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‘David B. A. MacDonald, Myths, History Wars, and Indigenous-Settler Relations in Canada and Other Settler States’

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David Bruce Amichand MacDonald, *Myths, History Wars, and Indigenous-Settler Relations in Canada and Other Settler States* (Cambridge University Press, 2026), 88pp. Paperback. £18. ISBN: 978-1-0092-2320-1.

This is probably one of the most unique books that I have ever reviewed in terms of its length. At less than a hundred pages in length, to say it is concise would be an understatement to say the least. However, this is exactly the point of the *Cambridge Elements: Historical Theory and Practice* series. Furthermore, MacDonald covers considerable ground in such a short space, which is not perhaps surprising considering he has honed his scholarly writing skills over a long and very productive career, which has seen him publish numerous works that have contributed considerably to their respective fields and this book is no exception.

In *Myths, History Wars, and Indigenous-Settler Relations in Canada and Other Settler States*, MacDonald argues that an earlier series of 'History Wars' took place in Canada when it came to Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis), specifically in the mid-nineteenth century – around the time the majority of the disparate colonies of British North America as it was then known were coalescing around confederation. He identifies several main areas: 'Myths of an Empty Beckoning Land', 'The Myth of Recent Asian Origins', 'Myths of a European Right of Discovery', 'Myth of Indigenous Peoples as Doomed Races', 'Myth of Treaties as Surrender Documents', 'Old-Fashioned Myths: Conflict, Cruelty, and Superstition', 'Myths Against Indigenous Women as a Justification for Colonization', 'Myths of Indigenous Alcoholism', 'Myths of Meritocracy and the Liberal Democratic (Racial) State', and 'Myths of Meritocracy and Multiculturalism: The Colour-Blind State'.

In his exploration of each of these themes MacDonald draws on mainly primary research to illustrate myths and harmful stereotypes and tropes that were propagated by influential settlers at the time (including politicians, civil servants, and even members of religious orders) about Indigenous peoples in what is now known as Canada to justify the awful treatment that they received as a direct result of settler-colonialism. The book's focus on examples from school textbooks is especially telling as these were reprinted in multiple editions and went on to educate numerous generations of settlers to maintain the settler-colonial system, especially in marginalising Indigenous peoples and putting obstacles in the way of their self-determination. However, the book also quite depressingly demonstrates how many of these myths are still very much alive today.

The book makes some useful comparisons with other settler-colonial states, including Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and the United States of America. But MacDonald emphasises and the title highlights that the book does not give equal coverage to the latter and that the focus is very much on Canada. I have to admit that I found this transparency quite refreshing as I have come across books that exaggerate their international or even transnational focus.

Another interesting feature of the book is the separate treatment of Quebec. MacDonald explains that this is because it has a unique history compared to the other provinces of Canada in that it was settled primarily by French settlers, whose arrival actually predated that of British settlers. There were several things in the book that I found of particular interest. This includes the long-standing propagation of the view that French settlers had much better relations with Indigenous peoples in the territory they occupied compared to British settlers, and that the French authorities had a much more enlightened view of Indigenous peoples. MacDonald quite rightly debunks this view and reminds readers that the French occupied large parts of North

America for a century and a half and their relations with Indigenous peoples were anything but benign. Moreover, MacDonald also draws attention to a more recent and quite disturbing view advanced by some Quebec nationalists that their 'long-standing' connection with Quebec and intermarriage with First Nations (which MacDonald shows was actually quite limited) means that they should be considered Indigenous peoples, specifically Métis, with all the rights associated with that status.

I very much enjoyed reading this book, despite some of the challenging subject matter. But MacDonald again helpfully gives the reader a head's up that they are about to read some quite ugly stereotypes and tropes about Indigenous peoples that have been expressed historically, and perhaps even more depressingly are still expressed in the modern day. I highly recommend this book to readers, both specialist and general. It is incredibly thought-provoking and makes an important contribution to the field, despite its concise nature. I also strongly encourage policymakers to read this book as it makes some excellent suggestions on things that can be done to further truth and reconciliation when it comes to Indigenous peoples and the settler-colonial Canadian state, and MacDonald in particular emphasises the importance of *truth* in this process, which his book is a very good example of.

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