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Fall 2011

## Review of *Manitoba Politics and Government: Issues, Institutions, Traditions*. Edited by Paul G. Thomas and Curtis Brown.

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Mochoruk, Jim, "Review of *Manitoba Politics and Government: Issues, Institutions, Traditions*. Edited by Paul G. Thomas and Curtis Brown." (2011). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 1191.

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fall of 2008, convened specifically to address what its organizers (now the book's editors) saw as the most glaring gaps in the coverage of "various aspects of Manitoba society, politics, government and contemporary policy issues." As with all such projects—especially when contributors come from several different fields—the contents are a bit uneven. Indeed, readers may feel somewhat whipsawed as they move from the smooth prose and deft touch of western Canada's leading historian, Gerry Friesen (who provides the first substantive chapter), to the more clipped tones of the political scientists, economists, senior policy advisers, and government mandarins who provide the vast majority of the volume's essays. Still, despite the inherent problems of such a collection, the editors have done a solid job of both grouping the essays into four more-or-less coherent sections and providing some much-needed connective tissue between the papers in their introduction.

Unfortunately, the central theme that Thomas and Brown (and many of the authors) seem to agree upon is summed up in the title of their introduction, "Manitoba in the Middle," a play upon Manitoba's position in the geographic center of Canada and a description of its centrist and, dare one say it, "Consensus Model" political culture. I say unfortunate as this makes Manitoba and its politics sound far less exciting, interesting, and *important* than has been the case since the province's founding in 1870. And, to be frank, I cringed just a bit when I read one contributor's concluding comments indicating that, in terms of political culture, "Manitoba's 'mediocre' image is well-earned, if undervalued. . . ." Ah, to be mediocre—it makes one so proud to hail from Manitoba. (Oops, hide the pride, that would be immodest and hence "un-Manitoban"!)

There were also a few times when reading some of the essays that I thought perhaps I had been transported back in time to the heyday of consensus historiography—a smidgin of Richard Hofstadter here, a sprinkling of Louis Hartz there, and, as a Canadian corrective, a pinch of Gad Horowitz over there. Judiciously leavened by the writings of political scientists who are more current, and proofed by the comments of well-placed political insiders, the overall sense of the book is that Manitobans have in fact inhabited a peaceable kingdom—dedicated to a collective quest for peace, order, and good government—for much of the past 141 years. Now, please understand, these essays, particularly those by Nelson Wiseman, Chris Adams (who challenges this model), and virtually all of the essays in part 3, "Government Institutions and Processes," which provide much valuable inside information on the recent functioning of Manitoba's government, are quite useful and make important contributions to the literature (and primary source base) on Manitoba politics. But it wasn't

**Manitoba Politics and Government: Issues, Institutions, Traditions.** Edited by Paul G. Thomas and Curtis Brown. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010. 452 pp. Illustrations, tables, charts, notes, appendices, index. \$29.95 paper.

This collection of 20 essays stems from a conference held at St. Johns College, University of Manitoba, in the

until part 4, "Manitoba's Economy and Society," that a less celebratory tone came to predominate, particularly in Jim Silver's powerful essay "Segregated City: A Century of Poverty in Winnipeg," and in Joan Grace's trenchant critique of the current New Democratic Party government's so-called "Manitoba Advantage" as it does—and does not—apply to women.

On the whole, however, while this reviewer obviously has issues with the collection's overall tone, there is a wealth of information contained in this volume that will make it essential reading for any serious student of Manitoba politics for many years to come. Moreover, some of the pieces are so well written that they will even appeal to a broader nonacademic audience—Jean Friesen's piece on being a Member of the Legislative Assembly and Frances Russell's essay on the evolution of political reporting spring to mind in this regard. And, although this work will be most useful to those who teach and study Manitoba affairs, it will also have considerable utility for those whose teaching and research interests include both Canadian and northern Great Plains history, politics, and society. **Jim Mochoruk**, *Department of History, University of North Dakota*.