

John Price. *Orienting Canada: Race, Empire, and the Transpacific*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011. 464pp.

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The last few years have not been kind to Canadian diplomats. Greg Donaghy, Adam Chapnick and Hector Mackenzie have each pointed out that the golden age of Canadian diplomacy in the 1940s and 1950s was not so lustrous. Canada's foreign policy, they have shown, was driven less by kind-hearted idealism and internationalism than by both the exigencies of the Cold War and a realistic appraisal of Canada's position as a junior partner to the United States and United Kingdom. Drawing similar conclusions, historians Ryan Touhey, Kevin Spooner and David Mackenzie have added race as a factor that influenced Canadian actions in the world. Joining these scholars is John Price, who has written *Orienting Canada: Race, Empire, and the Transpacific*, an ambitious book that critically examines Canadian foreign relations through a transpacific lens. Price's goal is to expose how race and "empire" influenced policymaking in Canada. In this, he is partly successful.

Orienting Canada is divided into two sections: the first scrutinizes Canada and the transpacific in the pre-1945 years; the second examines the decade or so following the end of the Second World War, the so-called golden age of Canadian foreign policy. Although much in the first half is familiar ground, Price provides a worthwhile look at White Canadian resistance to Chinese, Japanese and Indian immigration, the discrimination against Japanese Canadians in the wake of Pearl Harbor, and Ottawa's reaction – or lack thereof – to Japan's aggression against its Asian neighbours in the late 1930s. Price also does an excellent job of looking to the actions of non-state actors such as Japanese Canadians and Chinese Canadians, showing how these groups reacted to government policy. With the first half of *Orienting Canada*, Price has done an admirable job of exploring Canada's role in the transpacific and, as to his overall thesis, he

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certainly demonstrates that for the first four decades of the twentieth century, Canadian actions were shameful, driven, as they were, by racist sentiments.

Yet, his criticisms of Canadian foreign policy in the 1930s are occasionally shortsighted. In showing how officials in Ottawa ignored Japan's war against China, Price argues that this willful ignorance was a "reflection of the long process of the 'whitening' of Canada" (56). Eurocentric Canadians, he complains, were only concerned by the potential impact of Japanese actions upon European and American interests in the region. Price is not wrong. However, what he fails to establish is what course of action was open to Canada, a minor power, as well as why Canadian officials should have acted in a region where they had limited interests. Price's point, of course, is that Canada supported imperial powers. But, racist sentiments aside, why would Canadian policymakers have acted differently?

Price is just as critical of Canadian actions in the second half of *Orienting Canada*. Here, he looks at the Canadian government's response to the founding of the People's Republic of China and to the Korean War, at Ottawa's stance towards the Allied peace treaty with Japan, as well as at Canada's role in efforts – diplomatic and otherwise – to secure peace in Southeast Asia. In these sections, Price is on shaky ground. His discussion of Canadian foreign policy towards Asia during the early Cold War certainly shows that Canadian policymakers were hardly the internationalists of legend with Lester Pearson, Canadian foreign minister and the archetypal golden age diplomat, emerging as a callous figure, who was willing to cover-up the use of napalm and biological weapons. However, Price's arguments about the influence of race fall far short of being convincing.

Quite simply, on race Price does a lot of tell but not a lot of show. Although contending, for instance, that Pearson's initiatives were "paternalistic" (236), he fails to show how this was so. Other than when dealing with Thomas C. Davis, Ottawa's ambassador to Nanjing from 1946 to 1949, Price offers few egregious quotes from Canadian officials. For instance, he notes that Pearson and Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent "paternalistically called for 'moderate Korean leaders imbued with a spirit of genuine Korean nationalism'" (181), words that hardly seem to stem from a racist mindset. To take another example, Price remarks that in a speech in 1950 St. Laurent expressed the view that "the masses of Asia required benevolent assistance even if it killed them" (229), yet these are Price's words, not those of the prime minister, and the portions of the speech that he cites do not contain anything to substantiate Price's assertion. Moreover, in

his efforts to expose Canadian “Cold War ‘Orientalism’”, Price often uses stinging quotes from American officials, conflating the racist sentiments of US diplomats, military officers and politicians with Canadians (294). With the race card, at least, Price is wrong to assume guilt by association.

In his quest to condemn foreign policy decisions that he clearly disagrees with, Price makes other unfortunate judgments. On the outbreak of the Korean War, he contends that recent scholarship – as is the case – has shown that North Korea’s actions were not those of a Soviet puppet state. “As is now known”, he argues elsewhere, “the Soviet threat [during the early Cold War] was exaggerated” (188). Yet, he ignores the perceptions of Canadian officials at the time who, lacking access to archival evidence, viewed Soviet actions in a truly menacing light and saw North Korea as part of a Communist monolith.

All this is not to say, however, that *Orienting Canada* is not an excellent study, which it is. Price has focused much needed attention on Canadian actions towards Asia and he is certainly not wrong in highlighting, say, the “rampant” racism displayed by Canadian soldiers in Korea (266). Nor is he wrong in suggesting that Canadian diplomacy was influenced by racial stereotypes. But Price falls short in establishing race as a major driver of Canadian foreign policy, particularly after 1945. He establishes, instead, that Canadian officials were committed both to supporting their great power allies and to waging the Cold War. What emerges is that Canada’s actions were driven, not by racism, but by realism.