

REVIEWS

Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada. J.R. MILLER. Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1989. Pp. xii, 331, illus. \$35.00

Professor Miller has written a welcome and badly needed history of relations between Canada's native peoples and the European newcomers. In fifteen chapters he reviews the period of first contact to the present. A work of this scope, one accompanied with maps, illustrations, and a good index, has long been overdue. It is a pioneer study of great value to a wide audience.

Instructors in introductory Canadian history courses will benefit from his overview, written as it is in a clear, forceful prose. The findings of many of the new secondary studies on Indian-white relations in Canada in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been summarized in the text. Specialists in native history will find of particular interest the author's summary of his own work on Indian residential schools, and his review of the development of western Canadian Indian agriculture at the turn of the century. His last three chapters also provide one of the first overviews by a Canadian historian of contemporary Canadian Indian affairs since the late 1960s. The controversial final chapter, 'Do We Learn Anything From History?' will help specialists to clarify their own opinions on recent developments. Yet, its considerable strengths aside, the study does contain several weaknesses. All of these should be addressed in a second edition.

The author has divided his study chronologically into an introduction (chapter 1) and three major parts, Cooperation (chapters 2 to 4), Coercion (chapters 5 to 11), and Confrontation (chapters 12 to 15). The first phase of contact ended at varying points across the country, first in the east and later the west, as the newcomers came to outnumber the original peoples and to dominate them economically. With control, Miller points out, came an attempt by the newcomers to force the Indians and Métis to accept their way of life. Subsequently, native opposition arose to the attempts to assimilate them into the dominant society. These last two parts, Coercion and Confrontation are the strongest.

Any writer of a survey text faces great problems of condensation and simplification. The author cannot be expected to cover all topics. Moreover, the literature currently available on Canada's native peoples is simply enormous. Yet, all of this being said, several shortcomings in the introduction and the first part, Cooperation, must be addressed. Whether the author accepts it or not, the native elders' viewpoint that their Indian ancestors originated in the Americas deserves mention. This belief that Amerindians did not migrate across a land bridge from Asia helps to explain their strong

commitment to the land. In a second edition, the Amerindian viewpoint should be included.

While the author has consulted many recent studies, his review of the literature for the early period has serious omissions. Strangely he overlooked two important secondary studies in French, Denys Delâge's *Le Pays renversé: Amérindiens et Européens en Amérique du nord-est, 1600–1664* (1985) and Lucien Campeau's *La Mission des Jésuites chez les Hurons, 1634–1650* (1987). Olive Dickason's *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas* (1984) would have been very useful. Instead of citing Bruce Trigger's short monograph, *The Huron: Farmers of the North* (1969), his two-volume study, *The Children of Aataensic: A History of the Huron People to 1660* (1976), could have been consulted. Admittedly the author has completed a much more thorough search of the literature for the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, even including two publications issued in 1988. In a second edition he should do the same for the period up to the late nineteenth century.

The weaknesses of the first part pose problems in the third and final section. In his opening pages the diversity of the Indian cultures must receive greater emphasis. The author in his final chapter calls for Indian political unity (281), yet when one realizes the diversity of cultures, languages, and historical experiences, how can one expect it? One can no more speak of Indians as one entity anymore than one can of Asians, Africans, or Europeans. The author's final pages (281–5) on the strategies he feels native politicians should follow in the future also seem out-of-place in an historical text.

Overall, however, the author's review of developments since the late 1960s helps as a guide to contemporary issues. The survey of the mid–1980s, for instance, allows one to keep in proper sequence the four constitutional conferences, the Penner Report on native self-government, the Nielsen Report on native policy, the important Musqueam court case, and the proposed Meech Lake accord. One of the best parallels in the book appears in the last part when the author compares the provincial premiers' failure (at the final constitutional conference) to accept the idea of aboriginal self-government with their response to Meech Lake. 'Premiers who could not accept native self-government in principle because they did not understand fully its implications a few months later in 1987 enthusiastically adopted the Meech Lake Accord, which contained commitments of astonishing vagueness' (240).

Two additional suggestions are offered for a second edition of this important study. First, since several interesting parallels can be drawn, more references should be made to the relationship between the Amerindians in the United States and the American government. Second, to introduce the complexity of his subject, the author might consider the inclusion of short summaries of current historical debates over topics in Amerindian history. Instead, for example, of making the categorical statement that the fur trade was initially beneficial to both sides (40, 144), the historiographical debate could be

introduced. The counter-argument holds that the high population loss through diseases unknowingly introduced by the Europeans rules out any description of early contact as beneficial. Other points need elaboration. Did the Indians, as the author contends, really contribute substantially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the formation of a new French-Canadian identity in the St Lawrence Valley (46, 56)? If so, others could point out, why did so few Indian words enter the French language in Quebec? The references to Louis Riel also need more comment. Was Riel 'mentally ill' (186)? It would enrich the text to include a reference to the contrary position, that which interprets him in the context of messianic leaders throughout the world.

This is a good book, one which will introduce many Canadian educators and their students to the role of Canada's native peoples in the last five centuries of Canada's history. Instead of the native peoples' appearing as passive victims on whom the newcomers imposed their will, Miller accurately presents them as 'active, assertive contributors' (x) to Canada's historical development. It is hoped that a second edition will be prepared as soon as possible to improve what will be a valued reference work in universities and libraries across Canada.

DONALD B. SMITH *University of Calgary*

Seafaring Labour: The Merchant Marine of Atlantic Canada, 1820-1914. ERIC SAGER. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 1989. Pp. xxvi, 321. \$34.95

The inimitable wordsmith Dr Samuel Johnson, who figures in this study as a maligner of poor Jack, once compared a ship unfavourably with a jail. Like Johnson, Eric Sager adopts the comparative approach, except that his focus is on the ship as a factory. Johnson's allusion belongs to the eighteenth century, when ships were run by comradely pirates who shared an egalitarian world. Even on later coastal traders and fishing vessels, man and master were often interchangeable and fraternal relationships predominated. Sager, whose approach reflects the late twentieth-century fascination with labour process and state intervention, finds that after the repeal of the Navigation Acts in the mid-nineteenth century, shipboard relations in the merchant marine deteriorated into an 'endemic conflict' between masters, as ruthless and aloof middle-management agents of merchant capitalists, and deckhands, as wage labourers trying to eke out a decent standard of living in a cruel and exploitative wooden world.

Fortunately, Sager's approach is more sophisticated than his application of the industrial conflict model might imply. He allows for the unique features of work at sea and the special pressures under which seafarers in Atlantic Canada-owned vessels laboured in an increasingly obsolete workplace. His methodological approach to seafaring labour is three-fold: quantitative,

Copyright of Canadian Historical Review is the property of University of Toronto Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.