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Review of *Riding to the Rescue: The Transformation of the RCMP in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1914- 1939*. By Steve Hewitt

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Riding to the Rescue: The Transformation of the RCMP in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1914-1939. By Steve Hewitt. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006. xii + 205 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$65.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

This is a timely book. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), which has served as a popular symbol of Canadian identity since the late nineteenth century, is today awash with financial scandals and accusations of corruption, incompetence, and cover-ups. The police force that has its roots in the creation of the North-West Mounted Police in 1873 is now perceived by many Canadians as just one more example of a modern, bureaucratic organization that has fallen victim to the misuse and abuse of power. Of particular concern is the RCMP's controversial role in monitoring and detaining *suspected* threats to national security.

In *Riding to the Rescue*, Steve Hewitt provides a succinct and comprehensive study of how it was that a frontier police force that seemed out of step and perhaps even unnecessary in the 1910s transformed itself into a central and modern component of the Canadian state. Hewitt's focus is regional, but the issues he explores had ramifications far beyond Alberta and Saskatchewan. Indeed, the main story told here concerns the creation of Canada's security state.

Presiding over the early stages of this transformation was Commissioner A. B. Perry, and the book provides detailed evidence of Perry's campaign to ensure the future of the force during, and in the aftermath of, the Great

War. Historians of state security in Canada and elsewhere will appreciate Hewitt's thorough exploration of the transition of the frontier police force into the key player in the national government's attempt to secure order through the repression of real and suspected radicals. Perry recognized the government's need for a national security watchdog and saw this as the key to reinventing the force as the frontier era drew to a close. The book explores the RCMP's attempts to quell unrest and to bring into line groups deemed threatening to the status quo: communists, socialists, ethnic minorities, workers, and the unemployed.

Perhaps most satisfying here is Hewitt's focus on RCMP members themselves. Eschewing the tendency to treat members of the force as stock characters who wholeheartedly imbibed middle-class reform impulses and unthinkingly followed the orders of their superiors, Hewitt highlights the complexity involved in policing these two prairie provinces and, in doing so, illustrates how police officers could sometimes find themselves torn between allegiances.

Well organized and effectively argued, this book is a welcome addition to the history of the RCMP and the history of the Canadian Prairies more generally.

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