

Response Page

The following responses were posted on the H-France discussion list in response to Jeremy Popkin's review of Anna Julia Cooper, *Slavery and the French and Haitian Revolutions*.

H-France Vol. 6 (October 2006), No. 121.

The original review may be found on the H-France web page at:

<http://www.h-france.net/vol6reviews/Vol6no121popkin.pdf>

10 October 2006

David H Slavin
dhslavi@emory.edu

Concerning Anna Julia Cooper:

It would be helpful to clarify the provenance of Cooper's doctoral dissertation. My notes below are written without benefit of seeing the this Rowman and Littlefield edition, but it appears to be a reissue if not reprint of *Slavery and the French Revolutionists* translated by Frances Richardson Keller and published by Edwin Mellen Press in 1988.

According to Keller (in her Mellen Press forward), she discovered Cooper's thesis in an obscure corner of the "Regenstein Library" probably the main library of the University of Chicago. She was intrigued by an Anglophone woman getting a French PhD, and upon discovering the author was African American, decided to translate the French version.

In Cooper's privately published autobiography [no date but some time after 1950] she described her dissertation defense. She makes no mention of being called to account for mischaracterizations or inaccuracies, and she was awarded a *diplome' de Docteur des lettres de la Faculte' de Paris*. It was sent by the French government to Washington DC and was presented to Cooper at a ceremony, hosted by the local chapter of the AKA sorority, at Howard University on 29 Dec 1925.

There is a biography of Cooper which was written by Leona C Gabel cited at Dept of History, Smith College, but it isn't clear whether Gabel published it or it remained a manuscript. One article about Cooper appeared in *SIGNS: J of Women...* v 20 no 21 (1995) by Elizabeth Alexander of U Chicago's English Dept. It is concerned mainly with Cooper's collection of essays *A Voice from the South* published in 1892. Cooper's papers, over 20 cartons, are held by Howard University library's Moorland-Spingarn Research Center.

Cooper was in Paris at the same time as Josephine Baker; it is unlikely that they were the only African American in the city women but certainly they are the most prominent. She was defending her dissertation on 23 March 1925, left Paris a month later, just after the outbreak of

the Rif War, and returned to teaching a Dunbar High School in Washington DC.

Lothrop Stoddard, mentioned by Popkin as one of Cooper's sources, was along with Madison Grant one of the leading white supremacist thinker of the post-World War One years. Grant and Stoddard served as advisors to Congress and wrote the exclusionary immigration bill of 1924.

10 October 2006

Leland Barrows
lbarrows@voorhees.edu

Regarding Julia Cooper's doctoral dissertation: It would be good to know what kind of doctorate it really was. Was it a "doctorat d'état", the highest level of doctorate that one could learn in a French public university during a long period when there was a hierarchy of French doctorates? If so, it seems very surprising that the "directeur de thèse" and the "jury" would permit "mischaracterizations or inaccuracies" to stand.

If it was a "doctorat d'université", the lowest level of doctorate available, then one can understand why blemishes, such as those cited by David Slavin, might have remained uncorrected. Although I do not know what such a doctorate was really "worth" in the mid-1920's, in France and overseas, by the 1960's, the "doctorat d'université" had become a credential almost exclusively earned by foreigners who could produce one quickly while on a short visit to a French university (up to a year) and take it home. It had almost no value, for purposes of a teaching and research career, in a French university or lycée and was little respected in neighboring European countries, like Germany.

In American universities, on the other hand, a "doctorat d'université" might be recognized as the equivalent of a PhD awarded by an American university, that is, as the basic "union card" for a publish-or-perish university career. Then if the individual holding a "doctorat d'université" used this degree as the first step in a career of scholarly research and publication, he or she would have the normal career of a publishing university scholar and would be recognized as having earned a normal doctorate.

11 October 2006

Alyssa Sepinwall
sepinwal@csusm.edu

A few notes on Jeremy Popkin's review of the new edition of the translation of Anna Julia Cooper's book and on the subsequent discussion of the topic on the list. First, as David Slavin has noted, Keller's translation isn't actually new: it sounds from Popkin's review as if Scholarly

Resources has simply reissued the 1988 Edwin Mellon edition of Keller's translation of Cooper. It is important to note that at the time that Keller's translation was first published, there were far fewer books in English on the Haitian Revolution (or on the French revolution and slavery) than there are now - even Carolyn Fick's wonderful *Making of Haiti* did not appear until 1990. And long before document readers like Laura Mason's/Tracey Rizzo's included some wonderful colonial-related documents (and John Garrigus's and Laurent Dubois's superb new primary source collection), the appendices in Cooper's book were some of the only translated primary sources on the French Revolution and slavery that could be used with students (along with materials such as George Tyson's 1973 translation of various Toussaint Louverture sources).

As for the question Popkin raises at the end of the review about what drew Cooper to the topic, it is important to note that early 20th C. African-American scholars were working on the topic of the Haitian Revolution at a time when others were not. Cooper was one of a cluster of African-Americans in the 20s, 30s and 40s who did pioneering research on Haiti or on the French Revolution and slavery, including Mercer Cook, Guichard Parris, Rayford Logan, Carter Woodward and Arturo Schomburg. Their interest in Haiti paralleled that of Harlem Renaissance artists such as Jacob Lawrence, and of many American blacks in general, who preserved the history of Haiti in this country during many years when the topic was neglected by whites. I have explored some aspects of African-American memory on Haiti (and American memory on Haiti in general) in my essay "La révolution haïtienne et les États-Unis: Étude historiographique," in *1802. Rétablissement de l'esclavage dans les colonies françaises: Aux origines de Haïti*, eds. Yves Benot and Marcel Dorigny (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2003), 387 - 401.

As for the subsequent discussion on the list: if there were errors in Cooper's text, it should not be surprising that her professors did not "catch" them - nor evidence of her degree being of a lesser quality - but rather a testimony to the fact that professors at the Sorbonne knew virtually nothing about the topic, given the relative amnesia in France about Haitian history until very recently. (I have not read the essay by Sagnac on the colonies that Popkin cites, but certainly the Caribbean was not Sagnac's research speciality). While some of the errors Popkin has caught are more serious, we should also recognize that this edition is, after all, no more than an unrevised doctoral dissertation - a genre in which mistakes are not unknown.

Regarding the idea that Cooper "failed to develop" a radical perspective like C. L. R. James, let us remember the different natures of what they wrote: he was writing a book of his own from the Caribbean, while she was writing a doctoral dissertation to be accepted by white professors in France.

Finally, there are invariably errors in older historiography such as Cooper's, and I take Popkin's point about particular weaknesses in her research. But given the nature of the subsequent discussion of the review, may I suggest that we don't forget about the virtues of older scholarship either. Cooper makes several points in her text which had been nearly forgotten until recently. Indeed, though Cooper discussed it in her book (as did George W. Brown and C. L. R. James in the 1930s), several decades of scholarship overlooked the earliest antislavery debates in the National Assembly (summer 1789) until Professor Popkin himself reemphasized these years at SFHS in 2005. So despite wonderful new scholarship on the colonies, these older texts have not

been made obsolete yet!

11 October 2006

David Slavin
dhslavi@emory.edu

In her autobiography, "The Third Step" Cooper says she received a "diplome de Docteur des Lettres de la Faculte de Paris"

Her soutenance seems to be a cross between a dissertation defense, a PhD oral, and a written essay on "Equality of Races and the Democratic Movement" ("Les Idees egalitaires et le mouvement democratique") question proposed by Prof Bougle' at Soutenance of Thesis: l'Attitude de la France a l'egard de l'Esclavage pendant la Revolution)

11 October 2006

John Harvey
jlharvey@stcloudstate.edu

Hi all:

Brief note on the question of doctorates. I'm doping this off the cuff, but I think my memory is correct.

Remember, the French until recently really did share our idea of a "Dr." or Ph.D. There was no doctorate d'univeriste in the interwar years, as far as I know, at least in the facultes des lettres. You got your "licence es lettres" (if humanities) and did your agregation for the right to be a "professor" at a college or lycee. While there, unless you had another position in the system or exterior funding, you worked on the larger research project, the these d'etat. Along with that until the 1940s was the "petit these," sometimes in Latin, often as a research supplement akin to an annotated bibliography. (If we leave the univeristies and talk about the myriad number of schools/institutes, then doctorates and use become situation dependent). Only when that was approved could you join a faculty, working your way up from charge de cours, to the maitres de conferences, and finally the gradations of a professor (four or five levels for the professors in terms of state pay.) Even a charge de cours usually demanded passing the these d'etat. But on some occasions, however, a university could allow a scholar who had not completed a these d'etat to teach at a university, something akin to a visiting appointment as a charge de cours. He (rarely she) would not have faculty rights though. Once you had the these d'etat too, you could build your patronage network, hopefully to practice what we might call "academic simony" or double dipping the system with two appointments and thus two salaries, one in your university,

one to a "school" like the Musee Sociale.

11 October 2006

Leland C. Barrows
lcbarrows@voorhees.edu

While I would not wish to over do this thread on the meaning and value of French doctorates, I would still like to have somebody pinpoint the sort of doctorate that Anna Julia Cooper earned. If it wasn't strictly speaking a "doctorat d'université", as Professor Harvey implies, neither does it seem to have been a "doctorat d'état" (and the "doctorat troisième cycle" did not exist at that time; it would not be created until after World War II). Moreover, there has been, so far, no mention of a "thèse complémentaire", that in the interwar period always accompanied a "thèse d'état". Also, the implied time period in which Anna Julia Cooper completed her work seems to have been much too short for the successful completion of a full "doctorat d'état".

Was "doctorat de faculté" the name given to what later on would be called "doctorat d'université?"