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*Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal
Revolution* (review)

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chapter. The review of *superior* court decisions potentially leaves out a great deal of litigation, including most master and servant complaints and even trials for assault, which would have been heard in different, lower courts. This is compounded by Kercher's reliance on decisions available only electronically (38). His ninety cases include fifty-two from New South Wales, and ten to sixteen from the other three locations. Kercher notes that 'the most elaborate cases concerned the long voyages between Europe and the Australian colonies' (39), but he never satisfactorily explains the predominance of New South Wales in his sample, which may say something about the digitization of records and the search engines available, or perhaps something more interesting about the law and the sea in New South Wales, compared to the rest. Kercher may be right, but there remains too much left under-analyzed for the argument to be wholly convincing.

The Grand Experiment is a fitting tribute to John McLaren: there is great breadth in the articles and much presented that will provoke more work and argument in the legal histories of the represented colonies and in the comparative legal history of the British Empire. Canadian historians will find many pieces that will directly affect their own work, and more that will draw them to look once again at the imperial context of Canada's past.

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Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution. Edited by JEAN-FRANÇOIS CONSTANT and MICHEL DUCHARME. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. Pp. 473, \$35.00

The papers in this collection were presented at a 2006 workshop held at McGill University and inspired by an article by Ian McKay that appeared in this journal in 2000. In that article, McKay argued that Canadian history in the period from ca. 1840 to ca. 1940 must be understood with reference to the rise and hegemony of liberalism. Although McKay did not define liberalism precisely, it is clear that he was denoting a pro-capitalism ideology similar to what C.B. Macpherson called 'possessive individualism.' McKay argued that the Canadian state should be understood as a project of liberal rule in North America. Canada was more of a 'liberal empire' and the expression of a particular ideology than a nation.

McKay's liberal order framework has attracted a great deal of attention from Canadian historians for a variety of reasons. First, it moved us beyond the tired debate between J.L. Granatstein and the social

historians. Moreover, McKay's paradigm offered a replacement for such discarded meta-narratives as colony-to-nation, the Laurentian thesis, and Marxism. Bereft of master narratives, Canadian historiography in the 1990s had seemed in danger of degenerating into a series of unconnected thematic studies without a coherent organizing structure. Indeed, the proliferation of historical research on what are essentially non-national topics (gender, social class, sexuality, ecosystems, etc.) has led McKay, and others, to question whether Canadian history is a viable field. As McKay puts it, does the adjective "Canadian" still qualify that which it modifies in a meaningful way?' (622). McKay's framework also promised to answer a fundamental question in Canadian history: why does Canada exist as a separate country in North America? Why did a single nation-state emerge from heterogeneous set of First Nations and quasi-feudal neo-European societies that occupied Canada's landmass in 1840? McKay concluded that, because many aspects of life in northern North America, not just politics, were influenced by the liberal 'project of rule' that we call Canada,' Canadian history is indeed a viable field and should not be discarded in favour of strictly transnational approaches to studying the past. In other words, political boundaries such as the forty-ninth parallel should matter to social historians.

The papers in this collection exemplify both what is good and what is deeply frustrating about McKay's liberal order framework. Many of the contributors have integrated material from many historical periods and regions in the course of applying the framework, thus avoiding the narrow temporal and geographical focus characteristic of so much recent historiography.

Unfortunately, this book's readership is likely to remain confined to professional historians of Canada. Specialized jargon and unexplained references to Habermas and Foucault make the book inappropriate for both undergraduates and members of the public interested in history. The unnecessary impediments that confront potential readers are especially regrettable because the important subject matter deserves a big readership. It is legitimate for a scholarly book to deal with abstract concepts unlikely to interest, say, many readers of the *Beaver*, but the editors could have done far more to make the essays more accessible to non-academics.

A more important problem with this book is that only one of the contributors, Jerry Bannister, really grapples with the fundamental weakness of McKay's framework: the hegemony of liberalism in Canada does not really explain why Canada developed as a separate state rather than being absorbed by its superpower neighbour. The

United States embodied liberal individualism as least as much as the Dominion of Canada, if not more so. Indeed, there is a vast literature on the ways in which American life has been informed by Lockean and other liberal ideas from the eighteenth century onwards. To draw an analogy from European history, emphasizing that the Soviet Union was a Marxist project of rule does not explain why Stalin formally annexed Lithuania but left Marxist Czechoslovakia nominally independent.

Bannister's paper on the 'loyalist order framework' provides a far better explanation for why most of northern North America did not become part of the republic and instead coalesced into a separate country. He reminds us that the leaders of the scattered British colonies were united by a desire to remain British subjects and that Britishness was central to the Canadian identity until the mid-twentieth century. Bannister is correct to suggest that it is the loyalist order and its legacies, not liberalism, that make Canada distinctive from the United States. Unfortunately, McKay's essay 'Actually Existing Canadian Liberalisms,' which was ostensibly written in reply to the other papers in this volume, completely fails to address Bannister's powerful critique of the liberal order framework.

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The Slender Thread: Irish Women on the Southern Avalon, 1750–1860.
WILLEEN G. KEOUGH. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.
Pp. 560, \$60.00

This weighty micro-history (inspired in part by Keough's family history) is situated within the historiography on Irish migration to Newfoundland and Canada, and engages less with the literature on 'cultural transfer' and on gender and work, though these themes are explored at length in the study. Keough argues that cliometricians have encountered the limits of a narrow evidentiary base, and describes her study as one that employs the lenses and practices of both empiricism and poststructuralism to 'hook' into the past, interweaving analyses of legal records, official and unofficial correspondence, and diaries with oral tradition to illuminate 'lived experience.' In practice, she relies sparingly (and wisely so) on the last source set. Though often limited in extent, Keough's sources serve her well as she explores rural Irish women's agency and adaptive livelihood strategies in the small outharbours of the southern Avalon. She examines these themes within the context of the eclipsing migratory fishery and a