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Review of *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century* By Gerhard J. Ens.

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Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century. By Gerhard J. Ens. Toronto: University Press, 1996. Appendices, notes, bibliography, maps, tables, photographs, index. xv + 268 pp. \$55.00 cloth, \$18.95 paper.

Studies of the Red River Settlement, the Metis people, and their buffalo hunt are so numerous that historians in the wider fields of Aboriginal or western Canadian studies have become increasingly impatient with this phenomenon of "Red River myopia." The question a reader must ask of this book is what new perspective Gerhard Ens brings to the existing material.

According to Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland* situates the local experience in a "broader process of economic change." Authors of previous works, he claims, were political historians writing about "the rise of a 'new nation' without adequately explaining the social and economic origins," or fur trade historians who "seldom examine the Red River Metis past the mid-nineteenth century." Ens proposes to show

how a Metis identity developed within "the economic and social niche they carved out for themselves within the fur trade," looking with particular care at the interval between 1840 and 1880.

The author asserts again and again that this identity rose and fell with the "cottage industry" connected with exploitation of the buffalo as an item of peltry traded with Americans. In his estimate, buffalo robes were the mainstay of the Metis economy after 1840. These skins of the beasts—"hair left on and the hide tanned"—had to be "harvested in winter" to obtain the best product. Since the resource was increasingly remote from Red River, more and more Metis had to relocate to the prime buffalo wintering sites, their ties to Red River becoming ever more tenuous. Increasingly, "the Metis homeland" turned into little more than a waypoint in the marketing of robes manufactured in Saskatchewan for sale in St. Paul, Minnesota. As soon as Canadian newcomers began to pour into Red River as a province of Canada in 1870, the Metis robe traders thought even more seriously of cutting all ties to the old homeland. Long absences became permanent migrations. The point Ens asserts repeatedly is that the Metis dispersal "was the result largely of their involvement in the buffalo robe trade" rather than any push factors attributable to the bad faith of the Government of Canada in the administration of promised land and the assurance of full provincial status to the provisional government of Red River as a Metis province in Confederation. Thus, in the end, rather than providing a boldly innovative thesis, the work becomes narrowly political and fully implicated in the old defense-of-Canada tradition of historical scholarship.

The study fails in its stated purpose not because of its politics, but for the array of evidence left out. Ens ignores the role of Indians as the winter-producers of the prime buffalo robes; he pretends that the flattened curve of the rate of increase of old parishes is attributable to outmigration rather than extension to new parishes in the Red River

Settlement itself; he ignores the defense-of-settlement participatory democracy in the resistance of 1869-70 and the most important indicators of a determination to persist until the mid 1870s. These and other omissions were called to his attention in my "Dispossession vs. Accommodation in Plaintiff vs. Defendant Accounts of Metis Dispersal from Manitoba, 1870-1881," published in *Prairie Forum* in 1991 after the appearance of an article-length version of his thesis in 1988. This book contributes nothing in reply to that point-by-point refutation of his case—not so much as a footnote or bibliographical citation to suggest that his thesis is clouded by controversy. Readers expecting more will be disappointed to discover how little the work adds to that first assertion of his thesis now, almost a decade later.

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