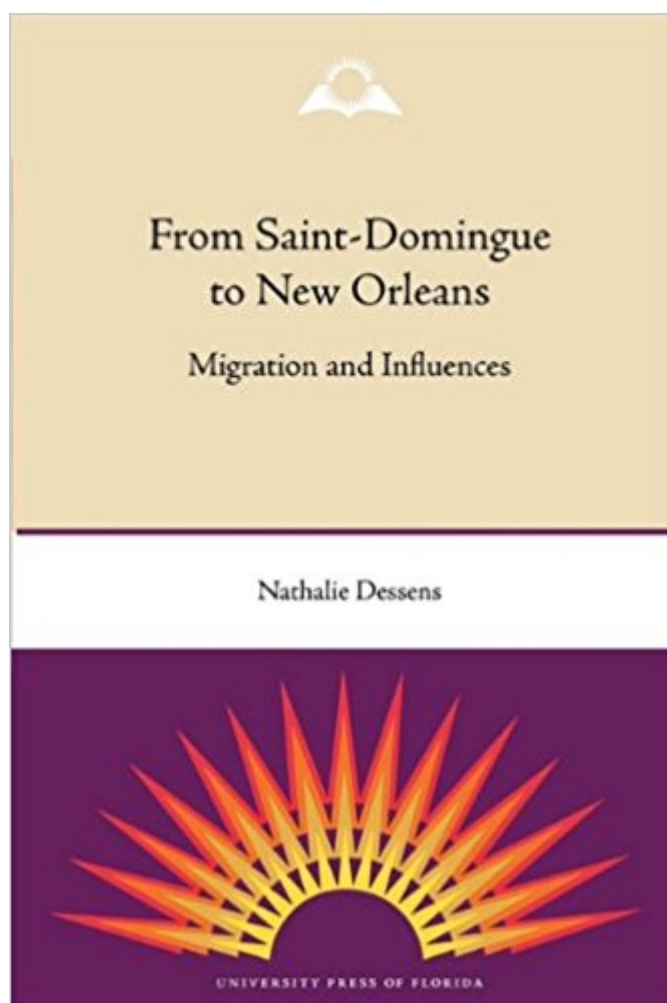


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From Saint-Domingue To New Orleans: Migration And Influences (Southern Dissent)



Synopsis

Â Dessens examines the legacy of approximately 15,000 Saint-Domingue refugees--whites, slaves, and free people of color--who settled in Louisiana between 1791 and 1815. Forced to flee their French Caribbean colony following a slave rebellion that gave birth to the Haitian Republic in January 1804, they spread throughout the Caribbean and along the North American Atlantic coast.Â Forming a relatively coherent diaspora for at least two decades, they concentrated in New Orleans. In this first comprehensive study of the Saint-Domingue influence, Dessens brings to light a refugee community composed in almost equal proportions of three population groups, yet completely forgotten by Louisiana historiography for more than 150 years, despite its arrival during a crucial historical era, its participation in the economic, social, and political life of a new homeland, and its cultural legacy to the "Creole capital."Â A few pioneer historians of Louisiana raised the Saint-Domingue refugees from oblivion in the mid-20th century, but only one collection of articles, *The Road to Louisiana*, has ever been published about them. Dessens finds that the new arrivals established New Orleans's first newspapers and many of its oldest schools and left their cultural influence on the city's music and architecture. The immigrants also brought with them inclusive ideas about people of African descent that helped shape local race relations. The children of these refugees carefully orchestrated shoemaker Homer Plessy's vain attempt to outlaw segregation.Â Drawing on sources in France and the United States, as well as civic, church, and other primary documents in New Orleans, Dessens examines the salient features of the refugees' former society, the reasons they left, the migration itself, and their reception and integration into New Orleans society. Revealing a better understanding of migratory movements and of Louisiana's exceptionalism in the United States, this study will be of special interest to historians of the South, Gulf South, Louisiana, and New Orleans, as well as African American, Latin American, and Caribbean history, migration, and genealogy.Â Â Â

Book Information

Series: Southern Dissent

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: University Press of Florida (November 15, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0813035678

ISBN-13: 978-0813035673

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #718,902 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #66 in [Books > History > Americas > Caribbean & West Indies > Haiti](#) #476 in [Books > History > Americas > United States > Immigrants](#) #1291 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Emigration & Immigration](#)

Customer Reviews

“An extremely detailed, intricate account of life during the early days of the Republic in the swiftly transforming city of New Orleans. Transatlantica

“Effectively integrates Caribbean history with Louisiana history, with a touch of Europe thrown in. It will be welcomed by scholars of Atlantic history.”--Virginia Meacham Gould, author of *No Cross on Earth, No Crown in Heaven: Black Nuns in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans*, and the forthcoming *Colonial New Orleans* (UPF)

“An important book [that will] contribute much to the historiography on Louisiana as well as to a wider understanding of circum-Caribbean migrations and influences.”--Daniel H. Usner, Vanderbilt University, author of *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783*

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This book gives a good overview of the situation as to what happened in Saint Domingue, and also what happened to the various people groups that migrated to New Orleans. It also gives a good feel for how those from Saint Domingue, both "free people of color" and former slaves who also chose to leave.

Excellent overview of the topics, events, and important players, by one of the experts in this field.

St.-Domingue is better known outside of Louisiana research as the western end of Santo Domingo, the island now divided between Haiti, with its French roots, and the Dominican Republic, which is Spanish in origin. Dessens is a French academic, however, specializing in American Studies, and she has a different take on the influence in Louisiana of the white sugar planters and merchants who fled St.-Domingue after the successful slave revolution that began in 1791. They settled all over the lower Mississippi Valley, but especially in New Orleans, and they had a considerable effect on the perspective of French-speaking creoles in the region, reinforcing and strengthening existing French culture. Planter society in St.-Domingue was, not surprisingly, heavily interbred, so many of the refugees were related to each other, which encouraged them to cultivate a group consciousness, resist assimilation, and maintain a separate identity as far as possible -- especially against the very different American political and cultural presence that arrived in force after 1803. Most of the Old South may have been monolithic in its upper strata, but not New Orleans or the surrounding region. Dessens examines in considerable detail the intricate interweavings of white, free black, and enslaved back Haitians and suggests several new approaches to the study of communities and how they form, and especially to "exceptionalism" in Louisiana's social history.

This is a thoroughly academic study (the footnotes take up twenty percent of the book), but also very readable, and it adds considerably to the relatively small body of research available to local historians and genealogists.

Excellent overview of the influence of Saint Domingue refugees from the Haitian Revolution on Louisiana culture, language, religion, and politics. Highly recommended for all students of Haiti and Louisiana.

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