American Political Science Review (2021) 115, 2, 412–428
doi:10.1017/S0003055420000994 © The Author(s), 2021. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the American Political Science Association

Universal Suffrage as Decolonization

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This essay reconstructs an important but forgotten dream of twentieth-century political thought: universal suffrage as decolonization. The dream emerged from efforts by Black Atlantic radicals to conscript universal suffrage into wider movements for racial self-expression and cultural revolution. Its proponents believed a mass franchise could enunciate the voice of colonial peoples inside imperial institutions and transform the global order. Recuperating this insurrectionary conception of the ballot reveals how radicals plotted universal suffrage and decolonization as a single historical process. It also places decolonization's fate in a surprising light: it may have been the century's greatest act of disenfranchisement. As dependent territories became nation-states, they lost their voice in metropolitan assemblies whose affairs affected them long after independence.

This essay reconstructs an important but forgotten dream of twentieth-century political thought: "universal suffrage as decolonization." An imaginative achievement of midcentury Francophone and Anglophone intellectuals, the dream figured suffrage expansion as a vector for political self-determination and cultural self-expression. Unlike its liberal counterparts, it did not conceive enfranchisement as political inclusion. Nor did it consider mass suffrage the simple universalization of an individual right. Instead, universal suffrage was like a Trojan horse. Subject populations would revolutionize the imperial institutions into which they entered.

According to this dream, universal suffrage could be a vector for decolonization, because suitably organized it could bring forth a corporate, collective voice that centuries of colonialism had repressed: the voice of Black folk, understood as an ancestral civilizational voice buried deep within Europe's collective psyche and America's shared past. Aimé Césaire had diagnosed in 1941 "the monstrous atrophy of voice, the secular prostration, the prodigious silence" colonialism inflicted on his home of Martinique (Césaire [1941] 1978a, 5).[1] For a startling array of midcentury intellectuals, rehabilitating that "atrophy of voice" pointed the way to self-rule for subject peoples and contributed to postwar denazification.

"Universal suffrage as decolonization" had unmistakable lure after the Second World War, especially in dependent territories with non-European majorities. In such places, growing the franchise threatened a qualitative rather than quantitative transformation on the *vox populi*. The centrality this vision accorded to collective voice distinguished it from tendencies in postwar democratic theory to cast voting as a minimalist, individual act of selecting leaders (Ciepley 2007; Mackie 2009; Son 2020). It distinguished the vision, too, from prevailing views of universal suffrage as a method of private preference aggregation. Even today, it remains commonplace to construe enfranchisement as a process of elevating individual subjects into individual electors. Universal suffrage may have mass effects, but those effects are quintessentially those of amassed atomized voices (Rosanvallon 2013, 34–35).

Despite its originality, "universal suffrage as decolonization" has nevertheless slipped into obscurity by historiographic tendencies to disconnect decolonization's history from universal suffrage. The former is usually plotted as a global process, an "axial shift from Atlantic Empires to nation-states" (Adelman 2008, 320). It begins with Indonesian independence in 1945 and the partition of India and Pakistan in June 1947, and it cascades through the 1950s–60s as numerous dependencies win independence in sequence. The process is measured by the fact that the United Nations was founded in 1945 with fifty-one member states, yet by 1975 there were 144 of them (Jansen and Osterhammel 2017, 9–11). Abdoulaye Ly baptized it a "ring of fire burning all along the tropics."

Yet the age of decolonization also encompassed unprecedented suffrage expansions. Between 1944 and 1962, twelve Anglo-Caribbean colonies achieved universal adult suffrage (Buddan 2004; Karatani 2003, 107–44). In 1944, French women won the franchise. The self-described homeland of human rights finally conceded them access to the ballot box after more than a century of resisting it (Scott 1996, 161–76). The basic law of June 23, 1956, further ensconced voting rights for all French colonial citizens. As always, Algeria presented a complicated case. Charles de Gaulle enfranchised tens of thousands of French Muslim men with the Ordinance of March 7, 1944, in anticipation of liberation from Nazi occupation. Military officers, political leaders, and indigenous administrators were all accorded the rights of French citizenship. Muslim women, however, were not accorded the right to vote: until 1956, they were marked out as bearers of a religious and sexual difference beyond the pale of integration (Perego 2013). In the United States, Jim

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Special thanks are owed to Jeannette Estruth and Jennie Ikuta for their early abundant feedback. For their help, I also thank Nolan Bennett, Andrew Dilts, Laura Ford, Sina Jo, Chris McIntosh, Alys Moody, Duff Morton, David Kettler, Éric Trudel, the History of Capitalism group at Bard College, participants of the Association for Political Theory meeting in 2019, and three anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback.

Received: January 28, 2020; revised: September 26, 2020; accepted: October 22, 2020. First published online: January 8, 2021.

[1] All translations are the author's own unless otherwise noted.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000994 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Crow suppressed the votes of African American women and men in spite of the 15th and 19th amendments. Something resembling universal suffrage had to await the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which together conferred Black Americans of both sexes a fuller citizenship (Daniels 2020).

Decolonization coincided with some of the largest electorate expansions in history. The two processes even shared overlapping protagonists. Nevertheless, they have been made to crystallize the struggle for democracy at different scales of space and time (Kahan 2003; Nord 1995; Offerlé 1993; Rosanvallon 1992). Decolonization's pace gets recorded by international law, its measure calibrated to the globe. Universal suffrage always turns out to be national suffrage, a domestic story of expanding inclusion rather than what Adom Getachew (2019) calls "anticolonial worldmaking."

What follows is an effort to bring these two histories back together, and to interpret from a common vantage point a cohort of thinkers who linked racial voice to universal suffrage. To be sure, "universal suffrage as decolonization" was not always an avowed collective dream. It was not a discrete textual artifact or mental object readily susceptible to documentary or contextual history. After all, Freud teaches us that dreams are made of relations and symptoms, and their interpretation depends on a dialogic, transferential relationship between analyst and analysand, theorist and archive (LaCapra 1995). That is why Walter Benjamin likens them to celestial constellations. Dreamworlds are ensembles of psychic and material fragments that nevertheless need the critical historian to arrange them for the purpose of articulating their reality (Benjamin [1963] 1998, 34–35; Buck-Morss 1995; Wilder 2015). Like dreams in general, "universal suffrage as decolonization" is not an empirical object to be found but a meaning for us to work out across symptoms and contexts. Approaching "universal suffrage as decolonization" this way allows for its shared authorship in ways contextualizations of single authors rarely do.

Though it never achieved the systematicity of a political program, "universal suffrage as decolonization" exercised real historical force. It involved concrete institutional prescriptions for a postcolonial future and struck terror in the defenders of the status quo. At a time when empire endures as Black disenfranchisement at home and neocolonialism abroad, the time seems ripe to recall this half-forgotten achievement of the age of decolonization.

UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE AS EXPRESSIVE SELF-REALIZATION

"We must remember that if the theory of democracy is correct, the right to vote is not merely a privilege, not simply a method of meeting the needs of a particular group, and least of all a matter of recognized want or desire." It is rather "a method of realizing the broadest measure of justice to all human beings." Such was W. E. B. Du Bois's appraisal of universal suffrage in his 1920 *Darkwater.* It was an expansive vision, so expansive in fact that universal suffrage became a motor of civilizational development. "There must come to the polls every generation, and indeed every year, men who are inexperienced in the solutions of the political problems that confront them." Yet only through repeated voting "will civilization grow" (Du Bois [1920] 2016, 81–82). For the interwar Du Bois, universal suffrage did not presuppose a fully formed electorate but conveyed it to self-ruling maturity as its effect. That was because political power was like a musical instrument. Its mastery was a matter of practical, repeated exercise.

Du Bois did not always hold universal suffrage in such exalted estimation. Since the 1890s, his attitude towards the franchise could be uneven and contradictory. Certainly in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) his view was comparatively dim. There the ballot could only be "looked upon as a visible sign of freedom" in his people's "credulous race-childhood." As Black Americans entered adulthood after Emancipation, "a new vision began gradually to replace the dream of political power," namely "book-learning." Enthusiasm for Black enfranchisement had to shrink in proportion to his race's spiritual progress, its struggle for "dawning self-consciousness, self-realization, self-respect" (Du Bois [1903] 1986, 367, 369). Racial self-advancement, *Souls* argued, was not found at the ballot box but at the summit of an existential climb "the end of which [was] culture" (Du Bois [1903] 1986, 434.)

Nineteenth-century romanticism often viewed modern politics as a fallen realm relative to the heights of culture. For a Rousseau or a Blake, a Delacroix or a Wagner, modern politics was inextricable from moral enervation. It was not in politics but in art and war that the romantic found an arena for soulful self-expression (Rosenblum 1982). Like the German romantics he imbibed as a student in Berlin, Du Bois was reluctant in *Souls* to ascribe to the franchise higher spiritual purposes (Gooding-Williams 2009, 19–65; Lewis 2009, 95–109). He did not share the romantics' romance with war, but he accepted the hierarchy they drew on that basis between politics and culture, matter and spirit. Hence he consigned "the dream of political power" to his people's race-childhood.

Undoubtedly, Du Bois and others like Ida B. Wells insisted "voting [was] necessary to modern manhood" (Du Bois [1903] 1986, 401; Wells [1910] 2014, 424). But if their rhetoric on suffrage could soar, that was only to balance the impossible weight of the alternative: "The power of the ballot we need in sheer self-defense,—what else shall save us from a second slavery?" (Du Bois [1903] 1986, 370).

> Here was a defenseless people suddenly made free. How were they to be protected from those who did not believe in their freedom and were determined to thwart it? Not by force, said the North; not by government guardianship, said the South; then by the ballot, the sole and legitimate defense of a free people, said the Common Sense of the Nation. (Du Bois [1903] 1986, 482)

"The sole and legitimate defense of a free people"—a bitter appraisal of something necessary in lieu of the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000994 Published online by Cambridge University Press

social revolution Reconstruction had pledged. The Freedman's Bureau of 1865–72 had promised the seeds of Black economic independence, "forty acres and a mule." Denied this, Black suffrage was a consolation prize (Du Bois 1910, 785). *Souls* defended universal suffrage's value unconditionally, but that value was minimal, even pathetic. "Sheer self-defense" is a value of last resort. To prize racial self-defense is to concede, however tacitly, that economic and racial justice is not forthcoming.

We only glean from Du Bois a premonition of "universal suffrage as decolonization" after he turned towards women's suffrage and international socialism. As Du Bois became more feminist and internationalist, his appreciation of the ballot's spiritual and expressive powers grew. Consider first women's suffrage (Dennie 2020; Sklar and Kuzma 1998). Du Bois was long-time editor of *The Crisis*, and beginning in 1912 he published repeatedly on women's suffrage, editing a special September 1912 issue on "Woman Suffrage" and a "Votes for Women" symposium in August 1915. In these articles, Du Bois navigated the treacherous ill will between women's and Black male suffrage movements; the relation between the two was marred by the former's racist "Southern Strategy" and their anger at the latter's claim it was "the Negro's hour" (Pauley 2000). On one hand, these articles defended women's suffrage on grounds of self-defense (Du Bois [1914] 1986, 1159–60). On the other hand, Du Bois argued in his November 1915 article,

> [T]o put this whole army [women] incontinently out of court and leave them unprotected and without voice in political life is more than unjust, it is a crime. . . . The meaning of the twentieth century is the freedom of the individual soul; the soul longest in slavery and still in the most disgusting and indefensible slavery is the soul of womanhood. (Du Bois [1915] 1986, 1170)

Du Bois reiterated disenfranchisement left one "unprotected," but he added the new argument that women's suffrage was required by "the meaning of the twentieth century": the liberation of the soul. This, Robert Gooding-Williams (2009) argues, is an ideal of freedom as "expressive self-realization." Emancipation here involves an inner authentic spirit finding expression in the public, political realm. It is a politics of authenticity, because the sign of our freedom is what Du Bois describes in *Souls*: "To attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another" (Du Bois [1903] 1986, 368). Women needed the ballot for self-defense. But now they also needed it, because the twentieth century demanded all souls be themselves and not another.

The same growing spiritualization of universal suffrage appears in Du Bois's *Darkwater* ([1920] 2016), his first semiautobiographical work. There he describes how the First World War irrevocably tarnished Europe's luster: "This is not Europe gone mad; this is not aberration nor insanity, this *is* Europe; this seeming Terrible is the real soul of white culture" (Du Bois [1920] 2016, 22). The war forced Du Bois to redefine whiteness. No longer was it skin color or an ascriptive character of persons. Whiteness now named a colonial disposition, a person's discovery that they enjoyed a natural, propriety relationship to the earth and labor (Du Bois [1920] 2016, 18; Myers 2019). Moreover, the war pushed Du Bois to resituate African American struggles at home in a global context of imperial competition and extractive processes applied to people of color in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and internally in America. American racism became, in Harold Cruse's famous formulation, an example of "domestic colonialism," and the First World War became an episode in the history of racial capitalism (Cruse 1968; Gutiérrez 2004). Together, these conclusions radicalized Du Bois. No longer optimistic the color line could be overcome by expanded education and American liberalism, he now endorsed "a new African World State," "a new democracy of all races," and the abolition of "all private property in raw materials and tools and demand that distribution hinge, not on the power of those who monopolize the materials, but on the needs of the mass of men" (Du Bois [1920] 2016, 37, 42, 57). If the color line was a global problem, then nothing less than a global restructuring of race and economy was necessary.

This analysis could have led Du Bois to an even dimmer view of suffrage's power. Voting for a local representative out of self-defense seems remote from abolishing racial capitalism. Yet the opposite happens. As with women's domination, Du Bois responded by enhancing the ballot's expressive powers. Enlightenment philosophers discovered universal suffrage, Du Bois argued in *Darkwater*, but these early democrats only knew how to apply it to limited issues like privileges and taxation. With the onset of the industrial revolution, "the new democracy stood aghast and impotent. It could not rule because it did not understand: an invincible kingdom of trade, business, and commerce ruled the world, and before its threshold stood the Freedom of 18th century philosophy warding the way." The dream of universal suffrage was born too late. By the time it penetrated the popular imagination, it was already outmoded, incapable of subjecting "the tyrants of the Industrial Age" to democratic control (Du Bois [1920] 2016, 78–79).

Rather than dismiss universal suffrage as the dream of a credulous race-childhood, however, Du Bois elevated its role in the "future industrial democracy of the world." To overcome racial capitalism, workers everywhere had to "apply their political power to [the economy's] reform through democratic control" (Du Bois [1920] 2016, 80, 58–59). That could not happen if elites governed the world economy in the name of all. A global industrial democracy needed everyone's voice. Hence it needed universal suffrage, because the ballot had an irreplaceable expressive power.

> In fact, no one knows himself but that self's own soul. The vast and wonderful knowledge of this marvelous universe is locked in the bosoms of its individual souls. To tap this mighty reservoir of experience, knowledge, beauty, love, and deed we must appeal not to the few, not to some souls,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000994 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> but to all. The narrower the appeal, the poorer the culture; the wider the appeal the more magnificent are the possibilities. Infinite is human nature. We make it finite by choking back the mass of men, by attempting to speak for others, to interpret and act for them, and we end by acting for ourselves and using the world as our private property. (Du Bois [1920] 2016, 81–82)

To limit the franchise, to believe one group can speak for another, was to perform Du Bois's new definition of whiteness. Likewise, to limit the franchise was to undercut the future industrial democracy of the world, because nobody's inner life could be expressed by someone else. The many must participate in industrial democracy for the many to enjoy its benefits. In the end, overcoming whiteness and capitalism amounted to the same thing: a world industrial democracy that accorded "proportionate representation in physical and spiritual form" to all races (Du Bois [1920] 2016, 88). Du Bois did not shy from the radical implications. Either the voices of working folk of all races were to be included in a global economic democracy or they would have no choice but to "overturn the world." They would show Europe and America the true meaning of world war (28).

The distance from *Souls* was dramatic. Universal suffrage was no longer limited to self-defense, but a spiritual medium allowing the souls of all races to find expression in a global industrial democracy. Electors were not to be regarded as "sharers of a limited treasure, but as sources of new national wisdom and strength" (Du Bois [1920] 2016, 84). The ballot participated in a communist logic. As access to it was shared, its value increased rather than diminished.

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Du Bois anticipated "universal suffrage as decolonization" by magnifying the ballot's expressive powers. Even so, he left a crucial matter ambiguous: how did universal suffrage connect the knowledge and beauty "locked in the bosoms" of "individual souls" to the articulation of the collective "gift of Black folk"? Was the latter hidden in the former, too? Black workers were disenfranchised as a group, yet they needed ballots as individuals because "a man in a modern civilized land" needed, beyond work and property, "something of the higher spiritual life of the world" (Du Bois 1909, 82). Between the emancipation of the individual soul and the expressive realization of a Black *volk*, Du Bois delineated a whole terrain of Black cultural politics.

The terrain came into sharper focus in Du Bois's Francophone counterparts. In 1944, France embarked on a constitutional refounding. For four years, Nazis had occupied its northern and western regions. The remaining unoccupied "Free Zone" was led by Marshal Philippe Pétain's collaborationist government based in Vichy. Under Pétain's "national revolution," Vichy France collaborated with the Nazis to deport Jews, frequently in proactive ways. It restricted women's liberties, criminalized homosexuality, revalorized France's Catholic heritage, and advocated a pronatalist family policy in the name of "regenerating" the nation (Marrus and Paxton 1981, Pollard 1998; Sibalis 2002). From within, communist women and men formed resistance cells, sabotaging Nazi efforts to turn France into a launchpad for Aryan domination (Schwartz 1989). From without, Charles de Gaulle denounced "the body located in Vichy" as "unconstitutional and subject to the invader" and declared France Libre the true seat of French sovereignty (de Gaulle 1940). Such patriotic efforts cannot hide the fact, better understood today, that the Resistance's numbers were sometimes exaggerated; that many French men and women—even young Jews—collaborated with the occupation; that it was wrong to quarantine Nazism as a German phenomenon; and that Vichy was not a "parenthesis" in the history of France, because Vichy was, at bottom, French (Lee 2014; Noiriel 1999; Rousso 1994).

Liberation provided an opportunity for France to denazify and repudiate Vichy. War against Nazism was understood as a war against racism. To continue colonial rule on the grounds of racial hierarchy would have been ludicrously hypocritical. "Fighting against the Germans," Simone Weil remarked, "is not sufficient proof that we love freedom" given the French behaved in "true Hitlerian style" in Africa and Indochina (Jennings 2001; Weil 2003, 112, 92). Africans had also played an outsized role in the war. Félix Éboué from Chad was among the first to rally to France Libre. Colonial reform was overdue.

A Constituent National Assembly was elected in October to draft a new French constitution. Electors, including women, overwhelmingly elected representatives from the Communist and Socialist parties. These included men from overseas territories like Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire. Born in Senegal, Senghor studied in interwar Paris. There he founded *L'Étudiant noir* with Césaire and Léon Damas, the journal that with the Nardal sisters inaugurated négritude (Sharpley-Whiting 2002). During the next two decades, négritude would, like Harlem's "New Negro" movement, participate in a transatlantic African modernism (Kesteloot 1991). With liberation in 1944, Senghor was invited to teach linguistics at the École nationale de la France d'outre-mer. The teaching stint was brief. That same year, Senghor joined Lamine Guèye on the Socialist ticket to represent Senegalese noncitizens at the Constituent Assembly; he was elected. For the next two years he would play a decisive role in preparing the new French Constitution, the first draft of which was so covered with his fingerprints that critics sometimes called it, contemptuously, the "Constitution Senghor" (Cooper 2018; Wilder 2015, 51–94).

Césaire grew up in Martinique before moving to Paris in the 1930s. Studying alongside Senghor, he translated the work of radicals like Richard Wright and contributed to *L'Étudiant noir*. In December 1939, Césaire returned to Martinique with his partner, Suzanne, where they both taught in Fort-de-France. To young radicals like Édouard Glissant and Frantz Fanon, Aimé assigned Malraux, Rimbaud, Lautréaumont, and ethnologists like Leo Frobenius. In 1941, he founded *Tropiques* with Suzanne and René Ménil. Over the next four years, their journal would produce

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000994 Published online by Cambridge University Press

iconic essays on twentieth-century modernist poetics. In 1944, Aimé would be recruited by Ménil to head the communist ticket for Martiniquais representatives to the Constituent Assembly. Like Senghor, he was elected (Nesbitt 2013, 86–95; Wilder 2015, 19–45). By the opening session of the Constituent National Assembly in December 1945, France was an inverted image of the just city in Plato's *Republic.* Plato's city was one of philosopher kings and banished poets, but the Fourth Republic was to be the handicraft, quite literally, of poets.

The Constituent National Assembly's work is well known (Marshall 1973; Cooper 2014). Under communist and socialist leadership, the Assembly created *sécurité sociale*; approved the US Marshall Plan; passed Houphouët-Boigny's law abolishing forced labor in the colonies and Guèye's law elevating colonial subjects into citizens; promised overseas territories local assemblies with deliberative rather than consultative powers; created a colonial development fund; and torpedoed proposals for a presidential system, to de Gaulle's dismay. Yet articles concerning the Empire's constitutional structure, now rebranded as the "French Union," bounced back and forth between the Commission de la France d'Outre-mer and the Commission Constitutionnelle (Cooper 2014, 67–88). Césaire sat on the former; Senghor was a member of both. By the time Assembly members finalized the constitution's first draft in June 1946, it reflected major compromises. The commitment to a more egalitarian empire triumphed. Overseas territories were provided elected assemblies, and a single legislature was designed to govern the Union. At the same time, the text retained important hierarchies. A Conseil de l'Union française was subordinated to the National Assembly. The extent of suffrage and the specific powers of local assemblies were left unspecified. Senghor defended these ambiguities as realistic. "This system is supple," he argued. "I could call it a transitional system; I prefer to call it a dynamic system which leaves the door open to the future" (Senghor 1946, 1714). Ambiguity left room for the Union to evolve. Nobody wanted the French Union to ossify into "a cage nobody would like to enter" (Senghor [1946] 1947, 3792).

Defending "Constitution Senghor" turned out to be futile. In a disastrous June referendum, the French electorate voted down the draft text. The vast majority of non-Europeans voted in favor of it; the vast majority of Europeans voted against it. Catholics of the Mouvement républicain populaire (MRP) and de Gaulle campaigned against it because they hated how its unicameral legislature empowered the communists (Bidault [1965] 1967, 108–122; Lewis 1998). The draft text was revised and voted upon again after yet more debate in October 1946. This second version was ratified as the Fourth Republic's constitution. It prescribed a bicameral legislature, representation for overseas territories (but not proportional to their population), and neither universal suffrage nor a single electoral college. White Europeans and settlers would have their own voter lists, guaranteeing them an outsized voice in the legislature.

This process was tortured. Nevertheless, Senghor and Césaire fought for as egalitarian a franchise as possible. For them, universal suffrage could place the empire on the path to decolonization, the latter understood as the creation of "a domination-free international order" rather than a world of independent states (Cooper 2018, 36–37; Getachew 2019, 10). At least, that would be true if enfranchisement could give voice to a civilization whose voice had long been smothered by European colonialism and French assimilation. "We want," Senghor argued, "an authentic voice of Africa to be heard" (Senghor 1945, 237).

Consider Senghor's 1945 essay "Vues sur l'Afrique noire ou assimiler, non être assimilés," written on the eve of the constitution drafting process. The essay popularized Senghor's refrain to Black Africa: "assimilate, don't be assimilated." It also spelled out his preferred view on universal suffrage:

> How would the representatives of the colonial peoples be elected and what would their powers be? I can only touch on generalities. I am not a fan of the ballot, which is a European mode of election. I do not want the vote to be individual. I would rather it be familial in Black Africa—which would be in the tradition of the country—*provided that the woman could make her voice heard.* (Senghor [1945] 1964, 59–60; original emphasis)

Universal suffrage should not be reduced to individual enfranchisement. To endorse the ballot as an individual's possession would mean subscribing to a European understanding of society as an aggregation of individual proprietors. As Senghor was fond of explaining, Africans believed "the simplest component, the basic cellule" of society "[was] the family." Indeed, "African Negro society is, in effect, made up of widening concentric circles, superimposed and interlaced" (Senghor 1956, 54). The mode of election adequate to African society would therefore be a ballot expressing collective voices, for humanity was not made of individuals but families, clans, tribes, villages, regions, and civilizations.

Senghor made variations of this argument repeatedly. In *Esprit* in July 1945, he urged the Declaration of the Rights of Man be "completed" by "adding to the liberty and equality of individuals that of peoples and races" (Senghor 1945, 247, 244). Before the Constituent Assembly in April 1946, Senghor acknowledged the historic importance of 1789's radical individualism. But twentieth-century sociology and ethnology demonstrated that not only individuals but also civilizations inhabited the world: "France had discovered little by little . . . the brilliant Arab civilization . . . the social humanism of China and Indochina, the collectivist and artistic humanism of Black Africa." "Voilà," Senghor indicated, "the difficulties that have arisen" for French individualism. The French Union's new constitution had to "take into account historical and geographical realities," to "recall that the science of man has living matter for its object," not dead abstractions, that to force the Union into a more "geometric construction" would threaten "brutal integration" (Senghor 1946, 1714–15). Yet again, in a speech to the Assembly in September 1946, Senghor insisted "democracy demands . . . that all its members contribute to the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000994 Published online by Cambridge University Press

election of deputies." But we must never forget the French Union is both a collection of individuals and "a conjunction of civilizations, a crucible of cultures." For it to succeed, the new constitutional framework had to establish "diverse laws or constitutions proper to each land" (Senghor [1946] 1947, 3790–92).

Césaire shared Senghor's reluctance to organize electoral democracy around abstract individualism. A communist, Césaire was more open to a unitary state. From 1944 to 1946, he pursued "departmentalization," or the conversion of dependent territories into equal administrative units of a single French state (Wilder 2015, 108–27). He claimed departmentalization would "bring to its logical conclusion the evolutionary process begun a century ago" in the French Revolution (Césaire 1946, 659). Departmentalization was no toothless process of legal inclusion. Applying the letter of the law to overseas departments would mean extending the postwar welfare state to underdeveloped colonies, an act of economic redistribution so enormous it would effectively bankrupt the metropole.

But as administrative sabotage over the years mocked departmentalization's promises, Césaire attacked "geometric" visions of integration and inclusion (Césaire [1947] 2013, 48–50). After the Constitution was accepted, some of Césaire's and Senghor's electoral recommendations were implemented. Yet consider Césaire's response to a subsequent 1949 proposal to "assimilate the electoral mode applied in these departments to that of the metropole." "The principle of departmentalization," he insisted, "had never been mechanical homogenization. I would even say that it was to the contrary." Why then did legislators "suppress under the pretext of assimilation a mode of voting which [was] traditional in the overseas departments"? After all, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Réunion had long "enjoyed in the electoral domain a system of their own," one reflecting "a natural partition, rooted in the soil and which, as such, has never raised any protest in the past." But France now wanted to inflict an "indignity to democracy" by imposing "a rigid assimilation, a geometric assimilation, an assimilation against nature": the creation of electoral districts without any attention to geography, traditional population centers, or demographics. Democracy, Césaire implies, does not rest on quantitative individualism. If electoral districts are not contoured to existing peoples, then those electoral maps will "snatch from our people what was left to them: their true representation" (Césaire [1949] 2013, 61–64).

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Individualism has long provided the French republican left its philosophical artillery against corporatism. Corporatism is an image of society as overlapping hierarchical groups: the family, the church, the town, and the guild. Historically, it was indissociable from the *ancien régime*'s society of orders. Since 1789, the French left's credo has been that a society of equal citizens can only be realized by liberating individuals from membership in unequal groups. For subjects to become citizens, they must become individuals.

Césaire's and Senghor's insistence that universal suffrage articulate a corporate racial voice put them at odds with some of the republican left's deepest convictions. That was one reason why Césaire broke with the Parti communiste français in 1956 (Hale and Véron 2009). Commitment to collective voice also brought Senghor into confusing proximity with Catholics of the MRP. Believing society's elemental unit should be groups rather than individuals is a hallmark of modern Catholic thought (Accetti 2019; Chappel 2018). Hence the MRP's receptivity to Senghor's federalist proposals. Senghor's references to "familial" ballots also seemed to reinforce paternalistic understandings of state obligation and the postwar conservative pronatalist welfare policy (Chapman 2018, 109–63). After a complete accounting, his championing of women's suffrage may be insufficient (Senghor 1945, 239–40; Senghor 1946, 1713).

Even so, Senghor's defense of familial ballots provides a clue to understanding what he meant by collective voice. He never saw the African family as nuclear. The association merged seamlessly with the community, nature, and history. "But what is the family?" It is, Senghor argued, "the totality of all of those, living and dead, who recognize a common ancestor" (Senghor 1956, 54). The individual, the family, nature, society, and mythological history all existed on the same metaphysical plane because each were simply aspects of our existential coparticipation in a common *élan vital* (Diagne 2008; Jones 2011). "Cooperation, in family, village, tribe, has always been held in honor in Africa," Senghor insisted, but "not in its collectivist form as an aggregate of individuals, but in its communal form as *con-spiracy*, from centre to centre, of hearts" (Senghor 1965, 100).

Césaire insisted this in his own way, too. "It is self-evident," Césaire wrote, "that national cultures, however differentiated they may be, are grouped by affinities," and "these great cultural families have a name: they are called *civilisations.*" Hence one could speak of "the French family," not as a biological entity but a multi-generational bond formed by attachment to revolutionary republicanism (Césaire 1946, 659). One could also speak of African civilization, a cultural family that has "given to the political and social world the original communal institutions such as village democracy . . . which is a negation of capitalism." For Césaire, African familialism contained an emancipatory element, and one of colonial capitalism's crimes was that it induced "the break-up of the social and economic structure of the community as well as the disintegration of the family" (Césaire 1956, 194, 198).

Senghor and Césaire invoked the family just as it was becoming an object of intense theoretical reflection. Claude Lévi-Strauss's landmark *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* appeared in 1949. There he argued the family presented "a dramatic encounter between nature and culture," that it was not only "necessary for the social state, but the social state itself" (Lévi-Strauss [1949] 1969, 489–90). We may have sex because we live in nature and are biological creatures, but we marry because we live in society and are symbolic creatures. To have family life is to have symbolic life.

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Senghor and Césaire came to know Lévi-Strauss's work. Everyone did. Lévi-Strauss was then pioneering a nascent French structuralism. His 1942 essay for the surrealist journal *VVV* was framed by Césaire's poetry, and the two were increasingly read together after the publication of the former's "Race and History" UNESCO pamphlet (Lévi-Strauss 1952; Loyer [2015] 2018, 221, 318–19). Césaire named Lévi-Strauss and Michel Leiris the new pillars of anti-racist anthropology in France (Césaire [1950] 2001, 101). Senghor and Lévi-Strauss probably encountered one another through Georges Balandier (Dosse [1991] 1997, 264–72); for his part Senghor consumed ethnology voraciously. These filiations invite us to see how Senghor and Césaire conceptualized the family much the same way structuralists were starting to see the family: as a synonym for social, symbolic life. What Senghor means when he writes "I would rather [the ballot] be familial in Black Africa" is that the ballot should be social in Black Africa. It must not be atomistic but express African symbolic life. Black African voices *as Africans* will never be heard if we simply count votes one by one. Even with non-European majorities, counting votes one by one will at best yield the voice of a majority that by happenstance is non-European. So organized, it will not enunciate the "authentic voice of Africa" in its all its symbolic density and that colonial assimilation repressed as a distinct imperative.

TOWARDS AN ANTI-ESSENTIALIST CULTURALISM

Du Bois, Césaire, and Senghor's interventions conscripted universal suffrage into a politics of racial expressivism. Highlighting that fact should not lead us to overstate continuities. Each reimagined universal suffrage amid their own political contexts. Du Bois fought on the interwar battlefield of women's suffrage and African American leadership; Césaire and Senghor navigated a polarizing postwar constitutional refounding. Each also cited distinct colonial histories. Du Bois grounded his arguments in the institutional experiments of Radical Reconstruction. Césaire's speeches on suffrage invoked Victor Schoelcher and 1848's revolutionary republicanism. Senghor cited the unusual privilege Senegal's four communes enjoyed as originaires extended "citoyenneté dans le statut" and exemption from the Code de l'indigénat.

Their discrete interventions nevertheless participated in a wider "culturalist" tendency that for better or worse dominated anticolonial intellectual politics in the twentieth century. Culturalism was once a method of imperial rule, enjoining colonial governors to calibrate their policies to the shapes of customary societies (Mantena 2010). In the twentieth century, the culture concept—"cultural difference"—also provided an immanent standpoint to critique the global capitalist system (Sartori 2008). Notions of ancestral voice ballasted "universal suffrage as decolonization" because they infused antiracist thought generally. Du Bois spoke of the "Sorrow Songs" as ancestral "voices of the past," disavowed by America yet whose self-conscious prominence would constitute the "greatest gift of the Negro people" to the world (Du Bois [1903] 1986, 536–38, 541). Alain Locke defended the Harlem Renaissance in 1925 as "a movement of folk-expression and self-determination," one that mirrored the "resurgence of a people" all over the world from India and China to Palestine and Mexico. To "repair a damaged group psychology," Locke believed it was time to "let the Negro speak for himself." (Locke [1925] 1997, xxv, xxvii, 10–11). Suzanne Césaire made much the same point in *Tropiques* in April 1942 when she claimed "our sentiment of the Martinican way of life can perhaps be the point of departure for a viable cultural style," an alternative to European culture's bankrupt rationalism (Césaire [1942] 1978, 48).

These culturalist claims were sourced in the common conviction that colonialism involved more than foreign rule and territorial occupation. It also named a process of psychic and linguistic dispossession. It left behind, Aimé Césaire lamented, only "the frightening silence of Man," a silence so existential it depleted the life of the land it stilled (Césaire [1941] 1978a, 5–6). No wonder Senghor believed anticolonialism entailed "cultural revolution" (Senghor 1949, 1024). The transatlantic project to unfetter Black "folk-expression and self-determination" preceded and succeeded Du Bois, Césaire, and Senghor's interventions in universal suffrage, and situating the latter within that horizon reveals those interventions as contiguous segments of a revolutionary dream.

Was this culturalist tendency underlying "universal suffrage as decolonization" essentialist? Even racist? Already by the time Locke published "The New Negro" in 1925 the question had become unavoidable. Josephine Baker posed it in epic form with her "banana dance" performances in Paris (Dalton and Gates 1998; Figure 1). For Senghor, Aimé, and Suzanne Césaire in particular, Alioune Diop's 1956 conference in Paris, organized under Présence Africaine's auspices, provided an international forum to confront the matter. They were joined by the Black intelligentsia's leaders like Frantz Fanon, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin (Figure 2). For her part, Baker promoted the conference, which was covered extensively by the press on both sides of the Atlantic. Lévi-Strauss forwarded a supportive telegram to be read aloud. Du Bois did the same; denied a travel visa by the American government, his missive urged attendees to "believe in socialism for Africa" (Du Bois 1956).

At the conference, Fanon attacked beliefs in an authentic African culture as racist. "Discovering the uselessness of his alienation," Fanon explained how the assimilated intellectual "plunges with passion in to this culture which he had abandoned, left, rejected, despised."

> There is a very definite exaggeration, psychologically related to the desire for forgiveness. . . . The oppressed one goes into ecstasies at each rediscovery [of his original culture.] The wonder is perpetual. Having previously emigrated from his culture, the autochthone now explores it with gusto. All is now a constant honeymoon. . . . Rediscovering tradition, living it as a defense mechanism,

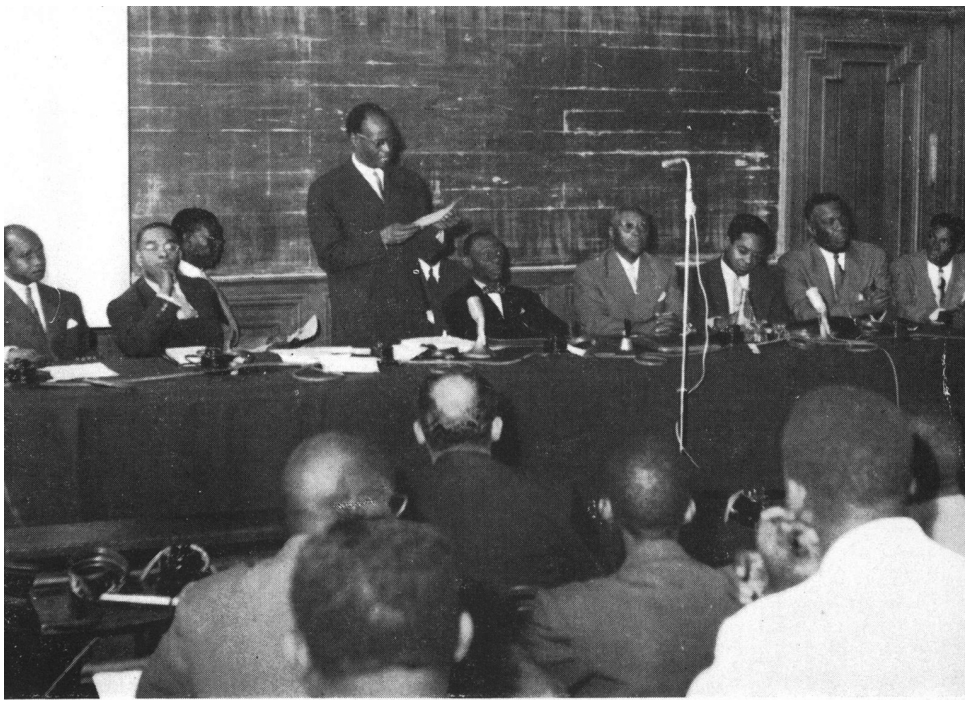
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FIGURE 1. Josephine Baker and Joe Alex in Their *Danse Sauvage*



Note: Baker's 1925 performance at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées made her France's most famous Black female performer. Lorenzo Ciniglio/Sygma via Getty Images.

FIGURE 2. Photograph of the Speakers' Platform at the 1956 Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs



Note: Alioune Diop stands. Second from the left is Richard Wright. Third from the right is Aimé Césaire. ©Présence Africaine Editions, Communauté Africaine de Culture, n 8/10, juin–novembre 1956.

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> as a symbol of purity, as a salvation, the decultured one leaves the impression that mediation is taking its revenge. (Fanon 1956, 129–30)

Recuperating the voice of an African *volk* was sheer psychological defense mechanism. Race pride was the sign of an alienated consciousness trying to return home only to live out a second alienation.

There was an unmistakable element of self-critique in Fanon's presentation. But these arguments also reflected his racial abolitionism, his belief that "the black soul is a white man's artifact" and that Black liberation necessitated "the liberation of the man of color from himself" (Fanon [1952] 1967, 8, 14). It was one reason he opted for the nation over race. His criticisms of racial authenticity cut deep. Paul Gilroy (1993) has warned that struggles for racial justice that ground themselves on racial foundationalism, whether biological or cultural, stand on quicksand. And there is no denying Du Bois, Senghor, Suzanne and Aimé Césaire, Locke, and their comrades sometimes flirted with racial foundationalism. *Volk* conceptions of race and civilization were unavoidable in an age where anthropology reigned among the human sciences (Conklin 2013; Stoczkowski 2008). Even Baldwin, who listened to Senghor claim that "the Negro is a man of nature," a being who is "touch, before being eye like the white European," admitted he found Senghor's perspective seductive even if he did not agree with it (Baldwin 1998, 150; Senghor 1956, 52).

We nonetheless misunderstand "universal suffrage as decolonization" if we take the culturalist demand for collective voice underwriting it to be naïve. Whatever else it was, this generation's pursuit of an African *vox populi* was critical and self-reflexive. They demanded a collective voice, but they did so first and foremost as critical theorists of voice. However much their calls for a corporate racial voice seemed "a symbol of purity," the fact of the matter was that such invocations just as often challenged racial foundationalism.

Consider how many thinkers employed Freud to uncover the African *vox populi* as a historical achievement rather than a given essence. When Du Bois spoke of slave songs "unknown to me" and yet "at once I knew them as of me and mine," or when Zora Neale Hurston journeyed to the American South in the 1920s to discover the "characteristics of Negro Expression," these were not quests for an authentic, precolonial culture. They were attempts to identify historical products of the Atlantic slave trade that had been disavowed, relegated to the "unconscious" of American history. Psychoanalysis could be a technique for reading history against the grain. Fanon knew that better than most (Robcis 2020). Du Bois later reflected he had not been "sufficiently Freudian," despite studying with William James at Harvard (Lewis 2009, 116). Richard Wright opened a low-cost psychoanalytic clinic in 1945 named after Paul Lafargue, Karl Marx's son-in-law. Ralph Ellison praised Wright's Harlem clinic as "the most successful attempt in the nation to provide psychotherapy for the underprivileged" and heal the "vast nervous and mental disorders found within the urban Negro community" (Ellison [1946] 2019, 212). Personally, Ellison hoped to synthesize Marx and Freud to understand the "irrational" aspects of African American oppression (Ellison [1945] 2019, 204). Eli Zaretsky is surely right that Black Americans drew on psychoanalysis to "come to grips with their history through mourning, working through, and the constitution of collective memory" (2015, 39).

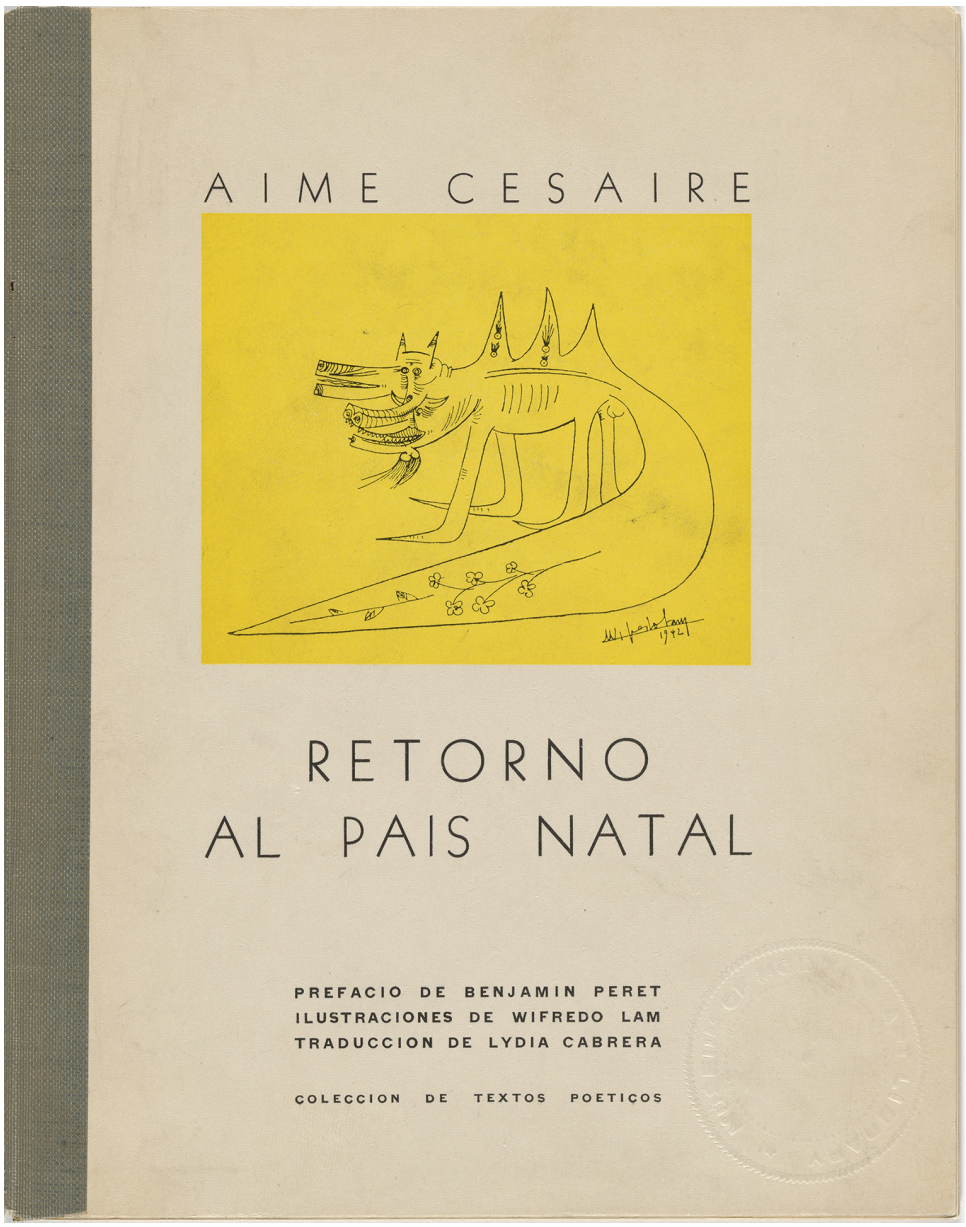
Consider, too, négritude's engagement with surrealism (Kesteloot 1991, 37–45, 229–276). Surrealism: that infamous artistic movement spanning Dali and Picasso, so focused on weaponizing Freud to rescue, in Breton's words, the "omnipotence of dream" from everyday instrumental reasoning (Breton [1924] 1972, 26). The bonds between surrealism and négritude went deep. In March 1941, the *Capitaine Paul Lemerle* docked in Martinique en route to New York City with Wifredo Lam, Lévi-Strauss, and Breton aboard. They were fleeing Vichy; the boat's gendarmes considered them "undesirables" and "scum" (Lévi-Strauss [1955] 1992, 22–34; Loyer 2005; Jennings 2018, 180–211). After disembarking Breton encountered *Tropiques* and the Césaires (Breton [1972] 2008, 83–94). The enthusiasm was mutual, and the Césaires repositioned *Tropiques* as a surrealist journal. In surrealism they found "the tightrope of our hope," a method Suzanne believed could "transcend at last the present's sordid antinomies: white-black, European-African, civilized-savage" (Césaire [1943] 1978, 18). Lam, a Cuban artist and Breton's friend, had already been using surrealism to articulate an African "archaic collective subconscious." On the trip to Martinique, he listened to Lévi-Strauss discuss Black Brazilian mythologies with rapt attention (Benitez 1999, 54, 81). Lam's encounter with Aimé in Martinique would lead to lifelong collaboration (David [2015] 2016). In fact, Lam provided the artwork for the 1942 publication of the "Cahiers d'un retour au pays natal" in Havana (Figure 3). Pablo Picasso, for his part, supplied the poster for Diop's 1956 conference (Figure 4; Figure 5).

Aimé Césaire explained surrealism and négritude's relationship best in a 1967 interview with René Depestre. Surrealism was a "joyful" confirmation of what he had been searching for: "a weapon that exploded the French language" and "a process of disalienation." Surrealism worked like a scalpel. It pried from below the surface of our consciousness hidden and unconscious dreamworlds. And what was Europe's unconscious? "If we break with all that, if we plumb the depths," what dreamworld do we find? "If I apply the surrealist approach to my particular situation, I can summon up these unconscious forces. This, for me, was a call to Africa." Beneath the imprints of his Cartesian education lay something "fundamentally black" (Depestre [1967] 2001, 83–84; see Figure 6).

Black radical engagements with psychoanalysis and surrealism warn us against interpreting the search for an ancestral African *vox populi* in essentialist and nostalgic terms. Disalienation is not about excavating a virginal reality, because the unconscious is not a factual given prior to repression. It is the stratum of

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FIGURE 3. Retorno al País Natal

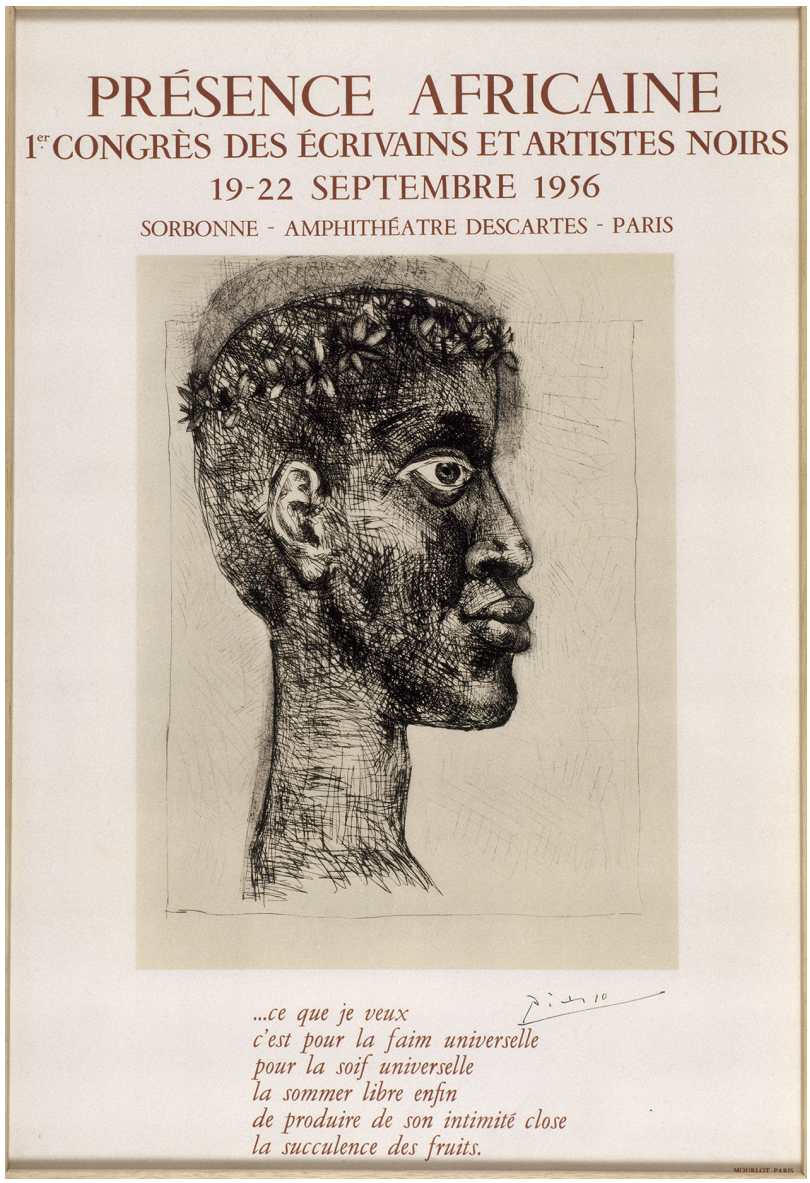


Note: Aimé Césaire, preface by Benjamin Peret, illustrations by Wifredo Lam, translation by Lydia Cabrera. The Museum of Modern Art Library, Special Collections (L2357 C27). Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art. Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

mental life produced by repression itself, the outcome of the unending psychic amputations required for us to transcend nature into society, individual instinct into normative collective life (Althusser 1969). Likewise, the African diaspora's *vox populi* does not enunciate an essentialist notion of race or an anthropologically authentic civilization. As European modernity's unconscious it, too, has no essential or preexisting reality. "Africa" is a myth produced by Europe's own repression, incarnating everything it alienated in the name of progress. Hence the return of the repressed is a feat of creation, not a return to origins. "For my part, I search in vain," Césaire insisted, "where I ever preached a *return* of any kind." Decolonization's task was "not to make a utopian and sterile attempt to repeat the past, but to go beyond. It is not a dead society that we want to revive. It is a new society that we must create" (Césaire [1950] 2001, 44–45, 52). There is no primordial measure, Du Bois argued, for African American music. "The Negro chorus has a right to sing music of any sort it likes," because "Art is not natural and is not supposed to be natural . . . and just because it is not natural, it may be great Art" (Du Bois [1933] 1986, 1239). "Négritude," Senghor insisted, "is awareness, defense and development of African cultural values. Négritude is a myth, I agree. And I agree there are false myths,

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FIGURE 4. Pablo Picasso's Poster for the 1956 Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs.



Note: Picasso's portrait "Negro, negro, negro . . ." had earlier adorned Césaire's 1949 *Corps perdu*. © 2020 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Digital Image © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

myths which breed division and hatred." However, "Négritude as a true myth is the very opposite of these" (Senghor 1965, 96–97).

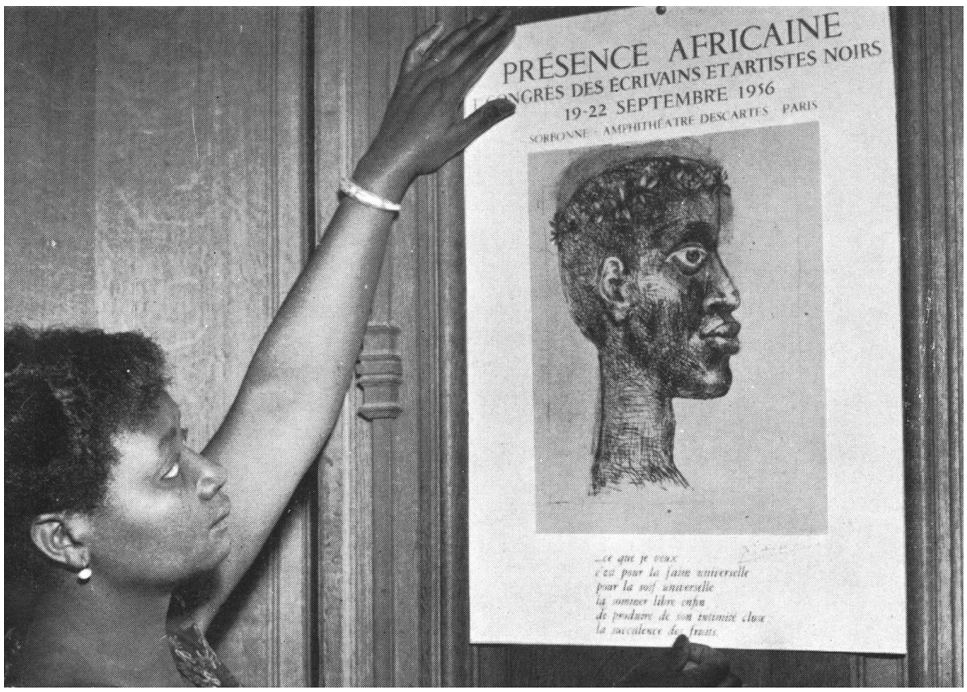
A true myth, is that an oxymoron? But which is more mythic, biological racism or the bonds of family Black Atlantic intellectuals tried to summon into being? Between measuring cranium sizes and the dream of Africanity, which is the civilized and which barbaric? That we think the relevant opposition is between "myth" and "science" is colonial thinking. Mythology and science, Lévi-Strauss argues, are equal forms of intelligence when the stakes concern the living of life (1955, 444). At stake is not a contest between authenticity and alienation, science and myth, but the political purposes to which we put our symbolic relations, the distribution of power among peoples produced by our symbolic designs.

UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE AS COLONIAL NIGHTMARE

The conception of voice animating "universal suffrage as decolonization" was both authentic and nonessentialist, the basis of a new "civilization of the universal" and a truly "democratic humanism" (Delavignette 1945, 230; Lévi-Strauss 1956, 384–85). Structuralism, surrealism, Freud, Bergson, and Marx—these were

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FIGURE 5. Yandé Christiane Diop Hanging Picasso's Poster



Note: Diop, putting up Picasso's poster at the Sorbonne conference. ©Présence Africaine Editions, Communauté Africaine de Culture, n 8/10, juin–novembre 1956.

among the tools Black Atlantic intellectuals used to "reconstitute" and "integrate [their] new experiences, hence [their] new wealth with the framework of *a new unity*" (Césaire 1956, 205). With these instruments, they would search "the racial grain of sand" for what the received canon of modern European thought had spectacularly failed to find: an "ethic that is 'universal,'" the seeds of a collectivist, democratic future (Ellison [1945] 2019, 204).

Depending on how much of this bricolage we accept, our mileage will vary. Those wary of psychoanalysis and structuralism will only despair. Certainly nascent "elite" theories of electoral democracy had no patience for notions of collective voice; such a thing was sheer mysticism, an archaism from bygone ages. Indeed, just as Césaire was demanding humanity hear the "cry of the eldest son of life" ([1941] 1978b, 37), just as Senghor was calling the world to hear "the authentic voice of Africa," men like Walter Lippmann and Joseph Schumpeter were trying to bury the idea of a *vox populi* once and for all. It is notable that the latter's antidemocratic theses—and not anticolonial cries for a collectivist future—were the ones Cold War democratic theory absorbed as doxa (Son 2020, 40–55). Few better allegories exist for the fate of the democratic imagination in the twentieth century.

To be sure, this cohort underestimated the African diaspora's internal divisions (Prashad 2007). Baldwin listened to Diop's opening remarks at the 1956 conference, only to marvel at the experiential gap separating African Americans from their Africana brothers and sisters: "We had been dealing with, had been made and mangled by, another machinery altogether." The result was "a psychology very different" (Baldwin 1998, 147–148). Richard Wright's presentation similarly elicited controversy, attacking as he did the irrational "rot" of African customary societies (Marso 2014). Even in their own time, their task must have seemed insurmountable: to forge a new symbolic filiation—a "true myth"—out of an historical experience that was above all centrifugal and disintegrating.

It is also unclear what institutionalizing this conception of voice could mean. Senghor considered "voice" both visual and aural, a surrealist image "uniting sign and sense, flesh and spirit into one whole" (Senghor 1956, 59). To hear the *vox populi* would require something akin to synesthesia, a readiness to relinquish the division of labor among the senses so precious to the modern European scientific mind. For his part, Césaire contrasted the African "immediacy of voice" whose rhythms were "like that of the mystic" with our feeble representational formalism: "When it comes to mathematics, the real escapes its abstract activity and logicality" (Césaire [1945] 1978, 157). Even Du Bois complained "the rhythmic cry of the slave" was often "mistaken and misunderstood" by white Americans who heard it (Du Bois [1903] 1986, 536–537). How the ballot could ever express such a surreal voice remains uncertain.

If translating anticolonial poetics into politics was an equivocal effort, the effort still had to be made. That was why, when faced with an incoherent

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FIGURE 6. Wifredo Lam, "The Jungle," 1943



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redesign of Martinique's electoral map, Césaire denounced the National Assembly's effort to impose "mechanical homogenization," "total assimilation and standardization," in the name of departmentalization (Césaire [1947] 2013, 63). That was why Senghor placed his faith in federalism for so long. It approximated his dream of a global symphony of civilizational voices: "far from weakening the unity of the Empire," a federation "would cohere it, just as an orchestra conductor's mission would not be to smother the voices of the different instruments by covering them up with his own, but by directing them in unity and allowing the least important country flute to play its part" (Senghor [1945] 1964, 59–60).

What *is* clear is that "universal suffrage as decolonization" struck empire's defenders with the purest terror. Time and again, Du Bois documented systematic attempts to restrict Negro suffrage during and after Reconstruction. "No language," Du Bois showed, was "spared to describe the results of Negro suffrage as the worst imaginable." African American voting was apocalyptic. To hear their voice would have meant social revolution. That was why Black suffrage offered "the greatest and most important step toward world democracy of all men of all races ever taken in the modern world" (Du Bois [1924] 2007, 75; see also Bateman 2018, 43–206).

De Gaulle, for his part, recommended universal suffrage for the colonies at Brazzaville in January 1944. Yet he was careful to distinguish his proposal from a devolution of power. To the contrary: "We believe," de Gaulle insisted, "that, as far as the life of the world of tomorrow is concerned, autarchy would not be desirable nor even possible for anybody" (de Gaulle 1944). The MRP felt no need to be ambiguous. In the Constituent National Assembly, they opposed "Constitution Senghor" by recommending a "dual" citizenship in the French Union: one for "France" and one for the larger "Union" (Cooper 2018, 44–45; Dimier 2004). Their provision would have constitutionalized racial inequality in the form of a differentiated citizenship. It underlined their fear of non-European votes shaping metropolitan affairs. As Adolphe Landry (1946) complained in *Le Monde*,

> What is the scope of this [Article 5]? The "French resortissants," . . . the natives, as we say more often, of the French overseas territories, are electors. For what

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> elections? Certainly not those of the Académie française. They will be electors for elections for [all assemblies of France] by direct and universal suffrage.

Landry could not even disguise his contempt. A single citizenship meant unqualified colonial men and women—people not even good enough to elect the Académie française!—might vote on all "national" concerns. The very idea seemed frankly "illogical" to Landry: "What is therefore necessary is two citizenships: French citizenship and a citizenship of the Union."

Édouard Herriot of the Radical Party best captured the primal fear universal suffrage provoked. Speaking on August 27, 1946, he denounced Article 67 of Constitution Senghor, which stipulated that "Nationals or ressortissants of the metropole, departments, and overseas territories enjoy the liberties and rights attached to the quality of the French citizen."

> How many citizens will there be in the overseas territories? According to many, there will be more than those in the territories of the metropole. Thus, citizens of the overseas territories will be more numerous than citizens of the metropole. . . . France would thereby become the colony of her former colonies. (Herriot [1946] 1947, 3334)

The colonizers will become the colonized. Herriot's phrase articulated, in the most compact way possible, why universal suffrage was empire's worst nightmare. Senghor interrupted Herriot to shout back, "That's racism!" but the effect was like dynamite. Herriot had vocalized the fear everyone had shrouded in endless chatter.

"Universal suffrage as decolonization" owed its utopian power to the rich mosaic of theories that composed it. But it incited terror because, if properly instituted, it could call into existence the subject of decolonization. Like the wider culturalist politics of which it was a piece, universal suffrage's power did not depend on transcribing the voice of a preexisting African people, but on its alchemical capacity to create that people's voice from within the heart of imperial institutions.

CONCLUSION

Why revisit "universal suffrage as decolonization"? Its formation depended on a momentous historical conjuncture not easily repeated. Its potent fusion of modernist aesthetics and anti-racist politics empowered its authors to reimagine racial collectivism beyond the contractualist tropes of modern European thought. At the same time, "the framework of a new unity" these radicals pursued was difficult to articulate. This generation's uneven achievements reflect those difficulties. Black Americans got the right to vote but not Du Bois's multiracial industrial democracy. Citizens of the French Union won a mass suffrage, but not Senghor's dream of a polyphonic *grand ensemble.* The Rassemblement Démocratique Africain ([1946] 1982, 559–560) asked for "a common front of all peoples, races, political parties, workers' organizations, cultural and religious movements of black Africa," but they got intra-African competition instead. As the Cold War proceeded apace, Black American activism retreated from anticolonialism to a domestic civil rights framework. Critiques of racial domination downplayed internationalism, shrinking instead to demands that America become morally fit to lead the free world (Von Eschen 1997). In democratic theory, minimalist electoral democracy and an individuated conception of the suffrage triumphed over the collectivist maximum program of anticolonial radicalism. The ballot was enshrined as the property of individuals, and universal suffrage came to measure civic inclusion rather than democratic self-determination (Beckman 2008).

Retrieving "universal suffrage as decolonization" is nonetheless important, because otherwise its revolutionary promise risks "becoming a tool of the ruling classes." The historian, Benjamin writes, must be "convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins." After the Second World War, mass enfranchisement threatened the hierarchies of the imperial order. That it no longer seems the insurrectionary weapon it once was, that the ballot now invites inclusion rather than revolution, only underlines that the present "has not ceased to be victorious" over the democratic dreams of the past (Benjamin [1955] 2007, 255).

Above all, "universal suffrage as decolonization" casts decolonization's fate in new, unsettling light. If we appreciate how hard anticolonial radicals fought for universal suffrage—and fight they did, tirelessly—then we arrive at a startling conclusion: decolonization's termination in a world of independent states might have been the twentieth century's greatest act of disenfranchisement. Metropoles no longer had to listen to their own citizens, because they were no longer theirs. Subject populations won political autonomy at the cost of having a voice in affairs that affected them long after independence. Former dependent territories could run their own elections, but their representatives would no longer be seated in metropolitan assemblies demanding, as they had been doing since 1944, reparations for centuries of underdevelopment and expropriation. Instead, Du Bois's desire that "the habit of democracy . . . encircle the earth" like a ring of fire gave way to Senghor decrying Africa's "balkanization" after the 1960s (Du Bois [1947] 1963, 19). In France, decolonization's termination in independent states let French citizens quarantine their involvement with colonialism, as though the whole experience had been exterior to them and come to an abrupt end in 1962 (Ross 1994; Shepard 2006).

But decolonization contained more emancipatory possibilities than the universalization of the nation-state form (Cooper 2008). Interpreting decolonization's history together with universal suffrage underscores that fact. The zeal with which postcolonial states implemented universal adult suffrage was an undisputed achievement for mass democracy. That it arrived just as universal suffrage's revolutionary ambit was circumscribed to national inclusion should be considered a

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tragedy. Reconstructing these anticolonial dreams is one way to reacquaint us with our own forgotten democratic ambitions, to rekindle aspirations for postcolonial world democracy once tethered to a mass franchise but whose dreamed-of potential our subsequent history squandered.

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