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## Book Review: *Influenza 1918: Disease, Death, and Struggle in Winnipeg* By Esyllt W. Jones

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**Influenza 1918: Disease, Death, and Struggle in Winnipeg.** By Eshyllt W. Jones. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. ix + 248 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$65.00 cloth, \$27.95 paper.

Historians of the 1918 flu once claimed that the pandemic had been forgotten by history. In recent years, however, it has been pulled off the rubbish heap, dusted off, and given a number of excellent book-length historical treatments in Britain and the United States. Canada, however, has not received as much recent attention; that is until the publication of Eshyllt Jones's excellent monograph.

Jones shows how the experience of influenza sheds light on familial, gender, and community relationships in a city just beginning its decline from prominence as the Chicago of the north. She treats "the disease itself as an historical actor, one that played a powerful role in articulating and redefining boundaries of social difference, particularly the boundaries of ethnicity and class that so profoundly marked Winnipeg society in this period." She then sets out to answer the question of whether influenza was a source of social division or a force of community cohesion.

In reaching an answer, Jones focuses most on the sites of familial and public interaction, or the "contact zones," between women and men, various ethnic groups, social classes, and organized labor. She argues that while the pandemic cast women into a prominent public role, it was based on the notion that women were natural caregivers. The pandemic thus reinforced rather than subverted gender roles. Likewise, while women crossed "diseased

boundaries" of class and ethnicity as volunteer nurses, contact tended to reinforce existing class and ethnic relationships as wealthy Anglo-Saxon women "did their duty" in coming to the aid of poor and marginalized immigrant groups.

If the pandemic reinforced social and gender divides, Jones also suggests that it brought immediacy to the labor movement, accentuating the need for systemic reform. In this analysis, influenza is seen as a factor exacerbating existing tensions and reinforcing longstanding complaints and grievances that perhaps even led to the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. In the end, it is the family that suffered most from the disease, and the author concludes that the internal social support networks established during the pandemic period were essential to the survival of the family unit in the years after the epidemic. From these observations, Jones concludes that the pandemic reinforced existing class, gender, and ethnic relationships, constructing or intensifying collective identities within existing groups, but not across the social spectrum as a whole. Influenza threatened the larger social fabric while strengthening the individual strands and threads.

Jones's argument is convincing, even if the book relies a little too heavily on newspaper accounts. On the other hand, the author makes use of the unmined files of the Manitoba Mothers' Allowance and the Winnipeg Children's Home to catch a rare and fleeting glimpse of familial life during the pandemic.

On the whole, *Influenza 1918* is a stylistically mature, well-documented, and engaging book that delivers cogent and insightful analysis on a timely topic. It is the new standard for studies of the flu and epidemics in Canada and will serve as an excellent model for some time to come. **Mark Osborne Humphries**, *Department of Humanities, Mount Royal College, Calgary, Alberta.*