

## Whites and Indians

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temptation to see women as nothing but passive victims. A strong antidote to that temptation is Sophia Firth's *The Urbanization of Sophia Firth* (Toronto, Peter Martin, 1974), an excellent account of one woman's migration with her family from unemployment and a drafty shack with outdoor plumbing in Restigouche County, New Brunswick, to unsteady employment, a deteriorating neighbourhood, and hassles with City Hall Inspectors and Manpower and Immigration in Toronto. It is not merely a female version of *Goin' Down the Road*. Sophia Firth is a highly intelligent, tough-minded, trenchantly articulate, and self-aware woman. Her story does not end in crime and defeat, but in sustained dedication to helping, not cheating, one's sister and brother, to social justice and democracy and to a belief in individual and group action to make the government serve the people who pay it to govern. Her stand on women's liberation, as on many other issues, is individual and unorthodox. She even formulates her own philosophy of freedom through poverty. Her book can serve to remind us that the experience of women, present and past, is vast and varied and that the proper study of womankind is woman.

RUTH PIERSON

### Whites and Indians

If in A. L. Kroeber's famous phrase, "culture is a precipitate of history", then the study of history may not be so much an attempt to illuminate the past as to come to terms with the present. For all the peoples of the Americas, an important constituent of this historic experience and one that uniquely shaped life here has been the complex inter-relationships between Whites and Indians. Thus, it is not surprising that ever since Europeans discovered what to them was a new world, these inter-relationships should be explored by writers of virtually every kind.

For the historian the study of Indian-White relations has its special problems. Two are of particular consequence. First, the Indians of the North American continent did not have writing systems; their societies lacked the centralized institutions, particularly commercial ones, that foster the development of such systems. Consequently, they did not leave for future generations the raw material historians demand for the practice of their craft: written documents. Second and of possibly equal importance, the Indians were not as infatuated with history as were their contemporaries of the Western world. The reasons for this are ill-understood, but may well rest on a different attitude than that familiar to us towards both time and cause and effect as expressed in temporal sequence. Those great bodies of tradition in Indian society that correspond to historical lore in our own often lack the particular sonorities we associate with accurate historical accounts and because we do not have at present the means of converting these traditions to

such familiar phrasing, we are prevented from using them in the writing of history.

In his *Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660* (2 vols., Montreal and London, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976), Bruce G. Trigger has tried to rectify the bias this lack of data has usually introduced into historical writing on the Indian. The attempt is one of the most successful to date. Trigger's work is also a monumental study, the history not only of one Indian people, but also of a region. Before their defeat by the Iroquois in 1649, the Hurons played an important role in the fur trade which affected both European-Indian relations, and relationships between the various Indian tribes in the Northeast region. The history of any Indian people cannot be understood without attention to the many and complex political and economic factors that affected not only them but also the other peoples with whom they were in direct and indirect contact. Trigger quite rightly has recognized this. For all his obvious biases, Francis Parkman did too — a matter often forgotten by more recent historians such as W. J. Eccles, who all too often treat all Indians as "Indians", ignoring the fact that the different "tribes" were as different as the "nations" of Europe and that each pursued its own interests much as did the European powers. Trigger correctly realizes that not all individuals or all groups within each Indian tribe and confederacy (like the Iroquois, the Hurons were a confederacy) agreed where their interests lay and so did not pursue the same course of action.

The approach used by Trigger is one that in recent decades has come to be known as ethnohistory, a term which although it has acquired several different meanings is usually regarded as combining the methods of the historian with those of the anthropologist to study the history of peoples who have no written history of their own. Although anthropologists have used the earlier accounts, both published and unpublished, of these peoples ever since the emergence of the field as a distinct discipline over a hundred years ago, the analysis of these accounts has not been their primary concern. Anthropologists have often been overly skeptical of the value of the historical accounts and when they have not, they too frequently have not employed the evaluative canons historians would normally apply to these data. Historians, on the other hand, usually have not used to full advantage the information relevant to history derived from the analysis of ethnographic study of culture, archaeological data, and the comparative study of language — materials anthropologists have turned to in their historical studies because the written record is so sparse. This is not to say that ethnohistory has resolved all problems; it has not. Nonetheless, ethnohistory may be the only proper way to approach this subject. The discussion of Huron culture and of Huron history in Trigger's *Children of Aataentsic* as evidenced in the archaeological remains is as necessary to the subject as is that of the sixteenth and seven-

teenth-century French accounts. Since Trigger has also examined the motives and actions of Europeans, both individuals and groups, his work is a major contribution to the history of New France as well as a model of how ethno-history ought to be done.

The Huron were a Northern Iroquoian-speaking people, one of approximately a half dozen Iroquoian groups who lived in the region centering on the Lower Great Lakes. The most famous of these were the Iroquois, the Confederacy of Five Nations, who, in the third quarter of the seventeenth century, defeated their linguistic and cultural relatives including the Hurons themselves. The other great group of linguistically and culturally related Indian peoples in the northeastern quadrant of the North American continent were the Algonquian-speakers. Fortuitously, the University of Toronto Press has republished A. G. Bailey's classic study of the response of some of these people to Western Civilization at the same time that the McGill-Queens University Press published Trigger's magnum opus on the Huron response to these influences. Bailey's *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures, 1504-1700* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1976) first appeared in 1936 and this second edition is an offset reprinting of the first to which has been added a new 13 page introduction — Bailey's appraisal of his work after three decades — and an index. Using the published sources, Bailey examines various changes in the society and culture of those Algonquian groups who had contact with the French in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He discusses the trade between Indians and Whites and the effect of that trade on the material, social, political, aesthetic, and religious life of these Indians as well as the changed relationships between the Indians themselves. Bailey recognizes that the exchange was not one-way, but that Indian ideas effected European culture contributing to the development of a distinctive Canadian culture — a process also to be found in histories of other countries of the western hemisphere. It is an important point, one sometimes more apparent to European observers than to those involved in the process, and one that deserves closer examination.

The conflict between Indian, both Algonquian and Iroquoian, and French cultures in the seventeenth century is also the subject of Cornelius J. Jaenen's *Friend and Foe: Aspects of French-Amerindian Cultural Contact in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1976). Jaenen has selected four different aspects of the conflict between the Indian and French cultures: religion, social problems and differences (especially those beloved topics of sociologists interested in social problems — alcohol and disease), warfare (including those two subjects that seem to have a peculiar fascination for Whites — scalping and torture), and assimilation. While the topics selected are perhaps more the favourite ones of the sociologist and social reformer than the historian or ethnologist, a useful purpose may

be served by this very selection. Our understanding of the complexities of the inter-relationships between Europeans and Indians will not be much increased by merely repeating the analyses of the past.

The documents themselves form the basis of W. D. Hamilton and W. A. Spray's *Source Material Relating to the New Brunswick Indians* (Fredericton, Centennial Print and Litho, 1976). I must admit to a personal preference for perusal of the major sources rather than a single volume of documentary history. Nonetheless, for most readers, who have neither the time nor inclination to browse extensively in this literature, volumes which extract from the primary sources serve a useful and important purpose: they convey a great deal about the flavour of the times in which the documents were written as well as the nature of the materials the historian perforce must use. This particular volume includes materials from Cartier's 1534 voyage to the year of Confederation divided into four time periods and with a brief summary of the major events of each period preceding the collection of documents from that period. It should prove to be a useful volume for those who want an overview of the history of the Indians of the province.

The most important work in French relevant to the study of Iroquoian culture and society that has escaped translation into English is undoubtedly Father Joseph Francois Lafitau's *Moeurs des sauvages américains*, first published in Paris in 1724. Happily this lack is now being corrected by the Champlain Society. The first volume of Lafitau's work, edited and translated by William N. Fenton and Elizabeth L. Moore, has been published; the second and final volume is to appear soon.<sup>1</sup> Lafitau's knowledge of Iroquois customs derived from the years (1712-1717) he spent as a missionary at Caughnawaga, the basically Mohawk settlement opposite Montreal, where he also had the benefit of the knowledge which other, long-time Jesuit missionaries to the Iroquois had gained. His description of the customs of Indians of the region is the most extensive of any for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the only near rival is the information scattered in the great seventeenth-century *Jesuit Relations*. In a sense Lafitau's volumes are a link between this seventeenth-century description of Iroquoian culture and modern ethnographic description which began in the middle of the nineteenth century with the publication of Lewis H. Morgan's *League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee or Iroquois* (Rochester, Sage and Brother, 1851). Lafitau's *Moeurs* is interesting and important also for his comparison of Iroquois practice with that of other peoples, notably those of the ancient world. Although such comparative studies were not new at the time, Lafitau's contribution was not inconsequential and offers some insight into how learned men in the early eighteenth

1 William N. Fenton and Elizabeth L. Moore, eds. and trans., *Customs of the American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times*, vol. 1 (Toronto, The Champlain Society, 1974).

century analyzed the data on the cultures of non-Western peoples, a subject that in the nineteenth century became the province of anthropology. In their long introduction to their translation, Fenton and Moore trace something of the intellectual history that preceded Lafitau's comparative study and the influence of his work on the studies which followed.

Throughout Lafitau's volumes, the reader can sense a concern with the question: what should the attitude toward the Indian be? As it is a question implicit or explicit in much writing on the Indian, some examination of these attitudes would seem useful and increasingly books and monographs dealing with the subject are being published. Jaenen's study of necessity includes considerable discussion of French attitudes toward the Indian in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Fenton and Moore include in their introduction some consideration of French attitudes as they relate to Lafitau's writings. Another recent study is Donald B. Smith's *Le Sauvage: The Native People in Quebec Historical Writing on the Heroic Period (1534-1663) of New France* (Ottawa, National Museum of Man, 1974). Although not presented as the definitive study of the subject, Smith's survey does serve as a reminder of how contemporary attitudes are both incorporated into and perpetuated by books written by historians over the centuries as well as in other descriptions of Indian life and culture such as those by the Jesuits in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As the interest in and the literature on the Indian grows, so also does the need for bibliographic guides. And in this respect, too, Smith's monograph reflects these current needs. He has included as an appendix a particularly useful bibliographic essay on the sources, including separate sections on various Quebec Indian groups.

With increased Indian activism and nationalistic demands of recent years — paradoxically the result, in part, of increased Indian participation in life outside the older Indian communities — there has been a call not only for more histories written by Indians themselves, but also for more sympathetic treatments than have appeared in the past. But the task may well not be easily accomplished. As Trigger notes:

Sympathy . . . does not always imply understanding and, without a clear understanding of people's motives, respect is impossible. All too much has been written about Indians that is well-intentioned and benevolent, yet most of this literature has failed to promote a genuine understanding of the Indians as people who had worthy ambitions of their own and who were, and are, able to conduct their own affairs and to interact intelligently with Europeans (p. 26).

After all Indians are people. They are subject to human frailties and have the capacity for greatness, and their lives are both constrained and encouraged by the heritage of their culture.