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Christian Ayne Crouch, *Nobility Lost: French and Canadian Martial Cultures, Indians and the End of New France*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2014. Maps, illustrations, notes, index. xii-250 pp. \$35.00. ISBN 978-0-814-5244-4.

Review by Kenneth Banks, Wofford College.

For belligerents at the time and historians since, the Seven Years' War is difficult to contain. Fought on a global scale from Martinique to Manila, Senegal to Sweden, with different names and chronologies wherever blood was shed, the course of the war and its impact have been interpreted largely in terms of the full ascent of the first British Empire, a check on French and Austrian imperial schemes, the full flowering of formalized battlefield conduct, and, in the British mainland colonies, the origins of independence. Unlike the explosion of literature on Atlantic Revolutions, however, the interconnected and wider dimensions of the war are only slowly garnering attention from scholars.[1] Christian Crouch's first book makes an intelligent and nuanced contribution to an important corner of this growing body of work, without being bombastically "Atlantic World."

While not without its faults, the work is an ambitious and lucid interpretation of how warfare in North America restructured French "codes of martial valor." Although not light reading for undergraduates, it would be a worthy and interesting challenge. Historians of colonial America and the Atlantic World more generally will want to consult it for both information and as a useful model. But traditional military historians beware: this is very much a part of the emerging canon in the field (sorry) of the New Military history. Largely eschewing the drama, field logistics, and gore of individual battles, Crouch's goal instead is to show how contesting cultures of violence in North America ultimately altered French imperial policies and perceptions of nobility. She argues that the Seven Years' in North America provoked a major "culture war" among the French, French colonial, and Indian combatants, one that contributed ultimately toward defeat, but that also proved crucial in redefining French imperial policies (pp. 4, 15).

Crouch's first original contribution is to locate the origins of the crisis of French noble identity in the "Austrian" War of 1744-48 (War of the Austrian Succession, King George's War in British America). From the perspective of the French military *noblesse*, she argues that Louis XV squandered his short-lived stab at martial honor with an easy peace at Aix-la-Chapelle and the acquisition of a domineering new royal mistress, Madame de Pompadour (pp. 23-25). Combined with the impoverishing pressures of increased material consumption, French nobles began questioning the meaning of their status and the king's place as "first noble among nobles." In New France, on the other hand, French colonial officers, had just achieved mastery (to the extent any group could) of negotiated surety throughout an expanding *pays d'en haut* (the vast drainage region of the Great Lakes and Ohio River Valley) but were undermined by cost-cutting measures and near-comical claims to sovereignty ordered by Versailles after 1748 (pp. 31-34). The third group of players, the Indian nations, notably the Six Nations Iroquois, the Ottawa, the Delaware (Lenape), and the Shawnee, and even some Catholicized Indians, began to develop stronger trade and personal/kinship alliances with British American agents and merchants, while becoming increasingly disenchanted with the meager gifts offered and stout forts erected by the French.

The shooting began in earnest with George Washington's assassination of Ensign Joseph Coulon de Villiers de Jumonville in 1754. The subsequent men-at-arms race by the European adversaries poured soldiers into the upper Ohio River Valley, and this alone upset the prevalent methods of war practiced by Indian nations and their French or British allies. From their first arrival, the French officer corps, veterans of the Austrian War, attempted to reform and contain wilderness violence within the more familiar confines of honorable European battlefield conduct (pp. 53-55). They did so over the vociferous objections of French colonial officers (often Canadian-born) of the *troupes de la Marine*, and especially the Canadian-born Governor-General, the Marquis de Vaudreuil. The situation worsened with the arrival of the Marquis de Montcalm, an astute, decorated veteran who had clear ideas for projecting noble civility onto the canvas of the Canadian wilderness (pp. 66-69). The ensuing Vaudreuil-Montcalm clash has long been well-documented, a major historiographical issue side-stepped by Crouch (see below).

Employing a deep reading of a wide range of largely printed sources, Crouch makes a strong case that, from the Indian viewpoint, the inconstant, even irrational behavior of the French commanders turned puzzlement into contempt. Demanding dangerous frontal attacks on British forts that contained no useful trade goods, for example, made no sense (pp. 54, 59, 80-82). Predictably, Native warriors dispensed with Enlightenment-era codes of honorable warfare and imposed their own culturally-sanctioned acts of violence, culminating in the Ft. William Henry Massacre (August 1757) (pp. 86-91). Such acts, in turn, further disinclined the French officers to value warriors, as well as the Canadian officers who supported or engaged in similar acts, as honorable fighters and astute advisors.

Crouch's analysis of how events in France and New France reinforced existing preconceptions is even more invigorating and daring. In one fine example, she suggests that when news reached Canada of Robert François Damiens' attempt on Louis XV's life (1757), Montcalm fretted that the Native allies would ascribe *sauvagerie* to the French themselves. Whether various Native leaders or their warriors did is unknown, but Crouch sensibly notes that Montcalm's concerns reflected a genuine *crise d'honneur*, a cultural vulnerability, for the French commanders in Canada (pp. 99-101). At the same time, a select few of the French victories—only those featuring some semblance of European conduct, particularly at Ft. Carillon (Ticonderoga, 1758)—were fêted back in France, an early version of “spin” that further divided colonial and French officers (pp. 103-04). The damage had been done by late 1758, and one has a sense of the inevitability of surrender by 1760.

However, Crouch refreshingly extends the analysis beyond French defeat in 1760 in the final three chapters by following the fortunes of the repatriated French, and exported French colonial, officers. Combing the dense maze of accusation and counter-accusation of the official investigation over defeat (*l'affaire du Canada*) and the subsequent rulings, Crouch finds that while colonial officers were assigned guilt and in essence exiled internally to Tourraine, French officers on the whole enjoyed exoneration, if they were even brought to trial. Many resumed their careers (save Montcalm, who had conveniently died in battle) (p. 146). The “Losing Face of France” was Janus-faced. Crouch then turns the cultural gaze on France's immediate post-war colonizing efforts. The massive and disastrous Kourou expedition (1763-65) to found a settlement colony in north-east South America marked, in Crouch's view, a conscious attempt by Choiseul to erase the Canadian debacle (p. 158) and in effect, “reboot” French imperial honor.

When the death toll reached horrific heights in Kourou, the French Naval Ministry (the Marine) then sponsored none other than the veteran of New France, Bougainville, to undertake a major exploration of the South Pacific (p. 162). This effort proved more successful, in Crouch's view, by satisfactorily re-establishing a new *noblesse* identity founded in part on scientific advancement and the improvement of human kind. It also helped that the Tahitians were portrayed in the subsequent publications emanating from the voyage as the “right sort” of native, docile and rather fawning, unlike the brutish and independent Natives with whom Bougainville had fought in Canada (pp. 171, 176). While somewhat at

odds in terms of tone and biographical bent with the rest of the work, this last chapter is an intriguing and valuable meditation on the continuity of French exploration over the centuries.

There remain some troubling elements, however. Despite the truly impressive and wide range of source material gathered from both sides of the Atlantic, Crouch relies heavily on the *transcripts* of the official correspondence in the Francis Parkman Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society), rather than the original correspondence itself in the C11A (from Canada) and B (from France) Series. As William J. Eccles noted over fifty years ago, Parkman was very selective in his use of French (well, any) sources.<sup>[2]</sup> The use of these sources gives the impression that, aside from the missives to cooperate from one short-lived minister (p. 102), Versailles clearly backed Montcalm and the French commanders. This might indeed be the case, but the author's argument would be more convincing to this reviewer if she had considered the full exchange of letters in their complete context.

Two curious lapses in historiography also tarnish this otherwise fine work. The culture shock experienced by French officers more generally, and the Vaudreuil-Montcalm rift in particular (primarily pp. 68-69, 101-02, 120-23), have been the focus of analyses by several historians for at least sixty years, including Guy Frégault, William J. Eccles (both of whose works are mentioned early in the endnotes as straightforward narratives of the war), George F. G. Stanley, Roger Michalon, Peter Moogk, Martin L. Nicolai, and this reviewer.<sup>[3]</sup> Crouch does not seem to be aware of this important legacy. Nicolai provided the first systematic and thoroughly documented clash of martial, as well as intellectual and cultural values between French and French colonial nobility during the Seven Years' War.<sup>[4]</sup> A similar lapse on a far more modest scale is evident in the sections on Intendant François Bigot, although the portrait of Bigot as totally corrupt no longer has the weight it once did.<sup>[5]</sup> These few lapses are all the more puzzling since Crouch is thoroughly grounded in the other historiographies, particularly the ethno-historical aspects of the conflict.

The writing is skillful and lively, but also alluring at times, making it difficult to detect when firm conclusions are wrung from soft evidence. To take one small example: after the destruction of English Ft. Pickawillany (1752) and the marking of the charred site by the victorious Ottawa with "tree writing" (scalps to mark an enemy's defeat), Crouch confidently reports that "Metropolitan French officials noticed none of these visual markers, no doubt because they considered the Ottawas to be located on the periphery of Native America" (p. 46). There are two assertions here. The first is based only on the fact that the markers were not *reported* by French officers (plausible, but not conclusive); the second is supposition. Crouch is clearly too good an historian to make any wild claims, and does not do so, but while the absence of qualifying terms translates into more robust prose, too often their absence can also smudge the boundary claims between what the author knows or can be logically extrapolated, and what is guesswork.

Finally, while there are very few inaccuracies, these few can nevertheless be jarring. For example, Voltaire's (in)famous quip of the war being fought over "quelques arpents de neige vers le Canada" is rendered as a "few meters of snow" in New France (meters?) (p. 4). British forces occupied French Martinique in February 1762, not 1759, and for both Martinique and Guadeloupe, Versailles (accurately) blamed the merchants and planters for defeat, not the officers (p. 127). Finally, the book is about New France. As the author points out, this jurisdiction included the trade posts of the *pays d'en haut* (p. 13), but New France also included Île Royale and the fabled and fallible fortress of Louisbourg. Crouch eagerly discusses events and personnel in the former, but the latter appears to have slipped somehow beyond the author's horizon. This is a shame, since including the extensive work on this part of New France might well support Crouch's ideas.<sup>[6]</sup>

Whose Nobility was Lost? In the end, Crouch supplies what appears to this reviewer a sly, perceptive answer: the title can be read both as statement and as a descriptive noun. Lost in Canada, French nobles slowly re-fashioned a new corporative identity once repatriated to France. French colonial nobles lost

out entirely, stripped of their positions, fort incomes, and honor. Indian peoples continued to forge their own concept of “nobility,” borrowing what seemed suitable from European nobles (such as claims to Bougainville’s lost lineage, pp. 185-86) to suit their own purposes. The ideal of the “noble savage” had been lost on the battlefields of Canada, only to be resurrected anew by Bougainville (and Diderot) on the beaches of Tahiti.

## NOTES

[1] For recent examples, see Christopher Hodson, *The Acadian Diaspora: An Eighteenth-Century History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Frans De Bruyn and Shaun Regan, *The Culture of the Seven Years’ War: Empire, Identity, and the Arts in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014). While focused on North America, Fred Anderson provides a solid understanding of the interplay of trans-Atlantic forces, though more for the British side. See Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Vintage, 2000).

[2] William J. Eccles, “The History of New France According to Francis Parkman,” in *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 18/2 (1961): 163-175.

[3] Guy Frégault, *La guerre de la Conquête, 1754-1760* (Montréal: Fides, 1955; reprinted 1966); William J. Eccles, “The Battle of Quebec: A Reappraisal,” originally published in *The French Colonial Historical Society Proceedings, Third Annual Meeting*, ed. by Alf Heggoy, French Colonial Historical Society (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978), reprinted Eccles, *Essays on New France* (Toronto: Oxford University Press: 1978, 125-33); and *The Canadian Frontier, 1534-1760* (revised ed., Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1983); George F.G. Stanley, *New France: The Last Phase, 1744-1760* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968); Roger Michalon, “Vaudreuil et Montcalm: les hommes, leurs relations, et influence de ces relations sur la conduite de la guerre 1756-1759,” in *Conflits de sociétés au Canada français pendant la Guerre de Sept Ans et leur influence sur les opérations*, ed. by Jean Delmas (Ottawa: Colloque International d’histoire militaire, Ottawa, d’août 1978); Martin L. Nicolai, “A Different Kind of Courage: The French Military and the Canadian Irregular Soldier during the Seven Years’ War,” in *Canadian Historical Review*, 70/1 (1989): 53-75; Peter Moogk, *La Nouvelle France: The Making of French Canada: A Cultural History* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000); Kenneth Banks, *Chasing Empire Across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713-1763* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), which Crouch does cite briefly elsewhere.

[4] Martin L. Nicolai, “Subjects and Citizens: French officers and the North American Experience, 1755-1783,” Ph.D. diss., Queen’s University, Canada, 1992.

[5] Primarily Guy Frégault, *François Bigot: Administrateur français* (2 vols. Montréal: Institut d’histoire de l’Amérique française, 1948).

[6] See, for example, A. J. B. Johnston’s *Endgame 1758: The Promise, the Glory, and the Despair of Louisbourg’s Last Decade* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

Kenneth Banks  
Wofford College  
[BanksKJ@wofford.edu](mailto:BanksKJ@wofford.edu)

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