

Donald Purich. *The Inuit and Their Land: The Story of Nunavut*. Toronto: Lorimer, 1992.

One could not hope for a more timely book than this introduction to the dual strategy by which the Inuit of Canada's central and eastern Arctic hope to gain control of their future. The November 1992, ratification of the Inuit Aboriginal claim and the approval six months earlier of the boundary for dividing the present Northwest Territories to create Nunavut represent very major steps toward a territory that the Inuit will control by virtue of comprising four-fifths of the population.

In *The Inuit and Their Land*, Donald Purich presents a highly readable, if occasionally inflated, account of the claim settlement and division of the NWT by which the Inuit hope to face their future with confidence. By way of background, Purich, a strong supporter of the Inuit strategy, briefly but cogently explains the rationale for Nunavut, presents the history of Inuit occupation of the North and describes contemporary social conditions among the Inuit. He emphasizes the arrival of non-Inuit and, in particular, non-Inuit government as having disrupted Inuit life and having contributed to the social problems, such as unemployment, poverty and lack of education. Purich describes these problems frankly, arguing that they are obstacles that the new territory of Nunavut will have to confront, and that the Inuit are confident that the new arrangements they seek will equip them to meet these challenges. His willingness to leave the matter at that may be congenial, but it inflates the prospects for Nunavut. He would be more convincing if he argued that, while the challenge is daunting and the outcome uncertain, division and the claim settlement deserve support because they offer the best chance of overcoming the problems whose difficulty he so powerfully describes.

Purich opens his discussion of division by reviewing its history from the 1960s to the present. This narrative is an excellent thumbnail sketch of the commissions, reports, debates and policies over the last thirty years that have defined the context within which Nunavut is taking shape today. Purich also identifies and argues against several objections to Nunavut. In the end he judges the financial cost to be the greatest problem facing the architects of division.

This discussion offers a great many valuable insights. However, it fails to clearly and correctly relate the creation of Nunavut to the national progress of Aboriginal self-government. As the author notes, Nunavut will empower an Aboriginal people to govern itself. Inuit success will add to the credibility with which other Aboriginal peoples pursue self-government for themselves. However, Nunavut will not in a constitutional sense be an instance of Aboriginal self-government. The sovereignty it will

ultimately exercise will derive from the Crown, not from any inherent Aboriginal right. The process by which the relationship between Nunavut and Ottawa will be negotiated will involve a legally subordinate Nunavut against a legally dominant Ottawa. The Inuit can point to the political accord they and Ottawa signed as a prerequisite to their ratifying the claim settlement. They can argue that this accord holds some kind of constitutional status by virtue of its connection to a claim settlement that enjoys constitutional entrenchment. However, this is likely to be a more indirect and less powerful claim on Ottawa than could be advanced by an Aboriginal government based on an inherent right. The author does describe Nunavut as a public government, but tends to emphasize the benefits of this status and understate its potential shortcomings.

Readers unfamiliar with Inuit Aboriginal claims will find the middle section of *The Inuit and Their Land* an excellent introduction that effectively places the claims in their historical context and details the recent Tungavik Federation of Nunavut settlement.

The concluding chapter muses "Nunavut and Canada's Future." The overstatement that intermittently mars the rest of the book reappears here when the author suggests that the new government of Nunavut might come to represent Inuit throughout Canada, in the same way that "Quebec [has] assumed that role for the French language and culture in North America." Leaving aside the fact that Quebec has spurned this role, viewing francophone life outside Quebec as doomed, Nunavut will provide a focus for Inuit life and culture but would be very ill-advised to intervene in the affairs of provinces or to claim to speak for their people. In contrast, the chapter takes a more realistic position in arguing that Inuit success in the future will depend on the goodwill with which non-Inuit respond to it.

It is on this plane that *The Inuit and Their Land* will make its greatest contribution. It is clearly addressed to a popular audience. In place of the footnotes found in scholarly publications, the book offers a helpful essay on sources to guide novices to the topic in their search for supplementary materials. Moreover, the book's accessible style makes for an attractive presentation of a wealth of detail and insight. While the author's enthusiasm for his subject leads to the occasional overblown observation, he has struck a better balance between the problems and prospects of Nunavut than most other authors have managed. *The Inuit and Their Land* will enlighten readers and, by fostering informed national sympathy for the Inuit project, will make a genuine contribution to the progress of Nunavut. It is a welcome addition to the literature.

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