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**Evelyn Peters, Matthew Stock and Adrian Werner. *Rooster Town: The History of an Urban Métis Community, 1901-1961*. University of Manitoba Press, 2018. 225pp. ISBN: 978-0-88755-825-2.**

<https://uofmpress.ca/books/detail/rooster-town>

In *Rooster Town*, Dr. Evelyn Peters, and her research associates Matthew Stock and Adrian Werner, shine a light on the largely ignored topic of urban Métis experiences. Drawing upon administrative databases (censuses, voter lists, WWI military records, Manitoba Vital Statistics, building permits and the like), newspaper records, Métis genealogies, scrip records, and interviews with former residents, the authors present a history of Rooster Town (or *Pakan Town*, the Michif word for hazelnut, as the Métis themselves refer to it) – a community on the fringes of southwest urban Winnipeg composed largely of Métis people who had been dispossessed, first of land promised to them in the Manitoba Act (1870), then from Rooster Town itself in the early 1960s.

Readers are taken on an intriguing journey beginning with the history of the Manitoba Métis, including dispossession from their lands, the formation and consolidation of the Métis community of Rooster Town, pressures in Winnipeg (including depression and inflation, chronic housing shortages, inadequate social supports) and their impacts upon Rooster Town across the six decades of its existence (1901-1961). A meticulous sifting through existing records enables the authors to track Rooster Town population fluctuations as they related to the Great Depression, the World Wars, and the interwar period, among other historic and municipal contexts.

The authors demonstrate that Métis experiences of settler colonialism, as evidenced by Rooster Town, were similar in ways yet differed significantly from those of First Nations. Peters, Stock, and Werner illuminate ways that colonial and administrative practices contributed to those differences, including federal government refusal to recognize Métis collective Indigenous rights to land, refusal to create reserves for the Métis, and insistence that the Métis fall under provincial jurisdiction. Whereas federal jurisdiction and recognition of First Nations' collective rights to land enabled them to sign treaties, Métis land rights were supposedly extinguished on an individual basis – though it should be noted that some Métis scholars, such as Dr. Adam Gaudry and Prof. Larry Chartrand of the Métis Treaties Research Project (2017), argue that Métis-settler relations in Canada have indeed produced treaties (for example, Louis Riel and the Métis provisional government of 1870 referred to the Manitoba Act (1870) as the “Manitoba Treaty” and the “Métis Treaty” (Gaudry 2016; Shore 1999)).

In addition to addressing the gap in scholarship regarding Métis urban experiences, and impressive attention to detail, the real strength of *Rooster Town* lies in its successful dismantling of colonial narratives that depict Indigenous people as out of place in modern urban society. Since Métis people were not systematically removed from urban areas and confined to rural reserves, as most First Nation people were, many Métis remained in the city and attempted to make a good life for their families. Peters, Stock, and Werner convincingly argue that Métis

urbanization was an adaptive strategy, rather than a failure to cope with city life. The authors highlight Métis agency, resilience, and adaptability in challenging colonial processes through explicit resistance, and refusing colonizers' attempts to move them. Moreover, Métis at Rooster Town also made efforts to improve their conditions by self-building, and their (likely strategic) decision to continue living clustered together with other Métis for decades (as evidenced by endogamous marriage, kinship, and residence patterns) which provided a buffer against the poverty and racism surrounding them.

Importantly, the authors challenge the view that Métis received the land promised to them in the Manitoba Act, or received good prices if they decided to sell their land, as argued most notably by Thomas Flanagan and Gerhard Ens (1994) on behalf of the government. Following the trail of records for Rooster Town Métis individuals who supposedly received land or good prices for it, the authors highlight that marginal, low-cost locations of households, overcrowding of relatives within a single dwelling, and low estimated worth of such dwellings all counter Flanagan and Ens's claims. In this they are not alone: other authors, including Métis scholar Darren O'Toole (2010), also dispute Flanagan and Ens's claims that the government fairly and systematically distributed the land promised to the Métis in the Manitoba Act and that subsequent land dispossession is the fault of Métis themselves. The accuracy of documentation of land transactions is specifically called into question by the authors – it seems Métis did not receive the recorded sales amounts for property, nor did land transactions lead to economic security.

Peters, Stock, and Werner also expose the role media played, via newspaper propaganda, in creating racist stereotypes of Métis in Rooster Town as unemployed, lazy, diseased, tax-evading criminals, living and partying in tarpaper shacks. While Rooster Town did experience economic marginality, the newspapers chose not to also publicize Métis contributions to the economy of Winnipeg, socio-economic heterogeneity and long-time gainful employment for some, or participation in Winnipeg society via the public school system among other avenues. Such portrayals would have made it difficult for Winnipeg officials to justify their lack of support and services to Rooster Town and the eventual forced dispersal of inhabitants in favour of Grant Park Shopping Centre and other amenities. Suburbanization engendered the branding of Rooster Town residents as so-called "squatters"; this and shady eviction tactics (such as government threats to withhold relief unless families moved) are also explored by Peters, Stock, and Werner.

Another strength of the book can be found in the authors' acknowledgement of the risks of cultural appropriation within their work as non-Indigenous scholars researching and writing aspects of Indigenous history. Ultimately, their decision to pursue the topic rested upon timing (interviews with surviving, elderly Rooster Town residents needed to happen now while a few are still with us), finances, and time-commitment – Dr. Peters's Canada Research Chair provided the resources that enabled this expensive and time-consuming research. Throughout the research, the authors kept the Manitoba Metis Federation well-informed, delivering progress reports and public talks and making sure to invite former Rooster Town residents. The authors are quick to note that they do not aim to provide an account of Rooster Town from Métis perspectives – appropriately, they encourage Métis scholars to undertake that work – but, rather, they

reconstruct a history of the community using settler records while challenging colonial interpretations. While it is refreshing that the authors honestly address the risks of cultural appropriation, their work would benefit from a deeper exploration of their social locations and the implications and consequences of non-Indigenous researchers undertaking such research. More could be said about their individual and collective relationships with Indigenous peoples, their attempts to undertake ethical work, and their efforts to remain accountable to Rooster Town residents and the Manitoba Métis. Nonetheless, Dr. Peters, Stock, and Werner offer other non-Indigenous authors a good example of how to openly and honestly address risks of cultural appropriation in scholarly work.

*Rooster Town* argues that the dissolution of Métis fringe communities has created an ongoing legacy of distrust and anger, and that more research is needed to correct the silencing of such communities in urban histories, economies, and cultures. The authors conclude that efforts to explore resistance to settler colonialism within these communities represent an important step in the process of reconciliation. Indeed, folks interested in urban history and geography, Métis Studies, Indigenous relationships with settler colonialism, and Métis dispossession of land in Manitoba, among others have much to gain by reading *Rooster Town*.

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