Paul-André Dubois, *Lire et écrire chez les Amérindiens de Nouvelle-France. Aux origines de la scolarisation et de la francisation des Autochtones*, Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2020, 720 pp. ISBN 9782763740867. Price Cdn$55.00.

In 1807 the bishop of Québec, Joseph-Octave Plessis, thus described to a puzzled Sulpician missionary the "sauvages" of Saint-Régis (now Akwesasne, Ontario, and New York), a mission established in 1755 to serve the spiritual needs of the Mohawks: "You must consider as savages all who live as savages and dress like them, even if they were not born among them. A family can be considered as savage if most of the individuals of which it consists, even though not all of them, live as savages do". This quotation is not in *Lire et écrire* but note how much its inner subtext sounds similar to that of the following quotation – which *is* in the book (346). It refers to Chedabouctou (later Halifax, Nova Scotia), a mission very distant from Saint-Régis. In 1751 Marie-Andrée Duplessis de Sainte-Hélène, the superior of the Hôtel-Dieu of Québec, described the Mi'kmaq of Acadia as "the most Frenchified that I have ever seen, the men dress as the French do as a matter of course, and the women who know our language pay their compliments in the fashion of the most educated Canadian women" (346).

This idea of the blurred borders between the identities of two ethnic communities so close, yet so different, evolving in parallel fashion through two centuries of contact but influencing each other nevertheless, is at the core of this monumental new book by Paul-André Dubois, a specialist in the history of New France at Université Laval. So far, we had appreciated Dubois through his work on religious music and singing and his edited volume on the Franciscan Recollets of New France (2018). *Lire et écrire* traces the history and the effects of schooling upon the indigenous communities of eastern North America. Dubois's analysis includes not only New France proper during the French regime, from Acadia to Detroit via the Saint Lawrence corridor, but also the post-conquest British North American period in the Maritime provinces and the New England-New York experience with the Protestant educational experiments, the latter carried out in English. (The title of the book should have been *Lire, écrire et chanter*, given the many and significant references to music and singing, an original feature that does not normally appear in the historical literature.)

France's initial idea was to replicate the domestic educational model in New France and to apply it to the indigenous peoples – a model that has since been known as Frenchification. Through reading, writing, and singing, French and indigenous children were to initiate their way towards the salvation of their souls and the acceptance of their role in society. As in France, schooling was

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conceived as a "two-tier system" (177), one for the wealthy, and one for the poor. In indigenous terms, this meant that preference was given to the sons and daughters of the prominent indigenous families, who were expected to become leaders in their own nations, or, in the case of girls, to lead with the example of their impeccable lives and to cement political alliances through mixed marriages (149, 160, 167, 603). In the peculiar colonial environment, schooling was also meant to provide interpreters for the missionaries and for the Crown, besides a cohort of young devouts, some of whom would in turn become priests and "apostles with their own kind" (145) – the eternal missionary dream of the birth of an autochthonous clergy. For a variety of reasons, thoroughly examined in *Lire et écrire*, among which infant mortality, indigenous parents' attachment to their children, traditionalists' resistance, and lack of adequate financing on the part of the Crown, the implementation of the French educational model in North America did not yield the expected results. As a consequence, in the second half of the seventeenth century institutional schooling was either abandoned or left to the dwindling means of a few missionaries or to the efforts of some women's congregations, only to be picked up by Protestant missionary societies in the Maritime provinces and in the American Northeast in the late eighteenth century.

According to Dubois, the "great lie" (224) equating Frenchification with a net loss was launched under the impulse of the new utilitarian approach inaugurated in France by minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert in the mid-seventeenth century. What is worse, he maintains, is that such a lie has since become a commonplace of historiography – compounded in the past few years, one should add, with the indigenous revanchism fueled by the political overtones of the debate over the residential school system (603). To claim that Frenchification was an overall failure might be somehow justified, Dubois admits, when considering only its institutional aspect (363) and downplaying the fact that schooling continued "on a small scale" (224). But because that commonplace was never backed by sound evidence, we really do not know anything of the consequences of the linguistic and cultural transformation that took place among the indigenous peoples, let alone of the destiny "of the Frenchified [Amerindians] once they moved out of the institution" (251).

In order to verify whether Frenchification and Christianization through schooling had really been such a wasted effort, Dubois has taken the longest path, that of in-depth archival research through the documents of the Archives nationales d'Outre-Mer of Aix-en-Provence (via Library and Archives Canada), the Sulpician archives of Montréal and Paris, and, in Quebec City, the archives of the Ursulines, the Augustines Hospitalières of the Hôtel-Dieu, the Archevêché, and the Séminaire, besides other less used repositories. A simple glance at the

numerous and substantial footnotes shows Dubois's reliance on manuscript evidence (especially in chapters 1–7). To be sure, he does not conceal the fact that in some cases he has not found documentary evidence to prove his case (173, 227, 230). Refraining from generalizing and theorizing, Dubois has resurrected from the archives the lives and careers of those boys and girls, as well as men and women, who were active participants in this process of schooling during almost two centuries. These individuals were mostly students, but were also parents, teachers, and community leaders, both of indigenous and European origin, many of them of métis biological background.

Historians are familiar with several of these people, such as the Acadian Baron Jean-Vincent d'Abbadie de Saint-Castin (138) or Pierre Accault, the son of the famous Kaskaskia convert Marie Rouensa-Accault (140). Others are less known, such as Jean-Baptiste Liénard, the son of a French father and of an Abenaki mother, who became a Recollet with the name of Frère Bonaventure and was appointed as missionary to Detroit in 1722 (141–144). Some of these individuals are described in great detail, at least as much as sources allow it. Others are simply mentioned. Dubois's own acquaintance with these people of the past is impressive. One is reminded of Lucian Campeau's *Monumenta Novae Franciae* (1967–2003), where the Canadian Jesuit showed such an intimate knowledge of the Huron people he portrayed that one might feel that he had actually lived among them. Similarly, the reader of *Lire et écrire* is given the impression that Dubois has matured a personal knowledge of all the people, European and indigenous, whose journeys through life he unfolds in his book.

In fact, so many individual stories are narrated in the book that Dubois feels it necessary to warn the reader not to lose oneself "inside that nebula" (269), because, he explains, such a "litany of testimonies" (343) is necessary in order to show to what extent Frenchification was a never-ending process that did not stop even when most schools were closed down for good. Never overdetailed, this insistence on personal itineraries, as opposed to overgeneralizations hinging on fashionable theories and moral stances – such as the outright identification of apostolate and conversion with domination and oppression (7) – is indeed one of the assets of the book. Take, for example, the personal stories of the indigenous girls who spent time, sometimes years, as students at the Ursuline convent in Quebec City, as "boarders" or "external pupils"; or the names and destinies of Baron de Saint-Castin's progeny. Both are usually referred to only as anecdotal curiosities, stilted figurines characterized only by their belonging to the Mi'kmaq nation. Dubois instead gives them substance by naming them and recounting their individual stories.

His strict adherence to documentary evidence makes it possible for Dubois to seize the complexities of both worlds, that of the missionaries and that of

the missionized. First of all, in spite of some proclamations to that effect, the Crown never had or was never able to implement any uniform, coherent, and constant policy of Frenchification, not even in the early days of New France (147–148, 155). The intendant himself was torn between the Crown's instructions and the necessity to adjust to the reality of the terrain (122). Secondly, in spite of their proclaimed differences – the Jesuits (34, *passim*) favoring the keeping of indigenous ways, Sulpicians and Recollets believing that Frenchification was a necessary step towards Christianization (107, 110–111) – missionaries of all kinds were pragmatic persons who assessed their local situation and based their varied solutions on experience (3, 19, 70). Should they be up to their task, the latitude they were granted by their superiors (2) allowed them to use their intelligence, "consisting of tact, patience, and perseverance" (122), to reach the hearts and the minds of their targets.

Thirdly, complexity is what characterized the personalities of the indigenous students admitted to the Ursuline college. Admittedly, these girls acquired new values, yet they were far from being passive receptacles, because even in their new identity they were never forgetful of their original cultural background (316–317). Complexity was also a significant feature of the major resident indigenous communities that were Catholic and stable ("*sauvages domiciliés*"), including those created by the massive arrival in Canada of Catholic Iroquois, mainly from New England, in the second half of the 17th century (124, 204, 592). That arrival soon created a melting pot of several indigenous nations. (Note the useful information on the location and dates of these missions, and the relative weight of their young adults [pp. 75 n1, 123–124].) As from the early eighteenth century a further element of complexity was provided by the arrival of many war prisoners from the British colonies, children as well as adults, some of whom were of fully English origin, others of mixed blood.

By showing the extent of this complexity, Dubois substantially undermines interpretations based on the binary opposition between Algonquins and Iroquois (595). He also distinguishes the members of the elites (500) within indigenous communities – those who had learned either French or English and had accepted some values of the European society and at times even biological *métissage* – from the "ignorant mass" (549) from which they had elevated themselves (588). The more the role of schooling within these indigenous populations is examined in depth, the less – Dubois well shows – these can be described as "a whole, ethnically and socially homogeneous" (549). Finally, to some extent this complexity undermines that major binary opposition between Europeans and indigenous peoples. Those who insist on such a fundamental opposition, Dubois argues, imply that the two parties had not

modified themselves throughout the French regime and even later (252, 315) and had not undergone a blurring of their borders and identities. (See as an example the two quotations that we have used to begin this review.)

Historians who look at the past searching for what should have been instead of what was, will certainly have a field day in extrapolating from Dubois's prose some words or expressions that, given today's intellectual climate, might sound like a Miranda warning in reverse. For example, in order fully to immerse himself in the mental universe of the times, Dubois does not refrain from using *sauvages* (along with *Amérindiens* and *Autochtones*) as well as Montagnais, Hurons, and Iroquois (instead of Innu, Ouendat, or Haudenosaunee). He also believes that schooling provided the first, necessary step for indigenous elites to move into their "*modernité*" (500), that is, from a culture based on orality (and indigenous languages) to another based on the written word (and French or English as secondary language) (500). Furthermore, he considers this process as part and parcel of those "great civilizing projects … of the Frenchification of children of the two sexes in the religious institutions" (xv). Although modernity and (western) civilization are concepts that must be handled with care, Dubois's scrupulous examination of the creation and attempted use of Recollet Chrestien Leclercq's and Spiritan Pierre-Antoine-Simon Maillard's cross-cultural hieroglyphical language demonstrates how much easier it proved to be, for the indigenous people, to adopt French or English as their vehicular language. Or, to use a down-to-earth example provided by Dubois, how illusory it would be for today's proponents of a return to the origins to believe that the indigenous girls who had experienced Quebec City's urban life, and whose parents already lived in French-style houses and not in huts any longer, were aspiring to return to the "*vie sylvestre*" [life in the woods] (272) of their mythical ancestors. Finally, Dubois is keen in pointing out that indigenous elites at times also used their learning and sharing of the European written language as an instrument of collective resistance against European power and land dispossession and made the most of it in their smooth adaptation to the new British regime (499–500, 517, 538, 588).

Supported as they are by a vast array of documentary evidence displayed over a lengthy but not excessive period of time, well organized and clearly written, Dubois's conclusions are convincing. Instead of being the utter failure depicted by mid-seventeenth-century detractors and later historians, early schooling was an important instrument of Frenchification and of integration (594). When schooling as an institution was virtually abandoned, the process of Frenchification continued, "slowly, but inevitably, by osmosis … through mixed parenthood, exchange networks and the adoption of the European

material culture" (599, 362–363), starting from the first half of the eighteenth century through the aftermath of the Conquest. In the end, Dubois argues, one cannot but emphasize the final success of the Frenchification process (253).

Lire et écrire is a well-produced book, repleted with interesting and high-quality illustrations. It carries a good bibliography, and a full index. For such a long book, typos and mistakes are remarkably few and far between. The most disappointing one is the lack of a cited source for the very nice 1701 quotation from Intendant Jean Bochart de Champigny (276). In sum, both the author and the Presses of Université Laval should be congratulated for this superb book, which has already been awarded the Lionel-Groulx prize of the Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française and merits a quick translation into English, because its historiographical implications extend well beyond the confines of the French-speaking world.

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