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‘Raymond B. Blake and Jeff Keshen, A History of Canada in 15 Moments: Making and Remaking a Nation since 1867’

Jatinder Mann

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Raymond B. Blake and Jeff Keshen, *A History of Canada in 15 Moments: Making and Remaking a Nation since 1867* (Bloomsbury, 2026), 256pp. Hardback. £65. ISBN: 978-1-3504-0823-4.

This book by Raymond B. Blake and Jeff Keshen is probably one of the most unique books that I have ever reviewed in my over two-decade career. The main reason for this is its premise: exploring Canadian history through fifteen significant moments. I do not envy the authors of the book in settling on which fifteen moments to focus on and I am sure it involved a long and lively discussion. But they should be pleased with their selection I think, as they cover Canadian history from implementing Confederation in 1869 to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2022. Furthermore and perhaps more importantly, within this vast temporal journey they explore several important themes in Canadian history, including nation-building; cultural genocide; racism, immigration, and xenophobia; war and society; the changing place of women in Canada; the rise of social citizenship in Canada; decolonization and the British world; universal health care for Canada; the centennial and searching for a better Canada; remaking the nation; towards a new nationalism for Canadians; to leave or stay in Canada?; A changing nation, activism, dialogue, truth – towards reconciliation; and Canada in the Covid-19 pandemic.

As several of the themes above illustrate the book does not just focus on celebratory moments in Canadian history, but includes the good, the bad, and the ugly as the authors put it. So, the authors often take a critical eye of Canadian history, although their affection for their country also comes across quite clearly. One of the overarching themes of the book is that Canada as a country has always been one of negotiation amongst its various disparate parts, and this continues to the present day. Something that I was struck by though when I read one of my first chapters in the book: 'The *Komagata Maru* incident, 1914: Racism, immigration and xenophobia' was that the chapter after spending quite a limited amount of time talking about this actually went on to discuss Canadian immigration history much more broadly. I have to admit I was expecting the chapter to go into much more detail about the *Komagata Maru* incident, and this approach is common with the other chapters as well. I think the authors intention was to use the fifteen moments that they decided to focus on as a launching pad to explore Canadian history in that particular theme, i.e. immigration, women's rights, reconciliation with Indigenous peoples etc. in a much broader way. A strong advantage of this approach is that the book manages to cover much more historical ground than its title suggests. So, on balance I think it is a good thing, but I just wanted to warn readers as I was personally caught a little bit off guard.

It is also obvious that the book draws on the particular scholarly strengths of the two authors in terms of its focus on prime ministers and war. I have always believed that you should play to your strengths and the book certainly does that well. On an aesthetic level the book includes some nice black and white photos at the beginning of each chapter which gives you a little taste of what is to come. However, it lacks a bibliography which I think would have strengthened the book as it would have been useful for readers, especially those new to Canadian history (which I am assuming is the main potential audience for the book), to know where to go to find out more about a particular theme. The book could also have benefitted from a slightly better edit as I noticed one of the footnotes cited a source actually by one of the authors of the book which had the incorrect year of publication. This of course

does not take anything from the substance of the book, but it is just a little sloppy and puts a fly in the ointment of what is actually quite a well-produced book.

I enjoyed reading this book. As mentioned above it covers considerably more historical territory than you would first imagine. I recommend it to readers, although it will probably appeal more to general readers rather than specialist. I commend the authors for writing a book that will hopefully entice readers to read more about Canadian history, which in my opinion is most definitely a good thing.

Jatinder Mann, University of Reading