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Christopher M. Parsons, *A Not-So-New World: Empire and Environment in French Colonial North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018). ISBN: 9780812250589

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Introduction by Keith Makoto Woodhouse, Northwestern University

In *A Not-So-New World: Empire and Environment in French Colonial North America*, **Christopher M. Parsons** describes how seventeenth-century French colonists endeavored to make the unfamiliar more recognizable by likening the plants they encountered in New France to common European species. In telling this engrossing story Parsons achieves the opposite of what those colonists attempted: he takes a familiar narrative and makes it surprising and new.

In Parsons's telling, horticulture and agriculture were not simply a source of sustenance but also a political process and a conceptual framework. French colonists deemed the plants they encountered *sauvage* variants of European versions, wilder and so lesser. By minimizing differences and emphasizing similarities, colonists rendered North American flora "cognitively domesticated." (32) This process allowed colonists to understand themselves as improvers, elevating a rough land from an inferior state to a superior one. It also allowed them to judge Native Americans uncivilized, uncultured, and similarly in want of improvement. Land and people alike were *sauvage*, crude and ready for manipulation at the hands of missionaries and colonial leaders.

Native knowledge, botanical evidence, and French prejudice eventually combined to challenge the view that the landscape of New France was simply a coarser version of Europe's, but not before early French perceptions of trees, flowers, and crops offered one tortuous justification for genocidal violence. Colonial views of the nonhuman world and of human societies, Parsons explains, were "related manifestations of a broader impulse aimed at subduing indigenous agencies for their effective replacement." (187)

Drawing on biogeography, ethnobotany, and climatology, Parsons shows how settler colonialism was tied up with uses and conceptions of nonhuman nature. In his telling the story of French imperialism in North America becomes something quite different: the French empire traveled by canoe along rivers deep into the interior but it also flourished in the rich soil of the St. Lawrence Valley and drew meaning from descriptions of an ostensibly knowable place.

Strother Roberts begins the roundtable by outlining Parsons's book and describing it as an environmental history and a history of science that focuses on literate men writing for a literate audience about the natural world they encountered in North America. As Roberts notes, Parsons challenges the still-common perception that French colonialism was somehow more respectful of Native American culture than were British imperial efforts to the south. Roberts is left wondering, however, just how consequential French ideas were. Was there a straight line from these ideas to the transformation of space and place in New France? Did non-literate colonists share and act according to the ideas Parsons describes? And how closely tied were

European conceptions of racial difference—among not only the French but also the Spanish and British—to views about the natural world?

Cindy Ermus takes note of how *A Not-So-New World* is an intellectual history, one that “reveals colonialism as an epistemically dynamic, ever-changing, process.” Ermus wonders how broadly we can apply Parsons’s insights—in particular, whether the processes that Parsons describes fit other imperial ventures and whether they could be used to understand colonial encounters with not just plants but also animals and diseases. Ermus appreciates the attention that Parsons pays to “indigenous women and feminine knowledge” but suggests that other sources written by women, including letters and diaries, might be available and might reveal much more about colonists’ ecological impressions.

As **Jacob F. Lee** points out, Parsons tells a different story about French colonialism from the outset by focusing on agriculture, treating planting not as secondary to the fur trade but instead as central to French imperialism. Sedentary agriculture, Lee notes, was both a fundamental part of the imperial project and also a measure of Native American culture in colonists’ minds; only by staying in one place and tending to crops could Native peoples dedicate themselves to Christianity. Lee is less sure, however, about the relationship between agriculture and imperial violence. Although Parsons makes clear the conceptual relationship between controlling plants and controlling people, Lee asks whether this is aligned with or distinct from the ways in which historians have linked imperial violence to the fur trade and imperial competition. Lee is also curious about whether French understandings of North American crops—in particular the shift from seeing them as cultivatable to seeing them as in need of replacement—shaped the practices of farmers in New France.

Finally, **Claire Campbell** places us in Nova Scotia’s Annapolis Valley in order to discuss what’s familiar and unfamiliar not only for French colonists but also for readers of Parsons’s book. She provides a discussion of lived experience and of limits. First, she asks what life was like on the ground in the St. Lawrence Valley, and specifically *who* was doing the actual planting and tending and *how* colonists consumed the various crops they grew. Second, Campbell asks whether colonists lived within a set of environmental limits in the new world they encountered, and how they adapted to the rugged conditions they confronted. Riffing off of Parsons’s own gestures toward contemporary environmental concerns, she points out that climate change will make a new world for all of us—one that will involve adapting to strict limits, whether self-imposed or not.

In his response, Parsons discusses the questions, perspectives, and methodological choices animating *A Not-So-New World* through a rich exploration of the differences between environmental history and the history of science, the challenges and rewards of writing environmental history at a large scale, and how to use sources from within an imperial enterprise in order to illuminate a world beyond it.

Thanks to all of the roundtable participants for taking part.

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Comments by Strother E. Roberts, Bowdoin College

Early Modern Science and the Ecology of the “*Sauvage*”

Christopher Parsons recently authored an online article for the *Washington Post* historically contextualizing Christian Dior’s short-lived ad campaign for their new men’s fragrance: *Sauvage*. The campaign—fronted by serial cultural-appropriationist Johnny Depp—urged customers to anoint themselves with “[t]he fragrance of a new frontier” while embarking on a “journey deep into the Native American soul.” Parsons, justifiably, characterized Dior’s ad messaging as “warmed-over colonialist rhetoric and a reminder of France’s not-so-recent past as a racist empire.”¹ I bring up the article both because it highlights the contemporary relevance of early modern historical knowledge and because the history of how French colonizers conceived of the *sauvage* forms the very heart of Parsons’ book. The French word “sauvage,” can accurately be translated as “wild” (the translation Dior preferred in defending its campaign), but, as Parsons adds, also carries the connotation of a state-of-being that is somehow lacking: lacking cultivation, lacking enlightenment, lacking civilization. Dior attempted to romanticize indigeneity and the *sauvage*, but Parsons makes clear in both article and book that the latter concept’s historical and racist baggage are inescapable. *A Not-So-New-World* is not a history of race, *per se*, but instead traces the historical origins of French perceptions of a *sauvage* America through a broader history of evolving ecological understandings. From a turn-of-the-seventeenth century optimism that northeastern America was a “wild” but easily tamable landscape fundamentally similar to France in its lands, plants, and peoples, *A Not-So-New World* charts a shift to an increasingly rigid eighteenth-century conviction that American landscapes and peoples were, in fact, inherently different and irredeemably outside the improving influence of French “civilization.” Although French colonialism is often downplayed as more benign and respectful of indigenous cultures, Parsons shows that the French engaged in processes of ecological conquest and native dispossession strikingly similar to those practiced by their imperial rivals farther south.

Although it does a disservice to the breadth and eloquence of Parsons’ book, I would like to start by pigeon-holing its subject in as succinct a manner as possible. First, it is a history of seventeenth- through eighteenth-century New France and the northern French Atlantic, although early Americanists whose interests lie elsewhere will find familiar themes and an intriguing thesis with the potential for enlivening important discussions of science, settler colonialism, environmental exploitation, and race in their own subfields. Secondly, Parsons identifies his book as foremost a history of science, but it is also an excellent work of environmental history, with important contributions to offer scholars interested in each. (192 n36) With regards

¹ Christopher M. Parsons, “The Real History Behind Dior’s Sauvage Campaign,” *The Washington Post Online* (Sept. 16, 2019), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/09/16/real-history-behind-diors-sauvage-campaign/>.

to both subfields, this is foremost a work of intellectual/cultural rather than physical/material history. Or, as Parsons himself disclaims, he is “less interested in studying the accuracy of French claims to know New France than... the long negotiation between French discourse and American matter through which this knowledge was produced.” (14) Relatedly, Parsons focuses primarily upon literate elite men conceptualizing and writing about American nature for an audience of other literate elite men. He leans heavily on published records—missionaries’ journals, explorers’ and travelers’ narratives, scientific treatises—supplemented by the archival papers of government officials, merchants, and aspiring colonial naturalists. The relationship of French women and non-elite male farmers, sailors, traders, etc. to the landscape of New France lies beyond the scope of his study. Parsons stresses the contributions of Native Americans as sources of knowledge and suppliers of scientific samples, and provides considerable context for understanding the relationship between the indigenous communities considered in his book and the physical and spiritual ecosystems in which they lived. But indigenous actors remain supporting characters within this larger narrative of French inquisitiveness. Of course, any coherent scholarly work must wrestle with what to leave in and what to leave out, and I present the above characterizations not as criticisms, but as a service to would-be readers.

The book’s first chapter provides a quick sketch of the geological and biological forces that defined the similarities and differences between France and northeastern North America before introducing the reader to an array of early French explorers and colonizers committed to the (at least superficially) surprising notion that the lands of New France were, in fact, “more French than new.” (18) In Chapter 2, Parsons identifies the literal and metaphorical act of “cultivation” as one of the primary prisms through which seventeenth-century French colonizers and authors viewed American landscapes. (43, 45) Having argued in his introduction that previous historians have too greatly emphasized strictly extractive commercial networks (e.g., fishing, the fur trade), Parsons instead presents a compelling case for dreams of agricultural settlement as the driving force behind French colonization. (7) Noting the ostensible similarities between some *sauvage* American plants and European crops, French colonists convinced themselves that the domestication of native species would quickly place New France on the path to a prosperous agrarian economy that hybridized the best that both America and France had to offer. Chapter 3 focuses on the rhetoric surrounding French efforts to “civilize” indigenous peoples, exploring the direct relationship that missionaries and officials perceived between cultivating American landscapes for European agriculture and “cultivating” indigenous peoples to accept French culture and Christianity. (71) Ecology and spirituality bled into one another and proved inseparable, Parsons shows, for both European colonizers and the indigenous communities they sought to assimilate. Chapter 4 explores the early stages of the paradigm shift that lies at the heart of the book’s argument about change over time. Here Parsons shows how colonizers drew on an expanding knowledge of the flora, landscapes, and people of the northeast to ultimately reject earlier theories of the region as an only slightly wilder version of France itself. At the turn of the eighteenth century, culturally chauvinistic European

writers in the colonies and the metropole instead began asking ever more critical questions about just how “improvable” American landscapes and peoples truly were.

The last two chapters break with what is, up to that point, the steady and methodical construction of the metanarrative underlying Parsons’ thesis—with mixed results. The fifth chapter shifts the reader’s perspective to the knowledge-creating networks that stretched from the indigenous and colonial communities of New France across the sea to Paris and the Académie Royale des Sciences, the ultimate arbiter of eighteenth-century French scientific knowledge. Colonial naturalists’ subordination within these networks, Parsons argues, pushed them into a model of science that stressed categorization and the delineation of difference, accentuating an already developing trend to see American ecosystems and peoples as inherently “other.” While it does provide important trans-Atlantic context for French ecological policies in New France—and would make an excellent stand-alone contribution to a historiography that includes the work of scholars such as Richard Grove, Susan Parrish Scott, and Londa Schiebinger—the chapter proves an awkward fit for the book’s erstwhile focus on French colonizers in America wrestling with their firsthand exposure to the *sauvage*. Chapter 6, on the other hand, *did* begin its life as a stand-alone article.² Slight differences in style and methodology compared to earlier chapters are noticeable, but work to the book’s benefit. Parsons’ deep-dive into the global commodification of one particular American plant—ginseng—serves to firmly root (so to speak) the metanarrative so carefully laid out in preceding chapters within both the American cultural landscape and early modern transnational networks of commerce and knowledge-creation. In the early eighteenth-century market for ginseng, a global crop cultivated in Asia but harvested wild in America, French dreams of exploiting a familiar-seeming plant (American ginseng is, in fact, a separate species) as an economic basis for colonialism ran into the hard realities of America’s untamable *sauvage* flora. Here, encapsulated in the history of a single plant, is Parsons’ thesis: that the turn-of the eighteenth century saw a shift from an optimism that the seemingly familiar landscapes of North America could be transformed into a “New France,” to a creeping intellectual awareness that America’s flora, fauna, and human cultures were inherently novel and only imperfectly assimilable to pre-conceived French notions of civilization.

The book’s thesis is reminiscent of Nancy Shoemaker’s in *Strange Likeness* where she argues that, despite cultural dissimilarities, seventeenth-century European-Indian interactions rested upon “a bedrock of shared ideas” which slowly eroded as competition for a common pool of resources encouraged both groups, by the eighteenth century, to “construct new identities that exaggerated the contrasts

² Christopher M. Parsons, “The Natural History of Colonial Science: Joseph-Francois Lafitau’s Discovery of Ginseng and Its Afterlives,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (January 2016), 37-72.

between them while ignoring what they had in common.”³ Both Shoemaker and Parsons fit within a broader trend among early American scholars that identifies the late seventeenth through early eighteenth century as a pivotal period in the development of a biological definition of race. Whereas earlier Europeans had viewed the physical, and in many cases cultural, differences between human populations as contingent upon local or regional environmental influences, intellectuals at the turn-of-the-eighteenth century began to conceive of race as a collection of inherent and inherited traits only loosely related to the environment. Basically, these scholars argue that eighteenth-century theorists of race, and the nineteenth-century proponents of “scientific” racism who followed, removed the external environment from discussions of the proximate causes of racial difference. No longer was identity seen as environmentally fluid and individuals as highly malleable. Instead, eighteenth-century authors stressed the interiority and rigidity of race. True familiarity, it seems, had bred contempt, and what had seemed comfortably familiar instead became intractably foreign.

Parsons’ greatest contribution is that he helps to contextualize this shift. Indeed, he suggests that rather than removing the environment from their theories of race, eighteenth-century intellectuals may better be understood as operating within a new understanding of the relative non-fluidity and non-malleability of the physical environment itself. French imperialists originally viewed indigenous Americans as fully assimilable to French culture just as they had seen the *sauvage* landscape as imminently cultivable. A century of experience with colonization proved that neither native peoples nor landscapes would yield meekly to French efforts at “taming” them and brought home to French writers the uniqueness of both American ecology and indigenous cultures. It also inspired a discourse of each as inherently and irredeemably other. In the end, Parsons suggests that this paradigm shift encouraged French colonizers to embrace the replacement of everything that was biologically American with the crops and peoples of France, at least in the fertile areas of New France best suited to agriculture. Areas that could not be cultivated were often written off as hopelessly *sauvage*. The result was an imperial process of ecological destruction and focused displacement/genocide akin to that practiced in British America. (186-187)

Of course, like any good historical study, Parson’s book begs new questions of its readers even as it informs. For instance, *A Not-So-New World* draws upon and plays off of the work of numerous historians of Anglo-America, and the book is stronger because of this comparative perspective. But I wonder if Parsons has anything to offer back to historians of other colonizing powers? Did the turn-of-the-eighteenth-century shift towards viewing colonial nature as more foreign and more intractably wild occur among British or Spanish colonial writers as well? Did this shift bear the same relationship to changing conceptions of racial difference in these other

³ Nancy Shoemaker, *A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford university Press, 2004), 3.

imperial regions? My first inclination, thinking briefly over the literature, would be to say “Yes,” but Parsons is doubtlessly better qualified to answer the question. Likewise, as a practitioner of a more materialist sort of environmental history, I would love to ask Parsons how his insights on French ideas about the *sauvage* related to the on-the-ground ecological decisions of non-elite colonists, and how these decisions, in turn, transformed the physical spaces that *A Not-So-New World* explores? Not that ideas are unimportant—Dior’s attempt to reject modernity and embrace the *sauvage* through the stereotyping of modern indigenous peoples prove that we need historians like Parsons to remind us of the power that words and ideas can hold.

Comments by Cindy Ermus, University of Texas at San Antonio

Historians are familiar with the famous, late eighteenth-century debate between Thomas Jefferson and Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon about American degeneracy, i.e. the “Dispute of the New World” (14 & 181). In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, the only book he ever wrote, Jefferson felt compelled to defend North America against Buffon’s argument—laid out in the latter’s *Histoire naturelle*—that American fauna, particularly that of North America, was weaker, smaller, and less diverse, and the people dumber and lazier, than their Old World counterparts. In his new book, *A Not-So-New World*, historian Chris Parsons reveals that such disputes were nothing new, and that colonists, missionaries, scientists, and others had debated the nature and value of North America’s biota for more than a hundred years before Buffon and Jefferson ever entered the fray.

Parsons’ focus is on northeastern North America, especially New France, and the French ecological narratives that helped define European understandings of, and approaches to, the region of the Saint Lawrence River in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Proceeding chronologically, the author skillfully demonstrates how European attitudes evolved over nearly two hundred years in response to political, environmental, and intellectual realities in both New France and the metropole. When French settlers arrived in the early seventeenth century, they perceived the Canadian environment as a *sauvage* (not to be confused with the English “savage”) version of the cultivated French environment. Originally full of optimism (some might say hubris), they felt that the Americas, including its peoples, could yet be “fixed” through cultivation.¹ As North America revealed limitations on French ambitions, however, they soon learned that their best-laid plans were no match for realities on the ground. Their frustrations eventually gave way to pessimism, and colonists, missionaries, explorers, and others were forced to accept that the “New” World (its flora, its people) would not submit to European whims.

By the eighteenth century, we encounter a shift in how the French perceived the environments of North America, specifically within the Académie Royale des Sciences in Paris—by this time the epicenter of French scientific inquiry and production. The men of the Académie and their naturalist correspondents in New France, who we may anachronistically call “scientists,” began to emphasize the “newness of New France” (126) rather than searching for the recognizable, as others had done to that point. Now prizing novelty over the well-known, the exotic over the familiar, they had little interest in cultivating, and making French, that which they perceived as *sauvage*. Meanwhile, participation and influence of the indigenous and colonial collectors on whom such inquiry relied was largely delegitimized and expunged, leaving little trace of its long-term significance. Discussions about the

¹ Here I invite the reader to refer to Parsons’ brilliant discussions on “cultivation” in chapter three on “Soils and Souls.”

newness of New France would take on new life, however, in the eighteenth-century debates about the novelty of American ginseng, as seen in the work of the Jesuit Joseph-François Lafitau. In the end, ginseng would serve as evidence “that North America was [in fact] another old world.” (168)

Parsons has produced a much welcome addition to the historiography of the early modern Atlantic World. At once an environmental history, an intellectual history, an Atlantic history, and a history of science, this study offers important insight into the development of intellectual traditions over time. In particular, it traces understandings of the American environment, and of the purpose and objectives of colonization, and reveals colonialism as an epistemically dynamic, ever-changing, process. Although the author focuses primarily on New France, one could see how lessons from this study might be applicable to other colonial powers and geographic regions. I would be curious to know whether or not the author has found this to be true. In the process of researching for this book, did he get a sense for the extent to which the French experience could be applicable elsewhere? Put another way, how is the French story different—in fact, *is* the French experience different—from that of other colonial powers? How is it unique? For example, based on the author’s note on the British concept of “improvement” (7), similar as it was to that of the French “cultivation,” could one assume that there were similarities between the British and French experiences? If so, I wonder what parallels there might have been? On that note, I would also like to know how the French colonial experience differed in other parts of the French colonies. Does the Laurentian experience offer any lessons or insight that apply equally well in other parts of New France, or in other French possessions such as those of the Caribbean?

A Not-So-New World concentrates on landscapes and botanical knowledge, which provides more than enough material for analysis. However, I found myself asking how the story would be different if it included not only flora but fauna. Did the author come across many passages in his French sources describing American animals? If so, did he get a sense of how these impressions might have changed over time? I would also ask the author to consider disease. I am more familiar with perceptions of “New World” health in Louisiana and the Caribbean, but I am curious to know how eastern Canada was perceived in terms of health.

Parsons’ book is extremely readable and well-researched. I appreciate his choice and use of sources. I was also happy to see Marie de l’Incarnation among these, as well as his sections on the importance of indigenous women and feminine knowledge, especially in chapters three and six. However, this left me wanting more from and about women. In the absence of a bibliography, it is possible I overlooked others, but I wonder about the availability of women’s writings more generally—whether in the form of letters, diaries, *mémoires*—that reflect botanical or ecological impressions of New France. While I know there are relatively few in the earlier years covered in this study, I suspect these increased in number by the eighteenth century. Did the author find this to be true? Did he happen to encounter any previously unused (by historians) sources written by women?

Meanwhile, as I read chapter five on “the science of novelty,” my mind went to Roderick Nash and his idea, from *Wilderness and the American Mind*, that “[a]ppreciation of wilderness began in the cities.”² My final question for the author seeks a connection between this idea and the science of the metropole. In other words, to what extent, if any, does the Académie’s appreciation for novelty anticipate the preservationists’ appreciation for wilderness in the nineteenth century?

One of the greatest strengths of this important study is the author’s attention to the contributions and influence of indigenous peoples to the development of French ecological and agricultural knowledge in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His acknowledgment that “French knowledge was always produced in dialogue with indigenous knowledge” (14) is an important one, and one on which I hope to see more research in the coming years. Rather than ask a question here, I would simply like to point out the importance of this contribution, and to commend the author on his choice to end the book with a timely call to “cultivat[e] new relationships with North America’s indigenous peoples and places.” (188) Parsons has written a brilliant study that is at once carefully researched and highly accessible. It is a must-read for students and scholars with interests at the intersection of environmental, Atlantic, indigenous, and colonia

² Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 4th ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 44.

Comments by Jacob F. Lee, Pennsylvania State University

When France established its first colonies in the St. Lawrence River valley in the early 1600s, colonists reported numerous similarities between the flora of France and that found in New France. Quebec founder Samuel de Champlain documented an array of species of trees with counterparts in Europe. Missionary Gabriel Sagard added wild cherries, onions, berries, grapes, and assorted flowers, among others, to the catalog of familiar species. But, as Christopher Parsons explains in *A Not-So-New World*, observers like Champlain and Sagard made an important distinction between the indigenous plants of North America and the species in Europe. Those in New France exhibited differences in appearance and flavor because they were *sauvage* (wild). For example, the grapes that Sagard described in the 1630s were smaller and produced wine the French considered unacceptable, because Native peoples “did not cultivate them” (18). Writing of the need for “cultivation,” colonist Nicolas Denys posited, “New France can produce all that the old one can and as well, but it will require a great number of people’s labor to bring it into productivity” (22-23). As Parsons explains, these observations of familiar but uncultivated plants provided French colonists with a justification for colonialism. According to Champlain, Sagard, and their compatriots, the *sauvage* flora of New France provided “evidence for the need for French intervention” (40).

In some respects, the broad strokes of this ideology of cultivation will be familiar to historians of imperialism and the environment. Colonizers have often defended violence and dispossession by citing the perceived failure of Indigenous peoples to properly exploit their environments and the natural resources available to them. U.S. history is rife with examples. In 1823, Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court John Marshall upheld the “doctrine of discovery” in U.S. jurisprudence, declaring, “To leave [Indigenous peoples] in possession of their country, was to leave the country a wilderness.”¹ A few years later, President Andrew Jackson championed Indian Removal in similar terms. In an address to Congress, he asked, “What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms?”² During the twentieth century, the U.S. government condemned Indigenous farmers for allegedly degrading the environment through poor agricultural techniques. Most famously, this led to the New Deal-era slaughter of thousands of sheep and goats owned by Navajo Indians. Far from stopping erosion in the Navajo Nation, the policy produced poverty and inequality.³ In recent years, the Trump

¹ *Johnson and Graham’s Lessee v. M’Intosh*, 21 U.S. 543, 590 (1823).

² Andrew Jackson, Second Annual Message to Congress, 6 December 1830, in James D. Richardson, comp., *A Compilation of Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, 10 vols. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1896-1899), 2:521.

³ See, among others, Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 212-314; Marsha L. Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009); Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 27-54.

administration has fast-tracked approval for oil pipelines over Native-led resistance and in violation of treaty rights, citing the “national interest” of extracting and transporting crude oil.⁴ For centuries, Europeans and Euro-Americans have insisted that, as Parsons writes about French beliefs, colonialism was the key to tapping the continent’s “unfulfilled potential” (41).

However, by identifying this focus on “cultivation” in New France, Parsons challenges stereotypes about French North America. Despite excellent work on farming in New France, a typical statement from a recent textbook insists that the colony placed “emphasis on the fur trade rather than agricultural settlement.”⁵ In contrast, Parsons demonstrates that agriculture was not incidental to French colonialism in North America but was instead an essential aspect of French ambitions for the continent. “From the founding moments of New France,” he argues, “an emergent colonial political ecology privileged cultivation as a way of both knowing and creating a New France in North America” (7).

Agriculture served multiple purposes in the French colonial project. In practical terms, it provided food and other resources to settlers. It also symbolized order and French control of the landscape. The practical and symbolic value of cultivation becomes apparent in Parsons’s discussion of French missionaries, who insisted that conversion to Catholicism went hand-in-hand with a sedentary, agricultural economy. The seasonal migrations of Native peoples who combined hunting and agriculture posed an obstacle to missionary work, because they created long periods of separation between priests and would-be converts. As Récollet father Chrestien Le Clerq explained in the 1690s, missionaries believed, “it is therefore necessary to fix them, and push them to clear and cultivate the soil.” With that accomplished, “we can little by little civilize them” (73). As a result, a commitment to cultivation came to represent the ability of Native peoples to convert, while mixed economies symbolized a moral deficiency.

By carefully untangling the currents of French and French colonial thought about empire and environment, Parsons also reveals the nuances and changes that

⁴ Donald J. Trump, Memorandum for the Secretary of the Army, 24 January 2017, available at <https://www.npr.org/assets/news/2017/01/DakotaAccessConstruction.pdf>.

⁵ Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History*, Seagull 5th Edition, Vol. 1: To 1877 (New York: Norton, 2017), 35. For key works on agriculture in French North America, see Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); Louise Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, trans. Liana Vardi (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), 129-196; Daniel J. Usner, Jr., *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000); M.J. Morgan, *Land of Big Rivers: French and Indian Illinois, 1699-1778* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010); Robert Michael Morrissey, “Kaskaskia Social Network: Kinship and Assimilation in the French-Illinois Borderlands, 1695-1735,” *William & Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 70 (Jan. 2013): 103-146; Louise Dechêne, *Power and Subsistence: The Political Economy of Grain in New France*, trans. Peter Feldstein (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018).

emerged over the century and a half of New France's existence. By the end of the 1600s, experience challenged the initial emphasis on ecological familiarity, which had produced a sense among French colonists that their presence in North America was "natural." During the preceding decades, colonists gained knowledge from both personal experience and from Indigenous informants which convinced them that seemingly familiar plants and environments were more different than they had anticipated. Meanwhile, imperial administrators grew frustrated with the limited extent of St. Lawrence Valley settlements, and missionaries fretted over continued difficulties in converting Native peoples. At the same time, the rise of the Paris-based Académie Royale des Sciences at the turn of the eighteenth century marked a change in the way French observers thought about the environment of New France. Where earlier writers had emphasized familiarity and similarity, the scientists of the Académie prioritized novelty and difference. In this regard, the Académie's understanding of New France increasingly resembled colonial understandings, even though Académie members disparaged both vernacular colonial and Indigenous knowledge. In the end, Parsons suggests, growing pessimism about New France's potential for cultivation influenced the decision to surrender the colony at the end of the Seven Years' War.

A Not-So-New World is an impressive study of the intellectual foundations of colonialism in New France. Yet, at times, I found myself wanting to know more about the material consequences of French colonial ideology. Parsons asserts, "Cultivation of agricultural landscapes continued to evoke a peaceful, morally upright colonialism but regularly implied that violence against indigenous peoples and places would nonetheless be necessary" (117). We only get allusions to the violence that accompanied cultivation—for example, colonist Pierre Boucher's call in the 1660s to drive Haudenosaunee Indians from their homelands in order to spread French agriculture. Does the ideology of cultivation help us better understand the wars between France, Native peoples, and rival empires which historians have explained typically as conflicts over the fur trade or the products of imperial competition? Additionally, I wondered about the effects of the shift toward viewing New France as novel and unfamiliar. Near the end of the book, Parsons writes, "By the end of the French regime in New France, ... cultivation as conversion had transitioned to cultivation as replacement" (186). We can see that mentality in Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban's recommendation in 1699 to ease plowing by removing "everything, stones, wood and grasses ... to at least a foot of depth" (116). Agriculture in New France, he insisted, required stripping the landscape to make way for plants imported from Europe. In the decades that followed, did French farmers alter their techniques or their crops to reflect this new belief in "cultivation as replacement"?

Parsons's book is a welcome addition to the growing wave of work that, in the last decade, has upended old ideas about the French empire in North America.⁶ The

⁶ Tracy Neal Leavelle, *Catholic Calumet: Colonial Conversions in French and Indian North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous*

stakes of *A Not-So-New World* extend, however, far beyond seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French outposts, because colonialism and the ideologies that undergird it remain with us. As Parsons notes, North American governments continue to oppress Native peoples through environmental policy, and scientists persist in dismissing Indigenous knowledge. By carefully analyzing ideas about similarity, difference, and cultivation in New France, Parsons highlights the long history behind ongoing struggles over colonialism and the environment.

and Atlantic Slaveries in New France (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Michael Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Robert Englebort and Guillaume Teasdale, eds., *French and Indians in the Heart of North America, 1630-1815* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013); Sophie White, *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians: Material Culture and Race in Colonial Louisiana* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Michael A. McDonnell, *Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015); Robert Michael Morrissey, *Empire by Collaboration: Indians, Colonists, and Governments in Colonial Illinois Country* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Karen Marrero, *Detroit's Hidden Channels: The Power of French-Indigenous Families in the Eighteenth Century* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, forthcoming).

Comments by Claire Campbell, Bucknell University

Along the west shore of the Annapolis River, near where the river empties into the Bay of Fundy, there is a small, quiet, little-visited farm site called the Melanson Settlement. It is now a national historic site commemorating Acadian farming in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (and just upriver from Port Royal, one of the oldest French settlements in North America). As in other communities in *Acadie*, like the better-known Grand Pré, Acadians at Melanson and Port Royal skillfully shaped the silted marshlands into sheltered, rich farmland. The Annapolis Valley was and remains one of the most important agricultural regions in Eastern Canada, and today markets its *terroir* of vineyards, apple orchards, and giant pumpkins. But at Melanson Settlement, there are simply open fields that slope down to the river and a narrow path that winds through an abandoned orchard, its grassy floor carpeted in small, misshapen apples in the fall. After centuries—after *le dérangement* and the displacement of the Acadian people—the fields, and the apple trees, are still here.

I thought a lot about Melanson and the other Acadian farmlands while reading *A Not-So-New World*. In part because there's no more beautiful part of the world in October, when I'm writing this, and when the harvest is in. But also because Melanson is a glimpse of the larger stories told in this book: of the attempts at settlement, of botanical introductions and agri/cultural adaptations, of taking and making home, of seeking connection. When I read how the Comte de Bougainville wrote dismissively in 1757 that "Canada produces almost no fruit" (182), I wanted to pelt him with a Valley apple. To be fair, Bougainville meant fruit as he recognized it. (His comment is even more understandable when we learn that the Jerusalem artichoke was called "the apple of Canada" (35); it's delicious, in its way, but we'd be hard-pressed to recognize it as a fruit.)

But we *can* see our world in this older one. *A Not-So-New World* is eminently readable because we—like the French settlers, administrators, and observers that Parsons describes—can recognize plants we know ("they had pumpkins too!"). But the landscape of New France seems familiar here in deeper ways. Early in the book, Parsons offers a suggestion that is, I think, somewhat unusual for both the book and for environmental history of the colonial era in its bluntness and in its engagement with the twenty-first century alongside the seventeenth:

The early architects of French colonial expansion in North America possessed a world view that, anachronistically, we might call ecological ... Cultivation offered early modern French colonists a capacious language with which to describe the interrelatedness of the human and natural environments discovered there – the culture of American peoples and the culture of American places – and to propose colonialism as a process that would transform them both ... We, in a time of ecological crisis, find ourselves confronted with phenomena such as global warming that we recognize as

neither wholly natural nor entirely social and that, in effect, have forced us to come to terms with the entanglements of the non-human and human world and the limits of anthropocentric approaches to understanding and inhabiting the world in which we live. (8)

I read this passage over several times. Can we make such a claim, an analogy? What I think Parsons does so well is provide opportunities for us to see ourselves (and our places) in the story, not just taking shape but as parallels or antecedents to our own situation.

The basic arc of this book—that agents for French America initially saw New World plants as close cousins to the Old, only to retreat from that conclusion when confronted by the realities of climatic and botanical difference—seems to speak almost uncannily to different strains of contemporary environmental thought. The faith in familiarity and shared experience evokes the sensibility of the blue marble, of a one-world unity and mutual dependence. At the same time, the retrenchment in the eighteenth century suggests a reasoned humility, a respect for local capacity, and a necessary adaptation.

Like many of us, I suspect, I want historical scholarship and teaching to matter; to somehow do more than analyze and report on human action, but improve it. Reading *A Not-So-New World*, I found myself thinking about inclusivity, habitat, and limits: equally stories from the past and issues for the present.

Who is Doing the Planting?

I began teaching the colonial period when I moved to the United States, where Thomas Jefferson offers a pedagogically convenient spokesperson for the freighted moral and material value of agriculture. His gardens in Virginia embodied the vegetal ambitions of the new republic, including everything from indigo to pomegranates. But as Lin-Manuel Miranda (in the role of Alexander Hamilton) points out, “We know who’s really doing the planting.” The tone of authorial remove in Samuel de Champlain’s accounts—“I had some native vines planted” (1), or “I had two gardens made” (45)—now seems discordantly disingenuous. *Who* made those gardens? Parsons tells us that Jesuit observers were unable and unwilling to see the agricultural knowledge practiced by Haudenosaunee and Wendat women; likewise, *voyageurs* who handed tree bark or water lilies to their note-taking passengers were acknowledged at best as anonymized sources of labour and bits of vernacular knowledge. As historians, we know to ask who is silenced in the historical record, and there has been more of a discussion about who has been discounted in our *field*. Who are our sources, but also our colleagues, our mentors? Who else should be in the story?

Hierarchies of authority are woven into the language of *mesnagement*, “a stewardship associated with the management of a landed estate” (44), as well as the elitism of the Académie Royale des Sciences. As Parsons shows, interest in natural

history was much more diffuse. Today, citizen science is a popular concept with conservation projects and public science agencies like Parks Canada, though public participation may have its drawbacks.¹ In order for correspondents abroad to attract the attention of the Académie they frequently resorted to a “pursuit of novelty” (134), reinforcing a culture of discovery in the natural sciences that paralleled and endorsed the territorial expansion of empire in search of natural resources. Nature, in other words, promised advancement as either material or intellectual property. It is telling that Parsons describes Québec as an *entrepôt* for botanical specimens (138)—using the same infrastructural vocabulary of transatlantic trade to describe the centrifugal dynamic in science between hinterland and metropolis, between Canadian sites of collection and the Parisian repository.

Understanding Habitat

Nevertheless, since I kill off house plants with alarming regularity, I confess a certain reluctant admiration for those who were able to collect, store, and then ship plants for weeks at sea. But this meant unmooring plants from their home ecologies into satisfyingly tidy intellectual categories, or the pleasingly elegant yet empty space of botanical drawings—now easily reproduced and bought off Etsy for your office. Such itemized displacement survives in the storage cabinets of natural history museums, true, but also in the plastic-wrapped broccoli in the grocery store, sterile and convenient, probably thousands of miles from its field of home. Whether for sustaining local agriculture or minimizing the fuel costs of transport, raising and using plants *in situ* seems a necessary practice, though one long out of favour.

As someone who loves reading cookbooks, I did want to know more about how the plants themselves were woven into daily life: how were they used by the colonists? Grapes and wheat could supply nutrition for soul and body; symbolism and sustenance. (Although much was made of Canadian grapes failing to measure to French expectations; would they be reassured to know that within two centuries, the Cantons de l’Est and the Annapolis Valley would boast popular wineries?) How did local practices of consumption or use serve to bridge botanical variety? What of medicinal or material needs? What did the pleasure gardens look like (46)? On the other hand, what species were considered the most threatening in the woods (115)?

And how much did they—do we—owe to Indigenous place-making? I have been fascinated by the stories of artifact plants (including Jerusalem artichokes) found along the St. John river valley of New Brunswick, quiet but persistent testament to sites of Maliseet farming. The Acadians and later the British occupied lands that had

¹ CBC Newfoundland and Labrador, “Barely trained observers hired to monitor wildlife impacts of offshore oil exploration” (19 September 2019), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/seismic-wildlife-marine-mammal-observers-1.5288626>

already been identified and long cultivated by the Maliseet.² Such is the historically unexamined environmental privilege of settler colonialism. Ironically, for all the insistence on the value and necessity of “improving” *sauvage* nature, Euro-American settlement thrived where such improvements were both established and invisible. Parsons invites us to be curious about Iroquoian and Mi’kmaq practices and thinking, and to ask what else we could be doing (or growing) in this place for richer nutritional or biological health.

At some level, environmental history is about the making of human habitats. Colonization takes root—literally—when extraction is paired with cultivation: take out the profitable *and* the unwanted in equal measure, and replace with the desired plant, animal, or architecture. Two years ago my neighbour (a fellow environmental historian) stopped mowing his lawn in order to nurture a pollinator-friendly space. He was promptly served a notice from the township. Human habitat, apparently, requires grass less than six inches in height.

He appealed, and then tore up his lawn.

The Question of Limits

But the most resonant connection I found in *A Not-So-New World* was its discussion of limits. The arc of the book is about the French empire confronting “the limitations of their ability to produce French places in North America” (108), unable to replicate the preferred habitat out from the valley of the St. Lawrence River. The elementary school account of New France posits this as a weakness, the Achilles’ heel of imperial contest. Confined to the narrow river plain, enveloped by cold, the story goes, Canada fell further behind in the demographically lopsided contest with the Thirteen Colonies until the dramatic moment on the Plains of Abraham.

This restraint was not, of course, intentional, in a small-is-beautiful kind of way. But from an historical perspective it was less costly. This was not the plantation of tidewater with its enslaved workforce; or the township grid unfurled over the prairies with a planted carpet of Marquis wheat; or the peeling of the earth in northern oil operations. What is striking about the surveys of early seigneurial land grants by men like Gédéon de Catalogne and Robert de Villeneuve (109) is how precisely and opportunistically these grants are placed—along interior waterways, at the junction of smaller rivers and the main trunk of the St. Lawrence. Settlement in New France suited its habitat. Thomas Davies’ 1787 painting, *A View of the Château-Richer, Cape Torment, and Lower End of the Ile of Orleans near Quebec* shows how much is possible on even a small piece of floodplain, with the tidal marsh at one end of the *censive* and the wooded uplands at the other.³ (A plea for presses

² See Jason Hall, “River of Three Peoples: An Environmental and Cultural History of the Wəlastəw/Rivière St. Jean/St. John River, c. 1550–1850” (Ph.D. diss., University of New Brunswick, 2015).

³ Held by the National Gallery of Canada; available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vue_de_Chateau-Richer_du_cap_Tourmente_et_de_la_pointe_orientale_de_l_ile_d_Orleans_pres_de_Quebec_-

to support including more of the “rich visual culture” (129), in either the botanical or landscape art of the period.)

I wondered about the different experiences of limits *within* New France: between Canada of the St. Lawrence and the other colonies on its geospatial margins. Parsons offers a great discussion of the ambivalence felt by French authorities toward the colony’s western edges. They hoped for more moderate climes in the Great Lakes basin, but resented the disruptive invitation of the unbounded woods of the *pays d’en haut*. Eastward, though, Acadian communities along the Bay of Fundy and on Île St. Jean cultivated relatively small areas of farmland with such success that it baffled—and nettled—British observers.

My students are typically horrified (or have their worst assumptions about Canada confirmed) by Thomas Jefferys’ description of Canadian winters: “There blows a piercing west wind that it almost blows the skin off the face.”⁴ Obviously the cold, exacerbated in the Little Ice Age, was unfamiliar and unforgiving to intended European ecological regimes. But to a Canadian reader there’s a rather satisfying moment of recognition in seeing the signature adaptations to cold—in architecture, in clothing—that were beginning to take shape, and in the process distinguish *canadien* from French. More sobering, the questions of climate adaptation—when does it happen? how? by whom? leading with what?—could not be more relevant. As we see most alarmingly in the far north, that signature cold is already changing in ways and to ends we cannot yet know, but anticipate either with dread or calculation.⁵ This *is* a new world, and we are unprepared.

In that passage early in *A Not-So-New World*, Parsons asks us to measure the meaning of ecological as understood by early modern French colonists and by us. I found the thread of connection here oddly affecting, like the silence of the orchard at Melanson. But the comparison is also disquieting. If the French response was colonialism and cultivation, we have not yet realized *our* response. Is it Greta Thunberg, or is it the Trans Mountain Pipeline? Parsons’ language parses thought and action: “understanding *and* inhabiting the world in which we live” (emphasis mine). Have we really accepted those limits?

[_Thomas_Davies_-_1787.jpg](#) I am grateful to Matthew Hatvany for sharing his work on tidal marshes in the St. Lawrence.

⁴ Thomas Jefferys, *The natural and civil history of the French dominions in North and South America* (London, 1760), 1.

⁵ Alan MacEachern, “A Little Essay on Big: Towards a History of Canada’s Size,” in *Big Country, Big Issues: Canada’s Environment, Culture, and History*, eds. Knopfler and Mauch, *Perspectives*, 4 (Rachel Carson Center, 2011), 6-13; a more opportunistic view was offered by former minister of natural resources Joe Oliver in the *National Post* (15 August 2019), “Here’s a truth few dare to utter: Canada will benefit from climate change,” https://business.financialpost.com/opinion/joe-oliver-heres-a-truth-few-dare-to-utter-canada-will-benefit-from-climate-change?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1565872641

Response by Christopher M. Parsons, Northeastern University

I learned, while writing *A Not-So-New World*, how much a book depends upon a vibrant community of friends and colleagues (readers, collaborators, compatriots) for its success. It has been a joy then to see this network expand with the book in print, starting rich conversations and promising yet more collaborations. So, I am incredibly grateful to Keith Makoto Woodhouse for making this forum possible and to Claire Campbell, Strother Roberts, Cindy Ermus, and Jacob Lee for engaging so rigorously and generously with my writing. This is a unique opportunity to see how environmental historians take up the challenge of the book and a provocation for me to reflect on the book now that it is out in the world and out of my hands.

Each reviewer points quite directly at an issue that has long engaged me: the relationship between the history of science and environmental history. I continue to find environmental history an exciting community with which to engage, and yet I've long wondered how exactly I fit into this field. Even if I had been interested in the methods and had read widely in the field during graduate school, I trained as a historian of science and medicine. It was only during an on-campus interview that, after being asked if I could teach environmental history, I became a self-professed environmental historian. I don't think it's accidental that I revised a dissertation that explained itself as a history of science into a book that proclaimed itself an environmental history as I developed lectures on the history of American nature.

This tension, as I read it, focuses essentially on methodology and the extent to which you could call my approach in *A Not-So-New World* an intellectual versus material history. Yet this points to a larger concern with what work, in effect, we want our histories to do. In Claire Campbell's insightful review, I read Campbell's concern with understanding how the plants that I discuss became integrated into daily lives, how they were consumed, and how they were tended as an invitation to more closely study how knowledge was produced through the lived experience of these environments. Campbell's review points to both the aesthetic and political dimensions of this ask; her own affective engagement with the places that I describe is simultaneously unsettled by a desire to understand how power shaped "who did the cultivating" and whose stories I ultimately tell. Roberts's description of my book as "foremost a work of intellectual/cultural rather than physical/material history" is perhaps the most explicit articulation of a critique that in pursuing an intellectual history, I have focused primarily on elite colonial authors. As he later explains, his interest in a more materialist approach is closely bound up with his desire to see how "French ideas about the *sauvage* related to the on-the-ground ecological decisions of non-elite colonists." While Campbell and Roberts push me to further consider non-elite and non-French actors in this history, Ermus and Lee also express concern that this intellectual history of the environment leaves little room for the voices of other non-human agents. For Ermus, this means calling for a broader

ecological vision that includes fauna as well as flora and the diseases that so radically transformed American environments. Lee's review situates this methodological distinction as separate stages of an unfolding environmental story. While *A Not-So-New World* is, he writes, "an impressive study of the intellectual foundations of colonialism in New France, ... at times, [he] found [himself] wanting to know more about the material consequences of French colonial ideology."

These are fantastic insights into the methodology of *A Not-So-New World* that point both to my own ultimate interests in the circulation of knowledge and my reliance on elite-authored published and manuscript sources that are more likely to describe idealized environments and plan interventions rather than to recount authors' experiences getting their hands dirty in real American soils. But these concerns also point to a larger tension between historians of the environment and historians of science about what it means to write material histories and what tools we can use to address archival gaps. In particular, I've long been interested in plumbing the distinction between histories of environmental science and histories that use environmental science to reconstruct the past. As somebody who came to the field of environmental history from the history of science, where science is approached as a culturally mediated system of knowledge, I put myself fairly firmly in the first of these camps.¹ In part because of my own experiences working as an ecological field assistant during graduate school, I learned to appreciate environmental science deeply, but I approach it as historically located and a very human set of practices. This influenced the direction of my project, focusing it, in the end, on Paris as the end of a long chain of knowledge exchange that began in the cultural and ecological borderlands of French North America. This was never, to paraphrase Dan Richter, a history that "faced east."² It was, somewhat accidentally, in both my first and my last chapters – those subject to substantial revision during the past several years – where I embraced the insights into historical environments that the natural sciences could offer in order to shift the narrative focus of my text. In both cases, I was drawn to paleoecology and biogeography for their ability to reframe New France's environmental history within a larger (and far longer) global history of plant distribution and evolution. On the other hand, I felt considerable uncertainty about whether to use the sciences to hypothesize about the ecological effects of colonization (as Roberts does in his excellent *Colonial Ecology, Atlantic Economy*, for example).³ The history of Euro-American efforts to cultivate North American grapes, for example, might profitably include the mid-nineteenth century production of the Concord grape (a variety of the native *Vitis labrusca*), but I was (and remain) wary

¹ This is paraphrased from the excellent discussion of the relationship between the history of science and environmental history in Michael Lewis, "And All Was Light? – Science and Environmental History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental History*, ed. Andrew C. Isenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 207.

² Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

³ Strother Roberts, *Colonial Ecology, Atlantic Economy: Transforming Nature in Early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

of positing even a scientifically informed hypothesis about the effects of French efforts to cultivate local plants on plant character or distribution.⁴

This is not to say that recent histories of science in the early modern world fail to take into account the material world. Far from it, in fact. I was inspired – and indeed, I remain so – by the historians of science who trace the history of knowledge production as it was mediated by social and natural environments and made through prolonged negotiation between the mental and the material.⁵ Interest in histories of science “from below” – histories that foreground the active participation and frequent erasure of Indigenous peoples and other historically marginalized communities – have similarly flourished in the past decades.⁶ If, as Roberts points out, this is not a history of indigenous knowledge systems in their own right, I have nonetheless worked to foreground the centrality of Indigenous peoples and knowledge in the history of environmental knowledge in the early Americas. I was driven not only to prove that this knowledge mattered but also to explain why it was that Europeans posed particular questions to Indigenous peoples at particular times and places (or blatantly sought out and stole their knowledge), while at other times they seemed utterly uninterested or entirely dismissive. Following these questions demanded methods that focused on the material or practical dimensions of the production of knowledge: where knowledge was produced and by whom, situated in which environments and when, and to what effect. Only if we understand the answers to these questions can we begin to approach such colonial-authored sources as the Jesuit *Relations* to recover Indigenous perspectives and ecological knowledge.

In the end, the richness of French sources that describe intercultural interaction is what makes *A Not-So-New World* unique in a scholarly landscape that seeks out all-together-too-rare glimpses of Indigenous knowledge and the natures of American borderlands. Missionaries (widely read and impressively literate authors), explorers, and would-be colonists and administrators left a trove of sources that mean that, even when the French colonial experience can seem trivial from the perspective of immigrant numbers, the study of French North America can illuminate modes of encounter that were likely just as common in other colonial projects but were either never written about or were described in texts that have failed to survive to this day. In part, and partly in response to Ermus’s astute question about the uniqueness of New France, this means that a comparable history

⁴ This longer history is told in Erica Hannickel, *Empire of Vines: Wine Cultures in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

⁵ See, for example, Deborah Harkness, *The Jewel House: Elizabethan London and the Scientific Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Pamela H. Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Pamela H. Smith and Paula Findlen, eds., *Merchants & Marvels: Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁶ See, for example, Neil Safier, *Measuring the New World: Enlightenment Science and South America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

of how the English ideology of improvement influenced relationships with Indigenous peoples could be far more difficult to write. Leaving aside the fact that I locate the discourse of the *sauvage* firmly in the context of seventeenth-century France and an ideology of improvement – at least in so far as I know it through the work of historians such as Anya Zilberstein and Richard Drayton – the ideology of improvement seems to take root far more prominently in the eighteenth century.⁷ Beyond simply saying that the French did it first, I would be excited for somebody else to trace out how English audiences took up and translated the ecological perspectives of the French as they described their colonial projects or – and this seems equally probable but difficult to prove – how both were inspired by their engagement with Iberian ideologies of empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Following the insights of this rich archive – reading it along the grain, if you will – made *A Not-So-New World* ever more French in its orientation and these sources encouraged me to operate at a larger scale than environmental histories often do: that of a colonial project that, if often rooted most firmly in the Saint Lawrence valley, had continental ambitions. My book does not focus on a particular ecologically defined region or watershed as is the case in the published works of Campbell, Lee, and Roberts. Instead, I consciously tried to follow the spatial imaginaries of my actors. This means that, in one chapter, I explored a New France that stretched – insisted the intendant Jean Talon – from Florida to the Arctic, while in another I traced out the implications of Joseph-François Lafitau’s insistence that the history of New France must necessarily include all of human history (at least as far back as that of the Scythians) and the entire globe (or at least those parts of Asia that American Indigenous peoples traversed before crossing a land bridge into the Americas, bringing with them vestiges of Old World faiths and flora). What Campbell terms “the limits *within* New France,” then became one of my principal interests, in so far as they evidenced a shifting relationship with ecological and political regions that we would now identify. Following the temporalities of my actors foreclosed some interesting possibilities that I hope to explore in future articles. In ending with the conquest of New France at the end of the Seven Years’ War (1754-1763), for example, I was unable to take up the transatlantic debates about American environments that began when Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, began to dismiss an entire hemisphere as immature and inferior in the mid-eighteenth century. Lee’s ability to frame my work within a broader American historiography that include nineteenth-century dispossession similarly shows how different my research could look within categories other than those of my actors.

In spite of a long tradition of historical geography and agricultural history in Canada, so much of the environmental history of New France remains to be written. I am therefore intensely grateful for the opportunity both to discuss my work with these

⁷ Anya Zilberstein, *A Temperate Empire: Making Climate Change in Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Richard Drayton, *Nature’s Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the ‘Improvement’ of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).

excellent reviewers and – hopefully – point out how much remains to be done. As I read these responses to *A Not-So-New World*, I also wanted to know the answer to their thoughtful questions. What were the environmental consequences of French colonialism in North America? How did indigenous ecological knowledge adapt to the changing human and natural landscapes of colonial North America? And what can the history of New France teach historians of the Anglo and Iberian Atlantic world who so rarely consider it? If *A Not-So-New World* can both offer answers to these questions and make clear the need for and possibilities of future research, I'll count it a success.

About the Contributors

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