

***Arctic Front: Defending Canada in the Far North.* By Ken S. Coates, P. Whitney Lackenbauer, William R. Morrison & Greg Poelzer. Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2008. xiii + 261 pp.**

This is a book that probably needs little introduction to readers of *The Northern Review*. Written by four leading experts on Canada's North and aiming to stimulate public debate about Canada's Arctic sovereignty, it won the Donner Prize for Canada's best book on public policy for 2008. *Arctic Front* makes the case that raucous public discourse about Canadian Arctic sovereignty interspersed with long periods of inaction is hardly new, but that the circumstances that propel the current round of noise actually are novel. The book's message is about that gap between political rhetoric and reality, and its potential consequences for Canada's interests.

Arctic Front follows a straightforward chronological narrative. Chapter One, "Planting the Flag," lays out the history of British and Canadian sovereignty claims in the North, making very clear the historical parallels with today's public statements and deeds. Chapter Two, "Arctic Frontiers," describes events in Canada's North during the Cold War. Chapter Three, "Internal Waters or International Strait?" provides a lively discussion of claims and counter-claims about the Northwest Passage. Chapter Four, "A New Sovereignty," reviews legislative and policy developments for the Arctic over the last few decades. Collectively, this background sets the context for the final two chapters, which assess Canada's current situation in the Arctic. Chapter Five, "The Final Race to the North Pole," describes the intersecting trends of rapidly-melting sea ice and increasing interest in the hydrocarbon resources that may lie underneath it—plus all that implies geopolitically. Chapter Six, "Reality Check," assesses where Canada stands in the Arctic and lays out a basic agenda for Canada to complete its nation-building task in the North. Finally, there is a comprehensive list of suggested further readings that will be welcomed by readers new to the subjects discussed here.

The authors state on the very first page of the preface that this book was born out of their collective frustration about the state of Canada's current thought and actions towards its Far North. That frustration probably explains the deliberately dramatic sub-title, "Defending Canada in the Far North." (One suspects that eager Canadian nationalists seeking a cause might actually be disappointed not to read a call to fortify our nation's besieged northern borders.) "Defending" is probably too strong a word for the title of the book, although the dramatic title and cover images have obviously had the desired effect of making the book visible in the public eye. *Arctic Front* is actually a carefully articulated argument for Canada to complete its task of nation-

building. To the authors, this means investing in communities, northerners, and the institutions that will help them advance regional and national interests in a common-sense fashion. To the authors, the real concern is about control, interests, and responsibilities—not the threatened sovereignty of the nation-state: “The Arctic sovereignty debate keeps reappearing precisely because of misperception and ignorance, born of tentative and reactionary measures in the North that reach back over a century and a quarter. If this country is going to defend its interests in the Arctic, it will have to rethink the very fundamentals of its approach to the region” (191).

The authors’ passion and frustration are also the likely sources of a few quibbles that academic readers may have with this book. For example, even if one agrees with the last chapter’s assessment of how poorly Canada has performed in the North, the report card format of that assessment feels like a hasty embellishment, disjointed from the rest of the text. Page 190 presents a map of changing sea ice extent without reference or source. Also, there are more typographic errors than one would expect, such as the unlikely suggestion that the DEW Line was proposed for the 17th parallel (70). Similarly, the environmental writer “Bill McGibbon” should be “Bill McKibben” (140).

There are, however, a few more substantive points of critique. Notably, the authors uncritically repeat the oft-stated but thoroughly-debunked claim that polar bears are more numerous now than ever (142). That assertion is based on the comparison of estimated populations in the 1960s—prior to any extensive scientific assessments—with the much firmer current numbers. (Past population estimates are reported in the proceedings of the IUCN/SSG Polar Bear Specialists Group, archived at <http://pbsg.npolar.no/en/references/proceedings.html>). This is a specious comparison more commonly heard in low-grade climate change denial, and one would hope not to see it repeated in books with higher aspirations. Similarly, the authors claim that a recent United States Geological Survey (USGS) estimate states that the Arctic has 25 percent of the world’s “undeveloped” oil & gas reserves (152). The USGS’ wording is actually “undiscovered” (see Gautier, D.L. et al. 2009. Assessment of undiscovered oil and gas in the Arctic. *Science* 324: 1175–1179). The results of that agency’s probabilistic estimate are quite different—and far less suggestive in terms of what might actually exist—than the word “undeveloped” would suggest. Since this book will be widely read and considered an authoritative information source by many readers, attention to such details *does* matter.

Nonetheless, *Arctic Front* is a rich, engaging, and timely contribution to contemporary public debate. Perhaps the best commentary on how well it

hits the mark was made to me by a member of the Canadian Rangers, a branch of the reserve military drawn from northern communities (and about which Lackenbauer is an acknowledged authority). This particular Ranger brought a copy of *Arctic Front* along on Operation Nanook 2009, the Canadian Forces major sovereignty operation in the eastern Arctic that year. He called it a good read that gave him context that few others on the exercise had been able to provide. He lent the book to at least two other military personnel and hasn't seen it since. The authors should be gratified to see their work shared in this way, as should Canadians concerned about the future of our country's North.

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***The Big Thaw: Travels in the Melting North.* By Ed Struzik. Mississauga, ON: John Wiley & Sons Canada, Ltd., 2009. x + 278 pp. Maps, illustrations, index.**

Ed Struzik is an Edmonton-based journalist who has been writing about climate change for as long as the phrase has been part of the general public's lexicon. In 1992, having already studied and written about the Arctic for a decade, the naturalist-turned-reporter wrote an article for *Equinox* magazine on the impacts of shifting climatic conditions, as researchers understood them at the time, on the region's people, environment, and wildlife. The scientists' conclusions (and thus Struzik's article) were largely speculative since no one yet had a grasp on just what was happening in the North. (It could be argued, of course, that we still don't.) In the intervening years, Struzik maintained contact with scientists in a wide range of disciplines, accompanying them on research trips across the Canadian Arctic on numerous occasions. These professional relationships—not to mention enduring friendships—provided Struzik with a from-the-beginning vantage point from which to view the progress of climate change research in the Arctic. His newest book, *The Big Thaw: Travels in the Melting North*, is an accumulation of his observations over the past three decades.

The book takes its narrative and thematic structure from eleven trips taken by the author over an eighteen-month period in which he met local residents, public officials, Inuit hunters, bush pilots, and others who live and work in the Arctic. The primary goal of his excursions, however, was to visit several government and university scientists at their field research stations and to observe their work both *sui generis* and in relation to the