Eric T. Jennings, *Escape from Vichy: The Refugee Exodus to the French Caribbean*.

Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2018. vi + 308 pp. (Cloth US\$ 35.00)

Historians of World War II will be grateful to E.T. Jennings for drawing together in a readable narrative an enormous amount of material from archives, correspondence, and memoirs concerning the Martinique escape route from Marseille, which functioned only from 1940 until May–June 1941. The importance of the artists, intellectuals, and antifascist political activists who reached the Western Hemisphere via Martinique during this brief period has had the effect of drawing extraordinary attention to its role. Jennings teases out the ambiguities in the motivations of bureaucrats in the unoccupied zone of France who issued exit permits for interned “undesirables” from all over Europe. On board the cargo ship *Paul Lemerle*, which arrived in Martinique toward the end of April 1941, were Victor Serge and his son, Wifredo Lam and Helena Holzer, André Breton and his wife and daughter, Germaine Krull, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Minna Flake, Jacques Rémy, and Anna Seghers, whose novel *Transit* was drafted during the crossing. The version of the narrative that made of Varian Fry the principal hero of apparently miraculous escapes receives a useful corrective in the painstaking and detailed analysis Jennings makes of numerous individual successes and tragic failures to escape the tightening of the vise. The messy and sometimes inexplicable results of careful planning on the part of the internees in camps designed in the first instance for Spanish Republicans defies easy rationalization.

Clearly the Vichy government favored exporting undesirables who might pose a threat to national defense between 1938 and 1940. The fall of France to Nazi Germany in June 1940 rendered official policy, and its sometimes unofficial implementation, far more ambiguous. Analysis of communications between the U.S. consul in Martinique and the Department of State permits Jennings to conclude: “The Martinique rescue path ... closed in May–June 1941 ... not because of German insistence, nor even because of the threat of submarine warfare, but mostly because of U.S. concerns about Germanic-sounding passenger surnames on board” (p. 5). In retrospect the notion that stateless Germans and German or Austrian Jews might form a pro-Nazi fifth column in the United States is patently absurd. That it did not appear absurd to the Department of State in 1941 is a sad commentary on the state of political awareness as well as generalized ignorance of cultural difference.

Not all editorial decisions made by the author rise to the same heights as the readability of his individual narratives. Parceling his carefully mined data out into eight relatively self-contained chapters has the result of postponing

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explanations that the reader needs at a much earlier stage. Only on p. 219 do we learn why the Dutch sloop *Van Kinsbergen* ran down and boarded the *Winnipeg* and obliged it to change course for Trinidad. Rumor and misinformation were the most likely causes. The U.K. admiralty's weekly report claimed that the *Winnipeg* had "over two hundred Germans on board" when seized by the *Van Kinsbergen*. For its part, Vichy had cabled its embassy in Havana to clarify that "the refugees the English-language press was depicting as Nazis were in large part Jewish" (p. 220). Jennings is right to stress the role of rumor in creating a situation in which "intelligence" could result in the most harmful decisions.

Had Harvard University Press asked someone conversant with literature to vet the manuscript, we would have been spared some embarrassing slips. Victor Hugo, author of *Bug-Jargal*, was no "admirer of the Haitian Revolution" (p. 124); on the contrary, he benefited financially from the reparations Haiti paid the French government. And I have demonstrated in two articles in the *Revue de littérature comparée* (April–June 2002 and January–March 2003) that the 1948 novel *Je suis Martiniquaise* was a hoax concocted by protestant literary men in Paris to please Frenchmen nostalgic for the colony that had just been rendered an overseas department of the Republic. But Jennings has concluded, on the basis of a poorly argued re-edition of *Je suis Martiniquaise* by Myriam Cottias and Madeleine Dobie (*Relire Mayotte Capécia*, 2012), that I implied "Capécia was also a literary fraud who perpetuated stereotypes and was a plagiarist to boot" (p. 129). He would have done better to read my articles.

Escape from Vichy is illustrated with numerous photos taken by the refugees themselves and now housed in far-flung archives. Maps of wartime France and of the trans-Atlantic route taken between Marseille and Martinique usefully orient readers who are not already familiar with the subject. Despite its relatively minor flaws, this book is a valuable contribution to a subject that has previously been characterized by vagueness and incomplete documentation. It is unlikely to be surpassed.

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