

Dickason, Olive Patricia. *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984. xvii + 372 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$30.00.

As we approach the 1992 Columbus Quincentennial, Americans both native and immigrant will be drawn to look again at the earliest contacts between Europeans and the original peoples. Olive Dickason's *The Myth of the Savage* can provide a valuable guide to those first encounters.

While most histories of Indian-European relations on the wider American frontier begin with the initial contacts, Dickason asks the reader to look into a longer and deeper past. Faced with the presence of new peoples with what seemed exotic and often frightening ways, Europeans in the Age of Discovery struggled to make sense of America and Americans. Dickason's book is a thoughtful analysis of that struggle. In a series of well-researched chapters she explores the mental and emotional categories present in the European mind. Using a wide variety of evidence—from folklore to the graphic arts—Dickason traces the European conception of native people from Wild Man to the Noble Savage. Here she demonstrates how preconceptions about non-European peoples and cultures molded and shaped the ways Europeans behaved when confronted with Native Americans. Other scholars, most notably Don Cameron, Margaret Hodgen, and Hugh Honour, have covered this ground before but Dickason shows that there is still much to be done. This section

of *The Myth of the Savage* is done with energy and fresh insight. Her comments in these chapters are enhanced by many well-chosen contemporary illustrations.

*The Myth of the Savage* is somewhat less fresh and successful in those chapters on the French experience in Brazil, Florida, and New France. Here the story is quite well known and has been recently told in great detail by Bruce Trigger, William Eccles, and James Axtell. Nonetheless, Dickason does make an important contribution. Her exhaustive and fascinating study of Indians taken to France is worth much attention.

*The Myth of the Savage* is a handsome book that does credit to both its author and publisher. There are times when the illustrations (of which there are more than in most scholarly books) are not tied closely enough to the text. And Dickason does tend to plough some well-tilled ground. Nevertheless, this is an important and timely book that deserves a wide audience.

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