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American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times. By Olive Patricia Dickason

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3cd7304w>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 17(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

1993-03-01

DOI

10.17953

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World" (p. 17), and he drives it to escape the boredom of the reservation in "A Funeral Procession of One" (p. 60). When he needs courage, he sees that "across the street the fog is afraid/of my brand new T-Bird" (p. 33), and when the car gets a flat tire ten miles out of town, amidst coyotes, both the narrator and the car hobble home on three wheels ("Coyote Night," p. 58). These characters add continuity to the book and expand the poetic monologues with fresh blood—and oil.

Several poems are about Wovoka, the Paiute who originated the Ghost Dance religion, and the history of the Ghost Dance on the Sioux reservation. Louis, unwittingly, is an ironic, contemporary Wovoka, come to save Lakota students from run-on sentences, if nothing else. He laughs at himself and everyone around him in this strong, angry, and sometimes loving book. He reaches out in poetry filled with adjectives and invectives in order to reconcile himself to his world, situated among "Dog Eaters" at Pine Ridge and the rednecks of Nebraska:

I have no answers and will fight no more.
My life has been spent in cultural dyslexia.
My years are soaked in historical aphasia.
Being a halfbreed is the world's hardest job.
Being sober helps a bit, but I still love
to whine, yes I do.
("Breakfast at Big Bat's Conoco Convenience Store," p.78)

Despite his protests and "whines," this could be the voice of a survivor, a new hero for these uneasy times.

Denise Low
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Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times. By Olive Patricia Dickason. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992. 590 pages. \$39.95 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

Since their inception, courses in Native American history and politics, whether they are offered in traditional history departments or in the more recently created native studies programs in Canadian universities, have suffered from the lack of comprehensive published studies of the history of aboriginal peoples in

Canada. Only J. R. Miller's *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens* (1989) falls into this category, and even it does not deal with the precontact period. Much of the literature on Canada's aboriginal history emphasizes specific periods, characterized, for example, by Bruce G. Trigger's studies of the Hurons and New France, Robin Fisher's and Wilson Duff's historical examinations of Indian-white relationships in British Columbia, and Thomas Flanagan's and D. N. Sprague's works on the Métis and the Riel Rebellion. Other aspects of the literature deal with specific issues, as illustrated by Paul Tennant's work on the Indian land question in British Columbia from 1849 to 1989. And in addition to studies of particular tribes and biographies of aboriginal leaders, an extensive literature exists on contemporary aboriginal government policy and aboriginal politics, of which Sally Weaver's study of the Canadian government's 1969 White Paper on Indian policy is a prominent example. Dickason's comprehensive survey of aboriginal history in Canada, therefore, must be treated as important, because it provides the student of aboriginal history with a kind of overview not previously available.

In *Canada's First Nations*, Dickason's objective goes beyond providing a synthesis of existing literature on the history of Canada's aboriginal peoples. The author also wants to provide a "corrective" to the more or less standard interpretation of Canadian history. This corrective consists of several facets. First, Dickason feels that the conventional fashion of starting Canadian history with the arrival of the "literate" Europeans ignores Canada's original inhabitants and thus not only omits a vital period of Canadian history but also seriously hinders the ability of Canadians to understand the diversity, the richness, and, very importantly, the unique, non-Western nature of aboriginal cultures. Second, Dickason wants to emphasize the active rather than passive role that aboriginal peoples played in early European enterprises. And, finally, the author appears to believe that an understanding of aboriginal-white relationships in Canada can occur only when aboriginal ideas are juxtaposed to those of the European colonizers, thus bringing the contrasting realities of Canadian aboriginal history into focus.

In order to manage such a vast timeframe, Dickason divides Canadian aboriginal history into periods within which she weaves the tapestry of cultural, social, legal, and political developments. Part 1, devoted mainly to the precontact period, relies heavily on anthropological literature. Part 2 explores the early contact period

and focuses primarily on the interactions of the Indians and the French and how they developed a working relationship or, in certain instances, a nonworking relationship. Dickason's well-developed discussion of early French attitudes and policy toward Indians—for example, the French approach to the recognition of aboriginal rights—is of more than historical importance, because it lays the groundwork for understanding the continuities of Quebec's approach to Indians, as emphasized by the province's policy toward Cree Indian land claims during the construction of the James Bay Project. Part 3 focuses on the British takeover in 1763, the westward expansion of the fur trade, and white settlement. In part 4, Dickason turns her attention to the British land cession treaties and the rise of the Métis. And part 5 concentrates on the modern period in Canadian aboriginal history by examining the Canadian government's efforts to force native cultures out of existence, the resistance of the Métis, and the opening up of the Canadian north, with its implications for the Inuit. Dickason ends this section with a discussion of the present political, legal, and constitutional issues affecting aboriginal peoples in Canada.

For the most part, *Canada's First Nations* is well thought out. It is thoroughly documented and contains extensive footnotes. In addition, it has an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources, which will be invaluable to students and others beginning study in the area of Canadian aboriginal history. The book is also well organized, with skillful use of subheadings, and is extensively illustrated. Finally, the prose is easily readable, despite the heavy documentation.

In spite of its generally high quality, however, Dickason's book does have some problems. First, the author's use of the term *Amerindian* is unfortunate in a contemporary Canadian context. The term *aboriginal peoples*, with its subgroups of Indian, Métis, and Inuit, is the appropriate legal and constitutional way to describe Canada's first nations. Dickason would be better off using this term and the specific names of the relevant subgroups, where appropriate. As it now stands, *Amerindian* is potentially confusing to both Canadian and non-Canadian students, when applied to Canada's aboriginal peoples.

Second, Dickason's discourse on the contemporary political and legal situation of Canada's aboriginal peoples lacks the quality of analysis and integration of material present in her earlier discussions. As a consequence, the book fails to convey the historic importance of the last two decades as a main turning point in the

development of aboriginal peoples in Canada. As a case in point, the author devotes only one paragraph to the constitutional conferences on aboriginal peoples held during the 1980s (p. 408). Even though these conferences ended in a failure to entrench a definition of aboriginal self-government in the Canadian constitution, they had significant impact on aboriginal peoples. Not only did they catapult aboriginal peoples into greater public view and help to build a reservoir of public support for their demands, which was carried through during both the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accord processes, they also demonstrated just how much the Canadian aboriginal policymaking forum had been altered by the incorporation of the provinces into a policymaking sphere that had previously been dominated by the federal government. This point is underscored by the role played by the provinces in affecting how aboriginal interests were expressed in the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords. In addition, Dickason's failure to go beyond the Sechelt and James Bay agreements and discuss the federal government's community-based approach to Indian self-government ignores the extent to which many of the larger Indian bands in Canada are moving toward a form of supramunicipal government. The author's failure also ignores the fact that this policy promotes a structural form of assimilation where Indian peoples will be incorporated into the realm of provincial institutions to a degree never experienced before. Dickason's book is based on the idea that a good understanding of the past is necessary to understand the present. While this is a sound argument, a good grasp of contemporary events is an integral part of the process. Certainly, there is ample literature to allow a much better analysis of contemporary aboriginal history than the author provides. If the author ever chooses to revise this book, she should concentrate on this part.

In the final pages of the book Dickason contends that the expectations of Europeans that Indians would be absorbed into the dominant society have not been fulfilled. Instead, Indian peoples have been able to survive because of their adaptability. She points to the revival of native spiritual beliefs, the rise of political activism, and the campaign for political self-determination as contemporary indicators of their survival. This may be an overly optimistic view. What the author needs to consider is whether traditional Indian cultures have been maintained when Indian peoples have had to confront the constant pressure of assimilation. If culture is defined as a blueprint for living and

survival, the question of surviving as Indians takes on quite a different form. The pertinent question becomes that of identifying what elements of traditional aboriginal cultures have survived and will continue to exist. To begin to answer this question, the author needs to expand her view to include the decision-making and leadership selection processes within existing aboriginal communities. In the end, however, despite my reservations, Dickason's book is a valuable survey of Canadian aboriginal history, and the author must be commended for accomplishing such an ambitious task.

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Chief Joseph's Allies. By Clifford E. Trafzer and Richard D. Scheuerman. Newcastle, California: Sierra Oaks Publishing Company, 1992. 112 pages. \$17.95 paper.

Prepared by specialists thoroughly familiar with their subject, this volume contributes a sound interpretation of useful information to an already extensive literature of Pacific Northwest Indian history, primarily from 1876 to 1885. A great deal of attention has been paid to ranching pressures against several Nez Percé bands in 1876 that led to their exile to Kansas and Oklahoma until 1885. But much less notice has attended any explanation of how, when Wallows Valley and Salmon River bands could not avoid military hostilities, similar troubles enveloped Palouse and other lower Snake River peoples. Problems of survival in Oklahoma and of returning to Idaho or Washington likewise have gained far less coverage. This presentation surveys both features.

Like other western Indians, independent Nez Percé bands encountered severe problems with settlers who wanted to exclude them from their traditional bases. A number of small bands identified as upper and lower Palouse spoke a Nez Percé dialect and, like all Nez Percé bands, pursued their own independent course as best they could after settlers invaded their country along the Snake River west of Lewiston. When mining in Idaho disrupted their culture, they did what they could to retain their ancestral lands and customs. Early military operations came through their domain, and ranchers bothered them when troubles focused on other Nez Percé bands. Some Palouse people were