

neglected. In some ways this book presents her quest to understand the role of women in the paid and unpaid economy. It is a superb effort.

Nancy M. Sheehan
University of British Columbia

Brian Titley, *Dark Age: The Political Odyssey of Emperor Bokassa*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press. 1997. Pp. xii, 257.

The story of Emperor Bokassa grips the reader from beginning to end, and I have rarely been so engrossed in a book. This is a story replete with sex, rape, and cannibalism; revolution, deception, and coronation; imprisonment, crocodile ponds, beatings, and murder; saints, sinners, rich, and poor; purity and prostitution; repression and democracy; independence, colonialism, exploitation, and international intrigue. The book's themes are so well interwoven that it beats most novels in intricacies of plot, climax, and characterization, all supported by authentic evidence drawn from personal interviews, archival sources, and on-site visits.

Titley has made people the central theme in history. Places, events, and celebrations are subsidiary to Bokassa, a character about whom much has been said. Was Bokassa a cannibal? Was he a statesman, a venerable leader? Did he sell out his country to France, or rather sustain a delicate balance between overarching colonialism and internal revolution? Titley does what he sets out to do—to give Bokassa a fair hearing.

The book is carefully planned in thirteen illustrated chapters, with preface, epilogue, conclusion, notes, bibliography, and index. Titley lists his sources so that the reader may judge the authenticity of the data and the difficulty of reconstructing this particular past. Titley offers a clear narrative and fine descriptions of the major characters. This is sustaining, entertaining, and critically-minded history. The reader is treated to descriptions culled from thick data but free of tortuous and ambiguous prose. Titley's details show how carefully he collected his data, yet engross his reader in a human story.

Women were particularly captivated by his words, and many came forward to wipe the sweat from his brow with their dresses. (36)

The throne was in the form of an eagle sitting upright with wings outstretched. The gold-plated bronze structure weighed 2 tonnes and was 3.5 metres high and 4.5 metres wide. Brice built a special workshop near his home in Gisors, Normandy, where thirty craftsmen executed his design. A local upholsterer, Michel Cousin, was hired to do the red velvet seat—in effect, a cavity in the bird's belly. The golden eagle cost the equivalent of \$2.5 million. (90)

Where evidence is wanting, Titley writes thus:

A true picture of those twelve hours of terror remains elusive, since eye witness accounts do not agree. (112)

While it is impossible to tell with any accuracy the full extent of the arrests and deaths, we can be reasonably certain that at least eighteen people died on the night of 18–19 April in the confines of Ngaragba. (113)

Titley concludes with general analysis. The question of colonial rule and its effects on the colonized demands further scrutiny. To state that "The authoritarianism of the colonial system was the only legacy of significance" (208) is an obvious understatement. The psychology of dependence and inferiority creates lasting scars on a people who have been under colonial rule. Add to this the exploitation of indigenous economic resources and the results are both psychological and physiological poverty.

"Bokassa's absolute power was reinforced by his style of heroic leadership." (210) Systematically eliminating one's opponents seems far from heroic leadership, but rather the hallmark of a despot. Further, reference to "dependency theorists" (212) raises yet another set of questions about capital accumulation in developing countries. Titley might have considered the work of Andre Gunder Frank, whose thesis (that the centre progresses at the expense of the periphery) may apply to the situation in Centrafrique. In other words, what did France gain at the expense of this African country? One must surely consider the raw materials, the sphere of influence in Africa, and capital development in France.

Although Titley claims Bokassa "was one of the most progressive of his African contemporaries on the question of women's advancement" (214-15), it is clear from Titley's own research that women were ill-treated by this leader. Is ill-treatment or inhumanity a situational phenomenon or are there some standards of decency and human rights that transcend geographical and racial boundaries? Titley could have said a lot more, especially in light of women's persistent quest for equality and respect, and especially in African countries.

This well-crafted book combines factual information gleaned from arduous research, offered with panache. Although one cannot exonerate a consummate dictator, Titley certainly raises reasonable doubts about allegations of Bokassa's atrocities. For this, Titley and his book should be commended.

Deo H. Poonwassie
University of Manitoba

Raymond J.A. Huel, *Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996. Pp. 388.

Historians have begun the arduous and often unwelcome task of demolishing the Canadian myth of a peaceful, orderly, and Anglo-centric West. Where once they emphasized the region's historical developments as a frontier or meeting place between civilization and savagery, now they imagine the frontier as a crossroads where diverse segments of the population, Native and non-Native, engaged in inter-cultural dialogue. With *Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis*, Raymond J. A. Huel, a historian at the University of Lethbridge, somewhat uneasily establishes himself as a proponent of the "new" western history.

His study explores the historic role that a French-speaking and Catholic religious order, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, played as missionaries