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**BOOK REVIEW**

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**W.A. Bogart**, *Good Government? Good Citizens? Courts, Politics, and Markets in a Changing Canada.*

**Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005, 264 pp.,**

**\$85.00 hardcover/\$29.95 paper.**

Reviewed by **Aaron Ogletree**

Examining the substantive political, legal, and socioeconomic changes underway in Canada and describing examples of how despite these changes, the concepts of peace, order, and good government remain vital to the lives of citizens, W. A. Bogart's *Good Government? Good Citizens?* is valuable in understanding the changes to the status quo in the contemporary context. The book compellingly challenges the main arguments that are behind the changes to Canadian society. Unfortunately, when discussing these issues he goes off topic repeatedly by relying on the practices and outcomes of the United States to make his arguments and leaves unexamined whether the state of disarray in representative politics is justified.

The central purposes of this book are to document why Canada needs rehabilitation and to explain the most hopeful situation for this rehabilitation. Part One, "The Society That Was", examines the traditional roles of courts, markets, and politics in Canada before changes to these roles began in the 1980s. Part Two, "Courts, Politics, and Markets in a Society in Transition", shows why and how the influence of representative politics is declining, while courts and markets are increasingly used to fill this power vacuum. Part Three, "Some Examples of a Changing Canada", illustrates and examines changes in the areas concerning Aboriginals, cyberspace, education, and aging.

The book compellingly dispels the illusion that courts, cyberspace, and markets are solutions to the disarray in representative politics. This is important when the claim that markets and legal rights are legitimate alternatives to resolve social problems is gaining favour over using politics and government to accomplish this end. The book supports the view that Canadians' time and energy are best spent trying to move toward representative

politics employing government for the common good. An insightful assessment of the limitations of the courts and the market is valuable to understanding the need for citizens to take control of their destiny rather than delegate it to entities or individuals largely unaccountable to the public.

The most profound insight presented is Bogart's documentation of the nexus between the declining standard of living of Canadians and neoliberal restructuring. Through a review of the declining power of labor unions, privatization of education, and the race to the bottom within economic sectors, Bogart points to how these growing disparities between classes have had many negative effects, such as an increase in child poverty. His analysis of neoliberal restructuring develops a complementary critique of how turning to the market functions to deny socioeconomic dignity to the most vulnerable members of society.

Within the book, Bogart notably argues that the erosion of deference to authority goes beyond distrust of political leaders, that neoliberal restructuring has not progressed as far as thought, and, as a result, the potential impact is the further dominance of the Canadian economy by market forces. For example, his overview of the commitment to the market has led to people substituting their preferences over that of those traditionally exercising authority, including religious leaders and medical authorities. This distrust of authority is encouraged by neoliberals seeking to discourage any attempt to confront abuses and expose the limitations of the market in solving problems in the lives of citizens. Despite this, Bogart contends that neoliberal restructuring will not inevitably result in a hollow state. In doing so, he cites William Watson's arguments that neoliberal restructuring allows limits on the mobility of capital and respect for the borders of countries. Bogart interprets the acceptance of neoliberalism as being more notable than the changes it has imposed on Canada.

However, Bogart's arguments depend too heavily on historical developments in the United States. While asserting the limitations of court decisions in Canada, he fails to document the shortcomings of these decisions. Instead, he focuses on the limitations of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. the Board of Education* to illustrate that the Court was virtually powerless in forcing desegregation. On the other hand, when the U.S. Congress passed legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act, several years later desegregation for a time became realized.

The book fails to consider the possibility that citizens' skepticism is consistent with the weakness of political parties. The failure of these parties to articulate their policy agendas and resist succumbing to the interests of campaign contributors has undermined their ability to represent, define policy options, and make policy. Deeper investigation would contribute to understanding the decline of authority in the face of neoliberalism. This book

is a significant contribution to debates regarding the declining perception of democracy across the world as well as an important overview of the current search for alternatives to the tradition role played by government. As such this book, like Michael Schudson's *The Good Citizen*, is valuable to readers seeking to understand the present dissatisfaction with American public life and its effects.