Last Exit from Vichy France: The Martinique Escape Route and the Ambiguities of Emigration*

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At the beginning of *Tristes Tropiques,* the famous anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss recalls being stranded in Marseilles in 1941, "already feeling like a potential concentration camp victim."[1] Armed with only an invitation from New York's New School for Social Research, he "knew [he] must leave, but how?" Here, the ethnographer's writings become terse, even cryptic: "from conversations in Marseilles, I learned that a boat was to leave soon for Martinique. . . . Finally I obtained my ticket on board the *Paul Lemerle.*"[2] Could it have been this straightforward for a French Jew to leave the Free Zone for Martinique in early 1941? Or could his departure have been abetted by Varian Fry, the local representative of the Emergency Rescue Committee, an American organization devoted to saving leading anti-Nazi dissidents, intellectuals, and artists? Or perhaps he had been assisted by the Guadeloupean deputy Maurice Satineau, whom Vichy suspected of aiding Jews to escape?[3] In a recent correspondence with the author, the now nonagenarian Lévi-Strauss responded graciously but categorically: "I found out about the boat thanks to

* I would like to recognize the generous support of the University of Toronto's Connaught fund, which defrayed research costs in Martinique and New York, as well as the Franco-American Foundation (Bicentennial Fellowship), which made possible a lengthy research trip at the French Colonial Archives in Aix-en-Provence. I wish to thank the anonymous readers for the *Journal of Modern History* for their very helpful recommendations. I am also indebted to Susanna Barrows, John Cairns, Michael Marrus, Derek Penslar, Clifford Rosenberg, and Aristide Zolberg for their constructive comments on this article. I am grateful to Modris Eksteins, Denis Peschanski, Richard and Sally Price, and Natalie Zemon Davis for fruitful discussions and a series of leads. Unless otherwise specified, all translations are my own.

[1] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (Paris, 1955), p. 18.

[2] Ibid., pp. 17–19.

[3] Several documents suggest that Satineau had arranged for the safe passage of Jewish families. Archives Nationales, Centre des Archives d'Outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence (hereafter CAOM), Télégrammes 807, no. 62, March 20, 1941. Satineau apparently facilitated the escape of a certain Lederberger, a Polish Jew, by hiring him as a chauffeur. The Guadeloupean deputy later sought to secure the escape of Lederberger's parents as well. Archives départmentales de la Guadeloupe, Basse Terre (hereafter ADG), Série Continue 4087, télégrammes divers 1941, no. 28, Platon to Sorin, January 12, 1941.

[*The Journal of Modern History* 74 (June 2002): 289–324]

my old contacts at the shipping company, and without any other help whatsoever. . . . Why Vichy would allow . . . this boat to leave, I have no idea. [At the time] I thought it might be transporting clandestine material."[4] Fifty-six years after the fact, Vichy's motivations for allowing refugees to depart remained unclear to the structural anthropologist. Indeed, given the dreadful conditions on board, none of the participants quite knew what to make of their exodus at the time: was this renewed persecution, deportation, part of a vast diaspora begun in 1933, or was it rescue?

The *Paul Lemerle,* it turned out, carried as its only contraband its passengers, Lévi-Strauss, Victor Serge and his son, the surrealist painter and writer André Breton, the novelist Anna Seghers and her two children, and 215 less famous refugees. The vessel was not alone in traveling from Marseilles for Martinique in the early months of 1941. From February to April of that year, at least six ships—from passenger liners to makeshift cargo ships transformed for the occasion[5]—left the Mediterranean port for Fort-de-France, crammed with refugees. Even the American Fry seemed taken aback by the sudden rate of departures.[6] He could hardly believe this good fortune, still less account for it. He later underscored the importance of this moment:

> It was the ships to Martinique which really kept us busy. We couldn't have thought up anything better if we had the power to arrange the route ourselves. They not only eliminated the trouble with the transit visas—they also removed the danger of the trip

[4] Claude Lévi-Strauss, letter to author, September 9, 1997.

[5] A character in Seghers's semifictional account *Transit* describes one of the vessels bound for Martinique as barely seaworthy: "And then, that steamer for Martinique! What a boat! That isn't anything for you. A rotten, stinking old tub. It'll never take you where you really want to go." Anna Seghers, *Transit,* trans. James A. Galston (Boston, 1944), p. 283.

[6] On Fry and his organization, see Varian Fry, *Surrender on Demand* (Boulder, Colo., 1997); Anne Klein, "Conscience, Conflict, and Politics: The Rescue of Political Refugees from Southern France to the United States, 1940–1942," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 43 (1998): 287–311; Andrew Marino, *A Quiet American: The Secret War of Varian Fry* (New York, 1999); François Bazzoli and Martine Soria, eds., *Varian Fry et les candidats à l'exil, Marseille, 1940–1941* (Arles, 1999); Donna Ryan, *The Holocaust and the Jews of Marseille: The Enforcement of Anti-Semitic Policies in Vichy France* (Urbana, Ill., 1996), pp. 140–46; Donald Carroll, "Escape from Vichy," *American Heritage* 34, no. 4 (1983): 82–93; Alfred Kazin, "Homage to Varian Fry," *New Republic* (February 9, 1998), p. 27; Jean-Marie Guillon, "Varian Fry et le Centre américain de secours," *Vingtième Siècle, Revue d'Histoire* 64 (October–December 1999): 133–35; Philippe Dagen, "Varian Fry, l'homme qui sauva les avants-gardes européennes des persécutions nazies," *Le Monde* (January 16, 1999), p. 27; "Marseille Honors an American Hero," *International Herald Tribune* (October 29, 2000), p. 7; and Pierre Sauvage's forthcoming documentary, *And Crown Thy Good: Varian Fry and the Emergency Rescue Committee.*

through Spain. For they went directly from Marseilles to Martinique, and from there it was possible to go straight to New York. They were almost as good as the much advertised but never realized rescue ship which was to have gone to Marseilles to take refugees [directly] to New York.[7]

Clearly, Fry's Emergency Rescue Committee helped some refugees exploit this unanticipated opportunity. But to humanitarian organizations like Fry's, the opening itself seemed almost providential, and its eventual closure equally arbitrary. As this closure approached, on May 18, 1941, Fry issued the following telegraphed appeal to prominent U.S. samaritans: "Break now imminent between Vichy-Washington means end hope of rescue for 300 men women anti-Nazis all European nationalities wanted by Gestapo now in possession complete emigration papers and awaiting evacuation Marseilles. Fear momentarily announcement Vichy decree interrupting Marseilles-Martinique shipping thus cutting *best avenue of escape.*"[8] May–June 1941 thus marked the closing of this heretofore overlooked window of opportunity for European refugees seeking to flee Hitler's Europe. That this "best avenue of escape" should have gone virtually unnoticed by historians is surprising in light of recent studies of rescue experiences and emigration plans.[9]

The significance of the Martinique plan is multifold. First and most important, I will argue, the French Caribbean plan was the only such government-endorsed colonial emigration scheme ever pressed into service, out of a host of earlier tropical expulsion/rescue projects, be they Nazi, Polish, French, or Zionist. It therefore affords historians who have for so long concentrated upon failed expulsion/rescue scenarios like the fanciful Madagascar project (fanciful insofar as circumstances never allowed it), an actual case of "tropical resettlement." Second, this window of opportunity and its ultimate closing sheds light on the Vichy regime's stance on emigration and hence on the broader question

[7] Fry, *Surrender on Demand,* p. 187.

[8] Butler Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York (hereafter RBC), Varian Fry Papers, box 8, "Emergency Rescue Committee"; emphasis mine.

[9] On Jewish emigration to Cuba, see Robert Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba* (Gainesville, Fla., 1993). For Jamaica, see Paul Bartrop, "From Lisbon to Jamaica: A Study of British Refugee Rescue during the Second World War," *Immigrants and Minorities* 13, no. 1 (1994): 48–64. Regarding the Portuguese consul in Milan's actions to save Jews, see Rui Afonso, "Count Giuseppe Agenore Magno," *Portuguese Studies Review* 5, no. 1 (1996): 12–21. On the remarkable story of the Japanese diplomat Sugihara Chiune, who rescued Jews in the Baltics, see Hillel Levine, *In Search of Sugihara: The Elusive Japanese Diplomat Who Risked His Life to Rescue 10,000 Jews from the Holocaust* (New York, 1996). Shanghai became another unlikely haven for many Jewish refugees. See Ernest Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge: A Memoir of the World War II Jewish Ghetto* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1993); David Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews: The Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938–1945* (New York, 1976).

of continuity or rupture between the Third Republic and Vichy. It can in fact be identified as the crucial transition phase between, on the one hand, French emigration schemes elaborated between 1938 and 1942 and, on the other hand, Vichy's complicity in deportations between 1942 and 1944. Third, the inception and course of the Martinique plan (followed all the way to the treatment of refugees upon their arrival in the Caribbean) betrays agendas that situate the project at the crossroads of rescue and expulsion, raising fundamental questions about motivations and interpretations. The Martinique escape route, then, provides a case study of the contradictions, tensions, breaks, and continuities, all inherent in Vichy's treatment of refugees.

Because the Martinique connection has been systematically neglected by secondary sources,[10] its origins, implementation, and demise must first be examined. In so doing, one must consider everything from narratives of travel and exodus to internal Vichy government rifts over emigration schemes. Fortunately, a host of archives in the French Caribbean, France, and the United States yield echoing and multilayered perspectives on an escape experience that was, moreover, chronicled by many of its eloquent participants and supporters—including Lévi-Strauss, of course, but also the professional revolutionary Serge, the Cuban African-Chinese painter and former Spanish Civil War militiaman Wifredo Lam, the apostle of surrealism Breton, the German writers Walter Mehring and Seghers, and the American humanitarian Fry.[11]

[10] Seemingly exhaustive studies like Asher Cohen's *Persécutions et sauvetages: Juifs et Français sous l'Occupation et sous Vichy* (Paris, 1993) have missed the Martinique route altogether. In fact, the only two historians to have noticed the French Caribbean escape line at all make only cursory mention of it. Renée Poznanski's single sentence on the topic erroneously concludes that the only ships from Marseilles to Fort-de-France were intercepted en route. Renée Poznanski, *Les Juifs en France pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* (Paris, 1994), p. 211. The other historian, Ryan, devotes less than a page to the Martinique escape line, observing that in general "the Mediterranean crossing entailed so many dangers that France forbade most French vessels to sail to Martinique during much of the war." In reality, maritime traffic to Martinique continued almost uninterrupted between late 1940 and 1942, with the major exception of the period between June and August 1941, after the boarding of the *Winnipeg.* But Ryan's analysis does present the basic merit of acknowledging the existence of a Martinique route. She remarks in a lone, pregnant sentence, "Fry managed one more flurry of emigration in the late spring of 1941, when the French government authorized departures for Martinique." Ryan, *The Holocaust and the Jews of Marseille,* pp. 131, 144–45, quotation pp. 131, 144.

[11] Wifredo Lam, the only one of these not to have provided a written account, has left paintings that speak eloquently of Martinique's impact upon him and vice-versa. On the theory that Lam's most famous painting, *The Jungle,* was inspired by the vista from the Balata internment camp in Martinique, where he was confined, see René Ménil, "*Tropiques,* témoin de la vie culturelle," *Les Cahiers du CERAG* ("La Martinique sous l'Amiral Robert"), 34 (February 1978): 153. For a more detailed analysis

These sources allow for a fruitful dialectic between narratives of exile and archival records and hence for a degree of multivocality rare in the history of "rescue" projects. Out of a seemingly chaotic exodus from Marseilles in 1940–41, it is possible not only to reconstitute the volition, impulsion, and organization of departures but also to analyze the complex and sometimes conflicting motivations underlying this uniquely successful emigration scheme. In so doing, one can deduce a set of broader conclusions about the nature of Vichy France and the politics of emigration and immigration in France, topics recently associated with each other—albeit in slightly different contexts—by Patrick Weil and Gérard Noiriel.[12]

The actual impulsion for these convoy departures can be traced to Vichy's Interior Ministry, then under the leadership of the loyal Pétainist Marcel Peyrouton. A colonial official by training, hailing from the French Republican Right, who had masterminded the December 13, 1940, arrest of Pierre Laval, Peyrouton in many ways embodied the mainstream of an "early" Vichy.[13] More important, as former French secretary general in Tunisia, Peyrouton boasted numerous colonial connections, which no doubt contributed to the ultimate configuration of the Martinique scheme. As the historian Vicki Caron has shown, Peyrouton emerged as an advocate of Jewish emigration—even urging administrators to bend financial requirements so as to facilitate Jewish departures.[14] Peyrouton was responding on a very basic level to overcrowded camps of political and Jewish refugees in southern France. Though his motives were evidently complex, as they were couched in alternately discriminatory and humanitarian terms, his objectives were clear. On November 29, 1940, he sent a remarkable missive to Vichy's Ministry of the Colonies:

> I have the honor of informing you that I am considering practicing a policy of massive emigration for foreigners who are overrepresented in the French nation and economy. Taking their fill of consumer goods without producing any themselves, sometimes suffering from the rigorous treatment that has been by necessity imposed on them, such foreigners cannot remain in this current limbo. A sense of social responsibility, a concern that we not falter on the rules of humanity, give us an imperious obligation urgently to arrange the departure of the greatest number of them to warmer climes. . . . I have

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of Lam's *The Jungle,* see Edouard Glissant, "Iguanes, busards, totems fous: L'art primordial de Wifredo Lam," in *Lam Métis* (Paris, 2001), pp. 13–48.

[12] Patrick Weil, *La France et ses étrangers* (Paris, 1991); Gérard Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot* (Minneapolis, 1996), and *Les origines républicaines de Vichy* (Paris, 1999).

[13] Cynthia Bisson, "Peyrouton," in *Historical Dictionary of World War II France,* ed. Bertram Gordon (Westport, Conn., 1998), pp. 281–82; and Marcel Peyrouton, *Du Service public à la prison commune* (Paris, 1950).

[14] Vicki Caron, *Uneasy Asylum: France and the Jewish Refugee Crisis, 1933–1942* (Stanford, Calif., 1999), p. 336.

the honor of asking you—given the urgency there is, for the aforementioned reasons, to distance these people from the metropole—whether it would be possible to direct a certain number of them to the French Caribbean. The stay of these said foreigners would be temporary in nature, and motivated purely by the exceptional circumstances we are living through.[15]

The ambiguity of Peyrouton's language lies at the crux of this emigration project. Not surprisingly, Peyrouton borrowed from two prevailing discursive registers: on the one hand, that of xenophobia and scapegoating, which had only been exacerbated and sharpened by the defeat of May–June 1940, and on the other hand, that of a vague sense of humanitarianism. The latter, however, was actually employed to turn on their head previous notions—no matter how hollow—of France as a land of asylum. In this instance, Vichy's interior minister contended, the "rules of humanity" mandated emigration, not "hospitality."[16]

Just two months after Peyrouton's initial letter, on February 1, 1941, Vichy's colonial minister cabled the governor of Martinique: "The ministry of the Interior informs me of the departure of fifty Jews, mostly German, for the USA via Martinique. I have granted rights of transit."[17] Only two weeks later, Peyrouton would resign his portfolio. But the Martinique plan, which he had first advanced, opened a last legal avenue out of Vichy France in the winter of 1940 and spring of 1941.

This short-lived window of opportunity also overlapped, not surprisingly, with a period of hesitation in Nazi policy. Indeed, from 1933 to October 1941, emigration still constituted the officially endorsed Nazi solution to the "Jewish problem." Christopher Browning has shown how the Nazis abruptly reversed

[15] CAOM, Affaires Politiques 768, minister of the interior to minister of the colonies, Vichy, November 29, 1940.

[16] Weil in particular sees July 1940 (the emergence of the Vichy regime) as having marked a "rupture with the republican tradition of asylum" (p. 65). Other scholars, among them Noiriel, have questioned whether the "pre-1940" reputation of France as a *terre d'asile* has somehow been exaggerated by historians. In his memoirs, Peyrouton barely alludes to his role in emigration plans, merely noting in a footnote that he allowed the departure of some fifty ships filled with Jewish refugees to North Africa in September–October 1940 and concluding, "this policy of collective escape could never have occurred had the heads of certain administrations and some functionaries at the Ministry of the Interior not helped out, or turned a blind eye" (Peyrouton, p. 154n.). Naturally, in his memoirs, Peyrouton spoke of "collective escape" rather than expulsion. What is curious about his recollections, however, is the selectiveness of memory: it was the November 29 instructions that proved decisive, as they opened the possibility for departures not just to imperiled North Africa but also to the safety of the Americas.

[17] CAOM, Affaires Politiques 768, Platon to governor of Martinique, February 1, 1941.

their policy on promoting Jewish departures when on October 18, 1941, Himmler sealed German borders to Jewish emigration.[18] However, prior to this watershed date, emigration had very much been the Nazi *modus operandi.* In the wake of the French debacle of June 1940, German officials had deliberately sent thousands of foreign Jews to unoccupied France as a bizarre "punishment" for previous French heel-dragging on Jewish emigration.[19] Expulsion/emigration—the distinction was by definition blurred—was still the order of the day in 1941 at the time of the Peyrouton plan. As long as Nazi leaders continued to contemplate the feasibility of the far-fetched Madagascar project, or alternative options for "dumping" Jews into the Lublin region or into the Soviet Union, possibilities for emigration remained.[20] The Martinique plan was certainly timely in this respect.

Invoking a curious blend of humanitarianism and xenophobia, Peyrouton's letter of November 1940 had in reality re-scripted earlier emigration plans to French colonies—which, as Caron suggests, establishes a certain continuity between late Third Republic and early Vichy emigration policies.[21] These previous schemes included the ill-fated Madagascar project, but also a more overlooked plan hatched between 1934 and 1939 to create a safe haven for Jewish refugees in French colonial Guinea. Then too, Caron has shown that French colonial authorities agreed to the establishment of a Jewish refugee settlement in French Guiana in 1938–39 and likewise pondered the possibilities of settlement in New Caledonia.[22] Such emigration/colonization fantasies were naturally nothing new. And, interestingly, Jewish organizations had long played a part in their elaboration, be it in the case of the Madagascar scheme or of a previous bid to settle in Angola. Emigration/colonization had in fact been a major concern of Jewish philanthropic organizations since the turn of the century.[23]

Of all the emigration schemes put forward before October 1941, that of Madagascar seems to have most captured the attention of contemporaries and

[18] Christopher Browning, *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 39–40.

[19] Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York, 1985), pp. 160–63.

[20] Browning, *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers,* p. 40.

[21] Caron, *Uneasy Asylum,* pp. 321–53; Vicki Caron, "Prelude to Vichy: France and the Jewish Refugees in the Era of Appeasement," *Journal of Contemporary History* 20, no. 1 (1985): 157–76, and "The Missed Opportunity: French Refugee Policy in Wartime, 1939–1940," *Historical Reflections* 22, no. 1 (1996): 117–57.

[22] Caron, *Uneasy Asylum,* pp. 222–23.

[23] On the Guinea project, see David Jessula, "Un Projet d'établissement d'Israélites en 1939 en Guinée française," *Notes Africaines* 156 (October 1977): 97–100. On the 1912 Angolan scheme, see Joao Medina and Joel Barromi, "The Jewish Colonization Project in Angola," *Studies in Zionism* 12, no. 1 (1991): 1–16.

historians alike. The origins of this outlandish project to send Jews to what seemed like the antipodes can be traced to 1885; the idea subsequently gained currency throughout Europe and came to fascinate individual humanitarians, Zionists, and antisemites alike. The Polish government advanced the scheme officially in 1926. In January 1937, the French colonial minister Marius Moutet publicly endorsed the project in an interview for the *Petit Parisien.* This in turn raised considerable hopes that the Popular Front government might open the doors to Jews in Madagascar.[24] A year later, leading Nazis had warmed to the project, which according to Browning would become their idée fixe until August 1940. Nazi leadership only scrapped the Madagascar option definitively in October 1941. The plan was of course never realized, in part because of daunting logistical problems, but also due to French misgivings (especially those of French colonizers in Madagascar, most notably the former governor Marcel Olivier) and finally because of a decision by Nazi leaders to radicalize "solutions to the Jewish question" in the wake of the Battle of Britain. The meanings of the Madagascar project—in its various manifestations—remain contested to this day. To Leni Yahil, Madagascar was a "fictional device" par excellence. To Magnus Brechtken, who has devoted a magisterial study to the question, Madagascar was tantamount to a "death sentence" for Jews. Browning, while denying any teleology between the Madagascar plan and the Holocaust, nonetheless concedes that "Madagascar implied a murderous decimation of the Jewish population."[25] Crucial though the Madagascar project was in the tortuous road to genocide, it nonetheless remained a dead letter, a case of "what if" history. It is all the more curious, then, that a corollary colonial scheme to send Jews to the French Caribbean should have been so utterly ignored by historians. After all, unlike the Madagascar scheme, the Martinique plan was actually carried out.

The Martinique plan also drew from the antecedent of a rescue that was successfully undertaken in 1939. Indeed, one of the very same ships that would later be employed to rescue refugees in 1941—the *Winnipeg*—had been used at the very outset of World War II to transport a boatload of Republican Spanish

[24] See Caron, *Uneasy Asylum* (n. 14 above), pp. 146–55; and Magnus Brechtken, *Madagaskar für die Juden: Antisemitsche Idee und politische Praxis, 1885–1945* (Munich, 1997), pp. 97–109.

[25] On the Madagascar project, see Caron, *Uneasy Asylum;* and Brechtken; as well as Leni Yahil, "Madagascar: Phantom of a Solution for the Jewish Question," in *Jews and Non-Jews in Eastern Europe, 1918–1945,* ed. George Mosse and Bela Vago (New Brunswick, N.J., 1974), pp. 315–34; Michael Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 186–87; Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York, 1981), pp. 60–62; Browning, *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers,* pp. 15–17, quotation on p. 17; and Christopher Browning, *The Path to Genocide* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 18–33.

Civil War veterans to Chile. The organizer of that largely personal rescue initiative was none other than the Nobel Prize–winning Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, who encountered stiff hostility to his plan both at home and in France.[26]

There existed, in other words, a legacy of rescue and emigration schemes to the new world—ranging from the utopian to the dystopian. To be sure, the Martinique plan was itself something of a hybrid fallback solution. Even in its boldest configuration, Martinique was a point of transit, not permanent settlement, though it was never clear how long transit might last, and certain refugees did file for asylum once in the Caribbean. But in November 1940 Peyrouton had turned to the Ministry of the Colonies as a last resort. He had first approached ambassadors of North and South American countries for assistance.[27] Only after this had failed had he sought the cooperation of the ultraorthodox Pétainist minister of the colonies, Admiral Charles-René Platon.[28] Platon and his subordinates, down to governors of individual colonies, would prove highly resistant to emigration initiatives, eventually stultifying them.

In this sense, the course of the Peyrouton plan at once confirms and challenges conventional historical wisdom concerning Vichy's outlook on emigration. Where a few historians such as Susan Zuccotti have called into question the earnestness of early emigration plans under Vichy, Caron has recently established that genuine efforts at emigration were made by leading Vichyites, only to be "thwarted on several fronts."[29] Nonetheless, she argues, emigration remained the officially endorsed Vichy solution to France's so-called refugee problem until the beginning of deportations. Other scholars have reached similar conclusions regarding the earnestness of Vichy's desire for refugee, and especially Jewish, emigration. Though emigration might have been contested, they suggest that it remained the officially advocated Vichy line well into 1942

[26] On this 1939 rescue, see Pablo Neruda, *Memoirs* (New York, 1977), pp. 145–48; and the excellent documentary, *Bateau de l'Espoir,* shown on la 5 (French television), July 15, 2001. The documentary provides a remarkably detailed reconstitution of Neruda's trials and tribulations, as well as of the crossing itself. Unfortunately, the piece makes no mention of the *Winnipeg*'s subsequent use for the Martinique rescue. It does, however, provide the interesting insight that the *Winnipeg* belonged to the fleet of the Compagnie France-Navigation, whose sailors were said to have Communist sympathies.

[27] CAOM, Affaires Politiques 768, minister of the interior to minister of the colonies, Vichy, November 29, 1940.

[28] Robert Aron has described Charles-René Platon as follows: "This ex-Professor from the Ecole Supérieure de la Marine, an austere Protestant, believed that the salvation of France lay in total collaboration with the Reich." Robert Aron, *The Vichy Regime, 1940–1944* (New York, 1958), p. 129.

[29] Caron, *Uneasy Asylum,* pp. 333, 335, 551, n. 41; Susan Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews* (New York, 1993), p. 67.

(thus well after Himmler's October 1941 order to seal German borders). In fact, Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton show how Laval reminded his high commissioner for Jewish affairs as late as May 1942 that Vichy policy was "to facilitate in every possible way the emigration of foreigners and Frenchmen superfluous to the national economy."[30] In the case of the Martinique project, however, the struggle lay not so much between Vichy leadership and the increasingly fanatical Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives but rather between Peyrouton's Interior Ministry and Platon's intractable colonial administration. That the Colonial Ministry constituted a bastion of Pétainist ultraorthodoxy is not altogether surprising. Elsewhere, I have shown how Pétainist colonial officials insisted upon exporting Vichy's antisemitic legislation wholesale to the French overseas empire.[31] Little wonder, then, that Platon would argue, "The same imperious reasons which drive you to distance these people from metropolitan France oblige me to forbid these foreigners to gain access to the territories under my control [the colonies]."[32]

The "bureaucratic obstruction"[33] to emigration described by Marrus and Paxton certainly did take place. But in this instance it pitted one Vichy agency against another. This illustrates the nuances and complexities of Vichy responses—or, if one prefers, the plurality of Vichys. Ultimately, what is most notable about the Peyrouton scheme is that in spite of major opposition, it did become a reality, unlike hosts of previous emigration/colonization dreams. In this way, the present article seeks to trace an actual success—albeit short-lived—in Vichy's early emigration policy, one that reveals significant complexities of agendas and outcomes.

Peyrouton's November 1940 letter did not explicitly refer to Jewish emigration; it employed the umbrella term foreigners—alluding to Jewish refugees, no doubt, but presumably including Spanish Republicans, anti-Nazi Germans, and other now-endangered groups as well. As specifics began to make their way into Colonial Ministry correspondence concerning Martinique, however, the emphasis shifted to Jewish emigration. By early 1941, the governors of each colony singled out in the plan—Guadeloupe, Martinique, and French Guiana—responded unfavorably to Peyrouton's initiative. Martinique's Governor Henry Bressoles telegraphed on January 3, 1941: "The United States claims to worry about the arrival of foreigners in these parts, especially about Central Europeans."[34] French Guiana's Governor Robert Chot had sent a vir-

[30] Marrus and Paxton, p. 247.

[31] Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940–1944* (Stanford, Calif., 2001), pp. 20–22, 44–46.

[32] CAOM, Affaires Politiques 1298, no. 644, Platon to Darlan, May 6, 1941.

[33] Marrus and Paxton, p. 163.

[34] CAOM, Affaires Politiques 768, Bressoles to Platon, January 3, 1941.

tually identical message. The arrival of "Israelite families bearing German-sounding names"[35] could be used as a pretext for Americans seeking any excuse to dislodge Vichy from the Caribbean basin. For his part, Constant Sorin, the local "Pétain of Guadeloupe,"[36] proved equally unreceptive after the first wave of refugees. On March 19, 1941, he cabled Vichy: "I deem it appropriate henceforth to refuse all requests for Israelites to settle in Guadeloupe. . . . There are serious inconveniences . . . in establishing a tide of Jewish immigration capable of becoming a beachhead and then a community, which would be facilitated by the proximity of the USA, their religious pole."[37] In this flourish of mixed metaphors, the specter of America was employed in a radically different way from Bressoles's and Chot's messages, but for identical ends. Whether as an agent of an imagined Zionist invasion or a paranoid and overzealous enforcer of the Monroe Doctrine, the United States was invoked as a prime factor that ought to discourage acceptance of further Jewish arrivals from Marseilles.

There was of course an element of truth to the latter of these two theories. There existed, in other words, a basis for fearing that the United States might react unfavorably to news of German-speaking refugees in the Caribbean—a basis that this article will address in due course. But this should not cloud the fact that French colonial governors used the reputation for American sensitivity on such issues as a pretext to try to refuse Jews entry. Based upon extensive correspondence with the governors of all colonies concerned, Platon replied to Peyrouton on January 8, 1941: "Admiral Robert [Vichy high commissioner to the Caribbean] informs me that the Antilles can only receive four hundred people. But I must underscore that, first, local conditions and lack of supplying and, second, possible American shows of concern over foreign arrivals in these islands dictate that it is preferable to shelve this project altogether."[38]

In spite of these strenuous objections, emigration to the Antilles continued until May 1941. That Platon's opposition was overcome reveals the insistence and resourcefulness of Vichy's Interior Ministry on this matter. The quota of four hundred individuals was no doubt respected in principle by keeping passengers in transit only for short periods, before escorting them off to the United States, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, or neighboring islands. What appears striking is, first, the insistence with which colonial officials sought to scuttle Peyrouton's plan and, second, its surviving as long as May 1941, in light of the hostility of those at the helm of "loyal" Vichy colonies. In Guadeloupe, for instance, Sorin followed his initial unfavorable report with two subsequent

[35] CAOM, Affaires Politiques 768, Chot to Platon, February 21, 1942.
[36] See Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics,* pp. 85–87.
[37] CAOM, Télégrammes 807, telegram no. 61, March 19, 1941.
[38] CAOM, Affaires Politiques 768, Platon to ministry of the interior, January 8, 1941.

refusals to allow Jewish immigration. On May 21, 1941, he "maintained his decision to refuse any further Jewish settlement in Guadeloupe."[39] Barring settlement, then, refugees were considered migrants in transit. Thus they never figured into the census of Jews in the Antilles that was ordered by the anti-semitic colonial authorities.[40] An April 22, 1941, local police report in Martinique illustrates the status of these refugees: "Out of the 222 passengers on board the *Paul Lemerle,* which arrived here on April 20, 1941, only three will be settling here in Martinique. . . . All the other passengers have either been interned at the Lazaret camp, or been authorized to reside here, while awaiting their departure."[41]

Before considering the experiences of individual refugees, however, one needs to gain a sense of the scope of emigration and greater insights into its ultimate undoing. Different accounts offer glimpses into the size of the refugee flow. The American consul in Martinique, Marcel Malige, reported to Washington in March 1941 that the refugees had been sent to camps outside Fort-de-France "in order to prevent overcrowding of the city"[42]—a clear indication that large numbers were involved. If one considers that the *Paul Lemerle* and *Carimare,* both of which arrived in Martinique in April 1941, brought respectively 219 and 304 refugees,[43] one can deduce as a conservative estimate that overall numbers certainly surpassed three thousand—though it is impossible to distinguish from the archives the precise breakdown of Jewish refugees, Spanish political dissidents, and anti-Nazi exiles. The *Winnipeg,* which was to arrive from Marseilles via Casablanca in May 1941, also brought 419 "passengers in transit" out of its total of 732 on board.[44] However, the *Winnipeg,* along with the *Arica,* was intercepted and boarded by a Dutch warship operating on behalf of the American and British navies in the Caribbean on May 25, 1941,[45] bringing the Peyrouton plan to an abrupt halt. Still, previous ships, among which the *Charles-Louis Dreyfus,* the *Wyoming, Ipanéma, Paul Lemerle,* and *Carimare* had regularly sailed the Marseilles-Casablanca-Fort-de-France line until May 1941. In fact, most had made several trips back and

[39] CAOM, Télégrammes 722, telegram from Sorin to Platon, May 2, 1941.

[40] Archives départementales de la Martinique, French West Indies (hereafter ADM), 4M 996, folder "Israélites," file "Liste des étrangers israélites autorisés à résider à la Colonie."

[41] ADM, 4M 997, file "Israélites," report to Admiral Robert, April 22, 1941.

[42] United States National Archives II, College Park, Md. (hereafter USNA), Record Group 84, French West Indies 1941, box 3, March 21, 1941.

[43] USNA, RG 84, French West Indies 1941, box 4, April 28, 1941.

[44] Service Historique de la Marine, Vincennes, France (hereafter SHM), TTE 32, folder "marine marchande," Captain Benech to Marcel Malige, June 27, 1941.

[45] A rare account of this event is provided by R. M. Sallé, *70,000 kilomètres d'aventures: Notes de voyage Indochine-France et retour, 19 novembre 1940–25 juillet 1941* (Hanoi, 1942), pp. 132–40.

forth, bringing back rum and bananas to rationed France on the return leg.[46] Thus, the *Winnipeg*'s first convoy of refugees had arrived in Fort-de-France on February 15, 1941;[47] the vessel would again set sail from Marseilles for Martinique on May 6, 1941—only to be intercepted en route.

Of course, considering the magnitude of the refugee crisis in wartime France, the Antilles connection was no panacea. The Jewish emigration agency in France, HICEM, played down the Martinique route, noting only that in May–June 1941 "the international situation closed down this small outlet for some of our refugees."[48] The HICEM's remarks no doubt betray a disappointment over the shortness of the window of Caribbean opportunity, but they may also indicate that the HICEM was less successful at tapping the Martinique line than was Fry's Emergency Rescue Committee, which "came to think of Martinique as the chief route of evacuation for those who were ready and able to go."[49] In this sense, not only was the escape to the French Caribbean the only successful government-endorsed and directed emigration plan from Vichy France, but it also clearly came to be seen as preferable to clandestine routes (I draw a distinction here between the Martinique plan, which Vichy authorities coordinated from start to finish, and the Spain/Lisbon route, where French officials were responsible only for sometimes permitting departure). Thus a certain Mrs. Kaminsky and her child, who had previously been slated to leave via Lisbon, were rerouted to Martinique in May 1941 aboard the *Winnipeg*—the last refugee ship to utilize the Martinique corridor.[50]

Explanations as to why the Peyrouton plan unraveled in late May 1941 are threefold. They include a very real American resistance to immigration, colonial Pétainists' opposition to refugee arrivals, and Anglo-American concerns over Vichy's purported neutrality. In reality, the British and Americans beat the Vichy French colonial authorities to the punch in shutting down the Martinique connection. Indeed, the actual halting of maritime refugee traffic is directly imputable to the Free-Dutch-Anglo-American boarding and seizure of

[46] The *Paul Lemerle* left Fort-de-France for Casablanca and Marseilles on January 29, 1941, carrying "ten thousand barrels of rum, twenty thousand cases of pineapple, and about sixty bags of coffee." USNA, Record Group 84, French West Indies 1941, box 5, document 885.91, January 30, 1941.

[47] On the February voyage of the *Winnipeg,* see ADG, Série Continue 3974, Robert to Nicol, March 11, 1941.

[48] Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine, Paris (hereafter CDJC), CCX VII-15, "Rapport d'activité de la HICEM-France pour 1941" (January 1, 1941–April 1, 1942), p. 6.

[49] RBC, Varian Fry Papers, box 7, "Centre Américain de Secours, Administrative Reports," p. 7. Also reproduced in a printed text: Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton, eds., *Archives of the Holocaust: An International Collection of Selected Documents* (New York, 1990), 5:10.

[50] USNA, Record Group 84, French West Indies, 1941, box 3, May 26, 1941.

two ships bound for Martinique, the *Winnipeg* and the *Arica,* on May 25, 1941. The boats were captured in part to compensate for a very basic but serious British need for sea vessels, but primarily because the Dutch Intelligence Service in Curaçao believed that twenty-five German spies were headed to Martinique.[51] Though the refugees on board the two boats did gain safe passage (principally to New York), the incident, tragically, marked the suspension of the Casablanca to Fort-de-France leg. It would only be reestablished on August 18, 1941, with the caveat that the British could inspect the passenger lists—which spelled the effective end of the refugee flow.[52]

Actually, the very maintaining of such a maritime line well into 1941 had been tenuous from the outset. It had clearly hinged first on the adamance of French officials in the French West Indies that traffic continue as long as possible, so as to liquidate the islands' stocks of raw materials and supply the Antilles with metropolitan goods that the colonial economy of dependence had rendered almost indispensable. Second, by definition the continuation of a maritime corridor relied on the separate and tacit cooperation of Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States—with the Germans requesting route information to avoid unstrategic U-boat sinkings, the English demanding evidence that the line would not serve German interests, and the Americans requesting assurances that Martinique would not serve as a staging point for Germany in the Western hemisphere. The British, in fact, tried in vain to curtail commercial shipping to the French West Indies between 1940 and 1943, in an effort to force Vichy governors in the Antilles to rally to Charles de Gaulle.[53]

It is difficult to reconstitute today the tensions at work around this Vichy enclave in 1940–41. The very fact that French ships were not being sunk en route to Martinique constituted sufficient grounds to arouse Anglo-American suspicions. When reports surfaced of a German sailor appearing in Martinique

[51] On the dearth of British ships and the resulting ineffectiveness of the British blockade in 1940–41, see Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* (New York, 1982), p. 89. Regarding British eagerness to get hold of merchant marine ships in the French Antilles, see Public Record Office, London (hereafter PRO), FO 371/32058, "French merchant ships at Martinique," May 21, 1942, p. 49. On the Dutch intelligence reports, see USNA, Record Group 84, French West Indies 1941, box 4, Cordell Hull, secretary of state, to U.S. consul in Martinique, Marcel Malige, April 27, 1941: "The Consul at Curaçao telegraphs that the Netherlands Intelligence Service in Curaçao has received a report to the effect that the arrival of twenty-five German officers is expected in the French West Indian possessions." For an interesting parallel with Vichy's treatment of Jewish refugees in the Caribbean, see Oscar Lansen, "Victims of Circumstance: Jewish Enemy Nationals in the Dutch West Indies, 1938–1947," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 13, no. 3 (Winter 1999): 437–58.

[52] SHM, TTE 33, folder "documents divers concernant les Antilles," document "Historique et description de la crise de mai 1942 aux Antilles," July 22, 1942.

[53] PRO, FO 371/32058, p. 118.

in February 1942—in reality a U-boat sailor whose leg had been blown off and whom shipmates had simply ditched off a Martinique beach—American fear gave way to hysteria.[54] Even prior to that, American sensitivity to the Martinique question had been apparent: in May 1941, the *New York Times* alleged that the island was serving as a pro-Nazi bastion in the West, supposedly distributing Axis propaganda.[55] In fact, from 1941 to 1942, American attention seemed riveted on a largely invented Caribbean threat. Martinique in 1941–42 evoked and foreshadowed the same sort of exaggerated fears of geographical enemy proximity that Castro's Cuba would during the cold war.

Besides these tensions, one must consider the American refusal to admit refugees—a refusal chronicled extensively by David Wyman and Richard Breitman, among others.[56] This American intransigence produced a ripple effect that reached Martinique time and again, serving as an excuse to refuse refugees and no doubt genuinely convincing Vichy governors to maintain a low profile on activities that could be mistaken for refugee smuggling or even espionage. This, in turn, was superimposed upon several decades of fears that the United States might seek to annex the French Caribbean outright. Already between the wars, rumors had circulated across the Caribbean that Martinique and Guadeloupe might be bartered in exchange for reduced debt repayment from World War I.[57] By 1941, unbeknownst to Vichy authorities, a resistance movement in Guadeloupe had even called on American intervention, with a view to establishing a future U.S. protectorate over the islands.[58] French fears,

[54] See Paxton, p. 130; and Dr. Schneyder, "La Seconde Guerre Mondiale," in *Histoire des Antilles et de la Guyane,* ed. Elisabeth Antébi (Fort-de-France, 1978), p. 291. A 1945 film adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not,* starring Humphrey Bogart and set in Vichy-controlled Martinique, further reinforced the opinion that pro-Nazis had lurked in the Lesser Antilles between 1940 and 1943 (the film was something of a less successful sequel to *Casablanca*).

[55] "Martinique Aiding Axis," *New York Times* (May 22, 1941), p. 1; "Martinique Is Reported Preparing to Resist Expected U.S. Attack," *New York Times* (May 23, 1941), p. 5.

[56] On American responses, or lack thereof, to the European refugee crisis and the Holocaust, see Richard Breitman and Alan Kraut, *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933–1945* (Bloomington, Ind., 1987); David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945* (New York, 1984). For a dissenting opinion, see Frank Brecher, "The Western Allies and the Holocaust: Counter-Considerations," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5, no. 4 (1990): 423–46.

[57] See Jacques Adélaïde-Merlande, "Va-t-on céder les Antilles françaises aux Etats-Unis?" in *Guadeloupe, Martinique et Guyane dans le monde américain,* ed. Maurice Burac (Paris, 1994), pp. 161–65; and Eric Jennings, "Monuments to Frenchness? The Memory of the Great War and the Politics of Guadeloupe's Identity," *French Historical Studies* 21, no. 4 (Fall 1998): 565.

[58] See Eric Jennings, "La Dissidence aux Antilles, 1940–1943," *Vingtième siècle, revue d'histoire* 68 (October–December 2000).

in other words, were, if not well founded, then at least built upon successive layers of tensions with the Monroe Doctrine.

The Anglo-American concerns to which the Vichy authorities in the Caribbean were so attuned were pervasive indeed. As a direct result of them, Malige, the U.S. consul in the French West Indies, was called upon to scrutinize the arrival of every ship in Fort-de-France's harbor. In March 1941, before the wave of April–May arrivals, Malige's office did not altogether discount the possibility of wolves posing in refugee clothing:

> A limited number of vessels have arrived at Fort-de-France bringing refugees from Marseilles and Casablanca of which the majority are French intermingled with Czechoslovaks, Belgians, Poles and Germans. There are constant rumors that while these German refugees should themselves turn out to be bona fide refugees, there are among them a number of Nazi agents who are using Martinique as a jumping off point for travel to various American republics, notably Brazil and the US, and that some of them are at present residing on this island. Although all attempts to verify these rumors have been unsuccessful, the fact that they are so persistent leads me to believe that there may be some basis for them.[59]

By July of the same year, however, an exasperated Malige concluded: "Germans here? We are amused by such stories—except when we have to devote overtime to gathering actual proof that they are wrong."[60] The American and British roles in closing down the Martinique connection were thus twofold. First, they quite literally shut down the escape route by having the *Alcina* and *Winnipeg* seized. Second, and more indirectly, the pervasiveness of American fears weighed on Vichy colonial officials who were all too eager to end the refugee flow themselves and who wished to maintain only commercial shipping. Where the former jeopardized the latter, the situation for colonial Vichyites became intolerable.

The dogged opposition of French colonial officials thus constitutes another major factor that led to the eventual demise of the Peyrouton project. This opposition was motivated partly by fears of U.S. sensitivity to refugee issues, but also by virulent antisemitism within a colonial corps known for its xenophobia and zealotry.[61] By April 1941, hostility to the plan had reached a fever pitch at Vichy's Colonial Ministry and in the Antilles themselves. A note signed by none other than Platon warned, "The Antilles and Guiana are currently threatened by large numbers of stateless peoples and Jews who wish to

[59] USNA, Record Group 84, Security—Segregated General Records, French West Indies, 1940–1941, box 1, vice-consul Martinique to U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull, March 19, 1941.

[60] USNA, Record Group 84, Security—Segregated General Records, French West Indies, 1940–1941, Box 1, Marcel Malige to Samuel Reber at the Department of State, July 12, 1941.

[61] See Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics* (n. 31 above).

settle there."[62] In July 1941, a Parisian doctor sent a letter of denunciation to the Ministry of the Colonies, "bringing to [its] attention the fact that Jews expelled from France were settling in Guadeloupe."[63] Though the motives for this denunciation were certainly familiar—the doctor seems to have been envious of Jewish colleagues allegedly buying up Guadeloupe's villas—the fact that this zealot should have hounded Jews who were already out of harm's way renders this case especially egregious. The denunciator was assured by the Ministry of the Colonies that "very strict measures are now being applied, to filter migration to the Antilles as carefully as possible."[64] In reality, Colonial Ministry antisemitism had begun to erode the Martinique connection in early May 1941. On May 6, Platon had entered into open conflict with then Prime Minister and Fleet Admiral François Darlan over the passengers of the *Alcina.* Platon argued that the same reasons that had driven Vichy to expel the undesirables on board from mainland France should dictate that they remain well clear of French colonies.[65] Six days later, Platon cabled the Caribbean that new measures had been implemented to screen refugees for the Antilles.[66] True to his conviction that Vichy's National Revolution should be exported wholesale to the empire, Platon had turned the Antilles from a safe haven into an integral part of Vichy France. In the span of only one month, Allied and colonial Vichy agendas had conspired to doom the Antilles route.

Before this turn of events, however, exiles and refugees stranded in Marseilles did manage to set sail for the Caribbean. Conditions in Vichy-controlled Marseilles were of course difficult, to say the least. At first the ships to Martinique must certainly have seemed yet another mirage to desperate refugees.[67] Historians Donna Ryan, Jean-Michel Guiraud, and Renée Poznanski have offered interesting insights into the life of asylum-seekers in Marseilles.[68] Poznanski describes how "every morning, new rumors circulated about such and such a possibility of leaving, and every evening these mirages vanished."[69]

[62] CAOM, Affaires Politiques 768, "Note de service, Secrétariat d'Etat aux Colonies," April 17, 1941.

[63] CAOM, Affaires Politiques 768, letter from Doctor X, Paris, July 7, 1941.

[64] CAOM, Affaires Politiques 768, response from Gaston Joseph.

[65] CAOM, Affaires Politiques 1298, no. 644, Platon to Admiral Darlan, May 6, 1941.

[66] CAOM, Affaires Politiques 768, telegram from Platon to Admiral Robert, May 12, 1941.

[67] On the experience of the refugees who had left Nazi Germany in the 1930s, only to have to flee France in 1940–41, see Gilbert Badia, Françoise Joly, et al., *Les barbelés de l'exil: Etudes sur l'émigration allemande et autrichienne, 1938–1940* (Grenoble, 1979).

[68] See Ryan, *The Holocaust and the Jews of Marseille* (n. 6 above), pp. 128–33; Jean-Michel Guiraud, "Marseille, cité-refuge des écrivains et des artistes," *Cahiers de l'Institut du Temps Présent* 8 (1988): 247–61.

[69] Poznanski (n. 10 above), p. 211. Dr. Spitzer, a Viennese author, described in some detail his vain efforts at securing a U.S. visa in Marseilles in 1941: *Testaments to the*

The German exile Seghers relates a similar experience in her semifictional account *Transit,* which captured the condition of an entire community trapped in an administrative and emotional limbo. One character despairs: "My visa hasn't come yet. . . . The official assured me it was only a question of days. But the sailing of the *Paul Lemerle* is also only a matter of days. Now they say down at the Martinique Line that the boat will leave sooner than she was scheduled to go. Special government orders. That little Mexican [Consular official] was very courteous to me, even more than courteous. . . . Every other consulate makes you feel as if you are nothing; the consuls give you the impression that they're talking to a ghost, a phantom dossier. "[70] Life in Marseilles in 1940–41 revolved around endless queues at consulates, months of anguish over visa procedures, and constant rumors about boat departures and exit lines.

The Fry papers contain some chilling tales underscoring how departure to the safety of Martinique could hinge on seemingly inconsequential details and could be variously interpreted as prearranged or fortuitous.[71] One such case involved Rudolf Breitscheid, former president of the German Social Democratic party and delegate to the League of Nations, and Rudolf Hilferding, former minister of finance under the Weimar Republic, both of whom were wanted by the Nazis. After many fruitless attempts to obtain visas in Marseilles and Arles, on January 27, 1941, they and their families were at last given *titres de voyage* by the prefecture of Marseilles. Peyrouton's late November directives appear to have trickled down to the *midi,* for at the prefecture the two statesmen were "given recommendations to steamship companies and were forbidden to cross Spain, but told . . . to take the route via Martinique."[72] With no individual cabins remaining aboard the *Wyoming,* Breitscheid, Hilferding, and their families were convinced by the management of the Compagnie Maritime not to accept the alternative, bunks in a dormitory.[73] They resolved instead to wait for the next ship. In vain, they later tried to change liners, only to have their visas abruptly and mysteriously rescinded by "order of Vichy." Both were then extradited by Vichy to Nazi authorities in the Occupied Zone, after empty promises of protection. Hilferding was murdered by the Gestapo

Holocaust, series 1, Wiener Library, London, sec. 2, reel 60, EW11, 11432–11511, P3, N 486, pp. 69–70.

[70] Seghers (n. 5 above), pp. 189–90.

[71] The examples that follow are also described, but in much less detail, in Fry's memoirs. The archival documents at the Columbia University Rare Book Collection present the advantage of being exhaustive and extant contemporaneous materials. For the memoir version, see Fry, *Surrender on Demand* (n. 6 above), pp. 172–74.

[72] RBC, Varian Fry Papers, box 7, "Breitscheid and Hilferding," February 14, 1941.

[73] Ibid.

in Paris in 1941, and Breitscheid likely died at Buchenwald near the end of the war.[74]

Next to such tragic foiled escapes, one finds remarkable accounts of near misses. The German poet Mehring recounted just such a saga to Fry. In late January 1941, Mehring had happened to cross paths with Hilferding and Breitscheid, who informed him of the arrival of the *titres de voyage.* At the Arles prefecture, known for its opposition to Vichy antisemitism, Mehring was told by "the old lady of the *Bureau des Passeports* . . . that I must try to find a place aboard the ship for Martinique; and she gave me a special visa for Martinique beside the Vichy visa."[75] There followed an amazing case of administrative complicity—one flying in the face of German orders. As he prepared to board the Martinique bound *Wyoming,* the police looked over Mehring's papers.

> Examining my papers, the Chief took out of the shelf a card, so that I could read it, running this way:
> *Walter Mehring, Interdit de sortir de France* (Banned from leaving France)
> *Décision de la Kundt Commission* (by decision of the Kundt Commission)
> He called the prefecture, and ten minutes later, he gave back to me my papers (*sic*) and said smiling: *C'est peut-être un autre Walter Mehring. Partez!* (Maybe it's another Walter Mehring. Go!)[76]

This police chief appears twice to have made deliberate efforts to convey to Mehring that he, as a French official, was willfully infringing protocol (within the framework of the Kundt Commission, resulting from the Armistice, German authorities screened all lists of potential exiles)—first by conspicuously displaying his order to Mehring and then by concocting an improbable double of the poet. Here one can discern either multiple cases of oppositional practices or a single broader instance of institutionalized resistance. All of these acts of connivance were connected to prefectures—and, indeed, to two separate prefectures, as Mehring was informed about the Martinique connection at Arles, while Hilferding and Breitscheid had been directed to it at Marseilles. Seghers and her two children were likewise assisted and placed on board the *Paul*

[74] See Ryan, *The Holocaust and the Jews of Marseille,* p. 243, n. 86; and Friedlander and Milton, eds. (n. 49 above), 5:xxi. Also see William Smaldone, *Rudolf Hilferding: The Tragedy of a German Social Democrat* (De Kalb, Ill., 1998).

[75] RBC, Varian Fry Papers, box 4, "Mehring, Walter," December 22, 1941.

[76] Ibid. In his memoirs, Fry has the police chief wink at Mehring as he says, "Maybe it's another Walter Mehring"—out of either a flair for the dramatic or a personal recollection that does not figure in his papers. Fry, *Surrender on Demand,* p. 174. A sinister coincidence had Mehring take the bunk that had been reserved for Hilferding. Fry, *Surrender on Demand,* p. 173.

Lemerle by a woman working at the visa bureau in Marseilles.[77] This clearly suggests a common prefectoral link—and hence orders from the ministry to which all prefectures must answer, Peyrouton's Ministry of the Interior.

Another question arises here—one that will be reexamined at length in the coming pages. Some of the departures from Marseilles to Martinique in 1940–41 bore the stamp of expulsion rather than voluntary exile; a number of refugees were slated for exile to Martinique as part of a "collective departure." Anne Klein has shown how two Austrian-Jewish refugees, Harry and Maria Kriszhaber, were *ordered* to leave for Martinique in February 1941.[78] A striking divergence emerges between, on the one hand, refugees desperate to escape via Martinique and, on the other hand, those deported on orders from a prefect. The situation on board the cargo ships to Martinique, as well as the prevailing conditions upon arrival, would only serve to confirm that this was *both* a convoy of "undesirables" and a relief effort, at once a deportation and a rescue.

Leaving for Martinique in 1941 involved more than merely good luck, a tip, or expulsion orders from a prefecture; it was also an administratively delicate and financially expensive proposition. As Caron has noted, the process was complicated by Vichy's restrictions on foreign currency, which made it virtually impossible for refugees to pay for transportation—a cost usually levied in U.S. dollars.[79] Another important restriction stemmed from the Kundt Commission, whose mesh Mehring managed to slip through. The German commission screened all lists of potential travelers, reserving the right to block any émigré and indeed to ask for the handover of individual refugees.[80] As for finances, for the vast majority of the refugee population that was neither artistically nor poetically inclined, the Emergency Rescue Committee could contribute little by way of subsidies (its clearly established mandate was to rescue *personnalités*). Any refugee wishing to leave for Martinique was required to pay the French government a hefty deposit that varied between 10,000 and 25,000 francs.[81] And this did not even begin to cover the next set of very expensive administrative fees to be levied in the French Caribbean itself, nor the cost of a visa to a country in the Americas. In some instances, the Martinique transit fee was erroneously demanded even of refugees slated to depart through Lisbon[82]—an indication either of bureaucratic incompetence or corruption or perhaps of a willingness to replace systematically the illegal Pyrenean crossing with a more regularized Martinique route. In addition to these

[77] Nicole Zand and Pierre Radvanyi, "En transit sur le *Paul-Lemerle*: Un entretien avec Pierre Radvanyi, le fils d'Anna Seghers," *Le Monde* (March 15, 1991), p. 22.
[78] Klein (n. 6 above), p. 304.
[79] Caron, *Uneasy Asylum* (n. 14 above), p. 336.
[80] Ibid.
[81] CDJC, CCX VII-15, "Rapport d'activité de la HICEM-France pour 1941," p. 24.
[82] Ibid.

considerations, there existed what is now a well-documented hierarchy of rescue, entirely dependent upon American or Latin American visa policies. Hence, it was easier for a German exile to obtain a U.S. visa than for a stateless eastern European refugee; conversely, if a German exile happened to be on the Kundt list, his or her odds at being allowed to leave in the first place were much reduced. The obstacles were thus innumerable and complex, both for departure and for arrival.

The many travel narratives penned by refugees allow us to reconstruct how the voyage of exodus was perceived. Was it seen as the last wave of anti-Nazi émigrés? Or was it instead a departure of virtual convicts, of political prisoners exiled by a France that had reneged on earlier humanitarian promises? There is no shortage of descriptions of the crossing from Marseilles to Martinique, for rarely has such an assembly of authors been concentrated aboard a flotilla. Lévi-Strauss's account is perhaps the most detailed, chronicling everything from the overcrowding of the *Paul Lemerle* to its lack of sanitary facilities.[83] The anthropologist's eye affords some attention to a handful of fellow passengers, drawing remarkable portraits of Breton and Serge in particular. As one of only four men to be granted a bunk in a proper cabin, Lévi-Strauss was clearly conscious of being among the privileged. But he was largely silent on the rest of the passengers and on the mood on board. When queried about this silence, he conceded "There were German Jews on board, but I cannot say how many: so as to overcome the promiscuity around us, we created small, inward-looking groups, rather than make outside contacts."[84] (See Fig. 1.) Clearly a mood of suspicion continued to pervade the voyage; there was no certainty about having escaped harm's way.

For his part, Serge, the former companion of Lenin and Trotsky, dismissed most of his fellow passengers out of hand: "On board, forty of us are comrades, out of 300 refugees. The rest of them have no thought except for flight, being apolitical, or in many cases, Reactionary."[85] The *Paul Lemerle* he portrayed as "an ersatz concentration-camp of the sea,"[86] referring no doubt at once to the stark accommodations and to the fact that so many Jewish refugees were on board. André Breton's narrative affords yet another glimpse into the diversity of the refugees on the same ship: "Germans, Austrians, Czechs, Spaniards and only a few French people."[87] The poet Mehring, aboard the *Wyoming,* which set sail for Martinique on February 1, divided passengers according to a political rather than national typology. He distinguished among the many Spanish

[83] Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (n. 1 above), pp. 21–22.
[84] Lévi-Strauss, letter to author.
[85] Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary, 1901–1941* (London, 1963), p. 366.
[86] Ibid.
[87] André Breton, *Martinique, charmeuse de serpents* (Paris, 1973), p. 57.

FIG. 1.—Refugees en route to Martinique aboard the *Paul Lemerle,* April 1941. Left to right: Victor Serge (far left); Midi Branton; two hidden people followed by Wifredo Lam (back row) and Mrs. Lam (in front of him); Dyno Lowenstein (back row), partially hidden to the left of Harry Branton (wearing glasses and smiling with boy above him); Barth family (middle back row); Emmy Bloch (sixth from right, front row); Osner family (back row); Hubert Giepen (far right, wearing hat). Photo by Dyno Lowenstein. Courtesy of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archives.

refugees on board: "Republicans, Communists, POUM people, Anarchists, Royalists, Catalan separatists, all of them noble."[88]

Complementing the ethnographic, revolutionary, and literary gaze, a curious contemporaneous travel account presents the crossing to Martinique from the perspective of an inveterate antisemite and fanatical Vichyite. When carefully filtered through several lenses, this testimony actually sheds some light on the voyage of the last refugee ship to Martinique—the *Winnipeg.* The text, replete with grotesque racist stereotypes, was penned by R. M. Sallé, a colonial official trapped in France, who had boarded the *Winnipeg* to return to Indochina by a rather circuitous westward route. He begins his lengthy diatribe against the refugees on board with the assertion that "there were 700 foreign migrants in all, 95% of them Jews."[89] The statement does not carry much weight since Sallé imagined Jews everywhere, including among French colonials and black Antillais returning to the Caribbean. The only archival corroboration available suggests that Sallé was at least correct on the overall number of passengers: 732 people boarded the *Winnipeg,* 419 of which were to "transit" out of Martinique.[90] If one manages to read beyond Sallé's incessant references to "passengers whose names remind one more of the Vistula than the Loire," or to "passenger business cards . . . which give one the impression of a quick tour of Central Europe,"[91] one can tease certain interesting details out of this zealot's travel narrative. First, the author dwells on the great pains taken by the crew to signify the ship's neutrality—by maximum nocturnal lighting and by prominently displaying the banner of neutral nations.[92] Second, Sallé elucidates the circumstances surrounding the boarding of the *Winnipeg.* It was intercepted on May 25, 1941, by the Dutch war vessel *Van Kingbergen* and taken to the British colony of Trinidad, on the suspicion that Nazi agents might be on board.[93] Third, then, Sallé speaks to the apprehensions of Free Dutch, British, and American authorities surrounding this refugee route. He no doubt correctly discerns "an intense Anglo-Saxon fear for whatever falls under the rubric of a fifth column."[94] Sallé cites a revealing incident during which youngsters trapped on board the quarantined ship tried to amuse themselves by singing "the Chant des Montagnards," only to see British officers misinterpret the verse

[88] Walter Mehring, *Wir Müssen Weiter: Fragmente aus dem Exil* (Düsseldorf, 1979), p. 94.
[89] Sallé (n. 45 above), p. 109.
[90] SHM, TTE 32, folder "Marine marchande," report of Captain Benech to Marcel Malige, June 27, 1941.
[91] Sallé, pp. 112, 123.
[92] Ibid., pp. 113, 132.
[93] Ibid., pp. 132–51.
[94] Ibid., p. 143.

"*Halte-là*" to mean "Heil Hitler."[95] In this way, Sallé does convey some of the tensions surrounding the odyssey of the *Winnipeg.* Indeed, his virulent anti-semitism, xenophobia, and single-minded devotion to Philippe Pétain (Sallé carried with him twelve portraits and one autograph of the marshal)[96] in themselves lend us a sense of how fraught with enmity and disquiet the voyage to Martinique must have been. Sarcastically, Sallé recalls how a rumor had spread on board that once in Martinique "foreigners would all be placed in concentration camps—this seemed to scare them greatly. [They complained] 'these French, what tyrants.'"[97] Sallé did not know how true both observations would prove.

In many ways, the French Antilles turned out to be a short-lived and even chimerical haven. No sooner did passengers disembark than the vexations and persecutions began. More loyal to Pétain than were many of their counterparts in France (more royalist than the king, the French expression goes), the Vichy colonial administration was doubly disdainful of incoming refugees, as they were not only anathema on ideological and racist grounds but also seemed to bring only trouble, be it American attention or simply added expense. Lévi-Strauss eloquently described the arrival of the *Paul Lemerle*:

> The passengers would soon learn that their disgusting and crowded ship had been idyllic next to the welcome that awaited them. No sooner had we docked than [we were harangued] by an army possessed by a form of collective insanity which would have deserved to be studied by the ethnologist, were he not busy using all of his intellectual resources towards escaping its terrible consequences. . . . It was . . . as if, by permitting our departure to Martinique, the Vichy authorities had sought to give these gentlemen a cargo of scapegoats on which to vent their bile. The troops in shorts, helmeted and armed, who settled in the commandant's offices seemed not so much to be conducting an interview . . . with each of us, as pouring out a slew of insults which we had to endure. Those who were not French were called enemies; those who were French were stripped of their Frenchness through the accusation that they were cowards leaving their country: a reproach which was not just contradictory, but galling, coming from the mouth of men who, since the declaration of war, had in reality been sheltered by the Monroe Doctrine.[98]

Breton, among the next in line, chronicled in horror the harassment of Lévi-Strauss: "a very distinguished young scientist, called upon to continue his research in New York was told: *no you are not French, you are Jewish, and the so-called French Jews are worse for us than the foreign ones.*"[99] On a

[95] Ibid., pp. 150–51.
[96] Ibid., pp. 170–73.
[97] Ibid., p. 114.
[98] Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (n. 1 above), pp. 22, 24.
[99] Breton (n. 87 above), p. 60.

fundamental level, one might attribute this "collective insanity" in part to a dissonant relationship with a metropole that was once revered in the colonial context and now reviled as part of a postdebacle mood of national self-flagellation. For his part, the structural anthropologist theorized that colonial officials felt free of blame for the defeat of 1940 and that their distance from mainland France had led them to substitute a faraway enemy—Germany—for a closer one in the United States.[100] Contextualizing this hatred for refugees also implies understanding the popularity of Vichy ideology in colonial circles. In Martinique and Guadeloupe, the new regime was welcomed with open arms in some white administrative circles especially. In this milieu, Pétain's National Revolution promised to erase the "unnatural privileges" of the French Caribbean, some of the few French overseas territories to have previously benefited from at least pro forma democratic institutions: a judicial system, representative government, full-fledged French citizenship, and universal male suffrage. Among hard-line colonial administrators, then, the advent of Vichy seemed a panacea, signaling the end of perceived political abuses and scandals and of "unnatural" racial equality before the law. In short, many colonial functionaries saw Pétain's ideology as perfectly suited to the colonial realm.[101]

On a more superficial level, the harsh treatment reserved for refugees was of course owed to the Pétainist convictions of the naval forces in control of Martinique, but also, and more specifically, to the resolve of Vichy's high commissioner to the Antilles, Admiral Robert.[102] Breton was perfectly correct to suspect that orders had gone out to treat all incoming refugees as prisoners.[103] On March 21, 1941, Admiral Robert concluded that "given the multi-

[100] Ibid., pp. 23–24. The term "self-flagellation" was aptly used by Robert Paxton to describe French reactions in the wake of the debacle of 1940. Paxton (n. 51 above), p. 21.

[101] Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics* (n. 31 above), pp. 40–44.

[102] On the Vichy regime and National Revolutionary ideology transposed to the French Caribbean, see ibid.; and Eliane Sempaire, *La Guadeloupe en tan Sorin, 1940–1943* (Pointe-à-Pitre, 1984); Dominique Chathuant, "Dans le sillage de la marine de guerre: pouvoir et Eglise en Guadeloupe, 1940–1943," *Bulletin de la société d'histoire de la Guadeloupe* 103 (1995): 40–64, and "La Guadeloupe dans l'obédience de Vichy, 1940–1943," *Bulletin de la société d'histoire de la Guadeloupe* 91–94 (1992): 3–27; Richard Burton, "Vichysme et Vichyistes à la Martinique," *Les Cahiers du CERAG* 34 (February 1978): 1–101; Camille Chauvet, "La Martinique pendant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale" (Ph.D. thesis, Université de Toulouse le Mirail, 1983); Fritz Baptiste, "Le régime de Vichy à la Martinique," *Revue d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale* 111 (1978): 1–24; Marie-Hélène Léotin, *La Martinique pendant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale* (Fort-de-France, 1993); Rodolphe Alexandre, "Contribution à l'étude du régime de Vichy en Guyane (1940–1943)," *Revue Guyanaise d'Histoire et de Géographie (Equinoxe)* 10 (April–June 1979): 26–48; Rodolphe Alexandre, *La Guyane sous Vichy* (Paris, 1988); and Raphaël Confiant's novel, *Le Nègre et l'Amiral* (Paris, 1988).

[103] Breton, p. 59.

plication of false passports and identities," he must advocate a policy of jailing first and asking questions later. He cabled his subordinates: "I ask you to reinforce the surveillance of all the passengers arriving in our colony; I would see no inconvenience, in cases where . . . identity is not absolutely established . . . for passengers to be placed under forced and controlled residence."[104] A March 11, 1941, chart instructed customs and police officials in Martinique on how to handle two distinct categories of refugees: the French and the foreigners. The French were to be discretely watched, while foreigners were automatically subjected to forced residence. An elaborate questionnaire, rigidly structured along Pétainist lines, asked refugees their religion, whether they had ever belonged to a secret society, and whether they "had ever taken part in any revolutionary activity whatsoever, in France or abroad." Curiously, the crucial question of one's final destination figured eighteenth, no doubt revealing how much greater the fear of subversion was than that of extending one's stay.[105]

Following these instructions, almost all refugees were imprisoned in two distinct camps outside of Fort-de-France: Balata, in the cooler heights overlooking the city, and the Lazaret, a former leper colony by the ocean. The camps had been created in 1939–40, initially to intern possible enemies of war; under Vichy, they served as "overspill" prisons, complementing the harsh and soon completely filled penitentiary of Fort-Napoléon. Of the two camps, the Lazaret provided the tightest security; Balata, on the contrary, featured low barriers, allowing for easy escape. The overcrowded camps also housed wayward Czechoslovak troops, unable and unwilling to return to occupied Europe in the midst of a world war. (By a bizarre twist of circumstance, the Czechoslovaks too were stranded; a 1939 French law had rendered Czech soldiers French in the eyes of the law, and the Armistice of 1940 forbade French troops from leaving French territory; the Czechoslovaks were therefore kept on location in Martinique until 1943.)[106] Also interned alongside the refugees were a host of local dissidents and resistors, who had dared to express their support for de Gaulle's Free French or their opposition to Vichy censorship, authoritarianism, and racism.[107] The internment camps were operated by the French

[104] ADG, Série Continue 3974, "Contrôle des passagers en transit ou arrivant à la colonie," Robert to Sorin, March 23, 1941.

[105] SHM, TTE 32, "Affaires coloniales," July 1941, contains both the questionnaire and charts in question.

[106] ADM, 1M 3670, General Picard's report of July 19, 1940. In the summer of 1940, these Czechs had been among the first to utilize the Martinique passage under Vichy. See Antoine Marès, "Les Tchèques et les Slovaques, de la démobilisation à la Libération," in *De l'exil à la Résistance: Réfugiés et immigrés d'Europe centrale en France, 1933–1945,* ed. Karel Bartosek, René Gallissot, and Denis Peschanski (Paris, 1989), p. 186.

[107] ADM, 1M 3670.

army, which complained bitterly to the civilian administration of the costs involved in running them.[108] Before each boat's arrival, the police arranged logistics for the "welcoming committee"—one of which greeted Lévi-Strauss and his companions. Prior to the docking of the *Carimare,* for instance, it was already ascertained that of its 174 passengers in transit, 150 were to be interned at Balata.[109] To add insult to injury, upon arrival, refugees were required to pay a hefty sum to cover their own internment (a 9,000 franc "deposit" and a further 1,500 to defray internment costs).[110] Isaac Fontaine, a Martiniquais witness from the period, recalls the refugee presence on the island in the following terms: "In the camps, the first Martiniquais political dissidents joined the Polish, Yugoslav and German Jewish refugees brought by the *Winnipeg* and other vessels, and who were interned [at the Lazaret]. These families, chased from their homelands by the German invaders, had hoped to find refuge in Martinique. Very quickly, the camp conditions revealed themselves to be inadequate, driving many of them to leave for neighboring islands or the US."[111] Incoming refugees, then, joined local dissidents and stranded soldiers in makeshift camps reminiscent of the very ones many had left in southern France. Given this draconian treatment, it is hardly surprising that Lévi-Strauss wondered whether the *Paul Lemerle* had been sent expressly as a punching bag for frustrated colonial functionaries.

Martinique was by necessity a stopover for refugees seeking to reach North or South America. The vast majority of those who disembarked in the Antilles did indeed subsequently manage to depart for the United States, Brazil, or the neighboring island of St. Lucia, with a relatively short delay. Some, like Lévi-Strauss and the distinguished Belgian musicologist Charles Leirens, saw their way to New York paved by the efforts of the New School for Social Research.[112] But a few were not so fortunate. By March 1941, the American

[108] ADM, 1M 3670, Colonel Quenardel to the governor of Martinique, October 13, 1942.

[109] SHM, TTE 32, rear admiral to governor of Martinique, regarding "l'arrivée d'étrangers à la Martinique," April 24, 1941.

[110] Breton (n. 87 above), p. 60.

[111] ADM, dossier de documentation numéro 47, "Le Ralliement de la Martinique à la France Libre en juin-juillet 1943," conférence d'Isaac Alexandre Fontaine, 1981, p. 9.

[112] USNA, Record Group 84, French West Indies, box 3, document 8111.11, New School of Social Research to U.S. consul, Fort-de-France, May 5, 1941. Lévi-Strauss did endure another layover before New York; this time in Puerto Rico. His stay there is recounted by Jacques Soustelle, *Envers et contre tout: de Londres à Alger* (Paris, 1947), pp. 234–35. On Lévi-Strauss and his French comrades in New York, see Jeffrey Mehlman, *French Intellectuals in Wartime Manhattan, 1940–1944* (Baltimore, 2000). For an examination of the Ecole Libre and the European intellectual refugees who taught there, a study based in part on the New School's own archives, see Aristide

authorities in Martinique had clearly conveyed to Washington the procedures and consequences facing unwanted refugees in the French Caribbean: "The camp at Lazaret is not a concentration camp but the most practicable place where persons in transit whose presence is not desired in Fort-de-France can be housed. . . . [French] immigration authorities state that if such persons do not find some means of proceeding to their destination within a month or six weeks after their arrival, they will be sent back to their port of departure, i.e. Marseilles or Casablanca. Persons who do not have visas for a country other than Martinique are also sent to Lazaret."[113] The possibility of "repatriation" to Europe does not appear to have stirred American authorities. On the contrary, refugees who seemed to linger in Martinique soon became the object of suspicion. According to the conspiracy-seeking U.S. Vice-Consul Howard Blocker: "It is said that those persons who went to St. Lucia did so because they were afraid of possible German influence in Martinique, whereas those who have remained here seem to have no fear of Germany or the present regime. This might indicate that they are German agents."[114] Such rumors spelled a terrible catch-22 for dispossessed refugees: the very fact that they were not able to leave was actually held against them.

The fate of the Martinique emigration scheme was thus sealed by a combination of "external" factors: reticence from colonial authorities in the Caribbean and American closed doors, themselves resulting in part from Washington's fears of a fifth column. However, from the outset this had been an ambiguous plan and a chimerical haven, symbolized by the very detention camps of Balata and the Lazaret. There, refugees expecting the freedom of the Americas were thrown in jail to languish in a Kafkaesque limbo exacerbated by American immigration restrictions. The very nature of "rescue" can be called into question by the conditions of internment in Martinique. Were these detention sites in the Caribbean the local manifestations of metropolitan in-

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Zolberg, "The Ecole Libre at the New School, 1941–1946," *Social Research* 65, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 921–51. On this same topic, also see François Chaubet and Emmanuelle Loyer, "L'Ecole libre des hautes études de New York: exil et résistance intellectuelle, 1942–1946," *Revue historique* 616 (October–December 2000): 939–72. These authors describe the New School as a "triage station" (p. 943) for rescued European intellectuals, from whence they were supposed to find a permanent host institution elsewhere in the United States. Like the Martinique plan itself, the New School was an improvised solution, involving a "triage" zone. Regarding another rescue organization for European scholars, see Emmanuelle Loyer, "La débâcle, les universitaires et la Fondation Rockefeller: France-Etats-Unis, 1940–1941," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 48, no. 1 (2001): 138–59.

[113] USNA, Record Group 84, French West Indies, box 3, document 800, "Detention of Spanish refugees of SS *Wyoming* at Martinique," U.S. consulate Martinique to secretary of state, March 21, 1941.

[114] USNA, Record Group 84, French West Indies, box 1, Fort-de-France, Martinique, subject "Foreign element, Martinique," December 19, 1940.

ternment camps, be they in the Free Zone or the Occupied one? Or were they closer in nature to the modern-day refugee camp for Haitians at Guantánamo Bay—itself a chimerical way station for the North American continent? The advocates of the Martinique project were in a sense as delphic as the camps themselves. Were they French "humanitarians" or "illiberals"—or elements of both, having embraced emigration for altogether different reasons? The Martinique connection thus permits multiple readings.

These readings, in turn, shed light upon a critical phase of the Vichy regime itself—a government that retained initiative and volition while seeking collaboration with Germany. The Martinique project was fraught with contradictions resulting from Vichy's own ambiguities. These would be reflected after 1942 in Vichy's position with relation to the Holocaust: neither an actual participant nor an innocent bystander, the regime was in a sense an accomplice (though the question of how much was known exactly when, and by whom, continues to haunt historians and jurors involved in trials of Vichy officials).[115] Thus, the Martinique plan, itself the embodiment of an "early Vichy," or at least an "early solution" to refugee questions, simultaneously displays the tropes of racist expulsion and rescue, professed humanitarianism and manifest indifference, within a single episode.

The nature of this emigration project, be it the choice of Martinique as a destination or the framing and elaboration of the plan itself, further betrays the many ambiguities of wartime refugee policies. The historian must of course resist any conflation of 1941 and 1942—conjuring up a teleological vision of an impending Holocaust in 1941. At the same time, this plan truly does reveal an intermediate stage. Balata and the Lazaret were not exactly replicas of the metropolitan detention camps of Les Milles, Gurs, or Drancy—but neither were they in any way a direct road to freedom. Martinique was in every sense a halfway house for refugees, one technically on French soil but theoretically out of harm's way. Similarly, one could argue that this moment marked a crucial intermediate stage in Vichy reactions to the refugee crisis and indeed in the broader history of French responses to foreigners and refugees. With these thoughts in mind, let us consider why Martinique was chosen in the first place and focus on whether this refugee outlet reflected a dynamic of rescue or expulsion.

Why, after the failed Madagascar and Guinea emigration blueprints, had so many eyes once again turned to a French colony in 1940–41? The first answer is that Peyrouton had already fully explored the possibilities of emigration to other countries and had found no takers.[116] Given the available options, and considering Peyrouton's characterization of "the problems raised by the pres-

[115] On these issues, see Michael Marrus, "Coming to Terms with Vichy," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 23–41.

[116] CAOM, Affaires Politiques 769, Peyrouton to Platon, November 29, 1940.

ence of great numbers of foreigners in France,"[117] French colonies seemed a logical fallback site for emigration. After all, they had long represented a liminal space: as French territories, one did not require special visa procedures to travel to them. And as ethnically "alien" lands, their identities seemed ill-defined, rendering them—in the minds of Vichy French officials—potential emigration destinations for the "stateless," those stripped of any identity. In fact, the colonies appeared to constitute an ideal emigration site across the board, one that was considered not just by Nazi officials contemplating the "colonization" of Madagascar but also by the French themselves. "Refugee dumping," like any other form of colonization, rested of course on the denial of the existence of indigenous societies: hence the constant claim that Madagascar was "grossly underpopulated." These fanciful deportation/colonization projects thus combined a series of precedents—those of Jewish philanthropic organizations, which had plotted a variety of colonial settlements; those of Third Republican France, which had entertained the idea of resettlement in "underpopulated" colonies;[118] and those of the Nazi designs for relocation, whether in Lublin or Madagascar.

Another important precedent—although it was never overtly cited—was certainly that of the *bagne,* or tropical prison colony. Vichy, like the Third Republic before it, deported political prisoners to Devil's Island in French Guiana. The *bagne* in New Caledonia had an equally political past. As Alice Bullard has shown, Paris Communards had been deported to this South Pacific island after 1871, in an exodus which was intended to signify, and indeed lump together, the "twin savageries" of Commune ideology and indigenous Kanak culture. In a broad sense, I would argue that the function of the *bagne* was retained in much of the thinking about "Jewish relocation" in the twentieth century. And certainly the Martinique scheme of 1940–41 grouped together a host of "undesirables," be they surrealist intellectuals, Jews, or anti-Nazi exiles, in a manner that recalls how the Versaillais had once aligned Communards and Kanaks as symbols of "the most savage human traits in the midst of precious civilization."[119]

Though the legacy of the *bagne* would clearly suggest a nonhumanitarian reading of Vichy motivations in this project, the existence of another, parallel project might lead us to temper any judgment about precedents and continui-

[117] Ibid.

[118] The French colonial administration considered Madagascar in particular to be grossly underpopulated, with roughly 4 million inhabitants on the eve of World War II. CAOM, Agence FOM, carton 312, dossiers 3–4.

[119] Alice Bullard, *Savagery and Civilization in Paris and the South Pacific, 1790–1900* (Palo Alto, Calif., 2000), quotation on p. 271. On the *bagne* more generally, see Stephen Toth, "Neither Myth nor Monolith: The *bagne* in Fin-de-Siècle France," *Journal of European Studies* 28, no. 3 (September 1998): 245–66.

ties. In November 1941, a year following Peyrouton's original instructions, a request for humanitarian migration made its way across the Atlantic in the reverse direction. This time, Admiral Robert requested that some two hundred French children be transported from France to Martinique to save them from the dangers of Allied air raids.[120] But if anything, instead of altering our view about the intentions underlying the November 1940 scheme, this willingness to receive French children underscores the discriminatory agenda of Vichy authorities in the Caribbean. Where they had stubbornly resisted any convoys of refugees, they actually sought out metropolitan French children—casting doubts on their earlier arguments that the French Caribbean was already overcrowded.

The camps of the Lazaret and Balata and Martinique were obviously neither *bagnes,* strictly speaking, nor the sorts of rescue camps envisioned for these children, though undoubtedly they were closer to the former than the latter. Instead, these were de facto political prison camps, which brought together groups that were anathema to Vichy politically: Spanish Civil War veterans, Marxists, surrealists, Jews, and other "undesirables." In this sense, these camps, like their equivalents in metropolitan France, truly were repositories of outcasts from Vichy's new order. The typology of scapegoats at the heart of the Vichy regime's paranoid worldview was known at the time as *l'Anti-France,* an imagined conspiracy of forces sapping the foundations of French society. All of these categories, especially political refugees, were depicted as the scourge of France by Vichy officials and the regime's ideologues.[121] Interestingly, surrealism had been singled out for special treatment, lambasted as "the [symbol] of our emotive degeneration" and the "instrument of Jewish deception"[122] by French fascist intellectuals Pierre Drieu la Rochelle and Louis Ferdinand Céline. Vichy censors described Breton himself as "the very antithesis of [Pétain's policy of] National Revolution."[123] In this sense, the Martinique scheme involved both a recasting of previous deportation experiences to tropical settings and a cast of characters reflecting the hatreds and bêtes noires of the new regime in France, be they Jews, political refugees, or surrealists. The fine line between escape and *bagne* banishment becomes blurred, if only by virtue of the political nature of these refugees and the conditions of exodus and reinternment in Martinique.

Ambiguity of another sort can be found in the radically different contemporaneous responses to refugees—from denunciations in mainland France, to

[120] CAOM, Affaires Politiques 769, Platon to the secretary general to the family, November 21, 1941.

[121] See Weil (n. 12 above), pp. 65–74.

[122] David Carroll, *French Literary Fascism* (Princeton, N.J., 1995), pp. 132, 192.

[123] André Parinaud, ed., *André Breton, entretiens* (Paris, 1952), p. 196.

a marked hostility from both French colonial and American administrations, to acts of complicity and outright resistance within the same episode. Thus, alongside an American paranoia over a possible fifth column, one finds a French colonial bureaucracy bent upon maintaining commercial but not refugee shipping. In this context, the fate of lives seemed to hinge on word of mouth, a few thousand francs, and propitious timing.

Fundamental ambiguities arguably first emerged around the paradox of a Vichy interior minister putting forward a plan for refugee escape, when his successors within this same ministry would implement the terrible roundups of Jews in the nonoccupied zone beginning in 1942.[124] Indeed, the same government agency that had advocated exile to Martinique would later be responsible for the deportation of some 76,000 Jews to Nazi death camps. One way to come to terms with this apparent contradiction is to question whether the Martinique scheme actually hinged on flight, rescue, or expulsion. In other words, does the seeming discontinuity between early Vichy-generated emigration plans like this one, on the one hand, and Vichy's later complicity in deportations, on the other hand, perhaps hide a disconcerting continuity? In this light, Peyrouton's emigration directives themselves could be viewed as precursors to rounding up and deporting Jews—this time to Germany and Poland rather than to the safety of the Caribbean. After all, Peyrouton invoked the alleged overrepresentation of dangerous elements and foreigners within the French community, calling for their expulsion. Fortunately for the refugees, expulsion in 1941 signaled something quite different from what it would spell a year later.

In 1986, the historian Philippe Videlier briefly recalled the 1941 exodus to Martinique in precisely these terms. Linking the event to some hundred years of xenophobia, he depicted it as one of the most shameful examples of France's treatment of foreigners: "André Breton, Victor Serge, Claude Lévi-Strauss, the most noble symbols of what this century has produced in the field of art, morality and science [were] . . . driven away from France."[125] The episode, Videlier suggested, constituted but a single, acute manifestation of a deep-rooted hostility to foreigners in France (the fact that these particular refugees were *French* was somehow obscured here), one culminating in the past two decades with new forms of expulsion and banishment under the so-called Pasqua Laws. Videlier went so far as to cite the *Paul Lemerle*'s departure itself as a perfect example of a "certain idea of France"—meaning an essentialist, xenophobic, and exclusionary vision of France.

[124] See in particular Gérard Gobitz, *Les déportations de réfugiés de Zone Libre en 1942* (Paris, 1996); and Serge Klarsfeld, *Vichy-Auschwitz: le rôle de Vichy dans la solution finale de la question juive en France, 1943–1944* (Paris, 1985).

[125] Philippe Videlier, "Avis aux étrangers: Une certaine France est de retour," *Le Monde diplomatique* (August 1986), p. 10.

Certainly, the fact that Vichy's scapegoats, be they Jews, Marxists, anti-Nazi Germans, or surrealists, were the ones leaving France in 1941 seems to lend credence to this interpretation. The temptation, then, might be to draw an admittedly teleological line from expulsion in the 1930s and 1940s to the recent forced repatriations of Malian *sans-papiers*—the modern-day scapegoats of the French far Right—with the important caveat that most of the refugees of 1941 desperately *wanted* to leave France. Surely, emigration in 1941—regardless of whether it was in any way "forced," or framed as ridding France of unwanted "parasites"—signified something quite different from expulsion in the past two decades. Videlier would have it both ways, blaming Vichy for organizing emigration and at the same time condemning it for its paralysis during the years of "refugee crisis." In this instance, the Vichy syndrome, described at length by Henri Rousso, seems to have played itself out in especially complex ways.[126] For some French intellectuals, reorienting their attention in recent decades to the forced expulsion of Malians from two Paris churches, the exodus of 1941 could be reinscribed as a fundamentally racist act, betraying France's purported vocation as a land of refuge.[127] The question is of contemporary relevance: a *reconduite forcée* ended in the death of a Sri Lankan refugee in 1991, and there was a recent incident during the expulsion of Malian immigrants in which excessive force was used all the way onto the airplane.[128]

Of course, these multiple and conflicting memories of the Martinique escape route were themselves partly a product of the project's very ambiguity at its inception. This *was,* in other words, a racist plan, among other things. What is no doubt so troubling about the Martinique project's origin is that the language and the rationale employed by Peyrouton to orchestrate what proved to be a final rescue in 1940–41 in many ways foreshadowed that utilized a year later to justify roundups and complicity in deportations: "foreigners who are overrepresented in the French nation and economy . . . taking their fill of consumer goods without producing any themselves." Paradoxically, side by side with this xenophobic and exclusionary discourse, one finds the trappings of rescue. Peyrouton had stated: "A sense of social responsibility, a concern that we not falter on the rules of humanity, gives us an imperious obligation urgently to arrange the departure of the greatest number of them to warmer climes." Perhaps the most important point is that Peyrouton seems not to have

[126] Henri Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994).

[127] On these events, see Mireille Rosello, "Representing Illegal Immigrants in France: From clandestins to l'affaire des sans-papiers de Saint-Bernard," *Journal of European Studies* 28, no. 1 (March 1998): 137–52.

[128] "La mort oubliée d'un demandeur d'asile lors d'une reconduite en 1991," *Le Monde* (October 2, 1998): p. 8; "Prison pour les sans-papiers de Roissy," *Libération* (March 19, 1999), p. 24.

detected any contradiction here; to him, as to most Vichy officials, emigration was doubly beneficial, by "cleansing the fatherland" of unwanted elements and providing a "humanitarian" method of doing so by the same stroke. The Martinique initiative, then, eludes simple categorization. Bearing the hallmarks of both humanitarian rescue and xenophobic expulsion, this hybrid plan constitutes a crucial missing link between the dynamics of exclusion, interment, expulsion, and deportation—dynamics that, of course, sometimes overlapped.[129]

Another reading of the Martinique migration centers around flight, rather than focusing upon the role of either Fry's organization or Vichy's Interior Ministry. To be sure, some refugees did discover the Martinique route on their own, or by chance; Lévi-Strauss clearly fits into this category. But by and large, the Arles and Marseilles prefectures and the Emergency Rescue Committee deliberately steered refugees to Martinique. The theory of flight, so to speak, certainly endows the refugees themselves with agency. But it also presents disquieting implications that were already exploited by xenophobes in 1941. Restituting agency to desperate refugees is no doubt more problematic and less aggrandizing than focusing on "active resistance."[130] It also falls headlong into the arguments advanced at the time by racists—arguments couched in a series of reductionist assumptions, themselves predicated on the stereotypical image of the "errant" or "nomadic" Jew.[131] Not surprisingly, the antisemitic passenger Sallé wove a narrative of cowardly escape, in which rich Jewish refugees unpacked their priceless *tableaux* and precious jewels once safely embarked on the Atlantic leg of their journey. Even after the war, Breton was forced to justify his departure from Marseilles to a series of interviewers who insinuated that the surrealists had somehow betrayed or deserted France. The suggestion was itself a carryover from preposterous wartime allegations that partisans of de Gaulle and the Free French had left a burning ship.[132]

When one considers antecedents and continuities, the Martinique plan also seemed in keeping with French interwar policies of expulsion, analyzed at length in the case of Paris by Clifford Rosenberg.[133] Looking specifically at

[129] In his book on internment camps in Vichy France, historian Denis Peschanski draws the useful distinction between the logics of "exception, exclusion and extermination," the first prior to 1940, the second between 1940 and 1942, and the third after 1942 (*La France des camps d'internement, 1938–1946* [Paris, 2002]).

[130] On agency, victims, and perpetrators, see Omer Bartov, "Defining Enemies, Making Victims: Germans, Jews and the Holocaust," *American Historical Review* 103, no. 3 (June 1998): 803–4.

[131] On a more contemporary "nomadic" trope and on the alleged "liberating aspects of the gatherings of dispersed . . . peoples," see Winfred Woodhull, "Exile, Emigrés and Immigrants," *Yale French Studies* 82 (1993): 7–24.

[132] Parinand, ed., p. 195.

[133] On the Third Republic's surveillance and expulsion of foreigners, see Clifford

Lyon and Marseilles, Mary Lewis has demonstrated that 1938 marked an increase in the practice of expulsion, although some slated for banishment benefited from stays (*sursis*), and others yet managed to outwit the authorities (thus, of the 1,827 expulsion files consulted by Lewis, only 30 confirm that an actual expulsion ensued).[134] For his part, Noiriel has stressed that the Republic, and not Vichy, had first established detention camps for political refugees and that the Third Republic had likewise set the stage for Vichy's retroactive denaturalization of foreigners and other "unwanted elements."[135] Regarding expulsions, Noiriel notes that it was the French Foreign Ministry which in the 1930s suggested the creation of detention camps as a way of drawing international attention away from the very "visible" practice of forced expulsion.[136] Paradoxically, then, the Peyrouton plan could be upheld at once as an indication of Vichy's early "leniency" with respect to emigration and as a confirmation of the long-standing "illiberalism" of French outlooks toward foreigners.[137] Of course, "leniency" and "harshness" lie in the eyes of the beholder, and they need to be contextualized. It is crucial to bear in mind that expulsion in this instance was tantamount to rescue. But one could argue that the rationales for emigration and deportation were eerily similar—comparable justifications, with diametrically differing results. More significantly, the antecedents of Madagascar, Guinea, and Martinique account in part for the banalization of exclusion, eviction, and exodus by 1942. It is important to remember as well that the French Third Republic had itself briefly entertained the idea of emigration to Madagascar; in this light, Martinique in 1940–41 also marked a continuity with pre-1940 policies.

In this sense, the Martinique plan calls into question the very relation between the French Third Republic and the Vichy regime. Expulsion to the colonies marked a transition phase between, on the one hand, forced expulsion (*refoulement*) and surveillance, as well as banishment to tropical *bagnes,* as these policies were already brutally and regularly practiced under the Third Republic, and, on the other hand, deportation proper, as it came to be applied under Vichy. In the vast debate over how fascist or Republican Vichy was, or how much of an ideological debt it owed the Third Republic,[138] the treatment

Rosenberg, "Republican Surveillance: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Police in Interwar Paris" (Ph.D. thesis, Princeton University, 2000).

[134] Mary Dewhurst Lewis, "The Company of Strangers: Immigration and Citizenship in Interwar Lyon and Marseille" (Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 2000), pp. 165–212 (figures appear on p. 165).

[135] Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot* (n. 12 above), pp. 65, 117, and *Les origines républicaines de Vichy* (n. 12 above), pp. 134–36.

[136] Noiriel, *Les origines républicaines,* p. 139.

[137] On the amazing extent of this illiberalism, see Rosenberg.

[138] On these debates, see Michael Marrus, "Vichy before Vichy: Antisemitic Currents

of refugees must be considered. Not surprisingly, in this realm as in so many others, Vichy seems initially to have resorted to methods already tested in the 1930s—such as expulsion to the colonies—before turning to dragnets and deportations. In this sense, the Martinique plan constitutes an element of continuity between Republican and Vichy emigration strategies, as well as a crucial missing link between pre-1942 exclusionary measures and Vichy's eventual complicity in deportations between 1942 and 1944. In a broader sense, the Martinique connection represented the last French emigration scheme before the Shoah, and, perhaps more important, the only colonial emigration plan actually realized out of a myriad of earlier tropical settlement fantasies. In the sinuous path to genocide—if such a "path" can be discerned without risking teleology—the Martinique scheme was doubly ambiguous, marking not only the rise of the policy of exclusion in Vichy France but also the last successful, government-endorsed escape plan from nonneutral western Europe.

in France during the 1930's," *Wiener Library Bulletin* 51 (1980): 13–19; Vicki Caron, "Prelude to Vichy: France and the Jewish Refugees in the Era of Appeasement," *Journal of Contemporary History* 20, no. 1 (January 1985): 157–76; Ralph Schor, *L'Antisémitisme en France pendant les années trente: Prélude à Vichy* (Bruxelles, 1992); Noiriel, *Les origines républicaines.*