

J.R. Miller, Editor. *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.

A colleague of mine remarked, upon first seeing *Sweet Promises* in print, "Wonderful, I finally have a textbook for my Indian History course." Indeed, Miller's book fills a gap in teaching Indian history by bringing together in one volume twenty-five essays, all previously published, on a wide variety of topics. The purpose of the book is to ". . . illustrate the several eras and themes that distinguish the history of Indian-White relations . . . and to provide an opportunity to study some of the shifts of attitudes of the people who have studied native peoples." The book is meant to be a companion volume to Miller's earlier work, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens*. Miller argues, in a brief introduction, that the history of Indian-White relations can be divided into four chronological phases, and the topics of the chapters are loosely organized to reflect those phases. The critical factor that determines the nature of the relationship is the motives the two sides had for interacting. The first phase in New France, the western interior and the Pacific is marked by relative co-operation and harmony as a result of the fact that both sides entered into a mutually satisfying commercial relationship in fishing, fur-trading and exploring. The positive relations on the Indian side were the outcome of their cultural value of sharing, augmented by the motive of economic gain. The Europeans, in addition to economic motives, posed no serious threat to the Indians or their land. The second phase was characterized by a period when the Europeans needed the Indians as military allies. After the war of 1812 the conflict in values and motives led to an era of friction between the two groups as the Europeans needed land for settlement, placed the Indians under government protection and implemented a policy of assimilation. The final period, beginning in the 1920s, Miller terms the emergence of Native political associations and is marked by Indians organizing around such issues as land claims, constitutional status of Aboriginal peoples and the environment.

The majority of the twenty-five essays in the volume is reprinted from a wide variety of academic journals (eleven), scholarly books (seven) and conference proceedings (three). Most of the papers are recently published (nineteen since 1970) and are from readily available sources such as the *Canadian Historical Review*, *Ethnohistory* and recently published anthologies. The editor provides a brief Introduction that discusses the phases of Indian-White interaction and relates them to the essays and includes a short conclusion outlining current issues facing Aboriginal peoples. There is no index.

The essays are written by a number of eminent historians in the field

of Indian history (e.g., Trigger, Jaenen, Dickason, Tobias, Milloy, Rich, Van Kirk, Fisher, Friesen, Carter) and are generally first-class treatments of their topics. Two early works, Diamond Jenness' "The Indian Interpretation of Nature" (1930) and George Stanley's "The Indians in the War of 1812" (1950) are the earliest pieces. There are also three papers by Aboriginal people (Dickason, Cuthand and Cardinal). The articles are arranged chronologically into twelve sections, each with two essays, and cover specific geographical areas and topics including New France, Atlantic Canada, Military Alliance, Indian Policy, the West, Treaties and Reserves, the Northwest Rebellion, the Pacific Coast, Native Organizations, Native Rights, and Native People and the Environment. The eclectic approach of the book is, inevitably, both its strength and weakness. On the one hand, the breadth of topics provides a solid overview of the subject; on the other hand, there is a "once over lightly" sense of the treatment of some of the issues. In addition, there is no serious linking of the topics or eras. To some degree, this is inevitable in volumes of readings by several authors on diverse topics. The situation is somewhat alleviated by the fact that this volume can be used as a supplement to two recently published texts on Indian history, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens* and Dickason's *Canada's First Nations*. Still, more attention could have been paid to the editing in terms of standardizing terms and providing a longer introduction or conclusion discussing the central themes and connecting the essays more effectively. It would also be helpful for comparative purposes if an index had been included.

The essays themselves, however, provide an important contribution to Indian historical scholarship in a variety of ways. Most importantly, they bring to a wide readership a treatment from a variety of perspectives of an important and, by and large, neglected area of Canadian history. Many provide important reinterpretations of conventional historical representations of "Indians as victims." For example, Dickason demonstrates that Micmacs were effective diplomats in the power relations between the European powers, Stanley points out that Indians were competent strategists in military matters, Taylor argues that western Indians were often shrewd negotiators of treaties, and Fisher suggests that Pacific Coast Indians exercised effective control over the maritime fur trade. The papers by Aboriginal people provide an opportunity to correct the mistake that Indians were passive victims of government attempts to assimilate them. Rather, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, various Indian groups undertook to organize politically to resist government policies.

The final section of the book, dealing with Native people and the environment, is the weakest. The short piece by Jenness on Indian spirituality is dated and presents an "outsiders" view on a complex aspect

of Aboriginal culture. It might have been appropriate, if the subject was to be covered at all, to reprint an article by a Native person knowledgeable of the subject. The last two articles, an excerpt from the Brundtland Report and a comment on the report, suggesting that non-Natives can learn a great deal from the knowledge that Indigenous peoples have of the environment, are too short and superficial to provide any real insight on the issue. Similarly, the conclusion makes an attempt in seven pages to discuss land claims, constitutional entrenchment of Aboriginal self-government and environmental issues. The strength of the volume is its historical analysis of Indian-White relations. The contemporary issues could have been omitted as they have been discussed more adequately elsewhere. Finally, Miller does not deliver on his stated purpose of examining the shifts in attitudes of people who have studied Native peoples. Indeed, the issue is not addressed. It would have been interesting if the volume had examined some of the emerging issues in the treatment of Aboriginal peoples by historians, such as the validity of "indigenous knowledge" and oral history.

Miller has done students, scholars and the layman a good turn by bringing these important essays together in one volume and supplied many Indian history courses with an excellent textbook.

Don McCaskill

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