

*Descendants of Caribbean slaves
break silence around France's
shameful past*

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Nantes, April 4 (RHC)-- Descendants of the Caribbean people enslaved by France have come forward to raise awareness about the country's blotted history of slave trade.

France was responsible for 11% of the transatlantic slave trade. From 15th to the 19th century, at least 12.5 million men, women, and children were kidnapped and forcibly transported by European ships and sold into slavery.

"The more I got into the story, the more anger there was," said Dieudonne Boutrin, a descendant. "(So) I decided to put all my energy into paying tribute to these men and women."

Boutrin is the president of the Nantes-based Coque Nomade-Fraternité, an association that wants to "break the silence" around slavery through education. Statistics show 27% of those enslaved by France were children.

About 13% died during the grueling "middle passage" voyage across the Atlantic.

Boutrin's association is raising funds to finish a 2018 project to build a replica of an 18th century ship that transported captive Africans enslaved by the French. "People will be able to understand the conditions the captives lived in," Boutrin said.

Through the association, Boutrin joined Guillon de Prince, to give guided tours that explore Nantes' links to slavery. De Prince has always known his ancestors were involved in slavery as ship-owners. That made him look deeper into the tainted past of France and work with Boutrin.

Hundreds of years after the abolition of slavery, Black people are still victims of racism in France. In a survey conducted in 2023 of Black and mixed-race people living in mainland France, nine out of ten respondents -- 91 percent -- said they personally experience racial discrimination in their daily lives.

Several cases of police using excessive force against Black people in recent years have highlighted accusations of systemic racism in the French police.

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