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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Connections Across the 49th Parallel: A Panoramic View and Life Stories

SARAH CARTER

This is an important, path-breaking book. Major strengths include its sweeping range and scope: geographically, temporally, topically and thematically. There are histories of the Canada-US border and borderlands, but they focus on sub-regions, selected peoples, and communities of these regions within restricted timeframes. As Benjamin Hoy writes, this approach has “obscured interactions and connections” (5) that the vast panoramic canvas of this book brings to light.

Another strength of this book is the frequent steps back it takes from the big picture with individual stories and voices of those whose lives were deeply affected or constrained by the border, who found refuge or opportunity through crossing the border, or who defied and ignored the border. Particularly compelling are the voices of Indigenous Peoples, drawing on sources such as the 1930s interviews of anthropologist David Mandelbaum with the Nehiyawak (Plains Cree) and the Robert Goodvoice (Dakota) and George First Rider (Kainai) transcripts.

A Line of Blood and Dirt defies categorization as it is not a borderlands study, though it is in part. Borderlands studies do not venture far from the border, but this book does, showing the long reach of the border and long arms of border enforcers. This is illustrated in the sad story of American Myron Pratt, a young father of two, deported in 1939 (for the second time) from Saskatoon to Quincy, Massachusetts, a 3,500 kilometre journey. His family was not allowed to enter the United States with him, and he was not allowed to remain in Saskatoon despite a petition with hundreds of signatures of Saskatoon citizens protesting his deportation. Hoy writes that borders mattered even in a city 400 kilometers away from the 49th parallel and far into the interior of the nation.

This book is not comparative history, though it is in part. It refreshingly departs from the “good marks, bad marks” approach to comparisons of Canada and the US, and it largely steers clear of the worn out and simplistic conclusion of many comparative studies, as apt as it may be, that the outcome for Indigenous Peoples was depressingly similar on both sides of the border. Perhaps the term transnational his-

tory comes the closest to describing this book, but it does not entirely fit that category either, as scholars of transnational history focus on the transit of ideas, people, policies, laws, organizations, and institutions between and across nation-states. This book pushes at the boundaries of all of these approaches.

In a sense, this book is trans-Indigenous history in that it highlights the ancient and persistent Indigenous nations upon which the border was drawn, and much of the history told here is about how authorities on both sides tried to get Indigenous Peoples to recognize the existence of the border and obey laws and regulations they imposed, with limited success.¹ It is the first study to link the border experiences of Indigenous Peoples from as far east as the Haudenosaunee to the Coast Salish of the West. But the book is about diverse non-Indigenous peoples as well, including African Americans, European immigrants, the Chinese and the laws that excluded them, and individuals like Myron Pratt.

The writing is lively and engaging. The border comes across as a living, breathing entity from its conception to childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. I like the metaphor of the border as body found throughout the book. It grows in size and strength over the course of its life. Sometimes the border is described as a frail skeleton onto which a body had to be scaffolded; muscle and flesh had to be added to the frail framework.

There are many unique and innovative features in this book, including the maps that quantify and permit comparison of patterns of federal control in each nation. There is one, for example, of customs employees in Canada and the United States where you can visualize the dramatically different levels of control depending on the region. US soldiers' locations are mapped and can be compared to the map of personnel of the North-West Mounted Police. There were in fact militia units in Canada such as the Border Horse, a cavalry regiment later renamed the 12th Manitoba Dragoons, of which my grandfather was one. But this was a "non-permanent active militia" unit distinct from the army postings in the United States. There are maps of Indian Affairs employees on both sides of the border. Hoy admits there are limitations to the maps, but they do show in the case of Indian agents that, in both countries, they clustered in key locations, with many stationed within one hundred miles of the border in both nations. In Canada, there would have been many more First Nations reserves near the border, such as in the Cypress Hills, but Indian Affairs authorities

did not permit this. Interactive maps and the datasets used to create them are available at Hoy's website.²

In a book this ambitious, it might be unfair to point out what topics, approaches, and theories might have been included. Yet even the finest work could add new angles. I wonder why there is no direct engagement with settler colonial theories and theorists, although I think this is implicit as the history of the border is presented as inseparable from histories of colonialism. Hoy argues that both nations saw the erasure of Indigenous societies as a component of creating the border. There might have been engagement with Manu Karuka's concept of railroad colonialism in *Empire's Tracks*.³ The Canadian Pacific Railway and the Great Northern Railway helped make and cement the border while acting as agents of colonialism and capitalism, extending state power over Indigenous homelands.

I am also reminded of Audra Simpson's work *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Duke, 2014) which is about the efforts to enforce a settler colonial border, limit mobility, enforce expulsions and passports and about the strength and resilience of Indigenous Peoples, communities, and nations who practice the politics of refusal. State power is far from complete, and the Mohawk retain their own membership, nationhood, and state.

The endurance of the Indigenous Peoples of the borderlands and how they practiced their own politics of refusal could have been more deeply pursued. *A Line of Blood and Dirt* has the Lakota, for example, pretty much disappearing from Canada, but in fact they persisted. In her 2022 dissertation (which I fully recognize Hoy could not possibly have used for this 2021 book), Claire Thomson demonstrates that Lakota understanding of their own country persists to this day, and it is an understanding that disregards the border. Her analysis of Lakḥóta Tḥamákḥoche (Lakota Country) rests within a framework of Lakota kinship and belonging. She argues that:

Wood Mountain Lakota people slipped through the cracks of settler state government control and surveillance, sometimes deliberately as a strategy for maintaining self-determination on various levels and sometimes because of settler colonial administrations that sought ... to sever Lakota ties to each other, place, sovereignty, and culture... Lakḥóta Tḥamákḥoche is more than the land and waters, places and spaces where Lakota people lived, travelled, and fought for, it is the realm of relationships and kinship — a

landscape and kinscape that defies settler state geopolitical and social boundaries.⁴

But Hoy does eloquently discuss that for Indigenous Peoples throughout the early twentieth century, the “border served as both an imposition and an absence, a shadow cast across daily life... the border structured heartache and esteem” (213).

There are fewer voices and perspectives of women among the individual stories presented in this book. They do increase considerably in Chapter 10, “The Borders of Everyday Life”, but there might have been more gender analysis. The border complicated the lives of women in distinct ways. Born in Montana and of Shoshone, Salish, Spanish, and German ancestry, Emma Minesinger (1866- 1950) and her extended family lived on both sides of the border, but she eventually decided to stay in Montana, where divorce was possible (from a first husband) and where she could obtain an allotment (on the Flathead Reservation) and live there with her (second) settler husband; these options were not available to her in Alberta through legal regimes including the Indian Act. Nor would she have had the income, by eventually selling her allotment, to build a home near her daughter in Los Angeles.⁵

Single settler women could homestead in the US West, and many thousands did, but they were denied this right in the Canadian West. One unhappy consequence of this was that single women homesteaders in the United States and near the 49th parallel who became engaged to male homesteaders on the Canadian side had to decide if they wanted a homestead or a husband. Jeanette Rankin, member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Montana, explained the situation in 1917 when she took up the cause of the women homesteaders: “In my State of Montana... many of the girls along the border near Canada love Canadian boys and cannot marry them without losing their American citizenship and therefore also their Montana homesteads. A most unhappy situation.”⁶

The book is illustrated with many political cartoons such as one (189) where Uncle Sam attempts to woo Miss Canada. There could have been more commentary on and analysis of these images. For example, Carmen J. Nielson analyzed depictions of Miss Canada that deployed feminized and eroticized images of the nation in satirical magazines. It would be interesting to compare depictions of Miss Canada in the US magazine *Puck* with those Nielson examined (British

and English Canadian graphic satire). While Nielson found Miss Canada to be generally “beautiful, slender [and] curvaceous,” this is not at all how she was depicted in the *Puck* cartoon of this book.⁷ Wearing a toque and mittens, she appears more as a stereotypical Canadian lumberjack.

This is a timely book and I hope it gets the wide readership it deserves, not only in Canada but in the United States. History textbooks in both nations need to pay more attention to the making and policing of the 49th parallel, which has loomed large in recent years when the unthinkable happened during COVID-19 and the border was closed. This book helps us understand the history of this powerful force in the lives of many Canadians and Americans. As Hoy concluded, “If the border today is a more prominent impediment to movement than it was even twenty years earlier, it has not succeeded in shaking its past. It remains one border among many, a border built on Indigenous lands with all the ambiguity and complexity that such a venture creates” (225).

SARAH CARTER studies the history of the Canadian West. Her recent work includes *Ancestors: Indigenous Peoples of Western Canada in Historic Photographs* (2021) with co-author Inez Lightning and *Ours By Every Law of Right and Justice: Women and the Vote in the Prairie Provinces* (2020). She is a member of the Royal Society of Canada. In 2020 she was awarded the Killam Prize in the Humanities and in 2023 was named to the Order of Canada.

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Endnotes

- 1 Chadwick Allen, "A *Transnational* Native American Studies? Why Not Studies That Are *Trans-Indigenous*?" *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4, no. 1 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.5070/T841007097>.
- 2 Building Borders: Visual Representations of the Canada-U.S. Border, 1860-1915 at <http://www.buildingborders.com/>
- 3 Manu Karuka, *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).
- 4 Claire Thomson, "Digging Roots and Remembering Relatives: Lakota Kinship and Movement in the Northern Great Plains from the Wood Mountain Uplands across Lakǰóta ǂamákǰoche/ Lakota Country, 1881 – 1940" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2022).
- 5 Sarah Carter, "The *Montana Memories* of Emma Minesinger: Windows on the Family, Work and Boundary Culture of a Borderlands Woman," in *Recollecting: Lives of Aboriginal Women of the Canadian Northwest and Borderlands*, eds. Sarah Carter and Patricia A McCormack (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2011): 197, 200.
- 6 "Cupid Championed by Miss Rankin in Talk to Congress," *The Washington Times*, December 8, 1917, 5.
- 7 Carmen J. Neilson, "Caricaturing Colonial Space: Indigenized, Feminized Bodies and Anglo-Canadian Identity, 1873–94," *Canadian Historical Review* 96, no. 4 (Dec. 2015): 473–506; Carmen J. Neilson, "Erotic Attachment, Identity Formation and the Body Politic: The Woman-as-Nation in Canadian Graphic Satire, 1867–1914," *Gender & History* 28, no. 1 (March 2016): 102–126.