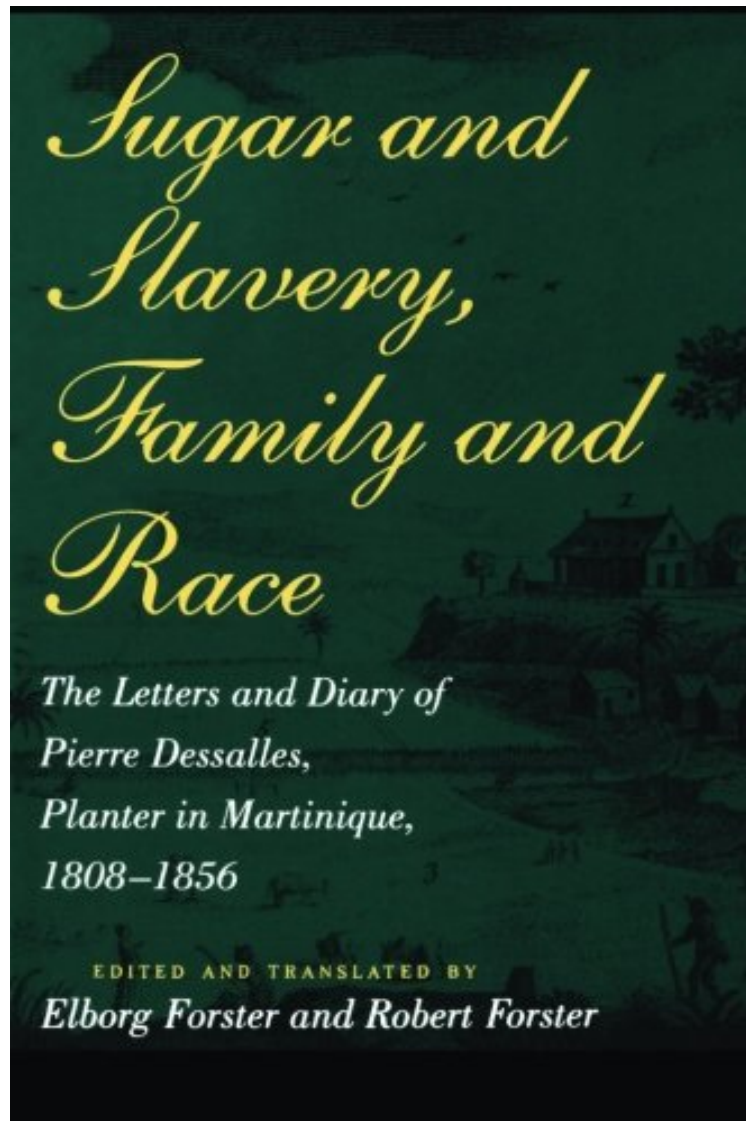


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Sugar and Slavery, Family and Race: The Letters and Diary of Pierre Dessalles, Planter in Martinique, 1808-1856 (Johns Hopkins Studies in Atlantic History and Culture)

Pierre Dasalles

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Diary of Pierre Dessalles, Planter in Martinique, 1808-1856 (Johns Hopkins Studies in Atlantic History and Culture):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A Fascinating Read, Because There's Nothing Like It By T. R. Smith This is a most unusual diary, with much for students and scholars to ponder. To be sure, being a slave on a sugar plantation in Martinique was about as difficult as life could ever get for any human being. As this diary of Dessalles shows, it wasn't too easy being a Martinique planter, either. With a wife and ungrateful children who chose to live well in the cultured salons of Paris off his efforts instead of helping out on a rural farm on a wretched, steamy island in the Caribbean; with uncertain sugar prices, not knowing if they could even manage to eat and keep the plantation going some years, let alone keep his wife and freeloading Parisian kids in the style to which they were accustomed; with irritating neighbors and endless long trips into town over a period of many years; it is little wonder that he often finds himself drawn closer to his farm and the slaves who work it. Though the "theoretical" social order of the day would have clearly challenged any such kind of moral outrage, Dessalles was an eminently practical man. He had to be, as his diary shows again and again. Despicable as slavery was, one finds it difficult to dislike Dessalles. Slavery was an inherently evil institution, but his diary does not paint a picture of an inherently evil man. Paradoxically, it also does not allow him any excuses for his participation in this drama. It shows that people and situations are far more complex than that. It also leaves one wondering how the institution of slavery in the New World could have survived for more than a generation or two, at best, let alone for centuries. Dessalles story would translate elegantly into film. Someone might want to try this some day. Meanwhile, it is highly recommended reading for those interested in New World slavery or the history of Martinique. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Best Autobiographical diary I've Ever Read! By Rmcelvr I bought this for research purposes for a novel I'm writing, and I couldn't put it down! This Frenchman's diary is a treasure from the beginning of his life on his family's Martinique plantation to his end days after he lost the plantation to his children. His ideas of slavery in the beginning were so different from those at the end of his life. The political upheaval of the West Indies was prevalent as well. And, I've never read such an in-depth experience of a sugar plantation in my life! This man led an interesting life full of political strife, family drama, creole debutantes, slaves, and even mulattoes, and it would make a wonderful epic movie. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Purchased as a gift. By cspt2 Purchased as a gift.

Diaries of nineteenth-century plantation managers are rare; diaries of French sugar planters are rarer still. Although such works as the diaries of Ella Gertrude Thomas and James Henry Hammond provide insight into the plantation societies of the antebellum South, virtually no contemporary source treats planter-slave relations as extensively, or presents a white planter's views on slave society in as much detail, as do the letters and diary of Pierre Dessalles. Now Elborg Forster and Robert Forster have translated and edited the most historically and socially significant portions of this unusual work. Previously available only in a four-volume French edition, these materials treat a wide range of topics, including the slave economy, management and socialization of the labor force, the role of free blacks in society, the lives led by the plantation owners, and, significantly, black-white relations before, during, and after emancipation.

"The editors have been most perceptive in making these documents available to the English-reading audience, because the lessons they contain about the system of slavery are universal in nature... Offers much to scholars and students of history. It reveals a complex and personal relationship among the races that may be surprising. Teachers may find the book useful as a learning tool." (Charles D. Ameringer Historian) "This is a remarkable document, beautifully translated and well presented. I know of nothing else quite like it. The Dessalles diaries are both an account of the daily thoughts and actions of an important colonial planter over the course of an immensely rich and interesting period of societal transformation and a presentation of the life history of Dessalles himself. They contain an immense amount of information about the maintenance of the slave gangs, work routines, punishments and rewards, sugarmaking, relations between planters and merchants, race relations and the nature of the status order in the colonies, kinship, property, inheritance, and insight into the transatlantic character of planter society both in the colony and in France." (Dale W. Tomich, Binghamton University) Language Notes Text: English (translation) Original Language: French From the Back Cover Dairies of nineteenth-century plantation managers are rare; diaries of French sugar planters are rarer still. All though such works as the diaries of Ella Gertrude Thomas and James Henry Hammond provide insight into the plantation societies of the antebellum South, virtually no contemporary source treats planters as extensively, or presents a white planters views on slave society in as much detail, as do the letters and diary of Pierre Dessalles.