Canadian Social Trends 3

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Canadian Social Trends 3 is, as its title indicates, a social studies text. Presumably, it is meant to function as a high school or initial college/university text supporting discussions on the social trends and predictors leading up to and including the new millennium. This particular volume is meant to be supportive of the two previous editions—volumes 1 and 2. Each volume addresses the same three umbrella topics: (1) population, human geography and health; (2) women, marriage, and the family; and (3) work, lifestyle and social problems. Volume 3 contains the table of contents of each of these companion volumes in addition to its own, facilitating cross-referencing among volumes.

Each of the three major units is divided into three sections that are, in turn, separated according to the specific statistical references. This organizational structure allows the reader to readily locate material that is identified in the table of contents. Unfortunately, there is no index, making it impossible to locate any item or area of interest that is not specified in the table of contents. Although the table of contents is quite thorough, I have always found that nothing can replace an alphabetized index for quick referencing purposes.

The writing style and layout of *Canadian Social Trends 3* is approachable and familiar to anyone who reads either magazines or newspapers. The vocabulary and grammatical structures are no more complex than your typical newspaper story. Each page is broken up into multiple sections, and the text is divided into either two or three rows with maps, figures, graphs and other diagrammatic representations of data presented throughout. Lead lines to many paragraphs are in bold script, facilitating skimming of the material for the main points. Each paragraph is typically no longer than half a page.

Canadian Social Trends 3 is obviously designed to be a visual book with its many fonts, print sizes, and variations in the representation of information. Each page is meant to appear accessible to the reader. Like most print news, short columns interrupted by diagrams and figures do not lend themselves to lengthy, inquisitive, philosophical machinations. *Canadian Social Trends 3* is a series of concise articles on the Canadian social context. This text is ideal for those who do not have the need or time for in-depth analysis.

The statistics supporting this social studies text are almost exclusively from various Statistics Canada documents. As such, all and more of what comprises this book can be found with relative ease directly from the source itself. For the purpose of directing the studies of students in a classroom and/or saving everyone time (and money) in gathering these data sets, *Canadian Social Trends 3* is quite useful. However, in my opinion, it is often helpful for students who intend to use data and fact sheets sourced from Statistics Canada to understand the process that is behind the construction of the questionnaires and surveys developed by Statistics Canada for gathering data and information. Statistics, as

they are presented in *Canadian Social Trends 3*, are meant to be read as unbiased truths. A critical analysis would, however, show that all of the collected data portrayed in *Canadian Social Trends 3* are as indicative of the data gathering instruments as they are of the social trends to which they are attributed.

I have concerns in relation to some of the language and images presented in this book. For example, the author proposes that considerable research suggests children from single-parent families or blended families are disadvantaged by the very nature of this situation. What about the possibility of other variables? Later on, the text does cite economic disadvantage, among other possible variables, for having a principal role in disadvantaging children, as opposed to the inference that it is primarily the result of the breakdown of the heterosexual nuclear family. The inference that the children of single parents are disadvantaged by the very nature of their situation, however, has already been made.

In discussing visual minorities in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, the authors report that 11.2% of Canada's population is comprised of "visible minorities". As this text is supposedly guiding student learning in the new millennium and hopefully carries a social responsibility given the publication date of 2000, I would suggest an alternative title for this section: "The Changing Social and Cultural Context of Canada's Urban Centres".

In the discussion of AIDS/HIV, the text identifies "men who have sex with men" as the number one risk category for contracting HIV. Surely, we might want this to read "unprotected sex with an infected partner" as the number one risk factor. The authors identify homosexual sex as the leading risk factor; rather, unprotected sex is inherently risky and unprotected sex with an infected partner is particularly risky.

With regard to images and pictures throughout the text, *Canadian Social Trends 3* contains images and photographs that depict primarily white, middle-class, heterosexual persons. This is not overly surprising given the shortcomings of this text in portraying a realistic and representative account of the social contexts of under-represented and/or marginalised persons and groups indicative of the complex Canadian social landscape. A few examples worth noting are:

- Page 93-"Marriage and the Family" accompanies an image of a young heterosexual couple.
- Page 130-"Children of Lower Income Families" accompanies an image of a woman of colour (depicted as a single parent).
- Page 182-"Graduates" accompanies a white male and a white female shown smiling at one another.
- Page 206-"Who Gives to Charity" accompanies an image of a white, middle class woman.
- Page 212-13-"Sports" accompanies a set of images, most of which appear to be depicting white, middle-class Canadians.

In conclusion, *Canadian Social Trends 3* is a social studies text for the new millennium. The rear cover states "taken together the three volumes contain a vast amount of invaluable information on Canadian society and where it is headed in the new millennium". Indeed, *Canadian Social Trends 3* has ample

charts, figures and statistics pertaining to life in Canada, past and present, presented “in an interesting and lively manner” (p. vii). However, it falls short of encapsulating any real sense of the social experiences and situations of Canadians other than those represented by the mainstream Anglo-Eurocentric heterosexual context. If in fact it was the intent of Thompson Publishing to present a volume of statistics, figures and commentary representing the tremendous variety and variance of the Canadian social landscape, then this text fails miserably. I shudder to think that, as noted on the rear cover, “Canadian Social Trends has been used widely at universities and colleges across Canada as a reference source and as a text”. I can only hope that whoever might integrate this text into their teaching would also instill in her/his students the ability to recognize the act of omission as being just as discriminatory as overt denigration.

Blye W. Frank
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