

**A Review of Gregory M.W. Kennedy's *Something of a Peasant Paradise? Comparing Rural Societies in Acadie and the Loudunais, 1604–1755*.  
Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2014.**

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Gregory Kennedy has written a fascinating and important book. In his Introduction he tells his reader that his main goal is a comparison of “the conditions, experiences, and decisions of ordinary people in the rural societies Acadie and the Loudunais, with a particular emphasis on the distinctiveness and success of Acadian society before the Deportation.” To achieve this aim, he continues, he has brought “together almost ten years of graduate and postgraduate research,” employing “a thematic approach” (15). Kennedy fulfills this ambition by placing his wealth of information, garnered from a careful reading of secondary sources and a wide-ranging investigation of archival resources, into closely reasoned arguments about life among the Acadians in North America and the Loudunais in France.

In chapter one, “The Natural Environment,” he examines the relationship between settlement and the local terrain and climate. He analyzes the questions of the movements of people within the regions themselves and considers the impact upon farming practices of traditional methods in contrast to new techniques. He pays due respect to the obvious dissimilarities between Acadie and Loudun but is at pains to emphasize the similar conditions that both communities face: hard work, the impact of variation in the fertility of the land, the vagaries of weather, and the necessities of trade. His discussion of the impact of wolves, almost non-existent in Acadia but certainly present in the Loudunais area well into the eighteenth century, is just one example of his erudition. In his conclusion to this chapter he quotes Faragher’s comment that “it is difficult to exaggerate the physical and psychological distance that separated the Old World from the New” (47). For Kennedy, this is interpreted as the result of geography, which “isolated Acadie from the rest of France and its colonies [leading to]...a heightened sense of insecurity, but also autonomy and community” (47).

In chapter two, “The Political and Military Environment,” Kennedy analyzes the difference between the expectations placed by authorities on the Acadians living on a contested military frontier and the Loudunais, where war at this time was fought elsewhere. The chapter then deftly weaves together accounts of the differing experiences of the two communities. In the case of the Acadians, it concentrates on the men that London and Paris sent to officiate in the colony.

The next three chapters are the heart of the book, their strength the clear writing and meticulous research. In each, Kennedy presents his knowledge so readers will question their beliefs, many of which may be generalizations accepted too easily. He argues, for example, that the different circumstances of life in the Loudunais and Acadie did not necessarily mean a greater level of comfort for the latter, and that there were obvious class distinctions among the Acadians, many of which deepened as the community developed.

This is evident in chapter three (“The Rural Economy”), where he concentrates on general trends rather than the minutiae of daily lives within the villages. When he writes about an individual, by contrast, he emphasizes biography. This is particularly useful for chapters four and five, where

biography reveals the moral and mental capacities of those in authority, and how those figures influenced the life of the community. His use of biography makes these chapters both interesting and informative, and enables him to avoid the traps of repetition that a thematic approach can produce. Further, in spite of his emphasis on particular themes and particular individuals, his book has a clear narrative history that carries from one chapter to another.

His conclusion is a fine examination of what he sees as the value of his approach, and I look forward to his future publications.

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