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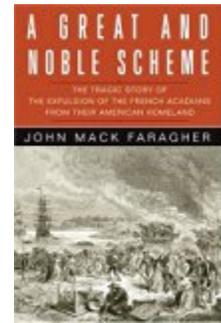
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John Mack Faragher. *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of Expulsion of the French Acadians from their American Homeland*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005. xx + 562 pp. \$17.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-393-32827-1; \$28.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-393-05135-3.

John Mack Faragher. *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from Their American Homeland*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2005. xx + 562 pp.

Reviewed by Monica D. Fitzgerald (Department of History, California State University, East Bay)

Published on H-NewEngland (June, 2008)



Lessons from the Borderland: Ethnic Cleansing, Colonial Identity, and Cultural Persistence

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow memorialized the story of the expulsion of the Acadians from their homeland in his 1847 fictionalized account, *Evangeline*. His poem recounted the trials of a young Acadian maiden searching for her long-lost lover from whom she was separated during the forced migration out of Acadia (Nova Scotia). The Longfellow-Evangeline State Historic Site in Saint Martinville, Louisiana, is home to a reconstructed Acadian homestead and serves to instruct visitors on the rich historical tradition of cultural diversity in the area. Indeed, it was a visit to this museum that spurred John Mack Faragher to explore the story of the Acadians and produce a comprehensive study of the peopling and unpeopling of the far corner of North America, known as Acadia. *A Great and Noble Scheme* provides a detailed account of what Faragher calls “the first episode of state-sponsored ethnic cleansing in North America” (p. 473).

Considering the issues of ethnic cleansing throughout the world in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, explaining the Acadian experience within the framework of modern definitions of ethnic cleansing is a compelling enough story. Faragher argues that war often justifies conduct that would otherwise be unconscionable, especially against groups who faced racial stereotyping, as the Acadians did. The English combined their anti-Catholic, anti-French, and anti-Indian hatred in full force

against the Acadians. Lessons for us resonate on identifying the signs and dangers of “othering” groups who differ in heritage, culture, religion, and ethnicity. However, Faragher offers many additional lessons as well. He provides an account of a type of settlement in North America that could have been, one that assimilated with various peoples to create a distinct and new identity. His account is also a lesson about cultural persistence, and the Acadians’ fight to maintain their identity through the battles of two empires, mass expulsion, and eventual resettlement. Perhaps it is in the borderlands of North America that we can learn most about our complex past, about the type of cultural interchange that was possible, the struggles for autonomy, and the painful reminders of the cost of fear and loathing.

When the French arrived in Port Royal in 1606, they first developed as an agricultural colony. The settlers quickly established trade and alliances with the Micmaq Indians. The French adapted many Micmaq customs, intermarried, and created a unique culture with few ties to a European identity. Yet, through trade, these French, who came to call themselves Acadians, also developed ties to the English. Kinship, politics, and commerce connected Acadians in “tangled webs of alliances” (p. 104). Faragher describes how over time the Acadians considered themselves a distinct people; no longer French, they

“were truly becoming a people in between” (p. 75). Living in the margin of empire between New France and New England, Acadians promoted a policy of neutrality, under which they prospered until the escalation of hostilities of the French-Indian War found them directly in the middle of the fight. However, for over one century, the Acadians lived and prospered, truly creating a multi-ethnic, diverse new world. The reader must assume that left alone Acadians would have continued on such a path. The story of Acadia serves as an excellent example of the possibility that existed in North America for cultural exchange and interchange; that settlement did not necessitate the removal of Native Americans, but could have involved coexistence and cooperation. It was not a path readily taken, but it was a path that the Acadians proved possible.

Yet, in the very foundation of their success, they also cemented their undoing. It was their distinctiveness, their “otherness,” their Indianness that the English exploited to remove them from their homeland. While the Acadian policy of neutrality sought to maintain ties to the French and English, neither empire considered Acadians one of their own. Each side used the Acadians as pawns in their imperial battles for control of North America. In 1755, the English created a legal justification for their removal, explaining that the Acadians refused to offer an unconditional oath to the British crown. However, what really made the expulsion of the Acadians possible was the utter hatred the English had for anything French, Catholic, or Indian. Acadians’ steadfast history of honoring their policy of neutrality was no match for the English arguments that they would always be the “secret enemies” of the British (p. 333). Of the estimated eighteen thousand Acadians, the English deported seven thousand to various British colonies in 1755. Another eleven thousand refugees escaped into Indian territory or attempted to reach Quebec, only to face disease and starvation. Considering statistics of reasonable popula-

tion growth, Faragher estimates that ten thousand Acadians lost their lives in this ethnic cleansing. After the English burned their homes and pillaged their towns, they sent Protestant families to settle on the fertile land. The English wanted to disperse the Acadians in small groups throughout the British colonies to prevent them from organizing any resistance or maintaining their allegiance to their Acadian identity. Yet, there are some things even brutal force cannot take away from people.

Ten years after their expulsion from their homeland, thousands of Acadians began migrating to New Orleans, some still looking for lost family members, others just searching for their Acadian community. Acadian refugees who were dispersed as far as France, sought out their people in New Orleans where they established a new Acadia, cultivating their rich and varied identities. In a final act of borderland irony, they asked to be considered neutrals during the American Revolution. Today, visitors to Louisiana find much evidence of their Acadian influences, which intermixed with Indian, black, Spanish, and Anglo influences to create an entirely new Cajun identity.

In 2003, Queen Elizabeth II issued a Royal Proclamation acknowledging the role of the British in the deportation of Acadians. No such American acknowledgement has occurred, even though “Yankees” were intricately involved in the ethnic cleansing. Americans have begun to confront the atrocities of the nineteenth-century policy of Cherokee Removal, but have not yet examined the tragedy in Acadia. *A Great and Noble Scheme* offers readers lessons from the past, which expose issues that continue to challenge not just America, but the rest of the world, issues of discrimination, diversity, and cultural identity. Readers interested in the histories of the borderlands, New England, New France, imperial diplomacy, or family history will find much to appreciate in this book. Faragher creates a poignant and usable past, one that I hope gains many readers.

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Citation: Monica D. Fitzgerald. Review of Faragher, John Mack, *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of Expulsion of the French Acadians from their American Homeland* and John Mack Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from Their American Homeland*. H-NewEngland, H-Net Reviews. June, 2008.

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