

Culture



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Adrian Tanner

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Augie FLERAS and Jean Leonard ELLIOTT, *The Nations Within: Aboriginal-State Relations in Canada, the United States and New Zealand*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992, 267 pages, \$16.95 (paper).

By Adrian Tanner

Memorial University

To what extent are the political accommodations made for aboriginal minorities within post-colonial states a product of the culture and institutions of the immigrant society? Such a perspective is amenable to the study of policy formation, seen as an institutionalized process of the modern state, where the aboriginal peoples are treated as a special interest group. Yet it is an approach which has seldom been seriously tested comparatively, by examination of controlled cases, to find parallels in the policies which comparable settler states might have towards their aboriginal peoples.

The impression given in the introduction to *The Nations Within* is that the authors intended to make this kind of controlled comparison. They are, for example, explicit in why they selected the three comparative cases. Canada, the U.S. and New Zealand are similar settler states, all with aboriginal minorities, all capitalist, democratic, and all based, at least to a partial degree, on early British settlement and laws. Furthermore, the authors seem to focus on the parallel emergence among all three of aboriginal domestic "Nations".

But as the book proceeds, the comparative aspect is seldom evident, being largely relegated to a series of points in a short chapter at the end. While "Nations Within" are alluded to, it is a concept the authors themselves acknowledge is vague and ambiguous, but one they do not dispel with a sustained analysis.

The book is not primarily a controlled comparative analysis, but a more conventional study of contemporary aboriginal policy development, most of it about Canada, in the same covers as two much briefer studies. The first half is devoted to the Canadian material, with separate chapters on social conditions, aboriginal policy, self-government, the Department of Indian Affairs, aboriginal protest, and Métis and Inuit nationalism.

Despite their brevity, the individual chapters on U.S. Indians and New Zealand Maoris cover not only contemporary politics, but also an historical summary from contact to the present, and a description of the aboriginal cultures involved. In the Canadian section, by contrast, both culture and history are hardly alluded to at all, perhaps on the questionable assumption that the Canadian reader (for whom the book seems intended) would have no need of this. In the final chapter a series of points of comparison and contrast are made, with some Canadian issues being illuminated by reference to the U.S. and New Zealand material, as much by contrasts as similarities.

The Canadian section focuses on events of the past twenty years. At times the text goes into apparently unnecessary detail (as when dealing with the three aboriginal constitutional conferences of the 1980s, which ended nowhere). There are also a few significant inaccuracies (such as that the comprehensive land claims policy was unveiled in 1986, the year it was actually slightly amended, instead of 1973), and some important details which are missing, like the significant political role played by the regional aboriginal associations. While in the New Zealand and U.S. sections space is devoted to who the Maoris and the U.S. Indians are, in the Canadian section aboriginal political issues are presented with little indication of their significance for the aboriginal people themselves. However, as an analysis of the events the book is insightful, and brings the account as far as Meech Lake, Oka and the announcement of the Royal Commission.

The New Zealand material is well balanced, with the analysis drawing on Fleras' numerous earlier publications on the topic. The U.S. section is more limited in its perspective, is dependent on only a few sources, and, by comparison, is analytically oversimplified. This is only partially accounted for by the low priority aboriginal issues have in U.S. politics. The U.S. Indian Land Claims Commission is not covered in detail, and no analysis is given of tribal governments and tribal courts. Aboriginal language and education policies, dealt with in both the Canadian and New Zealand sections, are hardly mentioned for the U.S.

Yet despite the unevenness, and the limited use of the comparative perspective, there is much of value and interest about the analyses of the three cases. Overall, it is a worthwhile addition to the growing literature on aboriginal politics.