The Forces Which Shaped Them: A History of the Education of Minority Group Children in British Columbia

Mary Ashworth, *The Forces Which Shaped Them: A History of the Education of Minority Group Children in British Columbia,* With an Introduction by Rosemary Brown, Vancouver: New Stars Books, 1979, 238 pp. incl. notes. $6.50 pbk.

"The miracle is that this is not a depressing book. It makes you angry, it makes you sad — but it is also filled with hope . . ." Thus, the introduction to this volume cautions the reader that the contents will be more than historical narration, even though emotional reactions are not the primary objective of the writer. The volume comprises a documented survey of the experiences of selected ethnic minorities in British Columbia over the past century. This review will focus particularly on the nature and extent of the documentation.

The book contains brief historical monographs of five minority groups; native people (redundantly referred to as "the native Indians"), Chinese, Japanese, Doukhobors, and East Indians. Each group is afforded about the same space and consideration even though the format of each chapter varies somewhat. The section on native people begins, expectedly, with the white man's treatment of Indians through missionary endeavours. The date is November 19, 1858, and the source is the journal of William Duncan who worked for the Church Missionary Society at Fort Simpson. His solution to the ailents of the native people was to Christianize and civilize them, and the medium was schooling. The author turns then to a discussion of the residential school and quotes Harold Cardinal whose disdain for the traditional form of Indian education is well known. Ashworth remains remarkably objective in dealing with the emotional subjects of language suppression and corporal punishment in residential schools, noting only that whipping was common in most industrial schools and sometimes took place in the presence of other students. Excerpts from Margaret Butcher's diary, an Englishwoman who kept accurate notes on her teaching experiences at Kitimat, are juxtaposed with quotations from George Manuel and an interview with a native person recorded in the Provincial Archives in Victoria and contrasted with statements by Chief Dan George, Harold Cardinal and Harry Hawthorn. The chapter ends with references to 1954 research by the University of British Columbia evaluating Indian education, stressing the need for Indian control over Indian education.

Treatment of Chinese people is recounted starting with February 13, 1901, on a rather dramatic note indicating that public sentiment was against integrating Chinese pupils. A significant amount of space is devoted to this discussion with careful documentation of the extent of prejudice against the Chinese. The Immigration Act, passed in 1923, restricted the entry of Chinese into Canada except for consuls, merchants, and college students, thus quieting the outcries against them. In 1947, about 2,000 Chinese left Canada to return to their homeland for reunification with their families. That year a bill was introduced in the House of Commons to repeal the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923, with the end result that Chinese were placed in the same category as other Asians. Immigration was still limited and the Chinese in British Columbia continued to experience educational discrimination as various governmental levels battled to avoid responsibility for providing English as a second language class. A quick jump in the chapter to 1977 contains a statement by Mr. Benno Friesen, an M.P. from Surrey-White Rock, lamenting federal support for immigrant children's schooling. In the meantime, hate groups resurrected old slogans about neglect for the children of settled citizens with too much concern for the Chinese. Ashworth's admirable objectivity is only slightly challenged when she observes, "Sadly, the opportunity to create bilingual-bicultural adults of these small children is being missed, the lessons of the past and the knowledge of the present not yet having joined forces".

The fear of the "yellow peril", pertaining to the Japanese, was very strongly accentuated in the last decade of the nineteenth century, when Japanese were excluded from working in the mines and on certain public projects. The government cooperated by designing various pieces of legislation which would restrict both their entry into the province and the occupations they would be permitted to practice once in the province. The federal government felt obligated to observe the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation, however, and the provincial government felt continually restricted. Schooling was affected by the anti-Japanese sentiment in that they were barred from voting in municipal elections or school board elections or from holding public office. They were not exempt from paying taxes. It is estimated that the number of Japanese children attending public schools in British Columbia in 1907 was about one hundred and fifty, despite the fact that the census six years prior showed 4,597 Japanese in the province. An ironic twist allowed for many young Japanese women to emigrate into Canada as brides when restrictions were

placed on males entering the country. Thus, the child population grew and the social climate softened so that many more children could go to school. Japanese was even taught in the schools.

The period from the 1920's to the present is briefly covered citing appropriate references with some analysis of conditions after World War One through the period of the second war and the aftermath. The task is accomplished utilizing newspaper accounts, correspondence, a high school student's essay, and even poetry. While it is obvious that the author has used materials selectively, it becomes clear that this is not done for the sake of bias. The chapter ends on an encouraging note, emphasizing more positive public attitudes toward the Japanese in the forties in the form of resolutions to the Department of Education by the British Columbia Teachers' Federation and the repeal of a deportation order against the Japanese by the Prime Minister of Canada, MacKenzie King.

The fourth chapter begins with an explanation of who Doukhobors are and a brief historical sketch of their arrival in Canada in 1898, a format not seemingly called for in the other chapters. As one of the "forces which shaped them," schooling problems were not long in coming. Refusing to send their children to public schools led to diametrically opposed positions with the Ministry of Education in British Columbia reminding the Doukhobors that "we can't change the laws of the country." The Doukhobor leaders retaliated with, "we can't change the laws of God either." Reason for opposition to compulsory schooling initially stemmed from Doukhobor beliefs that education is the responsibility of the home, but they also feared that secular teaching would undermine the spiritual element. Their preference for communal living caused further consternation and the first clash occurred when, under the Homestead Act, the Doukhobors were required to register individually and take an oath of allegiance to the crown.

By 1920 compulsory schooling was foisted on the Doukhobors, and the well-publicized burning of schools which resulted was actually initiated by a small minority of the sect. While most journalistic accounts exaggerated the extent of Doukhobor participation, Ashworth could do much better in differentiating the philosophies of Doukhobor Independents and Orthodox from those of the militant "freedomites" who were at the root of the reactionary movement. Failure to clarify these distinctions intensifies the public concept that "all Doukhobors are the same" without differentiating the true pacifists among the sect. Detailing of Doukhobor struggles is accomplished by the author through furnishing lists of incidents and legal manoeuvres and government reports. Besides being interesting the account takes into consideration various happenings across the western provinces in satisfactory detail. The chapter ends on an unfortunate note implying that the 1979 unrest was a replay of Doukhobor aggression without specifying factional delineations.

The fifth chapter of the book dealing with East Indians depicts the worst in Canadian reaction to minorities in that even without oppression of war, as in the case of the Japanese, the East Indians were picked on. Ashworth's approach includes a salute to Queen Victoria as a good monarch with a rapid switch to the invasion of British Columbia by thousands of East Indians. The year 1907 was one of rising unemployment in British Columbia, but still the Sikhs came, and not to a people with outstretched arms of welcome. Enter Prime Minister MacKenzie King, adamantly opposed to Asian immigration for over forty years, opposed even to wives and families immigrating to Canada to join fathers and husbands already here. Finally, in 1919 was this kind of request granted.

Ashworth's treatment of the educational factor comes out in a recounting of the problems East Indian children had in Canadian schools, primarily related to the attainment of proficiency in a second language and cultural differences. Discriminative treatment was an obvious factor in educational retardation. Attempts by East Indians to aid their plight through multicultural projects and the investigation of a Royal Commission Report resulted mainly in establishing that overt discrimination toward East Indians existed rather than proving that anything positive was being accomplished to reduce it. The chapter concludes by stating that this negative legacy is a vital part of British Columbian history.

The final section of the book, entitled, "Afterwords", outlines the author's concept of the "forces which shaped them" in terms of the role of parents, government, professional organizations, schools, ethnic groups, churches and politicians. The footnotes, gathered at the very end of the book, are quite lengthy for each chapter, indicating extensive historical effort.

This book is easy to read, objectively written and comprehensive. It should be on the shelf of every Canadian library, but should be read by Westerners particularly because of its West Coast emphasis. Multiculturalists, especially, will appreciate the carefully documented account of the treatment of minorities in British Columbia because it represents a fairly widespread Canadian occurrence. The lessons to be learned from a longitudinal and nationwide phenomenon as significant as that of this book should be of interest to more than the caring educator or historian.

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