

ter with the reduced expectations of voters. Meanwhile, the Conservatives, based on the record of incompetence and corruption of Grant Devine's government, passed into political oblivion to be replaced by the conservative Saskatchewan party. The future of that new party and of the once proud Liberal party is far from clear. Surprisingly for a book with the subtitle "into the 21st century," the authors provide very little speculation on where trends and developments are taking the province. Perhaps they accept that important parts of the future are unknowable. This is true. The collection provides a valuable basis for informed speculation on where the continuities and breaks from the past will take place.

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Cycling into Saigon: The Conservative Transition in Ontario

David R. Cameron and Graham White

Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000, pp. xii, 212

David R. Cameron and Graham White's *Cycling into Saigon* provides a detailed and intriguing glimpse into the process of "transition," when government power is transferred from one political party to another. The focus of their highly interesting study is the 1995 Conservative transition in Ontario, when the New Democratic government of Bob Rae surrendered its power to incoming Conservative Premier Mike Harris. The authors' conclude that in 1995 "the people of Ontario were witness to a remarkably efficient, and in fact surprisingly serene takeover of political power by a party that many would not have thought capable of such a performance" (148). For comparative purposes, Cameron and White also examine Ontario's 1985 and 1990 transitions, as well as the ultimately unnecessary preparations for a transition in 1999. Arguing that the process of transition is central to democracy and good government, the authors build a convincing case for recognizing the importance of this seldom-studied aspect of politics and government. Moreover, by contrasting the speed and surefootedness of the 1995 Conservative transition with the two earlier and less successful transitions, Cameron and White reveal the bureaucratic and political factors that are likely to ensure smooth and effective future transitions from one government to the next. In accomplishing this, they have produced a book that should be of interest to students of politics and public administration, as well as to public servants and high-level activists within political parties.

Often viewed as the final stage in an election campaign, transitions are more accurately understood as the first stage in the life of a new government. The process of transition represents the moment at which partisanship and electoral politics meets the administrative state for the purpose of governing—a moment that Cameron and White characterize as one of the most delicate in the political-bureaucratic interface that is so central to parliamentary government. *Cycling into Saigon* examines the efforts and activities of bureaucratic and partisan actors during the preparation for a possible transition, and then turns to the moment when a new party is actually taking power, when politics meets administration. One of the book's central lessons is that the possibility of a successful transition depends on the quality of the relationship between political and bureaucratic actors. But another lesson is that successful transition depends on preparation—preparation on the part of the outgoing government, the bureaucracy and the succeeding political party.

Prior to the 1995 Conservative transition, there was limited bureaucratic preparation for transitions in Ontario. Public servants prepared to brief their new political masters, but preparations for the transfer of power and establishment of a new government were not systematic or centrally co-ordinated. Nor did these preparations include such basic matters as ensuring bureaucratic familiarity with party policy platforms or the organization of adequate physical working space for the transition team. Indeed, in an interview with the authors, former Premier Bob Rae complained that when he came

to power in 1990 the outgoing Liberal premier, David Peterson, “slipped away without sharing very many tips of office organization, management or pending political issues” (60). But Cameron and White make it clear that the outgoing government was not alone in taking the transition less-than-seriously. As opposition parties too often do, the NDP of 1990 also treated transition preparations as an afterthought.

In 1995, the situation was different. Months before the 1995 election, Premier Rae instructed his cabinet secretary, David Agnew, to co-ordinate detailed transition preparations. Mike Harris’ advisors were also well-prepared. During the process of developing the “Common Sense Revolution” campaign platform, the Harris team had been very careful to make their plans with a “governing mindset.” Moreover, they acted early—prior to any clear sign they could actually win an election—to establish an active transition team led by individuals of stature and experience. According to Cameron and White, Rae and Agnew’s co-operation, the Conservative’s “governing mentality,” the authority and weight of Harris’ transition team, and the clarity of the Conservative commitment to their policy platform, were the key factors ensuring a successful transition. Each of these factors is examined in detail as the political and bureaucratic story of the 1995 transition is told.

Cycling into Saigon is an example of detailed qualitative research centred on an extensive series of elite interviews carried out before, during and after the transition. This is rare within the limited literature on Canadian transitions. By concluding their book with a set of recommendations regarding institutionalizing bureaucratic transition planning, fostering a more open relationship between opposition parties and the bureaucracy, and encouraging more serious transition planning by political parties, Cameron and White make an important contribution to the study and practice of politics and public administration. But the story they tell will be of interest to all those who follow partisan politics and government in Ontario.

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Constitutional Culture and Democratic Rule

John Ferejohn, Jack N. Rakove and Jonathan Riley, eds.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001 pp. xi, 414

This collection of essays is dedicated, at least implicitly, to exploring the puzzling question of why some constitutions facilitate liberal democratic rule, and some do not (or at least fail to do so at critical junctions of a nation’s history). The book turns on the concept of constitutional culture, in turn a product of both the initial deliberative process through which a constitution is adopted, and the interpretation of constitutional history, whereby norms are adopted and legitimacy retained.

A constitutional culture is akin to a set of constitutional conventions—norms and practices that constrain the operation of ordinary legislative practices. While we tend to think of conventions as residing in the province of unwritten constitutions, it is clear that no matter how well constitutions are constructed, they must also be broadly adhered to. Adherence is borne of interpretation; breadth is a function of a consensus on interpretation.

Of course, consensus must be somewhat ephemeral. Times change, and with them change social mores. Periods of profoundly differing interpretations of constitutional culture produce constitutional crises. These have occurred at numerous points in the history of the United States, most famously the Civil War, but also during Reconstruction, the New Deal and the rights revolution of the second half of the twentieth century. Canada too has seen its share of such crises, stemming primarily from Quebec’s proper role within Confederation, but extending in recent years to Native rights, and the relationship of citizens and groups to the state as mediated through the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.