

These self-serving white male constructions of devious and dangerous Aboriginal femininity also served to keep in place at the opposing end of the spectrum the image of virtuous and vulnerable white femininity. Thus were all women entrapped at the polarized extremes of the *real* captivity narrative of the Canadian West, namely patriarchal colonialism.

Capturing Women is a significant contribution to the history of Canadian women. Sarah Carter's meticulous and compelling argument is complemented by many photographs and sketches from several Canadian archives. All in all, the book is a fascinating and informative read guaranteed to capture the interest of both academic and non-academic audiences — and I enthusiastically recommend it to both.

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Forging the Prairie West, by John Herd Thompson. Toronto, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. 212 pp., bibliographic references and index.

This book is one of a six-volume series entitled *The Illustrated History of Canada*. Its purpose is to examine the country's major regions. Each volume is to be written by a distinguished Canadian historian.

Forging the Prairie West begins with a description of the physical features of the prairie region, carries the account forward through the centuries with emphasis on the period since 1600, and ends with a discussion of the new West of the 1980s and 1990s. The story is told by historian John Herd Thompson who throughout the book sympathizes with western regionalism and with the social and political progressivism which developed in the West.

The introduction includes an interesting discussion of writing illustrated history. Thompson emphasizes that each picture is like any other historical source: it is someone's interpretation of the past, and the historian must understand this and comment on it. For example, three photographs (pp. 33-35) are included which were taken by Humphrey Lloyd Hime, the Toronto photographer who accompanied the Hind expedition to the West in 1858. At first glance the photographs of Natives, Métis guides, members of the expedition and an Indian skull on a treeless plain appear merely to illustrate the pre-settlement prairies. However, in the text under the photographs Thompson comments on how Native people were depicted and adds that Hime only featured Natives when they fitted the "noble savage" stereotype common in the nineteenth century among Canadians of European background. This approach is followed consistently, and consequently *Forging the Prairie West* is not a coffee-table book with nice pictures. Rather the illustrations are an important part of the evidence Thompson presents in support of his interpretation and conclusions. Those who only look at the pictures without considering carefully what the author has to say about them are missing a great deal of what this book is about.

The book is intended for a wide audience. It could serve as a text for university students as well as an introduction to the history of the West for the general reader. Thompson's writing style adds greatly to the book's versatility and appeal. It is a solid historical account but is also readable and filled with contemporary language. Thompson has a flair for the interesting phrase as well as a fine sense of humour. In discussing the decade of strife between the Hudson Bay Company and the North West Company, he states, in words reminiscent of Dean Rusk in 1962, that "the winterers

of the North West Company, the toughest and most ruthless combatants, were the first to *blink*" (p. 22). To show the unpreparedness of prairie militia units in 1939, Thompson recalls the story that as the King and Queen were escorted through one western Canadian city by cavalry mounted on horses borrowed from a local dairy, "each trooper rode in fear that someone in the crowd might shout 'Milk!' and halt the horse in its tracks" (p. 135).

Forging the Prairie West reflects the work done by historians during the past generation. The book is a summary of that research and the historiographical debates which have been a part of it. The footnotes and the selected bibliography are invaluable guides to the vast secondary literature available on prairie history. Particularly noticeable is the emphasis on social history. There is much about gender, class and ethnicity in every chapter. As well, it is clear that Thompson has thoroughly explored the "new western history" in the United States and made excellent use of it. There are important and perceptive references to the links between the Canadian and American plains. In all, Thompson has written a far different history of the West than would have been written in 1960.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in his approach to Native history. Native societies are depicted like other human societies, struggling to control their destinies and adapting to changing circumstances. Accordingly, in chapter two, "Cultures in Contact: 1670-1821," Thompson analyses the interaction between the First Nations and Europeans as the fur trade extended into the West. Later he emphasizes that the treaties were not simply imposed by the Canadian government on helpless, docile people. Rather the Plains Indians insisted on the treaties, and although in a weakening position, retained enough military power to force the federal government to agree to negotiations. And the Natives won some victories in the treaties, indicating that they were not extremely weak and certainly not docile. Natives in *Forging the Prairie West* do not disappear after the first fur trader arrives but are a part of the story from the pre-contact period to the present. They are not "brutal savages"; nor are they innocent child-like "noble savages." Instead they are people with a history and motivations common to all humans.

Other parts of the book also deserve praise. For example, chapter five, "The Twentieth Century Belongs to the Canadian West: 1901-1921," not only is an excellent summary of that period in western history but also succinctly captures the spirit of progressivism at its high point and explains its many, at least from a present perspective, contradictory facets. Thus, progressives supported women's suffrage and labour unions and criticized the Winnipeg Grain Exchange. At the same time, they backed prohibition, favoured the internment of Ukrainians during the First World War and opposed bilingualism and multiculturalism for the West.

There are some things in the book that I find less satisfactory. Thompson's assertion (pp. 108-109) that it was the small poorer farmers that pushed farm organizations into politics in the 1920s and 1930s is unsubstantiated and likely incorrect. And surely it is possible to find a better example of the viciousness of the capitalist class in opposing the Saskatchewan CCF in the 1930s than the fact that students at Notre Dame College were threatened with expulsion for CCF activity. Possibly the CPR, the mining interests or the mortgage companies, but surely not Athol Murray and a poverty-stricken little college in the heart of the dust bowl. Overall Thompson seems to underestimate the impact of the Depression, particularly on Saskatchewan. This likely is due to the lack of good secondary literature on certain aspects of the 1930s. It is surprising that, despite all of the writing on western Canadian protest, S.M. Lipset's classic, *Agrarian Socialism*, published nearly fifty years ago, remains the best analysis of the social basis of the Saskatchewan CCF. It is clear that

the party's roots, its organization and its long-term success still have not been satisfactorily explained.

My most serious criticism of *Forging the Prairie West* is its neglect of religious history which in recent years has become an important field of study. Religion rarely appears, and when it does the connotation is usually negative or its significance downplayed. There is no acknowledgement of the large and continuing presence of religion and its impact on the lives of ordinary people.

The fur trade, wheat and oil, as Thompson aptly illustrates, are fundamental to the history of the West. But there were also blocs of religious settlements and ideas of utopianism and millennialism. There were Catholic and Orthodox Ukrainians, quarrels over public and separate schools, as well as the social gospel, All People's Mission and Church union. And certainly religion is basic to an understanding of westerners like J.S. Woodsworth, Salem Bland, Henry Wise Wood, Louis Lucas, Tommy Douglas, Stanley Knowles, William Aberhart, and Ernest and Preston Manning. In Saskatchewan during the CCF's first election campaign in the 1930s one party leader assured audiences at public meetings that the CCF platform was in accordance with Bible prophecy and then closed meetings with the singing of "Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow." (Is it possible that the CCF and NDP have had their greatest and most lasting success in Saskatchewan because, there, times and circumstances enabled the movement to become rooted in the popular culture in which religion, particularly Protestantism, was of the greatest importance?)

Sod houses, wheat fields, and combines are important symbols of the West and are included in the illustrations in the book. But churches do not appear, and there likely were more churches in the West than grain elevators. Later, as Thompson shows, resource development helped to create a new West. But surely the new currents in religion which were affecting the West by the 1970s and 1980s are also significant in understanding this new West. The fact that Briercrest Bible College in the small Saskatchewan village of Caronport had become the largest Bible college in Canada by 1990 is indicative.

In *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada 1900-1940*, Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau argue that, at least until the 1940s, Canadian culture retained its Protestant character and that Protestant churches exerted a central influence on social reform in the country. They also contend that the churches only began to relinquish this role in response to a popular cry for evangelism and revival of individual piety during the Depression. Thus they see a continuous influence of religion from the nineteenth century to the Second World War. Thompson does not recognize this even though the West was often seen as the laboratory of social reform for the entire nation and Albertans elected a fundamentalist Christian as premier at the peak of the Depression.

Despite this one major reservation, *Forging the Prairie West* is an excellent book. After reading it, it is hard to conclude that Canadian history is dying. Thompson's book is more alive than anything which could possibly have been written in the 1950s or 1960s. One hopes that other volumes in this series will reach the same standards.

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