

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1986

Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta By Howard Palmer

Jorgen Dahlie

University of British Columbia

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Dahlie, Jorgen, "Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta By Howard Palmer" (1986). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 942.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/942>

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.

Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta. By Howard Palmer. Toronto, Ontario: McClelland and Stewart, 1982. Tables, diagrams, notes, index. 217 pp. \$9.95 paper.

For almost two decades Howard Palmer has worked with impressive diligence to build a foundation of knowledge on ethnic relations in a province where, as he notes, "in a number of Alberta communities, the combinations of peoples are unique in the history of the world" (p. 6). Few readers of this monograph would disagree with that observation. Furthermore,

many will discern that while the book purports to have a limited focus, the range and depth of Palmer's research quickly establish that this volume is no parochial examination of the subject of nativism. Whether he deals with the rise and subsidence of anti-Semitism, the conflict between fundamentalism and the Klan, ethnic radicalism, or the Chinese and Japanese "problem" as perceived by the Anglo-conformist majority, Palmer is careful to place these examples in national and comparative contexts.

Palmer suggests that while Alberta may have been unique in the sheer variety of its immigrant population, the characteristic manifestations of nativism in that province were not dissimilar to those found in other English-speaking regions (or even in French Canada, for that matter). Whether Anglo-Saxon, anti-Catholic, or anti-radical, such categories of nativism were directed towards those groups perceived to be "different" and therefore a threat to the "Anglo-Saxon majority that controlled and dominated Alberta economically, politically, and socially from its beginnings as a province until some years beyond the end of the Second World War" (p. 13). A fourth category of nativism, the fear that some ethnic groups could never be assimilated, explains much of the hostility directed towards Chinese, Japanese, Blacks, and Hutterites. However, as Palmer has noted, Alberta's record is neither worse nor better than other provinces in the treatment of visible minorities.

Palmer's more provocative conclusions have to do with the role of political parties—the United Farmers of Alberta and Social Credit—and the more or less optimistic assessment advanced on the decline of nativist sentiment in the post-World War II period. It is his contention that both the U.F.A. and Social Credit were, on balance, institutions that helped to defuse nativism, and he presents considerable evidence for this assertion. Nevertheless, given the many anti-Semitic statements attributed to Social Credit spokesmen, it is difficult to accept that this

party was somehow a force for tolerance in the province. The evidence is also inconclusive on the U.F.A.; what needs further examination is the "inside" views of specific ethnic groups who saw themselves excluded from many of the decision-making processes. It is not always demonstrable that the so-called preferred immigrants—northern Europeans—had ready acceptance no matter that they appeared to have much in common with the Anglo-Saxon majority.

In summary, *Patterns of Prejudice* is a significant, highly readable addition to the Canadian Social History Series. The general editors could have taken some extra care to clarify the footnote references to Palmer's earlier studies on nativism since these works are central to the study. That aside, the volume can be considered essential reading for students who live in a pluralist society where minority rights, ethnic relationships, and majoritarian values often clash—or, as Palmer demonstrates, often work toward resolution.

JORGEN DAHLIE

Department of Social & Educational Studies
University of British Columbia