

 **Article REVIEW**

**Jon Parmenter and Mark Power Robison.** “The Perils and Possibilities of Wartime Neutrality on the Edges of Empire: Iroquois and Acadians between the French and British in North America, 1744-1760.” *Diplomatic History* 31.2 (April 2007): 167-206. doi:10.1111/j.1467-7709.2007.00611.x. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2007.00611.x> .

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**T**he scholarly literature on colonial America is awash with studies of colonists and Indians living side-by-side, forming families together, establishing alliances, developing polyglot communities, sometimes worshipping together, profiting from each other, exploiting each other or fighting. It is not unusual to study colonists and Indians together. Jon Parmenter and Mark Power Robison’s “The Perils and Possibilities of Wartime Neutrality on the Edges of Empire: Iroquois and Acadians between the French and British in North America, 1744-1760” is quite something different, however, and something, in fact, rare: a systematic comparative study of an Indian community and a colonial community separated by a significant distance. Similar comparative studies might be undertaken involving other Native American communities and a host of understudied conquered colonial populations in places such as Canada, Newfoundland, Florida, Louisiana and Illinois, New Jersey, or New York. I hope more work of this kind can be done. Such comparative work encourages us to think rigorously about the dynamics of imperialism.

The authors trace the political fortunes of the Iroquois and the Acadians through two imperial wars: the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years’ War. Like the Iroquois, the Acadians (French-speaking colonists) lived on the border between the French and the British Empires, and occupied lands claimed by both empires. The authors maintain that both the Iroquois and the Acadians successfully pursued policies of neutrality during the War of the Austrian Succession, and the Iroquois were able to continue that success in the subsequent conflict. The Acadians, disastrously, could not. In two major operations, in 1755 and 1758, the British seized and removed them by the thousands.

Parmenter and Robison identify four factors that contributed to the ability of the Iroquois to remain neutral and survive through the imperial wars. First, their elaborate political structure allowed them to negotiate with representatives of both empires. Second, they were able to gather intelligence from both empires. Third, they played an important role in facilitating illicit trade between Albany and New York, which reinforced the widespread perception that they were, in fact, neutral. Fourth, there were many among the Iroquois who had fought as allies alongside the British and the French in earlier

campaigns conducted by the British and the French, which gave the confederacy an advantage when the Iroquois were making strategic decisions.

Reviewing these factors, it becomes immediately apparent that the Acadians enjoyed some of the same advantages. Like the Iroquois, they maintained contact with representatives of both empires, and they acted as middlemen in a large-scale illicit trade network across the imperial border. The Acadians had little diplomatic or military experience, however, and in the mid-1750s they dramatically failed to grasp their strategic situation. These weaknesses stemmed, the authors argue, from one fundamental circumstance. The Acadians did not make any claim to sovereignty. Since the 1720s they had repeatedly sworn allegiance to the British king, and the few local government offices they maintained derived their authority from the British-colonial administration. As a consequence, they had no leaders who could speak for them effectively in a diplomatic context. They had no experienced military leaders, and none of the wherewithal necessary, in the short run, to raise an army. These were significant disabilities and they left the Acadians, in the difficult early years of the Seven Years' War, in a worse position than many Native American groups.

This is a highly suggestive piece, and it serves to remind us of the positive value of sovereignty and formal diplomacy in maintaining Native American cultural and political integrity. It is worth remembering, though, that the Acadians did not disappear after 1758. Their cultural persistence highlights the importance of an aspect of neutrality that the authors do not emphasize. The Acadians' most passionate and evocative declarations that they had always been neutral came after the expulsion, when they were not only pleading for restorative justice but also trying to make sense of what had happened to them. During the imperial wars one of the tactical advantages of neutrality was that it minimized infighting. Later, in a much more profound way, it helped keep the Acadians together.

**Geoffrey Plank** is the author of *An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign Against the Peoples of Acadia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) and *Rebellion and Savagery: The Jacobite Rising of 1745 and the British Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). He is a professor of history at the University of Cincinnati.

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