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William R. Nester, *The French and Indian War and the Conquest of New France*. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2014. Pp. xix, 492. ISBN 978-0-8061-4435-1.

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William Nester's choice of title for his latest book reminds us that the Anglo-French conflict in North America from 1754 to 1763 had at least two names: Anglo-Americans called it the French and Indian War, and French-Canadians called it the War of the Conquest (*Guerre de la Conquête*). Though each major anniversary of the war has seen a spate of new scholarship, the publication in 2000 of Fred Anderson's *Crucible of War*<sup>1</sup> marked the beginning of a vast expansion of literature on the subject.<sup>2</sup> Nester (St. John's Univ.) himself has written four other works related to the war in the past fifteen years.<sup>3</sup> He declares that the present volume is the first "to explore the fascinating personalities and epic events that shaped French diplomacy, strategy and tactics during the global war that determined North America's destiny" (7). This is to ignore several excellent historical works on the rise and fall of France's empire in the North Atlantic.<sup>4</sup> But Nester makes clear for popular audiences the French chain of command from Louis XV through the Ministry of the Marine to crown officials, military officers, licensed missionaries, merchants, and ordinary Canadian *habitants*.

The book comprises four parts: "Power" (chaps. 1-3), "The Years of Victories" (chaps. 4-7), "The Years of Defeats" (chaps. 8-10), and "The Long Denouement" (chaps. 11-13). Nester sets the tone for the entire volume in chapter 1, "The 'Absolute' Monarchy," on King Louis XV and his court. Under a strong leader, the French Council of State could muddle along, the provincial appellate courts could certify royal writs; Jesuits, Jansenists, and even Huguenots could submerge their religious differences; and France's economy could grow year by year.<sup>5</sup> But Louis XV was not that leader: Nester presents a timid soul, feeble before mistresses and ministers, often overwhelmed by his responsibilities. Though Louis tried to engage conscientiously in the affairs of state, he often lost his fights against Jansenists and philosophes, Parlements and ambitious ministers. The women around him may have exerted undue influence as well. Early in his reign, his foreign policy reflected the ambitions of Queen Marie Leszczyńska and her family. Later (1745-64), Madame Pompadour secured patronage for portrait painters, sculptors, and (especially Italian) musicians, but she may also, Nester writes, have played a decisive role in selecting the king's cabinet members and in shaping aspects of French foreign policy before and during the Seven Years' War.

Chapter 2, "War, Wealth, and the Great Powers," paints a familiar picture of France in the Seven Years'

1. Subtitle: *The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (NY: Knopf, 2000).

2. Including Franz A.J. Szabo, *The Seven Years War in Europe, 1756-1763* (2008; rpt. NY: Routledge, 2013); Matt Schumann and Karl Schweizer, *The Seven Years War: A Transatlantic History* (NY: Routledge, 2008); Daniel Baugh, *The Global Seven Years War, 1754-1763: Britain and France in a Great Power Contest* (NY: Longman, 2011); Mark H. Danley and Patrick J. Speelman, eds., *The Seven Years' War: Global Views* (Boston: Brill, 2012).

3. "Haughty Conquerors": *Amherst and the Great Indian Uprising of 1763* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), *The Great Frontier War: Britain, France, and the Imperial Struggle for North America, 1607-1755* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), *The First Global War: Britain, France, and the Fate of North America, 1756-1775* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), *The Epic Battles for Ticonderoga, 1758* (Albany: SUNY Pr, 2008).

4. Including Guy Frégault, *Canada: The War of the Conquest*, trans. Margaret M. Cameron (Toronto: Oxford U Pr, 1969); J.F. Boshier, *The Canada Merchants, 1713-1763* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 1987); James Pritchard, *Louis XV's Navy, 1748-1762: A Study of Organization and Administration* (1987; rpt. Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queens U Pr, 2009); Jonathan Dull, *The French Navy and the Seven Years' War* (Lincoln: U Nebraska Pr, 2005); Frank W. Brecher, *Losing a Continent: France's North American Policy, 1753-1763* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Pr, 1998); Kenneth Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713-1763* (Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queens U Pr, 2002).

5. See Arthur McAndless Wilson, *French Foreign Policy during the Administration of Cardinal Fleury, 1726-1743* (Cambridge: Harvard U Pr, 1936).

War: prestigious but diplomatically inept, militarily impressive only on paper, rich in internal trade but poor in government finances.<sup>6</sup> In Nester's view, France under Louis XV was fatally inefficient and corrupt in its state bureaucracy and unoriginal, lethargic, and purely reactive in its foreign relations—in short, fundamentally unready for a global war.

In chapter 3, "The French Empire," Nester concentrates on French grand strategy around the world, such as it was. Focusing on Canada and, to a lesser extent, Louisiana, he notes that, although French officials were presiding over a vast, wealthy country, they faced major difficulties posed by a corrupt state bureaucracy, immense logistical challenges, and a tiny, subsistence-minded colonial population.

So just how could Versailles defend its empire, not only in North America, but in the West Indies, West Africa, and India, as well? All it could do was keep sending enough troops, munitions, and provisions to each colony to thwart any British march or landing, and, if that failed and the French had to retreat to a port or city, survive a prolonged siege. The French did not need to match the number of British troops; they only needed enough to blunt any offensive against them. Given British naval supremacy, Versailles had to steel itself against the likelihood that a portion of any supply ships it dispatched overseas would be captured.... Versailles had to act on the reality that it could best defend its empire by winning victories in Germany—conquering Hanover and defeating Prussia. British Hanover along with Minorca, which the French captured in 1756, would be vital bargaining chips to trade for British acceptance of the Appalachian border between their North American empires or to get back Canada and any other colonies that fell.... The rest depended on its commanders in Canada and the other colonies. (109–10)

Concerning France's war in North America and beyond, Nester argues that a strategic emphasis on the Continent led to a problematic imposition of European military norms on French colonists and allies around the globe, including North America (111–12).

Chapter 4, "The Clash of Empires through 1754," considers the rise of colonial empires especially in North America, in which Amerindians appear as frequent yet minor actors. Nester rightly stresses the conflicts between French colonists, European rivals, and Native groups, but with some errors of fact and a notable pro-European bias. The most grievous errors concern Louisiana (123–26): the *Compagnie des Indes* governed from 1717 to 1731. Royal rule returned because of the Natchez War (1729–31), not the Mississippi Bubble (1720). Nester, relying on Boishébert's report of the Miami-Wyandot rebellion in 1749–52, gives more credit to British trade and French weakness than to the independent actions of chiefs Orontony and Meskia, despite the current historiographical trend of granting more agency to Native groups.<sup>7</sup>

The book's remaining chapters offer a blow-by-blow account of the Seven Years' War. Chapter 5, "Escalation, 1755," sets the tone, with its Versailles-centered summary of cabinet-level politics and diplomacy, and of the war's progress in Europe and around the world. Nester appears most in his element in chapters 6, "World War, 1756," 7, "Killing Fields, 1757," 8, "Turning Point, 1758," 9, "Rout, 1759," and 10, "Conquest, 1760." He moves deftly from Louis's bedchamber and domestic political rivalries to courts and battlefields across Europe, North America's wilderness, and the sea lanes and port facilities of France's sprawling, vulnerable colonial empire.

Chapters 11, "Peace or Alliance? 1761," and 12, "Last Gambles, 1762 and 1763," cover the aftermath of the war in Europe and overseas. Nester closes in chapter 13, "Distant Thunder," with hints about France's continued muddling up to 1789. As before, his global view sets calculations for Eastern Europe alongside the remnants of the French Atlantic. The most prominent figure in part IV, apart from Louis, is the new, dynamic but disliked figure of Etienne-François, Duc de Choiseul (302–5). Though Choiseul is not mentioned

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6. Lawrence J. Oliva, *Misalliance: A Study of French Policy in Russia during the Seven Years' War* (NY: NYU Pr, 1964); Lee Kennett, *The French Armies in the Seven Years' War: A Study in Military Organization and Administration* (Durham, NC: Duke U Pr, 1967); Paul H. Beik, *A Judgment of the Old Régime* (NY: Columbia U Pr, 1944).

7. See, e.g., Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 1991); Daniel Usner, *Indians, Settlers and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina Pr, 1992); Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard U Pr, 2001); Alan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670–1717* (New Haven: Yale U Pr, 2002).

in chapter 13, his administration in the 1760s reformed the French military in ways that would bear some fruit in the American War of Independence and still more in the Napoleonic wars. Choiseul's diplomacy and handling of naval and colonial affairs set the stage for a postwar economic boom, based not least in the revitalized French West Indies (399–401). Nester's opinion of Louis, by contrast, never improves. Contemplating a statue of himself at the Tuileries Palace, "the shy monarch," Nester opines, "concentrated on retaining an icy demeanor to shield himself from all those troublesome subjects beyond his familiar nobles while imagining the delightful nymph who awaited him that night at the Parc-aux-Cerfs" (398–99).

For its readability, range, detail, and development of major themes, Nester's new introduction to France's experience of the Seven Years' War deserves a wide readership. His writing is clear and engaging, his analysis comprehensive. And his reflections on "consequences" at the end of each chapter give armchair generals the chance to make their own strategic assessments. His frequent counterfactuals speak to a keen appreciation of agency and contingency in history, notwithstanding the air of inevitability in his conviction that France, given its administrative woes and indolent leadership, was doomed to defeat. In sum, the book on its merits well complements recent works on the Prussian, Austrian, and British experiences of the Seven Years' War.<sup>8</sup>

Nester fails, however, to deliver something new. His accounts of domestic politics, diplomacy, operations, and treaty negotiations, while quite sound, mostly follow those of recent general histories.<sup>9</sup> As for his strongest contribution, on Louis XV, a definitive English-language treatment of his role in the Seven Years' War remains a desideratum.<sup>10</sup> As a history of the war, the work has a key shortcoming: an absence of engagement with the current historiography of its subject. In his drive to assume an authoritative voice, the author often cites archival and printed primary documents and older secondary sources. Well and good, but he neglects a dozen or so current historians whose work is indispensable to an informed understanding of his topic.

In summary, then, while it does not meet its author's claims of originality, this book is a solid introduction not just to the French and Indian War, but also to the French Seven Years' War as it was experienced, perceived, waged, and ultimately mismanaged at Versailles.

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8. See Szabo (note 2 above), esp. introduction; Baugh (note 2 above); Richard Middleton, *The Bells of Victory: The Pitt-Newcastle Ministry and the Conduct of the Seven Years' War, 1757–1762* (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 1985); Dennis Showalter, *Wars of Frederick the Great* (NY: Longman, 1996) 116–320; and Christopher Duffy, *The Army of Frederick the Great*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Emperor's Pr, 1996), *Russia's Military Way to the West: Origins and Nature of Russian Military Power, 1700–1800* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), and *The Austrian Army in the Seven Years War*, vol. 1: *Instrument of War* (Rosemont, IL: Emperor's Pr, 2000).

9. E.g., Zenab Esmat Rashed, *The Peace of Paris, 1763* (Liverpool: Liverpool U Pr, 1951); Karl W. Schweizer, *England, Prussia and the Seven Years War: Studies in Alliance Policies and Diplomacy* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1989) chaps. 4–9; Schumann and Schweizer (note 2 above) chap. 6; Paul W. Mapp, *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713–63* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina Pr, 2011) chaps. 13–15; Baugh (note 2 above) chaps. 14–16.

10. The five volumes of Richard Waddington's *La Guerre de Sept Ans: Historie diplomatique et militaire* (Paris: Didot, 1889–1914) remain untranslated into English.