Race, Rights and Reform

Black Activism in the French Empire and the United States
from World War I to the Cold War

Sarah C. Dunstan constructs a narrative of black struggles for rights and citizenship that spans most of the twentieth century, encompassing a wide range of people and movements from France and the United States, the French Caribbean and African colonies. She explores how black scholars and activists grappled with the connections between culture, race and citizenship and access to rights, mapping African American and francophone black intellectual collaborations from the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 to the March on Washington in 1963. Connecting the independent archives of black activist organizations within America and France with those of international institutions such as the League of Nations, the United Nations and the Comintern, Dunstan situates key black intellectuals in a transnational framework. She reveals how questions of race and nation intersected across national and imperial borders and illuminates the ways in which black intellectuals simultaneously constituted and reconfigured notions of Western civilization.

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Acknowledgments

It would take another book, at the very least, to properly thank the people who have made mine possible. My debts traverse continents. I am deeply grateful to the many people who have offered me advice, kindness and patience. A common adage is that you should never meet your heroes. My experience has been the exception that proves the rule. As a postgraduate and early career scholar, I have had the opportunity to meet many of the scholars whose work has inspired and galvanized me. On every occasion, I have been met with intellectual generosity and lively debate.

One such example is my PhD supervisor, Shane White. Shane’s brilliant work on African American life first brought me to the University of Sydney, and his intellectual spirit and committed mentorship (not to mention his brilliant literary recommendations and exhortations to live beyond academia) have sustained me throughout every step of the project. From the beginning, he has challenged me to be the best that I can, both as a historian and as a writer. His attention to detail – both historical and grammatical – is impressive, along with his passion for African American history. I continue to benefit greatly from his wisdom and his friendship, for which I am most grateful.

The History Department at the University of Sydney is peopled with exceptional scholars and human beings. I only had the privilege of having Stephen Robertson as my associate supervisor for a few months before he moved to George Mason University in Washington, DC. Despite this, he made a point of offering support from afar – advice on archival organization and reassuring conversations when we met up at conferences. This brings me to Marco Duranti, who stepped in as my associate supervisor after Stephen left. A human rights scholar and...
European historian, Marco’s mentorship made my work stronger with his critical engagement and his constant encouragement. While Marco was on sabbatical at Cambridge, Glenda Sluga kindly stepped in as an associate supervisor for the final months of my dissertation. Unofficially, however, Glenda’s advice and support have shaped my intellectual trajectory from the beginning of my postgraduate degree. Her warmth and intellectual verve have been indispensable. Our conversations about transnational and international history carried over into her brilliant mentorship in my position as a Postdoctoral Fellow with the International History Laureate in 2017–2018 and have indelibly shaped this work. At the Laureate, I had the good fortune to work alongside Ben Huf, Claire Wright and Beatrice Wayne, who provided both intellectual challenge and a great deal of fun.

At Sydney, I also had the good fortune of being able to discuss French imperial history (and swap tales of freezing Paris winters) with Robert Aldrich. Several of my chapters have benefitted greatly from Robert’s comments, criticisms and suggestions. Chris Hilliard’s cultural and intellectual history seminars were a source of inspiration and prompted careful reflection about my own methodologies. Michael McDonnell has been similarly thoughtful and supportive, offering crucial advice on the structure of this book. For their conversation, enthusiasm and encouragement, I would also like to thank Thomas Adams, Frances Clarke, Sophie Loy-Wilson, Iain McCalman and Mark McKenna.

As a Fulbright Postgraduate Fellow, I spent a year at Columbia University in New York. There I had the good fortune of working with Eric Foner and Mark Mazower. Although incredibly busy, Eric read my work attentively and took the time to help me tease out the intricacies of the arguments I wanted to make. He gave me indispensable advice on everything from methodology to writing and archival research. Beyond this, he helped make me feel like New York was a home away from home by inviting me for Thanksgiving. Mark was also generous with his time, encouraging me to present my work in several intellectual and European history forums at Columbia. He also offered me crucial bibliographic leads and encouraged me to return to France to pursue lingering research questions raised by my time in the United States. At his invitation, I became a visiting scholar at Columbia’s Global Center in Paris in 2016. In Paris, I enjoyed a warm welcome and fruitful discussions with scholars including Hélène Le Dantec-Lowry, Claire Parfait and Marie-Jeanne Rossignol. In New York, the late Judith Stein graciously welcomed me into her home. Our conversations about Marcus Garvey
and the African American wartime experience were most inspiring. She is sorely missed.

Research for this book has included time at multiple archives throughout the United States and France, as well as several online repositories, including that of the Communist International Archives. I would like to thank the staff at the Schomburg Center for Research on Black Culture, the Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Columbia University, the New York Public Library Collections, the United Nations Archives, the Moorland-Spingarn Collection at Howard University, the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, the National Archives in Washington, DC, the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, the Library of Congress, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Collection at Yale University, the UNESCO archives, the Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris, the Archives Nationales, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and the Centre d’Archives d’Outre-Mer. Funding for this research came from the Australian Postgraduate Award, a series of grants from the University of Sydney’s History Department, the John Frazer Travelling Scholarship, the Australian-American Fulbright Commission Postgraduate Fellowship and the International History Laureate ARC Postdoctoral Fellowship.


This book would not be what it is without the influence and guidance of the three examiners for my dissertation: Gary Wilder, James Campbell and Earl Lewis. Their detailed suggestions for transforming the dissertation into a book were most helpful. I owe special thanks to Gary Wilder for his support and conversations about all things French history on several of my follow-up archival trips to New York. So too am I grateful for the enthusiasm and wonderful feedback given to me by the editors for the Global and International History series, Erez Manela, Aviel Roshwald and John McNeill. Likewise, I am much indebted to Cambridge University Press and to Debbie Gershenowitz, who from our first conversation about this book at the Organization of American Historians annual meeting in New Orleans, back in 2017, has believed in this project and helped shape it into the piece it is today. When Debbie
moved on to take up a new position at the University of North Carolina Press, the lovely Lucy Rhymer and Emily Sharp stepped in with enthusiasm to shepherd the book through the production process. The anonymous reviewers for the press also offered invaluable critiques that have vastly improved the work.

I offer heartfelt thanks to all of those scholars whose commentary, discussion and feedback at conferences and workshops have refined my thinking and most certainly improved this project. They include Matthew Connelly, Clare Corbould, Mamadou Diouf, Brent Hayes Edwards, David Engerman, David Goodman, Jim Grossman, Paul Kramer, Alys Moody, Michael Ondaatje, Andrew Preston, Akbar Rasulov, Christian Tams, Ian Tyrrell and Michael Williams. Particular thanks go to Stephen Tuck for his encouragement and wonderful conversations about African American history and the relationship between rights and religion, along with his invitation to take part in the special issue of *Callaloo* on African and African American histories in Europe. Likewise to Roland Burke, whose knowledge of human rights and brilliant sense of humor have been most sustaining. I am indebted also to Peter Jackson at Glasgow University, who, since we first met at a workshop in 2016, has been a mentor *par excellence* and a good friend. So too has William Mulligan offered great support and friendship. I would also like to thank Stefanos Geroulanos, whose intellectual generosity and brilliance have pushed me to make links I would not have anticipated. The same goes for Martin Evans, who warmly welcomed me to Sussex and whose conversations on French history, art and music sustained me through manuscript revisions. My work with the Leverhulme Women and the History of International Thought Project at the University of Sussex has also been instrumental in shaping my own thought in ways that I could not have imagined. For that, I owe Patricia Owens, Katharina Rietzler, Kimberly Hutchings and Joanna Wood.

Among the cohort of postgraduates, now scholars, that I met at Sydney, at Columbia, in Paris and through various conferences, I was lucky to get to know some truly remarkable human beings and historians who are both intellectual interlocutors and friends: Felicity Berry, James Farquharson, Pamela Maddock, Jamie Martin, John Raimo and Boyd Van Dijk have my particular gratitude. A special mention is certainly owed to my coeditors at the *Journal of the History of Ideas* website, Derek K. O’Leary and Spencer Weinreich. Both have been a source of intellectual enrichment and friendship as this book came to fruition.

Outside of university life, I have the great fortune of friends who have persevered despite my tendency to “talk shop.” The lovely Laura Céline
Haughey and I started talking at a party more than eight years ago. Neither of us has drawn breath since. She, like Tara Willoughby and Hope Sneddon, has shown that continents and time zones stand for little in the face of friendship. Jo Wood, too, has been a cherished comrade-in-arms. For their good humor and kindness, I must also thank Tiarne Barratt, Guy Cavé, Chris Challen, Kyra Challen, Lynn Dixon, Areej Mehdi, Desiree Peña, and Nicole Sutherland. As I revised the manuscript from dissertation to book, James R. Kipping was a source of endless support, joy and love, for which I am most grateful.

My grandparents, Anne, Dick, Margaret and Charlie, have given me so much love. They instilled in all of their children and grandchildren a thirst for knowledge. Anne and Dick lived to see me begin this project. Their unflagging belief in my potential and their continued directives to keep pressing on with my research meant the world, along with their letters and telephone conversations. Mandy and Dermot, my aunt and uncle, never failed to ask me about this project or send me relevant articles as they came across them. Their encouragement means so much.

From dissertation to book, my immediate family has truly lived this project with me and shaped its course. The menagerie residing at our various houses – Ellie, Tamsin, Rupert, Sophie, Cas, Harry and Charlie – have done their best to give me companionship (and distraction!) while I worked. My parents, Hugh Dunstan and Margaret Macdonald, possess a passion and genius for their own work in the sciences that has never ceased to inspire me. They first taught me to ask questions and set the example of how to do so with integrity. My siblings, Jennifer and Nicholas Dunstan, not only gave me the gift of their constant support and good humor but stoically helped with last-minute spell checks and bibliographical panics. All four of them have kept my feet on the ground and a smile on my face. I can never thank them enough. This book is dedicated to them.
Notes on Terminology and Language

Discussing race across national boundaries, languages and temporalities is not without its difficulties. Vocabularies of racial belonging and identification are contingent upon specific historical and geographical location. In this book, I have made the choice to use more contemporary terms in the sections of my own writing—such as people of color, African diasporic or African American. Where older racial terminology was employed in the documents that form the basis of my research, I have used them only in the context of quotation. For the sake of clarity, when discussing a particular movement or concept discussed at length by the intellectuals studied here—such as the “New Negro” movement—I have kept the name in quotation marks. Such terms are deployed in this study as historical categories and are not intended as ontological designation.

Throughout the book, I have translated most words from the original French, except where nuance or clarity requires me to use the original term or name for an organization, governing body or text. As noted previously, this is particularly the case when analyzing discourse on race. For the most part, in acknowledgment of the historical specificity of their usage, I have kept terms such as “nègre” and “noir” in their original form, rather than attempting to affix an English equivalent term. Occasionally, I have translated both as “black.”

1 A wonderful explication of these particular terms can be found in Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 20–38.
Notes on Terminology and Language

More generally, the reader will note the change in terms as the chapters move from 1919 through to the 1950s and early 1960s. Most often, the adoption of new terms was an intentional choice of the activists who form the focus of the book, and my discussion seeks to reflect some of the rationales behind these changes.

All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.