

MICHAEL BISSON

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**Bruce Trigger**  
**1937-2006**



The Department of Anthropology, the Faculty of Arts, and McGill University mourn the death of Bruce Graham Trigger, who passed away December 1 after a long battle with cancer. Bruce Trigger was the leading archaeologist and among the most distinguished social scientists in Canada. His works on Egypt, Canadian indigenous peoples, archaeological theory, and the nature of early civilizations remain not only at the cutting edge of current archaeological and anthropological research, but also have relevance for political science, history and the philosophy of science.

Professor Trigger graduated from the University of Toronto and received his Ph.D. from Yale in 1964. He came to McGill that same year, was promoted to Full Professor in five years, and was a central figure of the Anthropology Department until his death. In 2001, he was named to the first James McGill Professor in the Faculty of Arts, and he became a Professor Emeritus in 2006.

Professor Trigger's works included 24 books and over 250 articles and chapters. His comprehensive history of the Huron, *The Children of Aataentsic*, was been described as a "masterpiece of historical imagination and literary quality", and *Natives and Newcomers, Canada's 'Heroic Age' Reconsidered* helped transform our perception of the role of indigenous peoples in Canada's history. *A History of Archaeological Thought* is the basic reference work on that subject, as is his monumental *Understanding Early Civilizations*, a comprehensive treatment of the origin and nature of political and social inequality.

Professor Trigger was an outstanding teacher of both graduates and undergraduates. He supervised 10 MA and 14 Ph.D. students to completion, and virtually all of these today are active professional archaeologists. He believed that the synergy between undergraduate teaching and cutting-edge research were an essential part of the University. Indeed, two of his three most important books *A History of Archaeological Thought* and *Understanding Early Civilizations* were direct outgrowths of his undergraduate courses.

Professor Trigger was an Officer of the Order of Canada and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. He earned numerous awards including five honorary doctorates, the Prix Victor-Barbeau, the Prix Léon-Gérin, the Society for American Archaeology Lifetime Achievement Award (the highest honour the discipline can bestow), and was the only two-time winner of the Archaeological Society of America award for the best new book. One award that he specially valued was being adopted as a member of the Great Turtle Clan of the Huron, with the name Nyemea meaning "one who finds the way". This was in recognition for his advocacy of the rights of Native Canadians.

Bruce Trigger was an outstanding member of the University community, with a well-deserved reputation for integrity and wisdom. He served as Chair of the Department of Anthropology, and served two terms on the Board of Governors. He was an ideal colleague, a source of stability and good sense in the Department. Because of his reputation for fairness, he was often called on at McGill and elsewhere to serve on committees dealing with sensitive or difficult issues.

Despite his remarkable achievements, he was truly humble. For instance, he was genuinely surprised to receive the Prix du Québec, which he richly deserved. This humility was grounded in a passionate commitment to the creation of a moral and just society. His humanitarian principles were manifested in his quest to understand the origins of power and human inequality, his contributions to First Nations identity, and his support of their rights. Just as he asked "Who owns the past?" he also asked "To whom do universities belong?" speaking out forcefully on the difficulties faced by universities in the present economic and political climate. He was a champion of the need to maintain the independence of thought and enquiry that are the core of university life.

*Michael Bisson*

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