

Allan Greer — *The People of New France*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997. Pp. 3, 137.

Allan Greer's *The People of New France* is a welcome addition to the "Themes in Canadian Social History" series of the University of Toronto Press. The series, which is addressed to undergraduates and general readers, attempts to fill the gap between monographs and textbooks. Contributions are expected both to summarize the main themes of a topic and to outline the main historiographical approaches to the material.

The People of New France is monographic in its focus on social history but resembles a textbook in its lack of a scholarly apparatus. There are no page references, even for cited material, and the author provides only a brief select bibliography. The main task of the book is to delineate the frameworks of ordinary life in New France (predominantly but not exclusively Quebec) from the 1660s to the 1760s. In six chapters and a slightly shorter epilogue, Greer emphasizes the themes of population, life on the land, city folk, women, diversity, life beyond Quebec, and the British Conquest. Among the topics he regretfully downplays are crime, justice, religion, popular politics, and the impact of war, but in a survey of this length hard choices must be made. Of the omissions, perhaps crime and justice are the most regrettable, owing to the ability of New France's judicial records to convey the rich texture of everyday life.

Greer opens his overview of the population with the felicitous comment that "early French Canada has become a highly developed demographic laboratory" (p. 12). Basing himself on the results of the Programme de recherches en démographie historique (PRDH) of the Université de Montréal, he summarizes patterns of French immigration, nuptiality, natality, and mortality, but he does not stop there. Like Louise Dechêne, to whom the book is dedicated, Greer also considers the Native population, although the discussion is necessarily impressionistic. A sole criticism of this chapter concerns Greer's assertion that "In all, about 27,000 French people came to Canada over the century and a half preceding the Conquest" (p. 12). This figure for "observed immigration" (the portion that left documentary traces) derives from the 1983 dissertation of Mario Boleda, which has been superseded by his article "Trente mille Français à la conquête du Saint-Laurent", published in this journal in 1990. Neither work is cited in the select bibliography.

In Greer's survey of rural life, early Quebec is "the land par excellence of the self-sufficient family household" (p. 32), although "the self-sufficiency of the habitant household was not absolute, nor was it impervious to market forces" (p. 33). This chapter also provides a clear and balanced discussion of seigneurialism and a brief but interesting description of Iroquoian agriculture. From the countryside, Greer moves on to the town and its various social groups, concluding with a useful explanation of *Ancien Régime* concepts of social inequality.

The next two chapters deal with elements of the Quebec population that have traditionally been overlooked: women and ethnic and religious minorities. The chapter on women begins with the Iroquois, who "had a pronounced gender difference without a gender hierarchy" (p. 63). Greer notes that "Christianity had surprisingly little

effect on Iroquois sexual equality"; indeed, "women seem to have enjoyed even greater powers" (p. 63) in the Catholic settlement of Kahnawaké than in the old Iroquois homeland. Unfortunately, Greer does not discuss Montagnais or Huron women, for whom, according to Karen Anderson, the impact of Christianity was much more negative. The material on French women is excellent, but the bibliography ought to make reference to Liliane Plamondon and Geneviève Postolec, whose work on merchant widows and marital-property law is summarized.

Without denying the existence of ethnic and religious hierarchies, Greer reminds us that "New France was, in fact, a multicultural society" (p. 76). Where the Natives were concerned, the French developed "a comparatively subtle version of colonialism" (p. 77), although they also employed Pawnee slaves. A significant number of French men, as *coureurs de bois* and voyageurs, immersed themselves in Native cultures, giving rise to "anxieties about order and authority and the difficulties of preserving them in a colonial setting" (p. 85). African slaves, New England captives, and European Protestants provided still other examples of diversity.

Greer's sixth chapter takes us beyond Quebec to the French settlements in Acadia ("something of a peasant paradise", p. 97), Île Royale (that "most mercantile of colonies", p. 100), the *pays d'en haut* ("Native-controlled land in which the French maintained an important strategic and commercial presence", p. 101), and Louisiana (a colony that, like Île Royale, had little of Quebec's "feudal character", p. 106). The epilogue recounts the collapse of this vast North American empire in the wake of Britain's all-out military effort and assesses its impact on the French and Indian populations. Although nobles, merchants, and especially Natives lost out under British rule, *habitants* and French women were largely unaffected. As for the legacy of New France, it consists of innumerable place names, the linguistic and legal frameworks for the development of modern Quebec, and a critical role in the "momentous and multi-dimensional process" (p. 120) of Atlantic expansion.

Greer is less successful in surveying the historiography of New France than in providing a descriptive overview. He refers briefly in the introduction to the rival nationalist schools of the 1840s to 1960s, whose ideologies of pathology (anglophone) and *survivance* (francophone) were virtually mirror images of one another. He then quickly moves on to contemporary social history with its emphasis on the frameworks of ordinary life — the trend to which he aligns himself. So far so good, but what his paragraph on social history fails to convey is the contentious nature of the current historiography, particularly as regards rural society. As Catherine Desbarats has elegantly shown, historians of New France (like those of early America) are divided between market historians, who emphasize the development of capitalist relations in the countryside, and social, often Marxian historians, who view rural exchanges as secondary to the domestic economy. Greer, of course, falls into the latter category, yet he never informs the reader that an alternative interpretation exists. (Desbarats's article is, however, cited in the bibliography.)

As the previous comment indicates, historiographical coverage within the individual chapters is inconsistent. Two effective discussions include a dismissal of traditional explanations for Quebec's high birth rate ("Religious teachings, the nationalist revenge of the cradles, and cold winters", p. 23) in the chapter on popula-

tion and a deflation of the Myth of the Conquest (pp. 115–116) in the epilogue. Another example from the chapter on population is less germane: Greer takes “modern writers” (pp. 17–18) to task for an obsession with the vice or virtue of the *filles du roi*. Although that criticism was merited into the 1960s, it does not characterize the most recent and thorough historian of the *filles du roi*, Yves Landry.

Despite these flaws, *The People of New France* is an engaging and accessible work, and it will be a useful addition to the syllabi of courses on New France, Quebec, and Canada before Confederation.

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Yves Frenette — *Brève histoire des Canadiens français*, Québec, Boréal, 1998, 210 p.

Dans cette synthèse destinée au grand public, Yves Frenette de l'Université York écrit l'histoire des Canadiens français des origines de la Nouvelle-France jusqu'à nos jours. Son récit est coulé dans le moule des identités canadiennes et francophones changeantes au fil des ans.

Dans une brève introduction générale, l'auteur énonce sa thèse: « Ce livre raconte l'histoire d'un peuple qui n'existe plus. Il retrace la genèse et l'évolution du groupe canadien-français. C'était un groupe doté d'une forte identité nationale qui s'est pourtant fragmentée de façon irrémédiable dans les années 1960. » Il raconte que le nom « Canadien français » s'est imposé dans la première moitié du XIX^e siècle, mais qu'il est devenu un anachronisme aujourd'hui. « Le Canada français a disparu en tant qu'entité ethnique au XX^e siècle. » Ainsi, de Canadiens qu'ils étaient au préalable, les Canadiens français auraient existé entre 1840 et 1960, pour ensuite se transformer en Québécois ou Franco-Ontariens, entre autres. Cependant, puisque « les mutations identitaires ne sont jamais tranchées au couteau », Frenette écrit l'histoire de ce peuple pendant toute sa durée.

Des cinq chapitres du livre, les deux premiers couvrent la Nouvelle-France (1535–1760) et l'après-conquête (1760–1840); le chapitre 3 est celui du Canada français à l'unisson (1840–1918), le chapitre 4 marque les débuts de la fragmentation de l'unité (1918–1967) et le chapitre 5 traite de la période des identités francophones en conflit « de 1967 à nos jours ». Ce découpage chronologique correspond tout à fait à la thèse de l'auteur.

La synthèse historique est de première qualité pour diverses raisons. Premièrement parce que dans l'espace très limité dont il dispose, Frenette réussit à intégrer le politique, l'économique, le social et le culturel, écrivant une synthèse historique équilibrée qui évite la polarisation entre l'histoire politique et l'histoire sociale. Deuxièmement, l'auteur connaît bien l'historiographie récente et s'en éclaire. Troisièmement, l'auteur prend au sérieux et intègre à son récit l'histoire des Canadiens français de l'Ontario et de l'Ouest canadien, ceux qui ont trop souvent été lais-