

Jonathan K. Gosnell. *Franco-America in the Making: The Creole Nation Within*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 2018. ISBN-13: 978-0-8032-8527-9. 366 pp., 6 photographs, 5 illustrations, index.

Reviewed by
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On the last day of the 2018 American Council for Quebec Studies (ACQS) Biennial Conference in New Orleans, I had the unexpected pleasure of being introduced to and being seated next to Jonathan Gosnell at the open-seating lunch. Having similar research interests in Franco-American culture, in particular that of New England, we were engaged in a delightful conversation when a second colleague at the table encouraged me to read Gosnell's *Franco-America in the Making: The Creole Nation Within*. I could not be more thankful for this second colleague's advice.

As a post-secondary educator who strives to expose students to the little-known reality that there are multiple Francophone regions in Canada, each with a distinct culture and history that have direct connections to Franco-American populations in the United States, meeting Gosnell and learning of his publication were particularly meaningful. Given that the United States and Canada share the largest and friendliest border in the history of the world, it should be natural that secondary and post-secondary curricula include the study of Quebec and its connections to Canada's other French-speaking regions. However, despite recent strides in the past ten years by publishers to offer French-language textbooks that encompass more of the Francophone world, traditional textbooks, particularly ones geared for the introductory level, rarely dedicate more than one chapter to Quebec and even less to Canada's other French-speaking regions and to the Franco-American communities in the United States. This then sets up the precedent for the upper-level French courses and history courses with interdisciplinary connections to these upper-level French courses to continue along the same curricular path of not paying much attention to the twenty million French speakers and people of French or francophone descent in North America, who comprise the fifth largest ethnic group in the United States. In view of this fact, and in view of the reemergence of language reacquisition among the multiple Franco-American communities in the United States, educators are in need of resources, such as Gosnell's *Franco-America in the Making: The*

Creole Nation Within, that demonstrate why the study of French and Franco-Americans is relevant to the education of today's U.S. students.

Across its six chapters ("Between Dream and Reality in Franco-America;" "Cultural Institutions and French Renaissance in America;" "Women's Social Clubs and the Transmission of Culture;" "Franco-American Cultures in a New World Perspective;" "Ethnic Identity and the Franco-American Press;" and "Unmasking the Creole Cowboy"), *Franco-America in the Making: The Creole Nation Within*, presents the history of Franco-American culture in a gracious, well-balanced perspective. For example, when addressing the role of the Franco-American press during World War II, Gosnell astutely explains:

Franco-American newspapers found themselves in a predicament during the dark years, *les années noires*, between 1939 and 1945, which extended across the Atlantic Ocean. With French tendencies becoming increasingly dubious in the early 1940s, the Franco press was at the most exposed point of its existence, forced to defend itself because of its French connection. What did not help matters was that Franco papers, often serving socially conservative constituencies (although some politically more liberal), devoted congratulatory articles to Pétain, war hero, emblem of an age-old France in the early 1930s, and also Nazi sympathizer. He symbolized all that was traditionally and authentically French to French groups throughout the world. Pétain lauded French Canadians for their preservation of French culture in the New World even after the defeat of 1763. Such laudatory comments appeared in papers such as *Le Travailleur* and *L'Avenir National* until 1940. In the fall of 1940, after Pétain had made clear his intentions and had shaken Hitler's hand, *Le Travailleur* had still not yet clearly decided for whom it lent its support and for which France, Pétain's antiquated, collaborationist version or Charles de Gaulle's modern, independent variant. (211-212)

Here Gosnell adeptly shows just one of the many implications of being a Franco-American in a national as well as global context.

Notable also is Gosnell's analysis of welcome signs:

The welcome signs greeting residents and visitors to French heritage cities and states in New England illustrate a past and present French connection. The sometimes prominent position of the word at city/state entrances is a subtle but resonant invitation. It voices the potency of a single word, which for some can evoke a rich history. The bilingual signs represent typically American hybrid or hyphenated identities and are visible markers of francophone postcolonial presence. (45-46).

Gosnell purposefully continues by explaining the essential backstory of how the French were, more often than not, very unwelcomed:

They constituted the dregs of society, labored for meager wages, and lived in rundown areas. A late nineteenth-century report identified them as the “Chinese of the East,” presumably because of their foreign ways and indifference to assimilation. In the 1880s, Francos resented this unfavorable association with China. (46)

Moreover, Gosnell does not overlook the role women played in the French New World. When setting the stage to explain their contributions (from *les filles du roi* to Marie de l’Incarnation, founder of the Quebec Ursulines, to Jeanne Mance who helped to establish the first hospital in Montreal in 1642) and what being a woman of Franco-American descent entails, Gosnell describes a monument recently dedicated to Franco-American women:

Since its dedication in 2001, *La dame de la renaissance française* oversees the continuity of the French tradition through family and learning, in a small park overlooking the Nashua River in southern New Hampshire. The monument is accented with several *fleur-de-lys* and set against the backdrop of one of the local mills where Franco-Americans worked. A sign at the entrance of the park indicates the French community’s rebirth. It is fitting that this testament to French preservation is reconstructed as a woman, like Marianne, a female symbol of the French Republic, and that she is located on Water Street, near the life and industry-producing waters. (107)

In conclusion, *Franco-America in the Making: The Creole Nation Within* is a noteworthy contribution to Franco-American studies. It is well-researched, clearly presented, and supported by illustrative detail. Gosnell achieves his goal of exploring “the imprint that has been left by members of the diasporic French family on the North American continent since their arrival four hundred years ago” (1), proving that the history of this ethnic group and the role it has played in American culture should not be overlooked, neglected, or forgotten.