

Version 1.0 | Last updated 09 November 2015

Mangin, Charles

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Mangin, *Charles* Emmanuel Marie
French General
Born 06 July 1866 in Sarrebourg-en-Meurthe, France
Died 12 May 1925 in Paris, France

Charles Mangin was a very important French general during the First World War. With his concept “*La Force Noire*” (“Black Forces”), which he published in a book with the same title, he promoted the acceptance of black soldiers in the French Army.

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1. A Colonial Officer

Coming from the French officer school Saint-Cyr, Charles Mangin (1866-1925) decided to serve in the colonies, specifically in French Sudan, as a marine [infantry](#) officer in 1890. Ardent in combat, he fought against African leaders like [Samory Touré \(ca.1835-1900\)](#). He became famous and was chosen by Captain [Jean-Baptiste Marchand \(1863-1934\)](#) to accompany the Congo-Nile mission in 1898.

2. The Idea of a “Force Noire”

Contrary to popular belief, Mangin's army project, the "*Force Noire*"^[1] ("Black Forces"), was not designed for the Great War. The idea resulted from the [Russo-Japanese War \(1904-1905\)](#), which revealed to officers that the next war would be a war of the masses. Convinced that he must find enough soldiers, Mangin was very interested in the "*Force Jaune*" ("Yellow Forces"), which was a project defended by French officers in Asia. Back in Africa in 1907, Mangin developed a project that rejected the segregationist U.S. army model but was inspired by the British colonial theories on "[martial races](#)". He also sought to make the project compatible with the French Republic, for example by promoting [colonial troops](#) in the French army. He did so by limiting possible promotions to the grade of captain. Thus, he developed a racialising vision that considered African soldiers as combat-capable and saw them as a pool of men from which to recruit.

3. Role in World War I

When the war began, Charles Mangin came back to [France](#). He was given command of the 5th Infantry Division (August 1914-June 1916), with which he won the [Battle of Charleroi](#). With the 11th Army Corps (June-December 1916), he took Fort Douaumont on 24 October 1916. As commander-in-chief of the Sixth Army, he was dismissed after the failure of the offensive of the Chemin des Dames while being accused by the Senegalese deputy [Blaise Diagne \(1872-1934\)](#) of "massacring" the black troops. Yet he quickly returned to lead troops in December 1917, assuming control of the 9th Corps, then taking command of the 10th Army (June-November 1918), with which he led the great offensive of July 1918 that would upset the Germans. After the war, he was responsible for the Senegalese riflemen [occupying the Rhineland](#). During this time the soldiers were subjected to significant racism and were referred to as "[Schwarze Schmach](#)" ("black shame") by the German population. Contrary to Mangin's will, the high command could do little against this.

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Notes

1. ↑ Mangin, Charles : La Force noire, Hachette 1910.

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Citation

d'Andurain, Julie: Mangin, Charles , in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08. **DOI:** [10.15463/ie1418.10761](https://doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10761).

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