Melissa F. Weiner & Antonio Carmona Báez (eds.), *Smash the Pillars: Decoloniality and the Imaginary of Color in the Dutch Kingdom*. Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2018. xxv + 250 pp. (Cloth US\$100.00)

The “pillars” in Dutch society in the early twentieth century were blocs encompassing all major social affiliations, including church, school, political party, trade union, friendships, marriage, housing, and employment. This system thus embodied the vaunted Dutch ideals of pluralism and toleration. While aimed especially at allaying the historically volatile issue of religious divisions, it more generally sought social harmony among people living side by side with divergent world outlooks and associational preferences. Kwame Nimako’s chapter in *Smash the Pillars*, “Layers of Emancipation Struggles: Some Reflections on the Dutch Case,” provides useful historical context for understanding the objectives of all the book’s essays by retracing the Dutch government’s unsuccessful effort in its Minorities Policy of the 1980s to construct a new “pillar” encompassing Moluccans, new Moslem “guest workers,” and Surinamers. He concludes that the proposition failed because it was not based on parts of the population considered truly “Dutch.”

The editors define their subtitle’s “decolonial imaginary of color” as ideas, visions, and strategies of people of color in the Netherlands promoting full emancipation and the establishment of a new social, political, and economic order. It includes perspectives from all the cultural groups constituting Dutch society stemming from the colonial heritage and recent immigration. They assert that this “imaginary” challenges the official narrative of Dutch modernity as well as the traditional “pillars” they recognize as the basic underlying structure of the society. They draw on black intellectuals from earlier Dutch history such as Anton de Kom and Otto Huiswoud, as well as prominent counterparts in movements elsewhere.

The thesis running through all 16 essays, by activists and academic scholars, is that, while Dutch society recently has begun to address legacies of its colonial regime and the practice of slavery, it has yet to recognize their continuing impact on the lives of the descendants of both the enslaved and white Dutch. They give focused attention to a sustained protest movement that initially emerged in 2011 centered on demands to abolish the *Zwarte Piet* (Black Peter) figure in the annual Dutch Santa Claus (*Sinterklaas*) tradition. Following protests that year (including the arrest of artist Quinsy Gario, one of the book’s contributors), annual protests have continued to grow each year; and the movement has expanded to include other issues, such as the plight of post-colonial immigrants; the relationship between the government and parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands that were former colonies; and the relationship of

class, race, gender, and sexualized categories to these matters. For their analyses, the authors cite critical decolonial and race theories, valuing especially work in the Netherlands, beginning with Philomena Essed's *Understanding Everyday Racism* (1991), and *White Innocence* (2016) by Gloria Wekker, another one of this volume's authors. All of them demand reforms in government and academic policies, as well as in societal practices. Through insightful essays, some autobiographical, this collection joins numerous other recent works that make a compelling case for breaking the silence resulting from an unspoken taboo in polite society concerning such subject matter. Regarding the volume's title, however, readers not familiar with Dutch society might profit from a more extensive discussion of the extent to which the traditional "pillars" actually still structure Dutch society. It seems certain, for instance, that participation in two of their major building blocks, organized religion and labor unions, has already been in steep decline for decades.

A chapter by independent scholar Artwell Cain, "Decoloniality of Black Memory and Anti-Black Racism," rightly ascribes current racial thought in part to earlier European philosophical ideas that helped shape the colonial mind-set and practices, but employs some misleading examples by asserting that the concept of race derived from preexisting racism; proposing that the French philosopher René Descartes's axiom "I think therefore I am" rendered him an adherent to the belief that enslaved Africans were incapable of thought since enslavers considered them inhuman merchandise; and unfairly listing the Dutch anthropologist Petrus Camper (1722–89) and German anthropologist Johan Blumenbach (1752–1840) among those who, like Kant and Hegel, "[used their] findings to give credence and meaning to the supremacy of one race over the others" (p. 181). See Blumenbach, "Observations on the Bodily Conformation and Mental Capacity of the Negroes" (1799), and Camper, *Redevoering over den oorsprong en de kleur der zwarten* [Address on the Origin and Color of Blacks] (1772). There is ample evidence that the tradition of racism still plaguing world societies today derived from earlier deliberate choices to simply ignore the actual attributes of peoples discriminated against, a practice still popular today. The essays in *Smash the Pillars* are rich in content, though their presentation suffers from numerous breaks in the flow of the discourse that could have been corrected by more careful editing.

Allison Blakely

Department of History, Boston University

ablakely@bu.edu