

We're off to Toronto for two weeks during the holidays. David's now got four teeth (they all came at once!) and has taken his first steps on his own — an exciting time for us.

Please phone when you're down in Calgary. Both Nancy and I very much enjoyed your last visit. In any event we'll meet in Saskatoon, as I'm giving a paper there, too...

Your book is outstanding. Thank you so much for writing it! Our best wishes for 1985!

Don and Nancy

The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas.

By Olive Patricia Dickason. (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1984. Pp. xviii, 372. \$30.00.)

The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas is an excellent, well-documented and beautifully illustrated account of early French-Amerindian relations. In essence the author has given us a two part study. The first section discusses early European and French perceptions of the Indians, while the second concentrates on the actual cultural encounter itself. Both are important subjects in their own right, and deserve separate book length treatment. Indeed, if there is one weakness in this otherwise impressive book it lies in the attempt to deal with both subjects in a single book.

Images, rather than actual observations, dictated the European's perception of the native people from the time of their arrival in the Americas. This is Olive Dickason's thesis in the first section of the book. The concept of savagery, well entrenched in Europe before the first French trans-Atlantic voyages, quickly became applied to the new

people. "By classifying Amerindians as savages, Europeans were able to create the ideology that helped to make it possible to launch one of the great movements in the history of western civilization: the colonization of overseas empires" (p. xiii). Dickason provides a fully-developed discussion of how the image of the l'homme sauvage, or the wild man (a folk figure of medieval Europe), came to be applied to the Amerindians.

Having discussed the European image of the Indian, the author, in the second section of her book, describes the first century of racial contact. She introduces the subject by reviewing the Amerindian societies in Northeastern North America on the eve of European contact in the sixteenth century. Subsequently she deals with the unsuccessful attempt to establish the first French settlements in the Valley of the St. Lawrence, then in Brazil and in Florida.

In this second section of her book Dr. Dickason makes three important contributions to our understanding of the interchange between the French and the Amerindian. Her most significant contribution appears in the chapter, "The Old World Embraces the New" (pp. 123-140), in which she examines the French position toward, what today are termed, "aboriginal land rights." As she points out national differences existed between the European powers in their treatment of Amerindians' land rights. The Dutch and then the English, for example, favoured nominal "purchases," in which a minimal amount of goods, bearing no relationship to the value of the land given up, were presented to the respective tribe or band. The French, however, argued this was unnecessary as they had received the use of Amerindian lands in return for teaching them Christianity. Canadian historians in the past have generally interpreted the English purchases, and treaties, as a sign

that the English respected the Amerindians' land rights much more than did the French. This judgement, though, now appears outdated. Dr. Dickason establishes that the French actually honoured native practice by periodically renewing their agreements with their Indian allies - in effect the French resided on their allies' land, and regularly supplied gifts for the use of the Indians' territory (pp. 132-133).

Dr. Dickason makes a second major contribution to Canadian historical writing by including a treatment of the French colonial experience in Brazil and Florida. While it is true that Marcel Trudel explored the history of both colonies in his earlier work, Les vaines tentatives, 1524-1603 (Montréal: Fides, 1963), he did not emphasize in great detail the topic of French-Amerindian relations. In doing so Dr. Dickason discovered that the French first learned the importance of co-operation with the Amerindians, in Brazil and Florida. The French tradition, for example, of developing cultural go-betweens, later to be known as coureurs de bois, began in mid-sixteenth century Brazil (p. 190). By including the perspective of the entire Americas we can now more completely understand how the French in 1608 successfully established a colony in the Valley of the St. Lawrence.

The author's third contribution in this second section of her book has the greatest human interest. Her chapter, "Amerindians in Europe" (pp. 205-229), is a delight. While we have huge libraries of books, articles, and manuscripts on the experience of Europeans in the Americas, the subject of Amerindians abroad, begs out for a proper treatment. As Dr. Dickason reveals, they came in number to France. The French brought Amerindians from Brazil (as well as from eastern North America) as captives, curiosities, future interpreters, and even as

entertainers. (The author's research is so good that she includes a footnote on the city of Rouen's continuing Brazilian connection. In 1969, La Foire de Rouen, featured ballets 'Brasiliana,' as a major attraction, see footnote 54, page 321). Contrary to what the French expected, the Amerindians held to their own values, and displayed in Europe a marked preference for their Amerindian way of life.

In the third section of her book the author extends the discussion of French-Amerindian contact, discussing the experience of the new colony of New France. Here she shows how the fur traders succeeded, by conforming to Amerindian customs, while the missionaries largely failed, due to their inability to accommodate to the native religious tradition. The conversions by the Jesuits that did succeed were achieved, ". . . by a judicious accommodation and adaptation to the ways of the people among whom they were working" (p. 267).

There is so much in this book to recommend it: the review of the various European nations' positions on aboriginal land rights, the treatment of the French colonies in Brazil and in Florida, the summary of Amerindian visits to France. The author's research has been incredibly thorough, even in non-French sources, which have been consulted whenever pertinent. The illustrations beautifully supplement the text. The Myth of the Savage deserves to be read, and re-read, by all students of European-Amerindian contact in the Americas.

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