

Reviews

NEW ENGLAND AND THE MARITIME PROVINCES:

Connections and Comparisons

Stephen J. Hornsby and John G Reid, eds.
Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2005. Xii, and 411 pp.
ISBN: 0-7735-2865-2

Reviewed by Blake Harrison,
Department of Geography,
Southern Connecticut State University,
New Haven, CT

New England and the Maritime Provinces is a well-conceived and ably edited collection of original essays designed to “focus on the complementary themes of connection and comparison” (p. 10) as they relate to the cultural, social, economic, and environmental histories of New England and the Maritimes. Edited by Stephen Hornsby, a geographer and Director of the Canadian-American Center at the University of Maine, and John Reid, a professor of history at Saint Mary’s University, *New England and the Maritime Provinces* stands out as an exemplary collection, both for the quality of its individual essays and the quality of its editing.

Collectively, the book contains 19 chapters (including the book’s introduction), written by fifteen historians, two geographers, and five authors from an assortment of other fields and backgrounds. The contributors are evenly split between Canadian and American institutions.

For anyone with an interest in the history of New England or of the Maritimes, this collection deserves attention. On the one hand, it successfully convinces us to view a relatively narrow regional configuration like “New England” according to a larger frame of reference based on comparison and connection. This reminds readers to remove regional blinders and to seek out more nuanced views of interconnectivity and difference between regions. On the other hand, *New England and the Maritime Provinces* is a model of success as an edited volume. Too often, edited collections feel disjointed or “thrown together,” seemingly lacking in editorial guidance. By contrast, nearly all the essays in *New England and the Maritime Provinces* hang together nicely, speaking to common themes, and stating their arguments in clear, forceful, and cohesive ways. Authors routinely take concepts or arguments that very often stand alone in their respective bodies of literature (nineteenth-century nativism comes to mind as one example) and refashion or re-enliven them by placing them within a more specific “borderlands” context. How, they ask, might we rethink concepts we may already be familiar with by tracing the history of those concepts as they played out in or between New England and the Maritimes? It is that kind of analysis which makes this volume sharp, fresh, and often surprising, and it is that which makes it a volume whose importance and readership should extend beyond the regions it explores.

The book begins with an introductory chapter by Hornsby and Reid placing the book within the framework of borderland studies both in the United States and Canada. This dual focus on Canadian and American historiography is a core challenge for a book like this, but it is one that

the authors collectively meet well. (Indeed, one does not need to be entirely conversant in past or present scholarship on New England or the Maritimes to follow the book's introduction or its chapters. By and large, the essays articulate their positions relative to the literature in inclusive rather than exclusive ways.) As Hornsby and Reid explain, the book's "critical and analytical approach to both connection and comparison" allows it to tackle a history of trans-border regionalism in ways that stand to inform how we understand contemporary concepts such as globalization and transnationalism.

Following the introduction, the book moves into a series of chapters on the region's pre-colonial and colonial periods. Here the authors cover ground ranging from Native archaeology to economic history to the place-based and cultural perceptions of soldiers and other travelers. One essay stands out notably among the book's first 100 pages—Elizabeth Mancke's exploration of "spaces of power" in the early Modern Northeast, in which she decenters traditional historical narratives based on a "colonial" perspective in favor of a more complex and highly compelling focus on "systems of social power" based on economic, political, cultural, and military contexts.

The majority of the book's remaining chapters focus on the nineteenth century (while a couple spill over into the early twentieth), and as before, they range widely across topics while still retaining their focus on comparisons and/or connections between New England and the Maritimes. Here we move from an essay on smuggling that is both fun and insightful, to others on topics that include nativism, urban-economic history, folklore of lumber camps, fisheries policy, gender and cross-border migration, and fish and game management, among others. Particularly notable among the book's later chapters is Colin D. Howell's uniquely conceived chapter on transnational sporting culture in the early twentieth century. In this essay, Howell creatively traces the ways in which New England and the Maritimes were linked culturally through shared interests and encounters in baseball, sailboat racing, the Boston Marathon, and big game hunting, arguing that Maritime sporting culture was more closely linked to New England prior to World War Two than to the rest of Canada, suggesting again, the danger in granting too much argumentative authority to national boundaries.

Two conceptual chapters round out the book. In the first of these, Reginald C. Stuart and M. Brook Taylor ambitiously argue that comparative analyses of New England and the Maritimes necessitate the creation of a larger set of themes and a larger historical periodization capable of articulating an "epic of greater North America." This epic, they argue must be crafted in a way that allows scholars to "plot historical parallels and shared themes while still respecting national boundaries, the jurisdictions they enclose and the ways in which the neighboring societies remain distinct (p. 281)." The second conceptual chapter is an engagingly critical review of the book's essays written by geographer Graeme Wynn. Wynn's critique centers on essentially two points, each of which returns to a common theme. First, Wynn argues that the book's essays tend not to theorize the concept of boundaries/borderlands as much as they should. And second, Wynn notes that the essays collectively fail to engage "comparisons" between the regions as much as "connections," despite the promise of both terms in the book's title. The problem with both of these shortcomings, Wynn asserts, is that they tend to mute the differences that do exist between the regions. He writes: "In sum, it is fine to think about connections, but not at the expense of inquiry into the differences and the ways in which these connections are

constructed” (p. 303).

Wynn’s critiques are thoughtful, well-written, and well-informed. They are also “forcefully” stated (to use Wynn’s own characterization of his essay), and so need to be evaluated carefully by individual readers, for while I can agree with many of his points and was moved by them, I also feel that the book’s merits outweigh the force of Wynn’s criticisms, which some might read as verging on a condemnation of the entire project.

Two additional, small critiques do come to my mind. First, the book’s focus on New England is heavily weighted towards Maine, which makes sense considering that state’s proximity to and close historical connections with the Maritimes. But I was eager to learn more about connections to other parts of New England. Boston figures prominently in the book, as one might expect, but what did the relationship between the Maritimes and other states such as Vermont or Connecticut or Rhode Island look like? There is less mention of this in the book, and perhaps for good reason, yet I never felt this was addressed as completely or directly as it might have been. (Notably: I did not feel this imbalance about coverage of the Maritime Provinces, which seemed more diverse and inclusive overall.) Second (and as one sees so many times in reviews by geographers) I might have liked to see a more detailed regional map with more physical features labeled. These are small criticisms, though, and neither from my perspective undermines the fact that *New England and the Maritime Provinces* deserves high praise. The book gives readers refreshing examples of capable scholarship, both from the authors and the editors, and as such it serves as a model for how to succeed in telling regional and comparative histories, as well as for how to succeed in creating an edited collection.