



**Jordan Stanger-Ross, ed.** *Landscapes of Injustice: A New Perspective on the Internment and Dispossession of Japanese Canadians*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020. 496 pp. \$39.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-228-00172-0.

**Reviewed by** Tyler Cline (University of Florida)

**Published on** H-Socialisms (June, 2021)

**Commissioned by** Gary Roth (Rutgers University - Newark)

## Japanese Internment in Canada

In recent years, historians have increasingly begun to examine Canada's fraught past of racial and ethnic discrimination, ranging from the dispossession and marginalization of Indigenous peoples and the enforcement of racial hierarchies to the recurrent bouts of nativistic religious and ethnic exclusion that marked the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *Landscapes of Injustice: A New Perspective on the Internment and Dispossession of Japanese Canadians*, edited by Jordan Stanger-Ross and compiled from the work of the Landscapes of Injustice research collective, continues this trend by examining one of Canada's darkest historical moments: the wholesale dispossession and internment of Japanese Canadians, including those born in Canada as British subjects, during World War II. Breaking with prior works, such as Patricia Roy's *The Triumph of Citizenship: The Japanese and Chinese in Canada, 1941-67* (2008), that emphasize the experience of Japanese Canadian internment, Stanger-Ross and his fellow members of the Landscapes of Injustice research collective center property as a framework vital to understanding how and why the Canadian government chose to target Japanese Canadians for dis-

possession. Weaving together archival research, oral history, and an activist's revulsion toward the injustices of the past, the authors of *Landscapes of Injustice* challenge their readers to reconsider the "peaceable kingdom's" historical realities.

As Stanger-Ross notes in his detailed introduction, the members of the research collective pursued four central arguments, each of which is examined through chapters within a section focused on that specific aspect of dispossession and the Japanese Canadian experience. The first argument is that the Canadian government's dispossession of Japanese Canadians represented a "deliberate killing of home." The sense of belonging constructed by Japanese immigrants and their descendants through property was consciously destroyed by a Canadian government that had long been ambivalent at best toward the presence of nonwhite peoples along the Pacific Coast. The chapters in this section examine Japanese conceptions of and relationships to property and "home" within the racialized Canadian legal regime. Audrey Kobayashi examines changing conceptions of property that spanned the Pacific, emphasizing that the transnational Japanese community held ideals of

property at the heart of their cultural identity. These conceptions of property, home, and culture were shaped by both their Japanese heritage and their place in Canada. Eric Adams, by contrast, emphasizes the Canadian state's conception of Japanese Canadian property both before and during dispossession. He highlights the intensely racialized legal regime surrounding the state's right to dispossess as well as Japanese Canadian appeals to the egalitarian right to own property they understood to be at the heart of Canadian legalism. Eiji Okawa's chapter examines how property itself shaped Japanese Canadian ideas of family, home, and community, and how those ideas and the bonds they constructed were both shaken and vitalized by dispossession. Finally, Stanger-Ross and Nicholas Blomley stress the fierce resistance Japanese Canadians mounted against their dispossession, highlighting the strategies and justifications property owners used in letters protesting the seizure of their possessions. The two authors emphasize the ways in which Japanese Canadians appealed to a sense of justice, civic and social norms, and their experiential relationship to property to challenge the Canadian state's policies and assert their common humanity.

The second argument in *Landscapes of Injustice* seeks to challenge the assumption that dispossession represented an outbreak of racial frenzy; instead, the process of stripping Japanese Canadians of the property and their rights as subjects required an immense bureaucratic apparatus to enforce and maintain. The "sustained work" of dispossession was undergirded here by "the quiet violence ... characteristic of the administrative state" that permitted the wholesale immiseration of Japanese Canadians (p. 24). Stanger-Ross and Will Archibald highlight the role played by Glenn Willoughby McPherson, executive assistant to the Custodian of Enemy Property and a man whom the two authors pinpoint as "the individual most directly responsible for the forced sale of Japanese Canadian-owned property" (p. 161). Approaching the subject from the framing of "anthropology of

the state," Stanger-Ross and Archibald highlight the ways in which McPherson legitimized dispossession by making state force routine, seemingly legal, and ultimately justified. Next, Ariel Merriam emphasizes the bureaucratic relationship between Japanese Canadians and the dispossessive state. She examines the ways in which one family, the Nagatas, sought to negotiate with the multivalent and often incoherent impulses of the departments, agencies, and individuals that constituted the Canadian state. Finally, Kaitlin Findlay and Nicholas Blomley's co-authored chapter reveals the often incompetent management of Japanese Canadian property, of which the state was in theory the custodian. Theft, damage, and vandalism revealed "the everyday racism and complicity of state officials and bystanders" in the process of dispossession, as the state often turned a blind eye to the exploitation of interned Japanese Canadians and their property (p. 241).

The third argument of the book examines the relationship between race, Canadian legal structures, and dispossession. Stanger-Ross notes that "race was the foundational ideology of the dispossession"; yet at the same time, he and the other authors in the third section argue the importance of understanding the nuance within dispossession and the ways in which it was informed by a wide range of ideas (p. 29). Adams and Stanger-Ross's co-authored chapter emphasizes the ways in which the Canadian state's management of Japanese Canadian property was unlawful. They argue that it betrayed the trust of the dispossessed through willful mismanagement, the sale of property under its custodianship, and, as Findlay and Blomley noted earlier in the collection, through its complicity with the destruction and vandalizing of Japanese-owned property. Findlay's chapter in this section examines how, even after the war, the racialized nature of Canadian law and constitutionalism created further injustice for dispossessed Japanese Canadians. The Bird Commission, established to address grievances related to dispossession, instead "constituted an additional betrayal of Japanese

Canadians, suppressing their calls for compensation and justice” in favor of constructing a historical narrative in which Canada’s actions were justified and legitimate wartime actions (p. 326). Both chapters emphasize the ways in which the supposed colorblind nature of the law was explicitly weaponized to both target Japanese Canadians and justify that weaponization.

Finally, Stanger-Ross and other authors argue that dispossession was permanent; that is, in much the same way that the campaign against Japanese Canadians and their property was not just an outburst of racial anxiety, it was also not simply a wartime policy revoked at the end of hostilities with the Japanese Empire. Instead, the policy of dispossession remained in effect through the 1940s and its impacts, whether economic, physical, emotional, or political, shaped Japanese Canadian life for decades. Stanger-Ross’s chapter in this section emphasizes the immense economic and personal impact that dispossession had upon the Japanese Canadian community. As he notes, “the costs of the loss of freedom—the freedom not to sell and, barring that, to at least reinvest—can only be appreciated within history” (p. 341). Other chapters in this final section examine the ways in which Japanese Canadian internees and their descendants have fought for the redress of their grievances against the state and, indeed, a Canadian society that could allow thousands to be stripped of their possessions and their sense of belonging. Chapters co-authored by Findlay, Heather Read, and Stanger-Ross, Art Miki and Kobayashi, and Stanger-Ross and Matt James all seek to center Japanese Canadian voices, drawing upon oral histories, personal interviews, and public events. These chapters highlight how communal efforts to bring about redress and acknowledgement from the federal government has, as Miki says, “revitalized” the Japanese Canadian community and brought about real concessions from the Canadian state (p. 452). Ultimately, as Stanger-Ross notes in his epilogue, this history reveals how an understanding of “the undertaking of political violence, the compliant ma-

ajority, and those who thought and acted otherwise,” enacted against the Japanese Canadian community, has profound parallels for our own time, in which vulnerable groups and peoples are targeted and scapegoated in times of political and social duress (p. 486).

One of the most interesting aspects of *Landscapes of Injustice* is its origin as the product of a research collective. As Stanger-Ross lays out in the introduction, this large research collective, numbering over seventy members, served as a “partnership ... [that] fostered a specific way of knowing and sharing a history of injustice” (p. 5). The Landscapes of Injustice Collective brought legal scholars, historians, geographers, and other academics, ranging from graduate students to full professors, together with activists from within the Japanese Canadian community to provide a wide range of perspectives and methodologies toward the research. The collective, and the book that they produced, benefits from a tight focus on a single historical event that allows each of the authors to draw upon their own expertise to provide the reader with a broad range of perspectives on this multivalent moment in time. Indeed, Stanger-Ross notes that the research collective’s goal is to “work together but not in unison, to integrate without flattening” (p. 487). By drawing together a wide range of scholars, activists, and others, the Landscapes of Injustice Collective is able to examine the multifaceted origins and impacts of Japanese Canadian dispossession in ways a traditional monograph could not hope to accomplish.

Well written, clearly and effectively conceived and argued throughout, and intensely moving at times, *Landscapes of Injustice* is a significant book that both sheds light on the processes of dispossession and racial injustice and demonstrates the utility of collaboration to historians. Individual chapters would serve as effective reading in upper-level undergraduate classes or graduate seminars that examine Canadian history, race, or questions of legal and constitutional rights. More than that,

Stanger-Ross and his co-authors have created a deeply important work that challenges long-held beliefs about Canadian exceptionalism. In much the same way that historians have emphasized Canada's status as a settler colonial state, opposed Canada's growing militarism, or highlighted the ways in which violence served as an organizing force in Canadian colonial history, this book serves as a clarion call to Canadians that racism, government oppression, and cruelty do not stop at the forty-ninth parallel on their way north.[1] The argument that dispossession was permanent, in particular, serves as a reminder that Canada must continue to reckon with its history of racism and the legacies that remain to this day if it is to make right the crimes of its past. By melding the analytical focus of scholarship with the passion of activism, Stanger-Ross and the Landscapes of Injustice Collective have created a historical work that will force Canadians to reconsider their heritage of "peace, order, and good government" and reexamine the inequities of their society, past and present (p. 258).

*Erratum: This review was revised on June 14, 2021, to correct the editor's surname. It is Stanger-Ross, not Stranger-Ross. We regret the error. —Ed.*

#### Note

[1]. See, for instance, John Reid and Thomas Peace, "Colonies of Settlement and Settler Colonialism in Northeastern North America, 1450-1850," in *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism*, ed. Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017): 79-94; Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, *Warrior Nation: Rebranding Canada in an Age of Anxiety* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2012); and Elizabeth Mancke, Jerry Bannister, Denis McKim, and Scott W. See, eds., *Violence, Order, and Unrest: A History of British North America, 1749-1876* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019).

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**Citation:** Tyler Cline. Review of Stanger-Ross, Jordan, ed. *Landscapes of Injustice: A New Perspective on the Internment and Dispossession of Japanese Canadians*. H-Socialisms, H-Net Reviews. June, 2021.

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