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Pierre H. Boulle, *Race et esclavage dans la France de l'Ancien Régime*. Paris: Perrin, 2007. 288 pp. Maps, figures, tables, notes, appendices, and index of proper names. 21€ (pb.) ISBN 978-2-262-02672-1.

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The quasi-autobiographical introduction of *Race et esclavage dans la France de l'ancien Régime*, in which the author shares his French roots, American education and Canadian professional position, prompts me to begin this review with a personal anecdote of my own.

I traveled to Paris in 1990 as a graduate student to research the archival records pertaining to blacks in eighteenth-century Paris. Upon my return, senior colleagues at the French Colonial Historical Society suggested that I contact Pierre Boulle, a professor of history at McGill University who was engaged in a similar project. My heart sank when I learned that in addition to already having digitized all of the Paris census records that I had painstakingly copied by hand, Professor Boulle had collected similar materials from many French port cities—including Nantes and Bordeaux—where France's black residents concentrated. Only a handful of my original research materials had not yet been amassed by Boulle, including some judicial factums concerning slaves' lawsuits for freedom. After a genial (but for me demoralizing) exchange, we reached a "gentleman's agreement"—Professor Boulle would complete his statistical analysis of France's nonwhite population and I would concentrate on the lawsuits for freedom. It was not long before I would recognize the extraordinary generosity that his cession entailed. I had taken the far simpler narrative task; Professor Boulle was left with the much more difficult and time-consuming project of verifying the accuracy and relationships of thousands of names, of pursuing new leads and visiting many more archives, all in search of the elusive "comprehensive" portrait of France's people of color. This spirit of generosity has permeated all of our subsequent interactions, as Boulle has shared with me (and numerous other scholars) the substantial fruit of his labors over more than two decades. It is therefore a great pleasure to be asked to review this work, which many have looked forward to for so many years.

Since the mid-1980s, Pierre Boulle has produced a series of papers and articles on black (to use the comprehensive US term) or (as Boulle generally prefers) "non-white" people in eighteenth-century France. These writings are now collected and published as *Race et esclavage dans la France de l'ancien régime* and represent the ultimate state of knowledge of people of color in France in the decades prior to the Revolution.

*Race et esclavage* consists of an introduction and nine essays, five of which have been previously published, all translated (where necessary) into French and edited so as to eschew redundancy.<sup>[1]</sup> The book is divided into three parts: 1) the origins of French racism, 2) the legal status of non-whites in eighteenth-century France and 3) the social history of non-whites in France according to the 1777 census. An appendix gives the text of four laws as they appeared in eighteenth-century French published compilations: the 1685 Code Noir, the 1738 declaration concerning blacks who travel from the colonies to France, the 1777 Police des Noirs and the 1778 marriage ban on interracial marriages. American readers will lament the French practice of indexing only proper nouns, not topics, as references to many subjects are scattered throughout the chapters and can only be found by careful trawling through each chapter.

Part I allows us to trace continuities and change in Boulle's thinking on the origins of racism in metropolitan France over almost two decades. The first essay is the oldest in the collection, originally published in 1985, while the second and third appeared in 2002 and 2003. A consistent theme sustained throughout Boulle's inquiry into the origins of French racism is his assertion it originated in the colonies and from there was transmitted to the metropole (pp. 29, 73-76). Racism took hold among elites in Paris and the port cities where the largest concentration of non-whites lived (p. 44) but the popular classes did not share the same prejudices as evidenced in many marriages between black and white servants and artisans (pp. 80, 186-188, 197).

Boulle's second essay on racism focuses more narrowly on a peculiar text published anonymously in the *Journal des savants* in 1684, which, he claims is the first French work to employ the term "race" in its modern sense of four distinct classes of people, grouped primarily according to skin color, physical characteristics and geographical origin. Boulle argues persuasively that the author was the French adventurer and medical doctor François Bernier, a student of the eighteenth-century libertine philosopher Gassendi. According to Boulle, despite Bernier's prescient and original formulation of race, it never took hold among subsequent natural philosophers, like the Comte de Buffon or Carl Linnaeus, who ignored Bernier as "un homme de salon..., [ni] maître à penser, ni [fondateur] d'école" (p. 46).

Boulle summarizes his conclusions regarding the origins of French racism in his 2003 essay entitled, "Finalement, une triple origine." Here he puts forward three roots of French racist ideology: 1) the noble discourse of heritable character traits (including an exploration of the linguistic origins of the term "race" that originally appeared in the article on Bernier), 2) the emphasis on skin color that emerges in the late seventeenth century and 3) the influence of slavery on the notion of racial hierarchy. The early publication date of this essay, and its focus on the metropole as opposed to the colonies, does not permit Boulle to engage with some of the recent explorations of French colonial racial thought, including Guillaume Aubert's comparative exploration of *métissage* in Canada, Louisiana and the Caribbean, John Garrigus' careful analysis of mixed race identity and racism in Saint-Domingue, Frédéric Régent's postulations regarding racial identity in Guadeloupe, or my own inquiry into the early racism of French missionaries in the Caribbean.[2] These projects—and ongoing work by Brett Rushforth—tend to challenge both Boulle's timeline for the hardening of anti-black racism and the unidirectional flow of racial ideology from colonies to metropole.[3]

Boulle's second section, on the legal status of French blacks, offers useful correctives and new sources for a more complete, accurate account of French race and slave law. For example, Boulle argues persuasively that a memorandum attributed to De la Haye, the lieutenant general of the Table de Marbre (Admiralty Court), was instead authored by the racially phobic *procureur du roi*, Poncet de la Grave (p. 218, n. 23).[4] More significantly, Boulle has discovered that the 1777 law known as the Police des Noirs, which shifted regulation on the basis of slave status to racial categories and prohibited the introduction of all "negroes, mulattoes and other people of color" into France, was not a ministerial response to a single lawsuit for freedom, Pampy v. Julienne.[5] Rather, two earlier cases, in 1775 and 1776, concerning the slaves Jean-Louis and Hercules, developed into a jurisdictional battle between the *procureur du roi* (attorney general) of the Admiralty Court and the lieutenant general of the police. These two cases, along with that of Pampy and Julienne, prompted Minister of the Navy Antoine de Sartine to solicit proposals for the Police des Noirs, which ultimately resulted in both France's first experiment with racial quarantine and the census of non-whites of 1777.

The real gems of *Race et esclavage* can be found in the book's final five chapters, all based on Boulle's careful analysis of the 1777 census. His original quantitative study (published in 1989 and reprinted here as chapter six) addresses the 765 non-whites registered in greater Paris from 1777 to 1790. In the most recent summary Boulle is able to speak comprehensively about *all* blacks registered throughout France in 1777, a total of 2,329 individuals (109).[6] France's Enlightenment, bureaucratic, and colonialist penchant for systematic collection of information yields a precise catalog of details about most of these

people, including their name, age, sex, racial classification, and place of origin; the date, ship and port of their arrival in France; whether slave or free; their occupation, and current place of residence in France. Many of the free non-whites (“blacks, mulattoes and other people of color” in the parlance of the legislation) who registered themselves could sign their names; Boulle notes that their literacy levels approximate those of their white French peers (p. 194).

The typical French person of color in 1777 was a young black man employed as a domestic servant. The average age for male slaves was just under twenty, while enslaved women averaged twenty-five; free people of both sexes were a little older, averaging twenty-seven (p. 172). Most non-whites lived in one of three cities—Bordeaux, Paris and Nantes – with the remaining residents congregating primarily in the lesser port cities (p. 181), though a handful lived scattered in the countryside.[7] The vast majority of non-whites (93.5 percent) had African ancestry, while most of others were from South Asia (surprisingly few identified as Native American) (p. 175).[8] While two-thirds of all people of color were employed as servants, a substantial proportion (around 14 percent) were learning or practicing a skilled trade, the most common being sewing or hairdressing (p. 190).

Although the census did not specifically ask for marital status (which is therefore probably under-reported), Boulle has discovered evidence of seventy-nine married individuals and fifty-three extra-marital liaisons (pp. 186-188). Most of these were interracial liaisons, between blacks and whites, or mixed-race lineage and whites or blacks, at least partly because of the gender imbalance within the non-white population (2.5 men for every woman [p. 171]), but also, argues Boulle, because of the lack of racial prejudice in the French popular classes. The year following the 1777 census, Louis XVI would outlaw marriages between whites and non-whites. Boulle cites several examples of interracial marriages that flew in the face of this official regulation (pp. 183-184). There is more to uncover on this topic, as Jennifer Heuer’s recent work on interracial marriages in the Napoleonic era is showing.[9]

Chapter five, published here for the first time, treats the “non-blancs de l’océan indien en France.” Here Boulle argues that the two royal laws granting limited permission to masters to bring their slaves to France—the edict of 1716 and the declaration of 1738—applied only to colonies with plantations, such as the Antilles, Louisiana, Guyana and the Mascarenes. Implicitly, French settlements with slaves but without *plantations*, such as the trading factories located in Saint-Louis, Sénégal, or Pondichéry, India, were not covered by the two laws. Consequently, slaves arriving from these regions should have been entitled to avail themselves of the Free Soil principle, the maxim that held that any slave who set foot on French soil was free. Nevertheless, Boulle shows that migration from eastern branch of France’s empire was substantial in the period leading up to the 1777 census. Some 275 individuals, or 13 percent of the known non-white residents of France in this year, came directly from Africa or India. The overwhelming majority (almost 90 percent) was male and their average age (15.6 years) was considerably younger than the general non-white population (pp. 109-110).

Boulle explains the exceptional profile of the migrants from African and South Asia by noting these youths primarily came to France as the enslaved servants of slave ship captains or military officers. They belonged (and here I am going beyond Boulle’s careful empirical study) to the homosocial seafaring world of Equiano and the Black Jacks.[10] The arrival of South Asians in France, in particular, may also be the result of the British rout of French imperial designs in Pondichéry and Chandranagor following the Treaty of Paris in 1763. But it might also be useful to see the South Asians, in particular, as the roots of new nineteenth-century patterns of labor migration, drawing first from the Indian subcontinent and later China. Boulle does not address these “push factors” or deeply consider the origins of non-whites who found themselves migrating—willingly or unwillingly—to France.

In other words, Boulle’s painstaking and laborious quantitative study of the non-white population of eighteenth-century France yields very valuable information that will be useful not only to historians of France, its colonies, or the wider Atlantic. The material presented here will also be useful to historians working on borderlands, world history, diasporas, race, slavery, migration and identity in a comparative

light. The articles here reveal the gradual unfolding of Boulle's very important long-term project. While we await his final conclusions (and, I would hope, a website or database devoted to his dataset!), there is much here to chew on, as well as inspiration for new directions and future research.

## NOTES

[1] Three articles originally appeared in English and two in French: "In Defense of Slavery: Eighteenth-Century Opposition to Abolitions and the Origins of a Racist Ideology in France," in *History from Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology in Honor of George Rudé*, ed. Frederick Krantz (Montreal: Concordia University, 1985), pp. 221-41 (repr. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp. 219-46; "François Bernier and the Modern Conception of Race," in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, ed. Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 11-27; "Racial Purity or Legal Clarity? The Status of Black Residents in Eighteenth-Century France," *The Journal of the Historical Society* 6:1 (2006):19-46; "La construction du concept de race dans la France d'Ancien Régime," *Outre-mers, revue d'histoire* 89 (2002):155-75; "Les gens de couleur à Paris à la veille de la Révolution » *L'Image de la Révolution*, ed. Michel Vovelle, 4 vols., (Paris: Pergamon Press, 1989), 1:159-68.

[2] Guillaume Aubert, "'The Blood of France': Race and Purity of Blood in the French Atlantic World," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 61:3 (2004):439-478; John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Frédéric Régent, *Esclavage, métissage, liberté: La Révolution française en Guadeloupe, 1789-1802* (Paris: Grasset, 2004); Sue Peabody, "'A Nation Born to Slavery': Missionaries and Racial Discourse in Seventeenth-Century French Antilles," *Journal of Social History* 38:1 (2004):113-126.

[3] Rushforth's forthcoming analysis of the use of the term "Code Noir" to refer to Louis XIV's 1685 edict will dramatically impact our understanding of French racial ideology.

[4] Sue Peabody, *"There Are No Slaves in France": The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 74, 109-110.

[5] Peabody, *No Slaves*, pp. 106-111; see also Pierre Pluchon, *Nègres et Juifs au XVIIIe siècle: Le racisme au siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Tallandier, 1984), which focuses exclusively on the Pampy and Julienne freedom suit as a window into racism during the French Enlightenment.

[6] This represents an increase of almost 15 percent since Boulle's 2005 figure of 2,031 non-whites throughout France (p. 169).

[7] The registers for Marseilles, which were known to exist in the archives of the Customs Bureau three decades ago, have since disappeared (Boulle, *Race et esclavage*, p. 238, n. 11).

[8] Is the relative absence of Native Americans in the registers due to a) their limited presence in late eighteenth-century France, b) the law's framing of racial identity ("*noirs, mulâtres ou autres gens de couleur*"), hence presence but lack of registration, or c) a continuity of Bernier's system of racial classification, which collapsed Native Americans, Europeans, North Africans and East Asians in a single light-skinned category he called the "first race"? Or did French notions of race preclude the selection of Native Americans as servants, which then led to their paucity in terms of numbers, and hence their exclusion from the 1777 registers?

[9] Jennifer Heuer, "The One-Drop Rule in Reverse? Interracial Marriage in Early Nineteenth Century-France" unpublished paper presented at the French Colonial Historical Society Meeting, June 7, 2007, La Rochelle, France.

[10] Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-made Man* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005); Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1997); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

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