

**Book Reviews**

**433**

date and provide valuable points of contrast to the Canadian experience. The second benefit, and one which applies to the entire book, is that the articles are extensively referenced, a habit of citation which is especially helpful to others studying unfamiliar jurisdictions.

The articles on "theory and practice" focus on the following topics: Indigenous legal theory, gendered discourse, land rights, self-determination, justice systems, environmental governance, alternative dispute resolution and Indigenous rights, and mobility. The second half of the book, being more thematically oriented, does not read as seamlessly as the first half, but this is merely an issue of flow which ultimately speaks to the scope of issues covered. As stand-alone articles, each of the contributors has produced high quality work. The articles by Christie and Napoleon are particularly insightful.

My major criticism of this book is that it does not overcome the timidity often found in legal scholarship about recognizing that the law is fundamentally racist. Namely, that racism is at the heart of the law and is employed to dispossess Aboriginal peoples of their land, wealth, and well-being. Articulation of this fact should not be left to the exclusive domain of scholars in the social sciences: it is imperative that legal scholars tackle the issue *directly*. My criticism, however, is tempered somewhat by the recognition in several articles of the role that the law has played in land theft.

I highly recommend this book for anyone interested in studying Indigenous legal issues. Whether it is read cover to cover or simply used as a reference for further research, there is something for everyone. It would be a perfect text selection for a course in Native law and I intend on using it in my own upcoming undergraduate courses.

D'Arcy Vermette,  
Native Studies Programme  
St. Thomas University  
Fredericton, NB  
Canada, E3B 5G3

Brian Titley, *The Indian Commissioners: Agents of the State and the Indian Policy in Canada's Prairie West, 1873-1932*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2009. 288 pages. ISBN 978-0-88864-489-3. \$39.95 paperback.

*The Indian Commissioners* by Brian Titley is a close examination of

the office of Indian Commissioner for the Prairie region from 1873 to 1932. During this period five men sat six terms in office: J.A.N Provencher (1873-1878); David Laird (1876-1879); Edgar Dewdney (1879-1888); Amédée Emmanuel Forget (1893-1898); David Laird (1898-1909); and William Morris Graham (1920-1932). Titley sketches the lives of these men, their entries into public service, their terms as Commissioner, and their departures from the office.

Looking at the careers of these men reveals several things about Indian policy and the development of the DIA bureaucracy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the 1870s the DIA was in its infancy and its structures of governance, especially in the West, were in the process of being worked out. The first Indian Commissioner of the Prairie West, J.A.N. Provencher, oversaw the expansion of DIA bureaucracy in the region, and the involuntary retirement of William Morris Graham in 1932 marked the elimination of the position and the increasing centralization of Indian Affairs in Ottawa. The careers of these two bureaucrats at the beginning and the end of the Indian Commissioner's office, show that very little changed in the interim: the position was constantly filled by patronage appointments with little knowledge (if any) of Aboriginal people; while the goal of assimilation remained the cornerstone of Indian policy, the growing bureaucracy took on a custodial role; the office was rife with corruption and hampered by managerial incompetence both of which caused a great deal of suffering and hardship for Aboriginal people; and finally, the DIA remained a disorganized and often chaotic entity dependent upon the ambition and drive of particular individuals and the vagaries of party politics.

Titley uses biography to show the interplay between the personal, the political, and policy. At times the direction of Indian policy was determined by the personal agendas of the men who carried it out and at other times by politicians and senior officials in Ottawa who were detached from the people affected. The autocratic bureaucracy of the DIA gave very little consideration to and had very little sympathy for Aboriginal people and culture.

By looking at the individuals who implemented Indian policy in the West, Titley tries to humanize the monolithic state bureaucracy that was created during this period. However, in doing so he loses sight of the individuals governed and victimized by this regime. The facelessness of Aboriginal people in the book is reminiscent of how they were perceived and treated by the DIA. The centralization of the DIA in Ottawa further obscured Aboriginal people as real, and Titley's methodology, whether intentional or not, effectively illustrates this effacement. In the end, this work is not about the lives and experiences of individual people but a

biography of the office that was responsible for the implementation of Indian policy in western Canada for over fifty years.

Kristin Burnett  
Department of History  
Lakehead University  
Thunder Bay, ON  
Canada, P7B 5E1

J. A. Wainwright, *Blazing Figures: A Life of Robert Markle*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press. 304 pages. ISBN 978-1-55458-182-5. \$38.00 hardcover.

Lisa Yuskavage, the American artist known for her paintings of hyper-sexual female nudes, was asked, "When will you move on from the nude?" She replied, "When you stop having the reaction that you do." The sexualized female nude remains a controversial subject, especially when the artist is male: Robert Markle (1936-1990) was obsessed by it and his work, as J. A. Wainwright writes in *Blazing Figures*, continues to polarize viewers.

Markle's life was defined by three places: Hamilton, his hometown; Toronto, where his artistic career flourished; and Mount Forest, where he sought refuge from the city. The teenaged Markle rode his Harley from Hamilton to Buffalo's Palace Burlesque, drinking in the intoxicating atmosphere, live jazz, and "strippers so close you could smell them." He was hooked, for life: the female nude—stripper, wife, dancer, paramour, muse—became his constant subject. At the raucous taverns the artist loved, he wrote, "You see things that knock your socks off, and you *get it down*." Markle's drawings attest to his extraordinary ability to get it down; the National Gallery first acquired his work in 1964 and today it is held by Canada's foremost galleries.

In 1960s Toronto, Markle belonged to a tight-knit group of avant-garde (male) artists who exhibited at Isaacs Gallery, formed the Artist's Jazz Band, and founded the New School of Art, and later Art's Sake Inc., in opposition to the conservative Ontario College of Art. Wainwright's narrative is animated by his interviews with Markle's friends and family and his judicious use of the artist's bravura writing (published articles and private notes), sources he uses in the book's excellent Toronto chapters to recreate the city's bohemian scene.

Markle is a fascinating, decidedly elusive, subject. An intelligent and