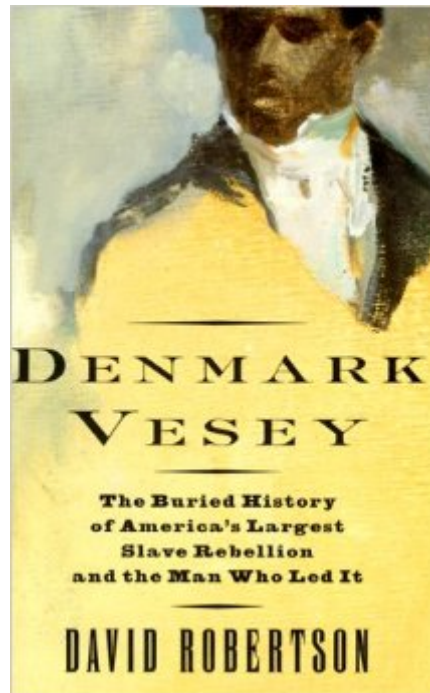


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Denmark Vesey: The Buried History Of America's Largest Slave Rebellion And The Man Who Led It



Synopsis

On July 2, 1822, Denmark Vesey and five co-conspirators were hanged in a desolate marsh outside of Charleston, South Carolina. They had been betrayed by black informers during their attempt to set in motion the largest slave rebellion in the history of the United States--an effort astonishing in its level of organization and support. Nine thousand armed slaves and free blacks were to converge on Charleston, set the city aflame, seize the government arsenal, and then murder the entire white population of the city, sparing only the ship captains who would carry Vesey and his followers to Haiti or Africa. The attempted revolt was a significant episode in American history, yet it, and its leader, have been all but forgotten. In this balanced and gracefully written biography of Vesey--the first in many decades--David Robertson gives us a profile of this extraordinary man. He shows how, by preaching a doctrine of negritude combined with various religious elements, Vesey was able to attract large numbers of blacks to a messianic crusade for freedom. Robertson details the aftermath of the failed revolt, analyzes its social and political consequences, and articulates the essential, disturbing questions it poses to a racially and ethnically pluralistic society today.

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Customer Reviews

The parallels between Denmark Vesey's failed slave insurrection in Charleston in 1822 and the start of Toussaint's successful slave insurrection in Saint Domingue (now Haiti) in 1791 are striking. In both circumstances, black slaves comprised the vast majority of the population -- 75% in Charleston, 90% in Saint Domingue. In both, the hopeful liberators were former slaves who had

become literate, fairly well-to-do, free blacks. Both Toussaint and Vesey distrusted mulattoes, who were regarded in both societies as a distinct class, with ambivalent loyalties. Both leaders took advantage of the disparate religious beliefs of their followers to enhance group cohesiveness. In any such mass event, planned well in advance, the risk of discovery or betrayal is always great. Remarkably, in both of these planned insurrections, rumors and confessions alerted authorities weeks in advance of the scheduled dates. And in both, the white slaveholders were incredulous that ignorant, simple blacks could possibly coordinate an uprising of the size suggested by their informants. In both instances, the threat was dismissed as fantasy. As we know, the French authorities of Saint Domingue were too late in recognizing the magnitude and reality of the uprising. Few of us, however, have grasped the slim margin of time by which white Charlestonians were able to prevent a similar success in Charleston. Considering that Charleston was the prime destination of French planters fleeing the conflagration in Saint Domingue, Charlestonians should have been more attuned to the threat brought on by their slaveholding, minority autocracy.

The more History I read of this Country the more I seem to read about South Carolina. I am not a concentrated reader of The Civil War, and while South Carolina played key roles in that conflict, it also was the locale of a number of additional notable events in this Country's History. If I were to pick one State the approximate vintage of South Carolina, I cannot make a better argument for a single State that was as independently oriented, and that defended its independence from influence outside its borders, and defended it with even greater passion from any Federal influence. To the very present, South Carolina has been expressing the same theme through the issue of what Flag they will fly over their Capital, and who the decision will be made by. A decision was reached, the flag may no longer fly over the Capital, but it shall fly not far from it. Denmark Vesey's birthplace is unknown contrary to the conflicting commercial reviews. From the book, "It is not confirmable whether Vesey was born in Africa or The West Indies". If there is a consistent thread through the book, it is how much is not known about this man who attempted what would have been a massive Rebellion, Slave in makeup or otherwise composed. This is not to say the book is not well done, quite the contrary. I believe that the documentation achieved by Mr. David Robinson is nothing short of remarkable when the effort to destroy all remnants of the rebellion is considered. The book loses no credibility because we don't know from what tree he was executed, nor where his body was finally buried. These issues are more legend than they will ever be fact, but these issues do not change the heart of the event, and the facts of what took place. Even Mr.

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