Introduction

RACIAL RESURRECTIONS

For most of the French, 1998 is vividly remembered as the year that *les bleus* won their stunning 3–0 victory over Brazil in the FIFA World Cup championships. The diverse team, which included Zinedine Zidane and Lilian Thuram—popular players with ties to former French colonies—was widely represented in the media as the triumph of French multiculturalism. The phrase "*La France: black, blanc, beur*" (France: black, white, Arab) became a ubiquitous refrain in coverage of the event. The uplifting framing of the World Cup victory and its symbolism of multicultural solidarity eclipsed a far more troublesome development that year, as 1998 happened to be the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in the French overseas territories.[1]

To mark the occasion, the French government planned a series of official events over the course of the year in both mainland France and the overseas departments of Guiana, Réunion Island, Guadeloupe, and Martinique.[2] This decision stood in marked contrast to the 100th anniversary of the abolition, which passed without much fanfare in 1948.[3] For the 150th anniversary, an inter-ministerial office was established under the leadership of the Guadeloupean writer Daniel Maximin to organize a series of commemorations (see Lutte Ouvrière 1998). In mainland France the commemorations included, among other events, the Déchaîne ta Citoyenneté (Unchain your Citizenship) exposition, which attracted more than fifty-five thousand primary school students. The National Assembly opened its doors on April 25 for a musical festival and display of "documents [and] objects illustrating the steps and evoking the great actors of the abolitionist fight."[4] The next day, the public televi-

sion station France 3 aired a biography of Aimé Césaire, the Martinican intellectual and politician. Designed to attract a young audience, the show brought together popular Francophone rap artists such as MC Solaar, Stomy Bugsy, and "Positive Black Soul" to interpret the words of the *négritude* writer.

The national day of commemoration itself was reserved for April 27, the anniversary of the abolitionary proclamation. The flurry of commemorative activities included a ceremony at the Pantheon honoring two white abolitionists and one black colonial administrator: Victor Schoelcher, author of the abolitionary decree; Abbé Grégoire, a famous antislavery agitator; and Adolphe-Sylvestre-Félix Eboué, the governor-general of French Equatorial Africa. Two large plaques were erected in the lower level of the Pantheon, near Schoelcher's tomb. Visitors can now find the name of Louis Delgrès, the French Caribbean freedom fighter, stretched in massive, glistening gold script across a beige stone wall. He is described as a "hero of the struggle against the re-establishment of slavery in Guadeloupe." On the opposite wall, the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint L'Ouverture is lionized as a "combatant of freedom [and] artisan of the abolition." Five years later, on the anniversary of L'Ouverture's death, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the erstwhile president of Haiti, would demand billions of dollars in reparations from France—a request that was swiftly rejected. Not long thereafter, Aristide was forcibly removed from power. French politicians, meanwhile, continue to refuse material reparations.

In 1998, the slogan that accompanied the French government's commemorative outreach was "Tous Nés en 1848" (We Were All Born in 1848), accompanied by an image that was meant to convey a hip, fun portrait of French multiculturalism. The photograph portrays a lower row of brown-skinned youth who are, not without some irony, flanked by several individuals who appear to be white or North African. The slogan became a source of consternation and offense, an emblem of all that was wrong with the Republic's awkward attempts to commemorate a difficult past by focusing on the glory of abolition.

It was also one of the factors that contributed to Afro-Caribbeans deciding to take their historical and contemporary grievances to the streets.[5] During an interview with me years later, one activist observed:

The Socialist Party and [Lionel] Jospin in particular, at the time he was prime minister, recognized that they had actually made a small linguistic mistake, because in 1998, . . . at the time of the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery, they [said]: "We Were All Born in 1848"—therefore, [born] at the moment of abolition. That is to say that before abolition, nothing happened. [There was a] very big reaction and march. The march

. . . affirmed dignity, respect and the will to have slavery recognized as a crime against humanity.[6]

The march the activist refers to is not a well-known event in recent French history. Yet it was the first time that thousands of French people of Caribbean and sub-Saharan African origin formed a visible, collective community of protest in mainland France. Unlike the famous Marche des Beurs, which stretched from Marseille to Paris in 1983 and drew widespread attention to the plight of the Maghrebis and their French-born children, the march in memory of the victims of slavery that took place in Paris on May 23, 1998, was largely ignored by the media, to the chagrin of the activists involved. A note published in *Le Monde* some three days later mentioned the march only at the end of an article about the annual commemoration of abolition in Martinique. The brief dispatch reported:

> In Paris, several thousand people (twenty thousand, according to the organizers; eight thousand, according to the police), in great majority natives of the overseas departments, marched, Saturday May 23, from Republic to Nation, in homage to millions of victims of slavery, at the call of the Committee for a Unitary Commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the Abolition of the Slavery of Negroes in the French Colonies, which gathers some three hundred associations of Guadeloupeans, Martinicans, Guianese, and Réunionese. The protestors marched in silence with banners carrying inscriptions such as, "Slavery: Crime against Humanity" [and] "We Are All the Daughters and Sons of Slaves."[7]

It is interesting to note that *Le Monde* does not refer to the event as a "black" march. Although it may seem odd to an American, this march by people of African descent—related to slavery—was not universally framed as a black mobilization, even by the activists themselves. The march brought together people and groups with divergent racial politics. One the one hand, certain activists—particularly those from the French Caribbean—eschewed race in favor of ethnicity, waving the banner of descendants of slaves. On the other hand, other activists with a variety of ancestral ties (Caribbean and African) embraced race and affirmed their blackness. French people of color on both sides of this divide have been involved in efforts to resurrect the slavery past.

Despite the atmosphere of general indifference that seemed to greet the protest, March 23, 1998, would prove to be a tipping point in efforts to break the silence surrounding the history of French slavery. This commemorative mobilization highlights the growing presence and political weight of postco-

lonial migrants and immigrants from both the French overseas departments and sub-Saharan Africa and laid the groundwork for the Taubira Law, passed three years later, which defines slavery as a "crime against humanity." The march also predates new black movements in France such as the moderate Conseil Representatif des Associations Noires (Representative Council of Black Associations [CRAN]) and the radical group Tribu Ka. The events of 1998 raise important questions about race in France. What present-day societal conditions motivated thousands of people to take to the streets in 1998 and subsequent years to resurrect the memory of those enslaved? How do commemorators grapple with the racial content of the slavery past (and present) in the context of French norms of color-blindness? Finally, what kinds of group identities are at stake today for activists and French people with ties to overseas territories where slavery took place?

These questions sent me to Paris nearly a decade after the 1998 march to study commemorations of slavery in France. On May 9, 2008, I joined more than one hundred people in an auditorium at the Hôtel de Ville (Paris City Hall) for a screening of *Africaphonie*, a new, fifty-two-minute documentary chronicling the rise of slavery commemorations in France. After the film, several panelists gathered on-stage for a roundtable discussion and question-and-answer session with the audience. The speakers included the director of a publishing house; a producer of the television series *Bitter Tropics*, about slavery; a journalist; and a few academics. After their opening remarks, a young black man in the audience stood up with a piece of paper in his hand and began speaking into the microphone. "I'm honored to be in the presence of the people who are involved," he said. "But I think that the real problem in France isn't simply a question of slavery but really a question of *race*." He paused, then continued: "We only have to look at the portrait you represent up there." The young man gestured dramatically toward the speakers, drawing some laughter from the audience as the panelists nervously looked at one another and smiled. His remarks drew my attention to the fact that none of the speakers appeared to be phenotypically black. He began reading from his paper:

I'm going to read the definition of "Negro" from the 1905 Larousse dictionary: "Nègre, Négresse: Latin, Niger. Black: Man, woman with Black skin. It's the name especially given to inhabitants of certain regions in Africa that form a Black race inferior in intelligence to the white race, also known as the Caucasian race." . . . This is the real problem. Today's society doesn't want *blaaaaaaack* men [*saying the word "black" slowly, for emphasis, and raising his pitch*] to have access to positions of responsibility.

> Today, at the National [Gendarmerie] Officers School, at the entrance to the cafeteria, we find a statue of a Negro servant [*le nègre serviteur*], the American kind [*he mimics the form of a figurine, bending his knees and opening his hands*], with his hands held out like this, at the entrance . . . , and it seems normal to everyone. The truth is that the Black man, for most people, is considered inferior in intelligence and considered a child. That's . . . why everything will be done to block him, to contain him.

The atmosphere in the room was electric. While a number of panelists discussed historical constructions of race, much of the earlier dialogue had centered on debates (such as whether Africans shared responsibility for the transatlantic slave trade) and sweeping overviews of the cultural legacies of slavery and the politics of commemoration. The young man managed to do what previous speakers had not: to make explicit links between past and present racism. With this audience member's intervention, white racism, anti-blackness, and black identity moved into the foreground.

This moment raises a central concern at the heart of this book: *To what extent do the French make connections between the history of slavery and race relations today?* Students of collective memory are concerned with how history comes to be framed, debated, and infused with meaning. These contested representations are linked to relations of power, as people with unequal resources and divergent interests produce competing perspectives on the past. Struggles over the meaning of racial history are, of course, informed by contemporary politics of race. One of the goals of this study is to show how people make sense of slavery in a nation where talking about race, colonialism, and slavery (not to mention their interconnections) remains taboo. In his masterly *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995: 98), Michel-Rolph Trouillot frames the suppression of the Haitian Revolution in French historiography as intimately connected to "the relegation to an historical backburner of the three themes to which it was linked: racism, slavery, and colonialism." The relegating of racism, slavery, and colonialism to the dustbin of an unspoken history explains not only inattention to the revolution in Saint-Domingue but also the difficulty the French have with acknowledging the social realities of racial inequality and oppression today.[8] Throughout this book, I inquire into the connections and disconnections that are made among these three themes—racism, slavery, and colonialism—in how French politicians, activists, and ordinary people interpret and frame transatlantic enslavement.

Such an inquiry requires unpacking the extent to which commemorators and members of the public *acknowledge* the racial and colonial content of the

slavery past—and the social present. In the French case especially, the degree to which the racial content of slavery is acknowledged—and the meanings that are attached to it—cannot be taken for granted. This is arguably the case throughout the commemorative landscape in societies shaped by transatlantic slavery, but it is particularly true in nations like France and Brazil where politicians represent the nation as color-blind. Although we are no strangers to post-racial ideology in the United States, the denial of race is far more hegemonic in France.[9] As Bruce Crumley observes in *Time* magazine, the "accepted wisdom in France . . . is that acknowledging difference, and naming it, is bigotry itself."[10] This ideological and moral objection to using racial categories is what the sociologist Melissa Weiner refers to as "anti-racialism"—the view that making racial distinctions is "racist" (Weiner 2014; Goldberg 2009). In such a context, one might expect to find representations of slavery that downplay or obscure the concept of race.

The notion that one could talk about slavery without directly addressing race might strike most Americans as absurd. In France, however, public racial discourse has been largely suppressed since World War II, when more than seventy thousand French Jews were targeted by racist ideology and sent to death camps in Nazi Germany. With the aftershocks of the Vichy regime and the ongoing trauma of anti-Semitism, many French antiracist groups continue to argue that acknowledging race or using racial categories is incompatible with fighting racism. Erik Bleich (2003: 14) describes French color-blind ideology this way: "Prevailing French frames have downplayed or denied the categories of race and ethnicity, they have focused more on expressive racism and on anti-Semitism, and they have rejected the North American analogy, because of its perceived irrelevance to understanding France's domestic context of racism." Thus, the dominant mode of "dealing with race" in France consists of racial avoidance.

It is clear, however, that the political posture of color-blindness has not erased the legacies of race and racism. Sonia Dayan-Herzbrun (2015: xii) notes, "In France where the use of the word 'race' is prohibited if it applies to human beings, where a 1991 law prohibits all sorts of discriminations, African artists and craftsmen, from ten to fifty years old, coming from Ivory Coast were, not so long ago, exhibited in a large zoological park, as a part of an *African safari*. This exhibition took place in 1994." Twenty years later, when the white South African artist Brett Bailey brought his controversial *Exhibit B* human zoo to Saint-Denis, a suburb outside Paris, minorities protested the display of black bodies in dehumanizing portraits that revived colonial imagery (Breeden 2014). Yet antiracist groups such as SOS-Racisme supported the exhibition in the interest of promoting "reflection" (see Sopo 2014). At the

same time, the group's leadership, including its (black) president, Dominique Sopo, have been vocal critics of using racial categories in research to measure and combat discrimination. This conflict—over race, memory, and representation—illustrates the extent to which French groups that seem to share the goal of fighting racism nonetheless embrace opposing racial politics and attitudes toward the colonial past.

As Trica Keaton (2010: 110) insightfully argues, France's official race-blindness "is actually a testament to the power of its 'race-blind' ideology that succeeds in diminishing the significance of the sociohistorical formation of 'race,' its on-going social potency, and its inherence in the objectivity and subjectivity of Blackness (and Whiteness) in the French context." Despite cultural and political pressure from French policy makers and intellectuals to remain race-mute (Bleich 2000), the reality on the ground demonstrates that racial exclusion remains a lived reality for minorities. Many view 2005 as a watershed year for raising consciousness about the weight of French racism. After highly publicized riots sparked by the death of minority youth fleeing the police, new antiracist organizations, including CRAN and the anticolonial group Indigènes de la République, highlighted the difficulties French racial and ethnic minorities face.[11] Thanks to a law proposed in 2001 by Christiane Taubira, France's first black (and female) minister of justice, there is now a national day of memory for slavery and the slave trade: May 10. New, powerful minority voices have emerged in the public sphere, including those of the filmmaker, TV personality, and activist Rokhaya Diallo and the scholar-activist Maboula Soumahoro, who spearheaded France's first "Black History Month" in 2012. That same year, a group of thirteen black and Arab men filed a suit accusing the French state of complicity in allowing police officers to practice racial discrimination. One of the victims included a black Frenchman stopped by police for "walking fast" while "wearing a hoodie" (Géraud 2015). In 2015, a court of appeals ruled in their favor, condemning *the French government itself* for racial profiling. French minorities are also beginning to challenge the overwhelming whiteness of the political establishment. A study published by CRAN showed that all of France's fifty largest cities have white mayors (Cassely 2014). The study also highlights ten French cities, including Bordeaux, Versailles, and Toulon, characterized by "apartheid," where the totality of elected officials is white. Another study commissioned by CRAN claims that the percentage of minority representatives in eighty departments in Hexagonal France is *zero*. With discrimination against non-whites gaining unprecedented attention, the question is whether—and how—French people are making connections between contemporary racism and the history of colonialism and slavery.

Race and Racialization

Before delving further into the racial politics of slavery and commemoration in France, it would be helpful to define several orienting concepts. *Race* refers to the categorization of human groups according to subjective perceptions of phenotypic features (such as skin tone, facial structure, and hair grade) and socially constructed ideas about biological difference.[12] *Ethnicity*, by contrast, refers to the categorization of human groups on the basis of perceived similarities in culture, religion, or nationality.[13] Sociologists often emphasize the fact that race has no biological basis (Roberts 2011; Smedley and Smedley 2005). As the sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva points out, "The selection of certain human traits to designate a racial group is always socially rather than biologically based" (Bonilla-Silva 1997: 469). The *social constructivist perspective*, widely accepted by most sociologists, maintains that race is not essential, biological, or timeless. Instead, ideas about race are produced by human beings and vary across social contexts and historical periods. Racial conceptualizations (Morning 2011) are socially constructed and disseminated through institutions, discourse, and representations. Transformations in the meanings we attach to race and ethnicity are influenced by demographic changes, as well as by shifting relations of power. The concept of race was largely developed by Europeans seeking to justify colonization and enslavement of people they viewed as physically different—and inferior (Golash-Boza 2015). The sociologist Dorothy Roberts describes race as a "political" concept because it is primarily tied to the exercise of power and domination.

Racism is also a political concept as it relates to power relations within racialized social *systems*—societies in which "economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories" (Bonilla-Silva 1997: 469). Racism involves the belief that "racial groups" are characterized by essential and permanent differences that, in turn, are used to justify "the practice of subordinating races believed to be inferior" (Golash-Boza 2015: 6). Racist ideology is inherently hierarchical: dominant racial groups are depicted as superior to minorities. While anyone can be *prejudiced*—biased against particular groups—racism, in strict terms, is accessible only to people who occupy dominant positions within a racialized society. This definition of racism, as a systematic feature of social life, is very different from the "interpersonal" understanding of racial prejudice often heard in public discourse.

I describe France not only as a racialized social system but also as a racist society for at least three reasons. First, racial bias is embedded within the nation's institutions. Discrimination against racial minorities in employment, housing, and public space has been well documented in recent years. As there

cannot be systematic, institutionalized racism within a nonracist society, a society that produces systematic racial bias is obviously racist. Second, racial categories and stereotypes are prevalent in everyday life. The lack of formal racial categories in French law does not preclude the social construction of racial categories, labels, and stereotypes on the ground. Finally, present-day inequalities are related to historical racial categories and openly racist practices rooted in colonialism and slavery. Chattel enslavement and colonial domination provide clear precedents of white-supremacist racialization in France and its overseas empire. Given that the French engaged in racialized slavery and colonialism for several centuries, it would be unreasonable to imagine that the traces and legacies of race could have been magically erased in the postcolonial period.

I use the metaphor of resurrection to refer to various attempts to revive the history of slavery through commemorative ceremonies, pedagogy, consciousness-raising, artistic representations, and discourse. "To resurrect" generally means to bring something from the past back to life. Thus, the imagery of resurrection is useful for conveying the sense in which present-day constructions of memory and history seek to *revive the dead* by invoking the historical existence of people involved in relations of colonial enslavement and bring *renewed attention* to an obscured and often forgotten past. For many of those involved in commemorating slavery, the aim is not merely to unearth historical details but also to (re)construct a living history.

Racial Diversity in France

Understanding race politics in France requires some familiarity with the country's basic demographics. However, describing France's racial demographics in precise terms is difficult because of the government's refusal to recognize race officially in its census. A law passed in 1990 banned the use of racial categories in electronic data collected by the government, and as recently as 2013 French politicians were so averse to acknowledging "race" that they voted to remove the word from French legal texts. Nevertheless, various attempts have been made—particularly since the riots in 2005—to approximate the ethnoracial diversity of the population. Like all western European nations, France continues to be a majority-white society. The French black activist group CRAN estimates that 12 percent of France's population falls under the category of "visible minority," while whites constitute 88 percent. However, the population has diversified rapidly over the past thirty years, with increased immigration flows from former colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. Of the 66 million people who live in France, approximately 20 percent are immigrants or children of immigrants. In the past most immigrants to France came from

Europe, but by the 2000s, nearly two-thirds of the immigrant population came from countries outside Europe (Bleich 2003; Breuil-Genier et al. 2011).[14] The growing population of immigrants and migrants from France's former colonies means that the physical appearance of the citizenry is changing. French politicians, journalists, and academics typically address this physical transformation euphemistically, referring obliquely to "visible minorities," by which they mean "non-whites."[15]

French people of Muslim confession or Maghrebi (North African) origin are widely considered the largest and most important minority population in France. A study commissioned by Pew in 2010 found that France's 4.7 million Muslims make up the second-largest Muslim population in Europe—second only to that in Germany.[16] The number of French people from the Maghreb is smaller, however, than the number of Muslims, and distinctions between the two groups should be kept in mind. Writing in 2008, the demographer Michèle Tribalat (2008) estimated the population of first-, second-, and third-generation French of North African descent at 3.5 million. Overall, the demographic and symbolic weight of Maghrebis—as well as growing attention to Islamophobia in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* terror attacks—tend to obscure the presence of other minority groups, including French of sub-Saharan African or Caribbean origin.

Determining the number of French black people is an unwieldy task. Estimates by CRAN put the number of blacks living in France (both in the mainland and in overseas departments and territories) at 1.88 million, or 3.86 percent of the general population. Most French blacks are of sub-Saharan African origin (Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires 2007). Some suggest that about 80 percent of the "overseas" French population is "black," setting aside those who would identify as white or multiracial (see Mataillet 2007). French Caribbeans are a very important, though understudied, population. They include "descendants of slaves"—French people of color whose ancestors were enslaved in the overseas departments and territories. In contrast to the establishment of Haiti—which involved the first and only successful slave revolt in history—Martinique and Guadeloupe followed a path of political assimilation into the French nation. Following the second abolition of French slavery (in 1848), Martinique and Guadeloupe remained colonies until 1946 when they were administratively and legally absorbed into France as *départements*. French Caribbeans' uninterrupted status as citizens since the abolition of slavery in 1848 provides them with cultural and social resources, as well as avenues for political inclusion, that are denied to many black French people of sub-Saharan African origin. A complex apparatus of administrative offices and political representatives is specifically concerned with Guadeloupe and Martinique (which are both overseas departments and

regions). Similarly, an entire ministry is dedicated to overseas affairs, a carryover from the colonial era. By contrast, no political office or ministry is specifically charged with the welfare of French people with immigrant ties to Africa. As a result of their special status—and their failure to follow in the footsteps of Haiti and attain independence—French Caribbeans are sometimes stereotyped by other Afro-descended minorities as "assimilated."

Migration from the French Caribbean to mainland France has grown steadily over the past fifty years, producing a large population of Afro-Caribbeans in Ile-de-France, the region where Paris is located.[17] Beginning in the 1960s, the Office for the Development of Migration in the Overseas Departments developed a state-sponsored program of mass migration from the Antilles to mainland France.[18] French Caribbean migrants were sought especially for jobs in the public sector (e.g., hospitals and post offices), where their status as citizens gave them pathways to upward mobility and assimilation that were not accessible to noncitizen residents and immigrants. More than three-quarters of French Caribbean migrants in mainland France are concentrated in the Paris region (Condon 2005). Census figures from 2008 (the first year I attended a commemoration of slavery in France) indicated a population of 455,000 first- and second-generation migrants from the *départements d'outre-mer* (overseas departments [DOM]) living in mainland France—more than the entire population of Guadeloupe (403,000) or Martinique (388,000).[19]

Toward a Critical Perspective on Race in France

Although *Resurrecting Slavery* is based on systematic empirical research, it is also unapologetically polemical. By bringing a critical race perspective to the study of French racism, I aim to critique and move beyond analyses that obscure (or outright deny) the existence of white domination in France. Unlike most scholars who work on race in Europe, I frame French racism in terms of oppression rather than "inequality." Further, I am explicit about the need to produce scholarly work that will help French people understand and resist systematic racism. In the contemporary period, many French academics and politicians have deployed color-blind ideology or revisionist denial (or both) to erase, justify, or grossly minimize France's history of racism. As late as 1950, Henri Blet, a prominent historian of French colonialism, affirmed that "Frenchmen . . . never adopted . . . racial doctrines affirming superiority of Whites over men of color" (quoted in Cohen 1980: xvi). Such denials of French racism are not only ahistorical and factually untrue. They are also *atemporal*. That is, portraying France as blind to race requires erasing French racism across time. It is against this backdrop of French racial denial that

some activists and intellectuals are attempting not only to resurrect slavery and the history of French racism but also, crucially, to connect these inter-related subjects to the present.[20]

Despite being relegated to the margins of scholarship on race in France, French enslaving colonies in the Caribbean were central sites of white domina-tion and racial formation. William Cohen (1980: xxii) notes that for the French, the "most significant contact between Whites and Blacks occurred in the plantation colonies in the West Indies" in the early seventeenth century. French settler colonialism in the Americas and slave trading in West Africa combined to form a crucible of increasingly racialized thought that crystal-lized into a modern ideology of white (and Western) superiority over primi-tive non-white "others" in the mid-nineteenth century (Cohen 1980: 210). Throughout the 1800s, French academics played a central role in constructing and disseminating a white-supremacist racial hierarchy by crafting scientific racism, eugenics, and social Darwinism. Even Abbé Grégoire, the famous white French abolitionist and member of the antislavery group Société des Amis des Noirs (Society of the Friends of the Blacks), viewed black Africans as inferior beings and referred to them as "barbarians" (Cohen 1980: 210).

To be clear, my objective is not to reconstruct the history of French At-lantic slavery. While I draw on historical elements to understand the racial politics of slavery in contemporary France, this is not the work of a historian. Nor is my aim to identify "memorial regimes," as conceived by the French political scientist Johann Michel (2015), whose recent work provides a rich institutional history of slavery commemorations in France. Rather, my aim is to interrogate the racial ideas, narratives, categories, and images involved in the way French people resurrect the slavery past (Cottias, Fleming, and Boulbina 2009; Hourcade 2012, 2014; Schmidt 2012). In so doing, I ask this: *To what extent do commemorators and ordinary people make temporal connec-tions between past and present racism? How do representations of chattel slavery provide insight into race relations in France today?*

In addressing these questions, I draw attention to features of the French racial order that emerged in the aftermath of transatlantic slavery and con-tinue to shape group relations today: anti-blackness and white supremacy. It is unusual for scholars interested in race in France to center anti-black racism and white domination. This is ostensibly the case for at least three reasons. First, most students of inter-group relations in France have framed social problems in terms of "immigration" or social class. Second, those (relatively few) academics with interests in French racial discrimination tend to focus on the difficulties of the Maghrebis—French Arabs of North African descent. Finally, and perhaps most perplexingly, scholars working in a fledgling field one might call black European studies have produced important studies of

contemporary and historical anti-black racism that, nonetheless, fail to dialogue with critical race and whiteness studies. As a result, analyses that connect anti-blackness to white supremacy in France are exceedingly rare. This is a problem, I argue, because scholarship on race that ignores white supremacy—in France and elsewhere—unwittingly reinforces the domination of people who have come to be socially defined as "white."

My work is influenced by scholarship that takes a "critical approach" (Golash-Boza 2015) to the study of race and racism. This perspective foregrounds the systemic and structural nature of racial oppression (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Feagin 2006) as well as the impact of ideology in perpetuating racial privilege and disadvantage (Jung 2015). In a similar vein, critical race scholarship (Bell 1992; Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Harris 1993) has also informed my analysis of race in France.[21] Critical race theory (CRT) is an activist intellectual movement that emerged among legal theorists in the 1970s who were attempting to analyze and challenge the persistence of racism in the post–Civil Rights era (Delgado and Stefancic 2001: 3). While CRT is largely ignored in Europe, it has migrated into other disciplines in the United States, including philosophy (Mills 1997; Sullivan 2014) and the social sciences. I follow the sociologist Melissa Weiner (2012: 332), who calls for a global approach to CRT, examining "the power of a dominant racial group to shape racial identities, knowledges, ideologies, and, thus, life chances and experiences of an oppressed racial group through coercion, violence and ideology." CRT represents a compelling—and underutilized—analytical framework for understanding French racism on the basis of its (1) critique of color-blind ideology and "race neutral" jurisprudence, (2) emphasis on systematic racism, and (3) insistence on making connections between the history of European imperialism and present-day inequalities.

A critical perspective is also helpful because of its conceptual specificity: instead of merely studying "race" or "racism," critical race scholars have been concerned with understanding white supremacy and interrelated forms of oppression. Although it may seem surprising to write about white supremacy in relation to France, a society that is sometimes imagined as color-blind or postracial, the persistence of white racial domination is key to understanding how matters of race, colonialism, and slavery are represented today. The phrase "white supremacy" generally brings to mind images of racial violence in the United States, exemplified by lynch mobs, the Ku Klux Klan, or the more recent terror attack in Charleston, South Carolina, where Dylann Roof, a twenty-one-year-old white man, murdered nine parishioners at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church. This caricature of white supremacy—as applicable only to extremist groups in the U.S. context—obscures the existence of white supremacy as a global system of political and social domination.

Contrary to this narrow portrait, I follow the critical race philosopher Charles Mills (1997, 1998) in defining white supremacy as a "sociopolitical system" of racial dominance. This system, which he describes as the *racial contract*, is rooted in the history of European colonial domination of non-white others:

> The Racial Contract . . . is clearly historically locatable in the series of events marking the creation of the modern world by European colonialism and the voyages of "discovery" now increasingly and more appropriately called expeditions of conquest. . . . [W]e live in a world which has been foundationally shaped for the past five hundred years by the realities of European domination and the gradual consolidation of global White supremacy. (Mills 1997: 20)

After Europeans began colonizing non-European populations and territories in the fifteenth century, they eventually elaborated an ideology of *white supremacy* that justified their conquest and domination.[22] Mills, along with sociologists of race such as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997, 2000), Joe Feagin (2006), Vilna Bashi-Treitler (2013), Melissa Weiner (2012, 2014b), and France Winddance Twine (1998) all examine how formations of white supremacy persist even after the fall of de jure racism.

By foregrounding the concept of global white supremacy and its particular manifestations in France, I attempt to move beyond the limitations of prior work on French racism. To that end, I advance two main arguments. First, I suggest that commemorations of slavery in mainland France are creating opportunities for the French to resurrect and (re)construct the intertwined taboos of race and colonialism. Yet I also argue that the hegemony of color-blindness and white racial dominance both limit the capacity of commemorations to foster antiracism. The racial context of French slavery commemorations—characterized by dominant rules of "political correctness," widespread resistance to talking frankly about race, and a lack of antiracist public policies—makes it difficult for activists and politicians to clearly link slavery to racism. For this reason, it is a mistake—in France and elsewhere—to believe that merely "breaking the silence" about slavery is itself antiracist.

The racial domination that reigned in the French Caribbean is inextricably linked to the racial biases that continue to shape France today. Few people realize that terms related to chattel enslavement are in some ways more racialized in French than in English. For example, the transatlantic slave trade is generally referred to as *la traite des noirs* (the trade in blacks) or *la traite negriere* (the Negro trade). This explicit racialization of slavery was built into the cultural and legal apparatus of French Atlantic slavery. Thus, in resurrecting

slavery through commemoration, the French would have a hard time completely avoiding race simply because of the racial language that was used to describe the trade. Nonetheless, the lexicon used to describe French slavery is, in fact, embedded with forms of racial avoidance hiding in plain sight. One of the things you might notice about a term such as the "black trade" is that it racializes the victims of slavery without mentioning—or racializing—the perpetrators. This pattern is also on display in the Code Noir (Black Code), the 1685 document promulgated by Louis XIV that provided legal infrastructure and regulation of slavery in the French colonies. Throughout, the document—long forgotten by most of the French—systematically describes "slave masters" in nonracial terms yet designates slaves by the word *nègres* (which denotes "black," "Negro," and "nigger" in French).

In addition to asymmetrically racializing blacks and people of color (*gens du couleur*), some French texts and practices related to slavery included explicit references to whiteness. As Keaton (2010) notes, the decree of 1802 reestablishing slavery in the colonies (after its initial abolition in 1794) formally restricted citizenship to whites. Moreover, the name of the general—Antoine Richepanse—who wrote the white-supremacist text reenslaving blacks and stripping them of citizenship rights is engraved on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.[23] Whiteness was also inscribed and institutionalized into French social, political, and cultural life through the writings of explorers, colonists, enslavers, politicians, and scientists (Cohen 1980). French intellectuals played a leading role in crafting scientific racism in the mid-1800s, which explicitly defined whiteness and Europeanness as superior to non-white and non-European groups. With his *Essays on the Inequality of the Human Races*, written in the 1850s, influential French thinker Arthur de Gobineau (1967) helped popularize racist thought and justified the ideology of white supremacy using the language of science (Biddiss 1970; Painter 2010). French advocates of social Darwinism and eugenics proliferated racist beliefs that defined whiteness as synonymous with intellectual, moral, and social achievement. Further, France's colonial encounter with and domination of Africans and their descendants both on the continent and in the West Indies solidified the ideology of white supremacy. On this subject, Alice Conklin (1997: 213) writes:

> The overwhelming superiority of French technology to any in Africa convinced the French that they held a monopoly on civilization. The belief in African laziness also derived from the absence of industrial achievements in Africa comparable to those in the West. . . . Both the apparent failure of freed slaves in the West Indies to prosper after emancipation . . . and the "scientific" findings of French physical anthropology after 1850, encouraged the image of the lazy African.

While Conklin's narrative is helpful for understanding the historical roots of French anti-blackness and anti-African sentiment, an important dimension of social construction is missing from this analysis. It is important to point out that rather than reproducing French colonial propaganda about their own technological superiority, French ideas about what the words "civilization" and "technology" mean shaped their perception of their own advancement. Thus, what emerges, to the critical eye, is not the "fact" of French technological superiority but, rather, that *the French framed their industrial practices as "advanced" and defined African technologies as non-existent or backward*. Thus, French ideas about their technical achievements (and their undervaluing or negating of African knowledge and achievement) facilitated the ideology of white (and European) superiority.

Racial Temporality

Much of this book concerns the extent to which the French imagine slavery and racism as *temporal* phenomena. Although the word "temporality" does not usually come up in everyday conversation, it is nonetheless a central component of our everyday lives. When we think or talk about time—or make connections among the past, present, and future—we are invoking temporality. Theories of time are of great interest to physicists, but temporality is also relevant to those who study the social world. Somewhat surprisingly, students of collective memory often neglect social perceptions of time and temporality. A significant exception to this trend is found in the work of Michael Flaherty (1999, 2011), whose contributions to the field of symbolic interactionism explore the ways people subjectively experience and attach meaning to the passage of time. In particular, Flaherty's notion of "time work" orients our attention to "how individuals control or manipulate their own experience of time" (Flaherty 2011: 10).[24] Flaherty's emphasis on agency is especially useful to this study, given my interest in the work of activists and officials involved in constructing and shifting the present-day representation of the colonial past. My study draws attention to an understudied form of time work at the heart of antiracist mobilizations: resistance to the collective forgetting, denial, or marginalizing of the racial past and its connections to the present. This resistance takes the form of social movements concerned with memorializing racial history that the state and other segments of the citizenry find embarrassing or inconvenient.

The concept of *racial temporality*, which I introduce and develop throughout the book, refers to social actors' representations of race. Representing race as temporal involves making claims about the *content* of the racial past, present, and future, as well as the *relationship* among racial categories, relations, and processes in these different time periods. Racial temporality involves

Figure I-1. *A monument dedicated to General Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, the son of a slave, installed in the Place du General Catroux (Seventeenth Arrondissement) in 2009 at the initiative of Claude Ribbe and the Association des Amis du Général Dumas.*

both time work and cognitive labor as social actors attempt to describe race in the past, present, and/or future. Claims about continuities and discontinuities are key to representations of race across time. Depictions of racial continuity emphasize what has not changed (e.g., similarities in patterns of racial discrimination over time). For example, in her work on the commemoration of Bristol's history of slavery in Britain, Olivette Otele (2012: 156) suggests that claims about continuity take the form of "discourses regarding the history of that trade and, by extension, the history of populations of African-Caribbean descent." Racial claims about temporal continuity might frame Africans and Caribbeans in the past and present as targets of racial domination. Other narratives and representations highlight *differences* between the racial past and present. For example, some people argue that racism existed in the past but no longer exists in the present. This kind of narrative is often referred to as *post-racial*—the claim that race and racism have disappeared in the contemporary moment. Still other depictions of racial temporality involve denial of race and racism in the past *and* present. This kind of temporal claim is at the heart of color-blind racial ideology, which denies or minimizes the existence of the racial past as well as of the racial present.

In my view, temporality is an understudied dimension of what Ann Morning (2011) refers to as *racial conceptualization*—the way people understand and define what race means. The way we invoke (or avoid) racial categories, narratives, and representations conveys certain understandings about race and time. Temporal representations of race not only are embedded in how we think about history; they also undergird our everyday conceptualizations of race. When we describe the legacies of racism, or speculate about racial progress in the present or the future, we are constructing racial temporality. By focusing on the racial temporalities constructed by activists, politicians, and ordinary people in

Figure I-2. *Flyers on racism at a commemoration of enslaved people on May 23, 2015, organized by the French Caribbean activist 1998 March Committee (CM98). The International League against Racism and Anti-Semitism hosted the table.*

France, this study aims to shed light on the role of social movements and political discourse in shaping the representation of racial processes across time.

My interest in this project reflects my impression that blacks broadly—and French Caribbeans specifically—are too often excluded from academic and political debates over racism, migration and immigration, diversity, and multiculturalism. As noted above, U.S. scholars studying France have framed anti-black racism as a side issue or as less important than anti-Arab sentiment—rather than developing an analysis of how racialized minorities are subject to white-supremacist oppression. Even scholarly treatments of race in France (already a rather narrow field) often fail to center the perspectives of black people—including the Martinican psychiatrist and theorist Frantz Fanon. Bizarrely, Fanon's trenchant analysis of French colonialism and anti-black racism, linking his experience with racial oppression as a Martinican to the Algerian struggle for independence, is curiously absent from much contemporary scholarship on French racism. While Fanon has garnered much more attention outside France than within it, the lack of engagement with his work among well-known scholars of French racism is striking. More than fifty years after his death, Fanon remains studiously ignored by most

scholars in his native country.[25] As Sonia Dayan-Herzbrun (2015: xi) notes, Fanon still is "not yet completely accepted as an author legitimately to be read and discussed" by the French intelligentsia. This sidelining of Fanon and the minimization of French anti-blackness have produced an inaccurate portrait of racism in France, a distortion that I hope to correct with this book.

In addition to centering the voices of French Afro-descendants, my work contributes to scholarship on race by unpacking the representation of whiteness in France. Specifically, I ask how the French construct (or obscure) white people as a social group in relation to the history and legacies of slavery. One of the most persistent findings in my fieldwork is what I term *asymmetric racialization*, a pattern of unequal recognition for racialized groups that very often renders whiteness an invisible, unmarked category. When racial categories are used asymmetrically in depictions of the past, certain groups are named and explicitly marked, whereas others are either implicitly alluded to or ignored altogether. Take, for example, the Taubira Law of 2001, mentioned earlier, which made France the first (and to this day, the only) country in the world to recognize slavery as a "crime against humanity." On its face, this legislative development might seem like a significant step in the fight against racism. After all, no other Western nation has explicitly enshrined in law any recognition for the criminality of transatlantic slavery, a practice that European practitioners routinely legitimated and justified with explicitly racist ideology throughout its history. Yet a closer look at the text of the law reveals certain peculiarities. The three main articles of the legislation read this way:

ARTICLE 1
The French Republic recognizes that the transatlantic Negro slave trade as well as the trade in the Indian ocean on the one hand, and slavery on the other, perpetrated from the 15th century in the Americas and in the Caribbean, in the Indian Ocean and Europe against African, American-Indian, Malagasy and Indian populations constitutes a crime against humanity.

ARTICLE 2
The academic curriculum and programs of research in history and the human sciences will accord to the Negro trade and slavery the consequential place they deserve. Cooperation which permits and places in articulation written archives available in Europe with oral sources and archeological knowledge accumulated in Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean and in all other territories having known slavery will be encouraged and promoted.

ARTICLE 3

A request for recognition of the transatlantic Negro trade as well as the trade in the Indian ocean and slavery as a crime against humanity will be introduced before the European Council, international organizations and the United Nations. This request will equally target the selection of a common date on an international scale for commemorating abolition of the Negro trade and slavery, without preference for the commemorative dates of each overseas department.

The text of the law makes it clear that the French state now acknowledges that transatlantic slavery was criminal and calls for educational and commemorative efforts to resurrect this aspect of the past. This retroactive declaration is important, given that slavery was completely legal in France while it was practiced. The wording also singles out specific groups that were targeted and exploited: African, American Indian, Malagasy, and Indian populations. Further, the law implicitly reifies a racial category—in this case, blackness—with four references to the Negro trade (*traite negrière*). But how are those who carried out enslavement characterized? The first article declares that slavery was "perpetrated," yet no perpetrator (individual or collective) is mentioned. More to the point, the perpetrators of slavery not only are not named; they are not racialized. The slavery past is represented in terms that resurrect certain aspects of race, but only the race of the victims.