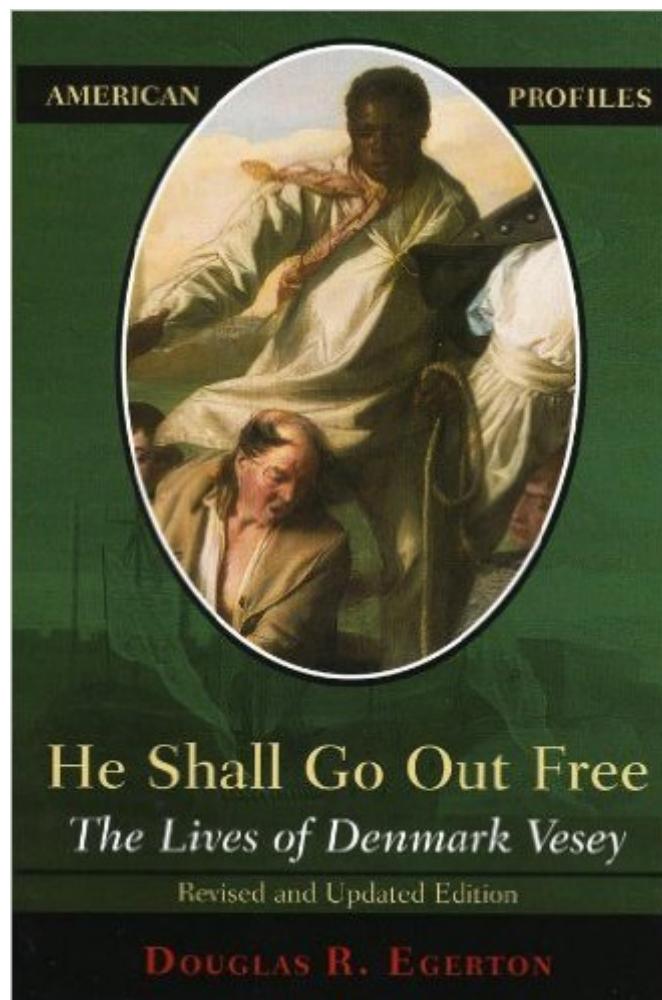


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He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives Of Denmark Vesey (American Profiles)



Synopsis

On July 2, 1822, Denmark Vesey was hanged in Charleston, S.C., for his role in planning one of the largest slave uprisings in the United States. During his long, extraordinary life Vesey played many roles—Caribbean field hand, cabin boy, chandler's man, house servant, proud freeman, carpenter, husband, father, church leader, abolitionist, revolutionary. Yet until his execution transformed him into a symbol of liberty, Vesey made it his life's work to avoid the attention of white authorities. Because he preferred to dwell in the hidden alleys of Charleston's slave community, Vesey remains as elusive as he is today celebrated, and his legend is often mistaken for fact. In this biography of the great rebel leader, Douglas R. Egerton employs a variety of historical sources—church records, court documents, travel accounts, and newspapers from America and Saint Domingue—to recreate the lost world of the mysterious Vesey. The revised and updated edition reflects the most recent scholarship on Vesey, and a new afterword by the author explores the current debate about the existence of the 1822 conspiracy. If Vesey's plot was unique in the annals of slave rebellions in North America, it was because he was unique; his goals, as well as the methods he chose to achieve them, were the product of a hard life's experience.

Book Information

File Size: 4883 KB

Print Length: 294 pages

Publisher: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers; Revised and Updated Edition edition (December 10, 2004)

Publication Date: July 17, 2013

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00E1CYEWI

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #1,038,274 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #128 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Ethnic & National > Scandinavian #1272 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Americas > United States > State & Local > South #1667 in Kindle

Customer Reviews

I have very mixed feelings about this book because there are parts that I enjoy and think are important, but as a whole I think that this is very dangerous not because of the content but because of how this book was written. For anyone who wants to understand the difference between field slaves and town slaves (there are a lot) in the 1820's in the South this is a good book. Douglas Egerton follows the life of the slave Denmark Vessey as a way to "show-off" Southern society and culture at the time and discusses issues that arose for enslaved and free blacks in Charleston. But the main part of the book is when Egerton gets to the failed insurrection by Vessey (a plan that involved killing a large portion of white Charleston and sailing on boats to Haiti). This too he describes in great detail from the planning of the revolt to how Vessey and his conspirators were tried and hanged. Then I read "Denmark Vessey and his Co-Conspirators" by Michael Johnson which appeared in the October 2001 issue of The William and Mary Quarterly. It is necessary that you read this in conjunction with Egerton's book. Johnson attacks the very evidence used by Egerton in his book (mainly trial documents) to claim that there wasn't a revolt at all and that Vessey and many others were killed because White Charleston "thought" there was a slave insurrection. He further argues that historians like Egerton have fabricated this entire plot and rewritten history, hence "co-conspirators." Personally, I don't agree with Johnson that there was no revolt, but he convinced me that Egerton's evidence isn't adequate to say there was. Egerton did write a response to Johnson which pushed that there was in fact a revolt but doesn't even acknowledge that a lot of his evidence is faulty.

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