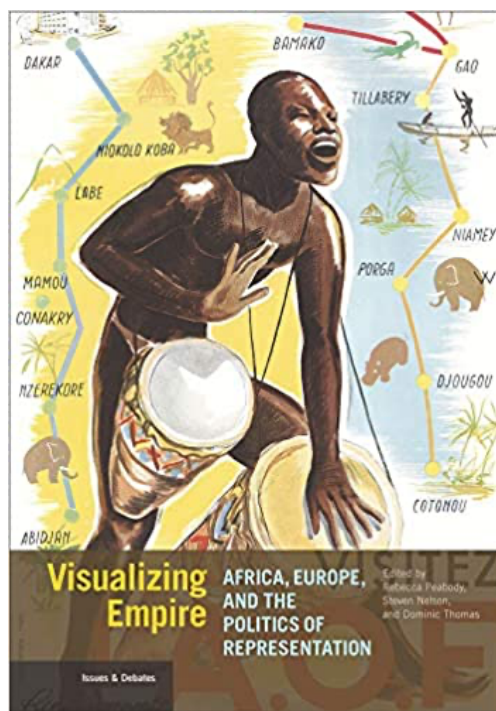


Visualizing Empire: Africa, Europe, and the Politics of Representation

edited by Rebecca Peabody, Steven Nelson, and Dominic Thomas. Getty Publications, January 2021. 200 p. ill. ISBN 9781606066683 (pbk.), \$55.00.

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The objects explored in this book are part of the Association Connaissance de l'histoire de l'Afrique contemporaine (ACHAC), a visual archive of the French colonial empire. This collection demonstrates how Africa's colonization was normalized through visual and material culture in Europe and aids in the critical reevaluation of the French empire. Many earlier books and films have drawn upon the larger ACHAC archive, but this book focuses exclusively on the subset of the collection that was purchased by the Getty Research Institute in 1997. The chapters are written by faculty in the United States and the United Kingdom, and scholars at the Getty Research Institute, the ACHAC research group, and Washington, D.C.'s National Gallery of Art.

While some of the book's essays focus on objects blatantly promoting French imperialism (i.e., photographs of the "exotic" locales of France's colonies), other chapters delve into a more insidious normalization of colonialism. To bolster its citizens' views of the empire, France used visual culture to create a heroic narrative around the act of colonization. While some of these items - such as posters encouraging military service in France's colonies - could be logically expected to promote a positive view of colonization, others were more subtle. Indeed, imperialism was peddled to the masses, including children, via imagery on maps, board games, paper dolls, comic strips, sheet music, food advertisements, and more. Interestingly, although one-third of the essays look at visuals from the late nineteenth century, much of the book (six chapters) looks at works created c. 1915-1957. A couple chapters also discuss images of colonized Africa in connection with World War II, a particularly effective way of emphasizing how recent this

history is.

Because this book seeks to publicize the Getty's ACHAC collection and the scholarship it makes possible, it is more focused on archives than one might expect given the book's description. Additionally, the subtitle (Africa, Europe, and the Politics of Representation) somewhat misleadingly indicates a broader scope of colonizing countries than just France. All the essays, however, effectively situate the objects within their cultural and historical milieu, although the different authors assume dissimilar levels of familiarity with French history, which may confuse some readers.

This book is appropriate for anyone, including undergraduates, researching French history or visual and material culture. This emphasis on archives, however, makes this an applicable read for graduate students in the archival field as well. The quantity and quality of the book's illustrations exceeded expectations, and in addition to a selected bibliography, a list of select films and traveling exhibitions (1993-2015) is provided. In all, this book is a valuable resource for research into postcolonial studies and propaganda in material culture.