

Not Good Enough For Canada: Canadian Public Discourse around Issues of Inadmissibility for Potential Immigrants with Disease and/or Disabilities, 1902-2002 by Valentina Capurri

Eric L. Payseur

Volume 112, Number 2, Fall 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1072247ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1072247ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Payseur, E. L. (2020). Review of [*Not Good Enough For Canada: Canadian Public Discourse around Issues of Inadmissibility for Potential Immigrants with Disease and/or Disabilities, 1902-2002* by Valentina Capurri]. *Ontario History*, 112(2), 270–271. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1072247ar>

Not Good Enough For Canada

Canadian Public Discourse around Issues of Inadmissibility for Potential Immigrants with Disease and/or Disabilities, 1902-2002

By Valentina Capurri

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019. 264 pages. \$37.95
ISBN 9781487523237 (www.utorontopress.com)

Few native-born citizens know the policies, procedures, and experiences of immigrants; citizenship tests are not given to the native-born, nor do those born with Canadian citizenship generally have to prove they will not be a burden to the state. Migration scholars have been shedding light on this disparity and the economics of immigration for at least five decades. Yet, few works have been as personal, political, hypocrisy-shattering and designed to effect positive change as Valentina Capurri's *Not Good Enough for Canada*.

Capurri's introduction is unequivocal in its personal-is-political impetus for this work (3), as the author understands firsthand the medically inadmissible rejection automatically given to so many applicants (4-6). On the very first page of text, she "declines to write a history that is only a window into the past" (3). The five chapters that follow deal with: the methodology, terminology and early development of Canada's immigration regime (Chapter 1); federal politicians' discourse on inadmissible immigrants (Chapter 2); discourse in Ontario's two main newspapers during pre- and post-Charter periods (Chapters 3 and 4); and how the federal courts dealt with challenges, particularly the Charter challenge brought by Angela Chesters in 2001 (Chapter 5).

Throughout the book, Capurri cogently captures the intricately linked dis-

course around immigrants, citizenship and disability/disease which have often been discussed separately (169) despite many previous scholars focusing on the economics (usefulness and productivity) of immigrants (28) and the exclusionary policies defining who is permitted to become a part of the state (who is on the right side of the Cold War, for example). None of the post-Second World War incremental changes in attitudes to persons with disabilities within Canada—pre- or post-Charter—and none



**"NOT GOOD ENOUGH
FOR CANADA"**

Canadian Public Discourse
around Issues of Inadmissibility
for Potential Immigrants with
Diseases and/or Disabilities

1902-2002

VALENTINA CAPURRI

of the immigration legislation in the 1970s or 2000s, addressed how individual diseased or disabled immigrants are assessed and rejected by the regime, so it continues (167). Indeed, “It remains problematic how the public discourse developed around disabled immigrants continues to be anchored to concerns about the depletion of money set aside for Canadians, rather than taking into account the effective monetary and non-monetary contributions of those same immigrants” (68).

Capurri aptly reveals the Canadian immigration regime historically has been and to this day is “predicated on the belief that individuals are worthy only insofar as they are productive and useful to the material growth of the country” (8). Excluding disabled immigrant applicants is the result of deeply rooted beliefs of disabled persons as “the prototype of unproductiveness” (8) and “a potential undue economic burden” to Canada’s social and health care services—a myth that is not backed by evidence (146-147), arbitrarily administered by medical officers, and quieted via ministerial permits to immigrants who challenged their cases (161).

Comprising around 40%, the central part of the book (Chapters 3 & 4) is Ontario focused in that it examines the discourse of medical admissibility in the *Toronto Star* and *Globe and Mail*. Certainly, these chapters reveal an Ontario public discourse if not a wholly Canadian one. One wonders if there may be more and perhaps better or slightly different evidence in the *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, the *Montreal Star* or the *Winnipeg Free Press* given migration geographies from 1900 to 1930. Similarly, I wonder if immigrant/ethnic newspapers in English or Italian-Canadian ones accessible to the author either reinforced the dominant discourse or challenged it in specific cases of their own “disabled” and

inadmissible or during specific periods. No evidence is noted either way except for a left-for-future-study phrase on the reasoning of “the traditionally scarce involvement of various immigrant organizations in contesting the medical admissibility provision” (185).

Detracting slightly from the incredible importance of the argument is that the style still seems too close to the PhD thesis. There is a repetition of arguments and phrases on the content of chapters, hitting the reader over the head chapter by chapter, as if still defending the thesis. Nonetheless, historians need only look to the Canadian Historical Association’s Immigration and Ethnicity in Canada series of almost four dozen titles—and particularly Booklet No. 36 on Deportation from Canada to realise the contribution Capurri makes. Indeed, a forty-page summary of this book, centred on its historiographical contributions for that series would be a welcome addition. Notwithstanding, the book makes a valuable contribution here well beyond the field of history.

Even if I were not a like-minded historian equally concerned with the present and future, or a decades-ago former immigrant who finally came to terms with his own “disability,” I would still label this required reading for all Canadian politicians and bureaucrats, as well as scholars of Canadian immigration. In fact, every Canadian needs to understand the discriminatory policies towards immigrants with disabilities and the implications for citizenship. Centred on human rights for all and challenging Canadian hypocrisy, *Not Good Enough for Canada* represents both hope and potential to affect policy in a *None is Too Many* vein.

Dr. Eric L. Payseur
Ottawa