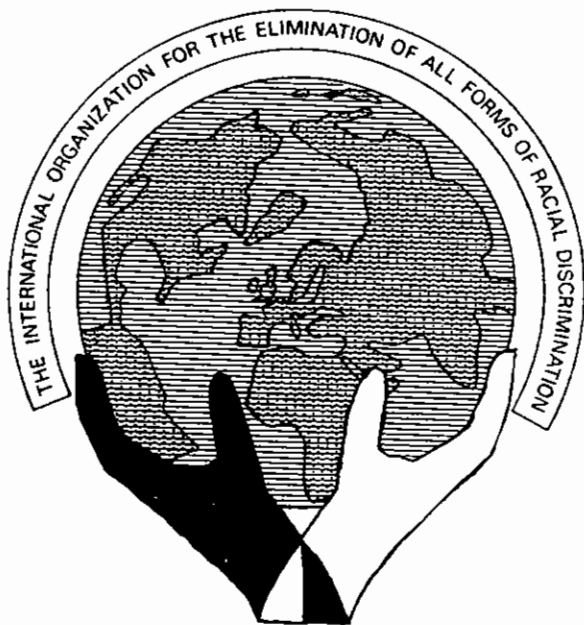


**THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION  
FOR THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF  
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION  
(EAFORD)**



**THE IMAGE OF THE AMERINDIAN  
IN QUEBEC TEXTBOOKS**

by  
**SYLVIE VINCENT &  
BERNARD ARCAND**

Published by  
The International Organization for the Elimination  
of All Forms of Racial Discrimination  
(EAFORD)  
June 1983

The views expressed in this Bulletin are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent those of EAFORD.

**All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.**  
Universal Declaration of Human Rights

### **Note**

Sylvie Vincent and Bernard Arcand were recipients of EAFORD's International Award for the Furtherance of Human Understanding for the year 1982 on their book "L'Image de l'Amerindian dans les Manuels Scolaires du Quebec" (Cahiers du Quebec/Hurtubise HMH Collection Cultures Amerindiennes Montreal, 1979, 335p). The Award was given to them at a special ceremony organised by Laval University.

In this paper, the authors give a summary of their findings.

# THE IMAGE OF THE AMERINDIAN IN QUEBEC TEXTBOOKS

by  
**SYLVIE VINCENT &  
BERNARD ARCAND**

## The Native Peoples in Quebec Textbooks

Does the image of the Amerindian in Quebec textbooks risk to instil into young people prejudice against the Amerindians? In order to find an answer to that question, two ethnologists, Sylvie Vincent and Bernard Arcand, made an exhaustive analysis of the textbooks approved by the Quebec Ministry of Education for the 1976-77 scholastic year. The findings of their research are to be found in *l'Image de l'Amerindien dans les manuels scolaires du Québec ou Comment les Québécois ne sont pas des sauvages* (1979). In drawing from these textbooks a particular image of the Amerindian, Vincent and Arcand have brought to light the ideology of their authors, an ideology which strongly risks to endure in the mind of children and young people often unable to consider with a critical mind the sources of information set for them. The two authors of the study therefore invite us to re-read those textbooks which tend to lead young people to racism and discrimination towards the Amerindians. This work is in a way a warning to teachers concerned about the respect of human rights of everyone and about relations between the Quebecers and the Amerindians living in Quebec.

Among all the textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education, the authors found 105 referring at least once to the Amerindians or to the Inuit. But it is the 27 history textbooks that treat most of native peoples, especially the books treating of the French regime. History textbooks have therefore been the object of a particularly searching analysis, in which the authors quote a large number of references, adding comments to enable the reader to also make a "different reading". (Arcand B., Vincent, S. 1979: 23) Let us look at this image of Amerindian.

### *Different facets of the same image*

In history textbooks, the Amerindian is presented through many images, often contradictory: the cruel and hostile Indian, the good and gentle savage, or again the naive and manipulated poor type.

In those books the hostility of Amerindians is presented as one of their inborn characteristics. Historians seem unable to recognize any reasonable motive for the hostility of the Amerindians, or to justify the fact that they might object to colonization, exploration or trade of the French colonizers. To sum up, the Amerindians are simply accused of having hindered the economic development of the colony and the enrichment of Europeans. In laying stress on the supposedly bellicose and cruel nature of the Indians,

historians also throw into relief the heroism of the first Quebecers who could bravely hold out against the plague these barbarious Indians represented.

On the other hand, Amerindians' hospitality, sometimes referred to in history books, is never presented as a factor of importance for the development of the colony or the economic survival of the French. These "allied" Indians who acted as guides, subsidiary troops and fur purveyors, never play in history but a part of extras supers "dull and nameless;" (Ibid: 85). Textbooks authors deny them any science or credit in territorial exploration or war victories. The Amerindians make up the back-cloth on which historians elaborated and go on elaborating national history, the history of others". (Ibid.)

This image of extras or supers always available and unable to do something on one's own initiative rejoins the one of naive Indians easily manipulated by colonial powers, an image ever-recurring in history textbooks. The Amerindians appear there as pawns, mere tools manipulated by the Europeans, to further their military and economic purposes. For historians, to conceive the Indians are not submitting to the white rule seems unthinkable. When the Amerindians seem to act in their own interest, the reason is that, there again, they are ruled either by missionaries or by chiefs to whom historians attribute a strong personality (this as a set-off to the lack of personality of the mass). When historians refer to the economic or war strength of the Indians, their struggles are always pictured in terms of their march towards "progress": the primitive wage war to benefit from the products of "civilization". Therefore historians pretend that the Amerindians themselves acknowledge that Europeans are of a superior breed. Europeans always imply that the Indian communities' business aspirations were misplaced, illegitimate, and that argument is used as a pretext to justify colonial repression:

"History textbooks teach that the Amerindians' desire for a control of their own economical and political destiny are ambitions, and when these ambitions go against the superior interests of the colony, it is practically normal to try to bring them down and to humble them." (Ibid. 141)

It sometimes happens that history books depict the Amerindians as victims, but yet we must make sure of *whom*, of *what* and during *which period* of history they are victimized. Shown as big losers in the fur trade, the Indians, according to textbooks, were above all victims of their own naivety. And if history textbooks authors picture the Amerindians as having possibly been naive victims of the first French traders, on the other hand, these same authors find the natives to have been shamefully exploited by the Hudson Bay Company.

Each time the Amerindians are victims of impostures or of acts of cruelty, these events take place either during the Jacques Cartier period, that is to

say long, long ago, in the prehistoric period of the colony, or after the French regime, where the culprits are no other than the Anglo-Saxons: Britishers or Americans. If it happened that Indians were reduced to slavery or became victims of an epidemic during the French regime, the French never directly bore the responsibility. On the other end, however, our textbooks keep silent on Amerindians victims of missionaries, colonial schools, or the government's policy of territorial expansion (except may be the Riel case). And above all, victims of racism are not to be found. According to Vincent and Arcand the Amerindians would be mainly victims of . . . our history textbooks. (Ibid: 124)

Elsewhere in these textbooks, we may notice attempts to present ethnographic descriptions where "what is told tells us as much if not more on the authors' opinions than on the Amerindians themselves." (Ibid: 145)

In these pseudo-ethnographic descriptions, usually placed at the beginning of the book, we first learn that the Amerindians are not physically different from the Europeans; some authors even go as far as to deny them any physical characteristic different from those of the Whites. By doing so, historians take shelter from any charge of racism because a large number of people think that racism lies only in genetic differences. This rectification done, they feel at ease to try to prove that the Amerindians are culturally inferior to us. In their superficial descriptions, the authors of history textbooks maintain that Amerindians languages and technologies are poor, and that their economies, their religions and their social and political organisations are inferior. The reader who is not well informed and who has no other sources of information on Amerindian cultures to rely on but these history textbooks containing hastily done and poorly documented descriptions, will have no choice but to conclude that the Indians are behind the times, inferior and primitive. The reader will really understand the meaning historians want to give to history, authentic history, the one beginning once the set is well in place.

History textbooks authors adhere to a type of social evolutionism popular last century: "According to this theory, history of mankind sums up to a slow social and cultural evolution towards the particular type of civilization represented by Western society." (Ibid: 169) Using the same words as the first European observers, quoting them without commentaries or denials and without referring to the values of the period, historians of today too often ratify the ethnocentric vision of Amerindians held by Europeans.

According to some authors, the Amerindians would have been unable to access to an "authentic civilization", on account of the poor state of their technology; according to others, their delay was due to linguistic deficiencies. But above all, the Indians pictured in textbooks are little civilized because they were very near to nature and almost animal like, untidy, unruly, lazy, immoderate, liars, not very reliable in war or in trade; in fact

precisely where the Europeans needed them most. In laying stress on the primitive and savage character of the Amerindians, historians come to want to convince us that:

“If they (the Amerindians) object to colonial control, it is not because it is oppressive, but because they cherish too much their wild liberty to willingly submit to control.” (Ibid. 184)

The childishness of these “savages” established, their disorder and indiscipline proved, it will then become easy to have the necessity of ruling those immature beings, who were unable to emerge from primitiveness, accepted. Invasions and colonial operations have often been justified owing to this same reasoning: Hitler in Europe, the French in Algeria, the Americans in Vietnam, the white regime in South Africa. In other words, it is the ideology of those who make a pretext of the inferiority of other peoples to maintain their rule on them. In advocating this ideology, history textbooks give proof of a constant depreciation of Amerindian customs, for which the authors of those books have often a hard time to conceal their contempt.

#### **Genocide, territorial integration and appropriation, or usefulness of the image of the primitive**

The image of the primitiveness of the Amerindians is not useless. It serves to explain and to justify the behaviour of the Europeans:

“Textbooks need to say that the Amerindians were more primitive, and less advanced than the Europeans, in order to justify, for the sake of progress, manipulations and transformations of Amerindian societies. Without this image of the primitive, our history would appear as an enduring genocide.” (Ibid: 196)

If it happens that history textbooks authors condemn the genocidal attitude of the Europeans towards the Amerindians, their blame is directed nearly only against the extermination policy practised by the Anglo-Saxons of the English colony or of the United States in order to extend their territory. As far as New France (la Nouvelle-France) is concerned, she is supposed to have practised only a kind and generous integration policy. And this will to integrate the Amerindians is considered by the textbooks authors as reasonable and justifiable: according to them, assimilation is what could be the best to happen to so primitive a people. History books sum up the four main strategies elaborated by the French to “civilize” the Amerindians: sedentary life, evangelization, frenchisation and cross-breeding. But as all these assimilation attempts resulted in failures, failures that have to be explained, textbooks are unanimous to affirm that responsibility lay with the Indians themselves. The failure is explained by a cultural incapacity of

primitives, who, having tried hard to accede to the "benefits of civilization" could never reach them. In history textbooks their refusal to integrate their colony never appears as being possibly the result of a deliberate decision on their part. Never are either the integration policy or the values of colonial society called in question.

As for the influence of the Amerindians on colonial society, if we believe the textbooks, it would be negligible. Their contribution would sum up to little: a few food products, a few techniques now obsolete, a few words from Indian languages. The fact that some of our ancestors preferred to leave the colony to go to live amidst Indians is presented as being completely marginal; the fact of a few eccentrics, most often debauched, unable to accept with discipline the hardships and constraints of civilization.

"The concept of liberty would be an Amerindian contribution far more dangerous politically. Its appeal must be marginalized or, at least, attributed to debauchery and disorder." (Ibid: 215)

In other respects, if some historians acknowledge that the spirit of independence and liberty of Quebecers could have been borrowed from the Amerindians, that does in no way bring them closer to us. Mention of the Amerindian influence on the identity of the Quebecers in textbooks serves but to distinguish us better from the French and to oppose us to the English, but at the same time without ever making us more alike to Amerindians.

If the French colonial government's wish to integrate the Amerindians did not realize, their disappearance from textbooks seems, on the contrary, to be an accomplished fact. History, as taught nowadays, seems in the end to limit itself to that of European immigrants. The Amerindians seem to be a people without history.

"The Amerindians appear only in so far as they interest us and to the extent their doings are always explained in terms that concern us." (Ibid. 222)

During the French regime, it was spoken about Amerindians without an identity of their own and without personal interests, playing a part of some sort of allies or enemies during the colonial wars. But with the British conquest, they disappear from textbooks. From now on, when authors speak about Amerindians, it will be to indicate who assumes "responsibility" for them or also to repeat that they want at all costs to assimilate and become integrated in Canadian society. Except in these few cases, textbooks make us believe the Amerindians do not exist anymore.\* And if some of them still exist, some authors would warn at the beginning of their book,

\*In a symposium organised in 1980 in Montreal by EAFORD's branch, the Quebec Movement to Combat Racism for the Amerindians, a Canadian attending the Symposium informed EAFORD that he did not think that Amerindians still existed. EAFORD.



that they are so few. And when they reappear in the textbooks, they always seem to be absent from the economic, political and social life. They are rather to be found in arts, a much less dangerous sphere of activities, where Amerindian artists have become excellent producers of exotic pieces. For example, we notice that the Inuit, to whom textbooks refer only to relate how ferocious they were in the past, have become peaceful creators of works of art. Still better, Amerindians are seen being chosen as an exotic theme by Canadian artists: painters, novelists and film producers.

Genocide and integration being colonial strategies aiming at territorial appropriation, it is of prime importance to look into the manner in which history textbooks give an account of Amerindians' territorial rights and in which they describe the conquest of the territory by the Europeans. Never do the authors question the reasons called upon by the Europeans to justify their rights to Amerindian territories. If the conquerers' ways were usual and official in the Europe of 16th and 17th centuries, it is however surprising "that textbooks intended for children living at the end of the 20th century, speak about an inalienable right assured by the fact of having spent a few months in a place or of having erected a cross there." (Ibid. 240) When keeping silent on the presence of the Amerindians or depict them as nomad peoples for whom land has little value, textbooks authors deny them any territorial right. The image of the primitive Indian conveyed by history books is useful: Besides justifying colonial government's policy of integration, it warrants territorial appropriation by Europeans.

Authors sometimes acknowledge that various tribes used to divide the American space between themselves in a precise way and had occasionally to fight for the respect of their territorial rights. But, according to our textbooks, those fights always took place outside of Quebec and after 1760, thus implying that the Amerindians would have had to protect their territories only from the Anglo-Saxons and the Americans.

"This is an indication that Quebec Amerindians possess no territorial rights or that the French have been so respectful of these rights that there has been no need to protect them." (Ibid: 251)

If the French pictured in history books never wrong the Amerindians concerning their territorial rights, we cannot say as much about the textbooks. It will be hard for students reading history textbooks to suspect that Indians have a title to territorial property in Quebec. It is more likely they will make theirs the notion of a national territory, totally under the jurisdiction of the province of Quebec, and upon which, at all times, the Amerindians never had any right.

Whereas history textbooks authors are not usually in the habit of standing for native peoples or siding against progress, they however make an exception when they protest against the infringement of the territorial rights of

the Métis of Rivière Rouge (Red River) and against repression of this uprising. And so appear the Western Métis, oppressed by Confederation and by the English; Métis who were justified to fight for the integrity of their territory, for their right to a culture of their own and for self-government. "Their saga has been related because some of them spoke French, because they opposed English rule and because their territorial claims involved only Western Canada." (Ibid: 269) That is how history textbooks authors have transformed those Métis into "Western Quebecers", at the same time completely ignoring the Métis in Quebec.

### **Other textbooks**

The image of the Amerindians drawn in other textbooks is rather similar to the one pictured by historians. French, plastic arts, religious sciences and humanities textbooks authors seem to have well kept in mind the lesson learned in history books. In textbooks intended for secondary schools students, one may still find the primitive Indian, devoid of history, living in a society little or badly organized, and whose culture did not bring any major contribution to ours. One may also discover there the good savage, the hostile Iroquois, the exploited Indian, the Amerindian on the road to evolution, integration or extinction. The secondary schools textbooks offer no other issue to the Amerindians than "to disappear in the great Canadian melting pot or to go back to a nature on the verge of perishing and of being recovered by white civilization." (Ibid: 306)

In the textbooks intended for elementary schools children we meet again with a few exceptions from the stereotype of the Amerindian drawn in history books. These exceptions, even if they are few (3 books out of 41), show a different history, and prove that, where other cultures are not always to be judged according to the standards and values of our society, different textbooks can be written, and that it is possible to give the Amerindians the right to express themselves in our textbooks. Nevertheless, aside from these few exceptions, it is the rather dull image of the Amerindian presented in history books that is conveyed to young children and it is that image which creates the first impression on them. Moreover, the child will also find in his textbooks, the fictitious Amerindian of Westerns: the silent, impassible, dirty, poor Indian expressing himself in signs or grunts, skillful in his own technology, but clumsy in the one of the Whites. From all that, the child will above all remember that native peoples, such as Inuit, either live very far – off in space, or off in time, as they are spoken of only in the past tense. That remoteness is also cultural: the Amerindians were backward peoples with strange customs and their languages were almost incomprehensible.

"Textbooks point out this cultural difference so much so that the Amerindians and the Inuit, seem equivalent to the Chinese or the Persians, to Cinderella or Puss in Boots. To meet them on the street, or

even to live in the same country where they lived, is a remote prospect.” (Ibid: 317)

### **Conclusion**

Vincent and Arcand have drawn up, in Quebec textbooks, an inventory of the different facets of the same image of the primitive Amerindian. This image serves to deny any right to native peoples, and to justify aggression by Europeans who attempted to exterminate them, assimilate them and to appropriate their territories. This image warrants the projects for western expansion and economic progress. This new morality of expansion and progress nowadays replaces religious ideology of former Quebec history books. However the definition of the Amerindians did not improve much in new textbooks. “Authors did not transform anything, except the objectives of the colony: evangelization of Indians is no more as important as their progress towards civilization.” (Ibid: 323). And the image of their primitiveness emphasizes the grandeur of our civilization.

Textbooks authors also use the image of the primitive to paint the image of the first Quebecers, heroic, advanced, and, contrary to the Anglo-Saxons, benevolent to the Amerindians. In other words, textbooks show how Quebecers are not savages. Therefore, the image of the Amerindian in textbooks contributes to the elaboration of the identity of Young Quebecers, but, as Vincent and Arcand write in their conclusion:

“We don’t deem it necessary to believe that this national identity, this vision of the world on which lies our conception of history be forever built on intolerance and be defined with the help of a contempt for the Amerindians.” (Ibid: 325)

## PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

1 Basic Documents of the International Organisation for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD)	free
2 Zionism and Racism (Proceedings of International Forum 1976)	£1.50
3 South Africa & Israel — R. P. Stevens & A. M. Elmessiri	£1.50
4 Treatment of Palestinians in Israeli-Occupied West Bank and Gaza — Report of the National Lawyers Guild (USA) 1977 Middle East Delegation	£1.50
5 Dossier: Le Racisme Au Quebec (Quebec Movement to Combat Racism)	£1.00
6 The International Organisation for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by Dr. T. Ataöv	free
7 La Relation et les Relations entre Israël a l'Afrique du Sud by Elizabeth Mathiot	50p
8 A Question of Identity and Self-fulfilment by Dr. Anis Al-Qasem and Dr Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira	50p
9 Israel and South Africa — Ideology and Practice by Dr. A. Moleah	50p
10 The Structure of the Zionist Movement in the United States by Rabbi Dr. Elmer Berger	50p
11 The Case in South Africa by Dr. T. Ataöv	50p
12 Sanctions Against South Africa: The Lessons of Sanctions Against Rhodesia by Dr. A. Moleah	50p
13 The Autonomy Plan: Israeli Colonisation Under a New Name by Elizabeth Mathiot (pub. by EURABIA, Paris)	50p
14 Le Racisme en France (in French) par un Groupe de Stagiaires Quebecois	free
15 An International View of Racial Discrimination by Dr. Anis Al-Qasem	50p
16 Zionist Ideology — Obstacle to Peace by Rabbi Dr. Elmer Berger	50p
17 Zionism and the Lands of Palestine by Sami Hadawi and Walter Lehn	50p
18 Jewish National Fund: an instrument of discrimination by Walter Lehn	50p
19 The Independent Personality of the Palestinians through their Arts by Dr. T. Ataöv	50p
20 Israeli use of Palestinian Waters and International Law by Dr. T. Ataöv	50p
21 Canada's Aboriginals: The Struggle for their Homelands by Charles Roach	50p
22 Racist Regimes and the Land of the Indigenous Peoples by Dr. Anis Al-Qasem	50p
23 The Caribs and their Colonizers; the Problem of Land presented by Chief Hilary Frederick	50p
24 Zionism and Apartheid: The Negation of Human Rights by Dr. A. Moleah	50p
25 Zionism, a System of Apartheid by Elizabeth Mathiot	50p
26 Human Rights or Self-Righteousness in the State of Israel by Rabbi Dr. Elmer Berger	50p
27 Racism and Racial Discrimination defined by Dr. Fayez Sayegh	50p
28 Israel and Nuremberg; are Israel's leaders guilty of war crimes? by John Reddaway	50p
29 Internal Control in Israel and South Africa: The Mechanisms of Colonial-Settler Regimes by Christopher Mansour and Richard P. Stevens	50p
30 Proceedings of the Symposium on Ethnic Groups & Racism	£1.00p
31 The Image of the Amerindian in Quebec Textbooks by Sylvie Vincent & Bernard Arcand	50p

The above publications are available from EAFORD's London Office at

**Agriculture House, Knightsbridge, London SW1**