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Review of *Plain Speaking: Essays on Aboriginal Peoples and the Prairie* Edited by Patrick Douaud and Bruce Dawson

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BOOK REVIEWS

Plain Speaking: Essays on Aboriginal Peoples and the Prairie. Edited by Patrick Douaud and Bruce Dawson. Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2002. Map, photographs. ix + 115 pp. \$29.95 paper.

Primarily derived from a March 2001 conference held in Regina, Saskatchewan, these essays present diverse perspectives on various connections between First Nations and Métis peoples and the Canadian Plains. Designed to create a more holistic perspective, the conference and this companion book used a wide variety of presentational formats to capture the diversity of past and present connections between Aboriginal Peoples and the prairies. The twelve articles range from traditional academic reports to autobiographical commentaries, photo essays, and transcribed interviews from an Elders' roundtable.

Essential to this collection is the confrontation of modernism with traditionalism. In his article Neal McLeod presents this struggle within the context of current and past social and political conditions. The remaining articles variously fit within his social change perspective. Portraying traditional ideas most vividly are the illuminating retrospectives of the Elders' roundtable and a photo essay by Finn Andersen about Everett Baker's work. Three historical articles reveal some of the

recurrent problems that characterize the colonial experience, such as broken treaties, foolish bureaucracies, and linguistic confusion. As cases in point, Blair Stonechild provides an archival report about Treaty Number Four, Bruce Dawson examines the bureaucratic fiasco of the Greater Production Campaign, and Jean Okimâsis analyzes Cree place names.

A recurrent theme in discussions of social change is what we have lost in the guise of progress. Three articles address the centrality of the land to physical and psychological welfare: Douaud frames these concerns broadly in relation to spirituality, Linda Otway analyzes the compromises in women's health care, and Bev Cardinal discusses her family's place as related to her social well-being. The remaining three articles examine the struggle of artists with their heritage and how to use it. Randy Lundy recognizes this struggle and seriously questions the burden of heritage; Floyd Favel Star skillfully integrates older art forms within his contemporary vision; and Heather Hodgson's interview reveals her personal management of the past in her current artwork.

Overall, these essays provide an exceptionally good account of the evolving struggle among what was, is, and might become. The metaphorical vehicle for this collection is the land of the aboriginals, but, as Lundy questions,

What does it mean to be an aboriginal? Are we overextending our metaphorical foundation in the face of current urbanization? And aren't we all just human beings coping with our past, present, and future? To examine this collection forces us to think about these and many other important questions. One of the frightening lessons of colonialism is the cost of human exploitation: the oppression of any people leads to the suppression of their potential for our mutual benefit. *Plain Speaking* offers us a glimpse of what might have been had we maximized our collective potential.

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