

Book Reviews



Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools. J.R. MILLER. Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1996. Pp. xvi, 582, illus. \$70.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper

The recently released report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommends that the federal government establish a public inquiry to investigate the effects of Native residential schools on its students and determine what remedial action should be taken to address whatever harm resulted from that experience. As a result, Miller's book is timely. It is also more balanced and comprehensive in its analysis than the commission's report.

Shingwauk's Vision is a historical account of residential schooling from the earliest days of French missionary activity to the termination of the Canadian federal policy in the late 1960s. Divided into three sections, the book combines both thematic and chronological approaches and Native and non-Native perspectives. Part One details the establishment of the residential system. It discusses the motivations of Indian leaders in requesting schools, the acceptance of the idea by missionaries and government officials, and the subsequent disillusionment with the schools by all concerned. Part Two describes the residential school experience. It includes not only the experiences of students and the policies of the federal government and church missionaries but also discusses the experiences of the teaching staff – a treatment of the topic not yet significantly explored. Part Three offers a blistering assessment of the policy of neglect: by the government for its lack of adequate financial support, by the churches for their lack of cultural respect and parental caring, and by the non-Native public for taking little interest in the welfare of their Native neighbours. Yet even though Miller does not shy away from assigning blame, he is fair in his assessment of the schools in that he also acknowledges the benefits some students feel they gained while living in these institutions.

Throughout the book, Miller highlights the initiatives of the Native leadership and communities, first in asking for and supporting the

schools, and then in resisting and avoiding them. Because little is known generally about this aspect of the schools' history, Miller adds to our understanding of Native parents' involvement in their children's education. One offshoot to Native participation in the schools, and one that is missed entirely by Miller, is the use made of the schools as orphanages. By the late nineteenth century, many schools received the bulk of their students from communities that could not care for children who had lost their parents.

Because residential schools are a controversial topic, Miller's book raises some challenging questions for historians about the practice of their craft. The study of Native/non-Native relations has often had political overtones. Miller continues this tradition by assigning blame to various constituents of Canadian society for the policy of neglect. In doing so, he puts aside his position of professional objectivity, raising important questions about how active historians should be in commenting on contemporary events and passing judgments, especially when such events could lead to court proceedings.

Miller's topic and approach raises one other question for historians. In writing about Native residential schools, he is writing about a topic that represents pain and shame to a significant number of people. Should he reveal the gruesome details of the schools for the sake of completeness, or should he respect the privacy of the suffering? Given Miller's light attention to the more objectionable aspects of the schools – he does not ignore them altogether but the attention he does give to the subject of physical and sexual abuse is cursory compared with other aspects of the schools' history – it appears that Miller wished to respect the feelings of those who still require healing.

In the end, Miller's book offers a substantive history of the residential schools and raises questions for historians about their professional practices. It is a book promoting social activism and offering sobering lessons. It is also a testimony to Native fortitude, for, in the end, the schools' ultimate failure lay not in the actions or inactions of non-Native society, but in the recognition, in the words of a French missionary, that 'the [Indian] parents love their children too much.'

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Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791–1850. CECILIA MORGAN. Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1996. Pp. xi, 304, \$55.00 cloth, \$18.95 paper

Public Men and Virtuous Women, based on the author's 1993 doctoral thesis, is an ambitious and wide-ranging examination of gender

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