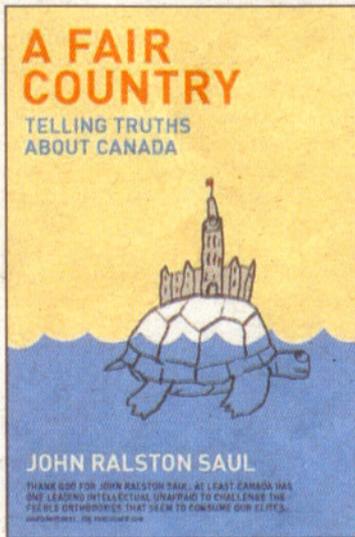


books



state of the nation **Wisdom of Saul**

 **A FAIR COUNTRY** by John Ralston Saul (Viking Canada), 320 pages, \$34 cloth. Rating: **NNNN**

IN HIS NEW BOOK, **A FAIR COUNTRY: Telling Truths About Canada**, John Ralston Saul does his damndest to make Canada more interesting. His goal is nothing short of a new foundational mythology of who we are as a country. His 300-page part history, part just plain old rant certainly succeeds in building a new big picture. His canvas extends across the country's vast landscape right up to the Arctic Sea and through the full record of Canada's post-contact history.

His revisioning aims to take down all the dominant Eurocentric assumptions that he says keep our elites happily mired in colonial mediocrity. And considering how much elite behaviour he's seen as spouse of former governor general Adrienne Clarkson, he knows well of what he speaks.

The best of Canada has nothing to do with the nationhood projects of Enlightenment Europe and its love child, the U.S., he argues. Rather, Canada is an exciting New World invention uniquely formed by this land itself, our Aboriginal and Métis roots our true defining ethos.

Saul points out that only through learning native ways and intermarrying with the locals were Europeans

able to survive in the harsh northern reality of our home and native land.

The first 200 years of Canada-to-be forged a collective unconscious that informs our world today, though we have no matrix of language to bring it to the fore. Saul says much of our true history was buried at around the time of Confederation, when "peace, welfare and good government" were undermined by the narrow Victorian prejudices of the time, only to be rewritten as "peace, order and good government."

Saul's sometimes scattershot, always challenging work is a new and much-needed foundation for a profoundly new (multi-)national self-definition.

ALICE KLEIN ©

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