

Book offers balanced view

OHSWEKEN — "When Europeans first reached the North American continent, they found hundreds of tribes occupying a vast and rich country. The newcomers quickly recognized the wealth of natural resources. They were not, however, so quick or willing to recognize the spiritual, cultural and intellectual riches of the people they called Indians."

The above is the beginning paragraph of the introduction to one of the best books on native people I have ever read. The title is *The Innu* and it was written by Peter Armitage, with an introduction by Frank W. Porter III.

One of the reasons I liked reading this book was that it did not adopt the superior tone so familiar in many books about natives. This cultural bias comes through very clearly, especially by writers of the earlier generation. Sometimes religious intolerance is mixed in by frequent use of words like heathen and pagan. There is a welcome absence of such an inclination in this book.

Neither writer attempts to soft-pedal the various issues which can often be seen to be more of a legal or government problem than an "Indian problem." It is good to see a writer call a spade a spade. It can only lead to a better understanding of natives by the secondary school and college students for which this book was prepared.

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Our Town

George
Beaver



of Innu

Another feature I liked was the book's slim size. It has only 103 pages and these are packed with 60 very relevant pictures. This aspect should appeal to many students. One photograph in the last chapter shows an Innu rock band with electric guitars and drums, performing at the "Indian Summer" festival held in Quebec in 1986.

Some books on natives emphasize too much of the negative. This is why many Canadians have such a negative view of the indigenous people. This slim volume gives a much more balanced study of the Innu situation than some books of twice the size.

Most, if not all, of the present day native problems are rooted in the past. Only now are some of their ideas on conservation of the environment, spirituality and a non-materialistic world view being appreciated. Some people are still unconvinced and continue to pollute the earth and exploit others.

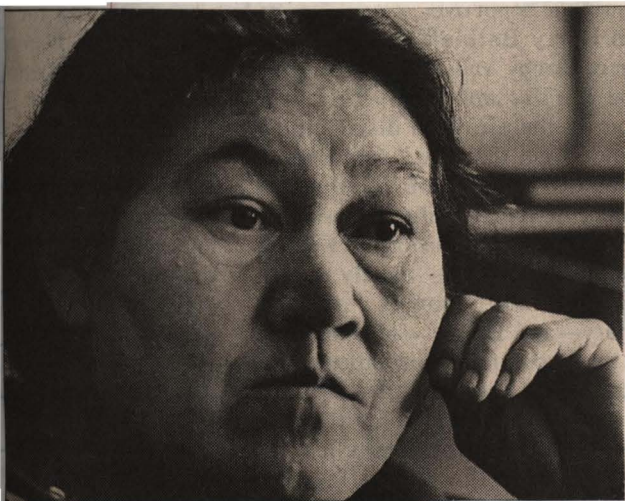
The Innu is a book which, in short order, deals with the past (from about 11,000 years ago), sketches in old Shamanic practices and explains quickly, but in depth, how their way of life is now threatened. In a way, it is representative of the difficulty facing most, if not all, First Nations people.

The only thing I found to disagree with — and this is quibbling with near perfection — is the unquestioning reference to the history of the Indians beginning 12,000 years ago. This is when the great glaciers of the last Ice Age lowered the oceans so that Asia and North America were joined. Of course people and animals crossed this land bridge — both ways.

However, Folsom spear points have been found in the U.S. southwest which have been carbon dated to 40,000 years ago. This would indicate that the history of North America natives goes back far beyond 12,000 years.

The Innu (The Montagnais-Naskapi) by Peter Armitage is published by Chelsea House of New York and Philadelphia.

Our Town is an Expositor feature which provides a forum for news and views from some of the smaller centres in the region. George Beaver, a Six Nations reserve resident, was a teacher and principal on the Six Nations and New Credit reserves for 33 years.



Innu spokesperson Rose Gregoire: