

Book Review: Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-44. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

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Eric Jennings' book, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-44*, presents a clear and comprehensive survey of colonial practices under the Vichy regime. The book argues that these colonies implemented Vichy ideology without direct German interference, which resulted in an adoption of Vichy policies that served to consolidate the power of colonial administrations.¹ This review argues that while Jennings successfully supports his thesis, he fails to present the consequences of the events in the colonies to France's wartime relationship with either the Vichy government or Germany.

The main purpose of Jennings' work is to challenge the Gaullist myth of "an empire immediately rallying behind" Free France.² Jennings believes that colonial administrations were not forced to support Vichy France because of direct Nazi pressure. Instead, individual administrators saw benefit in supporting the Vichy regime, because the policy of National Revolution allowed for the resurgence of a dominant *colons*³ identity over non-Europeans.⁴ Jennings proposes that while such policies were popular in the Vichy administration, they failed to consolidate popular support among non-Europeans, and at times, even the *colons*. The effects of such policies would have clear consequences on the future of these colonies in the French empire – they would both draw out opposition within indigenous populations and non-whites, who, similar to the *colons*, expressed a unique sentiment of national resurgence. The resurgence in national identity heightened resistance and led to the demise of the French empire.

The strengths in Jennings work are threefold. First, Jennings' research is an extensive example of the comprehensive research required to understand social history in relation to complex political theories. Jennings research combines archival material in French, English, and native languages from Europe, the United States and each of the colonies studies. For primary sources he applies a variety of official colonial documents, government correspondence, newspapers, pamphlets, books, and photographs, all of which he integrates with the variety of secondary research surrounding the topic. The book therefore provides in-depth research to benefit a specialist on the topic, yet through its comparative nature, exposes an awareness of the connection between colonialism, The Second World War, and the seeds of decolonization. Jennings' work therefore makes a unique contribution to both the politics of Vichy France and the history of 20th century decolonization. The work combines both narratives to explain events in the colonies of Vichy France.

The second strength comes from the extensive material Jennings examines, and from which he develops a complex understanding of colonies native and non-white populations. As a result, he does not limit himself to explain such groups as singular, but instead provides in depth explanations towards the differences both in these groups and their place within Vichy colonialism. For example, his research in Madagascar allows him to differentiate between Malagasy groups that supported the

¹ Eric Jennings. *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-44* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) 2.

² *Ibid.*, 10.

³ The *Colons* are France's colonial population.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

association the Vichy regime attempted to create between Marshall Pétain and the Merina monarchy, and which groups did not.⁵ His distinction can largely be understood by individual communities that had embraced the monarch during its rule, and those that always represent dissent.⁶ This distinction shows an in-depth awareness of the differences indigenous populations, groups that are often outlined as a single identity.

Jennings avoids the possible pitfall of idealizing colonial policies prior to the Vichy regime – characterizing the book's third strength. Jennings critically examines the colonial practices of the Third Republic. While this regime might have been different from the policies of Vichy France, he establishes a similar critical analysis of both. Jennings ultimately argues that the colonial policy of both Vichy France and the previous Third Republic both discredited the identity of indigenous and non-white populations. Vichy France applied the National Revolution to create national groups subservient to the *colons*. The Third Republic applied assimilation policies to create a single *colons* identity. The two policies, however, represent a very different perspective on the place of France's colonies in its empire. Jennings' argument, while comprehensive, is not without its failures.

This, however, leads to the main issue left out of Jennings' work. While Jennings bases his work off of the political reality of France during The Second World War, he fails to evaluate the consequences of the events in the colonies on the people of France, and their perspectives on the colonies. That is to say, while the mythical colonial perspective deteriorated during the war, Jennings strays from measuring any implications this may have had on the relationship France's population held with both Vichy regime and Germany. Jennings asserts that during the Third Republic, the colonial mythology associated with policies of assimilation lead the French population to believe that France was bettering its colonies, by spreading French values and creating populations in a reflection to their identity.⁷ Under the National Revolution, Jennings declares that native and non-white populations were promoted to create their own national identity. However, this identity was to remain subservient to French *colons*.⁸ While both colonial policies undermined the identities of indigenous and non-white populations, Jennings fails to consider if the end of the *mission civilisatrice* had any effect on the politics in France itself. Jennings' work accounts for rise in insurgency against the colonial Vichy administration, far from the seeming appeasement policies of the Third Republic. Jennings' work fails to address what effects this shift in policy, and its apparent consequences, had on France's population. While the work uses French politics to develop its analysis, Jennings fails to readdress any effects the colonial situation had on France itself.

To conclude, this review believes Jennings successfully argues his thesis and proves that the policies of the colonial administration during the Vichy regime served as an attempt to affirm the dominance of both the colonial administration and the *colons*. However, the National Revolution's discrediting of indigenous and non-white populations had clear consequences on the future of the French Empire. While the book is a strong analysis, it fails to address any consequences the Vichy regime's colonial policies may have had in France. Future historians who address a similar question should examine the colonial mythology of the Third Republic, and attempt to understand if the National Revolution's policies had irreconcilable consequences on this mythology. Such a historian could attempt to understand if such policies emphasized or inspired difference between the French population, the Vichy Regime and Nazi policy.

⁵ Ibid., 66.

⁶ Ibid., 67.

⁷ Ibid., 226

⁸ Ibid., 210

Bibliography

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