

New France
and the Illicit Fur Trade, 1663-1740

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Abstract

In my thesis I examine the illicit fur trade in New France between 1663 and 1740, focusing on the relationship between illicit trade and colonial governance. I argue that French illicit fur traders (*coureurs de bois*) undermined New France governance by subverting licensed trade, which was crucial to France's economic, diplomatic, and military policies in North America.

In chapter one I argue that government agents were forced to relax criminal penalties and New France trade regulations due to the close relationships that *coureurs de bois* had to the people who lived in and maintained the colony. Colonial administrators could not easily displace the illicit trade, as the French North American population sometimes relied upon the significant economic and diplomatic boons that *coureurs de bois* provided.

Throughout chapter two I explore how colonial officials such as Intendant Duchesneau and Governor Frontenac often disagreed over the most effective ways to govern New France. More specifically, I contend that the primary cause for rivalries between New France officials was disagreements about how *coureurs de bois* should be handled, and how illicit trade in New France should be reduced.

Finally, in chapter three I focus on Fort Frontenac as a case study of administrative interactions and the problems created by the illicit fur trade. In this chapter I argue that Fort Frontenac's status as a royal fort and the suspect behaviour of its operators demonstrate that the problems created by the illicit fur trade – common support for *coureurs de bois* and administrative disunity – were real.

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Introduction

The Sun King's ministers grew increasingly concerned about the problem of illicit trade in New France's hinterland through the latter half of the seventeenth century. Since New France's transition to becoming a royal colony in 1663, illicit fur traders – *coureurs de bois* – had been smuggling contraband to English and Dutch merchants in exchange for goods and profit. They were removing precious northern furs from New France and therefore taking money out of the pockets of hard-working *habitants* and *voyageurs*, as well as depriving the French state the economic boon of North American furs.¹ Dutch and English traders made *coureurs de bois* (runners of the woods) rich, but their earnings were typically not devoted to furthering France's colonial agenda.² Intendant Jacques Duchesneau knew more than anyone that something had to be done about the illicit fur trade. Duchesneau had received a missive from Versailles that blamed him for the colony's failings, and ordered him to curtail illicit trade and manage *coureurs de bois*.³ The fur trade was one of the colony's greatest contributions to the French Empire, as it brought goods and wealth to places such as Montreal and Quebec, and provided a productive outlet for young men unenthusiastic about other colonial pursuits, such as agriculture.⁴ Animal furs from North America were highly-prized commodities valued throughout Europe.⁵ At the same time, however, the fur trade was also problematic for the colony, as New France had

¹ LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance générale; Canada, R11577-4-2-F, "Lettre du roi à Duchesneau – le tient en partie," 1680, 214.

² Claiborne A. Skinner, *The Upper Country: French Enterprise in the Colonial Great Lakes* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 17.

³ LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance générale; Canada, R11577-4-2-F, "Lettre du roi à Duchesneau – le tient en partie," 1680, 213.

⁴ Louise Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth Century Montreal* trans. Liana Vardi (Montreal & Kingston, London, Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 21.

⁵ Ann M. Carlos and Frank D. Lewis, *Commerce by a Frozen Sea: Native Americans and the European Fur Trade* (Philadelphia and Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 16-17.

increasingly become over-reliant on the trade. New France's reliance on fur trade earnings, and the diplomatic alliances with Indigenous nations that the fur trade afforded, meant that efficient, lucrative, and lawful trading was crucial to the colony. Prior attempts to abolish illicit trade had been unsuccessful, but Intendant Duchesneau knew that to satisfy his King's demands, he would need a new strategy to deal with this clandestine trade and the "runners of the woods" that operated within it.⁶

The challenge facing Duchesneau to effectively administer the Laurentian colony elicits further investigation into New France, the fur trade, and illicit trading. It was not uncommon for Intendants in New France to receive direct royal instruction, but it is not readily evident if colonial officials and their counterparts in France more commonly cooperated or disagreed.⁷ The North American fur trade was crucial to French imperialism in North America, and *coureurs de bois* interacted with this economy through their illicit activity. Fur trading was considered illicit if it was conducted without a trade license (*cong *), or if it involved Frenchmen trading with English or Dutch merchants. The license system was meant to curb the proliferation of trade by limiting how many colonists could legally trade, as the fur trade pulled young men away from the St. Lawrence colony, and detracted from Minister Colbert's vision for New France. *Coureurs de bois* traded furs independently and relatively freely with Indigenous, English, and Dutch merchants, but surely that cannot be all that defined them.⁸ These reflections prompted my final research question: did the illicit fur trade alter or influence the way that colonial and imperial

⁶ Eugene Richard Henry Tesdahl, "The Price of Empire: Smuggling Between New York and New France, 1700-1754," (PhD diss., University of Colorado, 2012, ProQuest), 50; Eric Jay Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 96.

⁷ Peter Moogk, *La Nouvelle France: The Making of French Canada – A Cultural History* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000), 60.

⁸ Skinner, *The Upper Country*, 17.

administrators governed New France, and if so, how? This study sits at the intersection of colonial political and commercial history, and therefore contributes to the scholarship and greater understanding of colonial politics and economies.

The geographical and chronological context of New France between 1663 and 1740 is fundamental to understanding the illicit fur trade's influence on colonial governance. In 1663, New France became a royal colony, after which it underwent some crucial changes.⁹ La Compagnie de la Nouvelle France had governed New France since the seventeenth century, but King Louis XIV and his finance minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert lost confidence in company administration due to the company's inability to contend with the ever-present threat of Iroquois aggression, and frequent colonial mismanagement.¹⁰ Beginning in 1663, New France became a royal colony under the authority of a Governor General. This Governor was appointed by the King and answered to the Minister of Marine at Versailles.¹¹ In New France, the Governor handled issues such as colonial defence and protection. The Intendant and Sovereign Council oversaw civil matters such as colonial justice. There were some areas of jurisdictional overlap between the Governor General and the Intendant, each with their own political agendas. As a result, the colonial government often became mired down in administrative contention between competing officials.¹² The endpoint of 1740 was ultimately chosen because it marks the beginning of the War of the Austrian Succession, and as a global conflict it required extensive resources and manpower, which forced French administrators to ignore smaller-scale issues such as the illicit fur

⁹ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Kenneth J. Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea: Communications and the State in the French Atlantic, 1713-1763* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 22.

¹² W. J. Eccles, *Frontenac: The Courtier Governor* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1959), 1-6.

trade. Additionally, as historians Christian Crouch and Louise Dechêne argue, hard separations cannot be made between the intermittent colonial conflicts in the eighteenth century. Crouch even suggests that the War of the Austrian Succession influenced the attitudes of French marines, officers, and Indigenous warriors prior to the Seven Years' War and the fall of New France.¹³ The period of 1663-1740 is therefore useful to study New France governance and the illicit fur trade because the dates themselves are significant, and the substantial length of the period provides a large source sample size.

Minister Colbert believed that colonial success depended on stable commerce and agriculture. He envisioned a subsistence-based agricultural settler society leading to New France's economic self-sufficiency.¹⁴ An economically independent colony could contribute to a lucrative triangle trade with France's Atlantic colonies in the Caribbean and Africa.¹⁵ To a young French *habitant* (peasant farmer), however, the canoe, musket, and profits of the fur trade were at least as attractive as the hoe, rake, and corn of the farm. The fur trade depleted the colonial population by pulling a portion of colonists away from their farms and communities along the St. Lawrence; Colbert's dream was never fully realized.¹⁶ Historian Leslie Choquette argues that French emigrants expected to establish themselves abroad and live comfortably away from France, and migration numbers to New France may have initially looked promising. Unfortunately for Colbert, cold winters, harsh conditions, and stories of "les sauvages," combined with lackluster settler recruitment in France,

¹³ Christian Crouch, *Nobility Lost: French and Canadian Martial Cultures, Indians, and the End of New France* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014), 6.

¹⁴ Leslie Choquette, *De Français à paysans: Modernité et tradition dans le peuplement du Canada français* (Paris: Septentrion, Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 1997), 5; Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea*, 24.

¹⁵ Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea*, 25.

¹⁶ Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants*, xvii, 21; Skinner, *The Upper Country*, 18.

ultimately kept immigration to New France small-scale.¹⁷ Historian Yves Landry argues that those who ended up in Quebec did not even choose their destination, rather they were soldiers or missionaries following orders, hired workers (*engagés*), or prisoners.¹⁸ An unexpected benefit of these relatively dire New World circumstances, however, was that these conditions quickly coalesced with European traditions; historian Louise Dechêne argues that those who left France “...were probably of harder mettle than those who bowed to difficult circumstances and stayed.”¹⁹ French settlers intermarried with Indigenous peoples, culturally mixing these two groups (*métissage*), and made New France’s colonial population particularly diverse.²⁰ As Indigenous peoples vastly outnumbered the French in North America, French officials often had to concede to Indigenous diplomatic requirements, further complicating the character of New France.²¹ Indigenous peoples such as Algonquian-speakers of the Great Lakes region and the Iroquoian-speaking Huron-Wendat typically practiced “gift-diplomacy.” In these systems, French diplomats were obligated to provide goods in exchange for peaceful relations and military assistance.²² Therefore, although colonial officials were grounded in old world diplomatic practices, they

¹⁷ Leslie Choquette, *De Français à paysans*, 4; Peter Moogk, “Reluctant Exiles: Emigrants from France in Canada before 1760,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1989): 464. “Les sauvages” was the name the French gave the Indigenous peoples of North America. It generally means “Wild People of the Forests,” and was originally tied to North European folklore rather than hostility or malice. See: Moogk, *La Nouvelle France*, 17-18.

¹⁸ Yves Landry, “Les Français passés au Canada avant 1760: Le regard de l’émigrant,” *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française* 59, no. 4 (2006): 483.

¹⁹ Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants*, 46.

²⁰ Gilles Havard, *Empire et métissages: Indiens et Français dans le Pays d’en haut 1660-1715* (Paris: Septentrion, Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2003), 17, 44-45, 31. *Métissage* is defined as an interbreeding of peoples enacted through cultural exchanges. The result of *métissage* is a culture that is both a mixture of the originals, as well as something new altogether.

²¹ Havard, *Empire et métissages*, 16; Catherine Desbarats and Thomas Wien, “Introduction: La Nouvelle-France et l’Atlantique” *Revue d’Histoire de L’Amérique Française* 64.3, no. 4 (2011): 14.

²² Michael McDonnell, “Maintaining a Balance of Power: Michilimackinac, the Anishinaabe Odawa, and the Anglo-Indian War of 1763,” *Early American Studies* 13, no. 1 (2015): 40.

were forced to adapt to New France's distinct character based on fur trade relationships and novel French-Indigenous alliance building.

In the seventeenth century, newcomers to the easternmost edges of North America quickly realized the value of the area's extensive cod fishery. French fishermen established themselves on the Acadian coast but pushed inward in search of additional natural resources. This migration into the interior brought French explorers into contact with Indigenous groups bearing goods, such as furs, with which to trade.²³ French traders quickly discovered the high quality of North American beaver fur, and furs rapidly became a premier commodity of New France.²⁴ France's imperial hold on the continent was initially tenuous, which complicated the discovery of this newfound commodity and the trade relations it required. Although New France's transition to a royal colony in 1663 brought greater organization, its borders remained ill-defined and contested for much of the colonial period.²⁵ The colonial administration had to rely on and foster the relationships made with Indigenous peoples through trade.²⁶ Trade with Indigenous peoples was not only economic in nature, but also helped create strategic alliances, which allowed the French to better protect their imperial interests and defend loosely defined colonial borders.²⁷

Military security was a constant problem for French administrators in New France. Conflicts such as the seventeenth-century Iroquois Wars proved to French authorities that

²³ M. Brook Taylor ed., *Canadian History: A Reader's Guide vol. 1, Beginnings to Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 58. See also: Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America*, 10.

²⁴ Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America*, 22.

²⁵ Desbarats and Wien, "Introduction: La Nouvelle-France et l'Atlantique," 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁷ Moogk, *La Nouvelle France*, 14.

New France's Indigenous allies were essential for the security of the colony and its inhabitants.²⁸ These same authorities also saw that the fur trade promoted the spread of French power and territorial growth on the continent, and they relished its ability to disrupt Anglo-American settler expansion into the interior.²⁹ The fur trade needed military support, however, otherwise French merchants and traders could be edged out by rival European or Indigenous competition. Minister Colbert and his successors wanted New France to pay for itself, and provided limited state-sponsored military support for the colony prior to the Seven Years' War.³⁰ The fur trade was crucial then for not just commerce but also for military security, as it contributed to the maintenance of military alliances with Indigenous peoples.³¹

The fur trade's strategic and imperial importance meant that the illicit fur trade was a problem for the colonial government. It was characterized by the smuggling of goods and furs away from French Imperial centres, such as Quebec and Montreal. These goods and furs were covertly moved to the commercial centres of competing empires such as British-controlled Albany.³² The most recognizable actors in the illicit fur trade were *coureurs de*

²⁸ Thomas Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins in North America and Europe, 1720-1760: The Uses of Fur-Trade Imperialism" *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 1, no. 1 (1990): 296; Gilles Havard, *The Great Peace of Montreal of 1701: French-Native Diplomacy in the Seventeenth Century* trans. Phyllis Aronoff and Howard Scott (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 32. Havard states that "[w]ith their tradition as warriors, the Great Lakes nations . . . contributed decisively to the weakening of the Iroquois Confederacy. In this effort, they constituted an auxiliary force that became essential to New France in the intercolonial rivalries of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."

²⁹ Catherine Desbarats, "France in North America: The Net Burden of Empire During the First Half of the Eighteenth Century" *French History* 11, no. 1 (1997): 27-28. The strategic value of New France was its ability to quell the spread of Anglo-Americans into the North American interior. This helped to hinder Great Britain's ability to exploit North America's natural resource wealth. By encouraging fort construction and interior exploration, the fur trade helped to push French authority into the continent.

³⁰ Although the official military presence in New France may have been small, Louise Dechêne argues that a portion of male immigrants to the colony did have a martial background. See: Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants*, 17-19.

³¹ Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins in North America and Europe, 1720-1760," 295.

³² Tesdahl, "The Price of Empire: Smuggling Between New York and New France," 50.

bois, or “runners of the woods.”³³ They traded between places like Montreal and Albany, exchanging high-quality furs found in the interior for choice English goods.³⁴ American historian Claiborne A. Skinner argues that the independent spirit of *coureurs de bois* was rooted in French notions of liberty, that a free man should be able to go where he pleases.³⁵ Skinner’s notion is problematic, however, as it generalizes understandings of French freedom and liberty and links them to unruly behaviour. Skinner’s sentiment also implies that the average French person had a mind towards liberty over one hundred years before the French Revolution. In a similar vein, late historian and ardent anglophile Bernard DeVoto said a *coureur de bois* was “an Indian with a white man’s mind.”³⁶ The bias here should be obvious, but again DeVoto provides an overly simplistic view of the French, North American Indigenous peoples, and *coureurs de bois* in Anglo-centric literature. What we do know, however, is that these supposed “wild men of the woods” shrewdly and effectively worked together with Indigenous hunters and trappers to establish a lucrative clandestine trade network throughout North America. Aboriginal transgressors of New France and New York law often went unprosecuted, allowing them to easily smuggle goods across imperial borders.³⁷ Illicit fur traders substantially expanded contraband smuggling in New France because they could easily evade capture at the hands of colonial authorities, had extensive knowledge of the frontier, and were motivated by significant economic earnings from a black-market trade.

³³ Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America*, 96.

³⁴ Tesdahl, “The Price of Empire: Smuggling Between New York and New France,” 50.

³⁵ Skinner, *The Upper Country*, 17.

³⁶ Bernard DeVoto, *The Course of Empire* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998), 103.

³⁷ Tesdahl, “The Price of Empire: Smuggling Between New York and New France,” 60. Jan Grabowski, “French Criminal Justice and Indians in Montreal, 1670-1760” *Ethnohistory* 43, no. 3 (1996): 405. Mohawk Iroquois were especially prolific smugglers of goods between Montreal and Albany.

The success of illicit fur traders is interesting enough to prompt a lengthy examination of the clandestine trade. Yet throughout my research I was confronted with a recurring question: did the illicit fur trade alter or influence colonial governance, and if so, how? Not everything that *coureurs de bois* did was clandestine, but the very nature of their vocation was covert. They are useful in gaining a more complete picture of peripheral peoples, and the role that geography plays in criminal activity; for instance, the *pays d'en haut* (Upper Country), the vast territory west of Montreal that encompassed the entirety of the Great Lakes region, helped *coureurs de bois* evade state control.³⁸ To begin to understand the illicit fur trade's impact on colonial governance in New France, however, it is first essential to understand governance in the imperial metropolitan centre – France. Beginning with the coronation of King Louis XIV and lasting until the French Revolution, France was ruled by an absolute monarchy. Louis XIV was the embodiment of this political system of governance.³⁹ His authority stemmed from “the divine right of Kings,” and he lived by the mantra of Roman emperors, “*si veut le Roi, si veut la loi*” – the King's will is law.⁴⁰ Although the King relied on administrative support from numerous state officials and the cooperation of the state elite, under absolute monarchy, the power of the state was intended to rest in the King's person.⁴¹ In New France, both the Intendant and Governor were representatives of the King, but the scope of their responsibilities and their physical

³⁸ Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, 3, 5, 20; Havard, *Empire et métissages*, 17, 31, 44-45, 31; M. Brook Taylor, ed., *Canadian History: A Reader's Guide*, 59. The limits of the *pays d'en haut* corresponded to the limits of the Franco-Indigenous alliance system. For the French, it was a region of remote wilderness. For tens of thousands of Indigenous peoples, it was their cultural, political, and economic centre.

³⁹ Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea*, 22.

⁴⁰ Moogk, *La Nouvelle France*, 54.

⁴¹ K. A. Stanbridge, “England, France and their North American Colonies: An Analysis of Absolutist State Power in Europe and in the New World,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 10, no. 1 (1997): 37-38; Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea*, 22.

distance from the French Court meant that they often had to make administrative decisions on their own. Furthermore, they typically reported to the Minister of the Marine, rather than to the King directly, which created greater distance between their administration and the King's will. Without direct rule from the King himself, or at least detailed and frequent directives from the King, problems such as the illicit fur trade lacked clear and unified solutions. This thesis argues that the illicit fur trade frequently compelled colonial and imperial officials to rely less on stringent regulatory policies to manage clandestine trade, and that governance in New France took on a unique, somewhat weaker character as a result.

The following chapters support this argument. I will provide evidence of the uncertain nature of governance in New France, and argue that because of governmental weakness, illicit trade could occur relatively easily.⁴² In his work, *The Politics of Piracy*, Douglas R. Burgess Jr. argues that English pirates were afforded a measure of freedom and agency to operate unimpeded, as their illegal activities often provided economic advantages to Anglo-American colonies.⁴³ Similarly, I argue that administrative punishments against *coureurs de bois* were sometimes withheld as *coureurs de bois* benefitted New France economically and diplomatically through their trade and the Indigenous relationships that they fostered. *Habitants* and merchants also permitted *coureurs de bois* activity by continuing to conduct business with illicit traders regardless of their illegal ventures. Finally, I argue that colonial officials had to adapt, compromise, and cooperate with illicit traders because *coureurs de bois* were not easily apprehended, and

⁴² Desbarats and Wien, "Introduction: La Nouvelle-France et l'Atlantique," 14.

⁴³ Douglas R. Burgess, Jr., *The Politics of Piracy: Crime and Civil Disobedience in Colonial America* (New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 2014), 17-21, 36-37.

the illicit fur trade sometimes helped New France diplomacy, particularly with Indigenous nations. In chapter one I discuss the place of *coureurs de bois* in the colonial sphere. I argue that government agents were forced to relax criminal penalties and New France trade regulations due to the close relationships that *coureurs de bois* had to the people who lived in and maintained the colony. *Coureurs de bois* had connections with not only Indigenous peoples, but also *habitants*, *voyageurs*, urban merchants, garrison soldiers, and even members of the administration itself. Colonial administrators could not easily displace the illicit trade, as the French North American population sometimes relied upon the significant economic and diplomatic boons that *coureurs de bois* provided. This compromised the ability of Governors and Intendants to quell illicit trade, maintain colonial control, and corral *coureurs de bois*.

Chapter two examines the rampant administrative rivalries that sprung up between 1663 and 1740. I argue that colonial officials such as Intendant Jacques Duchesneau and Governor Louis de Buade, Comte de Frontenac often disagreed over the most effective ways to govern New France. More specifically, I contend that the primary cause for rivalries between New France officials was disagreements about how *coureurs de bois* should be handled, and how illicit trade in New France should be reduced. Finally, in chapter three I examine Fort Frontenac as a case study of administrative interactions and the problems created by the illicit fur trade. Throughout its history, Fort Frontenac was operated by a variety of administrators with varying degrees of competence and compliance. It was also located amid illicit fur trading activity, and its operators were often accused of harboring and trading with *coureurs de bois*. In this final chapter I argue that Fort Frontenac's status as a royal fort and the suspect behaviour of its operators demonstrate that the problems

created by the illicit fur trade – common support for *coureurs de bois* and administrative disunity – were real.

Throughout my thesis, I use textual analysis to understand and interpret the writings of colonial officials in New France, and the King's ministers in France. Textual analyses look at what people say to each other to gain meaning from their words. Educational psychologist Jessica Nina Lester argues that "...language is presumed to always be constructing something through its very construction."⁴⁴ Applying this to textual analysis means that there must be an interaction between subjective experiences or expressions, and objective realities. In the case of written correspondences between colonial officials and their counterparts across the Atlantic, textual analysis serves to uncover differing, sometimes contrary, aims and goals for governance of New France. Turning again to our story of Intendant Duchesneau, we see the value of official correspondences in arguing for administrative division in the face of the illicit fur trade problem. In his 1680 letter to Duchesneau, King Louis XIV accused the Intendant of not sufficiently following Governor Frontenac's plans for New France. The plans that Frontenac supposedly had for New France included a stringent abatement of illicit trade, advancement of immigration and colonization, and cultivation of the land. King Louis XIV at least suggested that he had full confidence in the efficacy of his Governor in 1680, and blamed Duchesneau for the colony's failings and for the continued proliferation of illicit trade.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Jessica Nina Lester, "Introduction: Discursive Psychology: Methodology and Applications," *Qualitative Psychology* 1, no. 2 (2014): 141.

⁴⁵ LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance générale; Canada, R11577-4-2-F, "Lettre du roi à Duchesneau – le tient en partie," 1680, 213. One plan that Duchesneau was apparently not following: preventing the continuation and proliferation of the illicit fur trade and the actions of *coureurs de bois*.

Structuralism is also used throughout my thesis as a methodological underpinning to my arguments. A structural study is one that distinguishes the elements of a system, and then focuses on and examines these elements in the context of a broad network of relationships. For example, a structuralist philosophy of given cultural phenomena would be more concerned with the entirety of what makes up said phenomena, rather than the individual parts.⁴⁶ For a structuralist analysis, the individual elements of a study should inform an argument of general applicability or relevance to the larger system.⁴⁷ More specifically, a structuralist approach argues that the particular units in phenomena are solely defined by the “network of relations” they are a part of.⁴⁸ I apply this structuralist approach to the administrative documents written about *coureurs de bois* to gain a more comprehensive understanding of official opinions about, and strategies concerning, these illegal traders. For example, a royal ordinance in 1684 implored colonial authorities to ensure that French traders brought their furs to Quebec or Montreal, rather than smuggle them to English Hudson’s Bay.⁴⁹ A structuralist approach places this somewhat ordinary edict in the larger context of French power and authority in the North American interior, and informs France’s struggle for greater political influence in the colonial ‘New World.’⁵⁰

The geopolitical context of New France provides the background to this thesis, and I have therefore endeavoured to establish New France as a colonial and imperial space using works on New France history. Early histories of New France typically make the argument

⁴⁶ John Rutherford, “Structuralism,” *Sociological Review* 25 (1977): 44.

⁴⁷ Rutherford, “Structuralism,” 44-45.

⁴⁸ Kanavillil Rajagopalan, “Structuralism,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Linguistics* ed. Philipp Strasny (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁴⁹ LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance Générale, R11577-4-2-F, 297, “Ordonnance royale portant que tous ceux qui feront le commerce,” April 10, 1684.

⁵⁰ David Pace, “Structuralism in History and the Social Sciences,” *American Quarterly* vol. 30, 3 (1978): 297.

that because of New France's subordinate position to France, European influence dominated New France culture. Historian Dale Miquelon acknowledged this extensively, and argued that New France was "a supplement to Europe," meaning that its primary purpose was to glorify and economically enrich France.⁵¹ Newer histories continue to consider New France within France's imperial orbit, but take a more nuanced approach. Historian Eric Hinderaker's *Elusive Empires* argues that empires were administrative bodies as well as zones of cultural interaction.⁵² Hinderaker's work is important in considering the operation of imperial policy on the ground. Historian James Pritchard's *In Search of Empire* discusses the difficulties that the French Empire had in creating and spreading authority in the Americas, informing discussion and appreciation of effective government in New France and consistent responses to the illicit fur trade.⁵³ Pritchard is differentiated from those before him, such as Miquelon, in this sense, as he argues that the logistics of maintaining New France was more of a burden than a 'supplement' to France. Historian Kenneth J. Banks examines the concept of a 'French Atlantic' in his book *Chasing Empire Across the Sea*.⁵⁴ Banks describes how the Atlantic created a physical and logistical gap that hampered imperial efficiency, and was a hindrance to uniform governance between empire and colony; I use this idea throughout my thesis to demonstrate how edicts from Versailles were difficult to implement in New France. Banks also diverges from those before him by arguing that geography, rather than people, was a primary determinant of the cultural and administrative configurations of New France. This 'New

⁵¹ Dale Miquelon, *New France, 1701-1744: "A Supplement to Europe"* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1987), 5.

⁵² Eric Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires: Constructing Colonialism in the Ohio Valley, 1673-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xi-xv.

⁵³ James Pritchard, *In Search of Empire: The French in the Americas, 1670-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xxi.

⁵⁴ Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea*, 4.

World' was one that was not simply an extension of France. It had qualities that were distinct from – even contrary to – those in France. As such, the people who inhabited it were of a very different character.

The fur trade was as important to the structure of New France as culture or imperialism, and it was through the fur trade that *coureurs de bois* and colonial administrators interacted. In *Fur, Fortune, and Empire*, historian Eric Jay Dolin offers a compelling narrative of this interaction by looking at how the fur trade shaped empire on the continent.⁵⁵ A connection between the fur trade and empire is not unique to Dolin's work. In his article "Selling Beaver Skins in North America and Europe," historian Thomas Wien defines the fur trade as a key component in the crucial Euro-Indigenous alliance systems that influenced how colonies governed.⁵⁶ Historian Catherine Desbarats built on Wien's thesis in her article "The Cost of Early Canada's Native Alliances," ultimately arguing that French-Indigenous alliances against the British were in part fueled by the fur trade.⁵⁷ The diplomatic importance of illicit fur trading is outlined by historian Jon Parmenter in his article "The Significance of the 'Illegal Fur Trade'." Parmenter argues that illegal fur trading was important for not just empires and colonizers, but for Indigenous peoples as well. He indicates that illegal fur trading was key to the Iroquois Confederacy's neutrality policy after the signing of the Great Peace of Montreal in 1701.⁵⁸ Although illicit fur trading could

⁵⁵ Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America*, xv-xvi.

⁵⁶ Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins in North America and Europe, 1720-1760," 293.

⁵⁷ Catherine Desbarats, "The Cost of Early Canada's Native Alliances: Reality and Scarcity's Rhetoric," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (1995): 609.

⁵⁸ Jon Parmenter, "The Significance of the 'Illegal Fur Trade' to the Eighteenth Century Iroquois," in *Aboriginal People and the Fur Trade: Proceedings of the 8th North American Fur Trade Conference, Akwesasne*, ed. Louise Johnston (Ontario: Akwesasne Notes Publishing, 2001), 40. For more on the Iroquois neutrality policy see: Jon Parmenter and Mark Power Robison, "The Perils and Possibilities of Wartime Neutrality on the Edges of Empire: Iroquois and Acadians between the French and British in North America, 1744-1760," *Diplomatic History* 31 (2007).

be diplomatically important, we know that some colonial administrators did try to reduce – or at least hinder – it. Eugene Tesdahl’s recent PhD dissertation “The Price of Empire” questions the ability of administrators to curtail illicit trade, and argues that smuggling was a standard pattern of fur trade. Tesdahl suggests that the trade regulations that administrators imposed on illicit trading increased, rather than decreased, the contraband trade.⁵⁹ Gilles Havard’s recent publication, *Histoire des coureurs de bois: Amérique du Nord, 1600 – 1840*, is a significant addition to *coureurs de bois* and fur trade history that provides a modern French perspective on subjects that are sometimes misunderstood in English histories. I build on Havard’s depiction of *coureurs de bois* (and *voyageurs*) as ‘transimperial’ figures, who flouted French laws and benefitted the French Empire in North America, both economically and diplomatically.⁶⁰ These scholars show that the fur trade, on either side of the law, was tied to the emerging identity of New France, and was a crucial component of this colonial world.

Taking account of what occurs on the peripheries of empire was particularly useful for my thesis. Historian Marcus Rediker’s analysis of Golden Age pirates helped to inform a greater understanding of the motivations of *coureurs de bois*, both of whom enjoyed measures of freedom, but whose activities were largely economically driven.⁶¹ Historian Douglas R. Burgess, Jr. states that the relationship between pirates and colonial administrators was often one of mutual benefit, and that pirates were given a degree of freedom in order to bring commercial advantages to Anglo-American colonies such as New

⁵⁹ Tesdahl, “The Price of Empire: Smuggling Between New York and New France,” 50.

⁶⁰ Gilles Havard, *Histoire des coureurs de bois: Amérique du Nord, 1600 – 1840* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2016), 8, 43.

⁶¹ Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American World 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 4, 9; Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 16; Skinner, *The Upper Country*, 17.

York.⁶² This form of colonial compromise and adaptation frames a discussion of administrative and commoner responses to the illicit fur trade. Borderlands theory also helps to better comprehend the relationship between the French Empire and *coureurs de bois*. Historians Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron offer a useful definition of frontiers as meeting places of varied peoples where geographic and cultural borders are blurred, and borderlands as “...contested boundaries between colonial domains.”⁶³ Adelman and Aron argue that borderlands conflict shaped frontier relations, and that the transition from inter-imperial competition to international coexistence formed ‘bordered lands’ into borderlands.⁶⁴ In her introduction to the 2008 special issue of the *Michigan Historical Review*, historian Nora Faires argues that there is an “...emerging body of scholarship that understands borderlands as both tangible and intangible spaces,” and that imperial struggles are crucial to understanding how borderlands spaces are divided into imperial or national territories.⁶⁵ As political scientist James C. Scott wrote in *The Art of Not Being Governed*, borderlands are defined as geographic spaces that have historically helped peripheral peoples evade state control.⁶⁶ In these borderland zones, a trans-border economy and society is created where the lines between legality and illegality are blurred.⁶⁷ The *pays d'en haut* was one such borderland space that contributed to the

⁶² Burgess, *The Politics of Piracy*, 17-21, 36-37.

⁶³ Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in between in North American History,” *The American Historical Review* 104, no 3 (1999): 815-816.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Nora Faires, “Introduction: Emerging Borderlands,” *Michigan Historical Review* 34, no. 1 (2008): vii, xii.

⁶⁶ James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 3, 5, 20. Scott’s *The Art of Not Being Governed* focuses on Zomia, a borderland region in Southeast Asia. Scott argues that because of its unique geographical characteristics, Zomia was an ideal space for political resistance and cultural refusal.

⁶⁷ Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson, “Ethnography, security and the ‘frontier effect’,” in *Borderlands: Ethnographic Approaches to Security, Power, and Identity* eds. Hastings Donnan and Thomas M. Wilson (Lanham: University Press of America, 2010), 7.

proliferation of the illicit fur trade. Mary Louise Pratt would consider the *pays d'en haut* a 'contact zone.' In her work *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt defines 'contact zones' as space of colonial encounters, where geographically and historically separated peoples come into 'contact,' "...in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power."⁶⁸ Integrating these theories has provided a useful lens for examination into how New France authorities may have comprehended the *coureurs de bois* and their actions.

Through all of this, what of Intendant Duchesneau? Why does – or why should – his story matter? Does it matter that Duchesneau's counterparts in France believed that the imperial vision for New France was not being sufficiently realized? Is there relevance to all this? The short answer is that yes, this did all matter. Although Intendant Jacques Duchesneau was but one man who served in a civil office in colonial North America for less than a decade, there is a lot to be learned from people like him. From imperial correspondences, for example, we know that there was tension between the centre and the peripheries. Just as decolonization was a long process of concessions, contestation, and cooperation, colonization itself was a system that required cultural, political, and diplomatic interaction and adaptation.⁶⁹ Ordinary people contributed to decolonization by rebelling against and resisting symbols of imperialism. Similarly, ordinary people also influenced how empires governed in the first place – whether they knew it or not – by engaging in phenomena such as the illicit fur trade. Due to the clandestine nature of

⁶⁸ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6-7.

⁶⁹ Gilles Havard and Cecile Vidal, *Histoire de l'Amérique française* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), 12; Gilles Paquet and Jean-Pierre Wallot, "Nouvelle-France / Quebec / Canada," in *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, ed. Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 96.

coureurs de bois, we may never definitively know their total numbers, impacts on their environment, or successes on the frontier. What we do know, however, is that *coureurs de bois* posed a continual problem for Intendants and Governors who desperately tried to create and govern a French Empire in North America. This thesis argues that between 1663 and 1740, *coureurs de bois* and the illicit fur trade deteriorated New France's colonial administration, ultimately hindering French imperial development in North America.

Chapter 1: *Coueurs de bois*: Allies and Advocates

The support of common *habitants* and merchants for *coueurs de bois* and illegal fur trading was crucial to the continuation of the illicit trade. *Coueurs de bois* were accomplished outdoorsmen, as well as shrewd smugglers and businessmen. They had successful illicit enterprises, often operating under the guise of conducting legitimate business by utilizing papers certifying work as letter carriers or debt collectors.⁷⁰ Historians such as Bernard DeVoto and Eric Jay Dolin frequently present an Anglo-centric picture of *coueurs de bois* as ‘wild men.’⁷¹ This decidedly one-dimensional designation of *coueurs de bois* does not tell the entire story. *Coueurs de bois* were multi-faceted; they traded furs illegally, but also cooperated with their Indigenous allies to foster a north-south slave trade, and formed a cultural bridge between Euro-Americans and Indigenous peoples.⁷² They were opportunistic and adaptable, temporarily residing in centres such as Montreal and Fort Orange depending on their status in the eyes of local officials.⁷³ Daniel A. Scalberg has drawn comparisons between the cultural elusiveness of *coueurs de bois* and modern borderland drug-runners.⁷⁴ While there was undoubtedly a certain ruggedness to the secretive fur-trading lifestyles of these men, to entirely define them as ‘wild’ is simplistic and neglects their multi-layered character.

Coueurs de bois were outsiders in relation to centres of commerce and administration like Montreal or Quebec, which were loci of French imperial power in New

⁷⁰ Jean Lunn, “The Illegal Fur Trade Out of New France, 1713-60,” *Canadian Association Report* (1939): 63.

⁷¹ Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America*, 96; DeVoto, *The Course of Empire*, 103.

⁷² Brett Rushforth, “‘A Little Flesh We Offer You’: The Origins of Indian Slavery in New France,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (2003): 799.

⁷³ Daniel A. Scalberg, “The French-Amerindian Religious Encounter in Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth-Century New France,” *French Colonial History* 1 (2002): 103.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

France. Illegal fur trading was focused in New France's territorial hinterland, which undermined colonial law through unsanctioned trade, and made *coureurs de bois* disruptors of the imperial agenda.⁷⁵ In 1682, the French Crown worked with colonial administrators, such as Governor de La Barre, to halt disorder in the colony through concerted efforts against *coureurs de bois*.⁷⁶ Much like the bandits, outlaws, pirates, and brigands in Europe and the Atlantic world, *coureurs de bois* disregarded laws and sanctions, causing administrators to draw easy comparisons between the groups.⁷⁷ *Coureurs de bois* were diametrically opposed to an overarching governing body that would dictate when, how, and with whom they could trade. Conversely, the men who administered this governing body – colonial officials who were appointed to control trade – became some of the greatest benefactors of the illicit fur trade.

New France officials may have viewed *coureurs de bois* as outsiders, those who lived a life away from civilized settler society, but many *habitants* and merchants did not consider the clandestine traders as strangers. Additionally, many *coureurs de bois* also had strong cultural or familial ties to the Indigenous nations in the interior.⁷⁸ New France's reliance on the fur trade meant that many colonists engaged in small-scale commerce on a daily basis.⁷⁹ Most *habitants* were relatively familiar with the rules of regulated commerce,

⁷⁵ Havard, *Empire et métissages*, 325-326. The 'imperial agenda' in this case is defined by Minister Colbert's desire for secure colonial holdings populated by young men and women as well as extensive trade with profits flowing back to France. See: Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 59, "Frontenac and Champigny to Pontchartrain," Quebec, 1694; Frontenac expresses an acknowledgement for the King's preference to settle and cultivate the land.

⁷⁶ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R11577-3-0-F, "Instructions du roi, pour être remises à M. de la ...," 1682, 24/122.

⁷⁷ Havard, *Empire et métissages*, 327-328.

⁷⁸ For both common colonists and Indigenous peoples of North America, *coureurs de bois* could be considered insiders either through trade relationships, blood ties, or both.

⁷⁹ Jan Noel, "'Nagging Wife' Revisited: Women and the Fur Trade in New France," *French Colonial History* 7 (2006): 51.

and the prevalence of unsupervised trade, which made profits from illicit trade activities attractive.⁸⁰ Acceptance of illicit trade was not universal, however, and groups such as the Jesuits and other ecclesiastical representatives detested the penchant for *coureurs de bois* to trade in brandy, and their priority of ‘profit over morality’.⁸¹ Despite Jesuit aversion to illicit trade, there is some truth to historian Jean Lunn’s exaggerated claim that in New France, the “...community [was] interested almost without exception in the smuggling trade.”⁸² Finally, French traders continually formed lasting familial, economic, and social bonds with peoples such as the mission Iroquois, commonly referred to as “Kahnawake Mohawks,” who also frequently contributed to illicit trading.⁸³ These mission Mohawks were important contributors to the illicit fur trade, as the northern furs that they obtained and traded were considered to be of the highest quality. Business-savvy *coureurs de bois* quickly realized that association with mission Mohawks was especially important in acquiring sought-after northern furs, and forming these bonds was regarded as a premium.⁸⁴ Historian Jon Parmenter argues that for their efforts, the illicit fur trade “...represented the primary means by which the Canadian mission Iroquois upheld their self-determination, and supported themselves economically.”⁸⁵ As insiders to the *habitant*

⁸⁰ BAnQ, Ordonnances, Commissions, Etc, Etc, des Gouverneurs et Intendants, NF 1639-1706, “Ordonnance de M. de Frontenac qui défend d’aller à la traite hors les dernières habitations et qui condamne à des peines sévères les habitants qui fourniront vivres, boissons, etc, aux coureurs des bois,” September 27, 1672, 111.

⁸¹ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. LVIII (Cleveland: The Burrows Company, 1901), 81, “Mission of Saint François Xavier des Prés, near Montreal, during the years 1672 and 1673,” Montreal, 1672-73.

⁸² Lunn, “The Illegal Fur Trade Out of New France, 1713-60,” 71.

⁸³ Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America*, 97; Parmenter, “The Significance of the ‘Illegal Fur Trade’ to the Eighteenth-Century Iroquois,” 41; Lunn, “The Illegal Fur Trade Out of New France, 1713-60,” 61. Lunn describes the Kahnawake Mohawk as ‘intermediaries’ in the illicit fur trade, while Parmenter states that they were active participants. While there is perhaps some disagreement over the extent to which this Iroquois group participated in the illegal fur trade, there is a consensus that they were tied to it.

⁸⁴ Parmenter, “The Significance of the ‘Illegal Fur Trade’ to the Eighteenth-Century Iroquois,” 41.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

and merchant community as well as many Indigenous communities, *coureurs de bois* held an advantaged position with two of the most important groups to French empire-building in North America.

The proliferation of *coureurs de bois* in New France was the result of the relative lack of control that colonial officials had over the colony. Compared to absolutist France with its tightly controlled top-down administration, New France was ‘disorderly.’ For example, in his book *Contraband*, historian Michael Kwass focuses on smuggling and criminality in Old France. He argues that brutal crackdowns on illicit activity resulted in harsh punishments like executions and bodily harm.⁸⁶ Just as in New France, France had trade restrictions on valuable commodities like tobacco and cloth from India, and similarly had problems with contraband smugglers. Unlike New France, however, smugglers were easier to apprehend in France. Death sentences accounted for twenty per cent of the approximately five hundred smuggler criminal sentences dispensed every year in mid-eighteenth-century France.⁸⁷ In New France, administrative power over colonial inhabitants was tenuous, and the borders between settlement and hinterland were ill-defined. This allowed an enterprising *habitant*, who worked his farm and traded legally in small wares, to slip into the backcountry for a time and trade illicitly as a *coureur de bois*, only to later return to farming. The blurred borders between settlement and frontier therefore limited the ability for colonial officials to exert their authority in these hinterland zones, and created a very different regulatory environment from the tightly managed realm of Old France. For example, in 1738 only two of New France’s seventy-three criminal

⁸⁶ Michael Kwass, *Contraband: Louis Mandrin and the Making of a Global Underground* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2014), 3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 229.

sentences of execution, exile, or penal labour were against *coureurs de bois*.⁸⁸ Although there were regulations regarding illicit trade and the threat of punishment often loomed for *coureurs de bois* and those who supported them, enforcement of such laws was spotty at best.

Punishments for *coureurs de bois* were frequently revised, and sometimes rescinded altogether.⁸⁹ The office of King Louis XV issued a response in 1737 to an edict from over twenty years earlier that had authorized galley punishment for *coureurs de bois*.⁹⁰ This revision was released at a time when there were marked tensions in ensuring colonial population growth, keeping colonial inhabitants loyal in order to compete with English colonies, and trying to enforce some sort of control over the fur trade. The response stated that harsh galley punishments must be lifted, as the threat of galley-slavery scared young men engaged in the fur trade from returning to centres of French influence like Montreal.⁹¹ New France officials sometimes softened punishments on their own accord, or took alliances and conflicts into account when interpreting laws and handing down verdicts. For example, historian Jan Grabowski argues that French judicial courts often absolved Indigenous peoples who broke French laws in order to maintain good French-Indigenous relations.⁹² Compared to France itself, colonial officials therefore exerted less control over

⁸⁸ ANOM, COL C11A, 69/fol.223-224, "Jugement du Conseil supérieur qui bannit Jean-Baptiste Caron pour une période de neuf ans, June 23, 1738." (Collected and translated by Scott Berthelette).

⁸⁹ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R1157-3-0-F, "Lettres patentes portant amnistie pour les coureurs des bois de ...," April 1737.

⁹⁰ 'Galley-slavery' was essentially a life-long punishment of working the oars of a galley ship. It was hard labour, and galley-slaves or 'galériens' suffered an arduous life.

⁹¹ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R1157-3-0-F, "Lettres patentes portant amnistie pour les coureurs des bois de ...," April 1737.

⁹² Grabowski, "French Criminal Justice and Indians in Montreal," 418.

its people, sometimes as a strategic choice, but oftentimes because of the realities of North American frontier spaces.

Coueurs de bois and systems of control in New France were connected. At their core, *coueurs de bois* and colonial disorder were not self-contained problems. The weak colonial government of New France was disorganized, and as such, unable to enforce some of its ordinances. New France administrative weakness was tied to competition and rivalries among administrators, jurisdictional overlap, and demographic issues. As the population of New France remained low relative to the English colonies, any economic, military, or diplomatic problems would have been exacerbated.⁹³ This administrative weakness created fertile ground for clandestine fur trade to flourish. The illicit fur trade was left largely unchecked, and therefore continued to grow. Furthermore, *coueurs de bois* changed how the government operated within New France because of their connectedness with colonial inhabitants and administrators. These close relationships compromised the ability of Governors and Intendants to maintain colonial control. The lack of control within New France resulted in, and was a product of, the proliferation of *coueurs de bois* and the illicit fur trade.

Administrative Responses to Illicit Trade

Smugglers, including *coueurs de bois*, are typically thought of as acting clandestinely, yet this was not necessarily always so. The word 'clandestine' suggests that

⁹³ Moogk, "Reluctant Exiles," 464; Edwin J. Perkins, *The Economy of Colonial America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 1. Peter Moogk estimates that there were no more than 62,000 European inhabitants in New France by 1755. By contrast, Edwin Perkins estimates there to have been 1.8 million European settlers in the English colonies by 1770.

coureurs de bois and their trade were hidden. Many fur trade scholars accept that the actions of *coureurs de bois* were hidden, and this was due both to the trade occurring on the fringes of empire in the North American hinterlands, as well as because the trade was illegal.⁹⁴ While there is an absence of individual *coureurs de bois* testimony in the written historical record, many of the people whose lives were affected by the illicit fur trade, such as legal traders and *habitants*, certainly knew of their presence. A common jurisdictional dilemma is revealed in Governor Frontenac's correspondence with the French ministry in 1679. He wrote that "...since the people say they have no funds and that they fear the *coureurs de bois* will return to the Dutch and the English laden with furs, they pray that Monsieur Duchesneau renews an order against those who would equip and house them."⁹⁵ Frontenac's statement reveals a fear that law-abiding traders had of unrestricted illicit trading and *habitant* patronage of *coureurs de bois*: the fear that this laxity would divert trade away from French centres, and towards Dutch and English ones. Frontenac's dilemma was that, as Intendants were charged with civil administration, Frontenac needed to rely on Intendant Duchesneau's cooperation. Problems arose because not only did Frontenac and Duchesneau commonly clash on policy, ordinances such as this had the potential to affect the security of the colony, which rested with Frontenac as Governor. It is also compelling that Frontenac alluded to fears that "the people" had of the ruin that *coureurs de bois* would bring to the colony, while also acknowledging that groups of *coureurs de bois* were being housed and sheltered by some of the people.⁹⁶ Frontenac

⁹⁴ M. Brook Taylor, ed., *Canadian History: A Reader's Guide*, 55.

⁹⁵ LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance Générale, R11577-4-2-F, "Lettre de Frontenac au ministre - difficultés suscitées par Duchesneau ...," November 6, 1679, 9.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

understood that some common people had a vested interest in the profits of the illicit trade, and that they would willingly house or supply *coureurs de bois*. The illicit fur trade was clandestine only insofar that it was hidden from authorities, but not necessarily the settler population, meaning that there was a disconnect between the colonial leadership and people on the ground.⁹⁷

Corruption among some New France administrators allowed *coureurs de bois* and the illicit fur trade to flourish. Chief among those who were accused of corruption were Governor Frontenac and members of his inner circle: Nicolas Perrot, Sieur du Lhut, and Sieur de La Salle.⁹⁸ Intendant Duchesneau wrote to the French ministry in November 1681 about a problem in New France whereby *coureurs de bois* received protection from some members of the administration.⁹⁹ Duchesneau cited a lack of oversight as the cause for the illicit fur trade's suffusion throughout the colony. He argued that he needed to be given more power and control over New France to repair its ineffective and corrupt system of governance.¹⁰⁰ Duchesneau believed that if he were given the power to end corruption in New France, he would be able to curb the illicit fur trade.¹⁰¹ Historian Kenneth J. Banks has suggested that Frontenac had a personal interest in the fur trade, evidenced by the creation of Fort Frontenac on the Cataraqui River.¹⁰² Support from corrupt officials within the colonial administration helped to extend the illicit fur trade in New France between 1663

⁹⁷ Tesdahl, "The Price of Empire: Smuggling Between New York and New France," 49.

⁹⁸ LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance Générale, R11577-4-2-F, "Lettre de Duchesneau au ministre - la nomination de Seignelay ...," November 13, 1681, 296.

⁹⁹ Ibid. Intendant Duchesneau is commonly depicted as a political rival to Governor Frontenac in the New France historiography. There is evidence in their correspondences to suggest that this rivalry was very real.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 298. Duchesneau's motivations here are somewhat suspect. It can be accepted that the illicit fur trade is proliferating, and that something needed to be done to quell its spread. But suggesting greater control for himself as the answer brings his claims into question.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea*, 25.

and 1700. Officials who ignored, and at times, actively supported illegal activities helped foster the growth of the illicit fur trade.

Intendant Duchesneau continued his criticism of Frontenac in a letter to the Minister of the Marine in 1681, which emphasized the detrimental effect that ignoring the illicit fur trade was having on New France's structure and organization. By Duchesneau's estimation, the issue of illegal *coureurs de bois* trade had become progressively worse over a period of four years. The problem had been exacerbated due to the successes that *coureurs de bois* continued to have in plying their trade.¹⁰³ Duchesneau noted that "...the woods give them great capabilities to evade Justice," and that when they were caught, the punishments were lax.¹⁰⁴ The substantial financial rewards that *coureurs de bois* gained from illicit trade continually enticed more and more young French *habitants* to become *coureurs de bois* themselves.¹⁰⁵ The problem that this created for New France was that continued connections to law-abiding *habitants* allowed *coureurs de bois* to more easily appeal for supplies and boarding.¹⁰⁶ The continual rise of *coureurs de bois* numbers ran contrary to the goals set out by Minister Colbert and other colonial architects, who wanted New France to act as a self-sufficient colony bordering the St. Lawrence River, peopled with sedentary farmers who would provide agricultural staples for the metropole.¹⁰⁷ *Habitant* support for *coureurs de bois* undermined this imperial vision and complicated the task of running the colony for the colonial administrators. Finally, *habitant* ignorance, or willful

¹⁰³ LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance Générale, R11577-4-2-F, "Lettre de Duchesneau au ministre - la nomination de Seignelay ...," November 13, 1681, 299.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 297.

¹⁰⁵ Scalberg, "The French-Amerindian Religious Encounter," 102.

¹⁰⁶ LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance Générale, R11577-4-2-F, "Lettre de Duchesneau au ministre - la nomination de Seignelay ...," November 13, 1681, 299. "Trade success" in this case means wealth of furs as well as quality goods at cheap prices.

¹⁰⁷ Moogk, *La Nouvelle France*, 83.

support of the illicit fur trade, not only undermined the authority of New France officials, it also had the potential to influence the colonial economy and *habitant* engagement in illegal affairs.

Minister Colbert's accusations of Frontenac's involvement in the illicit fur trade is some of the best evidence for the Governor's entanglement in illicit affairs. Colbert's letter to Frontenac in 1680 on the subject of the illicit fur trade stated that due to evidence and testimonies against the Governor, the King and French Court "...can no longer give more credence to these testimonies, and parts that are against you by those who have appeared in the spirit of His Majesty have been given more substance."¹⁰⁸ Colbert was in fact inferring that Frontenac was in some way involved in illicit trade. Colbert was inclined to side with Intendant Duchesneau, who honoured and supported his ideas for a densely populated and mercantile 'compact colony,' similar to that being developed by France's imperial rivals in New England.¹⁰⁹ Colbert ultimately decided against punishing Frontenac after receiving further public testimonies regarding the Governor's good character. Colbert clearly wrote in his letter to Frontenac that his mood had shifted due to "public testimonies."¹¹⁰ This flurry of correspondence between Duchesneau, Frontenac, and Colbert, shows that the public had partial knowledge of the role that some colonial officials had in maintaining the illicit fur trade.¹¹¹ The illicit fur trade in New France was not

¹⁰⁸ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R1157-3-0-F, "Colbert à M. de Frontenac. Sa Majesté, après avoir examiné ...," 1680, 55/18.

¹⁰⁹ Dale Miquelon, "Jean-Baptiste Colbert's 'Compact Colony Policy' Revisited: The Tenacity of an Idea," *Proceedings of the Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society* 17 (1993): 14.

¹¹⁰ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R1157-3-0-F, "Colbert à M. de Frontenac. Sa Majesté, après avoir examiné ...," 1680, 55/18.

¹¹¹ 'Public knowledge' is somewhat tricky here, as it could just as easily be written as 'public assumptions.' The distinction is only a matter of degree however, as both would have a similar effect on Colbert and his conclusions about Frontenac's conduct.

something that was only discussed in hushed tones. Frontenac wrote to Minister Colbert that the administration feared traders going to New England or New Netherland to conduct their trade, which was at its heart, illicit trading. English or Dutch merchants would not have considered this to be illegal trade, however, and there is no reason to believe that it would have been hidden, as it sometimes was in New France. Historian Thomas Wien even suggests that furs brought illegally to New York accounted for a large portion of the furs that were eventually sent to London markets.¹¹² The involvement of powerful men like Governor Frontenac in the illicit fur trade advances the idea that this trade altered governance in New France.

Royal instructions to New France officials show what the French Court thought about the colony's successes in fostering legitimate and beneficial trade. In 1682, the King's court cited opposition to royal orders as being a primary cause of troubles in the fur trade.¹¹³ The letter states that the principle issue was "...the freedom that many inhabitants have, notwithstanding the orders of His Majesty, to go into the woods with brandy to the homes of the savages [*sic*]."¹¹⁴ Due to the distance between France and New France, the French Court relied on second-hand information and reports as the basis for accusing *habitants* of illicitly trading with nearby Indigenous communities in the *pays d'en haut*. The assumptions that the French Court made are significant, as they show that the King and his Court saw a lack of control as being a hindrance to legitimate trade. The letter goes on to

¹¹² LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance Générale, R11577-4-2-F, "Lettre de Frontenac au ministre - difficultés suscitées par Duchesneau ...," November 6, 1679, 8; Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins in North America and Europe, 1720-1760," 312.

¹¹³ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R11577-3-0-F, "Instructions du roi, pour être remises à M. de la ...," 1682, 24/122.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 'Freedom' in the quotation is not to be thought of as a positive term in this context. The court is not, however, suggesting that French subjects should not be free. Rather, this is an indictment against those who would hunt, trap, and trade without the proper documentation giving them the right to do so.

say that illicit traders brought their furs from the interior to places like Montreal and Tadoussac, which disrupted sanctioned trade. While most discussions of the illicit fur trade focused on *coureurs de bois* bringing pelts to Dutch, and later English posts, this letter reveals that some pelts were brought back to the St. Lawrence River and that illegal trade occurred right under the nose of colonial officials in New France.¹¹⁵ There were safe havens for *coureurs de bois* at French posts, and they certainly could find buyers for their illegal furs. A market for illicit goods needs buyers, suggesting that merchants in these locations were ready and willing to engage with *coureurs de bois*.

Speaking for King Louis XIV, Ministers of the Marine such as Jean-Baptiste Colbert, his son the Marquis de Seignelay, and Louis Phélypeaux, comte de Pontchartrain regularly bombarded Governor Frontenac with inquiries and criticisms during his tenures administrating New France.¹¹⁶ In 1697, for example, Frontenac received a missive from Pontchartrain stating that *coureurs de bois* “...dominate urban communities and there needs to be a practical remedy for the successful enablement of the society of the Colony and of Trade.”¹¹⁷ The royal court’s impression, formed thousands of miles away from second-hand accounts and reports was that *coureurs de bois* were suffused into the towns and urban markets of New France. The supposed *coureurs de bois* ‘domination’ of towns throughout New France suggests a general acceptance, or at least tolerance, that law-abiding *habitants* and merchants had towards these illicit traders.¹¹⁸ At the very least, the visibility of

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ ‘Tenure’ is pluralized here to signify that Frontenac was Governor of New France on more than one occasion. His first term was from 1672 to 1682, and his second from 1689 until his death in 1698. For a substantial assay of Frontenac’s life and terms as Governor, see: W. J. Eccles, *Frontenac: The Courtier Governor*.

¹¹⁷ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R1157-3-0-F, “Le ministre à M. de Frontenac. Le roi a témoigné ...,” 1697, 251/238.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

coureurs de bois in New France towns suggests that there was little to stop or even hinder *coureurs de bois* encroachment into urban centres. For *coureurs de bois* to be able to successfully operate in places like Montreal, Quebec, or Trois-Rivières, they would have needed an urban support system. Barring the aid of *habitants* and merchants, *coureurs de bois* would have had to rely on a considerable lack of administrative power to operate in these areas.¹¹⁹

Habitants, Merchants, Coureurs de bois

Coureurs de bois, like many other types of smugglers, are typically thought of as clandestine actors, since the nature of their illicit activities means that they are rarely found in historical records. It is assumed that they concealed their illegal trade from authorities who sought to impede them, or the law-abiding public who would turn them in.¹²⁰ And yet, as we have already seen, Governor Frontenac's letter to First Minister Colbert in 1679 clearly indicates that some *habitants* were sheltering *coureurs de bois*, and others knew full well that illicit trade was occurring.¹²¹ The illicit fur trade itself was not always acknowledged by authorities, but its presence was not unknown to the public or colonial officials.¹²²

There is ample evidence that there was extensive support for *coureurs de bois* among the broader public. For example, on September 27, 1672, Frontenac released an

¹¹⁹ Havard, *Empire et métissages*, 330. Havard goes so far as to say that *coureurs de bois* not only had a large base of popular support, but the support of large merchants and conniving judges. This would buffer the *coureurs de bois* support system substantially, as well as increase their power and agency.

¹²⁰ M. Brook Taylor, ed., *Canadian History: A Reader's Guide*, 55.

¹²¹ LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance Générale, R11577-4-2-F, "Lettre de Frontenac au ministre - difficultés suscitées par Duchesneau ...," November 6, 1679, 9.

¹²² Tesdahl, "The Price of Empire: Smuggling Between New York and New France," 49.

ordinance expressly forbidding the actions of those “...*habitants* who openly or secretly sell them or give them goods by which they are able to continue their trade with the Indians.”¹²³ Frontenac blamed this public support as being the chief cause as to why the number of *coureurs de bois* steadily increased through the 1660s and 1670s.¹²⁴ While there is mention of *coureurs de bois*, this ordinance is almost wholly devoted to denouncing *habitant* supporters and accusing them of disrupting the “...public tranquility and generality of the colony.”¹²⁵ Frontenac also clearly outlined that *habitants* who sold or provided goods, commodities, drinks, and pelts to unlicensed traders were considered supporters of illegal trade.¹²⁶ Governor Frontenac believed that *habitant* support for *coureurs de bois* significantly hindered attempts to curtail the illicit fur trade; simply punishing unlicensed traders was not enough.

Efforts to put an end to the illicit fur trade proved ineffective and on November 6, 1674, Frontenac issued another ordinance meant to reinforce earlier mandates. Frontenac’s wording suggests that he was “...renewing the defences per the order of September 27, 1672,” as a sort of affirmation of the previous decree.¹²⁷ Frontenac was far more inclusive than in 1672, and orders that “...all French subjects of the King domiciled or non-domiciled to not be away from their homes under any pretext over twenty-four hours

¹²³ BAnQ, Ordonnances, Commissions, Etc, Etc, des Gouverneurs et Intendants, NF 1639-1706, “Ordonnance de M. de Frontenac qui défend d’aller à la traite hors les dernières habitations et qui condamne à des peines sévères les habitants qui fourniront vivres, boissons, etc, aux coureurs des bois,” September 27, 1672, 111. It has been established that Frontenac had a personal interest in the illicit fur trade. Officially, however, he still had to maintain appearances and condemn it. This document is more useful in showing knowledge of public support for *coureurs de bois*.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ BAnQ, Ordonnances, Commissions, Etc, Etc, des Gouverneurs et Intendants, NF 1639-1706, “Ordonnance de M. de Frontenac qui fait défense à tout particulier de sortir ou s’absenter des habitations sous prétexte de chasse plus de vingt-quatre heures sans un conge écrit,” November 5, 1674, 171.

without written leave.”¹²⁸ This was an all-encompassing order that left little room for manipulation or interpretation. It stated that punishments for disobedience could be as severe as death, the caveat being that executions were ultimately left to the discretion of administrators such as fort commandants, *seigneurs*, and judges.¹²⁹ As the ordinance left the severity of punishments to the discretion of individual administrators, there is an implied acceptance here that one blanket decree could not satisfy the multitude of cases that would appear across New France.¹³⁰

There were a few important differences between the ordinance of 1674 and one of 1673. After citing that punishments for illicit trading were fines or execution, the 1674 ordinance reads that “...promoting or equipping the so-called vagabonds and *coureurs de bois*,” was a criminal offence.¹³¹ This was clearly a harsher indictment against supporters of illicit trade than was given in 1673, where Frontenac “...very deeply express[ed] inhibitions” against those who did so.¹³² In just one year the tone against those supporting *coureurs de bois* had changed from one of disapproval to one that threatened harsh punishments or even execution. New France authorities had come to the realization that the illicit fur trade existed because there was a market for it. Small-scale trading was a part of New France life – *coureurs de bois* with high-quality yet inexpensive English goods were

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Lunn, “The Illegal Fur Trade Out of New France, 1713-60,” 68. The illicit fur trade spanned two continents, an ocean, and a multitude of rivers, lakes, bays, and colonies. It was not solely-contained to New France, nor was it contained to one or two areas. The size of New France and the extent of illicit trade meant that an all-encompassing ordinance for every known case would be unwieldy.

¹³¹ BAnQ, Ordonnances, Commissions, Etc, Etc, des Gouverneurs et Intendants, NF 1639-1706, “Ordonnance de M. de Frontenac qui fait défense à tout particulier de sortir ou s’absenter des habitations sous prétexte de chasse plus de vingt-quatre heures sans un conge écrit,” November 5, 1674, 171.

¹³² BAnQ, Ordonnances, Commissions, Etc, Etc, des Gouverneurs et Intendants, NF 1639-1706, “Ordonnance de M. de Frontenac contre les coureurs des bois et ceux qui les favorisent,” June 5, 1673, 145.

enticing trade partners.¹³³ Attractive trade goods could entice *habitants* to break the law and trade in illegal wares, thus fueling *coureurs de bois* activity. Legitimate merchants and habitants were enticed by a black market for cheap furs and other goods. Historian James Pritchard argues that French illicit traders could triple their price for northern furs in Albany, as well as receive higher-quality English trade goods. Albany merchants also paid in cash, rather than bills of exchange, which would have been more highly sought after. Given this lucrative Albany market, *coureurs de bois* could then bring these illegally traded goods back to Montreal to trade with French merchants. These French merchants numbered among the accused 'supporters of *coureurs de bois*.'¹³⁴ In this context, *coureurs de bois* were the product of a problem with the New France trade economy, where illegal trade was especially attractive to *habitants* and fur traders alike.

Incidental support for illicit trade occurred in New France as well, whereby colonial administrators unintentionally supported *coureurs de bois* because of the need to secure alliances with Indigenous peoples and to protect the colony from imperial rivals.¹³⁵ This type of support developed because administrators were sometimes unable to pay French soldiers on the frontier, but still needed to find a way to secure the defence of New France. For example, in 1698, Governor Frontenac explained to Secretary of State Louis Phélypeaux Pontchartrain that soldiers garrisoned at frontier posts traded illicitly out of necessity, noting "...it is impossible to have the Commandants and the soldiers in the

¹³³ Noel, "Nagging Wife' Revisited," 51; Cathy Matson, "Damned Scoundrels' and 'Libertisme of Trade': Freedom and Regulation in Colonial New York's Fur and Grain Trades," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (1994): 394. A thriving English trade on America's eastern seaboard meant that the inventories of Anglo-American traders were stocked with high-quality goods that were typically less expensive than their French counterparts.

¹³⁴ Pritchard, *In Search of Empire*, 156.

¹³⁵ 'Incidental support' meaning support that is acquired due to administrative necessity.

[Michilimackinac] and Miami Posts live on their salary alone.”¹³⁶ Frontenac’s inability to properly pay and provision troops at the western posts fostered support for the continuation of the illicit fur trade.¹³⁷ There is no mention of *coureurs de bois*, and how they fit into French incidental support for illicit trade. It was decidedly harder for colonial officials to monitor the activities of *coureurs de bois*, yet the fact that Frontenac openly supported the garrison soldiers’ need to trade illicitly is further evidence of the Governor’s vested interest in the illicit fur trade.¹³⁸ Both Frontenac’s government and French colonial officials at the interior forts saw the value in, if not the need for, illicit trade.

Popular support for *coureurs de bois* was not universal and French colonial settlers did not all benefit equally from illicit trade. Jean Talon was the first Intendant of New France, and took up his position in 1665, just two years after New France became a royal colony. Talon served two separate terms as Intendant, from 1665-68, and again from 1670-72. In his final year of service, he appealed to colonial officials to defend *habitants* against the ills of illicit trade. He wrote that *coureurs de bois* were “...a ruin to honest inhabitants who hope for a lawful gain with the Indians, and who are used to the Indians coming to them.”¹³⁹ Talon denounced *coureurs de bois* by showing them to be disruptors of legal trade

¹³⁶ Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 69, “Frontenac to Pontchartrain,” Quebec, 1698.

¹³⁷ The context of this letter is that Frontenac is discussing unauthorized trade. In this case, soldiers and their superiors would not be given *cong * or other letters of permission to engage in fur trading. As such, this is the definition of illicit trade. Louise Dech ne states that soldiers garrisoning interior posts supplemented their pay with fur trading, which consumed more and more of their energy throughout the period. See: Dech ne, *Habitants and Merchants*, 19. Gilles Havard lumps *coureurs de bois*, *engag s* and soldiers in as those who would be “disobedient to the King” (i.e., pursuing illicit trade) in the earlier years of expansion into the *pays d’en haut*. See: Havard, *Empires et m tissages*, 327. Claiborne A. Skinner states that the fur trade was a popular occupation for ex-soldiers, as it allowed them capital through adventure, which would have been something that drew many to soldiering in the first place. See: Skinner, *The Upper Country*, 16.

¹³⁸ LAC, S rie B, Lettres envoy es, R1157-3-0-F, “Colbert   M. de Frontenac. Sa Majest , apr s avoir examin  ...,” 1680, 55/18. This is but one example of a document that highlights Frontenac’s interests in illicit trade.

¹³⁹ BAnQ, Ordonnances, Commissions, Etc, Etc, des Gouverneurs et Intendants, NF 1639-1706, “Ordonnance de M. Talon qui d fend aux habitants de quitter leurs demeures pour courir les bois et faire la traite avec les

and honest traders and merchants. Talon complained that *coureurs de bois* leave “...their homes and the care of their families,” in order to trade with Indigenous peoples.¹⁴⁰ He wrote that “...they go into the wild to the Indians with drink, without Christianity, without sacraments, without religion, without priests, without laws, and without magistrates.”¹⁴¹ New France’s first Intendant saw good reason to denounce *coureurs de bois*, and tried to quell a growing illicit trade and undermine the support of normally law-abiding merchants and *habitants*. Not all *habitants* or colonial officials would make allowances for illicit trade, and Jean Talon was one administrator who would not stand for its suffusion into New France.

Moral Conflict: Jesuits v. *Coureurs de bois*

A group that almost entirely opposed the illicit fur trade, and *coureurs de bois* more specifically, was the Jesuits. The Jesuits were but a single Catholic Order among many in New France, but their voice against illicit fur trading emerged as one of the loudest. This was due to the zeal with which they approached their missionary work of converting Indigenous peoples to Catholicism, and their rejection of liquor, material excess, and debauchery.¹⁴² A 1672-73 *relation* from the Mission of Saint François Xavier des Prés in the

sauvages sous peine de punition corporelle,” June 5, 1672, 107. Talon is referring to the ‘normal’ or ‘legal’ practice of fur traders, where Indigenous hunters and trappers would bring pelts to centres of French trade such as Montreal. Illicit trade ran contrary to this, as *coureurs de bois* went to Indigenous settlements to trade for furs, rather than the other way around. See: Pritchard, *In Search of Empire*, 153.

¹⁴⁰ BAnQ, Ordonnances, Commissions, Etc, Etc, des Gouverneurs et Intendants, NF 1639-1706, “Ordonnance de M. Talon qui défend aux habitants de quitter leurs demeures pour courir les bois et faire la traite avec les sauvages sous peine de punition corporelle,” June 5, 1672, 107.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Scalberg, “The French-Amerindian Religious Encounter,” 105. Scalberg notes that missionaries desperately tried to “check the *coureurs*’ ‘impiety,’ ‘irreverence,’ ‘immorality,’ and ‘skepticism.’ Scalberg goes on to conclude that these attempts continually failed. The idea of this being a ‘moral’ problem for the missionaries is contentious. The evidence suggests that they were mostly concerned with Indigenous conversion, rather than morality. For example, a 1673 *relation* from Ste. Marie du Sault to the Governor praises trade for helping

pays d'en haut conveyed a biting criticism of illicit trade, stating that "...brandy has ruined the Algonquin missions."¹⁴³ It blamed "...the insatiable avarice of the [lay] French," and condemned those who "...go as far as two and three hundred leagues to seek the Savages [*sic*] in the woods, for the purpose of getting their furs by making them intoxicated."¹⁴⁴ *Coueurs de bois* commonly traveled to Indigenous communities to trade in furs as well as liquor.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, the Mission of Saint François Xavier des Prés was described as being "...in the midst of the French who carry on that detestable traffic."¹⁴⁶ Illicit trade occurred in specific areas, and "detestable" to the Jesuits of the Mission Saint François Xavier des Prés.¹⁴⁷ As the example of the Jesuits illustrates, support for the illicit trade varied depending on certain demographics.

Father François de Crespieul served as a Jesuit missionary to the Montagnais for over thirty years until his death in 1702, and wrote about *coueurs de bois* and the troubles

with conversion. See: Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. LVII (Cleveland: The Burrows Company, 1901), 21, "Extract from the letter of Father Nouvel, Jesuit, written from Ste. Marie du Sault to Monseigneur the Governor, May 29, 1673," Ste. Marie du Sault, May 29, 1673.

¹⁴³ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. LVIII (Cleveland: The Burrows Company, 1901), 81, "Mission of Saint François Xavier des Prés, near Montreal, during the years 1672 and 1673," Montreal, 1672-73; Lunn, *The Illegal Fur Trade Out of New France, 1713-60*, 81.

¹⁴⁴ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. LVIII (Cleveland: The Burrows Company, 1901), 81, "Mission of Saint François Xavier des Prés, near Montreal, during the years 1672 and 1673," Montreal, 1672-73. This document differs from the 1673 Ste. Marie du Sault relation in that alcohol and intoxication is seen as a hindrance to conversion, resulting in attacks against *coueurs de bois*.

¹⁴⁵ Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America*, 83; Susan Sleeper-Smith, "[A]n Unpleasant Transaction on This Frontier': Challenging Female Autonomy and Authority at Michilimackinac," *Journal of the Early Republic* 25, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 418. Susan Sleeper-Smith discusses the creation of Indigenous-trader kin networks that were formed in the frontier.

¹⁴⁶ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. LVIII (Cleveland: The Burrows Company, 1901), 81, "Mission of Saint François Xavier des Prés, near Montreal, during the years 1672 and 1673," Montreal, 1672-73; Lunn, *The Illegal Fur Trade Out of New France, 1713-60*, 81.

¹⁴⁷ The relation specifically states that the mission is in an area where this "detestable traffic" occurs, meaning that it did not occur everywhere. These two clues give reason to conclude that it is discussing *coueurs de bois* and the illicit trade.

they brought to the Tadoussac Mission in 1671.¹⁴⁸ Father Crespieul argued that “the less one employs the *coureurs de bois*, the better it is for the Mission and for the trade.”¹⁴⁹ Crespieul’s musings suggest Jesuit knowledge of *coureurs de bois* ‘employment’ in the New France economy. The wording here is important, for as a rule, illicit traders would not have been ‘employed.’ By specifically denouncing *coureurs de bois* ‘employment,’ Crespieul is alluding to administrative or merchant patronage of illicit traders. Crespieul also wrote that great efforts should be made to keep *coureurs de bois* away from young women and marriageable girls, and remarked that *coureurs de bois* should not have nor trade liquor.¹⁵⁰ These denunciations display that some Jesuit missionaries took a hardened stance against *coureurs de bois* and deplored the kind of atmosphere illicit trade created. Missionaries, particularly Jesuits, were agents of ecclesiastical imperialism and were tied to, but not entirely synonymous with, state power.¹⁵¹ Like other colonial agents, Jesuits had their own objectives, which informed their opinions of *coureurs de bois*. The primary objective of Jesuit missionaries was conversion, and therefore the perceived lechery and immorality of *coureurs de bois* was seen as particularly dangerous. Again, it is important to demonstrate that support for illicit trade was not all-encompassing, but that it was support from key members of New France society that allowed it to proliferate.

¹⁴⁸ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. LXIII (Cleveland: The Burrows Company, 1901), 21, “Remarks Concerning the Tadoussak Mission of the Society of Jesus since 1671, by father François de Crespieul, Jesuit – From the Cabin of Louys Kestabistichit at pastagoutchichiu sipiou, April 7, 1686,” Quebec, April 7, 1686; Lorenzo Angers, “François de Crespieul,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 2 (Toronto/Laval: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003).

¹⁴⁹ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. LXIII (Cleveland: The Burrows Company, 1901), 21, “Remarks Concerning the Tadoussak Mission of the Society of Jesus since 1671, by father François de Crespieul, Jesuit – From the Cabin of Louys Kestabistichit at pastagoutchichiu sipiou, April 7, 1686,” Quebec, April 7, 1686.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 22, 23; Havard, *Histoire des coureurs de bois*, 663.

¹⁵¹ Robert Englebert, “The Legacy of New France: Law and Social Cohesion between Quebec and the Illinois Country, 1763-1790,” *French Colonial History* 17 (2017): 36.

Jesuits did not simply chastise *coureurs de bois* or complain about illicit trade, they also actively appealed for punishments against illicit traders. Father Joseph-François Lafitau's memorial on the sale of liquor was a petition to the Sovereign Council to punish liquor traffickers.¹⁵² Lafitau framed this petition in terms colonial officials could understand, and designated liquor traffickers as threats to New France, and boons to English rivals. He wrote that "...the fugitive french [*sic*] who no longer dare to return home, take the Savages [*sic*] with them among the English to help them in transporting the goods that they buy there."¹⁵³ Smuggling and illegal trafficking was pervasive throughout Indigenous societies, and Father Lafitau suggested why this was so.¹⁵⁴ Indigenous violations of French laws, which according to men like Father Lafitau was brought on by *coureurs de bois* contrariness, created an environment of general Indigenous hesitancy to observe Christian rules and regulations. The result was resistance to Jesuit attempts at Christianization.¹⁵⁵ Lafitau stressed that illicit trade was "...almost the sole obstacle to the labors of the missionaries."¹⁵⁶ Lafitau was a Jesuit father who sought an end to the illicit trade for his own gains. His strategy to end illicit trading – appealing to higher administrative authorities – shows that he actively opposed illicit trade, rather than passively waited for its demise. Jesuit missions and 'mission Indians' often acted as

¹⁵² Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. LXVII (Cleveland: The Burrows Company, 1901), 43, "Memorial by Father Lafitau: On the sale of Liquor to the Savages," Paris, 1718.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Tesdahl, "The Price of Empire: Smuggling Between New York and New France," 50.

¹⁵⁵ Grabowski, "French Criminal Justice and Indians in Montreal," 418.

¹⁵⁶ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. LXVII (Cleveland: The Burrows Company, 1901), 43, "Memorial by Father Lafitau: On the sale of Liquor to the Savages," Paris, 1718. Important to consider that Lafitau is exaggerating for effect. By placing such tremendous blame on *coureurs de bois*, Lafitau is hoping to receive administrative support in stopping their activities.

intermediaries between colonies and opposing Indigenous nations or potential Indigenous allies.¹⁵⁷ By actively calling for action against *coureurs de bois*, Father Lafitau used his influence as a colonial ambassador for Indigenous relations in an attempt to influence New France government policy.

In 1702, Father Étienne de Carheil outlined to Governor Louis-Hector de Callières what the Jesuits considered beneficial trade. An examination of Carheil's argument provides an interesting contrast with Jesuit letters and *relations* concerning illicit trade.¹⁵⁸ Carheil continually referred to 'the Company,' or the Compagnie de la Nouvelle France, which had a monopoly on the Western fur trade at the time, for Carheil knew that the Company had a vested interest in stopping illicit trade as well. Father Carheil argued that if trade at Montreal could not sufficiently continue, then there would be "...no other measure for the Company to adopt than to send and maintain in our missions up here Selected persons, sober and virtuous, Intelligent, and well versed in everything connected with That trade."¹⁵⁹ Jesuits did not shun trade unequivocally, only trade that was harmful to their endeavors. Carheil continued: "...these men should be sent, in whatever number the Company might Deem necessary and sufficient for Carrying on its Trade, for attaching thereto the Savages [*sic*], and for retaining them in it both by their presence and that of their wares."¹⁶⁰ As long as trade was conducted by chaste men who did not sell liquor to

¹⁵⁷ Matson, "Damned Scoundrels' and 'Libertisme of Trade'," 61.

¹⁵⁸ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. LXV (Cleveland: The Burrows Company, 1901), 243, "Letter by Reverend Father Étienne de Carheil to Monsieur Louis-Hector de Callières, Governor – At Michilimackina, the 30th of august, 1702," Michilimackinac, August 30, 1702. 'Beneficial trade' in this context refers to trade that would further the goals of the missionaries, and that was conducive to Indigenous conversion and integration.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

Indigenous peoples, it was accepted and even desired among the missions.¹⁶¹ What is perhaps most compelling about this document is what it says about individual agendas within the colony.¹⁶² Different societal groups in New France interacted with trade – both legal and otherwise – at different times and for different reasons. How each group approached trade depended on the goals of the group and the context of trade. Illegal trade was not always wholly condemned, and legal trade sometimes had noneconomic value to groups like the Jesuits or Indigenous groups. For this reason, the illicit fur trade must always be set against a contextual background that asks what was at stake for its supporters and critics alike.

The French Court and Amnesty

As New France grew, French imperial attitudes at Versailles towards the colony and the illicit fur trade shifted as well. The shift in opinions at Versailles to illicit trade was particularly pronounced after the turn of the eighteenth century, when intermittent global conflicts gripped European empires.¹⁶³ France's involvement in wars in Europe siphoned resources away from the colonies and the empire more broadly. The War of the Spanish Succession was no exception, and as it was drawing to a close, King Louis XIV authorized

¹⁶¹ 'Chaste' being a relative term. As long as traders did not sell liquor to would-be converts, they could be beneficial to conversion.

¹⁶² Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 58, 68-69. White discusses the tensions between traders, *coureurs de bois*, and missionaries. These tensions highlight the significance of this document, as they show how letters and missives give insight into priorities and agendas.

¹⁶³ John A. Mears, "The Emergence of the Standing Professional Army in Seventeenth-Century Europe," *Social Science Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (1969): 106; Suzanne Sutherland Duchacek, "The Century of the Soldier: War, Diplomacy, and Knowledge in Habsburg Europe" (PhD diss., Stanford University: 2012, ProQuest), 5. Several large-scale wars occurred during the eighteenth century which exposed the world to 'world war.' These include significant conflicts such as the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), War of the Quadruple Alliance (1718-1720), War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748), and the Seven Years' War (1756-1763).

Governor General Philippe de Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil to grant amnesty to *coureurs de bois* in 1714.¹⁶⁴ Vaudreuil had proposed that punishments against *coureurs de bois* be rescinded and arrests of illicit traders suspended.¹⁶⁵ This concession emphasized France's demographic weakness and limited military power in New France, and the lack of French influence in North America.¹⁶⁶ The priorities of the French government, particularly the Crown, dictated how the administration dealt with *coureurs de bois*. Although illicit trade threatened the authority of government and the economic stability of the colony, insufficient military power threatened the colony's ability to defend itself from imperial enemies like the English or Indigenous adversaries. Tolerance for and acceptance of *coureurs de bois* was not common, but, at times, imperial strife made it necessary for imperial and colonial officials to turn a blind eye.

Amnesty and more forgiving policies did not end with the War of the Spanish Succession. In 1737, three years prior to the start of the War of the Austrian Succession, there was a revision to the *coureurs de bois* amnesty policy. Total amnesty for *coureurs de bois* had been retracted in the years following the War of the Spanish Succession, and in 1737 there was more concern with simply reducing the severity of the punishment for

¹⁶⁴ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R11577-3-0-F, "Mémoire du roi à MM. de Vaudreuil et Bégon. Affaires ...," 1714, 339. Vaudreuil was Governor of New France from 1703-1725. His desire to grant amnesty to *coureurs de bois* is not overly interesting, as much like his predecessor Governor Frontenac, he had a vested interest in illicit trade. See: Rushforth, "A Little Flesh We Offer You," 798; Lunn, "The Illegal Fur Trade Out of New France, 1713-60," 70. The interesting point here is that during and after wartime, the Crown could be compelled to retract previous orders and punishments against those who disobeyed the law.

¹⁶⁵ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R11577-3-0-F, "Mémoire du roi à MM. de Vaudreuil et Bégon. Affaires ...," 1714, 349.

¹⁶⁶ Pritchard, *In Search of Empire*, 421; Scalberg, "The French-Amerindian Religious Encounter," 102; Miquelon, "Jean-Baptiste Colbert's 'Compact Colony Policy' Revisited," 13. James Pritchard cites demographic limitations to be one of the sources of French weakness in North America. Compounding this problem was, as Daniel Scalberg and Dale Miquelon note, that a significant portion of young French males in New France were involved in the illegal fur trade. This drew away from an already meager potential fighting force.

illicit trading.¹⁶⁷ Unlike the proclamation of amnesty of 1714, this revision did not specifically state that the war was the reason for amnesty. Rather, the 1737 revision stated that a reduction in punishment was the result of harsh punishments inducing *coureurs de bois* to stay in the wilderness.¹⁶⁸ In both instances, New France needed the manpower and physical presence of young men to maintain imperial power and authority in North America. An edict from Versailles issued in March 1716 declared that *coureurs de bois* would be punished with “pain of the galley.”¹⁶⁹ The French Court altered its punishment policy for *coureurs de bois* merely two years after amnesty was given in 1714.¹⁷⁰ Frequent revisions to royal policy was typical of the push and pull of authority within the colonial sphere. The French Crown would never tolerate criminal activity on principle, but merely had to concede to it under extenuating circumstances. Concessions of this type display the tenuous hold that the French Empire had on its North American holdings, and suggests why colonial officials often trod carefully in their dealings with *coureurs de bois*.¹⁷¹ France was unable to enforce absolute rule in New France and relied on cooperation with the colony’s population, which included *coureurs de bois*.

Conclusion

¹⁶⁷ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R1157-3-0-F, “Lettres patentes portant amnistie pour les coureurs des bois de ...,” April 1737. This letter specifically states that there will be reduction of punishment for illicit trading such that *coureurs de bois* will not be subject to the galleys.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ This is in relation to the document of 1714 previously discussed.

¹⁷¹ Havard, *Empires et métissages*, 339. Havard here discusses how fort commandants in particular had to compromise and be malleable in their dealings with illicit trade. This was due to the soldiery often dealing with illicit traders, or becoming illicit traders themselves.

Connections and relationships between *coureurs de bois* and other New France colonial inhabitants were not entirely beneficial or detrimental. Commissioners, commanders, and administrators interacted with *coureurs de bois* for their own interests in the illicit fur trade. Common *habitants* utilized *coureurs de bois* connections to illicit merchandise for favorable prices and quality goods.¹⁷² But at the same time, *coureurs de bois* were typically condemned, and open support for them was punishable with fines or even death. What emerges is the vision of a system that was deeply connected to illicit commerce, but due to royal decrees and oversight, had to denounce it unequivocally. The result of this situation was inextricably tied to New France's status as a frontier colony. While imperial law-makers across the Atlantic expected colonial administration to be conducted honourably, the situation on the ground did not always permit it to be so. French merchandise was of relatively high price and low quality, making illicit commerce continually enticing to both *habitants* and administrators alike.

Ultimately, *coureurs de bois* were an imperial nightmare due to their connections to the general populace and colonial administrators. Their connections made them difficult to separate from law-abiding citizens and those in control, causing repeated inefficiencies in governing and controlling them. The interconnectedness between *coureurs de bois* and the rest of the colony muddied the administrative process, creating a slowness of government and a lack of follow-through in justice and punishment. A loosening of colonial control led to a greater increase in *coureurs de bois*, and the problem of illicit trading continued for decades as the royal government attempted to strengthen. Colonial development was

¹⁷² Havard, *Histoire des coureurs de bois*, 663.

consequently hindered by the lack of administrative stability within New France brought on by *coureurs de bois* and the illicit fur trade.

Chapter 2: Illicit Trade and the Fracturing of New France Leadership

The prevalence of the illicit fur trade in New France meant that most colonial inhabitants came into contact with the trade in one way or another, but it was ultimately left to colonial administrators to curb its growth. The Governor General and Intendant were the preeminent administrators in New France.¹⁷³ The Intendant was the highest-ranking civic official and dealt with areas such as the administration of justice and overseeing public finances.¹⁷⁴ Conversely, military and diplomatic matters fell to the Governor, who was the King's representative in North America.¹⁷⁵ As members of the New France leadership, the Governor General and Intendant sat on an administrating body called the Sovereign Council, which also included civilian officials, the Bishop of New France, and nobles.¹⁷⁶ The Governor, the Intendant, and the Bishop all had specific responsibilities and jurisdictions. In some instances, however, there was overlap in these powers and roles, which created jurisdictional conflicts.¹⁷⁷ The Governor oversaw the colonial military and broad imperial interests, which included the western fur trade. The Intendant generally administered the 'economy' of New France, which also happened to include the western fur trade. Finally, the Bishop was in charge of both tending to French Catholics in Canada and overseeing missionary activities of various Catholic orders in the hinterland, where fur trading took place. Within this political climate and charged with their personal responsibilities, the heads of New France's government had to confront the

¹⁷³ As the Intendant and Governor oversaw most of the government systems in New France, the illicit fur trade fell under their jurisdictions in varying ways.

¹⁷⁴ Desbarats, "France in North America: The Net Burden of Empire," 1; Moogk, *La Nouvelle France*, 60.

¹⁷⁵ Moogk, *La Nouvelle France*, 60.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid; Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants*, xvii, 22. Dechêne presents an example of the Sovereign Council negotiating with Minister Colbert, suggesting its importance in the New France government.

¹⁷⁷ Moogk, *La Nouvelle France*, 60.

problem of illicit trading. Illicit trade might seem as though it was solely under the jurisdiction of the Intendant, as Intendants dealt with colonial justice. The diplomatic implications of trade with Indigenous peoples, however, meant that Governors also had to pay heed to the persistent problem of illicit trade.¹⁷⁸ The result was regular disagreements on how to best deal with the illicit trade and *coureurs de bois*, which ultimately led to administrative disunity in New France between 1663 and 1740.

The individual backgrounds of specific New France administrators informed their overall approach to duty and cooperation. Power and authority in New France was supposed to flow down from the King's absolute power, through to colonial officials, then land-owning nobles (*seigneurs*) and finally to common farmers (*habitants*).¹⁷⁹ This allocation of power did not always work as intended, due in part to the physical and logistical distance between the King and his colonial administrators. In France as well as New France, administrators like Intendants and Governors were expected to follow the recognized values of nobility and honour, such as adherence to social conventions and service to the King.¹⁸⁰ Although colonial officials came from an environment where social status was paramount, New France historian Gilles Havard argues that the geographical realities of New France meant that the social practices of the Ancien Régime faltered or disappeared completely.¹⁸¹ Overlapping jurisdictional authority regarding the fur trade

¹⁷⁸ Sleeper-Smith, "'[A]n Unpleasant Transaction on This Frontier,'" 419. Sleeper-Smith posits that the French considered the diplomatic advantages with Indigenous groups to be the crucial benefit of the fur trade, rather than the profits it made. Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins in North America and Europe, 1720-1760," 295.

¹⁷⁹ Moogk, *La Nouvelle France*, 77.

¹⁸⁰ Havard, *Empire et métissages*, 337.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 331.

combined with more relaxed social conventions in Canada to make administrative rivalries at least as pronounced as they were in the Colbertian period of King Louis XIV's France.¹⁸²

New France's Intendants and Governors often disagreed over how to regulate *coureurs de bois*, which helped to foster intense administrative rivalries. The fur trade was a driving force behind New France commerce, and therefore the colony's commercial interests were heavily invested in the success of the trade. The illicit fur trade disrupted legally regulated trade and demanded significant attention from colonial officials.¹⁸³ Handling the illicit fur trade efficiently and appropriately became a way for colonial administrators to demonstrate their effectiveness as leaders.¹⁸⁴ Rather than collaborating, colonial leaders frequently opposed each other over how to properly deal with the illicit trade. For example, Intendant Duchesneau and Governor Frontenac were at odds over the fur trade for most of Duchesneau's tenure as Intendant (1675-82). Disagreements over the illicit trade spilled over into other areas, such as colonial security or the implementation of justice, and affected the good governance of New France. This caused administrative processes to become inefficient, and jeopardized pillars of colonial sustainability, such as trade.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Ancien Régime: A History of France, 1610-1774*, trans. Mark Greengrass (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 151; William Doyle, *The Ancien Régime*, 2nd ed. (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2001), 17, 20.

¹⁸³ Kwass, *Contraband*, 9-10. Michael Kwass states that illicit contraband trade steadily increased between 1650-1800, as illegal markets grew in Europe and elsewhere. Cathy Matson, *Merchants and Empire: Trading in Colonial New York* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 6. Cathy Matson considers illicit trade to be one of the primary causes of the growth of mercantilism in English colonies. Tesdahl, "The Price of Empire: Smuggling Between New York and New France," 50.

¹⁸⁴ Desbarats, "The Cost of Early Canada's Native Alliances," 612.

¹⁸⁵ Havard, *Empire et métissages*, 336. Gilles Havard argues for one step further, that administrators were often rooted in corruption from the top down. See also: Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. LXV (Cleveland: The Burrows Company, 1901), 243, "Letter by Reverend Father Étienne de Carheil to Monsieur Louis-Hector de Callières, Governor – At Michilimackina, the 30th of august, 1702," Michilimackinac, August 30, 1702.

Governor Frontenac and Intendant Duchesneau

Colonial leaders like Intendant Duchesneau or Governor Frontenac did not always overtly express their political disagreements, and in fact, they often pretended to cooperate with one another for their own and the King's benefit. In 1681, Intendant Duchesneau wrote to Minister Colbert, and expressed surprise over what he felt was Governor Frontenac's questionable behaviour regarding the fur trade. The Intendant professed his willingness to work with Frontenac to reign in the estimated seven hundred *coureurs de bois* in New France and the *pays d'en haut*, and feigned surprise that Frontenac had informed the First Minister that the two men were on bad terms.¹⁸⁶ By pretending to get along with the Governor, Duchesneau was attempting to make Frontenac seem like the source of discord. Duchesneau's supposed "surprise" that Frontenac and he were on bad terms mirrored that of the King, and showed the Intendant's solidarity with the French Court.¹⁸⁷ In his strategic choice of words, Intendant Duchesneau was able to align himself firmly with the will of King Louis XIV and Minister Colbert. Duchesneau's purpose for doing so was to secure or increase his power in New France. Duchesneau avoided slandering Frontenac at the outset of his letter to Colbert and walked a line between insinuating that the Governor was inept and saying it outright. Intendant Duchesneau dropped this façade later, however, in favour of a more straightforward approach.

¹⁸⁶ LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance Générale, R11577-4-2-F, "Lettre de Duchesneau au ministre - la nomination de Seignelay ...," November 13, 1681, 295.

¹⁸⁷ Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea*, 26. The office of Intendant was supposed to create a bridge between the French Court and the colony. As such, it comes as no surprise that Intendants like Duchesneau were firmly loyal to metropolitan interests.

Intendant Duchesneau continued to appeal to Minister Colbert and King Louis XIV for support in his rivalry with Governor Frontenac. Duchesneau established his fidelity and fealty to the Crown by saying that "...I promise that everything in this letter that I have said is true."¹⁸⁸ To maintain the illusion of congeniality between himself and Frontenac, Duchesneau also said that there was some truth in Frontenac's reports.¹⁸⁹ To summarize his relationship with Frontenac and devotion to the King, Duchesneau wrote that:

...despite the bad treatment that I again received from Monsignor [Frontenac] I have done my best to obey the orders of his Majesty and those of the Bishop, that my very fair judgements in my letters and reports are not only based on the prevention of bias, or because of animosity, but on the justice, truth, and fidelity I have for the King and our Father of Foundations.¹⁹⁰

This passage provides insight into the strained relationship between Duchesneau and Frontenac, as well as Duchesneau's attempts to demonstrate his loyalty to the Crown. From Duchesneau's perspective, Frontenac had treated him unjustly, although it is important to interrogate these documents and not simply take them at face value. It is possible that Duchesneau was being disingenuous in his letter to Minister Colbert to further ingratiate himself to the French Court. At the very least, Duchesneau gave the impression that he was loyal to the wishes of the King. These revelations provide a useful precursor to continued discussions of colonial rivalries, as they form the outline for administrative relationships in New France during this period.¹⁹¹

Duchesneau's pleasantries regarding Governor Frontenac slowly fell away as he got more specific. For example, he went on to state that Frontenac was not to be trusted in

¹⁸⁸ LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance Générale, R11577-4-2-F, "Lettre de Duchesneau au ministre - la nomination de Seignelay ...," November 13, 1681, 295.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Miquelon, "Jean-Baptiste Colbert's 'Compact Colony Policy' Revisited," 13.

regard to granting trade licenses.¹⁹² Duchesneau was referring to a promise made by Frontenac that the Governor would no longer grant fur trade licenses for commerce in the interior with Indigenous peoples.¹⁹³ Fur trading outside of centres of French control such as Montreal, Quebec, or Trois-Rivières was prohibited.¹⁹⁴ Frontenac's promise of adhering to this prohibition was indicative of his fealty to the King and the wishes of the state. Duchesneau dismissed Frontenac's promise by imploring the King and French Court to not "...listen to the claims of those who tested the orders of the King."¹⁹⁵ The Intendant further disparaged Frontenac's name by saying that Frontenac did not want Duchesneau to inform the King of the multitude of *coureurs de bois* that plagued New France.¹⁹⁶ Duchesneau moved beyond trying to feign congruence with Frontenac, and instead questioned the Governor's loyalty and presented Frontenac as someone who could not be trusted with a position of authority.

Correspondence from the French Court acknowledge how tense the relationship between New France's Governor and Intendant had become. In 1680, Minister of the Marine, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, was scathingly critical of Frontenac's conduct as Governor and his behaviour towards Intendant Duchesneau. Colbert accused Frontenac of resisting

¹⁹² LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance Générale, R11577-4-2-F, "Lettre de Duchesneau au ministre - la nomination de Seignelay ...," November 13, 1681, 298; Miquelon, "Jean-Baptiste Colbert's 'Compact Colony Policy' Revisited," 13; Havard, *Empire et métissages*, 339. By 'trade permissions,' Duchesneau is referring to *congé*. Gilles Havard has established that from 1681 until at least 1696, the Governor of New France (Frontenac for the most part in this period) abused the *congé* system.

¹⁹³ LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance Générale, R11577-4-2-F, "Lettre de Duchesneau au ministre - la nomination de Seignelay ...," November 13, 1681, 298; Havard, *Histoire des coureurs de bois*, 43.

¹⁹⁴ Paul Mapp, *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire, 1713-1763* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 197. Trade occurring deep in the North American west, away from areas along the St. Lawrence, was not officially sanctioned by the French government.

¹⁹⁵ LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance Générale, R11577-4-2-F, "Lettre de Duchesneau au ministre - la nomination de Seignelay ...," November 13, 1681, 298.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* By claiming that Frontenac wants to withhold information from the King, Duchesneau presents him as a liar, or at least as someone who omits crucial information from his reports. This does not cast a very favourable light for Frontenac.

unity with the Intendant and was more inclined to sympathize with Duchesneau. Colbert noted that administrative disunity was problematic to the growth of New France, and stated that “...all the divisions arriving in the country are today the main cause of the loss and ruin of the new colonies.”¹⁹⁷ To the French Court, particularly Minister Colbert, the open nature of petty competition and rivalries in New France ran contrary to imperial designs, and frustrated colonial development.¹⁹⁸ Colbert’s instructions were that the “divisions” had to be remedied without resistance or intransigence from either the Governor or Intendant.¹⁹⁹ To Colbert, discord among colonial administrators was the greatest hindrance to further developing France’s colonial empire in North America.²⁰⁰ While Colbert does not address the specifics of administrative dissonance between Duchesneau and Frontenac, he is very clear about how troublesome disparity among the colonial leadership could be to the success of an empire.²⁰¹

Colbert’s instructions to Frontenac in 1680 called attention to the divisions between the Governor and Intendant Duchesneau. To stress the importance of unity, Colbert invoked the word of the King, stating that it was a direct command that the rivalry ceased. Colbert first acknowledged that he knew Frontenac had been feigning solidarity with

¹⁹⁷ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R1157-3-0-F, “Colbert à M. de Frontenac. Sa Majesté, après avoir examiné ...,” 1680, 54/17.

¹⁹⁸ Havard, *Empire et métissages*, 337. This is especially important considering that service and fidelity to the King was considered the utmost priority to a ‘noble soul.’ Petty squabbling was counterintuitive to the designs of the empire as well as disrespectful to the King’s majesty.

¹⁹⁹ Moogk, *La Nouvelle France*, 63. In May of 1664, the Custom of Paris (Coutume de Paris) was implemented as the legal basis for New France. It incorporated norms for social behaviours and conduct. Key to this was the expectation that society was to be aristocratic, patriarchal, agricultural, and Roman Catholic. As such, the leaders of the colony (Governor and Intendant) were expected to conduct themselves as aristocrats in the metropole would.

²⁰⁰ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R1157-3-0-F, “Colbert à M. de Frontenac. Sa Majesté, après avoir examiné ...,” 1680, 54/17.

²⁰¹ We must look at correspondences between specific administrators to find the causes of division and rivalry. For Frontenac and Duchesneau, we commonly see disagreements over the illicit trade as the primary separator (as discussed earlier).

Duchesneau, and then spoke directly for the King and stated that the administration in New France had been operating “...absolutely contrary to his will.”²⁰² These instructions show the common problems of distance and communication for colonial governments throughout the Atlantic world.²⁰³ Frontenac understood that the physical distance between New France and France allowed him to administer the colony with a degree of autonomy. Additionally, without a stable of competent replacements for positions like colonial Governor, Frontenac could continue to act and govern as he saw fit.²⁰⁴

Colbert’s instructions to Frontenac conclude by reiterating the desires of the King, as well as by calling the Governor’s ability into question. Colbert wrote that honour and dignity “...are qualities that befit a leader.”²⁰⁵ Colbert alluded to ideas of honour and dignity as a way to question if Frontenac had these qualities, in an effort to change his conduct as Governor. Minister Colbert was attempting to use a decidedly “Old World” strategy to alter “New World” behaviours of those who inhabited and operated the colonies. The inherent problem with trying to use European strategies to influence North American governance was that the culture, society, geography, and interculturalism of North America made old strategies ineffective or inefficient.²⁰⁶ Colbert finished by reminding Frontenac that he was fortunate to get a chance to remedy his conduct, rather than simply being presented with a

²⁰² LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R1157-3-0-F, “Colbert à M. de Frontenac. Sa Majesté, après avoir examiné ...,” 1680, 55/17.

²⁰³ Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea*, 22. Banks states that when New France was formed into a royal colony, King Louis XIV ‘recast’ the French Atlantic to be more in line with Ancien Régime practices. The King garnered more individual power to reign in colonial enterprises. Colbert is responding to these reforms, and suggesting that Frontenac is not following them.

²⁰⁴ Frontenac distancing himself from administrators like Intendant Duchesneau, who was more loyal to the desires of the Crown, similarly distanced the Governor from the Crown itself.

²⁰⁵ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R1157-3-0-F, “Colbert à M. de Frontenac. Sa Majesté, après avoir examiné ...,” 1680, 55/18.

²⁰⁶ Havard and Vidal, *Histoire de l’Amérique française*, 12, 17. The New World was inherently different than the Old, and strategies for governance could not easily be replicated.

letter of recall. In a final biting insult, the Minister of the Marine finished his letter to the Governor, stating that "...His Majesty does not want to have to entirely defer all the orders to Duchesneau."²⁰⁷ Not only did Colbert's statement again appeal to Frontenac's honour, but it showed overt favoritism towards Frontenac's colonial rival, Intendant Duchesneau. Colbert's intention was to manipulate Frontenac into falling in line by suggesting that Duchesneau was perhaps the more qualified of the two men to run the colony. By comparing Governor Frontenac to Intendant Duchesneau, Colbert appealed to Frontenac's ego as an authority figure. According to Colbert, colonial rivalries had a significant effect on New France's success as a colony, and needed to be remedied at every turn.

Intendant Duchesneau and Governor Frontenac most certainly exaggerated the extent of each other's inefficiencies. Regardless, the rivalry that these men had was indeed genuine. King Louis XIV described the rivalry in 1682 as consisting of "...extreme prejudice and continual disagreement between Governor Frontenac and Intendant Duchesneau."²⁰⁸ The King's indictment of Frontenac and Duchesneau's rivalry shows that his patience for the Governor and Intendant was waning. King Louis XIV understood that a petty rivalry between the top colonial officials in New France detracted from his prestige and glory. Discord between the Intendant and Governor "...forces His Majesty to reconcile the one with the other."²⁰⁹ The problem of administrative divisions in New France had escalated to envelope the highest authority in the empire, and prior pleasantries began to fall away. The King was, however, simply reaffirming Minister Colbert's argument that incongruence

²⁰⁷ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R1157-3-0-F, "Colbert à M. de Frontenac. Sa Majesté, après avoir examiné ...," 1680, 55a/19.

²⁰⁸ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R11577-3-0-F, "Instructions du roi, pour être remises à M. de la ...," 1682, 16/114.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

between the Governor and Intendant was the root of all New France's problems.²¹⁰

Condemnations of Frontenac and Duchesneau's rivalry continued to arrive from Versailles, suggesting that colonial rivalries in New France were an ongoing problem. The King considered these administrative conflicts to be a primary reason for the difficulties in establishing a strong French presence in North America.

Unified colonial leadership was important to the King inasmuch as it was a means to an end. What was most important was that colonial administrators were unified with the Crown in spirit and in action so that they could properly exercise the King's will in North America. The King asserted that once Frontenac and Duchesneau began acting harmoniously, they were to ensure that "...the French inhabitants who [were] established in the country" were kept "...in complete tranquility, honesty, and to keep them in the right possession of all that belongs to them."²¹¹ This seems like a very basic instruction, but some analysis reveals that the King was trying to remedy the problems created by illicit trade. The inhabitants were supposed to be honest and lawful, and they were to retain that which was owed to them, namely, access to the profits of legal trade.²¹² King Louis XIV also instructed that Frontenac and Duchesneau were to "...keep the amount of inhabitants present, and even to increase the number of inhabitants every year."²¹³ In these instructions was a reminder of what Frontenac and Duchesneau were intended to do as

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Carolyn Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 293. It is important to distinguish *coureurs de bois* from *voyageurs* and other participants of legal trade who had express permission to engage in the fur trade. Here we can think of 'that which was owed to them' as being monies, goods, or merchandise that would be profited from legal trade. This would not be available to legal traders if *coureurs de bois* and illicit trade continued to dominate the market.

²¹³ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R11577-3-0-F, "Instructions du roi, pour être remises à M. de la ...," 1682, 16/114.

Governor and Intendant of New France. From the King's perspective, by busying themselves with their rivalry, Frontenac and Duchesneau were losing sight of how they were supposed to be exercising the King's will in New France. King Louis XIV also signified that divisions in leadership had the propensity to divide the people. New France already had difficulties with men who undermined colonial authority, such as *coureurs de bois*, and administrative divisions only exacerbated this problem.²¹⁴

By the late seventeenth century, King Louis XIV was especially suspicious about Frontenac's character and his efficacy as Governor General. In 1698, Secretary of State Louis Phélypeaux, comte de Pontchartrain wrote to Frontenac about the Governor's choice to abandon the forts at Michilimakinac and Fort Miami.²¹⁵ Abandonment of these forts was somewhat unexpected, as Frontenac had argued that they should be maintained amid previous inquiries into their usefulness.²¹⁶ Pontchartrain stated that Frontenac must have inevitably decided to abandon them because trading furs was now prohibited at the forts. Secretary Pontchartrain also noted that according to Frontenac "...the officers and soldiers could not subsist there without trading for furs."²¹⁷ Frontenac's altered stance on the forts was alarming to ministers like Pontchartrain, and questions of his fidelity abounded at Versailles.²¹⁸ Again, the problem was not that Frontenac chose to abandon the forts, but as

²¹⁴ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 13-14. In many ways, *coureurs de bois* were "contrarians" who rejected their expected roles as obedient *habitants*.

²¹⁵ Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 67, "Pontchartrain to Frontenac and Champigny," Versailles, May 21, 1698.

²¹⁶ Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 61, "Ordinance for Maintaining the Frontenac, Michilimackinac, and St. Joseph of the Miamis posts," Versailles, April 28, 1697.

²¹⁷ Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 67, "Pontchartrain to Frontenac and Champigny," Versailles, May 21, 1698.

²¹⁸ Havard, *Empire et métissages*, 336. Havard states that the French Court at Versailles was generally suspicious of the loyalty of New France officials. Rampant corruption and the continued spread of the illicit fur trade caused the French Court to lose confidence in its North American administrators.

Pontchartrain said, "...His Majesty was surprised to learn that after insisting as you did on the necessity of continuing the Missilimaquinat [*sic*] and Miamis posts You abandoned them."²¹⁹ The narrative that Governor Frontenac had constructed up to that point – that the forts were essential to the success of New France as a whole – began to falter. Once Pontchartrain, and by extension the King, learned that the Governor saw value in Michilimackinac and Fort Miami primarily for what they offered for the fur trade, Frontenac's intentions came into question. Frontenac was deviating from past claims, and his lack of consistency on issues of policy were alarming. Frontenac's position as Governor demanded reliability and consistency, neither of which were qualities that he was successfully displaying.

The closing of forts in the *pays d'en haut* did not arouse the suspicions of the French Court. Rather, Frontenac's actions confirmed prior suspicions. Pontchartrain noted that Frontenac's reason for closing the forts "...seemed quite weak to His Majesty," and implied that Frontenac's motives were already in question.²²⁰ Pontchartrain suspected that Frontenac's actions were motivated by personal interest. It became clear to the King and French Court that the entire reason Frontenac initially wanted the forts to remain "...was rather to satisfy the greed of several officers than the necessity of holding on to the Territory that these settlements had been established."²²¹ The French Court was 'confirming' suspicions that were brought to its attention through reports and

²¹⁹ Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 67, "Pontchartrain to Frontenac and Champigny," Versailles, May 21, 1698.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ *Ibid.*; Havard, *Empire et métissages*, 337. Men like Jesuit Father Carheil discuss the "debauchery" of military men at Michilimackinac, and by this period the level of decency and integrity at the fort was questionable.

correspondence.²²² The French Court did not speculate about the greed of officers on its own, rather, administrators like Pontchartrain had to rely on letters from New France. As historian Kenneth Banks argues, "...informing well and being well informed on transatlantic issues comprised the sinews of power for overseas administrators."²²³ Canadians were entirely foreign to men like Pontchartrain, and navigating the 'Canadian administration' was difficult to do from France. French courtiers at Versailles could therefore do nothing more than to take what was given to them from North American correspondence and try to come to logical conclusions based on the information.²²⁴ It was up to the French Court to disentangle the rivalries in New France, and to decide on the best course of action given what was occurring on the ground. This would have been exceedingly difficult as those who should have been trusted – the administration – were those who were involved in these rivalries.

Beyond Frontenac and Duchesneau

Intendant Duchesneau and Governor Frontenac found themselves at the centre of plenty of disagreements over colonial policy, but they were not the only New France officials embroiled in administrative disagreements. The Marquis de Denonville, who served as Governor General between 1685-1689 and was instrumental in New France's Iroquois policy prior to the Great Peace of Montreal in 1701, found himself at odds with men like Robert de La Salle. In 1686, La Salle, an accomplished French explorer of the

²²² Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea*, 27. Communication was inextricably tied to power in the Atlantic world.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 30.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

interior, became primary proprietor and Governor of Fort Frontenac (present-day Kingston, Ontario), which was situated at the mouth of the Cataraqui River. La Salle had helped to establish Fort Frontenac with Governor Frontenac in 1673, making him a good choice to administer the fort.²²⁵ Although La Salle was Governor of Fort Frontenac, the King's instructions to Governor General Denonville that he "...be careful to do nothing contrary to the interests of Sr de la Salle," would have been an affront to Denonville.²²⁶ As Governor General of the colony, Denonville would have considered himself superior to La Salle in all colonial issues, and would not have believed it to be his responsibility to further La Salle's interests. King Louis XIV's instructions would have reaffirmed that the King was the true authority in New France, as his word was law above all else. These instructions also show that Denonville and La Salle frequently disagreed over whose personal and professional interests were more imperative to New France's operation.

Antoine de La Mothe Cadillac, who founded Detroit in 1701 and had a close relationship with Governor Frontenac, also found himself amid political discord. In 1694 he complained to, as New France scholar Joseph Peyser states, "a highly placed person at the French court," about what he thought were the most problematic elements of New France.²²⁷ Cadillac lamented that there were those at the French Court who misunderstood the motives for men who became *coureurs de bois*, as well as criticized them for their disconnectedness from New France, and that they thought men only became *coureurs de*

²²⁵ "The History of Fort Frontenac," *The Cataraqui Archaeological Research Foundation*, 2017.

²²⁶ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 157, "Louis XIV to Denonville," Paris, May 31, 1686.

²²⁷ Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 56.

bois because of “wantonness.”²²⁸ Cadillac also urged the French Court “...to persuade [Monsieur de Pontchartrain] to reflect on whether an officer can subsist at Michilimackinac with the amount of this salary.”²²⁹ Cadillac did not openly challenge Minister Pontchartrain’s salary policies for officers at Michilimackinac, but did suggest that it was troubling and insufficient. Furthermore, Cadillac questioned whether Intendant Champigny – who was committed to the King’s policy of halting expansion and fur trading in the *pays d’en haut* – was administering honourably, or was simply acting upon “...some motive coming from jealousy.”²³⁰ The most significant aspect of Cadillac’s criticisms is that they show that New France officials had subsidiary support in their rivalries. Governor Frontenac was an aging man near the end of his second term as Governor General in 1694, yet the writings of officials such as Cadillac show that Frontenac still had supporters in the communications networks of French transatlantic correspondence.

Cadillac’s negative opinion of Intendant Champigny continued throughout 1697, at a time when Cadillac was attempting to restore the fur trade to Forts Michilimackinac and St. Joseph. In a letter to an unidentified superior at the French Court, Cadillac wrote that there was disconnectedness between himself and Intendant Champigny, and that the Intendant had openly expressed resentment towards him.²³¹ Cadillac wrote that, at times, he would receive contrary orders from Intendant Champigny and Governor Frontenac, but in the end, he “...always carried [Frontenac’s orders] out assiduously judging that he is the sole

²²⁸ Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 56, “Report of Cadillac for 1694,” Michilimackinac, 1694.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid., 57.

²³¹ Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 65, “Cadillac to Unknown,” Quebec, October 20, 1697.

person in this country who should explain the King's intent."²³² The question of whose authority should reign supreme was a common underpinning to disagreements and administrative divisions in New France during this period. The administrative system of New France between 1663 and 1740 was not always unified, and men such as Cadillac frequently argued that the Governor General should personify the King in New France. Problems typically arose when officials like Intendant Champigny vied for extensions of power and authority beyond their official political mandate, or into grey areas where official political jurisdictions overlapped.²³³

It would be disingenuous to suggest that Frontenac was the only Governor General to receive criticism for his supposed involvement in illicit trade. Philippe de Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil, who was Governor between 1703-1725, was accosted by the Council of Marine because "...all the Montreal businessmen have lodged a complaint against you for the indirect business which is taking place in the upper country."²³⁴ Vaudreuil was not one to take criticisms lightly, however, and wrote back to the Council "...that it is extremely sad for me to be exposed in this way to this kind of calumny because of the Permissiveness with which the Council accepts unfounded Complaints from unscrupulous people."²³⁵ Administrative discord was typical of New France's political environment during this period. It was consistently difficult for the French Court at Versailles to substantiate any claims made for or against administrators across the Atlantic, as there were too many

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 82.

²³⁴ Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 108, "Council to Vaudreuil," Paris, May 5, 1722.

²³⁵ Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 113, "Vaudreuil to the Council," Quebec, October 20, 1722.

contradictory accounts in the information pouring into Versailles in the form of letters and reports. Men such as Governor Vaudreuil, and Governor Frontenac before him, often had to present their case for legitimacy and fidelity of their own accord. The King's acceptance of their testimony was not always assured, and administrative strength therefore remained in a state of flux. The recall to France of both Frontenac and Duchesneau in 1682 was a testament to this administrative weakness, and marked the culmination of a long-standing rivalry between the Governor and Intendant.²³⁶

Lasting Effects of Administrative Disunity

Disagreements over the handling of illicit trade formed the basis of colonial rivalries, but they were expressed in more substantial ways. For example, Frontenac and Duchesneau commonly tried to undermine each other's efficacy. In 1682, Duchesneau questioned Frontenac's dealings with the Iroquois, and a proposed trip to Fort Frontenac.²³⁷ Duchesneau stated that Frontenac "...did not think it right to go to Fort Frontenac in the month of June last, as the Iroquois requested."²³⁸ Duchesneau's comments were a direct criticism of Frontenac's lack of follow-through in regard to Indigenous diplomacy.²³⁹ According to Duchesneau, Frontenac's absence in this instance denied the

²³⁶ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 145, "Frontenac to Duchesneau," Quebec, August 5, 1682.

²³⁷ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 143, "Duchesneau to Frontenac," Quebec, July 28, 1682; White, *The Middle Ground*, 59. Dealing with Indigenous groups was a significant part of administrating New France. Compromises and cooperation had to be reached to ensure the continued survival of France's holdings in North America. By calling Frontenac's adherence to doing so into question, Duchesneau is delegitimizing his effectiveness as a colonial leader.

²³⁸ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 143, "Duchesneau to Frontenac," Quebec, July 28, 1682.

²³⁹ Tesdahl, "The Price of Empire: Smuggling Between New York and New France," 55; Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants*, 17. Administrating North American colonies effectively required extensive diplomacy with Indigenous groups such as the Iroquois. The European powers knew this, and this was especially true for the

Iroquois "...justice which you had promised them against the Kiskakons."²⁴⁰ Duchesneau wanted to show Frontenac's incompetence in dealing with the Iroquois, a strong confederacy that had to be appeased.²⁴¹ Reporting on Frontenac's absence might have been the only way that word would reach Versailles. Frontenac himself would obviously not report that he failed to follow up on Iroquois requests. But this is also a showcase of colonial rivalries in effect. Duchesneau went out of his way to question Frontenac's decisions as a leader, specifically regarding French-Indigenous diplomacy.

Duchesneau did not hesitate to surmise the possible consequences of Frontenac's inaction. The Illinois, an Algonquian-speaking peoples who were allies of the French, were facing Iroquois incursions into their territory in the western Ohio Valley. By Frontenac not diplomatically dealing with the Iroquois, the Iroquois assumed that the French were weak and not willing to defend their Algonquian-speaking allies throughout the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley; as Intendant Duchesneau stated, this would cause the Iroquois to "...not doubt but that you were abandoning the Illinois to them."²⁴² Duchesneau was goading Frontenac into action, doubting his decisions, and also iterated that the Iroquois would think "...that you would be pleased that they should themselves treat the Kiskakons as they deserve since they would have reason to believe that you would put yourself to no more trouble about it."²⁴³ Again, this was pure speculation by Duchesneau, and while he was basing his assumptions on perceptions he may have had of Iroquois actions, there is no way that

French who had to rely more extensively on Indigenous support. It would be expected that a man like Frontenac would know this, and would act accordingly.

²⁴⁰ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 143, "Duchesneau to Frontenac," Quebec, July 28, 1682.

²⁴¹ Parmenter and Robison, "The Perils and Possibilities of Wartime Neutrality on the Edges of Empire," 172.

²⁴² Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 143, "Duchesneau to Frontenac," Quebec, July 28, 1682.

²⁴³ Ibid.

Duchesneau could have been assured of this outcome.²⁴⁴ Finally, Duchesneau suggested that Frontenac knew the consequences of letting the Iroquois have their way with the Illinois and Kiskakons even better than himself.²⁴⁵ By reminding Frontenac that ‘he knows the consequences of his actions,’ Duchesneau was bringing attention to Frontenac’s ineptitude. Correspondence between rivals like Duchesneau and Frontenac reveal a contest for power in New France that adversely influenced effective governance of the colony.

Although disagreements abounded between Duchesneau and Frontenac, Duchesneau remained hesitant to completely disregard Frontenac’s station as Governor. In speaking of the need for Frontenac to meet with the Iroquois, Duchesneau conceded that “...it seems to me that it is difficult for you to refuse it in the present conjuncture,” primarily because “...we can hope for nothing from France.”²⁴⁶ Duchesneau was suggesting a commitment to cooperating with Frontenac as a cohesive governing body in New France, not because he wanted to, but because he had little choice.²⁴⁷ Duchesneau’s dissatisfaction with Frontenac’s behaviour and decisions continued throughout this half-hearted cooperation, as he stressed that “...you ought to do nothing unworthy of your character,” and that Frontenac should “...keep your dignity and your authority intact.”²⁴⁸ A sense of dislike remained in Duchesneau and Frontenac’s correspondence, even when they seemingly supported each other. The incongruence between Frontenac and Duchesneau

²⁴⁴ Jon Parmenter, “L’arbe de Paix’: Eighteenth-Century Franco-Iroquois Relations,” *French Colonial History* 4 (2003): 65. Parmenter argues that the Iroquois themselves (particularly after the Great Peace of 1701) saw the value in maintaining strong Franco-Iroquois relations. This suggests that the Iroquois did not haphazardly cause the relationship to deteriorate. Perhaps then, Duchesneau is taking some liberties for dramatic effect.

²⁴⁵ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 143, “Duchesneau to Frontenac,” Quebec, July 28, 1682.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

was pervasive, and their disagreements and rivalry influenced nearly everything that New France's Intendant and Governor tried to accomplish.²⁴⁹

The Church Weighs In

Given the Church's importance to early modern French culture, its place in these colonial rivalries cannot be overlooked. New France church historian Daniel A. Scalberg notes that by the early eighteenth century, high-ranking clergymen such as the Bishop of Quebec City, Jean Baptiste de Saint-Vallier, reported that groups such as the Jesuits continually faced problems in their missionary efforts.²⁵⁰ Saint-Vallier blamed the fur trade for sabotaging Jesuit missionary efforts, and claimed that as much as six per cent of the New France population were drawn to trade brandy and rum for furs.²⁵¹ Historian Joseph Peyser realized the importance of the Catholic Church to New France diplomatic policy, and wrote that "[the Canadian Bishop's] exhortation to the Council of the Marine that France move quickly to forestall its enemy's designs suggests the dual religious and political role of the Church in New France."²⁵² The Council of the Marine itself stated in 1717 that "...the Jesuit Fathers are the ones who best succeed in the Missions and are most capable of leading the Indians. It is certain that they serve both Religion and the State equally well."²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Moogk, *La Nouvelle France*, 60; Peter Moogk states that "real political power in the colony belonged to the Governor General," as he represented the King's will and person on the ground. The Governor handled military and political matters. The Intendant, on the other hand, dealt with civilian matters, which included administering justice and public finances. There were other bodies, like the Sovereign Council and religious orders, but most power and influence rested with the Governor and Intendant.

²⁵⁰ Scalberg, "The French-Amerindian Religious Encounter," 101.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 102; the problem with this is that liquor had the tendency to undermine attempts at Christianization or 'civilization' of Indigenous peoples. To the missionaries, drinking liquor and acting on its effects was incongruent with acting morally, Christian, or civilized.

²⁵² Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 91.

²⁵³ Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 92, "Minutes of the Council of Marine," Paris, February 26, 1717.

Clearly there was recognition from the French Court that the Catholic Orders were crucial to French-Indigenous diplomacy in North America, even if some missionaries were not always afforded the support they required. Given the influential position of the Church in New France there is little wonder that its leaders found themselves entangled in the quagmire of New France politics.

Influential clergymen occasionally had to embroil themselves in colonial politics, due in part to the compromised position of some of the Church's missionary efforts. In 1682, Jesuit Father Lamberville appealed to Governor Frontenac in response to defamations of his character.²⁵⁴ Lamberville stated "...that surely some person has slandered us to you on two or three occasions," and concluded that "...I have never thought of anything but furthering, with [my] feeble power, all the good intentions that you have had and still have toward Canada."²⁵⁵ That Lamberville chose to appeal to Governor Frontenac shows that he sought favor with the person who most directly represented the King in New France. Colonial politics were so important to the Church's ability to safeguard its interests that Lamberville had no choice but to become involved.

A 1718 memorial by Father Joseph-François Lafitau shows an attempt by a Jesuit missionary to the Kahnawake Mohawks to navigate New France politics. The memorial itself was addressed to members of the Sovereign Council, and was concerned with the sale of liquor to Indigenous peoples whom the Jesuits hoped to Christianize. Lafitau wrote this appeal because he hoped that it would "...induce the council to give such precise orders for

²⁵⁴ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. LXII (Cleveland: The Burrows Company, 1901), 153, "Letter from Father Lamberville to Monsieur de Frontenac, Sept. 20, 1682," Onondaga, Sept. 20, 1682.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

preventing this traffic – which is almost the sole obstacle to the labors of the missionaries.”²⁵⁶ The Jesuits – and to some extent the entire Catholic Church in New France – had a stake in colonial politics, as decisions and compromises made by the upper echelons of government impacted their success in their missionary activities. This seems especially true, as Lafitau later requested “...that Messieurs the Governors will be obliged to execute those orders; and that no one will dare to evade them, as has been done in the past.”²⁵⁷ According to Lafitau’s estimation, management of illicit commerce had been slipping out of control. He and clergymen like him were losing confidence in the colonial government’s ability to adequately govern New France. New France’s administration did not always act as one cohesive unit, and different groups did whatever was necessary to ensure that their own interests were realized.²⁵⁸ Some Jesuits felt obligated to involve themselves in the political rivalries, trading insults, and the poisonous colonial administrative environment. Embroiling oneself in colonial politics seemed to be the only way, or at least the most effective way, to ensure that one’s goals and aspirations were met.

Church leadership in New France was typically unable to separate its missionary activities from the secular decisions of the administration and French Court. This is highlighted in a 1721 missive from the Marine Council to Governor Vaudreuil that

²⁵⁶ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. LXVII (Cleveland: The Burrows Company, 1901), 43, “Memorial by Father Lafitau: On the sale of Liquor to the Savages,” Paris, 1718; Sleeper-Smith, “[A]n Unpleasant Transaction on This Frontier”, 435. ‘Traffic’ in this passage refers to illegal trafficking or illicit trading of furs for liquor. Any trade that involved giving liquor to Indigenous peoples was considered an ongoing problem for missionaries. There were laws in place to stop the liquor trade to Indigenous peoples, but they were often circumvented.

²⁵⁷ Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, vol. LXVII (Cleveland: The Burrows Company, 1901), 43, “Memorial by Father Lafitau: On the sale of Liquor to the Savages,” Paris, 1718. Again, ‘those orders’ are referring to orders given against the illicit fur trade, and *coureurs de bois* specifically.

²⁵⁸ Moogk, *La Nouvelle France*, 12.

concerns, among other things, King Louis XV's control over the Church. Absolute monarchy in France was by divine right of Kings, appointed by God, and sanctioned in some ways by the Pope. The Church of France, or Gallican Church, somewhat restrained the Pope's authority in France in favour of the bishops and temporal ruler.²⁵⁹ French historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie argues that the French State was almost as much of a divine creation as the Church. Ladurie writes that the French clergy were to be submissive to the King, and that this was one of the most profound roots of absolutism.²⁶⁰ The Council wrote that it disapproved of the marriage of Vaudreuil's nephew without the King's approval. The Council argued that, as absolute monarch, the King should have a measure of control over the Church in New France.²⁶¹ Additionally, the Council wrote that "...nor did He approve of the Bishop of Quebec's celebrating this marriage," which suggests that the King and Marine Council believed that the King should have direct involvement in Church decisions. The Council also expressed that it approved of the request for additional Jesuit missionaries to be sent to New France, and that the King would do his best to see the request realized.²⁶² Even if the Church had wanted to distance itself from New France politics, it was firmly enmeshed in the designs of the French Empire by default. Church leaders like the Bishop of Quebec or the Temporal Head of the Jesuits of New France had to not only concede to the King's policies, but at times had to rely on them. Much like France itself, spiritual and temporal decision-making were inextricably entwined in New France. For Catholic Orders

²⁵⁹ Antoine Dégert, "Gallicanism," in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 6 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909).

²⁶⁰ Ladurie, *The Ancien Régime*, 43.

²⁶¹ Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 103, "Council to Vaudreuil," Paris, June 14, 1721. As the name suggests, the Marine Council was in charge of France's naval forces. Additionally, the Marine Council oversaw France's colonies, and the Minister of the Marine worked closely with the King to realize France's colonial vision.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 104.

like the Jesuits to succeed in their mission of Indigenous Christianization, they had to realize their place in New France politics, and what that meant for their own ambitions.

Conclusion

Rivalry and competition ultimately defined colonial politics in New France between 1663 and 1740. Not only did this environment of political disunity influence decisions regarding colonial government, it also dictated how these decisions were made. Competition and rivalry among colonial administrators created problems for New France, and hindered the implementation of the King's imperial designs for North America. The more time that New France officials devoted to navigating the political realities of the colony, the less time they could spend on adequately forming New France into a self-sufficient, economically profitable colony. Legitimate, stabilized fur trading was substantially hindered by the politicking of New France administrators, which thus hurt France's ability to maintain strong relations with Indigenous nations in the interior. The question of what to do about *coureurs de bois* and the illicit trade dominated a significant portion of colonial discussion and correspondence. The illicit trade undermined legal trading, and disagreements over how to manage illicit fur trading commonly caused administrative disunity. The way that colonial officials handled illicit trade was a focal point that emphasized differences in governing style, individual aspirations, and loyalty to the King. There was, however, the potential for administrative disagreements between colonial officials based on social origins and status, individual desires for power, and personal dislike. Administrative discord was exacerbated by illicit trading throughout New France as colonial officials struggled to agree over how the trade could be curbed. Illicit fur

trading was therefore a persistent problem for New France administrators that continually hampered their ability to govern according to the King's wishes.

Chapter 3: Fort Frontenac – A Case Study of Illicit Trading and Administration on the Frontier

In the summer of 1673, Governor Frontenac began construction of Fort Frontenac with the express purpose of increasing colonial defence and establishing a commercial centre for *voyageurs* and Indigenous traders. Fort Frontenac was situated at the mouth of the Cataraqui River on Lake Ontario, and is now the site of the Canadian city of Kingston, Ontario.²⁶³ The fort stood for nearly one hundred years after its construction, and went through periods of occupation and abandonment that largely depended on its usefulness to the Crown. The Crown was frequently skeptical of Fort Frontenac's utility, due to reports of the questionable behaviour of the fort's administrators, as well as the dubious nature of the fort's imperial benefits. Colonial Intendants under King Louis XIV such as Jacques Duchesneau and Jean Bochart de Champigny and Governors like the Marquis de Denonville and Joseph-Antoine de La Barre argued against maintaining Fort Frontenac because of its reputation for corruption.²⁶⁴ Contrarily, Governor Frontenac's personal interests often aligned with *voyageurs* and *coureurs de bois* who utilized Fort Frontenac, and therefore the Governor resisted calls from the Royal Court to have the fort dismantled. Governor Frontenac and supporters such as Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac and Robert de La Salle continually advocated to preserve Fort Frontenac, keeping the fort

²⁶³ Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea*, 25.

²⁶⁴ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 143, "Duchesneau to Frontenac," Quebec, July 28, 1682; Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 187, "Champigny to the Minister," Quebec, Oct. 24, 1694; Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 134, "Denonville to Seignelay," Quebec, Nov. 16, 1686; Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 132, "Louis XIV to La Barre," Paris, Apr. 10, 1684.

relevant throughout Frontenac's governorships.²⁶⁵ This chapter will explore Fort Frontenac as a case study for examining the corruption of high-ranking colonial officials and their involvement in the New France illicit fur trade.

An examination of corruption and illicit trade out of Fort Frontenac shows real instances of administrative inefficiencies and incompetence, proof that political disunity was not simply an abstract notion expressed in imperial correspondence. Contrary reports about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of Fort Frontenac displays the discord within New France. It was the level of uncertainty and lawfulness of places like Fort Frontenac that made Kings, councils, and first ministers come to understand some of the problems of governing an overseas empire. Legal uncertainties in New France also illustrate the clandestine nature of *coureurs de bois* and the illicit fur trade, as well as the difficulty in constructing an empire based on commerce. Military forts in New France's hinterland were administrative nightmares because the forts afforded individual stakeholders opportunities to make large sums of money through illegitimate means. Above all, Fort Frontenac's ambiguous status as both hub for illegal trade and legitimate imperial space makes it useful for examining the intersection between colonial administration and the illicit fur trade.

Beginnings

Early reports from New France to Versailles suggest that support for the construction of Fort Frontenac was initially widespread. Some clergymen, particularly

²⁶⁵ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 131, "Memoir to the Gentlemen Partners of the Society Invested with the Farm and Commerce of Canada, on Ways to Prevent Frauds in Beavers," Quebec, 1683.

Jesuit missionaries, saw the value of Fort Frontenac to their own goals of Indigenous conversion.²⁶⁶ Missionaries were primarily interested in royal fort construction because of the potential that forts had for bringing Indigenous peoples closer to centres of French culture and Christian conversion, such as Catholic missions along the St. Lawrence River.²⁶⁷ Missionaries understood that providing Indigenous peoples opportunities to trade improved French commerce and French-Indigenous diplomacy, as they commonly lived and operated within Indigenous communities.²⁶⁸ By 1671, missionaries came to the understanding that a royal fort “...could obstruct the Dutch trade,” and therefore the Iroquois (Dutch allies) would be “...compelled to go hunting in the northern countries where there [was] a prodigious quantity of beaver, otter, etc., and to cross Lake Ontario for that purpose.”²⁶⁹ The majority of missionaries certainly cared more about the fur trade’s ability to bring Indigenous peoples into the Christian sphere than what an increase in trade meant for the French Empire. Many Catholic missionaries in New France felt that the illicit fur trade resulted in the spread of the liquor consumption and immoral behaviour, and therefore despised its influence on Indigenous communities. Royal forts with military officers and soldiers were seen as a deterrent to illicit trade and the social ills that came with it.²⁷⁰ Missionaries therefore had their own reason for supporting the construction of Fort Frontenac outside of the imperial implications for France in North America.

²⁶⁶ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 103, “Memorandum by a Missionary,” Quebec, 1671.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Scalberg, “The French-Amerindian Religious Encounter,” 104.

²⁶⁹ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 103, “Memorandum by a Missionary,” Quebec, 1671.

²⁷⁰ Scalberg, “The French-Amerindian Religious Encounter,” 104, 105. Efforts to ‘tame’ and moralize illegal traders by missionaries alone were largely unsuccessful. Illegal trading was a problematic obstacle to missionary efforts due to the proximity that *coureurs de bois* and Indigenous peoples often lived to Catholic missions.

Governor Frontenac himself was the person with the largest stake in the success or failure of Fort Frontenac. The Governor lobbied for imperial support for its construction, and claimed to First Minister Colbert that he would “...spare neither care nor trouble, nor even my life if necessary, to attempt to do something to please you and to acknowledge the obligations which I have owed you all my life.”²⁷¹ Frontenac intentionally used language that would appeal to Colbert’s sense of French dignity and desire for French global influence.²⁷² Frontenac asked Colbert, “...whether, despite our weakness, we should not begin to set up a post there,” implying that the French Empire was losing ground in the race for power in North America. Finally, Frontenac claimed that by erecting a fort at the mouth of the Cataraqui River, the military “...would also be a support for the mission which the Gentlemen of the Montreal Seminary already have at Quintay.”²⁷³ By his account, Fort Frontenac would help spread French Catholicism among the Indigenous peoples of North America. Frontenac was still on good terms with the Royal Court at Versailles in 1672, and he could plea his case for a fort by appealing to the grandeur of King and empire. Over the following decades the political climate in New France changed and Frontenac’s motives came under scrutiny.²⁷⁴

The Comte de Frontenac initially garnered a substantial amount of prestige from his namesake fort, regardless of his initial intentions for constructing it. Frontenac was lauded

²⁷¹ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 106, “Frontenac to Colbert,” Quebec, Nov. 2, 1672.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid. “Quintay” refers to the Bay of Quinte, which is located on the northern shore of Lake Ontario.

²⁷⁴ LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R1157-3-0-F, “Colbert à M. de Frontenac. Sa Majesté, après avoir examiné ...,” 1680, 55/18; Joseph Peyser, ed. and trans., *Letters from New France: The Upper Country 1686-1783* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 67, “Pontchartrain to Frontenac and Champigny,” Versailles, May 21, 1698; LAC, Série B, Lettres envoyées, R11577-3-0-F, “Instructions du roi, pour être remises à M. de la ...,” 1682, 16/114. These are just a few documents that outline the French court’s displeasure with Frontenac.

for his oratory skills prior to the fort's assembly, which later gave him greater negotiating power when he needed to advocate for the fort's continuation. Jesuit Father Lamberville stated in the fall of 1673 "...that if [Frontenac] had not won [the Iroquois] chiefs at Katarakoui [*sic*] by [his] generosity and by [his] so very great affability, we believe that the French who are here would be either dead or chased out of the country."²⁷⁵ According to Lamberville, the Dutch were making inroads into the destruction of the French, and it was only through Frontenac's will that the French were saved.²⁷⁶ The praise heaped on Frontenac is worth exploring, and the rhetoric meant to lift up the Governor may have been somewhat misleading. French colonial historian Jon Parmenter argues that New France administrators were – and had to be – exceptionally adept at intertwining French interests with Iroquois interests, who often allied with France's enemies such as the English.²⁷⁷ By that estimation, Governor Frontenac was simply doing what French colonial administrators did out of necessity, and that he was not, as Father Lamberville suggested, going beyond his call of duty. The implication is that Father Lamberville was purposefully ingratiating himself to Frontenac, which seems like politically prudent maneuvering given Frontenac's prestige both in Canada and France in 1673.²⁷⁸ Lamberville was a Jesuit father, not a

²⁷⁵ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 108, "Copy of a Note Included in Father Lamberville's Letter to Frontenac," Quebec, Oct. 29, 1673.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.* The Dutch lost their North American possessions at Albany and New York in 1664, but were able to exert influence in 1673 because they retook the region in that year. The Dutch definitively lost these territories in the following year (1674).

²⁷⁷ Parmenter, "L'arbe de Paix': Eighteenth-Century Franco-Iroquois Relations," 67.

²⁷⁸ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 108, "Copy of a Note Included in Father Lamberville's Letter to Frontenac," Quebec, Oct. 29, 1673. Note that this excerpt was attached to a more formal letter to Frontenac concerning a cultural exchange of some Iroquois children from Onondaga. See: Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 108, "Father Lamberville, Jesuit, to Frontenac," Quebec, Sept. 9, 1673.

politician, and his actions show that all New France institutions, even the Church, had to deal with the politics of colonial governance.

Royal Responses to Fort Frontenac

Initial reactions from France to Governor Frontenac's construction of a fort on the Cataraqui River were tempered. Just a year after Fort Frontenac was established, First Minister Colbert expressed his general displeasure towards Governor Frontenac for its construction.²⁷⁹ This response from Colbert, and by extension the King, had less to do with the fort itself, and more to do with Frontenac's conduct as Governor.²⁸⁰ Minister Colbert deviated from a discussion on the fort to note "...that His Majesty's intent is that you should not make long voyages up the St. Lawrence River, nor even that in the future the colonists should spread out as much as they have done in the past."²⁸¹ The minister pressed Frontenac "...to crowd [the colonists] together, and to group them and settle them in towns and villages," to better populate Canada.²⁸² Minister Colbert wanted nothing more than for the Governor to oversee settlement, and expressed that it was

...more expedient for [the King's] service that you should apply yourself to have cleared and settled those vast fertile places . . . rather than that you should think of discoveries in the interior of the country, so remote that they can never be inhabited or possessed by Frenchmen.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 114, "Colbert to Frontenac," Paris, May 17, 1674. Fort Frontenac was created in 1673, and this letter is dated May 17, 1674. Given that correspondences were not instantaneous, we can regard this letter as being one of the very first royal responses to the fort's construction. See: Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea*, 5-7.

²⁸⁰ Gilles Paquet and Jean-Pierre Wallot, "Nouvelle-France / Quebec / Canada," 98. Paquet and Wallot argue that in general, plans for colonial development were constructed in the metropole. It was up to settlers and colonial administrators to implement these plans as much as possible, and when in doubt, to improvise given their circumstances.

²⁸¹ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 114, "Colbert to Frontenac," Paris, May 17, 1674.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

Colbert also reiterated that “...His Majesty is always of the opinion that you can and must leave the Indians free to bring their furs without putting yourself to the trouble of going so far to seek them.”²⁸⁴ Colbert wanted compact French agricultural settlement, much like the English had in New England and Virginia. Frontenac understood the realities on the ground, such as the importance of meeting Indigenous peoples to establish allies and secure the colony, and that the fur trade was going to be a drain on the population. At the very least, Frontenac was going to make the necessities of North American trade and diplomacy work for the colony in some manner.

Immediately following the construction of Fort Frontenac, Governor Frontenac sent letters to France to assuage any fears or doubts that the King might have had regarding the fort’s utility. The Governor attributed a lot of his success to Fort Frontenac, particularly that which concerned French-Indigenous negotiation and colonial defence.²⁸⁵ Frontenac took opportunities to wholeheartedly espouse his achievements by claiming that “...[the Iroquois] have shown themselves in so great submission, so touched by the good treatment, the gifts and feasts that I made for them, that there is nobody in this country who is not surprised to see them in this disposition.” To this the Governor added that

...the establishment of Fort Frontenac has produced the effects which I have noticed above, and the safety of all the missionaries . . . It has had a further effect on the trade, which is no less advantageous for the country; for never

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 115.

²⁸⁵ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 115, “Frontenac to Colbert,” Quebec, Nov. 12, 1674; Parmenter, “‘L’arbe de Paix’: Eighteenth-Century Franco-Iroquois Relations,” 64; Grabowski, “French Criminal Justice and Indians in Montreal,” 415. In the seventeenth century, the Iroquois were a military threat to the French, as well as a threat to French influence. Attempting to control and manage the Iroquois was a primary concern of the colonial government. French relations with the Iroquois only wholly improved after the signing of the Great Peace of Montreal in 1701, at which point, the Iroquois proved to be valuable allies to the French in many respects.

since the French have been in Canada have so many Indians come down to Montreal as we have seen this summer.²⁸⁶

Governor Frontenac summarized his thoughts on his namesake fort by stating that "...[the colony's] security, and the preservation of the fur trade, depends upon the retention of this post."²⁸⁷ In the ensuing years, men such as Intendant Duchesneau chastised Governor Frontenac for ignoring the Iroquois, and not satisfying his duties at Fort Frontenac.²⁸⁸ What is clear is that Frontenac deeply desired royal support immediately following the construction of Fort Frontenac. Unchecked illicit fur trading out of Fort Frontenac in later years suggests that Governor Frontenac had more selfish reasons for lobbying for construction of the fort, and puts the integrity of his early letters into question.

Governor Frontenac was particularly successful at asserting to the Crown that Fort Frontenac benefitted New France. By 1675, Frontenac's influence on Minister Colbert was clear, as the Minister stated that "...the post which you have established on Lake Ontario will doubtless bring that effect [of maintaining peace with the Iroquois and other nations]."²⁸⁹ Less than a year after questioning Frontenac's leadership in New France and alluding to the frivolity of building Fort Frontenac, Colbert's effusive support for the fort seems out of place.²⁹⁰ However, Colbert did an about-face and praised Frontenac for the creation of the fort, which he agreed would "...increase the fur trade, which is the only

²⁸⁶ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 115, "Frontenac to Colbert," Quebec, Nov. 12, 1674.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁸⁸ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 143, "Duchesneau to Frontenac," Quebec, July 28, 1682.

²⁸⁹ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 116, "Colbert to Frontenac," Paris, Mar. 15, 1675.

²⁹⁰ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 114, "Colbert to Frontenac," Paris, May 17, 1674.

means of strengthening and enriching the Colony.”²⁹¹ As Minister of the Marine and Colonies, Colbert was responsible for building France’s empire and had a vested interest in seeing New France succeed.²⁹² Colbert accepted Frontenac’s reported claims at face value; the Royal Court’s perceptions and knowledge about happenings in the ‘New World’ came overwhelmingly from officers, officials, and agents on the ground.²⁹³ It was therefore possible for colonial officials like Frontenac to put their personal interests above those of the empire. Royal servants at Versailles could not easily discern what was accurate and real, and what was a fabrication.

Royal reactions to colonial initiatives were fluid and ever-changing, and Governor Frontenac’s fort is a perfect example. In one instance, Minister Colbert would praise Frontenac’s work, and in the next, the King and Colbert would remind the Governor that “...you must always be careful to crowd the settlements together as much as possible in order to increase the number of people and so that they may be more united and more easily assembled for defence.”²⁹⁴ The Crown supported Frontenac’s endeavours to some extent, with King Louis XIV noting that “...I do not doubt at all that the post which you have set up last year on Lake Ontario is advantageous, and that it has attracted a great number of

²⁹¹ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 116, “Colbert to Frontenac,” Paris, Mar. 15, 1675.

²⁹² Havard, *Empire et métissages*, 337. Colbert was enmeshed in the status quo of the French Court where service and fidelity to the King was expected and assumed. While he may have had cautionary feelings towards Frontenac, he would not have imagined that the Governor would outright lie to him.

²⁹³ Desbarats, “France in North America: The Net Burden of Empire,” 12. Desbarats argues that even into the 1720s and 1730s, there was a sort of ‘chaos’ that surrounded imperial designs and colonial realities. A reliance on colonial agents with potentially personal motivations combined with a lack of funds for colonial development to make direction shaky at best.

²⁹⁴ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 116, “Colbert to Frontenac,” Paris, Mar. 15, 1675; Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 117, “Louis XIV to Frontenac,” Paris, April 22, 1675.

Indians into the French settlements.”²⁹⁵ The French Court was still conscious of small deviations that the Governor was making from the design of colonial settlement.²⁹⁶ While the King granted Frontenac some latitude to carry his own projects to fruition, the Crown ultimately had a goal in mind as to what New France should look like and how it should be developed. The construction of Fort Frontenac did not necessarily align with those goals. As long as positive assessments of Fort Frontenac flowed into Versailles, however, the fort could remain active and Frontenac could stay in the King’s good graces.

A House of Cards: Falsehoods on the Frontier

Favour for Governor Frontenac’s project on the Cataraqui fell within the first decade of the fort’s existence. Parties interested in the wellbeing of New France’s farms and commerce noted in 1683 that the fort:

...was established in the year 1673 by M. the Count Frontenac, purportedly for the security of the country, but in fact for trading with the Iroquois, to serve as a refuge and entrepot for the *coureurs de bois* scattered among all the Ottawa nations, and to form a trading connection in beavers with the Dutch and the English of Albany and Manhattan.²⁹⁷

This quotation alludes to Frontenac’s personal interests in illegal trade and his deviation from royal instructions. The notion that *coureurs de bois* were “scattered” among Indigenous nations and therefore kept Indigenous peoples in the woods and away from centres of trade was an obvious affront to the instructions of King Louis XIV to bring

²⁹⁵ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 117, “Louis XIV to Frontenac,” Paris, April 22, 1675.

²⁹⁶ Ibid; Moogk, *La Nouvelle France*, 80-81, 83. At first glance, Fort Frontenac did not fit in with the imperial model of government-approved trade monopolies and mercantilism, yet the King was initially optimistic to its uses as long as it proved beneficial to the empire.

²⁹⁷ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 131, “Memoir to the Gentlemen Partners of the Society Invested with the Farm and Commerce of Canada, on Ways to Prevent Frauds in Beavers,” Quebec, 1683.

Indigenous peoples into populated areas, and to maintain a centralized population.²⁹⁸ Historian Eric Hinderaker argues that *coureurs de bois* could be valuable to French-Indigenous relations because they bridged cultural and societal gaps between the two peoples.²⁹⁹ Forming cultural and economic ties with Indigenous peoples through the use of *coureurs de bois* was not, however, the stated goal that Governor Frontenac gave when he proposed the construction of Fort Frontenac.³⁰⁰ Considering Governor Frontenac's obvious transgressions from his original plans for Fort Frontenac, his complete innocence in these failings is doubtful.

King Louis XIV's inquiries and ordinances in the mid-1680s regarding Fort Frontenac expose the disorder that characterized the fort in the decade following its construction. The King scolded Joseph Antoine de La Barre, Governor of New France between 1682 and 1685, by stating that he had unlawfully taken possession of Fort Frontenac away from Sieur de la Salle.³⁰¹ King Louis XIV accused La Barre of "...[driving] away the men who were there under [La Salle's] orders, that the lands which are attached to [the fort] remain uncultivated, the greater part of the animals being dead, that you have

²⁹⁸ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 117, "Louis XIV to Frontenac," Paris, April 22, 1675.

²⁹⁹ Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, 16-18. While we are not dealing with the Ohio Valley here specifically, this is a common historical sentiment about the potential value of the illicit trade to French imperialism. See also: Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*; Wien, "Selling Beaver Skins in North America and Europe, 1720-1760," 295-296. Thomas Wien also discusses trade in general as being more of a 'policy instrument,' than an economic endeavour for French imperialists

³⁰⁰ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 106, "Frontenac to Colbert," Quebec, Nov. 2, 1672. Governor Frontenac's proposal to Minister Colbert contains language that speaks to France's 'weakness' in the area, and a need for greater security for the colony.

³⁰¹ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 132, "Louis XIV to La Barre," Paris, Apr. 10, 1684. The Comte de Frontenac would eventually resume Governorship of New France in 1689 until his death in 1698. During Frontenac's initial tenure, he awarded leadership of Fort Frontenac to French Explorer Robert de la Salle. La Barre relinquished the fort from La Salle, and the fort's problems were thrust upon the new Governor.

even permitted the Iroquois to seize him as an enemy of the colony.”³⁰² The King also then called for a quick resolution to the rampant disorder at Fort Frontenac.³⁰³ Although these were serious claims, the King did appreciate La Barre’s situation, and even insinuated that there had to be some measure of dishonesty in what he had been told about how bad the situation at the fort truly was. King Louis XIV suggested that there was the possibility that La Salle had simply abandoned Fort Frontenac, as La Barre had attested, but emphasized the seriousness of the claims against La Barre.³⁰⁴ What is evident is that the King had to concern himself with speculation and hearsay regarding his New France administrators. The continual efforts of New France officials to undermine each other’s authority meant that the King had to rule and make decisions without a complete picture of what was happening in the colony. Regardless of which party was being truthful, the original purpose of Fort Frontenac was already faltering. The promises and goals set out by Governor Frontenac in 1672 for what his namesake fort would offer to New France were crumbling.³⁰⁵ The King received reports in 1684 that the lands surrounding Fort Frontenac were derelict, and that the fort’s utility as a centre of trade and diplomacy was questionable.

Governor La Barre’s responses to King Louis XIV in November 1684 further complicated the question of Fort Frontenac’s leadership and the post’s state of disrepair. La Barre was very blunt with the King, stating “...it is a strange bravado – the falsehood that Sieur de la Salle has had to recite to your Majesty – that I have despoiled him of his Fort

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 106, “Frontenac to Colbert,” Quebec, Nov. 2, 1672.

Frontenac.”³⁰⁶ In his pioneering work on colonialism and Euro-Indigenous relations *The Middle Ground*, historian Richard White argues that contrary to *coureurs de bois* and other illegitimate traders, La Salle was a man of good standing, with the official backing of the Crown.³⁰⁷ La Salle’s reputation was brought into question when La Barre revealed that La Salle lied to the King in stating that La Barre “...despoiled him of his Fort Frontenac and that I have completely mined and destroyed it.”³⁰⁸ The French Court was in a difficult position, as the nature of transatlantic correspondence in the colonial period meant that reports from feuding officials would reach Versailles sporadically. Hesitancy among New France administrators to admit their mistakes and take responsibility for colonial failings precluded effective governing of places like Fort Frontenac. A sort of “court politicking” was taking place on New France’s frontier, where administrators vied for Court favour through deceit and underhandedness. It is difficult to discern a clear picture of what was occurring, except that there was a continuous battle of personalities being waged through correspondence.

The Marquis de Denonville became Governor of New France in 1685, and like his predecessor La Barre, maintained that La Salle was economically and politically corrupt. La Salle was typical of men that operated out of Fort Frontenac, who sacrificed colonial profits in favour of personal earnings garnered through unlicensed trade. Denonville attested to La Salle’s individual gains in the trade out of Fort Frontenac, and claimed that personal interest was the ruin of legitimate trade and strong connections with the Indigenous

³⁰⁶ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 132, “La Barre to Louis XIV,” Quebec, Nov. 13, 1684.

³⁰⁷ White, *The Middle Ground*, 58.

³⁰⁸ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 132, “La Barre to Louis XIV,” Quebec, Nov. 13, 1684.

peoples around the fort.³⁰⁹ Historian Jon Parmenter contradicts Denonville's argument, however, and contends that illegal trade was a unifying activity between French and Indigenous peoples.³¹⁰ Inconsistencies between Denonville's assertions and Parmenter's argument suggests that there may have been a difference in how lawful and illicit trade were understood across different levels of administration. Denonville might have understood illicit trade to be a destructive force, while La Salle might have thought the contrary. Historian Catherine Desbarats posits a more plausible argument for why trade was conducted legally or illegally in places like Fort Frontenac by maintaining that legal trading was not always economically feasible because legal trade revenues did not match the costs of upholding Indigenous alliances through gift-diplomacy.³¹¹ To men like Governor Denonville and La Barre before him – royal representatives of His Majesty's will – La Salle's engagement in unlicensed trade was an affront to authority.³¹² Like those before him, Denonville used strategic word choice in an effort to advance his agenda.³¹³ The Governor was intentionally vague in saying that there were "many" complaints about the trade and that the goods were "too expensive" to convince Indigenous peoples to trade.³¹⁴ Denonville was able to allow whoever he was communicating with to imagine the worst possible scenario by being vague and unspecific. In this case, Governor Denonville was

³⁰⁹ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 134, "Denonville to Seignelay," Quebec, Nov. 16, 1686.

³¹⁰ Parmenter, "The Significance of the 'Illegal Fur Trade' to the Eighteenth-Century Iroquois," 41.

³¹¹ Desbarats, "The Cost of Early Canada's Native Alliances," 625.

³¹² Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 134, "Denonville to Seignelay," Quebec, Nov. 16, 1686.

³¹³ LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance Générale, R11577-4-2-F, "Lettre de Duchesneau au ministre - la nomination de Seignelay ...," November 13, 1681, 295. Intendant Duchesneau used strategic word choice in 1681 to gain royal support over Governor Frontenac.

³¹⁴ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 134, "Denonville to Seignelay," Quebec, Nov. 16, 1686.

communicating with the Marquis de Seignelay, the eldest son of the late finance minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert. Seignelay, like his father before him, was Naval Secretary under King Louis XIV, and therefore had a vested interest in the success of New France. The attitudes that Governor Denonville had towards men like La Salle (illegal traders) and places like Fort Frontenac (locales where both legal and illicit trade occurred) show the fort to be representative of the larger and more widespread problem of illicit trade in New France.

The Royal Utility of Fort Frontenac

During his first term as Governor, Frontenac appealed to King Louis XIV for supplies and military reinforcements by attempting to persuade the King of the fort's usefulness. Regarding the Iroquois, Frontenac claimed in 1681 that "...I alone have kept these Indians in a spirit of obedience, of quiet, and of peace, by a little skill and tact."³¹⁵ Frontenac anguished that fostering relations with Indigenous peoples was difficult because he was "...deprived of everything," but that he was still able to do so commendably due to his apt leadership and the benefit of Fort Frontenac.³¹⁶ At any rate, Frontenac still appealed for military reinforcements from the Crown, as he understood the limitations of his supposed exceptional diplomacy.³¹⁷ The Crown listened to and considered these appeals, which indicates that at least initially, there was some imperial utility to Fort Frontenac, regardless of whether illicit activity occurred.³¹⁸ By Governor Frontenac's estimation, Fort Frontenac

³¹⁵ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 140, "Frontenac to the King," Quebec, Nov. 2, 1681.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea*, 25. Kenneth Banks suggests that Governor Frontenac established Fort Frontenac with the sole purpose of monopolizing the fur trade for his own personal gain.

was crucial to upholding French-Iroquois peace.³¹⁹ Frontenac was aware of the colony's weaknesses compared to Indigenous nations and other colonial powers, and therefore saw the need for a military presence in North America's interior. The Governor implored the King for support. Frontenac might have had his own motives, but as the King's representative on the ground in New France, he was best positioned to determine colonial needs for defence. The issue of colonial defence became problematic when Frontenac's recommendations and those of another of the King's representatives on the ground in New France (the Intendant), did not align, and even contradicted each other.

Fort Frontenac and the Beaver Wars

The Iroquois (Beaver) Wars of the seventeenth century were crucial in shaping New France and French imperialism in North America. Historians William Starna and José António Brandão argue that European trade goods and the beaver trade enflamed pre-existing rivalries between Indigenous peoples throughout the Great Lakes region.³²⁰ The actions of Fort Frontenac's administrators during these wars show that they would at times set aside their desires for personal profit in favor of conforming to the needs of the King and empire. An assembly meeting of Jesuits, fort commanders, and administrators in 1682 concluded that New France was much more prepared for war with the Iroquois than it previously had been. The assembly commended the benefits of Fort Frontenac and French

³¹⁹ Havard, *Empire et métissages*, 11. Gilles Havard states that in the early days of New France (1660-1670), forts established by traders, explorers, and *coureurs de bois* were crucial to realizing the French colonial dream. They were significantly important to establishing a fur trade empire, and a proposed step towards France becoming "le plus grand Empire du monde." Whether this held true for Fort Frontenac, and for New France as it matured towards the eighteenth century, is not as evident.

³²⁰ William A. Starna and José António Brandão, "From the Mohawk-Mahican War to the Beaver Wars: Questioning the Pattern," *Ethnohistory* vol. 51, 4 (2004): 740.

traders and explorers, positively explaining that “...the way to Fort Frontenac lies open, so that in forty hours we can fall upon the Senecas.”³²¹ The assembly also stated that there would need to be an increase in military support from the King, but that Fort Frontenac would be well-suited to garrison French troops in case of war.³²² In critical situations, such as when conflict with the Iroquois loomed, men of all pursuits could come together to form an assembly in the interest of colonial defence. Missionaries and traders never forwent their own personal interests completely, however, as the security of New France was paramount to ventures such as missionary conversion and profitable trade.

Troop and officer preoccupations with trade quickly began to cause problems for French military efficiency during the Beaver Wars. In July 1684, Intendant Jacques de Meulles complained that barques (sailing vessels) from Fort Frontenac that were needed for transporting wartime provisions were unavailable because of trade, which caused inefficient transportation schedules.³²³ King Louis XIV commented a year later that Fort Frontenac was important “...for the protection of the trade of his subjects, for standing against the Iroquois, and for being in position to attack them as soon as it will be thought convenient.”³²⁴ As De Meulles was focused on protecting New France from Iroquois attack in 1684, doubling transportation times because of commerce was reprehensible. De

³²¹ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 146, “In the Assembly,” Quebec, Oct. 10, 1682.

³²² *Ibid.*, 147.

³²³ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 149, “De Meulles to Seignelay,” Quebec, July 8, 1684; W. J. Eccles, “Jacques de Meulles,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 2 (Toronto/Laval: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1982). The intendency of Jacques de Meulles is interesting because he was thoroughly instructed by the Marquis de Seignelay that his relationship with Governor La Barre was to be nothing like Intendant Duchesneau’s relationship with Governor Frontenac. Seignelay recognized that the administrative rivalry between Frontenac and Duchesneau had severely hampered his father’s (Jean-Baptiste Colbert) plans for New France.

³²⁴ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 153, “Louis XIV to Denonville,” Paris, Mar. 10, 1685.

Meulles lamented that before conflict began with the Iroquois in the 1680s, Fort Frontenac was well-provisioned and ready for war; after aggressions erupted, the fort was suspiciously understocked.³²⁵ Inefficiencies and corruption that stemmed from Fort Frontenac hindered the war effort against the Iroquois, and the true interest of those running Fort Frontenac was trade, not colonial defence.³²⁶ For the leadership at Fort Frontenac, contributing to the French cause through garrisoning and provisioning was useful only insofar that it helped to support trade.³²⁷

Dismantling Fort Frontenac

By November 1686, the Marquis de Denonville was tired of the inefficiencies of Fort Frontenac and its problematic status as a royal fort. Denonville claimed that even though the fort could only garrison fifty men, it was incredibly expensive to maintain.³²⁸ To an administrator like Denonville, who strove to stop corruption within the colonial leadership, the drain of maintaining Fort Frontenac would have been incredibly frustrating. It had been twelve years since Minister Colbert instructed Governor Frontenac to cultivate the lands around Fort Frontenac in order to ensure its sustainability; Frontenac had failed to do this

³²⁵ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 150, "De Meulles to Seignelay," Quebec, July 8, 1684.

³²⁶ Dolin, *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America*, 105. War with either other European rivals or with Indigenous nations notoriously hurt the French fur trade. Diversion of resources during war and heavier taxation after war meant that the fur trade needed time to recuperate after conflicts. Because of this, privately interested parties working out of places like Fort Frontenac would have tried to lessen the effects of war on their profits.

³²⁷ Leadership at Fort Frontenac was comprised of men like La Salle and Du Luth, who began their work at the Fort under the direction of Frontenac himself.

³²⁸ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 158, "Memoir of Denonville [to the Minister] on the Present State of Affairs in Canada," Quebec, Nov. 8, 1686.

by the time he was recalled to France in 1682.³²⁹ Denonville still complained that “...it is very distressing that the lands there are not better so that this post could maintain itself.”³³⁰ Denonville admitted, however, that he did not know the lands around Fort Frontenac well enough, and therefore could not easily identify a plausible solution to the problem.³³¹ There was a disconnect between certain French officials who may have petitioned for better administrative and political organization within New France, but who were unfamiliar with its inner workings. Contrary to those who came after him, Frontenac was very much a hands-on Governor. He voyaged to the *pays d’en haut* and Fort Frontenac, experienced firsthand the landscape and climate, and met with various Indigenous peoples. His successors, who did not take this approach, were disadvantaged by their lack of familiarity with the colony’s hinterland.³³² Without Comte de Frontenac as Governor of New France, Fort Frontenac had little chance to survive as either a military garrison or centre of trade, and was ultimately abandoned under the Governorship of Denonville in 1689.³³³

The Comte de Frontenac once again became Governor of New France in 1689, and with that, went on a campaign to re-establish Fort Frontenac. Frontenac hoped that under his renewed leadership, the fort could attain the status that it had had during his first

³²⁹ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 114, “Colbert to Frontenac,” Paris, May 17, 1674; Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 132, “Louis XIV to La Barre,” Paris, Apr. 10, 1684.

³³⁰ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 158, “Memoir of Denonville [to the Minister] on the Present State of Affairs in Canada,” Quebec, Nov. 8, 1686.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² The important distinction here is that Frontenac was interested in the minutia of New France because he had personal economic interests there.

³³³ Fort Frontenac was later re-established and regarrisoned. Fort Frontenac experienced many periods of occupation and abandonment throughout its history.

tenure as Governor. Just three years after his return to the position of Governor, and knowing full well his opinion was in the minority, Frontenac proposed “...that when the opportunity occurs I would not know any greater service to do for the King, or anything more profitable for the colony, than to re-establish this post.”³³⁴ Governor Frontenac made the same arguments as before, that Fort Frontenac was crucial for colonial defence, for waging war, and for trade.³³⁵ Governor Denonville had seen no use for the fort and recognized his ignorance in the potential military and economic value of Fort Frontenac. Frontenac used his predecessor’s ignorance to his own advantage, hoping that it would compel the Crown to see his superior direction.³³⁶ Governor Frontenac claimed that his detractors had personal interest in closing Fort Frontenac and in disparaging his name.³³⁷ Frontenac attested that contrary to his critics, he had zero personal interest in reopening Fort Frontenac.³³⁸ Governor Frontenac was successful in his appeals, and the fort was reinstated to resume its prior activities.

Fort Frontenac’s proposed reconstitution was largely criticized following the start of Governor Frontenac’s second term. Intendant Jean Bochart de Champigny considered the

³³⁴ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 186, “Frontenac to the Minister,” Quebec, Sept. 15, 1692. We know that Frontenac accepted his minority position because he prefaced this proposition with saying that he “maintain[s] it at the risk of my head in spite of everybody.”

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 158, “Memoir of Denonville [to the Minister] on the Present State of Affairs in Canada,” Quebec, Nov. 8, 1686; Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 186, “Frontenac to the Minister,” Quebec, Sept. 15, 1692.

³³⁷ LAC, Série C11A, Correspondance Générale, R11577-4-2-F, “Lettre de Duchesneau au ministre - la nomination de Seignelay ...,” November 13, 1681, 296. Intendant Duchesneau relied on a narrative of ‘personal interest’ to discredit Governor Frontenac in the eyes of the King during Frontenac’s first tenure as Governor.

³³⁸ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 186, “Frontenac to the Minister,” Quebec, Sept. 15, 1692.

fort “useless,” as its garrison was too weak to operate as any sort of military deterrent.³³⁹ Champigny stated that he wished Governor Frontenac had never had it re-established, and considered the garrison that was at Fort Frontenac to be an absolute waste of valuable resources.³⁴⁰ As much as the King wanted Fort Frontenac dismantled and abandoned, he continually left the final decision to do so with the Governor. In 1696, King Louis XIV urged Governor Frontenac to dismantle the fort for the second time, due to its uselessness and rampant corruption. The King also cited that the fort was too often deviating from its principal aim of colonial defence.³⁴¹ King Louis XIV again had to suggest that the fort be abandoned in 1697 and 1698, as Governor Frontenac disagreed with the French Court about the fort’s usefulness. However, the King remained firm in an address to Frontenac and Intendant Champigny in 1697 that he ultimately wanted to leave preservation of Fort Frontenac to the Governor’s discretion.³⁴² Just six months before Governor Frontenac died, the King stated that he did not believe that Fort Frontenac was any more valuable than his other forts, and that its cost far outweighed its value.³⁴³ Although Fort Frontenac continued in this state even after Comte de Frontenac died, its use as a military garrison was drastically reduced in the following decades until the British destroyed it in 1758.

³³⁹ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 187, “Champigny to the Minister,” Quebec, Oct. 24, 1694.

³⁴⁰ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 188, “Champigny to the Minister,” Quebec, Aug. 11, 1695.

³⁴¹ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 194-5, “Louis XIV to Frontenac,” Paris, May 26, 1696. Although the King told Governor Frontenac that Fort Frontenac had to be given up, he did not directly order the Governor to do so. This was done, as the King expressed, “for the sake of honour.” The fort’s principal aim here described as reeling the French in from the interior of the continent and settling them centrally.

³⁴² Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 196, “Louis XIV to Frontenac and Champigny,” Paris, Apr. 26, 1697.

³⁴³ Leopold Lamontagne, ed., Richard A. Preston, trans., *Royal Fort Frontenac*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958), 197, “Louis XIV to Frontenac,” Paris, May 21, 1698. This letter was issued in May 1698, Comte de Frontenac died in November of that year.

Conclusion

Fort Frontenac's shifting status as venerated royal fort and economic drain illustrates that administrative assessments of colonial projects were rarely static. The fort's value in the eyes of the King and French Court mirrored their opinions of Governor Frontenac. Although initially proposed as a key military structure and centre for legitimate trade, Fort Frontenac operated as a sanctuary for illicit trade for most of its existence. The fort's involvement in illegal trade was known to most of the officials who hoped to legitimize operations at the fort, such as Governor Denonville and Intendant Champigny. Fort Frontenac provides a case study of some of the political rivalries and imperial issues facing New France, which were ultimately tied to the illicit fur trade. It highlights the questionable conduct of administrators, namely Governor Frontenac and his inner circle, including men like La Salle. The fort also shows how difficult it was to stop or even hinder illicit trade. The problems of administrative corruption and rampant illicit trade at Fort Frontenac mirrored those that plagued New France during this period.

Conclusion

From its inception as a royal colony in 1663, New France relied on the fur trade as a key driver of the economy.³⁴⁴ The illicit fur trade, particularly that which operated through Indigenous traders and *coureurs de bois*, existed concurrently with its legal counterpart.³⁴⁵ The proliferation of an unsanctioned clandestine trade was a hindrance to New France's economic viability.³⁴⁶ This thesis argues that the illicit fur trade in New France between 1663 and 1740 contributed to the political deterioration of colonial administration. The presence of *coureurs de bois*, and the way that they undermined New France's trade economy by circumventing official channels could not be ignored. *Coureurs de bois* demanded administrative attention if government officials wanted to realize the Crown's goal of economic self-sustainability and population growth. Ultimately, difficulties in punishing and bringing *coureurs de bois* to justice undermined the authority of the Crown in New France. In addition, disagreements over the proper way to deal with *coureurs de bois* fueled rivalries within the administration. Governor Frontenac and Intendant Duchesneau were at the forefront of these rivalries. Finally, Fort Frontenac shows another layer to the administrative rivalries. There were frequent disagreements about Fort Frontenac's usefulness throughout the fort's existence. Those who advocated for Fort Frontenac, such as La Salle and Governor Frontenac himself, believed that illicit trade out of the fort helped to uphold French interests, like New France's Indigenous diplomacy policy.

³⁴⁴ Havard, *Empire et métissages*, 11.

³⁴⁵ Skinner, *The Upper Country*, 17; Parmenter, "The Significance of the 'Illegal Fur Trade' to the Eighteenth-Century Iroquois," 41. Claiborne A. Skinner argues that *coureurs de bois* became a "force to be reckoned with" as early as 1672, while Jon Parmenter notes that Governor Frontenac observed Kahnawake Iroquois begin illicitly trading furs in 1681.

³⁴⁶ Miquelon, "Jean-Baptiste Colbert's 'Compact Colony Policy' Revisited," 14; Pritchard, *In Search of Empire*, 421. Historian James Pritchard argues that New France's economic viability was always in jeopardy because of a French preoccupation with dynastic, or continental, aims.

Officials like Intendant Duchesneau, who opposed maintaining Fort Frontenac, saw its relationship to illicit trade as antithetical to France's imperial and economic aims in North America.

This study has examined the social, political, and criminal structure of the historical colony of New France, as well as contributed a commentary of illicit activities on a broader scale. I have argued that sponsorship of the illicit fur trade from commoners and government officials allowed it to continue; through this lens, we attain a better understanding of some of the reasons why criminal activities continued in the face of state-sanctioned efforts to curb them.³⁴⁷ Similarly, connections between criminal elements, the general populace, and government officials speak to larger issues of dealing with criminality.³⁴⁸ Along with administrative disagreements and political disunity, public support for *coureurs de bois* was a persistent issue in curbing illicit trade and bringing *coureurs de bois* to justice.

There were few changes throughout this period regarding royal policy towards *coureurs de bois*, so any significant change has been difficult to track. However, I have attempted to trace how the attitudes of various New France administrators towards illicit trade did change, which was an important indicator for the status of *coureurs de bois* in the colony. Similarly, certain events had a propensity to influence how the illicit fur trade was perceived by the French administration. In cases of global conflicts, like the War of the Spanish Succession or the War of the Austrian Succession, the illicit fur trade essentially

³⁴⁷ Scalberg, "The French-Amerindian Religious Encounter," 103.

³⁴⁸ Kwass, *Contraband*, 8-9. Michael Kwass argues that dealing with rising illicit markets was not as easy as one might expect, as they typically grew alongside the growth of larger global markets – something that was on the rise in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

had to be ignored by colonial officials. Overall there is a sense that specific attitudes and actions towards the illicit fur trade may have changed among New France administrators, but a lasting change in policy never truly occurred.

A diverse range of peoples and nations fought for supremacy of the lands that would become Canada and the United States. Understanding why New France failed to achieve the goals laid out by men like Jean-Baptiste Colbert is important in following the trajectory of North American geopolitical development. The British Empire proved to be more successful in creating settlement colonies, whereas France continually had trouble in projecting its imperial vision in New France and making it a reality.³⁴⁹ Where Great Britain could rely on its colonies to support themselves through permanent settlement and intercolonial trade, New France had difficulty attracting settlers from France and had more limited intercolonial trade. Natural increase helped to stabilize the small colonial settler population of New France, but economically the colony slipped into reliance on a trade-based model with the fur trade as one of the driving engines.³⁵⁰ Since trade, diplomacy, and defence were invariable linked, and economic self-sufficiency a primary imperial goal, the disruptive power of *coureurs de bois* and the illicit fur trade played a crucial role in weakening the French empire in North America.

In many ways *coureurs de bois* form an archetypical frontier people in how they conducted their illicit trade in commercial centres and then slipped into the backcountry to avoid persecution. While I have argued that not everything that the *coureurs de bois* did

³⁴⁹ Mapp, *The Elusive West and the Contest for Empire*, 21.

³⁵⁰ Leslie Choquette, "Proprietorships in French North America," in *Constructing Early Modern Empires: Propriety Ventures in the Atlantic World, 1500-1750*, ed. L.H Roper and B. Van Ruymbeke (Boston: Brill, 2007), 123. Leslie Choquette argues that being modeled on trade was not New France's major problem, but that the region did not have a resource that could be readily exploited for massive profits, like sugar, that would drive large-scale immigration.

was clandestine, the very nature of their vocation was covert. We can use them as a lens through which to gain a more comprehensive picture of peripheral peoples, what they meant to the world around them, and how they contributed to the formation of the modern world. We see the role that geography plays in criminal activity; the mutable borders and hinterland zones of New France – particularly areas like the *pays d'en haut* – helped peripheral peoples such as *coureurs de bois* to evade state control.³⁵¹ It is for this reason that an individual *coureur de bois* should not simply be considered, “an Indian with a white man’s mind,” but rather, we should take them as a group and acknowledge them as Intendant Jean Talon did, that they were, “...masters of their own actions and the implementation of their own wills.”³⁵²

If there is one final note to take away from this analysis, it is that there is something to learn from peoples like *coureurs de bois* who evaded state-control, and who are therefore largely silent in the historical record. Through analyzing what colonial authorities within New France had to say about *coureurs de bois* and the illicit fur trade, I have uncovered that their role in the French colonial economy was much more nuanced. They could be a hindrance to legitimate, state-sponsored fur trading, but the protection they got from persecution, and their propensity to cause rifts in the administration, adds another dimension to the *coureur de bois* as historical subject. It is in this added dimension that *coureurs de bois* have value for continued study, and how they can continue to figure into

³⁵¹ Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, 3, 5, 20.

³⁵² DeVoto, *The Course of Empire*, 103; BANQ, Ordonnances, Commissions, Etc, Etc, des Gouverneurs et Intendants, NF 1639-1706, “Ordonnance de M. Talon qui défend aux habitants de quitter leurs demeures pour courir les bois et faire la traite avec les sauvages sous peine de punition corporelle,” June 5, 1672, 107.

larger discussions of society's relationship to the underground, and how that relationship shapes society as a whole.

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