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Anna Julia Cooper, *Slavery and the French and Haitian Revolutions (L'Attitude de la France à l'égard de l'esclavage pendant la Révolution)*. Trans. and ed. Frances Richardson Keller. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005 (French orig. 1925). 159 pp. + Index. \$29.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-7425-4474-5.

Review by Jeremy D. Popkin, University of Kentucky.

Anna Julia Cooper, the author of this brief survey of the debates about slavery during the French Revolution, was clearly a remarkable woman. Born into slavery in North Carolina in 1858, she graduated from Oberlin College in the post-Civil-War period and had a long and distinguished career as an educator. When she received her degree from the Sorbonne for this study in 1925, at the age of sixty-six, she is thought to have been only the fourth African-American woman to have earned a doctorate. Cooper remained active into her eighties, and died in 1963 at the age of 105. The topic of her study could not be timelier today, when the French revolutionaries' confrontation with the issues of race and slavery has moved to the center of scholarly debate, and many readers will be curious to see what an author with Cooper's background had to say on this subject. Unfortunately, *Slavery and the French and Haitian Revolutions* does not offer a distinctive interpretation of its subject. It is hardly surprising that the scholarship in an eighty-year-old monograph is now out of date, but the work is also inaccurate about many factual details. It is a pity that the energy expended on this translation was not used instead to give us a biography of its author's life.

The French Revolution's confrontations with race and slavery inspired a considerable amount of scholarship in the period from the 1890s to the 1930s, both in France and in the United States. Cooper was acquainted with the monographs that had appeared before her own thesis; she cites the French publications of Léon Deschamps, Pierre Boissonnade, Armand Brette and her dissertation director, Philippe Sagnac, as well as the English-language works of Lothrop Stoddard, Herbert E. Mills, Mitchell Garrett, and Eliza D. Bradby.^[1] (She does not appear to have used the important histories of the revolutionary period by the Haitian historians Thomas Madiou and Beaubrun Ardouin, both published in the mid-nineteenth century.)^[2] The introductory lines of Cooper's study frame the issue much more emphatically than any of these other authors had. "Slavery was an institution founded solely on the abuse of power," she wrote, and there was no excuse for its persistence into the revolutionary era, since "we shall see that it could be abolished by a stroke, a simple legislative measure when the people it dishonored felt that they could no longer violate moral laws" (p. 31).

Unlike the Trinidadian author Cyril L. R. James, whose *Black Jacobins* (1938) remains the classic example of a rewriting of the French revolutionary saga in which race and slavery are treated as central issues, however, Cooper failed to develop the radical perspective suggested in her introduction.^[3] Instead, following the lead of the scholarship on which she was drawing, she stressed the practical difficulties confronting the French deputies. "From the beginning of 1790 the situation might appear insoluble to the most conscientious of men, those most scrupulous in the performance of their duties, but also most concerned with the interests of their country," she wrote (p. 66). She adopted Bradby's sympathetic view of Barnave, the chair of the National Assembly's Colonial Committee, who fought strenuously against any measures to limit the white colonists' privileges, and she had hardly anything to say about the slave uprising in Saint-Domingue that began in 1791. She dismissed the French commissioner Léger-Félicité Sonthonax, author of the emancipation decree of 20 June 1793, as an *enragé* and a Montagnard (in fact, he was a protégé of Brissot and the Girondins), and blamed him for the fighting that resulted in the destruction of the colony's principal city, Cap français, in 1793 (pp. 90, 95).

The National Convention's epochal decree of 4 February 1794, which abolished slavery, rated only a brief reference in her narrative, and she did not mention at all the six-month "trial of Sonthonax" in 1795, the revolutionaries' lengthiest confrontation with these issues (p. 99). In addition, her account is often confused. Names are frequently misspelled, dates are often given incorrectly, and events are inaccurately characterized. Even by the standards of its time, Cooper's work was not a successful work of scholarship.

Although the value of having Cooper's French text translated into English at this late date is thus limited, Frances Richardson Keller's project does remind us that the memory of the Haitian uprising was never as entirely "silenced" as Michel-Rolph Trouillot's celebrated essay on that theme suggests.^[4] Although Cooper does not say so, one imagines that she was attracted to this topic because of her experience in the United States of the Jim Crow era, and her essay is evidence of the continued relevance of the Haitian uprising for black people in this country. The fact that she was able to draw on so much then-recent scholarship on the colonial dimension of the French Revolution also raises the question of why this issue was so prominent in early twentieth century historiography and why it virtually disappeared from view on both sides of the Atlantic from the 1940s until the late 1980s.

NOTES

[1] Works cited in Cooper's work include Léon Deschamps, *Les Colonies pendant la Révolution française* (Paris: Perrin, 1898); Armand Brette, "Les gens de couleur libres et leurs députés en 1789," *Révolution française* 29 (July-Dec. 1895): 326-45, 385-407; Lothrop Stoddard, *The French Revolution in San Domingo* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914); Pierre Vaissière, *Saint-Domingue: la société et la vie créoles sous l'ancien régime* (Paris: Perrin, 1909); Herbert E. Mills, *The Early Years of the French Revolution in San Domingo* (Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: A. V. Haight, 1892); Eliza D. Bradby, *The Life of Barnave*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915); Mitchell Garrett, *The French Colonial Question, 1789-1791* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: G. Wahr, 1916); Prosper Boissonnade, *Saint-Domingue à la veille de la Révolution et la question de la représentation coloniale aux États généraux* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1906). Paul Sagnac, who directed Cooper's dissertation, had written the section on the colonies during the Revolution for the Lavisserie series. Scholarship in this field remained active during the 1930s, with appearance of such works as Jules F. Saintoyant, *La Colonisation française pendant la Révolution française* (Paris: La Renaissance du Livre, 1930); Carl Lokke, *France and the Colonial Question: A Study of Contemporary French Opinion, 1763-1801* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932); Blanche Maurel, *Cahiers de doléances de la colonie de Saint Domingue pour les États Généraux de 1789* (Paris: Leroux, 1933); and Edward Seeber, *Anti-Slavery Opinion in France During the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1937).

[2] Thomas Madiou, *Histoire d'Haïti*, 7 vols. (1847; repr., Port-au-Prince: Éditions Henri Deschamps, 1987); [Alexis] Beaubrun Ardouin, *Études sur l'histoire d'Haïti, suivies de la vie du général J.-M. Borgella* (1853; repr. Port-au-Prince: Dr. François Dalencour, 1958).

[3] Cyril L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1938).

[4] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "An Unthinkable History: The Haitian Revolution as a Non-Event," in Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), pp. 70-107.

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