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Preface

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Preface

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Originally given at FCHS meetings in New Haven, Dakar, and La Rochelle, the 11 essays published here represent the intellectual diversity in the field of French colonial history. At first glance, this body of work may seem disconnected. Do articles about the legal status and treatment of women and children have a direct relationship with articles about memory and warfare, or about the archaeological investigation of rings or borders, or about the ordering of commerce, or the creation of the “other”? Can studies that range from the early seventeenth century be in dialogue with those that concern the twentieth century? Does reading about French colonialism in Africa reveal fresh insights about New France or Haiti?

Through the analysis of the intersection of indigenous cultural perspectives with French colonial policies and military realities, Micheline Lessard reveals the roots and expansion of the traffic in Vietnamese women and children in Indochina in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Archaeologists Paul A. Demers, and Carol I. Mason and Kathleen L. Ehrhardt bring an anthropological and material culture perspective to their studies of New France. Demers traces the persistence and retention of French colonial boundary assumptions in the formation of the U.S.-Canadian border. Mason and Ehrhardt reexamine the manufacture and distribution of Jesuit rings to ask what significance these rings may have had, and if they can indeed provide a chronology of meaning in the history of New France.

Three separate articles illuminate the ways in which intellectuals and French lawmakers attempted to make sense of the Haitian Revolution. Sandra Rebok

compares Thomas Jefferson's and Alexander von Humboldt's writings on the conflict. Jean-François Brière examines the role of Baron Portal in recognizing Haitian independence, while Frédérique Beauvois tackles the very practical and thorny problem of slavery compensation through the interaction of the French and Haitian states as political entities.

Joe Lunn's essay on the *tirailleur sénégalais* directly confronts the uses of memory and oral testimonies in the writing of history. Marie Rodet studies the way colonial and customary laws collude to restrict the rights of women in French Sudan during the mid-twentieth century. Hélène Grandhomme examines the complicated interplay of cultural understandings between Islam and French imperial power, seeing them as imperfect mirrors of one another in colonial Senegal.

Finally, two articles cast a new eye on the larger linkages of empire and colony. Laurent Marien explores the role of the French hinterlands in the success of the empire's commerce and infrastructure. Samir Saul, in an essay that could not be more timely, questions official reactions to the economic crisis of the 1930s, and how differing metropolitan and colonial interests created additional strain in the empire.

All of these articles in some way question memory and interpretation, examining the search for meaning and order in the past. The field of French colonial history is robust. And it is, in fact, this very diversity that underscores the importance of the study of colony and empire, revealing at its core the necessity for a vigorous cross-cultural history. As I leave my tenure as editor of *French Colonial History*, I'd like to recognize the fine work of the Michigan State University Press staff. Finally, I want to thank Mike Vann and the Society's executive board and membership for making this journal possible through their continued guidance and support.