

# Colonialism, Race and Slavery in Raynal's *Histoire des Deux Indes*

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## The author

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## The paper

Abbé Guillaume-Thomas Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, generally known as the *Histoire des deux Indes*, was one of the best-sellers of the Eighteenth Century. It has recently attracted more attention, including in the English-speaking world, and a critical edition is in progress. It contains denunciations of European behavior in overseas possessions and of the slave trade and slavery, many of them penned by Diderot, and it has been categorized as an anticolonial work, hostile to European imperialism, and even as part of the so-called 'Radical Enlightenment'. This paper attempts to provide a more accurate and nuanced picture of the work as a whole, going beyond Diderot's contributions, on which critical attention has generally concentrated. I first of all re-establish some of the facts about its authorship and the circumstances of its composition, before looking at the treatment of colonisation, race and slavery, essentially in Book XI. This book is mainly devoted to Africa, and contains the famous discussion of slavery, ending in its violent denunciation and foreseeing a bloody slave revolt. An analysis of changes in the text over the work's different editions (1770, 1774 and 1780), paying attention to the discussion as a whole, including the description of Africa and of the European slave trade on the West coast, brings out the tensions, ambiguities and even contradictions of Raynal's work. These contradictions reveal both those of France's colonial policy in the period after the Seven Years' War and the tensions of European thinking about the rest of the world in the Eighteenth Century.