

**From Colonies to Combat: A Comparative Analysis of Colonial and Black Soldiers in  
Francophone and American World War II Literature  
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This summer, under the guidance of Professor Meryem Belkaïd, I conducted literary research examining the experiences of French colonial and Black American soldiers fighting on behalf of the French and American armies during World War II. I began the project guided by a set of central questions: How do Francophone and American literature confront the central tension in the Allies' simultaneous war against fascism and subjugation of colonial subjects and Black citizens? How—if at all—do literary renderings of colonial and Black soldiers' experiences in combat reconcile that contradiction? What does that literature reveal about selfhood and domination? In what ways has the literature of World War II molded collective memory of the War in both the Francophone world and the United States?

While each of my initial animating questions proved indispensable in shaping my research, I developed a particular interest in further exploring my final question about the relationship between literature and collective memory. Using Tierno Monénembo's *Le Terroriste noir* and James McBride's *Miracle at St. Anna* as my starting point, I began to think and write about the ways in which the literature of World War II has not only served as a vehicle for transmitting the historical memory of the war but has also provided alternatives to national histories that peripheralized the contributions of colonial and Black soldiers. To that end, I read texts by cultural historians about the construction of collective memory and the role of memory in the national imagination. Particularly instructive was Françoise Vergès's 2010 essay *Wandering Souls and Returning Ghosts*, which both responds to French historian Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* and offers a novel method for conceptualizing memory-construction (what she calls *contacts de mémoire*). Vergès's concept of *contacts de mémoire* deeply informed my reading of my two primary texts and provided a crucial framework that guided my analysis of subsequent texts.

Beyond my research on literature and memory, I spent considerable time familiarizing myself with the discipline of comparative literature and its foundational theories. Having had no formal training in the methods and theories of comparative literature, I found my self-guided review of the discipline to be both fascinating and helpful. Also crucial to my research was my reading of historical texts, which I used to contextualize the content of the novels I read and supplement my reading of theoretical and literary texts.

Though I began the summer with the assumption that I would conduct a relatively straightforward literary analysis of two novels, I ended the summer having synthesized texts and ideas from a variety of disciplines. I hope to further develop the research I conducted this summer into a larger project focused on transnational literatures of resistance.

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