

# Great Lakes Creoles: A French-Indian Community on the Northern Borderlands, Prairie Du Chien, 1750-1860

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Some questions remain regarding the extent of both French and Illinois collaboration. Some scholars might disagree with Morrissey's characterization of Jesuit acceptance of Illinois syncretism. Archaeologists might quibble with Morrissey's grouping of the Danner Phase within the Fort Ancient cultural system. Nevertheless, few will doubt Morrissey's meticulous research or his ability to craft a new argument amid such a crowded historical field.

*Great Lakes Creoles: A French-Indian Community on the Northern Borderlands, Prairie Du Chien, 1750–1860*, by Lucy Eldersveld Murphy. Studies in North American Indian History. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. xvi, 313 pp. Maps, tables, graphs, illustrations, notes, index. \$34.99 paperback.

Reviewer Robert Michael Morrissey is assistant professor of history at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He is the author of *Empire by Collaboration: Indians, Colonists, and Governments in Colonial Illinois Country* (2015).

Founded as a fur trade center on the edge of the French and British empires, Prairie du Chien was one of the many multicultural communities that resulted from the meeting of French traders and Native peoples of the western Great Lakes in the eighteenth century. In this remarkable book, Lucy Eldersveld Murphy follows this community through its nineteenth-century transformations in the face of American settler colonialism. Murphy highlights the agency of the local Creole population as it negotiated new political subjectivity, cultural transformations, and new social practices under the American government. The central premise of the book is that while Creole *habitants* were challenged in this process, many of them preserved land, autonomy, and a distinctive culture, resisting the fate of other incorporated populations—such as the Canadian Métis and Mestizos of the American Southwest—who were marginalized as racialized outsiders in the process of settler colonialism.

In key ways, this book covers the same ground as another recent book, Bethel Saler's prize-winning *The Settlers' Empire* (2015), exploring the ways newly subject populations interacted with and responded to the American state-building project in present-day Wisconsin. What distinguishes Murphy's book is its approach; as a community study, *Great Lakes Creoles* focuses on the ground and from the *habitants'* own perspective. That allows Murphy not only to view large-scale historical transformations from a single place, but also to follow the experiences of several well-documented key families. Beautifully written, the book is both enlightening and entertaining, marrying settler colonialist

theory to a compelling narrative. The result is not only required reading for scholars of early America and the West, but also seems a great candidate for college classroom use.

The book is organized both chronologically and thematically. Beginning with an account of the roots of the Creole community in Prairie du Chien, Murphy shows how a syncretic Creole culture took root on the Mississippi River as French traders and Indian women established families in the 1750s. Largely autonomous, many of the town's residents were nominally loyal to Britain during the American Revolution and faced the prospect of American state building with uncertainty. That said, a special "middle ground" dynamic shaped the early relations between the Creoles and their colonial conquerors when territorial officials began to seriously contemplate incorporating the region into the American polity at the end of the War of 1812. As Murphy explains, the American newcomers needed the cooperation of the Creoles in order to achieve the domination of the much larger indigenous population of the region as well as to make their democratic institutions work. As a result of this dynamic, the Americans had to "imagine the Creoles as white people," as one observer put it, and treat them as insiders, not racialized outsiders. From this basic power dynamic stemmed opportunities for the Creoles. Murphy's book follows the Creoles as they confronted colonialism in many dimensions, from government, to law, to economy, to social life.

For instance, although of course the Creoles were subject to an invading government, Murphy emphasizes how they shaped their new political lives, voting, petitioning, and protesting. She explores their encounter with the new legal system, emphasizing their agency as they interacted with the jury system often to defend community priorities. In the most interesting chapter, Murphy explores how Creoles faced a new social order, especially in the arenas of family and gender. Focusing on the prominent "public mothers" of the Creole community, Murphy shows how they resisted new practices and preserved female ideals of community even as they adapted to new laws about marriage and property. In another richly researched chapter, Murphy explores the economic lives of the Creoles, who preserved autonomy and distinctive foodways under the new regime. In all of these chapters, Murphy shows how the increasing Anglo population limited Creole options but never resulted in the racialization of Creoles or their marginalization as outsiders.

The story of the Creoles' negotiations with American state building is full of fascinating episodes and people, and Murphy argues her thesis clearly and effectively. At times Murphy's strong effort to con-

textualize nearly all *habitants'* actions as a reflection of their resistance to settler colonialism or their distinctive Creole values overwhelms other subtler ways to understand the motives of actors in this story. In a similar vein, some may find certain depictions of the communitarian Creole world romanticized, lacking in complexity. Of course this is a quibble about emphasis, not about substance. *Great Lakes Creoles* is a wonderful book, the best study I have read about a community facing settler colonialism in the nineteenth-century Midwest.

*Illinois in the War of 1812*, by Gillum Ferguson. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012. xvi, 349 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 hardcover, \$24.95 paperback.

Reviewer Patrick J. Jung is a professor of history and anthropology at the Milwaukee School of Engineering. He is working on a book on the history of the War of 1812 in the upper Mississippi River valley, and his article on the military history of Fort Madison appears in this issue of the *Annals of Iowa*.

The recent bicentennial of the War of 1812 resulted in a spate of books, articles, and historical conferences dedicated to reexamining the legacy of that often forgotten conflict. The region including the western Great Lakes and the upper Mississippi River valley in particular remains probably the most overlooked theater of the war, which makes Gillum Ferguson's book a welcome addition to the growing body of scholarly literature. Nevertheless, this book is not without its defects, particularly its approach to the Indian side of the conflict.

Ferguson begins by examining Illinois Territory on the eve of the war and paints an excellent portrait of the various Anglo-American, French Canadian, and Indian communities in the territory. The early losses of Mackinac Island and Detroit to the British-Indian alliance made the region of southern Illinois, where the majority of the Anglo-Americans and French Canadians resided, vulnerable during the first year of the conflict. Even more significant was the assault by the Potawatomes against the garrison of Fort Dearborn as it attempted to make its way to Fort Wayne in August 1812. Ferguson handles this oft-told tale with great clarity and provides copious citations to the various primary sources, which present a variety of irreconcilable factual differences that must be considered. Equally strong are his assessments of the many secondary works that describe the battle. Indeed, Ferguson's book provides an outstanding bibliography of the Fort Dearborn saga that will be of great value to future scholars who research this topic.