

Heredity and Environmentalism in the History of French Colonization

Terry Crowley

Volume 19, numéro 1, autumn 1989

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad19_1re02

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Department of History of the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Crowley, T. (1989). Heredity and Environmentalism in the History of French Colonization. *Acadiensis*, 19(1), 169–181.

consciously recognized the challenge of unraveling the complex development of class, gender and ethnicity, and have sought to develop the theoretical tools to do so, they will continue to challenge long-held assumptions of Canadian historiography. What has emerged so far has been a greater understanding of social structure, of culture, of the state and of class as they have developed in Canada. Not surprisingly, this is far from a finished task.

JAMES NAYLOR

Hereditry and Environmentalism in the History of French Colonization

THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE WORK OF Phillip Rushton at the University of Western Ontario gravitated partially around one of the most longstanding and major disputes within the discipline of psychology: hereditary versus environmentalism. Historians have not been unfamiliar with such debates within their own field, although the consequences of their discussion are less likely to have such profound effects on social policy as did the fraudulent studies of hereditarian psychologist Sir Cyril Burt on the English school system early in the 20th century.¹

The environmentalist interpretation in Canadian history reached its apogee following World War Two. In the hands of Quebec writers like Guy Frégault and Michel Brunet, environmentalism was masked beneath the shroud of nationalism and stressed the uniqueness of the Canadian population to varying degrees. W. J. Eccles sounded the death knell to this approach in 1969 with his contribution to Ray Billington's ambitious frontier series.² While English-speaking scholars increasingly followed trends within American colonial history that emphasized the weight of inherited traditions in so many aspects of early American life, French Canadian historians adopted the methodology of the *Annales* in order to probe the realities of life from the bottom up. In an attempt to remove the stifling parochialism that had previously governed the contours of the historiography of New France, studies have become more comparative both in relation to their sponsoring societies and other colonies as well.

An interest in the formal document or expert treatise has remained, especially for the 16th century where records pertaining to French colonization of the

1 See Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York, 1981), ch. 6.

2 W.J. Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier 1534-1760* (Toronto, 1969).

Americas are rare. While the most enterprising work in this period has been uncovering the extent and nature of the French Atlantic fishery and its interaction with the coastal Indian peoples, some of the earliest formal writings on French colonization in the Americas have been published in an edition-translation entitled *André Thevet's North America, A Sixteenth-Century View* (Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986). "Bogus and naive compiler of facts", Marcel Trudel concluded of André Thevet, a royal cosmographer who mixed fact with fancy and occasionally lied.³ Sometimes Thevet relied on sound sources such as Cartier's relation of his third voyage to Canada and elsewhere produced exact information whose origin is unknown. While this volume by University of Washington scholars Arthur P. Stabler and Roger Schlesinger renders Thevet more accessible and useful through its translation and careful annotations, Thevet is likely to remain more important for European views of the New World than as an exact source for the history of French colonization itself. Perhaps that is the reason that a minor Thevet industry has emerged in Europe during the past few years.

The rapprochement between French and Canadian historians was witnessed most visibly in two conferences held at Rochefort and in Quebec in 1982 and 1985 that examined the history of western France and Quebec within the contexts of rural society and the relationship between town and country. More than 80 papers presented at those meetings were published in two volumes: *Evolution et éclatement du monde rural, Structures, fonctionnement et évolution des sociétés rurales françaises XVIIe — XXe siècles*, published under the direction of Joseph Goy and Jean-Pierre Wallot and assembled by Rolande Bonnain (Montréal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1985) and *Sociétés villageoises et rapports villes-compagnes au Québec et dans la France de l'ouest XVIIe-XXe siècles: Actes du colloque franco-québécois de Québec (1985)*, edited by François Lebrun and Normand Séguin (Trois-Rivières, Centre de recherche en études québécoises, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, 1987). Their quality varies enormously, as in all such enterprises, but the two collections reveal how much more willing French Canadians have been to publish the research of graduate students than their counterparts in English-speaking Canada. A quarter of the proceedings were devoted to the period of New France but only a handful of papers framed their research within the explicit mode of France/New France comparison.

Fish was the foremost attraction of North America in the pre-colonization era. In a short but perceptive article, Laurier Turgeon reveals the extent of Basque fishing off the Canadian Atlantic coast in the 16th century and the degree

3 *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. I (Toronto, 1966), p. 679.

to which Indians had become accustomed to trading European goods.⁴ Francis Bacon claimed that the North Atlantic fisheries were worth more than all Peru's silver. He was right if the measure of his statement is taken as the volume of traffic at this time. The Canadian fisheries attracted more men and ships than all the contemporary trade between Spain and America. The relative value of those respective cargoes is a different matter. Measured less easily is the extent of the religious motivation in the 17th century. Charles Frostin extends our understanding of the Jesuit *Relations* by contrasting their appeal to martyrdom with other French colonization narratives on a global basis.⁵ He is especially good in relating this question to developments in France as they related to women who figured prominently in the settlement history of New France. The view that women were integral to France's missionary and civilizing role was unique in the annals of French colonization. It formed part of a resurgence of upper-class women in France who sought new outlets for their energy and money through becoming founders of religious orders and other good works. Frostin goes further and links many of these people to the repressive fiscal regime that extracted levies from the lower orders. Some of those extractions were channelled by upper class women into charitable causes overseas.

Social studies examining the relationship of people to agriculture and to each other in individual parishes reveal how important land availability was in rural life. Two studies of the parish in the seigneurie of Neuville demonstrated a high level of exogamous marriages during the French regime but a low level of integration of those from without once land in the vicinity had been settled.⁶ Neuville was more generous in rendering up its young women than its land. Conversely, in a thinly settled parish such as Laprairie before 1760, the system of property inheritance differed significantly from that observed in 19th century Ontario where a younger son frequently inherited the farm, often with the responsibility of providing for single females in the family. The equal division of property among inheriting sons was the more common pattern observed in Laprairie in the 18th century, but whether this resulted from the availability of land in the area, as Louis Lavallée maintains, or derived from the Custom of Paris, is open to question.⁷ The practice of equal division of property well before

4 "Pêcheurs basques et indiens des côtes du Saint-Laurent au XVIe siècle: perspectives des recherches", in *Evolution et Eclatement du Monde Rural*, pp. 231-8.

5 "Vogue canadienne et milieu métropolitain de soutien à la mission lointaine au XVIIe siècle: 'l'épopée mystique' de la Nouvelle-France", in *Evolution et Eclatement du Monde Rural*, pp. 415-28.

6 T. Barthelemy de Saizieu, "Les alliances matrimoniales à Neuville à la fin du XVIIe siècle", and L. Michel, "Varennes et Verchères à la fin du XVIIe siècle", *Evolution et Eclatement du Monde Rural*, pp. 315-40.

7 "La transmission du patrimoine dans le seigneurie de Laprairie, 1667-1760", in *Evolution et Eclatement du Monde Rural*, pp. 341-52.

crowding in the St. Lawrence Valley during the 19th century suggests the need for historical revision. A stimulating article by John Dickinson goes further in contrasting the experience of France and New France.⁸ In examining popular conceptions of land tenure in Quebec and Normandy, Dickinson demonstrates that the widespread use of written forms in the former resulted in fewer legal situations in which the collective presence of the community as witnesses was necessary. Rural people during the French regime in Canada found greater means to settle disputes among themselves, but when cases emanated beyond the farm, they had recourse to notaries whose profession was thereby enhanced in the colony.

Demography has made a major contribution to the social history of French colonization. Not only is it a subject addressed in the first of the two collections just considered, but also in a major demographic study by Hubert Charbonneau, André Guillemette and Jacques L egar e, *Naissance d'une population, Les Franais  tablis au Canada au XVIIe si cle* (Montr al, Presses de l'Universit  de Montr al, 1987), which provides new information on immigrants to New France. Both the singularity of certain demographic traits in early French Canada and the common ground with its progenitor are highlighted in this work. These authors greatly revise the estimates of migration to Quebec. They suggest that some 15,000 people migrated to New France during the 17th century, rather than the 10,000 usually invoked for the entire French regime. Of those, two-thirds returned to France. The remainder, whom the authors call "pioneer immigrants", are the object of their study. Their methods only allow them to study 3,380 such people who generated some serial document such as a parish record of marriage or birth. This longitudinal study of pioneer immigrants in the 17th century population contains some remarkable findings. That there was a disproportionate number of young, single males in this group is unsurprising. It is more interesting that more than half emanated from urban areas in France, with over two-thirds coming from north of the Loire River. The west of France contributed the largest number, followed by Normandy and the Paris region, a conclusion that assaults the antiquated notion of the Norman origins of the Canadian population. Many married shortly after arrival, producing an amazing story. Early marriage, high fertility, and low mortality of those 1,500 male and 1,100 female pioneer immigrants who married accounted for two-thirds of the genes of the French Canadian population before 1950. Expressed a different way, on average these men and women had 36 children and grandchildren. Guillaume Couillard and Guillemette H bert had 689 descendants by 1730.

As diseases rather than Indian incursions were the chief cause of death, the

8 "La conception populaire de la tenure en Normandie et en Nouvelle-France", *Evolution et Eclatement du Monde Rural*, pp. 163-72.

low density of population, better nutrition, and clean water favoured lower mortality. There was a high level of infertility among some of the women which the authors can only attribute to their backgrounds in France before being sent to the colony as *filles du roi*. Women survived more frequently than men, and wives buried their husbands twice as often as the reverse. Men and women tended to remarry at the same rate, unlike in France where men remarried more frequently. Women chose new mates about their own age while men often chose younger women. Otherwise, the experience of migration did not alter demographic traits in regard to birth and marriage. The Breton birthrate was as high as that in Canada, but life expectancy in Canada (35.5 years) was greater than in France (25-28 years). Although it is hazardous to compare literacy rates due to variations in France, by the late 17th century more Canadian and immigrants could sign their name than in France, especially women. Early in the 19th century French patterns began to replicate those in Canada previously, but family limitation practices altered trends.

The urban counterpart of life in New France has been addressed recently by André Lachance in *La vie urbaine en Nouvelle-France* (Montréal, Boréal, 1987). As a first attempt at the subject, it reflects the superficiality that marked the early urban history surveys in the United States three decades ago. Not only is it fatally flawed by its failure to place its subject in either a European or North American comparative framework, but in adopting a narrow definition of New France that excludes even Port-Royal and Louisbourg, the book is parochial even in the Canadian context. Paradoxically, many of its illustrations were provided by the reconstructed fortress on Cape Breton.

Part of the dissatisfaction in reading this book derives from the curious amalgam that currently constitutes urban history in Canada.⁹ Lachance remains true to his vocation as social historian, but much of the evidence he adduces is deviant behaviour derived from his studies in criminality. Population, social structure, physical environment, collective needs (defence, water and public hygiene), and towns as centres of control are sketched in rudimentary manner. Generalizations are sometimes too facile. Lachance writes that misery led women to prostitution, despite literature from other periods and places that undermines such an assertion. He also writes compassionately of the care provided foundlings by nuns whereas research from after the Conquest suggests that such services facilitated the disposal of unwanted infants.¹⁰ Unfortunately, Lachance is also unaware of the larger questions that emerge from historiography. Why did New France develop so few towns containing only some 20 per

9 Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History* (2nd ed., Toronto, 1986), p. 316.

10 Peter Gossage, "Les enfants abandonnés à Montréal au 19e siècle: La Crèche d'Youville des Soeurs Grises, 1821-1871", *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 40 (1987), pp. 537-59.

cent of the population, especially in light of the urban origins of so many of its immigrants? What ideas governed state intervention in the marketplace, especially in comparison to the English colonies? The intellectual world is absent in more than the subjects addressed in this book.

The contrast between this first survey and the collected articles of W. J. Eccles, published during the last quarter century and reprinted in *Essays on New France* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1987), could not be greater. What has disguised Eccles as an historian is not simply his questioning of outmoded beliefs, but his willingness to venture new interpretations in the most important areas on the basis of a fresh encounter with the primary sources. While so much of history advances today through the narrow research monograph or paper, W.J. Eccles never lost the broader perspective. He has been able to impart significant new meaning to the period of the French regime and his essays remain valuable to specialist and generalist alike.

Although Eccles is advertised here as “the leading Anglo-Canadian social historian of New France”, his work has never been bounded by specialty. Period was always the primary attraction to W.J. Eccles. Beginning as a political, military and constitutional historian, he broadened his approach to include international relations as well as social and economic history. In his work, the past really mirrors the present. His first book on Frontenac appealed to the desire to disenthroned heroes in the period following World War Two in the same manner that his first published paper attempted to analyse the work of Francis Parkman on even more partial terms. During the turbulent decade of the 1960s when the role of the church was questioned in Quebec and social programs figured heavily on the political agenda, Eccles addressed these issues as they pertained to New France. More recently he borrowed the concept of sovereignty-association to discuss French-Amerindian relations. Even the subject of women entered his pages briefly, but the cutting edge of his inveterate iconoclasm was applied to best effect in his critical assessment of the work of Harold Innis as it applied to New France.

Even more misleading is the advertisement of Alan F. Williams, *Father Beaudoin's War, D'Iberville's Campaigns in Acadia and Newfoundland 1696-1697* (St. John's, Department of Geography, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1987) as “narrative history”. Trying to figure out just what this book was intended to be posed some problems for its author, a geographer, and for its publisher. Variously described as “campaign geography” — whatever that is — and as “a partial exercise in idealistic explanation”, this account is little more than a belaboured, descriptive recounting of Iberville's adventures that relies too heavily on one primary source. Narrative history as exemplified by its great practitioners involves a storyline and cast of characters assembled in a manner that allow its flow to carry its reader forward. Conversely, the account of Alan Williams is driven by his sources — sometimes just inventories in the manner of the past century — rather than riding on them to sustain his narrative. A mass of

arcane detail litters the text, but the maps are wonderful. The author's writing style is graceless and plagued with problems of verb tense. Not only does Williams know little about the discipline of history, but his book is weakened by his unfamiliarity with historiography. Would that he had read W.J. Eccles rather than Francis Parkman to avoid such statements as that which claims Acadia was an "appendage of New France and subject to a despotic Governor in the far-off city of Quebec" (p. 3). He is equally unfamiliar with the French colonial command structure and the literature on the extent of the Acadian-New England trade. While the European and Canadian backgrounds to the skirmishes involving Iberville and his men are drawn inadequately, this book is a reminder of the tenacious fighting spirit of French Canadians and Acadians in a brutal conflict that involved Europeans in scalping.

Medical history is another area where practitioners have applied the insights of their discipline to the study of the past with varying degrees of success. This enterprise frequently shares affinities to whig history in its concentration on professionalization as the centrepiece in an unfolding drama. Ronald L. Numbers, ed., *Medicine in the New World, New Spain, New France, and New England* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1987) contains three discrete essays in colonial medical history which the editor attempts to unite by stressing the reliance of New World experts on European expertise. Each paper looks at population, medicine, hospitals, and the healing professions, with a concentration on physicians. None is essentially a research essay but a survey of recent findings. Toby Gelfand from the University of Ottawa served as the author for "Medicine in New France". He provides a handy summary to have in English, but his account would have benefitted by greater knowledge of recent research on medical arts at Louisbourg.

Of far greater value is John McNeill's *The Atlantic Empires of France and Spain, Louisbourg and Havana* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1985). Not only is the comparative model in full force in this study, but its author has been guided by a sound grounding in the archives of both nations and knowledge of their respective imperial military and economic policies. McNeill asks some of the questions traditionally addressed by historiography, but in a more rounded way based on the dual focus of his study. While noting that both France and Spain appreciated the value of seapower, he argues that neither was able to devote as many resources towards its navy as was Great Britain. McNeill falls back on the old argument that geographical restraints forced Britain to spend more money on maritime defence.

In comparing and contrasting Louisbourg and Havana in their respective imperial systems, the Cuban capital clearly comes off the winner economically and militarily. Everyone knew that in the 18th century, but McNeill is especially good in disentangling the elements of mercantilist thought that governed the economic policies of the Bourbon monarchies and led them to support such installations in the New World. Each country was concerned to control colonial

commerce as well as production. Fortifications afforded the protection needed to facilitate the resource exploitation of their hinterlands, but Havana's position tapped a wealthier agricultural area than the fishing banks off Louisbourg. McNeill is condemnatory of both the defences constructed at Louisbourg, which he considers ill-conceived and poorly executed, and the naval role assigned to the Cape Breton fortress. Havana succumbed to the British in 1762 while Louisbourg fell in 1745 and 1758. He goes too far, however, in arguing that the fortress was useless to the defence of New France given the reluctance of the French navy to disperse its fleet, although he is correct in his claim that once the fortress was built, it was more important to the French to deny the port to the English. While McNeill acknowledges the delaying value of such an installation in wartime, his position fails to acknowledge adequately the shelter Louisbourg afforded the convoy of the *Compagnie des Indes* in 1745, the role of privateering in French naval thought, or the naval resources dispatched to Louisbourg during the years 1756 to 1758. It is possible to disagree with some of McNeill's interpretations, but his book has satisfied a real need for a realistic assessment of Louisbourg's economic and military role viewed within a broader perspective.

That same informed viewpoint serves as a constant frame of reference for Dale Miquelon in *New France 1701-1744: A Supplement to Europe* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1987). Miquelon has chosen his unifying theme very carefully in order to weave an integral account of the period. Guy Frégault, the first of three authors assigned to this volume in the "Canadian Centenary Series", expressed very different views that described the emergence of a distinctly Canadian society in Quebec. Extrapolating from the works of W.J. Eccles as well as trends in recent historiography, Miquelon emphasizes the role of New France in relation to Europe. This conforms nicely to his period which commences with the end of the Iroquois wars, the expansion of the colony westward with the founding of Detroit, the beginnings of colonization in Louisiana, and the opening of the War of the Spanish Succession. As North America became engulfed in European affairs, the French colonies emerged increasingly as military pawns in the contest of empire. Soon Louisbourg was constructed on the ruins of defeat in the east to serve as the bastion of Quebec defence, a role derided in some quarters at the time and since. Miquelon handles these developments and relations with the Indians intelligently within his theme of "supplement to Europe", although one might quibble with particular areas. By emphasizing the dynastic origins of wars in Europe, for instance, he neglects their commercial origins and nature as revealed in recent research.

The notable chapters are those that concern economic development and Canadian society that form the latter half of the book. As the author of a previous study of merchant trade, Miquelon is surest on economic matters, although he may have dug deeper into studies of Acadia and Louisbourg in recent years. His discussions of Canadian colonization, agriculture, and political and social structures are no less thoughtful and measured. He rightly refuses to

adopt instant postures, preferring instead to offer more complex answers to some of the thornier questions of French regime historiography. By constantly placing his study within the dual focus of the English colonies and Old Regime France, he concludes that New France was neither a golden age of French Canada nor as backward as some detractors have portrayed. He deftly relates these topics to his principal thesis by arguing that it "is this congruence of noble values percolating down with Indian values seeping in that explains the underlying unity of Canada and the Old Regime" (p. 239). His discussion of politics and government in the French colonies is equally masterful. This is a mature work that makes a major contribution to the field. Miquelon's account ends appropriately with New France about to fight in yet another war emanating from Europe.

One of the many sources that Miquelon uses adroitly is a doctoral dissertation written more than 45 years ago by Alice Jean Lunn under the supervision of E. R. Adair, who also served as supervisor to W.J. Eccles. It has now been translated into French by Brigitte Monel-Nish in a new series on Quebec's social and economic history edited by Cameron Nish for the Centre de recherche en histoire économique et sociale in Montreal.¹¹ While remarkable in its day and still mined by scholars doing their research, it remains an unfortunate choice to inaugurate a new series. Lunn's method of viewing economic development from the top down through the eyes of administrators has not been in fashion for the past three decades. On nearly every subject she approached, a book or series of articles have supplanted her account.

John Boshier is the latest author to throw genuinely new light on the economic and political history of New France in *The Canada Merchants 1713-1758* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987). The result of many years of scouring archives in France for evidence of trade between France and her Canadian colonies, Boshier weaves his materials into a succinct and insightful account that introduces religion as a factor in the history of New France in a way not previously considered except in one case study.¹² Those familiar with Boshier's earlier brilliant book on French finances prior to the revolution¹³ will notice a form and approach that is similar except that here the British conquest is viewed as climax. Faced with a mass of intractable sources, Boshier again assumes a basically prosopographical approach that places the Canadian trade squarely within the context of the families that conducted it. The economic prospects, social standing and official

11 *Développement économique de la Nouvelle-France 1730 — 1760* (Montréal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1986).

12 Dale Miquelon, "Havy and Lefebvre of Quebec: A Case Study of Metropolitan Participation in the Canadian Trade, 1730-1760", *Canadian Historical Review*, 56 (1975), pp. 1-24.

13 *French Finances 1770-1795: From Business to Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, U.K., 1970).

place of those people, he argues, were heavily influenced by their religion — Protestant, Catholic and Jew. The 18th century bears a strong resemblance to many developing countries today, even a nation such as China where the impact of religion is felt less heavily and where *guanxi* (connections) account for more than money.

After arguing for seeing Canadian history in the light of Europe, Bosher examines the merchant family, Bourbon official society, Huguenot trading society, the era of the cosmopolitan trade from 1743 to 1760, and the crisis of the merchants at the Conquest. Royal discrimination in favour of Catholics favoured them at every turn and allowed their integration with other elements of society through marriage, position, commission and office. Such connections allowed naval officers to engage in trade, a subject which Bosher has broached before, but amplifies here to greater extent. He resolutely holds to his conviction that the last intendant of New France, François Bigot, was simply a scapegoat for a regime so fundamentally corrupt that only a revolution — or a conquest — could end its infamy.¹⁴ In doing so, he reasserts the importance of that military victory of British over French arms in a manner that no historian has dared in more than three decades. Unfortunately, it at this point that Bosher falters. In attempting to link the suppression of the Jesuits in France in 1761 to a system in political, military and financial crisis, Bosher suggests that this step in the direction of crushing the power of the church in the mother country was accomplished in Canada by the British victory. Such a statement does not stand up well in the light of our current knowledge of post-conquest Quebec society.

As the historiography of French colonization has moved further towards stressing its roots in metropolitan culture, European and global affairs assume greater importance. The inter-relationship between economic power and military might has been a major attraction lately, even in the American Congress where the work of Yale historian Paul Kennedy has drawn widespread attention. Kennedy has argued that the triumph of one great power, or the collapse of another, has resulted from more than victory in arms. It has occurred as a consequence of a nation's deployment of its economic resources which, in turn, was dependent on a rise or fall in the economy of that country, relative to other nations, before the actual conflict.¹⁵ In a United States currently fretful about decline in a manner reminiscent of Britain a century ago, Kennedy's thesis has struck a tender nerve.

14 Despite their best efforts to argue otherwise, Jean-Claude Dubé and Pierre-Julien Laferrière, *Les Bigots du XVIIe siècle à la Révolution* (Montreal, Fides, 1988) is only a genealogical account that adds but a few minor details to what is currently known about François Bigot.

15 Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York, 1987). Also germane is the same author's *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London, 1976).

Economic power and financial strength figure prominently in two studies of 18th century Europe that will influence writing about the Seven Years' War in Canada. James Pritchard, *Louis XV's Navy 1748-1762, A Study of Organization and Administration* (Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987) and Richard Middleton, *The Bells of Victory, The Pitt-Newcastle Ministry and the Conduct of the Seven Years' War, 1757-1762* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985) describe themselves as administrative histories, but their purview is much larger. Each links the naval strength of Britain and the relative weakness of France to differences in financial resources. The enormous credit of Britain allowed her to conduct the Seven Years' War by land and sea. After the invasion of Saxony, France was forced to neglect her maritime and colonial possessions in order to aid her continental allies. Both William Pitt and the duc de Choiseul understood this, Pitt saying colourfully that America had been conquered in Germany.

Pritchard's study is especially welcome as the administrative history of the French navy has lagged behind that of its British counterpart. His account follows the navy's problems from the highest echelons of state down to questions of provisioning. He emphasizes throughout that all levels were caught in the grips of a financial system which was not anyone's to change. Financial demands, political constraints, and a method of government finance unable to respond adequately to the exigencies of war conspired to frustrate the navy. Although between 1748 and 1758 the French had built a well-balanced and well-constructed fleet which was the strongest since the days of Louis XIV, it was not one ready for war. The navy lost half its fighting strength in 1758 and 1759. Government bankruptcy precluded replacement. Few ships set sail during the next two years. By 1761, when Choiseul confirmed France's alliance with Spain, only 21 ships of the line were available.

While Pritchard proffers an administrative explanation appropriate to the nature of his documentation, one wonders if he might have forwarded a different interpretation if more could be known about politics at the uppermost reaches of government in France. The office of the secretary of state for the navy and colonies did not allow its incumbent access to the highest decision-making body, the Council of State. Only when the secretary was elevated to the rank of minister was he allowed to attend. More importantly, secretaries and ministers changed very rapidly during this period. From 1748 to 1762, 23 ministers and secretaries of state headed the four major government departments of war, finance, foreign affairs, and the navy. Government had reached the point where the inertia of inherited institutions and the interest of special groups limited the execution of the central will. As the number of council meetings declined, personal contacts between the king and his secretaries became increasingly important. Consequently, the quality of documentation concerning the conduct of the war is far poorer for the French side than the British. Pritchard nevertheless closes his account by attempting to challenge the traditional interpretation

which attributes important naval reforms to Choiseul, but he does not adduce enough proof from this period outside the chronological limits of his study to be convincing. One is struck as well by the fact that the problems Pritchard discusses had important antecedents earlier in the century.¹⁶ Other than the need to be inclusive, it is difficult to justify the strict time limits imposed on his study.

Pritchard's study is restrictive in another way that Middleton's study of the Pitt-Newcastle ministry is not. In examining the administration and organization of the navy, the great sea battles appear not only remote, but ultimately inconsequential to the larger case that Pritchard argues. Middleton, in contrast, manages to integrate the major land and sea operations with his account of ministerial decision making during the Seven Years' War. With a firm grasp of historiography and a thorough examination of the relevant primary sources, Middleton provides a revisionist perspective that will have to be addressed in explaining the British conquest of Canada. Besides stressing the superior economic power of British credit, he questions how historians have viewed war strategy in the 18th century. He argues that strategy was a limited concept until at least the Napoleonic era. Too much attention has been devoted, he maintains, to contrasting the maritime and continental schools of warfare in Britain. Both saw the validity of the other's arguments, Britain had always pursued both policies in previous wars, and the only true disagreement arose over the question of the deployment of British troops in Germany.

"There can be no question of the importance of Pitt's contribution to the conquest of Canada", George Stanley concluded two decades ago.¹⁷ Middleton disenthrones William Pitt from that position which he has enjoyed since the earliest part of the 20th century. He shows that Pitt had no coherent plan for the defeat of France when he assumed office in 1757. The defeat of France was engineered by a ministry in which a number of capable individuals acted and interacted. Field-Marshal Sir John Ligonier was responsible for the appointment of Jeffrey Amherst and James Wolfe to the most prestigious assignment in North America, the successful capture of Louisbourg in 1758. While Newcastle played an essential role in the financial realm, no minister made a greater contribution than Admiral Lord George Anson. Through his efforts, the British fleet was in excellent condition at the outbreak of the war and then successfully moved to meet combat conditions. The Anson era was not known for innovation, although better ships were designed. Greater human and financial resources allowed Britain to establish higher targets for manning her fleet and to meet

16 See Marcel Giraud, "Crise de conscience et d'autorité à la fin du règne de Louis XIV", *Annales: Economies-Sociétés-Civilisations*, 7 (1952), pp. 172-90, 293-302 and "Tendances humanitaires à la fin du règne de Louis XIV", *Revue Historique*, 209 (1953), pp. 217-37.

17 George F. Stanley, *New France, The Last Phase 1744-1760* (Toronto, 1968), p. 167.

those goals. William Pitt was clearly important, but not to the extent previously portrayed in most historical writing. Following the ascension of George III and the promotion of Lord Bute, Pitt's views hardened over the terms for peace with France. After five months of acrimonious debate, Pitt resigned, but the war continued. Middleton ends his study here, but includes an appendix which details the historiography of William Pitt since the 18th century and reveals his own presuppositions in creating this superb account.

As modern communications have allowed the world to grow smaller, a cross-fertilization between European and North American historians has provided new stress on the links and similarities in human experience on two continents. The influence of the hereditarian interpretation has worked in a different way in history than in psychology. In history, recent work has only shifted the balance of interpretation in one direction, but without obliterating arguments for the distinctiveness of some elements in the Canadian past. As social history has matured, it has come to assume the larger intellectual world view once associated with the military historians of the colonial period. The time appears ripe for a new synthesis that will unite these diverse strains into an integrated history of New France.

TERRY CROWLEY

Twentieth Century Newfoundland Politics: Some Recent Literature

WHILE THERE ARE MORE SCHOLARS AT work in the field of Newfoundland history than was once the case, their number is not large. For one of the group to attempt a review article is perhaps foolhardy, and throughout the preparation of this piece I have been reminded of the words of D.W. Prowse as he embarked on the section of his history dealing with Newfoundland in his own time. It was the most difficult part of his subject, he wrote, for "whilst endeavouring to write a true history of the period, I have had also to walk, like Agag before Saul, delicately, in order to avoid offence".¹ He went on to deliver an opinionated account of the later 19th century which reflected accurately his Liberal and nationalist views. Tact did not prove to be his strong suit.

Prowse was an admirer of Robert Bond, premier from 1900 to 1909, who placed great importance on — some might say was obsessed by — Newfoundland's

¹ D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland from the English, Colonial and Foreign Records* (London, 1895), pp. 481-2.