Le Figaro left the realm of popular newspapers to enter that of important newspapers of record. Although it would become associated with fascism and Vichyism, by 1945, Le Figaro became “the main organ of the democratic, republican and moderate right.” As de Lacratelle points out, because of Le Figaro’s slip to the extreme right, Pierre Brisson, the newspaper’s director, envisioned his publication as “a newspaper that would seek to appeal to a public who value intellectual independence and liberalism… Finally, (Brisson envisioned it as) a newspaper that would not impose a political opinion upon his readers but that, in the crossfire of sincere judgments, would provide them with the means to formulate their own opinion.” To a large extent, then, Le Figaro and Le Monde shared the ambition to establish themselves as indispensable resources for the French public to make sense of the world they lived in, both at home and abroad.

Despite this longing for intellectual independence, however, both newspapers took clear positions on some of the major events marking the era. In the Cold War context, Le Figaro’s virulent anticommunism would result in its support of the United States and the project of

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21 The subversive character of Le Figaro contributed to overthrowing Charles X. In 1832, the new regime purchased Le Figaro whose satirical criticisms of the power structure completely disappeared. No longer satisfying its readership, its publication ended in 1834. Fabrice Erre, “Le premier Figaro: Un journal satirique atypique (1826-1834),” in Le Figaro: Histoire d’un journal, 19.


Atlanticism. Indeed, after World War II, François Mauriac and Raymond Aron, “two figures of intellectual anticommunism” and editors for *Le Figaro*, largely defined the newspaper’s position in the Cold War. Unlike *Le Monde*, which was also anticommunist but rejected the prospect of an alliance with the U.S. and the rearmament of Germany, *Le Figaro* wholeheartedly supported a European collaboration with the U.S. against the Soviet Union. In fact, somewhat echoing diplomatic discourse with regards to France, *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* anchored their polemic on the subject of Atlanticism in terms of sexuality and gender. In 1951, Pierre Brisson characterized the supporters of “neutralism” as “asexual.” A few weeks later, Beuve-Méry spoke of the neutralist position in terms of “a virile project.” For him, the suggestion that the European countries ought to find another solution than to rally to the U.S. did not betray an approach any less virile than that of “those who call for hatred and the resort to the atomic bomb or to napalm.” Finally, whereas *Le Monde*’s “neutralist” position was reflective of a larger anti-American sentiment, *Le Figaro*’s support for Atlanticism pre-disposed the newspaper and its contributors to be “more appreciative of Americans’ virtues than they were critical of its vices.” However, both newspapers intersected in their approach towards the African American freedom movement in that they both stiffly condemned white Southerners’ fanaticism and African Americans for the unrest they caused in the U.S. and generally looked at Washington with a benevolent eye. As this chapter will illustrate, however, the specter of French colonialism,

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27 In the early 1950s, the controversy surrounding the execution of the Rosenbergs and the violent anti-communist rhetoric of Senator Joseph McCarthy made the French fear the possibility of a new World War. Americans perceived French anxiety as “symptoms of illness, cowardice or lack of manliness.” Costigliola, *France and the United States*, 81.  
particularly the war in Algeria, and the emotionalism it stirred among Frenchmen, more clearly shaped *Le Figaro*’s coverage of American racial events than that of *Le Monde*.

The demise of the French colonial empire, and with it its world standing had an important emotional impact on the French. In his 1966 book on the history of *Le Figaro*, Jacques de Lacretelle, contributor to the newspaper, expressed the emotional toll of decolonization on Frenchmen: “For us, deeply wounded and insulted, this question (decolonization) which has exasperated people, and, one more time, divided the country, remains painful.”31 Moreover, according to him, “it is *Le Figaro* which can best judge, from the high angle of civilization, the effects of decolonization… It is the civilizing mission of the white man, in conjunction with the problem of racial evolution, which is at stake here. This mission is, and will always be, to bring less developed peoples an education and notions of progress which are likely to fatally play against him (the white man).”32 De Lacretelle’s position on French colonialism and the colonized, which are strongly indicative of his sentiment of racial superiority, tend to be fairly representative of *Le Figaro*’s portrayals of non-white people. On the question of Algeria, the colonial territory with which the French entertained the strongest emotional tie, *Le Figaro*’s stance evolved along with that of the French government. Indeed, until 1959 when De Gaulle announced his support for Algerian self-determination, *Le Figaro*’s position towards the Algerian colonial conflict reflected that of its readership, who could not fathom losing Algeria. Afterwards, *Le Figaro*, “although it had defended French Algeria, chose the path of legality, the republican path, that of the legitimacy of institutions.”33 With regards to the French colonial project as a whole, *Le Figaro* figured within the pool of French newspapers which most fervently

32 Ibid.
33 Emilie Roche, “*Le Figaro* en guerre d’Algérie,” in *Le Figaro*, 365.
advocated for the ideology of the French Parti colonial. Finally, following the independence of French colonies, Le Figaro would adopt a clear neo-colonialist stance, further suggesting the newspaper and its readership’s conviction that France’s “mission civilisatrice” remained pertinent. Although it is highly unlikely that Le Figaro’s journalists would have categorized themselves as racists, the newspaper’s representations of African Americans and the “poor whites” of the American South were strongly indicative of French journalists’ racial prejudice.

To conclude this brief overview of the three French newspapers examined in his chapter, I will now turn to L’Humanité. Unlike Le Monde and Le Figaro, which both claimed their independence from any political party, L’Humanité was officially associated to the French Communist Party (PCF). In 1904, French socialist Jean Jaurès founded L’Humanité to foster unity within the French left. Despite its militant character, Jaurès envisioned L’Humanité as a newspaper that would provide a “wide” range of “accurate” information that would allow its readers to “make their own opinions about world events.” The split of the Section Française de l’Internationale Ouvrière (S.F.I.O.), the French Socialist Party, after World War II resulted in L’Humanité becoming the official organ of the French Communist Party in 1923. As such, L’Humanité’s editorial line closely mirrored the politics of the PCF. The newspaper targeted members of the PCF, workers and trade unionists. However, the dogmatism that characterized

34 The Parti colonial, or colonial lobby, gathered French groups and individuals who shaped French colonial ideology and promoted French colonialism. Aldrich, Greater France, 100; Alain Ruscio, La question coloniale dans l’Humanité, 1904-2004 (Paris: La Dispute, 2005), 10-11.

35 This chapter’s analysis of special correspondent Nicholas Châtelain’s treatment of American racial events, particularly in the South, and his multiple comparisons with the colonial situation in Algeria will illustrate the intersections between race and class in French racial prejudice.


38 Although the rapprochement between the French Communist Party (PCF) and L’Humanité started in 1920, it was only in 1923 that the newspaper adopted the subtitle “organe central du Parti Communiste.” Courban, “L’Humanité, du socialisme au communisme,” 66.
L’Humanité’s journalism during the Cold War contributed to alienating its non-Communist readership. Indeed, whereas L’Humanité sold an average of 423,000 daily copies in 1945, its sales continuously decreased in the following years to reach a daily average of 123,000 copies in 1955. For active members of the PCF, reading L’Humanité was an essential part of their militantism since they were to use this information to inform others and to fuel their argumentation in public debates. We can therefore suspect that L’Humanité’s coverage of American racial events of the 1950s and 1960s assumed an important function of communist propaganda, as it was in the Soviet Union. On a few occasions, however, L’Humanité’s treatment of and references to the American racial context also served to denounce French colonial policies and racism.

As the official organ of the PCF, L’Humanité actively participated in communist anti-American propaganda. The newspaper’s position towards the U.S. was thus marked by both French postwar current of anti-Americanism and Cold War communist anti-Americanism, which were both strongly interconnected. For the French left, including communists, “the United States was a capitalist behemoth threatening French political, social, economic, and cultural independence. Americans were, from this perspective, guilty of economic imperialism, warmongering, racism, incipient fascism, and cultural debasement.”

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39 In fact, Michel Winock affirms that according to French opinion polls between 1952 and 1957, “the image of the United States was unequivocally positive, even among Communist voters.” Winock, “The Cold War,” 74; Patrick Eveno, “L’Humanité, une entreprise politique,” in L’Humanité, 206.

40 L’Humanité sales peak in 1945 probably had a lot to do with its contribution to the Resistance in Nazi-occupied France. Moreover, before the Cold War infused the PCF with a strong dose of ideology, the PCF adapted its politics according to postwar political atmosphere which justified its larger appeal among the French population. Eveno, “L’Humanité, une entreprise politique,” 201-02; Gino G. Raymond, The French Communist Party during the Fifth Republic: A Crisis of Leadership and Ideology (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 13.


42 According to Richard F. Kuisel, “Anti-Americanism during the Cold War…did not represent the French and was in its most polemical form essentially the product of leftist Parisian, especially marxisant and Christian, literati and of the Communist Party.” Kuisel, Seducing the French, 16.

43 Ibid.
ideology and the context of the Cold War largely explain French Communists’ reprehension of the U.S., the postwar fate of the PCF also sheds light on the party’s anti-Americanism. After France’s liberation, the PCF adopted a “twin-track approach dictated by the ideological conviction of the need to transform society according to the tenets of the party, attenuated by the realpolitik of working within the constraints dictated by the disposition of forces around the party.”

PCF’s political realism earned it representation within the tripartite government led by Paul Ramadier. However, Communist Deputies’ opposition to the Ramadier government’s colonial (in Indochina), social and economic policies resulted in their dismissal by Ramadier on May 5, 1947. The Communists’ expulsion from the French government, along with the creation of the Kominform in 1948 and the implementation of the Marshall Plan all fueled the PCF’s anti-Americanism.

French communists’ anti-Americanism partly shaped L’Humanité’s treatment of 1950s and 1960s American racial developments. For example, the newspaper relied on the new flow of information regarding African Americans’ desolate socio-economic conditions to denounce the flaws of American capitalism and disparage the “American way of life.” Despite the Christian and integrationist dimensions of the non-violent phase of the movement and the limited influence of Marxist ideology in the more radical phase of the movement, French communists embraced black American activism more for what it revealed about the “true” nature of American society than for what it actually sought to accomplish.

While L’Humanité’s treatment of American racial issues bore resemblance to Soviet propaganda, French communists’ coverage of American racial developments should not be understood as a mere French version of Soviet ideological warfare against the U.S. Like the

44 Raymond, The French Communist Party during the Fifth Republic, 13.
Soviets, French communists pointed out the blatant discrepancy between American anticolonial rhetoric and the widespread and virulent racism that reigned in the U.S. French communists’ engagement with American racism was certainly inspired by Soviet propaganda, but their reactions to American racial developments were more importantly shaped by the French context of decolonization. In the aftermath of World War II, although the PCF condemned the treatment of the colonized and recognized their right to self-determination, French communists embraced “a framework of continued association of an economic, social, cultural and political kind” between the French metropole and its colonies.\(^{47}\) As historian Irwin M. Wall points out, however, the communist-inspired nationalist movement in Indochina was openly supported by the PCF and is therefore not representative of the party’s stance on colonialism.\(^{48}\) If the PCF did not fully embrace the cause of Algerian nationalists when the Algerian war broke out, \(L \text{’} \text{H} \text{umanité}\) was nonetheless one of the first newspapers to qualify the Algerian conflict as a “war,” a term which the French government was reluctant to adopt.\(^{49}\) Moreover, although \(L \text{’} \text{H} \text{umanité}\) was not the only French publication to denounce the Algerian war, until 1961, it was the most targeted by French government’s censorship.\(^{50}\) When FLN attacks opened the long and painful chapter of the Algerian war in 1954, the PCF saw in the events the expected outcome of more than a century of colonial exploitation and oppression. The PCF, however, called for a French politics of reform that would transform, and not sever, the bonds that united the French metropole and Algeria, a position which reflected French communists’ embrace of the French


Union in the aftermath of World War II. Even though scholars have debated the extent of French communists’ anticolonialism, *L’Humanité* nonetheless remained one of the most sympathetic voices regarding the plight of colonized peoples in the French public sphere. If the ideological context of the Cold War partly shaped *L’Humanité*’s treatment of American racial developments, the French colonial context also loomed large in French communists’ reactions to American racial tensions.

Regardless of their position on the issue of French colonialism, for *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *L’Humanité*, American racial events revealed the hypocrisy behind American anticolonialism. In the 1950s and 1960s, French newspapers pointed at the bad publicity that American racial crises triggered around the world. If, for *L’Humanité*, this denunciation mostly fit within the ideological context of the Cold War—we may not exclude French communists’ resentment against the U.S. for criticizing French colonialism—for *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*’s journalists, American racial crises represented opportunities to get back at the U.S. One such opportunity arose in the summer of 1955 when 14-year old Emmett Till was crudely assassinated in the town of Money, Mississippi for transgressing Southern “racial etiquette.” Unaware of the proper rules of conduct in the white supremacist South, Till, who was visiting relatives, whistled at Carolyn Bryant, the white wife of a storeowner. Wary to maintain the Southern order at a time when the racial status quo was being threatened, Roy Bryant, Carolyn’s husband, and his half-brother J.W. Milham kidnapped, beat up and shot Till in the head before throwing his body, tied to a cotton gin fan, into of the Tallahatchie river. When his body was retrieved from the water a

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53 A little over a year earlier, in the famous decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against racial segregation in the American public school system. The decision enraged southern whites and quickly resulted in the intensification of southern whites’ racial violence. Charles M. Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of
few days later, Till was barely recognizable. The shocking pictures of Till’s body were soon displayed in the international press, bringing attention to American racial tensions.

Although French newspapers did not immediately pick up on Till’s story, the trial of Roy Bryant and J.W. Milham received wide attention in French newspapers. For French journalists, the Sumner trial was important for what it revealed about the state of race relations in the American South. The representations of the tragic murder of Till and the ensuing trial were unequivocally critical of the extremes to which Southern white supremacists were ready to go to protect the Southern order as well as of the judicial farce which acquitted Bryant and Milham. But for French journalists, this event was also significant in so far as it undermined the humanitarian rhetoric of American anticolonialism.

In his September 20 article, *Le Monde*’s special correspondent, whose name did not appear in the article, expressed the relevance of Till’s murder and Sumner’s unfair trial for the French whose colonial endeavors received much criticism from Americans: “the situation of blacks should encourage the sworn enemies of ‘colonialism’ to show more reserve and more modesty. America also has her medinas and her ghettos….“54 It is interesting to note the journalist’s choice to put the term “colonialism” in quotation marks. Although we are left to speculations, the journalist’s editorial decision might reflect his reluctance to speak of the French presence in other parts of the world in terms of colonialism, especially with the negative connotations which became associated with it after World War II. Perhaps the author of this article numbered among the majority of Frenchmen who had bought into French official colonial rhetoric of *mission civilisatrice*. The use of the term “medinas” by *Le Monde*’s special

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correspondent’s to speak of African Americans’ socio-economic marginality in the U.S. is also relevant. In the French colonial context, a médina referred to “the Muslim part of a city in opposition to the European city.” The journalist’s reference to medinas clearly illustrates the journalist’s attempt to discredit American criticisms of French colonial practice in North Africa. For him and other French journalists, American treatment of its black population rescinded the U.S.’s “right” to criticize the French colonial experiment.

In his September 26, 1955 article published in Le Figaro, Pierre Seize joined his voice to the French chorus of criticism denouncing American racial violence and injustice. After expressing his consternation at the murder of a young boy and the acquittal of his murderers simply on account of his skin color, Seize explained the significance of these events for the French people:

For us, French people, an additional bitterness adds to the extra drop of venom which blends with the sorrows and anxieties of our time to make life decidedly detestable. For a little while now, many Americans have raised their voices in the name of morality and humanity to debase the uses of “colonialist France.” In light of Sumner’s verdict, we would like that our friends there, as well as those who do not like us much, reconsider their position.

In this quotation, Seize unequivocally expressed French emotional reaction to American’s back-stabbing position with regards to French colonialism. For him, as well as many French people, American “preachers and lecturers had better interrupt their discourse for a minute and watch what’s happening on their doorstep.”

Two years later, the racial crisis taking place in Arkansas over the racial integration of Little Rock’s Central High School continued to inspire comments on the legitimacy of American anticolonialism in the French mainstream press. Moreover, developments in Algeria also

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triggered French journalists’ comparisons between the American racial situation and the Algerian colonial context. Just as the African American freedom movement propelled American racial issues at the forefront of the global stage, the Algerian war internationalized French colonial issues.\textsuperscript{57} Starting in October 1956, Algerian nationalists of the \textit{Front de Libération Nationale} (FLN) staged terrorist attacks as part of their effort to liberate Algeria from the French colonial yoke. The methods employed by the French military under generals Raoul Salan and Jacques Massu to hamper FLN insurrection largely contributed to tainting the image of military actions in France and of France in the world.\textsuperscript{58} Moreover with the Algerian question entering the debates of the United Nation’s General Assembly and American pressure to find a solution to the Algerian conflict, the French government invited Robert Lacoste, governor general of Algeria, to work on a project of political reform. By granting Muslim Algerians a greater degree of political autonomy, the \textit{Loi-Cadre} would demonstrate French will to improve the conditions of non-European Algerians.\textsuperscript{59} It is within the joint contexts of international scrutiny regarding French military practices in Algeria and parliamentary debates over the nature and extent of Algerian political autonomy that the Little Rock crisis gained its significance for French journalists and their readers.

In 1957, although a federal district court had ordered the integration of Little Rock’s Central High School, nine African American students found themselves unable to attend school when classes started on September 4. Pretexting an expected surge of interracial violence, Arkansas governor Orval Faubus decided to declare a state of emergency and sent the state


\textsuperscript{58} Robert Aldrich, \textit{Greater France}, 293.

National Guard to the school to block the “Little Rock Nine” from entering in the premises. By using his authority to deny African Americans’ attendance in Central High School, Faubus defied federal purview and revived the traditional rift between state and federal authority. Weary of stepping on Faubus’s toes, President Dwight D. Eisenhower was slow to take action. His reluctance to right the wrongs of Faubus and local white segregationists paved the way for international outcry. Aware of the international influence of American racial issues in the contexts of the Cold War and decolonization, Le Monde’s special correspondent claimed: “In fact, it is the whole optimistic and conciliatory philosophy of the president which is at stake, not to mention the grave harm it caused to American prestige around the world, especially among the colored people whom Washington hopes to guide.” At a time when the French colonial order was under direct threat, the effects of American racial issues on the former colonized were obviously relevant to French journalists and readers.

Henri Pierre’s article also powerfully illustrates the comparison between the American racial context and the French colonial context which the Little Rock crisis evoked among French journalists. Considering the effects of the Little Rock crisis on global opinion, Pierre added: “It will be difficult to forget the monstrous image of these helmeted and armed soldiers who opposed the entrance of five or six little black girls surrounded by an angry crowd yelling insults. From Algeria to Arkansas the ‘poor white’ is unfortunately the same…” The military

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dimension conferred to the Little Rock crisis by Faubus’s dispatch of the National Guard may well have brought the Algerian situation to French minds. The coverage of the Little Rock crisis in the French mainstream press tended to highlight the discrepancy between the American federal government’s attempt to advance towards a more egalitarian society and southern states’ shameless battle to maintain the segregationist order. As the journalist noted, the fierce resistance of white southerners tainted the world’s image of the country as a whole. Similarly, the refusal of whites in Algeria to accept Muslim Algerians as equals badly reflected on France. However, by placing the blame on the “poor whites” of Arkansas and Algeria, Pierre sought to deflect indiscriminate criticism of the French for the critical events taking place in Algeria. Just as it would have been unfair to categorize all white Americans as racists because of the deplorable actions of a segment of the white population of Arkansas, it was unjust to blame the French, especially from the metropole, for the events tearing Algeria apart. In light of international opposition to the French conduct in the Algerian war, the journalist found it important to distinguish between the French population of the métropole, and the pieds noirs who were adamant about maintaining the colonial status quo in Algeria.

On September 14, a reader’s comment appeared in Le Monde’s “correspondence” section which directly addressed the remark made by Henri Pierre three days earlier. Jean Choussart, an Algerian native of French descent who had lived in Algeria for twenty years, denied the validity of the comparison between whites’ racism in Algeria and Arkansas. To cement his authority on the matter, Choussart noted that he had spent a year in the United States and “knew the South.”

His past encounters with both places led him to claim that Pierre’s analogy was unfounded: “Algeria has never suffered from segregation. The presence, today, of both Muslims and Europeans on the same school benches, is one of the rare elements of reassurance and hope

63 Jean Choussart, “Letter to the editor,” Le Monde, September 14, 1957
brought about by the tragic situation in Algeria. It is regrettable that one makes comparisons without foundations.” This comment suggests a strong emotional reaction on the part of Choussart who did not tolerate being compared to the infamous “poor whites” of the American South. But this comment also highlights an important facet of the traditional French condemnation of American racism i.e. legalized racism.64 As Philippe Roger notes in Rêves et cauchemars américains, “(the) separation of races stunned the French […] Many condemn this segregation which appears to them as the most repulsive manifestation of American racial prejudice.”65 However, this quotation also denotes Choussart’s bad faith/denial since Algerian cities, as many colonial cities, knew racial, ethnic, social, and cultural levels of segregation.66

This reaction may have something to do with the slightly different message communicated in Le Monde a few days later. Following the violence that took place in and around Central High when the “Little Rock Nine” finally managed to set foot in the school, an article about how the Little Rock Crisis damaged President Eisenhower’s image appeared on Le Monde’s front page. In the paragraph concluding this article, the unnamed author echoed the comparison drawn by Henri Pierre between Arkansas and Algeria but added an important nuance:

The images and accounts relating yesterday’s incidents shocked a majority of Americans, who did not recognize themselves in the hateful and aggressive faces of their white brothers. Similarly, the French residing in Algeria may feel a certain disgust at the sight of the crimes committed by the most fanatic. But at the end of the day, white elites remain silent, end up tolerating violence and thereby become the extremists’ accomplices.67

64 Roger, Rêves et cauchemars américains, 183.
65 Ibid., 184.
Unlike Pierre who suggested a certain generalized racism on the part of whites in Algeria and in Arkansas, here the journalist presents racial prejudice and violence as the vices of a deranged minority. While this “correction” might have been a way to assuage Choussart and others’ discontent over Pierre’s seeming bold generalization, the larger focus of the article was political—not racial—in nature. Indeed, the journalist highlighted politicians’ responsibility in the violence that characterized both situations. If Eisenhower’s delayed response to Governor Faubus was condemnable, the same went for French officials who failed to curb the excessive violence towards Muslim Algerians.

While *Le Monde* condemned the actions of white racists of Arkansas, communist newspaper *L’Humanité*’s coverage of the Little Rock events even more violently criticized white American racism. As early as September 5, 1957, in an article entitled “The Daggers of Alabama,” *L’Humanité* reported the words of Governor Faubus who discouraged blacks from attempting to integrate Arkansas public schools by warning them that whites in the state were arming themselves. Though the article primarily dealt with racial violence in Alabama, the sensational character of the title was also representative of the newspaper’s treatment of the Little Rock crisis. In its September 24, 1957 issue, *L’Humanité* covered the racial violence which resulted from the entrance of the Little Rock Nine in the previously all white High School of Little Rock. To accompany its article, *L’Humanité*, like *Le Figaro*, printed a visual representation of white racial violence against blacks. The picture accompanying the article showed Alex Wilson, a black reporter, falling on the ground after being hit by whites who protested against the integration of Central High. James Hick, another American journalist who witnessed the event, remembered that “somebody had a brick in his hand, and instead of throwing the brick, ’cause he was too close, he hit Alex Wilson up the side of his head… Wilson

was more than six feet tall, an ex-Marine—he went down like a tree.” 69 The famous picture of Wilson’s collapse powerfully illustrated the racial violence which the prospects of Central High’s racial integration unleashed. Indeed, the collapse of this tall black man under the blows of white racists suggested the almighty power of white racism. L’Humanité relied on the powerful iconography of American racial violence in its representation of the racial crisis of Little Rock to sensationalize its coverage of the event and, more generally, of white American racism.

The following day, to accompany an article on the response of President Eisenhower to recent developments in Little Rock, L’Humanité resorted to another tool which had characterized its anti-American propaganda since 1947. 70 It printed a political cartoon depicting a white American family watching the image of an African American hanging from a tree. Judging by the smiles on the faces of the three family members, including a young child, the sight of the lynching was a source of satisfaction for the white American family. 71 The caricatural representation of white Americans indiscriminately targeted all white Americans, regardless of age or sex, as racists. This generalization contributed to further sensationalizing the newspaper’s coverage of American racial incidents. Moreover, the cartoonist’s choice to depict the lynching of blacks as representative of white American racism also dramatized the state of white and black American racial relations. As this example suggests, tragic American racial events fueled L’Humanité’s anti-American propaganda during the Cold War.

Through their uncompromising condemnation of American racism, L’Humanité’s treatment of the African American freedom movement echoed communists’ condemnation of the

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hypocrisy underpinning American anticolonialism. In “The Daggers of Alabama,” journalist Robert Lambotte placed his discussion of American racial issues at the intersections of the Cold War and decolonization:

People of color certainly did not need this new disgusting event to be accurately informed on Americans’ real intentions which are concealed behind anticolonialist slogans which have only recently reigned in Washington. Last month, Americans offered tens of thousands of dollars to young African labor unions to “help them organize.” We can justly wonder if the travel costs of Ku Klux Klan specialists are not included in this budget.72

Positing himself as spokesman of the colonized, Lambotte strongly discredited American Cold War efforts which, in the context of decolonization, consisted in wooing nationalist leaders of the colonial world. While the journalist’s condemnation of American hypocrisy echoed Soviet propaganda, his attempt to deflect American criticism of colonialism was also inscribed within the French colonial context. In 1955, French communists’ anticolonialism revolved around reforming the French colonial apparatus, not granting independence to French colonies. French communists’ critique of American anticolonialism should not be merely viewed as Cold War anti-American propaganda; this critique also denotes French communists’ resentment towards the U.S. for attacking the legitimacy and threatening the viability of Greater France.

A few weeks later, after Faubus’s determination pushed the American president to send federal troops to proceed with the integration of Central High, journalist Pierre Courtade commented on an article published by Le Monde the day before which affirmed that the Little Rock story was going to fuel communist propaganda:

Of course it will. Not only because communists are confirmed enemies of racism, but also because those events and, especially, Washington’s unresponsiveness in front of “southerners” cast a dark light on the Eisenhower doctrine. What? It is

72 In this quotation, Lambotte is not referring to the events in Little Rock but to the violent beating and emasculation of a black man by a white Alabamian crowd. White racist Alabamians beat up Judge Aron as a warning against the integration of the Alabama public school system. Lambotte, “Les poignards de l’Alabama,” L’Humanité.
those people who are incapable of respecting the principle of racial equality in their own country who dare present themselves as the liberators of the colonized peoples?\[73\]

For French communists, like for communists around the world, the racial violence which took place in Little Rock over the issue of school integration strongly undermined American propaganda which erroneously presented the U.S. as the leader of the “free world.” As the real friends of the oppressed, it was French communists’ duty to denounce American racism and reveal the true face of America. By mentioning the Eisenhower doctrine, establishing the grounds for American economic and military assistance to countries of the Middle East threatened by potential communist aggression, Courtade perhaps had in mind American intervention in the Suez crisis which forced the French and the British to withdraw from the region. As these last examples suggest, L’Humanité’s coverage of the African American freedom movement needs to be read in light of the ideological contest which opposed the U.S. to the Soviets during the Cold War. Their commentaries on American anticolonialism may have also reflected, if to a lesser degree, French frustration over American criticism of the French colonial project. Certainly, if French communists had some qualms over French colonial practices, it was not Americans’ concurrence which they needed to assert their position.

Like the journalists of Le Monde and French antiracists of MRAP, the Little Rock crisis also triggered French communists’ reflection on racism in France and on the French government’s response to the war in Algeria. In his September 5, 1957 article, Lambotte foresaw the French reaction to the violent assault and emasculation of a black man in Alabama: “The atrocious crime of Birmingham—the most recent one, at least—is nauseating. It will trigger in our country the indignation which we can expect from a people who, in general, has known how to resist the excited calls of our own local racists: because we [emphasis added] have them

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too.”74 This quote is highly revealing of how evocative the American racial context was for French communists who, like other Frenchmen, were witnessing the rise of racism in France. In what appears to have been a true nationalistic impulse, Lambotte conceded that there existed racist elements in France, but he especially emphasized the honorability of the French people, as a whole, who did not fall in the traps laid by those racists. With the Algerian War tainting the image of the French in the world, even communist journalists rose to the defense of the French people, who were not to be mistaken for a few racist Frenchmen.

Moreover, the relevance of the Little Rock crisis in the French colonial context is perfectly illustrated in Pierre Courtade’s article entitled “Their ‘Southerners’ and ours.” Denying that the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision to integrate the American public school system constituted significant progress in American racial relations, journalist Pierre Courtade compared the Brown decision to the Loi-Cadre which the French parliament was currently debating: “The American law regarding racial segregation does share with the Loi-Cadre for Algeria the fact that it is a law which will never materialize. Both are, in addition, “alibi” laws which should allow the French and American delegations to the U.N. to make a better impression when the questions of racism and colonialism come to the fore of the organization’s debates.”75 But, Courtade continued, the actions of a few French and American “ultras” were significantly going to undermine the legal strategy of the French and American governments. Indeed, if there existed in the U.S. a population whose extreme racist sentiments weakened the American governments’ efforts to portray a more positive image of American racial developments, Courtade affirmed that “here too we have our own ‘southerners’: the ultra-colonialists of Paris and Algiers.” He further assimilated French colonialists and white American racists by claiming “the individuals

75 Courtade, “Leur sudistes et les nôtres.”
who chase the ‘nigger’ in Arkansas are the same as the people who, in Paris or in Algiers, chase the ‘rat.’”

In his comparison between the American racial context and the French colonial situation, Courtade was especially condemning the *Loi-Cadre*, a law which French politicians hoped would tame Algerian discontent. In the wake of mounting international opposition to the French war in Algeria, the French government sought to find a way to keep Algeria French while proving to the world that France was willing to take the necessary measures to grant all Algerians more power to govern their own affairs. However, the bill was the object of intense debates in the French parliament for French officials disagreed on the measure of political autonomy which they should grant to both French and Muslim Algerians.\(^76\) Wary to maintain Algeria within the French Union and to avoid alienating the pieds noirs, French legislators constantly modified the bill until “they took away from it everything that could have vaguely constituted—or so they believed—a threat in the long run.” Even French socialists, who did recognize peoples’ right to national self-determination, failed to support Muslim Algerians’ calls for independence.\(^77\) By reading the French colonial situation in Algeria in light of American racial developments, Courtade sought to more strongly assert his anticolonial stance and that of his fellow communists. During decolonization, French communists’ engagement with American racial issues was primarily inspired by the French colonial context.

Unlike *L’Humanité* and *Le Monde*, which both established direct parallels between the racial crisis unfurling at Little Rock and the Algerian conflict, *Le Figaro*’s treatment of Arkansas’s racial events did not include any explicit references to the French colonial situation in Algeria. But its coverage of the Little Rock crisis remains relevant for what it revealed about the

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\(^76\) On the subject of the 1957 *Loi-Cadre* for Algeria, see El Machat, *Les États-Unis et l’Algérie*.

\(^77\) Courtade, “Leur sudistes et les nôtres.”
newspaper’s expressions of racial prejudice. Moreover, in light of the newspaper’s later analogies between white segregationists of the U.S. South and the pieds noirs, we can nonetheless venture to affirm that the Little Rock crisis was evocative of the Algerian situation for *Le Figaro*. In its September 6, 1957 issue, the newspaper’s special correspondent in the U.S., Nicolas Châtelain, discussed the case of “antiblack” racism displayed in the early days of the Little Rock crisis. It is important to note the author’s use of quotation marks to talk about white racism towards the black segment of the American population. Although we can only speculate, it seems that Châtelain sought to bring his readers’ attention to the nature of white Americans’ racism. Perhaps he was suggesting that whites’ prejudice against the black segment of the population might not have been rooted in their victims’ skin color. Moreover, Châtelain portrayed white resistance to school integration in Arkansas as an exception. For him, most white southerners were not “madmen.” In fact, had racial change happened less abruptly, the majority of whites from the South would have complied with school integration. In this article, Châtelain suggested that the resistance of Arkansas whites to racial integration in public schools resulted from the dramatic transformation which the *Brown* decision imposed on Southern whites. Châtelain even went so far as to suggest that perhaps the reasons for whites’ opposition to contemporary challenges to the status quo deserved to be more fairly reconsidered: “What people can say in favor of black enfranchisement already constitutes a major threat. They may be right. They have always accused liberal ideologists of completely misunderstanding the realities of the black problem.”78 In these concluding comments, it seems that Châtelain was trying to offer a less biased understanding of white Southerners whose reasons for opposing racial integration may have been more justifiable than the Algerian situation where the pieds noirs felt that “their

humanitarian role was unjustly neglected by the metropole.”\textsuperscript{79} Moreover, Châtelain’s mention of the problem of blacks’ enfranchisement, which was not the issue at stake in the Little Rock crisis, might also have been a subtle reference to the \textit{Loi-Cadre}, which provided for universal suffrage in Algeria.\textsuperscript{80}

In addition to offering a seemingly more nuanced portrait of Southern whites, \textit{Le Figaro} also reported incriminating information regarding African Americans. If most white Americans were not the racist fanatics which the press generally portrayed them to be, black Americans’ role in the racial violence unfurling in the U.S. also deserved to receive attention. For example, on September 12, 1957, the newspaper reported a few cases of black racial violence in the American South. First, the article briefly mentioned the arrest of a 20-year old African American male in Nashville for assaulting a 43-year old white woman at gun point. Then, the article moved on to talk about the police investigation surrounding black students’ suspected assault on whites with bricks and rocks. Finally, \textit{Le Figaro} reported the case of a young white girl who was threatened by black students not to go to school.\textsuperscript{81} Instead of simply reporting white acts of racial violence towards blacks, the newspaper also found it necessary to highlight cases of black violence towards whites. In light of Châtelain’s comments discussed above, it seems that \textit{Le Figaro}’s reporting instances of black violence was meant to challenge the mainstream narrative in which blacks were the victims, not whites.

In fact, according to Châtelain, even the violent events which took place on September 23 were largely to be blamed on African Americans. In an article reporting on Faubus’s removal of the National Guard from the school premises, Châtelain suggested that were racial violence to

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{79} Charles-André Julien, introduction to \textit{Les Français d’Algérie} by Pierre Nora (Paris: René Julliard, 1961), 15.
    \item \textsuperscript{80} Etienne Maquin, \textit{Le parti socialiste et la guerre d’Algérie: La fin de la vieille maison, 1954-1958} (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1990), 133.
    \item \textsuperscript{81} “Après les incidents raciaux de ces derniers jours: Entretien entre le président Eisenhower et le gouverneur ‘rebelle’ Faubus demain ou samedi à Newport,” \textit{Le Figaro}, September 12, 1957.
\end{itemize}
happen when the Little Rock Nine finally enter the school, blacks would essentially be responsible: “If the negroes were to hurry to enjoy the undisputable victory they have just won, their gesture could look like an act of provocation, and rightly so.” The following day, like *L’Humanité, Le Figaro* printed the famous picture of the assault of black journalist Alex Wilson, but we can safely assume that the newspaper’s intention in providing a visual depiction of the violence which took place around Little Rock Central High was not to sensationalize the victimization of black Americans. As Châtelain explained, the violence which erupted around Central High had been staged by black leaders to guarantee the Little Rock Nine’s entrance into the school. Seemingly advocating law and order, Châtelain concluded his article by placing the blame on black civil rights leaders for unleashing whites’ raging violence: “The fight could have certainly been postponed or delayed if the black leaders, especially the leaders from the militant organization NAACP, had not absolutely wanted to demonstrate that they were well within their own rights. They acted in pure folly.” And because black activists had shown clear signs of impatience, the journalist sadly concluded, the black American cause for racial equality took a considerable step back. But, perhaps more importantly, Châtelain saw in this outburst of racial violence proof that “there is no point in trying to legislate in matters of morals and prejudice.” Regardless of who was responsible for the last day’s sad events, the important lesson that the journalist drew was that racial relations could not be regulated from above. Châtelain’s last comment on the powerlessness of reform to improve interpersonal relations might again derive from and shed light on his perception of the French government’s attempt to solve the Algerian conflict by providing Muslim Algerians with an unprecedented degree of political power.

Châtelain nonetheless deplored the fact that the political power play between Eisenhower and Faubus ultimately overshadowed the real issue at stake: i.e. racial integration. But even this statement of support was expressed in a less than generous light:

The political commentary and discussion regarding the electoral and constitutional influence of the racial crisis clearly prevail over local incidents in Little Rock, Nashville or Birmingham. It’s about blacks, we understand it; we devoted them sentimental articles. We went there and asked them what their opinions were on the crisis. They didn’t say much. They are not used to big public declarations, and the people of Arkansas, be they white, black or governors, don’t seem to be particularly smart.

Here, Châtelain praised his own, and perhaps more generally, the French people’s sympathetic views on the ordeal suffered by African Americans while lightly dealing with the matter. Indeed, Châtelain portrayed black Southerners as simple-minded individuals who did not seem to have the capacity to verbalize (or maybe even simply to think about) their impressions regarding the racial drama that was unfurling in Arkansas and in other places in the South. But, whites too were simple-minded. In other words, under Châtelain’s pen, it was the whole population of the South that seems to have been on trial. Perhaps this was also how Châtelain pictured the pieds noirs and Muslim populations of Algeria.

Unlike Le Monde and L’Humanité, Le Figaro did not explicitly establish parallels between the racial events which took place in Little Rock and the French colonial situation in Algeria. But Le Figaro’s choice to introduce the term “paras” into a discussion of the Little Rock crisis also indicated how the paper viewed American issues in light of the French colonial

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85 Nicolas Châtelain, “A la veille de sa rencontre avec Faubus et entre deux parties de golf, double préoccupation pour Eisenhower,” Le Figaro, September 13, 1957.
86 See my analysis of Châtelain’s coverage of the racial events taking place in Birmingham in September 1963.
context. In this issue, the paper announced both the story of Little Rock and the French parliamentary debates over Algeria right next to each other. This editorial decision may have reflected the newspaper’s intention to put the two situations in comparative perspective. As I mentioned earlier, the military dimension of the Little Rock crisis was strongly evocative of the raging “war” which was taking place in Algeria. French officials, who refused to qualify the conflict in Algeria in terms of war, rather portrayed the French military efforts in Algeria as an attempt at “pacification.” In this scenario, which Le Figaro embraced, French military intervention was motivated by the necessity to curb Algerian nationalists’ violence and restore law and order in Algeria. Similarly, Eisenhower’s dispatching of federal troops in Little Rock responded to the necessity to repress racial violence and ensure that laws be respected by all Americans. So when the journalist chose as a subtitle “Les paras…’go home’” to discuss white Southerners’ resentment due to the presence of federal troops, we can safely assume that the use of the word “paras” strongly echoed the French military situation in Algeria (even though in, this context, Algerian nationalists were the ones resenting the presence of the paras). In Images of the Algerian War, Philip Dine explains that the “myth of the paratrooper” emerged during the Algerian War. The conflict contributed to crystallizing the “para” as a “central mythical figure of the literary and cinematic imaging.” For the French left, the paratrooper came to represent the French government’s stubborn opposition to Algerian claims for independence. But for the French right, the para was “a focus for hero worship.” In the words of scholar John Talbott, the “para évangélique became in the columns of the press of the Right a symbol of Algérie

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This glorification of the “paras,” as well as their demonization, was largely fueled by the Battle of Algiers which ended with the defeat of the FLN in late September 1957. In light of the potency and meaning of the image of the “para” in French minds, we can venture to infer that Châtelain’s perception and representations of the Little Rock crisis was partly influenced by the French situation in Algeria.

After 1957, the Algerian conflict continued to inspire French journalists’ perceptions and representations of what they often called “the black problem” in the U.S. Of the three newspapers’ coverage of the African American freedom movement examined in this chapter, the specter of the French colonial situation, particularly in Algeria, appeared more consistently in *Le Figaro*. If *L’Humanité*’s sensational representation of American racial events seems to have been directly inscribed within the parameters of communist propaganda, *Le Figaro*’s similar reporting style betrayed the emotional resonance of the American racial crisis in the French colonial and post-colonial contexts. The newspaper’s coverage of the racial violence which took place in Alabama during the Freedom Rides in the spring of 1961 offers such a perspective. I would argue that it is possible to see indications of the newspaper’s resentment towards white extremists in Algeria, possibly even the pieds noirs in general, in the newspaper’s portrayal of white Alabamians. When the newspaper rallied to De Gaulle’s side, it came to reject French extremists’ violence as much as it did that of Algerian nationalists. As a result, when a part of the French military joined with disgruntled settlers in the *Organisation de l’Armée Secrète* (OAS) to fight against both Algerian nationalists and French supporters of an independent Algeria in the spring of 1961, *Le Figaro* strongly condemned the “ultras.”

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92 Blandin, “*Le Figaro* en guerre d’Algérie,” in *Le Figaro: Histoire d’un journal*, 365. Prior to the creation of OAS, there had existed various organizations of settlers who were fighting against Algerian nationalists’ terrorism.
newspaper’s hostility towards O.A.S. also resulted from the terrorist organization’s bombing of the house of *Le Figaro*’s editor, Pierre Brisson, and the newspaper’s headquarters. It is within this context of fierce opposition against those who stubbornly and violently tried to maintain Algeria French, thereby undercutting the authority of the French government, that *Le Figaro*’s representations of white American segregationists need to be analyzed.

The most sensational episode of the African American freedom movement following the Little Rock crisis of 1957 was the Freedom Rides. In order to test Southern states’ compliance with the Interstate Commerce Act, which outlawed racial discrimination in interstate public transportation, the Congress of Racial Equality recruited an interracial group of thirteen Riders, to start a ride on interstate buses across Southern states.93 *Le Figaro*’s coverage of the violence which erupted upon the arrival of the Freedom Riders in Montgomery, Alabama was especially critical of white locals. In a May 22, 1961 article, *Le Figaro* spoke of the lynching of the students participating in the Freedom Rides by “a thousand of out-of-control whites” who acted with a “horrifying savagery.”94 The following day, an article by special correspondent Châtelain qualified whites as “fanatics” and “white scum” who were “crying out,” “over-excited,” in front of the church where King, the Freedom Riders, and black locals of Montgomery had gathered in honor of the brave activists.95 Finally, speaking of the calm which returned to Montgomery, *Le

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Figaro’s May 25 article presented the whites of Montgomery as a people that would transform themselves into agents of hatred if their natural order were to be suddenly disrupted: “And yet, the slightest thing would suffice to spark things off and transform the calm faces of peaceful storekeepers and housewives into faces disfigured with hatred.” 96 This representation of white Alabamians as overly emotional and yielding to their instinctive sentiments strongly mirrors the ways in which the pieds noirs were represented in the French press. On the portrayal of the pieds noirs in the French weekly magazine Paris-Match and in the French communist press, Todd Shepard writes: “Finally, there were the supporters of fascism, the vast majority of the pieds noirs, the non-‘Muslim’ population of Algeria… These representations painted the pieds noirs as deeply racist and fundamentally irrational: ideologically incoherent, oblivious to reasoned discussion, at home only in the crowd, prone to loud, ultravirile displays, in short Mediterraneans.” 97 Although Shepard does not refer to Le Figaro in this quotation, the newspaper’s strong reprobation of the settlers’ violent resistance to the prospect of Algeria’s independence was such that this description of the pieds noirs mirrors Le Figaro’s perception of the non-Muslim population of Algeria.

In fact, Le Figaro’s coverage of the racial crisis surrounding James Meredith’s attempt to be the first black to integrate the University of Mississippi draws a clear parallel between white segregationists and the pieds noirs. Reporting what he and his team witnessed after Kennedy dispatched federal troops in Oxford, Châtelain described the white locals: “On both sides there are trees and, sometimes, houses; and by the trees and house, we can see figures… Those are whites, in groups of five or six, silent and breathing hatred. Here, we give a name to ‘poor

whites;’ they are called ‘red necks,’ but they could just as well be called ‘pieds noirs.’” By the time of the Mississippi racial crisis in late September 1962, Algeria had officially become independent but Muslims and Europeans continued to face each other in violent confrontations. Therefore, contemporary events in Algeria continued to fuel journalists’ comparisons between white American segregationists and pieds noirs.

In October of that year, columnist Robert Escarpit established a parallel between the Mississippi crisis and the French situation in Algeria. In this article, whose title echoes pied noir Albert Camus’ 1947 novel La Peste, Escarpit prompted the French to reflect on the racial crisis triggered by Meredith’s attempt to integrate the University of Mississippi in light of the Algerian context. Remembering the 1957 Little Rock crisis, Escarpit stated that he had not been surprised by the racial developments taking place in Mississippi and rhetorically asked “Could things [the racial situation] settle there?” With this question, Escarpit warned the French against seeing the end of the Algerian war as the end of the Algerian problem. Indeed, for Escarpit, the racial tragedy currently taking place in the U.S. remained relevant for the French, even though Algeria had acquired its independence:

The French had better watch closely (what is happening in the U.S.). The evil that is endemic there is the same one that they once acutely suffered from and for which they continue to endure the consequences: nostalgic paternalism, attachment to the native land, old racism of surrounded communities, despair of the poor white who feels threatened. Even the general is part of the scenario, the one who after commanding military forces, supports and guides the forces of disorder.

99 Aldrich, Greater France, 297.
As I mentioned earlier, Algeria’s independence did not immediately end the violent conflict between European and Muslim Algerians. Even though the French had untied their destiny from that of Algerians, enduring hostilities in Algeria continued to make racial issues of the American South relevant to the French people. Moreover, upon Algeria’s independence, massive numbers of pieds noirs migrated to France, but many also refused to leave their native land. It is likely that Escarpit sought to suggest to his fellow Frenchmen that although they were more than ready to dissociate themselves from those whom they thought had brought dishonor to France, the pieds noirs’ presence and actions in Algeria should remain a French concern. With hundreds of thousands of pied noir repatriates, perhaps Escarpit also meant to suggest the possibility that the métropole could very well suffer from the pieds noirs’ racism and frustration.

As the following example suggests, a year after Algeria’s independence, American racial developments continued to evoke the Algerian colonial context in French minds. After the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church, Châtelain established a direct parallel between the populations of Birmingham and those of Algiers:

We can easily imagine what would have happened in Birmingham if this city and its population were of “Mediterranean” temperament. Nonetheless, the industrial capital of Alabama could not be really compared to Algiers; there (Alabama) collective emotions are expressed with more heaviness. The black population, which represents more than a third of the population, has not fully escaped from the traditional southern torpor.\(^{102}\)

In this connection between Alabama and Algiers, Châtelain is referring specifically to the black segment of the Alabamian population whose anger and despair had relatively remained relatively under control. It is important to note, however, that the journalist spoke of a general “Mediterranean temperament,” as though European settlers and Algerians’ insurrections were deeply intertwined with their geographical location and its climate. In *Race and the Education of*

Desire, Ann Laura Stoler discusses the perceived impact of the colonial environment on European settlers in the Indies. Commenting on the remarks of a Dutchman, Stoler concludes, “even for the European-born, the Indies was transformative of cultural essence and personhood itself… ‘Europeanness’ was not a fixed attribute, but one altered by environment, class contingent and not secured by birth.” Although Stoler’s analysis particularly refers to the Indies, Châtelain’s characterization of the population of Algeria strongly suggests that, for him, the Algerian colonial environment transformed the “cultural essence” of European settlers. Indeed, Shepard also explains that, when metropolitan French came to terms with the loss of Algeria, they deflected French responsibility for the atrocious acts committed against Muslim Algerians on the no-longer French pieds noirs: “French intellectuals articulated a commonsensical definition of how ‘(European) Algerians’ were different from French. It was an explanation that offered the reassuring certainty that what had gone wrong in French-ruled Algeria resulted from an absence of French civilization, rather than the inherent contradictions of the French civilizing mission.”

Although Châtelain’s comparison between Birmingham and Algiers first fueled his discussion of African Americans’ passive reactions to the outbursts of white violence, his following comments explicitly placed white Alabamians and Algerian settlers in a similar perspective. Speaking of governor George Wallace and Birmingham local authorities, Châtelain affirmed, “They will not take any measure against the local ‘Bab-el-Oueds,’ they constitute an integral part of this population.” Châtelain’s association of white segregationists with the pieds noirs is revealing both of the journalist’s disdainful perception of European settlers in Algeria.

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104 Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, 203.  
105 Châtelain, “La rançon du progrès.”
and of the evocative character of the American racial crisis even after the end of the Algerian war. Bab el Oued was a working-class neighborhood of Algiers inhabited by European settlers. Following the signature of the Evian Accords on March 18, 1962, which conferred independence to Algeria, the OAS launched an insurrection in Bab el Oued which targeted both Muslim Algerians and French troops. The nature of Châtelain’s hostility towards European settlers may have consequently been twofold in so far as it could have been inspired both by class considerations and by the O.A.S.’ murderous reprisals.

We may also find signs of the continuing relevance of the Algerian war for French journalists covering American racial events in Le Monde. Le Monde’s contributors, just like those of Le Figaro, had good reason for resenting French Algerians. In February 1961, Le Monde also became a victim of O.A.S. terrorism when a bomb exploded in front of the newspaper’s headquarters. With O.A.S. bombing intensifying, in a September 1961 editorial, Beuve-Méry, under the pen name of Sirius, asked if this violence signaled the beginning of “the time of murderers.” Three years later, Claude Julien entitled his article on white violence in Mississippi during the Freedom Summer “the time of murderers.” Particularly, he condemned white segregationists who chose to respond to their fear of change with murder. Julien did not draw an explicit parallel between O.A.S.’s violent resistance to prospective Algerian independence and white segregationists’ opposition to the legal challenge of Southern racial status quo. But if Julien’s title was meant to echo Sirius’s editorial, this parallel would suggest that, for him at least, white Mississippians’ reactionary violence evoked O.A.S. terrorism.

As I have demonstrated, French journalists’ coverage of the African American freedom movement was partly influenced by French colonial events. The turbulence of racial events in

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107 Claude Bellanger, *Histoire générale de la presse française*, 175.
the American South particularly inspired French journalists’ analogies between white American segregationists and pieds noirs. But French coverage of the African American freedom movement also revealed French racial prejudice. Unlike *L’Humanité*, which represented African American activists as true heroes, *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* often expressed critical reactions to African Americans and their activism. In the spring of 1963, much like *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* strongly criticized black protests in Birmingham for creating situations that disrupted law and order. Overall, the two newspapers’ tradition of legalism seems to justify their embracing the position of white American moderates over the question of black civil rights and racial protest. If they more or less supported the idea that blacks should receive equal rights as white Americans, they nonetheless preached patience. Hostile to black protesters in Birmingham, *Le Figaro* portrayed them as hateful, irresponsible and lacking of a civic consciousness. Indeed, Châtelain presented the Birmingham protests as the product of “black collective and organized hatred.” Speaking of the use of black children to fill the ranks of marchers, he wrote, “the black protesters were mostly young, there were many children who were not going to school and who asked for nothing more than to go have fun by parading throughout the city singing their spirituals.”109 Two days later, Châtelain portrayed the protests as festive: “blacks had fun—this is indeed the proper term—they sang, prayed on the pavements, refused to circulate or played hide-and-seek with the police. When they were tired of playing, they went back to their church where their pastors reinvigorated them with a new dose of fanaticism. After that, once they were recharged and frenetic again, they started to protest.”110 Undermining the seriousness of the Birmingham movement and the awareness of its participants, *Le Figaro* represented black

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protesters as individuals who were overly emotional and who simply jumped on the opportunity to be defiant.

In a similar fashion, Le Monde’s May 8, 1963 article presented black Alabamians as “over-excited and hostile.” Speaking of the church meeting organized before the beginning of the march, the article described the spectacular effect of sermons and freedom songs on the black audience: “The tension rises in this over-heated room where more than one thousand blacks of all ages shout and stamp their feet… Finally, with pastor Martin Luther King in the pulpit, blacks become frenetic.”

Similar representations of what French journalists appear to perceive as blacks’ over-emotionalism can be found in Le Figaro’s coverage of the March on Washington which took place on August 28, 1963. Elaborating on the possibility that violence might erupt during the march, Châtelain affirmed that the atmosphere of the march would depend on whether blacks “indulge themselves in a movement of collective frenzy. This is indeed the primary danger. By always singing spirituals, clapping their hands, and then moving their whole bodies in rhythm, a black crowd over-stimulated by its pastors could easily enter into a state of collective convulsion, and at that point, everything is possible.”

The next day, Châtelain reported the festive atmosphere which characterized the march: “The people in attendance listen to speeches with less attention and certainly less delight than they do songs…men and women clap their hands along the rhythm of the spirituals, as they are used to do during their evangelical revivals. We would have thought to be at some ritual pilgrimage on the coast of Congo.” Again, this description of black marchers as more responsive to music than to discourse contributed to drawing a primitive representation of African Americans, one that, as this quotation indicated, was strongly reminiscent of Africans and their religious practices.

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French journalists’ light treatment of African American activism may betray the journalist’s incomprehension of the legal barriers preventing black Americans from claiming a stake in American political life. A thorough examination of the state of French knowledge of American political and racial life would be needed to assess the extent to which French journalists, and the French public at large, understood the complexity of the American politics of racism. Regardless of French journalists’ level of proficiency on American institutions and racial dynamics, however, their insulting portrayals of marching black activists and children illustrated their racist views on black Americans. It is doubtful that a greater understanding of the racial and political dynamics at stake in the African American freedom movement would have transformed the French journalists’ views on black Americans. If French journalists were indeed aware of the political and legal obstacles to black racial equality, then there is ground to question *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*’s “legalist” approach to the African American freedom movement. To an extent, the two newspapers expressed views that were similar to those of white American liberals, whose conscience led them to support, at least officially, racial equality. While white American progressives condoned the legitimacy of African Americans’ claims for racial equality, they nonetheless sought to maintain control over the pace and extent of the legal process that was destroying the institutional foundations of American racial discrimination. Addressing a French “white” audience who was witnessing an increasing influx of former colonial, “non-white” immigrants, *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*’s “legalist” approach to black American activism may have illustrated French growing fears over the integration of racial minorities.

Returning to Châtelain’s portrayal of the March on Washington, the terminology he used to describe the crowd, which the French journalist described as 90% black, also echoes a description of the black population of the former French colony of Ivory Coast which later
appeared in *Le Figaro*. The title of Châtelain’s article presented the crowd gathered for the march as a seething anthill: “A Gigantic Stalling, a Seething Anthill Dressed for a Party…” In the body of the article, Châtelain proposed to share with his readers what he, himself, witnessed: “Let’s simply say what we saw: an immense, seething anthill, happily stuck in a stand-still.”

Two years later, in a special report on Ivory Coast, Gerard Marin, who extolled the socio-economic miracles accomplished by this West African country thanks to its continued collaboration with France, employed a similar terminology in reference to Ivorians. He explained that, after leaving a club (where Europeans felt just like home), Marin “threw himself in the swarm of the big working-class district of Abidjan, which mixed its colors, music and violent scents into an intoxicating swirl.” The use of a terminology referring to insects common in both descriptions of black crowds in the U.S. and in Africa is strongly revealing of the newspaper’s racialization of blacks. Moreover, Marin’s description of his encounter with Ivorian president Houphouët-Boigny also echoed Châtelain’s emphasis on black Americans’ sensitivity to music. Exchanging about the communist penetration on the African continent, an extremely serious subject for both interlocutors, Marin described Boigny’s voice as “singing,” a voice “chopped by the deafening rhythms of a frenzied mambo.”

Those representations of African Americans and Africans directly tap into a long-lived set of images in France. As scholar Brett A. Berliner points out, the important turn towards physical anthropology in nineteenth-century France consolidated the amalgam between body and character: “from the Enlightenment through the nineteenth century, in both scientific and popular thought, the visible human body came to be considered a sign for internal and intellectual

qualities.” In the African American and African contexts discussed above, the focus on musical rhythms and the moving body signals the authors’ perceptions of blackness in primitive terms. As Jan Nederveen Pieterse notes in his chapter on European representations of blacks, one of Webster’s definition of “savage” includes “lacking the restraints normal to civilized man.” Châtelain’s repeated accounts of African Americans’ disposition to slip into a frenzied state and Marin’s reference to wild African music are both indicative of the French journalists’ perceptions of blacks as lacking personal control. These descriptions also echo that of French naturalist and anthropologist Julien-Joseph Virey in the second volume of his *Histoire naturelle du genre humain*: “The negro is more sensitive to the affection of senses than to pure contemplation of the mind; he exists wholly in his corporeal appetites. He has a passion for pleasant exercises, games, dance and pantomime; he feels more than he thinks.” Speaking of the effects of music on blacks, Virey wrote, “the sound of the tom-tom…is enough to make him tremble with joy and make him jump in step. Then, his whole body becomes agitated, shivers with pleasure and his whole body gets in motion… The negro woman shares these affections.” Further emphasizing blacks’ emotional and physical dispositions, Virey added that blacks were “extremely sensitive to sensations and nervous excitations, all of which testified to a greater animality in the black man than in the white.” Reading Châtelain and Marin’s respective descriptions of African Americans and Africans suggests that, more than a century after the first publication of Virey’s book, these mental representations of blacks had remained alive and well in French minds.

Finally, *Le Figaro*’s coverage of the March on Washington was revealed of the newspaper’s pro-colonialist position and of racism towards Africans. Speaking of the desire for grandeur inscribed in the classical architecture of the American capital, designed by a “pedantic” French-born, Châtelain commented on the French *mission civilisatrice* and on Africans’ naïveté: “We saw Africans get mistaken, especially those Africans who learned their roman history in French schools; a group of Guineans exclaimed, ‘So this is the ancient city!’ in front of the colonnade of Constitution Avenue edified in 1912.”¹¹⁸ To a critical reader, Châtelain’s example may suggest that French colonial schools did a poor job teaching geography. But Châtelain seems to be suggesting that Africans had benefitted from French colonial rule, where they received a French education, as opposed to African Americans’ conditions in the U.S. Additionally, it seems fair to interpret Châtelain’s anecdote as a mockery of Africans whose historical chronology could be so egregiously off the mark. Once again, Châtelain’s comments strangely echoed Virey’s beliefs on blacks’ intellectual abilities, or lack thereof. Convinced of his naturalist conclusions on the inferior state of blacks’ intelligence, Virey dismissed the position of French abolitionists who “insist that blacks’ intellectual capacity is equal to that of whites, but that the lack of education…necessarily hampers the development of their intelligence. Send young negroes to our schools, they say,… with a liberal education similar to that we dispense our own children, and you will see.”¹¹⁹ We can imagine Châtelain nodding at Virey’s disbelief that lack of education explained blacks’ poorer intellectual performances in comparison to whites. Clearly, Châtelain’s anecdote suggests that, for him, the lack of liberal education was not the problem.

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¹¹⁸ Nicolas Châtelain, “Aujourd’hui la marche noire.”
The racial upheavals which started taking place in American cities around the mid-1960s also resulted in *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*’s derogatory portrayals of African Americans. Unlike *L’Humanité* and, to a lesser extent, *Le Monde*, the right-wing newspaper presented black rioters as criminals for whom the least significant event was enough to result in uncontrollable violence. In his August 16, 1965 coverage of the Watts riots, Châtelain portrayed Los Angeles blacks as a community “abandoned to the obscure and demonic forces of the city.” Citing American liberal sociologists, Châtelain explained that blacks’ use of drugs corresponded to “a desire for evasion or a need to compensate” for their sense of inferiority. While these conclusions may have spoken to a correlation between blacks’ living conditions and their higher propensity for criminality, Châtelain asserted that blacks were nonetheless biologically prone to react more violently to drugs: “It remains a fact that narcotics and stimulants have on them a greater effect than on whites.” Moreover, whereas *L’Humanité* had mocked those journalists who had naïvely embraced the idea that heat (and lack of air conditioning) had almost sufficed to trigger the violence of Watts’ blacks, Châtelain stressed the correlation between the climate and blacks’ outburst of violence: “Add to drugs the heat… In summer, black American ghettos become veritable asphalt jungles. In this context, a simple incident is enough to spark a collective frenzy and a tribal insurrection.”

This representation of black Americans, which explicitly linked them to Africans and their environment, is, again, strongly reminiscent of French naturalist theories of blacks’ racial inferiority. Connecting blacks’ nervous systems to climatic conditions, Virey noted: “This exasperation of their nervous system is due to their constitution, exalted by the heat of the climate.”

According to *Le Figaro*’s special correspondent, Blacks’ propensity to strong emotional reactions, be it due to environmental factors—heat and demonic forces of the

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city—or to substance consumption, explained African Americans’ outburst of senseless violence. Poor socio-economic conditions and police racial discrimination towards African Americans, which both L’Humanité and Le Monde accepted as determining factors, almost did not appear in Le Figaro’s account of the events.

Even as Le Monde recognized the formidable socio-economic obstacles suffered by African Americans, its coverage of urban racial crises did not spare black rioters who, in the eyes of Le Monde’s journalists, remained criminals. As for its coverage of the 1963 Birmingham movement, Le Monde proved to be critical of the continuing non-violent protests in the South and of the growing radicalization of the African American community in the North. The newspaper’s coverage of the Harlem riots, which erupted in late July, strongly echoed that of Le Figaro. Although Le Monde’s coverage of the events took account of the socio-economic conditions underpinning this racial upheaval, the newspaper largely placed the blame on black rioters nonetheless. Indeed, by emphasizing blacks’ violence and printing the words of the New York police commissioner, who presented the riot as a “criminal problem” instead of a “social problem,” Le Monde clearly expressed its position towards the rioters.122 In his July 23 article on the events, special correspondent Claude Julien depicted the state of utter misery which characterized black lives in Harlem and which, as American sociologists continuously demonstrated, went hand in hand with increasing unrest: “With its slums, its unemployed and its humiliations, Harlem becomes the heaven of sociologists, who find in it a dazzling illustration of theses which no longer need proof. Torn families, high birth rate, juvenile delinquency, assaults; social misery and disorder progress together.” While Julien acknowledged the pertinence of socio-economic factors in understanding the rise of racial violence in Harlem, he nonetheless represented blacks as individuals with a special inclination for violence. Speaking of blacks and

Puerto-Ricans whose respective gangs had been fighting against each other, Julien wrote, “They discovered that they had better things to do than to fight each other with knives, razors or clubs. Now, they unite against whites. The emancipatory wave provides their taste for violence with an outlet…”

Even though \textit{Le Monde} did not exclude the responsibility of black Americans’ socio-economic marginality in the Harlem racial riots, its coverage of the events also presented black rioters as individuals with a propensity for violence.

Closely following American domestic and foreign politics, \textit{Le Monde}’s journalists did not fail to notice the incidence of racial unrest on conservatives’ growing appeal. In the summer of 1964, \textit{Le Monde} discussed racial developments in the U.S. along with information regarding the upcoming presidential elections under a common headline: “American domestic problems.” In the context of the Cold War, American conservatives’ increasing popularity was no good news. The bearing of the Cold War on \textit{Le Monde}’s attitude towards black American rioters was notable in the newspaper’s treatment of the 1964 Harlem race riots. To a large extent, \textit{Le Monde}’s condemnation of the Harlem riots derived from the political stakes of blacks’ actions, stakes that could have important consequences at the international level. At the time of the riots, Senator Barry Goldwater was campaigning for the Republican primaries on a conservative platform which, notably, called for a tougher stance towards communism. Goldwater’s conservative political ideology contributed to his unpopularity among the moderate and liberal wings of the Republican party, but, as French commentators did not fail to note, black racial violence played in Goldwater’s favor. It is, therefore, in the context of the Cold War that \textit{Le Monde} and other French journalists treated Northern blacks’ radicalization. In its August 2-3 issue, \textit{Le Monde} published extracts from various French newspapers whose approach to “the black problem” revolved around the prospects of the upcoming presidential elections. Warning the French

against playing “Moscow’s game,” journalist for the French weekly *Carrefour* Bernard Cabanes affirmed, “Let’s not accuse Americans of being racists too lightly. Let’s not insult gratuitously the one who, because of racial unrest, may become the president of the United States and the holder of the nuclear umbrella.” Cabanes’s stance in favor of “Atlantic solidarity” did not reflect *Le Monde*’s neutralist position but it highlights how the prospects of a possible escalation of the Cold War influenced French attitudes towards American racial issues.

Finally, it is worth noting Cabanes’s argument against French labeling of Americans as racists: “It is easy to deny the black problem when we have so few Africans at home. What would France be like with five million blacks?”\(^{124}\) Cabanes’ comment on what he generically called “the black problem” is highly suggestive of French racial prejudice. In this quotation, Cabanes associated disorder with blackness and therefore suggested that were France to have a much larger number of Africans, or blacks, within its frontiers, it would be likely to experience the same sort of racial dilemma that the U.S. was currently facing. This example shows that the context of the Cold War, which forced the French to position themselves one way or another towards the U.S., not only influenced French attitudes towards American racial developments but also triggered French reflections on their own racial sentiments.

French communists also used American racism and American racial imagery to denounce French racial prejudice, much like *Droit et Liberté* did. On May 17, 1961, three days after a group of local Klansmen and white segregationists ambushed the Freedom Rides bus in Anniston, Alabama, *L’Humanité* published an article entitled “Was Algerian Bourmane thrown in his well by a Ku-Klux-Klan from Lyon?”\(^{125}\) In this short article, special correspondent Jo Vareille connected the murder of Algerian Mohand Bourmane to that of Boudjéma Zerkani, who


was violently murdered with a hammer 13 days earlier. In light of these recent murders, Vareille suggests, “we cannot exclude the possibility that we are dealing with a sort of Ku-Klux-Klan from the Lyon plains, whose sad exploits are likely to happen again.”

This example shows that French communists used the imagery of violent American racism to add a sensational character to their condemnation of French racism. Similarly, in July 1964, *L’Humanité* established a direct parallel between racial bias in the American justice system and the colonialist pretensions of the French justice system. In the 1950s and 1960s, the assimilation of the French Caribbean islands within the French Union as French departments, did not hamper mounting anticolonialism in those territories.

In Martinique, dissatisfaction with continuing dependence on the metropole created a tense atmosphere which sometimes resulted in violent unrest. One such violent episode occurred on June 12, 1963 in Fort-de-France, when high school students from the metropole started an altercation with fellow black Martiniquais for wearing the same sweaters as they did. “Insults flow. A young girl from Martinique is molested. Violence ensues. A crowd gathers together and, in front of the prefecture, shout ‘Down with racism! Freedom now! Free the youths!’ Rioters throw stones as the *Hotel de l’Europe* and stores owned by metropolitans and damage cars.”

From the start, local authorities suspected the Martinique Communist Party (*Parti Communiste Martiniquais*, PCM) and the Communist Youth (*Jeunesse Communiste, JC*).

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128 In December 1959, for example, a traffic accident between a young black Martiniquais and a white French from the metropole escalated into a three day riot. See Louis-Georges Placide, *Les émeutes de décembre 1959 en Martinique: Un repère historique* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2009).

129 The “affaire du tricos” briefly described here is explained by Martiniquais historian Armand Nicolas, who happens to have been Secretary-General of the PCM. He was the one arrested by the police and tried for “exciting racial hatred” between the Martiniquais and the French metropolitans. This fact obviously poses the question of the historical veracity of the story presented in *L’Humanité* and recalled by Nicolas himself in his book *Histoire de la Martinique*. Armand Nicolas, *Histoire de la Martinique: Tome 3 - De 1939 à 1971* (Paris: Editions L’Harmattan, 1998), 225.

to have triggered the racial unrest. *L’Humanité* July 21, 1964 article denounced what it saw as
the unfair treatment of Nicolas Armand, secretary general of the PCM, and Georges Timothée,
editor in chief of PCM official organ *Justice*, for publications “exciting racial hatred between
citizens and inhabitants.”

As Vareille did three years earlier to denounce the racist murder of
Bourmane, the author established a direct parallel between the American racial situation and the
French colonial situation in Martinique:

> Encouraging Martiniquais to resist French racists and defending Martiniquais’
dignity has become a crime of “excitation of racial hatred.” We would think that we are in the South of the U.S. where it is antisegregationists who are arrested. The young racists who are the true culprits of those incidents did not even have to worry. The police pretend that since they were nowhere to be found, they must have been invented by the Communist Party.

By using this analogy, the anonymous author sought to criticize French efforts to smother
Martiniquais anticolonialist impulse. As these last two examples suggest, anti-Americanism and
anticolonialism/antiracism intersected in *L’Humanité*’s coverage of French colonial and racial
issues.

But the July 1964 political cartoon right above *L’Humanité*’s article on the upcoming
trial of two Martiniquais communists suggests that French communists were also alarmed by
Goldwater’s growing popularity. Unlike *Le Monde*, this concern did not result in the castigation
of African American activism, but *L’Humanité* did use contemporary racial events in the service
of its anti-Goldwater propaganda. For example, in its July 21 issue, *L’Humanité* printed a
political cartoon suggesting that voting for Barry Goldwater meant voting for the KKK. In this
caricature, Goldwater, armed with a club, and a white man, armed with a gun, both held a sign in

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132 I am using the term “colonialist” here since it is the framework within which the article is discussing the trial of Armand Nicholas and Georges Timothée.
the shape of a uniformed klansman reading “vote for Goldwater,” and signed “KKK.”\textsuperscript{134} The racial violence that erupted in Selma, Alabama where King, fellow activists, and the black local population were staging peaceful protests in favor of African Americans’ voting rights fueled \textit{L’Humanité}’s condemnation of Goldwater. \textit{L’Humanité} also used political cartoons to establish a parallel between American conduct of the war in Vietnam and American treatment of its black minority. On March 13, 1965, \textit{L’Humanité} accompanied its article on American bombing of a village in North Vietnam with a political cartoon criticizing Johnson for not sending troops to protect Selma marchers who were violently assaulted on “Bloody Sunday.” The cartoon was composed of three vignettes and three captions referring to Johnson’s reactions to the situations depicted in the left and right vignettes. The vignette on the left, whose caption read “This situation has to end…,” represented a Klansmen holding a club in one hand and shooting a gun from the other hand while a white policeman watched with a smile on his face. The vignette in the middle, reading “In the defense of freedom and democracy…,” showed President Johnson looking in the opposite direction (towards the right). Finally, the vignette on the right, whose caption reads “let’s send some backup!…” represented U.S. troops marching towards Vietnam.\textsuperscript{135} In this cartoon, French cartoonist Jacques Kamb associated the African American freedom movement and the Vietnam War to condemn Johnson’s domestic and foreign policy. Three years later, and two days after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., \textit{L’Humanité}’s cover page continued to associate American racism with the war in Vietnam by claiming “it is the America of war and racism that killed Martin Luther King.”\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{136} “C’est l’Amérique du racisme et de la guerre qui a tué Martin Luther King,” \textit{L’Humanité}, April 6, 1968.
In the aftermath of World War II, the French had to grapple with their dramatic loss of influence on the world stage. The emotional burden of this new state of affairs particularly materialized in French resentment towards the American superpower. Viewing their colonial possessions as the last iteration of French grandeur, French rancor towards the U.S. was all the more exasperated by American anticolonialism. As this chapter has shown, in their coverage of the racial events that shook the U.S. during the 1950s and 1960s, French journalists seized the opportunity to get back at the U.S. for its support of anticolonialism. For French journalists, across the political spectrum, African Americans’ racial oppression highlighted American hypocrisy and delegitimized American anticolonialist claims. However, the French colonial context impacted French journalists’ coverage of the African American freedom movement in other significant ways. Indeed, during and after the Algerian war for independence, French journalists’ treatment of American racial events also served as a platform to comment on the French colonial situation and its actors. Whether as a means to condemn some Frenchmen of racism or to exculpate French people of increasingly vocal charges of racism towards Algerian Muslims, French journalists drew parallels between the American South and the Algerian war theater. The prevalence of the Algerian colonial situation in French minds was also illustrated by the use of a language pertaining to the Algerian colonial situation in journalists’ commentaries on the American racial context. Perhaps more subtly, however, French journalists’ coverage of the African American freedom movement revealed their racial prejudice. As was especially the case in *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*, journalists’ portrayal of African Americans closely echoed long-lived racialized imagery of Africans. While generally in favor of racial equality for American blacks, French perceptions of African Americans, along with their concern over the impact of black Americans’ protests on American politics and the Cold War, justified French
journalists’ conditional support for the African American freedom movement. To an extent, this ambivalent support for racial integration in the U.S. foreshadowed French attitudes with regards to the assimilation of former colonials in French society. By looking at Francophone African journalists’ treatment of the African American freedom movement, the following chapter illustrates ways in which colonialism shaped Francophone Africans’ accounts of American racial issues.
Figure 3: *L’Humanité*, September 25, 1957.
Figure 4: Jacques Kamb, *L’Humanité*, July 21, 1964.
CHAPTER 4: BETWEEN AFROCENTRISM AND MARXISM: FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN INTELLECTUALS’ ENGAGEMENT WITH THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

In the decades following the First World War, French perceptions and representations of blacks underwent an important transformation. Shocked by the recent manifestation of the destructive power of modernity, a generation of French artists and intellectuals would turn to the “exotic black other” for escape.¹ In this new construct, blackness remained evocative of primitivism, but primitivism now positively constituted an “antidote to a stifling and civilizing society.”² This revalorization of Africa, if still founded on essentially racist notions of blackness, was supplemented by French, and European, interwar anthropological research. Inspired by works like German ethnologist and archeologist Leo Frobenius’s History of African Civilizations, African students in Paris welcomed the “new anthropology as one tool among many to promote cultural pride and to develop a scientific and humanistic attack on

¹ Brett A. Berliner, Ambivalent Desire: The Exotic Black Other in Jazz-Age France (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 2.
ethnocentrism.” While the new brand of French anthropology undeniably influenced Francophone African intellectuals, the phenomenon of the Harlem Renaissance and contacts with black Americans installed in Paris played a fundamental role in the emergence of the Négritude movement, an expression of Francophone blacks’ quest for the rehabilitation of Africa and Africans.

The subjects of Francophone blacks’ cultural Renaissance and the connections between Francophone African and Caribbean and African American artists and intellectuals during the interwar period have received due attention among scholars. Mainly via biographies of African American exiles in Paris, historians have also explored the nature of African Americans’ relations to the French and Francophone blacks after World War II. However, Francophone Africans and Caribbeans’ attitudes towards African Americans and their struggle for racial equality has largely remained unexplored. By looking at the Francophone African magazine Présence Africaine, a study on “Black Americans for Africans,” and the Catholic publication Tam-Tam founded by Francophone African students, this chapter proposes to explore the meanings and significance of the African American freedom movement for Francophone

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Africans. As the momentous transition between colonization and independence was taking place, how did Francophone Africans relate to their black American counterparts’ own emancipation struggle? I argue that Francophone African intellectuals’ different ideological approaches to black emancipation determined the extent to which they identified with black Americans’ struggle for racial equality. On the one hand, the cultural, Afrocentric emphasis on the rehabilitation of Africa among the Francophone African intellectuals associated with *Présence Africaine* rendered the black American political experience largely irrelevant. On the other hand, the deeply Marxist understanding of racial oppression shared by a generation of young Francophone African intellectuals was the fundamental basis for their identification with African Americans. I would argue that it was the “revival” of the imperialist threat in the 1960s that most made the African American freedom movement relevant to all Francophone African intellectuals, thereby blurring their ideological divisions.

A brief overview of the Francophone black community in Paris during the interwar years will provide some insights into their political and intellectual engagement with African Americans and contextualize the *Présence Africaine* magazine. The years following World War I saw the emergence of what historian Gary Wilder calls a “semi-autonomous black public sphere.” Although African and Caribbean activists depended heavily on established metropolitan structures, such as the *Ligue des Droits de l’Homme* and the French Communist Party, their unprecedented political organizing nonetheless allowed for the emergence of a self-aware black colonial community. In the early 1920s, this new black political awareness, which materialized with the creation of the *Ligue Universelle de la Race Nègre* (LUDRN) in 1924, remained strongly assimilationist. In Dewitte’s words, the organization “campaigned for what

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represented progress in the eyes of the radical and socialist left, that is full assimilation, and social and political equality.” Despite this conservative brand of anti-colonialism, men like Tojo Kouvalou, the Dahomean co-founder of the LUDRN, were nonetheless drawn to the contemporary, far more radical, Garveyist movement rooted in the U.S. The organization’s publication, *Les Continents*, frequently reported news corresponding to Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). While Francophone black assimilationists supported what Garveyism stood for in the American context, they discarded the relevance of such a movement in France.⁹ Published in the 15 September 1924 issue of *Les Continents* and reported by Dewitte, the following excerpt of Tovalou’s speech delivered to a 1924 UNIA Congress taking place in the U.S. highlights the irrelevance of Garveyist ideology for Francophone blacks: “The French metropole does not want to tolerate and will never tolerate racial prejudices. She considers her black and yellow children as equal to her white children.” If the supposed absence of racial discrimination in France rendered Garveyism largely inadequate for these Francophone blacks, they nonetheless embraced Garvey’s celebration of a glorious African past. This rehabilitation of Africa is perhaps the most significant heritage Garveyism left to Francophone blacks; it would be one of *Présence Africaine*’s main goals.

In the latter part of the 1920s, Garveyism would resonate more loudly among Francophone black activists of the *Ligue de defense de la race nègre* (LDRN). Founded by Senegalese labor organizer Lamine Senghor and Tiemoko Garan Kouyaté, from the French Sudan, LDRN’s communist ideology and nationalist advocacy placed them as the most radical group of black activists on the French scene.¹⁰ As Wilder argues, the group’s affiliation with the Communist Party, which had set up a Committee for Colonial Studies in 1921 and the

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Intercolonial Union, allowed Francophone blacks to “sustain a transnational racial solidarity.”

The appeal of black internationalism for the organization clearly appears in their newspaper, *La Race Nègre*, which frequently looked at the black condition in Africa, Latin America, North America, and the Caribbean. Unsurprisingly, the plight of African American workers was the aspect of the Black American experience which most triggered the organization’s interest. The radicalization of black activism in France, as embodied by LDRN, also gave Garveyism a new impulse among Francophone Africans. Dewitte cites, for example, an article which appeared in the third issue of *La Race Nègre* and whose style and nationalist dimension strongly echoed Garveyist discourse. In “To Each His Own Race,” Adolphe Mathurin encouraged “the cursed race, the martyr race [to] get up” and to regain their honor, stolen by the Caucasian race. Garvey’s influence operated even among the less radical offshoot of the LDRN. In the late 1920s, Caribbean lawyer André Béton launched a project to create a “Negro bank” to foster the kind of black economic autonomy preached by Garvey. Despite Béton’s embrace of the Garveyist idea that blacks had to become more self-reliant, the difference between metropolitan France and segregationist America required the creation of “a Garveyism adapted to the black community of France.” The rise of fascism in the 1930s, however, would push autonomist Emile Faure to adopt the strongly racialized discourse of Garvey. Viewing European colonialism as a “poisoned gift,” Faure advocated for a “black Zionism.” The “white race” had brought nothing good to Africans, whose ancestral traditions deserved to be glorified. Without ever

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11 Wilder, “Panafricanism and the Republican Political Sphere,” 240.
15 The LDRN’s affiliation with the French Communist Party did not sit well with the autonomist members of the organization. Led by Emile Faure, the autonomist branch of LDRN created their own faction of the organization. Wilder, “Panafrican Projects and National Politics,” 242; Dewitte, *Les mouvements nègres en France*, 195-96.
referring to Garvey, Faure’s rhetoric and underpinning ideology mirrored the former’s “absolute, sectarian, and racializing nationalism.” As for the reformist Comité de défense des intérêts de la race noir (CDIRN), composed of a more conservative Caribbean faction, they found that the ideas behind the UNIA “contradict the combat, the mere life of these assimilationist Negroes of Paris.” The emergence of a diffuse form of racial consciousness among Parisian blacks made Garvey’s Afrocentric ideology appealing to this community. However, Caribbeans and Africans’ political motivations and the French political climate largely shaped their reactions to Garveyism and its multiple dimensions. As this chapter will show, the same goes with the postwar generation of Francophone African intellectuals gathered around Présence Africaine.

Readers are perhaps more familiar with the influence of the Harlem Renaissance on the black intellectual community of France. With the emergence of the illustrious Négritude movement in the 1930s, scholarly accounts of the rapports between the Francophone and American black communities between the two world wars have almost exclusively focused on the cultural dimension of these connections. The dominance of the cultural over the political embodied by the Négritude movement has its roots in the CDIRN. Mostly composed of Martiniquais and Guadeloupan journalists, writers, lawyers, administrators, and students, the organization was born out of the Afro-Caribbean Comité de defense de la race nègre mentioned above. Influenced by what Dewitte calls the “old guard” black American intelligentsia like Du Bois, Caribbeans of CDIRN would “shed their inferiority complex” and awaken to “the conscience of the [Negro] race.” Posing as “the elite of the race,” CDIRN set out to “promote black art and thought.” From their experience in the CDRN, French Caribbeans maintained the ideal of racial solidarity, but they shifted its operation from the political to the cultural domain.

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17 Dewitte, Les mouvements nègres en France, 238.
18 Ibid., 218, 244.
The organization’s continuing adherence to an assimilationist doctrine alienated a younger generation of French Caribbeans who would rally around the publication *Légitime Défense*. Influenced by Marx, French surrealists, and more radical elements of the Harlem Renaissance movement, such as Claude McKay and Langston Hughes, those Caribbean students angrily rejected the “colored bourgeoisie.” The fragmented black front of the 1920s and early 1930s encouraged the intellectual founders of *L’Etudiant Noir* to opt for a cultural form of activism, thereby sidestepping the political tensions at the roots of this fragmentation. Fueled by ideas from the three trends of the black movement in France, i.e. “Afro-Latin,” nationalist, and revolutionary, *L’Etudiant Noir* and the Négritude movement transposed their debate to the cultural terrain. Moreover, the election of the leftist coalition of the Popular Front in 1936 brought a new black assimilationist impulse. The party’s focus on the growing fascist threat, however, meant that blacks’ anti-imperialist agenda was momentarily abandoned. As Dewitte concluded, “most of the Negro activism was therefore transferred to the cultural domain, the new negritude generation has taken the reins from earlier colonial organizations and the political struggle will only be able to recover its rights after the Second World War, but it will then be redirected to the colonies.” The arrival of a new generation of intellectuals and the French metropolitan context of the late 1930s would effectively mutate the black movement of France into an essentially cultural enterprise. As the following analysis of *Présence Africaine* shows, these developments heavily determined the nature of Francophone Africans’ relation to the black American community in the 1950s and 1960s.

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19 It is interesting to note that although the youths of *Légitime Défense* violently condemned the “colored bourgeoisie” and called for a social revolution, they did not rally to African workers and only addressed the “children of the black bourgeoisie.” Dewitte, *Les mouvements nègres en France*, 229, 263, 267-68, 270.

20 In the late 1920s, Jane Nardal invented the designation “Afro-Latin,” French equivalent to the New Negroes’ “Afro-American.” Through this expression, Nardal and other Caribbean expressed their attachment to their African roots as well as the Latin heritage of their French colonial experience. Ibid., 230-31, 353.

21 Ibid., 230-31, 353, 360-374, 375.
The magazine *Présence Africaine* is perhaps the best place to start to explore the significance of the African American freedom movement for Francophone Africans. *Présence Africaine*, founded by Senegalese writer Alioune Diop and other intellectuals in 1947, revived the Francophone African tradition of “written protest” that had emerged in interwar France. If permeated with different ideological currents, publications like *La Dépêche Africaine, La Voix des Nègres, La Race Nègre* and *L’Etudiant Noir* testified to Francophone Africans’ new attitude towards colonization and its impact on racial identity. Although Diop rejected claims that his journal was born in the intellectual lineage of *L’Etudiant Noir*, founded by the fathers of *Négritude*, *Présence Africaine* was nonetheless the major voice of *Négritude* after World War II. As Christiane Yandé Diop underlined, her husband “wanted to rehabilitate the collective memory of the peoples of Africa.” Equating memory with culture, Diop’s description of one of her husband’s motivations in founding *Présence Africaine* echoes the project of *Négritude* defined and undertaken a little over a decade earlier by Leopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Léon-Gontrand-Damas. As Bennetta Jules-Rosette points out in *Black Paris*, despite the contested meaning of *Négritude*, the concept “reaffirmed the integrity of African cultures and was a necessary philosophical tool for establishing the legitimacy of African literatures.” Diop’s desire to rehabilitate African culture and to get it “recognized by the entire world,” along

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22 In an article for *La Vie Africaine*, poet, journalist and essayist Paulin Joachim from Benin mentioned that men like André Gide, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Michel Leiris, Emmanuel Mounier, Richard Wright, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire and many others had all participated in the foundation of the journal. Saffo Mathieu Koua, “La presse nègro-Africaine en France: 1947-1969” (PhD diss., Université Michel de Montaigne, Bordeaux 3, 1997), 12, 218.


with his emphasis on the role of African literature in reaching these goals, made *Présence Africaine* a major vehicle of the *Négritude* intellectual tradition.\(^\text{26}\)

The project of colonization largely rested on Europeans’ assumption that people inhabiting the coveted territories of Africa lacked a culture and a history. The African *évolués*, successful products of the French policy of assimilation, received a colonial education illustrating the glories of French history and the wonders of French literature.\(^\text{27}\) It was against Africans’ denial of a worthy past that men like Alioune Diop, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Paulin Joachim, and many other contributors to *Présence Africaine* elevated their voices. More than illustrative of a quest for a buried identity and a fuller integration in the modern world, *Présence Africaine* also reflected Diop’s vision of a “European universalism…modified to include African elements.”\(^\text{28}\) As the “Cultural Journal of the Black World,” *Présence Africaine* provided a platform for Africans and descendants of Africans to “create new values for the African of today, the black man of today, values that belong to the black world,” in Mauritian Jacques Rabemananjara’s words.\(^\text{29}\) As the following analysis of the magazine will show, however, Francophone Africans’ interest in the African American community was largely contingent upon the latter’s representativeness of African values.

The 1956 First Congress of Black Writers and Artists, launched by the *Présence Africaine* group, provides some insights into Francophone blacks and black Americans’ perspectives on their mutual experiences. As Jules-Rosette points out, there existed an essential


\(^{29}\) This quotation comes from the transcript of Jules-Rosette’s interview with Jacques Rabemananjara and Christiane Yandé Diop, which the author published in her book. Ibid., 42.
disconnect between Francophone blacks and the African American delegation. Whereas black Americans sought to emphasize the political dimension of their liberation movement, “several of the African participants were concerned neither with the issue of political decolonization per se nor with the local politics of the American delegation.” Although the decolonization of Africa was central to the conference, the Francophone delegation was mostly interested in exploring African cultural rehabilitation, which they understood to be the necessary first step towards political emancipation.

Black American Mercer Cook, who was present at the Congress, drew attention to Francophone blacks’ lack of engagement with the American politics of racism in his 1957 article, “Racial Relations in the United States as Seen by French Travelers since the Second World War.” Directly addressing black writers in Paris, Cook questioned the quasi absence of such travelogues among Francophone blacks. In his article revisiting the Congress, “Princes and Powers,” James Baldwin referred to “the inability to discuss politics” for fear of engulfing the conference into “a war of political ideologies.” One main point of contention between the Francophone and American delegations notably surged when Césaire affirmed that Africans and African Americans shared a colonial status. In the eyes of the black American delegates, African Americans’ recent legal success concerning the question of racial segregation in the American public school system rendered Césaire’s comparison inadequate. In Talking to the Gates, James Campbell notes that, as a “bastard of the West,” in Baldwin’s terms, the black American writer found Francophone Africans to be “total strangers.”

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32 Ibid., 128.
34 Jules-Rosette, Black Paris, 60.
fundamentally alienated him from Africans. Speaking as a “western man of color,” Richard Wright’s presentation on “Tradition and Industrialization” argued that the West “could not have done a better job at liberating the masses of Asia and Africa from their age old traditions.” African Americans’ western perspective translated into a political democratic approach to fighting black racial oppression through democratic means. This approach differed markedly from Francophone blacks’ emphasis on African cultural rehabilitation, even as this project was arguably deeply European itself. In the 1950s and 1960s, Francophone Africans’ Afrocentric and cultural engagement with the black world strongly shaped Présence Africaine’s treatment of African Americans’ racial experiences.

As a French platform of what we might call postwar “black cosmopolitanism,” Présence Africaine allows us to investigate Francophone Africans’ rapport with the events shaking the lives and consciousness of African Americans in the 1950s and 1960s. An overview of the journal’s issues during the period under study reveals that the contents of the journal relating to African Americans were primarily written by African Americans and inconsistently followed American racial developments. Since its first appearance in 1947, Présence Africaine offered a platform for African American voices. However, as one could expect from an essentially cultural enterprise, most of those contributions pertained to African Americans’ cultural or artistic works. Excerpts and reviews of works, especially from black American writers like Richard Wright, Langston Hughes and Chester B. Himes, frequently appeared in the magazine. Présence

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Africaine also presented or commented on other aspects of African American artistic or cultural life, such as black American folk songs, jazz, and black American religious traditions. The special role Diop believed culture was to play in the quest for blacks’ identity seems to explain the journal’s early interest in African American culture and literature. As he affirmed in the magazine’s first issue, “it is art that best reveals our personalities, better than any action, the least peculiarities which constitute the will structure of our being.”\textsuperscript{39} To a lesser extent, the journal did engage with the social, economic and political dimensions of the African American experience. For example, in its early years, the journal published articles on subjects like “Black Industrial Labor in the United-States” and “School Segregation in the United States.”\textsuperscript{40} Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, however, the predominance of the cultural over the political would continue to characterize Présence Africaine’s approach to African Americans and the African American freedom movement.

The magazine’s ambition to recover the components of an authentic African identity and to create “the black world’s cultural unity” largely determined the aspects of African American life featured in its pages.\textsuperscript{41} African American literature and culture, more generally, were relevant in so far as they illustrated components of what Francophone Africans perceived as an African essence. Madeleine Gautier’s review of Richard Wright’s Native Son exemplifies this last point. Echoing Diop’s understanding that African culture would contribute to the “creation of a humanism reflecting the true measure of man,” Gautier identified Wright’s ability to

\textsuperscript{39} Although this was not a constant practice, the magazine sometimes published articles in English. In this first issue, the English translation of Diop’s editorial illustrated the desire of the magazine’s founder to also address the Anglophone black diaspora. Alioune Diop, trans. Richard Wright and Thomas Diop, “Niam n’goura or Présence Africaine’s raison d’être,” Présence Africaine (October-November 1947), 187.


\textsuperscript{41} In this collection marking the twentieth anniversary of Présence Africaine, French professor at the University of Dakar Jacques Lombard presented the “cultural unity of the black world” as a precious objective for the men of Présence Africaine. Jacques Lombard, in Mélanges, réflexions d’hommes de culture, ed. Présence Africaine (Paris: Présence africaine, 1969), 25.
reproduce the intensity of human interactions as “the typical power of his race.” As for Wright’s black characters, it is the “emergence of this force quivering with power, instinct, and sensitivity” which mirrored what Diop described as Africans and, by extension, blacks’ “fresh sensitivity.” As this review suggests, it was the ability of this “novelist of the black race” to exert central aspects of the African artistic fiber and to paint an evocative rendering of blacks’ internal human experience that placed *Native Son* on *Présence Africaine*’s list of recommended readings. Similarly, it seems fair to argue that the journal’s decision to publish the tenth chapter of Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folks*, entitled “Of the Faith of the Fathers,” derived from the chapter’s exposition of the Black Church’s African roots. That the Black Church was “the social center of Negro life in the United States” may have accounted for the insertion of Du Bois’ discussion in the journal. I would argue, however, that for Francophone Africans, the relevance of this piece primarily stemmed from Du Bois’ presentation of the Black Church as “the most characteristic expression of African character.” Defining “African socio-cultural values,” Nigerien Djibo Habi claimed, “we must give a special place to the problem of the *cult of the ancestors*, which is one of the most characteristic cultural aspects of black Africa.” The journal’s publication of Du Bois’ discussion of the Black Church in the U.S. appears to have stemmed more from an interest in African cultural influences on the black American religion than from a genuine interest in African American socio-cultural experiences. The insertion of an abstract from Léopold Sédar Senghor’s poem “Ndessé” under the title of Du Bois’ chapter further situates the latter’s discussion within the African cultural context. The magazine connected African Americans’ religious return to African roots as an escape from American

43 Diop, “Niam n’goura,” 190; Gauthier, “Un romancier de la race noir,” 164.  
racial oppression with Senghor’s dramatic demand that his mother “tell him again of the old tales of black evenings” to help him escape from the brutal European war. ⁴⁶ As these examples suggest, Francophone African intellectuals’ engagement with African Americans was strongly Afrocentric.

The journal’s quest for African cultural authenticity explains its interest in aspects of African American lives through which African roots remained visible. However, as a platform of the black world, Présence Africaine also published articles treating contemporary issues faced by African Americans. As mentioned earlier, most of the articles covering the black American struggle for racial equality were penned by African Americans. That Francophone Africans’ insights into the black American racial dilemma were largely absent and that the journal welcomed ideological diversity among its contributors—as well as its patronage and editorial committees—complicates our effort to determine Francophone Africans’ views on the African American freedom movement. ⁴⁷ Between 1955 and 1965, a turbulent decade on the American racial scene, Présence Africaine published very few non-American commentary pieces on American racial events. The murder of a 14-year old black Chicagoan, the resistance to black students’ integration in white institutions in Little Rock, Arkansas and Jackson, Mississippi, and the multiple scenes of racial violence in the Alabama cities of Anniston, Birmingham, Montgomery, and Selma, among others, if less publicized, events, all received broad coverage on the international scene, France included. Yet, throughout this decade, Francophone contributors to the magazine remained largely silent on the racial events shaking the U.S. and outraging the

⁴⁶ Senghor wrote the collection of poems entitled Hosties Noires at the prisoner-of-war camp where he and his regiment were sent in May 1940. In Ndessé, a broken Senghor longs for his mother and Africa. Vaillant, Black, French, and African, 166, 174.

⁴⁷ Micaela Fenoglio speaks of what some critics of Présence Africaine have dismissed as a lack of “rigor” in the thematic content of the journal. What appeared as a lack of rigor, Fenoglio corrected, was in fact the result of Diop’s ambition to allow all who had something to share on the black world to do so in the journal. Micaela Fenoglio, Présence africaine entre critique et littérature: L’esprit du dialogue (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1998), 33.
world. The infamous scenes of racial violence that took place in Alabama during the 1963 Birmingham civil rights campaign nonetheless broke Francophone blacks’ silence. Mauritian poet Edouard J. Maunick published a poem on the Birmingham movement in the journal, effectively illustrating the symbiotic bond uniting culture and politics in the journal. In his poem, “Alabama of Dogs,” Maunick compared the violence white American racists unleashed against black Americans in Birmingham to that the U.S. and its World War II Allies deployed against the Japanese in the Guadalcanal campaign and in Mindanao, one of Philippines’ largest islands.  

There, the poem stated,

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  blood leaked as well
  skin scorched as well
  the depths of despair opened up as well
  in those days one and the same finger
  freed the dog from the rifles…
  America something prowls around you
  Full of blood skin and dizziness
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For the poet, recent scenes of racial violence in the U.S. South evoked American war efforts to dislodge the Japanese from strategic areas in the Pacific. Whether this association evoked racism in the poet’s mind or was simply indicative of the poet’s perception of the U.S. as a country tarnished by its history of violence is not clear. But by placing the episode of dogs let loose on black protesters within a larger saga of American violence, the poet made the warning he expressed in the next stanza all the more powerful. This time, referring to eighteenth and nineteenth-century South African history, Maunick foresaw black revenge were the U.S. to follow the same violent path:

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America do not make a Shaka come to life
Do not call for strange spells
For blacks America blacks will come out

By continuously rejecting and assaulting its black population, the U.S. ran the risk of seeing a black leader emerge in the vein of the great Zulu warrior and King, Shaka. In the matter of a decade, Shaka, “bastard son of King Senzangakhona,” was able to recruit and prepare a well-trained army that, years after his death, would lead to a British defeat at the Battle of Isandlwana in Zululand, South Africa. If, as Maunick suggested, America continued to reject its illegitimate sons, an army of angry blacks may emerge to confront it. In this poem, which may have been written for Présence Africaine, Maunick linked the African American experience of racism to the African history of colonial resistance, thereby injecting an African dimension to his treatment of American racial issues.

Four years later, Cameroonian journalist Iwiyé Kala-Lobe claimed there had once been a Shaka among black Americans. In his tribute to late Malcolm X, entitled “The Black Horse,” Kala-Lobe placed Malcolm in the “grand tradition of Shaka.” Kala-Lobe’s invocation of Shaka in his tribute to the late black nationalist is illustrative of Francophone blacks’ attraction to the Zulu semi-legend. For the journalist, Shaka and Malcolm’s journeys were comparable. Both men experienced the “same breathtakingly fast ascension, the same brutal, dramatic, and inevitable end, the same destiny…the same fascinating adventure.” While “the roots of Shaka’s family tree” grew directly in the African motherland, “the fibers of Malcolm Little-X- El Hadj Mazisi Kunene, Emperor Shaka the Great: A Zulu Epic (Nairobi: East African Educational Pub., 1979), xiii; and Dorothy S Blair, African Literature in French: A History of Creative Writing in French from West and Equatorial Africa (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 96.


52 As Dorothy S. Blair explains, some of the aspects of Shaka’s life have not been historically proven. In a more recent book, Carolyn Hamilton speaks of “academic body servants” who place history at the service of the symbolization of Shaka they embrace. Blair, African Literature in French, 96; Carolyn Hamilton, Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 12.
Malik El Shabbaz’s family tree start from the youngest branch implanted in Nebraska, against its will, and then vertiginously descended in the depth of the generating African roots.” By “passing through the black ghettos of North America,” those fibers “irrigate the black American people with an impetuous yeast of revolutionary awakening.” For this Cameroonian journalist, both Shaka, or, to honor the French historical tradition, “the Black Napoleon,” and Malcolm accomplished the noble tasks of “creating a nation and giving it consciousness,” and awakening black America, respectively. Kala-Lobe related both men’s achievements more or less directly to Africa. He portrayed the black American activist’s “community-driven” action, like that of Shaka, as a product of African culture— which stood in contrast to Western individualism. Further tying Malcolm’s destiny to that of Shaka, Kala-Lobe pointed out that although the former did not undergo the traditional African initiation rite Shaka experienced, he nonetheless made the pilgrimage to Mecca and “received the Supreme Initiation.” Their respective initiations, according to the author, turned them into “Daring Cavaliers on the Path to the Black People’s Liberation… [cavaliers] who proudly caracole under the Arcs de Triomphe of recaptured African Dignity.” In Kala-Lobe’s observations on Shaka and Malcolm’s achievements, Africa stood at the starting and finishing lines of their race for blacks’ rehabilitation. Not only were Shaka and Malcolm inspired by the same primacy given to the community in the African tradition, but they both valiantly fought to clean Africa’s name, long sullied by the West. Further embedding Malcolm’s activism within African folklore, Kala-Lobe posited that the black American leader’s victory had been predicted by the divinatory spider

53 The author’s reference to the Arcs de Triomphe evoked both Roman and Napoleonic grandeur. Erected on Napoleon’s demand in the first half of the 19th century, the Arc de Triomphe de l’Etoile, built in Paris, was meant to echo the Roman tradition and to “accommodate triumphal victory.” Diana Rowell, Paris: The “New Rome” of Napoleon I (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 38.
“Dibobé-la-Ngambi.” Like Maunick’s poem, Kala-Lobe’s tribute to Malcolm placed black Americans’ plight and struggle within the African tradition of resistance.

That Francophone contributors to *Présence Africaine* engaged with the African American freedom movement in the form of a literary exercise is no surprise given the cultural dimensions of the magazine and its mission. Kala-Lobe’s ascription of Malcolm’s driving force to Africa also corresponds to the journal’s quest for African authenticity. Despite *Présence Africaine*’s opening to the black world, beyond the African territory, it seems fair to argue that Africa, its history, traditions, and artistic endeavors occupied the largest place on the group’s agenda. Like African Americans, whose instrumentalist use of African civilization contributed to rehabilitating black American identity, Francophone Africans’ interest in the black American experience was equally self-serving. Malcolm was certainly among the black Americans whose life and activism would have appealed to the Francophone African intellectuals working closely with *Présence Africaine*. Malcolm’s inscription of the black American struggle within the larger African context gave his activism a Panafrican dimension that must have appealed to *Présence Africaine*.

Indeed, whereas a single tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr. appeared in the journal in 1968, Malcolm’s passing was honored with multiple tributes, albeit two years after his death. In 1965, to mark the passing of the latter, the journal published parts of the speech the black American nationalist delivered at the *Salle de la Mutualité* in Paris on 23 November 1964. The section of the black American leader’s speech which the journal chose to feature and entitle “The Black American Community and the African Revolution,” connected the black American and

55 In *The Case against Afrocentrism*, Tunde Adeleke notably explores the “utilizations and representations of Africa” among African Americans. He particularly argues that, in the early twentieth century, African Americans’ efforts to rehabilitate African civilization and counteract Eurocentric accounts of Africa and its peoples derived from African Americans’ need to find a “basis and weapon of struggle.” Adeleke, *The Case against Afrocentrism*, 81–82.
African struggles.\textsuperscript{56} Presenting the Black Nationalist movement to his Francophone audience, Malcolm explained, “our task [consists in] being the hyphen between the people of the African continent and the people of African ancestry in the U.S.” This liaison, he explained, materialized during his trip to Africa where he was able to talk with illustrious African leaders such as the Ghanaian, Guinean, and Tanzanian presidents, respectively Kwame N’Khruma, Sékou Touré, and Julius Nyerere. Their common history of oppression at the hands of the white man, European or American, linked African Americans and Africans’ destinies. Deploying his oratory skills, Malcolm used a football metaphor to convey the idea that emancipated Africans remained under whites’ control. As he pointed out, Europeans only grudgingly relinquished their sovereignty over their colonial possessions and were determined to preserve the advantages which the African continent had provided them. He added, “It’s somewhat similar to someone who plays football: when he is cornered, he does not give up the ball; he passes it to someone who is unmarked. Those colonial powers, those Europeans who were on the African continent were in fact cornered. They were facing nationalists’ hostility…But the U.S. was unmarked and all the colonial powers had to do was to pass the ball to the U.S., and it was John Kennedy who caught it.”\textsuperscript{57} Not only had Europeans and Americans’ team strategy effectively maintained the African continent under white influence, but this new form of imperial domination was all the more pernicious in that it appeared under the guise of solidarity and philanthropy. Malcolm’s counter-strategy was clear: the only way to defeat the West was for Africans and Black Americans to team up against white imperialists.

Malcolm’s combined efforts to link the black American struggle to African fights against colonialism and neocolonialism and to rehabilitate the image of Africa in black Americans’

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 38.
minds seem to explain Présence Africaine’s publication of his Paris speech. However, one cannot help but wonder how significant the black American nationalist’s ideology and activism were for the journal’s editorial team and his readers. Did those excerpts from Malcolm’s speech find their way in the journal simply as a result of his death a few months later? Would the journal have published this piece had Malcolm not been assassinated? Malcolm delivered this speech, hosted by the Société Africaine de Culture (SAC), on 23 November 1964. Although it must have been too late to publish it in the last trimester issue of 1964, it could have certainly been printed in the January-March 1965 issue of the journal; but it was not. Instead, following the magazine’s tribute to Russian ethnologist, Ivan Potekhine, who played an instrumental role in Russian academic interest in Africa, an editor’s note informed readers that since the current issue had already been put together by the time they learned of the black American leader’s death, they would include texts about the man’s life and thought in the following issue of the journal. From that note we may infer that it was Malcolm’s death that motivated the publication of these abstracts of his speech in Présence Africaine. Without this tragic event, who knows if Malcolm’s presentation would have ever appeared in the journal. In fact, it is worth mentioning that the journal had paid no such attention to him prior to his death. His name may have been mentioned, as Chester Himes did in his article “Harlem or America’s cancer,” but his voice was never heard. Malcolm’s illustrious speeches like “Message to the Grassroots” (8 November 1963) or

59 Alioune Diop, founder of Présence Africaine, created the Society Africaine de Culture (SAC) after the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists which took place in Paris in September 1956. This organization, like Présence Africaine, was founded with the objective to unite black men across the world and to facilitate culture interactions among them. Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought, 1st ed., s.v. “The Société Africaine de Culture.”
60 In his piece on the black condition and black American activism in Harlem, Himes presented the Nation of Islam and briefly exposed Malcolm’s ideology, notably his emphasis on black racial pride and his disillusion with the black American middle-class. Chester Himes, “Harlem ou le cancer de l’Amérique,” Présence Africaine 45 (1963): 60.
“The Ballot or the Bullet,” (8 April 1964) which made extensive references to Africa and the Third World did not, and would not, appear in the pages of Présence Africaine.

In addition to making a case for greater solidarity between African Americans and Africans, Malcolm painted a brief portrait of American racial progress in the last two decades so as to show that “external pressures” had precipitated those changes, not the American government’s benevolence.61 For this reason, he concluded his address by asking the audience “to help them in the U.S. [by] very closely following [their] problem. And when they (white Americans) hit [us] and arrest [us], let them know that they should not have done that.”62 The black American activist said little in his speech regarding the African American freedom movement. In fact, historian Manning Marable claims that Malcolm’s “lack of mental focus” after Lyndon B. Johnson’s election to the U.S. presidency had prevented him from following up on his first intention to center his address around “The Black Struggle in the United States.”63 A few questions from the audience, however, invited the black American guest speaker to express his opinion on subjects pertaining to the issue of racial discrimination in the U.S. These subjects included the relevance of nonviolence, the prospects of racial integration under the recently elected American president, the creation of an independent black state in the U.S., or the risk of black Americans’ absorption in the white American majority.64 Still, Présence Africaine’s title of choice for this piece, “The black American community and the African Revolution,” subtly presented the African context as the article’s main subject of interest and, arguably, pushed aide black Americans’ struggle for racial equality. The magazine expected readers to learn about how black Americans related to African emancipation and national developments. According to this

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62 Ibid., 53.
interpretation, if the African American freedom movement was implied in the reference to the ‘black American community,” its relevance was certainly secondary.

*Présence Africaine* also published comments on Malcolm’s speech by Malian author and ethnologist Amadou Hampâté Bâ. The comments he offered at the conference drew attention to the larger significance of Africa, if not for all Francophone Africans in attendance, at least for this member of the audience. The speaker mentioned Malcolm’s reference to whites’ attempt to make blacks feel ashamed of their skin color and their physical traits. Hampâté Bâ reacted to Malcolm’s remark by suggesting that colonial history should be revised to include those “heroes who were able to defend science with a vigor that would deserve to appear in historical annals. For we saw savants from Tombouctou go and teach in Algeria…” Bringing the issue of so-called racial inferiority back to the African context, this Malian ethnologist advocated a solution that he, arguably, meant to apply to recently emancipated Africans more than to black Americans. Furthermore, concurring with Malcolm, Hampâté Ba recognized the importance for Africans to grant the former’s request for “the stump to think of the branches.” Referring to the African initiation rite of the red ant, Hampâté Ba explained that to carry a grasshopper, not only did there need to be more than one ant but the ants carrying the insect had to go in the same direction to be able to take it away. The Malian speaker thus concluded, “because of our under-development, we are like ants.” To “transport and take advantage of their freedom,” Africans and African Americans had to agree on a common direction to follow. As Hampâté Ba clearly put it, it was in Africans’ interest to answer Malcolm’s request. I would not go as far as to claim that Francophone African intellectuals such as Hampâté Ba disregarded the importance of black Americans’ experiences of racial discrimination. However, I would venture to argue that those

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65 Here, I am citing Hampâté Bâ whose reflections were printed after the transcription of Malcolm’s speech. Malcolm X, “La communauté noire américaine et la révolution africaine,” 52-53.

66 Ibid., 52.
intellectuals gathered around *Présence Africaine* adopted a relatively strict Afrocentric approach to black Americans and their struggle.

That the African American freedom movement failed to be relevant in its own right for *Présence Africaine* is further illustrated in African American academic Harold Cruse’s article regarding the path the black revolution should take in the U.S. Cruse started by underlining that the current civil rights movement was a rebellion, not a revolution. Because black leaders and the black masses sought no more than “the equitable distribution of the wealth of a capitalist democracy” and had no desire to modify the American capitalist status-quo, Marxism was irrelevant for a black American revolution.\(^67\) However, Cruise rightly noted, even without seeking to destroy the American capitalist apparatus, black integrationists nonetheless challenged the American capitalist order. Indeed, the full integration of blacks into American society required a transformation of its structures, including at the economic level. For African Americans to fully participate in American economic life, they would have to “reform the structures and administration of the capital and labor coalition,” which white Americans firmly held in their grasp. However, African Americans could not count on progressive social reforms, which, entailing government intervention in the economic sector, would receive strong opposition among the “disciples of the ‘free-enterprise’ religion.” Because of this serious obstacle, African Americans would have to tap into the “most vulnerable sector of the American capitalist front,” from which they would “bring about structural changes in the administration of certain parts of the American economic sector.” This vulnerable sector, Cruse argued, was the cultural sector. He explained that the current American apparatus of the cultural means of communication, “conditional on racial exclusion and the cultural negation of blacks,” failed to take on a “democratic or humanist role” and to adequately “cope with the actual realities of

\(^{67}\) Harold Cruse, “Rebellion et Révolution,” *Présence Africaine* 51 (1964), 43.
Black Americans should thus start by seeking integration in the domain of the arts and strive to bring about “the reforms which would revolutionize, in theory and practice, the administration, organization, working, and social function of the American apparatus of cultural means of communication, which would reside in the hands of the state.” By bringing radical change to this apparatus, African American artists and intellectuals would have a chance to “democratize the social role” of the cultural communications industry. Merging the cultural and the political, Cruse concluded, “the true political task of the black artist is therefore to fight for the democratization of the American apparatus of cultural means of communication in order to allow him to express his ethnic personality and his innate creative originality without restrictions.” Strongly reminiscent of Présence Africaine’s ideology of racial emancipation, the cultural revolution Cruse advocated was therefore a prerequisite for the social revolution African Americans were seeking.

As this brief presentation of Cruse’s ideas clearly shows, culture was at the heart of his blueprint for a black revolution in the U.S. It is therefore easy to imagine how Cruse’s treatment of the black American racial issue appealed to a magazine which was founded on the firm belief in the transformative power of culture. For Cruse, as for the intellectuals of Présence Africaine, culture and politics were not mutually exclusive. The cultural program Cruse recommended had to not only “define the form and content of art, but to also transform the economic, commercial and administrative institutions related to cultural production.” Additionally, Cruse’s understanding of the significance of blacks’ cultural contributions strongly echoes the magazine’s. Twenty years after the foundation of Présence Africaine, Habi, whom I mentioned earlier, identified “intelligence, heart, sensitivity, will, arts or life experience,” as domains where

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69 Ibid., 52, 55, 59, 61.
Africans had a significant cultural contribution to make to the world; “an African way to bring a bit of fresh air in this scientific world where the individual suffocates.”

This contribution, according to the founder of the magazine, consisted in the “recreating of a humanism reflecting the true measure of man.” Cruse’s framing of black artists’ role in American society as a humanist role thus corresponded to a major cultural ambition of Présence Africaine. Moreover, Cruse’s understanding that black artists’ cultural contributions were to have a global impact aligns with Diop’s vision of a universal culture composed in part of African elements. Cruse’s cultural theorization of a potential black American Revolution certainly appealed to Présence Africaine, which, in the words of French journalist Jean Rous, had for “mission to be the witness of and the platform for the … African cultural Revolution.”

Not only did Cruse’s blueprint for a black American revolution mirror Francophone African intellectuals’ cultural ambitions, but it was directly inspired by Présence Africaine’s cultural enterprise. Pointing to the Francophone African effort to rediscover and rehabilitate black cultures, Cruse called for “An American ‘Negritude.’” If African American artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance had sparked the birth of the Négritude movement a few decades earlier, Cruse now encouraged African Americans to “seriously study the role of black culture in American esthetics,” as Senghor told black American writers during a visit to New York. Blaming the American Society of African Culture (AMSAC), the American offshoot of the Société Africaine de Culture (SAC) founded in 1956, for failing to adapt the concept of

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74 Cruse, “Rebellion et Révolution,” 56.
75 On the influences of the Harlem Renaissance on the Francophone Afro-Caribbean movement of Négritude, see Archer Straw, Negrophilia; Dewitte, Les mouvements nègres en France, 1919-1939; Kesteloot, Black writers in French; and Stovall, Paris Noir.
Négritude to the black American community, Cruse pointed out the necessity for black Americans to understand the relevance of culture in their struggle for racial equality. Not only would African Americans have to abandon the mythical idea that culture was an essentially white domain but they would also have to connect the black American cultural revolution to the African revolution. Underlining the Afrocentric dimension of his revolutionary project, Cruse claimed, “black Americans must understand that they represent the cultural contribution of Africa in the general trend of culture.” Cruse rejected black American artists’ current function which, according to him, consisted in “absorbing the crises in favor of the professional promoters of the civil rights movement.” Instead, he recommended that black artists “assimilate the role defined by the Société Africaine de Culture, according to the interest of African artistic creators and intellectuals.” The mission of black American artists was therefore to “affirm, defend, and enrich [their] national cultures…to speak on the meaning of global events and cultural works, in so far as they concern our lives and destiny… to become and make people become aware every day a little more of our responsibility as men of culture…” Like the previous examples analyzed in this chapter, Présence Africaine’s interest in African Americans’ racial experiences largely revolved around strictly Afrocentric concerns.

Cruse’s reference to black artists’ and intellectuals’ role as defined by SAC provides us with insight into what seemed to also define Présence Africaine’s approach to the black world. According to their stated mission, global events appeared significant only in so far as they “concerned [Francophone Africans’] lives and destiny.” This comment sheds light on the magazine’s increasing engagement with the African American freedom movement in the second half of the 1960s. As I mentioned earlier, in addition to publishing the abstracts of Malcolm’s

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77 Ibid., 60.
1964 conference in Paris a few months after his death, Présence Africaine surprisingly paid tribute to the late black American nationalist leader again two years later. In its second trimester 1967 issue, the journal published tributes to the late black nationalists written by white and black Americans, as well as by a French intellectual and a Francophone African author. The radicalization of the African American freedom movement certainly gave new life to Malcolm’s ideology. From the Watts riots in Los Angeles in August 1965 to the July 1966 Hough riots in Cleveland, Ohio, the black American struggle was undeniably taking on a new dimension.  

Since Malcolm was one of the ideological forefathers of the Black Power movement, Présence Africaine may have jumped on the opportunity to revisit his life and thought. In light of the journal’s limited engagement with the African American freedom movement in the last decade or so, however, this sudden interest in Malcolm requires further investigation. Whereas Francophone authors had largely remained silent on African Americans’ racial predicament, in 1967 this trend started to shift. As discussed earlier, a Cameroonian journalist exposed his vision of Malcolm as an iconic figure for the black world whose life and achievements placed him in the lineage of the great Zulu king Shaka. Daniel Guérin, a French intellectual discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, also paid tribute to Malcolm in his article “Malcolm X: Strength and Vulnerability.” A year later, Présence Africaine published another article on the African American freedom movement by Daniel Guérin entitled “Can Black Power Revolutionize the

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In the same issue, Senegalese author and politician Lamine Diakhaté expressed his thoughts on the murders of King and Robert Kennedy. In 1968, Senegalese student Cheikh Tidiane Sy shared his “Tribute to Martin Luther King.”

*Présence Africaine*’s 1967 tribute to Malcolm further illustrates the journal’s interest in black American activism in so far as it directly related to Africa. Eight different pieces composed the magazine’s tribute to late black nationalist leader. French author Daniel Guérin, an African American leader of the Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP) Clifton DeBerry, one of the founding members of the SWP George Breitman, African American intellectual John Henrik Clarke and African American writer Sylvester Leakes, Afro-Cuban author Carlos More, African American writer William Strickland, and Cameroonian journalist Iwiyé Kala-Lobe all testified to the significance of Malcolm’s activism. In addition, the magazine published the charter of the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) which Malcolm founded in 1964 as well as the transcript of a phone conversation between Malcolm and an African American based in Paris after French authorities refused him entry on the French territory. Almost all of the pieces highlighted the late African American activist’s efforts to encompass all blacks in his vision of the struggle and his standing as a “revolutionary, a champion of global decolonization.” In this tribute, the readers of *Présence Africaine* briefly learned about the young Malcolm and the Malcolm X of the Nation of Islam (NOI), but more importantly, they discovered a man who spent the last year of his life accomplishing “one of the most important acts of the twentieth

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82 Cheikh Tidiane Sy, “Homage à Martin Luther King,” *Présence Africaine* 67 (1968), 175-181.
century,” that is “the establishment of an official connection with Africa.”\textsuperscript{84} However, Guérin noted that Malcolm’s effort to build this bridge between the African American and African struggles was hampered by “the crisis which the OAU entered and the progressive shift towards opportunism among the majority of the leaders of Francophone African countries.”\textsuperscript{85} Regardless of the limited extent to which Malcolm had managed to build an effective collaboration with African leaders, his Afrocentric ideology granted him a place in the pages of the magazine.

Of particular interest to the magazine was Malcolm’s ideological transformation following his rupture with the Nation of Islam in March 1964. His break from NOI was followed by his political radicalization. While the Nation of Islam armed the black American leader with racial pride, his two trips to Africa led him to “take a [political] left-turn.”\textsuperscript{86} George Breitman recalled that without any official political commitment to the SWP—leader of the NOI Elijah Muhammad prohibited Black Muslims from engaging in any political activity—Malcolm frequently bought the party’s newspaper, \textit{The Militant}, and encouraged African Americans to read it.\textsuperscript{87} Exactly a month after the NOI’s best spokesman announced to \textit{New York Times} reporter M.S. Handler that had he decided to leave the Nation, he delivered the first of three speeches hosted by the Militant Labor Forum in New York on the subject of “The Black Revolution.”\textsuperscript{88} Despite this rapprochement with American radicals, however, Malcolm’s political radicalization was decidedly influenced by his encounter with leaders of the African continent. His contact


\textsuperscript{87} Breitman, “La dernière année de Malcolm X,” 49.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 51; Marable, \textit{Malcolm X}, 293.
with Africa helped him grasp the nature of the relation between the American civil rights
movement and the colonial and semi-colonial revolutions taking place on other continents. He
recognized that the enemies of the oppressed and exploited people of Africa and Asia were the
same ones who controlled racism in America… [and that] capitalism was the source of racism,
exploitation, and oppression in the whole world.”

DeBerry identified Malcolm’s discussion
with the Algerian ambassador to Ghana as a major turning point in the black American activist’s
path to becoming a revolutionary. In response to “the idea that the Black Man needs to control
the economy of his community, [and] the politics of his community,” which Malcolm defined as
Black Nationalism, the Algerian ambassador asked where his people stood in the global struggle
against racial oppression. Conceding that Algerians, “who were whites,” in Malcolm’s words,
were on his side—and that they had fought a successful revolution against colonial and racial
oppression—the black American activist was forced to reevaluate his position on Black
Nationalism and to develop a global philosophy that would unite the struggles of all the
oppressed peoples of the world.

Less than a month after his return from his second trip to
Africa, Malcolm set out to share the value of socialism with the Harlem blacks gathered at an
OAAU meeting. He started by noting that almost all African countries that obtained
independence installed a socialist regime in their new nations. He continued by pointing out to
his Harlemite crowd that African people’s need for better housing, education, nutrition, and
clothing was what justified African leaders’ adoption of a socialist regime. With their need for
work, better housing, and education, black Americans should therefore consider the socialist
option. As DeBerry and Breitman explained, the political radicalization that marked Malcolm’s
last year of activism was directly tied to his growing contact with the African world. Certainly,

90 Ibid., 40-41.
91 George Breitman, “La dernière année de Malcolm X,” 57.
an intellectual and cultural enterprise such as *Présence Africaine*, dedicated to shedding light on African contributions to the world, found Malcolm’s late activism relevant. The following issue of the magazine, devoting special attention to Marxism in the African context, further denotes the relevance of DeBerry and Breitman’s discussions.\(^2\)

The OAAU charter published in the magazine not only highlighted the organization’s link between blacks of African descent and Africans, but it also laid out a major aspect of the black American leader’s mission which illustrate a level of ideological affinity with the intellectuals gathered around *Présence Africaine*. The program started by tracing the roots of the organization back to Africa by pointing out that the OAAU “was modeled after the Organization of African Unity founded at Addis-Abeba, Ethiopia in 1963.”\(^3\) Moreover, the organization’s constitution affirmed that “the Organization of Afro-American Unity would include all the peoples of African origin in the western hemisphere as well as [their] brothers and sisters of the African continent.” Malcolm’s desire to unite people of African descent in the U.S. and other parts of the world with Africans was thus at the core of the organization’s foundation. But another important aspect of this program that must have been of interest to *Présence Africaine* was the emphasis it placed on culture, which it qualified as the “vital weapon for [blacks’] struggle for freedom.” The “cultural revolution” that the organization advocated required black Americans to reconnect with Africa, “a vast continent with proud and diverse peoples, a land which is the new world and the cradle of civilization.” Freeing blacks from the burden of white supremacy, this cultural revolution was the means through which African Americans would

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“rediscover themselves.” Like Cruse’s program of cultural revolution, OAAU’s emphasis on culture closely mirrored the convictions held by the Francophone Africans affiliated with *Présence Africaine*. In so far as the program of OAAU validated the noble design underpinning the project of *Présence Africaine*, its publication in the magazine makes much sense.

The mainly Afrocentric and cultural ambition of the magazine undeniably justified its interest in Malcolm’s activism. However, the reader may understandably wonder what explains that the Francophone African magazine would dedicate a tribute to the late African American activist two years after his death, especially when it had already done so in the months following his assassination. I would suggest that Francophone Africans’ growing awareness of a new imperialist threat for the African continent made Malcolm’s internationalist and systemic approach to the African American struggle relevant to the Francophone African intellectuals of *Présence Africaine*. The theme of American imperialism was another important subject that transpired in some of the articles published as a tribute to Malcolm. Recalling a conversation he had had with Malcolm in a French café in November 1964, Carlos More mentioned that the former understood blacks’ current struggle as that of “the non-whites against the imperialist Occident,” a struggle that placed Asians on the same side as blacks. The most extensive discussion of Malcolm’s activism in the global context of imperialism, however, came from Daniel Guérin. The French author claimed that as early as 1962, when the black American activist gave a talk at Yale University, he “started expressing himself as a revolutionary, a champion of global decolonization. He literally put his finger in the wound of Uncle Sam, eaten up inside by the ‘black tumor,’ and put to trial outside, in Cuba and elsewhere.”

Looking at Malcolm’s assassination from the angle of a conspiracy theory, Guérin argued that this black

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95 More, “Malcolm…Je me souviens,” 86.
American’s efforts to work toward “an anti-imperialist solidarity…on the global scene,” was making him “a dreadful adversary for American imperialism.” By getting rid of Malcolm, Guérin concluded, the U.S. managed to “eliminate the black American leader the most attached to global anti-imperialism.” Putting European nations on the same footing as the U.S., Guérin reported the words of Malcolm’s personal secretary James Shabbaz who claimed that the French and British authorities’ refusal to allow the black American nationalist entrance in their respective countries had much to do with the presence of African and Muslim minorities in those countries who continued to be oppressed. This example confirmed that Malcolm was a “thorn in the side of a power apparatus that was committed to starting a war in Asia against other non-white peoples.”

Illustrating Malcolm’s engagement with American imperialism, More recalled that when the former encountered African American soldiers stationed in France, he insisted they did not go to Congo or Vietnam to “fight against our own brothers to the benefit of Uncle Sam.” Malcolm’s revolutionary engagement against neo-imperialism must have also appealed to Francophone Africans, who were increasingly expressing their dismay at the frailty of the Third World’s postcolonial independence.

In the following year, Francophone Africans’ growing wariness in the face of imperialism appeared more clearly in Présence Africaine. In the magazine’s last issue of 1967, poet Maunick, introduced poems by South African, Congolese and black American writers Ezekiel Mphahlele, Tchicaya U. Tam’si, and LeRoi Jones. These poems, in Maunick’s words, best illustrated “the soul of those ‘capitals of pain’” that were South Africa, Congo and Harlem. Expressing his anger at the Congolese mercenaries who, in their attempt to overthrow Congolese president Mobutu and replace him with the exiled Congolese leader Moise Tshombe, “devastated

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the land,” the Mauritian poet claimed “he hated even more the powers which financed such crimes in the shadow.”

In 1965, General Mobutu accessed the presidency of the Democratic Republic of Congo thanks to “the mercenaries and Washington.”

In 1967, when the mercenaries turned against him, the Congolese president received American military aid.

As Maunick’s reference illustrates, Francophone blacks expressed greater concern over international interventions in Africa. In the same issue, Diakhaté authored a book review on American journalist Cyrus Leo Sulzberger’s *Unfinished Revolution: America and the Third World* published in 1965. We should start by pointing out that like the journal’s 1967 tribute to Malcolm, Diakhaté’s review concerned a book that was published two years earlier. In his article, the Senegalese author signaled that Africans’ emancipation and the creation of African nations shook the world. This apparition must have disturbed the tranquility of the Big nations and forced them to revise their attitude regarding a fact that they were far from expecting. Therefore, here and there politics were conceived on the basis of paternalism or uncompromising rejection. In the name of the Occident’s ‘enlightened interests.’ For the United States, the Third World could not represent but a conglomerate of countries whose common denominator was ‘poverty and a solid inferiority complex.’ With the significance of this situation in the game of the Big players of this world in the back of their minds, they had to do something.

Completing this cynical analysis, Diakhaté pointed to American policy with regards to South Africa, where gold, diamond, and uranium fed American capitalism, and North Africa, where natural resources and military bases further served American economic and political interests. As for the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, the U.S. was constrained to adopt a policy of “charity” simply

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103 Lamine Diakhaté, “Les Etats-Unis et le tiers monde, de C.L. Sulzberger,” *Présence Africaine* 63 (1967), 249; [author’s ellipsis].
to prevent the growing influence of Arab socialism to take hold in those areas where, in Sulzberger’s words, the situation was “unsolvable.” With a hint of sarcasm, Diakhaté concluded, “it is a big responsibility to want to act for two billion men and women who have decided to take their destiny into their own hands and who, consequently, refuse to grant proxy to the most… disinterested good Samaritan.”104 This last remark clearly suggests that Diakhaté was suspicious as to the U.S.’s pretensions to care about the triumph of auto-determination, as professed by former president Woodrow Wilson and brandished by successive American governments ever since World War II. Maunick and Diakhaté’s discussions reveal a growing concern among Francophone Africans regarding the not-so-well disguised face of imperialism.

Diakhaté’s reaction to the assassination of Martin Luther King further exemplifies Francophone Africans’ growing concern with American imperialism. Although Diakhaté did not explicitly refer to “imperialism” in his article “From Martin Luther King to Robert Kennedy,” he nonetheless stressed the international role the U.S. had assumed in the last couple of decades. Diakhaté opened his discussion by affirming that the murder of these “two citizens of the world’s most powerful country” had made “the rest of the world astounded in the face of the powerlessness of material power to find human solutions to life problems.”105 This Senegalese author’s commentary reflects Francophone Africans’ mission to instill a dose of humanity in a world increasingly dominated by technology, as theorized by the men participating in Présence Africaine’s venture. Acknowledging the inevitable tensions that resulted from the union of a disparate group of “nations” into one country as vast as the United States, Diakhaté noted that by 1963 or 1968, American internal tensions no longer remained a purely domestic matter. Because the U.S. “had voiced and sought to materialize its aspiration to control the world,” the murder of

two of its most fervent defenders of equal rights and economic justice acquired a significance that crossed the American national frontiers. Cognizant of the pressure weighing on the U.S., engaged in an ideological race with the Soviet Union to win the Third World’s adherence to their respective concepts of modernity, Diakhaté recognized that “the U.S. suffered the instinctive fear of budding nations.” Aware of the necessity to address American internal tensions in this global context, President John F. Kennedy embarked on the journey to establish a “New Frontier” with “the desire to push the frontiers of absurdity back and to blow a wind of justice in the country.” His assassination could have cut this American impetus towards progress short; however, a man whom Diakhaté described as “a poor man with bare hands,” Martin Luther King, took on the fight that had inspired hope to “the twenty millions of underprivileged people cramped in the ghettos.” It was this noble effort, Diakhaté suggested, that cost King his life. If Robert Kennedy’s dedication to keep the flame of his brother’s “New Frontier” ablaze could comfort the ghettos of America and people around the world, his assassination further hampered the long American march towards progress. The ghettos of America would have to wait.

The reader cannot help but notice Diakhaté’s flawed characterization of King, who belonged to the privileged black middle class, as a “poor man.” Striking as well is the author’s Marxian conceptualization of King’s activism as one that called for “a little more justice and equity in the relations which determined the enjoyment of produced goods.” Senegalese student Cheikh Tidiane Sy’s tribute to King echoed this characterization of King’s activism. Sy affirmed that King had understood that to solve the contemporary “American drama,” it was necessary to strike at the roots of the evil that was eating up American society. His intellectual authority and his distinguished thinking abilities had

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106 Diakhaté, “De Martin Luther King à Robert Kennedy,” 154.
109 Ibid., 154.
allowed him to apprehend the problems of American society with a great lucidity. Solving the black problem, putting an end to the war in Vietnam, and giving more attention to the conditions of the poor, be they black or white, such were the goals of his action within the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.\(^{110}\)

The black American activist that both Diakhaté and Sy were referring to was mainly a post-1965, refashioned King who was making his transition from racial integration and political rights to economic justice and anti-imperialism. In the same way that Malcolm’s activism within the Nation of Islam bore little interest for the magazine, King’s ten-year struggle against segregation and black disfranchisement appeared less significant to both Senegalese authors.

Still, in the late 1960s, the journal appeared to take a more political approach to the black American experience. This shift notably found expression in the editorial “The People’s Power and the Revolution of Civilization” published in the same issue of the magazine which featured Diakhaté’s discussion of the King and the Kennedy murders.\(^{111}\) In this editorial, Présence Africaine drew conclusions on the significance of the recent wave of student protests, especially those which shook Paris in May 1968. In those events, the magazine saw the sign of a “crisis of western civilization” which “concerned the whole world.” Those protests especially demonstrated that the youth “whose minds banged into its fundamental horizons” was rejecting “the limits and constraints of their civilization.” In complement to what appeared to be a western revolution, the editorial insisted, the Third World should lead their own revolution, one that “filled the gap between the elite and the people.” In the African context, this revolution would fulfill the “need for a political power deriving from the same direct democracy,” whose authority rested both on the elite and the people. In order to reach this goal, the editorial pointed out that “culture, in the classical sense of the term” no longer served people’s goal to “control their scientific and social development, as well as their political destiny.” Instead of thinking in terms

\(^{110}\) Cheikh Tidiane Sy, “Hommage à Martin Luther King,” Présence Africaine 67 (1968), 175.

of “cultural conflicts,” Présence Africaine proposed to frame contemporary global challenges in terms of “relations of civilizations.” For our purpose, this editorial is significant in so far as it testified to the magazine’s intellectual engagement with the youth’s growing discontent, its recognition of a western crisis, its identification of a crippling rupture between the elite and the people, and finally its disposition to frame contemporary global issues beyond the realm of culture.

Indeed, this editorial seems to shed light on the relevance of Guérin’s article examining the extent to which Black Power was likely to revolutionize American society. Further drawing on the imperialist theme he brought up in his discussion of Malcolm, the French author highlighted the connection between the American war in Vietnam and the contemporary black American experience. Not only was Johnson’s War on Poverty hampered by the Vietnam War, but the proportion of black soldiers sent to Vietnam (22% of American troops) outnumbered black representation in American society (11% of the American population). Guérin proceeded to explain that this overrepresentation of blacks fighting in Vietnam resulted from the channeling operating under the Selective Service System, allowing privileged college students—most of them white—to obtain a deferment, and drafting those less privileged young men for whom college was not an option. The result was that the U.S. “threw masses of unemployed black boys in the army and the hell of Vietnam.” Reporting the words of Black Power activist Rap Brown, the disproportionate drafting of black men and the high number of black casualties led to “a true genocide.” Making the black American experience in the war more relevant to the Francophone African readership, Guérin drew a parallel with the “colonized of Africa and Asia

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112 Daniel Guérin, “Le pouvoir noir peut-il révolutionner les Etats-Unis?” 112.
[who] had been used by western imperialists in two world wars.” The socioeconomic depravation of blacks in American society and their subsequent use as “cannon fodder” in the Vietnam War thus brought a new generation of African Americans on the front scene of black activism in the U.S. Advocating for black political and economic self-determination, this new brand of black activists differed from its predecessors in that it was composed of young black men as opposed to older black elites. Unlike the black elites, who “resorted to progressive, legal action” to obtain full integration within American society, the young black leaders of the Black Power movement were driven by a “revolutionary consciousness” that “no longer hesitated to question the [American] capitalist regime” and that pulled the masses along with them.\textsuperscript{115}

Guérin’s exposition of current developments on the black American scene, the youth’s open protest against a capitalist “civilization” that continued to fail them and the black masses, and their lighting up and running with the torch long held by their elite elders, thus strongly echoed \textit{Présence Africaine}’s editorial on “The Power of the People and the Revolution of Civilization.”

The priority granted to culture in Francophone blacks’ quest for racial emancipation by the founders of \textit{Négritude} in the late 1930s conditioned Francophone Africans’ responses to African Americans and their struggle for racial equality in the 1950s and 1960s. As the most famous expression of \textit{Négritude} after World War II, \textit{Présence Africaine} carried on the quest for the rehabilitation of the African civilization and the “African personality.”\textsuperscript{116} It is from this strictly Afrocentric angle that the Francophone African intellectuals participating in the \textit{Présence Africaine} venture primarily approached the African American experience. In hindsight, the

\textsuperscript{115} Daniel Guérin, “Le pouvoir noir peut-il révolutionner les Etats-Unis?” 112-114, 118.

\textsuperscript{116} The notion of “African personality,” central to the \textit{Négritude} movement, refers to Africans’ quest for “self-understanding and self-projection.” As John S. Mbiti points out, advocates of “African personality” had different understandings of the concept. However, generically, the concept symbolized Africans’ “search for new values, foundations, and identity.” F. Abiola Irele, \textit{The Negritude Moment}, 91; and John S Mbiti, \textit{African Religions & Philosophy} (Oxford: N.H.: Heinemann, 1999), 262.
ideological tensions between the Francophone and American delegations at the 1956 Congress of Black Writers and Artists predicted the parameters within which Francophone Africans would engage with African Americans and their struggle. As the examples discussed above demonstrate, it was what the authors perceived as the African dimensions of the African American experience that mostly triggered Francophone Africans’ interest. If the deeply cultural nature of the magazine relegated the black American political experiment to the margins, African American activism nonetheless received attention. The Afrocentric and anti-imperialist components of Malcolm’s ideology, for example, captured Francophone Africans’ attention. Francophone Africans’ growing concern with the new imperialist threat increased their attentiveness to the African American freedom movement. However, as the following discussion will suggest, Présence Africaine’s greater engagement with the radical elements of the African American freedom movement did not translate into as harsh a condemnation of the West as that expressed by the authors of “Black Americans for Africans.”

The significance of the African American freedom movement for the Francophone African community was further illustrated in the May-June 1964 issue of Réalités Africaines, the bimonthly magazine of the Bureau d’Etudes des Réalités Africaines (B.E.R.A.). Founded by a group of African students in Paris in 1962, B.E.R.A. was an organization dedicated to research in African history and the current problems faced by Africans.117 In this issue, entitled “Black Americans for Africans,” Jean-Pierre N’Diaye, general secretary of B.E.R.A., J. Bassène and P. Poyas explored the history of the Black American community and underlined the significance of their current struggle for Africans. The authors of “Black Americans for Africans” thus framed their analysis of the history of the African American community within the larger context of

African history. The authors’ desire to reevaluate different aspects of African history justified their interest in familiarizing the Francophone African community with the experience of their black American counterparts. The preface to this study highlighted the sense of racial identification which tied Francophone African authors to African Americans: “The task which we have undertaken is not similar to that of practitioners who, motivated by humanistic or romantic condescension, examine a foreign, moving or interesting subject, but is rather that of men who deeply feel the most cruel sufferings and injustices ever known by Man and imposed on a part of our people: Black Americans.”\textsuperscript{118} Black Americans’ African ancestry explained Francophone Africans’ emotional engagement with the former’s history and current condition. However, as the authors insisted, their acute sense of identification with black Americans derived from their common experience of oppression.

The authors identified African decolonization as a propitious moment to explore African American history and to “inform [their] peoples and elites of the solidarity of struggle and goals which tie [them] to [their] black American brothers.” The relevance of the African American experience for Africans stemmed from both peoples’ relation to European domination. For their own enrichment, Europeans turned to Africans who were dragged out of their motherland with the purpose of exploiting their labor in the New World. While the Atlantic slave trade used Africans as economic assets, later colonization of Africa similarly exploited African natural resources. African Americans’ and Africans’ historical experiences were thus tied to “a sole point of convergence: Europe, the Occident. One sole result: Western economic expansion and the radical destruction of African societies drained of their men and their land, of their lives.” Familiarizing Africans with African American history would increase the former’s awareness of

the “order imposed by the West on the whole world.” For African Americans and Africans’ lives were both “the product of Europe’s domination of Africa,” Africans’ quest to recover their history had to incorporate the experiences of African descendants in the U.S.  

These authors viewed the African American experience as relevant to Africans’ cultural and political goals. Unlike other Francophone African commentators who saw sensible differences between Africans and African Americans’ situations, these authors stressed the commonalities shared by both groups. To demonstrate the common oppression that bound Africans and African Americans, the authors established “the facts: in the U.S. as in Africa, unemployment, hunger, low salaries, illiteracy, segregation, in short, rejection.” Ever since the enslavement of millions of Africans, the white Man’s greed had placed people of color from around the world, especially blacks, in a perpetual position of oppression. Indeed, the authors’ Marxian analysis led them to conclude that both Africans and African Americans were victims of a “racist ideology in the service of economic interests.” Africans’ and African Americans’ common subjection in a racist order meant that they continued to share the same cultural heritage. If for a number of Francophone African commentators, African Americans had irreversibly become Americans, for these authors, racial and economic oppression had contributed to the maintenance of black Americans’ Africanness: “If there exist differences between the black from Washington and the one from the Caribbean, between the Cameroonian and the Senegalese… the fact remains that all those blacks scattered across the globe and conditioned by various economic, political and cultural systems, all have in common the same

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120 The following chapter, exploring representations of the African American freedom movement in the Senegalese, Ivorian, and Guinean press, points out Francophone Africans’ expressions of alienation between their own and African Americans’ experiences.
121 N’Diaye, Bassène, Poyas, “Les noirs aux Etats-Unis pour les africains,” 166.
expressions, the same cultural approaches inherent to their roots: Africa.” In the same Marxian vein, this “superstructure,” i.e. in this case, blacks’ common cultural heritage, resulting from their common oppression, legitimated Africans’ identification with African Americans in the eyes of the authors.

By drawing further parallels between the African American trajectory in the U.S. and that of Africans in the colonial and “postcolonial” worlds, the authors reflected on African politics following independence. African Americans’ long history of oppression was also relevant in so far as it exemplified an order in which blacks had consistently occupied the lower rank. African Americans’ four hundred years of oppression revealed that “white Americans have never been willing to share their power with blacks, which they consider as others.” For the authors, the example of white Americans’ grip on power applied to whites as a whole and should inform Africans’ position towards European powers: “If we have deliberately chosen to present facts and to demonstrate Western domination of Africa through the example of blacks in the U.S. in this study, it is because many of our compatriots are wrong regarding the nature of relations between Africa and the West.” To those Africans who saw in decolonization the expression of the West’s goodwill to integrate African countries in the concert of nations and to share with them their centuries-long hold on power, African Americans’ continuing oppression should constitute a wake-up call. As their study of the black American problem showed, white American society had always refused to “pay the price, that is to abandon their domination.” In the same way that “the true integration of blacks in American society would mean the falling apart of a system and an ideology: capitalism,” the study insisted, “the development of Africa

122 The following chapter will provide examples of Francophone Africans’ perception of African Americans as primarily American. N’Diaye, Bassène, Poyas, “Les noirs aux Etats-Unis pour les africains,” 165.
would mean the regression of European development.” The Western powers would therefore never allow “full economic integration” to Africa and relinquish “their power and the riches they have gotten hold of, and still do, in the countries they dominated for five centuries.”

Extrapolating from the long history of blacks’ oppression in the hands of white Americans, the authors warned deluded Africans about the unlikeliness of their full integration in the postcolonial world order.

The Francophone African authors’ Marxian analysis also informed their views on the African American freedom movement and African politics, as well as their respective actors. They exposed a parallel between American integrationist politics and Western politics of economic integration for emancipated African countries. According to the authors, both politics were nothing more than whites’ make-believe gestures to maintain the colored peoples of the world in the illusion of progress. Speaking of civil rights politics and postcolonial assistance to decolonized countries in Africa, the study affirmed, “The solutions are offered by the dominators: to the blacks of the United States, the American government offers integration, promised for more than a century but never applied and more than ever problematic. To Africa, ‘international organizations’ offer an aid, multiple aids: in other words, the means to let Africans believe in an ‘integration’ among nations.”

Blinded by the illusion of power, black integrationists and the African elite, respectively composing the black American and the African bourgeoisie, embraced those solutions. As the authors argued, black American advocates of racial integration and the African elite “presented indisputable analogies.” Both communities were the products of the expansion of western capitalism, in the U.S. as in Europe. Black American integrationists, or the black bourgeoisie, forming the leadership of SCLC, the Student

124 Ibid., 175.
126 Ibid., 103, 133, 137-38, 140, 143.
Nonviolence Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) had for their main objective “to ‘integrate’ into white American society. They have accumulated money, and so, they want the right to buy a house in a previously all-white neighborhood, stay in a room in a white hotel, eat in fashionable restaurants, and occupy a well-paid management position.” In that sense, their “viewpoint on the racial question in the United States differs markedly from that of a great majority of blacks, members of the poor class.” To the extent that the black American bourgeoisie continued to occupy a marginal position in the American capitalist order, the authors concluded that they “could be considered as the most successful prototype of colonial alienation. In that way, [they] strangely resemble the African bourgeoisie after African nations’ accession to independence.” The authors cynically concluded that being in the “capital-money camp” and “drawing their revenue from the masses,” neither the black American bourgeoisie nor the African bourgeoisie were “favorable to a collective liberation of the masses.”

This rift between the bourgeoisie and the masses found its equivalent in different brands of leadership on the American and African scenes. In the American context, the authors took as examples King and the Nation of Islam’s approaches to the March on Washington. While the pastor “marched side by side with State Department officials… the black Muslims boycotted the march, denouncing it as a parade and a clear fraud.”\(^\text{127}\) Black American integrationists’ adoption of a nonviolent and legalistic approach, which progressed “at a snail’s pace,” was justified by their wariness of “losing the support of white liberals and threatening [their] supreme objective: the sacred ‘desegregation’ that can only be conceded by whites.” Black Muslims, on the other hand, believed that blacks’ desire for integration boiled down to “committing the unforgivable error of believing in whites’ good will and dissociating racial domination from economic

\(^{127}\) N’Diaye, Bassène, Poyas, “Les noirs aux Etats-Unis pour les Africains,” 143.
domination.” Similarly, at the 1957 Congress of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), Francophone African leader and later Ivorian president Félix Houphouët-Boigny pushed for “the establishment of the Franco-African Community at the expense of the African Community.” All the while, his nemesis, Guinean Sékou Touré “boycotted the French National Assembly and, at the Bamako Congress, stressed the objectives defined by the African masses in the Chart of the RDA,” i.e. to prioritize the African community and independence.128 Placing their personal interests over those of the black masses, black American integrationists and members of the African elite like Houphouët-Boigny were therefore disparaged by the authors as the white Man’s puppets. Disregarding the plight of African Americans and the oppressed peoples of Africa, the black bourgeoisie of America and Africa were thus “stuck in the illusion of gained independence, the African elite appears alien to black Americans’ problems—in the same way that it is alien to the problems of the African masses, and this for the same reasons: they persist in not seeing the parallels between Africans’ problems and the black American problem.”129 As this last quotation suggests, the opportunism of the African elite resulted not only in their disinterest in the African masses, but also in their disengagement with the plight of African Americans.

Africans’ desire to carve a meaningful role for themselves in the postcolonial world order was accompanied by their conscious effort to distance themselves from African Americans. Citing the examples of African diplomats and African students in the U.S., the authors claimed that the former “hurried to display their passport to prove that, if they were indeed black, they

were nonetheless African, thereby breaking off their solidarity with African Americans and playing the racists’ game.” Lured into the opportunity to share in the power of the West, African leaders and students discarded their racial identification with African Americans. The authors, defenders of Pan-African solidarity, condemned Africans’ dissociation from their black American counterparts in so far as it precluded blacks’ emancipation as a whole. By “forgetting the necessary solidarity with [their] oppressed brothers,” Africans proved to be “unaware of the precarious nature of gained independence.” Africans’ alienation from African Americans was all the more tragic in that only Pan-African solidarity, founded on a common history of oppression, held the key to the liberation of all black men. Because “the power and flourishing of the entire Occident rely on [blacks’] oppression,” Africans’ true emancipation would only come with the destruction of the white-dominated world system.\footnote{N’Diaye, Bassène, Poyas, “Les noirs aux Etats-Unis pour les Africains,” 169, 175.} Black Americans’ empowerment and liberation should therefore occupy an important position on Africans’ postcolonial agenda.

discussing expressions of racism in the U.S., Belgian Congo, Great Britain, and the French metropolitan and colonial territories, Maddy Lastel evoked the unique nature of racism. After citing various examples of racial prejudices in different contexts, Lastel affirmed that “once unmasked, racism has the same appearance everywhere.” Just because seventeenth and eighteenth-century racist arguments no longer held the same popularity did not mean that racism had disappeared, or, in fact, changed. For this author, the immutability of racism resulted from the economic context which gave birth to it, a context that had not changed either. Indeed, Lastel argued that “racism was born out of an economic structure which, from mercantilism to liberal capitalism, has only changed by name.” Like N’Diaye and his co-authors, Lastel understood racial oppression as the product of and the condition for a global economic order dominated by whites. Lastel added that racism was “nothing more than the passionate expression of a frustration that is offset by hatred for the other. Who else, but blacks, perceived as direct economic competitors, could better personify the “other,” with their weird color?” As illustrated in Lastel’s discussion of racism, the bond uniting Africans and African Americans stemmed from more than a common African ancestry. According to her analysis, the basis for Francophone Africans’ solidarity with black Americans primarily derived from their common subjection to a white capitalist world order.

Francophone African students’ reactions to King’s assassination in April 1968 also illustrated their understanding of racism and capitalism as deeply intertwined. On the occasion of King’s death, George Biwole printed extracts from King’s sermons published in the 1963 collection *Strength to Love*, in which the pastor had expressed divine will to see the white Man

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134 Lastel, “De l’inactualité du racisme,” 44.
put an end to his economic and psychological oppression of the colored Man, both in the colonial world and the U.S. Underlining the economic tension behind King’s murder, Biwole commented, “The rich, selfish, racist, and criminal exploiters did not want to hear those words and they killed him.” Although King’s reference to economic exploitation only constituted a fragment of his condemnation of Western colonial and racial oppression — King had also referred to the political domination and dehumanization of colored people — Biwole’s remark highlighted the money-hungry temperament of white oppressors. Louis-Paul Ngongo’s elegy for King also stressed the economic dimensions of oppression. Ngongo conceived of King’s activism primarily in economic terms as the following direct address to the late civil rights leader illustrates: “As for you, whose material comfort has never isolated you from the underprivileged, you have shared the plight of millions of oppressed people… There are armies of them in Africa and Asia, even in the opulent and savage America.” In addition to “inscribing (his) name on the honor roll where one can already find Lutuli” and Ghandi, according to the author, King’s merit lay in his ability to step down to the level of the economically downtrodden. Unfortunately, King’s sacred bravery faced an almighty obstacle: “The country of America, whose only God is the dollar.” King’s prayers for a racism-free United States could not defeat American faith in capitalism. As Biwole and Ngongo’s commentaries on the assassination of King demonstrate, key Marxian principles permeated Francophone African Catholic students’ understanding of American racial dynamics and the phenomenon of racism as a whole.

At this point, readers may well wonder how a Catholic publication voiced such a Marxian perspective on racial, colonial and neo-colonial phenomena. A 1955 article on “Political Awakening and Religious Consciousness,” by French Caribbean author Robert Charlery-Adèle,

136 Louis-Paul Ngongo, “A Martin Luther King, Jr.,” Tam-Tam (January-June 1968), 5.
may help us make sense of this apparent incongruity.\textsuperscript{137} In this largely autobiographical article, Charlery-Adèle sought to explain the appeal of Marxist ideology among Caribbean students in Paris, which \textit{Tam-Tam} found to be relatively representative of African students’ experiences upon their arrival in France. According to the author, the Caribbean students’ internal struggle triggered by contact with the French metropole created “a climate (…) favorable to the intervention of the Marxist militant, whose influence will bring in the former an intense social awakening.” By providing tormented students with clues to understand and combat their underprivileged position, French Marxists cultivated in those individuals “a powerful political consciousness,” if one that was “at first, more sentimental than reasoned.”\textsuperscript{138} This understanding of the appeal and function of Marxism among Caribbean students strongly echoes—former Communist—African American author Richard Wright’s views on the role of Marxist ideology for colonized peoples. Speaking of Asians’ and Africans’ quest to make sense of their past and present predicament, Wright argued, “[They] look into this or that theory to find an idea of what has happened to [them] and [their] kind. And when [they] select a theory, whether it be Marxism or any other revolutionary doctrine, [they are] not so much concerned emotionally with whether that theory is \textit{right} or \textit{wrong}, but whether it fits [their] feelings and most nearly describes what [they] see and feel.”\textsuperscript{139} In the French context, Caribbean and African students’ trying experiences in the metropole led to an “inevitable encounter with Marxist thought.”\textsuperscript{140} According to the author, however, this encounter should rather serve as a “springboard for [those students]’ spiritual ascent.” Armed with this new political consciousness, students from overseas should turn towards the Catholic Church to find practical solutions to their condition. As the “explicit

\textsuperscript{137} Robert Charlery-Adèle, “Eveil politique et conscience religieuse,” \textit{Tam-Tam} (December 1955), 6.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 7-8.
\textsuperscript{140} Charlery-Adele, “Eveil politique et conscience religieuse,” \textit{Tam-Tam}, 14.
and imperative requirement of a true charity,” achieving “greater social justice” was in fact among the Catholic Church’s duties.\textsuperscript{141}

That \textit{Tam-Tam}’s analyses of racial and colonial phenomena were driven by a Marxian outlook thus seems to have derived from the important function Marxism served in African students’ political awareness. Although Africans’ and Antilleans’ experiences of racism in France must have differed, their encounter with France N’Diaye’s 1961 survey of African students in Paris corroborates Charlery-Adele’s remark on the influence of Marxism on the young African immigrant. Asked what authors had most influenced them in their general education, a majority of the surveyed students identified Marx and Lenin.\textsuperscript{142} However, as Charlery-Adele discussion suggests, Francophone African Catholic students chose to inscribe their combat for human liberation within the Christian tradition of brotherly love.

\textit{Tam-Tam}’s Christian commitment to denouncing human inequalities also shaped the magazine’s treatment of the civil rights movement in the U.S. That the Christian nature of the publication influenced its relation to black Americans’ struggle for racial equality was notably visible though the special attention it gave to King, both his philosophy and his activism. For example, in 1965, \textit{Tam-Tam} reviewed two of the pastor’s most influential books: \textit{Strength to Love} and \textit{Why We Can’t Wait}. In the January-February 1965 issue of \textit{Tam-Tam}, Ngongo briefly exposed the main tenets of King’s nonviolent philosophy and form of activism. The Christian doctrines of brotherly love and redemptive suffering, at the core of King’s nonviolent ideology, must have appealed to Francophone African Catholic students, who had been framing their own spirit of protest within the confines of Christian humanitarianism. For Ngongo, \textit{Strength to Love}

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\textsuperscript{141} Charlery-Adele, “Eveil politique et conscience religieuse,” 12.
\textsuperscript{142} N’Diaye explained that for African students, revolutionary and Marxist authors fell under the same category. The author most cited by Francophone African students (19.7%) was Rousseau; then came Marx (15%) and Lenin (13%) Jean-Pierre N’Diaye, \textit{Enquête sur les étudiants noirs en France} (Paris: Éditions “Réalités africaines,” 1962), 148.
\end{footnotesize}
was “a book for the youth, a testimony for the young people who are anxious to … build a fairer, more humane world in order to save Man entirely, body and soul, in his dignity as the Son of God.”

According to Ngongo, the African youth needed to “meditate” King’s book, with the “firm resolution to take action.” As N’Diaye’s survey of African students revealed, many of these young Africans expressed concerns over the opportunism and corruption of African political leaders whose greed and thirst for power allowed for Africa to become prey to neo-colonialism. African students’ disaffection with neo-imperialism and the unfinished process of decolonization on the African continent was clearly expressed in Tam-Tam. In a 1961 editorial, Tam-Tam pointed out African students’ disillusion; “deceived and misled in their aspirations, [students] are witnessing the development of a neo-colonialism in the form of a privileged caste who enjoy many sorts of benefits.” But, as Ngongo warned, “it is not enough to pronounce pious words to break the wall of injustice and exploitation; one must take action.” As the reviewer saw it, King’s Christian form of activism was therefore relevant for the African youth, whose responsibility for the future of the African continent had been clearly laid out in the Catholic publication.

If in his review of King’s *Strength to Love* Ngongo pointed out the relevance of African American civil disobedience for the African context, African developments marking the end of the year led him to shift his views on the applicability of nonviolent direct action in Africa. Ngongo’s questioning of the viability of nonviolence in the African context followed November 11, 1965 Rhodesian Unilateral Declaration of Independence. Rejecting British conditions for

144 Ibid., 44.
148 The editorial to *Tam-Tam*’s 1961 issue stressed students’ responsibility to become politically engaged with the plight of the African masses. Tam-Tam, “Editorial,” *Tam-Tam* (December 1961), 3-5.
independence, i.e. majority rule, the white supremacist government of Rhodesia decided to declare independence on its own terms.\textsuperscript{149} Since “the practice of nonviolence requires a democratic regime…the American theories of nonviolence are put to a severe test” in the white-controlled countries of Rhodesia and South Africa as well as in the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique.\textsuperscript{150} Instead of offering his readers a detailed review of King’s \textit{Why We Can’t Wait}, Ngongo pointed out African situations that explained why “the African of today is allergic to the theories of nonviolence.” Referring to King’s speech at the \textit{salle de la Mutualité} in Paris a little over a month earlier, the reviewer went as far as to suggest that King, who remained evasive on the subject of Rhodesia, had perhaps “become aware of the limits of nonviolence in certain circumstances.” As he had argued a year earlier in his review of \textit{Strength to Love}, however, Ngongo still presented King’s “constant preoccupation to not simply preach but to take action” as a model for African youth. More than King’s Christian doctrine of nonviolence, what appealed to this African author was the ideal of Christian activism that pastor King embodied.

The relevance of activism for Ngongo was further illustrated in his 1968 elegy for King. In this piece, Ngongo claimed, “In you, I saw and understood that it was possible to tightly connect words and actions. This is enough to make you a model for us, the rejected 3/5 of humanity, who are wearing ourselves out talking and who no longer have the strength to act. Our oppressors know this and they don’t get tired of teaching us to talk.”\textsuperscript{151} In light of Africans’ continued oppression under a new imperialist order, King’s brave activism represented a model for the disaffected youth from Africa. But, as Ngongo had already made clear in his discussion of the inapplicability of nonviolence in the African context, he affirmed again that he “did not

\textsuperscript{150} Louis-Paul Ngongo, “La révolution nonviolente,” \textit{Tam-Tam} (December 1965), 50.
\textsuperscript{151} Ngongo, “A Martin Luther King, Jr.,” 7.
always agree with [King] on the path to follow to rehabilitate the Negro in his own eyes and in all men’s.” Ngongo proceeded to justify his lack of faith in nonviolent direct action to eradicate blacks’ oppression: “In a world where money rules, the power holders cannot hear the voice of nonviolence.” Here, Ngongo’s brief comment on the ineffectiveness of nonviolence strongly echoed the remarks N’Diaye, Bassène, and Poyas made in “Black Americans for Africans,” whose analysis of African Americans and Africans’ conditions of oppression derived from a Marxist worldview.

Francophone African students’ reactions to American racial issues also entailed a reflection on colonial racism, particularly in the French context. Following two short articles regarding racial incidents in the U.S., namely the exclusion of a black priest from a white Catholic church in New-Orleans and the assassination of fourteen-year old Emmett Till, Tam-Tam continued to link the issue of American racism to the French colonial context. Building a parallel between their discussion of American racism and the topic of French colonial racism, the unnamed author opened his/her piece by mentioning that “In Mississippi, when Negroes become a problem, we kill them… The French of Africa, on the other hand, has more gentle mores; his long-lived cultural tradition has taught him that those brutal means are shocking and even dangerous for his own security.” As this quotation suggests, the French may not have displayed their racial prejudice as openly and violently as Americans did, but they nonetheless held racist sentiments towards Africans. Reprinting Le Cameroun Libre’s commentary on the death of a Cameroonian student in Paris, Tam-Tam denounced the French colonists’ subtle effort to spread racialized representations of the African man: “It seems that the story of the Cameroonian student killed in a car accident caused some commotion. Certainly, it is not

152 Ngongo, “A Martin Luther King, Jr.,” 7.
153 “Entreprise de demolition,” Tam-Tam (November 1955), 32.
forbidden for an African student to go to a party and have women in his car, but three women for one man is a little too much, even when one reaches his thirties.” By capitalizing on “one of those hearsays” about the hypersexualized nature of the African man, *Le Cameroun Libre* exposed the French colonial settlers’ racial prejudice towards Africans, which was subtler, perhaps, than American racism but just as dangerous. As the journal pointed out, there was “no blood, none of those horrific news on the cover page of tabloids and, above all, nothing to bring you in front of a jury that would perhaps be less lenient than that of Sumner.” French racists, the author of this article argued, sought to maintain the racial order, just as their white American counterparts did, but they used subtler methods.

In its January-February issue, entitled “Color, Racism, and Culture,” *Tam-Tam* further aligned American racism with colonial racism. In a seventeen-page article, Maddy Lastel sought to question growing assumptions that “all over the world, the old racial prejudice is being smashed.” Great Britain’s apparent willingness to grant autonomy to its colonial possessions, France’s desire to consolidate the bonds uniting the colonized to the French people, and the U.S.’s recent strike against racial segregation in public schools had encouraged some people to draw hasty conclusions regarding the disappearance of racism. In the American context, the 1954 Supreme Court decision declaring racial segregation unconstitutional in public schools certainly represented a significant step towards greater racial equality. But, as Lastel pointed out, the upsurge of racial violence in the following year, most famously costing the life of young Emmett Till, proved that racism was far from being a relic of the past.

After discussing Belgian racial discrimination in the Congo, and the emergence of racism towards Jamaican immigrants in Great Britain, Lastel proceeded to look at the problem of racism in France and its colonies. She asked, “Could France be free of this plague called racial

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prejudice? This is what one thinks at first sight.” As the French liked to point out, the French government welcomed African students in metropolitan schools and universities, and it even offered seats to African politicians. These “exceptions,” however, tended to conceal a more troubling reality; “for all of the metropolitan population, the black person remains the curious human type they were presented via travelogues, comics, and movies.”155 French racial representations of blacks materialized in multiple forms of discrimination. For example, in their news reporting, the press always specified when a criminal was Senegalese or North African, whereas they offered no such detail when the perpetrator happened to be a French metropolitan. The difficulties many Francophone African students were facing to find housing in the metropole also testified to the continued existence of racial prejudice in France. In French colonies, Lastel claimed, “racial prejudice was permanent.” According to N’Diaye’s survey of Francophone African students in France, whose results appeared in *Enquête sur les étudiants noirs en France* in 1962, the French told Africans “that they [the French] cannot be compared to Americans.”156 By presenting racism as a unique, if multi-faceted, phenomenon, Lastel therefore challenged French exceptionalism.

In conclusion, the young generation of Francophone African intellectuals’ engagement with the African American experience of racism derived from their systemic understanding of racial oppression. For them, the famous expressions of American racism that marked the 1950s and 1960s were particularly evocative of Africans’ colonial and postcolonial experiences. In so far as it raised discussions on more subtle French racial prejudices or on the African elites’ participation in Western neocolonialist schemes in Africa, the African American freedom movement was a phenomenon to which politically aware Francophone African intellectuals

155 Maddy Lastel, “De l’inactualité des problèmes raciaux,” 41, 42.
related. The Francophone African intellectuals gathered around Présence Africaine, however, merely engaged with black Americans’ struggle for racial equality. As the postwar bearers of Négritude, their interest largely consisted in a cultural rehabilitation of Africa and everything African. As the 1956 Congress of Black Writers and Artists illustrated, black Americans’ political activism resonated very little with Francophone delegates. In fact, at the next Congress, in 1959, Frantz Fanon attacked Présence Africaine’s “négritudinist discourse” and some of the founders’ “bad faith in failing to support movements of national political liberation.” Not only did Francophone Africans’ emphasis on culture prevent them from engaging with African Americans’ political activism, but their strictly Afrocentric project made the black American experience relevant only in so far as it was revealing of the latter’s African roots or relation to Africa. Only in the late 1960s, in the context of Francophone Africans’ growing concern with imperialism, did the African American freedom movement become politically relevant to the intellectuals of Présence Africaine. The following chapter, exploring the representations of the black American movement for racial equality in the Francophone African press, further determines the relevance of the movement for Francophone Africans.

CHAPTER 5: BUILDING A NATION OR RE-BUILDING THE WORLD: THE FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN PRESS ON THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

The decolonization of the African continent impacted the struggle between the two superpowers as they sought global influence. From the American vantage point, the concurrent African American freedom movement, and the global wave of attention it brought to American racism, threatened American efforts to bring newly emancipated African nations in line with the “free world;” a threat strongly increased by Soviet propaganda in the region. As American officials were well aware, the American government’s responses to racial issues were to play a
determining role in American foreign policy in Africa. In turn, African accessions to independence galvanized the hopes of a number of African Americans who saw the emergence of a new era for the colored world. The sight of black men taking the lead of their countries inspired pride in African Americans, who used this renewed sense of identification with Africa as a means to fuel their own struggle for racial empowerment in the U.S. In the 1950s and 1960s, a number of black American activists even took trips to Africa to reconnect with the motherland and to express their support for new African nations.

That the newly emancipated African world had special significance for African Americans and for the American government has thus been well documented.¹ But what of the significance of American racial developments for Africans? To what extent did their former subjection to a colonial order influence their response to news of white racial violence towards blacks and the light thereby shed on the American system of racial oppression? How, if at all, did Francophone Africans’ recent accession to national independence shape their attitudes towards African Americans and their struggle? Former chapters of this dissertation have demonstrated that numerous discussions of American racism resulted in French reflections on colonialism and racial prejudice, if mostly as it concerned Algerians. By exploring the representations of the

African American freedom movement in the Senegalese, Ivorian and Guinean press, this chapter
now turns to the meaning attributed to black Americans’ struggle for racial equality among
Francophone Africans. As the following analysis will show, although Francophone Africans
often claimed a sense of solidarity with African Americans, their identification with African
Americans’ conditions and activism was far from unanimous. Francophone Africans’ colonial
heritage partly shaped their rapport with African Americans and their struggle, but their new
positions in the world order, along with the relative efficiency of American Cold War
propaganda, also powerfully molded their perceptions and representations of the African
American freedom movement.

To explore Francophone Africans’ response to the African American freedom movement,
I have relied on newspapers and magazines from three Francophone African territories: Senegal,
Ivory Coast, and Guinea. The Senegalese daily Dakar-Matin, Paris-Dakar, later renamed Dakar-
Matin, was founded by Frenchman Charles de Breteuil in 1937. After Senegalese independence,
it remained the sole daily newspaper in Senegal. To accompany the transition from colony to
independent country, Paris-Dakar became Dakar-Matin. However, as M. Mamadou Koumé
notes in his study of the newspaper, “nothing but the newspaper’s title changed.”⁵² In addition,
the few Senegalese journalists contributing to the newspaper were primarily reporting on sports
and national news.³ For international events, the Senegalese daily newspaper relied on cables
from the French Press Agency (AFP), Reuters, and the Associated Press. Even though the
Senegalese government created its own press agency to control the diffusion of information
within its territory, Dakar-Matin remained heavily dependent on French news and personnel in
the years following Senegal’s independence from France in 1960. The treatment of the African

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³ Ibid., 221.
American freedom movement in *Dakar-Matin* may therefore not accurately reflect Senegalese perceptions of American racial issues and instead constitute an example of French colonial legacy.

The two other Senegalese press organs examined in this chapter also found their roots in the French colonial experiment. In 1947, French priests founded the weekly *Afrique Nouvelle* in Dakar. While the newspaper was published in Dakar, it circulated throughout Francophone West Africa. As Thierry Perret pointed out in *Le Temps des journalistes*, the Catholic weekly played an essential “role in the emancipation of African elites.” In the early 1960s, the weekly’s staff became increasingly Africanized and laicized. In 1963, Senegalese Simon Kiba, who had written a number of reports on the U.S. and black Americans for the paper, replaced priest Joseph Roger de Benoist at the head of the newspaper. 4 The magazine *Bingo* was another Francophone African publication created by Charles de Breteuil. More than “the voice of an Africa anxious to affirm its values, its culture, and to convey a positive and dynamic image of its individualities,” *Bingo* was also a popular vehicle of Pan-Africanism in Francophone Africa. 5 Edited in Dakar, the cultural magazine circulated across Francophone Africa as well.

This chapter also examines the press treatment of the African American freedom movement in Ivory Coast and Guinea, two Francophone African countries that were positioned ideologically at opposite ends of the political spectrum. The fate of the daily press was much the same in Ivory Coast. The Ivorian daily *Abidjan-Matin* was also created by de Breteuil, albeit a few years later, in 1951. Like *Dakar-Matin*, *Abidjan-Matin* held a monopoly over daily news reporting. And perhaps like *Dakar-Matin*, *Abidjan-Matin* “was not adapted to the African

5 In the early 1960s, the magazine changed its name from *Bingo: L’illustre africain* to *Bingo: Le mensuel du monde noir*, effectively reflecting the Pan-African vocation of the publication.
context. It was in fact a European newspaper published in Africa.” In 1964, the Ivorian government thus bought Abidjan-Matin, which it renamed Fraternité Matin and put under government control. The other newspaper on the Ivorian scene discussed in this chapter, Fraternité, was created in 1959 and was the organ of the Parti Démocratique de la Cote d’Ivoire, the party in power after independence. As was the case in Senegal, Ivory Coast, and other newly independent African countries, authorities in Guinea quickly moved to restrict freedom of the press in the name of national unity and economic development. In April 1961, the organ of the Parti Démocratique de Guinée, La Liberté was renamed Horoya and soon became the unique publication on Guinean press scene. From the outset, Guinean president Sékou Touré and the Parti Démocratique de Guinée—the sole political party in Guinea—used Horoya as the official voice of the Guinean government.

All the sources cited above expressed Francophone Africans’ solidarity with African Americans in their struggle for racial equality. As the following analysis will illustrate, however, Francophone Africans’ condemnation of American racism and expressions of support for black Americans’ cause went beyond a mere sentiment of racial identification. The French humanitarian tradition and universalistic ethos also accounted for Francophone Africans’ denunciation of American racial prejudice. In addition, Francophone Africans’ identification with African Americans’ plight often derived from the former’s Marxist worldview, a product of their colonial experience. Francophone Africans’ experience of socio-economic dispossession, a hallmark of both the colonial and postcolonial eras, also shaped Francophone Africans’ perceptions and representations of the African American freedom movement. Francophone

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8 Mamadou Dindé Diallo, Un Siècle de journaux en Guinée : histoire de la presse écrite de la période coloniale à nos jours (PhD. diss., Université Toulouse le Mirail, 2013), 211.
Africans’ more or less unconditional support for African Americans’ struggle and their criticism of American racial prejudice seems to have also been dependent upon the former’s diverse perceptions of the American superpower. Although we may not legitimately draw a strict correlation between the two, Francophone Africans’ level of identification with their black American counterparts interestingly coincided with their views on the U.S.

The coverage of the African American freedom movement in the Francophone African press illustrated Francophone Africans’ racial solidarity with African Americans. The most obvious place to find a Francophone African expression of racial identification with African Americans was the Pan-African publication *Bingo*. Although the magazine became officially dedicated to the black world in the early 1960s, throughout the 1950s, *Bingo* primarily featured stories of famous African American artists, effectively integrating African American cultural contributions into African culture.⁹ For example, in its 1955 issue, *Bingo* published a picture of the African American actress, singer and dancer Dorothy Dandridge alongside a picture of Jo Tchad, a singer from Chad, and his dancers, and a picture of actor Sofiane Cissé. Throughout the 1950s, the monthly brought attention to jazz musicians and singers such as Sidney Bechet, Lionel Hampton, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Mary Lou Williams, Marian Anderson, and Abbey Lincoln, among others. That African American success stories appeared in the pages of this African magazine illustrates Francophone Africans’ racial identification with their American counterparts. However, I would also venture to suggest that pointing out black American cultural icons may have been part of the magazine’s effort to correct colonial assumptions regarding Africa’s lack of history and culture. In this hypothesis, black Americans’ accomplishments were important in so far as they symbolized the cultural richness of the black world. We may therefore

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⁹ In the early 1960s, the magazine changed its name from *Bingo: L’illustre africain* to *Bingo: Le mensuel du monde noir*, effectively reflecting the Pan-African vocation of the publication.
trace the roots of the magazine’s black internationalism back to the 1920s and 1930s when the Harlem Renaissance met with the Négritude movement of Francophone blacks.  

To an extent, the magazine’s focus on African American accomplishments in various domains during the 1950s contributed to obscuring mounting racial tensions in the U.S. When Bingo published pictures of the first African American general in the U.S. Air Force, Benjamin Oliver Davis, Jr., the magazine’s intention seems to have been to celebrate blacks’ growing prestige. Not a word appeared on the long history of racial discrimination in the American military establishment. By doing so, Bingo emphasized the isolated occurrences of Black American ascendency in American society at the expense of the larger narrative of racial oppression. The magazine’s publication of a picture of Bessie A. Buchanan, the first African American woman to hold a seat in the New York legislature, conveys a similar impression.

Although the African American movement received little coverage in the magazine during the 1950s, as early as 1954, Bingo briefly explored “Blacks in American Life.” In this article, the magazine discussed the recent Supreme Court decision integrating American public schools. The author recognized that racial discrimination had been a dominant aspect of American life and that racial integration in school was but a first step towards improved racial relations. Showing a picture of a white child studying with two black children, the caption naively affirmed that black and white children were now sitting on the same school benches.

After pointing out the painful history of racial discrimination in the U.S. and the Supreme Court

attempt to achieve progress in matters of race relations, *Bingo* moved to highlight African Americans’ achievements:

70,000 blacks already own flourishing businesses and their activities are spread in 27 states. They are at the head of 14 banks, 200 credit institutions, 60,000 trading firms, 26 savings and loans associations, and more than 200 insurance companies. Besides, they own more about 5,000,000 hectare of land. [...] Although they don’t reach a similar standard of living as that of whites, the 15,000,000 black Americans have an annual revenue of $16 billion and are progressively entering the middle-class.

To further demonstrate African Americans’ growing achievements in American life, *Bingo* offered a brief overview of the political trajectory of Hulan E. Jack. After holding a seat in the New York State Assembly for thirteen years, in 1953 Jack was elected Borough President of Manhattan, “the biggest black agglomeration in the world, the most important and richest neighborhood of New York.” Even as the magazine touched on the history of racial discrimination in the U.S., its portrayal of black Americans’ economic and political achievements resulted in downplaying the severity of American racial discrimination and its impact on African Americans’ lives. Although *Bingo*’s look at influential African American individuals and black American success stories denoted a sense of racial identification between Francophone Africans and African Americans, events such as the murder of Emmett Till, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and the Little Rock crisis, all illustrative of black Americans’ racial oppression, received no coverage in the magazine. Only in the 1960s did *Bingo* shed light on a much less glamorous aspect of African American life than that previously portrayed in the magazine.

We might attribute this transformation to the arrival of journalist Paulin Joachim on the editorialist team of *Bingo*. Joachim, born in what is today Benin, arrived in France after World War II. There, he published articles for the regional newspaper *Le Progrès de Lyon*, a leftist
publication, before enrolling in the *Ecole supérieure de journalisme*.\(^{14}\) In Paris, he contributed to the foundation of the Pan-African publication *Présence Africaine*.\(^{15}\) Joachim’s Pan-Africanist background and cutting prose found expression in the journalist’s editorials on American racial developments in the 1960s discussed later in this chapter. Joachim’s identification with black Americans was illustrated by his designation of them as “brothers.” For example, his July 1963 editorial dedicated to the racial violence which had taken place in Birmingham a little over a month earlier was entitled “Dogs Assaulting Our Brothers.”\(^ {16}\) In addition to Joachim’s fiery editorials on American racial developments, or lack thereof, the Francophone African magazine also published articles on the Ku Klux Klan and African American experiences of racism, as well as important events associated with the black American civil rights movement. More importantly, however, *Bingo* also introduced Francophone African readers to the black American leaders who were actively trying to improve blacks’ condition in the U.S. Unlike the mainstream coverage of the African American freedom movement, *Bingo* did not completely ignore the contributions of African American female activists. For example, in its April 1960 issue, the magazine shed light on the role Daisy Bates played in the battle for racial integration in Arkansas, and, more specifically, in Central High School.\(^ {17}\) The French and American press generally framed the Little Rock crisis as a constitutional battle opposing President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Governor Orval Faubus. *Bingo*, in contrast, presented Daisy Bates and Orval Faubus as the two main actors in the Little Rock drama, effectively placing Bates at the core of the civil rights narrative. The article especially pointed out Bates’ fundamental role in the integration of Little Rock high school. Reproducing the 1959 handshake between Governor

\(^{14}\) Perret, *Le temps des journalistes*, 69.


\(^{17}\) “Miracle à Little Rock,” *Bingo*, April 1960.
Faubus and activist Bates after the reopening of Little Rock public schools, suggested not only that racial progress was under way, but also that an African American woman was instrumental in this development.\footnote{In resistance to racial integration, Governor Faubus closed the Little Rock public schools.}

Bringing further attention to influential African American personalities, \textit{Bingo} introduced important black American leaders to its African readership. In September 1963, the magazine briefly presented Martin Luther King, Jr., president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), Roy Wilkins, president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Elijah Muhammad, head of the Nation of Islam, and Malcolm X, a leader of the Black Muslim movement in the U.S.\footnote{“La lutte contre la segregation,” \textit{Bingo}, September 1963.} By exploring the influence of these four men on black Americans, the magazine sought to familiarize its readers with the diverse nature of the African American freedom movement. As was characteristic of the magazine, \textit{Bingo}’s portrayal of influential black men also served the purpose of shedding light on black achievements. The relatively standard depiction of King, Wilkins, Muhammad, and Malcolm does not offer any significant insight into the author’s stance towards these black American leaders.

But Joachim’s later article reflecting on Malcolm’s life and contributions suggested that African Americans’ self-identification with Africa also mattered to Francophone Africans. After retracing Malcolm’s journey from a tragic childhood to a criminal young adulthood and a later career in black activism, Joachim examined the significance of the black American nationalist’s contributions to the African American freedom movement. The author started by pointing out, “we have never supported or blessed his opinions and his fierce racism.”\footnote{Joachim Paulin, “Malcolm X ou le racisme porté à son paroxysme,” \textit{Bingo}, April 1965.} However, Joachim praised Malcolm for reconnecting black Americans to their lost African heritage:
Malcolm gave them an identity and a content, a human density, by waking up in their blood the ancestral Africa which they had banished like a bad memory, Africa and its rages, its brutal strength and its violent elements. In Harlem temples, when out of breath trumpets become quiet, we can hear Negro poems delivered with frantic rhythms. They glorify the black race and dig up their buried pride. And the American Negro has recovered a past and traditions which are evidence of a great civilization. That’s what Malcolm X achieved.

For Joachim, then, the black American leader occupied an important spot in the pantheon of African American activists in so far as he reconnected African Americans to their African roots.

Like Bingo, the treatment of the African American freedom movement in the Senegalese weekly, Afrique Nouvelle, also illustrated Francophone Africans’ racial identification and solidarity with black Americans. Such expressions of solidarity with the plight of African Americans came after the Birmingham movement in the spring of 1963. Commissioner of Public Safety Eugene “Bull” Connor ordered Birmingham police forces to use fire hoses and dogs to check black protesters, including children. In his May 24 article, entitled “Black Hunt in the U.S.A,” Simon Kiba provided no information about the nature of the events themselves. Rather, he expressed Africans’ solidarity with black Americans. The article underlined the emotional impact of black Americans’ sufferings on Africans: “Be it in Alabama or other parts of the South, blacks are well aware of the humiliation Americans impose on them. As for us, Africans, we feel this humiliation as well because what would prevent us from being the equals to the descendants of Irishmen or Englishmen is nothing more than the color of our skin.”

Additionally, Kiba moved to underline the global consequences of American racism towards blacks: “It is indeed an American domestic affair, but were a black majority somewhere in the world to give whites a taste of their own medicine, wouldn’t we hear an uproar all the way to the

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21 Afrique Nouvelle may have published a description of the events which took place in Birmingham in its previous issue. However, I was not able to obtain this issue.

Security Council? This is why, for Africans, what happens in Alabama is a Black-African affair.” Blacks’ oppression in the U.S. was nothing else but a mirror of a much larger racial dynamic in the world that also affected African blacks.

A similar expression of racial solidarity towards African Americans appeared in the August 19, 1965 issue of *Afrique Nouvelle*. In this op-ed, the author, known as Petrus, did not reflect on the recent events which shook the black neighborhood of Watts but rather on the Selma campaign a few months earlier. The title of this piece, “Monsters and Our Black Kids,” illustrates the sense of racial identification which bonded this African author to African Americans. Petrus denounced the treatment of African American children whom the police ran after for taking part in a peaceful protest. Hearing the news on the radio, Petrus imagined this scene of violence: “I immediately closed my eyes […] I saw groups of little Negroes screaming, our little brothers, running desperately, eyes wide open, panting, deafened by the cracks of the whips brandished by some “yelling cow-boy cops.” This vision of racial violence angered the author for his powerlessness to protect these “kids of (his) race” against white Southern “monsters.” Further exemplifying Africans’ solidarity with African Americans, Petrus noted, “undoubtedly, all the Negroes of Africa and the world, who recognize their Negro state and who will have listened to this radio program, will more or less dominate their rage… Is that what THEY are looking for?” The author’s emotional connection to the plight of African Americans did not simply stem from a common skin color, but from a common experience of oppression. Commenting on the insistence that blacks in the U.S. and Africa refrain from using violence in response to violence, Petrus highlighted Africans’ continuing subjection to former colonial powers. While those who colonized Africa “jubilate at all manifestations likely to result in the new reign of the colonizer,” Petrus remarked, “we have to bite our lips, if necessary to the blood,

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to steer clear of these ill-mannered provocations; responding to them would fill those racists who are contemptuous of Peace with pleasure.” For the author, the Selma scenario was evocative of all blacks’ subjection to a common white order of oppression that, in the African context, outlived colonialism.

_Afrique Nouvelle_’s treatment of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968 further illustrated Francophone Africans’ racial identification with African Americans. On the cover page of the April 11 issue of the weekly, a picture of the late civil rights leader appeared under the title “All of Africa is Mourning.” The editorial on the same page stressed the significance of this illustrious freedom fighter for Africans: “In Africa, we can be proud of a man like Martin Luther King. He does not simply belong to African Americans, he also belongs to Africa.” Although expressions of alienation between African Americans and Africans had previously appeared in the weekly, this time _Afrique Nouvelle_ stressed King’s ties to Africa.

Another section of the weekly also illustrated Africans’ appropriation of King: “I am shocked by the crime which cost the life of one of my own, since I consider Martin Luther King as an African.” The author of these words did not expand on the dimension(s) of King’s African-ness, beyond his African ancestry. But we can suppose that, in the immediate postcolonial context, King’s struggle for American recognition of blacks’ human integrity partly justified the author’s association of King with Africa.

_Fraternité Matin_’s coverage of American racial issues included clear expressions of Ivorians’ racial solidarity towards African Americans. For example, the newspaper praised Johnson for guaranteeing “our black American brothers” the right to vote. As was the case in _Afrique Nouvelle_, the relevance of the African American experience for Africans, and the black

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24 _Afrique Nouvelle_, “Un lourd héritage,” _Afrique Nouvelle_, April 11, 1968.

diaspora as a whole, was further exemplified in the newspaper’s treatment of King’s assassination. Unlike Dakar-Matin, which approached the murder of King in an impersonal manner—perhaps a result of the French dimensions of the newspaper—Fraternité Matin explained how the assassination of King affected Ivorians. In the Ivory Coast, where “the government, under the authority of Houphoüet-Boigny, made peace, love, and nonviolence a golden rule,” people were outraged at the assassination of a “man of love and peace.” In light of the “indignation which has just taken hold of the population, especially the youth,” the newspaper reported, the government asked Ivorians “not to engage in protests that would be unworthy of their testimony of admiration towards the man who embodied the ideal of universal fraternity and nonviolence for the whole black world.” Ivorian coverage of the African American freedom movement illustrated a sense of racial solidarity with African Americans, a sense of pride in their accomplishments and of sorrow for their trials.

Francophone Africans’ perceptions and representations of the African American freedom movement were partly shaped by a sense of racial solidarity. However, Francophone Africans’ reactions to the American racial situation were also informed by their experience of French colonialism. In a 1962 article for Fraternité, racial solidarity had little to do with Amadou Thiam’s criticism of American racism, as I will further develop in a later part of this chapter. Rather, Thiam pointed to the French human rights tradition to justify his engagement with American racial issues. It was “especially (his) French culture” that pushed him to “condemn all forms of racism.” The relevance of French ideological traditions in Francophone Africans’ perception of racial issues is further exemplified in an October 1963 op-ed for Afrique Nouvelle. In this piece, Robert N’Guema, from Burkina Faso, expressed his surprise at the continuing

existence of racial discrimination despite the ideological legacy of the French Revolution and its global application through the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. With the Birmingham racial violence still fresh in the author’s mind, he “wished that the condemnation of racial discrimination in the U.N. by almost all nations of the world, as well as the goodwill of men like the American President and other defenders and advocates of the principles of 1789, 1948 and of the motto: ‘liberty, equality, fraternity,’ will defeat the Ku Klux Klan…”28 The author did not simply refer to the United Nations’ document establishing global human rights, but he also pointed out the French origins of universal human rights. In addition to framing his criticism of American racism within the French tradition of universal rights, N’Guema also conceived of the French Republican motto as part of the arsenal capable of defeating American racial prejudice. Like Thiam, who partly attributed his condemnation of American racism to his French culture, N’Guema denounced American racism on the basis of the French tradition of universalism and French Republican ideals.

Francophone Africans’ experience of French colonialism also shaped Guineans’ analysis of American racial tensions and their outlook on the African American freedom movement. As Elizabeth Schmidt states in Cold War and Decolonization in Guinea, 1946-1958, “the PCF (Parti Communiste Français), more than any other metropolitan party, was identified with postwar African nationalism.”29 As early as the mid-1930s, French communists entered the colonial administration of French East and West Africa, notably occupying positions as teachers. The creation of Groupes d’Etudes Communistes provided West African elites with a Marxist theoretical education which shaped these indigenous elites’ views of the world and their respective colonial situations. As Schmidt explains, the French communist presence strongly

influenced the history of Guinean colonial and postcolonial politics, in particular. The Marxian components of Guinean political thought influenced Horoya’s portrayal of the African American freedom movement. This is partly noticeable in the rhetoric employed by Guinean journalists to report on American racial tensions. Unlike other Francophone African newspapers which spoke of the “black problem,” Horoya often referred to black Americans’ efforts towards racial integration in terms of “struggle.” Moreover, Horoya portrayed both blacks and whites as actors in the American racial struggle. On July 27, 1963, for example, Horoya’s article dealing with white Southern Americans’ retaliation against their black fellow citizens was entitled “In the U.S., ‘southern’ shopkeepers run the racial struggle.” First, it is worth noting the quotation marks placed around the word “southern” by the author. In this example, it seems that the journalist sought to highlight the socio-economic dynamic of white racism, which made the regional identification of white racism in the U.S. irrelevant. Whereas the official American narrative pointed to the South as a national anomaly, Horoya presented American racial issues as inseparable from the country’s socio-economic fabric. Moreover, the story presented in this article is that of whites’ resistance to blacks’ economic empowerment: “Naturally, shopkeepers, this pack of small retailers with ridiculous pretensions, are leading this blind resistance… [their] objective is to terrorize the colored man and make him calmly witness his social and economic dispossession.”

Guinean perceptions and representations of the racial tensions which were shaking the U.S. therefore emphasized their socio-economic roots and the powerful expressions of American racism.

Along with Marxism, Guineans’ fervent anticolonialism influenced Horoya’s supportive treatment of the more radical expressions of black Americans’ fight for racial equality. In April 1962, Horoya serialized “On violence,” a chapter from Frantz Fanon’s famous The Wretched of

The “power struggle” which defined decolonization “could only succeed,” according to Fanon, “by resorting to every means, including violence.”

Guineans’ understanding of the socio-economic roots of African Americans’ oppression mirrored their conceptualization of colonial oppression. If circumstances sometimes required the colonized to resort to violence to break the shackles of colonization, so too did American resistance to blacks’ emancipation need to be addressed by force. In March 1965, following the assault of African American demonstrators by state troopers in Selma, Alabama and the murder of pastor James Reeb, Diare Ibrahima Khalil asked if non-violence was in fact the means by which black Americans were to obtain “social justice.” In light of the recent events, Khalil concurred with the late “El Hadj Malcolm who said that it’s not with psalms or placards of pious wishes that African Americans will manage to be accepted as human beings in American society.”

The disbelief expressed by this Guinean journalist regarding the efficacy of non-violence to achieve a “social transformation” is mirrored in Horoya’s treatment of the scenes of racial violence which erupted in American cities in the latter half of the 1960s.

Unlike the Senegalese press, which overwhelmingly condemned the “rioters,” often referred to as “juvenile delinquents,” who partook in the episodes of racial violence which broke out in cities like Watts, Harlem, Newark and Detroit, Horoya portrayed black urban violence as a legitimate struggle, one that resulted from the American government’s failure to address African Americans’ socio-economic plight. After the turbulent riots in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, M. Alpha Bade underlined that, while regrettable, blacks’ violent protests were the expected outcome of their miserable living conditions: “What have they done to prevent the formation of these despicable ‘ghettoes’…? But since those exist, and they knew it before Los Angeles...”

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31 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 3.
Angeles, Chicago, etc… as much as they know it now, what have they done to destroy them?”

Three-hundred and fifty years after the first blacks disembarked in Jamestown, African Americans “are still rotting in the slums. Their situation has not gotten any better.”33 In July 1967, speaking of the racial unrest which had shaken Newark and other American cities, Horoya pointed out the inefficiency of American officials’ approach to the black problem in the U.S.:

“American authorities are trying hard to make Americans recognize the legitimacy of racial equality without wanting to admit that social justice is primarily expressed in terms of well-being, and not in terms of principles devoid of meaning.”34 In such a context, blacks seemed to have no choice but to “take up arms to combat racial discrimination and oppression.”35 In Horoya’s representations of urban riots, black uprisings were the legitimate and necessary response to African Americans’ abject state of socio-economic oppression, much like the one African liberation movements sought to combat.

Horoya’s portrayal of late radical leader Malcolm also illustrates the relevance of global socio-economic oppression in Guinean perceptions of the black American problem. Whereas a number of Francophone African press organs tended to reduce Malcolm to a violent white-hater, Horoya portrayed the black nationalist as an inspiration. Following Malcolm’s assassination, Diare Ibrahima Kalil shared parts of the former’s speech delivered to African intellectuals gathered in Paris by the Pan-African organization Présence Africaine. On this occasion, the black American activist noted his desire to see African Americans and Africans united for a common cause: to fight against oppression. Black Americans’ struggle, Malcolm argued, was inscribed within a larger context of oppression that concerned humanity as a whole. For Khalil, it was the “social revolution he preached” that defined the legacy of the black American activist.

34 “La lutte raciale aux USA,” Horoya, July 18, 1967.
Commenting on Malcolm’s presentation in Paris, Khalil affirmed, “that day, he appeared like a prophet of the union of the races, not like a rabid extremist as he is portrayed in the imperialist press.” Malcolm’s framing of the African American experience in a global context of oppression fit within Guinean understandings of systemic oppression.

Despite multiple expressions of racial solidarity towards African Americans, not all Francophone Africans embraced the idea of racial identification with African Americans. Ivorian and Senegalese treatment of American racial tensions expressed a sense of alienation between Francophone Africans and African Americans. As briefly hinted at above, Ivorian journalist Amadou Thiam framed his discussion of African Americans’ racial issues within French ideological traditions, effectively discarding racial identification with black Americans. Interestingly, this apparent desire to distance himself from African Americans seems to have stemmed from his perception of African Americans as primarily Americans. Indeed, although the author referred to African Americans as brothers, he insisted on the fact that “those brothers, although they are black, are first and foremost Americans and proudly so.” In “The Black Problem,” Thiam expanded on the brief remarks he had made a month earlier on American racial issues. In this article, Thiam reiterated that “The blacks of America are above all Americans.” As the following quotation suggests, this fact seemed to have prevented him from “taking sides” on the American racial dilemma:

I said that I had no intention of stating in this article on which side I position myself. In fact, contrary to what one might think, blacks in America are above all Americans and very patriotic; they think and act according to this sole perspective. To think that they desire to regain their dignity and return to “their roots” is wishful thinking. Once again, they are Americans and they do not want it any other way.

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Here, Thiam seems to be reacting to the growing expression of identification with Africa among the African American community. Interestingly, the author did not justify his own alienation from African Americans. Rather, he legitimized his “neutrality” by pointing out that black Americans’ nationality overshadowed their racial identity, thereby undermining the basis for Africans’ identification with African Americans. As soon as John F. Kennedy became president of the U.S., Ivorian president Félix Houphouët-Boigny “considering himself the foremost leader on the continent, requested that he be given priority over all other African chiefs of state in consideration for a state visit to Washington.”38 The Ivorian president dreaded the expansion of communism in Africa and asked a favorable Kennedy Administration to grant aid to African nations to counteract this growing threat. In early 1961, Kennedy “initiated a modest aid program for the Ivory Coast.” The Ivorian eagerness to receive American financial and technical support may also account for Thiam’s refusal to “take sides” in the American racial drama.

Thiam’s sense of alienation from African Americans found echo in the Senegalese press. In the early 1960s, the Senegalese weekly Afrique Nouvelle, published a number of reports on the U.S., African Americans, and Americans’ relations to Africa. Like Thiam’s article on the “black problem,” representations of the African American community in Afrique Nouvelle suggest a sense of alienation between Africans and African Americans. In February 1962, Afrique Nouvelle special correspondent Ernest Milcent explored African Americans’ attitudes to Africa and their relations with Africans. In his article entitled “African Americans, Africa and discrimination,” Milcent sought to demonstrate that “the attitude of African Americans towards Africa is quite complex and reasonably different from what people in Dakar or Cotonou generally imagine.”39 Like Thiam, Milcent thus desired to correct apparent misconceptions

38 Muehlenbeck, Betting on the Africans, 145-46.
regarding African Americans’ supposed interest and identification with Africa and its peoples. In his February 7, 1962 article on American perceptions of Africa, Milcent recognized that there existed an effort on the part of African American intellectuals to develop Americans’ understanding of Africa and African contributions to “universal culture.” Milcent especially discussed the activities of the American Society of African Culture (AMSAC), the American branch of the Paris-based Pan African organization Présence Africaine. Milcent’s visit to director of AMSAC John A. Davis in New York revealed that while it was easy to demonstrate “black contribution to culture… it was, on the other hand, much more difficult to make people grasp African contributions since the vast majority of Americans, blacks included, were still thinking of Africa as the land of Tarzan and impenetrable jungles.”

Milcent’s encounter with the black elite of Cincinnati also led him to realize how very little even the most educated among the African American community knew of current developments in Africa. Tellingly, in a section of his article entitled “Pan-Africanism was born in the United States,” Milcent drew the conclusion that “in the end, it seems that the black American community as a whole cares less about Africa than Africa cares about the plight of Americans of the black race.” Milcent recognized that unlike the black American masses, whose daily concerns prevented them from caring about Africa and Africans, the black elite did experience “a sentimental attachment” with Africa. But, ultimately, the African American elite “is American and they are convinced that they have reached a level of development far superior to that of Africa.” Despite some African Americans’ emotional bond to Africa, the relative material comfort they were able to enjoy in the U.S. precluded them from truly desiring to return to the African motherland.

The contemporary attitude of the African American elite towards Africa was not a new phenomenon, as Milcent explained. African Americans who participated in the 19th century Colonization movement also expressed a desire to reconnect with the motherland, but this and other back-to-Africa movements all failed. Lack of financial resources partly explained those failures. More importantly, for Milcent, those movements aborted because “the great majority of black Americans always preferred the relative security of life ‘in the states,’ with all its disadvantages, to the adventurous return to Africa full of hazards and unknowns.” The author explained that it was not infrequent for African Americans to return from their trip to Africa “disappointed and sometimes totally disillusioned.” Nourished by unrealistic images, they were unable to move past the most trivial aspects of their experience. But he added that “in this case, skin color has very little to do with the situation; this attitude is no different from that of French intellectuals of the left who have nothing but sarcastic remarks to make about their fellow French ‘colonialists’ but who, after six months, become a hundred times more racist than the ‘old colonialists.’” By comparing African Americans to the French left Milcent further weakened the legitimacy of African Americans’ claims of association with Africans on racial grounds. That African Americans’ attachment to Africa was more idealistic than real seemed to be what Milcent wanted his readers to understand. Milcent therefore drew a similar conclusion to Thiam’s: “In fact to the members of the black American community the big problem is not Africa but their own social future within the American nation.” Both the Senegalese and Ivorian perspectives offered through Milcent’s and Thiam’s treatment of the African American community underlined a rupture between African American and African experiences.

In fact, it is worth mentioning that even the Pan-African press evoked an irremediable rupture between African American and African experiences. Journalist Joachim’s discussion of
Malcolm’s contributions to the African American freedom movement recognized the value in African Americans’ new emotional bond with the motherland. But Joachim quickly underlined the definitive rupture between black Americans and Africa: “The black American is condemned to fulfill his destiny where the vicissitudes of history have taken him. Returning to Africa will not serve him at all; an easy way out that will quickly become sour and unbearable.”

Like other Francophone African writers, Joachim pointed out African Americans’ inevitable alienation from Africa. For the author, while a psychological and emotional reconciliation with the motherland was the key to an emergent racial pride among the black American community, the Americanization of blacks in the U.S. was such that a physical return to Africa was no solution to African Americans’ racial dilemma.

Returning to Milcent’s discussion of black Americans, Africa, and Africans, although the author stressed African Americans and Africans’ estrangement, he also acknowledged the connections between the African American and African liberation movements. A conversation with the black elite of Cincinnati, reported by the author, confirmed the role played by the African liberation movements in the current awakening of African Americans seeking racial equality. In his discussion of the emergence of Pan-Africanism, Milcent also recognized the influence of W.E.B. Du Bois and the Pan-African congresses organized between 1919 and 1945 in the political awakening of Africa. But Milcent quickly added, “That said, since then, African American and African movements have certainly evolved differently.” The author goes on to explain that African Americans’ efforts to integrate American society resulted in their estrangement with Africans; the Panafriicanist impulse of decades prior gave way to a nationalist

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mindset that drew African and African American interests apart. Indeed, Milcent underlined that although a greater number of African Americans were making their way to Africa, “those blacks now go to Africa as representatives of American interests, and not as blacks.” In this case, African Americans’ greater integration in American institutions resulted in their further association with the U.S. nation, at the expense of their racial identity. This new global political context also impacted Africans’ encounter with African Americans: “Conversely, Africans who come to the U.S. often do so to represent African interests. This also leads them to take their distance with African Americans.” African Americans’ greater integration in American society led some to serve as American representatives in Africa, thereby lessening the relevance of racial identification between African Americans and Africans. In turn, Africans’ entry on the international political scene, coupled with their urgent priority to develop their nations, framed their contact with the U.S. and Americans in a way that relegated Africans’ racial identification with African Americans to the background.

Moreover, Milcent’s conversations with African Americans and Africans revealed that, on both sides, a sentiment of superiority guided those interactions. Reporting the words of AMSAC director John A. Davis, Milcent brought the issue of Africans’ condescension towards African Americans: “A few years back, our relations with African leaders were of the most amicable kind. But now that they are ministers, ambassadors, or heads of state, we sometimes have the impression that they look down on us with condescension.” African leaders’ disdain towards African Americans was mirrored by African Americans’ similarly condescending attitudes towards Africans. A study conducted by the University of Michigan International

43 In this book, Plummer seeks to restore the nation-state in analyses of African Americans’ relations with Africa. She also posits that “even in the most geographically remote areas [people] were never completely isolated from national trends, ideologies, and behaviors.” This goes to show that the nation-state occupied a central role in both African Americans’ and Africans’ liberation projects. Plummer, In Search of Power, 12.

Center surveyed over 1,200 African students studying in over 400 American colleges and universities. This survey revealed that: “2/3 of those students have complained either about African Americans’ cold attitude towards them or even about frictions with African Americans. Many have justified this attitude by the fact that African Americans felt superior to Africans.” As Milcent’s discussions and research revealed, African Americans’ and Africans’ postcolonial relationship were marred by reciprocal disdain. This observation challenges the American story of racial solidarity between African Americans and Africans during the 1950s and 1960s. More importantly, the fact that Milcent and other Francophone African journalists insisted on stressing differences between African Americans and Africans suggests that Francophone Africans themselves were actively challenging assumptions and/or expectations of racial solidarity between black Africans and Americans.

Finally, African Americans’ relative economic comfort compared to Africans also contributed to alienating Francophone Africans from African Americans and their struggle. As Milcent did a year later, Kiba had set out to emphasize the difference between African Americans and Africans. According to the author, the African American is “economically speaking, the happiest black in the world. His standard of living is superior to that of Europeans; forget about comparing it to that of the blacks of Africa.” Kiba added that in the South as in the North, black and white housing was of comparable quality. Poor whites shared the material misery of poor blacks, simply along opposite streets. A few days earlier, the Senegalese daily Paris-Dakar had also sought to emphasize African Americans’ relative economic comfort. The newspaper summarized an article from the British weekly newspaper Time and Tide which discussed the material conditions of African Americans. With supporting figures, this short article pointed out that, overall, African Americans enjoyed a higher standard of living than the
white British middle-class. Although *Dakar-Matin* did not comment on the relevance of these facts, presenting them at a time when news related to African Americans’ struggle for racial equality had become relatively frequent seems to denote an intention to reevaluate the plight of black Americans.

As early as the 1930s, the racially-conscious generation of Francophone Africans involved in anticolonial politics in Paris perceived differences between Africans’ and African Americans’ conditions. But what is striking in the examples discussed above is Francophone Africans’ insistence on creating a rupture between Africans and African Americans, as well as between their respective experiences. Milcent’s discussion of Africans’ and African Americans’ new functions in Cold War global politics partly explains Francophone Africans’ effort to distance themselves from black Americans. After independence, African leaders were left with the burdensome task of building new nations; a task all the more challenging since Westerners had long expressed strong doubts as to Africans’ ability to manage their own affairs. African leaders, and perhaps some journalists as well, prioritized economic development and integration in the world community. The entry of independent African countries on the international scene and those countries’ postcolonial agendas contributed to relegating some Africans’ sense of racial solidarity with African Americans to the background. Pointing out African Americans’ own sentiment of alienation from Africa and African experiences may have helped to justify and legitimize African distancing from black Americans’ racial victimization. But it also seems that Francophone Africans were holding a grudge against African Americans’ expressions of superiority towards Africans. None of the journalists who sought to expose African American and African estrangement explicitly connected their remarks on this estrangement to their

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discussions on the African American struggle for racial equality, even though the former always accompanied the latter.

Francophone African treatments of the African American freedom movement and, more generally, American racial issues seem to have also been shaped by their diverse perceptions of the American superpower. Some Francophone Africans seemed to embrace American claims to embody the ideals of democracy and liberty, and therefore supported the government-sponsored narrative of American dedication to racial progress. On the other hand, those who voiced more critical views on American racial events pointed to the latter as proof of America’s disingenuous commitment to be the leader of the “free world.” As illustrated in the newspapers analyzed in this chapter, Francophone Africans’ reactions to American racial issues were largely shaped by their perceptions of the American government’s actions in matters of civil rights. In both the Senegalese and Ivorian daily press, articles covering American racial developments tended to foreground the steps taken by the American government to combat segregationists’ resistance to racial integration and to grant African Americans full equality. Following the August 1963 March on Washington for example, Dakar-Matin’s August 30 cover page article underlined Kennedy’s contribution to the movement: “All the commentators concur to pay tribute to the courage with which Kennedy risked nothing less than his political future to undertake this long and difficult ‘interior decolonization.’”46 By giving his support to black Americans’ struggle for racial equality, President Kennedy actively engaged in the global movement toward the emancipation of the oppressed. It is also significant to note that Dakar-Matin published this article and another one about the boycott of products from Portugal and South Africa under a common headline: “Reinforcement of the struggle for decolonization and racial equality.” The

stubborn colonialism and racism of the Portuguese and white South Africans made President Kennedy’s support for African Americans’ domestic emancipation all the more deserving of praise. Indeed, while African leaders joined forces to fight against colonialism and racial discrimination, African Americans led a successful march wholeheartedly supported by the President of the United States.

As mentioned earlier, the French ownership and direction of Dakar-Matin makes it difficult to determine whether its coverage of the African American freedom movement was reflective of indigenous views. However, diplomatic reports to the U.S. State Department and diplomatic exchanges and correspondence between American and Senegalese officials suggest that President Kennedy’s actions with regards to racial issues were regarded favorably by the Senegalese. Following the 1963 racial events in Birmingham, the “Status Report of Civil Rights in the United States and American Missions in Africa” mentioned Senegalese president Leopold Sedar Senghor’s “strong appreciation of President Kennedy’s efforts” to guarantee civil rights and racial equality to African Americans.  

As reported by American ambassador to Senegal Philip Mayer Kaiser to American Secretary of State on June 25, 1963, Radio Senegal aired the telegram sent by President Senghor to President Kennedy affirming Senegalese support for the American president’s dedication to civil rights. Senghor’s telegram to the American president read, “In the name of the Senegalese government and people I send you my warm good wishes for the unwavering effort which you are directing towards racial consideration.”  

Senegalese reactions in the aftermath of Kennedy’s assassination also illustrated Senegalese appreciation of the late president’s contributions to racial progress in the U.S. As the American Chargé

48 Action Department 207, from Philip Mayer Kaiser, American Embassy, Dakar, Senegal to Secretary of State, June 25, 1963, RG 59 Bureau of African Affairs, Records of G.Mennen Williams, Subject Files, Civil Rights, Box 16, National Archives.
d’Affaires stationed in Dakar signaled, “press and radio gave full coverage to the death of President Kennedy and to his work in the last three years, particularly in racial relations.”

President Senghor himself also declared that the “people of Senegal (were) deeply moved by (the) death of President Kennedy (and that) Africa had lost more than a friend,” adding that “for Africans Kennedy was in effect an African.” The rekindling of interest towards Africa traditionally associated with the Kennedy administration and the seeming success of Kennedy’s “personal diplomacy” in Africa certainly explain Senghor’s association of Kennedy with Africa. However, Kennedy’s perceived commitment to racial equality in the U.S. also contributed to the consolidation of what French historian François Durpaire calls the “Kennedy Myth” in the minds of Francophone Africans like Senghor. Even though Dakar-Matin remained an essentially French newspaper in the early 1960s, its portrayal of Kennedy’s dedication to racial progress seemed to reflect Senegalese views on the matter.

President Johnson’s interventions in favor of racial equality also received their fair share of coverage and support in the Senegalese and Ivorian daily press. In the aftermath of the Selma movement in March 1965, titles like “JOHNSON Is Determined to Guarantee the Respect of Civil Rights Everywhere in the UNITED STATES,” “President Johnson Declares War to the

49 Biweekly Senegal Highlights Report No. 27, from Chargé d’Affaires Donald B. Easum, American Embassy, Dakar, Senegal to the State Department, December 7, 1963, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1963, Senegal, Box 4035, National Archives.

50 SECSTATE 655, from Philip Mayer Kaiser, American Embassy, Dakar, Senegal to Department of State, December 21, 1963, RG 59, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1963, Senegal, Box 4035, National Archives.

51 In Betting on the Africans, Philip E. Muehlenbeck argues that while modernization theory was an important component of the Kennedy Administration’s policy towards Africa, “Kennedy saw personal relations between himself and African heads of state as a more important avenue for protecting the long-term security of the United States.” Muehlenbeck, Betting on the Africans, xv.


KKK,”\textsuperscript{54} and “President Johnson is Determined to Carry Out Racial Integration and to Make All Black Americans Full Citizens,”\textsuperscript{55} all emphasized the American president’s dedication to the cause of racial equality. After announcing Johnson’s commitment to granting African Americans their full citizenship rights, \textit{Fraternité Matin} dedicated an entire page of its issue to President Johnson’s action in matters of racial equality. Above a picture of the American president, \textit{Fraternité Matin} presented Johnson as the key to the future of blacks’ civil rights in the U.S.:

“African Americans’ cause is perhaps not yet completely lost thanks to this big-hearted president… Doesn’t he deserve our admiration and our congratulations?” Admiration is perhaps indeed what a Senegalese reader of Dakar-Matin would have felt when seeing on a front page the picture of Johnson giving the pen he used to sign the Voting Rights law to Martin Luther King.\textsuperscript{56} Reporting on the creation of the “Club Lyndon Baines Johnson” in Abidjan on the fifth anniversary of Ivory Coast’s independence, \textit{Fraternité Matin} went so far as to compare Johnson to Ivorians’ “cherished” president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny: “For his liberal spirit and his extraordinary lucidity, for his vision of life among Men, President Johnson is, like our cherished President Houphouët-Boigny, the champion of freedom and the confirmation of faith in human beings.”\textsuperscript{57} Qualifications of Johnson as a “great American president,” in the Senegalese press, and as a “champion of freedom,” in the Ivorian press, seem to illustrate an authentic admiration for the American president and his actions towards racial equality.\textsuperscript{58}

Senegalese and Ivorian expressions of approval of the American government’s actions in matters of racial equality may testify to the efficiency of American Cold War propaganda. Soon

\textsuperscript{54} “Le président Johnson déclare la guerre au KKK (organisation raciste aux Etats Unis),” \textit{Fraternité Matin}, March 29, 1965.

\textsuperscript{55} “Après son courageux discours prononcé au Congrès, le président Johnson est décidé à réaliser l’intégration raciale et faire de tous les noirs américains des citoyens à part entière,” \textit{Fraternité Matin}, April 2, 1965.


\textsuperscript{58} “Johnson: ‘Tout va changer,’” \textit{Dakar-Matin}, March 22, 1965; “Un nouveau club a été fondé à Abidjan.”
after World War II, American officials recognized the importance of counteracting Soviet propaganda on American racism by releasing more optimistic information on the state of American race relations to be circulated abroad. But in areas where American racial issues had the potential to harm American foreign policy, as on the African continent, the American State Department also insisted that American embassies keep abreast of American racial developments. As recommended by the Interdepartmental Psychological-Political Working Group, a committee run by the American State Department, “every instance of positive (constructive) action taken in the U.S. by local, state or federal should be made available to our posts overseas in order that the negative aspects (racial demonstrations, violence etc..) which ‘grab the headlines’ may be offset.” The memorandum on “Race Relations and U.S. Foreign Policy” further elaborated on the “basic guidelines on civil rights coverage” set by the United States Information Agency in the past few years. American officials stationed abroad were to stress that “in this multiracial society, the Federal government is committed to the same objectives as the civil rights organizations.” That the Ivorian and Senegalese press tended to highlight the racial progress achieved by the American government seems to testify of the success of the propaganda efforts deployed by the State Department.

Guinean representations of official American responses to racial issues was far more ambivalent, as were Guinean diplomatic relations with the U.S. The election of John F. Kennedy in the oval office opened a new era in the budding diplomatic relationship between Guinea and the U.S. As Philip E. Muelenbeck discussed in *Betting on the Africans*, unlike his predecessor, Kennedy worked on developing more cordial relations with radical African leaders who had not

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60 Memorandum from Rollie H. White to Abernathy, July 19, 1963, RG 59 Bureau of African Affairs, Records of G. Mennen Williams, Subject Files, Civil Rights, Box 16, National Archives.
professed unconditional support for the U.S. Guinean president Sékou Touré was one of them. A combination of successful “personal diplomacy” and much needed economic and technical assistance patched up U.S.-Guinean diplomatic relations and seemingly improved Guinean views on the U.S. This unprecedented era of good feelings between the two nations seems to have been reflected in Horoya’s coverage of American racial developments. As Thomas A. Cassilly explained in a June 17, 1963 report to the State Department, the “treatment of racial problems in the United States by Horoya, the official organ of the Democratic Party of Guinea and Guinea’s Ronly newspaper, continues to be restrained.” That Horoya’s coverage of the Birmingham racial events “and other integration stories” was “in an entirely objective manner stressing federal government efforts to end segregation and enforce the law” thus seems to have surprised American officials stationed in Guinea. As early as 1962, Horoya underlined Kennedy’s efforts to challenge the racial status quo. During the turbulent events which shook Alabama in 1963, titles like “President Kennedy is in Favor of Better Relations between Blacks and Whites,” and “The Kennedy Administration against the Bastions of Segregation,” brought attention to the positive role the American government played in racial progress in the U.S. On November 23 1963, Horoya dedicated half of its four-page issue to honor the man who fought “a heroic struggle against racial segregation.” Horoya’s honoring of President Kennedy’s steps towards eradicating racial discrimination perhaps confirms the success of Kennedy’s “personal

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61 Muehlenbeck, Betting on the Africans, xiv–xv, xviii.
62 Bi-weeka n°5 from charge d’Affairs Thomas A. Cassilly, American Embassy, Conakry, Guinea to Department of State, June 17, 1963, RG 59 Central Foreign Policy File, 1963, Box 3922, National Archives.
63 Bi-weeka n°4 from Hugh C. MacDougall, American Embassy, Conakry, Guinea to Department of State, June 3, 1963, RG 59 Central Foreign Policy File, 1963, Box 3922, National Archives.
diplomacy.” But even during the Kennedy years, *Horoya*, as Mary Dudziak has underlined, hardly embraced the “story of progress, the story of triumph of good over evil,” that American officials tried hard to impart on Africans. Guinean Marxist understanding of American racial issues prevented *Horoya* from embracing the official American success story.

In April 1962, *Horoya* featured an article seeking to assess Kennedy’s record in matters of racial equality. According to the author, although Kennedy’s actions certainly contributed towards racial progress, his measures barely improved blacks’ condition in the U.S. Indeed, appointing a black man to a cabinet-level position accomplished nothing more than boosting black racial pride. Kennedy’s executive order 10925 would force “capitalists” to abandon their discriminatory practices to keep government funding, but it would not solve the problem of growing industrial automation and the increasing destitution of northern black workers resulting from that process. For the author, “despite the more or less open intervention of the American government, the anti-segregationist struggle is not easy. This is primarily because Kennedy is not Castro and the United States of trusts has a say in the ruling of the country. Therefore, we should not expect revolutionary measures on the part of President Kennedy…” As this example illustrates, the Guinean press primarily conceptualized the black problem in the U.S. in Marxian terms. Unlike other press organs in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa which saw progressive racial legislation as a sure sign of the gradual demise of racial discrimination, *Horoya*’s socio-economic understanding of the roots of the American racial problem prevented such optimism.

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67 Muehlenbeck argues that while modernization theory was an important component of the Kennedy Administration’s policy towards Africa, “Kennedy saw personal relations between himself and African heads of state as a more important avenue for protecting the long-term security of the United States.” Muehlenbeck, *Betting on the Africans*, xv.


As long as the “social system which expresses the interests of imperialist monopolies” is
maintained, racism would continue to plague American social life.70

Francophone Africans’ responses to American racial issues were also influenced by their
overall perceptions of the American superpower. American Cold War propaganda, presenting the
U.S. as the bastion of democracy and liberty, and racism as a national anomaly, was not equally
convincing to all Francophone Africans. But those who seemed to embrace positive
representations of the U.S. were far more inclined to formulate nuanced accounts and
assessments of the African American freedom movement and the state of racial progress.
Following Governor Ross Barnett and white Mississippians’ resistance to James Meredith’s
enrollment at the University of Mississippi, Kiba conceded that the events hurt the U.S. image in
Africa: “Americans often say that they are not extremists, that it is not them who are protesting
against integration in front of colleges and universities. For Africans, unfortunately, it is about
nothing else than Americans as a whole.”71 However, Kiba suggested that these racial events
surprised Africans, thereby illustrating Francophone Africans’ idealization of the U.S. as a land
of freedom and equality: “People often say that those events hurt the global consciousness. For
Africans, it is rather a moment of bewilderment which leads to unanswered questions.” Parts of
Radio-Abidjan’s editorial on the Meredith affair, reported in Afrique Nouvelle, reflected the
sense of surprise among Africans: “We remain confused to continuously witness the worst times
of obscurantism at a moment when a country universally recognized as the greatest democracy in
the world brings proof that it is one of the most glorious standard-bearers of the complete
liberation of Man.”72 Ivorian staunch support of the U.S. in its crusade against the Soviet Union

71 Simon Kiba, “Autour de l’affaire Meredith: Le noir américain doit-il vivre dans des réserves,” Afrique
Nouvelle, October 5, 1962.
was accompanied by a testament of faith in the American democratic credo. The racial violence unleashed as a result of Meredith’s attempt to enroll at Ole Miss did not fit into Ivorian and, seemingly, many other Francophone Africans’ imagery of the American champion of democracy. Like Kiba, who claimed that the “honest people who want to live in peace with blacks” were far more numerous than white racists, the editorialist of *Radio-Abidjan* stressed that Washington should not bear the blame in this infamous story.\(^73\) Alleviating the contradiction between American democratic official identity and the practice of racial discrimination, the speaker warned that “one must not equally condemn the authorities in Washington who are, in fact, making an effort to put an end to segregation, and a minority of stubborn and backward local politicians who are so shortsighted that they do not even realize they are hurting their country.”\(^74\)

The Francophone African press was critical of American racism, such as the violence which broke out when Meredith attempted to enroll at Ole Miss. Just as like French colonizers’ abuse of power and racism were not representative of France as a whole, however, the actions of a group of white American racists did not reflect badly on the whole of the American nation.

Unlike other Francophone African newspapers, *Horoya* frequently noted the discrepancy between American democratic rhetoric and domestic racial inequality. In an April 10, 1962 article on American racial progress, an anonymous journalist underlined American hypocrisy: “When an American speaks of liberty and democracy, it is always easy to throw in their face: What about racial discrimination and the lynching of Negroes in the U.S.? What about that?” As this example illustrates, *Horoya* bluntly underlined the contrast between much publicized American ideals and the U.S. domestic racial record. According to the author, this gap should certainly worry American officials, who were concerned with gaining the allegiance of

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\(^73\) Simon Kiba, “Autour de l’affaire Meredith.”

\(^74\) “Revue de la presse africaine: Quand le racisme se déchaîne.”
emancipated African countries. He affirmed, “No American official weary of future relations between the big metropolis of North America and the newly liberated African nations (or those in the process of obtaining liberation) can afford not to worry about the evolution of the black problem in the U.S…” 75 In July 1963, after the racial violence which took place in Birmingham, Alabama, Horoya directly attributed Kennedy’s intervention to the global Cold War context. For this anonymous journalist, in this situation “the merit of the Kennedy administration is to have rightly understood that the last anti-segregationist protests…had an impact that went dangerously beyond American frontiers.” 76 By placing the U.S. government’s actions towards racial issues in the Cold War context, Horoya challenged American official representation of the noble character of the Kennedy Administration’s approach to the civil rights movement.

Joachim’s editorials for Bingo also stressed the discrepancy between the American democratic credo and the reality of American racism. His negative appraisal of the American nation, fueled by both the Cold War and American racial contexts, shaped his depiction of Americans and the state of American racial progress. Following the 1963 Birmingham racial events, Joachim pointed out the inconsistency between American official commitment to freedom and the tragic examples of American racism towards African Americans. Joachim noted that blacks’ cries of suffering came from “a country which ostensibly placed itself at the forefront of global progress and which was a fierce defender of Liberty for a long time.” 77 He sarcastically added,

I don’t know if Americans, who are crazy about advertisement and efficiency, did not go so far as to establish that the sum of iniquities and crimes that a people commits was the sole indication of its presence and vitality. However, there is ample evidence that the desire to get the world’s attention appears to have the

effect of a mental disorder on the inhabitants of the New World, where the
dialogue between different communities is still stuck in the language of bombs.

Articles previously discussed in this chapter noted the discrepancy between American rhetoric of
freedom and the existence of racial inequalities in the U.S. However, this observation never
resulted in a critical reflection on America’s supposed commitment to freedom and democracy.
On the global Cold War stage, the U.S. represented Freedom; racial incidents only showed that
some Americans did not live up to their country’s ideals. However, by pointing out that when
blacks “call for Liberty using civil disobedience exercises, (Americans) organize a “Negro hunt”
with the help of police dogs as though they were dealing with criminals,” Joachim highlighted
American hypocrisy. The graphic pictures of dogs let loose on black protesters published in the
same issue of Bingo offered a different image of the U.S. than that of a freedom-and-democracy-
loving country.

As this last quotation illustrates, Joachim’s discussion of American racial problems also
led him to voice broader criticisms of the U.S. By sarcastically suggesting that the U.S. may have
conceived of its multiple incidents of racial violence as a sign of American “presence and
vitality,” the author condemned American foreign policy during the Cold War. The relevance of
the Cold War context in Joachim’s outcry against American racism was also exemplified by his
reference to American nuclear policy, as well as the space race between the U.S. and the Soviet
Union. Speaking of American handling of the U.S. racial situation, Joachim claimed, “This is the
greatest shame of our century and our civilization, a guilty civilization which runs away from its
most urgent earthly tasks to throw itself in the derisory conquest of space.” Most of the
Francophone African press’ treatment of the African American freedom movement pointed out
the active collaboration of the American government in bringing about racial progress. Joachim,
on the other hand, blamed the U.S. for deploying disproportionate means in its struggle against
the Soviet Union while “hundreds of thousands of human beings moan(ed) in the dungeon of despair.” As Joachim’s commentaries on recent racial developments illustrate, some Francophone Africans remained impervious to American propaganda.

A year later, in another editorial, Joachim continued to point out inconsistencies in American thought and practices in an article entitled “America Will Die of Paradox.” His editorial came in response to the renewed explosion of racial violence following the passage of the Civil Rights Act in “this country which pretends to be at the forefront of world progress.” Reporting the results of a recent study, Joachim pointed out that although 88% of white Americans in the South conceded that blacks should have the right to vote, only 31% supported legislation that would guarantee suffrage to blacks. Citing, for example, the “awful and diabolical” Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater who was manifestly against racial discrimination but who refused to impose on whites the obligation to live with blacks, Joachim illustrated the American dilemma in matters of racial progress. Further discussing the American paradox brought to light by the African American freedom movement, Joachim exposed white Americans’ internal struggle: “When white Americans think of the condition imposed on blacks, an absolute struggle takes place between their reason and their emotions. Their reason tells them that blacks have suffered from discrimination for too long, and that this discrimination is in blatant contradiction with the American doctrine of equality for all.” But whites’ acute fear of being socially overrun by a growing number of blacks and, more importantly, of living in an increasingly racially mixed society prevented whites from alleviating their guilty conscience by granting African Americans racial equality.

Unlike other Francophone African commentators, who celebrated the adoption of the Civil Rights Act as a sign that the U.S. was on a sure path towards racial equality, Joachim

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looked at this recent legislative move with a much more incredulous eye. Joachim’s perceptive observation of the American racial situation was accompanied by a supportive stance towards the foreseeable radicalization of the movement. Echoing the work of “correct prophet” James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, Joachim declared that despite whites’ fear of racial mixing, or “racial genocide,” “it is high time for white racists to lose some ground, and for blacks, the pariah, to change their condition, to win the battle, or put the house on fire.” Since the law of the land faced a considerable obstacle in whites’ irrational fear of racial integration, advocates of “blacks’ Revolution” may have no choice but to fight a “bloody conflict.”

Over a year later, Joachim’s pessimism remained unchanged. In an editorial entitled “Assessment of an Emancipation,” Joachim made the “tragic observation” that a century after the emancipation of black slaves in the U.S., the condition of his “brothers dragged away from the continent” had barely changed. 79 Despite the abolition of slavery, African Americans continued to bear the psychological brunt of slavery in so far as their “current status in American society did nothing more, in fact, than perpetuate the status they had had under the regime of slavery.” Therefore, since “America covered its ears and refused to hear the long chain of revolts dully rumbling,” Joachim affirmed, “the promises of American democracy” remained illusory. Further expressing his disbelief in the transformative power of American legislation in matters of racial equality, Joachim insisted that until “the white American Man managed to solve his internal contradictions… the virtual equality African Americans were just granted would remain a dead letter.” Or perhaps, the author added, “the hour of liberation” would come when “the black columns of Liberty, set in motion, would be able to impose their rule upon the enemy.”

Predicting that today’s religious spirituals would be tomorrow’s “war cries,” expressions of the “legitimate wrath of a minority who wanted to live,” Joachim’s stance with regards to a

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radicalized black freedom movement differed from many contemporary Francophone African commentators who tended to emphasize the criminal nature of racial riots.

Joachim reiterated his staunch criticism of the U.S. as a whole and his proclaimed support for a more aggressive black American activism after the murder of “non-violent apostle” Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968. With the disappearance of “The Man Who Could Still Save America,” white Americans lost their last chance to avoid racial violence. Unwilling to wait any longer, Joachim championed, “blacks were going to strike hard and the whole world was going to be behind them.” Once again, the author’s pen did not spare the U.S.: “This awful act considerably discredits the degree of civilization and technical progress this country has reached. Its prestige does not impress people any more. It is tragically caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. We pity soulless America.” By personifying America, Joachim issued a general condemnation of a country which was trying hard to sell the “American Dream” to the rest of the world while fighting to prevent blacks from stepping on the stage of humanity. Unlike many Francophone African authors who were careful to distinguish between a minority of racist Americans and the rest of white Americans, Joachim indiscriminately passed a guilty verdict on white American society as a whole.

Senegalese journalist and editor-in-chief of Afrique Nouvelle, Kiba, recognized the significance of racial developments in the American South for U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War as well. He affirmed that while African diplomats in the U.S. restrained from making any official commentary on what truly was an American domestic affair, their presence nonetheless influenced the American government’s response to racial violence in U.S. South. Moreover, confirming the fears of the American State Department regarding the negative effect of American racism on American foreign relations, Kiba conceded, “it is not possible for

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Americans to speak of peace and aid to under-developed countries so long as there is a whole part of the population that remains pariahs, for the caste system couldn’t but harm the U.S.A.”

In effect, the author noted, the Soviets were “getting a kick out of” denouncing American racism in the press and radio making its way to Africa. As the previous examples suggest, however, Soviet propaganda and, more generally, Francophone Africans’ awareness of American racial issues did not generally result in an outright condemnation of the U.S. by Francophone Africans.

In fact, a little over a year earlier, Kiba warned his readers about a tendency in the press to misrepresent the American racial situation: “In its reports on American racism, the press is, in general, very passionate. Journalists often rely on a priori ideas that they did not get the opportunity to confront with American reality.” This passionate bias resulted in an overgeneralized account of American racism that obscured African Americans’ different experiences whether they be in the North or in the South of the U.S., and, especially, the Northern “efforts to do good.” Unlike the U.S. South where the Jim Crow system tightly held its grip on the public lives of African Americans, the North, according to Kiba, was a place where “blacks have all the rights that whites have. Nobody would drive a black out of a white restaurant, nobody would protest against the admission of a black child in a white school.” In his report on American racism, Kiba thus set out to avoid what he saw as a mistaken generalization of the American racial situation.

Revisionist accounts of the Civil Rights movement have debunked the somewhat artificial division between Northern and Southern racial relations. The much mediatized

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81 Simon Kiba, “Autour de l’affaire Meredith.”
Southern theater of the African American freedom movement resulted in Northern de-facto segregation being left out of the conventional narrative of the movement. In turn, the media shift to Northern American cities in the mid-1960s effectively nationalized the American racial issue. We might see Kiba’s exculpation of the North as the result of popular framing of the civil rights movement, but what is perhaps more relevant is the author’s desire to condemn reductive representations of American racial issues and offer a more nuanced portrayal of African Americans’ condition. The author’s trip to Chicago and his encounter with some of its African American inhabitants revealed that whites’ racial prejudice prevented blacks from living in white residential areas and finding jobs. But he also recounted the efforts made by the city of Buffalo, NY to build housing projects where both blacks and whites lived together. Testifying to the liberal character of race relations in the North, Kiba also mentioned that one of the black pastors he met in Buffalo had married nineteen interracial couples. Moreover, Kiba did not simply exclude Northern whites from the generalized portrait of American whites as racist bigots; he also pointed out blacks’ own responsibility in their predicament. In a region where racial segregation did not exist, “what is striking is that even though blacks have fought and vanquished, they often don’t take advantage of their rights.” This last remark suggests that Kiba’s intentions were not only to alleviate the stigma weighing on all of white America, but also to introduce the idea that black Americans themselves had partial responsibility for their current predicament.

Following the Freedom Summer a few years later, *Afrique Nouvelle* published a report on blacks’ political integration in the U.S. This report stressed the progress accomplished by the U.S., especially white liberals, in granting African Americans political power. The weekly’s introduction to the article briefly presented its author, journalist and producer Herbert Krosney.
While the weekly rightly mentioned that Krosney was currently working for the National Educational Television, it inaccurately reported that he and the program he was working for were British and, that the conclusions he drew on the state of black Americans’ political empowerment resulted from a recent visit to the U.S. South. In fact, Krosney was an American, had been working as a journalist in the U.S., and also worked as a writer and producer for the National Educational Television, whose headquarters were located in New York.\textsuperscript{84} It is difficult to account for the weekly’s misrepresentation of Krosney. It might very well result from the fact that African journalists had just recently been dipping their toes in the world of professional journalism and perhaps lacked the circumspection that comes with experience. We can safely suspect that by presenting this account as a foreign take on American racial developments, however, the weekly sought to provide its readership with a non-biased, or non-American, opinion on the state of American racial progress. I would suggest that \textit{Afrique Nouvelle’s} introduction to the article is revealing of the weekly’s views on the state of racial developments in the U.S. Indeed, by establishing the “objective” character of Krosney’s account, the weekly tacitly concurred with Krosney’s conclusions and, by extension, with the official American “story of progress…of U.S. moral superiority.”\textsuperscript{85}

In his article, Krosney pointed out that Martin Luther King, Jr. had met with senators in Washington to discuss the Civil Rights bill. He also reported the words of black activist Charles Evers who signaled that, whenever he needed to, he could always contact Attorney General Robert Kennedy. For Krosney, these two examples show “how easy it was for black American

\textsuperscript{84} Herbert Krosney, \textit{Beyond Welfare: Poverty in the Supercity} (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), 211.

\textsuperscript{85} Dudziak, \textit{Cold War Civil Rights}, 13.
leaders to have access to the main political authorities of the country.” Moreover, white liberals’ growing leverage in some parts of the South and African Americans’ campaigns for voting rights brought “encouraging results.” However, if the situation remained far from rosy, white segregationists were not the only ones to blame. The white power structure represented an important obstacle to the efforts of the Voter Education Project, a program conceived to coordinate voter registration campaigns led by major civil rights organizations. But, Krosney noted, “the black population’s apathy” constituted another major break to further progress in blacks’ political empowerment. As he explained, “The percentage of blacks participating in elections in almost all of the states where they can vote is considerably lower than that of whites from a similar socio-economic background.” According to Krosney, years of oppression, poverty and illiteracy explained why “these former slaves… don’t feel the desire to vote or make any political act. This is especially true of the elderly.” In light of black Americans’ apparent inaction, Krosney affirmed, “it is not fair to place the blame solely on southern white authorities for the low participation of blacks in elections.” Even though white Americans’ racial discrimination constituted an important obstacle to black Americans’ political empowerment, the author sought to point out that African Americans themselves held part of the responsibility in their continuing political oppression.

Kiba’s 1961 report entitled “Blacks Have Solid Hopes” also highlighted whites’ support for the black American struggle for racial equality:

Personally, what I find amazing in this struggle is not that the Supreme Court was able to stand up for blacks, because it does nothing but its duty, but it is rather to see whites spontaneously serve this cause. Americans hurry to spread in the world

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the news of Supreme Court decisions. […] I believe that the United States should rather show to the world the cooperation between well-intentioned white Americans and black Americans in eradicating this Southern sickness.

Referring to American Cold War propaganda, seeking to alleviate Soviet criticism of American racism and to obtain the support of newly independent nations, Kiba criticized American efforts to publicize judicial steps towards racial integration at the expense of whites’ active support for racial equality. For example, the author cited blacks’ and whites’ joint effort to improve interracial relations and blacks’ condition in organizations like the National Urban League and the Southern Regional Council. Kiba also brought attention to the white students who “almost heroically” join black students’ picketing efforts. For Kiba, “it is the youth with this kind of moral fiber that should be sent later to Africa.” American Cold War narratives emphasized the responsiveness of the American government to eradicate racism in an effort to counter Soviet criticisms of the U.S. Kiba, however, chose to highlight examples of interracial cooperation. If there existed a group of racist “maniacs” in the U.S., as Kiba conceded, one would be wrong to mistake them for the majority of white Americans.

Finally, recognizing the global dimensions of racism, some Francophone Africans refrained from buying into contemporary Manichean accounts of American racism. For example, bringing the issue of racism to the African context, Kiba affirmed that the U.S. was not the only country where racial tensions existed: “Human relations between different races are difficult everywhere, even in Africa where constitutions provide for severe punishments in cases of racism.” By framing racism as a problem of global dimensions, Kiba further alleviated the stigma weighing heavily on the U.S. for its recent racist outbreaks. Although Kiba did not expand on his comparison between American and African racism, the following issue of Afrique

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89 Simon Kiba, “Autour de l’affaire Meredith.”
Nouvelle put Kiba’s comparison in perspective. Under the title “When Racism is Unleashed,” the weekly reprinted comments from the African press on the Meredith affair and on the conflict between the Gabonese and the Congolese, “two racial incidents with bloodshed.”

Interestingly, Afrique Nouvelle placed Southern white resistance to racial integration alongside tensions between the Gabonese and the Congolese. The conflict that erupted in October 1962 between the Congo and Gabon came as a result of a soccer game. Angry that the referee disallowed their goal, some Gabonese forcibly removed Congolese living in Gabon. In retaliation, the Congolese violently drove out Gabonese, as well as some Dahomeans, Senegalese, Togolese and Cameroonianians, from Dolisie, Pointe-Noire, and Brazzaville. Reporting on the violence that took place in the Congo towards these groups, Afrique Nouvelle affirmed that “a number of Congolese citizens have, in turn, given way to racism.”

Speaking of the violence against Dahomeans in the Congo, the Agence Dahoméenne de Presse declared that the Congolese believed Dahomeans were not “at home,” and that their presence and that of other groups prevented the Congolese from “fully benefiting from the resources of their country.” It is interesting to note that Africans portrayed this territorial conflict in terms of racial prejudice. While racism may not have been the adequate term to describe the tensions that divided different African groups, that they understood these tensions in racial terms is relevant for our examination of Francophone Africans’ views on American racial tensions. With Africans

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90 “Revue de la presse africaine: Quand le racisme se déchaîne.”
93 “Revue de la presse africaine: Quand le racisme se déchaîne.”
94 Frank Pfetsch and Christoph Rohloff characterized the conflict between Congo and Gabon in terms of “territory, border and sea border.” Frank R Pfetsch and Christoph Rohloff, National and International Conflicts, 1945-1995: New Empirical and Theoretical Approaches (London: Routledge, 2000), 240. Similarly, Jean-Pierre Missié argues that the concept of ethnicity does not suffice to explain conflicts such as the one that took place in the Congo in 1962: territorial identity also occupies an important place in this narrative. Missié, “Ethnicité et territorialité,” 835.
discriminating and persecuting other Africans, color may have played a lesser role in some Africans’ perceptions of American racial tensions. The “racism” that pitted Africans amongst themselves may have also contributed to a lesser sense of racial identification with African Americans, or, at least, a less stigmatic perception of white Americans. Indeed, Dahomean reader P. Yanda’s praise of Kennedy’s intervention in the Meredith affair was partly influenced by contemporary African developments for the Dahomean reader pointed out that “at a time when blacks drive other blacks out in Africa, some whites accept racial integration.”

Recent events in Gabon and the Congo, which the weekly portrayed as racial incidents, seem to have resulted in a softened critique of white American racism. Paradoxically, the parallel drawn between American racism and African tensions also served to magnify African condemnation of the former, as Yanda’s letter to the weekly suggests.

Three years later, the racial tensions which erupted in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles also inspired a comparison between American racism and racism in Europe and Africa. Stressing the dramatic socio-economic consequences of American racism on African Americans’ lives, Afrique Nouvelle pointed out that the American racial problems were far from exceptional:

Let’s not be scandalized by those facts: the world is such that only the powerful win. And, more importantly, let’s not say that this only exists in the United States. Don’t you know that in Europe, it is easier for a black person to find housing through telephone than to actually live in it afterwards? And in Africa, while it is suitable to offer whites air-conditioned accommodations and give them high salaries, blacks with the same qualifications, if they are at all given some of the same utilities, all they get is of cheap quality. Racism exists in Africa as well, if in more subtle forms.

Although the article strongly condemned racial discrimination towards African Americans, the author put American racism into perspective by underlining the existence of racism in other parts of the world. That Africans encountered difficulties in finding housing in France was no secret,

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for example. The scenes of urban violence in Watts and continuing criticism of American racism represented an opportunity for African journalists to voice their disapproval of racism towards, and, seemingly, among Africans. However, it is interesting to note that this comparison between different racist situations was not much framed so as to highlight grounds of racial solidarity between African Americans and Africans. Rather, the author sought to point out that Americans did not have the monopoly over racism; Europeans too could be racist.

In conclusion, the context of the Cold War turned what had so far been simply a domestic issue into a problem of global dimensions. As American officials understood very well, U.S. racial issues had the potential to harm American foreign policy in newly independent countries, especially on the African continent. Certainly, as this chapter has shown, Francophone African coverage of the African American freedom movement illustrated a relative sense of racial solidarity and identification towards black Americans on the part of Francophone Africans. Nonetheless, the racial bond uniting Africans and African Americans did not always translate into Francophone Africans’ sharp condemnation of the U.S. for its racial problems. While Francophone Africans followed American racial developments with keen interest and disapproved of white American racial prejudice towards blacks, they often recognized the role played by the American government to eradicate the plague of racism from U.S. society, as the Ivorian and Senegalese press especially illustrated. In these cases, it seems that the efforts led by the American State Department to counteract Soviet propaganda regarding American racial issues proved successful. Francophone Africans’ sentiment of estrangement towards African Americans may have contributed to the former’s moderate approach towards American racial tensions. On the flip side, Francophone Africans’ insistence on distancing themselves from black Americans may very well have resulted from the former’s accession to national independence
and international politics. African independence brought forth new challenges, notably that of developing new African countries’ economies. In such a context, being under the U.S.’s good graces may have left little room for racial solidarity. Certainly, Francophone Africans’ perception of American presidents as actively committed to bringing racial equality to the U.S. partly justify the former’s moderate approach to American racial issues.

However, the African American freedom movement also brought forth more critical and pessimistic responses among some Francophone Africans. For those commentators, black Americans’ racial oppression was a testament to America’s hypocritical claims to be the leader of the “free world” as well as to the unjust nature of capitalism. Just as French traditions of universalism and humanitarianism inspired some Francophone Africans’ criticism of American racism, French leftist influence not only permeated other Francophone Africans’ condemnation of American racial issues but also exacerbated its degree. To a large extent, Francophone Africans’ reactions to black Americans’ efforts to gain racial equality in the U.S. testify to the impact of the French colonial legacy in Francophone Sub-Saharan countries. The narrative of racial solidarity with Africans deployed by African Americans during the African American freedom movement was only partly reciprocated by Francophone Africans. While American historians have largely explored African Americans’ sense of connection to Africa after World War II and the significance of American racial issues for American foreign policy, Africans’ attitudes towards black Americans’ experiences of oppression have not been explored in their own right. As this chapter has illustrated, exploring Africans’ responses to American racial tensions has the potential to open new perspectives on the subjects of racial solidarity between Africans and the African diaspora.
CONCLUSION: DOUBLE TRAGEDIES?

In October 2013, the French antiracist journal Le Droit de Vivre displayed a photo of the 1983 March for Equality (marche des Beurs) in Paris and a photo of the 1963 March on Washington. Through this parallel, the International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism (LICRA) sought to “interrogate the present in the light of two major events which marked the historical combat against racism in North America and in France.” Alain Jacubowiks, president of the organization, remarked that although forty-five years after the famous March on Washington Americans elected a black President, thirty years after the French March for Equality, no progress has been accomplished in the domains of integration and civil rights in France. LICRA used the sign of racial progress embodied by the election of U.S. President Barack Obama to reflect on the racial climate in France. Contemporary French antiracists thus tap into a well-established feature of French antiracist thought and discourse. As this dissertation has demonstrated, American racial tensions of the 1950s and 1960s had already allowed the problem of racism to invade French public consciousness. Even though French and Francophone Africans’ efforts to tackle the problem of racism in France failed at effectively dissecting French constructions of racism, locating the emergence of a French “racial question” at the turn of the 21st century is problematic.

As this dissertation has shown, the contemporaneity of decolonization and black Americans’ struggle for racial equality was conducive to French reflection on colonialism and the colonized through the prism of American racial events. In the same way that French colonialism had revived the relevance of American racial relations in the late 19th century—after

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98 Indeed, in 1972 the French government passed a law against racial discrimination thirteen years after MRAP (discussed in chapter 2) proposed the bill to the French parliament. Catherine Lloyd, Discourses of Antiracism in France (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 169.
the abolition of slavery in the U.S. had curbed French passion on the subject—the French context of decolonization provided a fertile ground for a renewed interest in African Americans’ condition.\footnote{Jacques Portes, \textit{Fascination and Misgivings: The United States in French Opinion, 1870-1914} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 104–05.} If a rekindled preoccupation with American race relations among the French had deep historical roots, other contemporary developments contributed to magnifying the pertinence of the American racial context for the French public. In the years following World War II, American support for national self-determination antagonized the French public, for whom the interwar discourse of a Greater France must have resonated even louder than it had a couple of decades prior. Losing their favorite spot on the international scene to the new American giant, the idea of a “revitalized empire as the guarantor of international prestige and economic prosperity” must have sounded irreducibly tantalizing.\footnote{Gary Wilder, \textit{The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude & Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 4.} That the American superpower would use its newly acquired international weight to challenge colonialism could not but exacerbate French resentment towards the U.S. — an emotion that was notably channeled through French criticism of American racial hypocrisy. If French interwar fears of American economic and cultural “contamination” understandably intensified after World War II, as scholars have documented, my analysis of French reactions to American racial events of the 1950s and 1960s reveals another aspect of the French climate of anxiety, one that testified to French desires to remain immune to two American pitfalls: racism and racial diversity, or multiculturalism.\footnote{Jean-Philippe Mathy, \textit{Extrême-Occident: French Intellectuals and America} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 2.}

As French journalists and commentators across the political spectrum did not fail to point out, with a racially oppressed minority within its borders, U.S. advocacy for self-determination rang hollow. From the French communists, who would gradually come to support
French colonies’ independence, to French nationalists of the extreme-right, who fervently defended the French Empire, American racial events delegitimized the U.S.’s anticolonial rhetoric. An extensive analysis of French treatment of the African American freedom movement, however, reveals that American racial events allowed French journalists and intellectuals to do far more than to merely deflate American anticolonial pretenses. Regardless of their political leanings, French commentators read the events surrounding the French colonial system and its demise through the lens of American racial developments. Be it to sensitize the French nation to the danger of racial prejudice or the foreseeable apocalyptic consequences of global humanitarianism, French commentators resorted to often sensational analogies between the French colonial and postcolonial contexts and the American racial context. I would argue that this sensationalism should not be interpreted as a mere rhetorical device but rather as an indication of the emotionality underpinning the French experience of decolonization, especially as it pertained to the future of the French nation. I would also suggest that a decade or two after French participation in the Final Solution, the important place of race and racism in the French collective mind should really be no surprise.

As my analysis of French journalists and intellectuals’ treatment of American racial issues has demonstrated, French comparisons with the American racial context almost exclusively entailed the Algerian colonial situation and the Algerian population, both European and indigenous. As a department of France since 1848 and with a large population of French settlers, Algeria held a special place in the French “imperial nation-state.” The brutal and emotional character of their separation during the Algerian war for independence certainly explains French analogies between the Algerian colonial situation and the American racial context. However, that French journalists and intellectuals’ reflections on race and racism mostly
concerned Muslim Algerians reveals a French construction of race which, unlike the Americans, didn’t have color as its locus. This is not to say, however, that the French were indeed color-blind. As the MRAP’s 1963 survey of French racism revealed, Francophone Africans and Antilleans residing in France were victims of racial discrimination and suffered from humiliating French racial prejudices. The topic of French racism towards Francophone blacks nonetheless remained largely untouched in French public discourse.

I suggest that both the French and Francophone Africans played a part in the continuing omission of the white-on-black racial problem in France. During the 1950s and 1960s, the strong French Marxist current and the still potent discourse of French humanitarianism and universalism allowed both French and Francophone African intellectuals and journalists to take special interest in the racial events that were unraveling in the U.S. Both the French and Francophone Africans who strongly condemned the violent attempts of American segregationists to squelch black Americans’ efforts to gain racial equality did so on grounds of either the French tradition of humanitarianism and/or a Marxian conceptualization of oppression. The same humanitarian and universalistic thought that pressed French and Francophone Africans to condemn American racism largely prevented them from addressing French racism, not as a national anomaly but as a constitutive aspect of French history and national culture. For those French and Francophone Africans who embraced some kind of a Marxist theory, “race” was secondary, a mere necessary extension of economic oppression. While this understanding of the phenomenon of racism, in part gained through observations of American racism, allowed French and Francophone Africans to condemn colonial racism, it also prevented a particularistic treatment of, and investigation into, French racial prejudices. Even the most radical and elaborate condemnation of American racism by Black Power activists did not result in a more profound re-
evaluation of French racism. As far as French and Francophone Africans were concerned, the relevance of black Americans’ revolutionary attack on American racism stemmed from the latter’s capability of destroying American imperialism from within. As Sartre’s 1970 comparison between the French banlieues and American ghettos illustrates, the French only really started to address domestic racism in the late 1960s with French antiracists’ greater collaboration with immigrant workers.102

In the introduction to Black France/France Noire, Trica Danielle Keaton, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Tyler Stovall explain that French taboos around issues of “race and blackness in highly restricted spaces,” has led to “the in/visibility of blackness” in France to this day; an “in/visibility of blackness as a conspicuous body antithetical to a universal norm and as something simply unreadable as universal in dynamics of race and racism.” I argue that it is one of the tragic products of French and Francophone Africans’ lack of adequate theoretical tools to confront and make sense of the French phenomenon of racism, in its own national dimensions. For as I have shown in the last two chapters of this dissertation, race alone was not a factor potent enough to trigger Francophone Africans’ solidarity with African Americans in their brave challenge to the American racial status quo. Committed to the process of building their own nations, economically and politically both at home and abroad, some Francophone Africans were quick to dismiss any grounds of racial identification with their black American counterparts. For others, the quest to re-discover their African roots and build their own humanitarian project, thereby mixing French national identity and “forgotten” African traditions, rendered the black American political experience relatively obsolete. Blacks’ in/invisibility, I suggest, could have been avoided had French and Francophone African journalists and intellectuals been able to

learn what is specific to French racism through their observations of the American racial context of the 1950s and 1960s, a comparative approach that is basically what today’s scholars like Keaton, Sharpley-Whiting, and Stovall prescribe as the key to understanding French racial dynamics.103

In 2000, the soundtrack to the movie Comme un Aimant, following a group of French youths of African descent, was an almost equal mix of contemporary black American soul music and French hip-hop. Although we many not overlook the business aspect of this production decision, I would suggest that the inclusion of black American music on the soundtrack of a movie addressing French structural racism reveals of the larger significance black Americans’ experiences of racial oppression have taken on for French minorities over the last decades. Already in 1996 the French group who launched RAP on the French scene, NTM, released a record entitled Affirmative Action with the illustrious American rapper NAS.104 As these two examples suggest, in the last few decades black American popular culture has fed French hip-hop artists’ lyrical condemnation of French racism. As tragic as the contemporary French racial climate is, I would like to conclude this dissertation with a hypothetical scenario that could further dramatize the sudden death of Frantz Fanon, who passed away in a hospital in Maryland on 6 December 1961. As I mentioned in the introduction, I support Balibar’s assertion that the theorization of racism required an approach that combined Marxist philosophy with psychoanalysis. Fanon’s 1952 Black Skins, White Masks offered an analysis of the phenomenon of racism that was largely inspired by his psychoanalytic professional training. Ten years later, in


104 In 2013, Harvard University honored NAS with the foundation of the Nasir Jones Hip-Hop scholarship to nurture students with promising qualities both in the domains of scholarship and the art. “Announcing the Nasir Jones Hip-Hop Scholarship,” Hip-Hop Archive and Research Institute at the Hutchins Center, http://hutchinscenter.fas.harvard.edu/announcing-nasir-jones-hiphop-fellowship (accessed on April, 24 2015)
Fanon skillfully combined psychoanalytic and Marxist insights to analyze the phenomenon of colonial and racial oppression. We know the instrumental role this last book played in the ideological formation of black American radicals, but Fanon’s death in 1961 leaves us to wonder how he would have responded to the Black Power movement. Although this observation cannot be but hypothetical, I would suggest that had he lived through the 1960s his unique theoretical approach to racial oppression could have resulted in a comparative analysis of French and American racisms that would have engaged the French racial problem on its own terms.
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