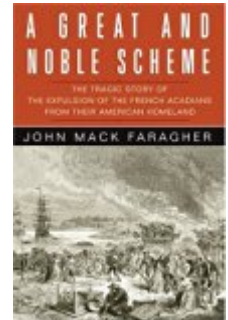


John Mack Faragher. *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of Expulsion of the French Acadians from their American Homeland.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005. xx + 562 pp. \$28.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-393-05135-3.



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Published on H-Canada (August, 2007)

Much of the historiography of Northeastern North America has been studied from a national perspective. Pre- (and post-) revolutionary history tends to be divided by the borders of our current nation-states. Canadians have focused on New France and Americans on New England and Virginia. Acadian history is different, as scholars incorporate both Maritime Canada and New England into the analysis. John Mack Faragher's *A Great and Noble Scheme* continues this tradition while simultaneously aiming the book at the American public. This approach makes the book accessible while limiting its overall scope.

Faragher's book covers the birth, death, and resurrection of the Acadian people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The narrative begins with the founding of Port Royal in 1604, discusses the formation of Acadian identity, the Acadian deportation in 1755, and the return of these people to Nova Scotia in the late eighteenth century. He pays particular attention to the critical role played by the people of New England and the Mi'kmaq—the original inhabitants of Acadia. At the heart of Faragher's discussion is the attempt to

draw the histories of these groups together and to contextualize the Acadian experience into the broader framework of North American history.

Central to this goal is his desire to demonstrate the importance of Acadia to the history of New England. His illustrations of the complexity of personal relationships among the region's key players best demonstrate this. For example, John Bradstreet, who planned the New England siege of Louisbourg in 1745, had well-placed family on both sides of the imperial divide. In examining these family connections, and the imperial situation in which he was placed, Faragher shows how Bradstreet found himself in an advantageous position for planning the town's invasion. Faragher paints a similar picture using Maj. John Handfield, who carried out the deportation in Annapolis Royal despite many family relations with the Acadian residents there. Faragher's discussion of these relationships conveys the region's complexity concisely and comprehensively.

The role played by the Mi'kmaq in this book warrants a mixed review. On the one hand, the story has paid much more attention to this peo-

ple's place in the early history of Acadia than previous narratives of Acadian history. Using similar arguments to those of A. H. Clark, L. F. S. Upton, and William C. Wicken, Faragher shows that the Mi'kmaq were instrumental in helping the Acadians establish themselves during the seventeenth century, and that they continued to provide support during tense moments in the eighteenth century. On the other hand, despite the early importance and central role ascribed to these people, this group is left out of his conclusions. "Le grand derangement," Faragher writes "was an Acadian, French, British, Canadian, and American story" (p. 479). In this way the book highlights the Mi'kmaq as key contributors to the geo-politics of this region, but discounts their overall impact on larger historical processes.

Despite the weight that Faragher has placed on the contributions of New Englanders and the Mi'kmaq, he does not consider them the critical influences on the formation of an Acadian identity. Acadia's frontier location plays the central role in this regard. As Acadia/Nova Scotia bounced back and forth between the French and English, the Acadians became well known for setting conditions on the oaths of allegiance demanded of them. The core of their resistance was the desire to remain neutral in future British conflicts with the French and Mi'kmaq. As Naomi Griffiths has argued persuasively, this sense of neutrality was central to the development of their collective identity. Unlike Faragher, Griffiths views Acadia as a historically conditioned borderland--a relatively unique situation. In keeping with his intellectual debts to Frederick Jackson Turner, Faragher sees this experience as being similar to other European immigrants in North America. For him, the Acadians are an American people.

The book's climax is the Acadian deportation. This forms the heart of Faragher's primary research, and the book's most important contribution. Here, he argues that the deportation was one of North America's first instances of ethnic cleans-

ing. Using a 1992 United Nations' definition, Faragher illustrates the parallels between this event and those more familiar in places like Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Although some scholars have rejected this type of parallel, Faragher's comparison conveys the deportation's gravity. He removes the deportation from the realm of political necessity, or impulsive decision making, to clearly lay the blame on specific individuals.

To meet the criteria set out in this definition, Faragher outlines the premeditated nature of this action. Using the writings of Nova Scotia surveyor Charles Morris, he convincingly demonstrates that the deportation was an event years in the planning. For Faragher, it was New England, and some of its elite, who bear responsibility for this tragedy. Morris and Massachusetts Governor William Shirley were the architects of this dispersal, while Nova Scotia Lieutenant-Governor Charles Lawrence and Attorney-General Jonathan Belcher carry the weight for putting the plan in place. It is this New England connection and the subsequent Acadian dispersal--primarily to the Thirteen Colonies--that provide the foundation for Faragher's trans-colonial focus.

Despite his ability to demonstrate that the deportation was planned, Faragher's interpretation of ethnic cleansing is not convincing for two reasons. First, he neglects the role of British perceptions of Acadian-Mi'kmaq relations. Despite primary documents suggesting this was a factor and recent historiography which demonstrates the consistent British desire to separate these two communities, Faragher does not address the issue. Not only does this illustrate the way the Mi'kmaq receive less attention near the book's conclusion, but it also reveals his tendency to narrowly focus on the central argument without addressing alternative interpretations. Second, Faragher does not fully acknowledge the importance of the broader imperial context. The work of both Griffiths and Geoffrey Plank convincingly show that this is critical to understanding the deportation. Using ex-

amples from both seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain and France, each scholar situates the deportation in its broader European intellectual climate. It was more than just a regional affair. Rather than seeing the deportation as "ethnic cleansing," and without diminishing the tragedy of the Acadian experience, focusing on these broader influences places the story into the geopolitical mentality of the eighteenth century.

Griffiths and Plank are able to provide a wider view by taking a different approach. Griffiths's focus is the pre-deportation Acadian community. Based on a lifetime of archival work in Canada and Europe, her recent *From Migrant to Acadian: A North American Border People, 1604-1755* (2005) is nearly a total history of this time and place. Plank's *An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign against the Peoples of Acadia* (2001) uses Acadia as a micro-analysis for larger themes in the British Empire. Using imperial sources that were created both in England and Acadia, Plank is able to address both local and international motivations for the deportation. Another book by John Reid et al., *The Conquest of Acadia, 1710: Imperial, Colonial, and Aboriginal Constructions* (2004), addresses this period from Acadian, New England, Mi'kmaq, and imperial perspectives. This collection of essays, written by experts in each of these fields, takes a broader perspective than Griffiths, Plank, or Faragher by using each chapter to discuss one group's response to the 1710 siege of Port Royal.

Faragher differs from these books by focusing primarily on the Acadian experience of expulsion. Despite framing his book from 1604-1785, his research is centred on the mid-eighteenth century. Well-known and accessible collections of documents from the French regime (pre-1713), such as the colonial correspondence for Acadia (C11D), do not appear to have been consulted, and some sections of the book rely heavily on the established historiographical canon.[1] For scholars working

in this field, the central impact of Faragher's book is his views on the deportation.

A Great and Noble Scheme is not Canadian history; rather the book seeks a larger narrative. This is American history, written for an American audience. Adhering to the frontier thesis, Faragher believes the cultural identity of the Acadians "retained its French origins in custom, language, and religion" while it also embraced "something American in its attachment to place, local practice, and newly developed traditions" (p. 179-180). They were early Americans; their key antagonists were New England men who hatched the plan to disperse them from their "American homeland." This sense of American identity is not necessarily a problem. Any study of the period before 1783 should be aware of the inter-connections between places now divided by an international border. There can be little doubt that living in rural North America was a transformative experience for many Acadians. In this case, however, such trans-colonial history has been written without greater contextualization of the European imperial world in which many of its historical actors lived. It is cast as too much of an American story.

A Great and Noble Scheme does an excellent job of drawing many of the important themes in Acadian historiography together. It provides a clear understanding of the social life of the early Acadians and tightly links each of the regional players into a North American web of relationships. Like many recent Atlantic and borderland scholars, Faragher reminds us that the histories of Canada and the United States have many intersections. The history of neither place can be written without the inclusion of the other. Most importantly, this book provides an admirable, if flawed, model for scholars seeking to integrate Aboriginal people, the French, or Thirteen Colonies into a North American meta-narrative. By the end of the book, readers will not only be aware of the important events of the Acadians' past, but will also

have gained a keen sense of how they relate to the present. Along with his last chapter, which discusses early Acadian historiography, this is by far one of the best introductions there is to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Acadia. John Mack Faragher deserves much credit for this well-written and accessible book.

Note

[1]. C11D refers to the correspondence received from Acadia by the Secretary of State in France. It is part of a larger grouping of items copied from the Archives des Colonies (MG1 at Library and Archives Canada). It has recently been made accessible online through the Library and Archives Canada website: www.collectionscanada.ca.

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Citation: Thomas Peace. Review of Faragher, John Mack. *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of Expulsion of the French Acadians from their American Homeland*. H-Canada, H-Net Reviews. August, 2007.

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