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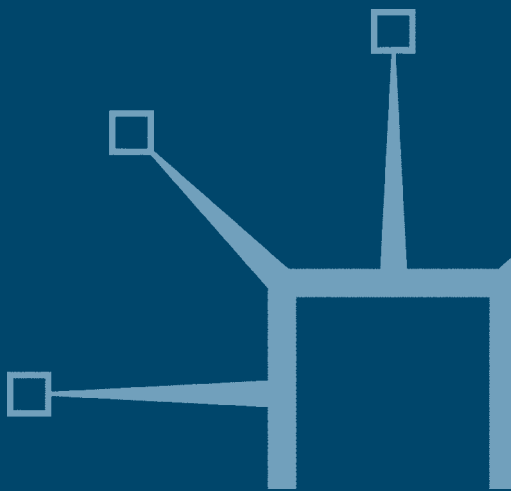
RACISM IN EUROPE 1870–2000

Neil MacMaster



RACISM IN EUROPE

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Neil MacMaster

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4

Anti-Black Racism in an Age of Total War

Black Soldiers and Workers, 1914–18

During the First World War both Britain and France recruited an enormous number of 'colonial' or 'native' workers, soldiers and sailors from their respective Empires and moved them into the European theatre of operations. France, which had a long tradition of imperial native regiments, and which was most desperate to find replacement manpower for the millions of Frenchmen called to the front, had the least hesitation in calling on the 'patriotism' of its subject peoples. In all, France mobilized some 300 000 colonial workers and 600 000 soldiers from Senegal, Indo-China, Madagascar, China, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. Likewise, the British deployed 138 000 Indian troops, as well as workers from the West Indies, West Africa, South Africa and China. If this number is added to the 200 000 black labourers and soldiers brought in by the US Army, then the total of black and Asian men in Europe was in the region of one and a half million. Europeans were confronted directly, within the boundaries of their own societies, with an unprecedented number of 'racially distinct' people and it is this contact which provides a rich source of historical evidence about early 'race-relations'. Nor was contact restricted to the War of 1914–18 since, although France, Britain and the USA repatriated the majority of colonials and black GIs after the Armistice, many tens of thousands stayed on and created the first large ethnic minority settlements, both in ports from Cardiff to Marseilles, as well as in French industrial towns from Lyons

and Paris to Lille and Metz. This process of post-war settlement led to the first manifestations of large-scale, popular racism. For example, the demobilization of British soldiers and sailors coincided with a wave of race riots in British ports in 1919, while the French occupation of the Rhine with black colonial troops during 1919–24 stirred up an extremely vicious racist campaign in Germany.

The deployment of black and Asian soldiers and workers into Europe during the First World War was accompanied by the injection of highly racist practices and attitudes from colonial and ex-slave societies, particularly from the USA, into a European society that, on the whole, showed widespread popular tolerance or even friendship towards minorities. Where there was a long tradition of native regiments, as with the British Sikh and Gurkha or French North African battalions, commanding officers, who were always white, often held a paternalist attitude towards 'their' men, who were viewed as 'big children' whose intelligence was too low for them to act as officers or to understand the complexities of modern tactics. But, when trained to respect white authority, the commanders could be proud of their endurance and courage: racial myths of native savagery, especially the use of the knife or bayonet by Indians, Algerians and Senegalese in hand-to-hand fighting, were deliberately cultivated and used as propaganda to intimidate the Germans.

However, more negative racial attitudes were far more prevalent among white officers who brought into the European theatre the prejudices and violence of colonial societies, from Algeria and South Africa to Australia, or the 'Jim Crow' practices of the American South. White colonial societies, and the colonial officers who controlled black units in Europe, were, in general, strongly opposed to the deployment of native troops and workers in the metropolitan territory. As noted earlier, colonial powers tended to operate a twin-track system of state regulation, in which the extremely repressive apparatus intended to maintain an iron grip on colonial subjects, from systematic police and military violence to the denial of basic legal and political rights, stood in stark contrast to the more liberal climate in Europe and the respect for the rule of law and individual rights. Colonials generally believed that control over the millions of 'natives', the 'thin white line' that protected settlers from being slaughtered and overrun, was fundamentally psychological: if the black population for an instant became aware of white self-doubt or anxiety, or could challenge the symbolic markers of European supremacy with impunity, then rebellion would inevitably follow. Settlers reacted strongly against any attempt by 'home' governments to

introduce liberal or humane reforms into the colonies since it was felt that European politicians, ignorant of the hard realities of colonial life, had no understanding of the importance of the 'special measures' required to keep the native 'in his place', and that any tampering with the system threatened to put a match to the tinder-box. It was in this context that colonials feared that black troops or workers moved into Europe would become infected by the more liberal attitudes of metropolitan society, be treated with equality by whites, break down the barriers of segregation, and – ultimate of horrors – enter into sexual relations with European women. This 'taste of freedom', along with contact with trade unions, left-wing and anti-colonial nationalist movements, would, it was feared, have a profound effect on the political consciousness of the blacks who on demobilization would bring these subversive influences home and undermine the racial order.

A South African officer, outraged that French ladies had served tea to white soldiers after black recruits, and in cups previously used by natives, exclaimed: 'When you people get back to South Africa, don't start thinking that you are whites, just because this place has spoiled you. You are black, and will stay black.'[1] It was also feared that blacks would not only learn sophisticated military skills that could be used in colonial rebellion, but that the act of fighting, killing and defeating Germans would subvert the concept of white racial invulnerability. The South African government accepted that blacks should only be recruited as labour, not as combatants: as the *East Rand Express* remarked: 'The empire must uphold the principle that a coloured man must not raise his hand against a white man if there is to be any law or order in either India, Africa, or any part of the Empire where the white man rules over a large concourse of coloured people.'[2] Such fears that native contact with European society would prove to have a dangerous, radicalizing impact turned out to be justified. Demobilized troops and workers provided a powerful impetus to the emergence of nationalist, anti-colonial movements throughout Africa and Asia, and black political consciousness was also raised in the USA where a wave of post-war lynchings tried to put, as white racists proclaimed, 'those military, French-women-ruined negro soldiers' back in their place.[3]

In order to contain the dangers of political and moral corruption and to prevent the breaking of the mental chains of subservience, the French, British and American commands introduced colonial segregationist and racist practices into Europe, practices that had an impact on public opinion. Black regiments and labour battalions were

strictly segregated from contact with British and French society: for example, it was standard practice for Algerian, Senegalese, black American, Indian, South African and other colonial units to strictly control or ban off-duty visits to town centres and bars, and, in particular, to block invitations to French homes. American officers brought with them all the worst practices of the racist Southern states, including savage beatings of blacks by Military Police and peremptory hangings for charges of 'rape'. Colonel Linard of the US Army drew up a circular, the *Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops*, which was distributed to French army officers and local government officials, warning them of the need to avoid giving offence to white Americans by breaking segregationist practices and spelling out the dangerous consequences for the United States of blacks returning home infected by egalitarianism. The circular advised officials that the French should not eat with black officers, shake them by the hand, strike up any friendships, or permit contact with women. Far from trying to moderate the racism of American officers to fit the more tolerant climate of French society, Americans publicly lectured the French on the need to 'respect' Jim Crow values and to collaborate in their implementation. Some Americans legitimated this by reference to scientific racism, like Major J. N. Merrill, commander of the black First Battalion, who held that all blacks were 'rank cowards' who, if they fought well, only did so when individuals had a high percentage of white blood. Anthropology, he claimed, had shown through 'the measurements of the cranial capacities and facial angles . . . the negro race . . . has reached a state that will not improve and cannot improve.'[4] Similar attitudes could be found in colonial units. The South African command kept black workers in guarded compounds and prohibited entrance to shops 'unless under European escort'. Likewise, the French Army tried to isolate colonial workers from social contact with French civilians by segregating them in camps under strict militarized regimes. African soldiers on leave were not allowed to accept invitations to stay with French families, while in 1916 the army command issued instructions that female nurses were to be withdrawn from hospitals for injured colonial troops to prevent the development of 'liaisons'.

How successful were the armed forces in their segregationist aims and did the colonial racism of the military élites have any impact on European society? The letters and autobiographical record left by colonial and black American soldiers show an unmistakable pattern of open acceptance from the French and British working class, a friendly welcome that was experienced with a sense of euphoric astonishment by those

who had grown up inured to the arrogant insults, violence and institutional racism of white colonial society. There are endless testaments like that of the American soldier who wrote to his mother: 'These French people don't bother with no color line business. They treat us so good that the only time I ever know I'm colored is when I look in the glass.'[5] What appears to have been a genuine level of open tolerance by the French public was reinforced by the fact that black troops were fêted as gallant fighters, come to risk their lives in defence of the French empire and the mother country. North Africans were welcomed into many French working-class homes and the military authorities were unable to prevent close relationships developing between black troops and European women.

Black and white soldiers inevitably came into close contact at the front and, through the shared hardship and danger of trench warfare, built up a sense of mutual respect and camaraderie. In 1918 about 50 West Indian limbless soldiers, convalescing in a military hospital in Liverpool, came under a violent, racially motivated attack by white soldiers who had served in South Africa, but were defended by 'some of the British Tommies who had fought side by side with these coloured soldiers in the trenches'.[6] Similarly, French civilians intervened to protect black French subjects from assault by American military personnel. Such incidents illustrate the wide gap between colonial racism, which was deeply entrenched in senior military and administrative personnel who had served in the colonies, and the European lower middle and working classes who, in spite of the racist stereotyping of blacks in the media, appear to have been quite open-minded and ready to assess blacks directly and individually, according to their personal and human qualities.

However, this generalized tolerance within the European working class did come under strain during the course of the war in the field of labour relations and it was here that the first indications of popular anti-black racism can be located. This took on a particularly marked form in France, where the majority of black workers were located in labour battalions that supplied labour for the docks, quarries, mines, forestry work, or in the munitions, chemical and gas industries. The trade unions objected that colonial workers were being deployed to undermine wage levels and from the spring of 1917, as French society entered a deepening war crisis, African workers were subjected to increasing street-level assault, and eventually to large-scale riots like those in June 1917 in Dijon and Le Havre where crowds of up to 1500 people attacked local Moroccan barracks and killed 15 people. Women frequently demonstrated against colonial workers on the grounds that

their deployment enabled husbands and sons to be replaced and then dispatched to the front, where they risked death or injury. Africans were also accused of strike-breaking activities, taking over 'women's work', or being a burden on scarce resources and eating the 'bread of French workers'. Sexual competition over women was a frequent cause of violence in bars, and Frenchmen perceived colonial workers as libidinous primitives and malingerers who, in the absence of husbands and fiancés who were risking their lives at the front, posed a predatory sexual threat to the honour of French women.

Demobilization and Inter-War Racism

Economic racism continued on an extensive scale in Britain immediately after the end of the war, as tens of thousands of colonial and white seamen and soldiers were demobilized and found themselves in competition for housing and employment in the major ports. A series of major race riots erupted in South Wales (Cardiff, Newport and Cadoxton), Liverpool, London, Glasgow and Tyneside. Shipping lines had greatly increased their employment of cheap colonial labour from the 1870s, but instead of returning them on homebound ships as required by law, they were frequently abandoned in British ports where they congregated in squalid lodging houses or settled permanently and married local women. During the war thousands of black seamen were recruited, often facing great danger at sea, but with the Armistice, 20 000 men were demobilized and stranded in British ports.

White sailors, backed by their unions, demanded that the shipping lines give priority of employment to European seamen, while black sailors, many of whom were British subjects, protested that in spite of their enormous sacrifice in the defence of Empire, they were being denied equality of treatment. As the Secretary of the African Races Association of Glasgow wrote to the press in 1919: 'Did not some of these men fight on the same battlefields with white men to defeat the enemy and make secure the British Empire?'[7] In Cardiff, Liverpool and Glasgow large crowds of up to 2000 people, often led by ex-servicemen who deployed military tactics, laid siege to the black dockland ghettos, destroying lodging houses and shops. During riots in London a black seaman, William Samuel, was told by a police sergeant: 'We want you niggers out of our country this is a white man's country and not yours.'[8] Much of this rioting took place against a background of extreme labour unrest and

turbulence during which the government, frightened by Bolshevism and the imminence of Communist-inspired revolution in Britain, deployed 12 000 troops and six tanks into 'Red Clydeside', and three battalions, tanks, and a battleship and destroyer into Liverpool.

During the inter-war period both the French and British governments followed identical policies in trying to repatriate all black soldiers and workers or, where African labour was still deployed, as in the merchant navy, to place them under the most strict surveillance or segregationist practices. In general, the presence of 'inferior races' was viewed as a threat to European society through miscegenation, criminality, the transmission of disease, and the formation of alien and unassimilated communities that endangered the 'national way of life'. By 1920 the French authorities had, for example, rounded up and repatriated all but 5000 of the 300 000 Algerians who had seen war service, while immediately after the 1919 Riots, the British government repatriated many hundreds of seamen. However, many black seamen and immigrant workers from the colonies were French or British subjects and since they had, as passport holders, rights of entry and of settlement, in practice it was difficult for the authorities to impose strict racist controls without breaking the law. However, both imperial powers succeeded in introducing mechanisms of racial subordination and control that reconstituted, within a European context, the segregationist and racial categories of colonial regimes.

British shipping owners, faced with recession and declining profits, reinforced on-board racial divisions between British sailors on standard articles or contracts and low-paid men on Asiatic articles. These divisions were then carried over into interracial dockside communities in which shipping lines and local police, backed by the India Office, collaborated in attempts to segregate black seamen from Europeans and from contact with trade unions. In 1925 the government introduced the *Coloured Alien Seamen Order*, quietly achieved by Order in Council and without public debate, which exposed even black seamen who were British subjects to official registration (fingerprinting, identity photographs), police harassment and enforced deportation. Likewise, French colonial governments, worried by migrant worker contact with the Communist Party and anti-colonial, nationalist movements in the metropolis, pushed hard for severe restrictions on labour migration, as well as the establishment of special police intelligence units to infiltrate immigrant communities, segregated hostels and clinics, and a system of enforced deportation. The founder of the special police and 'welfare' apparatus,

the senior colonial official Octave Depont, legitimated control and segregation with the paternalist argument that North Africans were like 'big children' who needed protection from the corrupting ways of Parisian society. Natives, he claimed, both needed and liked strong leadership: 'Our surveillance is not for them a form of subjection, but a protection – better still, a state of happiness.'[9]

In both France and Britain such measures were initiated by colonial, labour or police ministries and departments that were imbued with imperial assumptions of racial hierarchy, labour discipline and control, such as the British India Office, the Colonial Office and the British Board of Trade, and the French Ministry of the Interior, the department of Algerian Native Affairs and the Ministry of Labour. The imposition of policies of racial subordination and control in Britain and France, enforced through administrative orders that were implemented without any parliamentary debate or control, were justified to the public through concerted propaganda campaigns. The authorities created a climate of opinion that would readily accept the necessity for special controls and policing through the dissemination of highly racialized images of black immigrants as primitive 'invaders' who threatened European society through the transmission of dangerous microbes, criminal activity (pimping, drugs, gambling), by the sexual danger presented to women and children (rape, molestation), and the proliferation of squalid ghettos. Laura Tabili has argued that the recolonization and racialization of black minorities in inter-war Britain was largely the work of state agencies and employers' organizations, acting in collusion with local police, town-hall officials and trade union leaders. The same dynamic of racialization, in relation to Maghrebian immigrants, can be found in inter-war France. The origins of both racist propaganda, as well as institutional racist practices, can be traced to élites, rather than to any initiatives or antipathy arising from the British or French working class.[10]

Fear of Miscegenation in Britain and France

The linkages between European racial science, colonial institutional racism and the diffusion of racial prejudice in metropolitan society can be shown through the profound anxiety, even paranoia, that attached to the idea of racial mixing or miscegenation. This was such a central and continuous preoccupation throughout the period from 1900 to the Second World War that it will be examined in more detail for the insight

that it can provide into the general processes of racialization of European society.

From an early stage in the development of slavery and plantation economies in the Americas, the control of large black populations by numerically tiny and vulnerable strata of white masters was, in part, achieved by the rigid control of sexual boundaries and the prevention of mixing between the two sides. The more racist the colonial regime, then, in general, the more marked the legal or customary restrictions on intermarriage, as in the apartheid system of South Africa or the segregationist and lynch-law practices of the American South. The economic and political rationale of such racial stratification is clear: to prevent the majority black population slowly achieving a degree of equality and upward social mobility, and 'flooding' the white élite, it was essential to prevent intermarriage and the appearance of a mixed-race descent that was interstitial, ambiguous and a threat to the demarcation of clear racial boundaries.

So entrenched were such values within white colonial societies, through socialization, the maintenance of powerful taboos, religious doctrine, and the general cultural and social codes of correct speech, symbolic distancing and avoidance of physical contact, that the very idea of proximity to the black body was associated with feelings of profound loathing, contamination and staining, of dirt and disease. Reflecting the 'double standard' of patriarchal European societies, particularly strong revulsion was felt towards sexual relations between a black man and a white woman (less so between a white master and a black servant), since such 'appropriation' of the European female was regarded as the most powerful challenge to the status, honour and the most intimate foundations of white male hegemony. The history of colonial societies is rife with the brutal beatings and murder of 'natives' for 'overstepping the mark', making supposed slights and petty challenges to the symbolic order of white racial and sexual superiority. This was the central theme, worked out with deep psychological insight, of E. M. Forster's novel *A Passage to India* (1924). Periods of internal crisis within colonial regimes, stoked by fear of imminent black revolt and the uprising of servants within the domestic space, were frequently accompanied by the so-called 'Black Peril', powerful currents of panic and racial paranoia that were driven by unfounded rumours of the systematic rape of white women as an instrument of incipient race war.

During the nineteenth century it was a widely accepted practice within the British, French and Dutch empires that European soldiers or

administrators should regularly cohabit with native 'concubines', often in stable unions that led to the formation of mixed-race families. However, from about 1880 onwards a deep shift within Western European societies towards a more puritanical and sexually repressive code, linked to a cult of manliness and 'muscular Christianity', was eventually translated into a strict regulation of sexual relations in the colonies. While earlier colonial regimes had largely tolerated white sexual relations with black women, often through prostitution, even such 'irregular' contacts, let alone marriage, were increasingly regarded as immoral, a source of 'pollution' and degrading to the Europeans sense of prestige, founded on segregation and a deepening apartheid. For example, the 'Crewe Circular', a Colonial Service directive of 1909 on 'Immoral relations with native women', threatened severe penalties against any officials who engaged in concubinage. During the early 1900s all southern and central African colonies legislated against sexual intercourse between black men and white women. Under the Southern Rhodesian Immorality Act of 1903, a black man resorting to a white prostitute could be imprisoned for five years. By the turn of the century, it was widely believed that colonial hegemony was crucially dependent on the maintenance of a white 'moral power', self-discipline, and the upholding of a correct social and spatial distance between Europeans and blacks through strict rules of segregation and etiquette. The taboo against interracial sex was also reinforced, as has been seen, by race-science which demonstrated that miscegenation inevitably brought about a process of physical and moral degeneration.

A major concern that arose with the growing numbers of black males who entered Europe from the turn of the century was that without the constraints of the colonial regime, the repressive laws, codes of practice and the threat of violence that normally contained the bestial instincts of the native and prevented him from associating with white women, the black would be unchained, a dangerous libidinal force set loose in the heart of 'civilization'. Moreover, it was felt that European women, not realizing the dangers offered by 'natives', would naively break the codes of segregation and encourage physical contact. In 1899 the British press showed widespread disgust at the way in which English women flocked to get close to 'near-naked blacks' appearing in the *Savage South Africa* show: these women were not only, it was claimed, 'degrading themselves', but 'seriously weakening the Empire', since colonists knew how crucial it was to keep 'natives who are worse than brutes when their passion is aroused . . . in subjection by a wholesale dread of the white man's

powers and that dread is being dissipated daily by familiar intercourses at Earl's Court'. Following this *Daily Mail* campaign, the Earl's Court management barred women from entering the native 'kraal'. Worse was to come with the marriage of one black performer, 'Prince Lobenguela', to a Miss Florence Jewell: 'There is something inexpressibly disgusting', commented the *Evening News*, 'about the mating of a white girl with a dusky savage', while *The Spectator* noted, 'Miscegenation has long been regarded by the Anglo-Saxon races as a curse against civilisation.'[11]

There are endless incidents of this kind dating from the First World War and inter-war period as the numbers of black people increased enormously in Britain and France. Negative reactions to black intermarriage and sexual relations were especially marked among ex-colonial officials, army personnel and police officers, who brought into European society the racist attitudes of colonial society. Precisely because such officers and administrators claimed to have a special knowledge of native society and the 'primitive mind', they were able to carry particular weight with both government and public opinion, using their expertise to influence policy. During the race riots in Liverpool in 1919 black men were blamed for associating with white women. Sir Ralph Williams, former governor of the Windward Islands, wrote to *The Times*: 'To almost every white man and woman who has lived a life among coloured races, intimate association between black or coloured men and white women is a thing of horror . . . What blame . . . to those white men who, seeing these conditions and loathing them, resort to violence?'[12] During the inter-war period eugenicists and race-scientists, several of whom had visited South Africa, wrote at length on the psychological problems and 'vicious tendencies' of 'half-caste' children in the interracial port settlements of Cardiff and Liverpool, while the Chief Constable of Cardiff called for the introduction of legislation to prohibit interracial marriage on the lines of the South African Immorality Act of 1927.[13]

The French press, in similar vein, showed an almost obsessive concern with African immigrants, particularly the Algerian, as a sexually overcharged animal, a rapist, molester of children, vector of syphilis, and a threat to the purity and honour of French womanhood. When an unemployed and mentally ill migrant worker from Algeria killed two women in Paris in November 1923, it led to a widespread moral panic, crowd attacks on Arabs and calls for stricter immigration controls. A deputy from the Paris region wrote: 'thousands of natives are terrorizing certain regions of France, certain sectors of Paris. They wallow in poverty, adding to the vices of the lower depths of the city those which they

carry in a state of gestation. Libidinous crimes are on the increase, rapes, abductions, while armed robberies are beyond count.'[14]

Such racist perceptions did not, however, remain the monopoly of an educated élite. Politicians, journalists, novelists, colonial administrators, academics and a host of others from the French and British bourgeoisie had tremendous power to influence public opinion, as well as specific policies, relating to African migrants. They did so as the proprietors or editors of newspapers, as members of government, as senior officials in the police or in key ministries, as experts on health and tropical disease, missionaries, film directors – indeed all those that had their hands on the levers of state power or of cultural and educational expression. It was from this higher level that racist ideas and stereotypes filtered down into the wider society.

Fear of Miscegenation in Germany

The powerful reaction against miscegenation was not confined only to the great imperial powers, Britain and France, but also developed in the infant colonial powers of Germany and Italy. Debates in the German Reichstag in 1904 on the systematic genocide deployed against the Nama and Herero peoples of Namibia were formulated in a dehumanizing rhetoric which described Africans as 'labouring animals', 'human material' and, in an inversion of reality, as 'blood thirsty beasts in the form of humans'.[15] A shift, similar to that in British, French and Dutch colonies, occurred in the first decade of the twentieth century towards more radical forms of racial demarcation, the maintenance of Aryan racial purity and the criminalization of interracial marriage. Under pressure from the 'respectable' colonial middle class of Windhoek, disapproving of 'back-country' marriage between German farmers and native women, the colonial government issued an imperial ordinance outlawing interracial marriage in 1905.

Similar codes followed for German East Africa in 1906 and Samoa in 1912. The latter ordinance, debated in the Reichstag, decreed that mixed marriages consecrated prior to the new code, were legitimate and the children of such unions were juridically 'white', while marriages entered into after the ordinance were illegitimate and the children deemed 'black' and inferior: a perfect example of the arbitrary invention of racial categories. This measure, which caused some anxiety among Catholic conservatives, documented a major shift towards secular racist

assumptions since the modern state was arrogating to itself the right to undo a sacrament on the basis of physical or biological features rather than on the grounds of religious belief, and it denied the humanity of indigenous peoples. All political parties, from the Liberals to the Socialists (SPD), agreed that miscegenation represented a danger to the racial purity of the German nation, while *Mischlinge* (half-breeds) were inevitably unhealthy and corrupt, 'harmful to the national and racial interest'.[16] The outlawing of marriage with black natives bore a distinct parallel with the growing anti-Semitic belief that conversion to Christianity could not remove the essential racial characteristics of the Jew. However, while dehumanization of black people, genocidal practices and racial ordinances could pass into law before 1914 (an indicator of the large gap between colonial and metropolitan racial fields), no such measures could conceivably have been introduced at this time against the Jews in Germany.

Race War and the 'Horror on the Rhine'

During the course of the First World War Germany, an infant colonial power and unable to recruit native soldiers or labourers into the European theatre as had France and Britain, attacked the Allies for fomenting a kind of 'race-war' and, in a dangerous inversion of Social Darwinian principles, utilizing inferior 'savages' as an instrument to undermine superior white stock and Western civilization. German propagandists dwelled on the unspeakable brutality of black soldiers who, it was claimed, returned from the front with trophies of decapitated German heads, fingers and ears. Field Marshal Hindenburg wrote in his 1920 memoirs: 'Where there were no tanks, the enemy set black waves upon us. We were helpless when they broke into our lines and murdered or, worse, tortured the defenceless. Human indignation and indictment is directed not at the blacks who carried out such atrocities, but at those who brought such hordes to German soil allegedly to fight in the war for honour, freedom and justice.'[17] The eugenicist Ernst Haeckel, shocked by the scale of slaughter in the 'barbarous war of annihilation', exposed the cruel destruction of young German soldiers, 'tortured and maimed in inhuman fashion by the "hyenas" of the battlefield, the barbarian Indians and the cruel Senegal negroes', and lamented the fatal loss of their future breeding capacity, and superior racial and hereditary potential. England, by 'mobilizing all the different races of man', was

endangering not only Germany, but 'the white race as a whole. For the cultural and psychological differences that separate the highest developed European peoples from the lowest savages is greater than the differences that separate the savages from the anthropoid apes.'[18] German appropriation of the racial moral high ground, the emphasis on the deeper unity of the white race confronted with lower, primitive forms, was countered by the French claim that mobilization of all races, regardless of 'colour', and their treatment as equals upheld the universal principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

The propaganda on a black-white 'race-war' was to assume international proportions during the occupation of the Rhine by French colonial troops between 1919 and 1923. The German government, convinced that the deployment of black 'savages' was a deliberate revenge and humiliation, mounted an elaborate propaganda campaign which presented black troops as diseased animals who roamed the Rhineland in packs, gang-raping German mothers and virgins, infecting the nation and polluting the Aryan race. The *Hamburger Nachrichten* claimed that the African who 'occupies a lower rung on the evolutionary ladder' was brought into Europe and 'systematically trained to desire that which was formerly unreachable for him – the white woman! He is urged and driven to besmirch defenceless women and girls with his tuberculous and syphilitic stench, wrench them into his stinking apish arms and abuse them in the most unthinkable way!'[19] Official funding was secretly given for the publication of obscene postcards entitled 'Die Schwarze Schmach', depicting a gorilla raping a German woman, also of posters and atrocity leaflets, translated into English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, Dutch, Swedish, Danish, Finnish, and even Esperanto, which were distributed globally through German export companies and expatriate associations. A lavish Bavarian film, again titled 'Die Schwarze Schmach' (1921), which played to full houses in Stuttgart and elsewhere, showed a squad of Senegalese soldiers who stopped the car of a young couple in the woods and raped the fiancée, infecting her with a venereal disease and preventing her marriage – thus symbolically destroying her role as mother and pure racial progenitor. The local press, including the Socialist newspaper, found it sincere and to be recommended. A stage version drew full houses in Munich.

What is most interesting about this propaganda campaign, detailing atrocities that an Allied investigation at the time proved to be groundless and prurient fantasies, was the enormous international support which it received, both among socialist, feminist and liberal circles, as well as on

the conservative right. The astonishing alacrity with which the educated European middle class, apart from a small minority of doubters, accepted such crude rumours and propaganda provides detailed evidence of the universality of anti-black racism, a profound and disturbing sexual *angst* entrenched within the psyche of 'white civilization'. E. D. Morel, founder of the Congo Reform Society that had campaigned against Belgian atrocities and first Secretary of the left-wing Union of Democratic Control, interpreted (as did many Socialists and Communists) the deployment of black troops as an instrument of capitalist oppression, pitching unwitting natives against the trade unions, the strikes and revolutionary organizations of the European proletariat. But Morel, in his *Daily Herald* reports of April 1920, and a widely translated pamphlet, *The Horror on the Rhine* (1920), elaborated, in close detail, the most prurient fantasies of black atrocities. The sex impulse, claimed Morel, is in tropical Africa 'a more spontaneous, fiercer, less controllable impulse than among European peoples . . . in the absence of their own women-folk, they *must be satisfied upon the bodies of white women*', which they did by roaming the countryside in armed bands, 'their fierce passions hot within them'.[20] Similar obsessive concerns with the black sexual danger were voiced throughout Europe in protest campaigns, petitions and resolutions by the National Conference of Labour Women (London), the Association of Dutch Women for Social Welfare, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the League of Swedish Socialist Women, the Italian Anti-Slavery Society and similar organisations in Austria, the USA, Germany, Peru, Argentina, Canada and New Zealand. The Italian Prime Minister, Francesco Nitti, felt a great 'sensation of disgust and horror', not only at the savage rape of women and boys and by local municipalities that were compelled by the Allies to 'furnish German women for houses of prostitution, to gratify the lust of negroes', but even more so at the French breach of the unwritten rules of civilized Europe by occupying ancient cathedral cities, 'among the most cultured on earth . . . The Rhine cities which contain the greatest masterpieces of Gothic art now lodge negroes who come from mud huts.'[21]

The visceral horror of the black body, of its potent sexuality and of miscegenation appears to have been almost entirely restricted to the European middle class, a reflection of the puritanism, repression and libidinal control of bourgeois society, as well as of a more elaborated racial ideology among educated élites. Within the zone of occupation on the Rhine the local German population was more friendly towards black than towards white French soldiers. The African-American writer

Claude McKay, visiting Hamburg and Berlin in 1923 at the height of the Rhine controversy, was given a friendly reception among the populace, 'in hotels, cafés, dancing halls, restaurants and trains, on the river boats and in the streets'.[22] The German propagandists tried to conceal the fact that many women had affairs with black troops and even married Annamese, Algerian, Malagasies and Senegalese, returning with them to their home country. Several hundred mixed-race children were born of such unions in Germany. Likewise, in Paris during the inter-war years, social contact was close between Algerian immigrant workers and working-class women in the factories, cafés and dance halls of the industrial suburbs. In 1930 some 700 women were married to Algerians while a further 5000 were cohabiting in stable unions. One French woman wrote a letter to the press recounting how the arrival of black American soldiers in a rural community had, after an initial reaction of fear that was shaped by stereotypes of savage cannibalism, given way after a day or two to deep sympathy for the affable troops who were so kind to the local children. This kind of evidence tends to show that the European working class, although sometimes entering into economic conflict with black minorities over scarce resources of housing and employment, were much more open and pragmatic in their relations with non-Europeans, unlike the middle classes whose attitudes and behaviour were more doctrinaire and determined by both class and racist assumptions.

The Nazis and Anti-Black Racism

There exists a vast body of research on anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany, but relatively little has, until very recently, been written on racial attitudes towards blacks during the period that Hitler was in power. The National Socialists were obsessed by notions of racial purity, and after coming to power in 1933, implemented a huge programme of sterilization, euthanasia and (later) genocide to achieve their aims of eliminating 'inferior' groups that threatened the German racial stock. However, this programme, while it assumed an exterminationist or genocidal form in relation to Jews, did not seek to eradicate black people, a difference in racial strategy that can be linked back to basic contrasts in Jewish and black racial stereotypes and to Nazi plans for a future colonial empire. The traditional racist image of the black was of a profoundly inferior type, ape-like, low in intelligence, driven by instinctual urges. Such a being posed no fundamental threat to the superior and masterful

European, as long as he was segregated within the colonial sphere as a pliable source of unskilled labour and prevented from interbreeding and 'polluting' the Aryan. By contrast, for racists, the Jews posed a huge threat because of their intelligence, their ability to organize an international network of financiers and revolutionaries bent on the subversion and enslavement of the German race. A key component in German anti-Semitic thought was the idea that the Jews made an instrumental use of race and deliberately plotted miscegenation between Aryans and inferior racial groups so as to undermine German stock. This racial logic was perfectly illustrated by Hitler's interpretation of the Rhineland occupation as a diabolic Jewish conspiracy to weaken the German race-substance. The Jew, he claimed, 'as a matter of principle always keeps his male line pure. He poisons the blood of others, but preserves his own . . . It was and is Jews who bring the Negroes into the Rhineland, always with the same secret thought and clear aim of ruining the hated white race by the necessarily resulting bastardisation, throwing it down from its cultural and political height, and himself rising to be its master.'[23]

The core of Nazi colonial policy, which between 1933 and *c.*1941 showed strong continuity with that of Weimar, was to reverse the 'infamous' Treaty of Versailles, which had led to the appropriation of Togoland, the Cameroons, South-West Africa (Namibia) and East Africa. German propaganda, much of it aimed at international opinion, set out to disprove Allied claims of repressive German colonial policies, and this included paternalistic and protectionist measures taken towards the few hundred 'German Negroes' who were settled in Germany. During the long inter-war phase of Germany's 'colonialism in waiting', these black Germans were nurtured as an instrument of plans for the future reconquest of Africa, an empire that would be based on an apartheid-like system of strict racial segregation and the protection of the native in his 'traditional' culture. However, this posed a problem for Nazi racial policy of how to prevent this 'favoured' group, which was specifically excluded from sterilization programmes, from interbreeding with Germans, and this was largely achieved by concentrating them into large groups which could be readily segregated. The African groups were deployed in travelling shows (*ambulantes Negerdorf*) or as the cast for lavish colonial propaganda films like *Carl Peters*, *Ohm Krüger* and *Germanin*. The African Germans, who tended to be well educated, highly integrated and, in many cases, born in Europe, were thus forced to act out the role of semi-naked jungle savages.

As early as 1922 the colonial administration distinguished these protected 'German Negroes' from the 'real Negroes', the black occupation troops, and it was the latter's offspring, the so-called 'Rhineland Bastards', that became the main target of eugenic policies. These children, who numbered from 600 to 800, were viewed much more negatively as a living symbol of German defeat and humiliation. The infants became the centre of attention for the expanding ranks of race-scientists: one author claimed that according to Mendelian Laws, 'the German race will be polluted for centuries to come', while the visiting Swedish eugenic 'expert', the pastor Liljeblad, stoked up fears by estimating that such 'half-breeds' would number 27 000 by 1934. In 1933 Dr W. Abel of the *Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Genetics and Eugenics*, carried out research on 27 children in Wiesbaden, claiming to demonstrate the usual flaws of the 'half-caste', particularly early psychoses and low intelligence. Abel went on to act as a race evaluator of the 'Special Commission 3', which in 1937 discreetly sterilized some 400 children.

Italian Fascism and Anti-Black Racism

In contrast to Germany, it has often been claimed by historians that Italian society was quite unreceptive to racism and that Mussolini's regime, resistant to biological racial doctrines, only went through a late conversion to official anti-Semitism in 1938 in order to seal the alliance with Nazi Germany. However, a number of historians have argued that the transition to political anti-Semitism was opened up by an earlier phase of colonial conquest and anti-black racism. Following on the conquest of Libya in 1932–3 Mussolini called on the Colonial Minister to take a tough line against miscegenation, and similar steps were taken after the brutal campaign in Ethiopia (1935–6). In line with other colonial powers, the Duce sought to eradicate *madamismo*, the common practice by which officers and civil servants cohabited with native women, and a law of April 19th 1937 imposed a sentence of between one and five years prison for such liaisons. The aim behind this was not to penalize white sexual relations with black prostitutes, but to prevent the birth of 'half-caste' children who would, it was thought, pollute and weaken the Italian race. The elaboration of biological race doctrine and legislation within the colonial context opened the way to the introduction of racial anti-Semitism in mainland Italy from 1938 onwards.

Inter-War Mass Culture and Racism

Lastly, this chapter looks at the revolutionary changes in mass culture during the inter-war period and the way in which this led to the diffusion of black stereotypes throughout Continental Europe. Historians of propaganda have shown how there was strong continuity between the themes of racism diffused in the age of the 'New Imperialism' prior to the First World War (see Chapter 2) and those of the inter-war period. For example, great international exhibitions, like those at Wembley in 1924–5 and in Paris in 1930–1, continued to show the 'domestication' of so-called primitive peoples. The genre of the boys' adventure story in which intrepid white heroes fought with cannibals and evil medicine-men remained ever-popular, although the old stereotypes were given a fresh impetus through new forms of mass consumerism and popular culture, like the comic-strip and film presentations of *Tarzan*. Edgar Rice Burroughs, in his first story, *Tarzan of the Apes* (1911), describes how the infant son of Lord Greystoke, shipwrecked on the West African coast, was raised by apes, and then effortlessly exerted his mastery over both the jungle and its primitive black inhabitants solely through his hereditary qualities as the son of a white aristocrat. 'With the noble poise of his handsome head upon those broad shoulders, and the fire of life and intelligence in those fine, clear eyes, he might readily have typified some demigod.' By contrast, blacks are constantly described as cannibals, witch-doctors and rapists, like Luvini who tries to assault Jane, a 'huge fellow, with a low receding forehead and prognathous jaw. As he entered the hut with a lighted torch which he stuck in the floor, his bloodshot eyes gazed greedily at the still form of the woman lying prone before him. He licked his thick lips and, coming closer, reached out and touched her.' Once again the compulsive obsession with miscegenation was transferred over into popular culture.[24]

Particularly interesting in the changing representation of black people was the role played by the new phenomena of jazz and dance. New forms of black American music and dance, the rag-time and the 'cake-walk', had already spread widely throughout Europe from the 1890s onwards, and had inspired classical composers like Debussy. But this was a mere foretaste of the jazz-craze and 'negromania' that took off from 1917, following the arrival in Europe of black regimental bands, like the Harlem Hellfighters and the Seventy Black Devils. During the 1920s, a young generation who wished to forget the horrors of war, and

to caste off the prudery and stifling restraint of their Victorian elders, found a perfect expression in the 'hot' rhythms, the erotic physicality of the Charleston. During the 1920s controversy raged in Europe over jazz and served as a battleground for the definition of black art, the 'primitive' and latent racism.

The reactions of conservative Europe, as well as of emergent fascism, were fairly predictable: jazz, with its wild cacophony and exuberance, unlike anything in the repertoire of classical or popular music, was seen as profoundly decadent, an expression of dark instincts, of the black savage dancing and howling round jungle-fires to the throb of drums. Critics, like the German Arthur Rundt, saw jazz in racial terms: 'It is the animal freedom, to which the Negro, having landed in the teeming jungle of the World, gives keen expression . . . It is . . . the rhythm of America mirrored in the blood of the colored man.'[25] *Le Figaro*, reviewing Josephine Baker's famous erotic dance act in *La Revue Nègre*, described the show as a 'lamentable transatlantic exhibitionism which makes us revert to the ape in less time than it took to descend from it'.[26] Baker's tour of 1928–9 through Vienna, Budapest, Yugoslavia, Denmark, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Germany caused uproar and widespread condemnation of the naked and 'lewd' displays of the 'Congo savage'.[27] Even before Hitler came to power Wilhelm Frick, the Thuringian Minister of the Interior, issued a decree in September 1930 entitled 'Against Negro Culture – For German Nationhood' to suppress jazz, since it threatened to 'undermine the moral strength of the German nation'. In March 1933 the new Nazi government immediately banned jazz from the radio as a debased 'Judeo-Negroid' music, a form of 'musical decadence' that represented the 'disintegrating effects of cultural Bolshevist-Jewry'.[28]

However, not all Europeans' reactions were negative. Parisian intellectuals and artists, who were also drawn to African sculpture, lionized the American dancers and jazzmen, regarding them as the symbols of a dynamic and refreshing African spirit that challenged the exhausted and tight-laced culture of the West by, in the words of one critic, the 'return to the beginnings of the world, to the simplicity of the jungle'.[29] However, the avant-garde, in associating Africa with primitivism, inadvertently provided a fresh impetus to racial stereotypes by associating jazz with exotic images of the jungle savage. The French artistic directors of *La Revue Nègre* shifted Josephine Baker's show away from its background in the minstrel/plantation traditions of the American stage towards an 'African' programme of naked, eroticized brown bodies performing

to 'jungle music'. In 1926 the semi-nude Baker appeared at the Folies Bergères wearing a suggestive skirt of bananas and, during her 1928 tour of Europe was attacked as 'degenerate' and 'pornographic' in Budapest and Vienna and was banned in Munich as a danger to public morals. Black performers like Josephine Baker fulfilled a highly ambiguous role: while through her rise to stardom and wealth in France she made a strong claim to black status and equality, she at the same time shaped her performances to conform to pre-existing French stereotypes of Africa and to a public demand that thrived off associations between black people, the jungle, bananas and apes. Such representations had more than a superficial import, the mere surface glitter of popular entertainment, since they underscored the almost universal assumption that Africans, racial primitives, would always remain backward and would never rise to self-government, but be eternally dependent on the kindly but firm hand of their white colonial masters.

The universality of racialized stereotypes of the black in inter-war Europe can be shown through the way in which it informed even Soviet culture, the regime which was most committed to the struggle for universal black rights and against colonialism. The official position of the Soviet Union was to support the doctrine of revolutionary internationalism and the struggle of all proletarians, regardless of creed or colour, united in the fight against capitalism and imperialism. The Communist International, in its support for anti-colonial, liberation movements in Africa and elsewhere, promulgated an egalitarian doctrine that served as a powerful bulwark against racism and fascism throughout Europe. Black writers and artists, like Claude McKay and Paul Robeson, were given a triumphant reception that was not merely the reflection of official Communist propaganda, but also of a genuine popular warmth. But Soviet intellectuals, as did many socialists in Western Europe, betrayed an incipient racism. In 1922 Meierhold, adapting a novel by Ilya Ehrenburg to the stage, complete with jazz band, depicted a sinister plot by American capitalists (here with undertones of anti-Semitism) to conquer Europe by colonizing it with Africans. But this plot was overturned by revolutionary heroes tunnelling from Petrograd to Wall Street, thus saving Germany, Austria and Britain in the nick of time from the horrors of cannibalism. This play was staged at the height of the Rhine crisis, during which the middle class throughout Europe fantasized about Western civilization being swamped by blacks. Maxim Gorky, one of the most influential ideologues in Russia, depicted jazz as a capitalist conspiracy to brainwash and control black Americans, and

this dangerous music was now acting as a subversive force within Soviet society. This was a thinly disguised cover for the crudest racial stereotyping. 'Listening for a few minutes to these wails', claimed Gorky in 1928, 'one involuntarily imagines an orchestra of sexually driven madmen, conducted by a man-stallion brandishing a huge genital member.'[30]

Finally, in terms of black representation during the inter-war period an enormous impact was made through the cinema, which revolutionized popular entertainment and reached a vast and growing audience. In Britain the number of cinemas increased from 3000 in 1926 to 5000 in 1938, with annual ticket sales of 1000 million by the latter date. Nor was cinema restricted to the picture palaces of the more urbanized societies: film reached every corner of Europe, down to the travelling shows that visited village halls from Tuscany to the Polish *stetl*. The extraordinary visual power of film quickly made it a key factor, along with radio, in the diffusion of news and propaganda, and both Hollywood and national film production provide a valuable insight into racism and the representation of both blacks and Jews. Early Hollywood productions had often been crudely racist in form, like D. W. Griffith's notorious *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), which depicted the long pursuit of an innocent white girl by a lust-maddened and brutish black man, until she escaped dishonour by flinging herself down a cliff – a scene that led to its being banned by the French government in 1923. However, by 1925 European states were introducing legislative measures to restrict Hollywood domination, to nurture their own national film industries, and through offices of censorship, they were laying down strict guidelines on questions of morality and ethnic or racial representation. British censors were particularly sensitive to the impact of film on colonial audiences and banned pictures showing 'white men in a state of degradation amidst native surroundings', or 'equivocal situations between men of one race and girls of another race'.[31]

Down to 1914, a date coinciding with the completion of the partition of Africa, the main emphasis in the depiction of empire had been on the heroic and violent conquest of black savages. This was a staple in boys' adventure literature, as well as in the simulated battles of the great colonial exhibitions. During the inter-war period both France and Britain, worried by the rise of Pan-Africanism, Communism and other challenges to colonial rule, played down the frontier theme of military conquest and laid more emphasis on the peace, democracy, welfare and economic advance that benign imperial rule was bringing to the benighted savage. A favoured topic in many films was the story of how

dedicated, or even saintly, doctors, braving every hardship in the jungle or outback, fought against superstition and the 'mumbo-jumbo' remedies of witchdoctors, finally winning over the illiterate natives to the benefits of European power and technology through demonstrations of the efficacy and superiority of Western medicine. Rapid advances in epidemiology after 1900, the control of malaria, typhus, typhoid and yellow fever, made the Western doctor a powerful symbol of the civilizing mission and of the legitimacy of colonial rule. In the French film *Itto* (1934), set in Morocco, a doctor saved the newborn son of the heroine from diptheria and she then persuaded him to prevent an epidemic through the inoculation of local children. A battle then ensued between superstitious anti-French rebels, misled by sorcerers, who tried to sell the vaccine for ammunition, and the local women, who eventually rescued the precious medicine. In the Axis co-production *Germanin*, directed in 1943 by Goebbels' brother-in-law, a heroic doctor, Professor Achenbach, was working in German East Africa to find a cure for the dreaded sleeping sickness when British officers destroyed his medical station. The professor continued his search for a vaccine in the IG Farben laboratories, returning to Africa in 1923 to a triumphant demonstration of an effective cure and of German superiority as colonizers over the British.

Through such films, in which Africans were invariably portrayed in 'ethnographic' sequences through native ritual, chanting crowds, dancing and beating drums, European directors conveyed a uniform message of white racial superiority. The backward native was trapped in the eternal horror of the 'Dark Continent', incapable through his low intelligence and racial sloth of ever improving his situation without the kindly, but firm directing hand of his white masters. This paternalistic, colonial ideology was massively promulgated through school textbooks, by missionaries and the popular press, so that hardly a child in Europe could not but feel a warm glow of altruism at the good works that 'we' personally were bringing to the poor savage. As one school text commented, in defiance of the extreme paucity and underfunding of indigenous education in the colonies: 'France wants the little Arabs to be educated like the little French children. This shows how our France is bountiful and generous towards the people she has conquered.'[32] However, this inter-war racism was, as long as black people kept in their subordinate role, relatively benign and paternalistic, bent on the protection of 'our' natives rather than, as the next Chapter shows, on the more violent and exclusionary strategies that inspired anti-Semitism.