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Josette Rivallain and Hélène d'Almeida-Topor, eds., *Éboué, soixante ans après*. Paris: Publications de la SFHOM, 2008. 432 pp. 40€ (cl). ISBN 2-85970-039-3.

Review by Tony Chafer, University of Portsmouth, UK.

Félix Eboué died in 1944. He is remembered above all as France's first black colonial governor and for his decision, in 1941, to rally the colony he led, Chad, to de Gaulle's Free France, thereby conferring on de Gaulle's Free French a certain legitimacy and providing him with a territorial base from which to launch the liberation of metropolitan France. Following this, he was appointed Governor-General of French Equatorial Africa (Afrique Equatoriale Française: AEF) by de Gaulle and took a leading role in the Brazzaville African Conference of January-February 1944 that recommended wide-ranging reforms to France's colonial empire at the end of the war.

This book is the product of a conference, organised on the sixtieth anniversary of his death, that set out on the one hand, to celebrate Eboué's life and achievements and, on the other, to assess his activity and contributions in a range of different fields, many of which remain little known. The book comprises twenty-five chapters, together with a "Notice biographique," a conclusion by Hélène d'Almeida-Topor, and a series of appendices. The latter include a bibliography of works by and on Félix Eboué, an overview of the Eboué papers held by the Fondation Charles de Gaulle, a copy of a letter Eboué sent to René Plevin in London in July 1942 outlining the development difficulties facing AEF, and a witness account of the Lycée Félix Eboué in Cayenne in the 1950s.

Félix Eboué, like many of France's colonial governors, was a Freemason. Although he only joined in 1922, at the age of thirty-eight, he had long been familiar with the world of Freemasonry. Like his Guyana compatriot, Gaston Monnerville, who was to become a deputy in the National Assembly under the Fourth Republic, Eboué was profoundly influenced by the memory of Victor Schoelcher who, as minister in 1848, had abolished slavery. As for Schoelcher, Eboué's Freemasonry was an expression of his commitment to, and belief in, "la République fraternelle, celle qui en 1848 [avait] apporté la liberté à leurs pères, donc à [eux-mêmes]" (p. 45). Young Guyanan *assimilés* of Eboué's generation believed that the Freemason Jules Ferry and his fellow founders of the Third Republic had, thanks to the policy of assimilation, enabled them to gain access to French culture and citizenship. For them, the fraternity of Freemasonry was thus inseparable from the France of the Rights of Man.

Eboué arrived in Africa (in Oubangui-Chari) for the first time in 1908, imbued with the humanist ideals of the founders of the Third Republic. To be sure, all men were equal, but the colonised, for geographic, historic and sociological reasons, had not reached the level of civilisation of French citizens. It was therefore the task, indeed duty, of the coloniser to bring the colonised up to their level through education and by improving their standard of living. Nonetheless, Eboué was not an assimilationist *pur et dur*, in the sense that he did not believe in eliminating indigenous cultures and remaking the colonised in the image of the coloniser. Rather, he was an advocate of the policy of association and of cultural pluralism within the empire. In this sense, he was typical of a generation of inter-war French colonial humanists, such as Maurice Delafosse, Robert Delavignette and even Marshal Lyautey (of whom he was a great admirer), both attached to the permanence of the French colonial empire and committed to "l'élévation morale et matérielle des populations autochtones [avec le respect de] la dignité de ceux qui vont être appelés à en

bénéficiaire” (p.71).

This excellent collection covers not only the mythical Eboué, who rallied to de Gaulle in 1940, was the first black Governor-General of AEF, one of the first five Compagnons de la Libération and whose remains lie in the Panthéon, but also Eboué at the Ecole Coloniale, Eboué the sports enthusiast and poetry lover, the colonial civil servant, *technicien de la colonisation*, then (briefly) Socialist governor of Martinique and Guadeloupe, prior to his nomination as Governor of Chad. Here, in 1939, he was to meet Henri Laurentie, an enthusiastic Gaullist and colonial reformer, with whom he was to collaborate closely for four years. This section examines “la politique indigène de Félix Eboué” and de Gaulle’s relations with the Eboué-Laurentie tandem (pp. 227-243). Finally, there is a section on the memory of Félix Eboué, examining how Eboué is remembered not only in France, but also in Africa and in his native Caribbean. Eboué emerges from this extraordinarily rich collection as a multi-faceted individual: Freemason, humanist, reformer, poet, sportsman, conciliator and, above all, a loyal servant of France’s colonial empire.

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Tony Chafer
University of Portsmouth, UK
tony.chafer@port.ac.uk

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