Eric T. Jennings. *Escape from Vichy: The Refugee Exodus to the French Caribbean.*
Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018. 308 pp. Maps, illustrations, index. ISBN:
9780674983380 ($35.00 • £28.95 • €31.50).

URL: http://tiny.cc/E173

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During the great wartime diaspora from Europe, around 5000 of those who had managed to flee occupied France from 1940 until 1941 boarded ships bound for Martinique, and thence to the United States, Mexico or other destinations. Eric Jennings's book provides a comprehensive and fascinating study of that hitherto largely unexplored escape route, the men and women who travelled in the ships and sojourned briefly in the French West Indian territory (and some who failed to get passage), and the reciprocal effects on the local and European population of the Caribbean encounter. Based on extensive research in archives in metropolitan France, Martinique, the United States and elsewhere, as well as a close reading of the published and unpublished memoirs of the refugees and of decision-makers who allowed or thwarted their flight from France, and consideration of creative literary and artistic works, Jennings' book makes an original and important contribution to the historical literature on the Second World War, the Occupation, colonialism, and the artistic movements of Surrealism and *Négritude*. His accumulation of sources, piecing together of ship rosters and biographical details, and analysis of policy papers and correspondence, gives evidence of detective-like research which allows for biographies of refugees and consideration of the wider European and international conditions.

Those fearing for their lives in Nazi Germany and in both German-controlled and Vichy France encompassed Jews, Communists, Spanish Republicans, avant-garde intellectuals and others at odds with Adolf Hitler's regime and Marshal Philippe Pétain's 'French State.' Escape, however, required a stack of entry and exit documents and a visa for an ultimate destination, documentation that for many proved near impossible to obtain, especially given the obduracy and stonewalling of officials in Germany, France, and in potential countries of refuge, such as the United States. Long queues, persistent requests, the use of intermediaries, and substantial time, funds, and energy were necessary to procure a rare ticket on a ship and authorisation to board. Meanwhile, pathways to escape became fewer and fewer, or closed altogether. By late 1940, Lisbon and Marseille remained two of the only ports through which Europeans could find a way out; the route from the French Mediterranean port to somewhere else, via Martinique, for a period offered a lifeline.

Jennings discusses the arduous efforts of refugees desperately trying to avail themselves of that possibility. He also reflects on the ways in which allowing them to leave was portrayed by the Vichy regime as a humanitarian gesture, but also represented expulsion of 'undesirables' in light of the precepts of Pétain's National Revolution and pressure from German authorities. As Jennings nicely puts it, "at the entry point of the Martinique corridor, motivations varied, while moral imperatives both collided and coalesced" (79). Ironically, for Vichy's administrators in Martinique, the refugees' presence was also undesirable, especially given the island's small size, scarcities of basic provisions, the anti-Semitic regulations of the local Vichy-aligned government and latent tensions between the European elite and the black majority. Many of the refugees, Jennings also demonstrates, were seen as just as undesirable by the Americans, who feared that in their midst lurked Nazi operatives and others capable of subversion in the United States. Indeed, it was because of American pressure on Vichy that the Martinique route was closed, so Washington bears much culpability for cutting off this conduit for escape.

The refugees' lives in Europe had been hellish, with Germans among the 35,000 foreigners interned in detention camps in the French Midi by the autumn of 1940. Most of the French and non-French who boarded the ships to Martinique left with few if any belongings; the month-long voyage on crowded vessels was arduous and perilous (in part because of German U-boats in the Atlantic), though passengers developed a certain conviviality, as photographs show. On arrival in Martinique, after harsh interrogations, non-French citizens were again generally confined to camps (and charged dearly for their internment), where conditions of hygiene, nutrition, privacy and social life were poor. French citizens were allowed to live in Fort-de-France or outlying towns but with restrictions on their activities and surveillance by the authorities, who were concerned about espionage and subterfuge. The refugees' reactions to the West Indies varied, some still trying to work through the trauma of exile while facing an unknown future, others more able to enjoy the luxuriant scenery and ambiance of the tropics. It is also clear, however, that exiles sometimes shared with many of their contemporaries racist stereotypes and prejudices concerning those of African descent.

Jennings provides case studies of refugee experiences in thumbnail portraits. Attention necessarily focusses on those for whom the most information is available, including a formidable array of intellectuals and artists. With such an assembly of notable figures going to Martinique, there was practically a floating symposium on board some vessels – on one single ship (on which two-thirds of refugees were Jewish) sailed the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, the Surrealist leader André Breton, the artists Wilfredo Lam and Jacqueline Lamba, the photographer Germaine Krull, the novelist Anna Seghers, the film-writer Jacques Rémy, the anti-Stalinist Russian revolutionary Victor Serge and various distinguished academics and medical practitioners. (One who, tragically, was unable to get from France to Martinique was Marc Bloch; the Vichy government allowed the historian to leave but not his family, and he chose to remain; he was later executed by the Germans.)

One of Jennings's most engaging chapters concerns the interactions between the foreign cultural figures, in particular Breton and Lam, and Martinican intellectuals such as Aimé and Suzanne Césaire. Césaire—who subsequently dominated Martinique's intellectual and political life for decades—had only recently returned from Paris, where he had played a key role (along with the Senegalese Léopold Sedar Senghor) in the emergence of the *Négritude* movement, which sought to valorise African history and civilisation and, also, to experiment with innovative styles of literary expression. That effort concorded felicitously with the Surrealists' approach, and a new Martinican journal *Tropiques*—the first issue of which Breton discovered by happenstance soon after his arrival—provided a forum for works by and about West Indians and Europeans. A painting such as the splendid "Jungle" by Wilfredo Lam, Cuban-born but long resident in France, found

inspiration in the landscape of Martinique (as did works by André Masson), and Césaire's poetry and plays bore the influence of Surrealist style. Politics and culture intertwined in what Jennings labels an "improbable, yet, fecund, set of confluences" (231) in Martinique. Suzanne Césaire remarked, no doubt thinking of the literary works in *Tropiques* (including those of her husband) and Breton: "Not for a moment during the hard years of Vichy domination did the image of freedom completely fade here, and Surrealism was responsible for that" (211).

Martinique was for most of the refugees a way-station, and even what Jennings calls a "purgatory" (53), but for some it provided an important point of contact with the world outside Europe, a new experience of colonial situations (and of growing anti-colonialism), and a discovery of burgeoning African Caribbean cultural life. The refugees finally went their separate ways, though distinct traces of their brief stays in the West Indies, whether viewed favourably or less positively, can be traced in writings, paintings and photographs.

Escape from Vichy is the work of a master of the historian's craft, and it builds on Jennings's pioneering earlier work on *Vichy in the Tropics* and *Free French Africa in World War II*, as well as his studies of sociability, leisure and politics at the Vietnamese hill-station of Dalat and in other parts of the French empire.[1] *Escape from Vichy* is a salient reminder of the links between colonial history and international affairs, which are too often considered largely separate realms of politics (and of academic study). The book shows how a colony such as Martinique could join together, in a very real sense, a *métropole* with many other sites, the countries of origin of the exiles, France, neighbouring Caribbean islands to Martinique or the North and South American mainlands: small places can play a larger role than one might expect in world affairs. The volume also underscores the role of the colonies in the development of European culture, from the time of mid-nineteenth century Orientalists and Belle Époque travellers such as Paul Gaugin to later painters, writers and social theorists. A colonial crossroads, such as Fort-de-France, fortuitously brought together 'native,' metropolitan, and diasporic people with a hybridisation of experiences, ideas, and styles, even though it occurred in the midst of the tragedy and displacement of war.

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[1] Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); *Free French Africa in World War II: The African Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); *Imperial Heights: Dalat and the Making and Undoing of French Indochina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), among other works.