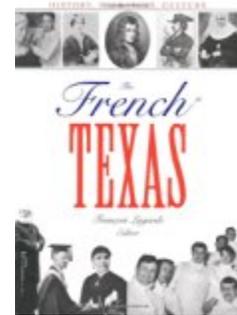


# H-Net Reviews

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François Lagarde, ed. *The French in Texas: History, Migration, Culture*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003. xiii + 360 pp. ISBN 978-0-292-74734-0; ISBN 978-0-292-70528-9.

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## Common Ground: French Contributions to Texas

How much did the French contribute to Texas? Unsurprisingly, this collection reveals that Francophones did not have a great impact on Texas—particularly in comparison with Hispanics or Anglophones who had and continue to have a much larger numerical presence. The contributions of French people for the most part tended to be on an individual, small-scale level, as their decision to migrate tended to be economically-motivated rather than cultural. Nevertheless, this compilation contributes a great deal to a thorough understanding of Texas and its history. The term “French” is intentionally defined in a broad manner in order to encompass not solely the French from France but also their North American counterparts from Quebec, Louisiana, and Texas, as well as all people of so-called “French stock,” including the second- and third-generation native or U.S.-born descendants of the French-born. In addition, this inclusive volume also embraces those French and French Creole speakers who form part of the extensive and on-going Cajun migration from Louisiana to Texas. This collection serves as a unique study of the important—albeit inherently limited—influence that even individuals or a small ethnic group can have on a larger society. In addition, in an era when the virtues of multiculturalism in America are questioned and unilateralism drives foreign policy, a volume that draws attention to the contributions of differing strains of western culture within the United States is particularly welcome. Such work acts as much-needed intellectual counterweight to the recent flurry of anti-Gallic bumper stickers that pronounce, “the spin stops here!” François Lagarde, a professor of French at the University of Texas in Austin and the editor of this book, not only contributed

a number of articles to this interdisciplinary collection, but wisely employed both professional academics, who add their expertise, and well-qualified local historians, who bring their unique passions.

A number of the essays demonstrate that economic motivations impelled most French men and women to go to Texas. For instance, Robert S. Weddle, a historian of the colonial history of Texas, shows that Robert Cavalier de La Salle sought to establish a port at the mouth of the Mississippi River in order to link New France with the coast. As Weddle demonstrated at length in his fine 2001 study *The Wreck of the Belle, the Ruin of La Salle*, La Salle’s arrogant personality and lack of accurate information about Gulf Coast geography, from the start doomed his expedition to end on the Texas coast instead, dashing whatever hopes the French Crown had of establishing a successful colony in the late-seventeenth century. Weddle and Patricia R. Lemée, also a specialist on the colonial Louisiana-Texas borderland, focus on Frenchmen such as Simars de Bellisle, Jean Béranger, and Bernard de la Harpe who expanded existing knowledge about the western Gulf of Mexico in order to aid the French colonizing efforts. In another article, Lemée focuses upon the efforts of Canadian-born Louis Juchereau de St. Denis and the Spanish-born second Marqués de San Miguel de Aguayo to settle and develop the Louisiana-Texas region by establishing Natchitoches in western French Louisiana and resettling Los Adaes in Spanish Texas. These entrepreneurs attracted colonists who forged the Indian trade, the area’s main source of revenue for much of the eighteenth century.

F. Todd Smith, who has published extensively on Native American tribes in Louisiana and Texas, stresses the importance of Athanase de Mézières, a Parisian man who shrewdly connected himself to the powerful St. Denis clan by marrying one of the Canadian's daughters and became Lieutenant Governor of Natchitoches under the late-eighteenth-century Spanish rule of Louisiana. A wealthy trader and planter in his own right, De Mézières directed Indian affairs in Louisiana, but also was instrumental in convincing Spanish authorities in Texas to adopt the more successful French policy of trading with the Indians rather than missionizing them, leading toward the establishment of a lasting peace with the Comanche Indians.

Economic need continued to drive many French migrants from France to Texas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. R. Dale Olson, the president of The Laffite Society, examines those men involved in piracy and privateering at Galveston Island who made a living at the expense of international shipping. However, Castroville, a town twenty-five miles west of San Antonio, epitomizes the nineteenth-century drive to come to Texas in search of a better quality of life. Janine Erny, a professor of Ethnology at the Université Marc Bloch, briefly details the poor economic conditions that drove a group of French colonists from the region of Alsace, who spoke a German dialect, while Wayne M. Ahr, a professor of Geology at Texas A&M University, examines the foundation and continuing development of Castroville, established in 1844. Henri Castro, a Portuguese Jewish immigrant to France, brought about 1,120 emigrants from Alsace, mostly hardy peasants as well as a few foreigners, to Castroville, creating a community that still views itself as culturally distinctive in spite of the few people who still speak Alsatian. When France extended official recognition of the Republic of Texas between 1836 and 1845, in part to slow American expansion into Latin America, Lagarde argues that not only did a handful of French entrepreneurs immigrate to Texas, but indelible ties were forged between France and Texas that continue until the present time.

The French who came from France to Texas differed in both number and degree of economic need from their counterparts also of French stock, the Louisiana Cajuns. Using censuses and oral interviews, Lagarde examines the nature of French migration from the nineteenth century to the present, finding that most were middle-class whites who had lived outside of France before permanently settling in Texas for financial reasons. Their numbers are so few that, it is poignant to learn, in most immi-

grant families French culture becomes a private origin or past that fails to cross over into the next generation that rarely learns French, leading immigrants to feel like detached global citizens. Indeed, in another article, Lagarde writes about the numerous French multinational corporations that extended the French economic presence in Texas by 2001; these corporations attracted a number of French employees to various cities who will certainly continue the pattern of isolated French migration. In contrast, Carl A. Brasseaux, a specialist of Louisiana history at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, focuses on the much more numerous Cajuns from the poor neighboring state of Louisiana, who came to seek economic opportunity westward in the heavily industrialized Golden Triangle, which encompasses Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Orange. Franco-Louisianans, some of whom were of mixed-race origins, actually began moving to southeastern Texas much earlier in 1850 when they numbered 600, a figure that almost tripled to 2,300 by 1887 and came to number 105,982 in 1990. After the discovery of oil near Beaumont in 1901, more Cajuns came on a large scale, especially after World War II, to work at petrochemical and refining plants. Unlike Francophone immigrants from France and their offspring, who have always been few in number and isolated from a wider network of immigrants in Texas, Cajuns employed a traditional migration pattern that emphasized familial networks, in which young males sent for their families after establishing themselves, and their French Catholic culture has influenced the Golden Triangle.

While economic need proved to be the primary drive for most French migrants, others who held cherished dreams of a better life also came, because Texas represented a land of opportunity. For example, Betje Black Klier, a historian who has published on the subject of French travelers and colonists in Texas, focuses on the fascinating story of former Baron General Charles Lallemand who led a group of Napoleon Bonaparte's defeated army to colonize the Champ d'Asile, or field of asylum, along the Trinity River between 1817 and 1819. The colony was a failure that lasted only a short time, yet the contemporary French press greatly romanticized the venture, today an almost forgotten incident. Jonathan Beecher, a specialist in French socialist and utopian movements, examines two radical French utopian dreamers, the Icarian communist Etienne Cabet and the Fourierist socialist Victor Considerant, who tried to colonize and create communities in North Texas after the failed European revolutions of 1848. In early 1848, Cabet and some adherents began the journey to settle Icarie, a site

near Denton, Texas, before relocating in 1849 to Nauvoo, Illinois, while Considerant's Fourierists settled Réunion in west Dallas in 1855, before that colony failed two years later.

Although the French were few in number, Gallic culture did manage to impact Texas, particularly through Roman Catholic missionary efforts. Lagarde stresses the importance of the French Catholic missionary effort in Texas between 1840 and 1880 that restored Catholicism to Texas in the face of Protestant rivals, especially Methodists and Baptists, the nascent public schools, and increasing immigration. Anne Marie Caldwell, a professor of French and Spanish at St. Mary's University, focuses on the educational efforts of Catholic brothers and sisters in Texas, including the successful establishment of a number of extant schools, academies, universities, and seminaries as well as the promotion of teaching French as a foreign language in a state lacking any large Francophone community. In addition, Klier examines the Frenchmen of the Alamo; she focuses on Louis "Moses" Rose, the so-called Yellow Rose of Texas, who experienced derision and scorn most of his life for leaving the Alamo before the Mexican siege even though the fight was not his own. Klier also reveals, startlingly, that the venerable Anglo-American hero-martyr David "Davy" Crockett was actually-unbeknownst to him-of aristocratic French heritage.

It is also evident from this collection that French migrants—as products of one of the arguably most sophisticated European cultures—brought an artistic influence to their adopted land. Richard Cleary, a specialist in architecture at the University of Texas, finds that the pedagogy of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, an influential school of the high-style European architecture and a source of enduring French contributions to architecture, had a substantial impact upon architectural education in Texas in the early-twentieth century. In addition, Paul Cret, born in Lyon, designed many buildings, particularly at the University of Texas in the 1930s, while John and Dominique de Menil were highly influential art

patrons in Houston. Martha Utterback, Assistant Director of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library in San Antonio, stresses the importance of a number of French artists who settled in Texas. Utterback focuses on two painters: Parisian-born Théodore Gentilz, who went to Castroville in 1844 and became an art teacher at St. Mary's Institute in San Antonio; and French woman Eugénie Aubanel, who married Englishman Charles Lavender and moved to Corpus Christi and Brownsville in the late-nineteenth century. Lagarde highlights the contributions of Raoul Josset, born in Tours in 1899, to Texas, where he remained after contributing many art deco statues and bas-reliefs to the 1936 Texas Centennial, including *Spirit of the Centennial*, a twenty-foot high female figure near the Women's Museum at Fair Park in Dallas.

Overall, this volume is a delightful addition to Texas history, particularly at this time. Perhaps President George W. Bush should consider offering a copy of this book to President Jacques Chirac in his attempt at rapprochement to our formerly close ally. After all, the pride shared among most Texans—whether native or not—in their state and that shared among French citizens in France find common ground here. Just as many Texans have misunderstood the French, this collection reveals that Texas has and continues to represent an exotic land to many French people. Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, a specialist of nineteenth-century art and literature at the University of Texas, examines the writings of French travelers, from La Salle's lieutenant Henri Joutel in 1685 to the twentieth-century feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, to expose the shifting politics of national identity reflected in the changing French view of Texas. Wettlaufer also amusingly exposes Texan stereotypes embedded in French writings such as Léon Paul Blouët's comic chapter "Why I Won't Go to Texas," in which he refuses to visit a place on the grounds that it was so violent that he certainly risked dying of a gunshot wound without attracting any public attention (p. 267)! Anyone interested specifically in the diverse contributions of the French to Texas or, more broadly, in Texas history and lore, would certainly be quite satisfied with this volume.

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