

## *Arming and Disarming: A History of Gun Control in Canada* by **R. Blake Brown**

Wendy Cukier

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Volume 105, Number 2, Fall 2013

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1050741ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050741ar>

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**Publisher(s)**

The Ontario Historical Society

**ISSN**

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

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**Cite this review**

Cukier, W. (2013). Review of [*Arming and Disarming: A History of Gun Control in Canada* by R. Blake Brown]. *Ontario History*, 105(2), 246–249.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1050741ar>

to the cause and capacity to understand it was likewise variable. Although beyond the author's scope, their own stories would make a fascinating compendium to those conveyed here.

In a brief preface, Zuehlke argues that existing books on the assault are dated and plagued by bias and use of selective evidence. It is surprising, then, that in the main body of his work he does not identify the specific failings of previous interpretations or demonstrate which of his own conclusions is new, well-rehearsed, or controversial. In fact, no previous historian or work is named in the text beyond occasional and vague identifiers such as "the Calgary war diarist," (171) or "[t]he Canadian Army's official historian" (369) (i.e., C.P. Stacey, the doyen of Canadian military history). In an epilogue, Zuehlke reveals some areas of debate among historians (Who was to blame? Did the raid provide beneficial lessons?), but does not disclose who has advanced these competing views. In a volume so carefully documented otherwise, these omissions stand out, and serve to relinquish an opportunity to make a case

for the specific contributions made by this new study. This is not to say that the author suffers from timidity. In the book's powerful concluding pages, Zuehlke deflates a series of myths upheld by those who wish to wrap the episode in at least some modicum of glory: in truth, no new strategic lessons were learned; it was not a dress rehearsal for D-Day; it was not a cover operation to allow a small group of commandos to capture Enigma machines—a theory Zuehlke labels "ridiculous" (370). Whether his latter position is able to withstand opposing claims from David O'Keefe's forthcoming work on Jubilee remains to be seen; less disputable is Zuehlke's contention that considering the raid completely unjustifiable does not defame those who fought. "We do not bestow less honour on those killed at Dieppe," he concludes, "just because their generals failed them by sending them into a battle doomed from the outset by a poor plan" (372).

**Robert Teigrob**  
Department of History  
Ryerson University

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## *Arming and Disarming*

A History of Gun Control in Canada

By R. Blake Brown

Toronto: Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History and the University of Toronto Press, 2012. 376 pages. \$70.00 cloth. ISBN 978-1-442646-39-1. \$34.95 paperback. ISBN 978-1-442626-37-9. ([www.utppublishing.com](http://www.utppublishing.com))

**I**n "Arming and Disarming: A History of Gun Control in Canada," R. Blake Brown explores the evolution of gun control, defined as "a wide range of regulatory provisions that shaped the possession, use, sale, transfer, and registration of weapons as well as criminal laws designed

to punish those who intentionally or unintentionally misused firearms." Drawing on a diverse range of sources—legislative debates and speeches, newspaper articles, photographs and other artifacts, he paints a picture of the ways in which firearms were used, discussed and regulated in six

historical periods. The interplay between different actors, competing values and, to a lesser extent, the role of industry, markets and technology makes for a rich and complex picture of the interplay of social, cultural, political and economic factors.

Prior to Confederation, guns were mainly used for hunting and defense, but ownership declined with urbanization. Brown reveals that, while British North American law required men to own and use weapons as part of militia systems, frequent firearm shortages impeded the militia's ability to defend the colonies. Nevertheless, growing concerns about firearms misuse by mid-nineteenth century prompted the development

of regulations forbidding possession or discharge of guns at public meetings, polling places, urban spaces, or in situations that threatened the interests of the state. Even early regulatory efforts met with critics, who cited the infringement of rights protected by the 1689 English Bill of Rights. While John A. Macdonald thought British citizens had a right to guns, this was limited to men of property.

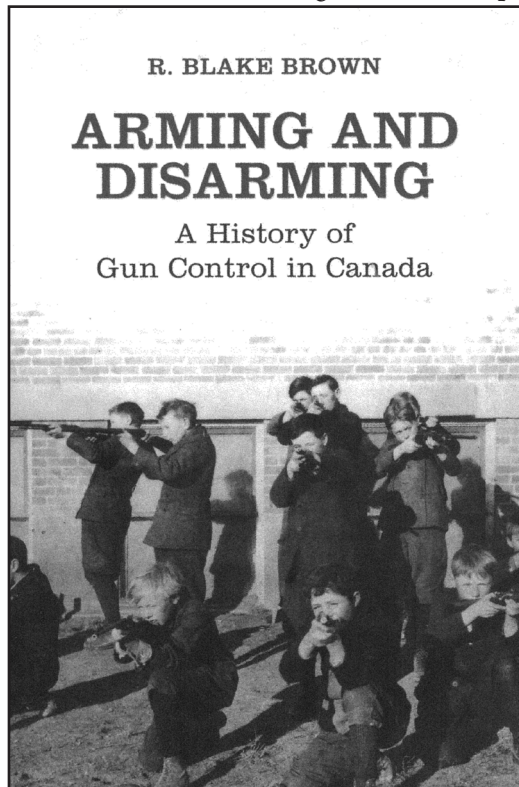
After Confederation, the Canadian government promoted firearms for national security. Gun sales and manufacturing grew with gun dealers linking guns and

manliness in their marketing efforts. Brown discusses the emergence of women's shooting clubs, the rising youth cadet movement, and the proliferation of toy guns and non-lethal firearms. The rising popularity of guns was accompanied by an increase in

shootings and calls for safety regulations. While rifles remained largely unregulated, there were efforts to control the availability and use of pistols and revolvers; gun sales were restricted to people over 15 years of age, and retailers were required to track sales. Often concerns were directed at "immigrants" who were believed to favour pistols—Italians in some areas and Japanese and Chinese in others. Legislative building blocks requiring

permits for both long guns and handguns were passed in 1919 and 1920, but the legislation was never fully implemented. Motivated in part by fear of crime during the Depression, Canada introduced legislation to increase penalties for firearm crime in 1933, create a handgun registry in 1934, and extend the registry to all guns as an extraordinary measure in 1940.

During the next thirty years, the debate about gun control persisted with some groups, notably police, advocating for stronger laws, while hunters, target shooters and collectors resisted. "Motivat-



ed by strong liberal believes in an individual right to property and to freedom from government regulation, as well as gendered ideas of the value of firearms ownership, many firearm owners passively or actively resisted new gun controls.” The 1977 law was a compromise—introducing a firearm acquisition certificate for rifles and shotguns, banning automatic weapons and introducing safe storage. One speech Brown did not mention was that of NDP leader Tommy Douglas, who, disappointed at the watering down of the legislation said...”half a loaf is better than none... I believe that some day we will have the techniques to register all guns.”

The gun control debate in Canada was re-ignited by the 6 December 1989 murder of fourteen women at l’Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal by a killer using a legally acquired semi-automatic rifle with a large capacity magazine. A new gun control movement brought together women’s groups, victims, health care and policing organizations calling for stronger laws. Kim Campbell, then justice minister, introduced legislation that was unprecedentedly voted down at second reading by her own caucus. A diluted version Bill C-17 eventually passed, introducing stronger screening process, and prohibiting some semi-automatic weapons and large capacity magazines. Liberal, NDP and Bloc Quebecois parties and some Conservatives called for measures, such as registration of all firearms, that went beyond Campbell’s bill. And when the Liberals came to power in 1993, gun control was on the agenda. Passed in 1995, Bill C-68 introduced licensing, registration, safe storage, and banned some short-barreled handguns and more semi-automatic weapons. Brown documents the debate and struggle that surrounded the implementation of the law and ended with the repeal of many of its

key elements. Resistance from gun owners “taxed the financial administrative and police powers of Ottawa and laid the ground for the Conservative’s making good on their promise to dismantle the registry in 2012” and destroying the records of 5.3 million rifles and shotguns. While challenges to this are before the courts in Quebec and Ontario, much of what had been built over the last forty years was destroyed.

Brown is very clear that he is writing “A” history not “The” history of gun control in Canada and as such, he has provided one perspective on the chronology and the data. There are areas which would have been interesting to explore further; for example, the “inaccurate belief that rural men traditionally possessed arms” and the persistence of rhetoric in Canada about the right to bear arms in spite of a ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada that rejected this. Brown suggests that in the 1970s the NRA was raised as a non-existent bogeyman, which may have been the case. But the influence of the American NRA materially and in shaping the discourse among gun lobby groups in recent years is undeniable. Active work of successive NRA presidents in Canada, raising funds and counselling Canadian gun lobby groups has been well documented. Another area that could be explored is the role of the internecine politics of the Liberal party in which Paul Martin supporters attacked gun control in an effort to undermine leadership contender Allan Rock. But then this is Brown’s history of gun control in Canada, not mine.

The book draws fascinating parallels between contemporary and pre-confederation gun control debates, discourses about “rights” versus “safety” and discusses concerns about American gun culture. Recent battles in the House of the Commons over gun control actually pale in comparison to debates from more than a century ago. But

Brown does not confuse history with destiny. In this regard, his work stands in marked contrast to David Kopel's sentimental *The Samurai, The Mountie and The Cowboy* (1992) which maintains that countries are captive of their history and traditions, that the United States, for example, simply cannot regulate guns because of its cowboy traditions, unlike Canada, which was founded by Mounties committed to peace, order and good government.

Brown also confronts Canada's history of racism and persistent pattern of trying to suppress firearm use by people deemed to be "a threat." The paradox of wanting some people to have guns but the "other" to be disarmed persists through the centuries, although the definition of the "other" changes—at one time aboriginal people were the target, at another it was immigrants—particularly Italians and Chinese—at another it is racialized minorities.

Perhaps the most welcome surprise is Brown's analysis of the links between guns and masculinity and his gendered perspective on the politics of the debate throughout the centuries. "Gun owners lashed out at

urban residents calling them effeminate and elitist. Ironically, even though gun owners declined as a percentage of the general population, such arguments proved remarkably effective. Firearm owners tapped effectively into anti-state sentiments, questioned government waste, employed popular conceptions of masculinity, and stoked an inaccurate belief that all rural men traditionally possessed arms. The result was the destruction of the long-gun registry." (241).

This book underscores the value of a historical perspective on important social policy issues in order to understand the forces shaping and often undermining evidence-based policy-making. While rigor and readability are uncommon bedfellows, this book is a lively and interesting, and regardless of your position on the merits of gun control, there is much to commend it.

### Wendy Cukier

Ryerson University

Co-author of *The Global Gun Epidemic: From Saturday Night Specials to AK 47s* (Praeger, 2002) Co-founder and President of the Coalition for Gun Control.

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## *The Religions of Canadians*

Jamie S. Scott (ed.)

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. 480 pages. \$46.95 paperback. ISBN 978-1-442605-16-9. ([www.utpress.utoronto.ca](http://www.utpress.utoronto.ca))

Attracted by the "motley array" of religions in our contemporary polity, Jamie Scott embarks on an analysis of the role of religion in the making of Canadian society. While recognizing the past history and present verities of Canada's "European Christian legacy" (xviii), Scott also addresses the influence of the post-1960 global diaspora of religions due

to decolonization and globalization and the magnet of western economic opportunity. He points out though, that Canada in particular had more to offer. The role of equality and multiculturalism as pillars of the Canadian *genre de vie*, protected by Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, has created an environment conducive to,