

FRENCH AMERICANS-NATIVE AMERICANS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH COLONIAL LOUISIANA: *The Population Geography of the Illinois Indians, 1670s -1760s.* By Joseph Zitomersky. Lund, Sweden: Lund University Press, 1994.

Scholars of the French period in Illinois and of the ethnohistory of the Illinois Indian tribe may not be aware of Zitomersky's previous work on French colonial studies, since his contributions are tucked away in such journals as the *Annales de Demographie Historique* and the *Proceedings of the Fifteenth Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society*. However, this Lund University Press book should take a place in the front ranks of sources consulted for analysis and interpretation on French Illinois and the Illinois Indian tribe.

I suggest this reference is of primary importance first of all because Zitomersky makes important theoretical contributions, examining French colonialism in terms of its unique territorial organization, which he characterizes as "structured, locally collective and regionally extensive, urban and proto-urban forms of settlement establishment and interaction." Moreover, from the perspective of one who loves documents and documentary interpretations more than the theories built upon them, Zitomersky's study *absolutely must* be consulted by those studying Illinois Indians because this approach has forced him to attempt to gain exacting control of the details of population and settlement geography of the Illinois Indian tribe. As indicated by the subtitle, the bulk of this book is, in fact, an exhaustive treatment of this subject alone.

The importance of population and settlement geography for the Illinois Indians is not an aspect of history that has necessarily been underestimated by previous studies. Alvord, Temple, Blasingham, Brown, Hauser, Jablow, Callender, and others have analyzed primary documents for the who, what, when, and where of Illinois Indian history. Several of their studies, especially Blasingham's 1956 "The Depopulation of the Illinois" and M. Brown's 1979 "Cultural Transformations Among the Illinois," have used the population geography of the Illinois Indians as their primary database. One would expect that this study mostly reworks well-plowed ground. The fact is, however, that Zitomersky has far outstripped all previous studies on this subject.

Zitomersky revisits and re-analyzes each document and event that has any history of discussion and controversy in its interpretation. Likewise, he is the first scholar in decades to publish defensible, but substantially different interpretations in many of these ongoing debates.

More importantly, Zitomersky opens new discussions, presenting alternate interpretations of documents of long standing standard reference whose past use, in fact, simply will not hold up to close scrutiny. He does this by being especially sensitive to the seasonally shifting residential pattern of the Illinois Indians and the conditions of the fur trade economy, and by being aware of the implications of clues embedded deeply within the documents that generally have been missed by more casual users. For example, Zitomersky avoids, but documents a pitfall that has misled many previous researchers by pointing out that references to activities "at the Peorias" does not necessarily indicate "at Peoria." In these ways he makes many major contributions to the historiography of the early Mississippi Valley.

Illinois Indian population geography is really based upon a series of assumptions. We know, or think we know, the basic outlines of Illinois Indian settlement histories and population dynamics, and we assume the Illinois followed the known pattern of their whereabouts during periods without documentation. Yet, assumptions made by earlier students of the colonial Mississippi Valley are often simply not sufficiently defensible to support interpretive social and historical models. In the case of this reviewer's ongoing study of Illinois Indian archaeological sites, an examination of the documents detailing Illinois Indian settlement patterns has caused me to realize that a major re-analysis is necessary. Zitomersky has done just that.

Zitomersky presents the first comprehensive discussion of dating the origins of the LeRocher settlement of Illinois Indians and the times when it was subsequently occupied. He also identifies the settlement's inhabitants and determines to what degree at different times in its history it was exclusive or inclusive of other Illinois Indian populations. Previous historians have either glossed over the significance of this settlement or have noted inconsistencies in the documentation while hazarding guesses regarding various points. Yet a better understanding of the major issues surrounding numerous

historical controversies is essential to correctly document the region's population geography.

In short, Zitomersky opens to discussion every single debatable issue of which I am aware in this particular field. This brings me to a single distressing caveat. Zitomersky's work *should* become of primary importance, yet it may well not become widely used. This is simply because it is exceedingly difficult to extract information from this book, much less to read it sequentially. Even to those familiar with each document and its history of interpretive applications, the study is a seemingly endless tangle of "on again-off again" discussions. Discussions of source documents, analyses of previous studies, presentations of new interpretations, and carefully qualified conclusions are sometimes woven into long discussions and sometimes scattered throughout the study.

Zitomersky's passion for the broadest possible view of the documents and extremely detailed considerations of their interpretation has backfired, disrupting the flow of the study intensely. Extremely relevant comments and qualifications to discussions are buried in detached and often obscure text. For example, to return to the LeRocher Village case, after concluding in a Chapter 3 discussion of the history of various settlements that the founding of the LeRocher Village must have taken place at the end of 1711 rather than at least six years later, Zitomersky appends a very long footnote in Chapter 6 to a related discussion of population figures at various settlements. Here he sets forth a very convincing and relevant scenario for the LeRocher settlement quite possibly having been formed by 1706.

I am not convinced that the scenario proposed by Zitomersky should have been relegated to a footnote to another discussion. The footnote is relevant to the primary discussion, and this reviewer is disturbed that it was not presented as part of a coherent synthesis. Unfortunately, there are many such cases throughout the work. Sadly also, as is the case in far too many recent scholarly works, this book is not indexed. The damage caused by the aforementioned organizational shortcomings might otherwise have been mitigated to some degree. As a consequence, I have not yet been able to figure out just how to get to Zitomersky's "bottom line" on any one aspect of this wonderfully obsessive study. I suspect others wanting a simple reference regarding any single historical point will also

become discouraged and return to the standard, more simplistic syntheses that Zitomersky has entirely superseded.

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