

Richard Condon, with Julia Ogina and the Holman Elders. *The Northern Copper Inuit: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, 216 pp.

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The practice of writing the history of Indigenous groups has undergone a major transformation in recent years. It was not so very long ago, in the 1950s and early 1960s, that First Nations societies were virtually ignored in the history texts, a striking omission that was an integral part of the cultural and intellectual process of marginalizing Indigenous peoples. The process of historical analysis has evolved dramatically since that time. The first non-Indigenous writers into the field generally wrote from a highly critical perspective, using the experiences of the Indigenous peoples to document the shortcomings of the federal government and Canadian society generally. A more nuanced interpretation emerged subsequently, as scholars searched the archives for historical records and provided a more balanced analysis of the evolution of northern and Indigenous societies.

*The Northern Copper Inuit* represents a continuation of the evolution of historical scholarship on Indigenous peoples and northern societies. The late Richard Condon (d. 1995), a noted Arctic ethnographer who had spent many years in the north, worked closely with the elders of Holman to create a history unlike those written a few decades earlier. This is not a history based on extensive archival work, although Condon and his principal researcher/interpreter Julia Ogina did draw on available published sources. Rather, this is history that seeks to draw evidence from the Inuit themselves, through oral testimony and community historians. Further, Condon's book weaves historical narratives, in a European sense, with Inuit oral accounts of events among the Copper Inuit. The result is an interesting, if often uneven, juxtaposition of historical records and accounts.

Condon's volume follows a fairly standard chronological structure, with chapters devoted to prehistory, early contact history, traditional Copper Inuit culture (1850–1910), trappers and traders, the growth of the Holman Settlement, and the evolution of the community (which Condon curiously calls "modernization") from 1966 to the present. The chapters blend insights across disciplines and culture, drawing heavily on archeological research and on historical, geographic and anthropological reports, and making extensive use of Inuit oral accounts. In the case of

the latter, Condon has endeavoured not to interfere unduly (beyond the selection of the material for inclusion) in the telling of Inuit stories. Most of the chapters (the earliest ones follow a fairly traditional academic format) include extensive quotations from Inuit elders. These oral accounts are separate from the main analytical text, but are juxtaposed by theme and content to add depth and insight into the standard scholarly analysis.

*The Northern Inuit* has much to commend it. The volume is well-illustrated, with many excellent photographs and Inuit prints, and a series of useful maps. There is an element of realism to this account of Inuit life that is often missing in non-Indigenous and academic accounts, and an unromanticized tone that gives considerable authenticity to the material. The fact that the elders' testimony is allowed to stand on its own – and is not dissected and shortened into partial quotations to support specific interpretative points – is particularly pleasing. The book endeavours to include contemporary elements, and does so without ignoring social problems or over-glorifying the promise of land claims settlement and self-government agreements.

The volume has some shortcomings. The material jumps around a great deal, and the desire to incorporate disparate voices and perspectives often means that the central point is easily missed and that contradictions in information are not clarified. Furthermore, the decision to integrate academic perspectives, accounts from historical records and Inuit testimony means that the narrative is often lost, resulting in a book that is full of information but does not lead the reader easily through its pages.

Historians have often said that there is a great deal to learn from Inuit and First Nations testimony, and then have typically limited their use of the material to an occasional quotation and footnote. Condon, an anthropologist by training, did not capitalize on the abundant and largely untapped documentary records in the preparation of this book, and relied instead on the relatively small number of published historical and anthropological accounts. He did, however, make good on his promise to incorporate Inuit perspectives and insights into his study. The result is a pleasing, if occasionally uneven, account of the Copper Inuit. It is, at the same time, a useful step in the continued evolution of scholarly writing on Indigenous peoples. The tragedy of Richard Condon's death is made more poignant by the promise of this volume, which illustrates his personal determination to work co-operatively with the Inuit in the elaboration of general understanding of northern society and history.

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