

Canada Watch

PRACTICAL AND AUTHORITATIVE ANALYSIS OF KEY NATIONAL ISSUES

(RE)STUDYING, (RE)IMAGINING, (RE)PRESENTING CANADA
THROUGH FATIGUE AND HOPE

Guest editors' introduction

In April 2022, the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies hosted its annual graduate student conference online. Panellists were then offered the opportunity to submit condensed versions of their work for publication in this special issue of *Canada Watch*. These 13 articles present a new narrative about Canada as a nation under constant construction and revision. The authors provide insightful commentaries and convincing argumentation on their chosen themes—a testament both to the excellence of their submissions and to their keen eye and intuition for subjects that speak to all members of our community. They challenge pre-existing notions of what it means to live in Canada and be Canadian.

The academic approaches taken by the articles in this issue are interdisciplinary. They engage with issues of studying Canada's past in relation to understanding its present. Many of the problems and challenges addressed in these articles remain ongoing in Canada. While reading the articles, consider how mainstream representations and myths about Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples, with its environment, and with people of different ethnicities and identities are reproduced and reimaged.

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**BY ZACHARY CONSITT AND
AQEEL IHSAN**

Zachary Consitt is a PhD candidate in history at York University with research interests in Canadian cultural and sport history in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. His dissertation focuses on how sport and fitness were used as tools by the Canadian federal government to unify the country. Aqeel Ihsan is a PhD candidate in history at York University, specializing in migration and food history. His research interests focus on the South Asian diaspora currently residing in Canada.

The articles in this issue are organized by the following themes: Indigenous-settler contact zones, Canada's environmental relations, and identity formations.

The articles in the opening section address themes surrounding the struggles faced by Indigenous peoples in every region of Canada, from the past to the present. Authors identify how settler Canadians commodified a misinformed and appropriated Indigenous culture, and they show how, in response, Indigenous people have fought to protect their forms of cultural expression, from crafts to film and literature, as a means of projecting their self-determination. Authors also document how Indigenous peoples have fought for their political autonomy, through grassroots protest movements and through legal action to renegotiate or reaffirm treaties with the federal

government. Finally, authors share how settler-colonial structures need to be considered when academic research is conducted with and regarding Indigenous peoples. The articles examine the continuing struggles by Indigenous peoples for self-determination and self-expression in Canada.

Canada's relationship with its environment is another major site of contention explored in this issue, as traced through four historical case studies. In writing about the environment, authors refer to issues pertaining to settler colonialism and the Canadian state's troubled relationship with its Indigenous populations. Whether it is water mills in Upper Canada that facilitated the project of colonialism and Indigenous dispossession, colonial power relations that came to the fore with the extraction of iron ore, a hydroelectric company that forcibly relocated Indigenous communities, or the struggle of Indigenous peoples as they defended their lands against encroachment from pipelines that threatened their livelihood, these issues cannot be read in isolation. Instead, an intersectional approach is needed to understand the complexities of the issues that are sources of frustration and fatigue in Canada.

The articles in the last section of this issue address identity formations. In 1971, multiculturalism was officially adopted as Canada's federal government policy. In 2023, Canada advertises itself as a country that welcomes people


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of all backgrounds, races, religions, and sexualities. However, while Canada is touted as a country that celebrates multiculturalism, citizens in Canada are far from equal and do not enjoy full and equitable access to opportunities. This has been the case throughout Canada's history. These debates are explored in this section through a discussion of Chi-

nese restaurant menus as a tool for communication, and Canada's immigration policies as they pertain to the LGBTQ+ community. The issue concludes by asking the important question, "Is Canada worth saving?"

The articles in this issue of *Canada Watch* (re)study and (re)imagine the various asymmetries and points of rupture

throughout Canadian history, while also highlighting key pathways to transformation and futures of hope. It is important to remember that Canada is a national project, one that is ongoing, and it is important to maintain hope for the future about what Canada can become. 

The Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies will be celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2024!

To this end, two special issues of *Canada Watch* will be published: one on the evolution of the study of Canada over 40 years and the role of the Robarts Centre in supporting research at York University and another one on testimonies of the Centre's impact on people's professional lives.

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