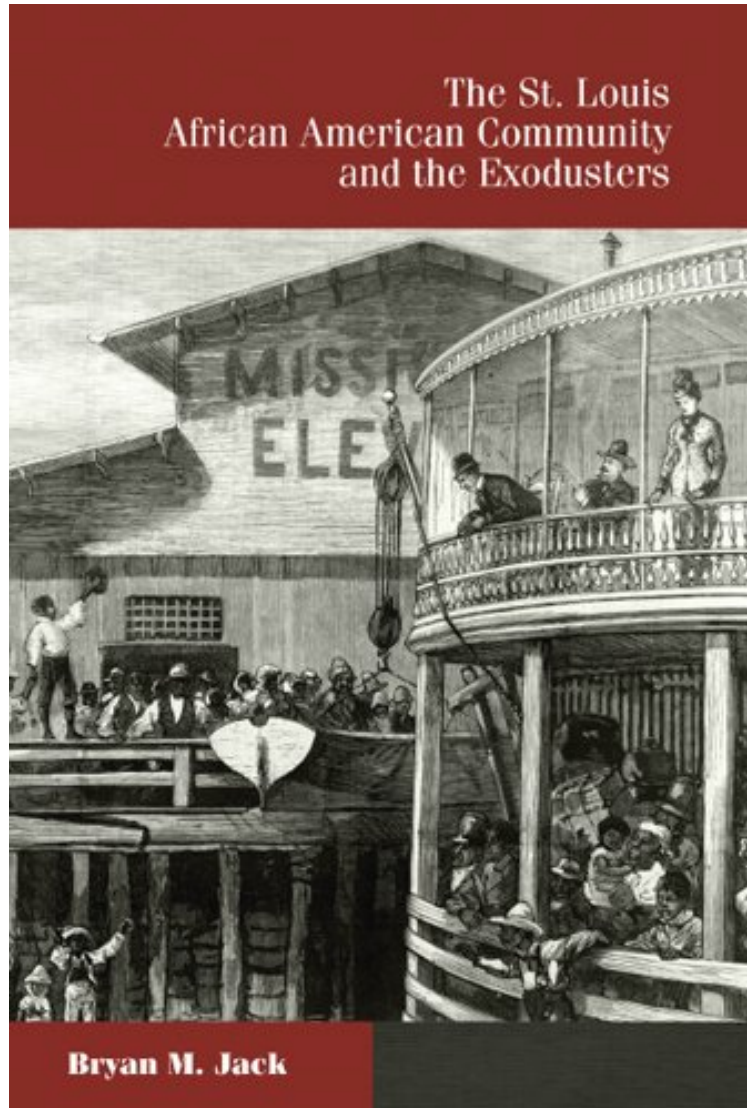


The St. Louis African American Community and the Exodusters

Bryan M. Jack

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Bryan M. Jack : The St. Louis African American Community and the Exodusters before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The St. Louis African American Community and the Exodusters:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Tightly written and highly readable By AfroAmericanHeritage When Reconstruction ended in 1877, blacks in the South were in some ways worse off than they'd been before the Civil War. Though slavery as it had been known was now illegal, Southerners found new ways to subjugate black Americans through fear, intimidation, forced labor and murder. For many Freedmen, the only glimmer of hope for a reasonable

life was elsewhere, in a more tolerant and progressive area such as Kansas. An unorganized mass exodus began in 1879, and thousands of mostly penniless refugees began arriving in St. Louis as their first stop. The city, while not exactly progressive or tolerant, did have a thriving, established and educated African American community (and some white allies) who sought to aid the Exodusters. As the title of the book indicates, this is the primary focus of this study, though other supporting threads are also explored and help place the story in context. It's not a simple story; within the African American community and among their white allies there were different ideas about what the goals were and exactly how best to accomplish them. Powerful personalities sometimes clashed and even lost sight of the goals. As the flood grew, some began to question whether the Exodusters might be better served by going back home, or being discouraged from leaving in the first place. (Frederick Douglass opposed the Exodus on several grounds, and rebuffed appeals for assistance.) Unfortunately some black citizens even abused their trust. But all in all, most of St. Louis' black citizens understood they had a stake in all this, too; they were taking a stand for civil rights, for the freedom of movement. And perhaps depriving the South of its cheap/free labor force would force it to change. Tightly written and highly readable, I'd recommend this book to anyone interested in St. Louis history, as well as to those interested in African American studies.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, thousands of former slaves made their way from the South to the Kansas plains. Called Exodusters, they were searching for their own promised land. Bryan Jack now tells the story of this American exodus as it played out in St. Louis, a key stop in the journey west. Many of the Exodusters landed on the St. Louis levee destitute, appearing more as refugees than as homesteaders, and city officials refused aid for fear of encouraging more migrants. To the stranded Exodusters, St. Louis became a barrier as formidable as the Red Sea, and Jack tells how the city's African American community organized relief in response to this crisis and provided the migrants with funds to continue their journey. *The St. Louis African American Community and the Exodusters* tells of former slaves such as George Rogers and Jacob Stevens, who fled violence and intimidation in Louisiana and Mississippi. It documents the efforts of individuals in St. Louis, such as Charlton Tandy, Moses Dickson, and Rev. John Turner, who reached out to help them. But it also shows that black aid to the Exodusters was more than charity. Jack argues that community support was a form of collective resistance to white supremacy and segregation as well as a statement for freedom and self-direction reflecting an understanding that if the Exodusters' right to freedom of movement was limited, so would be the rights of all African Americans. He also discusses divisions within the African American community and among its leaders regarding the nature of aid and even whether it should be provided. In telling of the community's efforts a commitment to civil rights that had started well before the Civil War Jack provides a more complete picture of St. Louis as a city, of Missouri as a state, and of African American life in an era of dramatic change. Blending African American, southern, western, and labor history, *The St. Louis African American Community and the Exodusters* offers an important new lens for exploring the complex racial relationships that existed within post-Reconstruction America.

"Jack does an excellent job of outlining one of the most important events in American history." *The North Carolina Historical*