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‘Jennifer Tunncliffe and Stephanie Bangarth (Editors), Revisiting Human Rights in Canadian History’

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Jennifer Tunnicliffe and Stephanie Bangarth (Editors), *Revisiting Human Rights in Canadian History* (University of Manitoba Press, 2025), 328pp. Paperback. C\$31.95. ISBN: 978-1-7728-4126-8.

This is a fascinating and very timely edited collection. What immediately struck me about it is its breadth and depth, which is no small achievement, especially with an edited book. Tunnicliffe and Bangarth illustrate a very apt dichotomy of there being a popular conception in Canada of the country being at the forefront of defending human rights, especially internationally, but the reality particularly domestically being extremely problematic, not least in relation to Indigenous Peoples and racialized minorities. The book is divided into several parts: 'Human Rights for Whom', 'Incarceration, Criminalization, and Human Rights in Canada', 'Human Rights Activists and Activism in Canada', and 'Canada, Foreign Policy, and Transnational Human Rights Approaches'. Due to the limitations of space, I will focus on one chapter from each of these four different sections.

Jasmine Holding Brown's 'A Child's Right to be Civilized? Human Rights, Children's Rights, and Indigenous Rights' explores the history of forced child transportation from the United Kingdom (UK) to Canada in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the near simultaneous compulsory education of Indigenous children in Residential Schools in Canada. Interestingly on the former Canada was the recipient of the largest numbers of primarily, if not exclusively, working class children from the UK out of the entire British Empire. And the transportation continued despite several prominent individuals and commissions of enquiry highlighting the real exploitation of the children, especially for labour purposes. The primary and well-known motivation behind the Residential School system for Indigenous children was to 'kill the Indian in the child', i.e. forcefully disconnect Indigenous children from their families, communities, and culture, which was cultural genocide. They also suffered tremendously, many dying of Tuberculosis, and those remaining being subjected to horrendous emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Holding Brown while making some interesting parallels between the two experiences – namely that they were both aimed at furthering the empire project of facilitating the settlement of British people in Indigenous lands and alleviating the population pressures in the UK, makes the important distinction that as terrible as the forced transportation of children from the UK was it sadly does not come close to the experiences of Indigenous children forced to attend residential schools.

"'Injurious Effects on Mind and Body': Solitary Confinement and the Limitations of Rights in Canadian Penitentiaries' by Janet Miron studies the history of solitary confinement in Canadian prisons, primarily federal ones. Much of the chapter focuses on the Kingston Federal Penitentiary in Ontario, which was one of the first prisons in the country to utilise solitary confinement for particularly 'troublesome' inmates. Interestingly the 'inspiration' for solitary confinement in Canada came from the United States of America (USA). There was opposition to the practice in the former pretty much from the set go. Much of this focused on the irreparable psychological harm experienced by inmates who were subjected to solitary confinement, especially for long periods of time. It also ran counter to the growing perspective of prisons as rehabilitating criminals as opposed to just punishing them. Furthermore, it was highlighted that criminals should not leave prisons in worse condition than when they entered. The chapter also mentions a very famous critic of solitary confinement in prisons, Charles Dickens who visited a penitentiary in the USA which carried out the practice. Moreover, Miron illustrates that the practice of

solitary confinement in Canada has been used disproportionately against Indigenous People in prisons, who are also incarcerated at far higher levels in general than other parts of the Canadian population. The chapter also makes the important point that Canada has signed up to various international human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which prohibits torture, that solitary confinement would certainly qualify under. However, the chapter ends on quite a somber note – that despite capital punishment coming to an end in the country, the practice of solitary confinement continues to this day in Canada, even though the huge psychological harm it engenders having been well-known for a very long time.

Tom Hooper's 'The Battle of Church Street: Queers, Police, and the Steets of Toronto, 1981' looks at the pivotal police raids on four Gay bathhouses in Toronto in February 1981 that resulted in street protests over the subsequent several months, a particular highlight of which was the first Pride celebration in June of that year. A prominent theme running throughout Hooper's chapter is that of intersectionality. He makes the point several times that police brutality and prejudice did not only lead to the Gay community organising in response but several allies, including black and South Asian Canadians joined the fight also as they also unfortunately experienced the heavy handedness of the police and had had enough. The chapter analyses in quite some detail the progression of the protests and how the Gay community and its allies became better organised as time went on. In addition, the chapter emphasises that they not only had to contend with further police brutality during this but also harassment and violence from anti-Gay counter protestors. Being a Gay person of colour myself, the chapter resonated with me quite a bit on a personal level, and it is certainly a useful reminder of the hard-fought struggles the Gay community and its allies have gone through just to be themselves without fear or intimidation and that the fight for equality continues.

"Eyes on the Prize": Canada, Human Rights, and South African Apartheid in the Transition Years' by Daniel Manulak focuses on Canada's position to South Africa in the last years of Apartheid, especially regarding continuing economic sanctions. Manulak makes the point quite early in the chapter that unlike its major Western allies Canada was quite late in ending economic sanctions on South Africa before the end of Apartheid in 1994, 1993 as opposed to 1991. This was primarily due to the Canadian government of Brian Mulroney wanting to maintain its long principled opposition to Apartheid since Prime Minister John Diefenbaker in the 1960s. However, there was still considerable anxiety and tension in the Canadian government surrounding this position, lest they be excluded from future lucrative economic and investment opportunities in the new post-Apartheid South Africa. Therefore, the Mulroney government put considerable pressure behind the scenes on the African National Congress (ANC) to soften its stance on continued economic sanctions on its country until Apartheid had officially ended (which the latter contrarily argued was the reason Apartheid was weakening in the first place and that pressure needed to remain until it was completely gone). Instead, the Mulroney government was quite confident that the writing was written on the wall when it came to the end of Apartheid in South Africa. However, despite this the Canadian government refused to end economic sanctions on the country until both the Commonwealth and the ANC agreed this should take place. Manulak quite rightly highlights that this is a rare occasion in foreign policy where national interest and principle were kept very much separate.

I found this book extremely thought-provoking and I have no doubt that it will be an excellent resource not only for future research but as a core text for courses

on the subject. I wholeheartedly recommend it to readers, both specialist and general. In fact, it should have pride of place on the bookshelf of any Canadian who is interested in a critical history of human rights in their country.

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