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# People, Politics, and Purpose: Biography and Canadian Political History

edited by Greg Donaghy and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2023, 274 pp., CAN $89.95 (cloth), 978-0-7748-6680-4.

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free and re-enslaved, to show that they were free persons. Sadly, they were often unsuccessful in this endeavor. The records show a wide range of ages, from infants to those in their 60s, both women and men. Toward the end of the book, entries 1122 to 1421 are of the nameless, or those whose names were never recorded. The entries go under "unnamed," "unnamed boy" and "unnamed girl," "unnamed man," "unnamed person," and "unnamed woman." It is a wonder that Whitfield found enough information, or any for that matter, to recognize these lives.

*Biographical Dictionary* is such a remarkable and necessary book that one struggles to critique it. The faults are few and minor. One is that Whitfield does not provide a map of the Maritimes, or even a proper definition, of where and what the Maritimes are. Scholars will know they are the three eastern Canadian provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, but this knowledge may not be familiar to the layperson. *Biographical Dictionary* does not give a firm date for the end of slavery in the Maritimes and whether it was gradual or immediate. Nor is there a bibliography of the sources utilized. Could the entries have been separated by province? Perhaps. One also wonders what percentage of the total Maritime population at any time were enslaved Blacks. One can assume it would not be large, but some indication would be appreciated.

The aforementioned quibbles are minor and do nothing to take away from this important piece of work. It is a different kind of book; not a biography in the typical sense or a history of slavery per se and so one should not expect to read through it like a normal monograph. Instead, one reads a certain number of entries, thinks about the people and lives they bring to life, puts down the book, comes back to it later, continues in the same manner, and proceeds at one's own pace until one reaches the end. It is there that one will appreciate the groundbreaking and painstaking work that *Biographical Dictionary* is and represents.

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**People, Politics, and Purpose: Biography and Canadian Political History**, edited by Greg Donaghy and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2023, 274 pp., CAN $89.95 (cloth), 978-0-7748-6680-4.

When I first saw the title of this book, I thought this was a work on the relationship between biography and Canadian political history. Perusing the table of contents, I saw a series of biographical case studies with some intriguing titles. But it was not until I read the opening lines of Robert Bothwell's brief foreword that I learned I was holding an exceptionally well-disguised *festschrift*, one that celebrates the life and career of John English, historian, former Liberal Party politician, past editor of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, and award-winning political biographer.

English has written biographies of prime ministers Lester B. Pearson and Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Expanding our understanding of the former, Galen Perras and Asa McKercher survey American perceptions of Pearson, while Stephen Azzi analyzes Pearson's political leadership. Other chapters tackle the Trudeau years: Jennifer Bonder reassesses MP Herb Gray's approach

to foreign investment, the late Greg Donaghy provided a study of MP Allan MacEachen's Middle East policy, and Ryan Touhey examines the life of diplomat John Hadwen, with a focus on his rebuilding of Canada-India relations.

Other contributors take a biographical approach in less traditional ways or regarding less traditional subjects. Appointing a person of Indigenous descent to the Senate was one of John Diefenbaker's election promises in 1957. After he won, the three candidates rumored to be favorites for the position were G.C. Monture (Mohawk), Andrew Paull (Skwxwú7mesh [Squamish]), and James Gladstone (Kainai [Blood]). In his chapter, P. Whitney Lackenbauer provides biographical sketches of all three, emphasizing how the biographies of each were carefully constructed by their supporters to highlight the traits believed to be most desirable to the prime minister.

Angelika Sauer's study of the "Lumberjack Wars" discusses how workers crossing the US-Canada border for employment in the logging industry became the subject of heated discussions at the highest echelons of government. Sauer reveals "different interests being swept to the surface by players who were not at the centre of events," and demonstrates that a minor political crisis was a major crisis in the lives of many ordinary people. In some ways her chapter is more a social history than a biographical approach to political history, as our view of the lumberjacks themselves remains dim; the study nevertheless—in the author's words—"somewhat decentres traditional political biographies" (76).

The shift from center to periphery is also found in P.E. Bryden's fascinating reexamination of "the tale—the quasi-biography—of the woman at the centre of one of Canada's only sex scandals," Gerda Munsinger (160). The German-born Munsinger allegedly had liaisons with two cabinet ministers in the Diefenbaker government, including a more prolonged affair with the Associate Minister of National Defence, Pierre Sévigny. Bryden's feminist approach centers the woman, not the powerful male politicians, and examines three differing accounts of Munsinger's life: coverage in the North American press, the story Munsinger sold to the German press, and the Canadian government's inquiry into the matter. In so doing, Bryden takes seriously—but not uncritically—Munsinger's attempts at self-fashioning, and thus acknowledges the importance of autobiographical sources in the writing of historical biography.

The question of how autobiographies might contribute to our understanding of Canada's international history is taken up by Robert Bothwell and Norman Hillmer, who turn to a wide range of published and unpublished autobiographical texts by Canadian diplomats. By examining not only autobiographies but the more unfiltered egodocuments like diaries and journals, Bothwell and Hillmer push the volume from the titular "Biography" to the more expansive realm of "Life Writing." Past autobiographies have their limitations, Bothwell and Hillmer caution—"Francophones and women are often all but invisible in these works, and the perspective often bends hard toward the Eurocentric"—but they argue that at least these scribblers took up the burden of history with serious intent, whereas in more recent generations the impulse to record one's days seems to be lacking (42-43).

The *festschrift* is a much-abused genre: such works have often been accused of consisting of little more than unrelated, subpar essays and some hagiographical pieces about the recipient. Although all the contributors were English's "close colleagues or former students" (19), the volume contains only one traditional piece (John Milloy's brief piece, "Academic as Activist," which serves as the conclusion) and generally avoids the pitfalls of the genre.

Naturally, however, the volume's focus also shapes the introduction, which provides an overview of political biography in Canada. It is quite condensed and works more to highlight English's significant contributions to the field than to engage meaningfully with the literature on biographical theory and methods that has been published over the last decade, as the notes make clear. Taken as a whole, the volume's endnotes illustrate how much Canadian

political biography owes to English, as Milloy argues in his conclusion. Alas, a comprehensive bibliography for the work, or even of English's works, would have better illustrated that point and would better serve a reader looking to get acquainted with his impressive *oeuvre*. Its absence—although no doubt the press's decision—is a serious flaw.

By not limiting itself to the traditional biographies of prime ministers and instead including the lives of lovers, lumberjacks, and Indigenous leaders, *People, Politics, and Purpose* represents an expansive approach to political biography and political history more generally. At a time when some historians are jettisoning the practice of biography due to the challenges of writing the lives of marginalized subjects, political biographers' inclusion of the lives of those on the periphery of formal political power is a surprising but welcome development that bodes well for both the field and the discipline. A decade ago, English worried that fewer historians were willing to write political biographies. But this volume demonstrates that the field that he so carefully tended is still flourishing and that his former students and colleagues are purposefully peopling political history in creative new ways.

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**Mass Capture: Chinese Head Tax and the Making of NonCitizens**, by Lily Cho, Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queens University Press, 2021, 272 pp., CAN $39.95 (paper), ISBN: 978-0-22800-816-3

*Mass Capture* is a captivating study of alternative histories.

In five chapters, Lily Cho, Vice-Provost and Associate Vice-Provost (International) at Western University, explores how a certain collection of state documents, namely CI 9s, functioned as a form of state surveillance and mass capture of the thousands of Chinese migrants who came to Canada following the imposition of the 1885 Chinese Immigration Act. CI 9 documents were issued from 1885 to 1953 and included such information as date of birth, place of residence, occupation, identifying marks, known associates, and, for the purposes of this study, identification photographs. CI 9s represented the first large scale use of identification photographs in Canada and, as Cho reveals, comprise the largest archive of photos of Chinese migrants, most of whom would not have been photographed otherwise. Cho's study is entirely based on the remaining 41,000 microfilm reproductions, as the original materials were destroyed in 1963.

*Mass Capture* presents many tantalizing findings, not the least of which includes the idea of agency and unknowability; that in fact this project of mass capture by the state was a failure. Cho provides details from her painstaking detective work that there are multiple stories of Chinese migrants eluding the intentions of the CI 9s. The story of the two photographs attached to the CI 9 of Ma Chow Lai is one such example. In fact, the main message that emerges from the evidence offered in this study is that, in general, mass capture should be considered a failure, as photos of a person cannot be counted upon to be a true representation of that person.

While the CI 9s that Cho examines function as individual portraits of individual people, they also serve as a collective portrait of an entire community that was denied citizenship. Cho maintains that inasmuch as the Head Tax functioned as a form of surveillance, more broadly