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# Félix Éboué: The Second Resister

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Andrew Skabelund

### Félix Éboué: The Second Resister

On July 14, 1944, *The New York Times* reported that French citizens in New York were celebrating both the liberation of Normandy and Bastille Day. The French consul general in New York, Guerin de Beaumont, expressed gratitude for what he called the first time since the beginning of World War II that the French were able to celebrate the holiday in recently freed Normandy without interference. He expressed the hope that “perhaps in another year all of France will be able to celebrate the day so.”<sup>1</sup> Other events in New York were held to celebrate the efforts of the French Resistance to free the country from Nazi control, and several people spoke on the subject of freedom from France: acclaimed author Pearl Buck, president of the France-America Committee Frederic Coudert, and French journalist Genevieve Tabouis. In addition to the speeches, the story of French Resistance was prominently displayed through sixty-nine enlarged photographs in an exhibit entitled “France Alive.”

Among the various displays and celebrations of French resistance and freedom, the Council on African Affairs chose to honor the recently deceased former governor general of Chad, Félix Éboué. The commemoration was approved by General Charles de Gaulle in a telegram, in which he described Éboué as “the first to attack the spirit of capitulation which threatened to engulf all of French Africa, as well as the rest of the empire.”<sup>2</sup> Despite difficult circumstances, Éboué was the first governor general to side with de Gaulle and the Resistance, and he did so unequivocally. His prompt response and ready support were absolutely essential to the success of the French Resistance.

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<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, “Early Freedom of France Cheers Observances of Bastille Day Here.” *New York Times*. 15 July 1944, 4.

<sup>2</sup> *New York Times*, “Early Freedom of France Cheers Observances of Bastille Day Here.” *New York Times*. 15 July 1944, 4.

*The New York Times* reporting clearly shows that during the war, Éboué was viewed as a key member of the Resistance and a contemporary of de Gaulle. Yet despite his integral role in the Resistance and despite being one of the first to oppose capitulation and collaboration with Nazi Germany, Éboué's important contributions to the Resistance have been left out of many discussions and academic scholarship. This paper seeks to explain why Félix Éboué deserves to be considered an integral part of the French Resistance; in addition, it documents the silence of historical sources on Éboué's contributions to the Resistance and posits reasons why he has been forgotten.

### **Éboué the Resister**

Félix Éboué was born in the city of Cayenne, French Guiana on December 26, 1884. He was born both a free man and a French citizen of African origin. After training at the École Colonial in Paris, he worked as a student administrator in Equatorial Africa.<sup>3</sup> Éboué went on to have a distinguished career in the French colonial service, first serving as Secretary-General of Martinique from 1931 to 1934, then as the first black governor of French Soudan from 1934-1936, the governor of Guadeloupe from 1936-1939, and then as the Governor General of the French colony of Chad. Later he was appointed by de Gaulle to be Governor General of French Equatorial Africa. It was during his time as Governor General that he truly made his mark on French history.

On May 10, 1940, Hitler's army began its famous Blitzkrieg assault on France. By May 26, Germany had much of France under control, but not before several hundred thousand British and French troops were ferried across the channel to England. Charles de Gaulle, who was then under-secretary of state for war and opposed the decision to capitulate to the Germans, soon left France for London. On June 18, de Gaulle gave a speech broadcasted on the BBC to his fellow

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<sup>3</sup> *New York Times*, "Gov. Gen. F. Eboue of Central Africa." *New York Times*. 18 May 1944, 19.

countrymen to continue the fight.<sup>4</sup> De Gaulle is often known as the first resister; Éboué can conceivably be viewed as the second. With mainland France firmly under control of the Germans, de Gaulle and his Free French compatriots saw the colonies as potential for “territorial and political legitimacy for a marginalized movement operating out of London.”<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately for de Gaulle and the few Free French supporters in London, most of the colonies remained loyal to the Vichy government. Historian Marc Michel’s work explains that “only Chad ever joined de Gaulle of the free will of its administrators...later ‘rallyings,’ as in Syria in July 1941, Madagascar and north and West Africa from May to November 1942 should all properly be referred to as conquests.” It is important to note that all of these colonial governments were led by white French officials; the only colony to side with France was Chad, led by Éboué, a black French official.

Historian Janet Vaillant notes the irony surrounding Éboué’s decision in comparison with other colonial officials, explaining “at the time of France’s trial, this twice-transplanted African proves more loyal than his French colleagues to the French traditions of patriotism and liberty. He alone of the French colonial administrators seems to understand the implications of collaboration with the Nazis and to possess the courage to move out on his own.”<sup>6</sup> Éboué demonstrated a bravery and understanding that other French leaders failed to display, yet ironically, some of these officials had seen him as being unfit for the job in the first place.

While Éboué’s decision might seem like the obvious right decision today, he stood with de Gaulle in the face of threats to his own life and amidst even greater uncertainty of his family

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<sup>4</sup> Alice Conklin, Sarah Fishman, Robert Zaretsky. *France and its Empire Since 1870*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 213.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Jennings. *Vichy in the Tropics: Petains National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Janet Vaillant. *Black, French, and African: A life of Léopold Sédar Senghor*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

situation. When Éboué decided to side with de Gaulle, he allowed those who supported Vichy to leave for Vichy controlled territories. As these officials left, radio broadcasts emanating from France and West Africa criticized and rebuked those who were supporting de Gaulle, even threatening reprisals against the administrators' families in France if they supported Éboué. Letters also poured in telling officials to take control of the colony and put it in the hands of the Vichy government. They were advised to stop supporting “‘that Negro’ or ‘that Mulatto’ Éboué.’”<sup>7</sup> The personal situation of Éboué and his wife was even more disconcerting. Éboué's two sons had been fighting in France in the French army, and there was no news of their condition or location; their daughter, Ginette, who was also in France had not been heard from. In addition, his extended family was located in France, and anyone could have easily pointed them out to the Vichy or German governments.<sup>8</sup>

In the face of all these threats, Éboué only increased his support to de Gaulle. He sent telegrams to the governor of Niger, inviting him to support de Gaulle. He also contacted other friends, urging them to join his side. Éboué, like de Gaulle, expected a groundswell of support for the Free French movement, but there were none who were brave enough to join him. Despite the other colonies' slow response, Chad provided a strategic outpost that allowed Free French forces to participate in the war. In large measure because of Éboué's aid, the Free French were able to gain control of French Equatorial Africa, which consequently allowed General Phillippe Leclerc and French Equatorial troops to participate on the battlefield in North Africa.<sup>9</sup> *The New York Times* reported that the Lake Chad region provided a base for French forces to attack “German and Italian forces during the fighting in Libya and from which they made their final

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<sup>7</sup> Brian Weinstein. *Éboué*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.

<sup>8</sup> Weinstein, 253.

<sup>9</sup> Patrick Manning. *Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa: 1880-1995*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 136.

invasion of Algiers.”<sup>10</sup> De Gaulle recognized Éboué’s contribution as being very significant, in large part because Éboué provided de Gaulle with the number one thing he lacked: territory.<sup>11</sup> Éboué played a critical, if not pivotal, part in de Gaulle’s resistance efforts. His support cannot be overstated.

### **A poetic representation of Éboué’s response to de Gaulle’s call resistance**

It cannot be disputed that Félix Éboué provided both legitimacy and territory to General de Gaulle’s resistance effort. Perhaps the greatest testament to the relationship between de Gaulle and Éboué is found in the poetry of the eventual president of Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor. Two poems in Senghor’s collection, *Hosties Noires*, explore the deep connection between Éboué and de Gaulle: “Au Guélowâr” and “Au Gouverneur Éboué.” These poems act as a call and response between the two men, and they offer a unique lens through which to see history. Analyzing them in depth provides greater understanding for what de Gaulle and Éboué meant for the Free France resistance movement. Once Éboué’s essential role in the French resistance is understood, it becomes even more apparent that his contributions have been generally overlooked and undervalued.

Senghor wrote most of *Hosties Noires* during his time as a prisoner of war in France. He chose the term, *Hosties Noires*, for its double meaning; the title means both “black victims” and “black hosts.” Host refers to the “sacrificial host of the Catholic Communion. The title suggests therefore that black people have been both victims and sacrifices for European causes.”<sup>12</sup> This idea of a sacrificial Africa plays out in much of Senghor’s collection, and Senghor hopes the African offering will set them on equal footing with the Europeans in the future. Senghor

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<sup>10</sup> *New York Times*, “Gov. Gen. F. Eboué of Central Africa.” *New York Times*. 18 May 1944, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Ginio, 162.

<sup>12</sup> Vaillant, 172.

provides a unique lens into how de Gaulle's call to resistance was perceived and the role that Éboué played in responding.

*Hosties Noires* portrays a conflicted Senghor grappling with feelings of betrayal by the French. The two poems, "Au Guéwâlor" and "Au Gouverneur Éboué," found in the middle of *Hosties Noires*, display Senghor's feelings of despair and hope during the war as well as the role Europe and Africa are to play in the future. Senghor wrote "Au Guéwâlor" when he was a prisoner of war in Amiens. The poem praises the leader of Free France, Charles de Gaulle, and offers him African support. The poem that directly follows in the collection is "Au Gouverneur Éboué" and is in a way, a response to de Gaulle's call for action. The poem praises Félix Éboué for being the first French official to support Charles de Gaulle, and it is dedicated to Éboué's sons, whom Senghor met as a prisoner of war. Senghor connects the two worlds of Africa and Europe by calling de Gaulle an African warrior and by portraying Éboué as a true Frenchman. The two are interconnected. By placing them side by side, Senghor shows that Éboué is every bit of deserving of the title of resistance fighter as de Gaulle is.

Senghor's poem "Au Guélowâr," explains in poetic terms the bravery of de Gaulle and the hope he brought to Africa. It was one of the first poems in the collection that he wrote as a prisoner of war. The poem is Senghor's call for resistance and his commitment to de Gaulle, who had escaped to Britain to lead the Free French movement. Senghor employs the term "guélowâr" in reference to de Gaulle; the word refers to the descendants of the Malinké warriors found in the Senegambia region of West Africa. This royal class of guélowârs became the rulers of the Sine and Saloum kingdoms,<sup>13</sup> and they were characterized by their noble lineage and commitment to

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<sup>13</sup> Janice Spleth. *Léopold Sédar Senghor*. Boston: Twain Publishers, 1985, 82

duty and honor.<sup>14</sup> Senghor sees de Gaulle as a noble warrior, ready to fight for a just cause. It is interesting to note that de Gaulle and “guélowâr” are also phonetically similar, making a connection on an auditory level as well. In the poem, Senghor never mentions de Gaulle’s name, referring to him throughout as “Guélowar.” This omission is in part due to security reasons: writing poetry praising French resistance leaders while living as a prisoner of war was risky, but Senghor’s word choice could imply de Gaulle is somewhere between an African and a Frenchman. Senghor describes a France that Africans can no longer recognize, and de Gaulle does not play a role in this fallen France. Senghor also implies that if de Gaulle turns to African strength, he will be able to bring about a new and better France. For Senghor, it does not matter whether one is African or French, one can still be a resistance fighter.

The poem starts with a call to de Gaulle, “Guélowar!” and how his call has reached the pitiful African soldiers who were being held as prisoners of war in France. Senghor explains their helpless state, describing them like “des petits d’oiseaux tombés du nid,”<sup>15</sup> (small birds fallen from the nest), and how they were betrayed by the France they knew. But de Gaulle has brought hope back into their lives, and after hearing his call, they answer it. This brief sketch is only the framework of the poem, and a deeper study is needed to better understand Senghor’s message.

According to the poem, the African soldiers heard de Gaulle’s call for freedom with “les oreilles de notre Coeur,”<sup>16</sup> (the ears of our heart), meaning it penetrated them deeply. De Gaulle’s “Appeal” resonated with them and brought them light while they were prisoners; addressing de Gaulle, Senghor says, “Lumineuse, ta voix a éclaté la nuit de notre prison” (your

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<sup>14</sup> Samuel Adeoya Ojo. “The Reluctant Hero in Senghor’s *Hosties Noires*.” *Critical Perspectives on Léopold Sédar Senghor*. Colorado Springs: Three Continents Press, 1993, 139.

<sup>15</sup> Senghor, Léopold Sédar. *Poèmes*. “Au Guélowar.” Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984, 72

<sup>16</sup> Senghor, 72.



voice has burst radiantly through our prison night).<sup>17</sup> How Senghor came to hear or know of de Gaulle's speech is unclear, but there was some level of free exchange with the outside world when he was a prisoner of war. He received letters and packages from Jacqueline Cahour, sister-in-law of future French president Georges Pompidou.<sup>18</sup> However he learned of it, whether through friends or through the camp, Senghor believed it was a ray of sunshine for all who were in such a depressed state. De Gaulle represented the true spirit of what it meant to be French.

Senghor then compares de Gaulle's voice to that of a lion, "comme celle du Seigneur de la brousse," (like the roar of the Lord of the bush).<sup>19</sup> De Gaulle's strong and powerful voice rings out for all to hear like that of the king of the savannah. It is striking that just five lines into the poem, Senghor has already compared de Gaulle to two different distinctly African beings, both with positive connotations. The first comparison is "Guélowar," and the second is a lion. Senghor seems to be implying that de Gaulle is part African, and he is not like the France that has chosen to concede. This idea is developed more fully in the poem about Éboué, where he shows how Éboué is a true Frenchman.

Senghor then turns to his own pitiable state and that of his fellow soldiers. De Gaulle's message excited them, and "quel frisson a parcouru l'onde de notre échine courbe" (what a thrill raced up the spines of our bent backs).<sup>20</sup> Despite being bent over from years of oppression, mistreatment that began even before the war, de Gaulle brings hope with his call. Despite this ray of hope, the soldiers are birds fallen from their nests; they are "des corps privés d'espoir et qui se fanent" (drooping bodies without hope).<sup>21</sup> Senghor paints a picture of empty bodies that are shells of what they used to be. He also compares the soldiers to "des fauves aux griffes

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<sup>17</sup> Senghor, 72

<sup>18</sup> Vaillant, 179

<sup>19</sup> Senghor, 72

<sup>20</sup> Senghor, 72

<sup>21</sup> Senghor, 72

rognées, des soldats désarmés, des hommes nus” (Beasts with clipped claws, soldiers without weapons, naked men).<sup>22</sup> While de Gaulle is a mighty lion, the soldiers feel powerless: they are animals robbed of their ability to fight. Later these soldiers find voice through the roaring response of Félix Éboué.

Senghor continues this idea of alienation from the France they once knew. The country became a stranger that did not answer their calls at night and was no longer recognizable. Senghor then launches into a critique of both the Catholic Church and French government officials. “Les princes de l’Église se sont tus, les hommes d’état ont clamé le magnanimité des hyènes” (The Princes of the Church remained silent, and statesmen claimed the magnanimity of hyenas).<sup>23</sup> Senghor does not shy away from criticizing the French leadership, who he believes should be acting in a more dignified manner. Senghor implies that the French political and religious leaders who have chosen to support the Vichy government and the Nazi regime are hyenas in comparison with de Gaulle and Éboué; they are cowardly and pathetic. For Senghor, it is an easy decision whom to follow and support; de Gaulle is by far the nobler candidate.

Senghor concludes the poem by addressing a reply to the Guélowâr telling him of the hope that his call has brought. “Ta voix nous dit l’honneur l’espoir et le combat, et ses ailes s’agitent dans notre poitrine” (Your voice tells us of honor, hope, and battle and its wings rustle in our chest). Senghor says that de Gaulle has brought them optimism for the future, but for Senghor, the future is not only an end to the war that frees France but a brighter future for both Africa and France. “Ta voix nous dit la République, que nous dresserons la Cité dans le jour bleu, dans l’égalité des peuples fraternels” (your voice tells us Republic, that we will build the

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<sup>22</sup> Senghor, 72

<sup>23</sup> Senghor, 73

City in the Blue daylight, in the equality of fraternal people).<sup>24</sup> Senghor is expressing a revolutionary idea that France and its African colonies will be able to stand side by side on equal footing following the war. Senghor goes on to provide a resounding affirmation of African soldier support by saying they answer de Gaulle, “Présent, ô Guélowâr” (Present, O Guélowâr).<sup>25</sup> Senghor makes it clear that despite all they have suffered by being committed to France, they still stand firm with the ideals set forth by de Gaulle. But Senghor is equally clear that they expect a better future where they are on equal footing with their French brothers. Senghor argues in this poem that Africa and Europe are best served by working together for a better future. And for Senghor, the African addition is best embodied in that of Félix Éboué.

Senghor’s next poem in the *Hosties Noires* collection, entitled “Au Gouverneur Éboué,” deals more extensively with this idea of sacrifice. In the poem, Senghor directs his praise to Félix Éboué. For Senghor, Éboué provides a telling example of the paradoxical nature of French colonialism. A black French governor of African descent, Éboué proved more loyal to the ideals of France than his white counterparts. After Éboué announced his backing of de Gaulle, many French administrators throughout Africa became angry with Éboué and pressured him to go back on his decision. Éboué saw himself and those who supported de Gaulle as being truly French. He said, “We will remain French in spite of the illegitimate masters...On your feet, sons of the Empire, for the salvation of the homeland.”<sup>26</sup>

Senghor wrote “Au gouverneur Éboué” in 1942 in Paris soon after his release from prison camp. Senghor was released from prison because of illness, and his time in Paris was supported in part by Georges and Claude Pompidou. While many scholars focus on the last three lines of the poem from which comes the name of the collection “Hosties Noires,” much of the rest of the

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<sup>24</sup> Senghor, Léopold Sédar. *Poèmes*. “Au Gouverneur Éboué.” Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984: 73.

<sup>25</sup> Senghor, 73

<sup>26</sup> Weinstein, 253

poem has been overlooked. In poetic form, Senghor explains Éboué's qualities, comparing him to a rock as well as a lion standing up to face the desperation of the war. Éboué is definitely seen as an equal to de Gaulle in his ability to stand up against despotism. Senghor also praises the role of African soldiers through his admiration of Éboué and his fight to free the world from the oppression. Senghor uses the example of Éboué to portray the African role as essential in the war effort, and he also attempts to convince his European and colonial audiences of the essential and valuable role that colonial people play in the war and in society afterwards. While this is the rough outline of the poem, it is helpful to take a deeper look at it.

Senghor implies that the freedom of France now rests upon the people that France has subjugated, just as the Germans have subjugated France. Senghor compares Éboué to a rock, calling him "la pierre sur quoi se batit le temple et l'espoir" (the rock on which the church and hope are built), which is a clear reference to Christ's conversation with Peter in the New Testament. In this exchange, Christ tells Peter, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."<sup>27</sup> In this case, Éboué is Peter and the church is France. The impending hell is the gruesome reality of World War II. Éboué is France's hope for salvation as well as the foundation that will support France through its difficult days. Senghor then changes Éboué's name to Peter, saying "Et ton nom signifie "la pierre" tu n'es plus Félix; je dis Pierre Éboué." (And your name means "the rock" and I say you are no longer Felix, but Peter Éboué).<sup>28</sup> Changing his name to Peter has greater significance in French because Pierre means both Peter and rock, emphasizing the stabilizing force that Éboué provides. Towards the end of the poem, Senghor recalls the rock motif once again, saying Éboué "es pierre qui amasse mousse, parce que tu es stable et tu es debout." (You are the stone that gathers moss,

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<sup>27</sup> Mathew 16:18

<sup>28</sup> Senghor, 73

for you are steady and you stand so tall).<sup>29</sup> Senghor evokes an image of a rock that will not be removed by force or time and can serve as a solid foundation for an unstable France. Éboué is critical for France's effort to regain its position in the world.

In addition to calling Éboué a rock, Senghor compares him to a lion responding to the call for action from the lion de Gaulle in the previous poem. Éboué is one who stands against the tide of violence sweeping the world, as "the black Lion with prophetic eyes."<sup>30</sup> Here Senghor is implying that Éboué's visionary eyes are able to see what other Europeans have not been able to see -- the true nature of the fascist dictators -- and Éboué demonstrates this foresight by standing firmly on the side of de Gaulle. This reference is not just a commendation of Éboué's actions but an indirect criticism of collaborationist French leaders, the hyenas in the previous poem, who are not able to see their wrongs. Senghor also describes Éboué as "le Lion au cri bref, le Lion qui es debout et qui dit non !" (the Lion with the quick shout, the Lion who stands tall, who says no!).<sup>31</sup> Senghor explains how Éboué does not need to philosophize or hedge his bets on what would be best for himself personally; Éboué knows what is right, and he does it. The lion image could also be an additional reference to the apostle Peter once again. Peter was timid and denied Christ three times at the time of Christ's trial, but after seeing the resurrected Christ, he spoke without fear; he became a lion. Éboué, like Peter, does not speak with timidity despite difficult circumstances or potential personal costs.

Senghor also calls Éboué the pride of Africa, the "la fierté simple de l'Afrique mienne, la fierté d'une terre vidée de ses fils" (You are the simple pride of my Africa, the pride of a land drained of all her sons).<sup>32</sup> Senghor appears amazed that despite all of the repression and slavery

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<sup>29</sup> Senghor, 74

<sup>30</sup> Senghor, 74

<sup>31</sup> Senghor, 74

<sup>32</sup> Senghor, 74

imposed on Africa, the draining of its sons, it still stands tall through the likes of Éboué. “Et trois siècles du sueur n’ont pu soumettre ton échine.” (And three centuries of sweat have not bent your back).<sup>33</sup> All the years of colonization have not been enough to ruin the Africans, and they are still able to stand straight. Senghor truly sees Éboué and Africa as the salvation of Europe.

Despite Senghor’s positive outlook, he does not diminish the danger of the war nor the sacrifice that is required of Africans. He describes the war by saying, “les jeunes dieux de proie se sont dressés, ils lancent leurs yeux sillonnés d’éclairs. Ils ont lancé devant eux l’ouragan et les faucons planant sur les hordes de fer.” (The young gods of prey have risen, hurling their lightning-streaked eyes. They have hurled the storm before them and the falcons soar over the hordes of iron and the whole earth has trembled far away under the massive charge of pride).<sup>34</sup> The war is described as massive chaos, and the whole world trembles. This description of the war serves to make Éboué’s decision all the more impressive: he made the decision to back de Gaulle in the face of overwhelming odds.

In what could be seen as a third reference to Peter, Senghor tells Éboué “mille peuples et mille langues ont pris langue avec ta foi rouge” (A thousand people and a thousand tongues have found voice in your red faith).<sup>35</sup> Not only is Senghor saying that Éboué represents Africa, a country of many people and many languages, and is speaking for them, but he could also be referencing Peter’s speech at the feast of the Pentecost where many people were gathered from different nations. Peter, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is able to speak so that all gathered understand him without need of translation.<sup>36</sup> Senghor believes that not only is Éboué the type of unifying example who can speak for all of Africa, he is also an example to the

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<sup>33</sup> Senghor, 74

<sup>34</sup> Senghor, 74

<sup>35</sup> Senghor, 74

<sup>36</sup> Acts: 2

French. Just as Peter calls the Jews to repentance at the Pentecost, Éboué calls for France to turn from its unrighteous ways.

To conclude his poem, Senghor explains that as Africa rises up, its people will serve as a sacrifice to purify and redeem mankind from the war. Senghor says Africa “s’est fait acier blanc, l’Afrique s’est faite hostie noir” (Africa made itself white steel, African made itself black host).<sup>37</sup> As mentioned before the term “hostie noire” has multiple interpretations: black host, black victim. It symbolizes both the repression Africa has undergone as well as its sacrifice to make Europe what it is. During the war, Africa is once again called on to sacrifice itself “so the hope of man can live.” Senghor is telling both the Europeans and Africans that the Africans are worth more than they realize; Africa has redeeming qualities for Europe, and Éboué is the greatest example.

Éboué would go on to serve as the governor General of French Equatorial Africa, and would lead the fight against Vichy France and the Axis. In February 1941, de Gaulle awarded Éboué the Order of the Liberation, which is the second highest French honor that could be bestowed upon an individual who did something of significance in order to free France.<sup>38</sup> On May 20, after his death, France enshrined Éboué in the Pantheon, a place reserved for the greatest heroes in French history.

### **Overlooking Éboué**

Author Raoul Aglion published *The Fighting French* in 1943, well before mainland France had been liberated. In the book, he details the Free French efforts to take back Africa. He praised Éboué for immediately proving “a tower of strength to the resistance movement.”<sup>39</sup> Recognizing that “the greatest addition to Fighting French territory” was French Equatorial

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<sup>37</sup> Senghor, 74

<sup>38</sup> Weinstein 251.

<sup>39</sup> Aglion, 122

Africa.<sup>40</sup> None of this would have been possible without Éboué's support of de Gaulle. Although many contemporary observers saw Éboué as a major support for the Free French resistance, later historical accounts regarding this time period have undervalued and sometimes ignored his addition to the Resistance. Two books that illustrate this unconscious oversight which deserve a closer look are Peter Davies' *France and the Second World War*, published in 2001, and Alice Conklin's *France and its Empire since 1870*, published in 2011. Both books show that even recent texts display a disregard for Éboué's contributions to the Free French resistance.

In his book, Davies attempts to "introduce the reader to an important and highly controversial period of French history: world war and occupation."<sup>41</sup> Davies gives an interesting and concise introduction into a complex era in French history. Despite the fact that Davies was not attempting to provide a complete picture, his explanations are insightful nonetheless. In the middle of the book, Davies seeks to explain the different types of resistance. He explains that despite the myriad definitions of resistance, "it is agreed that the most obvious sub-division occurs between 'external' and 'internal resistance.'"<sup>42</sup> Davies's next line betrays the lack of recognition for Éboué's and Africa's resistance efforts; here he quotes another historian saying that external and internal resistance can be classified as "the Resistance of the Interior and the men of London." It is striking to see that the definition "external" resistance is the "men of London." This passage is an example of the Eurocentric approach that has long plagued a holistic understanding of the French resistance. While Davies does show the complexities in defining and providing examples of the definition of resistance, these different forms are primarily found in the Interior. Not once is Éboué or an African resistance mentioned.

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<sup>40</sup> Raoul Aglion. *The Fighting French*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943, 121

<sup>41</sup> Peter Davies. *France and the Second World War*. London: Routledge, 2001, 52

<sup>42</sup> Davies, 52



Davies goes on to discuss the external resistance, and while he does mention that de Gaulle “encouraged the growth of ‘support groups’ all over the world,” he does not mention the key role that Éboué and others played. Much of Davies’s focus on the external resistance focuses around de Gaulle, and it does not provide much information on areas outside of France and the resisters of London.

Ten years after Davies’ book, *France and its Empire* was published. While Conklin does provide more information about resistance in Guadeloupe, which was in protest to the Vichy government’s revocation of their right to send representatives to the National Assembly, the overall account of the Resistance is in many ways similar to Davies’s account.

Conklin gives excellent background on the definition of French resistance in World War

## II. She explains that

some scholars define resistance in narrow, military terms. Resisting meant taking direct action against the German occupiers, military action such as combat, sabotage, assassination, bombing, or the dangerous activities of publishing and distributing Resistance newspapers, flyers, and posters. That definition would include the 7,000 or so French soldiers who joined de Gaulle’s Free French movement in London in 1940.<sup>43</sup>

It is clear from this passage that the most basic definition of resistance is that of action in France and directly across the Channel. There is no mention of the resistance that took place in Africa and certainly no mention of Éboué.<sup>44</sup> Like Davies, Conklin expands the definition of resistance to those in France who participated in less confrontational ways. Conklin goes from those who actively resisted to those who “collected and passed information to the Allies or to de Gaulle in London.” She also includes those who provided sustenance such as food and shelter to

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<sup>43</sup> Conklin, 231

<sup>44</sup> To be fair, Éboué is mentioned earlier in the book, and Conklin explains that “Eboué’s decision to join de Gaulle nevertheless allowed the latter to gain control of the remainder of French Equatorial Africa in November 1940 and gave de Gaulle a base of operations there that would later prove decisive” (Conklin, 213) However, Éboué is not considered, or presented as a resistance fighter. He and his fellow officials in Africa’s contributions are almost seen as something entirely ancillary.

Resistance fighters, as well as those who listened to BBC French broadcasts or who lied to police about the whereabouts of their neighbors. The section then mentions people who took part in what is called “dissidence.” This ranged from yelling insults at policemen to the zaouzou dancers who subverted Pétain’s effort for moral order. Historians have done an excellent job fleshing out and expanding our understanding of what it meant to be in the Resistance in the European field, yet the expansion of the idea of French resistance stops at its European borders, betraying once again the Eurocentric approach to French resistance.

The previous two examples provide insight into how historians have perceived the Resistance. If zaouzou dancers can be included as resisters because their scandalous dancing was subversive, then someone like Éboué, who risked everything for France, deserves at the very least to be mentioned among the Resisters. Unfortunately, it is quite common for books to fail to notice Éboué’s contribution. Nicholas Atkin’s *The French at War*, published in 2001, goes over resistance in detail, yet the external focus is also very much focused on de Gaulle, and there is not a single reference to Éboué. Blake Ehrlich’s *Resistance: France 1940-1945*, published in 1965, and Frida Knight’s *The French Resistance*, published in 1975, also focus on the European theater of resistance, and there is no mention of Éboué’s contributions. Likewise John F. Sweets’ *The Politics of Resistance in France, 1940-1944*, published in 1976, makes no reference to Éboué. And finally, Julian Jackson’s *France; The dark years: 1940-1944*, published in 2001, discusses the Free French and internal resistance fighters with no specific mention of Éboué. These books are the base of the literature dealing with French resistance. Many other books only make passing references to Éboué’s contributions but generally not in the context of the Resistance. One would be hard pressed in a library to find books that value Éboué’s significant contribution to the French resistance movement.

## Reasons for Forgetting Éboué

There are many possible reasons why Éboué has not been featured prominently in the Resistance. One obvious reason is the difficulty of fitting Éboué in the traditional resistance narrative. A French official situated half a continent away does not lend itself into inclusion with a book about the French resistance that generally invokes the European mainland. In some books, it would likely be awkward or clunky to add, and there is likely no intentional bias against a seemingly obscure French official. But the French Equatorial African contribution to the French resistance has long been overlooked. Historian Eric Jennings has likely noticed that gap; the working title of his forthcoming book reads “La France libre fut africaine” (The Free French were African). His book will provide much needed understanding of the value that French Equatorial Africa played in the Free French resistance, none of which would have been possible without Éboué. As has been discussed above, much of the research has been very Eurocentric, and has not given proper recognition to the African support provided to combat Nazi Germany and collaboration with the Vichy government.

Another challenge to Éboué being considered a resistance leader would be French memory. A simple glance at Wikipedia shows that both the French and the English pages explaining the French resistance do not mention Éboué.<sup>45</sup> He is however cursorily mentioned in English version of the Free French Forces Wikipedia page but not in the French version. Although not scientific, this quick comparison shows that Éboué often falls outside of the general memory of the French resistance movement. This brings up possibilities as to what might have affected the memory of Éboué’s contribution.

Memory of resistance and collaboration has long been a convoluted and complex arena. France had to grapple with the reality that many had collaborated with Nazi Germany, and it was

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<sup>45</sup> "French Resistance," "Free French Forces," "Forces Françaises libres." "Résistance intérieure française," [Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Resistance). Available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French\\_Resistance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Resistance). Internet; accessed 29 July 2011.

in a difficult mental state following the end of the war. In an effort to deal with this painful memory, de Gaulle set forth what has now become known as the myth of de Gaulle. In many speeches, like one he gave June 16, 1946, he set for the myth of France as a country of “40 million resisters.”<sup>46</sup> In an effort to provide healing and unity in a shattered country, de Gaulle put forward the idea that all French people were resisters, at least at heart. He did set forth the idea that there was an “elite” group that led the way, but he claimed that everyone else was right behind them, supporting them all the way. This “Gaullist myth” devalued the contributions of those like Éboué. If everyone had been a resistance fighter, why should someone like Éboué matter? It was slightly embarrassing to have a French official of African origins prove to be a greater Frenchman than most anyone else. Although it is impossible to tell, it is likely that the Gaullist myth diluted the resistance efforts of Éboué and made it easier to undervalue him. Along with the “40 million resisters myth, there had also been the myth of the Empire rising to de Gaulle’s call instantaneously.<sup>47</sup> This was however not the case, but a collective memory of an Empire rising up to support France would only serve to diminish Éboué’s role. In this myth, his was not the lone voice responding to the call of liberty.

De Gaulle’s version of resistance would be the standard, despite some efforts to counteract it, until the 1970s. During this time period, there were several writers and activists who questioned de Gaulle’s interpretation of events and brought forward examples of French collaboration with the Vichy government and Nazi Germany. However, this new narrative did little to turn attention to African resistance movements and to the contributions of Éboué. Many who would question de Gaulle’s myth were also questioning de Gaulle’s essential role in the

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<sup>46</sup> Conklin, 239

<sup>47</sup> Jennings, 10

Resistance. This would have only served to diminish Éboué's standing, as he was linked to de Gaulle.

Not only has France had a difficulty grappling with the complexities of resistance fighters, it has also had challenges recognizing and valuing the contributions its colonial troops sacrificed for the war. This inability to recognize its colonial subjects' sacrifices was only made worse by its efforts following World War II to regain its ancient glory and vast empire. How can one remember blacks like Éboué and other African support when one is trying to regain control of its subjects? France was likely blinded by its feelings of superiority and vestiges of its colonial civilizing mission.

Whatever role these different ideas played in overlooking Éboué's contribution is currently unknown, but it is likely that they had some impact in diminishing the attention historians have paid to him. It is clear that Éboué provided much needed support to de Gaulle's resistance efforts in a time of crisis, and it is also readily apparent that his sacrifice has not been given the attention it deserves. The hope is that he, and other African resistance players, can be included in future discussions on French resistance. For if anyone can lay claim title to "the second resister," it is Éboué.

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