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# No Cross, No Crown: Black Nuns in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans

*Sister Mary Bernard Deggs*

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Among New Orleans' most compelling stories is that of the Sisters of the Holy Family, which was founded in the 19th century and still thrives today. The community's difficult early years are portrayed in a remarkable account by one of the sisters, Mary Bernard Deggs. While Deggs did not officially join the community until 1873, as a student at the sisters' early school she would have known Henriette Delille and the other founders. It was not until 1852 that the sisters were able to take their first official vows and exchange their blue percale gowns for black ones, and it was 1873 before they were permitted to wear a formal religious habit. This community of mixed race faced almost insurmountable obstacles, but the women remained unflagging in their dedication to the poor, to education, and to the care of the elderly and the orphaned?to the needs of "their people."

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