Canada and the United States share not only the longest peaceful border in the world, but a similar heritage, history, and customs. In many respects, both countries share a common gun heritage as well. However, in this policy area, as in other respects, the paths of the two countries diverged in the modern era, where Canada, unlike the United States, has embraced gun control as “a core value” that punctuates “the difference between Canadians and Americans.” (3) That, in a nutshell, is much of the story of guns and gun control for these two neighbors.

R. Blake Brown’s admirable book is an exceptionally vast, sweeping, detailed, and authoritative account of Canada’s gun experience. Relying on a chronological account, he begins with the gun presence in Canada’s early settlement period, up through 1867. It is during this early period that parallels between Canada and the United States are greatest, characterized by concerns over national defense, the formation of citizen militias, legislative efforts to require militia-eligible men to own guns (largely unsuccessful, as was the case in the United States), the desire to stem the flow of guns to Native Americans, the enactment of restrictions barring gun carrying in populated areas, and an oft-noted lack of adequate arms for military or other purposes. In the early United States, as in early Canada, the typical militia-eligible male probably did not own a working firearm, and if early military records are any judge, did not know one end of a firearm from another.

In Chapter 2, Brown chronicles efforts after Canadian confederation to encourage and promote long gun use, and to improve marksmanship skills. As in the United States, guns became much more prolific as modern manufacturing processes and newer, more durable materials were used to make guns more available and reliable, and less expensive. Chapter 3 examines the period from the 1890s to World War I. Again as was true in the United States, a primary focus was on shooting skills and gun familiarity as a trait of masculinity, which incorporated the desire to make sure that the young male population was prepared for military service, and the belief that gun skills promoted good character and health.

Chapter 4 turns to the period between the two world wars, when overt political fears focused particularly on immigrants and political subversives prompted efforts to keep guns out of such hands. Handgun use also rose before and during this period, which established a pattern more effectively addressed in Canada than in the United States: the use of handguns in most gun crimes. By this point, however, Canada began to depart from its neighbor to the south when it instituted a national handgun registry system (a similar proposal was floated in the United States Congress in the early 1930s, but did not survive as
a part of the first modern national gun regulation enacted in 1934). Brown’s diagnosis for how and why a stricter gun regulatory regime succeeded in Canada but not in the United States is on the mark: Canada lacked any domestic handgun manufacturers, and instead relied on imports, which could be readily regulated; the nation had a national police force: something the United States has never had; and Canada had nothing equivalent to the Second Amendment “right to bear arms” found in the United States Constitution (it should be noted here that that amendment posed no actual obstacle to stricter gun laws in the United States until its meaning was changed by the Supreme Court in 2008; however, its symbolic power over the national gun debate sometimes has functioned as though it really did serve as a barrier to gun laws).

Chapter 5 examines the period from the end of World War II to 1980, when a rising tide of hunters and gun enthusiasts rebelled against ever-stricter gun laws, including proposals to impose similar restrictions on long guns. In the face of this backlash, the ruling Liberal Party then in power backtracked on these proposals, settling for a measure in 1977 that focused more narrowly on the link between guns and criminality. Chapter 6 examines the period from 1980 to 2006, when the Canadian gun community, feeling its oats after beating back stricter laws, was disappointed when the Montreal Massacre of 1989 tipped the political scales to control supporters. A final change, enactment of a nationwide firearm registry system in 1995, continued to rankle gun owners.

For Americans sympathetic to stronger gun laws, the path Canada took represents what might have been for the United States. To Canadians, it has been a mostly popular, if controversial, effort to rein in gun excesses. Whatever else might be said, gun traditions survive in Canada alongside tough laws.

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In this comprehensive and engaging book, Holly McCammon explores the activism behind the laws that eventually, although sometimes begrudgingly, granted women in the United States the right to serve on juries. Although the general timeline of women’s inclusion on juries and the key judicial decisions that slowed or hastened the process have been well documented