

1st International **CONFERENCE**
ON
MIGRATIONS

Migration research at a crossroads

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Imperial policies and indentured labor migration in the Caribbean (19th century)

Organized by
the French Collaborative Institute on Migration

**A. India: the only perennial but inaccessible
indentured laborers source**

B. French blackmail: Indian workers versus African workers

Letter of March 12, 1852, from Minister of Navy and Colonies, to Minister of Foreign Affairs:

« Je crois que les bases de la négociation doivent être modifiées ; qu'elle doit porter à la fois sur l'immigration indienne et sur l'immigration africaine, de manière que du rapprochement de ces deux termes naisse une alternative qui nous laisse, en définitive, maîtres d'une partie du terrain. »

« I believe that the basis of the negotiation must be changed; that it must deal with both Indian immigration and African immigration, so that by bringing these two terms together an alternative is created that ultimately leaves us in control of part of the field. »

Source: Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, ADP, Inde, Carton 1.

Decree of 13 February 1852 on immigration and hiring in the colonies

Decree of 27 March 1852 on emigration from Europe and outside Europe to the French colonies

Source: *Bulletin Officiel* ,1852, number 3724 and 3958.

Letter of May 5, 1852, from Minister of Foreign Affairs, to French ambassador in London:

« Il serait bien difficile, si l'interdiction actuelle était maintenue [de recruter des Indiens en territoire anglais], de dissuader nos colons de recourir à des engagements sur la côte d'Afrique parmi des indigènes esclaves préalablement émancipés, [...] une exclusion que les nouvelles mesures prises par le département de la Marine [les deux décrets de 1852] semblerait devoir rendre désormais sans motif et, qui d'ailleurs s'accorderait mal avec les relations amicales qui existent entre les deux États. »

« It would be very difficult, if the present prohibition were maintained [of recruiting Indians in English territory], to dissuade our colonists from having recourse to engagements on the coast of Africa among previously emancipated native slaves, [...] an exclusion which the new measures taken by the Navy Department [the two decrees of 1852] would seem to render henceforth without cause, and which, moreover, would be ill-suited to the amicable relations which exist between the two States. »

Source: Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, ADP, Inde, Carton 1.

article 4 of this convention concluded on May 29, 1845 between France and Great Britain. Ratified on June 7, 1845.

"Treaties for the suppression of the slave trade will be negotiated with the princes or native chiefs of the part of the west coast of Africa above designated, as it will seem necessary to the commanders of the French and English squadrons."

« Des traités pour la suppression de la Traite des Noirs seront négociés avec les princes ou chefs indigènes de la partie de la côte occidentale d'Afrique ci-dessus désignée, selon qu'il paraîtra nécessaire aux commandants des escadres Françaises et Anglaises. »

Source: De Clercq, *recueil des traités de la France*, tome 4, p.279.

Thus, how could France justify prohibiting them from selling captives on the one hand and buying them on the other.

Number of Indentured Laborers arrived in the French Caribbean Post-Slavery

- **Indentured laborers from Africa (1854-1862): 18 520 (17 050 « captive repurchased »)**

Guyane: 1 826

Guadeloupe: 6 142

Martinique: 10 552

- **Indentured laborers from India (1853-1884): 76 854**

Guyane: 8 472

Guadeloupe: 42 873

Martinique: 25 509

- **Indentured laborers from China (1859-1860): 1 562**

Guyane: 156

Guadeloupe: 428

Martinique: 978