

control), and he quite rightly views these proliferating identities as part of his story. But although his efforts to diverge from a more conventional political narrative are commendable, he often leans quite heavily on the work of a single band or sporting event as evidence of cross-cultural borrowing, and his treatment of the cultural history of empire and its aftermath feels too episodic.

Overall, for those who wish to introduce undergraduates to the twists and turns of British imperial power in the twentieth century – which Parsons persuasively portrays as decidedly non-linear – this engaging (and, happily, affordable) book represents a welcome opportunity to do so.

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THE ACCIDENTAL NATION-STATE

Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–60.

By Frederick Cooper.

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Key Words: West Africa, colonial policy, decolonization, entitlements, nationalism.

This rich volume is the capstone of Cooper's substantial scholarship on the post-Second World War transition from subject to citizen and empire to nation-state in French West Africa. Debates between African and French elites about the nature of citizenship, nationality, sovereignty, and the state are the book's primary focus. Two issues dominated these debates. The first was the African demand for the rights and benefits of French citizenship. The second was the form that African political entities would take after the dissolution of empire and the nature of their relationship to one another and to France. These intra-elite debates were shaped by their historical context – a vibrant milieu of African workers, peasants, women, and youth who had mobilized around specific demands and a French government that was burdened by the increased costs of reformed imperialism. Cooper posits that these struggles shaped French as well as African institutions.

The meaning of citizenship was hotly disputed. With the enactment of the 1946 constitution that laid the foundations for France's Fourth Republic, African subjects became citizens of France. Exactly what that meant was the subject of contention, since citizens could be governed by either French or personal civil status, operating under different legal codes on matters relating to marriage, family, and inheritance. It was left to future lawmakers to determine what rights would be accorded to which civil status. In consequence, French citizens who lived according to Muslim or 'customary' law were generally deemed to possess lesser juridical status than those governed by the French civil code. During the decade and a half after the war, French citizens in Africa used their new status to claim political, economic, and social rights equal to those of French citizens in the metropole, while preserving their own cultural identities, practices, and social norms.

The nature and scope of postcolonial political structures were also the subject of struggle. Cooper argues that African political leaders were anticolonialist, but not necessarily nationalist, and that the transition from empire to nation-state was neither inevitable nor desirable. Disavowing independence on the basis of small, economically precarious states that would result in poverty and political impotence, many African leaders called instead for federations that bound self-governing African territories together and linked them to France in a reformed system that allowed for both diversity and equality. In the end, Africans wound up with nation-states that neither they nor France had sought. Cooper's task was to explain this paradox.

Although the basic premises of this book have been established in Cooper's earlier works, this volume adds considerable detail concerning the debates and struggles in conference rooms, legislative sessions, and the streets. Although the ramifications affected all of French Africa, the book focuses primarily on French West Africa – specifically Senegal, and to a lesser extent, Côte d'Ivoire and Soudan. The dominant voices are those of African and French elites – gleaned from books, newspapers, legislative debates, and official letters and reports – who, Cooper contends, shaped the debates. However, there is significant reference to the actions of the mobilized base – women agitating for the vote, workers striking for equal wages, benefits, and living standards, and military veterans claiming benefits and spearheading resistance to chiefly authority – all of whom employed 'the rhetoric of republican citizenship' to make demands for equality (p. 53). As these groups advanced toward parity with metropolitan citizens, France ceded power and responsibility to African political bodies in order to sidestep the growing costs of the reformed imperial system. Cooper's book provides a fascinating window into the thoughts and actions of the people who conceptualized and realized these momentous transformations.

This penetrating analysis provides invaluable historical context for current debates over the rights of African immigrants and their descendants in contemporary French society. In the decade and a half after the Second World War, the ancestors of many of these immigrants were citizens of France – and thus entitled to make political and economic claims on the metropolitan power. After independence, they lost their claim-making power, and Africans in France were reduced to immigrants with no intrinsic right to equal justice, suffrage, free speech, assembly, and movement throughout French territory. A decade and a half into the twenty-first century, the definition of the French nation continues to be contested. The popular notion that citizenship requires adherence to specific social and cultural norms reverses the progress of postwar France, when citizens were permitted to retain their own cultures, customs, and values, without jeopardizing their claims to political and social equality. Revisiting a time when French citizenship embraced social, political, and cultural diversity, Cooper suggests, 'might help us think anew about the relationship of republican citizenship to cultural difference and of the colonial past to exclusion and discrimination in the present' (p. 434). A critical contribution to our understanding of France and Africa after the Second World War, this book makes a superlative case for the relevance of history to the creation of a more just and equitable world.

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