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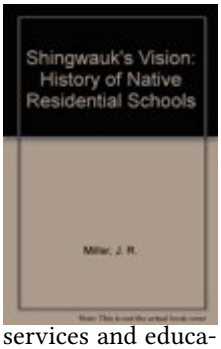
J. R. Miller. *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996. xiii + 582 pp. $36.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8020-7858-2; $73.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8020-0833-6.



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The headlines are among the most sensational and disturbing in recent years in Canada. In court cases, testimony before government commissions, literature and public speeches, First Nations people in Canada have recounted their experiences in residential schools. These educational institutions, designed as instruments of "civilization" and training, became powerful tools of cultural destruction, language suppression and personal torment. In recent years, media attention has focused on examples of sexual abuse and brutality, documented in frightening detail by the survivors of the residential school experience. The recent Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples listened to many First Nations speakers as they recounted their stories, and included a detailed examination of residential schools in their final report.

For many years, First Nations people in Canada described the cultural and social mistreatment that they experienced at the hands of religious and government school officials and attempted to convince Canadians of the long-term effects of the residential school experience on their lives and their communities. Few non-Natives paid much attention to their criticisms. Education was, after all, one of the "good things" that governments did for indigenous peoples, the foundation of the First Nations meager economic prosperity and their hope for the future. Only a handful of Canadians had more than an inkling of the deep-seated hostility and anger that First Nations had for the residential schools.

Save for a few ardent defenders of the residential schools, few Canadians continue to hold to that view. What has often been described as the "mission-school syndrome" is now well known across the country. *Shingwauk's Vision* (the title refers to the effort of Chief Shingwauk to bring Anglican missionary services and education to his people, in the hope that it would enrich the lives of the Ojibwa) is not an attempt to raise the temperature in an already heated debate. It does provide an explanation for the angers and frustrations of former students and their parents. What the book does offer is even more important–a balanced, carefully considered and scholarly appraisal of an important and intrusive colonial institution. Historian J. R. Miller has stepped into a debate that is inflamed by the passions of contemporary indigenous politics, the pain of personal experience, and the rationalizations of the church and government organizations. This is difficult ground, since the controversies surrounding residential school education in Canada reveal the degree to which indigenous history, in particular, remains contested territory. Few historians could have handled this challenge with more compassion, caution and insight.

The history of Native residential schools in Canada is told in three sections. In the first, "Establishing the Residential School System," Miller examines the nature of indigenous education, and recounts the origins of the residential school system in Canada. He follows the trail through the hitherto little known developments in New France, experiments in British North America, and the expansion of the residential school concept across the new nation of Canada from the 1880s to the 1920s. The account focuses primarily on the objectives of the missionary and government agencies involved with setting up the early residential schools; few accounts of students' experiences survived. What is available, however, is used to illustrate the continuity between early developments and twentieth-century activities–particularly indigenous dissatisfaction with the educational initiatives and cul-

tural structurings built into the school system.

The heart of the book rests in the second section, "Experiencing Residential Schools," which focuses on twentieth-century developments. Here Miller draws on a judicious balance of written (largely government) sources and oral testimony from former students and teachers. While he gives fair attention to government priorities and objectives–previously the central focus of historical work on residential schools–Miller devotes much of this segment to a study of the students' experiences. The chapters on "Abuse" and "Resistance" are particularly compelling. The author, obviously confronted with disturbing accounts of violence and sexual assault, works to keep the experiences in perspective and to provide a convincing analysis while not losing sight of the personal suffering encapsulated in the stories. Miller provides a compelling and disturbing account of the nature and extent of violence and abuse– teachers and supervisors toward students and student to student–that was often a big part of life in the residential schools. The discussion of resistance is of particular importance, for it illustrates the degree to which First Nations students and parents protested conditions in the schools–while often still supporting the concept of Canadian education–and their often futile attempts to gain government attention. Miller does not pull punches in his descriptions–one male supervisor at a Saskatchewan school is described as a "monster"–and the accompanying account reveals the accuracy of the word (p. 327)–but even this account is not overwhelmed by the emotional situation.

Part Three offers an assessment of the final years of the Native residential school program and an analysis of the meaning and contemporary significance of the residential school experience in Canada. "An Assessment" provides an excellent discussion of the historical processes involved with residential schools, including government-missionary motivation, First Nations response, pedagogical elements, and long-term social and cultural impacts. This survey provides a concise overview of the book's main themes and a very insightful analysis of the lingering effects of residential school education on First Nations relations with other Canadians. It is the best short summary of the significance of the residential school education available. Of particular note is the final section of the chapter, which offers a compelling discussion of the question of the moral and practical responsibility for the legacy of the residential schools. Miller argues that Canadians have a continuing and unresolved collective responsibility for dealing with the fall-out of the educational experiments. He ends his book with the cautionary note that contemporary political leaders have not yet surrendered the paternalistic impulses that underlay the residential school initiative.

While it is important to note that *Shingwauk's Vision* provides a great deal of historical background to the claims and accusations of contemporary First Nations people, the greatest strength of the book lies elsewhere. Native residential schools were comprehensive institutions, in that they sought to control all aspects of the students' lives. By moving beyond the important but more sensational elements–violence, sexual abuse, suppression of indigenous languages–Miller provides an excellent means of understanding the long-term impact of the government-funded schools. His study of the relationship between gender and education provides useful insights into the differential impact of residential schools on boys and girls, and an introduction to European concepts of gender differences to First Nations children. Similarly, Miller offers a detailed examination of the work conducted by residential school students–often involving more time than classroom instruction–and the social and recreational activities offered after hours. The chapter entitled "Child Care" provides an excellent description of the institutional life within residential schools. Collectively, Miller's account illustrates the pervasive impact of residential school education on the children that passed through the institutions and provides an excellent examination of the lasting social, cultural and emotional effects of government-sponsored education.

Miller draws from a wide and diverse range of sources. He makes good use of well-known government collections, and draws extensively on the available historiography. To a degree that still remains rare, he makes effective use of major missionary collections and explores little-used materials in a variety of other repositories. Most significantly, Miller collected oral testimony from many people, most of them former students of the residential schools. Teachers and school administrators may argue (they have done so in many other instances) that they were not interviewed as extensively as the students, but their thoughts and experiences are far better recorded in the written record than are those of the students. Miller also kept a close eye on contemporary media coverage of the residential school experience, and used the material generated to good effect, in framing and explaining historical developments.

This is a book with few shortcomings. A set of useful maps is provided and numerous photographs–most of them are of the official variety, showing staged, well

scrubbed students–are included in the text. Each chapter in the "Experiencing Residential Schools" begins and ends with an extended quote from a First Nations student, offering readers the words and sentiments that, until recently, went largely unheard. Miller might have devoted a little more time to describing the relationship between the residential schools and the dozens of day schools operated by the Canadian government and missionary organizations. After all, more First Nations students attended the day schools than the high profile residential schools. And, there is perhaps not enough about the motivations of the school workers; their devotion to their cause is a matter of considerable significance in understanding the evolution and impact of the schools. The lack of systematic analysis to the missionaries and teachers remains a significant historiographical gap. Finally, Miller follows the well established Canadian tradition of exploring the developments in a national context. Some attention should have been paid, even if only in summary form, to the comparable developments in the education of indigenous peoples in other countries. This broader, comparative perspective would have strengthened an already strong book.

Shingwauk's Vision is a wonderful example of the historian's craft. Miller has combined a strong narrative thread, drawn largely on the administrative and policy history of residential school education in Canada, with well chosen accounts of experiences of students and teachers. The study is engaging, well written and insightful. It does not shy away from contemporary public debates–Miller's position on the current issues is made abundantly clear–but nor do these discussions dominate or direct the analysis. This is not polemic masquerading as history, but rather a sound, systematic and thorough examination of an issue of vital contemporary importance. The debate that must and will continue about the impact of residential school education on First Nations people in Canada will be much stronger with Miller's timely contribution.

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