

VOLUME XIX, NUMBER 1, WINTER 2018/19

# CLAREMONT

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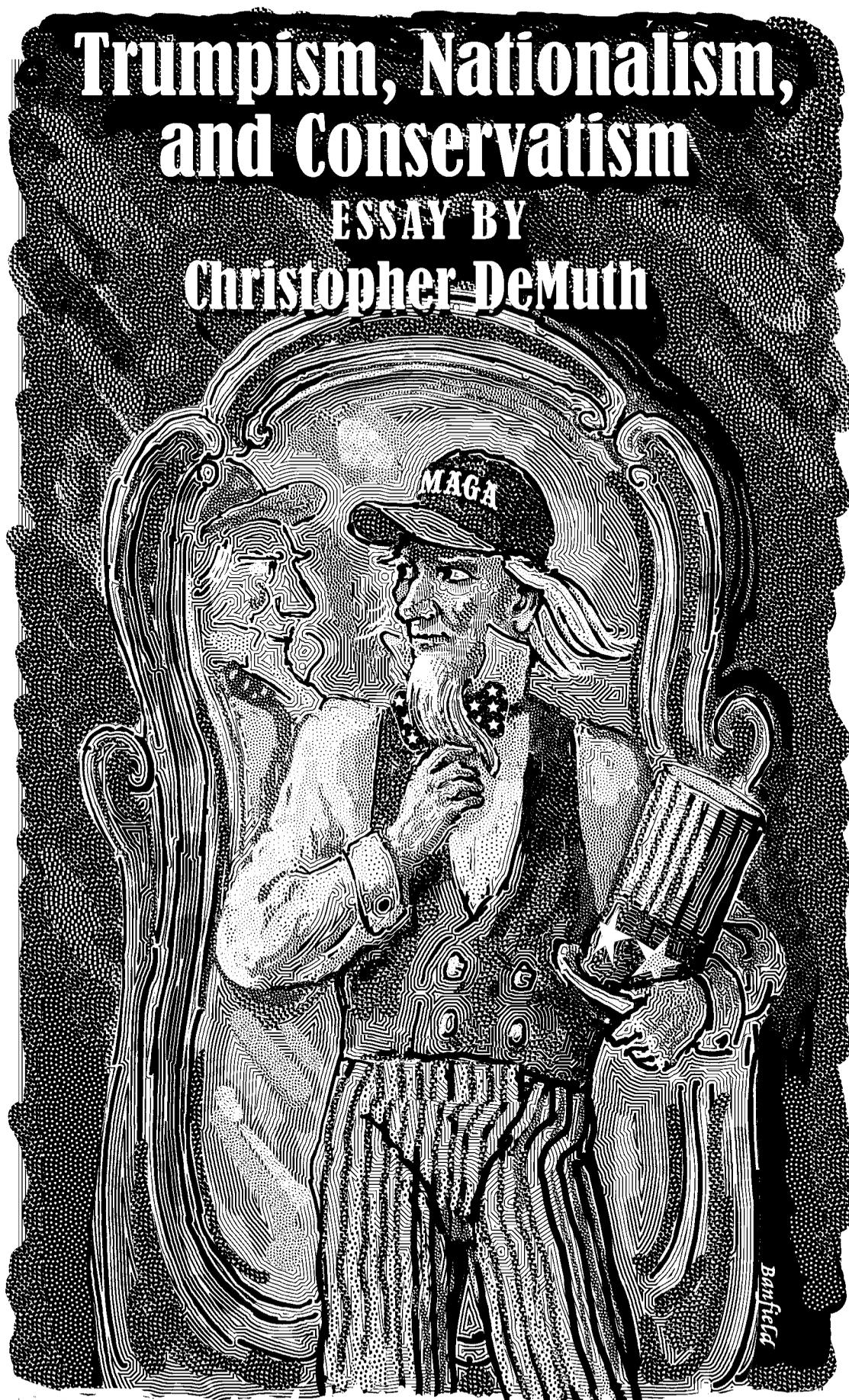
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## BATTLE FOR A CONTINENT



*Oregon Trail Memorial half-dollar ("Indian side"), issued by the United States Mint, 1926–1939, showing an American Indian holding a bow, with his arm raised in a gesture of peace*

TO ESTABLISH CIVILIZATION IN THE North American wilderness required heroic energy, courage, sacrifice, and dauntlessness, from both ordinary and extraordinary men and women. The annals of discovery, exploration, settlement, and conquest recount prodigies of boldness and perseverance that the comfortable modern reader can scarcely imagine.

Americans used to take pride in the achievements of those forebears, who made possible the sweet, comfortable, civilized life most of us enjoy. Such pride has of course become unfashionable, not to say "racist." The ugliness in America's origins, and our complicity as the beneficiaries of the ancestral crimes, is all we are allowed to see of our beginnings; and we are admonished to be appropriately horrified and revolted. Now that the wilderness has itself become holy—for

many, the last sanctuary of holiness—the fact that large cities and their suburbs sprawl where primeval forest or drear desert once stood is desecration. And with the destruction of the wilderness came the dispossession of the land's rightful possessors, in the perfection of their Neolithic innocence: the indigenous peoples who would have lived in peace, but were defeated in unjust, even genocidal war.

All nations' origins have their ugliness, and it is right that the truth be told. Without candor and a sense of proportion, however, the whole truth about the encounter of civilization with barbarism in North America has degenerated into a Hollywood fantasy of unforgivable evildoing on the part of white invaders who, professing to bring salvation to savagery, had proved to be themselves the real savages.

A corrective to this woke narrative can be found in the writings of Francis Parkman (1823–1893), the supreme historian of that fateful encounter, which was really a world-historical collision. Parkman was the author of *The Oregon Trail* (1849), and of the seven-volume *France and England in North America* (1865–92), along with the two-volume *The Conspiracy of Pontiac and The Indian War after the Conquest of Canada* (1851), a coda to his masterwork that was actually written before it. (These major works are now available in three volumes by the Library of America.) He was honestly ambivalent, as many Americans are today, about the inexorable advance of white civilization across North America. He appreciated the cruelty of the loss. His enthusiasm, especially in his youth, for wild places and wild Indians far overflowed the bounds of Boston Brahmin propriety, in which he



had been steeped. Yet his appraisal of Indian virtues and vices was sober and, when necessary, unsparing, which has largely discredited Parkman in modern eyes.

The late Peter Matthiessen—the most beautiful nature writer of his generation and a subscriber to all liberal pieties, chief mourner of vanished wilderness and of Native American moral superiority to the white violators—believed he had made the definitive case against Parkman with a single sentence in his book *Indian Country* (1984): “The historian Francis Parkman described these formerly admired people as ‘man, wolf, and devil, all in one’ (he wrote of the ‘homicidal fury’ of the Iroquois, whose Six Nations parliamentary system, so admired by Benjamin Franklin and the Founding Fathers, was incorporated in his country’s constitution).” But Parkman was frank about Indian viciousness, while Matthiessen stretched the truth about the founders’ admiration for the Indians’ political science. Franklin at the Albany Congress in 1754 was not quite so complimentary: “It would be a strange thing...if Six nations of ignorant savages should be capable of forming such a union [a confederation of tribes] and be able to execute it in such a manner that it has subsisted for ages and appears indissoluble, and yet that a like union should be impractical for ten or a dozen English colonies.” Matthiessen’s cant may have been enshrined as progressive truth, but Parkman finds the fact of the matter where Matthiessen burbles. Parkman is perfectly capable of scorn and indignation at whites’ mistreatment of Indians, yet he remains justly confident of the superiority of civilization to savagery, and he is never confused in the modern liberal manner about who was civilized and who savage. He deserves to be read again in our time.

#### All Respectable Ceremoniousness

**F**RANCIS PARKMAN, BORN ON BEACON Hill, was heir to a considerable fortune, earned by his paternal grandfather in the China trade; to Unitarian orthodoxy, for his father was the pastor of Boston’s New North Church, and with the entrepreneur grandfather the benefactor of the Parkman Professorship of Pulpit Eloquence and the Pastoral Care at the Harvard Divinity School; and to all the respectable ceremoniousness that such distinction entails. He made good use of the family money, rejected the paternal religion in favor of what he called “reverent agnosticism,” and was known to stand abruptly on ceremony when grossness intruded, as it would in post-Jacksonian

America. But for all that, he discovered his soul’s true need while living from age 8 to 13 at his maternal grandfather’s farm and roaming the Middlesex Fells, which Howard Doughty describes in his biography, *Francis Parkman* (1962), as “a little enclave of sufficiently primeval wilderness within eight miles of the heart of Boston.” Reading Sir Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper, and Lord Byron made Parkman see how a life of adventure might be joined to a literary vocation. Summer vacations from Harvard found him on daring expeditions with rather refractory classmates in wild regions of northern New England where only Indians and some few white hunters had preceded them.

His studies—under the direction of Professor Jared Sparks, the first academic historian to specialize in American history, who

#### Books discussed in this essay:

*Francis Parkman: France and England in North America: Volume One*,  
edited by David Levin.

Library of America, 1,504 pages, \$45

*Francis Parkman: France and England in North America: Volume Two*,  
edited by David Levin.

Library of America, 1,620 pages, \$45

*Francis Parkman: The Oregon Trail, The Conspiracy of Pontiac*,  
edited by William R. Taylor.

Library of America, 951 pages, \$40

*Francis Parkman*, by Howard Doughty.  
The Macmillan Company, 414 pages,  
out-of-print

would write biographies of the French explorers Father Jacques Marquette and Robert de La Salle—dovetailed nicely with his adventures. During his sophomore year Parkman conceived the momentous project, as he later recalled, of writing the history of “the whole course of the American conflict between France and England, or, in other words, the history of the American forest; for this was the light in which I regarded it. My theme fascinated me, and I was haunted with wilderness images day and night.” Driving himself hard to ready mind and body for this great undertaking, he broke down: heart trouble, brought on by over-exertion in the college’s new gymnasium, he believed, though Doughty is inclined to suspect nervous collapse long coming, and destined to recur with terrible force in future years.

After he graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1844, at his father’s insistence Parkman entered Harvard Law School. He made the most of his confinement, devoting one hour each day to his formal studies and the rest to his “own notions.” These included a comprehensive reading course in the master European historians—Edward Gibbon, William Robertson, François Guizot, Leopold von Ranke—and, nearer to home, preparation for writing *The Conspiracy of Pontiac*, his account of the 18th-century war waged by a coalition of Indian tribes against British settlers in the Great Lakes region. He was wearing himself thin again, however, and suffered from sleeplessness, digestive trouble, and impaired sight that sometimes made reading impossible. He got his law degree—his sister read William Blackstone to him when he could not—and immediately set to serious documentary research on Pontiac, but his health so deteriorated that another urgent respite was called for.

#### Among the Indians

**T**HIS TIME HE LIT OUT FOR THE TERRITORIES, following the California and Oregon Trail in the company of his cousin Quincy Shaw and two formidable French-American mountain men. *The Oregon Trail* (1847), the only book of his that is much read or even known today, is not a history but a personal narrative. Manifest Destiny was the rallying cry of westward expansion, but such jingo romance is not to be seen in these pages. For him the appeal of the West was visceral: even in the Platte River valley, where nature was neither majestic nor beautiful and small lizards were the only sign of life, wildness had its allure, more moral than aesthetic: “And yet stern and wild associations gave a singular interest to the view; for here each man lives by the strength of his arm and the valor of his heart. Here society is reduced to its original elements, the whole fabric of art and conventionality is struck rudely to pieces, and men find themselves suddenly brought back to the wants and resources of their original natures.”

Parkman went west largely because he wanted to live among Indians. His companion Henry Chatillon, hunter and trapper, was married to the daughter of a Sioux chieftain, a connection that allowed Parkman to spend three weeks in an Indian village. So he got his wish. He found the Indians curious about “subjects within their ordinary range of thought,” but that orbit was severely limited. “They will not trouble themselves to inquire into what they



cannot comprehend, but are quite contented to place their hands over their mouths in token of wonder, and exclaim that it is 'great medicine.'"

He comes across an old man, his best friend in the village, evidently rapt in "communion of some kind with a supernatural being." "To [the Indian] all nature is instinct with mystic influence. Among those mountains not a wild beast was prowling, a bird singing, or a leaf fluttering, that might not tend to direct his destiny, or give warning of what was in store for him; and he watches the world of nature around him as the astrologer watches the stars." His respect for Indian spiritual beliefs did not attenuate his clear insinuation that they were primitive superstition after all.

At the same time, Indian beauty evokes the most superb forms of Greek sculpture. "With his free and noble attitude, with the bow in his hand, and the quiver at his back, he might seem, but for his face, the Pythian Apollo himself. Such a figure rose before the imagination of [the painter Benjamin] West, when on first seeing the Belvidere in the Vatican, he exclaimed, 'By God, a Mohawk!'" And the Sioux's ferocity fascinates Parkman. "War is the breath of their nostrils. Against most of the neighboring tribes they cherish a deadly,

rancorous hatred, transmitted from father to son, and inflamed by constant aggression and retaliation."

But he is rightly appalled as well as fascinated. He relates a celebrated warrior's bragadocio about tortures not merely savage but downright diabolical, administered to a captive Snake Indian—scalping him alive, then slicing the tendons of his wrists and feet and throwing him into a fire. "He garnished his story with a great many descriptive particulars much too revolting to mention." The warrior gazes at Parkman with a childlike innocence as he details his malign handiwork. The Indian fondness for inflicting ungodly pain on their enemies before killing them is a recurring motif in Parkman's writings.

Parkman clearly thought it a rare privilege to live among "one of the wildest of the wild hordes."

These men were thorough savages. Neither their manners nor their ideas were in the slightest degree modified by contact with civilization. They knew nothing of the power and real character of the white men, and their children would scream in terror at the sight of me.

He strikes the elegiac note for a way of life fated to pass away, as the whites' movement westward kills off the buffalo on which the nomadic Indians depend for sustenance. "The Indians will soon be corrupted by the example of the whites, abased by whisky, and overawed by military posts; so that within a few years the traveler may pass in tolerable security through their country. Its danger and its charm will have disappeared together."

Although Parkman was right to foresee the extinction of the traditional life, the disappearance would take longer, and cost both conqueror and conquered more, than he anticipated. He gives a dark hint of what is eventually to take place. The fearsome Arapahoes whom Parkman's party encounters are tamer than usual because General Stephen Kearny, at the head of the Army of the West, had recently informed them that "if they ever again touched the hair of a white man's head he would exterminate their nation. This placed them for the time in an admirable frame of mind, and the effect of his menaces had not yet disappeared." Such menaces would be made good in time, over and over again.

The western adventure, intended to restore Parkman to health, ravaged him instead—dysentery, eye trouble, near prostration—and

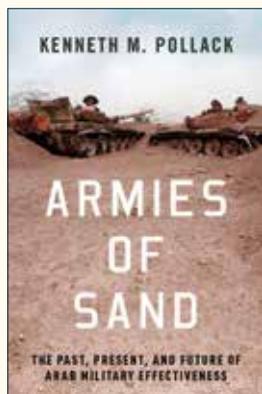
## New and Noteworthy Books from AEI Scholars

### Armies of Sand: The Past, Present, and Future of Arab Military Effectiveness

Kenneth M. Pollack

January 15, 2019  
Publisher: Oxford University Press  
ISBN: 978-0-89090-696-2

Since the Second World War, Arab armed forces have consistently punched below their weight. *Armies of Sand*, Kenneth M.



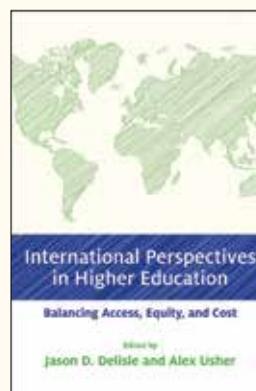
Pollack's powerful and riveting history of Arab armies from the end of World War II to the present, assesses these differing explanations and isolates the most important causes.

### International Perspectives in Higher Education: Balancing Access, Equity, and Cost

Jason D. Delisle and Alex Usher

January 22, 2019  
Publisher: Harvard Education Press  
ISBN: 978-1-68253-267-6

*International Perspectives in Higher Education* offers a balanced perspective on how different countries approach key policies and what the United States can learn from those programs. Jason D. Delisle and Alex Usher have gathered a diverse group of experts to examine systems across the globe with a focus on the trade-offs between access, cost, and quality.

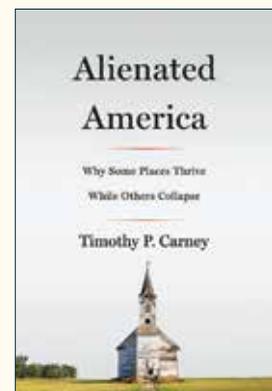


### Alienated America: Why Some Places Thrive While Others Collapse

Tim Carney

February 19, 2019  
Publisher: HarperCollins  
ISBN: 978-0-06279-710-0

Why do so many people believe the American dream is no longer within reach? The standard account points to economic problems among the working class, but the root was a cultural collapse. In *Alienated America*, Timothy P. Carney visits all corners of America and examines the most important data and research to demonstrate how social connection is the great divide in America.



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the return home worsened his condition. Parkman's eyes were so sensitive to light that he wrote with them closed. It was not his eyes, though, but his dervish mind that frightened him most. He was to endure this host of symptoms for many years, with only occasional remissions. Psychic distress exacerbated the disease. Somehow, with a thrust of will heroically sustained, his immense seven-volume history was completed.

### Father of New France

**T**HE PARTICULAR HEROES OF FRANCE and England in the New World are figures of outstanding moral and physical bravery: Samuel de Champlain in the first volume, *Pioneers of France in the New World* (1865, revised 1885); Father Jean de Brébeuf and his priestly brethren in the second, *The Jesuits in North America in the Seventeenth Century* (1867); and René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de la Salle in the third, *La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West* (1869, under a different title; revised 1879 and 1893).

Champlain, explorer of the West Indies, founder of Quebec City in 1608, "the Father of New France," was an intrepid adventurer for whom the known world was not sufficiently wondrous to hold him. Faith in the sacred civilizing mission of Catholic France was paramount—a belief that the staunch New Englander Parkman, standing in his mind for liberty against absolutism, considers chauvinist and misguided:

he gave himself with a loyal zeal and devotedness to the profoundly mistaken principles which he had espoused. In his mind, patriotism and religion were inseparably linked. France was the champion of Christianity, and her honor, her greatness, were involved in her fidelity to this high function. Should she abandon to perdition the darkened nations among whom she had cast the first faint rays of hope?

Champlain ran perhaps a greater risk than he knew by enlisting Huron and Algonquin tribes against the Iroquois, who were their traditional enemies and the most warlike and terrible of all Indians; but thereby he seized the chance to "make himself the indispensable ally and leader of the tribes of Canada, and at the same time fight his way to discovery in regions which otherwise were barred against him. From first to last, it was the policy of France in America to mingle in Indian politics, hold the balance of power between adverse tribes, and envelop in the network of her

power and diplomacy the remotest hordes of the wilderness."

In the first battle against the Iroquois, on the shores of what would be known as Lake Champlain, superior European military technology that the enemy had never encountered before won the day: Champlain fired his arquebus (forerunner to the rifle), loaded with four balls, at the Iroquois chiefs, and killed two and wounded another with one shot. Consternation ensued. "Camp, canoes, provisions, all were abandoned, and many weapons flung down in the panic flight. The victory was complete." The victory celebration of the Indian allies sickened Champlain, as they scalped an Iroquois prisoner in preparation for burning him alive. At first the Indians refused Champlain's entreaty to let him shoot the victim, but when he walked away in disgust, they called him back and allowed him to do the merciful thing. "The scene filled him with horror; but, a few months later, on the Place de Grève at Paris, he might have witnessed tortures equally revolting and equally vindictive, inflicted on the regicide Ravallac by the sentence of grave and learned judges."

### Parkman is never confused in the modern liberal manner about who was civilized and who savage.

So the Europeans were hardly free from moral taint in Parkman's eyes. In *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* (1851) Parkman cites the correspondence in 1763 between Sir Jeffery Amherst and Colonel Henry Bouquet in which the two Englishmen discuss the scheme of using contaminated blankets to spread smallpox among the Indians or hunting them with dogs. "[T]o extirpate this execrable race" was Sir Jeffrey's stated intention. Parkman states with relief that there is "no direct evidence" the "shameful" biological attack was put into effect, but he notes that a few months later a smallpox outbreak "made havoc among the tribes of the Ohio." Parkman loathes barbaric violence and perfidy wherever he sees it. But that doesn't mean he considers the Europeans generally as barbaric as the Indians. The evidence tells him otherwise.

### Missionary Zeal

**T**HE JESUIT PRIESTS WERE PART OF THE French imperial vanguard, and in their missionary zeal pushed into the depths

of the wilderness and the very heart of barbarism. Parkman finds much to fault in the Jesuits and in the entire Church of Rome—"now breathing charity and love, now dark with the passions of Hell; now beaming with celestial truth, now masked in hypocrisy and lies." Yet the missionaries' "enthusiastic exaltation" and austere purity of intention earn his respect. "That gloomy wilderness, those hordes of savages, had nothing to tempt the ambitious, the proud, the grasping, or the indolent. Obscure toil, solitude, privation, hardship, and death were to be the missionaries' portion."

Before the Europeans arrived, the Indians suffered the predations of "chronic warfare," dwelt "[i]n the midst of Nature" yet "knew nothing of her laws," and felt the "perpetual fear" bred by animist superstition; even had the most capable of them, the Iroquois, been "left under their institutions to work out their destiny undisturbed, [they] would [never] have developed a civilization of their own." Parkman understands civilization after the manner of a modern American democrat: Christian in sentiment if not necessarily in profession of faith. In his view, the Indians had not begun to show the buds of philosophy and science, to demonstrate the systematic use of reason to see beneath the surface of nature, and thus to assert some human mastery over it. Nor had they imagined on their own a God whose example of mercy and love sweetened human life, encouraging peaceable ways and making tender-heartedness estimable rather than contemptible. Jesuit care of Indian souls was part of the general French solicitude. "Spanish civilization crushed the Indian; English civilization scorned and neglected him; French civilization embraced and cherished him." Parkman leaves little doubt, however, that for all the benefits of Christianity the Jesuits' mystical transports were no less preposterous to him than the beliefs of the Indians.

When the time comes for Brébeuf actually to face death, in its most awful manifestation, there is no trace of Parkman's deadpan irony. The priest had led the mission to the Hurons, the tribe most receptive to the Christian teaching. In 1649 the intractable Iroquois waged devastating war on the Hurons and took Brébeuf prisoner. They bound him to a stake, and when he loudly exhorted the Huron converts also captive to think on Heaven, the torturers "scorched him from head to foot, to silence him." He in turn threatened them with hellfire, so "they cut away his lower lip and thrust a red-hot iron down his throat. He still held his tall form erect and defiant, with no sign or sound of pain." After the Iroquois had set fire to his fellow priest Father Lalement, they bedecked Brébeuf with a necklace



of red-hot hatchets, poured boiling water over his head in a parody of baptism, then “cut strips of flesh from his limbs, and devoured them before his eyes.” He was of course scalped, and when he was nearly dead and still imperturbable they ripped his chest open and the crowd drew near to drink “the blood of so valiant an enemy, thinking to imbibe with it some portion of his courage. A chief then tore out his heart, and devoured it.”

The sacrifice of men such as Brébeuf was not pointless suffering. In time Christian civilization had a softening effect on Indian manners:

In the wars of the next century we do not often find those examples of diabolic atrocity with which the earlier annals are crowded. The savage burned his enemies alive, it is true, but he rarely ate them; neither did he torment them with the same deliberation and persistency. He was a savage still, but not so often a devil. The improvement was not great, but it was distinct; and it seems to have taken place wherever Indian tribes were in close relations with any respectable community of white men.

### Daring and Freedom

**L**A SALLE EXTENDED THE FRENCH IMPERIAL reach into the Mississippi Valley in the 1670s. “Neither the English nor the Jesuits should conquer that rich domain: the one must rest content with the country east of the Alleghanies, and the other with the forests, savages, and beaver-skins of the northern lakes. It was for him to call into light the latent riches of the great West.” The arduousness of La Salle’s expeditions, the indomitable will that overcame misfortune heaped on disaster piled on calamity, roused Parkman to magniloquence; his prose turns as purple as fatal apoplexy, and one is grateful that 19th-century taste allowed such excesses, for they are appropriate to the man and the occasion: “He was a tower of adamant, against whose impregnable front hardship and danger, the rage of man and of the elements, the southern sun, the northern blast, fatigue, famine, and disease, delay, disappointment, and deferred hope emptied their quivers in vain.” Yet in the end La Salle dared too much, proposing to gather an immense force of Indians to invade Mexico: “a wild project of leading fifteen thousand sav-

ages for an unknown distance, through an unknown country to attack an unknown enemy, —was something more than Quixotic daring... It is difficult not to see in all this the chimera of an overwrought brain, no longer able to distinguish between the possible and the impossible.” Catastrophe was in the cards, and La Salle was shot and killed by one of his own men, as his party, reduced to a handful, floundered in malarial swamps.

It was for dominion of the great West that France and England, and New France and New England, fought a world-altering North American war nearly a century after La Salle’s explorations. In *Montcalm and Wolfe* (1884), the concluding volume of the history, which treats the Seven Years’ War of 1756-63 (known in America as the French and Indian War, though Parkman never calls it that), westward expansion is seen as crucial to the English colonies’ securing increased independence from the mother country, and becomes the impetus for war on French Canada. “Their first necessity was to rid themselves of the French, who, by shutting them between the Alleghanies and the sea, would cramp them into perpetual littleness. With France on their backs, growing while they had no room to grow, they must remain in helpless wardship, dependent on England, whose aid they would always need; but with the West open before them, their future was their own.”

The American future looked more promising than the Canadian because in the one the experience of freedom encouraged energies in ordinary people that centralized paternalistic absolutism in the other killed in the cradle. In his fourth volume, *The Old Régime in Canada* (1874; revised 1893), Parkman explains why the English colonial power flourished while the French withered:

Perpetual intervention of government, —regulations, restrictions, encouragements sometimes more mischievous than restrictions, a constant uncertainty what the authorities would do next, the fate of each man resting less with himself than with another, volition enfeebled, self-reliance paralyzed, —the condition, in short, of a child held always under the rule of a father, in the main well-meaning and kind, sometimes generous, sometimes neglectful, often capricious, and rarely very wise, —such were the influences under which Canada grew up. If she had prospered, it

would have been sheer miracle. A man, to be a man, must feel that he holds his fate, in some good measure, in his own hands.

Had the Canadians been given freedom they would not have known what to do with it. “Freedom is for those who are fit for it; the rest will lose it, or turn it to corruption. Church and State were right in exercising authority over a people which had not learned the first rudiments of self-government.” The success of the English colonies and the failure of the French had their origins in deep-rooted political traditions that respectively enhanced and inhibited intellectual and moral independence. “The cause lies chiefly in the vast advantage drawn by England from the historical training of her people in habits of reflection, forecast, industry, and self-reliance, —a training which enabled them to adopt and maintain an invigorating system of self-rule, totally inapplicable to their rivals.”

Great men are prominent in Parkman’s account, but as the history approaches the epoch of the American Founding, the life of the common people increases in significance. How the actions of political and military leaders affect the condition of ordinary men and women becomes his primary concern. The best thing that happened to Canadians, he declares, was James Wolfe’s victory over the Marquis of Montcalm on Quebec’s Plains of Abraham.

This English conquest was the grand crisis of Canadian history. It was the beginning of a new life.... England imposed by the sword on reluctant Canada the boon of rational and ordered liberty.... A happier calamity never befell a people than the conquest of Canada by the British arms.

Many modern French Canadians fail to partake of such happiness, however. Even so, one awaits the day when Native Americans will be willing to say that the happiest calamity to befall their peoples was their conquest by the arms of the white man. It is likely to be a long wait. In the meantime, one can educate oneself in the mostly forgotten, or misremembered, history of that world-shaking collision by reading Francis Parkman.

*Algis Valiunas is a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and a contributing editor to The New Atlantis.*

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