

**TV Nation:  
The Nationalist Narratives and Mythological Messages  
of the Heritage Minutes**

by

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in conformity with the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts**

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## Abstract

The inherently teleological project of 'nation-building' which privileges the ultimate objective of Canadian unity provides the foundation for various narratives of Canadian nationalism. In the quest to provide an effective unity discourse, these narratives are driven by an entrenched national mythology that is associated with, and ultimately legitimized by, a sense of common purpose. This mythology consists of fundamental Canadian beliefs that are commonly endorsed for their contribution to a hoped-for Canadian unity, while rarely deconstructed to identify their resemblance to quixotic Canadian myths.

This thesis offers an interpretive analysis of the different frameworks of mythology and nationalism which arise from the Canadian preoccupation with unity, and the manifestation of these narratives within a prominent campaign of Canadian identity. Specifically, this study will examine the role of mythology in the Heritage Minutes - a private initiative promoting Canadian historical self-knowledge - and will specifically identify the ways in which the Minutes convey the images and stories of both *negative* and *heritage* nationalism. By dissecting the storylines and characters of the Heritage Minutes, as well as the more nebulous elements of symbolism, imagery, and allusion, this thesis will identify both the direct and indirect ways in which the Minutes inform our understanding of what it is to be Canadian.

**This is for my Father.**

**Oh how I wish you could speak to me from the fence at the far end of the field  
and tell me how proud you are of me.**

**(I would like you to know that though I never found myself in your eyes,  
I now see the pieces of you rooted deeply in the lines of my hands)**

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## Introduction

Nation-states are not artless structures. They demand constant cultivation, both politically and culturally. While its geographical presence is generally without question, a nation-state's civic personality, and in some cases its political stability, is only maintained by mapping character onto territory. Globalization and conversely, localization have undermined the state as the basic political, economic, and social measurement. It is becoming clear that the nation-state does not exist as an uncontrived grouping, but instead might be seen as a construction of space and belonging. As Benedict Anderson has noted, most nation-states are too large for individual members to interact meaningfully and be able to directly experience a sense of national community.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the invisible meta-entity of the nation-state "must be personified before it can be seen, symbolized before it can be loved, imagined before it can be conceived."<sup>2</sup>

### Nationalism

The cultivation of a national consciousness is often associated with the concept of *nationalism*. Like the nebulous *nation*, nationalism can vary in form and definition, earning it the description of "an ideologically empty bottle with strength and shape, but no particular content."<sup>3</sup> However, while nationalisms vary considerably, each involves the basic identification of those principles and characteristics which organize national belonging. Nationalism ultimately involves the ideological conviction that some "sense of sameness over time and space" can be identified to explain and legitimize the concept of national identity.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983), see introduction.

2 Waltzer, 1967 as cited in Brian Osborne, "<<Grounding>> National Mythologies: The Case of Canada." in *Space and Culture*, ed. Serge Courville and Normand Seguin (Sainte-Foy: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1995), 265.

3 Iain Mclean, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 334.

4 John R. Gillis, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," in *Commemorations: The Politics of*

Canada is a nation consumed with identifying an essential narrative of nationalism.<sup>5</sup> Various national liabilities point to the need for careful creative work to be done in configuring the pan-Canadian identity. Relatively shallow historical roots, combined with a crippling linguistic divide, vast regional differences, and an increasingly multicultural citizenry, do not allow Canada an easy or obvious sense of nationhood. In addition, Canada's dependence on other world powers - first France and Britain, and more recently the United States - has created a chronic uncertainty regarding the autonomy and even relevance of the Canadian nation. It is under the shadows of these internal and external threats that Canadian elites have sought to carve out a sense of nationhood. Whether for the purpose of presenting a discernable international presence, or for the development of workable constitutional amendment, much public energy has been devoted to uncovering what it is that makes Canadians distinct, and how this distinction should be marketed in order to bolster national unity. This protracted project of 'nation-building' has earned Canada the reputation of a purely political or 'synthetic' nation.

### Identity versus Unity in Canada

Canadian nationalism, in its various forms, has the difficult task of reconciling two often incompatible concepts. Like the orphan's search for birth parents, the quest for an ultimate sense of national purpose seeks out the genetic foundations of the nation in order to provide key insight into the essential traits, and in turn, familial bonds of Canadians. Yet, the 'essential traits' of Canadians are most easily mapped according to division; the elements of language, region, culture, and political

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*Identity*, ed. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>5</sup> The routine references made to 'Canadian' nationalism, as well as its symbols, myths, and elements of belonging, refer to a holistic, or *pan-Canadian* narrative of identity. Unfortunately, a study of this length does not offer room to adequately address the numerous discrepancies between different 'subnational nationalisms,' including French, English (which itself can be further subdivided), and Aboriginal. It is understood, and is in fact the point of this study to argue, that the narratives of nationalism as discussed in the following arguments are *mythical* narratives of unity, and are not embraced by all Canadians; their most notable rejection is likely to come from those in Quebec, or in First Nations communities. Instead the reductionist phraseology of 'Canadian nationalism' is used to show that these narratives are often superimposed on all Canadians, assuming that they share this vision of national belonging.

and economic power provide points of difference that are natural, inescapable and resistant. The 'common bonds' which tie Canadians together are, in comparison, synthetic, uneasy, and fluctuating. Thus, while the quest for national *identity* in Canada is inextricably linked to the hunger for national *unity*, these remain conflicting, if not mutually exclusive objectives for the Canadian polity.

Northrop Frye has commented on the essential incompatibility of identity and unity in Canada. He suggests that while the search for unity is national in reference and is largely concerned with issues of political stability and autonomy, identity is a concept based on the exclusivity and prestige of recognized selfhood, and is rooted in the local and the cultural.<sup>6</sup> In Frye's words, "the tension between this political sense of unity and the imaginative sense of locality is the essence of whatever the word 'Canadian' means."<sup>7</sup> While many nations are able to equate the ideas of essential identity and national cohesion, Canada's cultural, geographical, and political decentralization mean that identity is often situated at a subnational level, at a distance from the discourse of pan-Canadianism. As Charles Taylor states, the integration of the two concepts in Canada is blocked not only by the 'obvious' obstacle of bilingualism or the 'mosaic' obstacle of multiculturalism, but by the structural divisions rooted in "regional separation and economic interest...history, background, and tradition."<sup>8</sup> When looking at the historical aspect of the incongruity between identity and unity in Canada, it becomes clear that obsessive concern with the latter from the early days of Confederation has meant that identity has been consistently conceived within the context of unity. The push to create communications and trade links, the constant struggle to maintain a workable separation of powers, and the critical operational goal of preventing provincial secession paint a clear picture of a nation preoccupied with the establishment of a distinct "feeling of collective enterprise."<sup>9</sup> This entrenched

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6 Northrop Frye, *The bush garden: essays on the Canadian imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971) iii.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Charles Taylor, *Reconciling the Solitudes* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 26.

9 *Ibid.*, 27.

Canadian narrative of nation-building produces an interesting dichotomy. *Identity*, as a lived, local, and most importantly subnational phenomenon, represents the danger of difference, and thus is perceived as a *problem*. *Unity*, which promises an element of social cohesion, national allegiance, and political stability, represents safety and community. It is perceived as the ultimate *solution* to the Canadian dilemma, and has thus created attempts throughout Canada's history to construct, instill, and evoke a pan-Canadian identity.

### The Mythology of Canadian Unity

The inherently teleological project of 'nation-building', which subordinates identity to the ultimate objective of Canadian unity, provides the foundation for various narratives of Canadian nationalism. In the quest to establish an effective unity discourse, these narratives are driven by an entrenched national mythology that is associated with, and ultimately legitimized by, a sense of common purpose. This mythology consists of fundamental Canadian beliefs that are commonly endorsed for their contribution to a hoped-for Canadian unity, while rarely deconstructed to identify their resemblance to quixotic Canadian myths. Evolving into a central doctrine of unquestioned and self-perpetuating national truisms, the acceptance of this national mythology becomes an exercise in "consensual hallucination."<sup>10</sup> Ronald Wright notes the weight of societal myths, stating:

Myth is an arrangement of the past, whether real or imagined, in patterns that resonate with a culture's deepest values and aspirations. Myths create and reinforce archetypes so taken for granted, so seemingly axiomatic, that they go unchallenged. Myths are so fraught with meaning that we live and die by them. They are the maps by which cultures navigate through time.<sup>11</sup>

In the Canadian case, this collection of national myths clearly speaks to the social conditions under which it was and is produced; a mythological narrative of belonging provides an escape from the bewildering complexity of Canadian society and the seemingly incompatible identifications of its

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<sup>10</sup> This phrase is attributed to cyberpunk novelist William Gibson, in Daniel Francis. *National Dreams: Myth Memory and Canadian History* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997), 10.

<sup>11</sup> Ronald Wright, *Stolen Continents: The <New World> through Indian Eyes Since 1492* (Toronto: Viking, 1991),

diverse citizenry. By embracing these myths, Canadians are allowed the opportunity to imagine their society as a cohesive cultural community.

### Negative and Heritage Nationalisms

Daniel Francis states that a “nation is a group of people who share the same illusions about themselves.”<sup>12</sup> In Canada, this is evidenced by two particular frameworks of national belonging. The first and most obvious, is the conception of national identity that depends on a continual comparison to the threatening presence of the United States. This framework can be termed *negative nationalism*, and depends on an external foil to create a unified and proud national image. Relying on a politicized emotional construct of castigation and resentment, narratives of negative nationalism provide a comforting exercise in American fault-finding. These perceived shortcomings are the foundations for a shared feeling of comparative superiority; Canadians hold tightly to the oppositional traits of civility, non-violence, humility, benevolence, and diversity.

These national qualities also provide the basis for a second narrative of Canadian belonging, that of *heritage nationalism*. This nationalist discourse similarly relies on proud mythological attributes to provide Canadians a sense of shared experience. However, rather than using an external threat to unify Canadians, heritage nationalism uses the past as a place to address the contemporary anxiety surrounding Canadian unity. Through a strategic narrative of omission and distortion, heritage nationalism constructs *the* story of Canada, providing an historic rationale for proud Canadian belonging. By emphasizing the continuity of Canadian citizenship, this national narrative also uses the past in an attempt to secure a common Canadian future. Brian Osborne points out that the discourse which awards a nation an historic legitimization of its existence is not solely concerned

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as cited in Brian Osborne “<<Grounding>>,” 266.  
12 Francis, *National*, 10.

with the past, but involves a more intricate temporal equation. He states that this heritage narrative entails “the choreographing of an invented history, grounding it in an imagined geography, re-enacting it in the real present, in order to ensure a hoped-for future.”<sup>13</sup>

### Constructed Narratives of Canadian Nationalism

These mythological narratives of nationalism have many avenues of social substance. They are shaped within the public and private spheres, and are used to maintain the stability of national institutions and retain partisan political power, as well as to simply sell a certain product or evoke a specified response. Direct discourses of nationalism include the national holidays we celebrate, the policies and institutions that structure our society, and the symbols and heroes with which Canadians identify. Other national elements provide a tacit re-creation and reinforcement of a particular doctrine of Canadian civic ideology,<sup>14</sup> and include such things as the books, products, sports, and even advertising images of Canadian society. Rooted in the mythological constructs of Canadian unity and identity, these narratives are examples of “strategies of cultural identification...that signify a people, a nation, or a national culture.”<sup>15</sup> They provide an imaginary sense of the nation rooted strongly in the desire for unity, and weakly in the actual complexity of Canadian society. As charged constructions rather than unfiltered reproductions, these national narratives highlight the difference between the ‘performative’ and ‘pedagogical’ aspects of the nation, something that Greg Nielsen and John Jackson have labeled “the distinction between lived and official culture.”<sup>16</sup> The *official*

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13 Brian Osborne, “Figuring Space, Marking Time: contested identities in Canada,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2, 1&2 (1996): 26.

14 Francis, *National*, 10. Francis defines ‘civic ideology’ as “a framework of ideas and aspirations which expresses itself as an allegiance to certain public policies and institutions.” Francis cites the CBC, the social safety net, universal health care, and hockey as some of the components of the Canadian civic ideology.

15 Homi Bhabha, “DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 292.

16 The terms ‘pedagogical’ and ‘performative’ are used by Homi Bhabha in “DissemiNation,” 297. Greg M. Nielsen and John D. Jackson discuss the difference between the ‘lived’ and ‘official’ narratives of Canadian culture in their article, “Cultural studies, a sociological poetics: institutions of the Canadian imaginary,” *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 28, 2 (1991): 279.

messages and images which 'write the nation' as a unified and proud entity, provide a set of social cues which instruct Canadians on who they are, what they have in common, and why they should love their country.<sup>17</sup> This idealistic sense of Canadian belonging is, more often than not, incompatible with the *lived* Canadian culture that stems from direct experience with a complex plurality.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Heritage Project*

*The Heritage Project* is one example of a contemporary narrative of national meaning. Through a selective retelling of the events of Canadian history, the *Project* provides Canadians with stories of national continuity, development, and purpose. The most notable elements of *The Heritage Project* are its Heritage Minutes, a series of sixty-second historical vignettes which air as commercials on Canadian television networks and as trailers in movie theatres. Widely seen by Canadians, these dramatic and engaging stories manipulate the Canadian past to construct a contemporary narrative of national belonging.

At first glance, the Minutes seem to carry an obvious celebration of difference. The stories told include traditional political and military milestones as well as 'everyday' examples of Canadian courage, perseverance, and accomplishment. However, the topics of the Minutes, and to a greater extent, the themes guiding these national stories, remain anchored in a mythological discourse of Canadian unity. The Heritage Minutes exist as an *official* or *pedagogical* representation of the Canadian nation, and are a tool of both negative and heritage nationalism. Combining present motivations with historical content, the *Project* is able to take a convoluted and divergent set of

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<sup>17</sup> The idea of "writing the nation" is taken from Bhabha, 292.

<sup>18</sup> Nielsen & Jackson note that this 'lived' culture is one which "begins with direct experience." and suggest that "the only way of knowing a socially constructed world is knowing it from within" (281).

histories, and clarify it with invented and exaggerated elements of Canadian essentialism.<sup>19</sup> Driven by contemporary concerns of Canadian unity and national identity, the *Project* shapes and polishes Canadian history until it becomes unifying rather than divisive, proud and dramatic rather than humdrum. Through the emphasis of 'essentially Canadian' attributes like unsung heroism, modesty, benevolence, innovation, and other un-American virtues, the Minutes are able to thematically integrate a diverse series of historical anecdotes into a cohesive and patriotic heritage narrative.

While myths are often dismissed as lies, Daniel Francis states that they can also be "ways of getting to the truth."<sup>20</sup> An examination of the mythology of the Heritage Minutes provides interesting insight into the construction of the Canadian nation. A close look at the Minutes highlights the remarkable divergence between image and actuality when it comes to narrating the nation. The glorious, noble, and unified version of Canada presented in these pedagogical narratives bears little resemblance to the contentious, discontinuous, and often unpalatable stories of past and present-day Canada. This divergence does not suggest a conscious misrepresentation of the Canadian historical record on the part of the staff at *The Heritage Project*, or an intentional injection of a particular mythology into the stories of the Heritage Minutes. Instead, it highlights the Canadian tendency to straight-jacket our chaotic complexity in return for a coherent national mythology.

This study will examine the role of mythology in the Heritage Minutes, and will specifically identify the ways in which the Minutes convey the images and stories of both negative and heritage

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<sup>19</sup> As a theme of both negative and heritage nationalism, and a strong motif of *The Heritage Project*, the idea of an essential Canadian character is an important one in this study. By Canadian 'essentialism', I mean a set of essential, fundamental, and vital characteristics that are inherently common to all Canadians. These characteristics are *essential* in the fact that they belong to Canadianism itself, and thus are always present in all Canadians; *fundamental* because they provide the foundations for the identity of Canadians; and *vital* because they are necessary to the continued existence of Canadianism. These ideas are derived from the definition of *essential* provided by *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* 10<sup>th</sup> Edition (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1993), 396.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Francis, "Myth and History," *Queen's Quarterly* 105, 3 (Fall 1998): 474.

nationalism. This examination does not offer a quantitative study of the Minutes, but an interpretive analysis of the different frameworks of mythology and nationalism which arise from the national preoccupation with unity, and the manifestation of these narratives within a prominent campaign of Canadian identity. While other scholars have offered analyses of *The Heritage Project* and its Minutes, they have provided only brief and generalized comments on the form and content, and have not undertaken a comprehensive deconstruction of the narratives of the individual Minutes within the series of sixty. By dissecting the storylines and characters of the Minutes, as well as the more nebulous elements of symbolism, imagery, and allusion, this study will identify both the direct and indirect ways in which the Minutes inform our understanding of what it is to be Canadian.

### Thesis Overview

This study seeks to analyze the ways in which the central goal of national unity in Canada has resulted in a downplay of internal identity difference. The first two chapters will outline two narratives of nationalism which work to paper over the cleavages of Canadian society. The first of these involves the construction of a unified national purpose using the United States as the congealing 'Other'. Drawing from the works of different scholars, the first chapter outlines the various elements that contribute to an entrenched ideology of national definition by contrast, or *negative nationalism*. Following this theoretical investigation are several practical examples of how the principles of negative nationalism creep into the public and private discourse of everyday Canadian life, and how this mythological sense of oppositional commonality can work against Canadians in their efforts to comprehend the actual *lived* difference of Canadian society.

The second chapter outlines a framework of Canadian nationalism that awards the Canadian past the same consolidating role given to the United States. The idea of *heritage nationalism* involves "the

invention of tradition,<sup>21</sup> and uses selective history to shape a cohesive and noble narrative of the nation. In the Canadian case, a constructed narrative of proud national progress and glorified citizenship is able to address the contemporary issue of national unity by stressing the nobility and continuity of the Canadian nation. This chapter draws from the ideas of David Lowenthal and a few other notable scholars to distinguish between the concepts of 'history' and 'heritage', and illustrates the convenience of the concept of heritage to a nation whose historical record exists as highly contestable terrain.

The third chapter will outline the development of the private philanthropic initiative known as *The Heritage Project* using information supplied by interviews with senior administrators, as well as internal documents and promotional materials. It will also include a brief review of what other scholars have written about the *Project*, and a response to these critiques. The final chapter uses the most prominent aspect of the *Project*, its Heritage Minutes, to analyze the ways in which the above frameworks of nationalism work to construct a national mythology of unity. After outlining the methodology used, this study will commence an intensive viewing of the Heritage Minutes. The examination of this 'official' representation of Canadian belonging uncovers structures of meaning which closely adhere to the narratives of both negative and heritage nationalism, and the general mythology of Canadian unity. A close investigation of the Heritage Minutes exposes a narrative in which "certain series of happenings are named as important events in the story of Canadian identity while others are excluded or re-articulated to fit the overall coherence of the story."<sup>22</sup>

The conclusion of this study will provide a few brief critiques of the pervasive presence of

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21 This phrase is commonly used in works analyzing the narration of the nation; here it is taken from Katarzyna Rukszto. "National Encounters: Narrating Canada and the Plurality of Difference." *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 16 (Fall 1997): 149.

22 *Ibid.*, 151.

mythology in the narration of the Canadian nation. The dominant desire for Canadian unity privileges frameworks of nationalism that downplay the plural actuality of Canadian society using the strategic presence of an external threat, or a calculated reconstruction of past events. As the driving force behind various narratives of political and cultural legitimacy – such as the Heritage Minutes - these nationalist frameworks are often accepted as representations of actual societal activities and relationships, making them important apparatuses of power.<sup>23</sup> As Ramsay Cook states, the consciousness of belonging to a nation provides Canadians with beliefs and assumptions “around which to organize the past, criticize the present, and construct the future.”<sup>24</sup>

In their presentation of an imagined vision of national unity, those narratives which construct a publicly intelligible sense of Canadian identity work to misrepresent the lived plurality of the nation, and deny the dominant characteristic of Canadianism – difficult difference. As Daniel Francis warns, while these narratives of mythological unity provide a comforting commonality, they also construct barriers to understanding. He states that if we, as Canadians, “are not telling ourselves the right narratives, then we cannot imagine ourselves acting together to resolve our problems.”<sup>25</sup> The national dream of a unified Canadian nation provides an unstable foundation for the waking reality of Canadian difference.

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23 Ibid.

24 Ramsay Cook, *The Maple Leaf Forever* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1986), 191. While Ramsay Cook applies these temporal organizational principles to Canadian *nationalists*, the pervasive nature of the symbols and ideas of Canadian nationalism which will be outlined in this study suggest that these principles can be extended to Canadians in general.

25 Francis, “Myth,” 475.

## Chapter I

### Negative Nationalism

#### The Roots of Canadian Diversity

Confederation provided the framework for what would become a 'typically Canadian' way of establishing alliance: political elites sitting around a conference table negotiating and compromising until a barely workable arrangement is reached.<sup>26</sup> Retreating from external threats, Canadian provinces seemed to back into Confederation like companies merging to avoid hostile takeover. While this pragmatic framework was meant to be a foundation upon which a more effortless and confident union would develop, Canada remained "at best a blueprint only," laid thinly over the hostile territory and fragmented populace within its borders.<sup>27</sup>

Rooted in concession rather than desire, Canada was born a political community, not a sociological or emotional one.<sup>28</sup> Thus, there never existed an obvious or intrinsic sense of pan-Canadian nationalism. The narrative of Canadian identity and belonging has been compromised by numerous factors throughout the nation's history. Competing accounts of historical belonging from pre-Confederation to contemporary Canada provide insight into the difficulty of constructing a unified national narrative. The original inhabitants of the territory that would become Canada were the Indian and Inuit peoples. Displaced by the arrival of European settlers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Aboriginal Peoples would be long excluded from the 'founding nations' label reserved for the French and British.<sup>29</sup> The conflict between these two European groups eventually ended in British victory, but

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26 Francis, *National*, 87.

27 Cynthia Flood, *My Father Took a Cake to France* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1992), as cited in R. B. Fleming, "The Unbearable Lightness of Being Canadian," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, 2 (Summer 1992): 132.

28 Richard Gwyn, *Nationalism Without Walls: The Unbearable Lightness of Being Canadian* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995), 255.

29 John Meisel and Jean Van Loon, "Cultivating the Bushgarden: Cultural Policy in Canada," in *The Patron State: Government and the Arts in Europe, North America, and Japan*, ed. Milton C. Cummings Jr. and Richard S. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 276.

the antagonism remained, and cultural and linguistic duality became an entrenched element of Canadian society. This binary constitution soon spread to include 'new' immigrants delivered by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which coincided with the partial eclipse of the British and French influences on Canadian society by the inescapable presence of an American superpower to the south. This fragmentation was compounded by the geographical differences and federal political structures already dividing Canadians into regional and provincial units. More current trends toward the bipolar thrusts of globalization on one hand, and more local and postmodern attachments on the other, have left national loyalties - especially the tenuous ones existing toward the already patchy Canadian nation - weak and vulnerable.

#### Literature on Canadian nationalism

The search for collective solidarity in Canada has included constant attempts to delineate the different narratives of pan-Canadian nationalism. Roger Gibbins' work, *The New Face of Canadian Nationalism* points out a number of important nationalist discourses in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gibbins suggests that five narratives of nationalism can be identified: defensive nationalism; state enterprise nationalism; international nationalism or Canada as global peacekeeper; two-nations nationalism; and Trudeau nationalism or multiculturalism in a bilingual framework.<sup>30</sup> Gibbins states that while these narratives have enjoyed varying levels of influence over the last few decades, globalization, multiculturalism, Charter individualism, and Quebec distinctiveness are a few of the developments that have undermined the foundations of these five frameworks. Gibbins fears that new forms of pan-Canadian nationalism are likely to respond to the frustration of Canadian complexity with a "less accommodating and more homogenizing" articulation of the nation.<sup>31</sup> Sylvia Bashevkin also discusses the different manifestations of nationalism, but reduces the idea of Pan-

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<sup>30</sup> Roger Gibbins. *The New Face of Canadian Nationalism* (Kingston: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 1995), 2.

Canadianism to “the organized pursuit of a more independent and distinctive in-group on the North-American continent,” a goal which primarily involves public policy initiatives designed to restrict American influence.<sup>32</sup> Bashevkin suggests that while this conception of pan-Canadianism incorporates three distinct streams - cultural, trade, and investment nationalism – these different areas encounter the same problems. The idea of a cohesive Canadian in-group not only comes up against inescapable diversity and particularistic sub-nationalisms, but is forced to define a sense of Canadian distinctiveness and superiority in contrast to a hegemonic American ‘out-group’.<sup>33</sup> Like Gibbins, Bashevkin asserts that while an inclusive and tolerant narrative of Canadian nationalism may be the most desirable course, the obstacles to this vision of pan-Canadianism are many and varied.

Charles Taylor and Alan Cairns suggest that a workable framework of pan-Canadianism involves the necessary recognition of “the multiple reality of belonging” in Canada.<sup>34</sup> Charles Taylor asserts that any conceptualization of Canadian society must involve a “deep diversity,” and recognize the “plurality of ways of belonging” to the nation.<sup>35</sup> He states that a strict concept of unity only pushes Canada to the point of breakup in the name of uniformity, while a “first-level” diversity based on Charter individualism and official multiculturalism does not accommodate Quebec or Aboriginal communities.<sup>36</sup> Alan Cairns similarly calls for the recognition of a multifaceted narrative of Canadian belonging, suggesting that membership in the Canadian community is not the same for everyone, and thus cannot be represented by a uniform Canadian identity.<sup>37</sup> In his discussion of the fragmentation of Canadian citizenship, Cairns points to three distinct sociological nations in Canada

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31 Ibid., 12.

32 Sylvia Bashevkin, *True Patriot Love: The Politics of Canadian Nationalism* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1991), viii.

33 Ibid., ix.

34 Michael Ignatieff, “Nationalism and the Narcissism of Minor Difference,” *Queen’s Quarterly* 102 (1995): 16.

35 Charles Taylor, *Reconciling*, 183.

36 Ibid., 182-183.

37 Alan C. Cairns, “The Fragmentation of Canadian Citizenship,” in *Belonging: The Meaning and Future of Canadian Citizenship*, ed. William Kaplan (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), 184.

– Quebec, the rest of Canada, and Aboriginal. The author suggests that a homogenizing pan-Canadian narrative cannot adequately represent these groups, as “the extent and nature of their political organization vary; their members belong to and identify with the pan-Canadian community with differing degrees of enthusiasm. Their nationalisms are dissimilar and generate distinctive constitutional ambitions.”<sup>38</sup> Cairns also states that provincial measurement as well as different social, ethnic, and gender diversities deny the possibility for a single narrative of national belonging.

This recognition of the inescapable diversity of Canadian society has created the common conception that frameworks of Canadian nationalism must be driven by the pragmatic recognition of difference, rather than the romantic and idealistic goal of national unity. This involves accepting several sets of ideas and identities, and creating new symbols based on a plural, rather than a consensus vision of Canada. John Ralston Saul suggests that while Canadians cannot create effective belonging by reducing nationalism to mere legal citizenship – ostensibly the easiest answer to the question of identity difference/indifference - it is important to avoid the opposite extreme of using a purely emotional scale to measure nationalist attachment. Saul suggests that while the exaggeration of national feelings of fear, anger, or victory might be a convenient way to construct Canadian nationalism, it does not contribute to a meaningful or lasting cultural identity.<sup>39</sup> Saul concludes with the familiar sounds of Canadian practicality, in his assertion that “we need not tie nationalism to joy...A sense of place. of belonging is central to creative nationalism, but what makes it positive is a strong sense of how society works and should work.”<sup>40</sup>

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38 Ibid.. 186.

39 John Ralston Saul. *Reflections of a Siamese Twin: Canada at the end of the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: Viking, 1997), 436.

40 Ibid.

### Negative Nationalism

Despite the call to recognize the complex nature of the Canadian nation, there remain strong mythological narratives that reject the pragmatism of a nationalism anchored in institutional workings and diverse identities. The desperate complexity of Canadian society has produced a number of frameworks of belonging which chase after unity by espousing an ethereal Canadian essentialism. Facing an intricate patchwork of roots, inhabitants, landscapes, classes, and cultures, these narratives of nationalism seek out “the indispensable thread in our country’s fabric”<sup>41</sup>

Many assertions of Canadian nationalism are defined by the dominant national attitudes of nihilism and negativism. Canada’s poor track record of self-identification has resulted in a defensive and cynical attitude toward national pride. A comparatively underdeveloped sense of patriotism has led to a surrendering of sorts; broken by years of disappointing results in the search for common ground, Canadians surrender their nation to the pedantic task of survival, and relinquish the arduous job of seeking out their own sense of meaningful national belonging.<sup>42</sup> As Nielsen and Jackson note in their study of the ‘Canadian imaginary,’ in our “post-literate age...the ‘Canadian-self’ is consumed by the nihilism of its own circumstances...the general crisis [is] the sign or the inability and even the undesirability of relating any representation to a real referent in contemporary social configurations.”<sup>43</sup> This sense of ‘national forfeit’ has characterized and consequently compromised attempts to create tangible narratives of national belonging. Richard Gwyn comments that this uncertainty begins with the debate over whether to call ourselves “A state-nation rather than a nation-

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41 This quote is taken from Tom Axworthy. “Curing the Historical Amnesia that is killing Canada.” *Canadian Speeches* 11, 6 (October 1997): 19-24. Webspirs. CBCA Fulltext Reference 1997 database, #3978776. While Axworthy speaks about the need for Canadians to have a sense of themselves through a shared history—ostensibly an indispensable thread in itself—this quote specifically refers to the Canadian Club of Toronto, where Axworthy gave his speech.

42 In recent years, this disappointment has come from such things as the threat of Quebec secession, growing Western grievance, and an inability to amend the Constitution.

state. A nationless state. A post-sovereignty state. A postmodern one...[or] an *invented* community."<sup>44</sup> Some authors suggest that this nihilism indeed falls under the title of the Canadian *postmodern*,<sup>45</sup> asserting that the Canadian route to *defining* a sense of nationhood is to *renounce self-definition*. The irony that defines this nihilistic nationalism has been articulated by numerous scholars, including Michael Bliss, who suggests that while Canada is "divided in its unity," it remains "united in its divisions;"<sup>46</sup> Michael Adams, who states that Canadians "are strongly attached to our weak attachments to each other;"<sup>47</sup> and J.B. MacKinnon, who asserts that, "with nothing left to hang onto, we've decided that nothingness unites us."<sup>48</sup>

While this 'nonexistent nationalism' provides a jumping-off point for national unity, it proves an unsound foundation for exercises in national pride. Negative nationalism – one that comes at the expense of outsiders - is the logical extension of this precarious and cynical self-image. Canadian nationalism has strongly relied on a survivalist, or 'us versus them' way of thinking. As Nielsen and Jackson note, English-Canada "communicates a sense of otherness that is almost always defined negatively and almost always measured against the United States, as in earlier years it was measured against British culture."<sup>49</sup> A national identity based on exclusion and rivalry need not involve self-generated elements of national pride, and a consequent willingness to fight for their protection. It can instead be fueled by externally-focused fear, anger, and frustration, and can involve the identification and inflation of negative qualities belonging to other countries. In the Canadian case, the tedious task

43 Nielsen & Jackson, 293.

44 Gwyn, 254.

45 These authors include Linda Hutcheon, in *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989); Richard Gwyn, in *Nationalism* Ch. 14, "Postmodern Dominion;" and Tom Henighan, in *The Presumption of Culture: Structure, Strategy, and Survival in the Canadian Cultural Landscape* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 1996).

46 J.M. Bliss, "Searching for Canadian History," *Queen's Quarterly* 75, 3 (1968): 508.

47 Michael Adams, as cited in Gwyn, 182.

48 J.B MacKinnon, "I am anti-Canadian. Canada a caring, sharing nation? Not in my lifetime," *This Magazine* 34, 2 (Sept/Oct. 2000): 18-21. Webspurs, CBCA Fulltext Reference 1/00-12/00 database, #4951152.

49 Nielsen & Jackson, 283.

of discovering the positive elements that bring Canadians together is replaced by the simplistic idea that a national narrative of belonging “needn’t be uniquely Canadian so long as it isn’t a copy of the United States.”<sup>50</sup> As Homi Bhabha notes in his *Nation and Narration*, this process circumvents the “sovereignty of a nation’s *self-generation*,” by using “the Other or the Outside” to provide its own defining social narrative.<sup>51</sup> Bhabha cites Freud’s ideas on the congealing effects of love and hate on territorial communities, and includes his notion that “it is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left to receive the manifestation of their aggressiveness.”<sup>52</sup> Once Canadians have identified the ‘Other’ by which they can distinguish their national discourse, they are left only to congratulate themselves for ‘not being like that/them’. This exercise provides Canadians backdoor access to elements of common pride, and thus creates their most promising, albeit well-concealed, national attachments. Interestingly, even this long sought-after sense of national worth must be muted, in order to set Canadians apart from the perceived bravado and egotism of other states. It is the negative characteristics – closely associated with American attitudes – of “flag-waving braggadocio,” and “pyrotechnical patriotism” by which Canada has defined its humble attributes of muted pride, and cynical nationalism.<sup>53</sup>

While the negative approach to Canadian nationalism can be understood as a defensive reaction to the insecurity of the Canadian identity, it cannot be forgiven or endorsed as such. Deflecting attention away using an external focus makes for a trivial and unstable sense of national identification. Negative nationalism seems even more dangerous than the dreary monotony that accompanies national forfeit. Using another actor to define a narcissistic sense of self, means relying

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50 Gad Horowitz, “On the Fear of Nationalism,” in *Nationalism, Socialism, and Canadian Independence*, ed. Gad Horowitz, Charles Taylor, and C.W. Gonick (Winnipeg: 1967), 6-7.

51 Bhabha, 299.

52 *Ibid.*, 300.

53 Randall Scotland, “Heritage program a promotional challenge,” *The Financial Post Daily* 5, 176 (December 8, 1992): 17.

on the increasingly infirm boundaries between territories and national identities. As Homi Bhabha points out, the neurotic nature of this type of national discourse is both “ambivalent and vacillating [in its] representation.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, the certainty of its meaning is open to collapse, resulting in the admission of other narratives of difference. In this case, the “paranoid projections ‘outwards’ return to haunt and split the place from which they are made.”<sup>55</sup> This commonly comes when the supposed ‘facts’ regarding the deficiencies of other nations do not hold up to experiential assessment, and the gap between ‘official’ and ‘lived’ narratives is closed through the acquisition of cultural knowledge.

A second danger of negative nationalism is one that is far more concerning for Canada. Building a sense of self out of other nations’ imperfections inevitably leads to the neglect and possible denial of important domestic problems. Furthermore, the ultimate goal of a unifying Canadian nationhood – a search for something that Nielsen and Jackson have termed ‘*the Canada*’<sup>56</sup> – invites homogenization, almost by definition. The authors state that the “dilemma of any nation-state that aims to promote its official cultural sovereignty,” lies in the fact that “the moment the cultural lifeworld of the nation is defined...[it] must absorb, exclude, or repress contradictory lifeworlds occupying the same space.”<sup>57</sup> These hazards are particularly relevant to the Canadian case, as the motivating force behind most nation-building efforts in Canada has ostensibly involved escapism of one form or another. Involvement in a task that demands the absence of sub-national divisions – whether through inattention, circumvention, or suppression - offers an escape from the seemingly interminable internal conflict plaguing Canadian society. Negative nationalism offers one such escape with its totalization of national boundaries.

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54 Bhabha, 300.

55 Ibid.

56 Nielsen & Jackson, 277 (*italics added*).

57 Ibid., 289. The term ‘lifeworld’ is taken from Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vols. I & II*. It is defined in the Nielsen & Jackson text as “a communication community which demarcates, through its interpretive accomplishments and background convictions, the structures of meaning between actors that distinguish one group from another.” or “a consensus which demarcates one social group from another.” 286.

### An Oppositional Sense of *the* Canada

The story of the heroic Canadian nation relies on well-carved out roles for threatening international antagonists. As mentioned above, Canada has often practiced negative nationalism by using other international actors as character foils. As David Bell writes, this “incomplete political philosophy” is grounded in a “strong sense of self-righteous resentment,” primarily aimed at American cultural and political hegemony.<sup>58</sup> This indisputable anti-Americanism is joined by a lingering sense of colonial inferiority resulting from former British domination. Britishness has long been unavailable as the primary source for Canadian unity. This is due not only to the obvious exclusion of French-Canadians, but to the extreme variance in loyalty to British provenance that exists outside of Quebec.<sup>59</sup> The American presence thus provides the dominant motivation for contemporary narratives of Canadian distinctiveness.

With a small population that hugs the border of a world superpower, there is no denying that the Canadian identity crisis is largely linked to American supremacy. Both physically and culturally, Canada is inextricable from the American presence. Not only are we naturally similar in terms of language, climate, media, religion, and other social and political institutions, but Canadians actively consume American popular culture. Scholars such as John Meisel have shown that Canadians prefer American movies, sports, magazines, clothing, and most importantly, American television.<sup>60</sup> While the evidence of cultural absorption mounts, this only results in an intensification of the Canadian claim that “a sense of national purpose, mission, or destiny establishes an elemental difference

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58 David J. Bell, *The Roots of Disunity: A Study of Canadian Political Culture* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), 55.

59 Charles Taylor, *Reconciling*, 58.

60 See John Meisel, “Escaping Extinction: Cultural Difference of an Undefended Border.” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 10, 1-2 (1986). Also see Walter Pitman, “Arts Policy in Canada and the USA: A Comparative Perspective,” in *Free Expression, Public Support, and Censorship*, ed. Michael Margolis (New York: University Press of America, 1994), and Frederick Elkin, “Communications Media and Identity Formation in

between Americans and Canadians of identical age, religious, and occupational groups.”<sup>61</sup> Strategies of cultural unification that aim to construct ‘*the Canada*’ demand a “non-pluralistic politics of difference.”<sup>62</sup> For this purpose, the United States has historically occupied the place of the ‘Other’. While Canadians have a difficult time identifying a free-standing and constructive national purpose, we can always defer to a comparative sense of superiority. Charles Taylor, in his famous work “Shared and Divergent Values,” shows that Canadians often answer the question of “what common goals ought to animate this country?” with the need to preserve an *alternative* political culture to that of the United States.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the question of “what is Canada for?”<sup>64</sup> automatically shifts to ‘what is Canada against’?

Taylor discusses several core differences perceived by Canadians to distinguish their nation from the United States: less violence and conflict; a stronger commitment to collectivities and social programs; attention to regional equalization; multiculturalism; and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.<sup>65</sup> He suggests that there is a fair amount of evidence which might be cited to support these claims. Canadians certainly seem to show a substantial commitment to ‘peace, order and good government’, with a lower crime rate, and a greater level of deference to police patrol.<sup>66</sup> In terms of commitment to the collective, there is the much-cited example of universal health care to vault us above our southern neighbours. The remaining discrepancies cited by Taylor also have some evidence to their truth. Canada has a federal commitment to redistribution, boasts immigration and education policies which officially recognize cultural difference, and has a Charter which ostensibly

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Canada,” in *Communications in Canadian Society*, ed. Benjamin D. Singer (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1972).

61 Bliss points out this common Canadian attitude in “Searching,” 503.

62 Bhabha, 305.

63 Charles Taylor, *Reconciling*, 159.

64 *Ibid.*, 157.

65 See Charles Taylor, *Reconciling*, 158-162. Taylor cites these distinguishing features as important for both English and French Canadians, but suggests that they are really more central to English-Canada. Taylor also adds an extra item – the importance of nation – to French Canada’s list.

66 The author cites the War Measures Act of 1970, and the reluctance to condemn the RCMP, even after allegations

respects individual and group rights. On the surface, these factors set Canada apart from the United States as a peaceful, compassionate, and principled mosaic community. However, this enviable profile has been constructed in contrast to a hyperbolic society fueled by guns, litigation, poverty, ignorance, and racism.

Taylor's elements of difference rely on a mythical representation that Nielsen and Jackson term "the imaginary but not necessarily fictional construction of the other."<sup>67</sup> While rooted in reality, these points of contrast have developed into mythological Canadianisms. Our insistence that we remain untouched by the levels of violence and corruption to the south has resulted in what some might see as a naïve trust in, and deference to, authority such as "the strange reluctance of the Canadian public to condemn the RCMP, even after all the revelations of its dubious behaviour."<sup>68</sup> The Canadian belief that our universal health care and lower levels of poverty elevate us above Americans in terms of collective provision does nothing to address our severe shortage of resources and declining levels of service in these areas. Emphasis on the noble practice of federal redistribution as a bonding principle obviously ignores immense provincial inequality, not to mention the cultural and most recently, partisan political divisions drawn along regional lines.<sup>69</sup> Finally, the much-cited 'Canadian mosaic' has consistently been compared to the more assimilationist 'melting pot' in the United States. While this feature is seen to be another shining example of Canada's narrative of 'unity out

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of impropriety (159).

67 Nielsen & Jackson, 283.

68 Charles Taylor, *Reconciling*, 159. See also Daniel Francis, *National*, Ch. 2, entitled "The Myth of the RCMP." The idea that Canadians are more law-abiding remains a contentious one. While scholars such as Louis Hartz and Seymour Martin Lipset have made claims that Canadian and Americans differ in their respect for authority, more recent evidence suggests that the values of the two cultures in this area are more similar than different. See Mebs Kanji and Neil Nevitte, "Who are the Most Deferential – Canadians and Americans?" in *Canada and the United States: Differences that Count 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*, ed. David M. Thomas (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 200), 121-140. Also see Neil Nevitte, *The Decline of Deference* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996).

69 Taylor suggests that federal redistribution geared toward regional development has been "a locus of failed aspirations and disappointed expectations" (*Reconciling*, 160). Evidence to the cultural and partisan divisions along regional lines can be seen in the breakdown of party representation at the federal level, which demonstrates that different issues are important for Canadians, depending on their geographic location.

of difference', it only exists as such with necessary omissions. Racism, ethnic conflict, and assimilation policies, both past and present, are an undeniable part of Canadian society.<sup>70</sup>

### The Internal 'Other'

Canadian conceptions of nationalism have demonstrated a notable element of irony. Nihilism has produced nationalism, self-deprecation has resulted in self-protection, and a chronic inferiority complex has generated an aggressive campaign to establish comparative national superiority. The use of the United States as the 'Other' in the Canadian pedagogical narrative of unity is equally peculiar, considering that the most glaring examples of 'othering' exist *inside* Canadian borders.<sup>71</sup> English-Canada's most common, and most defining 'other' is, in fact, *French-Canada*. This internal foil has provided English-Canadians with the most glaring evidence to the inadequacy of their own nationhood, while at the same time delivering a certain level of comparative congealment. English-Canada's underdeveloped and defensive sense of nationalism often results in the inability to understand, and/or the unwillingness to recognize and respect, the entrenched elements of French culture.<sup>72</sup> The hypothetical and externally-realized concept of difference that lays the foundation for an insecure pan-Canadian nationalism disallows the real internal diversity of subsidiary nationalism and belonging.

It is obvious that English-Canada finds it easier to deal with the contrast provided by the United States, than that of French-Canada. This is due in part to the common belief that states require an element of internal unity, but can also be attributed to the desire for English-Canada to be able to

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<sup>70</sup> See Francis, *National*, Ch. 3, which debunks Canadian myths based on the ideas of 'the master race', and 'the mosaic'. Also see David Bell, Ch. 3, where the author discusses the reality of racism in Canada.

<sup>71</sup> This idea is derived from Rukszo, "National," 151.

<sup>72</sup> The most obvious example of this is the unwillingness on the part of many Canadians to recognize Quebec's distinct society in the unsuccessful constitutional rounds of 1987, and 1992.

“anticipate its other.”<sup>73</sup> To maintain the guise of a unified national narrative, it is obvious that one must be able to attribute certain common attitudes to members of the in-group. Attempting to use the topic of French-Canada to elicit a common response from English-Canadians, let alone Canadians of both native languages, would be a disastrous endeavour. This element of difference is not only an immediate and passionate part of Canadian existence, but it is also an area where a thousand shades of gray separate the extremes of black and white. The chances of being able to predict the opinion of a randomly chosen Canadian on the subject of French-English relations are quite low. English-Canadians attitudes toward the United States exhibit both a lower degree of controversy and a higher degree of predictability. A comforting reassurance of common conviction comes from the fact “we(?). ‘English-speaking Canadians,’ might be seen to share one quality in that we anticipate a certain attitude, a particular rejoinder from each other as we discuss Americans among ourselves.”<sup>74</sup> Ironically, while English-Canadians anticipate a pan-Canadian resentment of the United States, Quebec reinforces its own nationalism through the anticipation of English-Canadian attitudes toward its cultural distinctiveness.

This act of privileging a congealed national identity based on an outward projection of fear and disdain not only ignores, but exacerbates the more immediate power struggles emanating from domestic divisions. Internal complacency is the natural outgrowth of this misplaced attention. As Ramsay Cook notes, when Canadians revert to the comfort of “a heady, emotion-satisfying anti-Americanism,” it inevitably “affects the quality of our response to Canadian problems.”<sup>75</sup>

Comparative national measurement will always uncover lesser nations for the purpose of redirecting critical attention. Further to this, a lack of foreign experiential knowledge allows for the flourishing of myth, stereotype, and caricature in the Canadian-constructed narratives of rival nations. All of the

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73 Nielsen & Jackson, 282.

74 Ibid.

negative American aspects cited in the dominant narrative of Canadian national pride can be matched with similar domestic vices. While some of the afflictions of American society are accelerated in comparison to Canada, there is a possibility that this is due primarily to differences in population and historical circumstance, and not to differing national *essences*. As David Bell states, our departure from American society is one of our own insistence, and is actualized in a very minimal way; “in photographic terms, we are merely the ‘negative’.”<sup>76</sup>

### Public and Private Narratives of Negative Nationalism

Various attempts at marketing the Canadian identity can be used to illustrate the continual re-creation and reinforcement of a national civic ideology based on opposition.<sup>77</sup> These negative identity narratives are shaped in both the public and private spheres, and work to construct a holistic concept of *the Canada* in response to external threats, which are both perceived and real.

It is under the shadows of internal complexity and external encroachment that Canadian elites have attempted to establish an identifiable Canadian nation. Public attempts to construct a narrative of essential Canadian identity have customarily generated more heat than light. The marketing of an official federal version of nationalism to a population both divided along numerous identity lines, and generally unconvinced of the merits and feasibility of Canadian nationalism, is an arduous and unappealing task to most federal political figures and agencies. Though frustrated by the perpetual inability to pinpoint Canada’s diagnostic identity, most political elites remain convinced of the importance of the task. The difficulty involved in the creation of a cohesive national narrative and its perceived indispensability have resulted in a pervasive and often crippling governmental

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75 Cook. *The Maple*, 4.

76 Bell, 55.

77 Francis. *National*, 10.

preoccupation with Canada's "common cultural capital."<sup>78</sup> Few would deny that "nationalism has been a strong motivation for support for the arts and humanities in Canada, and the maintenance of cultural institutions by the federal government."<sup>79</sup>

As with most elements of Canadian nationalism, the motivating force behind governmental attempts to establish a central narrative of Canadian identity is the fear of American absorption. However, the threat to local self-expression provided by American cultural infiltration is less an example of the hyperbolic American villainy outlined above, than a government-sanctioned basis for its widespread acceptance. Early on, the United States was entrenched as Canada's cultural nemesis, and became well-known as the 'Other' by which Canada defined its protectionist policies.<sup>80</sup> Through funding and regulation, cultural agencies like the Canada Council, CRTC and Telefilm Canada were established to provide support to public operating bodies like the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, RadioCanada, and the National Film Board.<sup>81</sup> The creation of conditions and quotas<sup>82</sup> seemingly shifted cultural activity in Canada from a purely *aesthetic* to a strategic *utilitarian* enterprise, and assigned the survivalist charge of safeguarding and strengthening national cohesion and self-awareness.<sup>83</sup> The establishment of this custodial responsibility for the cultural sector

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78 While this term is well-used in political studies, here it is taken from Jack Granatstein. "History as Victimology," in *Great Questions of Canada*, ed. Rudyard Griffiths (Toronto: Stoddart, 2000), 5. In a response to Granatstein's usage, Michael Ignatieff presumes its definition to be "a set of understandings, widely shared by Canadians about how the country came to be, what its basic rules are, and what it stands for." Michael Ignatieff, "The History that Matters Most" in *Great Questions of Canada*, ed. Rudyard Griffiths (Toronto: Stoddart, 2000), 19.

79 Joy Cohnstaedt. "Shoulder to Fingertip: Arm's Length and Points Between in Canadian Cultural Policy," in *Culture and Democracy*, ed. Andrew Buchwalter (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 170.

80 It is not my intention to argue that Canadian protectionist policies are invalid or inappropriate. I only seek to point out that Canadian cultural policy has done its part to establish the United States as the 'Other' in the minds of Canadians, and has produced 'negative nationalist' agencies that can be seen to exist in opposition to American cultural domination.

81 Although it is important to mention these bodies for their roles in the public attempt to establish identity narratives in Canada, the full significance of these institutions cannot be adequately addressed here. For an informative summary, see Meisel & Van Loon.

82 These quotas are known as Canadian content, or 'Cancon' requirements, and are applied to Canadian television, radio and print media.

83 Meisel & Van Loon, 301. For example, The Broadcasting Act of 1968, still used today, specifies that the Canadian Broadcasting System "should safeguard, enrich, and strengthen the cultural, political, social and economic

awarded a victory to protectionists who maintained that cultural policy must focus outward, and devote its energy to leveling the playing field shared with Canada's southern neighbour. Thus, the important public bodies that attempt to define Canadians to themselves are in essence, externally-determined. Furthermore, the inability of the CBC and NFB to compete with the mammoth American entertainment industry means that these Canadian landmarks continually project a wounded and defensive public image to Canadians. In the true fashion of negative nationalism, they are routinely battling for recognition, and often struggle just to stay alive – much like the Canadian nation.

A recent advertising campaign by Molson *Canadian*<sup>84</sup> demonstrates a similar use of oppositional identity within private or corporate narratives of Canadian belonging. The 'I Am' advertisements present popular narratives which highlight the prototypical Canadian reliance on negative American stereotypes. The most notable ad of *Canadian*'s 2000 campaign appeared on television and in theatres in March, and was known simply as the 'Rant'. Its premise is fairly straightforward: a twenty-something Canadian gets up on stage and speaks about his country. While the plot and dialogue of this advertisement are fueled by simple, predictable Canadianisms, the monumental response to the 'Rant' has elevated it to the status of a national cultural phenomenon.<sup>85</sup> Instead of

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fabric of Canada.”

84 When referring to Molson's product by that name, the word 'Canadian' is italicized.

85 Molson received thousands of phone-calls, emails, faxes, and letters in praise of their efforts, while the Ad Critic, an American agency followed closely by the industry, ranked the 'Rant' as the number two commercial for the initial weeks of its release - an extraordinary achievement for a spot aimed solely at Canada's small market of 30 million (Kerry Gillespie, "How that Molson ad hit our nationalist nerve with the rant that rocks," *The Toronto Star*, 15 April 2000, A30). Federal politicians used the lines in their speeches (Brent Paul, "Armchair critics forum 'Rant Ad'," *Financial Post* 15 May 2000, Webspirls, CBCA Fulltext Reference 1/00-9/00 database #4846843), while Jeff Douglas – or, 'Joe Canadian' from the TV spots – became a familiar face and name to many Canadians. Douglas performed a live version of the 'Rant' to screaming fans at NHL hockey games and Canada day celebrations, and was interviewed by numerous television, radio and print media. Molson's *iam.ca* website immediately focused on this new campaign of negative nationalism, establishing "a place to submit your rant." The submissions, wrought with anti-American sentiment finish the sentence 'I am Canadian because...' with ideas like 'there are more Canadians than guns'; 'I know what a toque is'; 'it is MuchMusic, not MTV'; 'I can get sick and it won't cost me my house'; 'I watch the CFL, not the NFL'; 'I know we are not the only country' (Website is located at <http://www.iam.ca/homefghtml>. Accessed Jan/01).

merely gaining people's attention, the 'Rant' almost forcibly extracted a reaction from its audience.<sup>86</sup> As one commentator noted, "when was the last time you witnessed an audience applauding a commercial when it appeared on the screen prior to a feature film? Or bar patrons reciting the words and clinking glasses when it plays on the TV monitor."<sup>87</sup> The overwhelming support received by the ad elevated it to the status of legend, and vaulted the 'Rant' into position as one of, if not *the* most popular ad in Canadian television history.

The popularity of the 'Rant' speaks less to beer preference and marketing gimmick than to a much deeper national leaning. The initial spot and its follow-up ads are rooted in the simplest and most tenacious forms of Canadian nationalism: myth, stereotype, and most importantly, anti-Americanism. The spots backslide into a weak, defensive identity narrative relying on the generalized concepts of *the* Canada. The young man in the 'Rant' is quiet and apologetic to start, obviously Canadian in his desire not to impose or offend. As he humbly questions some perceived stereotypes concerning Canadians – residing in igloos, working as lumberjacks, owning dogsleds – corresponding images flash on a screen behind the speaker to enhance the idiocy of these assumptions. While initial sentiments are indirectly aimed at American ignorance, the remaining dialogue is an overt and very pointed reprimand from a speaker who, careful not to be smug, allows his delivery to become increasingly self-assured. The identifying national references continue to be trite, hyperbolized characterizations, with lines such as:

I speak English and French, not American...I can proudly sew my country's flag on my backpack...I believe in peacekeeping, not policing; diversity, not assimilation; and that the beaver is a truly proud and noble animal. A toque is a hat, a chesterfield is a couch, and it is pronounced 'zed' not 'zee' – 'zed'.<sup>88</sup>

86 Patrick Allossery, "Molson gets Canadian: the brewery's most nationalistic spot ever is a hit for its flagship brand," *Financial Post (National Post)*, 10 April 2000, C5. Webspirs, CBCA Fulltext Reference 1/00-9/00 database. #4823146.

87 Ibid.

88 The full text of the commercial, as taken from Gillespie A30, is as follows:

"Hey, I'm not a lumberjack or a fur trader. I don't live in an igloo or eat blubber or own a dog sled. And I don't know Jimmy, Sally, or Suzie from Canada (although I'm certain they're really, really nice). I have a prime

Toward the end of the dialogue, the young Canadian is overcome with emotion, yelling the closing statement: "Canada is the second largest land mass, the first nation of hockey, and the best part of North America. My name is Joe and I am Canadian!" After returning to his self-conscious and courteous Canadian self, Joe gives a meek but polite "thank-you", and exits the stage. And with that, your average Joe, or your average Joe Canada, or more accurately, your average Joe beerdrinker provides one of the most compelling pieces of nationalist propaganda ever remembered by the Canadian public.

The diatribe of Joe Canadian is an empowering appeal for national pride. It is also a nation's temper tantrum. This fantastical condemnation of mythical American ignorance uses the negative nationalist reasoning that 'defense is the best offense'. For every stereotype it attempts to collapse, another is constructed. While Joe sporadically reminds us of his underlying humility and charity, his dialogue is fueled by the self-congratulatory bravado and insular perception so loathed in his imagined American rivals. In fact, it is obvious that this supposedly noble and dignified salute would be a disgustingly arrogant outburst when spoken through the mouth of any American. The justification for this double standard is twofold, and relies on the central ideas of negative nationalism. Firstly, Molson depends on the entrenched belief of Canadians that their nationality is inherently virtuous in comparison to American citizenship. Secondly, in the fight for national pride, when underdog Canadians see themselves backed into a corner by their bigger, meaner American counterparts, they must come out swinging. It is justified as a matter of Canadian dignity, and ultimately, national survival. This form of nationalism is pure self-defense; it's visceral and involuntary. For the purposes of national unity and nationalist fervor, it often helps when the conflict itself is contrived, and the

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minister not a president. I speak English and French, not American, and I pronounce it 'about' not 'aboot'. I can proudly sew my country's flag on my backpack. I believe in peacekeeping, not policing, diversity, not assimilation, and that the beaver is a truly proud and noble animal. Canada is the second largest landmass, the

American contingent involved is unaware of the animosity.<sup>89</sup>

### The Collapse of Negative Nationalism

There are a few circumstances in which the default narrative of negative nationalism is not employable for Canadian narratives of belonging. The absence of the surefire element of collective ill-will toward the United States leaves the difficult task of constructing autonomous and inclusive narratives of national self-definition. Without American backs upon which to build a national self-image, one is left with little evidence that Canadians are able or willing to identify a meaningful and free-standing definition of our common cultural capital.

The most telling example of the inadequacy of negative nationalism as a defining national narrative is the long-standing inability of Canadians to amend their constitution. It is in the area of constitutional dynamics that Canada earns its reputation as a “perpetually incomplete experiment.”<sup>90</sup> As Peter Russell notes, the continuing inability to ratify an inclusive constitution is formal evidence to the absence of a nation’s social contract; “the Canadian people or peoples have not explicitly affirmed a common understanding of the political community they share.”<sup>91</sup> Including and beyond the *Constitution Act*, Canada has experienced grievous constitutional malaise. In an attempt to bring Quebec into the document after its exclusion from final ratification in 1982, Canada would endure the failure of two very high-profile constitutional rounds; defeats that led to a sovereignty

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first nation of hockey and the best part of North America. My name is Joe and I am Canadian! Thank you!”

89 Though Molson products are sold in the United States, the ‘Rant’ was not broadcast on American television, and went largely unnoticed by American audiences. See “Americans haven’t noticed We Are Canadian,” *Canadian Press Newswire*, 18 April 2000. Webspirs, CBCA Fulltext Reference 1/00-9/00database, #4835077. Also, there are numerous examples of Canadians who attack and mock unsuspecting Americans, knowing that this ‘inside joke’ among Canadians will never be seen or understood by an American audience. The best example of this is the ‘Talking to Americans’ segment of the popular TV show, *This Hour has 22 Minutes*. Here, Rick Mercer travels to different locations in the U.S. and tricks unwitting Americans into believing outrageous stories about Canadian society, such as having a 20-hour clock, only one telephone area code, and a giant igloo encasing Parliament Hill.

90 Saul, 15.

91 Peter Russell, *Constitutional Odyssey* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 235.

referendum that resulted in a narrow avoidance of Quebec secession. Whether behind the closed-doors of the elitist Meech Lake talks, or part of the mindbogglingly open and complex process of Charlottetown, Canadians have seemingly only been able to agree on official disagreement. Unable to include the congealing presence of an always reliable American adversary in documents of official self-definition, Canadians are forced to reconcile an official narrative of seamless, though elusive Canadian essentialism with their nihilistic attitudes concerning lived Canadian difference. It is in this way that constitutional rounds embody the difficult intersection of lived and official belonging. The self/other configuration, so convincingly fulfilled by an unaware and thus unresponsive United States, becomes a sub-national equation, with 'others' (looking surprisingly similar to the 'self') sitting across the table asking for proper recognition. This startling reality results in the collapse of *the* Canada, and ultimately in constitutional failure. Instead of merely representing an unratified document, this defeat exposes the consequences of the false security provided by an official and dominantly oppositional version of homogenous Canadian culture. Because "the actual imaginary inherent in 'the Canada' is based on a negation of the other as a consequence of its centralizing tendencies,"<sup>92</sup> the true complexity of Canadian society is unreal and incomprehensible in comparison. Daniel Francis eloquently summarizes this problem of perception, stating that "The narratives that we construct...produce the language that we use to describe ourselves as a community. If we are not telling ourselves the right narratives, then we cannot imagine ourselves acting together to resolve our problems."<sup>93</sup>

The clash of official and lived culture is also evident in the attempts to construct a 'Canada Clause' for the Charlottetown Accord. The 'Clause' sought to establish an essentialist poetic of Canadian culture over and above the day-to-day discord of Canadian society. Once again a sanctioned vision

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92 Nielsen & Jackson, 293.

93 Francis, "Myth," 475.

of *the Canada* privileged an abstract and compromised version of official culture, over a more representative difference of lived society.<sup>94</sup> Not surprisingly, early versions of the Canada Clause focused on romantic and clichéd imagery.<sup>95</sup> When subnational groups began demanding representation as distinctive elements of Canadian society, official homogeneity and lived difference clashed, and the Clause, according to Ramsay Cook, ended up constitutionalizing a cacophony of stubborn “tribal allegiances.”<sup>96</sup> The search for an essentialized version of *the Canada* to include in the constitution stunts the development of new narratives of understanding by offering another piece of official camouflage to conceal the fact that the only true Canada is a divided and largely political entity. Attempts to construct a Canada Clause demonstrated that, caught in the headlights of an imagined essentialism, Canadians could not conceive of forms of pragmatic compromise, and were left with “an inability to distinguish between a clear statement of the values of civic culture or political nationality and a list of the anxieties of a number of groups about their identities.”<sup>97</sup>

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94 Nielsen & Jackson, 294.

95 See Fleming, 131, where he includes a tentative draft from the Writers’ Union of Canada that began “Canada is the land stretching from sea to sea, across mountains and prairies, forests, rivers and lakes, a northern land, harsh and beautiful.”

96 Ramsay Cook, *Canada, Quebec, and the uses of Nationalism* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995) 235.

97 *Ibid.*, 234–235.

## Chapter II

### Heritage Nationalism

#### Territory as Tradition

Narratives of Canadian nationalism often utilize a symbolic national history in the attempt to address contemporary fragmentation and provide a convincing foundation for collective identity. A sense of 'common memory' works to underpin the cohesion and identity of nations by using temporal landmarks to create what Brian Osborne has labeled "a psychic terrain."<sup>98</sup> Here, time works to symbolize and punctuate the nation, and provides historic justification for its existence. Negative nationalism concerns itself with *spatial* encroachment: an external presence threatens the Canadian space, in physical, cultural and economic terms. This historical delineation of the nation – best termed *heritage nationalism* – adds a *temporal* dimension to the national unity narrative, relying on history to symbolically connect the citizens of a divided modern territory. Homi Bhabha highlights the signification that the concept of time brings to a nation's strategic narrative. He suggests that,

...the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of its irredeemably plural modern space, bounded by different, even hostile nations, into a signifying space that is archaic and mythical, paradoxically representing the nation's modern territoriality, in the patriotic, atavistic temporality of Traditionalism.<sup>99</sup>

By locating the nation in space *and* time, a national discourse is constructed using a combination of totalizing boundaries and essentialist identities. Donald Creighton suggests that the past might be considered "an encounter between character and circumstance."<sup>100</sup> Heritage nationalism carefully manipulates this equation to emphasize the continuity of the Canadian *character*, thus detracting from the *circumstantial* volatility of Canadian society. Therefore, when territory becomes tradition, its people are not only united against the world outside its borders through the sharing of a unique national story, but are tied together through time in an ongoing account of identity and belonging.

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98 Brian Osborne, "Figuring," 25.

99 Bhabha, 300.

Through the 'invention of tradition', heritage nationalism constructs a narrative of national cohesion wherein "the difference of space returns as the Sameness of time."<sup>101</sup>

### Canadian History

Canada's vast 'difference of space' seems to beg for a unifying heritage narrative. Jack Granatstein points out that "history has social utility in a nation like ours."<sup>102</sup> Canada, perpetually unsure of its ability to endure as a collectivity, could utilize a common national history to instill a sense of collective belonging. The continuity associated with a common understanding of the country's past has the potential to provide an historic rationale for Canadian national identity, and could help to highlight the original foundations of our civic ideology. However, the issues and events of Canada's past are not easily synthesized into a nationalist meta-narrative. While Mackenzie King was right in his assertion that a young country like Canada does not have to contend with too *much* history, a multicultural, multiregional, and bilingual citizenry means it is in danger of having too *many* histories.<sup>103</sup> Marc Starowicz, in his role as executive-director of CBC's 30-hour documentary on Canadian history<sup>104</sup>, has directly experienced the difficulty of reconciling the numerous historical perspectives of Canada's peoples. He ponders.

Whose history do we tell?...There are at least two perfectly valid and distinct views of Canadian History. English and French. I would add a third, the aboriginal view, and a fourth, the 20<sup>th</sup> century immigrant view, and one can go on with the perspective of women, the perspective of labour and class...How do you possibly decide what to include and exclude?<sup>105</sup>

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100 As cited in J.R. Miller, "The Invisible Historian." *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*. New Series 8 (1997): 5.

101 Bhabha, 300.

102 Granatstein, "History," 5.

103 King's famous quote, "If some countries have too much history, we have too much geography," is cited in David Olive, *Canada Inside Out*, (Toronto: Doubleday, 1996), 24.

104 Canada's History Project is 16-part, 30-hour dramatic series to air over two years on CBC television. Detailing four hundred years of nation-building in both English and French, the project is cited as "the first history of Canada in the television age." In production since 1996, the first episode aired in the fall of 2000. At a reported 25 million dollars, it is the most expensive project in the history of CBC television. Information taken from "CBC plans to KO fall viewers." *Canadian Press Newswire*, 8 June 2000. Webspirs. CBCA Fulltext Reference 1/00-11/00 database, #4867252.

105 Mark Starowicz, "The Fate of Memory in the Digital Age," presented as part of the Giving the Past a Future Conference, January 1999. Located online at: <http://www.historymatters.com/sp10.html>.

This complexity is compounded by the fact that many of the power struggles between these historical groups are still at play in contemporary society. Michael Ignatieff suggests that national history is the story of our arguments, and how we have worked to resolve them or why we haven't.<sup>106</sup> Yet, the 'historic' arguments that he cites - French versus English, Native-born versus new arrivals, region versus region - are all examples of 'unresolved' cleavages, and can be seen to fuel the contemporary Canadian problem of finding common national ground. Not only do these conflicts remain unsettled and misunderstood, but they seem to move further away from resolution with the passage of time. As Starowicz suggests, the immediacy of historical conflict in our everyday lives has limited our ability to teach, and learn from, the Canadian past. He states that "we are afraid of our history not because it is boring, but because it is still alive...It is a living and evolving political model."<sup>107</sup> It takes only the mention of reopening constitutional rounds - events that have come to be associated with an insurmountable set of historical grievances - to leave Canadians feeling anxious and fatalistic. Aboriginal treaty rights, Quebec secession issues, and provincial power distributions are a few examples of familiar Canadian cleavages which seem to widen with each historical root exposed. If the past has given Canadians anything, it is the knowledge that fragmented and often-conflicting historical narratives do not easily lend themselves to a unifying collective memory, especially when their embattlement remains at the heart of contemporary Canadian society. As David Lowenthal suggests, no nation in search of a harmonizing historical record "can afford such a bleak transparency."<sup>108</sup>

It is clear that the pictures of Canada's past do not fit within the frames of national unity and belonging. As Michael Ignatieff eloquently states,

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<sup>106</sup> Ignatieff, 10.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

History can never speak with the one voice that our need for belonging requires. It cannot heal the hurt of loss. Our knowledge of the past cannot satisfy our desire for the past. What we can know about the past, and what we want from it are different things.<sup>109</sup>

This divergence between untidy actuality and desired image has not killed the past as an instrument of national unity. It has, however, made for an interesting discourse on the functions of Canadian history, and the appropriate method of “writing the nation.”<sup>110</sup>

### The Concept of Heritage

Heritage nationalism, which also might be termed *the politics of memory*, allows for a strategic narration of the country’s past.<sup>111</sup> Heritage narratives provide a set of social cues that inform the nation of its ultimate purpose by pointing to the endurance of its institutions, and the moral strength of its ancestors. David Bell notes that,

What a nation remembers about itself...is a major source of its political culture. History as *tradition* literally ‘gives across’ or hands down institutions, practices, symbols, and slogans from one generation to the next. History offers us ‘myths’ that make our values, beliefs, and assumptions clear, concrete. Ignoring history is like travelling without a map or compass...<sup>112</sup>

Like its negative counterpart, heritage nationalism uses the ideas of comparative national virtue and Canadian essentialism to create an imaginary sense of homogeneity, and reify a symbolic national community. Through intentional omission and emphasis of historical events, the nation is shaped and packaged for popular public consumption. Myth, symbol, legend, landscape, and commemoration are heritage tools that effectively fuse present and past, and establish national

1997), 122.

109 Michael Ignatieff, as Cited in “Quotations on History,” located at ‘Giving the Past a Future’ Conference Website: [http://www.historymatters.com/famous\\_quotes.html](http://www.historymatters.com/famous_quotes.html). Accessed 3/4/00.

110 Bhabha, 292.

111 While the concept of heritage outlined in this chapter draws from the ideas of a number of scholars, a few thinkers provide key arguments. The most significant of these figures is David Lowenthal, whose book *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* gives a detailed description of the main components of heritage, as well as the differences between heritage and history. Brian Osborne, who draws from Lowenthal, provides valuable arguments on symbolic spaces in Canada, and the imagining of the nation through constructed versions of its past. Finally, John Gillis’ piece “Memory and Identity: the History of a Relationship,” as well as the other articles in his edited work, *Commemorations: The Politics of Identity*, provide significant insight into the interplay of memory and identity.

112 Bell, 5.

identity and collective memory as inextricable and mutually reinforcing concepts.

Heritage, like any theoretical concept, is a fluid and expansive set of ideas that continually merges and interacts with other ideational realms, notably: history, mythology, and propaganda. Its careful negotiation between the present and the past has also been labeled 'collective' or 'public' memory.<sup>113</sup> Despite being vague in its definition, heritage continues to enjoy an expanding usage that has made it one of the key political and social buzzwords of contemporary society. Heritage sites, heritage days, and even a federal Department of Canadian Heritage have established the concept as a positive one – something that evokes pride, something which should be celebrated, something we should work to keep. The importance of heritage in the construction of Canadian narratives of consensus demands a detailed investigation of its theoretical foundations and functional tools.

Heritage is more than mere history. It is the practice of selective and seductive storytelling, and works to provide a sculpted narrative of individual or societal ancestry. To equate the subjective memory of heritage with historical fact is to ignore the overt as well as underlying ways in which it manipulates, and is manipulated by, identity construction. John Gillis notes,

That identities and memories change over time tends to be obscured by the fact that we too often refer to both as if they had the status of material objects...we need to be reminded that [they] are not fixed things, but representations and constructs of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena...we are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities.<sup>114</sup>

Social memories are not museum artifacts mounted for sporadic observation, but the living lenses through which we continually think ourselves into existence. George Grant points out that when we represent the past as object, we stand above it as subject, and elevate ourselves to the role of

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<sup>113</sup> Peter Seixas, "Negotiating Past and Present: A Review of New Materials for Teaching Canadian History in the Schools." *Canadian Historical Review* 80, 4 (December 1999): 688. The author points out that the term 'heritage' is attributed to David Lowenthal, while 'traditional' is Jorn Rusen's. The terms 'public memory' and 'collective memory' are commonly used; they are outlined in the various articles of *Commemorations*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>114</sup> Gillis, 3.

“transcending summoners.”<sup>115</sup> Rather than giving insight as an interpretive cultural exercise, this view establishes history as a tourist destination where “you can learn about the past; [but] you cannot learn from the past.”<sup>116</sup> This interpretation creates a past which is fixed, organized, and pristine. Inaccessible to contemporary manipulation, our history provides a comforting bedrock of knowledge in an accelerated modern environment. While the strict temporal equation of ‘observing our past, living our present, and anticipating our future’ might be convenient, it does not accurately represent the continuum of time that marks our society. The questions, ‘where are we now, and where are we going?’ demand some consideration of ‘how did we get here?’<sup>117</sup> Yet, our looking back is inevitably affected by the present circumstances in which we find ourselves, and the concerns we hold about what is to come. This temporal see-saw translates into an identity exercise where “the core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity.”<sup>118</sup> The past is not sealed-off from contemporary manipulation; our memory of what has come before is imperative to present-day purposes. At the same time that our past defines us, we define it. This catch-22 is at the heart of ‘the politics of memory’, and involves rhetoric, symbols, and commemorative activities which are based in the past, but mobilized for present political purposes.

Produced within the context of contemporary concern, heritage narratives shape the past to produce embraceable and restorative national legacies. While individuals and subgroups often search the past for something that sets them apart, the state looks to history to provide a sense of national purpose that might serve to heal contemporary divisions. Thus, while individual memory underpins personal identity, ‘social memory’ becomes a tool for both identity *and* cohesion. The past provides a

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115 George Grant, *Technology and Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1986), 99.

116 *Ibid.*, 100.

117 Northrop Frye, *Divisions on a ground* (Toronto: Anansi, 1982), 183.

118 Gillis, 3.

symbolic national space where the divisions and contradictions of a modern social system can be tranquilized. The elements of contemporary national fragility are combatted with intensified commemorative efforts that glorify a shared tradition. As John Gillis suggests, "If the conflicts of the present seem intractable, the past offer[s] a screen onto which desires for unity and continuity, that is, identity, [can] be projected."<sup>119</sup>

### Heritage versus History

Seeking an historical rationalization for identity and national unity casts history in the role of national saviour. Yet, historian Marcel Trudel states that "history used as a defense, history used for preaching; history used as a tool is no longer history."<sup>120</sup> In fact, history granted this sense of agency and purpose is not *history*, but *heritage*. Semantically, the difference between *history* and *heritage* is a precarious one. Despite their designations, both *history* and *heritage* involve the concept of historical understanding. However, while heritage uses the past as its basic context, it is far from the unadulterated and disciplined chronicle that history – as an account of the past, and not the past itself – strives to be.<sup>121</sup> History views the past as an end in itself, while heritage views it only as a means to a greater goal. In other words, the two realms respectively employ history as *knowledge*, and history as *tactic*.

The most useful delineation of the concept of heritage is provided by David Lowenthal, in his book *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. The title itself suggests that heritage is commonly perceived as 'spoiled' history, or history employed chiefly for profit. However, Lowenthal's title

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>120</sup> As cited in Bliss "Searching," 507.

<sup>121</sup> Here, I am referring to the *practice* of history as it would be defined in a scholarly setting, rather than the definition of history which identifies it merely as *the past*. David Lowenthal notes that, when considering the concept of history, people tend to confuse and merge the past that *was*, and the past as *chronicled*. He notes that it is often assumed that there is an authentic past that "can be retrieved intact and untarnished," a view which posits that true history is not made but found (107). The concept of heritage outlined here involves no such double meaning.

also hints at a definition of heritage that makes it more than history's flunkey. *The Heritage Crusade* implies a deeper mission, a type of Holy Grail. Lowenthal suggests that instead of automatically condemning heritage as shabby history, we should face up to the differences between the two concepts, and learn to judge each by a distinctive set of criteria. He states,

These two routes to the past are habitually confused with each other, yet they are also defined as antithetical. Heritage is apt to be labeled as false, deceitful, sleazy, presentist, chauvinist, self-serving – as indeed it often is. But such charges...are usually leveled on the mistaken assumption that heritage is 'bad' history. In fact, heritage is not history at all; while it borrows from and enlivens historical study, heritage is not an inquiry into the past, but a celebration of it, not an effort to know what actually happened, but a profession of faith in a past tailored to present-day purposes.<sup>122</sup>

Lowenthal's desire to differentiate these concepts so that we can "live more fruitfully with both" does not imply an exclusive dichotomy; history and heritage continually travel the continuum between bias and historical reality.<sup>123</sup> Most people do not create or consume within one of these categories, but draw from both in concerted efforts to know the past, as well as in everyday experience. What set these two enterprises apart are their goals. Historical accounts seek a comprehensive, objective, and detached investigation of the past. Although it often succumbs to bias and falsehood – potential dangers of any investigative practice - history uses documentation to drive towards truth and knowledge, and thus is always open to inspection and verification.

Heritage is less about an accurate past than a *useful* past. It is a snapshot of history, framed in the contemporary desire to historically justify, and thus "fix the identity and enhance the well-being of some chosen individual or folk."<sup>124</sup> To do this, heritage mandates distortion, invention, and omission, and creates a set of faiths "nutritive not despite but owing to their flaws."<sup>125</sup> The emotive fictions of heritage are both immediate and accessible, and seek to stir up sentiment through romantic images and self-congratulatory depictions. As Brian Osborne points out, "the diagnostic feature of

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<sup>122</sup> Lowenthal, x.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

history is the footnote; the diagnostic feature of heritage is some indicator of response. It could be gate receipts, wet handkerchiefs, or flag purchases."<sup>126</sup> Because the mythmaking of heritage is concerned with coherent, self-affirming history – the history that we wish happened versus the difficulty of the true past – it relies on faith to eclipse fact. Many heritage narratives are able to evade critical scrutiny, toting a set of traditions and legends that is accepted “not because it is demonstrably true but because it *ought* to be.”<sup>127</sup> David Lowenthal suggests that this reliance on faith over reason assigns heritage the same virtues and vices of religion. While heritage narratives can work to strengthen identity by provoking a visceral response from the intended audience, their reductionist treatment of actual historical complexity can result in misunderstanding, intolerance and conflict. Lowenthal suggests that an effective examination of heritage must go beyond its condemnation as ‘bad history’ on one hand, and its impulsive embrace as glorified gospel on the other. As an important element in the social construction of identity, the figures, events and themes that are hidden and highlighted by heritage narratives can help to explain the foundational myths of contemporary cultures.

### Heritage as Nation-Builder

While heritage works on individual as well as collective levels, it can be seen as a vital tool for the strengthening of national identity. As outlined above, the semi-fictional narratives of heritage are not meant to stand up to critical historical inquiry; they are a set of social cues designed to activate belonging. Thus, while history is for everyone and is enriched by widespread dissemination and reaction, heritage creates a body of national mythology whose significance demands exclusivity. Heritage invokes national pride by providing a narrative of noble distinction, and in doing so aids the “the nation-state’s ideological mission...to nurture people’s identity with a politicised emotional

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>126</sup> Brian Osborne. Personal interview conducted by author. 13 April 2000

construct and fabricate a collective national consciousness."<sup>128</sup> Our past is unlike any other nation's, and thus makes us unique; our heritage provides an exclusive sense of common purpose, and thus makes us *superior*. For those nations lacking a strong sense of national community, heritage legacies not only console, but enlist citizens in the preservation of the nation's founding ideas. As David Lowenthal states, "Lineal linkage justifies holding on to possessions; to keep all we gain may seem selfish, but to keep what we inherit is a family duty, binding us in a chain of caretakers."<sup>129</sup>

Nations commonly develop a 'bureaucracy of memory', that allows 'official memory' to eclipse more disorganized narratives of grassroots commemoration.<sup>130</sup> John Bodnar suggests that this official cultural expression comes from those elites who "share a common interest in social unity, the continuity of existing institutions, and loyalty to the status quo."<sup>131</sup> This elite memory attempts to paper over the divisions of the 'vernacular culture', whose diverse and vacillating interests pose a danger to the coherence of the sanctioned narrative of public memory. While it is individuals who remember – not groups or institutions – they cannot personally recall the events of national history.<sup>132</sup> Thus, individuals rely on the assistance of the cues provided by institutionalized commemoration – symbols, sites, legends, and traditions – cues created by elites in government, the media, and education among others. This construction of a meaningful past might be seen as an abuse of history; those in power convert the past into propaganda to control the powerless, and maintain their privileged positions.<sup>133</sup> A less cynical view recognizes the construction of an 'official memory' as a manifestation of the social need for community, as well the need for states to maintain stability by

127 Lowenthal, 128.

128 Brian Osborne, "<<Grounding>>," 265.

129 Lowenthal, 31.

130 Brian Osborne, "Figuring," 25.

131 John Bodnar, "Public Memory in an American City: Commemoration in Cleveland," in *Commemorations*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 75.

132 Lewis A. Coser, Introduction to *On Collective Memory*, ed. Maurice Halbwachs (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 22.

133 Ken Osborne, *In Defence of History: Teaching the Past and the Meaning of Democratic Citizenship* (Toronto:

claiming a sufficient unity of outlooks among the units comprising it.<sup>134</sup> As Maurice Halbwachs suggests,

This is why society tends to erase from its memory all that might separate individuals, or that might distance groups from each other. It is also why society, in each period, arranges its recollections in such a way as to adjust them to the variable conditions of its equilibrium...to introduce greater coherence.<sup>135</sup>

Regardless of the intention, heritage commemoration has become an unquestionable part of civic allegiance and has transcended partisan divisions. Central to tourism, culture, and patriotism, national heritage invades the collective consciousness through symbols, entertainment, folklore, and popular values.<sup>136</sup> Narratives of heritage nationalism combine contemporary concerns and past events; mythology and history; and memory and identity to create a blueprint for common national belonging.

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Our Schools/Our Selves, 1995), 6-7.

134 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 182.

135 *Ibid.*, 183.

136 Doug Owram, "Intellectual History in the Land of Limited Identities." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 24, 3 (Fall 1989): 125.

## Chapter III

### *The Heritage Project*

As noted above, Canadian history is littered with attempts at creating a stable sense of national community. Public and private initiatives have been exercised in fields such as broadcasting, sports, the arts, education, and the economy in order to assert and protect a collective Canadian identity. Some of the most telling activities of identity cultivation are those undertaken in the field of heritage. By looking at the Canadian discourse of collective memory through projects that have given it social substance, one can effectively identify the symbols, myths, and traditions that not only tell Canadians who they are, but instruct them on who they should want to be.

Not surprisingly, nearly all of the Canadian attempts to use institutionalized memory to promote patriotic sentiment have been federal government initiatives.<sup>137</sup> Ottawa has worked steadily, through funding and regulation, to strengthen Canadian pride and community, and has been the source of our major symbols, including our national flag, national anthem, and most national monuments and institutions. However, when looking at attempts to develop, or perhaps impose, a narrative of *national history*, few federal projects have achieved the popular success required for the task. The seeming failure of Canadian governments to provide successful large-scale heritage initiatives has opened the door for private investment in the area of heritage self-knowledge. There is no better example of this than the Charles R. Bronfman *Heritage Project*.<sup>138</sup> The *Project* offers its own

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> It is important to note that the selection of this title does not suggest an active consideration, on the part of administrators, of any theoretical differences between the concepts of history and heritage (along the lines of above arguments). Interviewed staffers and promotional materials do not remark on any intentional use of the term *heritage*, and use *history and heritage* interchangeably in their comments. While there might have been some strategy involved in the usage of *heritage*, it seems more likely to involve the elements of marketing and aesthetics, and be based on the idea that the title of *History Project* might scare off members of the target audience—namely, kids. Also, *The Heritage Project*, as discussed in this section, ceased to exist as of December 1999. It was replaced by *Histor!ca*, which was created to preserve the ideas and initiatives of *The Heritage Project*, while relieving Bronfman of his role as primary investor. *Histor!ca* was ignited with a 25 million dollar pledge by Bronfman.

version of official Canadian history in what Brian Osborne calls “a dynamic agenda of reconstructing national memory...and national identity.”<sup>139</sup> An astronomical budget and a popular mandate grant the *Project* something that like-minded public programs crave – widespread societal exposure. The *Project*’s construction and presentation of national symbols, figures, and legends is achieved through the telling of selective stories from Canadian history. The best known element of the *Project* are its *Heritage Minutes*, a series of sixty-second dramatic anecdotes that rack up major airtime on all prominent Canadian networks. Similar to the other commercials on television, these Minutes are used to sell a product - namely, Canadian identity.

### The Origins of The Heritage Project<sup>140</sup>

While *The Heritage Project* had its official launch in 1991, the ideas behind the *Project* were ten years in development. In 1981, well-known Seagram heir and Montreal businessman, Charles R. Bronfman received the Order of Canada for his commitment to philanthropic endeavours. While listening to the citations of the other people receiving the same distinction, Bronfman thought it unfortunate that, apart from those at the ceremony, few would ever know of the accomplishments of these distinguished Canadians. He realized that, due to various media influences, Canadians had more knowledge of American, British, and French celebrities and events, than of the everyday heroism in their own country.<sup>141</sup> As Bronfman states, “I looked around the room and realized that here were these fabulous people who never asked for any credit for their works--but fully deserved

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which was to be matched with private sector dollars. This new bodywill continue to produce the Minutes and run the Fairs; the biggest change will be in the area of new technology, which will be the primary focus of*Histor!ca*.  
117 Brian Osborne. “Figuring,” 23.

140 The following text, which outlines the creation and evolution of*The Heritage Project*, is based on information provided by senior administrators. Those interviewed include Ann Dadson, Administrative Director; Johanne McDonald, Director of Operations; Deborah Morrison, Director of Communications and Development; Patti Robson, Manager of The Heritage Fairs Programme; and John Fielding, Chief Educational Advisor to *The Heritage Project*. These arguments also rely on several internal, promotional, and educational documents provided to me by the above individuals.

141 As stated by Johanne McDonald, Personal Interview conducted by author, 7 March 2000.

much greater attention."<sup>142</sup> This event would eventually determine the greater goal of *The Heritage Project*: to tell the stories of those Canadians who are the custodians of national accomplishment, and in the process, enhance national pride and belonging.

In the mid-1980's, Bronfman set up a charitable foundation for the purposes of influencing public policy and opinion both in Canada and abroad. Modeled after American bodies like the Ford and Carnegie Foundations, the *CRB* – or Charles R. Bronfman – *Foundation* sought out potential sectors in which it could effectively focus its resources. The fields that were chosen as two possible bases for the *Foundation's* activities focused on the concept of identity, and represented the two major areas of Bronfman's self-identification: Judaism and Canadianism. Due to the substantial amount of the projected investment, the *Foundation* did extensive market research to ensure that financial partners could be secured, and that some measure of tangible results might be achieved.

In the early 1990's the *Foundation* started research on the connections between Diaspora Jews and the state of Israel, contemplating the impact that visits to Israel might have on Jewish identity and community building.<sup>143</sup> Its second research portfolio sought to determine how much Canadians know about their country's history, and whether they want to know more. At the time of this investigation, Canada was caught up in yet another constitutional round - one that seemed plagued by issues involving historical divisions and identifications. The open approach of Charlottetown included the formulation of a report by Keith Spicer, which boasted the consultation of over six hundred thousand Canadians on their perceptions of Canada, as well as their concerns about its

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142 Anthony Wilson-Smith, "The Charles Bronfman Way," *Maclean's*, Toronto ed. 111, 37 (September 1998). Webspirs, CBCA Fulltext Reference 1998 database. #4276257. This Order of Canada story was cited – almost word for word – by all *Heritage Project* interviewees, including Ann Dadson, Johanne McDonald, Deborah Morrison, and Patti Robson.

143 *The CRB Foundation: The First Decade*. CRB Foundation Promotional Material, 10.

future.<sup>144</sup> The Report noted that:

Citizens told us countless times about their lack of knowledge and reliable information about their history, their country, and their fellow citizens...Participants often faulted the education system for failing to equip them with sufficient understanding of our history and cultural evolution.<sup>145</sup>

This observation made itself apparent in the notable lack of historical understanding that ultimately led to the demise of the Charlottetown round in 1992.

In line with these events, the *Foundation* conducted its own surveys to gauge the knowledge of Canadians about their country's past. In doing so, they discovered a telling paradox: while respondents believed that Canadians should know more about their history, results found shockingly low levels of historical knowledge, with huge gaps existing between the responses of English and French Canadians.<sup>146</sup> Furthermore, while most Canadians believed that their history had the potential to be an exciting area of study, both French and English respondents had trouble identifying Canadian events or achievements in which they took pride.<sup>147</sup> In addition to these survey results, the *Foundation* found governmental activity in the field of heritage education to be somewhat ineffective. While *cultural* policy was a high-profile part of federal activity in the area of identity and citizenship, *heritage* activity was focused on the preservation of historic sites and ailing museums.<sup>148</sup> History education in the classroom – arguably the most effective route to impacting national historical knowledge and understanding – was suffering from severe fragmentation as a

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144 Patrick J. Monahan, "The Sounds of Silence," in *The Charlottetown Accord, the Referendum, and the Future of Canada*, ed. Kenneth McRoberts and Patrick Monahan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 225.

145 Citizens' Forum on Canada's Future, *Report to the People and Government of Canada!* Keith Spicer, Chairman (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1991), 38.

146 As cited in Axworthy "History." For example, the 1991 survey found that more than 40% of Canadians were unable to name the first Canadian prime minister, or identify the year of Canadian Confederation, while 95% of respondents across Canada (including Quebec) felt that every Canadian should know more about Canadian history.

147 As Cited in Stephen Godfrey, "They may fill some gaps, but Heritage Minutes also point to some gaping holes." *The Globe and Mail*, Metro ed., 19 April 1991, C1. The survey saw only 32% of English Canadians (compared with 68% of French Quebecers) able to identify the Quiet Revolution, while 38% of French Quebecers (compared with 73% of English Canadians) could identify Margaret Atwood as a Canadian writer. 23% of Canadians could not think of one proud moment of Canadian history.

148 The discovery of this 'void' in public history and heritage education was relayed by Deborah Morrison, in a Personal Interview conducted by author, 9 March 2000.

result of the diversified curricula of provincially administered educational institutions.

At the same time, it didn't take much research to uncover the political instability of the country in the late 1980's and early 1990's, and more generally, to recognize the traditional anxiety regarding the fragility of the Canadian identity. The *Foundation* recognized that the bifurcation wherein "schools and university taught history and political elites defined our national identities," meant that while unity and identity swayed violently according to the political and constitutional developments of the day, the calming and continuous thread of history was being overlooked as a potential unifying factor.<sup>149</sup> In order to give Canadians an avenue for expressing their identity on their own terms, the Foundation decided to enter the lifeless heritage education landscape in order to fuse history and identity, and with luck, "influence the country's agenda."<sup>150</sup>

In 1991, *The Heritage Project* began its intentionally unspecific goal of "enhancing Canadianism" through heritage education.<sup>151</sup> In a field historically dominated by government initiatives at both the federal and provincial levels, the *Project*, in its establishment of a unique path for itself within the Canadian "consciousness industry,"<sup>152</sup> essentially had to 'create' a market for private heritage products. The boundless financial commitment offered by the Bronfman fortune allowed *The Heritage Project* the flexibility to explore different media alternatives, and to exhaustively research the feasibility of possible program directions before committing to their production. With a personal wealth estimated at three billion dollars and an initial pledge of one hundred million to *The CRB Foundation*, the everyday restraints of limited funding and budget cuts did not impact *The Heritage*

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149 This idea comes from *The History of The Heritage Project. 1986-1999. Heritage Project Internal Document. 1.*

150 Ibid.

151 *The First Decade. 11.*

152 This term is taken from Hans Magnus Enzenberger, *The Consciousness Industry* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

*Project* the way that they did its public counterparts.<sup>153</sup> With financial limitations removed, the *Project* also enjoyed expanded marketing options, increased time allowed for completion of projects, creative freedom independent of the ideological motivations of outside financial backers, and the choice of leading experts to head up the creative and administrative staff. Able to attract some of the most prominent administrators and creative consultants from both the public and private sectors, *The Heritage Project* came under the direction of such notable figures as Tom Axworthy, Laurier LaPierre, and Patrick Watson.<sup>154</sup>

### Decisions Regarding Format

*The Heritage Project* entered the knowledge industry with the goal of educating young Canadians about their country's past. This age bracket not only provides the most receptive – and in the case of the classroom, most captive – audience, but also represents a generation of Canadians who have encountered a continual decline in the amount of Canadian history being taught in schools.<sup>155</sup> Staffers believed that connecting children to the past would not only allow them a national narrative in which to situate themselves, but would open up an important intergenerational dialogue. While the *Project* was initially aimed at kids of all ages, advisors in the field of pedagogical research insisted that the market was most receptive in later years, where the historical imagination clicks in

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153 The information on the Bronfman fortune is taken from Wilson-Smith. *Project* administrators are extremely tight-lipped about operating budgets. Johanne McDonald, Director of Operations for *The Heritage Project* asserted that only a handful of internal staff are allowed access to the *Project's* financial records.

154 Tom Axworthy is known for his position as principle secretary to former prime minister Pierre Trudeau, while LaPierre and Watson are known as the co-hosts of the innovative public affairs program *This Hour Has Seven Days*, airing on CBC in the 1960's. Besides being a well-known filmmaker and broadcaster, Patrick Watson also served as past chairman of the CBC.

155 John Fielding, Personal Interview conducted by author, 28 March 2000. Fielding, Director of the Social Program Evaluation Group (SPEG) at Queen's University and Chief Educational Advisor to *The Heritage Project* suggests that globalization and an increased focus on technology meant a decline in the number of Canadian history courses offered at the high school level in the 1980's and 1990's (at the time of the time of my interview with Fielding, this trend was beginning to show small signs of reversal). This information is documented in a compilation of social studies courses commissioned by *The Heritage Project*, and put together by SPEG. This study breaks down each province's social science curriculum by grade and subject. Updated each year, Fielding suggests that it is the only one of its kind in Canada.

and history begins to be taught with a more national emphasis in schools.<sup>156</sup> *The Heritage Project* sought to tap into this pan-Canadian focus, and use accessible and engaging media pathways to market Canadian history and citizenship to a new generation. As the Administrative Director of the *Project*, Ann Dadson, notes,

If one educates the future generation about their land, their ancestors, and the fundamental principles of the nation of which they are a part, they are more likely to act in light of these ideas in the future, rather than risk their extinction, and thus compromise the unifying narratives which bind together a nation.<sup>157</sup>

Believing that previous attempts to instill a homogeneous and meaningful citizenship had been overtly political and had focused on swaying the electorate to support different elite views of constitutional amendment, the staffers at the *Project* chose the educational realm as a less political, and seemingly more effective avenue.<sup>158</sup> Reaching in at the formative stage of learning, the *Project* had the potential to reconnect a forward-looking generation of Canadians with the past, and emphasize the role of history in the shaping of the future.

Seeing many before them fail in their attempts to establish a national history curriculum within a provincially-determined system, *Project* administrators did not want to rush into lobbying for national history standards. They also decided against the production of another textbook or documentary, likely to be relegated to the dust-covered archives of Canadian history material. Instead, people at the *Project* came to the conclusion that the first step to making history more exciting, and more useful to Canadians in their quest for unity, was to change the medium of communication. The second step was to present history as a series of stories, where drama and emotional attachment outweighed the need for informative, comprehensive history.

The different landscapes within which *The Heritage Project* was trying to ignite ideas – namely,

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<sup>156</sup> This information was conveyed by John Fielding.

<sup>157</sup> Ann Dadson. Personal Interview conducted by author, 8 March 2000.

Canadian television and heritage education – were rather lifeless. Initially, it was thought that the *Project* would provide financial support to innovative television programming aimed at kids, aged 8-14. A call for proposals did not yield desired results; although informative, submissions were often dry, serious, and inaccessible to the young imagination. At the same time, music videos were gaining in popularity, prompting one staff member to suggest the creation of short historical dramas, or ‘history commercials’.<sup>159</sup> Television advertising was recognized to be a powerful socializing force, and seemed a natural medium for *The Heritage Project* to try to impact the formation of collective attitudes and values. Like other television commercials, these compressed narratives would focus on emotion over information, selling Canadian heritage like any other product on the market.<sup>160</sup>

### The Development of the Heritage Minutes

While the benefits of this format seemed clear, there were a number of obstacles involved in the production of what would come to be known as the *Heritage Minutes*. Patrick Watson, a well-known filmmaker who was hired on as Creative Director of the *Project*, insisted that while these Minutes should involve a sparing amount of historical information, in order to advance “the dramatic nucleus,” there could not be a similar sparing of expense in terms of production quality.<sup>161</sup> Watson suggested that the dramas should be considered ‘mini movies’ and should involve good acting, high-quality lighting and sound, original music, authentic costumes and sets, and even the use of 35-

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158 *The History of the Heritage Project*, 1.

159 Deborah Morrison cites Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* video as the example that led to idea of the Minutes. Surprisingly, none of the interviewed staffers could remember the name of the individual who had come up with the idea for the Minutes. It is in one of the promotional videos that former *Heritage Project* staffer, Patricia Lavoie, is cited as the mind behind this format (*Minute by Minute: The Making of a Canadian Mythology*, as part of the videocassette recording, *The CRB Foundation Heritage Minutes: The Heritage Project*, 1998).

160 Patrick Watson, Creative Director of the *Project* states, “If we can use 30 second slots or one minute slots on television to persuade people that cornflakes or underarm deodorant, or Cadillacs are interesting, could we not use the same period on television to persuade Canadians that they have an interesting past?” Taken from *Minute by Minute*.

161 Patrick Watson, as cited in Christopher Moore. “Our History, Minute by Minute.” *The Beaver* 75, 3 (June/July

millimeter film used more commonly for the big screen than for television.<sup>162</sup> These costly production standards set the price of a single Minute at well over 250,000 dollars, a budget that was originally intended to buy *The Heritage Project* a whole series of television pilots.<sup>163</sup> Another drawback to the Minutes was the expense of television advertising time, estimated at close to eleven million dollars per year for normal commercial rotation on the various Canadian broadcast networks.<sup>164</sup> Luckily, this problem was sidestepped through another prominent advisor to the *Project*, entertainment lawyer Michael Levine, who managed to convince CRTC officials that these mini-dramas were worth their weight in Canadian Content points. After the Minutes were awarded 150 percent Canadian status, networks who had traditionally struggled to meet the bare minimum of legislated Cancon obligations were suddenly eager to include them in their commercial rotation.<sup>165</sup> Yet, even with large endowment from the CRB Foundation, and the savings that resulted from the Cancon ruling, the *CRB Foundation* board maintained that the pricetag on *The Heritage Minutes*, as well as their immense mandate, remained too much for one organization to carry. Because the Minutes not only seemed the ideal avenue to fulfill the *Project's* goals, but also a strong foundation from which to seek private investment, *Project* administrators began to seek financial partners. After *Canada Post*, *Power Corporation*, and the Federal Government were secured as primary investors, the production of the Minutes continued as planned.<sup>166</sup>

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1995): 54.

162 Ibid., 53.

163 *The History of The Heritage Project* states that this was four times the amount originally envisioned for each minute (3).

164 *The History of The Heritage Project*, 3.

165 Godfrey.

166 A few staff members quietly mentioned that it was difficult to secure investment for the *Project* due to the well-known fortune of Bronfman. However, staff maintained that corporate sponsors "never have any creative control over the content" of the *Project's* initiatives (Johanne McDonald Interview). Yet, *Canada Post's* sponsorship is noticeable in *The Heritage Post* (see footnote 173), where at least one or two articles in each issue is devoted to new sets of postage stamps, holiday stamp editions, and collectors information. Spokeswoman Brenda Adams states that the *Project* is "a really good way to publicize what we're doing on commemorative stamps." Interestingly, she points out that "A lot of the topics...chosen as subjects of the Heritage Minutes have been the subjects of commemorative stamps." As cited in Randall Scotland, "Boosting history and sales at same time" *The Financial Post Daily* 5, 86 (July 2, 1992): 11. Montreal-based *Power Corporation* is not as openly a part of published materials, but seems to fit nicely into the *Project's* unstated venture of privatizing traditionally public domains—

### Minute Selection Criteria

Drawing on an extensive staff of creative writers, historians, and educators, topics and scripts were created using an official *Story Selection Criteria*. Rather than “create the definitive Canadian history book on TV,” these guidelines sought to shape Minutes that would “engage people with good storylines.”<sup>167</sup> Ranked in order of importance, the six goals of the *Selection Criteria* were: Dramatic Value; Historical Significance or Importance; Educational Use; Historical Accuracy; Representation of Minorities; and Balance with Other Minutes in the Series. Accepted storylines had to communicate “a uniquely Canadian idea, philosophy, or event,” considering such questions as “Has this affected the way Canadians think, the way they are?” and “Does this tell us something about ourselves we might otherwise not have known?”<sup>168</sup> In addition to the official regulations regarding plot content and construction, *The Heritage Project* sought a balance between the stories of so-called ‘ordinary’ Canadians, along with the political and military figures of textbooks and biographies. As Ann Dadson states, “the *Project* always wanted to reflect the experiences, accomplishments, and challenges of everyday people; we didn’t want to concentrate only on *page one* political leaders, or people that were well-known beyond the professional circle that they might have been part of.”<sup>169</sup> By portraying the struggle and sacrifice of everyday Canadians, the *Project* believed it could present

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namely, history education and heritage commemoration. *Power Corporation* has holdings in broadcasting, satellite technology, property management and insurance, just to name a few. In his article, “Slash & Burn at the CBC: the real story behind the dismantling of Canada’s public broadcaster” (*Briarpatch* 28, 3 April 1999: 5-6. Webspirs. CBCA Fulltext Reference 1999 database, #4537979), Roy Armand suggests that all recent efforts to privatize the CBC can be linked to *Power Corporation* and its principle owner Paul Desmarais. Desmarais is openly interested in the CBC’s ability to reach such a large percentage of the population (95%), and has a keen interest in privately acquiring the broadcasting corporation’s extensive transmission system. If one looks at the Heritage Minutes, there is a perceptible theme of what Christopher Moore calls “corporate back-patting” (Moore “Our.” 53), and even a Minute concerning information transmission and broadcasting technology—two main portfolios of *Power Corporation*. In the case of Federal Government investment, *Project* staff provide few details, other than the fact that the Government might be considered a ‘major contributor’.

167 Ann Dadson Interview. Dadson and other administrators state that scripts for the Minutes came from internal staffers as well as external sources. They suggest that the *Project* receives thousands of suggestions for storylines, and the idea to do one topic or another is the result of committee consensus, and is based on the *Story Selection Criteria*.

168 This quote is taken from the category ‘Historical Significance or Importance’, in *Story Selection Criteria*.

a set of historical dramas that was not only more representative of the past, but that would set out certain values, beliefs, and codes of behaviour integrating past and present Canadians into meaningful structures of national belonging. According to Deborah Morrison,

We just felt there were all sorts of things that have happened in Canada that all Canadians should take some sense of association or identity with; they weren't going to walk away with a set of facts. To give history the perspective of how it was relevant to you *as a Canadian*, was a far more enduring thing that we could do... we figured the dates and facts of history were something people would take care of themselves."<sup>170</sup>

Thus, the goal of 'enhancing Canadianism' was established as the primary framework around which the *Project* would construct the Heritage Minutes.

### Exposure

With the security of a large endowment and two strong financial partners, *The Heritage Project* began an open-ended production campaign. Without a set number of Minutes in mind, staffers started producing and distributing the spots, letting popular response dictate whether or not new Minutes would continue to be created, as well as the form and content they would display. With each new Minute, *The Heritage Project* bought time in *Cineplex Odeon* theatres in order to officially 'launch' the spot, before it became part of a series tape which was sent to both *Cineplex* and to broadcasters to air on television. By the summer of 1998, broadcasters had a choice of over 60 minutes to choose from; once stations and cinemas received the series, it was their choice which Minutes were broadcast, and for what reasons.<sup>171</sup> The Minutes are estimated to have a cumulative monthly airtime of more than thirteen hours, while each year approximately twenty-three million Canadians view the Minutes on television or in movie theatres.<sup>172</sup> This exposure has made the Minutes subjects of parodies done by such popular Canadian television shows as *This Hour has 22*

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<sup>169</sup> Ann Dadson Interview.

<sup>170</sup> Deborah Morrison Interview.

<sup>171</sup> Johanne McDonald Interview.

<sup>172</sup> This information is taken from *The First Decade*.

*Minutes* and *Air Farce*, and produced a series of ‘Sacrilege Minutes’ on the cable channel *The Comedy Network*.<sup>173</sup> The success of the Minutes also allowed *The Heritage Project* to use the well-known vignettes to launch a number of other popular initiatives. These included a comic book based on the Heritage Minutes, distributed by McDonald’s; an interactive *Heritage Minute* kiosk located at the Museum of Civilization; a half-hour television show entitled ‘Just a Minute’, hosted by Pamela Wallin and aired on CBC television; artist renditions of Minutes’ figures and events on Canada Dry cans and bottles; and a series of books by Marsha Boulton, which turned the *Heritage Minute* vignettes and other tales of Canadian history into short non-fiction texts.<sup>174</sup>

### Additional Initiatives

Though the Minutes were clearly its most visible aspect, the people at *The Heritage Project* contended that these dramas existed only to pique interest in a more detailed examination of Canadian history. From the outset, *The Heritage Project* looked to television for *visibility*, and to classroom education for *credibility*.<sup>175</sup> While popular media outlets provided all-important publicity, “the real influence was to be in the schools, where kids could really learn about their past: the Minutes could never eclipse the greater goal of classroom history education.”<sup>176</sup> In order to facilitate this classroom presence, a tape of the Minutes, accompanied by teaching materials that included 1-2 page elaborations and possible teaching ideas on each Minute, as well as a list of 5-10 books or films

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173The ‘Sacrilege Minutes’ are cited by Justin Smallbridge, “Defining all that is Canada: the latest Molson Canadian advertising has nailed our schizophrenic identity,” *Marketing Magazine* 103, 17 (May 1998): 10. Webspurs, CBCA Fulltext Reference 1998 database, #4132719. He notes the Sacrilege Minute ‘Jacques Strappe’, wherein a frustrated hockey player decides to invent the male athletic cup, along the lines of the *Heritage Minute* which sees Jacques Plante invent the goalie mask.

174 Most of these initiatives were either intended to be short-term projects, or were cancelled due to lack of interest, or lack of funds. The comic books, soft drink campaign, and television show were short-lived, while the kiosk, which was to be followed by additional installations across Canada, seems to have become an outdated project. The various books written by Marsha Boulton – author of a number of *Heritage Minute* scripts – are clearly related to, though not expressly endorsed as *Heritage Project* materials. These books include the titles *Just a Minute*, *Just Another Minute*, and *Just a Minute More*.

175 While this idea is my own, it is based on the text of *The History of The Heritage Project*, which states that “The strategy of *The Heritage Project* was that it gained national credibility and visibility before addressing curriculum

on each Minute topic, became available to educators for a nominal fee. Further to this, when the Minutes went into production in 1991, so too did a series of “educational materials designed to link the *Project*’s media elements to school curricula” through their use in history and social studies classrooms.<sup>177</sup> *We Are Canadians* and *Canadians in the Global Community*, respectively intended for intermediate and high school students were released in 1995 and 1998, while a monthly history magazine entitled *The Heritage Post* was freely distributed to all interested schools across Canada.<sup>178</sup> This material was followed by the sponsorship of a series of Heritage Fairs – a concept based on the tradition of annual science fairs – which saw students create and present projects on aspects of Canadian history. Using the Minutes as a springboard, the fairs encourage students to tell their own stories from the past, and even promote the creation of their own Heritage Minute as part of their project; the official motto of the Fairs is ‘*History’s what you make it*’.<sup>179</sup> From the pilot held in Winnipeg in 1993, the Fairs program grew into a mammoth element of *The Heritage Project*, with the involvement of over 300 communities in 80 regional fairs in 2000.<sup>180</sup> The final element of the *Project* - its 1995 launch of an official website – would also be its most forward-looking one. The

reform.” (9)

176 Ann Dadson Interview.

177 The materials are promoted this way in the Teaching Materials. Accompanying *The CRB Foundation Heritage Minutes*. (*The Heritage Project*, 1998) 1.

178 The intermediate years are identified by John Fielding as grades 7-10. *We Are Canadians* and *Canadians in the Global Community* (in French, *Nos Histoires du Canada*) were created for *The Heritage Project* by the Social Program Evaluation Group, running out of the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University. Initially, the *Project* sought to create materials for all levels, but this was not economically feasible. These two box sets – aiming at age groups identified as those most in need of Canadian history materials – were created at great expense, and took many years to complete. Firstly, it was difficult to find a publisher willing to both produce and invest in the materials. Jack Stoddart of General Publishing in Toronto states that after reviewing the materials, his firm “saw no chance of economic viability for the project,” and commented that “Interestingly, none of the other educational publishing companies here offered on it either” (taken from Val Ross and Harvey Enchin, “Viacom cuddles up to Ottawa,” *The Globe and Mail*, Metro ed., 8 June 1994, B4). Also, their decentralized marketing was not conducive to mass sales, and thus, they did not sell at the rate originally envisioned. This initiative resulted in a loss for *The Heritage Project*, and thus no further materials of this nature will be produced (this information is taken from an interview with John Fielding, co-creator of the educational materials for the *Project*). *The Heritage Post* is also no longer produced, cited by *Project* documents as “a victim of its own success.” After publishing 19 editions and reaching a circulation of 60,000 in 1996, its 100,000 dollar an issue pricetag became too much for the *Project* to absorb. Information taken from *The History of The Heritage Project*, 4.

179 Patti Robson, Personal Interview conducted by author, 7 March 2000. As a judge at the 2000 Kingston Heritage Fair, I encountered student Minutes based on such topics as Lucy Maud Montgomery, the history of Canadian Hockey, and the travels of immigrants from the West Indies.

internet was meant to offer new ways for young Canadians to connect to their history and to each other with chat opportunities, interactive games and quizzes, and basic information on the elements of Canadian heritage. The web also allowed *The Heritage Project* to market its educational materials, fairs, and Minutes to both teachers and students alike, and provided a way to lengthen the shelf-life of the latter. With more in-depth information and teaching hints, the popularity of the web delighted *Heritage Project* insiders with the knowledge that “just when the Minutes are considered to have reached their mature stage, the Internet offers new ways to repackage the product.”<sup>181</sup>

### Minutes: Heritage or History?

It is clear that, of all of the elements of *The Heritage Project*, the Minutes are the pivotal component. As a set of stories, they remain engaging, entertaining, and at times, thought-provoking. Following the rules of heritage, these dramas are nostalgic tools and emotional national cues. The staffers at the *Project* admit that they are in the business of making myths; the short documentary on the making of the Minutes that is included with each videocassette of the vignettes is unabashedly entitled *Minute by Minute: the Making of a Canadian Mythology*. In this promotional piece, Patrick Watson states that the people at *The Heritage Project* “are not really doing documentaries here, we are making myths, that is what movies are, they are myths, and this country needs a mythology of its history before it can get motivated and go and study its documentary history.”<sup>182</sup> *Heritage Project* promotional materials similarly draw attention to the fact that their program grew out of the belief that Canada “is not possessed of a strong mythology about its roots and values,” and thus their mandate has always involved the creation of popular stories about the heroes and proud achievements of Canadian history.<sup>183</sup> As the Co-ordinator of *The Heritage Project*, Deborah

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180 Patti Robson Interview.

181 *The History of the Heritage Project*, 7.

182 As stated in *Minute by Minute*.

183 *The First Decade*, 14.

Morrison states,

Yes absolutely, we are making myths. That is important. It is true that the *Heritage Minutes* are dramas...they are stories, they are not documentaries. There is, of course, a bunch of mythology that has to take place. There are a lot of topics that we treated where we don't really know for sure, so we create scenarios about everyday things that probably happened to people at that time. By doing that, we hope to contextualize the facts of history. We are interested in creating an emotional response as well as an intellectual one.<sup>184</sup>

As part of a national mythology, each *Heritage Minute* "leaves a thousand things unexplained, undiscussed, barely evoked."<sup>185</sup> This key limitation in the field of history, becomes a great strength as a heritage device. Just as we forgive dramatic movies for their implausible plots, it is possible to forgive *The Heritage Project* on its admission that its aim remains "to create a national mythology, not to be didactic."<sup>186</sup> As *Beaver* columnist Christopher Moore states, "Even at 10 million dollars, the Minutes ought to be appreciated for themselves, just a bunch of media moments."<sup>187</sup>

With the Heritage Minutes to provide a narrative of popular Canadian mythology, and the Fairs, Educational Materials, and Website to supply the more comprehensive elements of history education, it seems that *The Heritage Project* strikes an effective balance between *heritage* and *history*. According to staffers, this bifurcation of the *Project's* materials allows Canadians to recognize the Minutes as a dramatic interpretation or patriotic commemoration of Canadian history, and thus inspires a further investigation of the events and figures of these narratives using outside sources and ideas. Yet, the distinction between Canadian *mythology* and Canadian *history* is not as clear as *Project* administrators make it out to be. The Minutes are not just *vehicles* for a nobler educational task, but *commodities* begging to be consumed. The "authoritative yet authorless, unqualified picture of the past"<sup>188</sup> offered by the Minutes is entering the classroom and the consciousness as *history* material rather than *heritage* nationalism. To educators and the public alike, the Minutes are

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184 Deborah Morrison Interview.

185 Moore, "Our," 54.

186 *The First Decade*, 17.

marketed, and consequently can be interpreted, as effective educational materials on Canadian history. Tapes of the Minutes are *only* available for purchase by educators, and are accompanied with additional notes which aim to assist teachers in their use of the Minutes as classroom material.<sup>189</sup> On television, these mythological narratives are mass-marketed to Canadians without explanation of origin, or contextualization of their assertions. In fact, many Canadians believe these vignettes are educational materials produced by the Federal Government, rather than a private foundation.<sup>190</sup> In addition to this, the intended audience of this series of unqualified narratives is, both in and out of educational institutions, an age group that has not begun, or is in the initial stages of, formulating critical thinking skills. Thus, without explanation or qualification, young Canadians - not to mention, many adults - are accepting of this presentation of historical information as fact rather than interpretation or even propaganda.

These mass-marketed narratives provide Canadians with a particular historical understanding of their nation, while at the same time neglecting to point out this very particularity. While infused with mythology and nationalism, there is no disclaimer preventing the Minutes from being construed as narratives which portray an undistorted chronicling of Canadian history. This unqualified presentation raises the questions: what kind of mythology drives the Heritage Minutes presentation of Canadian history, and what does this tell Canadians about the identity of their nation and its citizens?

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187 Moore, "Our," 55.

188 Seixas, 691.

189 *The Heritage Project* sold the video of its *Heritage Minutes* from their website (<http://www.heritageproject.ca/default.htm>) until the transition was made to *Histor!ca*. The tapes could only be purchased by those affiliated with an educational institution, and were accompanied by approximately 150 pages of teaching materials. These include a 1-2 page elaboration, as well as 5-10 additional sources and a few teaching ideas for most of the Minutes. Furthermore, the present *Histor!ca* site, (like the former *Heritage Project* website) includes resources for teachers to use in conjunction with the Heritage Minutes, including tips on how to 'use the Minutes critically,' as well as student worksheets to download (<http://www.histori.ca/engsite/critically1/html>).

190 This is evidenced by the short documentary *Minute by Minute*, which precedes the Heritage Minutes on videocassette. Here, people polled on the street are asked who they think produced the Minutes. The answers given fall into one of two opinions: either the respondents don't know, or they feel they are part of a federal government campaign. While I have no quantitative evidence to back this up, the various questions and opinions that I have

### Existing Critiques

Despite the familiarity, longevity, and relative anonymity of the Heritage Minute campaign, few scholars have looked closely at the Minutes, with only a handful attempting to answer the above questions. Articles by Christopher Moore, and Elspeth Cameron and Janice Dickin McGinnis, briefly examine the structure of *The Heritage Project*, and some basic elements of the Minutes. Peter Seixas provides a concise analysis of the educational value of the *Project's* various materials, while Katarzyna Rukzsto undertakes a more conceptual investigation of the racial limitations of the Minutes' theme of national unity. Finally, Robert Fulford, and Justin Smallbridge provide the only overt statements of disapproval of the Minutes. While these scholars offer interesting insights, their reviews are brief, and thus their investigations remain relatively shallow. These studies do not take the time to dissect the storylines of the Minutes themselves, with few even mentioning how Canadian nationalism finds its way into the narratives.<sup>191</sup> The most advanced analyses involve grouping the narratives according to certain themes, such as the categorization of different types of heroism by Cameron and Dickin McGinnis, and Moore's classification of some Minutes according to their effectiveness. However, these scholars collectively provide a few useful criticisms of the Minutes and other *Project* materials. In order to separate the arguments of this study from those of the above authors, the following section will outline some ideas that borrow from the already existing critiques of *The Heritage Project* and its Minutes.

A prominent and easy criticism of the Minutes concerns their form. By bringing information directly to the audience using the format of televised mini-dramas, it is true that the Heritage Minutes

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encountered in my work on this subject would suggest that this is a common perception among people who have seen the Minutes.

<sup>191</sup> Katarzyna Rukzsto very briefly discusses a couple of the Minutes in her article "Up For Sale: The Commodification of Canadian Culture," *Fuse Magazine* 20, 4 August 1997: 7-11. However, this involves only a few lines. Cameron and Dickin McGinnis also look at the storylines of the Minutes, but rarely devote more than a

increase the accessibility of history through their choice of form and medium. Mark Starowicz notes that to dismiss television as tool for the relation of information is a mistake; Canadians spend an average of three hours a day, or nine years of their life in front of a television set.<sup>192</sup> Speaking as the producer of the CBC documentary, *A People's History*, Starowicz states that "television is the greatest stage, the greatest classroom in history."<sup>193</sup> Yet, the ability of the Minutes to successfully speak to the "flickering short-term memory"<sup>194</sup> of television viewers effectively precludes the possibility of adequately addressing the long-term record of Canadian history. Television generally demands, and has created a demand for, a shallow engagement with information. It values forms of entertainment that are striking, simplistic, sexy, and short.<sup>195</sup> Television commercials are guided by these norms to an exponential degree: having even less time to entice the viewer, images must be instant and ephemeral, and messages can realistically contain only a modicum of knowledge, the less explicit the better. As Christopher Moore states, the Minutes "are history, but they are television first. It is hard not to mock the idea of Canadiana as a sound-bite...[or] to be alarmed at history being sold like cornflakes."<sup>196</sup> It is impossible to explore the historical foundations of Canadian society in sixty seconds; just as entertainment cannot serve as a synonym for information, these Minutes cannot serve as critical historical references. Peter Seixas suggests that this format precludes the Minutes from being effective learning resources. He states that "Like the advertisements whose structures they replicate, they are unlikely to help students bring a critical sensibility to the task of reading historical texts."<sup>197</sup> By redefining the tools of historical interpretation, the Minutes are forced to redefine certain events of Canadian history. As Robert Fulford notes,

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sentence to each narrative in their study. "Ambushed by Patriotism."

192 Starowicz.

193 Ibid.

194 Ibid.

195 See Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Penguin, 1986), Ch. 6, where Postman gives evidence that "Entertainment is the supraideology of all discourse on television" (87).

196 Moore, "Our," 53.

There is...something fundamentally wrong-headed in the idea that events of the past can be described as one-minute bursts. In one minute, there's no time for the unsolved questions, the mixed motives, and the unexpected consequences... Watching the Heritage Minutes, I have the feeling that the people who create them are not seriously interested in history and have no understanding of who people are.<sup>198</sup>

Thus, the same format that allows the Minutes impact, denies them historical credibility.

Another clear drawback to presenting significant subject matter within the format of a television commercial is the fact that the intricate interconnection of events and individuals cannot be properly illustrated. The Minutes not only demand engaging images, but necessitate the fragmentation of historical narratives into what Robert Fulford terms "picturesque and unconnected anecdotes."<sup>199</sup> Justin Smallbridge suggests that this trivial pursuit of using disjointed tidbits of information as a source of amusement does nothing to foster a meaningful sense of historical knowledge, and warns: "Give a nation its identity through trivia, and you get a trivial identity."<sup>200</sup> Thus, while *The Heritage Project* is concerned with both showing Canadians their historical ability to reach understanding despite their differences, and promoting those things that have bound Canadians together through time, the theme of integration does not extend to its historical vignettes. By removing events and personalities from a greater historical context, the Minutes create a patchwork of the past in order to romanticize national memory, and solidify contemporary identity. This 'disney-fication' of the Canadian historical experience allows for a series of cheerful stories that makes us feel good about being Canadian, and halts our critical sensibilities.<sup>201</sup> As Ken Dewar points out, this type of neatly-boxed history means that "habitant, voyageur, shanty man, farmer and labourer are described in isolation; nowhere do we see how they fit into the social structure of the colony, or how their labour

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197 Seixas, 691.

198 Robert Fulford. "Heritage Minutes seem like hours," *The Globe and Mail* Metro ed., 30 June 1993, C1.

199 Robert Fulford, as cited in Gwyn, 282.

200 Smallbridge.

201 The term 'disney-fication' is taken from Rudyard Griffiths, Personal Interview conducted by author, 9 March 2000.

contributed to the accumulation of wealth and capital by others."<sup>202</sup> To expose structures of corruption, exploitation would be to deflate the romance of the past, and collapse the narrative of a rosy and unified national historical record. As a meaningless succession of events, the Minutes are digestible heritage fare.

The superficial and dramatic presentation of Canadian history in the Minutes speaks to the educational value of these narratives both in and out of the classroom. In his review of history education materials, Peter Seixas considers the difference between the "celebration of people's moral connection to their forebears" offered by heritage commemoration, and a critical historical approach which "involves acknowledgment of distance, unfamiliarity, strangeness" and is both "more complex and less immediate than the connection established by heritage."<sup>203</sup> While Seixas offers a very brief examination of the materials, he introduces a few important points worth exploring. Without examining the content of the Minutes themselves, the author looks at how the Minutes and teaching materials are put together *historically*, and how this precludes their usage as tools to convey critical perspectives central to historical inquiry.

Seixas notes that *The Heritage Minutes* and the classroom materials that accompany their distribution, display a "minimum of contact with the traces and documents from which historians work."<sup>204</sup> Despite the restrictions of the format and medium of the Minutes, avenues are provided for substantiation or qualification. The Minutes' classroom distribution is accompanied by teaching materials which are meant to elaborate on the issues and themes involved. However, these materials do not give evidence to the accuracy of the versions presented in the Minutes, or suggest that there

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202 Ken Dewar, "The Road to Happiness: Canadian History in Public Schools." *This Magazine is About Schools* 6 (Fall 1972): 115. This comment is made about the disjointed history that often appears in textbooks.

203 Seixas. 688, 689.

204 *Ibid.*, 691.

might be competing interpretations of Canadian historical events. As Seixas points out, this presentation suggests that “tradition is there to be learned, not to be questioned. It comes in the form of the story, not an interpretation.”<sup>205</sup> Seixas notes, “the supplementary print package of ‘Teaching Material,’ which was an opportunity to present documentary, pictorial, and other primary sources, consists principally of retellings of the stories told in the series, with no attribution, footnotes, or documentary quotations.”<sup>206</sup> The bulk of the entries in the short bibliography/filmography provided with this package are from the 1960’s and 1970’s, with sources as old as 1933. The lesson plans provided for teachers at *The Heritage Project* website include a worksheet with the questions “What is the source of the factual information?” and “What is the limitation of the evidence?”<sup>207</sup> While these questions encourage a consideration of the interpretive side of history, this seems a token reference, as the students clearly cannot distinguish between fact and opinion without any clue as to where the information in the Minutes was obtained. The sketchy substantiation process of this material becomes even more suspect when it is observed that the only footnotes provided to the Minute synopses state that their information is excerpted from *The Heritage Post* – another *Heritage Project* production. Incredibly, a further investigation of this publication uncovers that it lacks not only sources, but accredited authors for its articles.<sup>208</sup>

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205 Ibid.

206 Ibid. See Teaching Materials.

207 *The Heritage Project* (now the *Histor!ca*) website provides ‘strategies’ for teachers to use with the Minutes. The main Minutes webpage announces: “Learn the successful strategies used by teachers to bring Heritage Minutes into the classroom!” Following this link takes you to a page with a few short paragraphs about using the Minutes critically, the final lines of which ironically read “All history must be examined in light of who is writing it, why they are writing it and what evidence they have used to create the story.” This page also opens a ‘worksheet’ which contains the four questions: What is the story that is told?: What factual information was presented?: What is the source of the factual information?: What are the limitations of the evidence? Located at: <[www.histori.ca/historica/eng\\_site/minutes/critically1.html](http://www.histori.ca/historica/eng_site/minutes/critically1.html)>

208 For Example, the Autumn 1997 edition of *The Heritage Post* contains articles up to ten pages long, unattributed to a particular author. Accompanying the list of staffers, in microscopic print, is the phrase: “designed and written by the Excite Group, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University.”

### Reaction to these Critiques

There is no doubt that the form and medium of the Minutes demands a superficial and disjointed approach to Canadian history. This is the most obvious, and most prominent critique of the Minutes by the above authors. A far more interesting objection, and one that must be further explored before entering into a thematic analysis of the Minutes is the idea that these vignettes include no qualification of the information contained in their narratives. While Seixas points out that the teaching materials contain no information that qualifies or substantiates their distinctive presentation of Canadian history, it is necessary to explore how the Minutes themselves frame their historical information. A lack of contextualization would mean that the themes, myths, and symbols of the Minutes - to be discussed in the following analysis - are more likely to be endowed with cultural legitimacy and "largely accepted as representations of actual social relations and past happenings."<sup>209</sup> The following arguments will highlight some of the sentiments of Project staffers on this idea of qualifying the Minutes' presentation of history, and will outline a few examples from the Minutes to highlight the often misleading nature of the information presented.

*Project* administrators admit that, just like any exercise in history, the information presented in the Minutes is not definitive, but rather is a valid deduction based on the bits and pieces of the past that have been recovered. Johanne McDonald suggests that pre-production involves making sure "we have got all of the history, and that all the facts are proven...as much as possible."<sup>210</sup> This is done through consultation with *Project* historians John Thompson of Duke University, and Jean-Claude Robert at Université du Québec à Montréal.<sup>211</sup> Staffers and historians alike suggest that while some events of the Minutes are well-established, others are only *possible* scenarios. Deborah Morrison states,

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<sup>209</sup> Rukzsto, "National." 151.

<sup>210</sup> Johanne McDonald Interview.

There are a lot of topics that we treated where we don't really know for sure, so we are creating what our historians tell us is a perfectly valid deduction about everyday things that probably happened to a majority of people at that time. There are a lot of examples of that. Soddie, making a house, we don't know that the Kovacs actually went to work, but we know that a lot of people did that. Same thing with orphans, they came over and they had to go to the church and they got assigned to families all of the time. Did Catherine Ryan really exist, we don't know that either. But, by doing that, we hope to *contextualize the facts of history*. Our historians actually told us at the very beginning of this program, if you put all of the historians in the world end to end, they would still never meet. There are just so many interpretations out there.<sup>212</sup>

This sentiment emphasizes that the Minutes involve one of many interpretations based on the information available about certain events and figures of Canadian history. In this light, their narratives offer a plausible explanation, or an educated guess at what might have happened at a particular time, in a particular place. Yet, Morrison's assertion that the *Project* tries to "contextualize the facts of history" is nowhere to be found in the Minutes: fictional figures, imagined scenarios, and manufactured conversation are used without the qualification that these dramatic devices build historical events out of speculation and contemporary reasoning. One might suggest that this is because the Minutes themselves are unable to attribute their sources, as they are televised commercials and do not have the time or the means to substantiate their claims. This justification does not hold up; apart from the extra materials meant for the classroom, the Minutes themselves often come with a voice-over narration that provides the audience with the contextual information that did not make it into the script. However, like the classroom materials, this narration is void of citation or qualification, and merely serves to reaffirm the interpretation of the events as presented in the Minute.

Several Minutes illustrate this lack of qualification. One example of a Minute that fails to point out that it is only *one* possible account of an historical development is *Naming of Canada*, in which Cartier first meets with the Iroquois. Here, a country receives its name by mishap when a stubborn

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211 Ann Dadson Interview.

and clueless translator insists that the Iroquois, in their invitation of Cartier to 'Canada', are referring to the nation, and not to the small settlement where they live. A lowly and polite follower of Cartier's attempts to point out the misunderstanding, but is waved off by the arrogant interpreter. While the list of Minutes points out that this "provides one explanation of how Canada may have got its name," the Minute itself contains no such disclaimer, and exists to Canadians as *the* explanation of this occurrence.<sup>213</sup>

Another spot that contains a fair bit of historical inaccuracy, not to mention elements of modern-day negative nationalism, is the *Frontenac* Minute. This drama sees a handsome young French gasconader cleverly entice a white-wigged American lieutenant into a swordfight, while his Commander Phipps meets with Governor Frontenac. Not only does this young Anglo-officer seem to speak perfect French (the minute is originally done entirely in French, and dubbed into English), but 1690 Quebec City suddenly becomes a swashbuckling scene from an Errol Flynn adventure. John Thompson suggests that this Minute was made despite historians' assertions that there existed "several blow by blow accounts of the encounter between Phipps...and Frontenac. There aren't any young hotheads or swordfights, and the English emissary, this young major, is certainly not going to engage in swashbuckling...As far as I know, not a single swash was buckled."<sup>214</sup> Thompson states that the director of the Minute responded, "it's 1690, three hundred years ago, who is going to remember that?"<sup>215</sup> Furthermore, the Minute clearly plays upon present-day anti-Americanism by suggesting that this battle was fought between Canadians and Americans, when in actuality, it preceded the formation of these nations by decades. An earlier version of the English-dubbed Minute celebrates the failure of Sir William Phipps' naval assault by informing us that "Canada had

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212 Deborah Morrison Interview.

213 List of Minute Synopses for The Heritage Project 60<sup>th</sup> Minute Commemorative Video (The Heritage Project, 1998). See Appendix I.

214 John Thompson makes this assertion in *Minute by Minute: The Making of a Canadian Mythology*.

beaten off an attack by the Americans.”<sup>216</sup> Clearly mistaking New France for Canada, and the British colonies for America, this text was revised for the release of the 1998 tape. The new narration of the Minute suggests that “The Americans pressed the attack, but *Frontenac* beat them off,” while the text of the teaching materials uses the terms ‘Anglo-American’, and ‘New France’. Further to this, while it is boasted that, after being repelled by Frontenac “Phipps weighed anchor, and never returned!” the Minute fails to mention that Sir William came to Quebec directly after his defeat of the ‘Canadian’ stronghold of Port-Royal - not such a glorious vignette by which to uphold oppositional identity and anti-American vainglory.<sup>217</sup>

These and other Minutes present a particular reading of Canadian history, at times imagining events or fabricating dialogue without providing the disclaimer that this presentation is one explanation or a specific interpretation of Canadian history. This lack of qualification of the information presented in the Minutes creates the idea that these narratives are factual accounts, rather than charged dramatizations. This awards the Minutes and their messages a kind of authoritative weight that might not come with an expressly ‘fictional’ or ‘subjective’ narrative. This weight makes an analysis of the themes and ideas presented in the Minutes all the more significant.

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215 Ibid.

216 “History gets frostbite: is politics rearing its head again in the Heritage Minutes?” *Western Report* 11, 9 (March 1996): 10. Webspirs, CBCA Fulltext Reference 1995-96 database, #3604086.

217 Ibid.

## Chapter Four

### Analysis of The Heritage Minutes

#### Structure of the Analysis

The commercial format of the Minutes, as well as their lack of historical context and documentation illustrate the combination of availability, art, and faith involved in narratives of heritage commemoration. Previous critiques have pointed to these structural elements as important factors in the establishment of the Minutes as an exercise in national mythology, rather than instruction on critical history. Yet, the questions remain, what kind of mythology is it that connects these various narratives, and how does this mythology work to construct an idea of Canadian identity and unity? It is through an analysis of the events, figures, and themes of Minutes themselves that these questions can begin to be addressed.

Donald Smiley suggests that “Canadians are the only people in the world who continually pull themselves up by the roots to see if they are still growing.”<sup>218</sup> Taking this metaphor literally, the *Heritage Project* uproots the stories and personalities that prove to Canadians that their nation has experienced, and will continue to experience, significant cultivation of its society and essential identity. As the main vehicle for this national narrative, the Heritage Minutes rely on a set of Canadian myths that has solidified over time to represent mainstream memory and culture. This “master narrative,” as Daniel Francis points out, frames the fundamental beliefs that a nation holds about itself, while at the same time explaining the origins of its culture, and its overriding sense of purpose.<sup>219</sup> The ideological tenets of this entrenched narrative provide a bedrock of comfort, convenience, and familiarity, and thus are natural foundations for any exercise in national self-definition.

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<sup>218</sup> Donald Smiley, *The Canadian Political Nationality* (Toronto: Methuen, 1967), ix.

The following analysis seeks to identify the familiar and comforting Canadian symbols and beliefs presented in the situated realities of the Heritage Minutes. Before looking at the Minutes themselves, it was hypothesized that these narratives of Canadian belonging would, in fact, contain direct and indirect references to the myths of both the negative and heritage schools of nationalism. As established elements of Canadian identification, anti-Americanism and traditional Canadian essentialism seemed likely to lay the foundations for this campaign of national self-identification. This study will conduct an in-depth analysis, which will allow for the theoretical exploration of the images and symbols of the Minutes. To borrow from Nielsen and Jackson, the following arguments ultimately attempt a “critique of the utterance through an intense listening.”<sup>220</sup>

Examples of the negative and heritage forms of nationalism are not only found in the events and dialogue of the Minutes, but in the more indirect elements of dress and demeanour, symbolism and implication. While the examination of negative nationalism begins with a basic look at how many Minutes contain American references, the more important element is what *shape* these references take. Important questions include, is there a consistently negative portrayal of American figures in the Minutes? Do the messages of these narratives rely on, or get lost in, the focus on American failings? And finally, are Canadian virtues constructed in opposition to American flaws? The investigation of heritage nationalism is slightly more complex, as it involves the identification of a series of ideas, rather than the presentation of a particular antagonist. This examination entails searching the Minutes’ selective presentation of Canadian history for patterns of essential Canadian virtue, steady national progress, and above all, achievement through unity. Questions involved in the exploration of these themes include the following: do the Minutes consistently assign noble

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<sup>219</sup> Francis, “Myth and History,” 473.

characteristics to Canadians? Is there a notable theme of unbroken national progress? Is there an obvious avoidance of the issues and events that threaten this narrative of exceptional character and progressive development? Are these historical narratives used to mend the contemporary cleavages of Canadian society? And, does this attention to the current concern of national unity preclude the inclusion of certain groups, events, or ideas in the Canadian historical record?

Using these questions and the basic tenets of these two forms of nationalism as a guideline, sixty Heritage Minute narratives were analyzed.<sup>221</sup> While this analysis was primarily based on the audio-visual material of the Minutes themselves, written synopses and educational materials were also used to provide additional information on the characters and events of the Minutes. The historical accuracy of the Minutes remains an interesting and important element of their analysis. However, its exhaustive consideration is both beyond the scope and peripheral to the argument of this study. While issues of critical history are important in the identification of the mythology used in the Minutes, they remain secondary to the political and sociological implications of these narratives. Furthermore, while certain themes and tendencies can be distinguished within the Minutes, and subsequently attributed to different discourses on Canadian nationalism, this does not carry the implication that these ideas were intentionally injected into the Heritage Minutes by their authors, or by administrators at *The Heritage Project*. While the *Project* staff state that the mythology of the Minutes is not consciously constructed, this does not affect the relevance of this study. Whether as an intentional program of identity construction or an unconscious reliance on entrenched Canadian myths, the Minutes continue to project interesting images and ideas of Canadianism.

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220 Nielsen & Jackson, 283.

221 These Minutes are those contained in *The CRB Foundation Heritage Minutes*, videocassette recording (*The Heritage Project*, 1998), English version. While a number of new Minutes have been produced since this tape was released in 1998, this is the most up-to-date collection available.

## Findings

After a close examination of the different elements of the Heritage Minutes, it is clear that the symbols and ideas of both the negative and heritage forms of Canadian nationalism are present within the narratives. Using the time-honoured truths of these nationalist discourses, the Heritage Minutes are both driven by, and dictate lessons for, contemporary Canadian society. The elements of these two forms of Canadian nationalism often overlap. The essential heritage characteristics that seek to glorify the Canadian past and fix a continuous national identity are often constructed in opposition to traditional 'American' attributes. For example, the benevolence and humility seen in the heroic actions of the Canadians in the Minutes can be direct responses to American intolerance, implicitly oppositional or un-American ways of doing things, or simply glorified national characteristics emphasized by the selective history of heritage. In addition, several heritage narratives of national moral progress are those which focus on noble and open-minded Canadians surpassing backward American thinking. Because of this overlap, an examination of the Minutes often seeks one discourse on Canadian nationalism, and uncovers another. However, there remain definite examples of each to be found in the Minutes.

### *Negative Nationalism within the Heritage Minutes*

David Lowenthal suggests that heritage, by its very nature glamourizes narrow nationalism; he states that "In asserting our own virtues, we harp on others' vices."<sup>222</sup> The Heritage minutes carefully construct this oppositional definition of Canadian heritage, bringing our contemporary national nemesis to life in the Canadian past. Twelve of the sixty Minutes contain some reference to American rivalry, whether it be the minute detail of making sure Americans always perform the role of opponent to Canadian sports legends, or the direct condemnation of American racial

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222 Lowenthal, xiv, 89.

intolerance.<sup>223</sup> These Minutes display the entrenched Canadian habit “of comparing themselves with Americans at every opportunity, and almost always judging themselves to be better.”<sup>224</sup> The Minutes driven by anti-Americanism add national smugness to heritage distortion and television culture in the list of elements that smother critical inquiry and creative thinking.<sup>225</sup>

### Steele of the Mounties – The Fabled ‘Other’

The Minute that best highlights the myths and symbols of negative nationalism is *Steele of the Mounties*. This Minute plays up the moral strength of famed North-West Mounted Police Superintendent, Sam Steele, in opposition to a ‘no-good’ American gunslinger travelling through to the Klondike. The American maverick is a scruffy, inarticulate, ignorant figure who literally hoots and hollers about why he should have his own way. Sam Steele is the picture of restraint: remaining composed and polite, he is able to quietly mock and politely deport the Yankee prospector. The Canadian fondness for *peacekeeping* over the more American *policekeeping*<sup>226</sup> comes to the fore when Steele asks the American to give up his gambling gear and revolvers, as “Men don’t wear pistols in Canada.” The Yankee, with ‘typical’ ignorance of Canadian society – and in this case, Canadian geography – responds with “Canada be damned, I’m going to the Klondike!” Unhappy with the Mountie’s request that he return to U.S. territory, the Yankee pulls two revolvers from his holsters and, red-faced with frustration, points them at Steele and yells “I’m an *American*, you can’t do this to me!” With a condescending tone, Steele replies “In that case, I will be lenient: we’ll keep

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223 In the Minutes, *Bluenose*, *Jackie Robinson*, and *Rocket Richard*, Americans provide the opposition. The *Bluenose* dramatically edges out the American ship to remain undefeated, while the *Rocket* scores 8 points to seal a victory over the Detroit Red Wings – a Minute that might not have meant as much to Canadians (although surely it would have to the *Canadiens*) if Montreal had defeated the Toronto Maple Leafs. While Jackie Robinson’s trip to Montreal is itself a comment on American racism, the opposing, (and ungracious) team in the Minute is from Newark.

224 Bell, 71.

225 Ibid.

226 Earlier arguments saw this idea brought up by Charles Taylor in his elements of perceived difference, as well as being directly cited by Joe Canadian in Molson’s ‘Rant’. This motif is also apparent in the *Peacekeepers* Minute, which will be discussed in later arguments.

this gambling gear and you'll be back in the United States by sundown." If this dialogue did not impress enough upon our anti-American sensibilities, the retreating American leaves us with lingering proof of his arrogance, simple-mindedness, and the truly American inability to be a gracious loser. Still in shock that Steele "never drew no gun," he confidently states in retrospect, "I could'a shot that guy right there."

*Steele of the Mounties* demonstrates that those attributes and symbols which are thought to be 'typically Canadian' can be seen as part of a culture that is defined by its contempt for perceived American values and norms. The script is filled with the most blatant of stereotypes based on the discrepant national mottoes 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness', and 'peace, order, and good government'. The American gambler displays an individualism out of control – akin to common Canadian perceptions of present-day American society. Displaying ignorance, insolence, arrogance, and violence, the American maintains his right to firearms, to unlimited mobility, and ultimately, to his own way. Canadians, represented by the strong and noble Steele, are awarded the oppositional virtues of civility and good manners, order and restraint. This vignette traces the present-day perception of the United States as an individualistic, gun-happy society back to turn-of-the-century norms, while contrasting a continuous and overriding Canadian commitment to justice and peacekeeping. Daniel Francis notes that this romantic and imaginary sense of the Mountie, which establishes it as one of Canada's proudest national symbols, allows Canadians to "'know' that the absence of the Wild West in Canada was no accident of history; it was the result of our moral superiority..."<sup>227</sup>

### American Racism

American racial intolerance serves as the theme of at least three Minutes, including *The*

*Underground Railroad, Jackie Robinson, and Maurice Ruddick*. The first two of these Minutes see Canadians come to the aid of disenfranchised Afro-Americans, with nearly a century separating the two ‘rescues’. *The Underground Railroad* shows a group of kind and courageous Canadians helping Black Americans secretly cross the border during the antebellum period in the United States. The lucky father and daughter that make it to safety stowed in church pews exclaim to each other “We’re free!” - “Yes Paw, we’re in *Canada*.” The *Jackie Robinson* Minute is a 20<sup>th</sup> century version of the *Underground Railroad*’s ‘Canadian emancipation’ of victims of the American colour barrier. In this Minute, the Montreal crowd supports Robinson when the opposing pitcher - from *Newark* - intentionally hits him with a pitch. This idea of Canadian teamwork is made possible by a threatening American presence, and comes through in both the Minute’s narrative - “cheering Montrealers *helped Jackie Robinson break the colour bar*” - and Charles Bronfman’s recognition that this Minute showed that Canadians “would take a stranger into our arms and say, ‘hey, you are one of us’.”<sup>228</sup>

The idea of accepting, open-hearted Canadians – in contrast with the intolerance of the United States - is echoed in the *Maurice Ruddick* Minute. Here, an older Afro-Canadian recounts his days at the Springhill mine in Nova Scotia, and details the story of how he and several white co-workers survived a mining disaster by ‘sticking together’, and singing hymns. Then, Ruddick throws in a seemingly insignificant and surprisingly gracious detail that “some *good folks in the U.S.* gave all us survivors a free holiday in the south.” Yet, this news becomes the focal point of the Minute when he goes on to say that these generous Americans “said I couldn’t stay with the others because of my colour.” From here on in, the disaster at the mine becomes second seat to American racism, which is shown by the Minute to still flourish in the late 1950’s – the same time that Black and White

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227 Francis, *National*. 34.

Canadians were seemingly working and living side by side. This discrepancy is driven home when Ruddick goes on to mention that his Canadian co-workers were going to refuse this vacation due to the shameful treatment of their Black friend. However, in the dignified and considerate Canadian way, Ruddick insists that the boys go “have a holiday, and then we will be together again...and we were.” The final thoughts left with the audience are those which hint at the essential moral superiority of Canadians; even the weight of death and destruction did not result in the Canadians turning on one another the way Americans seemed to do under normal circumstances. Ruddick insists that he and his fellow Canadians had a hard life around the Springhill mines. “but my, didn’t we sing those hymns *together*.”

#### Appropriation of U.S. Symbols

Tom Axworthy, the Executive Director of *The Heritage Project* hints that an objective of the Minutes is to re-Canadianize the historical imagination of the nation by rescuing the stories of our past from the clutches of American cultural domination. He suggests that even though the weight of our neighbour to the south means “we have trouble telling our own story in our own land having access to our own imagination,” Canadians do not have to settle for stories which are “pale imitations of Davy Crockett.”<sup>229</sup> Recognizing that Canadians are bombarded with American historical images and folk heroes, a few of the Heritage Minutes seek to undermine fundamental American symbols by revealing their Canadian origins. This defensive and powerful tactic weakens the weight of these American icons by implying that they were stolen from Canadian hands and subsequently misrepresented as genuine American inventions. It also provides a lesson to Canadians: while we often create the kinds of symbols and activities that are embraced throughout the world, these domestic inventions do not receive enough national recognition and support to be accredited as

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228 This Bronfman quotation is taken from *Minute by Minute*.

229 Thomas Axworthy, speaking in *Minute by Minute*.

*Canadian ideas*. This is why two of these creations – represented in the *Minutes Basketball* and *Superman* – are readily accepted as having American authorship. These Minutes carry the implicit message that Canadian traditions, products, and personalities might have a better shot at international familiarity and success if they received stronger support at home.

In the Minute entitled *Basketball*, it is revealed that one of the world's most popular sports – one which is often thought of as quintessentially American – was actually invented by a Canadian. The teaching materials for this Minute declare that “The phenomenal feats of Michael Jordan or Magic Johnson would have amazed Dr. James Naismith, the modest Canadian who invented the game 100 years ago when he hung a peach basket on a gym wall.”<sup>230</sup> *Basketball* shows an unassuming physical education instructor experiment with a new game while teaching at a school in Massachusetts. This Minute combines many of the un-American themes of the Minutes, including evolution, unsung heroism, and self-conscious humour. In *Basketball*, we are met with the absurd scene of players running around trying to figure out how to play this curious game, while the old janitor climbs up a ladder to poke balls out of peach baskets. Inevitably, this trial and error is met with the sanctimonious skepticism of the American players, who snicker at the peculiar rules, and ask whether this is “some kind of Canadian joke.” The conscientious Naismith takes the ideas of the players and even the old janitor into consideration, and we watch as he adjusts the rules of the game, and comes up with the idea of cutting holes in the bottom of the baskets. At the end of the Minute the narrator reminds us that this Canadian ‘little guy’ made it big: “a hundred years after James Naismith from Almonte, Ontario invented it, basketball is being played by hundreds of millions of people around the world.”

Joe Shuster is another ‘never heard of him’ innovator who became known to many Canadians

through a Heritage Minute.<sup>231</sup> This enterprising young Canadian takes the credit for one of the major symbols of American popular culture – the comic book hero, Superman. The minute shows the young cartoonist describing the character to a skeptical American relative, who is as disbelieving as the American players on Naismith's basketball court. Shuster's simple-minded enthusiasm is met with the assurance that his idea of a strongman in tights "will never fly." Again, the American figure in *Superman* equates Shuster's seeming foolishness with a national disposition, remarking "honestly, you Canadian kids."

### American Medium, Anti-American Message

These popular Minutes are good examples of the *Project's* ability to sidestep blatant anti-Americanism in favour of a more subtle manipulation of images and themes. Both Minutes subliminally promote a set of myths and patterns espoused by Canadians in response to the American presence. Naismith and Shuster are awkward, unheroic figures who humbly uphold their ideas in the face of self-assured American cynicism. Each of these two Minutes is set in the United States, and is careful to assign tacit self-importance to an American character who inevitably makes reference to the absurdity of 'Canadian' ideas. What is interesting about these and other Minutes, is the fact that the anti-American – i.e. Canadian – themes of the Minutes are being effectively conveyed using the smoothly-fashioned entertainment values of the United States. While the *Project* strengthens its heritage nationalism on the back of anti-American sentiment, it owes its notoriety to the "slick techniques associated with American high-tech production values," and is granted emotional impact through its assertive effort to "reach out and grab us by our patriotic throats," a goal often associated

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230 Teaching Materials, 78.

231 'Never heard of Them – Must be Canadian' was the title of a study of student awareness conducted by Mel Hurtig in 1975 (Bell, 5). Thomas Axworthy remarks that comedian Frank Shuster, Joe's nephew, was grateful to the *Project* for finally awarding credit to Joe Shuster for his contribution to popular culture, and for letting millions of Canadians know that a young Torontonian invented one of the worlds most famous comic book characters. Taken from Axworthy, "History."

with shameless American propaganda.<sup>232</sup> Not one of the Heritage Minutes could be equated with the more 'authentic' Canadian productions of the *Beachcombers*, *North of 60*, or the *Red Green Show*. Even a highly analogous project - CBC's high-quality historical docudrama, *Canada: A Peoples History* - cannot compare to glossy finish and dramatic execution of the Minutes. Contrary to theoretical musings of Marshall McLuhan in his own Heritage Minute, in the case of the Minutes, the message is not inextricably linked to the medium.

### Oppositional Canadian Characteristics

While some of the Minutes directly address comparative American shortcomings, others promote the fundamental Canadian attributes that have been developed in reaction to American bravado and excessive love of country. Yet, these patriotic heritage tools have to work within a contradiction: while they suggest that Canada, in fact, might be something to be proud of, this national self-confidence undermines the popular Canadian attitudes of modesty and cynicism, and threatens the strong foundations of negative nationalism. Afraid of making Canadians suspicious through an overt demonstration of patriotism, the Minutes soften their narratives of Canadian pride by including some quintessentially Canadian anchors. Self-deprecatory humour is used to soften some of the showcased accomplishments. Also, the heroes and heroines of Canadian history are not allowed flashy celebrity; they are everyday individuals and groups thrust into heroism by chance, misadventure, or by their efforts to conquer incredible obstacles.

Many minutes point out that modest Canadian accomplishments – even ones that could be construed as tales of defeat - are just as heroic as the illustrious and celebrated tales of American heroism. This theme is certainly emphasized in the Minutes. Chronologically, it is introduced in the Minute,

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232 Cameron & Dickin McGinnis, 12.

*Nicollet*, which tells the story of the navigator's futile search for the Asian Sea. There is something absurd, and perhaps 'typically Canadian' about an historical vignette choosing as its focus a dud of an explorer whose failure to reach the Asian sea gave him the glorious distinction of adding Lake Michigan to European maps.<sup>233</sup> Somehow, the Minute turns this laughable figure – who at one point holds up a red silk robe in the mirror, and exclaims “When I reach China, I shall greet them wearing this!” - into a visionary who would have “others follow his dream...and map most of North America from the Rockies to the Gulf of Mexico.”<sup>234</sup> It seems as if the makers of this Minute were looking for an antithetical image to the heroic American explorer Christopher Columbus.

Another example of this curious desire to celebrate Canadian disappointments comes in the Minute, *Avro Arrow*. Despite the fact that the Arrow remains a well-known symbol of national failure and frustration to many Canadians, its design and successful testing are celebrated in this Minute.

Created from film clips of the CBC television drama which documented the story of the Arrow, the Minute is full of celebratory images and swelling music. Hinging on the heroic narrative of a team of engineers fighting against those who say it can't be done, the Minute triumphantly concludes with a successful test flight of the jet fighter. However, after this emotional high, the narrator states that “Although the government *cancelled the project and destroyed the prototypes* the Avro Arrow remains for Canada a world benchmark in aerospace achievement.” This Minute is an example of the lengths gone to by the *Project* to retreat from the grandeur of American hero-worship, and to simultaneously emphasize that while many Canadian accomplishments might look like defeats in the face of celebrated U.S. achievement, this does not wipe them off the map as important national milestones.

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233 In *Minute by Minute*, John Thompson notes that historians “don't really know if Nicollet reached Lake Michigan.”

234 This text is spoken by the narrator – who happens to be another typical Canadian hero, Peter Gzowski – at the end of the Minute.

Several other Minutes use a sort of self-conscious national humour to sell their images. In fact, three rather weighty national symbols – the country’s name, its anthem, and its system of responsible government – are presented in a flippant, comical way, and are used to stress the quintessentially Canadian ability to laugh at ourselves. As mentioned above, the very naming of Canada is displayed as a *mistake*. This momentous blunder seems unlikely to be vaunted as a proud piece of national history for, say, the United States. There are similar undertones to the Minute portraying a rehearsal for the first public performance of what would become the Canadian national anthem. Here, the French Canadian regiment, *Les Voltigeurs de Québec* intentionally bungle *O Canada!* – a butchery which arouses great laughter from the band, as well as the amusement of the conductor trying to keep them in line. Finally, the most outrageous bit of comedy in the Minutes comes in *Victoria*, which “imagines a discussion between the Queen and Lord Melbourne on the question of responsible government in Canada.”<sup>235</sup> The most memorable element of this Minute is its hokey reference to a tea commercial. When the Queen giddily states that responsible government is “a Canadian idea,” her attendant answers with “pity ma’am” – seemingly pointing out that responsible government, like Red Rose tea, disappointingly is only to be found in Canada.<sup>236</sup>

The heritage idea of using precedence to evoke national pride is a dominant theme of the Minutes. As David Lowenthal notes, “to be first in a place warrants possession; to antedate others’ origins or exploits shows superiority.”<sup>237</sup> Along with Naismith and Shuster, Canadian innovators like Joseph Casavant, Sir Sandford Fleming, Joseph-Armand Bombardier, and Dr. Wilder Penfield are used to shock Canadians into appreciating their national accomplishments, and provide the surprising

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235 Taken from List of Minute Synopses; see Appendix I.

236 While this parallel jumps out at the viewer when watching the Minute, this idea is contained in both Moore, “Our,” 53; and Cameron and Dickin McGinnis, 14.

237 Lowenthal, 174.

information that such monumental achievements are, in fact, of Canadian origin. Yet these Canadian characters are not portrayed as people who transformed the world in an instant; rather, their progress is slow but steady, important but unglamorous. This theme seems to highlight the subtle anti-American idea that *evolution* is preferable to *revolution*.

Sir Sandford Fleming, surprisingly the only Minute celebrating the building of the Canadian railway system,<sup>238</sup> is presented as a vocal and confident individual. When an assistant points out that Fleming's idea of standard time will never achieve the support of all of the different cities who set their own time by the sun, Fleming boldly asserts, "We will have to make them understand, even if it takes years." Sure enough, while Fleming might have appeared to be a man to have greatness thrust upon him, the Minute points out that it was fifteen years before his efforts were rewarded. The closing scene of the Minute shows Fleming being honoured in *Washington* – a small detail to show that this invention was worthy of American recognition – where he is introduced as "Mr. Sandford Fleming of Canada, to whom the world owes standard time." The Casavant and Bombardier Minutes similarly show two Canadian legends a long time in the making. At the age of twenty-seven, Joseph Casavant leaves a successful blacksmith business to pursue a formal education in music. Discovering his love for organ-building, Casavant studied this tedious and difficult craft, and constructed his first instrument seven years after entering school. Working for a poor parish, Casavant received little pay and limited recognition for what would become the first of thousands of world-renowned instruments. Joseph-Armand Bombardier has the same smalltown roots as Casavant, and eventually, the same great success. This Minute shows a young Bombardier working as an Altar Boy, earning money to buy tools and equipment to make models of engines. Ten years later we are given a glimpse

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238 While this Minute's main idea is the invention of Standard Time, Fleming is shown working on the railway and at one point exclaims "We are not just building a railroad gentlemen, we are building a country." There is one other Minute which shows the building of the railway—*Nitro*. However, it does not celebrate this landmark, but shows the negative side of its construction. This Minute is discussed in later arguments.

into his workshop where the same childhood model sits as a life-sized construction; we are reminded of this evolutionary process by the concluding narrative, “from his first experimental snowmobile to jet aircraft, Joseph-Armand Bombardier’s vision would eventually circle the world.”<sup>239</sup>

### *Heritage Nationalism within the Heritage Minutes*

Though a dominant one, Anti-Americanism is not the only theme running throughout the Heritage Minutes. Core myths of heritage nationalism make themselves apparent in the essential Canadian characteristics that provide the basis for acts of heroism, and achievement through unity. Because people are inclined to embrace myths that establish a socially-supported identity,<sup>240</sup> the Canadian qualities that are promoted by the Minutes are praiseworthy and dignified. Forward-thinking, selflessness, loyalty, and teamwork are established as fundamental Canadian qualities, suggesting that those who embrace the Canadian nation are embracing a noble enterprise. The various virtues of Canadianism settle into unchallenged truisms, forming the ‘official’ narrative of Canadian belonging. As Daniel Francis states,

These are the images and stories that seem to express the fundamental beliefs that Canadians hold about themselves. They are the “core myths” which settle out from the welter of historical detail, like silt at the bottom of a river. With repetition they come to form the mainstream memory of the culture, our national dreams... This is the story of Canada... This is who we are.<sup>241</sup>

In choosing to believe the historical mythology that establishes Canadians as progressive, benevolent, courageous, and neighbourly, contemporary citizens implicitly choose these same identities for themselves, and provide continuity, common purpose, and ultimately, unity to the Canadian experience.

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239 This Minute is not effective at conveying Bombardier’s commitment to learning, and trial and error invention style. The teaching materials accompanying the Minute paint a better picture, stating that while Bombardier started developing his mechanical gadgets at the age of thirteen, it wasn’t until age thirty that he was granted exclusive patent rights for the commercial use of the snowmobile.

240 Murray Edelman, *Politics as Symbolic Action* (New York: Academic Press, 1971), 54.

241 Francis *National*, 10.

### The Theme of National Progress – Women as the Voice of Moral Improvement

The women in the Minutes make up their own category of ‘heroes’, and are invariably strong, progressive figures. Women are definitely underrepresented in the Minutes: only twelve of the sixty narratives focus on female figures, while thirty-seven highlight the accomplishments of men. This seems a significant underrepresentation considering the fact that the Minutes are consciously interested in telling the stories those Canadians traditionally omitted from ‘page one’ political and military history.<sup>242</sup>

While male heroes are modest, unassuming figures, the women in the Minutes are, for the most part, strong, obstinate figures. Recognizing that Canadians see themselves as “generally imposed upon” by American celebrity and pomposity, the good deeds of the male figures in the Minutes are downplayed, creating reserved, selfless, ‘un-American’ heroes.<sup>243</sup> In contrast, female figures are generally spunky, self-assured leaders who are unapologetic about their assertions and intrusions. One reason why women display a kind of self-possession denied to the male protagonists of the Minutes is the fact that the narratives involving female protagonists shoulder the Minutes’ stress of national *moral* improvement, while the men are responsible for *technological* advancement. At least thirty of the sixty Minutes involve the theme of national progress, as driven by Canadian citizens and groups. These thirty Minutes can be further broken down into narratives involving exploration (4), social justice (15), technology and enterprise (11), and prominent thinkers (3).<sup>244</sup> Of these categories,

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242 These twelve Minutes include *Victoria*, who is not a Canadian heroine *per se*, but is depicted as fighting for responsible government in Canada, and thus is included in the tally. There are also a handful of other Minutes, including *Orphans*, *Underground Railroad*, and *Soddie*, which show kind or strong women, but do so in the context of more prominent characters or storylines. Of the thirty-seven minutes which feature men, twenty-nine showcase individuals, while the remaining eight show groups of men. The remaining Minutes in the series highlight either groups or events, and are not gender specific.

243 See the above arguments concerning figures like Maurice Ruddick, Sam Steele, James Naismith, and Joe Shuster. Other examples include heroes of circumstance, including geologist Joseph Burr Tyrrell, and train dispatcher Vince Coleman; and heroes of character, such as Officers Walsh and McLeod, who gave their word to Sitting Bull, and John Humphrey, who penned the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

244 By Social Justice, I mean attention to human rights, or a degree of societal compassion. Also, while many of

women are only present in one: social justice. And they dominate this category. Of the fifteen Minutes, ten feature women, while three involve men, and two – *Myrnam Hospital* and *Jackie Robinson* – show the compassion of a group of people.<sup>245</sup>

One theme of these Minutes can be termed ‘firsts for women’, and involves the struggle for the inclusion of women in various political and educational institutions. These Minutes include Jennie Trout battling to become the first female doctor, Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy fighting for political rights, and Marion Orr planning to become the first female flight school operator. These Minutes perform the double task of highlighting the true ‘Canadian’ characteristic of fighting against the odds, while at the same time charting the moral progress of Canadian society in its defeat of sexist policies.

Jennie Trout is a fantastically dramatic heroine who literally stands up to her sexist anatomy professor. Against the pleadings of her fellow female student, Jennie rises from her seat and approaches the shocked lecturer, providing the clever and daring warning: “if you do not bring this classroom under control, I am going to repeat every word of this disgusting lecture to your charming wife.” She then rips down a piece of paper used to shield her from a diagram of the male anatomy, and throws it at the suddenly silenced male medical students. The audience is then informed that Jennie Trout became the first woman licensed to practice medicine in Canada. *Nellie McClung* and *Emily Murphy* are just as effective in the portrayal of a strong woman fighting for, and achieving, an unbelievable goal. McClung uses humour and spunk to attract people to the cause of universal suffrage. Peter Gzowski narrates an amusing Minute which shows McClung hold a mock parliament

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the Minutes involve ‘prominent thinkers’, this category is expressly for those Minutes which value ideas *for themselves*. These include *Etienne Parent*, *Borduas*, and *Marshall McLuhan*. Some might add the categories of sport and art, but I consider these to be less specifically about *progress* than the areas mentioned here.  
<sup>245</sup> *Underground Railroad* implies a group effort, but its protagonist is a White woman.

discussing the dangers of giving votes to *men*, seeing her eventually gain the upper hand on an oppressive premier. *Emily Murphy* uses an entirely different means to capture the attention and support of the audience. Speaking directly to the camera, Murphy details how she and a group of women fought to be ‘persons’ under the law.

These Minutes tell the stories of strong women. They also tell the story of a nation’s progress in the treatment of its female citizens. The ‘firsts for women’ Minutes, and the other narratives which feature women fighting on behalf of the larger community, show female figures to be the clear *conscience* of Canadian society. *Underground Railroad*, *Rural Teacher*, *Agnes MacPhail*, and *Pauline Vanier* draw our attention to how far we have come as a nation, and how compassionate and virtuous Canadians are. The narratives of these Minutes are not portrayed as continuously developing stories, but completed projects. There is no hint of progress still to be made in the areas of women’s rights, racism, education or basic human dignities. Unlike the male heroes, who are required to demonstrate evolutionary thinking in their technological developments, the heroines of the Minutes are given much easier paths in their dealings with much weightier issues. With long and arduous battles seemingly reduced to a single meeting or speech, and enemies who are more amusing than they are threatening, it is easy to focus on the happy *results* of these Minutes, rather than the intricate and entrenched power structures they implicitly represent.<sup>246</sup> These Minutes seek to evoke the sentiment ‘thank God things aren’t like that anymore’, displaying the transition from a period of injustice to one of justice. These accomplishments inextricably connect contemporary Canadians – especially Canadian women - with those who have worked to secure their rights and freedoms, and shape a better society. It is ironic that some of the objectives of the female figures in the Minutes - such as the improvement of the penal system, the wresting of educational curricula from detached

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246 For more on the continuous struggle of women for political and social equality in Canada – something which the Minutes establish as a completed project – see arguments of Sylvia Bashevkin, Janine Brodie, Heather MacIvor,

bureaucrats, and the relaxation of immigration laws - are portrayed as achieving definitive advancement, while existing as current points of controversy in Canadian society.

### Essential Canadian Characteristics and the Use of Highly Selective History

While the Heritage Minutes present a progressive national inclination and an unbroken narrative of moral improvement, they also inform Canadians that they are kind people. At least twenty of the sixty Minutes feature the benevolent acts of Canadians, while many others include indirect references to this national virtue. There are many examples of Canadians offering help to those facing persecution in other countries. As mentioned above, Canadians combat American racism by offering freedom and friendship to African-Americans on more than one occasion. Canadians are also shown to provide refuge to groups such as Sitting Bull and his Sioux people, 19<sup>th</sup> century Irish orphans, and World War II refugees. Other minutes portraying Canada on the international stage feature John Humphrey as the Canadian mind behind the UN Declaration of Human Rights; Canadian Peacekeepers working as part of the United Nations team; and a Canadian engineered waterpump designed to contribute to sustainable development in the third world. The presentation of these stories makes Canadian nationalism easy and natural; these Minutes dignify Canadian citizenship, and give us many reasons to feel good about, and embrace our nationality. In this way, *The Heritage Project* has achieved its goal of heritage nationalism.

Both Brian Osborne and Jack Granatstein maintain that the Heritage Minutes are full of historical errors.<sup>247</sup> Osborne tells an interesting story of a colleague – Donald Swainson, a former Canadian history professor at Queen’s University – being asked for his opinion on a number of the Minutes. Commenting on the *Louis Riel* Minute, Osborne recalls Swainson commenting, “number one, it is

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and Jill Vickers.

<sup>247</sup> This sentiment was expressed in personal interviews conducted with both scholars.

inaccurate as Louis Riel had a hood over his head and they didn't see a lovely handsome curly-haired fellow; and, number two, the speech you thought up for him was presented by the officiating priest, not Riel."<sup>248</sup> For this story, it is certain that there are many others. The factual errors of the Minutes are clear to most Canadian historians, and remain an interesting topic for an historical investigation. However, what are most interesting from a *political* point of view are not the scattered erroneous details, but the ideas *intentionally omitted* from the narratives of the Heritage Minutes. The Heritage Minutes point to a national inclination toward international humanitarianism and justice; there are certainly many historical examples of Canadians who have displayed remarkable altruism. Yet, the Minutes used to affirm this predisposition carry parallel - and well-hidden - narratives of Canadian cruelty. The following section will discuss some of the strategic omissions of the Minutes, in their attempt to construct a proud narrative of Canadian accomplishment. This analysis is not intended as a comment on the factual errors of the Minutes, or an attempt to condemn them as 'wrong'. It instead aims to show the pattern of omission and distortion that allows for the promotion of an embraceable national identity, and to highlight the difference between the idealistic images of this pedagogical narrative, and the difficult reality of the events they seek to represent.

*Sitting Bull* is another example of the Canadian tendency to highlight American injustice in an attempt to draw a positive national contrast. In this Minute, a group of American officers travels to the Canadian west to inform the Sioux Chief that he will be received kindly by the President upon his people's return to the United States. After accusing the Americans of lying, *Sitting Bull* states that a select group of Northwest Mounted Police officers "are the first men who have never lied" to his Sioux people. He tells the American officers, "this country [Canada] does not belong to you" and informs them of his choice to remain in Canada rather than return to the United States. *Sitting Bull's*

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248 Brian Osborne Interview.

decision once again assures Canadians of their moral superiority to the United States. A vague ending to the Minute only confirms this virtuosity, suggesting that, to the regret of the Canadian officers that tried to ensure his protection, the Chief was betrayed and murdered after being “starved out of Canada.” Yet, while this conclusion suggests unfortunate circumstances beyond anyone’s control, Sitting Bull’s return to the United States was not merely due to the disappearance of the buffalo. This Minute would likely not serve to solidify comparative national superiority if it were included that Sir John A. Macdonald’s government viewed the Sitting Bull and his Sioux as *American* Indians, and literally pushed the tribe out of Canada by refusing to help provide land or food in Canada.<sup>249</sup>

The choice to highlight the efforts of Pauline and Georges Vanier for their efforts in aiding refugees during World War II is similarly misleading. While the Minute alludes to the bureaucratic barriers faced by the Vaniers as advocates of displaced persons, the focus on the compassion of one couple allows the Minute to sidestep the appalling context within which the Vaniers had to work.

Administrative obfuscation, political inaction, and blatant anti-Semitism combined to produce restrictionist Canadian immigration policies at the time of the War.<sup>250</sup> In fact, the numbers suggest that Canada was one of, if not *the* worst of the refugee-receiving states, accepting less than five thousand Jews between 1933 and 1945.<sup>251</sup> The teaching materials, while including reference to the negligence of the nation during the War, still attempt to soften the situation through such justifications as “Canadians could not grasp the seriousness of events over there.” and “Canadians were still recovering from the hardships of the Great Depression.”<sup>252</sup> Anti-Semitism is mentioned

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249 This information is outlined in the teaching materials accompanying the minute. However, the *idea* that the Canadian government did not act to help the Sioux occupies only three sentences of a page and a half of notes; the main focus is clearly Sitting Bull’s discrepant levels of trust regarding the American and Canadian authorities.

250 This unsettling time in Canadian history is detailed in Irving Abella and Harold Troper. *None is too many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1983).

251 *Ibid.*, xxii.

252 Teaching Materials, 130.

rather than discussed, and the entire set of events is basically boiled down to “that regrettable chapter of our immigration history.”<sup>253</sup> While the efforts of the Vaniers are commendable, they are certainly not representative of views of the Canadian public at the time, and are more appropriately viewed as the exception to the rule.

One further attempt of *The Heritage Project* to avoid national controversy must be mentioned.

However, this example is not about the omission of historical information, but the retraction of an entire Heritage Minute from the series of sixty. Earlier tapes and lists of the Minutes include one entitled *Peacekeepers*, which features Canadian soldiers working as part of the United Nations Peace Forces in Cyprus.<sup>254</sup> This Minute recognizes Lester B. Pearson for his role in creating the UN Peacekeepers, and states that “for his dream that soldiers could make peace instead of war, he received the Nobel peace prize.” However, the *Peacekeepers* Minute was not included on the 1998 commemorative cassette of the Minutes, and was removed from the *Project*’s website in late 1999.<sup>255</sup> When contacted about the removal of the Minute, staffers at the newly formed *Histor!ca* stated that the Minute had, in fact, been taken out of circulation, but did not provide any reason for its removal.<sup>256</sup> *Peacekeepers* was created sometime before 1991, as it was featured that year on a CBC television special entitled *The Heritage Quiz*. It was shortly after this date that Canada’s Peacekeeping Forces made headlines with the death of civilians in Somalia and charges of corruption in the Balkans, Rwanda and Haiti. In addition to a number of high-profile investigations into these missions, the Canadian military suffered slashed budgets, dilapidated equipment, and increased numbers of ailing soldiers who placed the blame on a high-level cover-up of the effects of depleted

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253 *Ibid.*, 131.

254 The Minute is included in the videocassette series of the first 40 Heritage Minutes, released in 1995.

255 While the *Peacekeepers* Minute was present when the website was accessed in August of 1999, it had been removed by my next recorded visit in January 2000. This Minute is also absent from the teaching materials—this is evident from the blank space in the bibliography/filmography listings where the Minute’s information would have been.

256 This information was provided by Susan Schroder of *Histor!ca*.

uranium, used as ammunition in several peacekeeping missions. It can only be assumed that, in light of these developments, *The Heritage Project* chose to pull this Minute to avoid the controversy associated with Canadian Peacekeepers in the 1990's. In their hasty retreat from the topic, it seems plausible that the *Project* was alarmed by the possibility that this simplistic, happy-ending narrative would be exposed as laughingly idealistic, and all but irreconcilable to the lived conflicts and questions of contemporary Canadian society.

### The Presence of 'Unfavourable' Canadian History

Amazingly, only *two* of sixty Minutes recall the 'negative' events of Canadian history, *Louis Riel and Nitro*. While *Louis Riel* features a dark and disputed part of Canadian history, Riel's noble martyrdom makes this Minute more about the honour of heroic sacrifice, than the disgrace of oppression and assimilation. Riel's role as a kind of "all-purpose hero."<sup>257</sup> detracts from the painful and stark nature of the Minute.<sup>258</sup> While not evoking the feel-good pride of a national athlete or innovator, Riel flourishes as a hero by being completely protean. Adopted by First Nations, Francophones, Westerners, and even English-Canadians, Riel "manages to be different things to different people, depending on what they want him to be."<sup>259</sup> Thus, while Riel represents a dark period of history, he exists less as a casualty of injustice than as a remarkable and versatile hero.

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257 Francis, *National*, 114.

258 In this black and white Minute, there is a close-up of Riel's face, as he stares blankly, and straight ahead. A voice over gives a speech by Riel, stating "I forgive them with all my heart...but let them remember that I struggled for the Métis, for the people of Manitoba and the Northwest...I have struggled not only for myself but for the rights of my people, the Métis." At the end of his speech, the face suddenly drops from the screen to reveal the taught rope of Riel's hangman's noose.

259 Francis, *National*, 114. *Project* historian John Thompson, suggests that this Minute is meant to give Louis Riel back to the Métis, and set the record straight about who he was actually fighting for (though Riel's speech mentions his commitment to "the people of Manitoba and the northwest"). However, Thompson's comments allude to the versatile nature of Riel's heroism: "We took Louis Riel away from French Canadians, and we took him away from Western Canadians. But they say 'Louis Riel stood up to those central Canadians in Ontario and Quebec for the West'. And in Quebec they say, 'Ah, Louis, pendu pour les Anglophones, pour les Protestants'. And in fact, Louis was a Métis leader. He was not a leader of western Canada or a leader of Quebec. What he was fighting for in the

It can thus be argued that the only example of truly *negative* Canadian history is *Nitro*, a critical account of the exploitation of Chinese labour on 19<sup>th</sup> Century CPR construction sites. *Nitro* features young Chinese workers being asked to set dangerous nitroglycerin charges in return for boat fare for their relatives. Construction administrators are presented as ruthless and racist figures; a fatal explosion is followed by the callous remark, “Dammit, that’s the third one we lost this month...get another volunteer.” The same young worker that survives an explosion trying to set a charge appears at the end of the Minute as an elderly Chinese man recounting the story to his grandchildren. He states that that “there is one dead Chinese man for every mile of the track.”<sup>260</sup> This stark narrative of racism makes *Nitro* the most anomalous Minute of the sixty. The nameless figures of *Nitro* are not only casualties of appalling racism, but leave an imprint of injustice on one of Canada’s most notable national symbols. Unfortunately, the message of this Minute is diluted. Firstly, the fact that *Nitro* remains only one gritty and difficult Minute in the series of sixty means that its message is a whisper within the Minutes’ loud national narrative of self-congratulation. Also, the fact that an elderly Chinese Canadian is relaying this story from ‘long ago’ to an intrigued and surprised group of Chinese children again highlights the theme of moral progress. Like the *results* seen in the Minutes featuring female crusaders, *Nitro* implies the completion of the transition to racial tolerance and acceptance in Canada.<sup>261</sup>

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west was the rights of the Métis. So, it was exciting to have an opportunity...to show that there are all these different kinds of perspectives that most of us never thought about’ (*Minute by Minute*).

260 *Project* Historian John Thompson states, “There was this western Canadian expression I learned from my grandfather who worked on the Canadian Pacific Railway, and he would actually say, ‘there is a dead pigtail for every mile of that railway through the mountains, Johnny’, so we wrote it, ‘there is a dead Chinaman for every mile of railway’, and eventually it had to be ‘there is a dead Chinese man for every mile’, so there are things that can’t be said.” (*Minute by Minute*)

261 This ‘buffering’ aspect of *Nitro* is alluded to by Deborah Morrison, who suggests that the Minute is one of the best of the series. Morrison states that *Nitro* “gives history a connectedness” and allows “Asians who are coming over now” to situate themselves within the history of Canada. This sentiment hints at the fact that this Minute is primarily intended to relay ‘how far Canada has come’ to new Canadians, rather than solely emphasize the racism of the Canadian past. Morrison also states that while administrators sought the approval of the Chinese community in Vancouver before releasing the Minute, they have had a lot of negative feedback from Canadians of British descent.

### Subnational Collectivities and the Mythology of Unity within the Minutes

The heroism of the Heritage Minutes has been shown to be largely unobtrusive. Based on the oppositional traits of humility, quiet resourcefulness, and courageous benevolence, beautiful Canadian losers have made their mark on the nation, and the world. The Minutes have made sure to shy away from those figures that display rabid heroism, realizing that Canadians distrust the imposition of vociferous and self-assured 'American' gallantry. There is also an obvious celebration of collective accomplishment in the Minutes, in opposition to the legendary 'rabid individualism' of the United States. Various Minutes highlight groups working together toward a common goal. This collective courage includes families overcoming hardship, as in the Minutes *Saguenay Fire* and *Soddie*; groups fighting for justice, such as the Quakers in *Underground Railroad* and Winnipeg soldiers in *Valour Road*; and individuals representing a larger community of contributors, in Minutes like *Rural Teacher*, and *Midwife*.

While this collective achievement is an important part of the Minutes, the ultimate theme of unity means that the more significant element is the *interaction* depicted between collectivities, especially those that have experienced protracted antagonism. Daniel Francis suggests that, while many countries celebrate heroes as symbols of nationalism and unity, "in Canada, a country with a weak national culture, strong regional grievances, and an ethnically diverse population, they are more often than not flashpoints for disunity."<sup>262</sup> Picking up on the fact that heroism is a contested terrain in Canada, and that "heroic figures have tended to emerge from the regions or from minority struggles against the status quo,"<sup>263</sup> the *Project* stresses the importance of co-operation and compromise to the nation's development. The two main partnerships seen in the Minutes are associations between

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who feel their ancestors are being portrayed in a negative light. Information taken from Deborah Morrison Interview.

<sup>262</sup> Francis, *National*, 113.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

Aboriginal and European communities, as well as English and French speaking Canadians.

Chronologically, the first pairing appears in the first few Minutes, from the early origins of the Iroquois Confederacy to the first few decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The French-English partnership is presented in the Minutes of the following time period, which consists of the pre-Confederation decades of the 1830's to the 1850's. After these early historical narratives, French-Canadians are presented in isolation, while First Nations Peoples all but disappear from the Minutes.

### First Nations Representation – Tokenism and Homogenization

After the *Peacemaker* Minute - which itself explains the origin of the Iroquois Confederacy through mystical, intangible images, creating a simplistic and mythical rather than a real and complex sense of 'the Indian' - the Minutes rarely specify the particular First Nations culture being represented. They instead use a kind of an 'Aboriginal Presence', which allows for the avoidance of an articulation of an intricate and particularistic delineation of Canada's First Nations.<sup>264</sup> The only other Minute which makes a point of defining a specific First Nations culture comes in *Riel*, whose story obviously demands an articulation of his Métis heritage. This mythical amalgamation is not the only thing that prevents Aboriginal figures from having their own historical narratives. First Nations Peoples are consistently presented in coalition with European settlers, whether they be French or English, and the narratives of these Minutes are consistently told from the point of view of the European characters, and do not allow Aboriginal figures to tell their own stories.<sup>265</sup>

Of the eight Minutes in which Aboriginal Peoples appear, six involve them working together with

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264 The Minutes seem to promote what Ojibway playwright Drew Hayden Taylor calls "The myth of pan-Indianism", which puts forth a common Indian identity. Taylor states that it is always easier for non-Aboriginals to lump together the distinct languages and cultures into one. He states that "To us, [First Nations peoples] there is only the Cree, the Ojibway, the Salish, the Innu, the Shuswap." Drew Hayden Taylor. "Seeing red over myths." *The Globe and Mail*, 8 March 2001, A15.

265 The possible exception to this rule is *Sitting Bull*, who gets to tell his own story within the Minute. However, the voice-over at the end of the Minute, as shown in above arguments, misrepresents the experiences of the Sioux

European settlers, all of which are told from the perspective of the latter.<sup>266</sup> After *Peacemaker*, Louis Riel is the only figure able to tell his own story, breaking from the theme of easy friendship between European settlers and First Nations Peoples. *The Naming of Canada* shows Cartier's first meeting with the Iroquois<sup>267</sup>, where he is welcomed into their village by an elder, while the following Minute, *Nicollet*, shows a group of Aboriginal men paddling the explorer to what he thinks is the China Sea, and pointing out areas that might lead to his desired destination.<sup>268</sup> The Minutes *Siroop* and *Laura Secord* again emphasize an easy friendship between these two groups. *Siroop* shows an Indian family drawing syrup from a maple tree. When a family of French-Canadians observes the practice from afar, they are invited to join in the harvest. Eventually the two families are shown sitting around the fire, smiling and laughing, with an Indian woman trying to teach the French guests the Aboriginal term for syrup. The end of the Minute hears the French matriarch say, "thanks to *our Indian friends*, we have produced 30.000 pounds of this sweet gift." Aboriginal figures provide a similar 'obliging' presence in *Laura Secord*. When the Minute sees *Secord* run to warn of the impending American attack, she faints from exhaustion and is kindly helped up by a concerned group of Aboriginal men. She asks them to take her to the Lieutenant, and they do so without hesitation. After this, we are informed that the message was delivered, and that these Mohawks worked on behalf of British North Americans to repel the American invasion.

The remaining Minutes featuring Aboriginal figures are *Sitting Bull*, showing the Chief's decision to remain in Canada, and the *Inuksuk* Minute which uses the interaction between an RCMP officer and a group of Inuit to explain the meaning of the Inuksuk structures. The first Minute involves Sitting

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Chief.

266 These eight Minutes do not include *Vikings*, where it is implied that the Norse explorers battled native inhabitants, or *Emily Carr*, which includes allusion to the Native presence in Canada. These two Minutes do not give an on-screen role to Aboriginal figures, and thus are not included here.

267 Here, the delineation of specific Aboriginal cultures is possible due to the information provided by the teaching materials, not the Minutes themselves.

268 The teaching materials on this Minute, like many of the Minutes, are quite unclear. Even after several readings.

Bull's choice of which territory and body of laws would be kinder to his people – Canadian or American - and seems to be included in the series of Minutes mostly for its ability to emphasize the tolerance of the Canadian authorities in comparison to their American counterparts.<sup>269</sup> The second Minute involves an explanation of the Inuksuk – an Inuit marking involving a particular arrangement of stones - which comes in the form of a justification provided to a disbelieving RCMP officer. This officer seems to act as a representative figure of the general non-Inuit population, and in doing so provides a skeptical narrative for the Minute. Obviously suffering from some sort of leg injury, the officer sits at the campsite of a group of Inuit that are helping him regain his health. As he watches the Inuit build an Inuksuk, we hear him think to himself, "I'm in trouble, and they are building an Inuksuk!" Unable to stand alone in the Minute, the Inuit must answer to the officer's disbelief: the Inuit mother asks her son to translate into English the justification. "Now, the people will know we were here."

Of the eight minutes featuring Aboriginal Peoples, only one – the *Peacemaker* Minute - presents the Indian culture independently of European settlers. The remaining First Nations Minutes, of which only one extends beyond the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, are all concerned with the role of Aboriginal Peoples in the context of white society.<sup>270</sup> Indigenous figures are present to assist in exploration, provide men for battle, or to generally emphasize the neighbourly relationship between Aboriginals and European settlers. To trust these Minutes as an accurate account of the historical association between these two groups would be to believe that there never existed points of conflict, and that the two cultures were not only tolerant of one another, but willingly and harmoniously intermingled. Furthermore, rather than presenting the idea that European settlers invaded the land and culture of the First Nations

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it is unclear whether the Indians portrayed in the Minute are Algonquin or Winnebago.

<sup>269</sup> See above arguments, which demonstrate that a misleading voiceover narrative leads the audience to conclude that Canadians were virtually blameless in the mistreatment and ultimate death of Sitting Bull and his people. It is unlikely that a Minute with Sioux authorship would contain the same presentation of information.

Peoples, the Minutes portray a society that seems to naturally *belong* to the newcomers. Aboriginal figures constantly seem out of place, an imposition or an afterthought. In *Sitting Bull* there does not seem to be a place for the Sioux people, with both Canada and the United States being reticent to accept the tribe. The Inuit of *Inuksuk* are questioned for putting their culture in front of an outsider's needs, while *Nicollet*, *Sirop*, and *Laura Secord* all present First Nations Peoples who accommodate the needs of European settlers. While this assisting role assigns First Nations a peripheral presence in the Minutes, the fact that most of these stories are set in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries also keeps Aboriginal Canadians prisoners of the past. The evolution of their place within Canadian society is not charted like the progress of Canadian women, and they do not hold a place in the national narratives of accomplishment and heroism occupied by Canadians of European origin.

#### The Disallowance of French-Canadian Distinctiveness

The second pairing of the Minutes involves the relationship between French and English-speaking Canadians. Of the sixty Minutes, twenty-one involve French-speaking Canadians or Quebeckers.<sup>271</sup> Of these Minutes, there exist three main groupings. The first are those Minutes in which French-speaking Canadians are presented in tandem with English or Aboriginal figures. While there are few of these Minutes, their message is unmistakable. They portray a nation built on the historical foundations of tolerance and co-operation, and imply that a glance back to these founding ideals might be a step toward a common future. This theme comes out most notably in the Minutes, *Etienne Parent*, *Baldwin and Lafontaine*, and *Orphans*, which use different settings to stress the message of Canadian unity. In the Minute featuring Parent writing editorials from his 1838 jail cell, this devoted *patriote* is toned down to a reasoned mediator, calling for tolerance between French and

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270 The Minute featuring Inuit building an Inuksuk takes place in 1931.

271 While twenty-one Minutes present French-Canadians or Quebeckers, only 14 were produced in French (each Minute is produced in *either* French or English, none in both). Surprisingly, a number of Minutes with French speaking characters are produced in English, including *Hart and Papineau*, *Casavant*, *Pauline Vanier*, and *Borduas*.

English Canadians, and suggesting that “our two races can live side by side without one enslaving the other.”<sup>272</sup> *Baldwin and Lafontaine*, a predictable Heritage Minute topic, obviously stresses the potential for French-English teamwork. The injustice of Lafontaine being denied political power in Lower Canada is quickly overshadowed by an invitation from Robert Baldwin to run in a Toronto riding. Lafontaine wins, works together with Baldwin to forge the basis of responsible government, and together they provide the most legendary example of French and English Canadians working together to solve their political problems. *Orphans* is a similarly inspiring story of co-operation. Here, the Irish children orphaned on their voyage to the new world (who, incidentally, lack Irish accents but manage to converse with their prospective parents in French), beg to keep their surnames on the wishes of their dying mother. The adoptive French families are sympathetic to this request, and agree that the children can keep their names. Again, we witness compromise between individuals of French and English cultures, and see the origins of French-speaking Quebecers of Irish descent.

The second and largest main grouping of ‘French’ Minutes are those which happen to feature figures or events of French or Quebec origin, but do so only in focusing on another aspect of the narrative.<sup>273</sup> The Frenchness of the people and situations is almost non-existent; the characters could be of any cultural origin, the location could be any spot in English Canada. Their French connection is usually mentioned, but in no way elaborated. These Minutes shy away from any hint of cultural distinctiveness, choosing instead to focus on the essential Canadian qualities of the characters and events. This is the case for the Minutes involving Cartier and Nicollet, whose main theme is nation

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Often the characters in these Minutes speak in English, but carry notable French accents.

272 The teaching materials for *Etienne Parent*, which portray a nationalist that fought for the culture and language of his people, paint a far different picture than the text of the Minute. Far from actively promoting a coalition of the two linguistic communities, The Act of Union forced Parent to convert his French nationalism into a plea to his people to “make the best they could of this ‘political marriage’” (28).

273 At least 13 of the 21 French/Quebec Heritage Minutes either make quick reference to this connection, or do not mention it at all within the text of the Minute.

and exploration, as well as those featuring the creations of Casavant and Bombardier, which stress innovation and enterprise. There are also a number of Montreal Minutes – seemingly natural for a project whose primary patron is from Montreal himself. These range from those Minutes taking place in the city, such as *Jackie Robinson* and *Expo '67*, to those showcasing figures like John Humphrey and Pauline Vanier, who lived and worked in Montreal.

The final grouping consists of those Minutes which highlight events and figures specific to French-Canadian culture, and which clearly hold greater meaning for French-Canadians. This collection of Minutes includes, at the most, five narratives, and ranges from pre-Conquest battles, to ideas of the Quiet Revolution. However, while the cultural distinctiveness of these narratives is much stronger than in the Minutes of the above categories, it remains understated. The *Project* uses careful imagery and layered themes to keep Quebec nationalism far from these Minutes. While *Frontenac* displays the fortitude of New France, its dominant theme of anti-Americanism detracts from the pre-Conquest independence shown in the Minute. This negative nationalist theme works to evoke an 'us versus them' response from the television audience, resulting in the quick and natural mental conversion of *New France* defeating the *Anglo-American* invasion, to *Canada* trouncing the *United States*.<sup>274</sup> The Minutes *Louis Riel* and *Rocket Richard* also can be seen to carry special meaning for French Canadians. However, both of these Minutes also speak to other Canadians. There is no doubt that Maurice Richard is a celebrated Francophone hero. However, the Minute that honours his accomplishments shows the hockey legend moving his family into a new home the same day that he scores eight points in a game against the Detroit Red Wings. His identity in this Minute is attached to professional sport and not specifically to Quebec; as an NHL hockey legend, his following remains as much national and even international, as Québécois. Riel, despite the controversial circumstances of his narrative, carries the same type of multifaceted heroism as Richard. In this

Minute, Riel himself states that he “struggled for the Métis, for the people of Manitoba and the northwest.” Thus, while the Riel Minute might carry special meaning for Francophones, they again have to share this icon with other Canadians.

The Minutes which contain the strongest and most independent references to French culture are *La Bolduc* and *Borduas*. These Minutes are distinctively Québécois, and contain individuals and movements that are recognizable to Quebeckers, while presumably remaining comparatively unfamiliar to English-Canadians. *La Bolduc* features a Francophone songstress whose music reached out to Quebeckers during the Depression of the 1930’s, while *Borduas* shows the Quebec painter whose ideas are linked to the Quiet Revolution. While these two Minutes are the most overt in their celebration of distinctive elements of French-Canadian history, this celebration remains muted, making no reference to the collective identity and struggles of the Quebec people.<sup>275</sup>

While the listing of Minutes suggests that *La Bolduc* is about the famed singer “whose songs cheered les Québécois during the bitter Depression of the 1930’s,” the Minute itself does little to convey a sense of French community, and doesn’t even mention Quebec in the narrative of the Minute. The teaching materials insist that Travers-Bolduc was the voice of courage for Francophones during the depression, stating that “she spoke directly to the audience with whom she identified.”<sup>276</sup> Yet, the singer remains detached from her beloved Québécois during the entire Minute; the closest that the singer comes to interacting with her community is when she plays her records out the window of her

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274 See earlier arguments, which discuss the revised text of this Minute.

275 Johanne Macdonald was the only staff member to venture a personal opinion about Quebec nationalism in the Minutes, stating that “I think that they have shied away from that.” She suggests that the *Project*, in an attempt to gain positive exposure, stayed away from controversy and fragmentation and “tried to stay neutral.” The Minutes analyzed here represent the work done by the Project before the implementation of a specifically *French* component in 1998, with Macdonald appointed as the co-ordinator. She states that “if you chose to start with an almost all English team, you don’t want to deal with the controversy in Quebec. But, 2 ½ years ago, they decided, ok we do want a French team on board. And the day that they bring in an aboriginal team, then you truly will have Canadian history.”

apartment while the people gather around below. This absence of a sense of French community is compounded by the fact that the images and message of the Minute do nothing to convey a distinct sense of the Quebec People. The voice-over at the end of the Minute makes no mention of French-Canadians, and even contains an unspecific reference to Travers-Bolduc's audience, stating that "to her fans, she would always be *La Bolduc*." In fact, if it weren't for the French music that the audience hears the singer play out her window, as well as the basic fact that this Minute was produced in French, *La Bolduc* could just as easily have taken place in an Anglophone community.

*Borduas* is another Minute which does little to convey the cultural particularity of Quebeckers. The Minute is as colourless as it is complex, mimicking the black and white surrealist painting created by the artist during the narrative. Paul-Emile Borduas is shown in his Paris studio reflecting on his philosophical views. Yet, while the list of Minutes describes *Borduas* as "Québec's renowned voice of the Quiet Revolution," the images and words of the Minute do nothing to convey the fact that this Minute, in fact, *concerns Quebec*. The artist's commentary makes only theoretical allusion to the ideas that would propel the watershed events of the Quiet Revolution. Furthermore, the involved and inaccessible monologue of *Borduas* makes this Minute the outlier to a series driven by simple, emotional issues and dialogue that avoid "the temptation to be too informative."<sup>277</sup> A comparable Minute featuring Marshall McLuhan involves the ideas of an equally complex and influential thinker, but also gives the audience a context within which to situate the scholar, showing a back-and-forth between McLuhan and his fascinated students. *Borduas* provides us with only two images - Borduas himself, and his paint - and the following text:

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276 Teaching Materials, 112.

277 Patrick Watson, as cited in Boone, D5.

*Refus Globale*, c'mon that was in '48. Fear of prejudice, fear of public opinion, total condemnation, fear of finding yourself without God. It's enough to make you sick to your stomach when you see all of the rewards given to appalling cruelty, to threats, to mindless excesses, to the manufacture of mountains of useless goods. Life goes on. The important thing is to be able to create, isn't it? *Refus Globale*, this piece of paper cost me a lot. Forced to finish his days in exile, the *poor* artist.

While this text is certainly dramatic, its ideas are quite sophisticated, and are beyond the comprehension of the *Project's* targeted audience of young Canadians, as well as a good portion of the general population. Further to this, the context of these ideas is virtually non-existent, and it is not until the concluding voice-over that the audience can attempt to situate these concepts within the information that *Refus Globale* was a "manifesto decrying the stifling conditions of Quebec society in the forties...written by a group of artists led by Borduas." Not only does it seem curious that an event as important as the Quiet Revolution is portrayed in such an indirect and inaccessible way, but also that Borduas speaks *English* rather than *French* in this Minute.

## Conclusion

Even though *The Heritage Project* stresses knowledge about Canada's past, the Minutes and the various educational materials growing out of them are gifts for studying the myths and anxieties of contemporary Canadian identity. The Heritage Minutes are not scattered stories of Canadian history, but mythological narratives of nationalist belonging. While the topics of the Minutes are diverse, the storylines demonstrate a strategic pattern of distortion and omission. The underlying task of constructing a shared sense of Canadian belonging, combined with a popular medium that demands artful packaging, provide us with a "national fantasy life" that effectively disables our ability to comprehend the reality of contemporary elements of difference and disagreement.<sup>278</sup>

Canadians carry fragmented and multiple identities. Linguistic, ethnic, regional, and political divisions leave Canadians feeling skeptical and nihilistic about common national foundations and traditions.<sup>279</sup> The high level of anxiety that is seen to accompany this instability of the Canadian union lends credence to wishful national myths. *The Heritage Project* responds to this national concern by presenting a comforting heritage lesson on who we are as Canadians, and why we should love our country. The *Project's* message is that the fundamental elements of the master narrative of Canadianism can be found in the essential characteristics and accomplishments of those Canadians who have worked to shape our country; losing the historical footing of the nation and its ancestors means losing touch with our Canadian identity and jeopardizing the future of our country. Yet, as Daniel Francis points out, "There is consolation in nostalgia, but there is also danger."<sup>280</sup> The idealistic narrative of a unified collective memory and identity sidesteps the debilitating fractures of Canadian society, and dangerously misrepresents our complex and changing nation. The stories of

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<sup>278</sup> Francis, *National*, 28.

<sup>279</sup> Seixas, 698.

<sup>280</sup> Francis, *National*, 176.

both negative and heritage nationalism are literally too good to be true; the roots, connections, and virtues they revere are flawless fantasy. All ancestors are noble, courageous figures, all landscapes are sprawling and windswept, and all chronicled events “strew tales of heroism and sacrifice along a tapestry of steady progress.”<sup>281</sup> The Canadian nation forges on, in an unbroken and harmonious rhythm of moral and technological development.

### Denial of Difference

Brian Osborne states that the Minutes should be praised for their inclusive reconfiguration of the Canadian historical record. He states that “no one region, class, ethnic group or gender is privileged in a representation of heritage that attempts to advance an integrative function by celebrating the participation of many of the diversities in the record of nation-building.”<sup>282</sup> In one way, Osborne is right. The stories of the Minutes do, in fact, present diverse moments of crisis, and various points of identity. In order to keep this popular national narrative internally persuasive – which entails maintaining its relevance to a substantial number of Canadians – the Minutes must embody a certain level of difference and intersection. However, the *generic* and *essential* Canadianism which acts as the ‘integrative function’ in the Minutes means that the theoretical concept of *difference* is never allowed to approach the practical reality of *division*. This nation-building theme necessitates the omission and misrepresentation of those particularities that fragment the unified vision of the Canadian nation by demanding or merely exhibiting their own narrative of subnational belonging.

Various groups are denied their own histories, swallowed by the ultimate goal of a unified and proud national narrative. While White Canadians are awarded a heroic story of emancipation through the emphasis of Canadian (un-American) racial tolerance, Afro-Canadians are denied their own stories,

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281 Lowenthal, 88.

282 Brian Osborne. “Figuring,” 38.

existing as props in the national biography. Women nurture the country's narrative of moral progress, but are refused misery, frustration, and oppression – namely, reality – as they lay outside the story of a just society. French-Canadians, while having a wide presence in the Minutes, do not have a collective one. Again, this group, which produces the most serious counter-narrative to the myth of Canadian unity, holds a superficial and largely strategic role in the narrative of pan-Canadian identity. The First Nations of Canada are fused into a mythical Aboriginal 'presence' which is ultimately used to highlight the easy interaction between these original inhabitants and the European newcomers. Labour, a traditional voice of protest, is absent from the Minutes while innovation and enterprise are at the heart of national glory and progress.<sup>283</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> century immigrants, remarkably, receive no voice, 20<sup>th</sup> century Aboriginals do not exist, and the cracks in the Canadian identity that both develop and expand in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are somehow all addressed and corrected with the agreement and compromise of the distant Canadian past. These examples show that the ultimate goal of unity and national belonging within the Minutes mandates a reduction of the fragmentation of Canadian society, to a neutral, disengaged, and largely hollow personification of plurality. To bring the actual lived concept of identity difference into the fold, and award subnational groups a self-defined historical narrative, is to collapse the dominant idea of *the Canada*.

### History Displayed as set of Results

*The Heritage Project* insists that its Minutes will inspire a generation of Canadians to investigate the nation's past through more thorough sources such as books, documentaries and museums. Because these vignettes only polish the surface of Canadian history, people will be left unsatisfied, and strive to know the deeper details of the events and personalities involved. However, the comforting

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283 While space limitations did not allow a discussion of the themes of labour and business, there is a clear imbalance between the two. Enterprise is celebrated in at least seven Minutes, including *Bombardier*, *Le Resau*, and *Nat Taylor*. In contrast, labour is virtually non-existent; its strongest presence is in the Minute, *Nitro* (although this Minute is as much or more about race than labour). Labour is also alluded to in *Maurice Ruddick*.

narratives of progress and virtue provided by these easily digestible dramas are not likely to make them springboards to further historical examination. Driven by the contemporary needs of Canadian unity, *The Heritage Minutes* collapse together past and present-day Canada. They emphasize the continuity of noble Canadian characteristics such as courage, benevolence, and ingenuity, and use historical stories to address contemporary concerns and divisions. While the essential attributes of Canadians are *continuous*, history is conversely displayed as a set of *results*. In the Minutes, racism, sexism, exploitation, and oppression have been neatly tied up and thrown away. In this sense, the Minutes can be likened to half-hour television sitcoms: while the plot must involve an entertaining and sometimes informative lesson for the audience, every problem must be solved by the end of the show. In the Minutes, complications have been solved, hardships have been overcome, and mistakes have been repaired. Most importantly, a sense of national self-satisfaction has been tapped. In this way, the *Project* fulfils a goal set out by Laurier LaPierre in his assertion: "It's not a question of teaching history, it's a question of feeling it."<sup>284</sup> Much like Remembrance Day ceremonies which seem to "train children's memorial sensibilities rather than to foster a critical disciplinary investigation of the past,"<sup>285</sup> the Minutes evoke the detached emotions of appreciation and indifference toward past struggles that are clearly *over*.

#### The Search for Canadian Unity – An Exercise in Futility

This study began as an attempt to identify *The Heritage Project* as one of the most successful national 'identity campaigns' in the history of Canada. Looking at its scope and impact, it is impossible not to recognize the *Project's* contribution to the contemporary narration of the nation. *The Heritage Project* has worked to redefine the roster of the 'consciousness industry,' and its Minutes have reshaped the avenues of national self-knowledge. Yet, while the novelty of the

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284 Taken from promotional video *A Simple Idea. Heritage Project Promotional Materials*, videocassette recording.

Project's contribution and the unconventional format of the Minutes point to an original and forward-looking initiative, the ideas and themes driving the Heritage Minutes remain grounded in the age-old myths of Canadian unity. The myth of comparative national superiority is used to unite Canadians in a congratulatory feeling of proud nationality. This contrast helps to paper over the internal fragmentation of Canadian society, and obscure examples of injustice and intolerance by drawing attention to a contemptible external foil. The myth of a noble and unifying national memory is equally useful in drawing out a sense of national purpose and common belonging. When built on a set of stories that outlines a national essence of strength, compassion, and co-operation, Canadian nationalism is effortless, stable, and embraceable. If contemporary Canadians are tired of working toward common points of understanding, the past provides a distant and mythical space where problems can be tranquilized, loose bonds can be tightened, and above all, a sense of national unity can be constructed.

These conventional unity narratives provide many Canadians with evidence that their ancestors were involved in an important national undertaking. For others, the mythology of national unity has necessitated the exclusion of their story, or an imaginary sense of their historical presence. Like any pedagogical delineation of the nation, this narrative will be accepted by some, and rejected by others. However, an unqualified mass media presence means that to many, the Heritage Minutes provide an 'official' account of national belonging. Using the Minutes' neat and tidy delineation of the nation to formulate contemporary avenues of Canadian understanding "is like packing a suitcase with objects that persist in overflowing or underfilling the space."<sup>286</sup>

Organizing these pedagogical narratives around the desire for national unity means that the Minutes

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285 Seixas, 689.

286 John Updike, as cited in Lowenthal, 112. Updike uses this phrase to describe the 'composition' of history.

avoid the hard variance of Canadian identity – perhaps the only true element of *the* Canada. A symbolic communication of the nation built out of the familiar myths of heritage and negative nationalism is distant from and incompatible with the lived diversity and difficulty of Canadian society. While these myths might give Canadians a certain level of comfort, they blind us to the complexity of identity in Canada, and actually work to block avenues of understanding. To build new and meaningful structures of understanding and awareness, Canadians need national narratives that resist the temptation to establish a unified national identity as the fundamental national enterprise. The search for the answer to ‘*what Canada is...*’ has given Canadians a hollow mythology. The subsequent task of identifying ‘*what Canada isn’t...*’ has only resulted in an imagined comparison to our national arch nemesis. Perhaps Canadians would be better off recognizing that these ellipsis points only lead the nation into oblivion. As poet Robert Finch suggests, “Sure. Canadians are. Canada is./All the suspension points are in the full-stop.”<sup>287</sup>

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287 Robert Finch, “For The Land’s Sake,” in *Silverthorn Bush and Other Poems* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1966), 64.

**Appendix I**  
*The Heritage Project 60<sup>th</sup> Minute Commemorative Video List of Minute Synopses*  
 (Chronological Order)

1. **Peacemaker** dramatizes the Iroquois legend of the Tree of Great Peace which explains the origins of the Iroquois Confederacy.
2. **Vikings** depicts the destruction and the rediscovery – nine centuries later – of a Norse settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland. (980 A.D.)
3. **John Cabot** Voyaging from England to North America in 1497, Captain John Cabot and his sailors encounter the Grand Banks off Newfoundland and encounter cod fish so thick they slow the ship.
4. **Naming of Canada** provides one explanation of how Canada may have got [sic] its name during Jacques Cartier's first meeting with Iroquoian peoples. (1534)
5. **Nicollet** explores Jean Nicollet's futile search for the Asian Sea which instead added Lake Michigan to European maps. (1634)
6. **Sirop** A family of Attikamek Indians show a French-Canadian family how to harvest the syrup of the sugar maple.
7. **Frontenac** portrays the fortitude of Governor Frontenac and the people of New France as they repel an Anglo-American invasion in 1690.
8. **Laura Secord** dramatizes Secord's journey to warn of an American attack during the War of 1812, and portrays the role of the Kahnawake Mohawks in repelling the invasion.
9. **Hart and Papineau** retraces the path toward religious tolerance laws in Québec and the Commonwealth. (1832)
10. **Etienne Parent** looks into the young journalist's prison cell in 1838, where the future political economist writes an editorial calling for mutual tolerance between French and English Canadians.
11. **Baldwin and Lafontaine** two politicians from Upper and Lower Canada demonstrate French/English cooperation when Lafontaine seeks election in Toronto and goes on to help shape democratic reforms for all of Canada. (1841)
12. **Victoria** imagines a discussion between the Queen and Lord Melbourne on the question of Responsible Government in Canada. (1841)
13. **Orphans** shows one of the many French-Canadian families which adopted Irish children orphaned during their voyage to Canada in the 1850's.
14. **The Underground Railroad** illustrates the escape of African Americans from slavery to freedom in Canada during the 1850's.
15. **Casavant** looks at young Joseph Casavant, as he builds the first of what would be thousands of world renowned musical organs. (1834-1879)
16. **Paris Crew** recaptures the day in July, 1867 when four unheralded oarsmen from Saint John, New Brunswick, electrified Canadians with their victory in the world rowing championship in Paris.
17. **Saguenay Fire** recounts the tenacity of one family as they save themselves and their farm animals from the devastating fire of 1870.
18. **Trout** portrays Jennie Trout's struggle against prejudice to become the first woman licensed to practice medicine in Canada. (1871)
19. **Sitting Bull** Confident that the North-West Mounted Police will respect him and his people, the great Sioux Chief chooses to remain in Western Canada rather than return to the United States. (1877)

20. **Les Voltigeurs de Québec** watches the band of this famous French-Canadian regiment rehearse Calixa Lavallée's O Canada! For its first public performance at the St. Jean Baptiste celebrations of 1880.
21. **Nitro** takes viewers to a CPR construction site in 1880's British Columbia, as a young Chinese worker volunteers to set a dangerous nitroglycerine charge in return for a bonus which will pay his wife's boat fair to Canada.
22. **Tyrrell** reenacts the Canadian geologist's astounding discovery of dinosaur bones in the Alberta Badlands in 1884.
23. **Sir Sandford Fleming** follows the incredible career of the nineteenth-century engineer who planned three railways and played a pivotal role in the adoption of Standard Time. (1885)
24. **Louis Riel** joins the Métis leader on the gallows, as Riel recalls his struggle for his people in the moments before his execution in November, 1885.
25. **Rural Teacher** brings to life the famous Robert Harris painting, as a P.E.I. teacher confronts her school board. (1885)
26. **Soddie** depicts prairie settlers building their first home from the same sod they break to grow their crops. (1890's)
27. **Midwife** dramatizes the importance of a skilled midwife in a Canadian rural community in the late nineteenth century.
28. **Basketball** revisits the sport's inventor, James Naismith of Almonte, Ontario during one of the first experimental games. (1891)
29. **Steele of the Mounties** looks in on a chastened American gambler as he recalls his eviction from the Yukon by Superintendent Sam Steele during the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898.
30. **Marconi** revisits Signall Hill in St. John's, Newfoundland, on December 12, 1901, as Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi receives the first transatlantic radio message.
31. **Valour Road** became the name of Winnipeg's Pine Street after three of its young men won the Victoria Cross during the First World War.
32. **Winnie** recounts the true story of a Canadian soldier's bear – the object of adoration and inspiration for a young boy and his father. A.A. Milne. (1915)
33. **Flanders** Outside a field hospital in Belgium, Canadian Army surgeon John McCrae solemnly pens the country's most often recited poem. (1915)
34. **McClung** depicts Nellie McClung's confrontation with Premier R.P. Roblin to win the right to vote for Manitoban women. (1916)
35. **Halifax Explosion** dramatizes one man's heroism during this 1917 disaster in Halifax Harbour which killed or injured thousands of people.
36. **Joseph-Armand Bombardier** glimpses the boyhood beginnings of Joseph-Armand's career as innovator and entrepreneur. (1920)
37. **Emily Murphy** recounts the circumstances under which she, and a group of Canadian women secured the rights of women as persons throughout the Commonwealth. (1929)
38. **Superman** looks at Toronto cartoonist Joe Shuster explaining the comic book hero he created. (1931)
39. **Myrnam Hospital** the struggle of one small Alberta community to care for its residents during the 1930s marks a tiny step in the evolution of Canada's universal health care system.
40. **La Bolduc** depicts the first recording session of Mary Travers, the young woman whose songs cheered Québécois during the bitter Depression of the 1930's.

41. **Inuksuk** joins an RCMP officer in 1931 as he watches a group of Inuit build one of these remarkable Northern landmarks.
42. **Penfield** illustrates the Montreal neurosurgeon's path-breaking advances in the treatment of seizure disorders. (1934)
43. **Agnes MacPhail** recalls Canada's first female MP through a depiction of her contribution to the reform of the Canadian penal system. (1935)
44. **Bluenose** a 17 year old Nova Scotian schooner – the undefeated champion of the International Fisherman's Trophy – is pitted against an American ship in the last and most dramatic sailing race of her glorious career (1939)
45. **Emily Carr** portrays the artistic evolution of the British Columbia painter and her life long commitment to her muse. (Died in 1945)
46. **Pauline Vanier** features one of Canada's most remarkable families, their efforts to aid displaced persons and refugees during World War II and their life long contributions to charitable endeavours. (1940's)
47. **Marion Orr** The ferry command pilot delivers fighters to Britain during World War II, and plans her post war career as Canada's first female flight school operator. (1942)
48. **Rocket Richard** Legendary hockey star, Maurice Richard, having worked 8 hours moving his family from one end of Montreal to the other, scores 8 points (5 goals and 3 assists) towards a 9-1 victory against the Detroit Red Wings. (1944)
49. **Jackie Robinson** In 1946, Montreal Royals players and fans welcome the first African-American player in the modern history of organized baseball.
50. **John Humphrey** A Montreal lawyer drafts and wins support for the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights.
51. **Avro Arrow** Canadian aerospace scientists design and test the world's fastest and most advanced interceptor aircraft (1953).
52. **Borduas** In his studio in Paris in 1957, Paul-Emile Borduas, Québec's renowned voice of the Quiet Revolution reflects on the impact of his writing and his art.
53. **Le Resau** recalls the vision of Bell Canada's Thomas Eadie, whose determination led to the trans-Canadian microwave network which began to carry television broadcasts and telephone calls across the country on July 1, 1958.
54. **Maurice Ruddick** provides an Afro-Canadian collier the opportunity to describe how he and his fellow workers survived eight days trapped underground during the 1958 Springhill, Nova Scotia mining disaster.
55. **Jacques Plante** portrays the goalie's challenge to hockey's conventions by wearing his invention, the hockey mask during an NHL game. (1959)
56. **Marshall McLuhan** peeks into a 1960's University of Toronto classroom as the world-renowned communications theorist fascinates students with his insights about mass media.
57. **Flags** John Matheson, MP a member of the 1965 parliamentary committee to choose a national flag surveys the many designs proposed for consideration.
58. **Expo '67** Montreal's Expo literally rises from the depths of the St. Lawrence River to give Canada a dazzling one hundredth birthday party. (1967)
59. **Nat Taylor** An enterprising Canadian cinema operator invents the modern multi-screen movie theatre.
60. **Water Pump** Mennonite communities in Southwestern Ontario serve as the inspiration in the design of tools and practices of sustainable development for developing countries.

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