



Rediscovering the First Nations of Canada, by John W. Friesen. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1997. Pp. 259 + references/ index.

John W. Friesen begins this volume by telling his readers that he originally wanted to call the book "People Just Like Us," as the premise of the work "is that beneath the surface of any cultural garb beats a human heart" (p. 10). Friesen promises to take us on "a journey of discovery and rediscovery" of Canada's First Nations, after which he hopes readers will ascertain "the true essence of what a pluralist society can be" (p. 258). While Friesen does guide us through the maze of the various Native culture areas in Canada, he succeeds mainly in covering territory that has already been charted by other historians and anthropologists. Still, the issues Friesen raise in this publication do incite discussion about both the past and future of Canada's Native peoples.

A professor of education in the Graduate Division of Educational Research at the University of Calgary, Friesen has authored a number of publications in the areas of Native history and multiculturalism such as *When Cultures Clash: Case Studies in Multiculturalism* (Detselig, 1993) and *The Riel/Real Story: An Interpretive History of the Métis People of Canada* (Borealis, 1996). As in many of his other works, Friesen admits in the preface of *Rediscovering the First Nations of Canada* that the "book is not for everyone" (p. 9), as he is "biased with a pro-Indian slant" (p. 11). It is not clear whom Friesen planned to take along with him on this tour of Native Canada, although he primarily seems to be addressing the general public rather than an academic audience. He in fact defines his approach as "interpretive, rather than constituting an archetype of hard-core academia" (p. 11). Regardless of who is making the trip, Friesen does stress that the aim of the voyage should be to explore the many facets of Canada's Native peoples that the European "discoverers" of Canada neglected the first time.

To meet this goal, in the first of ten chapters Friesen begins by discussing what he calls the "Pre-Contact Lifestyle of Canada's First Nations." This chapter offers background information for the next six chapters, each of which deals with a specific culture area — Maritimes, Great Lakes, Plains, West Plateau, West Coast and the North. Within this larger framework of culture areas, each of these six chapters provide brief ethnographies of selected Native groups such as the Beothuk and Huron, and all of the chapters follow the same organization. Each ethnography begins with what Friesen has titled a "Chronicle" which encompasses a legend from each Aboriginal Nation, such as the source of the seasons and stories about such topics as how the bear came to have a short tail. Next, the cultural aspects of the Native group under study such as ceremonies and social order are discussed, followed by an examination of the religious practices of each Nation. Every ethnographical record ends with a short conclusion. Friesen devotes the most time to an examination of the Plains culture area, covering such topics as the importance of the buffalo to Plains tribes.

The final three chapters address the concept of "rediscovering" Canada's First Nations. The first of these entitled "The First Discovery" follows the interaction of Aboriginal peoples and newcomers from eastern to western Canada, stressing the misconceptions which plagued the initial interaction between Canada's indigenous peoples and the Europeans. Describing the newcomers as "tourists," Friesen's main point in this chapter is that European explorers and settlers should have accorded Native peoples more respect and recognition. Friesen's prior research into the history of Plains Native groups becomes evident in this and the next chapter, to the point where he sometimes makes claims which do not apply to Native groups in the rest of Canada. He mentions, for instance, that government officials "coerced" Natives across Canada into farming (p. 223), yet many

Native groups of course were agriculturists long before the federal government adopted the "civilization" policy. Further, works such as Sarah Carter's *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990) have shown that many groups actively sought out farming enterprises. Elsewhere, Friesen professes that the establishment of reserves made it easier for government agents to manage Native peoples, particularly "once the buffalo had vanished" (p. 234). Again, such a statement cannot be applied to all Aboriginal groups from the various regions of Canada.

The second last chapter of *Rediscovering the First Nations of Canada* explores the ways in which indigenous peoples today are experiencing a cultural and spiritual revival through such methods as contact with elders, a resurgence of traditional ceremonies and Aboriginal control of First Nations education. Friesen ends the chapter with a discussion of the possibility and the implications of Native self-government.

The final chapter, "Benefits of Rediscovery," studies the various ways in which non-Native society would profit from "rediscovering" Canada's First Nations. Friesen cites a multitude of ways in which traditional Native society is exemplary and worthy of imitation by mainstream Canadian society, such as a concern for ecology, democratic systems of government, a hospitable nature and an admirable treatment of women. Friesen hopes that the existence of such positive aspects of traditional Native cultures will inspire Canadians to investigate what the original explorers either missed or disregarded about Canada's indigenous peoples.

While interesting and informative, in many ways Friesen does not deliver what the title of this work promises. Only three of ten chapters discuss "discovery" and "rediscovery." The rest of the work focuses on ethnographies which are readily found in such works as Alice B. Kehoe, *North American Indians: A Comprehensive Account*, 2nd ed. (Prentice-Hall, 1992); R. Bruce Morrison and C. Roderick Wilson, eds., *Native Peoples: The Canadian Experience*, 2nd ed. (McClelland and Stewart, 1995); Alan D. McMillan, *Native Peoples and Cultures of Canada: An Anthropological Overview*, 2nd ed. (Douglas and McIntyre, 1995) and in various volumes in the series *Handbook of North American Indians* (Smithsonian Institution, various dates).

Yet, even though much of this information is found elsewhere and Friesen does not undertake any primary research, the work does succeed in synthesizing a great deal of literature on Canada's Native peoples. Rather than full footnote notations, however, Friesen chooses to use the parenthetical method of citation which provides only the author and the year of publication, without including a page reference. This proves frustrating for those wanting to conduct more in-depth research. One also questions why Native oral testimony is absent from such a work, particularly since Friesen claims to have undertaken a great deal of this type of research (p. 11).

Moreover, at times Friesen is unduly harsh towards his readers, assuming they lack a great deal of knowledge about Canada's Native peoples. At one point, for instance, he flippantly points out that "[c]ontrary to popular myth, Canadian agriculture did not begin with the Alberta or Saskatchewan Wheat Pool!" (p. 67). This shortcoming seems even more obvious given that Friesen writes in a manner that makes it appear that all First Nations today live according to the ways and tenets of their ancestors, when this is obviously not the case for every Native. The author neglects a discussion of this point, instead treating the Native peoples of Canada like anachronistic beings who have somehow escaped the ravages of time.

Not surprisingly, then, a discussion of Native agency is lacking in this piece. Often, Friesen describes Aboriginals as victims who were incapable of responding to the actions and policies of non-Native society. Only now, he claims, are indigenous people operating

“with the advantage of knowing how things really work” (p. 226). Native societies, of course, realized relatively quickly that the encroachment of European settlement would have a profound impact on their way of life. That First Nations peoples fought such intrusion early on has been well documented by writers such as J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada*, rev. ed. (University of Toronto Press, 1991) and Olive Patricia Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (McClelland and Stewart, 1992). Friesen does concede that men such as Plains Cree Chief Thunderchild held out signing a treaty because of neglected treaty promises (p. 118), and he points out that Natives were “shrewd bargainers” in the fur trade (p. 214).

Despite these criticisms, *Rediscovering the First Nations of Canada* does serve as a useful reference work that would be effective as a text for an introductory course in an area such as the history of Canada's Native peoples. Questions raised by a reading of this volume can easily be answered by consulting the extensive list of references utilized by Friesen. Even though this work offers little that is new to the more advanced scholar of Native history and culture, it does provoke thought about not only what newcomers could have learned from First Nations peoples, but also what present-day mainstream society has yet to discover as well.

Dr. Jennifer Pettit
University of Calgary/Mount Royal College



Deemed Unsuitable: Blacks from Oklahoma Move to the Canadian Prairies in Search of Equality in the Early 20th Century Only to Find Racism in their New Home, by R. Bruce Shepard. Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1997. Pp. ix, 149. 17 plates, 5 maps.

The fact that racism knows no boundaries is the major proposition of R. Bruce Shepard's *Deemed Unsuitable*, a book documenting the migration of African-Americans from Oklahoma to the Canadian Prairies during the early twentieth century. Shepard, the director of the Diefenbaker Canada Centre at the University of Saskatchewan, examines the pre- and post-migration experiences of just over 1,000 men, women and children. Yet this is more than just a simple story of migration as the author effectively demonstrates the way in which racism on both sides of the border engendered the political, social and moral corruption which characterized this particularly sad chapter in North American history. To this end, Shepard embarks on a mission to show Canadians that “however much they pride themselves on their ethnic and racial tolerance, they still have not confronted the latent racism in their society” (p. v).

In his introduction, the author outlines the themes to be explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters: the roots of colour prejudice in North America, the role of business and the media in promoting such attitudes on both sides of the border, and the impact that Canadian government policies had on discouraging the emigration of this group into Canada. The roots of European and, in particular, British racism are reviewed in chapter one. Shepard identifies and discusses the mechanisms, such as slavery, by which such attitudes were transported and diffused throughout American society. In particular, he provides a lengthy review of measures taken to segregate and disenfranchise African-Americans in the south.

In chapter two, Shepard places the movement of African-Americans into the Indian Territory of Oklahoma in the larger historical context of black migration from the older southeastern states to the new lands of the west, an exodus driven by the “push” of