

# A Mission To Civilize: The Republican Idea Of Empire In France And West Africa, 1895-1930

**Alice L Conklin**

A mission to civilize: the republican idea of empire in France and. A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa 1895-1930. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. x + 367 pp. \$55.00 cloth

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This French imperialist self-concept forms the focus of Alice Conklin's *Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*. Conklin, a historian at the University of Rochester, argues persuasively that the zealous republican ideology animating France's Third Republic in the late nineteenth century also defined its West African empire. To develop and support this thesis, Conklin examines official rhetoric and decision making in French West Africa as manifested in the [End Page 488] directives and policy initiatives of the colonial governors-general over a thirty-five-year period. The office of governor-general, the source of most of Conklin's documentation, was a peculiar feature of the French approach to colonial administration. In France, this idea was followed by a campaign to popularize ideas about Africans' lack of civilization through educational and media materials (13-14). Practically, this was carried out in the colonies through increasing infrastructure, public health campaigns, education, and political reform (38-39; 73-74). Conklin, Alice L. *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 1997. Print. D. Lugard, *The Rise of Our East African Empire*, (Edinburgh, 1893), I.585-587, II.69-75. Gann, Lewis H., and Peter Duignan. "Introduction."

French ideas of civilizationâ€”simultaneously republican, racist, and modernâ€”encouraged the governors general in the 1890s to attack such â€œfeudalâ€ African institutions as aristocratic rule and slavery in ways that referred back to Franceâ€™s own experience of revolutionary change. Ironically, local administrators in the 1920s also invoked these same ideas to justify such reactionary policies as the reintroduction of forced labor, arguing that coercion, which inculcated a work ethic in the â€œlazyâ€ African, legitimized his loss of freedom.â€ One of the authorâ€™s principal arguments is that the idea of a civilized mission underwent dramatic changes, due to ideological, political, and economic transformations occurring simultaneously in France and its colonies. A Mission to Civilize: Th has been added to your Cart. Add to Cart. Turn on 1-Click ordering.â€ Colonial Suspects: Suspicion, Imperial Rule, and Colonial Society in Interwar French West Africa (France Overseas: Studies in Empire and Decolonization). Kathleen Keller. Hardcover. \$52.53 Prime. King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa. Adam Hochschild. 4.6 out of 5 stars 661.