

In some respects, Second Nature is the antidote to Farley Mowat's Sea of Slaughter. While this may seem too damning with faint praise, by this I mean that Alan Herscovici has produced a timely and readable book. It is not and does not pretend to be scholarly. For much of its length, it provides a good and, in the Native peoples sections, excellent overview of events and effects. Because it is not scholarly in intent (although it definitely will find use in ethics, philosophy and anthropology-sociology forums and classes), the problems of weak bibliography, manner of referencing, and heavy reliance on personal communications can be absorbed. One thing that might be noted, however, is that it is my understanding that the author received some material support during the writing stage of Second Nature from the Fur Institute of Canada. If this is true, it is nowhere acknowledged in the book's preface. Beyond this, I believe that the author has provided us with a work that deserves a wide readership from all sides of the question.

George W. Wenzel

Paul Driben: We Are Metis: The Ethnography of a Halfbreed Community in Northern Alberta. New York: AMS Press, 1985. 176 pages.

When I heard that Driben's 1975 thesis on an Alberta Metis colony was to be published, I had hoped that he would have taken the opportunity to update his material, or at least inform his readers of the many significant changes that have taken place in the Metis communities since he visited the colonies in 1970. However, except for the addition of an index, the thesis has been reprinted without change. The unfortunate result is that opening this book thrusts the reader into a sort of time-warp, with few indications that this is happening.

The time-warp operates on at least two levels: the theoretical framework is hopelessly out of date and irrelevant (it is based in part on a refutation of the Social Darwinist ideas of

Herbert Spencer, circa 1892), and the ethnographic description gives us a totally out-moded picture of life on the Metis colonies (or settlements as they are now called) of Alberta. These data are presented in the "ethnographic present" with absolutely no indication that anything has changed in the last fifteen years. Anyone who is unfamiliar with the current state of Metis life in Alberta is going to be left with a very distorted impression after reading this book.

For example, Driben describes the power structure as it existed in the colonies in the late 1960s, showing the almost total subjugation the residents suffered at the hands of the colony supervisor, the Metis Rehabilitation Branch and the rest of the provincial government hierarchy. We are left with the impression that there was an almost total political apathy on the part of the Metis residents. This is a disturbing picture, but the situation has changed greatly since then. For example, the Metis Rehabilitation Branch (now known as the Metis Development Branch) has been moved out of the Department of Public Welfare to the Department of Municipal Affairs. This involves more than a mere name change; the Metis themselves see the move as a positive one, as part of the long range plans to have the settlements function as full-fledged municipalities. Another kind of change is evidenced by the formation of the Federation of Metis Settlements (FMS), the political voice of the settlement residents. From its inception, the FMS quickly began challenging established government policy concerning the Metis settlements, and in 1974 launched a court case against the province in an attempt to recoup oil and gas royalties which had been flowing into the provincial coffers from oil wells located on settlement lands.

It seems likely that the Metis were much more politically active than Driben reported in 1970. The Federation of Metis Settlements was formed in 1973, only three years after Driben visited the colony, and its formulation was just one manifestation of a long line of Metis political activities, many of which were going on while Driben was there. For example, The Metis Association of Alberta was operating at the time, and had as one

of its official concerns the welfare of the settlement residents. Driben does not mention the organization once.

There are other problems with this work besides the fact that time has passed it by. The treatment of Metis history in the province of Alberta is one example. Although the bulk of the ethnography concerns itself with life on a Metis colony, there is no indication of why these colonies exist, or how they came to be. Instead, Driben gives us a quick rehash of Metis history ending with the 1885 Rebellion. He then begins to describe Metis colony life in 1970 as if nothing of import had happened in the intervening eighty-five years, other than noting that the Metis Betterment Act was passed in 1938, and the first colonies opened in 1940. But where did the decision to open the Metis colonies come from? What were the social conditions that led to this? Driben does not seem to think that these are important questions. Nowhere is there any mention of the Ewing Commission, or why it was set up, or why it eventually recommended the establishment of the Metis colonies. Neither is there any mention of early Metis leaders like Brady, Norris or Dion, whose activities formed such an important part of the entire proceedings.

If Driben ignores history when he discusses the settlements, he lives history in his theoretical approach. Here we are carried all the way back to the nineteenth century when Social Darwinism was in flower. Incredibly, Driben seriously quotes an 1893 suggestion of Herbert Spencer's that interracial miscegenation would undoubtedly lead to physiological misfits. Ignoring the fact that physical anthropologists have long since abandoned such ideas as completely unfounded, Driben then considers whether the Metis could be characterized as "sociologically maladapted" because of miscegenation. Near the end of his thesis, Driben indicates that he does not think that they can be, but he cautions us that his data cannot completely refute Spencer's hypothesis. It is unbelievable that Driben should give these ideas any credibility in this day and age, or that he does not at least discuss the negative assessment of Social Darwinism held by the majority of social scientists today.

Driben's inappropriate and outmoded theoretical perspective is matched by his apparent lack of awareness of other research and writing being done at the time. He seems to think no one has done research on the Metis colonies previously--"They have been ignored," he tells us, more than once. Granted, in 1970, research on the Metis had not yet become the mini-industry it is today, but Driben overlooks such basic material as Hatt's 1969 thesis on a sister colony near Lac-la-Biche, or Spaulding's 1970 thesis on the Metis of Ile-a-la-Crosse in Saskatchewan. This adds to the impression that Driben is writing in some sort of vacuum.

Driben's thesis does provide those interested in the political activities of the Metis with a useful basis for comparison with the contemporary situation. His research was carried out at a significant time in the Metis' political development. They were just beginning to find their voice on the provincial and national levels with the reformulation of the Metis Association of Alberta, but they had not yet formulated an effective organization that could speak to the problems of the Metis living on the colonies. However, the significance of all this is likely to be lost on the reader, since Driben's framework of analysis does not allow him to place his material in any kind of wider perspective, but leaves the Metis frozen in some sort of never-never land untouched by time or by any events outside the confines of their colony.

At the very least, this book needs an introductory chapter delineating some of the political activities that were already under way during Driben's stay, as well as some of the fundamental changes that have occurred since 1970. But even with such an addition, this work would still be saddled with its woefully inadequate historical treatment, and its inept and irrelevant theoretical orientation. It is difficult to see why this book was published. It is doomed to occupy a very low place on the bookshelves devoted to Metis literature and analysis.

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