

Book Reviews

Indian Education in Canada. Volume 1: The Legacy, edited by Jean Barman, Yvonne Hebert and Don McCaskill. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986. 180 pp. \$13.50 paper.

Indian education, in its every variation, was sometimes deemed a failure. The handmaiden of the Dominion government's policy of assimilation, it was intended ultimately to eradicate any distinctions between Indians and whites. Other government programs participated — creation of reserves, prohibition of certain ceremonies and costumes, restrictions on alcohol and other protectionist devices — but education was given the major share of the burden. This ostensible goal of total assimilation was never achieved, neither by day schools nor boarding schools nor any other refinement. At school children were taught to disdain Native culture and then were sent home to it. An imprecise curriculum, divided between the classroom and practical chores, failed to prepare Indians for life in white society and left them poorly equipped to adjust back to the reserve. Indian Act amendments in 1906 aimed at more rapid assimilation; the education policy announced in 1910 claimed Indians were incapable of rapid assimilation. Reserve lands were made available for sale to whites, resulting in smaller reserves, just when educators decided that Indians were not suited to off-reserve life for the moment. The problem is that "the problem" was never properly defined, and so there were no consistent policies to address it.

Today assimilation has been abandoned as a policy goal. Indian control of Indian education, following the National Indian Brotherhood's initiative, has been accepted in principle by federal authorities, and most bands now exert full or partial control over reserve schools while special programs enhance the teaching of Native culture. The principles are established; only the policies remain to be articulated, and that requires a painstaking analysis of the underlying problems. It is to this process that the volume under review contributes. Appropriately sub-titled "The Legacy," this book not only demonstrates the failures, inconsistencies and

cruelties of past policies but also traces their accumulation and their consequences which linger today as the chief problem to be confronted. The rejection of the 1969 White Paper was an eloquent warning against ignoring the historical dimensions to Indian policy. The editors of *Indian Education in Canada*, committed to Indian control as a "vehicle for the advancement and empowerment of aboriginal peoples," are determined that the current programs should not flounder for similar causes. This is "public history," the essential adjunct to policy-making. Presumably the editors' second volume, "The Challenge," will explore the most promising policy options available. "The Legacy" is the prerequisite.

The individual chapters succeed very well in illustrating the intricacies of the Legacy. One of the most fascinating is Jean Barman's case study of All Hallows school in British Columbia, 1884-1920, where changing treatment of and relations between Indian and white girls exactly duplicated national policies. Another intimate study, by Diane Persson on Blue Quills school in Alberta, 1931-1970, offers a similar prism through which to view the general directions in Indian education over the succeeding period. These moving accounts, relating experiences of students themselves, are of inestimable value in keeping people at the centre of the policy review process. Equally successful, but different in format and intent, is Cornelius Jaenen's overview of "francization" in New France. By showing that every assimilationist experiment introduced after 1867 — day schools, reserves, boarding schools, even enfranchisement — had been attempted before, Jaenen provides a persuasive argument for the careful consideration of past experience before new programs are implemented.

The volume as a whole does not entirely match the success of its chapters. The editors have been too modest, perhaps, for their collection is capable of a greater contribution than their introduction allows. Designed "to facilitate discussion," the book could be used to influence policy planning more directly. This would require some different packaging, or at least a more explicit presentation of the message and its implications in an introduction or conclusion. An effective format for advocacy scholarship remains a challenge for public historians and others anxious to spread their knowledge beyond academic circles. In the meantime the evidence contained in this volume deserves to be brought forcefully into the public arena. It will indeed facilitate discussion, and it illuminates vital aspects of the problem that must be addressed.