

**Jonathan Judaken, ed.**

*Race after Sartre: Antiracism, Africana Existentialism, Postcolonialism.*

Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 2008.

250 pages

US\$75.00 (cloth ISBN 978-0-7914-7547-8)

US\$24.95 (paper ISBN 978-0-7914-7548-5)

Speaking of Jean-Paul Sartre, editor Judaken says, ‘there are few figures who have had a greater influence on the critical theories applied to “race” and whose own praxis served so consistently to destabilize racial and colonial oppression’ (1). In collecting these essays, most of which are published here for the first time, Judaken seeks to respond to lack of appreciation for this fact—a lack explainable, he suggests, by 1) Sartre’s general eclipse in the 1980s caused by the rise of structuralism/poststructuralism while Sartre still adhered to Marxist politics, 2) the fact that Sartre, aside from the early *Anti-Semite and Jew*, wrote no single book on race, and 3) the absence of racial oppression in Sartre’s own personal experience. Judaken’s hope is that this collection of essays will bring Sartre further into contemporary discussions of race and racial oppression.

Part 1 (‘Sartre on Race and Racism’) begins with an essay by Judaken, largely historical in orientation, mapping out ‘four overlapping phases’ in Sartre’s development (24): ‘Sartre’s anti-Antisemitism’, ‘Anticolonialist Existentialism’, ‘Third World Radicalism’, and ‘Antiracist Alter-Globalization’. We see Sartre begin by applying the categories of *Being and Nothingness* to the case of anti-Semitism, early on articulating the essentials of his anti-racist position, essentials which include the notion that, though race is a social construct, it is for the racist constitutive of reality, and a rejection of a liberal politics of assimilation in favor of a fight against racism based in the struggle for freedom and in the characteristic Sartrean claim that no individual freedom is possible when others are oppressed. In the second and third phases Sartre deepens his understanding of racism and colonialism as institutional and systematic, based on economic exploitation and requiring the dehumanization of the colonized, while in its fourth phase Sartre responds, says Judaken, ‘to shifts in the global conditions of labor’ (42), focusing on issues of legal and illegal immigration. In this context, Sartre develops the notion of ‘interior colonies’ within capitalist countries, where he applies his analyses of colonial exploitation anew. Judaken concludes that it is best to read Sartre ‘backward’, beginning with the economics of globalization, but using Sartre’s earlier work as a limit on what the Judaken calls ‘the shortcuts of terroristic violence’ (45).

Steve Martinot’s excellent essay, ‘Skin for Sale’, offers a critical analysis of Sartre’s 1946 play, ‘The Respectful Prostitute’. He argues that Sartre demonstrates ‘the operation of whiteness as a social structure’ (56). The play focuses on two versions of a story involving the death of a black man, one of which, as remembered by a prostitute

named Lizzie, implicates a white man in murder. Martinot's detailed analysis shows how white social structure has the power to re-narrate her story into a second version in which white men were defending Lizzie's honor and one of the white men shot in self defense. Martinot illustrates how, 'regardless of truth, morality, law or experience, yet in the name of all that, white solidarity takes precedence' in the play (57). According to Martinot, both in the play and in the contemporary world '[r]acial domination decriminalizes itself by criminalizing its victims' (58). Much of Martinot's essay links Sartre's analysis to contemporary events, noting that when black people complain of racism, they are labeled racist. He also notes how black voices are simply excluded by white consensus: it simply didn't matter that ten thousand blacks signed affidavits saying they were illegally restricted from voting in Florida in the 2000 presidential election. Relying on a subtle analysis of Sartre's well known concept of 'the look', and linking the 'The Respectful Prostitute' to other writings by Sartre, Martinot's essay will send anyone unfamiliar with the play immediately to the text.

Page Arthur's 'The Persistence of Colonialism' focuses on the short period 1970-1974, offering an historical account of Sartre's interventions in both immigrant workers' movements and regionalist movements. Sartre is shown consistently to link questions of identity with struggles for freedom and against exploitation. Arthur also explains how the French political context had changed by the mid-1970s: 'Against Sartre's argument that living fully one's own cultural identity was a basic freedom that ought to be defended, culture-based arguments for rights were increasingly treated as incompatible with the universalist-based arguments once more in vogue on the Left' (92).

Christian Delacampagne begins Part 2 ('Sartre and Antiracist Theory') by discussing the importance of *Anti-Semite and Jew*, calling it 'a landmark book—in fact one of the major books that came out of the twentieth century' (109). Sartre's account of anti-Semitism as a global ideology rather than an opinion, laid the philosophical foundation for more in-depth histories of anti-Semitism that have followed. That is, anti-Semitism became something that could have a history. Delacampagne's piece also serves as a fine bibliographical resource for these studies.

Robert Bernasconi's 'Sartre and Levinas' seeks to show that both thinkers stand together in thinking of racism as a system, and not just a set of false beliefs to be overcome in a 'colorblind' society 'where blacks are asked to renounce their blackness, or Jews to conceal their Jewishness for the sake of creating a society free of discrimination' (124). Since Sartre is pretty clear about these matters, Bernasconi's task is to show that this is the position of Levinas, especially given that scholars such as Alain Finkelkraut emphasize the *differences* in the two positions, with Levinas 'overcoming racism by appealing at once to the universality of "man" in the Enlightenment tradition' and Sartre advocating 'positive discrimination, which necessitates continuing use of the categories under which the oppressed have been identified' (116). Bernasconi cites a number of texts to show that Finkelkraut's interpretation of Levinas may be too simple, though it must be

said that Bernasconi's emphasis on isolated passages fails to provide him with sufficient evidence for a general interpretation of Levinas.

George Ciccariello-Maher's 'European Intellectuals and Colonial Difference' intervenes in the debate between Sartre and Foucault regarding the totalizing imperative of the intellectual. Ciccariello-Maher argues that Sartre's emphasis on the existential situation allowed him to be open to and learn from a thinker like Fanon, who together with Aimé Césaire are understood to have offered a new version of humanism 'without falling into the kindred errors of classical humanism and radical antihumanism' (149). At a very general level Sartre, Fanon, and Césaire are taken to open up a space for revolutionary theory and practice, while Foucault is seen as politically impotent in that his rejection of totalization is in fact radically totalizing and therefore akin to classical humanism.

The two essays comprising Part 3 ('Sartre and Africana Existentialism') are closely linked. Lewis Gordon's 'Sartre and Black Existentialism' is partly a remembrance and celebration of Sartre's moral and political commitments, which he pursued even in the face of threatened violence. Gordon's contribution is wide-ranging, moving from Sartre's love of jazz to his relationships with Franz Fanon and Richard Wright, and Gordon includes references to many thinkers who have engaged with Sartre's contributions to black existential thought, while also providing much helpful bibliographic information. Mabogo More's 'Sartre and South African Apartheid' focuses on one instance of this influence. Concentrating on Steven Biko, he successfully shows a number of parallels between the ideas of Biko and Sartre, especially regarding the notion of collective responsibility and hence the complicity of liberal whites in the apartheid system. However, More provides no evidence of any *direct* influence of Sartre on Biko.

The book's concluding section, 'Sartre and the Postcolonial Turn', begins with an interesting essay by Richard Watts, 'Difference/Indifference', which compares the preface writing of Sartre with that of Édouard Glissant. Sartre's essay 'Black Orpheus' has been criticized for its omniscient and totalizing perspective, where Sartre's authority contains the potential to silence the writers he promotes. On the other hand, using various strategies Glissant seeks to undermine this authority, culminating in the anti-preface to Patrick Chamoiseau's *L'Esclave vieil homme et le molosse* where bits of text from Glissant written for other purposes are attached to each chapter of the book; in other words, both authors write together. This, though, may represent, says Watts, a kind of indifference to the text, carrying with it a different set of strengths and weakness than does Sartre's approach.

The collection concludes with Judith Butler's 'Violence, Nonviolence'. Butler engages in a close and fascinating reading of Sartre's preface to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. Ultimately, she illustrates how the role of violence informs the masculine visions of the new human for both writers, and how neither adequately connects the need for

present violence, insofar as it is necessary to constitute this new human, to the future society in which such beings would presumably live in peace. She also notes countertendencies in both writers—though more particularly in Fanon—that illustrate openness to a different, less masculine vision of the future.

Overall, the essays here are far ranging. While a handful explicitly argue for Sartre's importance to matters of race, most simply assume it, a fact that might constitute a powerful case in itself. One critical reflection: It would have been appropriate if Simone de Beauvoir's work had been noted somewhere in this volume. De Beauvoir worked with Sartre politically on the projects discussed here, and she interacted with most of the same writers with whom he had commerce, sometimes independently of him. Ironically, in a book deeply engaged with the complexities of the encounter with the other, de Beauvoir is absolutely invisible.

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