12.4: 12.1:3 Summary

Figure 12.36 Alternately thrilling and terrifying, hilarious and horrifying, the post-Confederation era bears comparison to a fairground ride where it is easier to assume that someone, somewhere exercises some kind of reasonable control than to actually enquire.

Closing with the “end of history” is a useful way to consider the “short 20th century,” from 1914-1991, as a chapter in human history that now recedes from view. The Cold War, suburbanization, domestic women and breadwinner men, peacekeepers and peaceniks, and industrial capitalism were themes that will, in all likelihood, never again be the obsessions that they once were.

It is absolutely true that there are continuities of which we need to be aware. Colonialism in Canada remains largely intact, as demonstrated every day by the rotten conditions on reserves, the grotesque over-representation of Aboriginal men and women in the penal system, and the appallingly low life expectancy of Indigenous peoples. When we look at differential lifetime wages for men and women, we will find the fingerprints of sexual discrimination everywhere. Canada
remains mainly a hewer of wood and a drawer of water to the world; our economy is based on an export model that continues to favour raw, unprocessed staples like oil, natural gas, and mineral ores. At the same time, Central Canada’s manufacturing sector — and the unions that have organized its workforces — still has tremendous political and economic influence. Suburbs continue to be built, sprawl continues to eat up agricultural land, and — notwithstanding improvements in public transit and bicycle lanes — automobilism continues to define our cities. Most child-rearing is unpaid work done by women (aka: mothers). The political elites survive: Paul Martin Jr. and Justin Trudeau are no doubt the best known examples of sons following in their father’s footsteps, but prominent Liberal Sheila Copps followed her father into politics as well, as did Manitoba Senator Sharon Carstairs, the daughter of a former Nova Scotian premier and senator.

Against all this, I would argue, urban densities and planning models today would be unrecognizable (and largely unappealing) to people in the 1970s. Oil and copper may be volatile exports, but so far they haven’t led us into a crisis like the one the wheat economy provided in 1929-39. Aboriginal people are suffering, without a shadow of doubt, from the legacy of colonialism but now their stories are front and centre and increasingly regarded as a truth that must somehow be reconciled. We are, it is increasingly understood, all treaty people and that realization alone would have been beyond the ability of Cold War Canadians.

Surely the most important and the most obvious continuity is that of Canada itself. Despite attempts to dismantle or even fundamentally rethink the Confederation bargain of 1867, the nation-state continues to tick along. The 2015 election results suggest a country more in agreement than it has been since 1984; the Atlantic provinces and the North gave every seat they had to offer to the Liberals, and only Alberta and Saskatchewan offered succour to the previous Harper Government, as it chose to brand itself. If a study of Canada’s political history teaches us anything, however, it is that governments are more often voted out than in; the Liberal victory in 2015 will one day receive proper historical assessment, but at this time it seems safe to say that it was the result of a strong anti-Harper (if not anti-Conservative) reaction more than a stampede to the Liberal platform. Building a consensus over what we all dislike is a rather different proposition from a shared vision of what the country is, needs, and might become.

Still, it has to be said that a cabinet that is evenly divided between men and women marks a significant change. How significant? Pauline Jewett (1922-1992) was a Liberal MP first elected in Pearson’s 1963 win. She subsequently left the Trudeau administration in 1970 over the War Measures Act and joined the NDP but, before then, she was an aspirant backbencher who believed she ought to be in the Cabinet. She enjoyed telling the story of the day she approached Prime Minister Pearson and made her pitch. As Jewett was nobody’s fool and a Harvard Ph.D. to boot, one can imagine that she made a compelling case for a ministerial post. Pearson listened patiently and then replied, “But Pauline, we already have a woman in the Cabinet.” In that context, Justin Trudeau’s decision to populate his 2015 Cabinet with women and to seek out diversity that more closely reflects the complexion of the Canadian population was not merely laudable — it was (a) badly overdue by any measure, and (b) proof that Cold War modernity had, to use a modernist phrase, left the building.

In many respects, this open textbook reflects some of the changes in both the history and the historiography of postmodern Canada. Being available online and being a document that can be changed, it is a sharp contrast with the “modern” era textbook, which was a very finite object. The historians who contributed to this project, you will have noticed, work principally in areas outside of the traditional political historical focus. Most of them, too, are drawn from a generation that is much younger than the New Social History cohort of the 1960s and ‘70s. Their sources have changed, as have the questions they ask.
Has this enabled the book you are now reading to achieve comprehensiveness? Hardly. There is not enough here on women’s and feminist history, environmental histories are barely hinted at, and there are themes in Aboriginal history that deserve much more space. There are, as well, debates among historians that space and time do not allow us to explore here. Postmodern history finds a place for the stories of common people, marginalized people, and people for whom the nation state was at best a neutral thing, at worst an oppressive entity. Getting at those histories requires innovation in historical research; transmitting those histories requires a willingness to think outside of the paradigm of the textbook and journal article. History is built into the fabric of our communities, our environment, and our identities; finding these stories will be the task of the generation to come.

Welcome to the end of this textbook and congratulations. Perhaps it has stimulated in you an interest to pursue some questions further or to explore other histories. Perhaps you’ve absolutely reached your limit. Either way, you need to know that historians have a saying:

You may be through with history, but history is not through with you.

Key Terms

9/11: Has come to signify the terrorist attacks on multiple targets in the United States on 9 September 2001, and the beginning of the War on Terror.

Afghanistan War: Following 9/11, an alliance of forces including Canada which initiated a military campaign against the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001. Troop withdrawals from active duty were complete in 2014.

al-Qaeda: A jihadist group pieced together in the 1980s by Americans to fight against the Soviet Union.

Big Data: Refers to collections of enormous data sets that typically include large quantities of demographic information useful in social analysis.

bipolar: The essence of the Cold War in that there were two superpowers in existence. Juxtaposed with the unipolar world at the end of the Cold War.

Calgary Declaration: Also called the Calgary Accord; in 1997, an agreement signed between all provinces but Quebec; established principles for future constitutional change while enshrining principles regarding equality of rights, inclusion, and multiculturalism.

Charlottetown Accord: 1992; a package of proposed constitutional changes; defeated in a national referendum.

contemporary history: The study of very recent history.

deconstructing: An examination of the relationship between text and meaning.

ethnic cleansing: A variant on genocide in that it combines extermination with expulsion of an identifiable ethnic group; strongly associated with the war in the former Yugoslavia.

failed state: A country that has no national administration; usually associated with civil wars.

fruit machine: A device intended to measure levels of arousal in a test subject; applied by Canadian security services in
their efforts to identify sexual “deviants” and homosexuals.

**History Wars:** Conflict between generations of historians that spiked in the 1990s; pitted national/nationalist historians against historians of society and culture.

**identity politics:** An orientation in politics that begins with a sense of oppression or loss among a constituency (an identity) and moves toward an agenda of initiatives that will address those inequities; distinct from ideological politics, which begin from a position of principles and ongoing goals that are society-wide.

**nationalist historians:** Or “national historians”; scholars who believe that the principal role of history is to analyze and explain the history of the nation state.

**New World Order:** In the context of the post-Cold War era, a United States-dominated international stage in which diminished expenditures on nuclear arsenals would be turned into resources to build up economies globally; in the context of wars in the Gulf and Middle East, an effort to impose the (Western) rule of law on recalcitrant states.

**partition:** The potential for, or the act of, formally dividing an established jurisdiction. In the case of Canada, Quebec’s separation from Canada would not constitute partition because it existed before Confederation, but the removal of anglophone-dominated areas and Inuit and Cree territories would constitute a partition of Quebec.

**peace dividend:** At the end of the Cold War it was widely predicted that the cost of maintaining readiness in the face of the threat posed by the Warsaw Pact and other communist countries would come to an end and resources would be spent in other ways.

**political correctness:** A provocative (and often ironic) term to describe attempts to modify language in such ways as to minimize unnecessary offence, typically of minorities, women, and vulnerable populations. The inclusive ethos of sensitive language — which was essentially self-reflection on the ways in which language binds social roles and relationships — has been challenged by privileged groups in particular who regard restrictions on the ability to defame others as a loss of freedom.

**post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):** Mental health consequences of trauma, typically within the context of warfare; associated with research in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy.

**queer history:** The study of the historic experience of LGBT individuals and communities; also the analysis of popular and governmental attitudes toward LGBT communities.

**regional disparities:** Term used increasingly in the 1970s to describe the existence of “have” and “have-not” provinces whose inequalities were a product of long-term economic circumstances.

**rights culture:** Beginning in the 1960s; a belief in the existence of un- or under-recognized rights as well as the importance and value of extending and enshrining rights to under-protected groups.

**Senate reform:** The upper house has been the subject of chronic criticism for decades. These critiques intensified in the 1960s and especially in the 1980s. See also Triple-E Senate.

**Somalia Affair:** Political and military scandal arising from Canadian Airborne Regiment’s violent, arbitrary, and
murderous behaviour which led to several civilian deaths (including the beating death of Shidane Arone).

**START:** Three Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties, the first of which was signed in 1991; committed the signatories — the USSR and the United States — to making substantial reductions in their nuclear arsenals and delivery systems.

**Taliban:** The fundamentalist Islamic regime in Afghanistan; deposed in 2001 following the NATO invasion in response to 9/11.

**Triple-E Senate:** Call for reform of the upper house that would see it become elected, equal, and efficient; a plank in the Reform Party platform since the 1980s.

**unipolar:** Following on the collapse of multipolar global relations in the 1940s, and the subsequent age of bipolar superpowers, the unipolar era was defined by one superpower (the United States) dominating global affairs.

**War on Terror:** Initially a military campaign launched against non-state organizations responsible for targeted attacks on American bases or civilians; after 9/11, included military attacks on regimes supportive of organizations regarded as “terrorist”; conducted by a broad alliance of nations predominantly in the West.

**Short Answer Exercises**

1. In what ways does the end of the Cold War signal a turning point in world and Canadian affairs?
2. How did the business of peacekeeping change in the post-1991 period?
3. What was the objective of further constitutional negotiations in the 1990s? Why did the Charlottetown Accord follow Meech Lake into the waste basket of history?
4. Why did the 1995 Quebec referendum fail so narrowly?
5. What breakthroughs occurred for women in Canadian politics in the post-Cold War era?
6. How and why did the Progressive Conservative Party change after Brian Mulroney?
7. What has been the cause and the effect of the rise of identity politics and rights cultures?
8. In what ways has the idea of being a Canadian changed since 1867?
9. What are some of the distinctions between history and heritage?
10. In what ways did the rights of LGBT Canadians change in the last quarter of the 20th century, and what does it reveal about Canadian society generally?
11. In what ways has the job of the historian changed in recent years?

**Suggested Readings**


Hayday, Matthew. “Fireworks, Folk-dancing, and Fostering a National Identity: The Politics of Canada Day,” *Canadian...


Attributions

Figure 12.36
[Two girls on midway ride] – CVA 260-930 by James Crookall / City of Vancouver Archives is in the public domain.