Eric T. Jennings, *Escape from Vichy: The Refugee Exodus to the French Caribbean.* Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2018. 308 pp. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. $35 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-67-498338-6.

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The passage of European refugees from Marseilles to Martinique in the wake of the fall of France is the subject of Eric Jennings's *Escape from Vichy.* Jennings builds on an impressive scholarly foundation of archival materials, correspondence, literary, and visual sources to depict a remarkable confluence of antifascism, anticolonialism, Negritude, and Surrealism that took place in Martinique in the early 1940s. The book is at once a political, a social, and a cultural history of this encounter, featuring a cast of characters including André Breton, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Anna Seghers, Germaine Krull, Victor Serge, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, Wilfredo Lam, and André Masson among countless others.

Escape from Vichy's penultimate chapter, on the encounter of Surrealism and Negritude in wartime Martinique is the intellectual center of the book. Jennings, though, approaches this territory with a caution that allows his readers to appreciate the context and the significance of that encounter. The narrative that Jennings lays out begins in France on the eve of the Second World War. By the late 1930s, in the context of increasing xenophobia, economic crisis, and fear of a "fifth column" in the expected war to come with Hitler's Germany, French policy toward refugees pivoted from relative generosity to persecution. In November of 1938, the French government released a decree calling for the internment of "undesirable foreigners." Many of those interned were antifascist Germans, Jews (including the author Lion Feuchtwanger, whose imprisonment in the Gurs camp is narrated in *The Devil in France*), and Spanish Republicans.[1] In the summer of 1940, these refugees, who had fled fascism in the first place, became scapegoats for France's defeat by Nazi Germany. Additionally, the armistice between France and Germany called for the unconditional surrender on demand of German refugees living in France, although emigration remained the Vichy government's preferred method of dealing with "undesirables" until the summer of 1942.

France's crowded internment camps were thus transformed from holding camps to transit centers and finally to deportation "antechambers" for German camps (p. 10). Who was interned, how one could escape internment, and how one could secure release once interned was determined by a range of groups and issues: a seemingly capricious French bureaucracy, the efforts of Jewish aid organizations and groups like the Emergency Rescue Committee (ERC) coordinated by Varian Fry, personal connections and networks, payments and bribery, and

sheer luck. These were the same factors that dictated whether one could escape France to the Western hemisphere, with the added complication of securing passage and visas from host countries that were usually reluctant to grant them, not to mention transit visas for the countries in between. Many people were unable to surmount these barriers, as in the famous example of Walter Benjamin who took his own life in the Pyrenees after being denied transit through Spain, or the Social Democratic leaders Rudolf Hilferding and Rudolf Breitscheid, both of whom were turned over to German authorities and later murdered. Anna Seghers describes the milieu of increasingly desperate refugees struggling to escape Marseilles in her novel *Transit*, drafted during her passage to Martinique aboard the *Paul Lemerle.*[2]

This is the context for the Martinique route, a project of Vichy Interior Minister Marcel Peyrouton in 1940. A key question for historians has been whether the exodus of refugees from Vichy France in 1940 and 1941 should be considered deportation or rescue. Certainly, people like Fry, or those he helped to escape, like Feuchtwanger, thought of themselves as rescuers and rescued, while others, like Lévi Strauss and the Czech artist Alen Divis compared their journeys to the French penal deportations of the nineteenth century. Jennings takes pains to point out that the plan to send refugees and undesirables to Martinique was in fact both and neither; Peyrouton's language in justifying his plan was couched in terms that were racist and humanitarian in equal measure. Martinique emerged as a "fall-back hybrid solution" (p. 39) to Vichy's refugee crisis, considered a transit destination to the United States and Latin America, but, as a French colony, requiring no additional visa. The colonial authorities in Vichy France and Martinique opposed this plan, but it survived until the summer of 1942, when a combination of factors, including American and Allied suspicion of "fifth columnists" among European refugees and a shift in both Vichy and German policy from emigration toward deportation and extermination led to its termination as an escape route. Jennings argues that the Martinique route was significant because it was one of few "government-sponsored tropical emigration schemes" that ever worked (in comparison, for example, with many Madagascar schemes in those years) (p. 36); that the window of opportunity presented through this plan "sheds light on the Vichy regime's stance on emigration" (p. 36); and finally, that the Martinique plan reveals a range of competing agendas at work in what Jennings describes as "a plurality of Vichys" (p. 41). Vichy authorities were a source of constant confusion for the refugees themselves, facilitating and hindering by turns, often without any discernable logic. In fact, as Jennings points out, Vichy officials exfiltrated many prominent antifascists right under the noses of the Germans. Was this a case of "oppositional bureaucratic practice" (p. 72) or were these officials actually following the policy of Vichy's Interior Ministry? Jennings's account here is not definitive, but it does suggest that the later was the case. At any rate, while never commensurate with the scope of the crisis, and hampered by the reluctance of the US and other countries to accept European refugees, the Martinique route "undoubtedly saved thousands of lives" (p. 45).

The journeys themselves were conducted on a number of dilapidated freighters, under generally severe conditions, and often lasted for the better part of a month, providing ships were not seized or redirected by the allies. Since many of the refugees were writers, artists, and intellectuals, some of the more interesting passages in the book emerge from case studies that Jennings lays out based on the many accounts of these crossings that survive in letters, memoirs, and literary treatments. Figures like photographer Germaine Krull, Seghers, Lévi-Strauss, Serge, Erich Itor and Frida Kahn, along with many others, provide different angles on the passage from Marseilles to Martinique. The literary bent of this group is not coincidental,

since it was largely Europe's intellectual and political elites who were able to marshal the resources and connections necessary to secure passage. Nevertheless, the passengers were caught up in various hierarchies of danger as Jews, Communists, antifascists, and oppositional artists. Jennings describes them clustering on deck in "penguin-like groups" (p. 89), their isolated groupuscules on board corresponding to friendship groups, nationalities, political affinities, and so forth, all in all reproducing the intellectual, social and class geographies of the interwar Paris from which they had been expelled, or from which they had fled. While Breton and Lévi-Strauss conducted a letter exchange on board the *Paul Lemerle* on the relationship between aesthetic beauty and absolute originality, wide-ranging conversations—from the status of the refugee versus the émigré, to the cultural history of Brazil—took place on deck. "One of the finest free universities ever assembled," Jennings writes, "seemed to spontaneously form on deck." This was a men-only affair, however, despite the presence of "female artists, doctors, and authors on board" (p. 91).

The welcome that the passengers received upon arrival in Martinique was less than friendly. Wartime Martinique was largely controlled by Vichy naval officers attempting to maneuver between the pressure of the United States to the north the hostility of the majority of the island's population. The hostility of Martinicans to the Vichy regime was anything but arbitrary. In the book's fifth chapter, Jennings describes a colonial regime characterized by coercion, incarceration, and violence. The rights that Martinique had as an "old colony" under the Third Republic were rolled back by Vichy officials, who mounted a sustained assault on democracy and civil society between 1941 and 1943, when the island went over to de Gaulle's Free French. In a colonial context already stratified by race and wealth, the Vichy regime marked a turning point; according to Frantz Fanon, the Vichy officials were "authentic racists."[3] Legacies of slavery and *marronnage* regained actuality as the Vichy regime cracked down on agricultural laborers, and increasing numbers of Martinicans fled to Dominica and St. Lucia. At the same time, isolation and food shortages exacerbated the situation as European refugees arrived on the island. Most of those who were not French nationals found themselves imprisoned in either Balata or the former leper colony of Lazaret. In these "makeshift camps," local dissidents and incoming refugees "rubbed shoulders" (p. 145). As he did with the crossings, Jennings draws on the rich literary and visual archives created by the internees in these camps. Although many refugees were able to secure visas to move on to the US and Latin America, many were not, and the US became increasing suspicious of those who remained, although in fact, most of the espionage that took place in Martinique was on the behalf of the Allies and the Free French.

Among the many transatlantic encounters that Jennings describes in *Escape from Vichy*, that of Negritude and Surrealism is the most significant for the book. "The exchanges that resulted," Jennings writes of the discussions between Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, René Ménil, André Breton, Wilfredo Lam, and André Masson, "would generate profound and fecund reflections on questions of identity, race, authenticity, and rediscovery" (p. 181). The catalyst for this encounter was the journal *Tropiques*, edited by the Césaires and Ménil, which Breton stumbled across in a Fort-de-France bookstore. For Breton, Tropiques represented a literary *niveau* no longer reachable in wartime France, while for Césaire, Breton's influence lent power to the project of "recentering" at the heart of *Tropiques*: "… Surrealism provided the axe with which to destroy existing paradigms, while Negritude presented the mold for a brighter future" (p. 186). Jennings provides an excellent treatment of *Tropiques*, posing the question of how it was that a journal devoted to surrealism and Caribbean identity could survive under the alert and active

censorship regime of Vichy Martinique. The answer is a complicated one; *Tropiques* was subversive but censored to a lesser extent than many more regime-friendly publications. To some degree, the journal was written in coded language (at least until 1943, when the censors did come down on the journal) legible only to certain readers; Jennings also speculates on the extent to which the journal may have benefited from Césaire's connection to a leading Vichy intellectual, Georges Pelorson. Jennings suggests, however, that beyond this "duping" of the censors and the possible protection thesis, *Tropiques* echoed the cultural policies of Vichy itself, turning the nationalist and regionalist cultural policies of the metropole against themselves and opening a space for maneuver within "the interplay between imperial and local identities." In this interpretation, Jennings writes, the island's lead censor was "…fooled not so much by *Tropiques* as by Vichy's own unconditional promotion of authenticity, of 'regionalism,' and of nostalgia for a remote, purer past, which backfired before his eyes" (p. 191). Césaire went much further in his criticism of the collaborationist regime in Martinique in his initial drafts of *Et les chiens taisaient* written between 1941 and 1943 (later published in the late 1950s in a substantially revised form), which focused on the Haitian revolution with heavy allusions to the Vichy regime in Martinique, "what the 'whites' brought in both instances," Jennings summarizes, "was a 'degradation and servitude with no hope'" (p. 196). Jennings also focuses of the visual interactions between Surrealism and Negritude, with discussions of the works of painters Wilfredo Lam and André Masson, both of whom shared Césaire's interest in autochthonous Arawak and Carib influences. Lam illustrated the Spanish edition of Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Notebook of a Return to the Native Land), whereas Césaire admired the "plethoric Afro-Caribbean allegories and references" in Lam's work, which he descried as a form of "poetic *marronnage*" (p. 198).

The Martinique route was closed to refugees in the summer of 1942, when the Dutch seized the *Winnipeg* en route from Marseilles to Martinique. Jennings describes American and British fears of fifth columnists among European, and particularly Jewish, refugees (although does not mention the American fear of Communists that kept, for example, Seghers out of the US). Jennings makes an excellent case for the significance the Marseilles-Martinique escape route not only as a lifeline for thousands of refugees fleeing European fascism, but also as a circuit that contributed to the development of a distinctive French Caribbean culture in the postwar period. Jennings's book closes with an invocation of the anticolonial and anti-imperialist movements and struggles that would trace their genealogies to this route of rescue and expulsion. "National liberation struggles, *tier-mondisme*, and the advocates of pan-Africanism and pan-Caribbeanism would all sprout roots in the fertile ground of the 1941 Martinique encounter" (p. 231).

NOTES

[1] Lion Feuchtwanger, *The Devil In France: My Encounter With Him in the Summer of 1940*, trans. Elizabeth Abbott (New York: Viking Press, 1941).

[2] Anna Seghers, *Transit*, trans. Margot Bettauer Dembo (New York: NYRB Classics, 2013).

[3] Frantz Fanon, *Pour la révolution africaine (écrits politques)*(Paris: Maspero, 1964), 32. Cited in Jennings, *Escape from Vichy*, 125.

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