VISIONS OF THE *Heart*

CANADIAN ABORIGINAL ISSUES

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...ctive of Native people themselves. By breaking down the socially constructed barriers between researchers and researched, these writers offer an alternative, more personal view of social science.

Concerning the historical aspect, the standard western approach to history has been broadening and deepening as a result of the aboriginal challenge. Faced with the problem of tracing out the histories of peoples without writing, historians are having to resort to an interdisciplinary approach, one that draws from geology, archaeology, anthropology, linguistics, and other fields, providing insights into human combinations can lead to different answers from those offered in the past. In treating the Native factor within a narrow focus, and dismissing it as a relic of the past, historians and others have impoverished Canadian history. However, there is more to re-assessing the evidence than simply keeping the Native factor in mind. As Couture, Irwin and Farrell, Fox, Peters, Monture-Angus, and Brascoupé demonstrate, historians and other social scientists need to make the effort to understand Native concerns and, above all, to appreciate Native perceptions. Indeed, each chapter in *Visions of the Heart* shows that the Native contribution to the formation of modern Canada has been both much greater and more multifaceted than has ever been generally acknowledged, and that Natives actively contribute to Canadian society today. The contributors to this collection share the conviction that in taking up the challenge to understand the historical role of Native people in Canada, academics and non-academics alike will contribute to more hopeful, unifying dialogue.

CHAPTER 1

Toward a Larger View of Canada's History: The Native Factor[1]

Olive Patricia Dickason

A major lesson of the Oka confrontation of 1990 for most Canadians was the startling realization of how little they knew about their own history. For many, it was a revelation to learn that the conflict, far from being a flash in the pan, had roots that go deep into our national past — easily to the first meetings between Amerindians and Europeans, and by extension even beyond, if the attitudes that both sides brought with them are included. There was nothing in our standard national histories that prepared Canadians for this. The accepted historical approach, at least until recently, has been to begin with the voyages of Jacques Cartier, give a brief summary of his relations with the Amerindians of the St. Lawrence Valley, go on to discuss the fur trade and missionary activity, which were described as radically altering the Amerindian way of life, and perhaps to include something about the role of Amerindians in the colonial wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Once launched into the political and constitutional development of our country, historians have habitually left the Amerindians far behind as picturesque but irrelevant relics of the past. Not even mentioned are the numbered treaties of the west and north, by which the federal government acquired enormous areas of Amerindian lands for white settlement and industrial development, paving the way for the creation of the Canadian confederacy. Until well into the twentieth century, Canadian historians habitually depicted Natives as barbarians much in need of the civilizing influence of whites. There was little, if any, serious attempt to examine the Amerindian side of the story.[2]

HISTORY AS DEFINED IN THE WESTERN WORLD

History as developed in the western world during the nineteenth century is ... rather than derived from official

sources (Dickason, 1992, p. 11). Further, until the past few decades, the emphasis was almost exclusively on public affairs where the powerful and important dominated; not only were the rank and file who made up the bulk of society largely excluded, but preliterate or tribal societies were almost completely ignored. Such societies were labelled prehistoric or perhaps protohistoric; the best they could hope for was to become historic by extension, when they came into contact with literate societies. Since this

H. Trevor Roper, regius professor of modern history at Oxford University, [illegible] "equally African, the period before the arrival of [illegible] largely darkness, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not a subject of history" (*The Rise of Christian Europe*, cited in Krech, 1991, p. 345).

In the case of Canada, the meeting of French and Amerindians on the north Atlantic coast in the sixteenth century was very poorly documented, because with few exceptions (principally Jacques Cartier, who made three official voyages, 1534–42), early visitors came over on their own initiative primarily for the profits to be made from fishing and whaling. Keeping records was not a concern, except perhaps for commercial reasons, and the survival rate of those records has reflected their low official importance. It should also be remembered that these meetings were not a first, neither for the French nor for the Natives. The French had been trading with Amerindians in Brazil for nearly a century before they began seriously to develop the northern fur trade toward the end of the sixteenth century. By that time, northern Amerindians and Inuit had been dealing with Basques and Breton fishermen for almost as long, and before that may have encountered Norse. The earliest accounts we have indicate prior familiarity on both sides (except perhaps for the Norse); nowhere in the documented Canadian experience do we find Amerindians reacting toward Europeans as they did in the Caribbean toward the Spanish, whom they at first regarded as returning spirits. The closest approximation of this that has been recorded for Canada was Cartier's reception by the people upriver on the St. Lawrence above Stadacona (today's Quebec City), especially at Hochelaga (today's Montreal). There is some indication that they regarded Cartier as a shaman, with curing powers; however, their joy seems to have been mainly inspired by the French breach of Stadacona's control of the river, and the consequent prospect of direct trade with the French. Known documentary sources about these contacts, patchy as they are, in most cases have not been thoroughly searched by historians with Native history in mind. Surviving records, early published material, and Native traditions all need to be re-examined with this in view. A point to remember is that written accounts, no matter how objective they may seem, are always influenced by the attitudes and beliefs of the writer. Sorting out the biases from facts is rarely simple, no matter

TOWARD A BROADER CONCEPTION

Despite such difficulties, this century has seen a move toward a broader view of history, a move which has meant that, among other things, historians have begun to pay more attention to tribal nations. Because those nations were oral rather than literate peoples (even those who did possess a form of writing had not developed it into a widely shared form of com-

[illegible] that researching such a history calls for an interdisciplinary approach, one that draws from geology, archaeology, anthropology, linguistics, oral traditions, and the arts. Each provides insights that when pieced together with whatever documentary evidence exists help to fill in the picture. A principal problem for this approach has been the development of critical techniques to evaluate the information: cross-checking can be difficult, if possible at all. On top of that, the type of information provided by oral history does not necessarily fit the requirements of western-style history.[4]

Before delving into research methods, two questions should be answered: why is an understanding of prehistory important, and why should historians concern themselves about first contacts if the information is so difficult to come by? To begin with the last question, first contacts set the pattern for what was to follow in Amerindian–white relationships. The first impressions of Europeans — that Amerindians were "a remarkably strange and savage people, without faith, without law, without religion" (Thevet, 1878, p. 135) — crystallized into attitudes that determined patterns of relationships, which in turn influenced policies.

It is comparatively simple to trace out this sequence in today's sometimes problematic relations between First Nations and mainstream society. Two clear examples of this are the confrontation at Oka in 1990 over land that the Mohawk claim to be theirs since time immemorial, and Justice Allan McEachern's rejection in 1991 of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en claim to 57 000 square kilometres of traditional lands in northern British Columbia, a resource-rich area about the size of Nova Scotia. Justice McEachern denied the existence of aboriginal rights of ownership and jurisdiction,[5] drawing on arguments that had been developed originally from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries to justify the European takeover of aboriginal lands. According to these arguments, a sedentary lifestyle based on farming within a nation-state was a prerequisite for proprietary and sovereign rights; since hunter/gatherers were without settled abodes, they had no legitimate claims to either. In the case of the Mohawk, they are facing the added challenge of proving that they were the first, and continuous, occupants of the lands they are claiming. From these examples, it should be clear why it is important to understand the nature and history of precontact societies in Canada, at least as far as we are able. As Renaissance Europe had debated, were these fully

[illegible] different from those of Europe?

Or were they living according to nature, and thus with no more property rights (or rights of any kind, for that matter) than panthers or bears, to use a nineteenth-century journalistic expression?

WHAT GEOLOGY HAS TO SAY

Geology is [illegible] the glacial [illegible] know[illegible] different [illegible] and where humans could survive. Since Canada was largely ice-bound until about 10 000 to 14 000 years ago, human habitation is [illegible] to have been first confined to the few regions that escaped glaciation, such as the Yukon. In regions south of the glaciers it has been estimated that ecological conditions have been suitable for human habitation for about 50 000 years or more. It is widely believed that Amerindians first crossed over from Siberia on foot during periods when intensification of the glaciation lowered the sea level, transforming the Bering Strait into a grassy steppe some 2000 kilometres wide [illegible] 99) [illegible] coasts into one of this land bridge, called Beringia, emerged several times during the late Pleistocene geological age (the Wisconsin stage) between about 75 000 and 14 000 years ago (Young, 1988). It provided a rich habitat for such animals as mammoth, mastodon, giant bison, saiga antelope, and the predators that preyed upon them. That the herds attracted human hunters is a reasonable assumption supported by archaeological evidence from both sides of the Bering Strait.

However, the presence of land game does not necessarily imply that that the rich marine life off the coasts was ignored. Nor did the convenience of the pedestrian route mean that it was the only one that was used. In fact, the evidence is to the contrary; early camp sites tend to be by seacoasts and waterways, probably because of the comparative ease of harvesting marine resources, not to mention that of water travel. The Japanese Current, sweeping straight eastward across the Pacific to the Americas, provided a natural aquatic highway that would not have presented any great problems. We know that sea voyages were being undertaken as early as 50 000 years ago, as that was the time that humans reached the island continent of Australia. The argument that Arctic conditions were too dangerous for early seagoing technology is tenuous at best; the seagoing Beothuk canoe, for example, was well adapted for use among the ice floes.

ARCHAEOLOGY LENDS A HAND

Archaeology has been history's principal ally in tracing out the first set-

not preserve well in New World soils, the evidence of very early human presence has been based on artifacts rather than skeletal remains, a situation unique to the Americas (Dillehay, 1991, p. 13). Rather than providing sure answers, dates established so far for human habitation have given rise to more questions, as the oldest ones have come out of unglaciated South America, and the most recent ones for precontact migration have come from the ice-bound Arctic. This, of course, argues [illegible] Attempts to prove an American genesis for modern [illegible] this is not [illegible] because scientific evidence is not needed to convince them that this is the land of their origin.

Archaeology has been described as "simply another process for understanding the past" (Devine, 1991, p. 21). No more than other types of knowledge does it give us final answers; what it does do is provide fresh insights as new data and new dating and interpretive techniques become available, which they are doing at an increasing rate (Trigger, 1985, p. 52). Dating, and especially interpretation, have always been particular problems for archaeologists, who even under the best of circumstances must work with non-perishable material remains—a tiny percentage of the data that would have been available from the site when it was active. It is extremely rare for sites to be preserved as they were used—Pompeii, buried under a volcanic eruption in A.D. 63, is probably the best known. In the Americas, there is Ozette, a Makah village on the Olympic Peninsula in the state of Washington, that was buried under a mud slide about 500 years before Columbus. Since Makah still live in the area, archaeologists have been able to work with the people to reconstruct the village's lifestyle. More often there is little, if any, apparent connection between ancient sites and present-day inhabitants. The best that can usually be hoped for is to be able to deduce the broad outlines of the social dynamics of the communities that once occupied them. As Bruce Trigger has observed (1985, p. 52), archaeology studies what humans made or used; while such data can sometimes suggest what people thought and did, they are inadequate for fleshing out the intricacies of social interactions. Nor, where writing is absent, can archaeology pinpoint languages, except perhaps in very general terms.

That said, however, archaeology is still our main source of information about the distant past; for one thing, it can reveal much about trade patterns by tracing the sources of non-local plants, as well as non-local materials used in the manufacture of such items as tools. For another, it can tell us much about the tools themselves. Tools as such do not reveal methods or systems of use; but, as archaeologists learned when they began to involve Native communities in their projects, knowledge of these ancient technological systems has not entirely disappeared. An example of what can happen through such co-operation was recently illustrated when archaeologists and villagers of the Koani Pampa in the Bolivian alti-

niques for growing potatoes, and were rewarded with a dramatic increase in yields.[7] In this case, recovering an ancient technology brought material benefits to the natives concerned, and satisfaction to the archaeologists for having proved a point. In Canada as well, co-operation between archaeologists and the Native communities affected by their work has already brought benefits, not the least of which is a much wider and deeper understanding of the complexity and creativity of our aboriginal societies, and consequently of ourselves as a multicultural nation.

ANTHROPOLOGY'S CONTRIBUTION

[illegible] is the study of humans in the [illegible] principally by [illegible] to [illegible] and material remains, anthropology [illegible] mainly by direct observation of living societies. It is the study of [illegible] in terms of their time and place. History and archaeology are con[illegible] past; anthropology with the present, although within the [illegible] anthropology illustrates one type [illegible] with both history and archaeology. Since physical characteristics are influenced by cultural behaviour, skeletal remains can tell us something about ways of life: height, for instance, can be influenced by nutrition, diet can affect jaw conformity and the condition of teeth, diseases can affect bones, and injuries can point to occupational hazards or war.

Each of these approaches to the study of humans is supplementary to the other, as was seen in the case of archaeology. Historians are capitalizing more and more upon anthropology as they look for information to help them understand Native behaviour as reported in the documents. Some call this partnership between anthropology and history "ethnohistory," but the term is not universally accepted; history is history, say some historians, even if in some cases they have to turn to other than documentary evidence. The term "ethnohistory" came into use in the 1950s, following a proposal by anthropologist William N. Fenton, to the Institute of Early American History and Culture, that ethnologists and historians collaborate on the "common ground" of Indian–white relations to enhance our understanding of the past (Merrell, 1989, p. 94). That historians were slow to respond reflected, at least in part, hesitancies about entering unknown territory.

LANGUAGE, ORAL TRADITION, AND THE ARTS

Still another discipline that contributes to this holistic approach to history is that of language. Studies have shown that prehistorically unglaciated North America contained by far the greatest number of languages, 93 percent, along with a higher degree of differentiation than did the glaciated areas (Dickason, 1992, p. 25). The two most widely diffused languages in the prehistoric Americas were Cree, in the once-glaciated north, and Inuktitut, in the ice-bound Arctic. The latter still shows clear traces of its Asiatic connections. Of the 500 or so languages spoken in North America, the greatest concentrations were in California and on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico; in South America, the number totalled more than 1500. It has been proposed that such a wealth of languages was more likely to have evolved in many localities over a very long span of [illegible]

[illegible] for the largest, most widespread and most diversified of the three [illegible] groups (Dyen[illegible], 1987, pp. 331–37). Such theorizing [illegible] receive some support from recent genetic studies that suggest that [illegible] Amerindians have descended from four primary maternal lineages [illegible] although this is vigorously disputed by advocates of a multiplicity of [illegible] migrations (Schurr et al., 1990).[8]

[illegible] and oral traditions of [illegible] peoples are receiving increasing attention by ethnohistorians as a source of evidence, particularly for the recent past. More controversial is such evidence for the distant past, particularly when there are different versions of the same event. In that case, independent confirmation is needed. Myths are in another realm; with their different conception of time and nature, they deal with the interconnecting patterns of the spiritual and material worlds, whereas history deals with humans within the time and space of the material world. Myths tell us about a people's view of themselves, and how they relate to the world around them; history records the actions by which humans work out their destiny. Mythic descriptions of how humans came to be here are many and varied, abounding in metaphors; what these stories have in common is their emphasis and confirmation of the peoples' place in the web of the universe as well as their fundamental attachment to the land. Their underlying message is clear: however and whenever Amerindians came to be here, this is their homeland; they have no bonds with any other.

Besides myths and storytelling, rituals and the visual arts also have roles in explicating and recording these relationships. Orally and visually, they are all part of the dialogue by which peoples create their cultural contexts and thus define themselves.

POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Obviously, undertaking a history of Canada's aboriginal peoples is not a simple matter. Two points of departure suggest themselves. First, despite the rich variety of their cultures, there is an underlying commonality in

dian worldviews, evident in their myths.[9] Similarly, the wide disparities in their societal developments notwithstanding, they still shared many underlying assumptions, so that their cultures fit into a hemisphere-wide pattern; like Europeans on the other side of the Atlantic, they shared a basic civilization. The "formidable originality" of these civilizations has led some scholars to place them on a par with those of the Old World, the Han, the Gupta, and the Hellenistic age (Needham and Gwei-Djen, 1985, p. 64). Canada was in the northern zone of a hemispheric civilization, just as the American hemisphere would later be on the western periphery of European civilization.

Second, it is important to keep in mind the fundamental importance of the early encounters between Europeans and Amerindians. As already noted, these set the pattern for Amerindian-white relationships and have influenced policies to this day. The general sixteenth-century European impression that Amerindians were "sans foi, sans loi, sans roi" stemmed from first reports that New World men lacked churches and marketplaces and lived according to nature "like beasts in the woods." Columbus, for one, could not see that Amerindians had government, because in warm latitudes they wore little, if any, clothing. When he spoke with an elderly Taino cacique who seemed respectable enough although he wore no clothes, Columbus was surprised to observe "sound judgment in a man who went naked" (Anghiera, 1912, pp. 1:102–3). Leading European thinkers concluded that Aristotle's doctrine that some men are by nature free and others servile applied to Amerindians; in other words, that they were not yet fully developed as human beings, although capable of becoming so, like children. The custom of referring to Amerindians as children or, even worse, as "savages" endured until well into the second half of the twentieth century. Such a people were obviously not qualified to run their own affairs; besides, the rights of Christians had priority over those of non-Christians. On both these counts, Europeans had no doubts about their right to claim New World lands for themselves. As we learn more about Amerindian societies, it is becoming clearer all the time how wrong these European impressions were; that New World societies met individual and community needs very well, and had worked out solutions to problems of living that are still viable today.

Lack of official documentation for the early contact period, at least as far as Canada was concerned, was offset to some extent by the publicity to which the discoveries gave rise. Columbus's letter making his sensational announcement was disseminated with unheard-of speed, thanks to the new technology of the printing press. This heralded new fashions in literature: cosmographies, particularly popular during the last half of the sixteenth and first part of the seventeenth centuries, and travel tales, much in vogue during the seventeenth and into the eighteenth centuries, until they were overtaken by explorers' accounts, which hit their stride during the eighteenth century and continued through to the early twentieth century. Cosmographers, as their name indicates, set themselves the task of describing the whole world and everything in it, particularly its peoples and their societies; travel accounts concentrated more on adventure, while those of explorers developed a scientific bent, particularly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This literature is invaluable for the researcher, because it opens a window onto the type of information that was being disseminated, as well as reactions to the wonders of worlds previously unknown to Europeans. For the student of Amerindian-white relations, this literature is in some ways more useful than official records, [illegible] particularly [illegible]

EARLY INTERACTIONS

[illegible] charged nature of so many early interactions. Far from overwhelming simple savages, Europeans often found themselves in complex and difficult negotiations from which they did not always emerge the winners. Recollet Gabriel Sagard (fl. 1614–36) tells of one such confrontation at Tadoussac, which occurred when a chief felt himself to be insulted by inappropriate gifts offered by the French during pretrade ceremonies. He told his people to help themselves to whatever French trade goods they wanted, paying what they wished. Although the French were not in a position to resist, the Amerindians, on thinking the matter over, later brought extra furs to make up the value of what had been taken. Both sides agreed to forget the incident, and "to continue always in their old friendship." As Sagard saw it, the French were more concerned about offending the Amerindians than the Amerindians were of antagonizing the French (Sagard, 1939, pp. 45–46; Dickason, 1992, p. 105). Both the seventeenth-century entrepreneur Nicholas Denys (1598–1688) and the eighteenth-century Jesuit historian Pierre-François de Charlevoix (1682–1761) reported that some sagamores took a haughty tone when dealing with the French; in the words of Charlevoix, they made it clear "they were honoring the Great Sagamo of the French by treating him as an equal" (Charlevoix, 1744, p. I:128; Denys, 1908, pp. 195–96).

An important factor that has been overlooked all too often by historians was the role of religion in these early encounters. Ritual was traditionally very important to Amerindians, whose most respected leaders were also shamans. A major factor in the success of the French with their Amerindian alliances was their identification of the centrality of religion in Amerindian leadership, and their enlistment of these sentiments in their favour. This was of considerable consequence to the role of the missionaries, who, besides functioning in their evangelical capacity, also operated as agents of the state. In this, the French conformed to Amerindian political reality; as one eighteenth-century colonial governor observed, "It is

…se men [the missionaries] who can control the Savages in their … to God and the King."[9] Without an appreciation of how spiritual sensibilities shaped Amerindian politics, it is not possible to understand Native behaviour in relation to Europeans or, for that matter, in any other field of action.

Recent confrontations between Amerindians and the dominant society, of which Oka is but the most spectacular example, and the rise of Amerindian participation in the constitutional debates give witness to the continuing strength of Native cultures. In treating the Native factor within … as a relic of the … past, historians have … particularly for the early period, historians will have to do more than just keeping Native actors in the background; they will have to make the effort to … all to … Native peoples are also an active part of our society today. For just one example, Amerindians have been in the forefront of the environmental movement. Canada's First Nations are a vital part of our national persona, both present and future. The challenge that faces historians is to take a broader and deeper view of Canada's past, which will not only change our understanding of our history, but also enormously enrich it. Because our sense of history is fundamental to our sense of ourselves, both as individuals and as a nation, it arms us for the formidable task of working out solutions to the social and political problems that are developing as a result of our rapidly evolving technology. As the ante rises, so does the importance of history.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this chapter appeared in Riewe and Oakes (1993, pp. 1–10), and some of its material is drawn from Dickason (1992, particularly chapter 1).
2. See James W. St. G. Walker's pioneering study, "The Indian in Canadian Historical Writing" (Walker, 1971). See also his follow-up article (Walker, 1985).
3. On June 18, 1936, William Lyon Mackenzie King, Liberal prime minister of Canada 1921–26, 1926–30, and 1935–48, observed in the House of Commons "that if some countries have too much history, we have too much geography" (Colombo, 1974, p. 306).
4. Some of these problems are described by Rowley (1993).
5. "Land Claim Dismissed," *The Edmonton Journal*, March 8, 1991; "Judge Heard 100 Witnesses, Read 10,000 Documents," *The Edmonton Journal*, March 8, 1991; "Natives Hit Another Dead End," *The Edmonton Journal*, March 17, 1991; "A Stunning Blow to Native Rights," *The Montreal Gazette*, March 13, 1991.
6. See, for example, Goodman (1981). Some of the various approaches to the study of early man in the Americas are found in Laughlin and Harper (1979).
7. "Archaeology Makes Edible Impact," *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 9, 1991, p. 12. Not only did potato yields rise from 2.5 tons to 70 tons per hectare, but weather damage to crops was minimized. All this was achieved without the use of artificial fertilizers or large infusions of capital.
8. For a different interpretation of the evidence, see Milford H. Wolpoff's article in Trinkaus (1989).
9. [illegible] particularly [illegible] on this point.
10. [illegible] Maurepas, 25 November 1701.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Outline the attitudes that have given rise to the saying that Canada is a young country of much geography and little history.
2. Why were the first meetings of Europeans with Canada's aboriginal peoples so poorly documented?
3. Describe the role of archaeology in tracing out Canada's early history.
4. How important were first impressions in the development of European attitudes toward Amerindians? What was the effect on subsequent policies?
5. What can geology tell us about the early presence of humans in the Americas?
6. What is "ethnohistory"? Would you put it in a separate category from standard history?

FURTHER READINGS

Chiappelli, Fredi, ed. 1976. *First Images of America*, 2 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press. A wide-ranging collection of essays on first contacts between Europeans and Amerindians throughout the Americas.

Honour, Hugh. 1975. *The European Vision of America*. Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art. A catalogue of European reactions to the Americas were expressed in visual representations from the days of first meetings through to the late nineteenth century.

Josephy, Alvin M., Jr. 1992. *America in 1492*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. This hemispheric-wide survey brings into sharp focus the high level of achievement and rich variety of New World cultures on the eve of the European arrival.