

Mangin, Charles

By [Julie d'Andurain](#)



Charles Mangin (1866-1925)

French General Charles Mangin photographed in 1915.

Agence Rol: Général Mangin, black-and-white photograph, n.p., 1915; source: Gallica, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rol 44963, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6908328f>. This image has been identified as public domain.

Mangin, *Charles* Emmanuel Marie

French General

Born 06 July 1866 in Sarrebourg-en-Meurthe, France

Died 12 May 1925 in Paris, France

Summary

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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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 \(1830-1900\)](#). He became famous and was chosen by Captain [Jean-Baptiste Marchand \(1863-1934\)](#) to accompany the Congo-Nile mission in 1898.

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.

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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- D'Andurain, Julie: **La genèse intellectuelle de la Force noire**, in: Buton, Philippe / Michel, Marc (eds.): *Les troupes coloniales et la Première Guerre mondiale*, Paris 2018 Vendémiaire.
- Duroselle, Jean-Baptiste: **Préface**, in: Mangin, Louis-Eugène (ed.): *Le général Mangin, 1866-1925*, Paris 1986 F. Sorlot, pp. 9-14.
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External Links

- [Bataille de Verdun, General Mangin's photo album, 1916-1917 \(Gallica\) \(Image\)](#)
- [Campagnes du colonel Mangin au Maroc, photo album, 1912-1913 \(Gallica\) \(Image\)](#)
- [Campagnes du général Mangin dans la Marne, sur l'Aisne et en Artois, photo album, 1914-1915 \(Gallica\) \(Image\)](#)
- [Fachoda et la mission Marchand, photo album, 1896-1899 \(Gallica\) \(Image\)](#)
- [Koller, Christian: The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and their Deployment in Europe during the First World War, in: Immigrants and Minorities 26/1-2, March/July 2008, pp. 111-133 \(Vancouver Island University\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Lunn, Joe: "Les Races Guerrières". Racial Preconceptions in the French Military about West African Soldiers during the First World War, in: Journal of Contemporary History 34/4, 1999, pp. 517-536 \(University of Michigan\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Mangin, Charles: La force noire, Paris 1910 \(Gallica\) \(Book\)](#)
- [Mangin, Charles: Regards sur la France d'Afrique, Paris 1924 \(Gallica\) \(Book\)](#)
- [Paysages et peuples du Tonkin, photographies rassemblées par le Général Mangin, 1901-1904 \(Gallica\) \(Image\)](#)
- [Section photographique des armées: Combats de l'été 1918 dans l'Aisne, 1918 \(Gallica\) \(Image\)](#)
- [Séjour et missions en Afrique du général Mangin, photo album, 1906-1909 \(Gallica\) \(Image\)](#)
- [Voyage officiel du général Mangin aux Antilles françaises et en Amérique du sud, photo album, 1921 \(Gallica\) \(Image\)](#)
- [Vues de l'Inde, photographies rassemblées par le Général Mangin, 1901-1904 \(Gallica\) \(Image\)](#)

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Key Person(s)

[Diagne, Blaise](#); [Ture, Samori](#); [Marchand, Jean-Baptiste](#)

Key Location(s)

[Chemin des Dames](#); [Fort Douaumont](#); [Sarrebouurg-en-Meurthe](#); [Paris](#)

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