Review of *We Are All Treaty People: Prairie Essays* by Roger Epp. Edmonton

J. William Brennan

*University of Regina*

---

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly

Part of the American Studies Commons, Cultural History Commons, and the United States History Commons


This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

In the aftermath of the 1996 release of the massive report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, and Canada’s subsequent official statement of regret for the “Indian policies” that successive governments have pursued down to our own day, “We Are All Treaty People: History, Reconciliation and the ‘Settler Problem’” is arguably this book’s most provocative essay. Roger Epp begins by asserting that the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Euro-Canadian settlers who came afterward “constitutes a . . . powerful common history, inherited, not chosen, whose
birthright we can either disavow, because its burdens are too great, or else make our own through respectful initiatives.” He then goes on to suggest that there is no better place to begin this process of reconciliation than in the rural West, where small towns and Aboriginal communities face common challenges: an overdependence on transfers from senior governments, the out-migration of many of the best and brightest of their young people, and the limited opportunities inherent in a global economy (where investment concentrates in the cities, and the rural places most desperate for employment are forced to bid against each other to attract whatever jobs they can).

Other essays discuss the political and economic history of the rural West, and more particularly rural Alberta, during the early decades of the twentieth century. This was a period, Epp argues, “when Alberta was . . . central to the agrarian movement on the Canadian prairies, and home to some of its most radical elements.” Alberta farmers founded the Wheat Pool; put a United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) government in power in Edmonton; and elected other UFA candidates as Members of Parliament, the most radical of whom helped to found the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in 1932 (in Calgary, no less). The roots of this agrarian activism can be partly traced to two American transplants (the Society of Equity and the Nonpartisan League), Epp argues, but also to a much older tradition of European peasant resistance to serfdom that dates back to the fourteenth century.

We Are All Treaty People, which also addresses in some detail the many challenges that are now facing rural communities and farm livelihoods, is a welcome addition to the literature.

J. William Brennan
Department of History
University of Regina