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Response to Robert Aldrich's review of **Stephen A. Toth**, *Beyond Papillon: The French Overseas Penal Colonies, 1854-1952*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006. xx + 213 pp. Maps, photographs, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. \$35:00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 13-978-0-8032-4449-8.

Response by Stephen A. Toth, Arizona State University, West Campus.

I am grateful to the editors of H-France for the opportunity to respond to Robert Aldrich's review of my book *Beyond Papillon: The French Overseas Penal Colonies, 1854-1952*. I also wish to thank Professor Aldrich for sharing his insight on the *bagnes*, and in particular for his knowledge of New Caledonia and the French colonial world. In his review, however, he raises two basic points that I would like to briefly address.

First, this book was primarily conceived as a response to the work of Michel Foucault whose *Discipline and Punish* offered a broad interpretive sweep of the history of crime and punishment, but provided little in the way of historical nuance or understanding.[1] More recent studies reveal a shift towards work based on deep archival research, especially as it relates to prison records. For instance, Peter Zinoman has argued that the colonial prisons of French Indochina were not sites of methodical bureaucratic control but rather pre-modern jails that had the unintended effect of imbuing in its prisoners--through their shared sense of suffering at the hands of an "antiquated and ill-disciplined" penal regime--a distinct national identity that actually helped facilitate and strengthen anti-French sentiments.[2] Such scholarship represents a move away from Foucauldian abstractions in which all sense of historical contingency is absent, to a new appreciation for how institutions like the prison actually functioned and what its existence and often imperfect operation meant in terms of social control.

By juxtaposing representations of crime and punishment in nineteenth and twentieth-century France with the actual, day-to-day administration of its overseas penal colonies, I attempt to move beyond mythic characterizations to reveal how power, discipline, and control were actually construed and enforced in these prison outposts. In this regard I do not uncover a monolith of surveillance and discipline, but a deeply fractured and poorly-managed domain in which inmates found means of subversion, prison guards resisted militaristic discipline, and camp commanders fought prison physicians for authority. Thus, I offer a new understanding of a carceral practice that was critical to the exercise of authority in nineteenth and twentieth-century France.

In this context it was not my intention to analyze relations between released prisoners and local indigenous groups. I focus primarily upon the inner institutional, administrative, and bureaucratic workings within the penal enterprise itself, and the various collusions and conflicts that arose as a result of its operation. Scholars such as Peter Redfield and Richard Price in the case of French Guiana, and Alice Bullard and Isabelle Merle in the case of New Caledonia have, to greater or lesser degrees, examined the social and cultural exchanges between the two populations and the impact this interaction had in the formation of these two colonial societies.[3] I do, however, explain the relationship of the penal-colonial institution with the Kanaks in my discussion of the increasing number of land concessions provided to freed prisoners at the expense of tribal lands; and the problems this posed for colonial authorities interested in encouraging free settlement in New Caledonia.

On a second and somewhat related note, Professor Aldrich wishes there had been a greater effort to compare and contrast the two penal establishments, yet within each chapter both locales are discussed,

with attention given to the lives of prisoners, the employment of physicians, guards, and colonial administrators, and the myriad representations of the penal colonies by journalists and criminologists. While the book may tilt toward the South American colony this reflects the fact that nearly two-thirds of all prisoners transported overseas were sent to Guiana and that it remained in operation for over a century whereas transportation to New Caledonia was halted after a period of only twenty-five years.[4] For those interested in a broader yet more explicitly comparative perspective of the French colonial empire, I recommend *France's Overseas Empire* by Robert Aldrich and John Connell.[5]

## NOTES

[1] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* trans., Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979).

[2] Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1852-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 7.

[3] Peter Redfield, *Space in the Tropics: From Convicts to Rockets* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Richard Price, *The Convict and the Colonel* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); Alice Bullard, *Exile to Paradise: Savagery and Civilization in Paris and the South Pacific 1790-1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Isabelle Merle, *Expériences coloniales: La Nouvelle-Calédonie, 1853-1920* (Paris: Belin, 1995).

[4] Sylvie Clair, Odile Krakovitch and Jean Préteux, eds., *Établissements pénitentiaires coloniaux, 1792-1952* (Paris: Archives Nationales, 1990), 15.

[5] Robert Aldrich and John Connell, *France's Overseas Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

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