

## Sean T. Cadigan. *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History*

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Sean T. Cadigan. *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8020-8247-3

IT IS NOT AN EASY task to write a narrative history that covers the span of several centuries, as Sean Cadigan has done for Newfoundland and Labrador. Having just completed a book that covers the history of Canada for a similar period, I understand how Cadigan must have struggled with which periods and themes to emphasize and which ones to leave out of his survey. I appreciate, too, how books such as this depend on the scholarship of colleagues and graduate students, and here the work of Jerry Bannister and Peter Pope in addition to Cadigan's earlier research is obvious. The sections on the legal history of Newfoundland are among the strongest in a book that offers a useful narrative of the history of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Cadigan begins his history with a 1946 quote from Joseph R. Smallwood, "We are not a nation" and he selects part of that phrase "Not a Nation" as the title for his conclusion. Nationalism is the dominant theme in the book, but aside from a brief description of the concept as "an ideological construct partially based on the fabrication that peoples of diverse interests are really one and should mobilize in support of a particular interest group or party" (296) he offers little discussion or analysis of a concept that has generated much scholarly debate and analysis in recent years. He argues that the nationalist rhetoric has served to obscure the real issues in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador; the history of the peoples of Newfoundland and Labrador, Cadigan maintains, is defined "far more by their class, gender and ethnicity than by the mythical nationalist identities invented by political elites." While Cadigan's history reflects much of the new research on women, Aboriginal peoples, labour, and various ethnic groups in Newfoundland and Labrador, his attempt to impose a Marxist, gendered and ethnically based interpretation on the history of Newfoundland and Labrador does not always succeed. Although his narrative refers frequently to the labouring classes, class antagonisms and divisions in Newfoundland society, the mercantile bourgeoisie, and numerous examples of exploitation based on class and ethnicity, Cadigan's book remains primarily a political and economic narrative history of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Newfoundland and Labrador has failed to prosper in large part, Cadigan argues, because politicians and elites failed to understand that the resources of the “sea were paramount” (which seems, in Cadigan’s view, not to include offshore oil and gas). His history chronicles how the political and economic elite — often with the misguided support of labour — largely ignored the marine resources to instead pursue various nationalist projects that aimed to promote the natural resource wealth of the interior of both the island and of Labrador. Cadigan is correct in identifying the economic development model pursued first by the colonial reformers and subsequently embraced by successive generations of leaders in Newfoundland and Labrador. I am not sure, however, that his explanation for why such a model was pursued with such vigour since the early nineteenth century is convincing; it seems at times that he ignores his own evidence. By the beginnings of the nineteenth century, Cadigan tells us, the limited population was already struggling to survive because of the “persistence of low prices in the cod fishery” (90). Poverty was a constant in Newfoundland and Labrador because of the often depressed condition of the fish trade (113), and Cadigan refers frequently to the “hungry and starving fishing people” in the 1830s and in the 1890s for whom local politicians demanded aid from the state (117). Throughout the book, Cadigan notes the “failed inshore fisheries” (121), the poor catches and the overexploitation of the cod stocks. He mentions at one point that “efforts ... rose constantly, but catches did not” (121). Many of the outport merchants who had benefited much more from the fishery than the fishers left the “chronically troubled fishery” by the end of the nineteenth century and many more deserted the fisheries in the middle of the twentieth century. The search for economic diversification away from the sea was driven primarily by a desire for a better and more stable standard of living, though Cadigan is correct to argue that many mistakes were made along the way.

As he shows throughout the book, the fishery failed to provide a decent living for many Newfoundlanders; that might explain why elites and fishers, too, were searching for new economic opportunities. The troubles in the fisheries, notably the persistent low incomes, explain the haste with which Newfoundlanders and Labradorians deserted the industry in favour of wage employment on Canadian and American military bases during the Second World War. Cadigan condemns the attempt to modernize the fisheries in the 1930s when the Commission of Government (and later the provincial and federal governments) adopted what he and others have called the “Canadian model” of fishery development based primarily on a fresh and frozen industry rather than the salt fishery. Cadigan argues that the Commission of Government was “fooled” into thinking that such a strategy would work for Newfoundland and he claims such a policy was “designed to bring to a close the outport life of Newfoundland” (232). Not really: it was designed to bring to those citizens living in the outports a decent standard of living, something Cadigan repeatedly notes that the traditional fishery had failed to accomplish since settlers first arrived in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Cadigan's book is required reading for those interested in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador and it will surely generate considerable discussion throughout the province.

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Raoul R. Anderson and John K. Crellin, comp. and eds., *Mi'sel Joe: An Aboriginal Chief's Journey*. St. John's: Flanker Press, 2009. ISBN 978-1-897317-42-6.

SAQAMAW MI'SEL JOE'S (White Caribou's) autobiography, *Mi'sel Joe: An Aboriginal Chief's Journey*, can be contextualized in several ways. It is the third book by an aboriginal author to be published on the island of Newfoundland.<sup>1</sup> It continues a tradition of elders and chiefs creating a space for other Aboriginal authors to write: like the body of Aboriginal literature that surfaced in Canada during the late 1960s and 1970s (written mostly by elders and chiefs), *An Aboriginal Chief's Journey* (the second of Joe's books) sets a precedent for other Mi'kmaq authors to share their stories. As Joe says, "[t]he more people I tell about us, not just the Mi'kmaq people in Conne River, but the Native Canadians, increases our chances of survival" (105). As well, the text — told to and tape-recorded by non-Native editors and compilers — follows in the footsteps of the "as-told-to" tradition, a convention that is most consistently associated with the nineteenth-century and one that has become hotly contested in the study of Aboriginal literatures. This is due to a problematic legacy of non-Native intervention in Aboriginal discourses. Thankfully, though, the book does not seem to register control or manipulation of Joe's voice, and the editorial preface shows respect and a desire to learn.

Mi'sel Joe, who became traditional Saqamaw and the Newfoundland District Chief for the Mi'kmaq Grand Council in 1982, ends his autobiography as follows: "In the last 20 years and more, we have come a long way. The future remains promising as we continue to co-operate with governments, constitutions, companies, and individuals. And I will be travelling with the community on that path" (152). *An Aboriginal Chief's Journey* proves the relevance, significance and truth of this comment.

"Worlds Apart," the first section, introduces us to Mi'sel as a young boy and his description of a colonial and traumatic education system. Beginning school in 1954 at the age of seven years, Joe talks about the manner in which his cultural values and, in particular, his language was attacked. Forced to memorize and recite catechism, "[t]he teacher referred to [the children's] broken English as "mumbling"(2), and [t]he priest, ... the ultimate power in the community, ... banned the use of the [Mi'kmaq] language and ceremonies" (5). Not surprisingly, Joe "stayed at school till [he] ran away ... [at] 14 years old" (18). The rest of this chapter recounts Joe's early life working in various trades on the mainland of Canada, a drinking problem