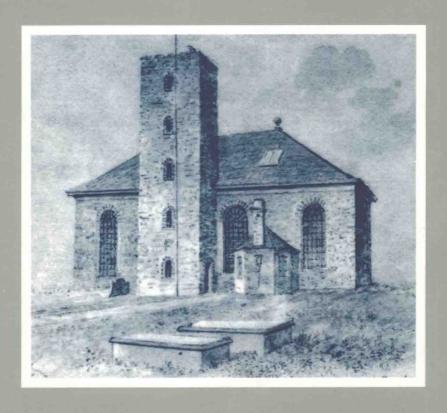
The Huguenots In America

A REFUGEE PEOPLE IN New World Society



JON BUTLER



A Refugee People in New World Society



Jon Butler

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For Benjamin and Peter

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Introduction. The Huguenot Diaspora and the European Immigrant in Early American Society

Between 1680 and 1690, some 160,000 French adults and children fled their homeland to escape Louis XIV's vicious suppression of Protestant worship. Louis XIV began his drive against the Protestants in the 1660s and capped it in October 1685 when he revoked the Edict of Nantes, a decree issued by Henry IV in 1598 that granted France's Protestants freedom of worship under certain limited conditions. The 1685 Revocation, as it usually is called, produced the largest forced migration of Europeans in the early modern period. Braving crude transportation, incomplete knowledge of foreign places, and a countryside swarming with royal troops—in many cases escaping torture to elicit conversions to Catholicism-many French Protestants abandoned family businesses and farms to seek physical safety and freedom of worship in countries with a Protestant political leadership. Most of the refugees streamed into Europe's great Protestant cities—Geneva, Berlin, Amsterdam, and London where they created large urban exile communities almost overnight.

The Huguenot refugees of the 1680s also settled in America. Indeed, they became the first major Continental European refugee group to settle in the British colonies of North America since the arrival of the Puritans half a century earlier. Most other immigrants in the British colonies between 1635 and 1680 came to America voluntarily to pursue their individual advancement; they were not captured to serve as forced laborers, as were Africans, nor were they forced out of their homes because they wanted to sustain a collective religious life, as were Huguenots. Little wonder, then, that Cotton Mather welcomed the Huguenots. In 1681, before even a dozen French refugees lived in Boston, Mather offered public prayers for France's Huguenots, hoping not only to relieve their "grievous persecution" but also to remind New Englanders that they too might lose their religious

privileges, if not to persecution then to backsliding indifference to their grandfathers' still unrealized goals.¹

This book marks the tercentenary of the settlement of Huguenot refugees in the American colonies. Sadly, it also marks a dearth of scholarship not only on the Huguenot diaspora but on the history of the Huguenot refugees in America and even on non-English immigrants in colonial America. The Huguenot dispersal thrusts up stimulating problems in the history of early modern Europe. The 160,000 Protestant exiles challenge historians to probe the social dynamics of an extraordinary forced migration occurring before the rise of modern industrial society. The experience of the exiled Huguenots raises important questions about national limits in late seventeenth-century Protestant cooperation and about the difficulty of sustaining religious and social cohesion beyond native homelands. The conversion of some 1,500,000 French Protestants to Catholicism between 1680 and 1700 underscores even contemporary doubts about the range and depth of lay religious commitment in early modern society, particularly after two hundred years of religious disputing.

The Huguenot diaspora and its causes have stimulated relatively little extended scholarly analysis, however. Jean Orcibal's Louis XIV et les Protestants (Paris, 1951) offers an intriguing explanation of monarchical policy toward France's seventeenth-century Protestants. Warren Scoville's The Persecution of Huguenots and French Economic Development, 1680–1720 (Berkley, Calif., 1960) examines the technological and economic significance of the Revocation and diaspora. A superb new denominational history by Robert Mandrou et al., Histoire des Protestants en France (Toulouse, 1977), too little known in the United States, provides insightful if brief chapters on the Revocation and on French Protestantism in the next century.

Yet the diaspora remains an enigma. Elisabeth Labrousse and others have written brilliantly of Pierre Bayle's contribution to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and on intellectual life in the Dutch exile community, but its social history remains unknown. Warren Scoville focused on economic development within France and was forced to depend frequently on often inadequate secondary materials to discuss the importance of the refugees outside France. Only in Germany has the diaspora and its effects

in the eighteenth century attracted modern scholars, as in Stefi Jersch-Wenzel's recent Juden und "Franzosen" in der Wirtschaft des Raumes Berlin-Brandenburg zur Zeit des Merkantilismus (Berlin, 1978), although even this literature is often guided by antiquarian principles. Frederick A. Norwood's general study of forced migrations, Strangers and Exiles: A History of Religious Refugees (Nashville, Tenn., 1969), also depended on antiquarian histories to describe the diaspora of the 1680s and the subsequent life of the refugees in their places of exile. Robert Mandrou and the authors of Histoire des Protestants en France thus are not wrong when they complain that after three centuries historians still have not written a synoptic history of le Refuge.²

The dimension of the problem is revealed in the lack of histories about Huguenot refugees in Great Britain after 1680. At least 20,000 and perhaps as many as 50,000 Huguenot adults and children entered Britain between 1680 and the early 1690s. They arrived in a time of dangerously escalating political tension in England, much of which concerned Catholicism and France. In an overwhelmingly agrarian nation, the Huguenots were largely artisans, merchants, shopkeepers, and cloth-trade workers, and most of them understandably settled in London. If they knew prosperity in France, they frequently knew poverty in England. Now poor yet still skilled, they strained the national charity, stimulated angry debate about naturalization, and brought mobs of English artisans to the street demanding their deportation.

Voluminous sources exist to probe the experience and assimilation of the Huguenot refugees in Great Britain between 1685 and 1800. The Huguenot Society of London has published sixty quarto volumes of refugees' records and twenty-five volumes of its yearly *Proceedings*. London's major research libraries house several thousand seventeenth- and eighteenth-century manuscripts bearing directly on the history of the Huguenot refugees, sources only complemented by other extensive manuscript sources elsewhere in the nation. Yet we lack a single modern comprehensive history of the Huguenots' fate in eighteenth-century Britain. Thanks largely to the industry of the Huguenot Society of London we know a great deal about the refugees' arrival in the 1680s and about the history of their predecessors in the previous century. But we still do not possess a lengthy

systematic account of the rise and fall of Huguenot refugee communities in eighteenth-century England, the pace of Huguenot intermarriage, the effect of occupational and residential change on the refugees' social cohesion, and causes of decline in the Huguenots' religious institutions.

One subtle measure of this neglect can be seen in George Rudé's study of London politics, Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century: Studies in Popular Protest (New York, 1970). Although Rudé's subjects often are French-surnamed weavers from London's Spitalfields section, the lack of a modern comprehensive history of Great Britain's Huguenot refugees prevents Rudé from even linking the weaver's demands for political rights in the 1760s to the Huguenots' flight to avoid French Catholic persecution in the 1680s. Such a link would force us to revise our understanding of the origins of London's 1760s protests, while its absence would be an important measure of the weavers' assimilation in London society and politics.

Historians have ignored the Huguenot diaspora for several reasons. Nancy Roelker has suggested that modern Huguenots cherish the "Desert" era between 1700 and 1787, when France's remaining Protestants persevered as a persecuted minority, but are embarrassed by the period between 1598 and 1685, when Huguenots cultivated the favor of the monarchy to retain their privileges of worship. They also exhibit little interest in the diaspora itself, perhaps because the Huguenots who fled France escaped the persecution of the Desert era and frequently abandoned their distinctive Huguenot religious institutions in exile after 1700. Other historians of religion relegate the period of significant Huguenot influence in European Protestantism to the sixteenth century, slight Huguenots in the seventeenth century, and find themselves lured away in the eighteenth century by the problem of Enlightenment secularism. In contrast, immigration and ethnic historians concentrate on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and, apparently, judge the flight of France's Huguenots to be too early and too "pre-modern" to be interesting or important.³

Huguenots have fared no better in America. They appear briefly in most of the standard American history texts and in all the histories of American immigration. But this appearance is

limited to one or two paragraphs. Never have the American refugees benefited from a detailed scholarly study tracing their experience in the century after their arrival. Charles Washington Baird's two-volume History of the Huguenot Emigration to America (New York, 1885) is a masterful survey of the Huguenots' geographical origins in France and of the Huguenot refugee settlements in New England. But Baird provided no treatment of the more important Huguenot communities in New York and South Carolina, something he apparently intended to do in additional volumes he never completed. The only scholarly local study, Arthur H. Hirsch's The Huguenots of Colonial South Carolina (Durham, N.C., 1928), is often undependable and now is outdated in both method and interpretation. Gilbert Chinard's charming Les réfugiés Huguenots en Amérique (Paris, 1925) reflected Chinard's incomparable knowledge of European emigration literature. But elsewhere he followed Baird, as he himself acknowledged, and, in any case, Chinard's work never appeared in English. It is scarcely surprising then that the Huguenots did not gain a separate listing in the most recent summation of American immigration and ethnic scholarship, the Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), where they are briefly described in the general entry on all French immigrants.

Perhaps the American refugees' salient characteristic—their rapid social and religious disintegration—explains their absence from American scholarship. By 1750 only two weak French Protestant congregations still existed in the colonies, the vast majority of Huguenots were taking non-Huguenot spouses in marriage, and no discernible Huguenot strand existed anywhere in colonial political or economic life. Of course, these characteristics, if only for their pathological tenor, might also have intrigued historians. Indeed, if their main feature were added to the stereotyped images of Huguenots as rich merchants and skilled artisans and to the recent concern of American historians for social history, the Huguenot refugees should have furnished ideal subjects for historical study.

Yet Huguenots comprise only one of several colonial immigrant groups ignored by historians. Non-English Europeans accounted for about a third of the white settlers in the mainland colonies on the eve of the American Revolution, and they offer historians

unusual opportunities to examine economic opportunity, political advancement, and cultural adaptation in pre-Revolutionary society. Two decades ago a sociologist, Gillian Lindt Gollin, contrasted Old and New World environments in Moravians in Two Worlds: A Study of Changing Communities (New York, 1967), and more recently Stephanie Grauman Wolf has used new techniques in family history to unravel a significant part of the German experience in early America in Urban Village: Population, Community, and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1683-1800 (Princeton, N.J., 1976). But other studies provide more limited information on colonial American immigrant groups. Jews, Scots, and the Scotch-Irish fare best. Works published since 1940 by James G. Leyburn, R. J. Dickson, and Duane Meyer on the Scots and Scotch-Irish and by Jacob Marcus, Edwin Wolf II, and David de Sola Pool on colonial Jews offer useful treatments of their respective immigrants, although they lack the greater precision of recent social history and now fit somewhat awkwardly into the picture of pre-Revolutionary society drawn by historians in the past two decades. The situation is desperate elsewhere, however. We still lack a sophisticated general history of German emigration to the American colonies. We are dependent on a 1936 study for our knowledge of Palatine emigrants and on a 1916 study for our knowledge of Swiss emigrants. Most important, we know almost nothing about the continuing emigration of English settlers to America after 1680.4

This book cannot remedy all the problems of early American immigration history. But it does attempt to widen our knowledge of the colonial American immigrant experience through a study of the first major continental European refugee group to arrive in the colonies after 1650. Readers will find limited references here to the first few Huguenots who arrived in New York in the 1660s and subsequently founded New Paltz in 1677 or to those who later settled at Manakin in Virginia in 1700 after living in exile in Europe for as long as two decades. Rather, the study concentrates on the refugees of the 1680s; these emigrants left Europe in the same decade under similar circumstances; they formed the bulk of the Huguenot emigration to America; and their surviving settlements in Boston and rural and urban New York and South Carolina placed them in the three major cultural regions of the

eighteenth-century British mainland colonies—post-Puritan New England, the ethnically heterogeneous middle colonies, and the slave-holding societies of the colonial south.

This diversity in settlements makes the Huguenots unusual. Most other early American immigrant groups concentrated in the rural areas of the colonies, as with Scots, Scotch-Irish, and Germans, or resided exclusively in the colonial cities, as with Jews. It also makes the Huguenots more significant. The Huguenot experience in Boston, New York, and South Carolina offers a rare opportunity to capture the escalating regionalism of eighteenthcentury America. That members of one immigrant group could so quickly adapt to such different societies not only suggests something important about the Huguenots but also points up the heterogeneity of the maturing mainland colonies before the making of the American Revolution. In this context, the Huguenot refugees emerge as the centerpiece of a very natural comparative history that follows the experience of the same immigrant group in three remarkably different American settings. What happened to the Huguenot refugees in Boston, New York, and South Carolina raises important questions about the relative importance of New World environment and Old World culture in shaping immigrant behavior—environment especially if Huguenots remained cohesive in one society but not everywhere, the European past if their cohesiveness disintegrated and if they assimilated rapidly in each of their new and different societies.

Of course, the historian's principal task in discussing the Huguenot experience in colonial America is to explain their swift disappearance as a cohesive refugee group. Two models are especially relevant to this task. One achieved a classic formulation in Milton Gordon's Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins (New York, 1964). Gordon emphasized the importance of "structural assimilation" in incorporating immigrants within their host societies. For the American Huguenots this involved their acquisition of legal rights through naturalization and denization, their participation in colonial politics, their economic activity and success, their pursuit of exogamous or endogamous marriage unions, their relations with English-speaking Protestant groups, and the pace and extent