

consider the limits on tolerance or how tolerance can flourish in a society only if that society as a whole upholds certain basic values such as veracity, responsibility, and compassion. He also fails to deal with the difficult question of where we draw the line and forbid certain types of religious schools to operate in a democratic society (for example, those that openly foster racial superiority or civil violence, or do not tolerate opposing points of view).

Throughout the book, Thiessen addresses the question of pluralism. In the end, he argues, Enlightenment liberalism as well as postmodernism undermine true pluralism. His alternative is to search for reconciliation between individualistic modernism and communitarian postmodernism, a so-called “middle ground.” But here Thiessen glosses over the fact that the basic worldviews represented by liberal modernism and constructivist postmodernism may well be incompatible and cannot be “reconciled.” What Thiessen calls a “middle way” may well have to be quite a different third way, perhaps related to critical realism, but needing to be worked out in more depth.

Most of Thiessen’s lines of reasoning are not new. The value of his book is that the arguments for and against religious schooling are all brought together in one volume, and that Thiessen’s meticulous analysis builds a compelling case for the existence and funding of religiously based schools. If you believe that the state has an obligation to uphold a uniform public school system in order to ensure the health of our democratic society, you will not likely agree with Thiessen’s conclusions. Nevertheless, you will benefit from his arguments and be able to enter the debate in a more informed and responsible way.

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**Marlene Shore, ed. *The Contested Past: Reading Canada's History – Selections from the Canadian Historical Review*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. Pp. 353.**

*The Contested Past* is a collection of excerpts from articles, letters to the editor, and Notes and Comments from the *Canadian Historical Review (CHR)*, the flagship journal of the Canadian historical profession, since the journal’s inception in 1920. The

excerpts are designed to show that the *CHR* has consistently been guided by two principal objectives: “to promote high standards of historical research and methodological developments elsewhere and to foster the study of Canadian history.”

The readings selected are arranged both chronologically and thematically. First of all, the collection is divided into three broad chronological periods: Part One: Nation and Diversity, 1920 to 1939; Part Two: Centralization and Reaction, 1940-1965; and Part Three: The Renewal of Diversity, 1966 to the Present; with a fourth and concluding part added, entitled “Reflections,” with articles spanning the years 1944 to 1995. Then within each Part, there are sub-themes that have articles related to the theme listed chronologically. Some of these sub-themes are: The Purpose of the Past, Defining the Canadian Nation, The Environment and Natural Resources, Native-European Contact, Society and War, Nationalism Challenged, Limited Identities, Quebec and Nationalism, Class Consciousness, Gender Politics, and Cultural History. All four Parts are introduced by a commentary by the editor, Marlene Shore, in which she summarizes the excerpts and relates them to the sub-theme of that period. She has also provided a helpful introduction to the collection as a whole in which she explores general trends, debates, and overarching themes in the writing of Canadian history as reflected in the *CHR*. She concludes that the one clear observation that emerges from a study of the *CHR* is the diversity of opinions and approaches to Canadian history in all periods. “Divergent views about the writing of Canadian history,” she writes, “have engaged the *CHR* and its editors and contributors ever since its founding” (p. xiii).

In her “Introduction,” Shore notes that Canadian history today is alive and well as reflected in an interest in family genealogy, theme parks, museums, historical documentaries, the CBC’s *Canada: A People’s History*, movies based on historical subjects, and works of historical fiction by such noted Canadian novelists as Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Anne Michaels, and Wayne Johnston. Yet Canadian professional historians in the academy have not, with few exceptions, been part of this popularizing trend. Shore points out that professional historians have been more concerned with larger and “weightier” issues such as: objectivity – its meaning, desirability, or possibility; the link between history and literature; the use of sources and what constitutes a historical source; whether historians have a responsibility to speak out on current issues based on their knowledge of the past or simply to study that past for what it tells us about the period or event itself.

She notes that at no time has there been consensus on these questions.

Nor has there ever been consensus on one theme that underlies all writings in the *CHR* and that is particularly problematic for this national historical journal, namely that of Canadian nationalism. The debate has taken various forms. Early on in the life of the journal, its contributors debated to what extent the journal's focus on *Canadian* history excluded other national histories that could offer important reflections or counter-perspectives to that of Canada. Then they debated whether the emphasis should be on Canada's unique contribution to broader topics such as federalism, responsible government, or the British Commonwealth. In the mid-twentieth century, with the rise of Quebec separatism, the debate centred on the issue of whether the anti-Canadian nationalist perspective of some Quebec historians should be presented in a Canadian national journal. Some historians proposed getting around the national conundrum by studying Canada as a whole without dwelling on the theme of nationalism, while others proposed abandoning national history entirely and opting instead to study "limited identities," be they regional, community, class, or gender in nature – anything but national! More recently, postmodernism, with its challenge to consensus and meta-narratives, has posed a new challenge to studying national history. While the debates over the issue of nationalism have not resulted in any consensus on the subject, they have ensured that the subject of Canadian history has been thoroughly discussed from a variety of perspectives in the *CHR*.

This collection does present the essence of the views of notable Canadian historians of the past. But there are limitations. Certain distinguished Canadian historians are conspicuously absent, such as Ramsay Cook, Carl Berger, J.M.S. Careless, and Craig Brown, to name a few. In some respects, they have led the debate on issues germane to the *CHR*, and have served on its editorial board, and yet their views are unavailable in the collection. Also, while one can appreciate that such a collection can only present the essence of an article or letter to the editor, the condensed version often does not do justice to the complexity and nuances of the argument being presented. As well, the diversity of viewpoints and material presented results in a lack of continuity and coherence in the volume. It is difficult in reading the excerpts to remember what the authors have in common other than the subject matter, whereas clearly the editor hopes that the reader will see how these excerpts reflect changing trends in and perspectives on the writing of history

over time. These trends and perspectives Shore presents in her introduction to the collection, but even here there is a sense that in attempting to deal with the diversity of subject matter and approaches, the editor deals with each article on an ad hoc basis, with the result that one “loses the forest in the trees.”

These criticisms aside, the collection does show how the writing of Canadian history has evolved over time. The debate takes different turns but always returns to the central issue: to what extent the nation should be the focal point of Canadian history. That question alone has ensured that the writing of Canadian history will continue to be alive and well, at least among Canadian professional historians. Whether their writings will percolate down to the general public is another question – and one that will never be answered definitely because professional historians do not agree among themselves whether this should even be a concern.

This book will be of interest to instructors of Canadian history as a way of introducing students to trends in the writing of Canadian history, and to the debates that have informed the subject. It will be useful in making students aware of the dynamics of the subject of Canadian history.

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**Sharon Anne Cook, Lorna R. McLean, and Kate O'Rourke, eds. *Framing Our Past: Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001. Pp. 495.**

*Framing Our Past: Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century* documents women's diverse experiences and contributions to Canadian society in the twentieth century; while it is academic and “rooted in the archival” and photographic record, it aims to tell women's stories and women's history “to a wide readership” (p. xxiii). The book is organized thematically, with an introductory essay on each section establishing the context for “diverse papers, vignettes, and images” (p. xxvi). As the editors admit, the book makes no effort to cover “each decade or every major historical event” of the twentieth century. Instead it implicitly challenges the traditional (male) time lines of historical