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review of "Franco-America in the Making: The Creole Nation Within

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BOOK REVIEWS

Jonathan K. Gosnell. *Franco-America in the Making: The Creole Nation Within*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. Pp. xv + 347.

Jonathan Gosnell's recent monograph argues for the significance of the French presence in North America. In so doing, his work steps into the void created by the characteristics that define this field. North American French communities are "the United States' fifth largest and forgotten ethnic group" (1). "Forgotten," for despite accounting for 6% to 25% of New England states' populations, little of these communities is known outside of the communities themselves. This erasure arises in part from disciplinary boundaries. Since many in these Franco-American communities no longer speak French, they are omitted from studies on *francophone* North America. In a similar way, since French North American communities do not neatly fit into the paradigmatic understanding of "first wave" migrations (from Europe and through Ellis Island), they are often excluded from studies on white ethnicity in the United States. Gosnell avoids both of these pitfalls by keeping the theoretical context of *la francophonie* whether these communities speak French or not. "Many Americans today no longer master their heritage language, but there are some twenty million French speakers and people of French or francophone descent in North America. They are French as well as American linguistically, culturally, and in myriad ways that they redefine continually" (2). Gosnell's broadening of *la francophonie* to include people of francophone *descent* and not just those who currently speak French opens up a new conceptual terrain that allows him to include all francophone heritage communities in the US. His focus in this book is on New England and southern Louisiana.

Franco-America in the Making walks us through some of the key cultural institutions that define French North America. Gosnell begins by framing his choice to prioritize linguistic similarity over historical and cultural differences. He argues in Chapter One that although the French colonial settlement was short-lived, it nevertheless established "an original New World sense of Frenchness" (38) that lives on today and can be seen in traces all over America. The remaining chapters each investigate an instance of these French traces. Chapter Two explores the various institutions that teach French, including the Alliance Française and CODOFIL. Chapter Three introduces Franco-American Women's Associations once found throughout New England. Chapter Four surveys Franco-American literature written in both English and French. Chapter Five gives an overview of key Franco-American French newspapers in New England, focusing specifically on the articulation of Franco-American identity in Worcester's *Le Travailleur*, Manchester's *L'Avenir National* and *Le Journal de Lowell*. The book ends with an exploration of the concept of creolization in Cajun music and folkways, considering the ways in which French cultures have mixed with other Americans. With these examples, Gosnell seeks to prove the importance

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of these “understated assertion[s] of francophone life in the United States” (288), arguing that these “Franco-American sties articulate to observers evolving yet resistant ethnic cultures of North America” (289).

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