

Special Feature:

JWSFH Mixtape:

2025 Edition

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NOISE REDUCTION

JEAN BEAMAN
EMILY MARKER
MATHIAS VALVERDE

In our 2024 issue, we launched the *JWSFH Mixtape* to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Western Society for French History and volume 50 of this journal. Last year, we asked contributors to look through the journal's entire back catalog and organized their selections by decade. This round, we asked participants to choose five books, articles, films, etc. from 2024 and 2025 that really stood out for them. The lists below were drawn up by Jean Beaman, Emily Marker, and Mathias Valverde, three wonderful scholars who work on different periods and questions in French and Francophone history and studies from the eighteenth century to contemporary France. We encourage readers to explore their recommendations and to reflect on their own favorite works from the past year.

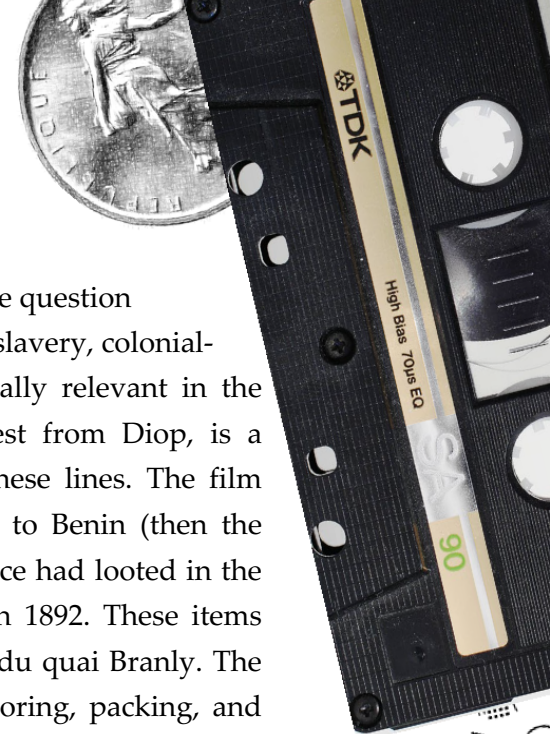
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JEAN BEAMAN

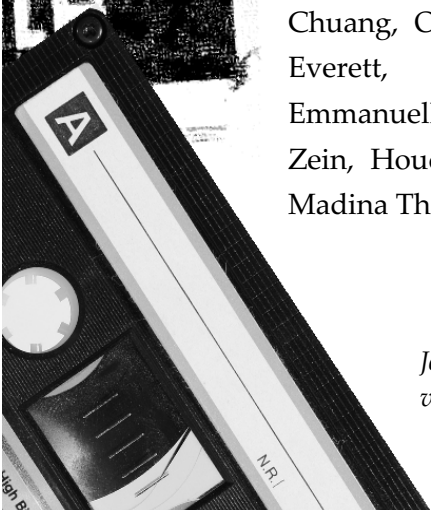
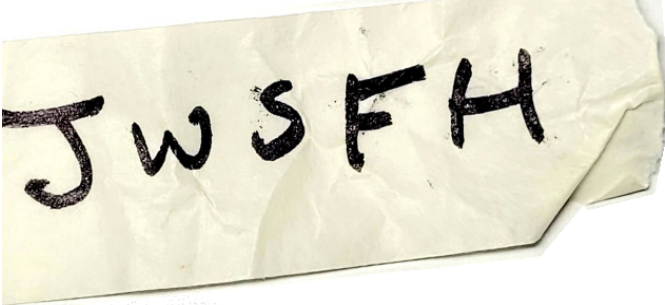
[Madeleine Hunt-Ehrlich, dir. *The Ballad of Suzanne Césaire*, 2024.](#) This film employs a bit of surrealism to trace the life of Martinican writer, editor, and intellectual Suzanne Césaire through her own writings and known fragments of her life, and outside of her better-known husband Aimé Césaire. Specifically, it follows an actress as she learns about Suzanne Césaire in her attempt to portray her. In doing so, *The Ballad of Suzanne Césaire* is in conversation with other efforts to excavate and recenter Black women as integral to the anti-colonial struggle and to the Negritude movement, among other movements and intellectual projects in France and its empire. It also speculates about what more Suzanne Césaire might have been able to produce outside of the constraints of mothering six children. I was moved seeing this film in New York in Fall 2024, both because of my previous ignorance of Suzanne Césaire and my own interest in what gets remembered and what gets obscured.

¹ [Anna Cordreo-Rado, Emmanuel Macron Says Return of African Artifacts Is a Top Priority, *New York Times*, 29 November 2017.](#)

[*Dahomey*, dir. Mati Diop, 2024.](#) The question of repatriation and reparations for slavery, colonialism, and colonial theft is perennially relevant in the French context. *Dahomey*, the latest from Diop, is a provocative documentary along these lines. The film examines the return of 26 objects to Benin (then the kingdom of Dahomey) which France had looted in the Second Franco-Dahomeyan War in 1892. These items had been shown in Paris's Musée du quai Branly. The documentary shows the careful storing, packing, and shipping of these items in 2021 as well as their eventual display in Benin (following a 2018 report on the Repatriation of African Treasures commissioned by President Emmanuel Macron who declared that "African heritage can't just be in European private collections and museums")¹. The most fascinating part of the film is its inclusion of a discussion and debate among Beninese university students on the value and significance of returning these particular items when so many other similar items remain in Paris.



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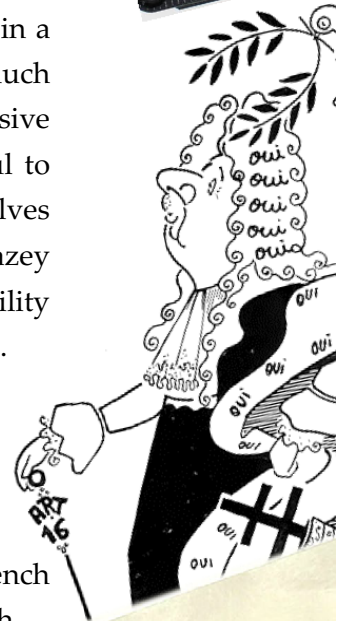
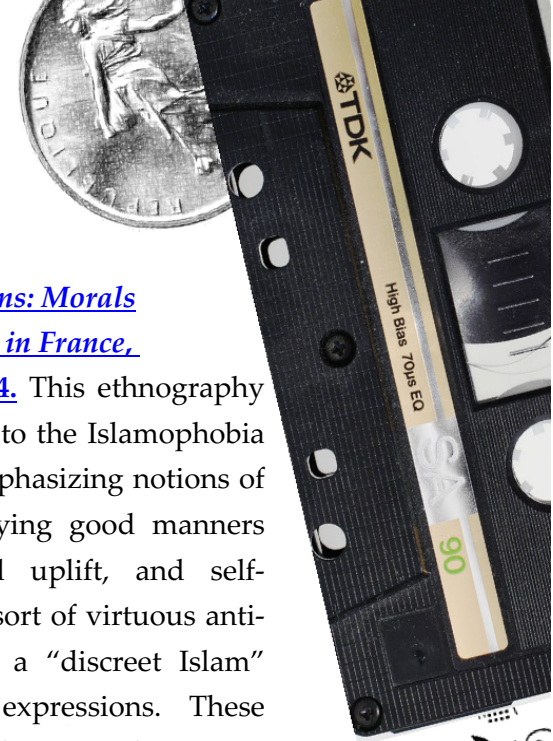


POMEPS Studies 52 – Race Politics and Colonial Legacies: France, Africa and the Middle East, May 2024.

This issue of the Project on Middle East Political Science, or POMEPS, co-edited by Hisham Aidi, Marc Lynch, and Zachariah Mampilly, offers a careful reading of the lasting interconnections between France, Africa, and the Middle East, partly due to France's colonial and imperial project. This issue is the latest output following several meetings at Columbia University on the Africa-Middle East divide. Myriad contributions in this issue address important questions in French and Francophone studies, including the relationship between colonialism and pre-existing ethnoracial hierarchies in the colonies, legacies of French colonial rule in both Africa and France, and epistemological questions regarding the study of race, racialization, and racism within France. Contributors include Paul Silverstein, Solène Brun, Claire Cosquer, Ya-Han Chuang, Olivia Umurerwa Rutazibwa, Samuel Sami Everett, Sélima Kebaili, Eléonore Lépinard, Emmanuelle Carinos Vasquez, Oumar Ba, Dahlia El Zein, Houda Mzioudet, Amy Niang, Kenza Talmat, Madina Thiam, Baba Adou, and Hamza Esmili.

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Margot Dazey, Respectable Muslims: Morals and Manners of Minority Citizens in France, Cambridge University Press, 2024.

This ethnography focuses on how Muslims respond to the Islamophobia and stigma they experience by emphasizing notions of “respectability,” including displaying good manners and modeling discretion, social uplift, and self-discipline. Self-control becomes a sort of virtuous anti-racist modality. They emphasize a “discreet Islam” versus more “loud” political expressions. These Muslims strive to assert or prove their Frenchness in a society that actively denies them. Given that much previous work has documented pervasive Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism, it is helpful to have more research tracing how Muslims themselves both experience and respond to these structures. Dazey demonstrates how these Muslims subvert the hostility they face yet also reinforce French republican logics.

Patrick Lyons, “Racial Capitalism in French and Francophone Studies,” L’Esprit Créateur vol. 64, no. 1: 1-10.

This piece introduces a special issue dedicated to racial capitalism in France and French studies that was partly a response to the 2023 French



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translation of Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. The special issue is exciting for its incorporation of a racial capitalism lens to explore existing questions of race and racism in the French context, or as Lyons put it, "reading for racial capitalism." Some of the contributions also discuss the reception of Robinson in French academic circles. Contributors include Norman Ajari, Hourya Bentouhami, Dimitri Diagne, Selim Nadi, and Chloé Luu.

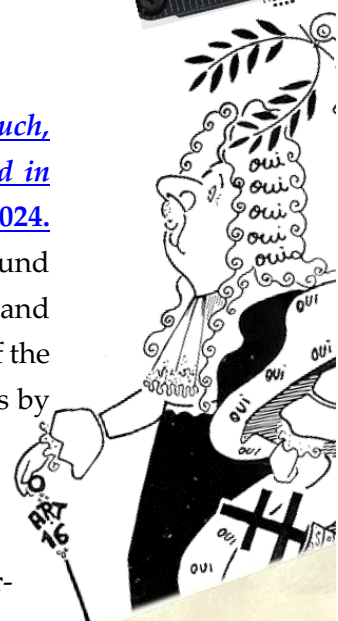
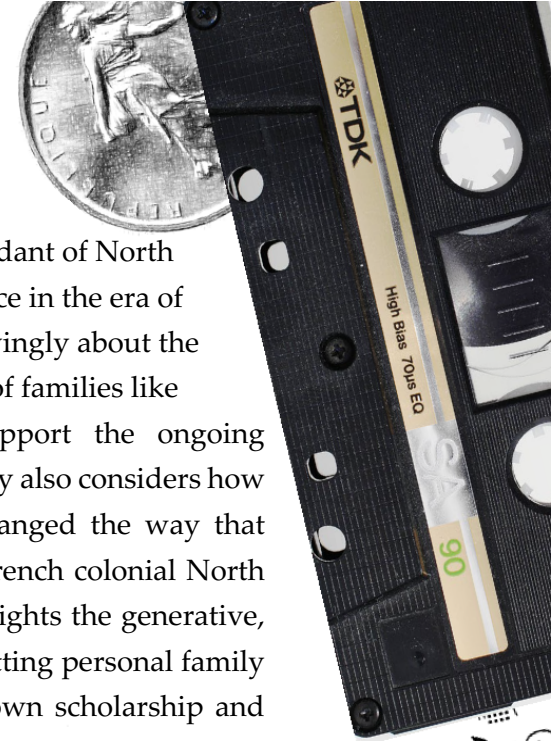
EMILY MARKER

Arthur Asseraf, "The Algeria Analogy," *Jewish Currents* (Fall/Winter 2024). This powerful essay resonated so strongly with me for both its analytical insights and its methods. The piece is an urgent call to reject facile, distorting analogies between Algeria and Israel/Palestine. As Asseraf writes, "Understanding Algeria's past – beyond a slogan or an analogy – is essential to countering attacks on decolonization today." He makes this case by mobilizing his personal family history—an approach I am now experimenting

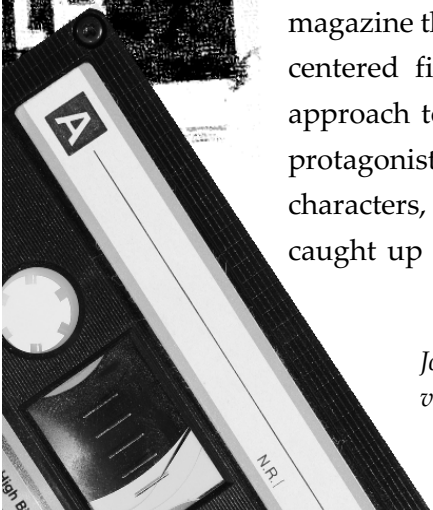
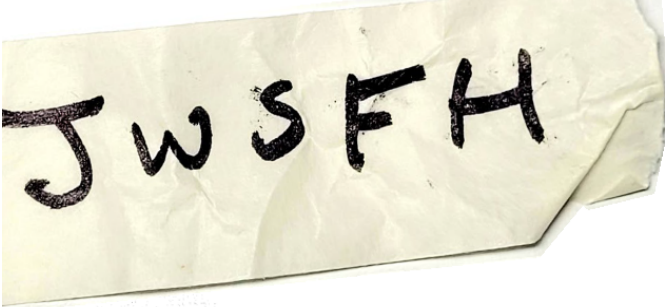
with in my own work. As a descendant of North African Jews who resettled in France in the era of decolonization, Asseraf writes movingly about the urgency of preventing the history of families like his "from being twisted to support the ongoing colonization of Palestine." The essay also considers how "the present of Palestine" has changed the way that Asseraf understands the past in French colonial North Africa. In this way, the piece spotlights the generative, multidirectional possibilities of putting personal family history into dialogue with one's own scholarship and political commitments.

Laure Astourian, *The Ethnographic Optic: Jean Rouch, Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, and the Turn Inward in 1960s French Cinema*, Indiana University Press, 2024.

This excellent monograph highlights the profound interconnections between colonial ethnography and some of the most iconic experimental French films of the 1960s. More than a close reading of canonical works by Rouch, Marker, and Resnais, this study offers a rich cultural and intellectual history of the convergence of aesthetics, anthropology, urbanism, and youth politics in the era of decolonization. I was particular-

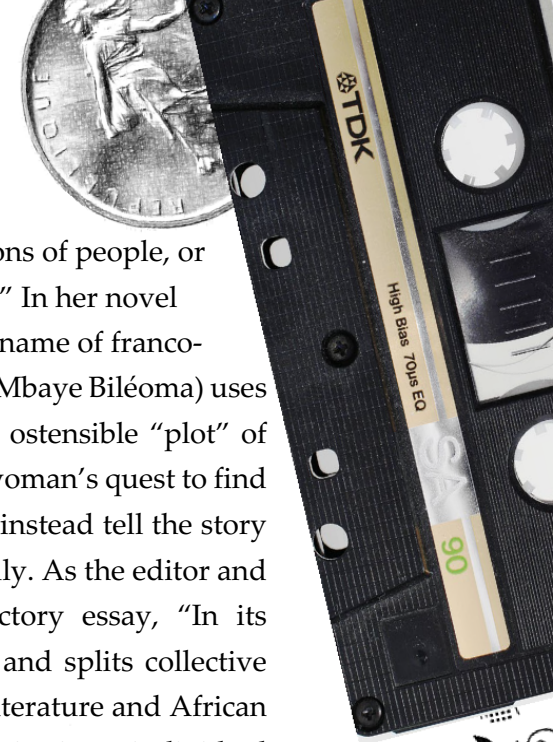


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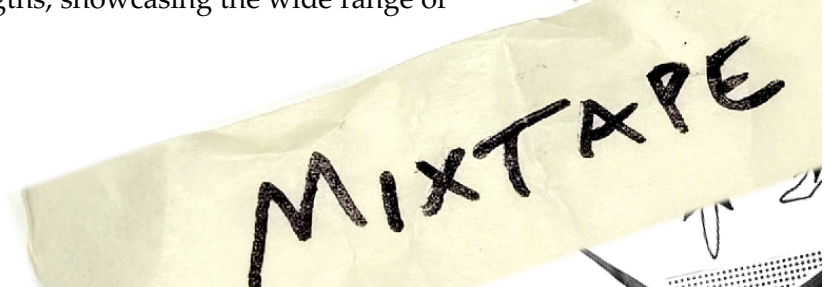
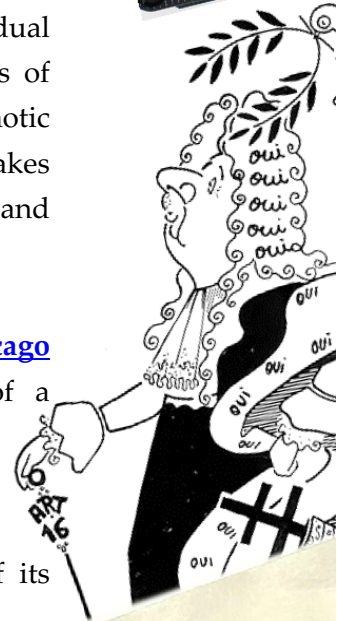
ly struck by Astorian's discussion of just how profoundly Rouch's *Moi, un Noir* (1958), which follows a group of young Nigerien migrants in Abidjan on their daily search for work and nightly alcohol-fueled reveries, influenced the rising cohort of directors of the French New Wave. Jean-Luc Godard has widely acknowledged Rouch's film as a direct inspiration for *À bout de souffle* (1959). Astorian cheekily observes that, given the numerous parallels between the two films—the hand-held camerawork, jump cuts, monologues while walking, focus on youth in the city, the looming influence of Hollywood—*À bout de souffle* could just as well have been called, *Moi, un Blanc*. Imagine that!

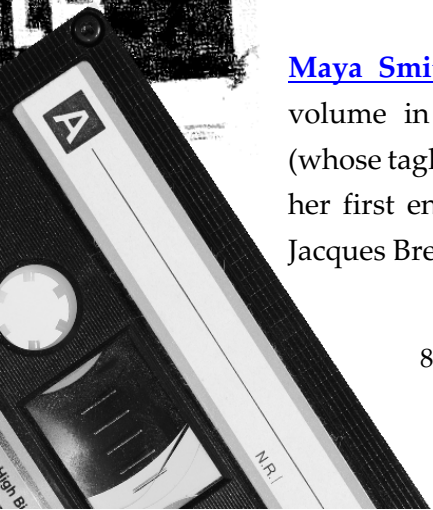
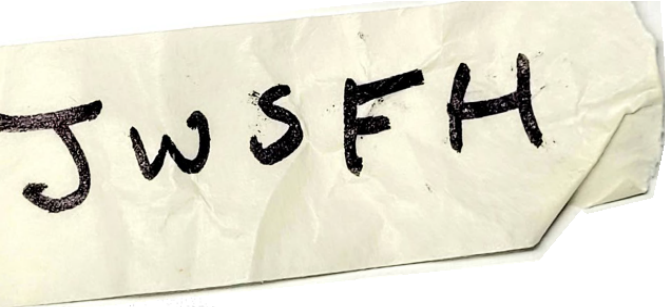
[Ken Bugul, excerpt from *Aller et Retour* \[2014\], new English translation from the original French/Wolof by Julianna Blair Watson and Hugo Bujon, *Lean Magazine*, Issue 6, 2024.](#) *Lean* is an online literary magazine that specializes in works of “non-protagonist-centered fiction,” which the editor describes as “an approach to literature that formally deemphasizes the protagonist.” By shrinking the presence of main characters, such work dramatizes “how individuals are caught up in and reduced by large events, structures,



enormous timescales, agglomerations of people, or just their immediate surroundings.” In her novel *Aller et Retour*, Ken Bugul (the pen name of francophone Senegalese writer Mariétou Mbaye Biléoma) uses the narrator's voice to disrupt the ostensible “plot” of the novel, which follows a young woman's quest to find her lost brother in 1980s Dakar, to instead tell the story of Dakar and Senegal more generally. As the editor and translators note in their introductory essay, “In its relentless flow, this voice merges and splits collective and personal memories, Western literature and African literature, recitation and improvisation, individual voice and collective voice, places and generations of Senegalese poets.” *Aller et Retour* is a beautiful, hypnotic read, and with this new translated excerpt, *Lean* makes the work available to anglophone readers (and students) for the first time.

[Stéphane Gerson, ed., *Scholars and their Kin* \(Chicago 2025\).](#) This edited volume, which grew out of a symposium at New York University in March 2020, brings together an interdisciplinary group of scholars working on personal family history. The interdisciplinarity of the collection is one of its greatest strengths, showcasing the wide range of





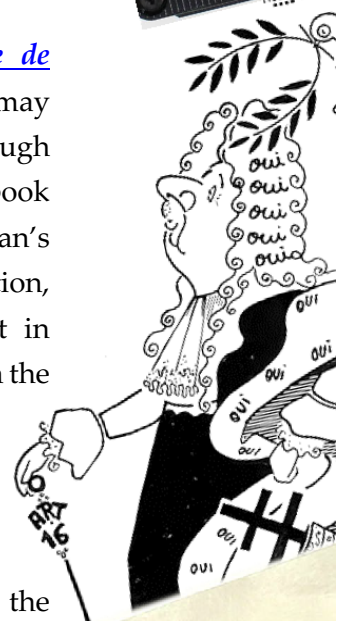
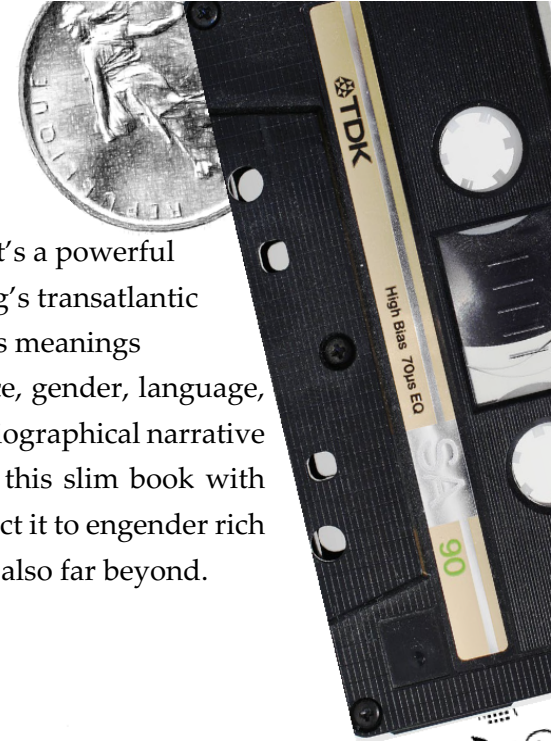
possibilities writing about one's own family can open up with regards to both the production of new knowledge and different genres and approaches to storytelling. As Gerson writes in the introduction, though many of the contributors in the volume draw on personal memoir, "they are nonetheless venturing beyond self-writing, embracing the methods and commitments of their intellectual disciplines to capture the experiences of relatives and kin whose lives unfolded against specific historical horizons." With its impressive roster of contributors, who themselves draw on the vast corpus of personal family history writing that began to emerge in the 2000s and has really exploded since the 2010s, the volume signals the depth and breadth of "the personal turn" across the contemporary humanities and social sciences, forecasting its analytical possibilities with an impressive clarity of purpose.

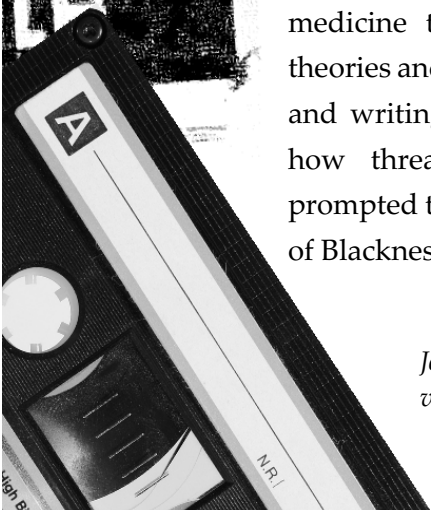
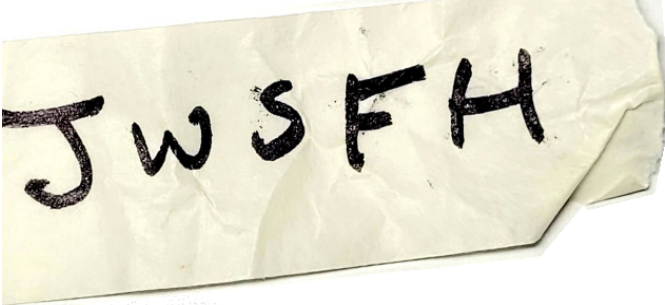
Maya Smith, *Ne me quitte pas*, Duke 2025. In this volume in Duke University Press's "Singles" series (whose tagline is: "one song, one book"), Smith recounts her first encounter with Nina Simone's 1965 cover of Jacques Brel's 1959 hit, which ultimately inspired Smith

to become a francophone scholar. It's a powerful and moving meditation on the song's transatlantic and global circulations, and how its meanings change as it crosses frontiers of race, gender, language, and generation. Smith melds autobiographical narrative and trenchant cultural analysis in this slim book with such skill and finesse. I would expect it to engender rich conversations in the classroom but also far beyond.

MATHIAS VALVERDE

Aïcha Limbada, *La nuit de nocces. Une histoire de l'intimité conjugale*, La Découverte, 2023. While it may seem contradictory to access the intimate through mediated, often institutional sources, this book demonstrates that intimacy is not beyond the historian's reach. By focusing on the moment of consummation, Limbada helps us rethink the notion of consent in nineteenth-century marriage and sheds light on both the construction of sexual norms and the production of ignorance surrounding nuptial rites. The research compellingly shows how deeply gendered these intimate moments were, revealing how masculine domination was embedded in the structure and expectations of "mariage consummation".



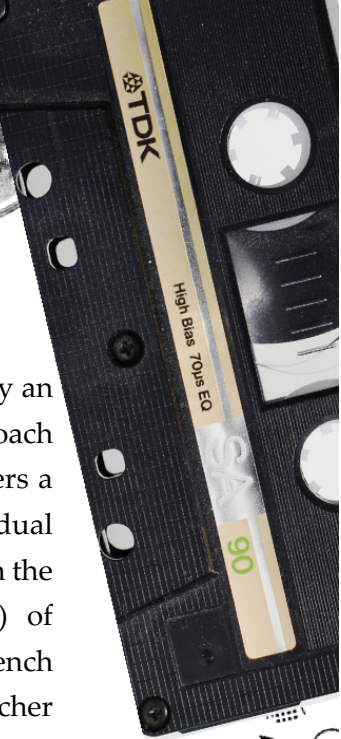


Men were expected to perform, while women were expected to endure. Limbada's acute reading of sources on the wedding night will have a lasting impact on how we study the history of intimacy.

[Meghan K. Roberts, "Making Race and Reputations in Eighteenth-Century France," *History Workshop Journal*, 98, 2024: 135–154.](#) Given the ways media today may amplify racist narratives to serve political ends, revisiting the cultural framework of racist theories in the past is necessary. According to Meghan K. Roberts, media and public discourse played a central role in shaping European racial thought during the Enlightenment. By sensationalizing race or offering expert structures justifying slavery, some eighteenth-century savants leveraged the expanding public sphere to assert their intellectual authority. In doing so, they participated in a cultural framework of science and medicine that actively supported the rise of racist theories and anti-Black ideologies. Roberts's storytelling and writing are captivating in this article that shows how threats to masculine honor and reputation prompted these men to engage publicly on the question of Blackness.

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[Michaela Kalcher, "The Self in the Shadow of the Guillotine: Revolution, Terror and Trauma in a Parisian Diary," *History Workshop Journal*, 98, 2024: 155–180.](#) Making sense of oneself is already an impossible task—so how can we attempt to approach the self in historical context? Michaela Kalcher offers a compelling example by uncovering an individual response to historical upheaval, specifically through the diary (composed of written parts and doodles) of Célestin Guittard de Floriban during the French Revolution. Using trauma as an analytical lens, Kalcher explores how the Revolution was experienced on a deeply personal level, revealing the often overlooked, intimate traces left behind by unremarkable individuals. This approach adds a meaningful layer to our understanding of the Revolution's effects on individuals. I just hope no future historian attempts to reconstruct my life from my Instagram history (please, don't!).

[Nahema Hanafi, "Testicules, masculinités et normes de genre. Les récits scientifiques français sur les castrats italiens au siècle des Lumières," *Histoire, médecine et santé*, vol. 25, 2024: 61-81.](#)



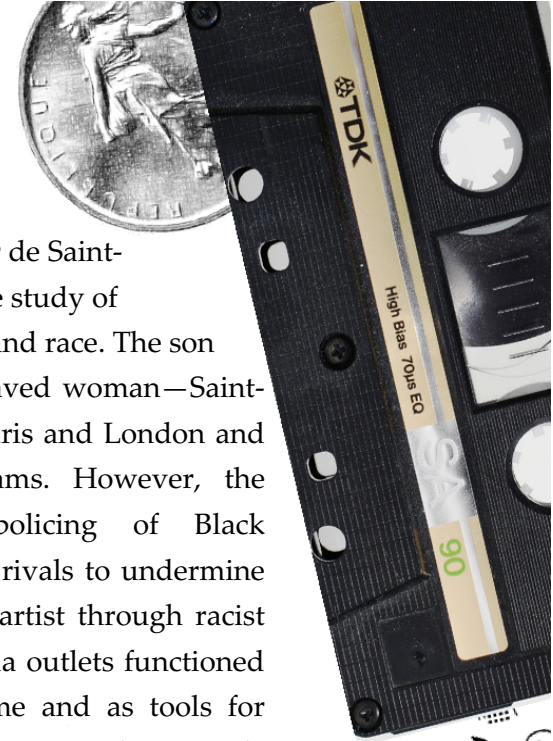
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Exploring the figure of the castrato and the debates surrounding the ethics of cutting off someone's virile parts offers a powerful lens through which to understand the contested meanings assigned to bodies and the normative construction of sex in eighteenth-century France. Nahema Hanafi's first book on women's bodies, *Le frisson et le baume: expériences féminines du corps au Siècle des Lumières* (Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2017), was already remarkable; this new project moves in an exciting direction by shifting the focus to masculinity and its embodiment. This article's inquiry into the cultural and medical meanings of emasculated singing men—examined through the emerging scientific discourse on sex—provides a timely and original perspective. Looking at the castrati is a great way to get at the weird and contested logics around bodies in the period and attempts to pin down what made a man a man.

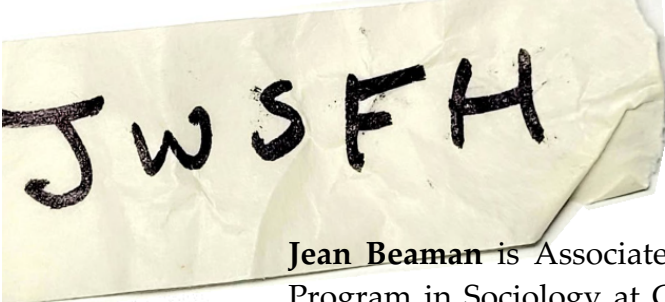
[Christy Pichichero, "Race, Revolution, and Celebrity: The Case of Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-George" in David A. Bell and Colin Jones, eds., *French Revolutionary Lives. War, Culture and Society, 1750–1850*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024: 13–28.](#)

Christy

Pichichero's essay on the Chevalier de Saint-George (1745–1799) is a remarkable study of the intersection between celebrity and race. The son of Anne, or Nanon—a Black enslaved woman—Saint-George led an exuberant life in Paris and London and was even known to John Adams. However, the increasing surveillance and policing of Black individuals in France allowed his rivals to undermine his reputation as a multitalented artist through racist tropes. As Pichichero shows, media outlets functioned both as vehicles for building fame and as tools for disseminating anti-Black stereotypes. This article beautifully reconstructs the life of the first Black celebrity of the Atlantic world and the racial hostility he faced.



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Jean Beaman is Associate Professor in the Ph.D. Program in Sociology at CUNY Graduate Center. She is the author of *Citizen Outsider: Children of North African Immigrants in France* (University of California Press, 2017). She is also an Associate Editor of the journal, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* and a Corresponding Editor for the journal *Metropolitics/Métropolitiques*. She is currently finishing an ethnography on suspect citizenship and state violence in France, forthcoming with Stanford University Press.

Emily Marker is Associate Professor of History at Rutgers University-Camden. Her first book, *Black France, White Europe: Youth, Race, and Belonging in the Postwar Era*, was published by Cornell in 2022. She is now working on the transnational dynamics of reparations policy in contemporary Europe. A former president of the WSFH, she is currently the president of the Camden chapter of Rutgers AAUP-AFT and a member of the boards of the *Journal for the History of Childhood and Youth*, the American Friends of the Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance (AFDÖW), and Rutgers' Centers for African Studies and European Studies.

Mathias Valverde is a PhD candidate in Early Modern History at the Université de Strasbourg and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Paris. His research examines the history of masculinities within learned communities during the French Enlightenment. He has held fellowships at the Interdisciplinary Centre for European Enlightenment Studies in Halle and the Leibniz Institute for European History in Mainz. His work has been published in *Dix-Huitième Siècle*, *Clio*, and the *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*.

