

Review articles & reviews/ *Critiques et comptes rendus*

MULTICULTURALISM AND CANADIAN HISTORY

Origins: Canada's multicultural heritage, Julia Saint & Joan Reid. Academic Press, 1979. 200 pp. paper. ISBN 0-7747-1119-1.

One of the great pastimes of Canadians is to discuss the question of our national identity. Over the decades the discussion has taken many forms, but an obsessive concern has been to explain how and why (or if) Canadians differ from Americans. Countless arguments have been advanced, but one of the most staple of all explanations relates to the very nature of the experience of those who have peopled the two countries. American society, we are told, is a "melting pot" society where immigrants are assimilated into a common Americanized type. Many accept this line of interpretation as a truism, in spite of massive evidence to the contrary. (Have blacks from Georgia, Scandinavians from Minnesota and Californians — or whatever ethnic origin — really been melted into a standard American type?) Canadian experience is different. It is argued that we are a more tolerant people who are able to accommodate many groups with widely divergent cultures. What this meant for most of our post-confederation history was an Anglophone-dominated society with a weakly protected Francophone enclave in Quebec and various quaint ethnic groups scattered here and there throughout the country. To succeed in most areas one had to be acculturated to Anglo-Canadian norms: about all, one had to speak English. Nonetheless, the belief that we were a "Mosaic" and not a "melting pot" persisted in many quarters and gained strength in this century.

Substantial change came in the 1960s when Quebec underwent its "quiet revolution." An aggressive Francophone nationalism that challenged the nature and existence of the Canadian state was released. The old complacency concerning the primacy of Anglo-Canadians gave way to a conviction that French Canada must be accommodated and brought into the main stream of Canadian life. A chief instrument of accommodation was the royal commission established by Lester Pearson to study bilingualism and biculturalism. When Pearson inaugurated the famous commission he referred to Canada's "two founding races." That phrase enraged many Canadians who were of neither British nor French origin. Canada, they argued, did not have "two founding races." Duality was not our hallmark: rather, Canada is a mosaic in which the non-charter group people are every bit as important as the two founding charter

groups. The old mosaic concept, now called multiculturalism, received a major shot in the arm and quickly became entrenched in government policy. The idea became and remained very popular with many segments of the population. It swept into several of our school systems and stayed there — accepted uncritically as an article of faith.

Origins: Canada's Multicultural heritage by Julia Saint and Joan Reid is a product of this set of developments. The authors explain: 'One in every five Canadians today is a person who has immigrated to Canada. The rest of us are descendants of immigrants, who, at widely different times, came to North America from other continents. The members of each immigrant group had their special reasons for leaving their original homes. Each had to overcome difficulties in adapting to a new country. Each group changed and was changed by the Canadian environment. To begin to understand ourselves and other Canadians we need to share this common experience. It is the purpose of this book to provide that opportunity.' This explanation is quite unexceptionable as it stands, but the authors do not then limit their discussion to immigrants and the immigration experience: they use the multicultural theme to explain the Canadian experience. We read about the origins and nature of parliament, confederation, the opening of the west, the French legal system and so on. All of these things need explanation, but the explanations become simplistic and skewed when forced within the multicultural model. The result is an introduction to Canadian history that fails to deal with many of the realities and complexities of Canadian life.

This problem is made worse by the authors' uncritical approach to the various groups that constitute Canada. By definition one cannot write text books that are negative about ethnic groups (except, of course, for Anglo-Canadians who have discriminated against and persecuted minority groups). We are given comments that stress the positive contributions of various groups. (The likelihood is that any other approach would be illegal or, at least, politically unacceptable). There is a place for this kind of boosterism, but it does not leave one with a very realistic understanding of Canadian history. Conflict and change in Canada have often related to ethnicity and religion. However, other considerations have been paramount just as often. To understand the history of Canada, all of these considerations must be studied and analysed.

Also, the very concept of multiculturalism merits close analysis. What does it really mean? Can one succeed in Canada today without being either a Francophone or an Anglophone? Is it not necessary, in the real world, to be acculturated to either Anglo-, or Franco-Canadian society? Should even "Intermediate Level" students, for whom the book was designed, leave the study of Canadian history with a knowledge of Canada that is anchored on anything but historical reality?

The book is also marred by inaccuracies and pedagogical technique of dubious validity. The lengthy interview with Lord North and Thomas Jefferson (pp.

86-87) is admittedly imaginary, but surely students should be taught that the eighteenth century differed from our era, and that such joint interviews were simply not part of the eighteenth century scene. On page 83 the photo captions for Sir George Simpson and William Lyon Mackenzie are reversed. It is noted on page 74 that "all cabinet ministers must be elected members of the Commons and available for questioning by other members. . . ." Both Prime Minister Abbott and Prime Minister Bowell led the country from the Senate. Prime Minister Trudeau's last cabinet included powerful ministers like Bud Olson and Hazen Argue who were senators.

Origins is nicely illustrated and makes a number of valid and useful points. This reviewer's concern is that it is an inadequate introduction to Canadian history. That inadequacy is almost certainly explained by the book's basic conceptualization, which is based not on the state of the art of the discipline of history but on government policy and folk wisdom.

Donald Swainson teaches history at Queen's University. He has published extensively, especially about prairie and Ontario history. With his wife Eleanor he has written a book for children: The buffalo hunt, PMA, Toronto, 1980.

IMMIGRANT CHILDREN

Rebecca's Nancy, Joan Reimer Goman. Scholastic-TAB, 1982. 48 pp. \$1.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-71149-0; *Michi's New Year*, Shelley Tanaka. Illus. Ron Berg. Peter Martin Associates Ltd., 1980. 32 pp. \$6.95 cloth. ISBN 0-8878-205-1; *Pettranella*, Betty Waterton. Illus. Ann Blades. Douglas & McIntyre, 1980. 28 pp., \$8.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88894-237-0.

The story of a child uprooted from a familiar world, transported across expanses of land or sea, and then deposited in an environment that is physically, socially, and psychologically alien is a promising subject for children's literature. The theme may be treated in a variety of ways, ranging from thinly disguised autobiography to romantic adventure. When the child differs in race and culture from the majority of people in the new homeland, the process of adaptation requires an adjustment of perspective, not only geographically but also socially. Alienation provides the problem, reconciliation the solution. Because Canada, in contrast to the United States, has not insisted on the melting pot approach to immigrants, the expression of ethnic distinctiveness is not limited to the immigrant generation. Nevertheless, Canadian children's books dealing with minorities are most often set in the past, an orientation that allows author and artist an opportunity to provide nostalgic recollection (often of their own childhoods) while conveying to young readers an impression of "olden days" life.

The heroine of *Rebecca's Nancy* belongs to a large family that has settled