

Owen Stanwood, *The Global Refuge: Huguenots in an Age of Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. xii + 295 pp. Maps, figures, notes, and index. \$36.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-19-026474-1.

Response Essay by Owen Stanwood, Boston College

Perhaps the most famous chronicle of Huguenot suffering appeared in serial from 1686 to 1689. The Rotterdam minister Pierre Jurieu issued a series of *Lettres pastorales* directed to the poor Protestants who remained in Louis XIV's France.[1] The letters were meant to urge them to keep the faith in the face of great challenges, but they read more as a chronicle of suffering, as a new martyrology. Readers of Jurieu's compiled reports from France's Protestants found stories of godly people executed for refusing to take part in Catholic sacraments; of women and men languishing in prisons and dungeons; of formerly prosperous merchants and lawyers turned into galley slaves or laborers on Caribbean plantations. It is debatable whether the *Lettres pastorales* had much effect on those who remained in France, but they did play a key role in crafting a historical narrative around the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the subsequent dispersion of the Huguenots. This was a story of dislocation, of sadness, of suffering, punctuated at times, of course, by glimpses of God's providence and glory.[2]

When I set out to write a book about the Huguenot diaspora in the world of empires, I did not explicitly seek to challenge this common interpretation of Huguenot history. While I understood it reflected propaganda, the fact was Huguenots *did* suffer. Moreover, I have been skeptical of the historical focus on agency, especially in the early modern Atlantic world where so many people possessed little of it. In my first published work on the Huguenots, in the *American Historical Review* in 2013, I described the Huguenots' attempts to dominate foreign states and institutions as largely failures.[3] More than beneficiaries of empires, the refugees were victims of them, forced to settle in strange places around the world where they had to abandon their dreams of Eden. Empires and states mattered, and often possessed more power than was first apparent. As I worked to turn that article into a book, however, something changed. I began to see less Huguenot victimhood and more ingenuity. I confess that it was only after the book was published, and I started to see reviews (including the excellent ones in this Forum), that I realized how far I had gone. According to Amanda Eurich's close reading, the book "transforms the narrative of victimization that has long dominated histories of the Huguenot diaspora into a fascinating tale of agency and invention."

The difference between my initial argument and my final one can best be seen in the stories of two refugees who featured in the story. In the original *AHR* article and in chapter 4 of the book, I used the story of Jacques de La Case, an ordinary soldier who spent time in Germany, the Netherlands, South Africa, the Indian Ocean, and Virginia, to demonstrate how migration patterns often followed the whims of imperial planners more than the desires of the refugees. As I put it in 2013, "La Case was a pawn; his foreign masters moved him around the world to realize goals that had little to do with charity or the Protestant cause, and everything to do with the development of the

English and Dutch states.”[4] Contrast that with my portrayal of Élie Neau in *The Global Refugee*. Neau was in some ways the caricature of a victim: he spent years languishing in a French prison, where he became a potent symbol of Huguenot suffering as well as of their ability, in some cases at least, to maintain their faith under great challenges. He would have made a great character in Jurieu’s *Lettres pastorales* if they had continued into the late-1690s. Nonetheless, I used his story to show the opportunities that could come to Huguenots who embraced foreign empires. Neau engineered a release from prison with the help of the English crown, and then worked as a catechist under the umbrella of the Church of England. “[I]t was access to institutional power,” I wrote, “that allowed Neau to prosper in a foreign world” (p. 3).

Of course, the real story was far from black and white, but rather included many shades of grey. Even in the published version of the book, glimpses of the old story remain. Some Huguenots who struck out into the Atlantic world and beyond could only be classed as victims. As Joy Palacios notably pointed out, “competition between the Dutch, English, and French for militarily strategic locales turned Eden into hell.” Given that reality, it may have been better, as Ruth Whelan contended in her review, to put more stress on the power of empires rather than the agency of individuals. After all, as she rightly noted, many (though certainly not all) of the refugees who ventured overseas came out of pure desperation, as they had not found sufficient opportunities in the closer and more comfortable European refuge. In particular, Whelan has a different reading of Neau’s story, based on her own deep study of his life, that views Neau as a pawn of the SPCK and SPG rather than someone who used those organizations to further his own goals. The same argument could be made about many characters in the book. Were Jacob Guérard and René Petit, the petitioners who gained land and passage to Carolina in 1678, simply pawns in the hands of an overbearing English state who wanted new settlers for a marginal colony (pp. 83-85)? Was Paul Mascarene, the military officer who helped the English negotiate with French Acadians in the early eighteenth century, being exploited for his linguistic and cultural knowledge (pp. 184-91)? In both cases, the answer was certainly yes, even if that was not quite the whole story.

Nonetheless, on reflection, I stand by my decision to stress Huguenot agency over victimization. In fact, I was reinforced in that choice in engaging with criticism from Ellen McClure, who rightly chastised me for neglecting Indigenous and enslaved perspectives in my book (Palacios made a similar and equally valid point about the absence of Huguenot women). McClure is correct that my reliance on imperial archives could tend to center the perspectives of colonizers and indemnify the Huguenots from participating in what was, indeed, an act (or multiple acts) of conquest. In an attempt to correct this imbalance, let me highlight one story, of a refugee woman in South Carolina. Judith Giton arrived in the colony in 1685, and we know about her early experience from a remarkable letter she wrote to an unnamed relative. Giton’s relation of her travails would seem to underline Whelan’s assertions. She came to the colony because her brother pressured her to do so, entranced by the descriptions of Carolina in promotional tracts. On arrival, he and their mother quickly fell to disease, leaving young Judith alone in a strange land. She had not tasted bread for months, and “worked the land like a slave” (p. 97). Her American dream was a nightmare.

And yet, things got better, for Judith at least. We don’t know how, but she attracted the attention of another refugee, Pierre Manigault, and became his wife. Pierre was a cooper, and upon arrival in the colony he worked in that trade in Charleston, but he was able to easily acquire 400 acres of land, where he built a lucrative plantation. Eventually he returned to the city and became a distiller

of whiskey and rum; his and Judith's son Gabriel would become a wealthy merchant, and the family a prominent one in revolutionary and early republican South Carolina.[5] In sum, Judith may have "worked like a slave" for one season, but as a Huguenot she could call on both her community's networks and the beneficence of the colonial state, which allowed her family to prosper through acquiring land and then entering into imperial trading networks. And to be blunt, she did not need to "work like a slave" in the long term because she benefited from the labor of others who did, both on the family plantation and later in the larger slave-based Atlantic world that provided such rewards to her husband and son. More than that, the Manigault story was not unique but typical. After the horror stories of the first generation, many Huguenot families moved quickly into Charleston's elite, and their descendants remain there today. The French Church is still a meeting place for prominent Charlestonians, many of whom are also members of the local Huguenot Society. The early refugees may not have accomplished all that they aimed, but in the *longue durée* it is hard to view them as victims, especially in an Atlantic world that was rent by such profound inequality.

To conclude, I must give my thanks and appreciation to the four reviewers in this roundtable. I built my argument in *The Global Refuge* not just on years of primary research, but by engaging with well over a century of scholarship on the Huguenot Refuge, and I will count the book as successful if it recharges and reinvigorates future scholarly conversations about the refugees and their world. As these reviewers show, I have left plenty of issues for debate and reinterpretation—not just the questions of agency and colonialism, but also the issue of the refugees' inner spiritual lives, which received too little attention in my book. With the aid of new sources, new theoretical perspectives, and the changing priorities of the field, I hope that future generations of scholars will continue to confront these questions and paint a fuller picture of the refugee experience. I hope we can all agree that, especially in our present moment, recovering the stories of people like the Huguenots is important and enlightening work.

NOTES

[1] The *Lettres pastorales* were published in Rotterdam and smuggled into France. See Elisabeth Labrousse, "Les pastorales de Pierre Jurieu," in *Conscience et conviction: Études sur le XVII^e siècle* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996): 230-7.

[2] A version of this argument appears in David Van der Linden, *Experiencing Exile: Huguenot Refugees in the Dutch Republic, 1680-1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015).

[3] Owen Stanwood, "Between Eden and Empire: Huguenot Refugees and the Promise of New Worlds," *American Historical Review*, 118 (2013): 1319-44.

[4] *Ibid.*, 1342.

[5] On Pierre see Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, *From New Babylon to Eden: The Huguenots and their Migration to Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006): 78. On their son Gabriel, see Maurice A. Crouse, "Gabriel Manigault, Charleston Merchant," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 68 (1967): 220-31.

Owen Stanwood
Boston College
owen.stanwood@bc.edu

Copyright © 2022 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and its location on the H-France website. No republication or distribution by print media will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France.

H-France Forum
Volume 17 (2022), Issue 6, #5