

MENNESKET MINIK. By ROLF GILBERG. Espergærde, Denmark: Forlaget ILBE, 1994. 680 p., maps, illus., bib., index. Softbound. Dkk300.

The story of Minik, who, together with his father and four other “Polar Eskimos” was brought to New York by the American explorer Robert Peary in 1897, has been published before, but other accounts were never as detailed as this substantial work by Gilberg. A brief description of Minik’s life is in order for the reader not familiar with this moving and fascinating story.

Minik was born in 1888 in North Greenland and spent his first five years, like most other Inughuit children, unaware of the external forces which were gradually eroding the old Polar Eskimo (Inughuit) way of life. Contact with whalers and explorers was taking its toll. His father, Qissuk, had recently taken a new wife when one of the many devastating epidemics which periodically ravaged the little community of Inughuit killed Minik’s two mothers and his newborn sister.

The explorer who undoubtedly influenced the life of the Inughuit more than anyone else was Robert Peary, whose ceaseless attempts to reach the North Pole involved, at one time or another, nearly the entire Inughuit population. Since his first visit to Minik’s land in 1891, Peary had wintered there on several occasions while carrying out his explorations. Scientists in the United States had suggested that he bring one or more Eskimos to New York. Minik’s father was one of the Inughuit who had agreed to go, as long as his son came along. On a hot, muggy fall day in 1897, the small group of six Inughuit arrived in New York, where they remained on Peary’s ship *Hope* until they were moved to the basement of the American Museum of Natural History. Not surprisingly, they all became sick within a month and were admitted to Bellevue Hospital for treatment and observation. Miraculously, everyone survived the first bout of illness—but not for long. They were soon readmitted, and this time only two survived: Minik and another young man, Uisakavsak, who was eventually released and shipped home. Minik was adopted by one of the museum administrators, William Wallace, and his wife Retta. One of Peary’s backers, the wealthy Morris Jesup, provided funding for Minik’s education. In 1901, Wallace was dismissed from his job, and only a few years later Minik’s ‘third’ mother succumbed to illness.

Minik had become aware that his father’s skeleton was at the museum, and in 1907 he pleaded in a newspaper article to have his father’s bones removed from the museum. Nothing came of it, and the young man became increasingly homesick for his land and people in the North. Incredibly, Peary refused to give him passage back home and all other requests were equally unsuccessful. Finally in 1909, the year Peary claimed to have reached the North Pole, Minik managed to get back to North Greenland. Home had become nearly as alien to him as New York had been twelve years earlier; he couldn’t speak the language and didn’t know how to hunt.

It says a lot about Minik’s ability to cope and adapt that he eventually managed to fit in with his old community. In 1910, Knud Rasmussen and Peter Freuchen established the Thule

trading and mission station and hired Minik as hunter and sled-driver. Minik’s knowledge of English and his skills as a hunter landed him a job in 1913 with the American Crocker Land Expedition under the leadership of Donald B. MacMillan, who had earlier accompanied Peary. When several of the expedition members left for the United States in 1916, Minik took hire on board and accompanied them, apparently no longer content to remain in the North. In New York he moved in with Chester R. Beechcroft, a journalist who had befriended him during his previous stay in America. Following an abortive attempt to write a book about his experiences, Minik travelled to northern New Hampshire, where he worked as a logger. Later he worked on a small farm, where he seems to have thrived until an influenza epidemic swept through the area in October of 1918. This time he didn’t survive and died at the age of thirty.

Rolf Gilberg states that the inspiration for presenting the story of Minik as he does came from seeing the film *Little Big Man*. In essence, Minik’s story is one of a young person suffering from cultural alienation and struggling to find enough personal identity to bridge two completely different worlds. In that sense Minik’s story goes far beyond his personal struggles and embraces the whole question of foreign domination and cultural assimilation anywhere in the world.

The story about Minik has been published before, as Gilberg clearly acknowledges. What makes his presentation unique is the tremendous amount of material with which he surrounds the story. The book is divided into twelve parts, each dealing either directly with Minik or with events being played out around him whether in the North or in the South. The reader is treated to numerous interesting and often obscure pieces of information meticulously extracted by the author from a wide variety of sources, all listed in 95 pages in Part 12. In Part 1, Gilberg establishes the ethnogeographical, environmental/ecological setting of the Inughuit people, their land, society, religion and rituals surrounding death. In Part 2, the author describes Minik’s childhood and many of the intriguing events surrounding Peary’s involvement with the Inughuit people, from stories about making complete gypsum body casts of the Inughuit to the theft of the meteorites near Cape York. Part 3 explores Minik’s life in the United States, with detailed insights into the rather amazing events which eventually led to the death of his father and three of the other Inughuit. The fate of other Inuit brought to the south is described in the following part, which includes the fascinating story of Uisakavsak, “The great Liar,” as he was called in North Greenland, since no one believed the stories he recalled from his visit to America. Minik’s experiences as a child growing up in America make up Part 5. One of the most interesting parts is probably the one that follows. Part 6 describes Minik’s realization of what has happened to his father’s remains, his pleading for a return trip to Greenland, and the reaction of prominent men of science, such as Franz Boas, the “father” of American anthropology, who disappoint greatly in their lack of human understanding. The return to Greenland and Minik’s northern presence during the contentious Cook and Peary rival claims over the attainment of

the North Pole are presented in Part 7. This blends in quite well with the account in Part 8 of Minik's 'second' life with the Inughuit and his exploits with Peter Freuchen. Here we also meet other captivating characters from the annals of arctic exploration like Captain George Comer, Elmer Ekblaw and Donald MacMillan. With the account in Part 9 of Minik's return to New York in 1916 and his final days in New Hampshire, the story might have been concluded. At this point, however, the author offers the reader a picture of post-Minik in the land of the Inughuit. Even if Parts 10 and 11 are not essential, they provide some interesting insights and an analysis of Minik's life by an author who has particular familiarity with the Inughuit people.

The thoroughness of the research for this book is amply demonstrated in nearly 50 pages of source materials followed by 45 pages of index material. The story is richly illustrated with interesting old photographs and drawings. Surprisingly, there is no listing of these in the table of contents.

Gilberg's book is a most informative and interesting read; it is surprising that the author had to publish it on his own. The occasional mistakes and spelling errors, particularly in the illustration captions, probably reflect the home-edited nature of the work. Obviously the strength of Gilberg's book lies as much in the supplementary material surrounding the events of Minik's life as in the life itself. As far as the international market is concerned, there is one major problem with the book—presently it is available only in Danish.

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ARCTIC REVOLUTION: SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES, 1935–1994. By JOHN DAVID HAMILTON. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1994. 298 p., maps, illus., notes, bib., index. Softbound. Cdn\$19.99.

In *Arctic Revolution*, journalist and broadcaster John David Hamilton has distilled what he saw and heard during fifty years of northern reporting into a lively demonstration of the adage that journalism is the first draft of history. From the 1935 gold miners' invasion of Yellowknife, the CANOL (Canadian Oil) Project of 1942, Thomas Berger's Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry of 1975—which Hamilton dubs a "Magic Circus"—to the 1991 preliminary agreement on the creation of the territory of Nunavut in the Eastern Arctic, Hamilton wends his way through the maze of conflicting social, economic, and political interests to present a readable account of a complicated scene. He does this by respecting the journalistic tradition of keeping his distance from the issues, and by writing in an informal and at times colloquial (if somewhat rambling) style. This work is a good introduction to northern history for the general reader.

The "revolution" of the title dates from the Cold War days of 1953, when the United States built the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line across northern Canada to protect North America from Soviet attack. That same year the administrative headquarters for the Northwest Territories were moved from Ottawa to Yellowknife, paving the way for that city to be named the capital of the Northwest Territories in 1967—without, however, Ottawa's giving up its powers. Later, Jean Chrétien summed up the situation when he observed, as Minister for Indian Affairs and Northern Development during the first Trudeau government, that he was "the last emperor in North America." The devolution of power from Ottawa was complicated by the Northwest Territories' ethnic mix of Inuit, Amerindians split among several Athapaskan groups and Cree, Métis, and whites, each group with its own agenda. Compromise was (and is) the order of the day, down to such matters as the proper way of conducting a meeting. A major issue was the gap between the Native tradition of government by consensus and the parliamentary tradition of rule by majority, which has been temporarily resolved, at least in part, by eliminating formal political parties. The author is at pains to stress that the transition of power has been voluntary, with the active aid of such administrators as Stuart Hodgson and John L. Parker, both of whom served as commissioners at different times.

Hamilton's main strength lies in the scope of his coverage, and the offbeat details with which he enlivens his text. The reader learns, for instance, about the pivotal role of airplanes in the development of northern mining; the crucial importance of family allowances for both Amerindians and Inuit, and the problems of delivering payments to distant peoples unfamiliar with a cash economy; and the 1960 outbreak of distemper at the old whaling station at Lake Harbour, which killed 80% of the Inuit's dogs, making hunting impossible. The outbreak, which spread to other areas as well, capped a series of plagues that had begun in 1946, finally driving the Inuit to town living.

Such disasters highlighted the multiple problems facing arctic administration as traditional subsistence bases diminished under the pressures of industrial development: town living called for permanent housing and provision for such services as medical care, schools, police, and civic administration, to mention only a few items in a long list. As Hamilton points out, the dilemma facing Ottawa was clear enough: traditional hunting and gathering could no longer be relied upon, but rescuing the people from starvation meant undertaking responsibility for their welfare. The government's response has been to support programs to train the people in the skills needed for coping with the twentieth century's wage economy, but at the same time to encourage the continuance of hunting and gathering wherever feasible. Similar difficulties plagued the Amerindians of the boreal forest, but not on quite such a dramatic scale.

Quite apart from such survival problems, Amerindians and Métis have their own particular expectations, as do the whites. One of the best known Amerindian expressions of this is the Dene Declaration of 1975, at the time characterized by