Beginning in the 1870s, a great many Bretons—men and women from Brittany, a region in western France—began arriving in Paris. Every age has its pariahs, and in 1900 the “pariahs of Paris” were the Bretons, the last distinct group of provincials to come en masse to the capital city. The pariah designation took hold in Paris, in Brittany, and among historians. Yet the derision of recent migrants can be temporary. Tracing the changing status of Bretons in Paris since 1870, Leslie Page Moch demonstrates that state policy, economic trends, and the attitudes of established Parisians and Breton newcomers evolved as the fortunes of Bretons in the capital improved. The pariah stereotype became outdated. Drawing on demographic records and the writings of physicians, journalists, novelists, lawyers, and social scientists, Moch connects internal migration with national integration. She interprets marriage records, official reports on employment, legal and medical theses, memoirs, and writings from secular and religious organizations in the Breton community. As the pariahs of yesterday, Bretons are an example of successful integration into Parisian life. At the same time, their experiences show integration to be a complicated and lengthy process.

“Leslie Page Moch has given us a more vivid and fully analyzed picture of Breton migration to Paris during the Third French Republic than we have had before. She moves deftly across the fields of demographic, urban, and cultural history to show how young women and men from rural villages in western France became Parisians in their own way, despite the stubborn persistence of prejudice against them. The Pariahs of Yesterday demonstrates that the history of France’s internal migration from the provinces has much to teach us about the dynamics of the country’s more recent controversies over immigration and cultural diversity.”—HERRICK CHAPMAN, co-editor of Race in France: Intercultural Perspectives on the Politics of Difference

“The Pariahs of Yesterday will be the definitive work on Bretons in Paris. Leslie Page Moch is one of the foremost historians of European migration and here, through the eyes of contemporary observers and the microscope of marriage registries, Moch traces a longue durée history of an important component of the Parisian population from the late nineteenth century to the present.”—NANCY L. GREEN, author of Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York

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On the cover: Bretons en route to work in Saint-Denis, courtesy of the Douzenel Collection.