

People, Politics, and Purpose: Biography and Canadian Political History edited by Greg Donaghy and P. Whitney Lackenbauer

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People, Politics, and Purpose
Biography and Canadian Political History

Edited by Greg Donaghy and P. Whitney Lackenbauer

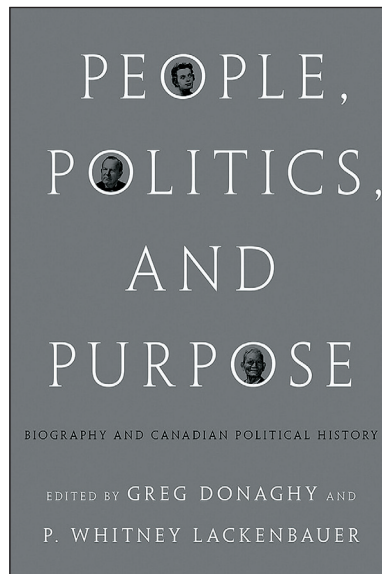
Vancouver, British Columbia: UBC Press, 2023. 274 pages. \$89.95 hardcover, \$34.95 softcover and e-pub. ISBN 9780774866804 (ubcpress.ca).

As John English worked on his magisterial biography of Pierre Trudeau, he realized that apparent contractions in Trudeau's life were more often consistencies (13). This is equally true of *People, Politics, and Purpose*, a tribute to English's career that examines biography's place in the wider field of Canadian political history. The contributors are former students and close colleagues of English's who approach the genre in fundamentally different ways. But all believe that people's ideas, actions, and agency matter. The volume encompasses the stories of Canadian statemen, diplomats, lumberjacks, Indigenous leaders, and a femme fatale.

Chapters that make the case that "powerful individuals can and do shape history" coexist with contributions that focus on individuals further removed from the centres of power (132). Stephen Azzi lauds Lester B. Pearson's achievements without straying into hagiography, offering readers a window into broader trends in 1960s Canadian society. A combination of Pearson's leadership and the context he was operating in account for the completion of Canada's welfare state and the introduction of a new national flag. Jennifer Levin Bonder uses biography to

rescue long-serving Member of Parliament Herb Gray from caricatures of a nationalist demagogue that have surfaced in histories of continental trade. Her focus on the individual reveals Gray was a feminist rock 'n' roll enthusiast with a self-deprecating sense of humor whose concerns about American investment were rooted in conditions in his hometown of Windsor, Ontario. Rather than prime ministers, MPs, or ambassadors, "ordinary people" are Angelika Sauer's point-of-departure for scrutiny of Canada-US relations during the Second World War. Politicians on both sides of the border still feature in her treatment of the lumberjack wars of 1943-44, but in response to the actions of labourers driven by considerations of economic self-interest rather than national interests. P. Whitney Lackenbauer's

subjects were simultaneously members of marginalized groups and individuals of influence. James Gladstone, Gilbert Monture, and Andy Paull were singled out by Ottawa's governing party as candidates for public office, and Lackenbauer's account culminates in Gladstone's appointment as Canada's first Indigenous senator. Intriguingly, P.E. Bryden uses biography as an interpretive tool rather than an end in itself, opening avenues of



inquiry into gender, opportunity, culture, and espionage. Because Gerda Munsinger, the woman at the centre of an anomalous Canadian “sex and security” scandal, inhabited the periphery of the “same world introduced by English in his biographies of Pearson and Trudeau,” she sheds different light on 1960s Canada (160). Bryden characterizes her chapter as the “quasi-biography” of a narrative of scandal, while Sauer’s is a transnational history of labour migration informed by certain tenets of political biography. Such varied subjects and points of emphasis have the potential to be divisive or contradictory, but they complement each other remarkably well in five consecutive chapters of *People, Politics and Purpose*.

Canadian diplomats anchor the volume’s four other essays. For a generation of American statesmen, Lester B. Pearson was frequently the face of Canada in official and social settings. Galen Roger Perras and Asa McKercher reveal that when US Secretary of State Dean Acheson likened Canada to the “Stern Daughter of the Voice of God,” it was with Pearson in mind (49). Greg Donaghy and Ryan Touhey’s contributions explore Canadian diplomatic initiatives in the 1970s-1980s that produced starkly different outcomes. Touhey sheds light on how Canadian High Commissioner in India John Hadwen engineered a limited renaissance in Canada-India relations through sheer force of will and a personal rapport with Indira Gandhi and key ministers. By contrast, Donaghy’s chapter emphasises the limits of Canadian diplomatic impetus and initiatives vis-à-vis the Middle East. Allan MacEachen was a capable, experienced minister predisposed to be an activist, but his efforts to reorient Canadian policy on issues like recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization ended in failure. This contrasts with the teleological “great man” origins of biogra-

phy in Canada and the golden age nostalgia that permeates Canadian diplomatic history. The diplomats who crafted the golden age narrative are themselves among the subjects of Robert Bothwell and Norman Hillmer’s thoughtful consideration of Canadian autobiographies, memoirs, and diaries as records of Canada’s place in the world. Bothwell and Hillmer express nostalgia not for a bygone era in Canadian foreign policy, but for the abundance of sources produced by the “professors and near professors” of Canada’s Department of External Affairs (30). The chapters implicitly and explicitly consider how biography contributes to our understanding of the past. All are strong enough to stand alone and will make excellent additions to syllabuses.

The sum of these parts is a superb contribution to Canadian political history, if not a flawless book. *People, Politics, and Purpose* does not really attempt to bridge the two solitudes of English and French Canadian history, notwithstanding acknowledgment of this separation. The editors argue that the “rising tide of regionalism” helped create a richer, more diverse literature by introducing biographies of, say, Ontario provincial politicians and Indigenous political leaders into a field traditionally dominated by Canada’s “nation-builders” (10). Yet federal politics loom so large in the volume that readers are rarely reminded that Canadian governance takes place on multiple levels. During the book’s chronology (roughly interwar nationalism to the neoliberal revolution), other levels of government were central to, for instance, the development of a social security system and the separatist challenge to the integrity of Canada. It may be unfair to dwell on what is not in the volume rather than what is: the introduction offers a clear roadmap for those eager to read more Ca-

nadian political biography. The content is more representative of English's work and legacy than an attempt to produce a comprehensive treatment of the field. Given that English was a prolific scholar, Member of Parliament for Kitchener, Ontario, and a professor always willing to "share the latest gossip from Queen's Park or Parliament Hill" with students at the University of Waterloo, it is fitting that the volume concludes with John Milloy's call for more permeable frontiers between academia, ac-

tivism, and policymaking (6).

People, Politics, and Purpose is quite simply a very good read. It embodies the best qualities of biography—a genre that presents myriad opportunities for historians to tell compelling stories—while showing no traces of the intellectual shallowness charged by the field's detractors.

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1934:

The Chatham Coloured All Stars' Barrier Breaking Year

By Heidi LM Jacobs

Windsor, Ontario: Biblioasis, 2023. 281 pages. \$24.95 paperback. ISBN 978177196477 (biblioasis.com)

Heidi LM Jacobs' *1934: The Chatham Coloured All-Stars' Barrier-Breaking Year* paints a vibrant picture of a Black working-class neighbourhood in Chatham's East End that loves baseball. Entertainment and community life centre around Stirling Park where the All-Stars, the pride of the community innovated a fast paced, exciting brand of baseball. Jacobs utilizes oral histories and scrapbooks collected mostly by the women relatives of team members, the Shepherd's city directory, Jack Calder's vivid play-by-plays, portraits, and progress reports of All-Star team members in the *Chatham Daily News* to tell an important chapter in Canadian and sports history at the apex of the Great Depression. *1934* is a chronological account of a record and barrier breaking year for the Chatham All-Stars. Through close readings of local news reports and oral history interviews, Jacobs documents the pervasive nature of racial discrimination across Southwestern On-

