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Philip D. Morgan, Sean Hawkins. *Black Experience and the Empire.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. xv + 416 pp. $60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-926029-4.

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So long as the British Empire was a going concern, the sun never set on black experience. In those days the words "black" and "nigger" were used practically everywhere to refer to subject peoples, from Fiji to Mauritius, from Sydney to Bombay, from Burma to Cape Town. Only East Asians escaped through relegation to the auxiliary color category,yellow; and Amerindians, to red. Scholars of empire need to be warned at the outset that this book limits its geographical horizons to sub-Saharan Africa and those parts of the Americas that received African slaves.

Apart from that warning about the packaging, the book can be warmly recommended. Every one of the fourteen chapters offers something surprising, stimulating and insightful. The word "and" in the title is important, because much of the book concerns events outside the formal empire, especially the long centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade when the British could aspire to no more than fortified toeholds along the West African seaboard. Various aspects of the trade are handled with skill and nuance, most notably the African side. By pointing out the various ways in which some classes and individuals in Africa profited from their participation in the trade, the authors steer clear of the easy answers proffered by advocates of the contemporary reparations movement, who seek in a lawyer-like way to make the defendant with the deepest pockets (the United States) pay damages for injuries received from many different quarters.

In a way it is a pity that the editors could not find space for a historiographical essay on the trans-Atlantic trade. Nineteenth-century philanthropy contested the slave owners' narratives of benefits conferred with their own monochromatic accounts of evils perpetrated on innocent victims. By the middle of the twentieth century, African nationalist historians were telling a different story, in which slave-raiding and trading were sideshows to the internal concerns of African rulers. Such events as the Yoruba War were seen not as wars to produce slaves but power struggles which generated slave exports as a by-product. Slavery within Africa was presented in many texts as a relatively benign institution, one that bore no more than a passing resemblance to the

chattel slavery of Jamaica or Mississippi. Beginning with Walter Rodney's work on the Upper Guinea Coast in the late 1960s, a new trend emerged, which saw economic and class interests as the serpents which beguiled some Africans into betraying their own people--perverting existing institutions into new forms which served the expanding market place. Later work by Humphrey Fisher and Paul Lovejoy extended this line of analysis, documenting a whole spectrum of African responses to the opportunities presented by the expanding trade in different parts of the continent. Then, in the 1980s and 1990s, the linguistic turn redirected attention to European traders and their humanitarian opponents, who alone produced texts in the quantity demanded by scholars fixated on textual analysis. The chapters of ***Black Experience*** that treat the slave trade appear to retreat to an earlier position. For example, David Northrup writes in his chapter, "West Africans and the Atlantic," that "where it was once common to blame most wars in West Africa on the slave trade, modern historians recognize that such an assumption greatly exaggerates the influence of Atlantic trade on West African statecraft" (pp. 47-48). And David Richardson's chapter reminds us of the Niger Delta slaver-chief who warned a European explorer, "if you come from Mr. Wilberforce, I will kill you" (p. 64).

While some might wonder at the disproportionate attention paid to the West Indies in this book, the choice proves to be felicitous, enlightening readers on many important issues. Anyone familiar with the crusade against the slave trade knows Somerset's case of 1772, which held that the condition of slavery, being contrary to natural law, could only be sustained by explicit legislation by Parliament; in the absence of such legislation slaves must be considered freed when domiciled in England. Christopher Brown's chapter pushes past Lord Mansfield's judgment to explore the logical corollary, which was that slavery in Britain's American and West Indian colonies rested solely on the legal foundations raised by planter-dominated local legislatures (and the whip). Thus the campaigns against the slave trade and slavery did not aim to diminish imperial authority by repealing laws in Parliament. On the contrary, they required that Parliament should extend the Empire's authority over the slave-holding colonies in novel ways. From this perspective it is easy to see why planters viewed the emancipation movement as an infringement of their liberty; it seemed a counterrevolution aimed at curtailing the freedom of colonial legislatures. In other words, from 1776 right through to 1834, the American legislatures were the rebels and the emancipated slaves were the Empire loyalists. As Brown interestingly concludes, "Taken together, these actions held out the prospect of an Empire defined by allegiance, rather than by race or nationality. Throughout the American colonies and beyond, Africans and the descendants of Africans seized the apparent opportunity by presenting themselves as loyal, and therefore deserving, British subjects" (p. 134). Sad to say, unholy alliances between the Tory defenders of Governor Eyre and Liberal advocates of settler self-government ensured that the Empire resumed its accustomed ways.

Historians of Southern Africa may be disappointed to find little of immediate relevance to their region in this book. Thomas McCaskie's otherwise excellent chapter,"Britain and Africa in the Nineteenth Century," is recycled from volume 3 of the original edition of the ***Oxford History of the British Empire***. Its sections on Southern Africa are derivative and sometimes badly out of date. To cite but two examples, McCaskie clings to old shibboleths about the "mfecane," and thus writes (p. 185), "fleeing before Shaka's Zulu, the Ndebele settled in the late 1830s as overlords among a part of the decentralized Shona people." Elsewhere (p. 187) he tells us that "the Xhosa, borrowing from Christian missionary eschatology, killed their cattle in 1857 in an other-worldly attempt to expel Europeans once and for all." In contrast, Diana Jeater's chapter, "The British Empire and African Women in the Twentieth Century," makes good

use of Southern African material to score some important points. One of the most striking is her reflection that "where the British Empire ended up affecting the lives of African women most was not in terms of the ways it saw them, but in terms of the ways it did not see them. It was not the laws and policies that were designed to affect women that really changed their lives, but rather those that seemed to overlook their very existence" (p. 253).

The chapter,"The Betrayal of Creole Elites, 1880-1920," by Vivian Bickford-Smith does concentrate very much on Southern Africa, but may strike readers as unduly focused on the experience of Western Cape Coloureds. It is understandable that increasing use should have been made of the term Creole in the wake of Homi Bhaba's seminal 1989 essay on hybridity a work that helped so many postcolonial literary scholars to escape the paralyzing bipolarities that pervaded writing of the previous decade. But to adapt W. K. Hancock's comment on imperialism, Creole is no word for scholars. Aware of the difficulties, Bickford-Smith nonetheless mounts a dubious defense of his decision to apply the term to westernized Africa elites: "We refer to such elites as 'Creole' because this term--though used historically in different ways in different places--usefully suggests a high degree of cultural hybridity rather than a purely one-way process of acculturation. In the case of some members of Creole elites, notably 'Coloureds' in the Western Cape, cultural hybridity was accompanied by 'racial' hybridity" (p. 195).

Surely there are other ways of avoiding the suggestion of a "one-way process of acculturation." Any term that can simultaneously be applied to the white writer Jean Rhys, Cajun cooking, South American rebels against Spanish rule, and Cape Coloureds is fatally flawed as a category of social analysis. Moreover, in Bickford-Smith's hands the use of the term actually leads him to ignore African elites who do not fit his mold. Thus, when he writes on page 222 of the betrayals which led certain Cape Coloureds and Sol Plaatje to help launch the SANNC (forerunner of the ANC) in 1912, he appears to completely ignore the even more substantial contributions of Kholwa African Christians from Natal.

Black Experience and the Empire accords an admirable amount of coverage to the twentieth century. Frederick Cooper brings his formidable expertise to bear on the experience of workers and labor organizations. His chapter is especially useful for its account of African workers' power during World War II. Equally useful are the later chapters and the editors' introduction which explore the consequences for empire of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940. As the editors explain, "For the first time, Africans and West Indians were seen as part of the same colonial people and the social existence of workers in both areas was finally acknowledged.... Education, housing, and nutrition were suddenly factors that the Colonial Office concluded were crucial to a modern labour market" (p. 24). From one point of view it can be argued that African nationalism, strikes, and reactionary white settlers combined to kill the promise of the 1940 legislation. It is perhaps just as plausible to suggest that the creation of the postwar welfare state put the whole overseas British Empire in question. If, as the 1940 act implied, development and welfare were to be consumed by everyone, how could the war-ravished British population support such a vast enterprise? From this vantage point, decolonization may look less like an achievement for African liberators, than a lucky escape for British taxpayers, who escaped all obligations to plough further resources into capital-starved Africa.

One consequence they did not escape was a better acquaintance with Britain's former black subjects, especially West Indians, who immigrated to Britain in unprecedented numbers between 1945 and 1960. In some ways this paralleled the migration of more than 100,000 Caribbean people to the United States between 1901 and 1924 (p.

323). However, the experience of these two waves of West Indian migration diverged in ways that have yet to be fully studied by historians. As Winston James' chapter, "The Black Experience in Twentieth-Century Britain," makes plain, the emigrant experience had plenty of ups and downs in England. On the other hand, it held few of the perils faced by black migrants to the United States in the days of legalized segregation, when the visible and invisible legacies of slavery still haunted the land.

It is a credit to the editors and contributors that ***Black Experience and the Empire*** raises this and so many other important questions.

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