

Social Studies: New France

Part 1

Question #5: Defend or refute the statement:

"Trapping should be illegal-then and now"

By: Josh Lambert

Trapping is a very important issue, which is connected to many other larger issues. For instance, trapping lies at the heart of the First Nation's distinct society issue. Before I talk about the present, however, I would like to discuss whether trapping should have been illegal when Canada was first being settled in the 17th and 18th centuries.

When the first explorers came to the new world, it was regarded as a huge slab of worthless rock standing between Europe and the riches of the Orient. The only reason these explorers even explored this continent was the hope of finding the North-West passage, a route to the Orient. Fortunately, while searching for this North-West passage, some of these explorers stumbled onto a virtual magnet for settlement: The Fur Trade. When people heard how pelts of all kinds could be obtained so easily and sold for so much, the idea of not settling in the new world was ridiculous. Suddenly settlers came to this "slab of worthless rock" and tried to set up permanent living there. Even after a few failed attempts the draw of the fur trade was responsible for the settlement we call New France.

After the first steps toward a permanent colony in the new world were made, the next steps came in leaps and bounds. The French government was sending everyone they could to settle in New France. Couriers de Bois, began coming to the colony to trap furs and sell them back in France. France granted land to poor people that were willing to risk the great voyage. The colony flourished, and grew.

It was the fur trade that was mostly responsible for this colony. However, some think that by this point the colony was large enough to illegalize fur trapping and still remain a profitable colony for France. However, there is one major reason that fur trading should have been allowed: Relations with the Indians.

Relations with the Indians were shaky, at best. Some Indians befriended the French, and some befriended the English. Some just gave their furs to the highest bidder. The relationship with the Indians was more than just a trade agreement. The wars of the Indians were the wars of the French. Now, imagine what would happen if one day, an Indian came to a Frenchman and offered him a pelt. The Frenchman tells the Indian that not only will he not buy it, but no Frenchman in New France will. Not only that, trapping furs in the forests belonging to the French was not allowed. The relationships with the Indians which had taken so long to establish would be shattered in days. The Indians would probably recognize the French as their enemies. Now not only the enemies of the Indian "friends" of the French would attack them, but also their "friends". Settlers would again become afraid to come to New France because of the fierce Indian attacks. The French colony in New France would cease to exist. Therefore, I think trapping should have been legal then.

Now that I have talked about fur trapping then, I'll talk about it now. Unfortunately, it is much more complicated now. Animal rights activists have told us that it is wrong to kill an animal for its fur. I strongly agree with this opinion, especially since man-made fur is so accessible. Unfortunately, there are people who feel they deserve real fur if they can pay for it. Although I disagree with them, you cannot just deny them the fur, because one way or another they will arrange to get it. Even so, trapping (for fur) should be illegal. If you want real fur, you should not kill wild animals. You should go to a farm where animals are raised for their fur.

The problem of people wanting real fur is small compared to other problems for and against the fur trade. For instance, if we illegalize trapping, the First Nation's way of life would be totally disrupted. Not letting the First Nation trap is like taking away a large profession from us, for instance law. What would all the lawyers do if suddenly practising law was illegal? The First Nations, I believe, should be allowed to continue trapping as long as it is under limits. However, I believe that, after all, their ancestors had such a successful relationship with the land that trapping within limits should not be a problem.

Another problem that would arise if trapping is illegalized is that it is said that too many predators (wolves, etc.) would roam the forests and be dangerous to farms with livestock on them. It is said that trapping keeps the populations of these predators low, so they will not pose as much of a threat to farms.

In conclusion, I feel that trapping today should be legal within strict limits that allow for the way of life of the native peoples and for the balance of nature, but do not permit gratuitous killing of animals.