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‘Eric M. Adams and Jordan Stanger-Ross, Challenging Exile: Japanese Canadians and the Wartime Constitution’

Jatinder Mann

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Eric M. Adams and Jordan Stanger-Ross, *Challenging Exile: Japanese Canadians and the Wartime Constitution* (UBC Press, 2025), 384pp. Paperback. C\$55. ISBN: 978-0-7748-7284-3.

This book by Adams and Stanger-Ross is a thought-provoking one (especially in light of what is going on in the United States of America currently), which looks at the traumatic experience of Japanese-Canadians exiled (either to other parts of Canada in internment camps or to Japan itself) during and after the Second World War from a legal history perspective. Although the subject in a broad sense has received not insignificant attention from scholars in the past, *Challenging Exile* provides considerable archival richness to the story and views the subject through three prisms. Firstly, it focuses on the civil servants and politicians who framed and introduced the *War Measures Act* which provided the legislative basis for Japanese-Canadians after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 to be interned and exiled. Secondly, it explores the active opposition that Japanese-Canadians had to both this internment and exile. And thirdly it examines the reactions of the judicial system to challenges brought by the latter to the former.

The authors quite rightly highlight that the motivations behind the *War Measures Act* had their origins much earlier than Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour. The book provides a very useful historical context of anti-Japanese feeling and anti-Asian racism more broadly long before the Second World War and even the First World War (clearly on display in daily newspapers of the time). The civil servants and politicians that came of age in the 1940s were very much raised in this context and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in 1940 gave them an opportunity to act on long-held racist views towards the Japanese especially.

Adams and Stanger-Ross also illustrate the active opposition that Japanese-Canadians had to their forced internment and exile. This is probably the most fascinating and significant part of the book for me, as the prevailing view of the Japanese-Canadian experience of internment and exile during and after the Second World War is one of 'a deer caught in headlights'. Instead, the book in quite some detail shows that Japanese-Canadians tried to oppose the discriminatory treatment that they were receiving, be it through political or legal means, and not only domestically. Although they were not particularly confident of succeeding in their efforts, they wanted their opposition to their treatment to be on record. And ample personal accounts of Japanese-Canadians are certainly poignant, if not sad.

This is quite a good segway to discuss the third prism of the book: the legal reaction to the internment and exile of Japanese-Canadians during and after the Second World War. The authors provide quite a comprehensive overview of the major challenges that Japanese-Canadians brought to both domestic and overseas courts (the Privy Council in the United Kingdom was the highest court of appeal in Canada at the time of the Second World War). Although the cases brought by Japanese-Canadians had strong legal merit, the judicial system was just as much influenced by racist views at the time as the political system.

This is something that Adams and Stanger-Ross go to some pains to emphasise. There were several opportunities during the whole sorry episode for civil servants, politicians, or judges to change course. The *War Measures Act*, and more importantly its broad interpretation was not a *fait accompli*. Active decisions were made by those in power at the time to facilitate the internment and exile of Japanese-Canadians. The book also puts the Japanese-Canadian experience in a broader context of other internment experiences of enemy aliens (as they were

known) in Canada, especially during the First World War. In contrast to the internment of German and Austro/Ukrainian-Canadians during the latter, the internment of Japanese-Canadians was much more systematic and pretty much involved the entire population. Furthermore, the former groups were never exiled to their countries of origin like Japanese-Canadians. This again reflected the racial basis of the policy at the time.

The book also looks forward and explores in some detail the impact, especially legally, that the Japanese-Canadian experience during the Second World War had, namely in the introduction of the Canadian Bill of Rights in the 1960s and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the 1980s. Adams and Stanger-Ross show that Japanese-Canadian organisations were at the forefront of appearing before parliamentary committees discussing both of these measures, and they were listened to, especially in regard to the latter due to the moral authority that they had due to their traumatic wartime experience.

I enjoyed reading this book, despite the sad subject. As a legal historian myself I truly think it is an excellent example of what work in the field can contribute to scholarship. I recommend the book to readers, although it will probably appeal more to experts than general readers.

Jatinder Mann, University of Reading