

## BOOK REVIEWS

Marten's claim that "New England has dominated the literature on the history of childhood," it undermines some of the volume's claims to diversity (1). Where are the children of New France, for example? What about the youth of Spain's New Mexico or even Texas settlements? Finally, there are small things. One author is misidentified as a "he" in the list of contributors. And New York University Press did an especially poor job of quality control in production. In the volume I received, every third and fourth page for nearly forty pages was missing (unprinted), thus undermining my ability to fully understand several of the chapters.

In the end, for those looking for a solid, readable introductory volume on children in colonial America—particularly British North America—this is, without doubt, a valuable work. It would work well for college classroom use and might even inspire some students to do further research in the field.

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Claiborne A. Skinner. *The Upper Country: French Enterprise in the Great Lakes*. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. Pp. 224, illustrations, maps, notes, index. Cloth, \$50.00; Paper, \$25.00.)

To American scholars of seventeenth and eighteenth-century North America, focus naturally tends to favor the British colonies. In *The Upper Country*, Claiborne Skinner synthesizes recent scholarship on French endeavors in the New World. In doing so, he argues that New France became the fur-based, expansionist competitor to British interests not by plan but rather by the force of specific individuals and an almost irrepressible desire by regular Canadians to tap the riches of the interior. By terminating in 1754, the book appears to end rather abruptly at the critical moment for France's dominance of the Great Lakes. Upon reflection, however, it makes sense. Scholars and students of the eighteenth century already know much about the Seven Years' War, and many sources discussing the conflict already exist. Instead, Skinner provides a unique interpretation of events leading the French to focus on the Ohio Country—a region they had largely ignored for the first hundred and fifty years of empire in North America.

According to the author, Louis XIV's finance minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, set the initial tone for New France. Seeing it as a source of raw

materials and a market for French manufactures, the minister's vision for the region differed little from Britain's view of its own North American colonies. Suspecting that an expansionist and growing colony in the New World might become a burden, Colbert's fears ultimately proved prophetic. Yet Skinner demonstrates that desires in France ran counter to the wishes of those on the scene. Citing both rational actor and bureaucratic models of decision-making, he shows how New France inevitably spread westward at an alarming rate. On the one hand, individuals such as Governor Frontenac and the explorer La Salle aggressively promoted westward expansion. Both in Canada as a result of failures in Europe, they used their positions of relative power in an attempt to increase personal esteem and wealth. On a more grass-roots level, the author argues that regular Canadians, many of them disbanded soldiers, rejected Colbert's restrictive vision. Not content to eke out a living in the tough agricultural environment allowed by Canada, these men sought out the hard, yet possibly lucrative opportunities provided by trade in the West.

Skinner's discussion of the fur trade proves nuanced and on par with modern scholarship. Accordingly, he portrays the trade not as an extremely profitable endeavor but instead as a self-supporting economic system. As a result, the narrative naturally vacates the Great Lakes at times to discuss the establishment of important settlements in Louisiana and the Illinois Country. The author thus portrays France's North American interests as more geo-political than economic. As English expansion increased, the fragility of the French position in the West became exposed. As evidence, Skinner introduces the reader to a colorful collection of French commanders in western posts. Rather than mere garrison commanders, he demonstrates the critical importance of these individuals to French control as mediators, traders, and, in a sense, troubleshooters. Thus, the stability of French interests in the West depended much too heavily on the personal abilities of a handful of individuals—individuals who sometimes proved unequal to the task.

The increasing geo-political significance of French expansion raises the native inhabitants above mere trade partners to active participants in French policy. Skinner remains consistent with modern interpretations of native-European trade. Instead of becoming instantly dependent upon European trade goods, he portrays the interaction as a source of cultural and diplomatic connection. As time went on, the French became dependent on Indian support even as natives increasingly came to rely on trade goods. This development and the stress placed on it by English expansionism leads

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to the author's unique discussion regarding the growth of French interest in the Ohio Country.

According to Skinner, the French had become alarmed by the 1750s with English involvement along the Ohio. Placed within the broader view of French imperial design, however, he provides an alternative interpretation. Faced with growing resentment by western Indians, particularly the Fox, the French became increasingly concerned about the tenuous connection between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River. Should western natives cut off such connections, as they at times demonstrated the ability to do, the entire French enterprise might be compromised. The Ohio River, with access to Canada from Lake Erie, thus became an alternative, though less-than-ideal, path. For Skinner then, the developing conflict in Western Pennsylvania resulted not only from English actions but from events occurring in the far west as well. It proves a convincing and infrequently discussed aspect of the origins of the Seven Years' War.

Claiborne Skinner's *Upper Country* thus provides any scholar of seventeenth and eighteenth-century North America with a broader understanding of French actions prior to the Seven Years' War. It can at times be a bit confusing following an extensive cast of characters as they maneuver throughout a vast territory, but this should be seen more as a consequence of the chaotic nature of the period than of any negligence on the part of the author. Overall, Skinner's work should prove to be an easily accessible handbook for those historians too often focused on British North America.

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