

able background information on the Indian land question in British Columbia.

*Vancouver*

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*Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada*, by J. R. Miller. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989. Pp. xi, 329; illus.; maps.

Only in the last two or three decades have academic writers begun to regard the native peoples of Canada as having respectable histories of their own, after as well as before contact, and to assume that the various peoples were inherently as capable as any others in responding to new circumstances. Among the more influential in establishing the new directions have been Bruce Trigger, Arthur Ray, and Robin Fisher, each of whom has published major regional works dealing with particular periods.

Miller, a University of Saskatchewan historian, builds upon such previous works to provide a general history of Indian-White relations across Canada and from contact to present day. His title comes from an evocative poem by the Micmac Rita Joe. If his treatment of British Columbia is any indication (the province receives one whole chapter and parts of several others), Miller makes effective use of the historical literature. There are, however, several minor mapping errors: the Cowichan and Shuswap are divorced from their Salish groupings (12) and the Tlingit are omitted from British Columbia (138). Despite its title, the book focuses upon status Indians and ignores the role of non-status Indians, which has been especially important in recent decades. The deficiencies of the book, indeed, are largely in its treatment of current issues.

Miller identifies four major periods. Initially "Europeans came to Canada for fish, fur, exploration, and evangelization" (268). Relations were harmonious, despite the effects of disease and alcohol. In this first period, Indians were the dominant partners. In the eighteenth century "the era of alliance" emerged as the English, French, and Americans made Indians into allies or enemies in their imperial struggles. Indians were now equal partners. On the Pacific coast the first two periods were compressed into a century, commencing in the 1770s, but without the military element.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, in varying decades across the continent, as settlers came in ever-increasing numbers to cut down the forests and cut up the soil, Indians became an impediment to white pro-

gress. White governments implemented policies “to remove Indians from resources” and “to remove Indians as a distinct racial and social type” (274). Indians were now objects of coercion rather than partners in co-operation.

The fourth era began after World War II. Because of “intellectual and ideological changes” within the dominant society, but also because of their own economic power and political action, Indians emerged from irrelevance. Perhaps because this era is still evolving, Miller seems less confident in his treatment of it. He characterizes it as one of confrontation.

The final two chapters, which discuss current issues and seek lessons from the past, are less satisfying than the history. The discussion is deficient in appreciation of legal and constitutional principles. In defining aboriginal title as resting upon “occupation of an area ‘from time immemorial’” (257), Miller ignores the Indian, Inuit, Metis, and judicial emphasis upon circumstances at the time effective colonial authority was first exercised. Miller’s definition demeans aboriginal nations by denying them the ability to have acquired territory other than by first, or at least very early, occupancy. His definition, for example, would remove title from the Inland Tlingit, who migrated from the coast early in the last century. His comments on the applicability of the royal proclamation (258) and on the constitution’s relevance to the question of title (259) are, similarly, weak and partial.

Insofar as it does draw lessons from the past, the final chapter contains worth-while observations, as in suggesting that new motives for interaction must be found and that beneficial policies can result only “within a real partnership” (278). Oddly, however, Miller himself ignores one of the most powerful lessons of history — that the various Indian peoples or nations do have their own identities and agendas, and cannot and will not be constrained by the simplistic white expectation that all Indians can and should fall into one organization following one strategy. Yet, in his concluding recommendations to Indians, it is precisely this expectation that Miller calls upon them to fulfil, and his preachy tone suggests his own exasperation at their resisting his sort of advice (280-84). The present difficulties on the Indian side that concern him would be better treated academically, and as on-going aspects of the historic relationship.

All in all, however, Miller presents a useful overview and provides abundant evidence “that the native peoples have always been active, assertive contributors to the unfolding of Canadian history” (x).