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Review of *The Prairie West as Promised Land.* Edited by R. Douglas Francis and Chris Kitzan

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The Prairie West as Promised Land. Edited by R. Douglas Francis and Chris Kitzan. Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 2007. xxiv + 462 pp. Photographs, notes, index. $54.95 paper.

This collection of eighteen essays explores the "ways in which the Prairie West was identified as a Promised Land in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." In one variant, western Canada became a place where individuals could escape from the stresses of urban and industrial society in Europe or the United States and find a land of natural abundance, full of

God's bountiful riches that would be bestowed on those worthy of living there, the "Chosen People." This imaginary construct, Doug Owram points out, was first advanced by those who lobbied successfully for Canada to acquire Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company. A later proponent, Chris Kitzan argues, was George Exton Lloyd, an Anglican clergyman who helped establish an all-British settlement in what is now Saskatchewan in 1903 and in the 1920s endlessly warned Canadians that the West's British character was being undermined by a flood of immigrants from central and eastern Europe who could never be assimilated.

Western Canada also came to be imagined as a region where it would be possible to create the ideal or perfect society. This notion was most strongly espoused by those influenced by the Social Gospel, such as Nellie McClung and J. S. Woodsworth, as the essays by Randi Warne and Douglas Francis make clear. But it also found expression in a wide variety of utopian communities (and city plans), as Anthony Rasporich demonstrates in his two contributions to this collection. In another essay, Bradford Rennie argues that utopian ideals also inspired the agrarian reform movement in Alberta, giving rise to Henry Wise Wood's notion of "group government" in 1919 and the creation of the Alberta Wheat Pool in 1923.

A third variant saw western Canada becoming a "land of opportunity" where almost anyone could succeed. This was certainly the opinion of Clifford Sifton (Minister of the Interior, 1896-1905), as his biographer David Hall makes clear in his essay. Other contributors offer a more critical view. Bill Waiser demonstrates that homesteading was not as easy as government immigration propaganda claimed at the time, and Catherine Cavanaugh, Sarah Carter, and Steve Hewitt respectively argue that there was no place in this "land of opportunity" for women, the Plains Cree, or the Chinese.

The final four essays demonstrate how and why western Canada has since 1945 ceased to be regarded as a "Promised Land."

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