

Gosnell, Jonathan K: *Franco-America in the Making. The Creole Nation Within*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 2018. ISBN: 978-0-8032-8527-9; 366 S.

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This book tackles two vastly different American cultures established by French immigrants and colonists in the northeastern states and southern Louisiana. Jonathan Gosnell examines both the origins and contemporary life of those French-speaking communities built on the remains of the once vast French Empire that stretched from the St. Lawrence river to the Gulf of Mexico. They are 'creole' because they transformed „Old-World cultures into contemporary modes of life“ (p. 279), far removed from France. Previous studies considered the Franco-Americans of the Northeast (Brault, Louder, Richards, Chartier) separately from the Cajuns (Acadians), Creoles and others of South Louisiana (Brasseaux, Hall, Ancelet, Stivale). However, Francophone postcolonial studies with its many geographically and culturally diverse areas has provided an opening for the inclusion of both within this framework. The author's aim is to increase the visibility of these islands of Franco-America within „francophone post-colonial studies“ (p. 11) while challenging the „cultural insularity“ (p. 20) of previous studies mainly by Franco-Americans. The overview that emerges from the six chapters provides an understanding of efforts by Franco-Americans, north and south to bridge the contradiction of being culturally American but also somewhat „French“, as well as occasional objects of French ethnic shaming (p. 31). The first five chapters focus for the most part on the Franco-Americans in the six New England states and New York while the sixth concerns the „French“ of South Louisiana.

Chapter one details the challenges faced by French-Canadian workers who, by the late 19th century, had immigrated into almost every major industrial locale in New England and northern New York. Gosnell describes the subsequent challenge of forging a Franco-American identity between 1850

and 1950, as well as „what it means to be French and francophone today in the United States“ (p. 23). He discusses France's ill-fated North American colony, its conquest by Britain and the purchase of the Louisiana Territory by the United States. Chapter two focuses on the twentieth century institutions created by French populations in the United States faced with „cultural erasure“, among them the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and Assumption College in Massachusetts, which produced the groups' leaders. Historical sites „embody still living cultures“ (p. 66) while new sites and organizations have accomplished „notable strides“ (p. 94) in the preservation of French. Turning to the Alliance Française, conceived to support France's colonial aims, Gosnell argues that in the US it was a bulwark against anglicization in several Franco-American locales admitting however, that its secular, elite status (p. 77) attracted few working-class Franco-Americans. Similarly, he notes that in Acadiana today, this organization supports language promotion in South Louisiana. Such focus neglects the fundamental role played by Franco-Americans themselves who, during nearly a century, funded hundreds of bilingual parochial schools to anchor the language within their communities.

Chapter three focuses on the role of Franco women's social clubs in the Northeast; widespread vanguards of „survivance“ the sponsored cultural activities to transmit language, faith and traditions. Gosnell examines four such organizations ranging from a local parish-centered group, to the largest and most influential, La Fédération Feminine Franco-Américaine. At its height this umbrella organization had a membership of 47,000 women. Three local clubs in Massachusetts are described; they range from those catering to a cultural elite, as well as to the only still-active group, a working-class, bingo and card-playing parish association. Gosnell studies the latter most extensively, providing information on the structure of meetings, strategies to continue using French, and to develop membership. The „decorum“ (p. 131) and „esteemed French status“ focusing on France of the other clubs is clearly remote from the interests of the Chicopee club whose mem-

bers find satisfaction in performing the non-US identity they attach to Canada by speaking mostly French and displaying traditional culinary skills at their monthly meetings. Despite the contrasts between clubs, all are concerned with the promotion of education through scholarships and the study of French. Gosnell ends with the online umbrella organization, the Franco-American Women's Institute which originates in Maine and connects women digitally throughout Franco-America.

In Chapter four Gosnell describes the four centuries of writing „since French settlers first came to the New World“ (p. 152). Included in his transnational category are the long-orphaned literatures from the Northeastern U.S. and South Louisiana along with that of pre-1960's French Canada, all „creole (...) writing from the periphery“ (p. 157). For Gosnell it reflects the concept of „Littérature Monde“ proposed in 2007 by a coterie of francophone writers who argued that the centrality of continental French literature had been displaced by writing in French outside of France. While the early texts expressed the traditional view of a French destiny steeped in loyalty to the land, the French language and Catholicism, US writing reflected the complexities of life within the urban-industrial environment as well as writing by women. By considering Jack Kerouac in the context of writing in French, Gosnell theorizes that Kerouac's French texts provide a key link between earlier North American literary expression in French and contemporary writing in English which continues to be „peppered with French“ (p. 176).

In Chapter five, Gosnell addresses the phenomenal development of French-language newspapers, reflecting a major shift in New England's demographic and linguistic profile. Founded by trained journalists who emigrated from French Canada, newspapers offered analysis and commentary; hundreds of smaller papers catered more to local and business interests in French. Six newspapers are considered, with a focus on the WWII watershed that illustrated the Survivance/Americanization conundrum. Several advocacy papers at first supported France's collaborationist Vichy government, later adopting the US position. The chapter ends with a

study of the last of the French-language papers, a small monthly operation, *Le Journal de Lowell* (1975-1995). Even here France's longstanding shadow is reflected in the articles by *Le Journal's* Paris correspondent, the granddaughter of the last editor Lowell's oldest daily, *L'Etoile*. Gosnell discusses the paper's outward turn in the 1980's as changes in Quebec and within the Francophonie movement energized Franco leadership; the journal's own demise some years later provides evidence of a shrinking Franco-America unable to further sustain journalism in French.

The final chapter, „Unmasking the Creole Cowboy“, focuses on the long-suppressed French hybrid cultures of the Gulf Coast, located at the end point of the imagined Creole Highway Gosnell uses to connect the „islands“ of Franco-America. Native American, African, and European mixing resulted in the vacillating nature of the terms Cajun and Creole in this outpost of the French Atlantic. Gosnell's figure of the Creole Cowboy embodies not only the region's French creolization but also the concept of *culture-monde* which opens the cowboy's music, food, prose and poetry to the world, perpetuating „the French narrative of America“ (p. 267).

Gosnell's book is unique in that it provides a composite portrait of little-known North American cultures historically linked through a shared French origin, placed within the context of francophone world cultures. While the title, *Franco-America in the Making*, suggests that Franco-America is expanding, harboring a sub-rosa „*Creole Nation Within*“, this claim is dubious. Still vibrant in certain locales, often supplanted by English elsewhere, it is rather the unmaking of this language-based Franco-America that emerges. Gosnell weaves a rich tapestry of these cultures using archival research, interviews, travel to various sites of memory, and his own participation in Franco activities. If the numerous footnotes provide mainly titles of books or references to sources, they also constitute a highly useful map for scholars and others wishing to familiarize themselves with Franco-American cultures. Despite occasional unevenness, this is a highly informative book that successfully argues for the persistence of this unknown aspect of France's cultural legacy within the

United States.

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