

HIST 204 Abridged Course Text

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John Douglas Belshaw



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Cover caption: The winner crosses the finish line at a 1915 “sports day” organized by the Vancouver Police Department. Photo by Stuart Thomson, City of Vancouver Archives 99-1073.

Author's Notes

Like most instructors, I am never fully satisfied with the textbook I wind up choosing for my students. This one lacks a social history bent, the other is regionally-focussed in ways I don't like, that one doesn't say nearly enough about the economy or demography, and some seem geared toward the instructor rather than the student. I have often wanted to tear out the odd-numbered chapters from one text and staple them to the even-numbered chapters from another and then pass a third through a grinder and sprinkle its cheerful spirit of enquiry throughout. Writing a course text myself did not seem to be much of an option. This open text book project made all those scenarios possible.

This textbook is a document that exists in the Creative Commons. It is meant to be torn apart, restitched, added and subtracted from, improved, challenged, brought up to date, and even re-imagined. It is a system of storage rooms in which you'll find information you can use or lock away. My goal has been to (a) provide a familiar framework of pre-confederation Canadian history that raises challenging questions for undergraduates and (b) to build the kind of text that I would want to use in my own classes. To that end, this open textbook is organized along lines that meet most post-secondary learning outcomes in this field while simultaneously leaving my own imprint on the final product. It is, then, both recognizably a survey text for the years to 1867 without being absent of personality. I strove to reassert an Aboriginal perspective on events and in this last regard I hope, humbly and as a non-Aboriginal person, that I have achieved some success. I have, as well, endeavoured to raise the profile of both demographic and environmental history at a time when both fields require our attention and I did so, as well, in the companion text, *Canadian History: Post-Confederation*. The bottom line, however, is that the instructor and the students are in a position to make this text their own. And I encourage you to do so.

In order to make a resource like this one as widely available as possible one has to make the greatest possible use of other open educational resources (OER). Illustrations, for example, must be free of copyright and exist in the public domain or, if copyrighted, be released under a [Creative Commons license](#). Including material that does not allow for sharing privileges limits the usefulness of the finished product. Meeting this objective structures the process of writing an open textbook in distinctive ways. OER are used liberally but the vast majority of the text is comprised of original material.

Knowing that some sections are likely to be reused more than others (and some possibly replaced more often than others), one makes judgment calls as to the length of sections so as to facilitate both processes. Learning Objectives, Key Terms, Exercises, Short Answer Exercises, a Glossary, and other features are added, knowing

that they will be replaced/augmented/tweaked – and that the ability of a user to do so has to be made as easy as possible. The whole, then, is designed for repurposing and re-crafting, a rather different point of departure than one takes when writing a conventional monograph.

Some years ago I worked on a campus where a large patch of lawn was laid down between two busy buildings. There was a nice sidewalk around the edge, but it was obvious from the outset that people were going to walk across that grass. We watched as the path appeared, yellowed, and then became hardpacked – all in the course of only a few months. Then the facilities team showed up and laid the sidewalk where it was meant to go – where users wanted it to go. Interestingly, it was not in a straight line. This open textbook is like that experiment. I encourage you to reuse, remix, repurpose in ways that show us where users want it to go. Be fearless and creative.

Here's your chance to make history.

John Douglas Belshaw

February 2015

Week 1 - Introduction

Historical studies demand that we learn something about the past but it also requires us to ask *how* it is we know *what* we think we know about the past. When you read an academic history text, you'll observe that historians typically want to prove something about events in the past. For example, they want to show that one individual played a critical role, or that environmental change was a silent but critical player, or that prejudices affecting one group had an unanticipated outcome. At the same time, however, historians are keen to prove the value of their sources. They might argue, for example, that this census record or that judicial file or some set of private correspondence offers special insights that have not before been made available.

Although it may be simplistic, perhaps too simplistic, you may find it helpful to think about the study of history as a combination of the “what” and the “how.” That is, *what* happened and *how* we know it happened.

Grappling with the Canadian past is fraught with challenges and alive with exciting questions crying out to be addressed. But what constitutes the “Canadian” past? Clearly, the geographic space we call Canada is a relatively recent invention. Confederation, beginning in 1867, spread the brand beyond the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes to include other British colonies on the east and west coasts and some of the land in between. As a political idea — a country made up of provinces and territories with a constitution, flag, anthem, etc. — it continues to evolve. But in 1867 it was just one of many colonies in the British Empire and not necessarily the pick of the litter. A century and 10 years earlier it was part of a French empire that claimed influence over a much larger territory than the Canada of today. Still another century earlier, “Canada” referred to a struggling chain of frightened and fortified settlements along the St. Lawrence.

Let's push it back yet another century and more. Around 1567 the northern half of North America was a well-populated landscape made up of a multitude of diverse cultures. Their economies and relationships were continually changing while retaining core (and important shared) features from one generation to the next. The “Canada” of 1497 — one small patch of which may have been briefly visited by John Cabot and his crew — was a vastly more populous and rich human environment than would re-emerge here until the 19th century.

So whose Canada do we study? The Canada of the French? Of the Naskapi? Of the Basque whalers with their toeholds on the east coast? Of the Nuu-chah-nulth or the Acadians? When was Canada? Are there themes we can draw across generations and centuries? Are there successions of transitions as tumultuous and irreversible as rapids on a river? Who gets to tell those stories and whose voices are likely to remain silent?

It is only by asking questions such as these that history — as an activity — can be undertaken.

Learning Objectives

- Describe some of the principal concerns of historians as they undertake historical research.
- Explain the difference between primary and secondary sources.
- Demonstrate an ability to interrogate sources.
- Identify the dominant themes and debates in the telling of Canadian history.

1.1 The Writing of History

The telling of every country's national story is unique, and there are conflicts in that telling. Who gets to speak? Who does not? What alternative stories are there to be told? And how did it all turn out this way?

Historical writing is never without purpose. As early as the 18th century, historical accounts of New France were being produced that promoted the role of the Catholic Church and the seigneurs (the major landowners) as the custodians of the Canadien culture. These accounts were intended to buttress the position of the Church and seigneurs in the years to come as the authentic voice of Canadien ambitions. In the mid- and late-19th century, nationalist histories covering the whole of the Canadian timeline began to appear. They told the tale of the new nation, the Dominion of Canada, as something that embodied a recognizable vision of the modern state and thus provided historical legitimacy. Titles like *Colony to Nation* (1946) tell the tale: Canada had been a dependant (= a child) and now had achieved nation status (= adulthood).¹

This metaphor of maturation is commonly used in historical writing on new or newish societies. While doing so might appear benign, think about what it implies. Its purpose is to suggest that past societies were less evolved and that the newer one is better. Ask yourself: Is that an argument that bears serious scrutiny? It's certainly a good example of how history gets used to support a particular position.

We review four issues in this chapter:

1. **What is history?** The answer may seem obvious, but it can be complicated. Without having some sense of what is implied by history — and historical writing (historiography) — you'll miss many of the key issues in the study of the past. It's something like watching your first foreign film. You know there's more going on than meets the eye and that the experience would be better if you just knew what it was.
2. **Researching history.** How historians do their research — historical method — is different from history (that is, the account that you read). Historians find their bricks and mortar somewhere, and they need to organize them in ways that will stand up over time, although history is also often revised as new evidence emerges or research methodology evolves. Not having a sense of this aspect of historical work is akin to studying sculpture without having a clue about how stone is carved or steel is forged.
3. **Making histories.** Historians use a great many different kinds of sources to assemble

1. A.R.M. Lower, *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada* (Toronto: Longmans, Green and Company, 1946).

information on the past. Evidence comes in many forms.

4. **The current state of historical writing in Canada.** The field is rife with debates and disagreements, some of which can look like bench-clearing brawls.

What Is History?

In asking what history is, you must also ask, what is **historiography**? There is a subfield of history, one in which all historians have to have some expertise, that deals with the *history of history*. Historical writing — and the study of historical writing — is correctly called “historiography,” which encompasses both the *doing* (the writing of history) and the *reflecting on* (the study of history).

In the Western tradition, Herodotus (ca. 484-425 BCE) is considered as the Father of History, but the paternity of historical writing is not clear-cut, since storytelling about the past is a very old business. Historical writing in China probably began about 500 years before Herodotus was born, and everywhere human societies have appeared, there have been sagas and chronicles of some kind. Some of these were done with more literary licence than others. Brian Thom points out that the oral tradition of the Hul’qumi’num (of the Coast Salish nations) notes a difference between *syuth* (true histories) and *sxwi’em’* (fables and moral tales). This distinction is made by many cultures and is important to keep in mind: stories from and about the past take different forms and they do so to serve different purposes.² Written and oral histories alike adhere to two basic rules: reliability and verifiability. For the historian whose goal is to deliver as truthful a tale as possible, these rules are the gold standard for evidence.



Figure 1.1 A fragment of the *Book of Documents* attributed to Confucius (551-479 BCE).

If the source is trustworthy, then it’s reliable. Take the example of Bartolomé de las Casas, who was among the first Europeans in the Caribbean and who spent nearly half a century working as a priest, missionary, plantation

2. Brian Thom, "Coast Salish Senses of Place: Dwelling, Meaning, Power, Property and Territory in the Coast Salish World" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 2005), 81.

owner, bishop, and colonial administrator in Hispaniola, Venezuela, and Mexico. When he wrote of the vicious Spanish conquest of Haiti — “My eyes have seen these acts so foreign to human nature, and now I tremble as I write, not believing them myself, afraid that perhaps I was dreaming. But truly this sort of thing has happened all over the Indies, and more cruelly too sometimes, and I am quite sure that I have not forgotten.” — we are inclined to believe him, not least because he wasn’t going to win himself any friends by speaking out.³



Figure 1.2 Bartolomé de las Casas.

If historians can prove the claims made by their source, that’s verifiability. The best biographies go far beyond the personal diaries and letters written by their subject and look to other sources to confirm that the subject did what he or she claimed to have done. Another example, this one drawn from population history, shows some of the challenges of official documents. Bruce Curtis examined the early days of the census of Canada and found that Canada West (Ontario) and Canada East (Quebec) counted people differently.⁴ In the former, people were counted based on where they actually were on census day; in the latter, they were counted based on where they were supposed to be. This means that Canada East’s census takers included locals who were off working in factories in other jurisdictions, perhaps in New England. But in Canada West, anyone who was engaged in migrant work — wandering the countryside and towns looking for a job — or who was a recent arrival in a new town would most likely be overlooked. Without this bit of knowledge in hand, we might be forgiven for assuming that an official source like the census would be 100% reliable; however, thanks to local tax records, church registers, and other documents, we are in a position to *verify* the official numbers.

Serious historians seek to be both reliable and verifiable, which is why you’ll typically find a torrent of references supporting a scholarly study. The point is to demonstrate that the writer can be trusted because he or she has done the necessary digging and cross-checking. As well, studies that are well supported by references say to the reader, “Feel free to check it yourself and, by all means, use the information I’ve found to further your own

3. Bartolomé de las Casas, *History of the Indies*, trans. and ed. Andrée M. Collard (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1971), 121.

4. Bruce Curtis, *The Politics of Population: State Formation, Statistics, and the Census of Canada, 1840-1875* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

studies.” This reflects another tendency in historical research: the desire to share discoveries. Holding back sources raises both suspicion and eyebrows in readers.

Researching History

History just never gets old. Or does it? If historians use only verifiable and reliable sources, surely at some point we should have all the history we’re ever going to need. But a paradox exists about history: it has a stale-date. Our understanding of the past is constantly subject to change. This makes history open to revision, and its practitioners (that is, all serious historians) are sometimes pejoratively called **revisionists**. There do exist some landmark studies that stand the test of time, but more often than not conclusions reached by historians a generation or more ago are subject to a second (and third and fourth) look. Why is it that history is regularly “freshened up”?

New evidence emerges

Sometimes — although rarely — lost documents are found that shed new light on a historical event. For example, in the article “Reluctant Warriors: British North Americans and the War of 1812,” author E. Jane Errington reveals previously unexamined evidence from the newspapers of the time that Upper Canadians were not the fearless protectors of the homeland that they had appeared to be in earlier accounts and in popular mythology.⁵

More usual is for new evidence to emerge through discoveries made in a different field — say, medicine — that prove to be relevant to historical studies. It is unlikely that Mary Ellen Kelm could have written *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-50* without the knowledge that medical research provided toward the end of the 20th century.⁶ Cross-fertilization of this kind happens all the time, transforming *definitive* histories into *conditional* histories.



Figure 1.3 In this 1896 painting, General Isaac Brock encourages the volunteer Upper Canadian troops in the War of 1812: “Push on, brave York volunteers.” Recent research suggests that Upper Canadian enthusiasm for the war was, in fact, muted.

5. E. Jane Errington, “Reluctant Warriors: British North Americans and the War of 1812,” *The Sixty Years’ War for the Great Lakes, 1754-1814*, eds. David Curtis Skaggs and Larry L. Nelson (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001): 325-336.

6. Mary Ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-50* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999).

Ideology matters

Ideologies (i.e., ideas and values that guide our understanding of society and economy and may also drive political and personal agendas) also affect our perception of history. For example, Ian McKay of Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario, has been the key figure in identifying the importance of liberalism in Canadian history, both as a phenomenon and as a lens through which the past is viewed. (Note that here we are talking about small-l liberalism, as opposed to capital-L Liberalism, which is associated with the Liberal Party of Canada.) Liberalism, as a political ideology, places an emphasis on the individual. Whether in the role of consumer or voter or historical actor, the individual has been promoted as more important to Canadian history and public policy than groups or sub-nations.

Think about how this can affect our view of Canadian history. If the history of Canada is about the rise of the individual in a liberal-democratic state (one in which more and more people get the vote and in which rights are extended more and more broadly to individuals), how does that affect **collectivities** like First Nations? What about the experiences of French Canadians who, at various times in their history, have demonstrated a strong predisposition for being seen as one nation first and as many individuals second? Or how does this ideology of individualism square with the history of “working-class solidarity”?

After World War II small-l liberal values combined with a moderate form of left-wing collectivism that sought to enhance the condition of the individual by means of a larger, social welfare state. These ideals of democratic rights and a social safety net were a formative influence on nearly three generations of historians. In your lifetime there has been a growing reaction to state-liberalism from the Right. So-called neo-liberalism seeks a return to the “classical liberalism” of the 18th and early 19th centuries wherein the individual operates in a free market unfettered by government regulation and identity-group rights. The Left continues to provide a critique of liberalism/individualism, and it is more supportive of collective identities while at the same time subscribing to the essentially liberal view that individual choice in a democracy is non-negotiable. Just because these perspectives exist happily together in the mainstream does not mean they are not ideologically loaded. Historians writing from any one of these perspectives will take a different view on the past.

Other “isms” have had an effect on historical writing as well. **Marxism** and Marxist historians draw attention to the economic structures that overlay people’s lives in the past. **Environmentalism** invites us to look at the history of the fur trade, resource-extraction industries like logging and fishing, and the fabric of cities in ways that recast the environment from something that was acted upon to something that has an impact on human actors. Certainly **feminism** continues to have an enormous and laudable impact on historical thinking. Theological approaches to the writing of history are much less in vogue now than they once were, but **imperialism** (which, for centuries, had a strong theological and evangelical component) continues to influence the story of the nation-state in profound and very subtle ways. How scholars see society is one part of this ideological rainbow; how people in the past saw society — ideologically — is another. It’s complicated, but it’s hugely important in the context of how history is presented and written about.

Perspectives on what happened in the past may be informed by our concerns in the present, but that’s not the same thing as saying that the past exists for the benefit of the present. The Maritimes historian George Rawlyk once

wrote that “all historical writing is basically autobiographical in nature.”⁷ That is to say, the history we look for reflects the interests of our time and is constrained by the ways that our culture thinks. A society that is interested in the civil rights of women is more likely to ask questions on that topic than one that is not. By the same token, earlier generations of historians looked to the past for answers to questions that most of us today would not care to pose. The Canadian novelist William Gibson contributes this view: “The past changes. Our version of the past will interest the future to about the extent we’re interested in whatever past the Victorians believed in.”⁸ We have concerns and perspectives that are different from past generations and from those that will be nourished by future generations. This does not mean, however, that we have a licence to shop around in the past for vindications of the present. It is in the nature of historical celebrations to claim that it is thanks to historical events that we enjoy the freedoms that we do today, or that without the fur trade, Canada as we know it simply would not exist. This is called the **presentist fallacy**. What if we view our present dimly due to high unemployment, repressive legislation, massive cuts at the CBC, and environmental disaster constantly on the horizon? Would we then say that these things are the *fault* of whatever it was that happened 270 years ago or that the fur trade is to blame? Bias can be okay — we can be biased in our search for evidence of adolescent rebelliousness in early Nova Scotia and ignore much else that was going on at that time — but we cannot favour one outcome over another and certainly we cannot favour an outcome in our present.

Methodological approaches evolve

It isn’t enough for a historian to be a bloodhound who sniffs out the rare fact. The historian has to be a capable and versatile analyst. That means that each generation of historians will find a new way of cracking the code of the past. The application of good **quantitative historical techniques** borrowed from statistical sciences has had a great impact on the telling of history, and has sometimes completely toppled older histories. An example of an evolving approach is presented in Wendy Wickwire’s article “To See Ourselves as the Other’s Other,” which makes the case for using **oral histories** to examine events that took place centuries ago.⁹ More than 20 years before Wickwire’s article appeared, Bruce Trigger made a similar point regarding **ethnohistory** and the study of the Wendat/Huron First Nation. It is largely thanks to research of this kind that Aboriginal oral traditions have acquired greater and greater respect and credibility in the courtroom over the last two decades.¹⁰ Further, **demographic historians**, especially in Quebec, have devised new ways of analyzing population information held in censuses, birth and death records, and baptismal and marriage records. The end effect is that history is constantly being rewritten with new discoveries, new information, new perspectives, and new conclusions. It all makes for a dynamic field, despite the reputation that history has in some quarters for being dusty, musty, and dull.

7. G. A. Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit: Religious Revivals, Baptists, and Henry Alline* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), ix.

8. William Gibson, *Pattern Recognition* (New York: Berkley Books, 2005): 59.

9. Wendy C. Wickwire, "To See Ourselves as the Other's Other: Nlaka'pamux Contact Narratives," *Canadian Historical Review* 75, issue 1 (1994): 1-20.

10. For a detailed discussion of these developments, see Bruce Granville Miller, *Oral History on Trial: Recognizing Aboriginal Narratives in Court* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

List of Negro Men & Boys, also their age & value

Name	Age	Build	Complexion	Value	Remarks
Barry, Simon	40 yrs	6'	"	200	decent & well known
Old Samuels	70	"	"	200	old & disabled
John Miller	25	5' 8"	"	100	a runaway
Sam. Baskby	20	"	"	100	decently
Charles West	25	"	"	100	good Negro
Book Page	25	"	"	100	last runaway
William Anderson	25	"	"	100	last runaway
Orange	25	"	"	100	good Negro
Anderson, M.	25	"	"	100	good Negro
Bob, Severn	25	"	"	100	well disposed & able
Egon, L.	40	"	"	200	African, good & able
George, M.	25	"	"	100	a temperate & well known
Smith, M.	25	"	"	100	a runaway, no record
Charles, M.	25	"	"	100	a runaway, no record
Charles, M.	40	"	"	200	African, very good
Harold	45	"	"	100	decent & well known
Edmond	40	"	"	100	African, decent
Sam. Williams	25	"	"	100	A good Negro
Ballant	45	"	"	100	African, well known
Old, M.	25	"	"	100	decent & well known
Bill, M.	45	"	"	100	good Negro
Thomas	45	"	"	100	a runaway
Jefferson	25	"	"	100	African, good
Edmond, J.	45	"	"	100	the greatest used in the lot

Figure 1.4 A page from the “Book of Negroes,” which lists the 3,000 African-Americans who departed from New York as freed loyalists in 1783. Documents like this may provide both qualitative and quantitative evidence to historians.

Key Points

- Historical sources of all kinds are subject to the tests of verifiability and reliability.
- Historical revisions are invited by new evidence and changes in perspectives and methodologies.

Attributions

Figure 1.1

Shujing NCL 1 by White whirlwind is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 1.2

Bartolomedelascasas by Nagypaja is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 1.3

Push on, brave York volunteers by Scorpius59 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 1.4

2book0706b by Dr Wilson is in the [public domain](#).

1.2 Making Histories

Where does history come from? Historians use a great many different sources to assemble information on the past. Evidence comes in many forms.

To think like a historian, we must concern ourselves not only with what people did, but also with what they thought they were doing. In every act that humans perform, however simple or banal, they are looking toward the future. Nations don't go to war for the sake of war; they do so to obtain more territory or to secure borders or to chasten a neighbour *in the future*. Likewise, individuals make personal choices, such as emigrating or postponing marriage until they are older, because of how their decisions will "pay out" later on.

Peter Moogk, an accomplished historian of New France, encourages us to develop a deep understanding of past societies: "If a historian is not immersed in the culture of the time being studied and has not grasped its internal logic, then that scholar's reconstruction of past human behaviour will inevitably be superficial and anachronistic."¹ *French Colonial History* 4 (2003): 5. To study history properly, we must creep around behind people in the past and try to look at the future through their eyes. In order to do so, we must become open to the institutions and instincts of earlier eras and then consult the detritus and records of our predecessors.

The sources that historians rely upon are grouped under two headings (which sometimes overlap). The first group is **primary sources**, which are original materials that come to us directly from people in the past. Diaries, letters, and reports of government inquiries are good examples of primary materials. The other group is **secondary sources**, which generally are documents that examine primary documents and provide an interpretation. Both types are discussed below.

1. Peter Moogk, "Writing the Cultural History of Pre-1760 European Colonists,"

Primary Sources



Figure 1.5 Primary sources are often held in archives.

Primary sources are often held in **archives**, and sometimes in museums. (Often the archives are *in* a museum.) Archives may be private or semi-private, but the principal archival institutions in Canada are public and are organized by levels of government. The [National Library and Archives of Canada](#) is housed in Ottawa, every provincial capital has its own provincial archives, and most cities have one too. Most universities have their own archives, which are sometimes called “special collections,” and large public libraries very often have a room dedicated to primary documents.

In this electronic age of ours, many public archives are available online through [Archives Canada](#). As well, increasingly, historical photographs and maps are available online. Still, there are times when a visit to the physical place is called for. It is typically in an archives that historians do the painstaking detective work that leads to new discoveries about the past.

Exercise: Find the Archives

Wherever You Live, There's an Archives

The town or city in which you live has one. Local museums usually have some kind of archives or a set of local records, as do churches, military regiments, schools, and universities. It costs nothing to get into the archives.

Where is the provincial archives nearest to you? How many local archives are attached to museums? To churches? Regiments? Take a look at the online catalogue of any one of them. What kinds of things do they have? Pick a topic — the local breweries, the street on which you live, a home-grown artist you like — and see what they've got.

If possible, drop by and take a closer look. Ask the archivist about the collections. Tell him or her you're interested in learning what kinds of materials are collected and what most excites them. Describe in a couple of paragraphs the assets and, broadly, what makes them important resources for historical and/or community knowledge.

Finally, share what you've found with others. Go to [Wikipedia](#) or a community website and add that knowledge.

Reading the Records

Primary documents can get you closer to actual participants in past events, but they are not without problems. Think about it: Has anyone ever lied or embellished a story in his or her diary? Has there ever been an inquiry without a political agenda in the background? Have you ever read a letter and wondered if it reveals the writer's thoughts or what the writer thinks you will understand by it? Take the *Jesuit Relations*, for example. These are reports submitted by Jesuit missionaries in New France to their masters back home. There are many truths contained in them, but you have to keep in mind that the Jesuits who prepared the *Relations* knew that they would be read by people who had the power to cut off their supplies or to send them the reinforcements and materials essential to success. In the reports, were they overly optimistic about the likelihood of religious conversions among the First Nations? Did they dramatize or downplay daily life? Both?

Salt and pepper: comparing two paintings

If letters and reports can be duplicitous, what about paintings and maps? Take a look at Benjamin West's famous 1770 work, *The Death of General Wolfe* (Figure 1.6), which hangs in the National Gallery in Ottawa. Clearly it is a very romantic interpretation of what actually took place in 1759, but what truths does it reveal ... despite itself?



Figure 1.6 *The Death of General Wolfe* painted by Benjamin West.

The pepper to West's salt is *The Death of Montcalm* by François-Louis-Joseph Watteau, painted in 1800. It, too, hangs in the National Gallery. It shows Montcalm dying on the battlefield, despite the fact that he died in a surgeon's home.



Figure 1.7 *The Death of Montcalm* painted by François-Louis-Joseph Watteau.

Exercise: Paintings as Primary Sources

Portrayals of Historic Events

Compare the above two famous — and canonical — representations of *real events* with three more:



Figure 1.8 *Mort de Montcalm* ca. 1759.



Figure 1.9 *Death of General Montcalm* by Charles William Jefferys (1869-1952).



Figure 1.10 *General Wolfe killed at the Siege of Quebec on September 14, 1759.* (1792)

Now answer these questions.

1. What differences do you see?
2. Who was the intended audience of each?
3. What purpose was each painting meant to serve?
4. Who is in each painting? Who is not?
5. How are those in the paintings depicted?
6. In the end, who do you trust and why?

In order to appreciate and make the most of primary documents, we need to follow some basic practices of critical

enquiry. The questions that follow are ones that you should ask of your sources (even secondary sources) and have been posed by the historians whose articles and books you will read.

Identify the Source

- **What is the nature of the source?**

You'll want to know what kind of source it is — a newspaper, an oral history account, a diary entry, a government document, etc. — because different kinds of sources must be considered differently. For example, you might think about a written description of a fur trade post differently than you would think about a photograph of one, or you might ask different questions of census data regarding poverty in the 1830s and 1840s than you would of the recollections of Irish immigrants who arrived in the midst of the 1834 cholera epidemic. Knowing the type of source you're dealing with can help you start to think about appropriate questions.

- **Who created this source, and what do you know about them?**

Knowing something about who created the source can help you determine what biases they might have had, what their relationship to the things they described in the source might have been, and whether this source should be considered credible. Keep in mind that someone doesn't have to be a famous leader or play a dramatic role in history to be a credible source. In terms of understanding the experience of the War of 1812, for example, the writings of a militia soldier may be as valuable or even much more so than the correspondence of General Isaac Brock.

- **When was the source produced?**

Knowing when the source was produced can help you put it into historical perspective. A discussion of slavery in Canada, for example, would obviously be very different in the early 1700s (when most Canadian slaves were Aboriginals), the 1790s (when John Graves Simcoe, lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada, introduced an Act Against Slavery), and the mid-19th century (when the "underground railway" was shepherding American slaves north to freedom). If you don't know when a source was written, you can't put it in historical context and understand how it connects to historical events. If you're using a first-hand account that was written some time after the events it describes, you might also take into account the passage of time in your analysis. A record of events produced at the time has the advantage of freshness and a first-hand quality; it has the disadvantage of a limited horizon and none of the benefits of hindsight. A subsequent reminiscence or recollection of events may place things in perspective but it will likely lose a sense of the context of decisions and actions and, of course, it is subject to forgetfulness.

- **Where was the source produced?**

Just as it is important to situate the source in time, it's also important to identify *where* the source was produced. If you found a letter describing Acadia, it would matter quite a bit if the letter was written

by someone living and working — or even visiting — the colony as opposed to an official sitting in a chateau somewhere in France.

Contextualize the Source

- **What is the historical context for this source?**

What was going on in the place and time that the source was created? What significant local, regional, or global events might this source relate to? You can look for information about the historical context for your sources in many places. Sometimes sources are packaged along with descriptive information that can help you contextualize them. You can also consult secondary sources (like this textbook) to learn more about the time and place in which the source was created.

- **How were the creators of your document(s) connected to their historical context?**

Gender, race, and social and economic class all matter. So does ideological position. An account of the burning of the Parliament Buildings in Montreal in 1849, for example, will be of value only if you can determine where the creator stood on the issue of the Rebellion Losses Bill. Was he or she opposed? Was the creator involved in the arsonist mob that is described in the source? Figuring out how the author of your primary document fitted into the historical context can help you think more critically and creatively about what he or she had to say.

- **Why was the source created in the first place?**

You'll also want to know the motivations of the person who wrote the source, which may be easier to guess after you know the historical context. Why do you think this source was created? Was it meant to be a private document or was it intended for others to view? How do you know? If there was an intended audience, who was that audience? Family? The general public? Future generations? What did the creator of the source intend for that audience to get out of it? Was he or she trying to persuade people to a particular point of view? Simply recording daily events? Intentionally trying to deceive the audience? Trying to look good in the eyes of the readers and/or posterity?

Naturally, you'll want to extract as much factual information as you can from the source. Details are what you're after. But documents from the past are tricky and they might contain a surprise or two. What is the balance in the document between opinion and verifiable fact? Opinion isn't entirely without value, because you can then ask why the creator of the document held that opinion. Also, ask what the source is *not* telling you. What information might be withheld? Ask yourself what you expected to see that you didn't? For example, it might seem odd to find a letter written on July 1, 1867, that makes no mention of Confederation. Was that date not important to everyone in British North America?

In addition you can look at documents for unintentional messages — revelations of perspectives and prejudices that they so took for granted that they weren't necessarily aware they were transmitting them to their audience. An example is how women are regularly described in historic documents in a vocabulary of dependence and

weakness. Finally, be open to being surprised; documents may disclose much more than the facts. It is often only by confronting the original documents that you may be able to do some justice to the truth of the past .

Just one example comes from the journals kept by the Hudson's Bay Company's field officers. These journals covered commerce, day-to-day life in the posts and forts, relations with Aboriginal peoples, and personnel issues. The senior clerk at Fort Rupert on Vancouver Island in 1850 recorded in his journal that he was going to discipline some of his men: "I shall put them in Irons," he wrote. While that in itself may seem surprising, a look at the original document reveals even more: it shows us that the clerk's mental stability was in free fall. He was so agitated that the word "Irons" is scrawled in letters nearly two inches tall and it is triple-underlined. The nib of his quill pen nearly tore through the page.²



Figure 1.11 Hudson's Bay Company trading post (ca. 1800).

CASE IN POINT

The Colonial Advocate was produced by William Lyon Mackenzie from 1824 to 1834, first in Kingston and then in York/Toronto. Mackenzie was what is sometimes described as a “gadfly”: someone who discomfits the comfortable. His attacks on the Upper Canadian ruling class, which he called the “Family Compact,” were highly provocative and ultimately contributed to the Rebellions of 1837. Even if you know nothing of 19th-century newspapers, you’ll know that they were highly different from those of today. Who would Mackenzie be writing for? Literacy was hardly universal in the 1830s. Like all publishers, he was in business to make money, so you need to ask what and who his market was. Was his combative stance part of his marketing strategy? The point is that newspaper accounts (then as now) don’t occur in a vacuum. Newspapers are interpretative documents in that they try — to some extent — to make sense of events even as they report on them.

2. Hudson's Bay Company Archives, *Fort Rupert Journals* 1 (638), 28 April 1850.

Secondary Sources

When historians consult the works of other historians, they are using secondary sources. Overwhelmingly these are documents that examine primary documents and provide an interpretation. The shelves of libraries are full of secondary sources, which may come in the form of books or scholarly journals (such as the *Canadian Historical Review* or *Labour/Le Travail*). Every article you read on a historical topic is a secondary source (assuming that it's not just pure invention and fantasy). These are sources that *filter* primary evidence. Sometimes that's good; sometimes it's not. You, as the reader, have to be critically aware of that filter. And keep in mind that the distinction between primary and secondary is not always clear. For example, let's say that you're reading a history of New France written in 1800. It's a secondary source that made use of primary documents, but it is simultaneously itself a primary source, in that it is evidence of how people thought in 1800.

Making Sense of the Past

Teodoro Agoncillo, a historian of the Philippines, captures in a few lines what most historians know (and often say):

There is a great similarity between legal evidence and historical evidence. The only difference lies in the fact that in legal evidence it is the judge who determines whether the account of a witness is acceptable or not... The historian is prosecuting attorney and defence attorney and the judge all rolled into one, and [she or he] is the narrator and the interpreter.³

This is why historians say that the facts cannot speak for themselves. Our responsibility is to cross-examine the facts and to lay out clearly what they reveal. As the great British historian E. H. Carr wrote in the middle of the last century,

The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: It is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context. It was, I think, one of Pirandello's characters who said that a fact is like a sack – it won't stand up till you've put something in it. The only reason why we are interested to know that the battle was fought at Hastings in 1066 is that historians regard it as a major historical event. It is the historian who has decided for his own reasons that Caesar's crossing of that petty stream, the Rubicon, is a fact of history, whereas the crossing of the Rubicon by millions of other people before or since interests nobody at all.⁴

3. Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *Talking History: Conversations with Teodoro A. Agoncillo* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1995).

4. E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin, 1961): 11.



Figure 1.12 E.H. Carr, British historian.

Events and personalities to which we apply importance are a matter of choice. If we want to tell the story of New France from the point of view of the French, that's one perspective; if we decide, however, to tell that story from the point of view of the Wendat (on whose territory New France impinged) that will be a very different history. In other words, history doesn't exist independently of the human imagination: it is something that is created.

Key Points

- Historical sources fall into two categories: primary (original documents produced by people in the past) and secondary (interpretative documents produced by people who made — and make — use of primary sources).

Attributions

Figure 1.5

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[Death of General Montcalm](#) by Jeangagnon is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 1.10

[The Death of General Wolfe at the Siege of Quebec](#) by Dcoetzee is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 1.11

[Indians at a Hudson Bay Company trading post](#) by Tungsten is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 1.12

[E.H. Carr](#) by Themightyquill is in the [public domain](#).

1.3 The Current State of Historical Writing in Canada

It's one thing to know about some of the key events in Canada's history; it's another to know a thing or two about how our history came to be written.

Part of the challenge is defining what constitutes history. For example, it is often said that Canada is a young country without much history. A response to that claim is that Canada is actually a few years older than the modern states of Italy and Germany. Doing so, however, is to fall into the trap of thinking that a constitution defines a country and its history. Others point out that the existence of New France stretches back to the early 1600s (which makes Canada quite a bit older still) and before that there was not much going on in the way of settlement. But that perspective writes off entirely the Aboriginal, pre-contact experience. In response, some people argue that the history of Canada is limited to the literate societies in Canada, and before the arrival of Europeans there existed only illiterate societies. In other words, they argue that no written record = no history.

This viewpoint is not defensible. In Britain, historians of ancient times don't fold up their tents when they get into the pre-Roman past. If they did, nothing would have been studied about Stonehenge, for example. The lands that have become Canada are littered with burial mounds, old fortifications, petroglyphs and pictographs, ancient foot trails, bison pounds, and fishing weirs. Intertidal fishtraps in Comox Bay on Vancouver Island have been carbon-dated to at least 800 years before the present; their scale and design are both staggering and beautiful. Oral traditions, moreover, punch a hole through that artificial barrier erected between the colonialist past and that of pre-contact times. This territory that we call Canada has so much history that the greatest challenge is how to organize it and understand it.



Figure 1.13 Fishing weirs like this one from the Cowichan River (ca. 1866) were built by Aboriginal peoples across Canada long before contact. Wood, a readily available building material in northern North America, was used far more widely than stone, but it leaves less evidence behind. [\[Long Description\]](#)

Careless and Wrong: Nationalist Histories

What most people think of as the “proper subject of history” is the story of regimes. And certainly it is easy — and meaningful — to think of historical periods associated with different political organisms. Whether it is New France, Nova Scotia, or Wendake (the Huron Confederacy), each administrative era imposes certain structures on its people and their lives. Harbours get built, systems of land ownership (individual, family, collective) are recognized and sometimes imposed, alliances with neighbours are forged and broken. The little things — the things that mark the course of a lifetime — are also associated with regimes. Think of practices associated with reaching adulthood, marriage, burial, and mourning. Spiritual and religious authority has to reside somewhere, even if it is in a common set of non-institutionalized beliefs. And when regimes change, all those practices can be lost. Or, conversely, their preservation becomes a fundamental creed of the survivor population. In any event, history’s focus on governments, empires, and nation states has a long pedigree.

In Canada the business of establishing a legitimate country with something like a national identity depended on the writing of national histories. The 20th century witnessed a parade of classically trained historians based in the oldest anglophone universities (University of Toronto, McGill, Queen’s), developing powerful narratives of the epic of New France, the Conquest, the Loyalists, the rise of liberal-democratic processes, and the achievement of Confederation. George M. Wrong (1860-1948), Donald Creighton (1902-1979), and J.M.S. Careless (1919-2009) were key figures in this phase of Canadian historiography, and all were based in the Department of History at the University of Toronto.



Figure 1.14 George MacKinnon Wrong.

This **National School** approach was essentially small-c conservative in its ideology, Anglican in its creed, and mostly capital-C Conservative in its politics. There were regular challenges from the Left, particularly in the 1930s, but few other historians enjoyed as much influence. Certainly feminist challenges were almost impossible with the absence of women in any university history departments. The situation was even more parlous for non-Whites, non-Christians, and non-nationalists. The National School only began to face serious challenges in the 1960s, by which time there was growing dissatisfaction with it in academic circles.

Generation Gap: The New Social History

The rise of the **baby boom generation** brought to universities huge numbers of young Canadians who were concerned with the histories of working people, non-Whites, and women. The topics of race, class, and gender — formerly untended — scrambled to the top of the historian's agenda. The rise of **multiculturalism** — as a fact and as an official policy — facilitated further the growth of layered histories of ethnicities, each of which had a thing or two to say about gender and social class. As well, the Canadian regions and provinces found they had tales to tell that were either subsumed within the larger national narrative or ran in very different, sometimes contrary, directions. National History School, by contrast, gave centre stage to the accomplishments of elite groups, political leaders, industrialists, and big media. Their representatives in the pages of history books were, of course, all but 100% males and equally white. Their representatives in the history departments of Canadian universities tended to be drawn from the same demographic. Then the ground rather suddenly shifted.



Figure 1.15 Simon Fraser University (top left), the University of Victoria (top right), the U.S. Civil Rights Movement (bottom left), and Florence Bird, Chair of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, 1967-70 (bottom right).

The baby boom generation witnessed the creation of a new cadre of universities. In the western half of the country alone a half dozen appeared: Simon Fraser University and the Universities of Victoria, Calgary, Lethbridge, Regina, and Winnipeg. Each of these became crucibles for new approaches to the field. The **civil rights movement** in the United States, protests against the war in Southeast Asia, the rise of **second wave feminism**, and the appearance of what became known as the **New Left** influenced campuses across North America and beyond. While the **Quiet Revolution** was underway in Quebec, English Canada was undergoing significant intellectual and cultural challenges as well.¹ In the field of history all this played out in challenges to the National History School and took the form of the **new social history**. A rising generation of historians turned their back on themes like nation building, railways, and political biography, and produced scores of books on the history of labour, women, immigrant experiences, and Aboriginal peoples. New thematically oriented scholarly journals appeared, such as *Labour/Le Travail*, *Urban History Review*, and *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, and these were joined by regional historical journals like *Acadiensis* and *BC Studies*.

History Wars

The old order of historians didn't stay quiet about these changes. As the politics of identity gained ground, some scholars began to systematically criticize the fracturing of the historical vision of the country's past. Fragmentation of the story into smaller identities, they argued, didn't enhance opportunities to learn a broader range of histories, it undermined the ability of Canadians to learn a common, core story about themselves. By the 1990s the so-called history wars were fully underway. A leading figure in that conflict was [Jack Granatstein](#), a graduate of the Royal Military College of Canada and a distinguished historian based at Toronto's York University. Foreign affairs historians like Granatstein were particularly disturbed by the rise of histories of sexualities, women's experiences, counter-nationalisms, First Nations, and many others — all of which appeared to undermine the possibility of a shared national past. Granatstein sniffed at social history as so much "housemaid's knee in Belleville"; needless to say, social historians and feminists were outraged. The CBC television series *The Valour and the Horror* (1992), about three significant battles in World War II, became a

1. On intellectual and cultural changes in English Canada in these years, see José Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English-Canada, 1945-71* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006).

lightening rod for this debate, one that even found its way onto the floor of the Senate. Six years later Granatstein would publish *Who Killed Canadian History?*, a polemical attack on the “fragmenters” within the academy. The provocative title of his book tells you a lot about how desperate the defenders of conventional approaches had become. What that cohort longed for was a singular story of “our great nation,” one that everyone — more or less — could agree to, one that new immigrants to Canada could learn as part of the fitting-in process.

Indeed, the multitude of voices that were being heard and broadcast in the 1990s on the subject of Canadians’ past was cacophonous. Early in this century, however, a growing trend toward **interdisciplinary studies** marked the beginning of the process of synthesis. [Ruth Sandwell](#), a historian of education at the University of Toronto, has addressed the tensions between fragmentation and synthesis in the classroom. She has [observed](#) that “history education in the schools has moved away from a much narrower vision of citizenship education as explicitly patriotic narrative.” This opens up opportunities for historians to use their specialized knowledge — even in the narrowest of subfields — to contribute to undergraduate knowledge and social good by focusing on “a disciplinary understanding of what history *is* and what it *does*.”² Rather than build “citizenship” around a history of prime ministers and wars, the key is to “convey the kinds of historical understanding that scholars are suggesting ‘the people’ need in a pluralist democracy.” University of Western Ontario history professor [Alan MacEachern](#) takes this a step further. In his article, “[A Polyphony of Synthesizers: Why Every Historian of Canada Should Write a History of Canada](#)”, he challenges historians to attempt synthesis to develop a national history — even if it comes from a fairly small fragment of the larger field. One of the most difficult specialties that nevertheless holds out much promise for a new perspective on the story of Canada would be a very broad history of childhood.³

Nothing, of course, stands still for long. The innovators of the 1960s and 1970s have themselves been eclipsed by new approaches. The most advanced and promising of these deal with **environmental history**. There is possibly no avenue of historical enquiry that is quite so interdisciplinary. Environmental history was once mainly about animals and nature; now it is more concerned with what we *think of* as nature and how that notion has changed historically. Where it was once informed heavily by geography, lately it has become more influenced by philosophy. One understanding of environmental history is provided by Jan Oosthoek, formerly a professor at Scotland’s University of Stirling in [What is Environmental History? \[YouTube\]](#).



2. R.W. Sandwell, "Synthesis and Fragmentation: the Case of Historians as Undergraduate Teachers," *Active History*. Accessed January 4, 2015, <http://activehistory.ca/papers/rsandwell/>.

3. The work of Neil Sutherland on English-Canadian childhood is outstanding as is Robert McIntosh's, but a national synthesis is still needed.



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/lwiener/?p=563>

Key Points

Every generation writes its own history, in part, because:

- Perspectives change.
- Sources for historical analysis change.
- Methodological approaches evolve.

Attributions

Figure 1.3

Salmon weir at Quamichan Village on the Cowichan River, Vancouver Island by Themightyquill is in the public domain.

Figure 1.14

George MacKinnon Wrong2 by Materialscientist is used under a CC-BY 4.0 International license.

Figure 1.15

SFU Tour by kardboard604 is used under a CC-BY-NC 2.0 license (first); On Golden Pond by Nick Kenrick is used under a CC BY-NC-SA 2.0 license (second); Civil rights movement: 1964 march on washington by Aude is in the public domain (third); Florence Bird: Chair of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, 1967-70 by Harry Palmer. This image cannot be used for commercial purposes without Mr. Harry Palmer's

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Video 1.1

[What is Environmental History?](#) by [Jan Oosthoek](#) is used under a [CC-BY 3.0 Unported](#) license.

Long Descriptions

Figure 1.13 long description: A wooden fishing weir stretches across a large stream. Sticks are tied close together facing down to make a barrier and are attached to a long log which spans the width of the stream to trap fish.

[\[Return to Figure 1.13\]](#)

1.4 The Aboriginal Americas

When does the history of Canada begin? If we think of Canada as a political entity, then we will offer up one kind of answer (although, in all likelihood, we won't agree at the outset on the answer). If we think of Canada as a space roughly defined by our current borders and as a stage on which humans perform, then the answer is necessarily going to take us as deeply into the past as we can go.

Having taken on the question of *how do we know what it is we think we know?* in [Chapter 1](#), this chapter tackles the challenge of pushing back the frontier of history. Generations of students learned that the moment of **contact** between Europeans and Aboriginal peoples in the “Americas” marks the end of pre-history in this hemisphere and the beginning of the historical period. But that perspective has changed.

The telling of Aboriginal history in Canada often begins with a discussion of human migration routes into the Americas, which reflects the long-standing misperception that was held by Europeans that Aboriginal societies were primitive, usually migratory, and unlikely to have been in the Americas for very long before the 15th century. This misperception, of course, served European empires in the Americas very well because it justified the dispossession of native peoples from their lands.

Twentieth-century historians and archaeologists worked hard to remedy this situation and to magnify the many Aboriginal voices that said, in chorus, that they had been here “since time immemorial.”

Occupying the Americas

Human occupation of the Americas is itself a complicated tale. However, there is general agreement among scholars that modern hominids were hereabouts some 12,000 to 14,000 years before the Present Era (BPE).

Dating Systems

There are several dating systems and conventions used by historians. The one most widely used in Europe and the Western Hemisphere is based on the Christian dating system of marking years based on the year of Christ's birth: BC, meaning “before Christ” and AD, meaning *anno domini*, or “in the year of our Lord.”

Another is **before the Present Era (BPE)**, which arose from the use of radiocarbon dating and

uses January 1, 1950, as its baseline. Therefore, 10,000 years BPE equals 10,000 years before New Year's Day, 1950.

Recently the **Common Era (CE)** and **before the Common Era (BCE)** have become more widely used. These two terms align exactly with the Christian system, dividing time approximately 2,000 years ago.

Some Christians object to the BCE/CE system as an attempt to secularize the use of BC and AD; some non-Christians retort that BCE/CE is just the Western and Christian system in disguise, imposing itself on other cultures for further generations. This debate makes it clear that dating is neither scientific nor especially logical — it is cultural.

It is perhaps worth mentioning that the most precise calendrical system in the Western Hemisphere originated with the Zapotec and Olmec societies and was subsequently refined by the Mayan culture. It consists in part of a long count that begins on August 11, 3114, BCE.

For convenience, BPE is used in this text when referring to events occurring more than 4,000 years ago; it is most commonly used by archaeologists in conjunction with radiocarbon dating — a means of determining the age of organic materials by measuring the amount of radioactive decay of carbon-14 in the material. Otherwise, BCE and CE are used as they are most likely to correlate with what you will read elsewhere.

Scientists and archaeologists hold several theories regarding the origins of Aboriginal peoples in the Americas. By far the oldest and most widely accepted of these theories is the **Bering land bridge** migration model. This theory posits that during the last ice age (approximately 50,000-10,000 BPE), humans were able to migrate from Siberia to Alaska over land. Evidence suggests strongly that for as many as 100,000 years, sea levels were much lower than they currently are and the Bering Strait — the body of water that separates Siberia from Alaska — was an open plain of land and glaciers (which scholars call **Beringia**). During a period of several millennia, about 10,000-14,000 BPE, as many as four distinct migrations are thought to have occurred over the land bridge. People migrated from Siberia, Eurasia, and coastal Asia, following the megafauna of the Pleistocene (to about 12,000-11,000 BPE).

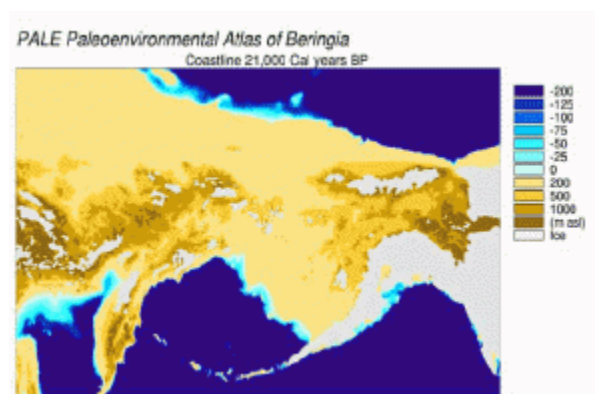


Figure 2.5 The separation of Siberia from Alaska about 10,000 years ago can be seen in this short GIF from the American National Climatic Data Center. (Click on the map if using web version of book.)

The greatest supporting evidence of the Bering land bridge theory is the extensive homogeneity of the North American **Clovis** culture, so named for the archaeological site in New Mexico where it was first identified. The Clovis people were long considered to be the first to inhabit the Americas. Archaeologists theorize that the Clovis came over the land bridge and down a glacier pass to the east of the Rocky Mountains sometime between 12,000 and 11,000 BCE, eventually spreading through much of North America and into South America. Everywhere they went, Clovis people littered their camps and settlements with stone tools and weapons that bear some trademark features and suggest close cultural links.

A second theory focuses on Pacific sea travel. The **coastal migration theory** suggests that some people arrived in the Americas by following the coast of Asia and Beringia, down the western shore of North America, all the way to South America. The coastal migration theory is bolstered by the fact that the rich marine environment would have supported maritime people well. Travel by boat would also be much faster and easier than the route overland, thus allowing people to spread throughout the Americas much more quickly. The most compelling evidence supporting this model comes from archaeological sites in South America that predate the North American Clovis sites. Sites like Monte Verde in Chile date to 14,800-12,500 BCE; Taima-Taima in western Venezuela dates to 13,000 BCE. These two sites contradict the notion of “Clovis first.” However, there are far fewer archaeological sites that support the coastal migration theory compared to the Clovis sites; there may be more but, due to rising sea levels in the intervening millennia, the coastline of the Pleistocene era now lies under the Pacific Ocean. Barring breakthroughs in submarine archaeology, further evidence of earlier coastal migration at the source is lost to us.

Although the two theories might seem to be at odds with each other, most historians and archaeologists now accept that both are probably correct, and that human migration to the Americas occurred over a very long span of time, over land and by sea. It is, however, important to note that conclusive evidence in support of either theory continues to elude us; these are still **hypotheses** only.

What is almost certain is that — however they got here — the original human inhabitants of the Americas came from Asia. Genetic evidence strongly supports this: mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) and DNA haplogroups show evidence of multiple migrations from Asia, starting at about 30,000 BPE.¹ There are two important points to note in this regard:

1. There is currently no conclusive archeological proof of human existence in the Americas before about 20,000 years ago, but the DNA evidence points to a considerably earlier period of settlement.
2. There is no genetic indication of migration from Europe or Africa, so the suggestion (which has been around since the late 15th century) that the Aboriginal peoples must have some roots on the other side of the Atlantic is utterly unproven. This point is important because for hundreds of years after the arrival of Europeans, efforts were made to explain the presence of Aboriginal people as the “Lost Tribes of Israel,” wayward Welshmen, or some other European offshoot. DNA studies have exploded this thesis: not one study has shown conclusive proof of European genetic markers among the Native American population before 1492.

1. Jason A. Eshleman, Ripan S. Malhi, and David Glenn Smith, “Mitochondrial DNA Studies of Native Americans: Conceptions and Misconceptions of the Population Prehistory of the Americas,” *Evolutionary Anthropology* 12 (2003): 7-18.

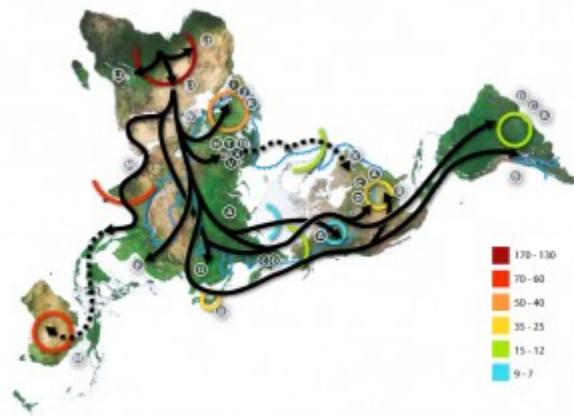


Figure 2.6 World map of human migrations based on studies of mitochondrial (matrilinear) DNA. Dashed lines are hypothetical migrations. Numbers represent thousand years before present (BPE). The blue line represents area covered in ice or tundra during the last great ice age. The letters are the mitochondrial DNA haplogroups (pure motherly lineages); haplogroups can be used to define genetic populations and are often geographically oriented.

Indigenous people throughout the Western Hemisphere talk of their origins in oral histories, stories, and myths that link them intimately to the places they inhabit. The land, the stories commonly assert, was made for “the people,” and they were made to inhabit the land. Every group has an origin story, and they vary widely while having elements of consistency. Sometimes, groups have multiple origin stories that tell differing versions of creation and the founding of the group. Origin stories often begin with a “First Person” (or First Peoples), a mythical man or woman who founded the group. These First People often are created from, or emerge from, the natural world itself. For example, the first Iroquois and Wendat/Huron fell from the sky. An elderly couple of great virtue survive various trials to give birth to the peoples of the Earth, according to the Mi’kmaq. Animals play important roles in these stories as well. In the creation story of the Haida, Raven arranges things nicely and then releases the first humans from a clamshell; the Cree tell of the Earth mother’s offspring/agent Wisakedjak (a shape-changing and benign trickster whose name is widely mispronounced as “Whiskey-Jack”) who peoples the world. And there are stories that involve a singular creator, such as the Blackfoot figure Napi, who moulds the world and everything in it from a lump of mud. The oral traditions of the Lenape/Delaware and Iroquoian peoples, along with records from the Anishinaabe Midewiwin scrolls, refer to “Turtle Island,” a useful convergence of origin tales that has acquired broad acceptance among Aboriginal peoples since the 1970s.

These origin stories encapsulated and shaped the worldview of each group, establishing their people’s purpose in this world as well as their relationship to the spirits and the world around them. In other words, origin stories are key to establishing a group identity and a deep connection with the region the people inhabit. It is also the case that these stories are invoked by Aboriginal peoples as sufficient to their needs as regards history. Whether ancient peoples crossed Beringia or paddled in proto-kayaks along the west coast is perhaps interesting but no more proven and demonstrable than an allegory of cultural birth on an island of mud.

The Paleo-Indian Period

The time between the arrival of humans in the Americas until 10000-9000 years BPE is known as the **Paleo-Indian** period. During this time, humans spread throughout the Western Hemisphere, supporting themselves with similar subsistence patterns and technologies. Paleo-Indians were nomadic hunter-gatherers. They moved as frequently as once or twice a week, hunting the big game of the **Paleolithic**: the megafauna. These included now-extinct creatures such as the mammoth, mastodon, short-faced bear, enormous versions of the modern-day sloth, the very muscular dire wolf, and upsized editions of moose and beaver.

Paleo-Indian technology included knapped, or chipped, stone tools such as scrapers, knives, and projectile points, such as the Clovis point. These were made from a variety of materials including bone and antler, obsidian, quartz, chert, and flint. Throughout the Paleo-Indian era, the spear was the most common weapon. At first, humans used spears as thrusting weapons, which required very close engagement between the hunter and game, a dangerous prospect when dealing with giant prey and predators. Sometime during the Paleo-Indian era, humans developed new kinds of technology, including a lighter throwing spear and an implement to propel this spear much farther: the atlatl. The atlatl, or spear thrower, was one of the most important items in the late Paleo-Indian tool kit. It was a long, thin piece of wood with a notch at the end. This notch was designed to receive the end of a spear or dart. The atlatl acted as an extension of the throwing arm, enabling the spear thrower to greatly increase the velocity and range of the cast.

Paleo-Indians probably lived in groups that anthropologists call bands, small groups of related individuals, typically no bigger than 100 to 150 people. This setup allowed for a simple leadership structure, probably with one individual at the head of the group. It also allowed for easy mobility, and hunter-gatherers such as Paleo-Indians lived with only transportable and reproducible possessions. One of the greatest problems of living in such a small group, however, was finding a suitable mate. Anthropologists think that regional Paleo-Indian bands came together yearly in the summer months to celebrate religious rituals, pass along news, and exchange young women and men to ensure genetic diversity among their groups.

The Archaic and Woodland Periods

From 10000 to 9000 BPE, Earth's climate began to warm, and the North American environment changed. A warming world created opportunities for plants to thrive and diversify; it also created large bodies of water as glaciers and ice caps melted. Over the next 6,000 to 7,000 years, native cultures developed and diversified during the **Archaic** and the **Woodland periods**, 10000-3000 BPE and 3000-1000 BPE respectively.

Paleo-Indians adapted to the world around them, learning to rely more on a diet rich in plant materials. For reasons as yet unknown, megafauna began to die out, and Aboriginal people had to rely more on bison and other relatively smaller game animals for meat. It was near the start of this period, around 9000 to 7000 BPE, that West Coast societies started organizing themselves around salmon fishing. The Nuu-chah-nulth of Vancouver Island, for example, began whaling with advanced long spears.

The **Maritime Archaic** is another expression of North America's Archaic culture of sea-mammal hunters in

the subarctic. They prospered from approximately 7000 BCE to 1500 BCE (9,000-3,500 years ago) along the Atlantic coast of North America. Their settlements included **longhouses** and boat-topped temporary or seasonal houses. They engaged in long-distance trade, using as currency white chert, a rock quarried from northern Labrador to Maine.

It was, as well, during the Archaic and Woodland periods that the peoples of the Americas also began to domesticate plants, leading to one of the most important transformations in human history: the development of agriculture. The Archaic **agricultural revolution** got underway in Mesoamerica (the area between Central Mexico and Costa Rica) and in coastal Peru by the Caral-Supe (also called Norte Chico) civilization. In Oaxaca, Mexico, people tended squash vines in order to use the hard fruit as containers. Eventually, more tender forms of squash became a food source. Following the domestication of beans, around 6000 BPE, Mesoamerican peoples became more sedentary. Finally, **maize** (or corn) was domesticated sometime around 5500 BPE. Over thousands of years, the tiny **teosinte** seed pod, measuring about four centimetres long, was transformed through cultivation into much larger, nutritionally rich ears of corn.

The domestication of maize completed the Mesoamerican **triad**: corn, beans, and squash. The “three sisters” provided an ideal diet. Aboriginal agriculturalists all over the hemisphere grew these crops as their principal foods until many years after European contact. This combination of plants proved ideal as they supported one another in growth. The corn grew tall and provided a “pole” for the beans to grow up and around, and the large squash leaves provided shade that retained moisture and inhibited the growth of weeds. As well, beans, which are “nitrogen fixers,” returned nitrogen back into the soil that the corn crops stripped out during growth.



Figure 2.7 Teosinte, the ancestor of corn, is shown on the left. In the middle is a teosinte-maize hybrid. Modern corn is on the right. [\[Long Description\]](#)

It was a diet that served the Mayan civilization exceedingly well. Agricultural societies, where they are successful,

witness significant population growth and a degree of urbanization. The farming societies of Mesoamerica produced some of the largest and most elaborate city states in the Americas, comparable to European, African, and Asian civilizations in many respects. Architectural styles were elaborate, city layouts were complex and aesthetically stunning, and artistic and scientific knowledge was peerless, especially in the field of astronomy.

Further, from about 200 to 900 CE the Mayan civilization crested on the strength of an infrastructure of priesthoods that was the underpinning of the whole culture. Although the Mayan Empire declined sharply in the eighth and ninth centuries CE, the Aztec Triple Alliance followed with another, more militarized, iteration of Mesoamerican power from the 1300s to the 1500s. The Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan was, in the late 1400s, one of the largest cities on the planet and possibly the most beautiful, a fact that tells us a great deal about the administrative, creative, technological, and cultural sophistication of these pre-contact civilizations.

Agricultural knowledge and techniques spread from Mesoamerica throughout the temperate parts of the Western Hemisphere in a process called **diffusion**. Although corn and beans probably came from Mesoamerica, other peoples throughout North America contributed to the body of agricultural knowledge and accomplishment across the continent.

Less successful was the domestication of animals. There weren't a lot of suitable species available for experiments in domesticated rearing, although turkeys and dogs were notable exceptions. Horses, which may have originated in the Americas, disappeared along with the megafauna some 8,000 years ago. Mountain goats and bighorn sheep are fiercely recalcitrant creatures and almost impossible to contain, let alone domesticate. There was no equivalent of the African cattle to turn into a placid source of milk, meat, and hides. Most significantly, perhaps, there were no pigs or even boars to pen up and dine on.

The ramifications of having few domestic animals was significant to the history of Aboriginal peoples. The absence of large draught animals meant that land had to be cleared and prepared by human energy alone. Soil exhaustion could be postponed to some degree by composting or using fallow field practices, but Aboriginal farmers lacked access to the sort of fertilizers that cattle- and chicken-rearing peoples could exploit. Turkeys, which were domesticated, have the advantage of size and ease of capture, but they do not produce as many eggs and thus offspring as prodigiously as chickens. The inability to secure a household source of protein meant that Aboriginal diets necessarily relied more heavily on wild game and fish than was the case in much of Europe, Asia, and Africa. This resulted in a more nomadic or semi-nomadic life for many societies, and that constraint worked against large-scale and concentrated populations. Even the farming communities were obliged to augment their agrarian economy with wild meat and fish, which is much more time-consuming than slaughtering hogs. Further, the lack of dairy animals precluded women from weaning their infants onto cow, goat, or sheep milk, which meant that Aboriginal infants were breastfed longer, which in turn limited population fertility. Finally, the absence of domesticated animals meant that Aboriginal peoples were not exposed to cross-species infections and epidemics. For 10,000 years or so this proved to be beneficial, but after 1492 it was disastrous, the reasons for which are explored in [Chapter 5](#).

Key Points

- Two theories currently explain the arrival of humans in the Americas: the Bering Strait land bridge theory and the coastal migration theory.
- The timing of early human occupation of the Americas is uncertain and archaeological evidence keeps pushing back the arrival dates.
- Aboriginal peoples' traditions point to occupation of "Turtle Island" since time immemorial.
- Agricultural societies appeared about 6000 BPE and complex communities arose throughout Mesoamerica, spreading into the interior of North America.

Attributions

Figure 2.5

[Bering Land Bridge](#) by [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 2.6

[Map-of-human-migrations](#) by [84User](#) is used under a [CC-BY-SA 3.0](#) license.

Figure 2.7

[Maize-teosinte](#) by [Gauravm1312](#) is used under a [CC-BY 3.0](#) license.

Long Descriptions

Figure 2.7 long description: Teosinte is small and green with only 12 kernels. The teosinte-maize has many more kernels but is still only an 8th of the size of modern corn. [\[Return to Figure 2.7\]](#)

1.5 The Millennia before Contact



Figure 2.8 Mound-builder societies produced functional and graceful structures, including the Great Serpent Mound in the Ohio Valley.

Early in their encounters with Aboriginal peoples, European newcomers struggled to conceive of and understand a continent teeming with (what was to them) mysterious peoples with highly unusual ways of doing things. Often the Europeans rejected the possibility that these civilizations could have arisen independently of Europe or Asia. Where the evidence to the contrary was inconvenient to their own worldview, Europeans sometimes simply stopped seeing it. Consequently, the myth developed that pre-contact Aboriginal societies were unsophisticated, unchanging, and primitive. This suited the newcomers' agenda, but it was nothing like the truth.

Early Agriculturalists in the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys

The southeastern portion of North America was an early centre of agricultural development that fostered the growth of a large, long-lasting, and influential culture known as the **Mississippian** (ca. 500-1400 CE). This culture originated in the Mississippi River Valley and spread out to encompass an area that includes the lower Great Lakes region to the north, the Carolinas to the east, and northern Florida to the south. This culture emerged from the late Woodland Period as a significantly more sedentary culture of large-scale, corn-based agriculture. Surplus agricultural production allowed Mississippians to stave off famines and sieges, support a dense population that included a large group of specialized artisans, and engage in trade with non-farming neighbours.

Politically, Mississippians were organized as a **chiefdom**, a form of organization based on a hierarchy of chiefs that followed the leader of the most important group. Within the chiefdom existed a high level of social stratification, with a noble class at the top. Socially, the Mississippians appear to have practised **matrilineal** descent patterns, meaning that familial relations focused on the mother's family, with property, status, and clan affiliation being conferred through the female line. A person's most important relations were his or her mother's parents and siblings; the father's relations were relatively unimportant. Boys looked to their mother's brother as an important male figure rather than to their father, and uncles passed political power and possessions to their nephews and maternal relatives rather than to their sons. This system's main advantage is that descent and clan affiliation were beyond doubt; a child's paternity may be uncertain, but a clan can be sure of a child's maternity. Matrilineality is relatively common among indigenous peoples of North America (though it is not universal), and it may explain the important roles that women often played in Aboriginal political systems. (Note that this is not, however, the same thing as **matriarchy**, which is a political system in which authority resides with females. Nor can it be assumed that the Mississippians were **matrilocal**, which means that married couples reside in or in close proximity to the family/parents of the wife.¹)

The religion practised by the Mississippians is known as the **Southeastern Ceremonial Complex**. Important religious symbols included a snake (sometimes depicted as a horned serpent), a cross-in-circle motif, and a warrior-falcon hybrid. These symbols were closely related to cosmology and to elites and warriors, giving the religion a socio-political aspect that reinforced the social status and authority of the elite — including the high chieftain, lesser chiefs, and the priests. In time, elements of this iconography found their way across much of southern Canada.

One key feature of the Mississippian culture was that they were **mound builders**. They produced thousands of earthworks used in a variety of manners, including burial mounds for the elite. The chief, his family, and perhaps other members of the chieftain class lived atop some of the mounds in longhouses. Other mounds — some of the largest — appear to have been centres of worship or temples.



Figure 2.9 The Cahokia Mounds is now a State Historic Site in Illinois. [\[Long Description\]](#)

1. As one author writes, "Kinship and residence in Mississippian societies have been more assumed about than understood." Patricia Galloway, "Where have all the Menstrual Huts Gone? The Invisibility of Menstrual Seclusion in the Late Prehistoric Southeast," *Reader in Gender Archaeology*, eds. Kelly Hays-Gilpin and David S. Whitley (Oxford: Routledge, 1998): 197-211.

The largest and most important Mississippian centre was **Cahokia** (ca. 600-1400 CE) located just across the Mississippi River from what is now St. Louis, Missouri. Cahokia was a walled complex made up of 120 mounds that housed perhaps as many as 30,000 people, making it a very large city for its day, certainly as large as contemporary Lisbon, Portugal. It had many of the features one would look for in contemporary towns and cities anywhere, including community plazas, which were located throughout the complex. A woodhenge (a circle of wood posts) was built for astrological observations, with poles in the henge marked to indicate the sun's rising point on the solstices and equinoxes, making it a kind of community calendar or town-square clock. Cahokia's mounds took tremendous effort to build; labourers moved about 1.5 million cubic metres of earth in their construction. The largest of the mounds, today called Monk's Mound, is approximately 10 storeys high, covering an area of 5.6 hectares at the base. The top of the mound, the focal point of the city, housed a huge structure that may either have been a temple or the residence of the paramount chief of the Cahokia chiefdom.

Cahokia became a centre of power in part because of its location near the confluence of the Mississippi, Illinois, and Missouri Rivers. This confluence allowed the chiefdom to control much of the regional commerce, giving it access to a great variety of trade items from many regions. Cahokians participated in trade networks stretching as far as the Great Lakes to the north and the Gulf Coast to the south. The town began to decline around 1300 CE and slowly dwindled in size and importance, although some aspects of it remained in the 1500s. Scholars have speculated that overhunting, deforestation, a **little ice age**, and the rise of competing centres to the south contributed to Cahokia's demise. The Ohio Valley, into which the French ventured in the 1600s and 1700s, carried many traces of the influence of the Mississippian culture; "Caouquias" appears on one of the first maps of the area, drawn in 1718 by Guillaume de L'isle. The Laurentian Iroquois of the St. Lawrence Valley and what is now southwestern Ontario (as well as the nearby Haudenosaunee or Five Nations Iroquois) would certainly have been influenced by this indigenous empire.



Figure 2.10 The extent of Mississippian cultures, ca. 1300.

The Interior Plateau

A different model of high-density population in the pre-contact era is Keatley Creek, an important site above the Fraser Canyon in present-day British Columbia, which was well removed from the Mississippian and Mesoamerican cultures, which it mostly preceded. The Stl'atl'imx people who lived there from about 2800 BCE established an economy based on the salmon runs in the river below their plateau village. A large cluster of kekuli (pit houses) — as many as 115 house-sized depressions, the largest about 20 metres across — suggest a population of several hundred. Archaeologists cannot agree on the cause of its abandonment between 800 and 1,200 years ago. Old caricatures of Aboriginal societies as small, unsophisticated nomadic hunter-gatherer societies are challenged and overturned by this kind of evidence. It also provides a challenge to the model of agriculture-led town development. Keatley Creek in this respect has more in common with the Norte Chico culture of Peru (with which it was contemporary) than it does with Cahokia. Like the Mississippian tradition, Keatley Creek was a source of cultural diffusion and would have influenced many of its neighbours — by example or by force.

The Pre-Contact Era

The two centuries before the arrival of French exploratory missions in the 1530s witnessed enormous changes in Aboriginal North America. The “little ice age,” beginning in the late 1200s, had severe impacts on farming communities. From the middle of the 14th century there was widespread abandonment of the Mississippian cities and villages, and the archaeological record reveals extensive evidence of famine and dispersal of populations. Much of the desperate and violent conflict that took place between Iroquoian peoples of this period — and the peace between the Five Nations that eventually emerged — has been ascribed to the unsettled environmental conditions of the time.

The Plains

Westward and northward movement of horticulturalists and farmers brought new populations into what is now southern Manitoba and Alberta. Some may have attempted to recreate the semi-urban environment of previous Mississippian generations as far north as the Bow River. Others introduced maize farming near the Red River and the Tiger Hills, with limited success.² Just below the 49th parallel on the Great Plains were more successful agriculturalists. Among the most important of these was the Mandan, whose villages along the Missouri and Knife Rivers survived until the smallpox catastrophe of the 1830s. Like many of their Siouan-speaking relations, they migrated into the region from areas associated with the Mississippian cultures. The Mandan villages acted as the commercial hub of an enormous wheel of Plains culture, one that extended into the lowlands around Hudson Bay. It included, as well, peoples who engaged in some corn farming and the harvesting of wild rice in what is now southern Manitoba and the western Lake Superior lowlands. The more nomadic peoples of the Plains in this period hunted large game, pursuing the herds on foot before the return of the horse in the **post-contact** period. Dogs pulling travois were an important asset; sometimes wolves were put to the same task. The Lakota, Cree,

2. James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Regina: U of R Press, 2013).

Assiniboine, and, further west, the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Shoshones, Gros Ventre, and Kutenai were participants in this shared Plains culture, as were later arrivals the Anishinaabeg (also called Plains Ojibwa or Saukteaux).

Although the hunting economies of Plains peoples evolved in many respects over the 8,000 years before contact, there were also some remarkable continuities. One of these is the **buffalo jump** phenomenon. Some 12,000 sites have been identified in Alberta alone, with the best known today being Head-Smashed-In (not far from present-day Lethbridge), which first came into use about 5,700 years ago. Buffalo jumps were kill sites, where herds of bison were driven off steep cliffs. If the fall didn't crush their skulls or necks outright, they would be sufficiently stunned to allow for slaughter by hunters. The bodies would then be dragged to a nearby campsite and processed; every part of the animal was used to provide clothes (the hides), tools (the bones), and bowstrings (the sinew). Head-Smashed-In was in use for thousands of years, into the historic period, when Blackfoot, disguised as coyote and wolves, would drive buffalo along established "drive lanes" to the cliff. Excavations at Head-Smashed-In have unearthed a deposit of skeletons, primarily of bison, measuring more than 10 metres deep. But Head-Smashed-In is only one of many jump sites that dot the Prairies; another is Clay Banks Buffalo Jump in southwestern Manitoba, which was used by the Sonata and Besant cultures as early as 2,500 years ago.³

Warfare was endemic on the Plains. War was waged for three main reasons: to gain prestige, to obtain goods, and for revenge. The strategy and tactics of Plains warfare revolved around the concept of **counting coup**.⁴ Coup was an action that demonstrated bravery and skill. The most highly valued coup was to touch a live enemy and live to tell about it. Killing an enemy was coup, too, but demonstrated valour to a lesser degree; after all, the live man is still a threat, while a dead one can do no harm. Touching a dead enemy was also a lesser form of coup. After a battle, warriors returned to the settlement to recount their stories, or "count coup."

Religious beliefs on the Plains tended to hold the bison as a central figure of the sacred Earth. Most groups kept "medicine bundles," a collection of sacred objects holding symbolic importance for the group. Often, religious celebrations centred on the medicine bundle. The concept of annual world renewal was an important one in Plains religion, and one of the chief renewal ceremonies celebrated by many Plains peoples was the **sun dance**. The sun dance was sponsored by an individual who wished to give to his tribe or to thank or petition the supernatural through the act of self-sacrifice for the good of the group. Celebration of the sun dance varied in detail from group to group, but a general pattern existed. It usually occurred in the summer and involved erecting a large structure with a central pole, symbolizing the Tree of Life. Large groups would gather to give thanks, celebrate, pray, and fast. The individual sponsoring the sun dance would pray and fast throughout the celebration, which lasted up to a week. He was the celebration's lead dancer, and the dance would continue until his strength was completely gone. Often, the dance involved some kind of bloodletting or self-torture. Participants might pierce their skin and/or chest muscles and attach themselves to the central pole by piercing pegs and lengths of leather, dancing around or hanging from it until the pegs were pulled free. Another variation involved piercing the muscles of the back and dragging buffalo skulls behind the dancer until the weight of the skull ripped the pins out of the dancer's flesh. The scars that the dancer carried after the celebration were a mark of honour. At the end of the sun dance, the world was renewed and replenished.

3. Olive Patricia Dickason, "A Historical Reconstruction for the Northwestern Plains," in *The Prairie West: Historical Readings* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1992): 51.

4. Anthony McGinnis, *Counting Coup and Cutting Horses: Intertribal Warfare on the Northern Plains, 1738-1889* (Evergreen, CO: Cordillera Press, 1990).

The East

Northeastern Aboriginal peoples were diverse and complex in many respects. Economically, they relied on both hunting-gathering and farming, as well as trade. Iroquoian-speakers — the Wendat (Huron), Tionontati (Pétun or Tobacco), and Attawandaron (Neutral) of southwest Ontario and the Laurentian Iroquois (which included the people of Stadacona and Hochelaga), as well as the Erieehronon (Erie), Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, Seneca, and Cayuga, whose territories were south of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence — built their societies around the planting and harvesting of the “three sisters” (corn, squash, and beans). Farming led to larger population numbers, bigger villages, more elaborate political structures to manage internal decision making and diplomacy (or war), and the capacity to store large quantities of surplus crops in the event of famine and for trade purposes. The 500 years before contact were marked by political transformations that produced confederacies and leagues among the Iroquoians, the most successful and largest of which were the Haudenosaunee (also known as the League of the Tree of Peace and Power, or the Five Nations Iroquois) and the Wendat Confederacy. These alliances were an effective means of reducing the prospect of long-running blood feuds between many bands and clans, although the creation of confederacies may have simply increased the scale of warfare between a few larger groupings.

The other eastern peoples were mostly Algonquian-speakers. These include the Abenaki, Mi’kmaq, and Maliseet (subsequently known as the Wabanaki Confederacy) in what are now the Maritimes and much of modern New England; the Innu (also known as Montagnais) on the north shore of the St. Lawrence and in the north-central Ungava Peninsula; the Nipissing (whose lands surround the lake bearing their name); and the three closely aligned factions of the Anishinaabe group: the Algonquin, Odawa, and the Ojibwe. The existence of Algonquian alliances hint at conflict with others; many of these peoples shared a common dislike of the Iroquois long before the arrival of Europeans. Several claim to have driven them westward out of the northeast and the Gaspé and perhaps out of the St. Lawrence Valley in the years before contact and shortly thereafter. Principally foraging horticulturalists, these Algonquian-speaking peoples were highly mobile. They made extensive use of the resources of the land and the sea, with the Mi’kmaq establishing an eastward position in southern Newfoundland.

All peoples of the northeast participated in extensive networks of commerce. Many participated in a system of exchange with shells (sometimes called “wampum”). The shells, which themselves were highly valued, had a currency value but were often assembled in strings, on belts, and otherwise in patterns that served as mnemonic devices to record the details of treaties or other agreements. Similarly the Mohawk — whose homeland was along the Hudson River in what is now New York State but who are now mostly settled in Ontario and Quebec — were noted traders in flint, a commodity that made them wealthy and powerful, not least because it was used as part of the Aboriginal arsenal.

Warfare played an important role in the northeast as it did on the Plains. It was the chief way to gain power and prestige, and revenge was its primary driver. A cycle of war was ensured because each group sought to avenge those killed in earlier wars or skirmishes in what became called the **Mourning Wars**. Acceptable outcomes of war could take several forms: killing the enemy, taking captives, and taking trophies of some sorts, often in the form of beheadings and/or scalping (a practice that may have been introduced to the region by Europeans). Captives would be taken back to the victors’ town, where they would be handed over to the women who had

lost family members to war. Ultimately, one of two fates awaited a prisoner: either being tortured to death (which could last many hours or even days) or being adopted by one of the families whose warrior-males had died in battle or were prisoners themselves. The captive who withstood the torture by showing strength and singing his “death song” so as to have a good death, would be held in high esteem and sometimes spared. Occasionally, the torturers would consume the flesh of those tortured after they had died, in order to ingest the strength of the enemy, a practice that many cultures shared. At the very least, Iroquoian and other cultures echoed sacrificial practices conducted on a large ritualistic scale by the Aztec and Mayan peoples.

The Beothuk may have been an exception to many of these models and cultures. What little is known about these original inhabitants of Newfoundland and Labrador is discussed in Chapter 7. One distinctive element of their culture that would have a lasting impact on European perceptions of Aboriginal peoples was their practice of liberally applying red ochre over their bodies. It was this custom that led to newcomers describing them as “red Indians,” an appellation that wound up being much more broadly used.

People of the Far Northwest

The Pacific Northwest region was utterly separate from the Plains and other cultural zones. Its peoples were many and they shared several cultural features that were unique to the region.

By the 1400s there were at least five distinct language groups on the West Coast, including Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Wakashan, and Salishan, all of which divide into many more dialects. However, these differences (and there are many others) are overshadowed by cultural similarities across the region. An abundance of food from the sea meant that coastal populations enjoyed comparatively high fertility rates and life expectancy. Population densities were, as a consequence, among the highest in the Americas.

The people of the Pacific Northwest do not share the agricultural traditions that existed east of the Rockies, nor did they influence Plains and other cultures. There was, however, a long and important relationship of trade and culture between the coastal and interior peoples. In some respects it is appropriate to consider the mainland cultures as inlet-and-river societies. The Salish-speaking peoples of the Strait of Georgia (Salish Sea) share many features with the Interior Salish (Okanagan, Secwepemc, Nlaka’pamux, Stl’atl’imx), though they are not as closely bound as the peoples of the Skeena and Stikine Valleys (which include the Tsimshian, the Gitksan, and the Nisga’a). Running north of the Interior Salish nations through the Cariboo Plateau and flanked on the west by the Coast Mountain Range are societies associated with the Athabaskan language group. Some of these peoples took on cultural habits and practices more typically associated with the Pacific Northwest coastal traditions than with the northern Athabaskan peoples who cover a swath of territory from Alaska to northern Manitoba. In what is now British Columbia, the Tsilhqot’in, the Dakelh, Wet’suwet’en, and Sekani were part of an expansive, southward-bound population that sent offshoots into the Nicola Valley and deep into the southwest of what is now the United States.



Figure 2.11 The Salish Sea (as Georgia Strait is now widely known) was an ecologically and culturally rich zone occupied by related but unallied peoples.

Most coastal and interior groups lived in large, permanent towns in the winter, and these villages reflected local political structures. Society in Pacific Northwest groups was generally highly stratified and included, in many instances, an elite, a commoner class, and a slave class. The Kwakwaka'wakw, whose domain extended in pre-contact times from the northern tip of Vancouver Island south along its east coast to Quadra Island and possibly farther, assembled kin groups (*numayms*) as part of a system of social rank in which all groups were ranked in relation to others. Additionally, each kin group “owned” names or positions that were also ranked. An individual could hold more than one name; some names were inherited and others were acquired through marriage. In this way, an individual could acquire rank through kin associations, although kin groups themselves had ascribed ranks. Movement in and out of slavery was even possible.

The fact that slavery existed points to the competition that existed between coastal rivals. The Haida, Tsimshian, Haisla, Nuxalk, Heiltsuk, Wuikinuxv (Oowekeeno), Kwakwaka'wakw, Pentlatch/K'ómoks, and Nuuchahnulth regularly raided one another and their Stó:lō neighbours. Many of the winter towns were in some way or other fortified and, indeed, small stone defensive sniper blinds can still be discerned in the Fraser Canyon. The large number of oral traditions that arise from this era regularly reference conflict and the severe loss of personnel. Natural disasters are also part of the oral tradition: they tell of massive and apocalyptic floods as well as volcanic explosions and other seismic (and tidal) events that had tremendous impacts on local populations.

The practice of **potlatch** (a public feast held to mark important community events, deaths, ascensions, etc.) is a further commonality. It involved giving away property and thus redistributing wealth as a means for the host to maintain, reinforce, and even advance through the complex hierarchical structure. In receiving property at a potlatch an attendee was committing to act as a witness to the legitimacy of the event being celebrated. The size of potlatching varied radically and would evolve along new lines in the post-contact period but the outlines and protocols of this cultural trademark were well-elaborated centuries before the contact moment. Potlatching was universal among the coastal peoples and could also be found among more inland, upriver societies as well.

Horticulture (the domestication of some plants) was another important source of food. West Coast peoples and the nations of the Columbia Plateau (which covers much of southern inland British Columbia), like many eastern groups, applied controlled burning to eliminate underbrush and open up landscape to berry patches and meadows of camas plants that were gathered for their potato-like roots. This required somewhat less labour than farming (although harvesting root plants is never light work) and it functioned within a strategy of seasonal camps.

Communities moved from one food crop location to another for preparation and then, later, harvest. A great deal of the land seized upon by early European settlers in the Pacific Northwest included these berry patches and meadows. These were attractive sites because they had been cleared of huge trees and consisted of mostly open and well-drained pasture. Europeans would see these spaces as pastoral, natural, and available rather than **anthropogenic** — human-made — landscapes, the product of centuries of horticultural experimentation.

Summary

More than 500 identifiable groups emerged in North America during the pre-contact era (that is, from 1000 to 1492 CE). Although tremendously diverse, the groups within each region of the continent shared many common features, including subsistence strategies, kinship relations, political structure, and elements of material culture. And although there were common economic and cultural features across North America and some that were shared in Meso-America and South America as well, this does not in any way indicate a single monolithic Aboriginal culture. In the northern half of North America alone the number of tongues spoken, artistic techniques perfected, songs and dance styles, architectural and engineering experiments, and systems of government can barely be calculated.

Nomenclature

“Nomenclature” is the word used to refer to a set or system of names used in a particular field of study. How do we name things? Which names are correct? Some terms fall out of favour while others rise. In the study of Aboriginal history, this is particularly important.

- **Indians:** The term used by newcomers (not by native peoples) to describe and characterize all the Aboriginal peoples of the Americas. Aboriginal peoples today sometimes describe themselves as Indians, though generally in a political context. The Canadian Indian Act, for example, uses the word “Indian” to describe native peoples, as do some native organizations (e.g., the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs). Keep in mind, of course, that there is no singular “Indian” culture, no one “Indian” language, no universal “Indian” economy. Making that assumption is an error referred to as “pan-Indianism,” the mistaken belief that all Aboriginal societies are essentially the same. The diversity of Aboriginal cultures, languages, and economies was a fact in the past and remains a fact today.
- **First Nations, Amerindians, American Indians:** Beginning in the mid-20th century, Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal peoples began experimenting with terms to replace “Indian.” In Canada, the term that has so far enjoyed the widest use and recognition is “First Nations.” “First Peoples” is also used, as is “indigenous peoples” and “Aboriginals.” In the United States the most widely used terms are “Native Americans” and “American Indians,” sometimes contracted to “Amerindians.” This last term is sometimes embraced by Aboriginal peoples as being the most serviceable.
- **Nuxalk, Anishinaabe, Wendat, Mi’kmaq:** As 20th-century Aboriginal peoples found a stronger political voice, many articulated a desire to be known by their own nation names. Bella Coola became Nuxalk, Ojibwa became Anishinaabe (Anishinaabeg is the plural form), Huron reverted to Wendat, and Micmac reacquired a breath in the first syllable and a more

open consonant at the end of the second in the form of Mi'kmaq. These are only four examples. Across the country Aboriginal peoples are reclaiming their names, an important step toward reclaiming their history.

Key Points

- Elaborate agricultural societies with some measure of urbanization appeared in the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys around 500 CE and began to decline in the century or so before contact with Europeans.
- High density communities arose around the same time, based on maritime and riverine food resources.
- Pre-contact societies included hunter-gatherers, farmers, and seafaring mammal hunters, all of whom were engaged in commerce.

Attributions

Figure 2.8

[The Great Serpent Mound](#), courtesy of Richard A. Cook/Corbis, is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from the U.S. [National Library of Medicine](#) website.

Figure 2.9

[Views of the remains of a mound at Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site](#), courtesy of Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from the U.S. [National Library of Medicine](#) website.

Figure 2.10

[Mississippian cultures HRoe 2010](#) by [Ras67](#) is used under a [CC-BY-SA 3.0](#) license.

Figure 2.11

[The Salish Sea](#) by [Arct](#) is used under [CC-BY-SA 3.0](#) license.

Long Description

Figure 2.9 long description: The earth has been built up to form a huge stage-like structure. There are two levels with sloping sides and it is all covered in grass. [\[Return to Figure 2.9\]](#)

1.6 Languages, Cultures, Economies



Figure 2.12 Pre-contact distribution of Na-Dené languages. [\[Long Description\]](#)



Figure 2.13 Pre-contact distribution of Algonkian speakers.
[\[Long Description\]](#)

These brief histories of the Aboriginal Americas reveal that categorization is complicated. Take language, for example, which is often used as a key element of nationality (e.g., French people speak French and live in France and almost everyone in France speaks French). For Aboriginal peoples, there are no political units that encapsulate the whole of the largest and most widespread language groups in Canada. As the maps in Figures 2.12 and 2.13 show, the two most widely spoken language groups before contact — Athabascan or Na-Dené and Algonquian — cover massive areas and include societies that were separated by huge distances. Na-Dené dialects are spoken by Apache and Navajo in the American southwest, as well as by peoples from Alaska’s Tlingit to Alberta’s Tsuu T’ina (or Sarcee) who migrated south onto the Plains in the early 1700s. Similarly the Algonquian-speakers are represented by agricultural societies, bison hunters like the Siksika (Blackfoot), and lowland fisher-hunter peoples like the Cree, the Mi’kmaq, and the Anishinaabe, as well as large populations (some of them agriculturalists) in what is now the United States. Within these two language areas, dialect differences can be very great, but the core elements of the language mostly survive.



Figure 2.14 Pre-contact distribution of Aboriginal language families.

One of the challenges facing anyone interested in Aboriginal language groups is that European contact was a catalyst for migration, generally in a westward direction. European observers were, thus, recording the presence of language groups whose more recent homelands in some cases were somewhere else. Figure 2.14 gives a sense of the huge diversity of language groups in North America but no sense at all of the internal diversity within the broad linguistic categories.

Pre-Contact Societies

Agriculture, horticulture, foraging, hunting, and fishing were key features of the economies of the pre-contact Americas. In Canada, rocky, stony, or hard-packed soils (like those on the Prairies) made agriculture all but impossible (as did, of course, the climate in many zones). Despite some mastery in metalwork, as evidenced in silver, gold, and copper decorative arts, the knowledge and skills necessary to produce iron tools that would give agriculture a lift were not available. “Digging sticks” used to drill seed holes are far more labour intensive but less demanding on the soil than wooden or metal ploughs. This is not to say that agriculture is the higher form of economic activity in a pre-industrial world. Farming societies have many advantages, such as the ability to achieve rapid and substantial growth, the wherewithal to build villages and armies, political sophistication of a particular kind, and so on. But they also have significant health issues, less flexibility in the event of famine or drought, and are at more risk of being attacked by enemies. The Aboriginal economies were far more adaptable in this respect than their Old World contemporaries.

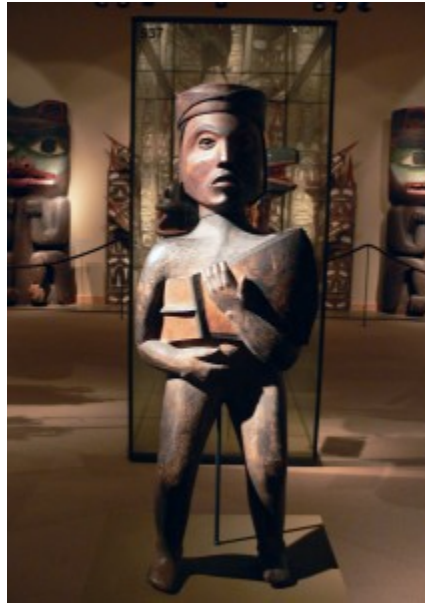


Figure 2.15 Copper was widely worked and used in pre-contact North America. On the northwest coast it was fashioned into large and beautifully-finished shields, symbolic of wealth and authority. This Kwakwaka'wakw figure, carrying “a copper,” was carved before the 1880s and is housed at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin.

What is more, everyone participated in commerce. These were trading societies that augmented their output with goods from their neighbours. Sometimes these were raw materials, such as furs or maize, flint or wampum; other times they were crafted goods like clothing, hides, or the much-sought-after sinew-backed bows made by the Shoshone. Everywhere one looks, the archaeological evidence turns up exotic artifacts in village sites, indicating a rich intercommunity and intercultural life that dates back thousands of years. For example, red ochre suitable for rock painting and other uses as a dye was mined for centuries from caves in the Similkameen Valley in southern British Columbia; it shows up in pictographs as far afield as Arizona.

Exercise: History Around You

Aboriginal History Where You Live

In Vancouver's Stanley Park there is a clutch of totem poles arranged near the old cricket oval on Brockton Point. It is a favourite spot for tourists to stop for photographs. The display became much more complex and informative in preparation for the 2010 Winter Olympics. However, a long-standing complaint was that the poles were not examples of local, Coast Salish work, but rather, northern Kwakwaka'wakw and Tsimshian styles. In other words, the people who used to live on Brockton Point (and whose graveyards remain nearby) were excluded from this display of “native” history.

How is Aboriginal history depicted in your community? Is there a museum or gallery dedicated to the subject? Is there one on a nearby reserve? Do a mental inventory of the statues and memorials and plaques in the community: how many of those pertain to the experiences of indigenous people? Do they get it right?

(If you're not in Canada, consider paying a visit to the consulate or embassy — if one's nearby. How is the nation's Aboriginal heritage represented?)

Populations

Given the fragmentary nature of the evidence, even semi-accurate pre-Columbian population figures are impossible to obtain for the indigenous populations prior to colonization. Estimates are extrapolated from small bits of data. Recent research suggests that the 13th century marked a critical break in the demographic history of North America. As the climate changed for the worse and the little ice age began, populations struggled to survive famine and competition for resources intensified. It has been suggested that peak pre-contact population numbers may have occurred two or three centuries before contact.¹

In 1976, geographer William Denevan used the existing estimates to derive a “consensus count” of about 54 million people for the Americas as a whole.² There is, however, no “consensus.” Estimates for North America range from a low of 2.1 million (Ubelaker 1976) to 7 million people (Thornton 1987) and even to a high of 18 million (Dobyns 1983).³ The Aboriginal population of Canada during the late 15th century is estimated to have been between 200,000 and 2 million, with a figure of 500,000 currently accepted widely. These numbers are utterly conditional: on the West Coast alone estimates range from 80,000 (ca. 1780) to 1.6 million, although the evidence to support either the low count or the high count is sparse.⁴ Nonetheless, if the widely touted figure of 350,000 for British Columbia is reckoned as fair, then the national figures would jump up by as much as 200,000 (a 40% increase on the widely accepted figure of half a million)! Thus, there are significant discrepancies.

As we shall see in [Chapter 5](#), the contact experience brought with it terrible disease epidemics that raced ahead of the Europeans in the proto-contact period. It is important to note here that the work of historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, and others — often supported by oral testimony from Aboriginal sources — suggests that the pre-contact Americas were *not* disease-free. Contagious diseases included tuberculosis, hepatitis, and respiratory infections. Syphilis and gastrointestinal illnesses might also belong to this list. And there were, in parts of the Americas, significant numbers of parasites. With the exception of tuberculosis, however, none of these are proper epidemic diseases. Syphilis, for example, spreads only on a one-to-one basis through intimate contact between individuals; influenza, by contrast, can be transmitted by one infected individual to dozens of other hosts at a time by the simple means of coughing. For the most part, then, experience with epidemics was both limited and very different from what Asians, Africans, and European humans witnessed regularly. This lack of knowledge meant that Aboriginal societies were badly unprepared for highly contagious disease epidemics. It does not mean, however, that Aboriginal life expectancies were particularly good. All indications suggest that, as in most human societies, a person was lucky to reach 30 years of age and very fortunate to reach 50. If infant mortality levels were

1. James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Regina: U of R Press, 2013), 2.

2. William M. Denevan, *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976).

3. Douglas H. Ubelaker, “North American Indian Population Size: Changing Perspectives,” in *Disease and Demography in the Americas*, eds. John Verano and Douglas H. Ubelaker, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1992), 172-3; Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History since 1492* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); Henry F. Dobyns, *Their Number Become Thinned: Native American Population Dynamics in Eastern North America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983).

4. John Belshaw, *Becoming British Columbia: A Population History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 72-6.

higher in the Americas (and evidence suggests they were) it wasn't helped by extended breastfeeding practices. Probably in most Aboriginal societies, infants were nursed for four years. This custom has an effect beyond nourishment and hydration: prolonged breastfeeding reduces fertility. Fewer infants may have generated more intensive childcare overall but, obviously, dampened fertility rates placed an upward limit on population growth rates. This would prove a critical weakness when it came time to recover from epidemic depopulations.⁵

Key Points

- Aboriginal societies at contact defy simple categorization by language, economic activity, or location.
- Population estimates suggest that humans were very numerous in the Americas in the late 1400s but perhaps not as numerous as they were a few hundred years earlier.

Attributions

Figure 2.12

[Na-Dene langs](#) by [ish ishwar](#) is used under a [CC-BY 2.0](#) license.

Figure 2.13

[Algonquian langs](#) by [ish ishwar](#) is used under a [CC-BY 2.0](#) license.

Figure 2.14

[Langs N.Amer fr](#) by [ish ishwar](#) is used under a [CC-BY 2.0](#) license.

Figure 2.15

[Kwakiutl chief](#) by [FA2010](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Long Description

Figure 2.12 long description: Before contact, speakers of Na-Dené languages could be found in most of North Western Canada (excluding the northern coastal area and Nunavut) and along the Californian coast and some of the Southern United States. [\[Return to Figure 2.12\]](#)

Figure 2.13 long description: Pre-contact Algonkian speakers could be found in most of Eastern Canada, parts of the central prairies, and small parts of the central and north eastern United States. [\[Return to Figure 2.13\]](#)

5. Roderic Beaujot and Don Kerr, *Population Change in Canada*, 2nd edition (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.

1.7 Oral History: The Stories Our Grandmothers Tell Us and More

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What is Oral History?

At its heart, oral history is about listening to and learning from stories of the past. Rooted in ancient storytelling traditions, oral history happens all the time around dinner tables, along trap lines, in coffee shops, and classrooms. It happens between generations, among students and teachers, and researchers and historical actors. The nature of listening and sharing depends on who is involved and what participants are hoping to learn or share: sacred teachings, practical skills, or an understanding of events and experiences in the past.

Why Do We Record Oral Histories?

Oral histories have different purposes and they must be analyzed in this spirit. As historian Winona Wheeler reminds us about the Ininiw (aka: Cree) epistemological context, stories are gifts given from one person to another. Some are sacred and are not knowable outside families or communities; some can only be shared in certain seasons of the year; some will not be shared until relationships built on trust and reciprocity are established. It can take years to earn the right to listen. In these contexts, oral history has always been used as a methodology for recording, sharing, and archiving. Historians trained in Euro-Western intellectual contexts embraced oral history methodology in increasing numbers after the 1970s because it allowed them to do “history from below”, uncovering perspectives and experiences not commonly available in the written documentary record. These historians were interested in eyewitness testimonies that allowed them to develop a more complete picture of the past. By the late 1980s, the field expanded to include historians interested in memory and memory making. They recorded stories to explore how and why people remember the past in the way that they do.

No matter the context, before sitting down to listen to and record stories with a smartphone, computer, digital voice recorder, or just a pair of ears, the best oral historians reflect on the following questions: why do I want to hear these stories? What do I plan to do with what I learn? Are there cultural protocols I should observe? Is

there anything I might ask that would be upsetting or uncomfortable? How will I provide support if necessary? How will I thank the participant for their time? We take these steps to uphold the highest principle of ethics: *to do no harm*. In Canada, researchers are guided by the [Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans \(TCPS\)](#), 2nd edition.

How Do We Analyze Oral Histories?

As with other aspects of oral history, analysis takes different forms depending on the purpose and nature of sharing. In history classrooms we teach our students to contextualize in ways that are mindful of oral histories as historical sources created in the present and shaped by both teller and listener. We ask why was the oral history recorded and for whom, while also exploring how stories are shaped by the context in which they are shared. It stands to reason that strangers hear the same stories differently than do family members. Further to this, people forget things, remember things differently, exaggerate, and even lie. As such, you must ask: what is the relationship between past and present in this story? Why does a person or community members remember the past in a particular way? Analyzing oral histories is a multilayered process and what any one listener takes away varies dramatically. This makes oral history one of the most rewarding and challenging methodologies for learning about the past.

Key Points

- Oral history offers the possibility of accessing the historical experiences of people about whom the standard texts and archives have little to say.
- The ethical requirements of doing oral history well and professionally are necessarily rigorous and should never be conducted without approval under an ethics review process.

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Week 2 - Building Rural Communities



Figure 10.1 Cities went from garrison towns to diverse and rapidly expanding centres of trade and industry.
(The Port of Halifax, 1830-1840, artist unknown.)

Changing economic conditions contributed to and worked in tandem with changing social relations and experiences. Even in those places in British North America where lives continued along paths that had existed for centuries — in fishing communities, on farms, and among bison hunters — social changes were taking place. Technological innovations arose and a population explosion was underway around the North Atlantic. Some of these changes came so fast that people caught in their midst could not see them. Take William Lyon Mackenzie, for example. In the 1830s he was fighting on the streets of Toronto for greater democratic rights. Mackenzie's city — a commercial centre typical of British North America's major towns, if a bit larger than most — was undergoing a messy and complex rebirth. Cities were looking up the hill of a long growth curve that would continue for more than a century and would transform city dwellers into a constituency that Mackenzie would hardly recognize. Just as his political career reached its peak, the oppressed majority he spoke for were in the process of becoming a minority in their own towns.

This new era of urbanization was fed by immigration and rural abandonment and was fired by coal and steam. The ideal member of society, which was held to be the independent landowner and the yeoman farmer, was being overtaken by events and a new society.

This chapter considers some of the major social changes taking place in the middle of the 19th century. This period — the dawn of the age of steam — was also the proving ground for 20th century modernity. Cities, working-class neighbourhoods, labour organizations, gender issues, environmental decay, and public health and welfare were all topics of conversation and concern, especially as the 1860s approached. This chapter offers an introduction to some of the concerns of social historians looking at the 19th century. It also introduces some of the approaches taken in scholarly histories.

Learning Objectives

- Identify the underlying economic and human factors driving social change in the period 1818-1860.
- Describe the main social classes and their relationship to one another.
- Outline the main cities of British North America in the 19th century and why they were growing.
- Sketch the ways in which gender roles and the experiences of children were changing.

Attributions

Figure 10.1

[The Port of Halifax \(1830 – 1840\)](#) by [Tetraktys](#) is in the [public domain](#).

2.1 Country Life



Figure 10.4 Water-powered grist mills like this one near Waterloo, Ontario, were common features in the countryside.

Life on the land in the 19th century was not insulated entirely from changes occurring elsewhere. In fact, the countryside was often where change originated. It was also where intensely conservative impulses could be found.

In a study of seigneurie communities near Trois-Rivières, historian Colin Coates reveals the connections between landscape, community, social relations, and economic transformation. At Batiscan attempts were made at the beginning of the century to establish an ironworks, something which would have provided seasonal, part-time, and full-time/year-round work for locals. This was an attractive proposition in part because the habitants' farmlands had been so severely divided across generations that their productivity was quickly diminishing. These conditions were a product of rising human fertility and family size in the Lower Canadian countryside; in a Malthusian sense the growth that food production had made possible could not now keep pace with the population it produced.

Young men found it more and more difficult to establish the kind of economic security that would allow them to marry, which forced some to leave the land for opportunities in the woods or in the towns, ideally to find land grants elsewhere, perhaps nearby, but these options were increasingly unlikely. Some of the seigneuries thus became densely packed rural enclaves in which community members were heavily dependent on one another while also quite competitive. The Batiscan ironworks held out the hope of wealth from something other than the

finite resource represented by land. The failure of the ironworks project wasn't a disaster, but it set back the hopes of the seigneurie for a while.

All this happened in less than a single generation, and the result was country life returning to its agricultural focus. The countryside continued to generate food but it was increasingly focused on subsistence. In a sense, it became even more intensively agricultural than it had been during the days of the fur trade. An outsider visiting for the first time in the 1830s might mistake it for a very traditional agrarian landscape. In truth, the "tradition" only went a generation or so deep. In 1790 there were fewer than a thousand people in Saint-Anne and 1,281 in Batiscan; in 1825 the numbers were 2,175 and 2,454 respectively. The two communities were doubling in size at a roughly Malthusian rate. They were, as well, shedding large numbers: nearly 500 people left Batiscan between 1790 and 1825 — a fifth of the total population in 1825. What is more, household sizes were rising. At Batiscan in 1784 the average family size was about five; in 1825 it was around six.

Coates identifies one of the consequences of these changes: "As households grew larger and young men and women remained dependent on their parents for longer periods, hierarchical relations within the family were strengthened."¹ This hints at the changes in the status of elders and the roles of mothers and fathers. Rather than being viewed as a place in a state of stasis, these seigneuries (and they are probably exemplary of many more) were undergoing profound changes.

Class in the Countryside

Class relations were also under pressure. As Cole Harris observes, land shortages played into the hands of seigneurs. Too many people and too little land meant that labour costs fell, making it more feasible for seigneurs to hire workers to improve their own lands. Between 1791 and the 1830s, seigneurs were more likely to insist on payments of debts, which they lacked the leverage to do in previous decades. They even increased the *cens et rentes*, something they were unable to do under the *ancien régime*'s regulating hand. One effect was the rise of a seigneurial class that was more aristocratic (at least in its wealth and its manorial lifestyle) in the 19th century than it had been in the days of New France.

Harris notes that Lower Canada was, perhaps perversely, becoming more rural than urban in the 19th century. At the end of the French regime, one-fifth to one-quarter of the population of the St. Lawrence Valley lived in the towns, a figure that dropped to one-twentieth "of the French-Canadians" by 1815. This change took place in an era where the population as a whole jumped from 70,000 to more than 300,000. The main cities were becoming more English and less welcoming to francophones, but that doesn't mean that the Canadien population retreated into the countryside. In order for those numbers to work, they only had to stay put on the land, have more babies, and stay out of the cities, which is exactly what happened. Small wonder that Canadiens saw the institutions of the countryside (the parish church and the parish priest, the seigneur and the manor house, the *Coutume de Paris* with its focus on family rather than individual) as fundamental to their way of life, even if each of those was at one time or another exploitative of their rural existence.²

1. Colin M. Coates, *The Metamorphosis of Landscape and Community in Early Quebec* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 58-60.

2. Cole Harris, "Of Poverty and Helplessness in Petite-Nation," *Canadian Historical Review* 52, issue 1 (March 1971): 23-50.

The situation in the English-speaking world was quite different. While the economic model of the family farm was found throughout all of British North America, it meant something different in the patrilineal nuclear family households of the anglophones. The availability of land in the western stretches of Upper Canada ensured that competition for inheritances would not produce painfully small subdivisions of farms. Communities stood in for families when it came time to depend on group labour for harvests, threshing, road building, and barn raising. The same was not always true in the Atlantic colonies, where poorer soil conditions and limited availability of arable land created pressures on locals to find other sources of income. In Prince Edward Island farming was an easier proposition, but often Maritime farming families looked to sawmills and mines to provide part-time and seasonal work. The family farm and the small market towns persisted, but they were rapidly becoming less typical of Maritime social organization.

Some of the changes occurring at the urban level diffused to rural areas, so much so that the clear cultural boundaries between town and country began to blur. Large edifices appeared, many of them made of brick and stone, to house new industries and institutions. In the early 19th century industry went to where there was water power: hydraulics were key to driving early factories. Once again, the river courses — especially the most difficult portage sites because that's where the water power was to be found — were determining the shape of Canadian life.

Key Points

- Social relations in rural British North America were directly impacted by the availability of land and competition for space.
- Land shortages in Lower Canada reinforced and enhanced the authority and wealth of seigneurs.
- The countryside was not impervious to industrial life.

Attributions

Figure 10.4

[Erb's Grist Mill at Sunset](#) by [Russ Gordon](#) is used under a [CC-BY-NC-SA 2.0](#) license.

2.2 Social Classes

The social classes of British North America at mid-century were a mix of old and new elements. The seigneurs of New France survived into the 19th century, their ranks inflated by the arrival of British gentry who bought up seigneurial titles and lands. And, of course, seigneuries depended utterly on the perpetuation of feudal relations with *censitaires*. It wasn't until 1854, with the passage of An Act for the Abolition of Feudal Rights and Duties in Lower Canada by the now-united Province of Canada, that the system truly began to disappear. It would take another 80 years before it was wound up completely, but 1854 marks the beginning of the end of feudalism in British North America.

The seigneurs and *censitaires* had roots that ran deep into the history of New France, as did the merchants (or burghers or bourgeois) whose claims to legitimacy might go as deep as the fur trade. The seigneurs retained importance politically and socially, but it was the merchants who emerged in the 19th century as the leading social class. By the 1820s, **liberal professionals** were beginning to make a significant appearance (especially in the towns and cities), and throughout this period the clergy were effectively a social class in their own right, one with considerable clout in all colonies.

Farmers and artisans remained, by far, the largest social category, but by the mid-19th century their numbers were being challenged by a growing working class, or proletariat. (The latter became more organized and significant in size only after Confederation.)

Self-awareness or **class consciousness** is what makes social classes matter. Not all of these social classes were able to act with a singular will, although their interests were often quite clearly distinct.

Exercise: Documents

Fashion plates

One of the features of vernacular (or folk) culture is that it is slow to change. Below are five visual records of the clothing styles of Canadien men and women in the 19th century (Figures 10.E1 – 10.E5).

To what extent are they durable? What changes do you notice? What elements stand out?

All of these illustrations were made by Anglo-Canadians or British army personnel. What do you think they saw when they looked at their subjects?



Figure 10.E1 Sempronius Stretton's 1805 depiction of a Canadian man and woman in winter clothing.



Figure 10.E2 John Lambert's 1816 illustration of a Canadienne and a Catholic Priest in winter dress.



Figure 10.E3 John Lambert's 1816 depiction of "Habitants in their Summer dress."



Figure 10.E4 John Crawford Young's ca. 1825-36 watercolour of "Canadian Habitants".



Figure 10.E5 Frances Anne Hopkins, "Canadian Habitant in Winter," ca. 1858-59.

The Clergy

While it is the case that the clergy shared a common identity, this identity was fractured by denominations. There was much more solidarity in Lower Canada (Canada East) where the Catholic clergy was tightly organized, engaged in a wide range of social and educational services that went far beyond the saving of souls, and — perhaps most importantly — was aware that their sect existed at the sufferance of the British-Anglican imperial establishment. Belonging to an organization that had these qualities was attractive to many Canadiens, not just as members of congregations but as people seeking a career. Whether in nursing or education, ministering to the poor, serving as missionaries among the Aboriginal population, or working as far afield as the Prairies or the West Coast, the Catholic church offered career opportunities for men and women alike that offered social status, influence, a community of peers, a sense of inclusion, security from cradle to grave, a chance to travel, and a role in protecting and advancing the culture of the Canadiens. In this respect Lower Canada was distinct from France: there, the nobility and the clergy had lost much of their influence during the Revolution, while in Canada they still enjoyed prominence and respect.

The situation for clergy in the Anglo-Protestant colonies was different. Sectarianism was loaded with meaning and sometimes vitriol. The Anglican establishment in Toronto, led by the Reverend (Bishop from 1839) John Strachan, represented the elite, the English, the Crown, and Toryism and took the form of the Family Compact. They regarded Methodists with suspicion and the Presbyterians hardly less so. In 1820 the Family Compact was able to institute a body for managing the Clergy Reserves, one-seventh of the public land. All of this land and the profits from its sale was claimed by the Church of England. Opposition to this arrangement grew through the mid-19th century, and in 1824 the Church of Scotland (the Presbyterians) won a share of the Clergy Reserves, but it remained outside of the local power structure and was a factor in the 1837-38 Rebellions.

William Lyon Mackenzie (1795-1861), a Presbyterian, aligned in his legislative career with Egerton Ryerson (1803-1882), a prominent Methodist minister in Toronto, in pursuing equity of the Clergy Reserves. Mackenzie was reputedly strongly influenced by the **anti-clerical** views of his mother, Elizabeth Mackenzie, and he was a lifelong advocate of the separation of church and state as a result.¹

Competitiveness among the various sects was evident in some of the other colonies as well. In Newfoundland, outposts were generally defined by the presence of one or two churches to the exclusion of other denominations, but in Prince Edward Island, rivalries between denominations appeared within individual villages. Island Presbyterians, Anglicans, Catholics, and Methodists found themselves squaring off against Congregationalists and Baptists. Each sect offered up larger and larger village churches as a sign of their competitive strength. By mid-century, the Tories on Prince Edward Island had become the party of Protestantism while the Liberal opposition spoke for Catholics and some of the smaller denominations.²

Elsewhere in the Maritimes sectarian distribution reflected waves of immigration and movement. Catholicism followed the Acadians back to Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and it was reinforced by the arrival in Cape Breton of Highland Scots and everywhere by Irish immigrants. Presbyterianism came with the Lowland Scots, and Congregationalism — a vestige of the New England Planter migration in the 18th century — was a minority sect in the 19th century mostly found in New Brunswick.

The end effect of this plurality in Atlantic Canada was to weaken claims of primacy by any one sect. This made it impossible, however, for the colonies to avoid sectarian disputes such as those associated with the funding of schools. And sectarian education, of course, made the imposition of a single curriculum impossible.

Generally, the clergy enjoyed significant social status and influence, in both the French and English areas. The Catholic establishment in Lower Canada had an infrastructure that must have been the envy of other denominations. But religious identity was just as important to Anglo-British North Americans. Sometimes this was tied to ethnicity — such as Scottishness and Presbyterianism or Welshness and Methodism — but more broadly denominational commitment was associational. That is, it was akin to belonging to an exclusive club, one that had its own history and heroes and took care of its members in this life and the next. Robert Barry (ca. 1759-1843) provides one example: press-ganged into the British Navy at no more than 15 years of age, he jumped ship in New York, joined a local Methodist chapel, and was part of the Loyalist migration to Nova Scotia in 1783 where, as one biography has it, “his promotion of Methodism...aided his integration into the pre-existing mercantile structure through select business ties.”³

The Capitalist Class

The merchant elite of the Canadas and the Maritimes may have been competitive in their business dealings but they soon recognized a common cause in many aspects of business. And, of course, they were united by

1. Frederick H. Armstrong and Ronald J. Stagg, “MACKENZIE, WILLIAM LYON,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 9 (University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003). Accessed October 9, 2014, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mackenzie_william_lyon_9E.html.
2. Edward Macdonald, “Who's Afraid of the Fenians? The Fenian Scare on Prince Edward Island, 1865-1867,” *Acadiensis* 38, no.1 (Winter/Spring 2009).
3. Allen B. Robertson, “BARRY, ROBERT,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 7 (University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003). Accessed January 15, 2015, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/barry_robert_7E.html.

Anglicanism, Toryism, and language (English). As early as the 1820s, capitalists had achieved a degree of **hegemony** in the English-speaking colonies. Being Tory, Loyalist, patriarchal, and hierarchical were the dominant values, largely by default. There was no nobility (other than the governors) or local aristocracy to challenge them from above, the Presbyterians were increasingly onside, and there was not yet a large enough class of artisans or industrial workers who might generate a viable critique of emergent Canadian capitalism. Farmers, smaller entrepreneurs, and urban professionals (discussed below) had something to say about this situation, as did some journalists, but there was a line to be toed and it was drawn by the well-to-do bourgeoisie of Toronto, Montreal, Quebec, Halifax, and Saint John.



Figure 10.8 Ravenscrag, the Montreal home of shipping tycoon Hugh Allan, ca. 1865.

The leading spokesmen of this class were, of course, men. However, their web of connections points firmly at female networks that were every bit as important and sometimes gave the men upper-class pretensions. For example, James McGill (an Ayrshire-born son of a metalworker) arrived in post-Conquest/pre-Revolutionary Montreal, entered the fur trade, and promptly married Marie-Charlotte Guillimin (1747-1818), whose father had been a member of the Sovereign Council of New France and a judge in the Courts of Admiralty, and whose maternal grandfather was a giant among the seigneurial class. Sarah Vaughan (1751-1829) fell on very hard times at the end of the Revolution and fled to Montreal as a propertyless Loyalist, where she met, cohabited with (for 15 years), and finally married the brewing magnate, John Molson. Molson himself came from gentry stock in England but Vaughan's family included the 1st Earl of Lisburne and the Duke of Atholl. Another example from Montreal is Marie-Marguerite Chaboillez (1775-?), the daughter of a leading fur trade *marchand* who was a founder of the exclusive Beaver Club and who married the Scottish fur trader Simon McTavish. Insulated by wealth and borrowing some of the glow from relatives' titles and accomplishments, the capitalist elite formed an almost impregnable leadership class in the main towns of the colonies.



Figure 10.9 Charlotte Trottier Desrivières,
sister-in-law of Marie-Charlotte Guillimin McGill.

However much the merchants and leading manufacturers wished to cast themselves in the mould of “old money,” they were North Americans as well and they endorsed hard work and determination. As one study puts it, “Profit, loss, extensive growth, efficiency, and a myth of individualism pervaded the Canadian economy and the Canadian political scene....”⁴ There were enough examples of self-made men in the ranks of leading capitalists — Alexander Keith (a brewer), John Redpath (construction and sugar), McTavish and McGill (fur traders) — to give substance to the notion of individual accomplishment through hard work. These values became deeply embedded in the Canadian culture, reinforced by Britain’s turn to laissez-faire capitalism, the rise of American capitalism south of the border, and a Protestant clergy whose views were not wholly dissimilar.

The Agrarians and Artisans

Farming was the bedrock of the colonial economies of the Canadas, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. Farming mattered in Nova Scotia as well, but as was the case in Newfoundland, the fisheries continued to exert more power there.

The relationship of farmers to the rest of society was complex. Under the model of the independent farm, a household invested labour and its capital in order to maximize production, making the most of an environment in which winters arrived earlier and left later than in American grain belts. In Upper Canada and in New Brunswick, the farming frontier was organized around townships, which became places of interaction, commerce, stockpiling grain output, and combining to improve infrastructure. The surrounding towns were also where artisans associated with agrarian society located: shoemakers and dressmakers served basic consumer needs, and ironmongers and blacksmiths contributed to the success of farming. In the agricultural monoculture of wheat that existed in Upper

4. Kenneth Norrie and Douglas Owsam, *A History of the Canadian Economy* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991), 234.

Canada (Canada West), competition with other producers was largely meaningless: when everyone grows wheat, everyone hopes for the same rising tide.

For artisans, being a member of a craft signified a degree of structured and regulated training. Stonemasons, for example, were part of a tradition of builders arising out of the Middle Ages who trained as child apprentices, became journeymen, and eventually achieved the status of master craftsmen. They might belong to a guild or an association that limited the number of craftsmen in the market at any time, thereby assuring a reasonably good income. They were mostly independent workers, hiring themselves out on contracts, not as wage labourers. They often had their own shops although some were itinerant.

Shoemakers are among the best studied artisans of the time. They had a strong collective identity, celebrated annually on October 25 during marches for St. Crispin, the shoemakers' patron saint. As early as 1830 the shoemakers of York (Toronto) organized and went on strike for higher prices, which were locally regulated. According to one study by Greg Kealey, there were 68 shoemakers in the city in 1833 and 49 shoe shops (which may have combined retail with the manufacturing processes) in 1846; by 1851 there were two "shoe factories." Montreal shoemakers, however, dominated the trade for many decades and were the first to see their work broken into components: women assembled the leather from home, and men added the soles in small shops. Eventually the process was brought under one roof where the newly invented sewing machine was introduced.⁵ Again, this part was women's work: less skilled, lower paid, and more aggressively supervised.

The 1861 census of Canada West tells us that there were 221 boot- and shoemakers in the eastern districts of the colony. Of those, 141 were independent, typically working from their homes or a nearby shop. The work was slow and hard: a single shoemaker was unlikely to complete more than 150 pairs in a year. As the population grew at mid-century, so too did demand for shoes. The factories responded by expanding output which, at the same time, increased pressure on the producer-artisan in the small towns. An advertisement in the Halifax *Citizen* newspaper of February 20, 1864, called for "20 Workmen on Pegged Work" for the Truro Boot & Shoe Factory.

The effects of industrialization were being felt by the crafts far beyond the big cities. One of the factors necessary for this change was the rise of the dairy industry and beef cattle farming. A shortage of cowhide and tanneries would doom the shoemaking business, so an ecology of supply and demand had to evolve to sustain both the early and the industrialized operations. (In this way, shoemaking also encouraged the cheese business.) Of course, advancements in transportation meant that shoe leather could be obtained from American sources too, especially at mid-century under the terms of reciprocity. With supplies secured and a post-reciprocity market guaranteed, one of the largest operations in British North America, Sessions, Carpenter and Company in Toronto, employed 250 men, women, and children on the eve of Confederation.

In this way, craftsmen's work became **proletarianized**. Even if skilled artisans were needed to complete the final product, the **division of labour** now included children and women, with as much as a third of the workforce in the largest factories being made up of women. Unionization would follow early in the post-Confederation era in an attempt to win back what had been lost in terms of control of work and incomes by the shift from craft to industry.

5. Gregory Kealey, "Artisans Respond to Industrialization: Shoemakers, Shoe Factories and the Knights of St. Crispin in Toronto," in *Age of Transition: Readings in Canadian Social History*, ed. Norman Knowles (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1998), 161-4.

The transition from craft to unskilled **sweated labour** was even more rapid in the production of textiles. Montreal was the centre of clothing production business by the 1820s and 1830s. A business that had been dominated formerly by tailors and seamstresses became centralized in early factories where ready-made clothing was produced in large quantities. This entailed, again, a division of labour that supplanted skilled artisans with lower-paid women, men, and children. And according to one study, it did more than disrupt the existing generation of artisans: by dismantling the system that sustained the apprenticeship and journeyman system, it severely impacted the survival prospects for the trade as a whole.⁶

The Middle Classes

As farm families accumulated money from land speculation and wheat production, some were able to advance their position in society. Likewise, some artisans shifted from being independent producers of goods or services to hiring others to play that role: shoemakers grew from being small-shop cobblers to running small- or medium-sized shoe factories; blacksmiths produced a range of agricultural tools, not just horseshoes. As well, a generation of fur traders who, if they had survived the fur trade wars, settled into communities across British North America as people of comfortable means.

As colonial administrative structures became more complex to meet the needs of growing and changing populations, there were opportunities in a very broadly defined **civil service**. Similarly, as financial institutions became larger they produced opportunities for regional and branch managers. And there also emerged a class of liberal professionals: lawyers, physicians, notaries, journalists, printers and publishers, surveyors, and engineers.

Together these categories made up an emerging **middle class** that occupied a socioeconomic and cultural space between the old elites of the Loyalist Family Compacts, the military leadership, and the vice-regal governors on the one side, and the agrarian and working classes on the other. Shared values of the middle class included enthusiasm for literacy and schooling, moral advancement, the primacy of the individual as the key unit in society, the growth and spread of institutions, democratic principles, patriarchy, and the separation of public and private spheres.

In some ways, these values mimicked the upper class, but the middle class also believed in social mobility and the fluidity of social structures, a position that Tories detested. For the upper classes, everyone had a more-or-less fixed, assigned role to play in the social order. For the middle classes, education and (adult male) equality were the keys to advancement and a better society as a whole. As one historian writes of the middle class emerging in Halifax in the second quarter of the century, “growing in absolute numbers, increasingly literate, with ever more disposable income and leisure time, members of these strata tended to become, over time, increasingly self-conscious and ambitious.”⁷

One example was the Red River patriarch Alexander Ross, who started out as an amateur schoolmaster in Lower

6. Robert McIntosh, "Sweated Labour: Female Needleworkers in Industrializing Canada," in *Age of Transition: Readings in Canadian Social History*, ed. Norman Knowles (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1998), 178-80.

7. David A. Sutherland, "Voluntary Societies and the Process of Middle-Class Formation in Early-Victorian Halifax, Nova Scotia," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 5 (1994): 239.

Canada, rising through the fur trade to become sheriff of Assiniboia. His son James attended university in Toronto and became a journalist, while another son, William, became a postmaster (a bureaucratic position that only came into existence with the invention of the organized postal system). A contemporary in Prince Edward Island, Edward Jarvis, trained as a lawyer in New Brunswick and London and ascended to the post of chief justice on the island colony. His sons Munson, Henry, and William were destined for careers in law, medicine, and the clergy, respectively.⁸

The British North American middle classes left a definite fingerprint on the mid-19th century. The houses they lived in displayed a scaled-down architecture from those of the elites: they were designed with the nuclear family in mind and included “transition zones” from the public space — the parlour — to the private spaces in the rest of the structure. As one study describes the situation, “Middle-class family life in the Victorian era was characterized by two related developments. The first is generally referred to as the ‘domesticization’ of the household, a clear separation of work-life and home-life and the withdrawal of the various household members into the privacy of the home, which became the central social unit for ‘the transmission of culture, the maintenance of social stability, and the pursuit of happiness.’”⁹ The house gave form to the lives of its inhabitants and was both the academy and the factory floor on which girls learned domestic skills. The role of hostess was held by the matriarch until age and/or health compromised her ability to be the public face of the family in the private space of the home. The eldest daughter would then typically step into that position, thus playing a role in the oversight of household accounts, any servants the household might employ (e.g., cooks, nannies, governesses), and entertaining guests. The scale of these duties should not be minimized as they were often physically demanding and usually unceasing. Many young Canadian women could not escape these roles and faced spinsterhood rather than abandon the responsibilities of the patriarch’s hearth and home.

Key Points

- Old social classes survived into Victorian British North America while entirely new social categories appeared.
- Differences in social class became more widely felt, especially with the middle class and the upper class.
- Sectarian loyalties and rivalries marked life across British North America as did growing anti-clericalism.
- The growing trend toward proletarianization increasingly challenged the position of artisans and craftsmen/women.
- A middle class with common features emerged, and it was increasingly critical of the power appropriated by the well-off merchant classes and Loyalist elites.

8. J.M.Bumsted and Wendy Owen, “The Victorian Family in Canada in Historical Perspective: The Ross Family of Red River and the Jarvis Family of Prince Edward Island,” *Manitoba History* 13 (Spring 1987): 12-18.

9. *Ibid.*, 15.

Attributions

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[Canadian Man and Woman in their Winter Dress](#) by [Victuallers](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.E2

[A French Canadian Lady in her Winter Dress and a Roman Catholic Priest](#) by [Metilsteiner](#) is in the [public domain](#).

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2.3 Gender Roles

Patriarchal authority was the norm in the colonies, less so among some Aboriginal communities, but even there missionaries were making changes. Property ownership in Upper Canada and the Atlantic colonies favoured men and, given the link between property ownership and the franchise, it favoured them politically as well.

Women and Girls

The role of women in the first half of the 19th century was diverse, ranging from life in a religious order to working in a logging camp.

Even though many industries at the time were very male oriented, women helped in woodlot management and harvesting on their family farms. Even in the logging camps, women might find work as cooks, laundresses, and boarding-house keepers. Villages like Bytown (Ottawa), however rowdy and dangerous they were at their worst, contained a substantial female population. Similarly, mining towns were heavily male enclaves but not entirely bereft of women. It was rare to find females working in underground coal mines in British North America, even though in England women laboured in pits until prohibited by law in 1842, and in Belgium for decades after that. Women did, however, find work in haulage and at the pithead; Aboriginal women in particular played a role in Vancouver Island's coal industry loading the ore from the minehead in cedar baskets and then down the long hill to the waterfront and onto ships.

In the days before factories, fine work associated with textiles and shoe manufacture was often performed by women. Since most artisanal operations were independent — that is, run by families or small employers — the living and working spaces were often closely connected if not overlapping. The manufacture of wool — carding, spinning, and weaving — was **cottage industry** work in which both men and women participated, but in which women predominated. Likewise the manufacture of dairy products (milk, butter, cheese) was an important component of female farmwork, as was canning preserves. Women made these products not simply for themselves but for sale. Fall fairs presented opportunities for women to show off their products under the scrutiny of their peers; a coveted blue ribbon would mean orders from local grocers and thus were an important source of cash. Because farm produce was often sold under a system of credit, any cash a woman brought in might be a household's chief source of hard currency. The household was, therefore, much more than a place of domesticity: it was a site of production.

There is an interesting parallel to be drawn between the impact the fur trade had on pre-contact Aboriginal skillsets and the industrialization of “women’s work” in the 19th century. During the fur trade, copper pots made handwoven cedar baskets obsolete; in the era of industrialization, textile mills dealt a fatal blow to **homespun** clothes-making. (Indeed, the term *homespun* changed in meaning from denoting artisanal skill to a derisory adjective meaning unsophisticated and unlovely.) In both cases, manufactured goods were substituted for time-consuming crafts and the one gradually squeezed out the other.

But women’s work remained significant to the social economy of early British North America, particularly in farming, logging, and fishing. New farmland in many cases had to be carved out of the forests, so while the men did the hard work of clearing the land, the women tended to the early planting, weeding, and some animal rearing. If logging was lucrative, men might carry on with that seasonally or over a longer term to accumulate money for the farm. The frontier farm women thus perpetuated the near-independence experienced by habitant women married to fur traders in New France: their men were off elsewhere earning money so the farm was the woman’s domain. Even after the farms matured into more stable economic propositions, women’s work was critical to their success.

Many other women during this time operated boarding houses and laundries. In communities centred on resource-extraction, generally dominated by men, there was high demand for good accommodations, a daily meal or two, and clean clothes. Women who provided these services brought in cash to contribute to the household economy. In **single-industry** and/or **company towns** from Cape Breton to Vancouver Island where workers were paid with scrip or credits to be spent at the **company store**, a woman’s income might be critical. Where possible, women opened and operated saloons (perhaps capitalized by their wage-earning husbands) and small stores. Sometimes these were temporary measures, part of a plan calculated to provide an income when the husband could no longer manage heavy work. Amanda (Gough) Norris’s experience illustrates a similar cross-generational experience: she was one of the first English immigrants to Vancouver Island in the 1850s and she worked alongside her husband in his print shop until their sons were old enough to take her place.¹

In other cases, women raised chickens, pigs, and even cows on very small urban properties. Taking in boarders, even in cramped little homes and tenements, was another possibility, one for which women were usually responsible. These were all financial survival strategies that reduced costs and provided hard-to-come-by cash.

As support grew in the early 19th century for formal education, the need arose for teachers. Although the Catholic tradition in French Canada provided generations of educator development, there was nothing in the way of formal training for English-speakers in British North America. Women took on many of the early teaching responsibilities in Upper Canada, most seizing on it as an opportunity to improve their incomes. Teaching typically took place in the teacher’s home, although small academies also appeared, especially after 1820. For these “lady teachers,” expertise came with experience, although many — perhaps most — never intended to teach for more than a few years until they were married. Widows and lifelong spinsters, to take a different **life-course** view, came to teaching as a survival strategy and a means to attain financial security.

By the 1840s education was becoming more regulated, so the setting of the independent teacher-proprietor

1. John Douglas Belshaw, *Colonization and Community: The Vancouver Island Coalfield and the Making of the British Columbian Working Class* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 105-107.

working out of her home declined. Female teachers were generally restricted to teaching girls and boys below the age of puberty. Older boys were the responsibility of male teachers. To be clear, however, most boys and girls did not proceed very far in formal education: the advantages of literacy and numeracy were not appreciated by many agricultural and/or industrial families. The emergent middle classes, however, placed a high value on literacy. Their growing wealth made the business of opening a small school a worthwhile venture.

As **ideals of womanhood** changed mid-century, middle-class parents wanted their daughters to be educated and provide some “refinement” and a domestic sensibility. Middle-class families demonstrated their success by sending their daughters to school, and girls who turned into literate, organized, respectable young women were more likely to marry good middle-class lads, thereby ensuring the family’s security for another generation. As more girls received this kind of education, demands grew for more specialized skills that moved beyond literacy and behaviour. Musical and artistic education was added to the mix, making daughters even more attractive as prospective brides. An education that extended into the girl’s mid- to late teens might prepare her for a career as a teacher-proprietor.²

The Catholic French-Canadian experience offered different opportunities to women. Despite its strict hierarchical structure and gender roles, the Catholic Church nevertheless contained room in which a woman could manoeuvre. Whether it was in health care or education, a number of full-time and lifelong career paths were available to women of all social classes. Almost entirely, these positions involved taking religious orders, vows of celibacy, and possibly poverty as well. Certainly women who “took the veil” gave up much, but they also gained security within the largest corporate organization in the colonies and the possibility of making independent and consequential decisions on a daily basis.³

Women also found work on the legal margins of society. The sex trade was alive and well, usually concentrated in brothels somewhere near the docks. Dancehall girls — women who were paid for a dance — blurred the edges between the suggestion and the provision of sex as a business proposition. In gold rush towns of the Cariboo, the acrobatic “hurdy gurdy girls” charged a dollar a dance, which mainly involved being thrown into the air, sometimes upside down. Clearly the prospect of spending time with and being in physical if not sexual contact with a woman had a great appeal to the multitude of men working in resource towns. Dancehall owners exploited this to the point that dance girls were often and very wrongly equated with prostitutes. In Victoria these roles were often filled by Aboriginal women, so they faced the double opprobrium of the moral and, inevitably, racial prejudices held by crusading journalists, politicians, and clerics alike.⁴

More generally, the experiences of Aboriginal women were different from those of non-Aboriginal women. On the West Coast they traditionally worked in food preparation: fishing and hunting was usually done by the men, but the women were responsible for dressing and preparing the food. The skills developed propelled Aboriginal women into the multitude of salmon canneries that appeared on the West Coast in the late 19th century.

2. Jane Errington, “Ladies and Schoolmistresses: Educating Women in Early Nineteenth-Century Upper Canada,” *Historical Studies in Education* 6, issue 1 (1994): 71-96.

3. Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Québec, 1840-1920* (Toronto: UTP, 1987).

4. Jean Barman, “Aboriginal Women on the Streets of Victoria: Rethinking Transgressive Sexuality during the Colonial Encounter,” in *Contact Zones: Aboriginal Women and Settler Women in Canada’s Colonial Past*, eds. Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 205-27.

These women also worked in horticulture and were quick to seize on earning opportunities in the fields of settler-farmers. Aboriginal women on the coast had a long-established claim to their earnings, which were not necessarily shared with the men in their lives. As well, child-rearing and care responsibilities were often the lot of “the infirm,” to use one historian’s phrase. This was particularly the case when traditional work became industrialized, such as when Aboriginal women (and mothers) worked in the canneries.⁵ While child-minding might not always be available to non-Aboriginals at least it was sometimes enjoyed by First Nations women.

Indeed, the responsibility of reproduction fell to women in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies. In households containing extended families, mothers might receive assistance raising their children; women in nuclear family households fared less well. Daughters were trained into motherhood by taking on responsibilities for younger siblings, which, given the fertility rates of the period, they were likely to have. From the *filles du roi* to Confederation, there were significant social and economic pressures on women to marry and have children. In rural areas, children contributed significantly to the business of farming; primogeniture left a widow vulnerable to the prospect of expulsion from her home, so having children with whom she could live in old age was a practical strategy.

Men and Boys

In a study of manliness in 19th century Nova Scotia, Janet Guildford identifies three ideals of masculinity. These rose sequentially though they overlapped significantly, existed concurrently, were in conflict with one another, and sometimes even blended together.

The first is the “masculine achiever,” a character who subscribes to the view that by hard work and ambition he would be rewarded with wealth and success. This ideal keeps his feelings to himself for the most part, is driven, and believes very much in the value of individual autonomy. The second is the “Christian gentleman,” a variant that appears around the mid-century and is more likely to display sympathy and even empathy, less likely to measure his manliness by his wealth, and more concerned with proprieties (as he understands them). No less hard working, he is the embodiment of “evangelical Christianity,” a movement that took root after the 1830s across the English-speaking world. Finally, there is the “masculine primitive,” the muscular and physically powerful male who represents the success of the “race.” It is not a coincidence that the masculine primitive appears around the same time as Darwinian theories about the survival of the fittest.⁶

These were types favoured and promoted and dissected in middle-class literature, in the pulpit, in newspapers, and in theatre. And they had their uses for the emerging colonies. Missionary zeal augmented and tempered mercantile muscle while physical prowess made for a strong militia in a strong empire. While each might critique the weaknesses of the other, they were distinctively 19th century creations. In the dominant heterosexual narrative of the day, each one had to be able to turn his abilities into the sort of earnings that would win him a bride and a family — the twin pillars of Victorian society.

5. John Lutz, “After the Fur Trade: The Aboriginal Working Class of British Columbia, 1849-1890,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* (1992): 69-93.

6. Janet Guildford, “Creating the Ideal Man: Middle-Class Women’s Constructions of Masculinity in Nova Scotia, 1840-1880,” in *Age of Transition: Readings in Canadian Social History*, ed. Norman Knowles (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1998), 141-2.

Men often walked away from this domestic ideal. After all, ideals of personal autonomy were not necessarily compatible with the binding role of patriarchy. This was part of the appeal of heading off to goldfields and forest frontiers. When the American writer Mark Twain had his character Huck Finn say that he's going to "light out for the territories," he was speaking of this chance to escape the grasp of "civilization" and routine. If one considers a boy being born in the 1820s when the farming and logging frontiers were expanding rapidly, then reaching adulthood in the 1840s and 1850s, by which time towns and cities were growing and opportunities for independent action shrinking, it is easy to imagine him wishing for a life he knew second-hand from his elders. As the number and size of farms available to homestead or to buy in the Canadas and the Maritimes shrank, the western frontier on the Plains became more attractive.

And economic and demographic factors often forced their hand. Opportunities to marry are closely tied to the ratio of men to women: where there is an imbalance (and there was a radically stark imbalance in British Columbia among the newcomer population after 1858, running as high as 200 men to every non-Aboriginal woman), lifelong bachelorhood was likely for some. Very local economic conditions also affected men's options in these years. In Lower Canada in the 1820s, as the availability of new farmland for young families diminished and as prosperity on existing seigneuries slipped, the nuptiality rate dropped as well. If there was a pioneering option nearby, regardless of how poor the soil might be, marriage numbers rebounded. And, perhaps most significantly, if there existed a reliable source of part-time — perhaps seasonal — labour for men, possibly in logging or fishing, then marriage once again became a possibility.⁷

In something like a mirror image of women's experiences, men were also expected to follow certain gender roles in work and other socioeconomic activities. The commercial seal hunt in Newfoundland and Labrador provides one example. In the 1700s this was an activity that involved both men and women. Seals were hunted near to shore and whole families participated. Then, in the late 18th century, the work became organized on a larger scale. Vessels set out in the spring to hunt seals in more commercially viable numbers, in part because of rising demand for seal oil. At this point, women were excluded from the process and it became "men's work." By the middle of the 1800s, according to historian Willeen Keough,

the dominant cultural understanding of the seal fishery [was] an exclusively masculine space — where men and boys tested themselves in a harsh, frozen landscape; where cruel sealing masters drove their crews to exhaustion while greedy merchants urged on their fleets with the toast "Bloody decks and a bumper crop"; where countless ships were crushed in the ice and thousands of men lost their lives.

There was a huge appeal, nonetheless, in the machismo, heroic, mythic features of this business, and males young and old competed for a chance to join the fleet.⁸ Most importantly, there was money to be made and sealing was as good a way to do so as any along Newfoundland's northeast coast. Being gendered into the role of seal hunter meant, conversely, being gendered out of other possibilities. The individualistic striver, risking life and limb for a good catch so as to cover the family's costs, was never objectively the best of all possible options.

Boys had to make choices from an early age. Apprenticeships, as we have seen, and labouring jobs as well often

7. Colin M. Coates, *The Metamorphoses of Landscape and Community in Early Québec* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 142.-3.

8. Willeen Keough, "(Re-)telling Newfoundland Sealing Masculinity: Narrative and Counter-Narrative," *Journal of the CHA 2010 Revue de la SHC*, New Series 21, no.1 (2010): 133-4.

began by age seven or eight. Boys pursuing a trade were usually “apprenticed out” to another household where they were trained and, for all intents and purposes, raised.

As the overwhelming majority of British North Americans either lived on the land or in fishing villages, the typical boyhood involved hard labour that followed the hours of daylight rather than a clock on the wall. Until the 1870s, working people in towns had only one day of rest a week: Sunday. This left little time to recharge small bodies which they badly needed, given the beatings regularly administered by overseers in some of the colonies’ truly Dickensian-like workplaces. The physical demands of boyhood were high in this period, possibly higher than they had been at any time before in human history outside of plantation slavery. Formal schooling, moreover, offered little in the way of relief.

Marriage and Divorce

English common law was used throughout anglophone British North America, although not always uniformly. The Maritime colonies’ traditions were heavily influenced by those of New England and New York, from where so many Loyalists had come, whereas Upper Canada tended to follow British traditions. The effect was to produce a patchwork quilt of civil law legislation across British North America, which was reflected in the divorce laws of the day.

Nova Scotia, for example, established parameters for divorce in the late 1750s that were more generous than those in place in English law. Divorce could be pursued because of adultery under both legal realms, but in Nova Scotia wives and husbands could also file for divorce on the basis of impotence, physical abuse, and too close a familial connection (also called “consanguinity”). In New Brunswick “cruelty” was replaced by “frigidity” in 1791 legislation. Prince Edward Island copied the New Brunswick legislation in 1833, making a few changes of its own, including allowing wives to retain a “common law right to a life interest in one-third of the real property at the death of their husband,” even after divorce. All of the Atlantic colonies sought to punish “fornication” (heterosexual relations outside of marriage) and adultery, and on the whole they were all relatively even-handed in the treatment of men and women.

Upper Canada followed a path more consistent with English law, which made divorce a matter for Parliament itself to decide on a case-by-case basis; for all intents and purposes, divorce was an impossibility in Upper Canada. In Lower Canada the hostility of the Catholic clergy to the concept of divorce was seemingly unchanged from the pre-Conquest era; it was simply illegal and immoral. It was possible after 1839 to dissolve individual marriages in Lower Canada by statute, which drew the two Canadas closer together in practice.

In 1857 Parliament in London introduced the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act, and the colonies of British North America spent some of the next 20 years struggling with how they might conform to this single model. It proved impossible and, although Canada West finally allowed for the possibility of divorce, it was even more cumbersome than was the case in Britain. The British legislation, moreover, introduced the “notorious double standard for cause,” which made it so much easier for husbands to secure relief from an adulterous wife than vice

versa.⁹ Long after Confederation the responsibility for divorce remained a provincial matter and an artifact of the distinctive experiences of the individual colonies.¹⁰

Key Points

- Notwithstanding the core patriarchal values of the era, mid-19th century women played important economic roles.
- Changes in the production of food and cloth impacted women by reducing the value of their domestic output. Some women turned instead to providing services like lodging, meals, or laundry.
- The roles of men and boys were equally gendered and the expectation was every bit as great that they would marry and produce other colonists.

9. Wendy Owen and J.M. Bumsted, "Divorce in a Small Province: A History of Divorce on Prince Edward Island from 1833," *Acadiensis* XX, no.2 (Spring 1991): 86-94.

10. Roderick Phillips, *Untying the Knot: A Short History of Divorce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 136-9).

2.4 Race and Racism

Ethnicity became a common dividing line in British North American society in the mid-19th century. This was associated most acutely with the Irish immigrants, who were viewed by established settlers as competing for jobs, compromised by cholera, heavily addicted to alcohol, inclined to brawling, and mostly Catholic. Take out the specifics and one has the outlines of **nativist** responses to newcomers for generations: economic threat, health threat, moral threat, physical threat, and spiritual threat. Nativists — that is, British North Americans whose claim to precedence might go back generations or only a matter of years — repeatedly stirred up panic about new immigrants, most of whom were unskilled and badly connected to the local society.

Of course the living conditions and hygiene were poor (although hardly different from the rest of the working population), but all of these prejudices combined to keep newcomers in generations of poverty. In Saint John, New Brunswick, in the late 1840s, this situation provoked violence when Catholic Irish descended on the town, fleeing poverty during the Great Famine. The **Orange Order**, a local branch of an international organization that fought Catholicism in Europe (but especially in the largely Protestant counties of northern Ireland), spoke for nativist interests by trying to drive out Irish immigrants.¹

Similar confrontations occurred along the Ottawa Valley, where the Irish Catholics turned on the host society. In a running battle that lasted from 1835 to 1845, Irish Catholic logging camp workers were incited by one employer, Peter Aylen (1799-1868), to attack Canadian loggers and logging operations. Using violence as a tactic to gain advantage, Aylen and the Irish asserted their authority over the whole of Bytown in what was known as the Shiners' War. The reign of terror lasted only two years, but the violence took another eight years to end.²

Ethnic bias could be found in other circumstances, too. Certainly Canadiens often found themselves at the sharp end of prejudice in English Canada. This played out in any number of venues, not the least of which was the legislature of the united colony of Canada after 1841. Acadians, too, faced anglophone hostility in the Atlantic colonies. The Jewish population of Lower Canada faced a kind of double discrimination as British law forbade their entering political life unless they took an oath to the Christian god, and the Catholic church was actively hostile. Ezekial Hart's case illustrates the situation. A seigneur at Trois-Rivieres, Hart and his family were active in the fur trade and local life for many years before he was elected to the Lower Canada assembly in 1807. He was repeatedly blocked in his attempt to take his seat because of the aforementioned oath. Among those opposed to

1. Scott W. See, "The Orange Order and Social Violence in Mid-Nineteenth Century Saint John," *Acadiensis* 13, issue 1 (Autumn 1983): 68-92.

2. David Lee, *Lumber Kings & Shantymen: Logging and Lumbering in the Ottawa Valley* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 2006), 157-196.

his presence in the assembly was a young Louis-Joseph Papineau. Hart left politics but embarrassed his opponents by serving as a lieutenant at the Battle of Chateaugay in 1813. Twenty years later Papineau, as Speaker of the Assembly, would demonstrate a change of attitude toward Hart and championed an Emancipation Act (1832), the first of its kind in the British Empire. This Act expanded Jewish rights significantly, though it did not by any means put an end to anti-Semitism.

There is a line between ethnic, sectarian, and racial division that is often unclear. Were Franco-Catholics targeted by Anglo-Protestants because of language, culture, or creed?³ Or a combination of all three? Certainly Lord Durham claimed that he found “two nations warring in the bosom of a single state,” a phrase that has long outlived the man but which complicated the discussion by juxtaposing “nation” and “state.” For people like Durham, nation equated with race and state with an administrative unit. “Nations,” in Durham’s time were identifiable peoples with distinctive cultural qualities and beliefs and inclinations, not a great leap from the essentials of “race.” Durham’s use of the terms “nation” and “state” reflects the rise in his lifetime of the idea of the “nation state,” a political and geographic unit that supersedes the old absolutist arrangements that might have Bourbon monarchs ruling over disparate parts of Europe.

The values associated with these terms changed dramatically in the next century. Between 1800 and Confederation, attitudes about the inferiority of certain “races” became popular, even among scholars. What became known as **scientific racism** postulated measurable differences in intelligence, barbarity, and morality (although spirituality had by this time slipped off the agenda). It also argued that the more numerous and less valuable “races” needed managing by superior peoples, lest their near-subhuman characteristics spread across continents and undermine civilization itself. In this respect, “racism” is not merely a set of discriminatory attitudes or a belief in the inferiority of certain identifiable groups of humans: it is a call to action, to resist at every turn the possibility of inferior people destroying the accomplishments of superior people.

This attitude prevailed at the time for a number reasons. First, it was the age of Britain’s Second Empire. Expansion into Africa and Asia was helped along by a theory of the human race that legitimized conquest and subjugation. Just as Europeans in the 15th and 16th centuries were armed with their Christian beliefs to strengthen their assault on people in the Americas, the British, French, German, Belgian, Dutch, and American expeditions abroad in the 19th century used racism. Second, the Darwinian theory of natural selection that explained the diversity of species within a population was misapplied to humans — using skin pigment, physique, and place of origin to establish a hierarchy of humanity among human races. Dislike of foreigners — xenophobia — was given a scientific veneer, whether that was Darwin’s intention or not. And, of course Darwin was not the only celebrity scientist of his age whose ideas were brought to bear on the issue.

While racism was used in New Brunswick and elsewhere to lend legitimacy to attacks on Irish immigrants, it flourished most fully on the West Coast. In retrospect, the era of the HBC monopoly looks like an age of tolerance and mutual respect (although geographers like Cole Harris have characterized it as one of brutality and efforts at subjugation of employees and Aboriginal peoples alike by HBC traders).⁴ Beginning in the 1840s and the start

3. This was never a one-way street. In 1853 Catholic crowds in Montréal responded to the visit of a prominent anti-Catholic speaker with violent protest. See Dan Horner, “Shame upon you as men!': Contesting Authority in the Aftermath of Montreal's Gavazzi Riot,” *histoire sociale/Social History*, vol. 44, no.1 (2011): 29-52.

4. Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 31-67.

of colonization, White attitudes toward other peoples in the region started to shift. At first the prejudices that emerged had much more to do with religion and spiritual issues. Missionaries who arrived in those years were quick to point out the heathen state of the locals, but they were also in conflict with one another. Oblate (Catholic) missions were among the earliest, arriving from the Oregon Territory at mid-century and extending to the central coast and the Cariboo Plateau before 1870. The Anglicans were an established presence under the HBC and the Crown colony regime. Other Protestant denominations showed up along with the gold rush, so that by 1860 in Victoria there were Anglicans, Catholics, Methodists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians. The plurality of sects had the effect of sapping any one faith of sufficient adherents to become the leading church in the new colonies. By the 1860s this situation produced a political compromise in which secularism and non-denominationalism in education and other activities guided the thinking of government officials.

The gold rush itself, however, produced a distinctive human landscape. The arrival of many Chinese miners, along with smaller numbers of people from other parts of Asia, significant numbers of African-Americans, Mexicans, and others elevated the issue of race locally. Arriving in the colonies from San Francisco, the original Chinese were followed by immigrants from Guangzhou (a.k.a. Canton) and Taishan counties. Initially Vancouver Island and British Columbia (united in 1866) were inclusive in their democratic institutions. By the 1870s, however, almost all non-Whites had lost the right to vote. As well, Chinese settlers were discouraged from owning property or residing outside of demarcated quarters known as **Chinatown**.

The Chinese immigrants were overwhelmingly male and motivated to make money in a hurry and return to China. Discrimination and hostility impeded some of their efforts, although Chinese miners left a distinctive mark on the gold rush landscape. Thoroughly washing off every rock they lifted from the gold-bearing streams, they stacked them in huge piles along the riverbanks; evidence of this practice may be seen in many old gold rush towns. The Chinese needed to be meticulous because they were regularly challenged over their claims. Numbers came to matter in the goldfield, however, and roughly half of the population of Barkerville at its height was Chinese. Some of this population, particularly the Taishan immigrants, would make their way to Nanaimo and Wellington on Vancouver Island where they would later find work in the coal mines.

Racism was articulated within the context of a discourse tied to evolutionary theory, but it had a longer pedigree. African slavery did not require 19th century science to produce laws and behaviours that spoke to ideas like superiority and inferiority. Imperialism had, for more than two centuries, reinforced those ideas as was clear from the marginalization of African Nova Scotians on poorer land or in underserved urban enclaves.⁵ However, the mid-19th century iteration of racism was different in that it became a generalized way of looking at the world. The age of steam power had something to do with this: more peoples were crossing paths with one another than had been the case in the past. Asia, too, was breaking out of its long, self-imposed isolation. The distinctions were sometimes subtle.

There were important contradictions here as in all social relations. At the very moment that racism was on the rise, the anti-slavery movement was as well. At the same instant that British North American middle classes were agitated over the future of the British “race,” they were condemning slavery in the United States, backing the Underground Railroad, and in some cases publicly endorsing African-Canadian involvement in the body politic.

5. John Zucchi, *A History of Ethnic Enclaves in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association Booklet no. 31, 2007), 3.

The career of Mary Ann Shadd (1823-1893) offers an example. She and her brother fled the United States after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law (1850), taking up residence in Windsor, Canada West. There she published *The Provincial Freeman* and built a base of support for racial integration and the exodus of African-Americans to Canada and Vancouver Island. In the West Coast colony, some of these immigrants formed the all-Black Victoria Pioneer Rifle Corps, and one of their number (Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, 1823-1915) became a highly influential merchant and political broker in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Gibbs's counting house, however, was only a few metres away from Victoria's Chinatown and a stone's throw from the Songhees reserve, neither of whose occupants were invited to participate in the new democratic civilization.

One place in British North America where the nuances and contradictions of racism could be seen — and mattered greatly — was in Aboriginal relations with the expanding settler communities. This theme is pursued in [Chapters 11](#) and [Chapter 13](#).

Key Points

- Ethnic and sectarian intolerance divided many communities in Upper Canada and the Maritimes following the arrival of Irish immigrants.
- Religious intolerance was widespread.
- British North Americans invoked the language of race to disadvantage minority groups and Aboriginal peoples.
- The diversity of the immigrant community continued to expand through the 19th century provoking further instances of systemic and formalized racism.
- At the same time, there were strange contradictions, the most outstanding being White British North American attitudes toward African-Americans, which were generally much more tolerant than for any other group.

2.5 Environment and Colonialism



Figure 11.2 The Sinixt people of the Arrow Lakes controlled salmon fisheries along the Columbia River system, including this site at Fort Colville in what is now Washington State. Epidemics, ranching, mining, industrial fisheries, and hydroelectric projects reduced their numbers to such an extent that in 1956 they were declared “extinct” by Ottawa, much to the chagrin of the Sinixt still living in BC.

One of the more subtle features of colonialism is the way in which it creates environments that favour newcomers over natives. NASA defines *terraforming* — a staple of many science-fiction movies — as “the process of transforming a hostile environment into one suitable for human life.”¹ But what kind of “human life”? If it’s European human life, extensive grazing lands will be required for their dairy animals and meat herds, and even larger territories will be required for grain production and a variety of edible and non-edible crops that include tobacco and cotton, among others.

European societies effectively terraformed North America to make it more amenable to their familiar and preferred food sources. By doing so, the kinds of animals and plants on which innumerable generations of Aboriginal peoples survived were reduced, removed, or eliminated. Bison herds, salal berries, camas roots, and many other resources were chased off, burned away, or ploughed under to make way for beef cattle, strawberries, and potatoes. This occurred in small plots across New France and British North America before 1867, and in the post-Confederation years, the wholesale transformation of the Prairie West under the plough is one of the most rapid and enormous examples of environmental colonialism in history. Accomplishing this required a

1. Mars Team Online, accessed February 1, 2016, <http://quest.nasa.gov/mars/background/terra.html>.

reorganization of the land itself (into lots), the addition of modern-era infrastructure (roads, rails, airports), and the development of energy sources to keep this new economic order moving. From the mid-century to the present, hydroelectricity projects have had the greatest impact on indigenous populations. The Columbia and Peace River projects in British Columbia, Churchill Falls in Labrador, and the James Bay dams in northern Quebec have flooded more than a million hectares of land. There have been cases (BC's Columbia Valley system, for example) where Euro-Canadians have been displaced, but these are the exceptions that prove the rule. Mostly “native land” has been terraformed so as to be unusable for anything other than the production of electricity.

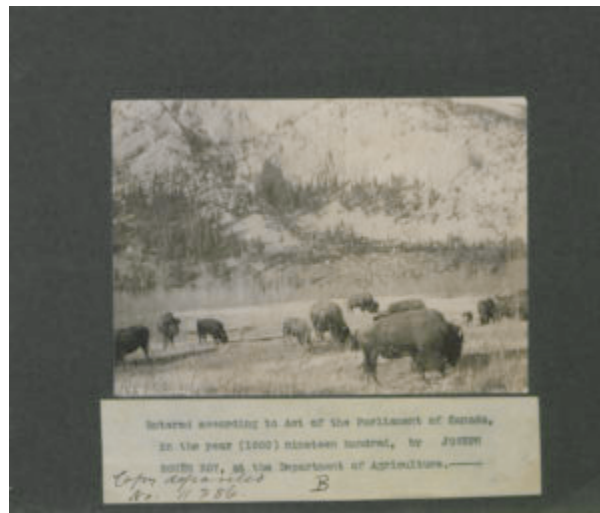


Figure 11.3 By 1900 bison herds were virtually extinct, and their rangeland was being converted to wheat fields.

Sometimes these changes have been less immediate but no less disastrous for Aboriginal economies and communities. The commercial salmon fishery in Georgia Strait (aka: the Salish Sea) in the early part of the 20th century plundered the sockeye and spring runs so aggressively that fewer and fewer spawning fish made it into the Interior along the Fraser and Thompson River systems. Communities that relied on these resources, and which had fewer fallback alternatives, suffered from an industrialized fishery hundreds of miles away. However, the situation could be worse: it is thought that the Sacramento River in California was the largest salmon spawning ground on the west coast of North America in the 19th century, but today, the native fish are as good as extinct.

The loss of resources like salmon or bison is often used as a reason to relocate native communities. Having terraformed Canada to suit the needs of the Euro-Canadian food and economic cultures, Canadian administrators were tasked with finding spaces where alienated native people could be huddled together with alternative resources or services delivered from “the south.” Thus, relocations and their consequent economic marginalization became common themes in Aboriginal history in the 20th century.

Environmental historian Sean Kheraj (York University) describes how one mammal species bounced back in a Europeanized environment.

Key Points

- Aboriginal people experienced the arrival Euro-Canadian agriculture and other industries as a process that alienated land and food resources, as well as traditional spaces with more complex meanings.
- European food cultures have been historically incompatible with Aboriginal food resources.
- The mega-projects of the 20th century displaced permanently large numbers of Aboriginal peoples by utterly destroying their landscapes.

Attributions**Figure 11.2**

[PaulKane-BushCamp-ROM](#) by [Captmondo](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 11.3

[Herd of buffaloes in the National Park, Banff North West Territories, Canada Photo B \(HS85-10-11286\)](#) by “Picturing Canada Project” of the British Library is in the [public domain](#).

2.6 Living with Treaties

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Not unlike communities in Europe or elsewhere, the Indigenous peoples of North America confirmed access to resource sites, facilitated trade, resolved conflicts, settled alliances, and navigated the mass of other relations with their neighbours by negotiating agreements. When European newcomers found their way into Indigenous territories, they realized it was in their interest, and often necessary for their survival, to learn Indigenous treaty protocols and to fit themselves into Indigenous commercial networks. After these initial encounters, over time, treaty making changed in intent and content, but whether for military alliance, access to land and resources, or for some other reason, all of those involved understood that only agreements of this sort could protect the often divergent strategic, cultural, and economic interests of the treaty partners.¹

The significance of treaty making to the newcomers is evident in Britain's *Royal Proclamation* (1763) that, in part, committed it and then Canada to gain the consent of Indigenous Nations before settling in their territories. This commitment led to several treaties on Canada's West Coast, and in what became Ontario and southern Manitoba prior to 1867. Soon after Confederation, the treaty process continued with the negotiation of the so-called "numbered treaties," the first seven of which were concluded between 1871 and 1877 and covered the southern region between Lake Superior and the Rocky Mountains. For its part, Canada was primarily concerned with the acquisition of land and the fulfillment of its promise to British Columbia for a transcontinental railway. First Nations, on the other hand, were generally interested in protecting their territories and resources from incursion, while at the same time ensuring their cultural survival and independence. For them, these treaties were peace treaties. As Piikani (Peigan) elder Cecile Many Guns (aka: Grassy Water) confirmed almost a century after the treaties, the intent was that there would be "no more fighting between anyone, everybody will be friends.... Everybody will be in peace."²

From the perspective of the newcomers, the transfer of land stood above all other policy considerations, and

1. On treaty making in Canada across time see J. R. Miller, *Compact, Contract, Covenant: Aboriginal Treaty-Making in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

2. Interview with Mrs. Cecile Many Guns conducted by Dila Provost and Albert Yellowhorn Sr., n.d. University of Regina, oURspace, <http://ourspace.uregina.ca/handle/10294/586>.

the numbered treaties were presented as successful mechanisms by both politicians of the day and many later historians. However, it is becoming increasingly recognized that rather than representing everything that was agreed to, the written treaties are much more reflective of Canada's goals and Euro-Canadian interpretations of treaty-making, and much less representative of the objectives of First Nations and of Indigenous understandings of treaty processes. Many of the arrangements that were presented and agreed to orally during treaty negotiations are absent or minimized in the text of the numbered treaties.³ The actual meaning of these treaties remains in dispute among historians and in the courts.

Reserves

As a central provision of the **numbered treaties**, and where there were no treaties as Federal Government policy initiatives, isolated enclaves called *Indian reserves* were created to accommodate Indigenous people. The reserve system, as it developed in the mid to late 19th century, was meant as a temporary measure only, providing closed sites where missionaries and agents of the state could indoctrinate Indigenous populations in the economic, political, religious, and social conduct acceptable to settler Canada. Reserves offered residents refuge of sort from the various forms of discrimination they faced in the outside world, but to policy makers and church officials, they were laboratories of reform where residents could be observed and judged and where "Indian-ness" could be instructed, legislated, or coerced out of Indigenous people.⁴ On these fragments of ancestral territories, Indigenous residents held the right to occupancy only. Ownership and title remained in the hands of Canada.



Figure 11.7 Medals were issued to Aboriginal signatories of the numbered treaties. This 1873 example was given to Muskegee Eyineer, one of the Manitoban signatories to Treaty 3.

Since non-Indigenous lawmakers took for themselves, even in treaty areas, absolute authority to decide who

3. Sarah Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 118-127.

4. Keith Smith, *Liberalism, Surveillance, and Resistance: Indigenous Communities in Western Canada, 1877-1927* (Edmonton, AB: University of Athabasca Press, 2009), 50.

would own land, reserve size depended largely on local settler demand. Even in areas covered by the numbered treaties, reserve size was calculated differentially on the basis of between 160 and 640 acres per family of five, while in British Columbia, for example, 10 acres per family was established as the standard. These inequities, and the smaller average reserve land base in Canada compared to the United States, were recognized and challenged by Indigenous political movements such as the Allied Tribes of British Columbia during the First World War and Interwar period, but they have largely remained to the present day.⁵

Regardless of the original size of reserves, even these small tracts remaining to Indigenous people were often under threat. While the Federal Government restricted the ability of reserve communities to manage the lands they lived on, Canadian officials were more than willing to alienate reserve lands themselves to meet settler demands for mineral, forest, or agricultural lands; for the construction of transportation routes or military sites; or for a myriad of other purposes. While often, though not always, Indigenous agreement of a sort was sought, this consent was regularly acquired under circumstances that were at best questionable. Additionally, the sale of reserve lands was consistently presented as being in the long-term interests of the reserve communities, although it was railway and corporate executives and other members of the settler elite — including senior **Department of Indian Affairs (DIA)** and other public officials — who gained possession of the alienated reserve lands during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁶ Some of these land sales continue to be the subject of land claims and court challenges.

The contradictions here are apparent. While Canada presented its policies as beneficial to Indigenous peoples, and while it maintained that its goal was to remake reserve residents into farmers, the best agricultural land was the first to be removed from First Nations' control. Even the right to use modern farming equipment and to participate in training programs, farm organizations, and **wheat pools** like their non-Native neighbours were curbed by Canadian officials. Further, amendments were made to the *Indian Act* soon after its creation, and more strictly applied after the mid-1880s, whereby reserve residents were required to secure a permit before selling or giving away any goods located or produced on reserves or by reserve residents. While some, like Cree elder John Tootoosis (1899-1989), recognized the positive aspects of the permit system as a means to protect First Nations vendors and consumers, he nonetheless saw it as a "loaded gun" that was, in the end, turned against those it was ostensibly designed to protect. Certainly, there was ongoing resistance to all of this from Indigenous communities, but for the most part, the protests were disregarded in Ottawa.⁷

Restricting Movement and Cultural Practices

Most Canadians are secure in their right to move about freely and practice whatever form of spirituality they choose, but in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Canadian and church authorities went to some lengths to restrict both for those they defined as *Indians*. The kinds of activities allowed on ever-shrinking reserves were

5. Ibid., 132; Robert White-Harvey, "Reservation Geography and Restoration of Native Self-Government," *The Dalhousie Law Journal* 17, no. 2 (1994): 588-589; *Statement of the Allied Indian Tribes of British Columbia for the Government of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Cowan & Brookhouse, 1919) in LAC, RG 10, vol. 3821, file 59335, part 4A.

6. Robert Cail, *Land, Man and the Law: The Disposal of Crown Lands in British Columbia, 1871-1913* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1974), 14; Peggy Martin-McGuire, *First Nation Land Surrenders on the Prairies, 1896-1911* (Ottawa, ON: Indian Claims Commission, 1998), 15-16, 42, 493-494, and 497-498.

7. Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 253-258 and 156-158; Smith, *Liberalism, Surveillance and Resistance*, 99-103; Jean Goodwill and Norma Sluman, *John Tootoosis* (Winnipeg, MB: Pemmican Publications, 1984), 123-125.

increasingly limited, restrictions were placed on movement, and cultural practices among reserve residents were policed and penalized. The suppression of liberty among Indigenous peoples was central to Canada's Indian policy.

The Pass System

The confinement of Indigenous peoples to reserves was set in motion through the application of a matrix of laws, regulations, and policies meant to “elevate” reserve residents while advancing the interests of non-Indigenous settlers. In much of Canada, movement was limited through the **vagrancy** provisions of the **Criminal Code** or the restrictions against trespass in the *Indian Act*. However, in the region that became the prairie provinces, the most notorious and comprehensive element of the restrictive matrix was implemented through a Federal Government policy known as the **pass system**. Under this initiative, a reserve resident was required to first secure a written pass from their Indian agent if they wanted to visit family or friends in a nearby village; check on their children at a residential school; participate in a celebration or attend a cultural event in a neighbouring community; leave their reserve to hunt, fish, and collect resources; find paid employment; travel to urban centres; or leave the reserve for any other reason.⁸ According to Assiniboine Chief Dan Kennedy of the Carry the Kettle First Nation in Saskatchewan, “[t]he Indian reserve was a veritable concentration camp.”⁹

Official correspondence from the decade before 1885 reveals that procedures were already in place and that there was a will at all levels of the D.I.A., the North-West Mounted Police, and political hierarchies, including Prime Minister John A. Macdonald himself, to restrict Indigenous movement in the West. The Northwest Resistance of 1885 provided the justification for the application of a comprehensive pass system in the Prairie West, regardless of whether individuals or their communities were part of the resistance.

All of those involved in the implementation of the pass system understood that it had no basis in Canadian law. It was never included in the *Indian Act* or any other piece of Canadian legislation, which naturally put senior police officials in a difficult position. The regulations were at odds with settlers who relied on Indigenous labour and trade (and so opposed the restrictions), but high-ranking policemen also feared that they would be humiliated once Indigenous people recognized the pass system lacked a legal foundation and then chose not to comply with the policy. Generally, the NWMP/RNWMP/RCMP leadership preferred compliance by persuasion rather than by force, although individual officers were at times even more zealous than Indian agents, and chose to apply force when they felt it was necessary. Indigenous people naturally resisted their confinement to reserves and seem to have made little distinction between being persuaded to remain on, or return to, their reserves and being escorted back by a contingent of mounted policemen. They tended to choose to comply with the policy, or openly defy it, according to their own judgment of the specific situation.

There is textual evidence that passes continued to be issued until after World War I, and oral evidence that the pass system remained in operation into the mid-1930s at least. Even though Canada never had the capacity to forcibly restrict all off-reserve movement, the will of both the police and the D.I.A. to do what they could in this regard — regardless of the lack of legal foundation — is evident, even if some in the upper echelons of the police were sometimes uncomfortable.

8. This section on the pass system is drawn from Smith, *Liberalism, Surveillance and Resistance*, 60-77.

9. Dan Kennedy, *Recollections of an Assiniboine Chief*, ed. James R. Stevens (Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 87.

Cultural Restriction

Figure 11.8 State and church combined to end Aboriginal cultural practices. Ceremonies were targeted, as were burial and mourning practices. By 1907 memorial poles were combined with headstones at Kitwanga as new forms are adopted and older ones persist.

Not only were Indigenous people restricted in their right to move about freely, even in their traditional territories, but also spiritual practices that were fundamental to personal and community identity and well-being — and that had been practiced since time immemorial — were targeted for suppression. State and church officials alike were intolerant of these practices, which they regarded as alien and immoral. Canadian and religious authorities also recognized that spiritual systems were integral components of the cultural, political, economic, and social structures of Indigenous communities. To transform one, the others had to be reconfigured as well.¹⁰



Figure 11.9 Potlatching continued at Alert Bay (aka: 'yalis) until an RCMP crackdown in 1921.

10. Katherine Pettipas, *Severing the Ties that Bind: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremonies on the Prairies* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), 3-4.

While there is evidence of this cultural repression across the country, the ceremonies of West Coast peoples known collectively as the **potlatch** received particular attention from politicians, missionaries, and government officials. The term *potlatch* refers to a complex of strictly regulated ceremonies that continue to be of critical significance to the Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuuchahnulth, Coast Salish, Haida, Tlingit, Tsimshian, Heiltsuk, and other peoples of the North West Coast of North America. The potlatch is the central institution that binds each of these societies together. Potlatches can be held to confirm leadership, alliances, or access to land and resources. Names (and, thus, status) can be given or passed down, debts repaid, dishonour erased, marriages performed, births announced, or the loss of loved ones memorialized. Potlatches provide a forum for history to be transmitted and verified, and gifts are given to witnesses who are obliged to remember and confirm what they have experienced. In addition to handling and healing earthly concerns, potlatches also have important spiritual components.¹¹

Many in late 19th and early 20th century settler society who were fortunate enough to witness potlatch ceremonies first hand, or who benefited materially by providing supplies, supported their continuation. On the other hand, Indian agents who saw families working for months to meet the expense of a potlatch denounced the institution as “foolish, wasteful, and demoralizing.” It seemed to them that these ceremonies were held solely to give away material goods, a concept that was directly opposite to settler goals of capitalist accumulation and private property, and which simultaneously challenged settler understandings of what constituted “wealth.”¹² Missionaries, for their part, tended to see potlatches simply as a manifestation of evil. Thomas Crosby (1840-1914), who worked as a Methodist lay missionary to Coast Salish peoples of southern Vancouver Island and the lower Fraser Valley, from 1863 to the 1890s, said of potlatches, “Of the many evils of heathenism, with the exception of witchcraft, the potlatch is the worst, and one of the most difficult to root out.”¹³



Figure 9.10 Plains peoples like the Niitsitapi struggled to preserve ceremonies like the sun dance in the face of Canadian efforts to eradicate Aboriginal culture.

In 1884, the *Indian Act* was amended to include a ban on the potlatch along with the expressly spiritual dances associated with plains ceremonial practices. Unlike the pass system, the prohibition against these institutions and

11. John Lutz, *Makuk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), 58.

12. Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1992), 206-207; Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 160.

13. Thomas Crosby, *Among the An-Ko-me-nuns or Flathead Tribes of Indians of the Pacific Coast* (Toronto, ON: William Briggs, 1907), 106.

practices was backed up by the force of law that became ever more strict and comprehensive over time. Despite the legislative prohibitions, many communities felt they had no alternative but to continue to hold potlatches and dances, even if they went to considerable effort to make them more portable and keep them out of the view of missionaries and Indian agents. Even with these precautions, there was a wave of prosecutions and subsequent incarcerations soon after World War I. It wasn't until 1951 that the prohibitions against Indigenous ceremonies were finally dropped from the *Indian Act*. Some of the masks and other spiritual objects confiscated during the period of the ban have since been returned to their owners, but many others remain in the hands of museums and private collectors.

Key Points

- Treaties evolved as instruments for negotiating accommodation between Aboriginal peoples and the newcomer society. By the late 19th century, the newcomers saw treaties as a means to acquire resources and manage Aboriginal populations.
- The final versions of the numbered treaties do not always or honestly reflect what was agreed (or understood to have taken place) in the treaty-making processes.
- Reserves were accepted by Aboriginal peoples as lands that were protected against intrusion; the Canadians carved out reserves as contained spaces in which assimilative efforts could be conducted more efficiently.
- Reserve size and resources were determined more by settler needs than Aboriginal requirements or expectations.
- Federal policies like the pass system and prohibitions against the potlatch and the sun dance were bureaucratic tools used to extinguish Aboriginal culture while restricting basic freedoms of movement and belief.

Attributions

Figure 11.7

[Indian Chiefs 1873 Medal, Presented to commemorate Treaty Number 3 \(Queen Victoria\) \(Online MIKAN no.2851194\)](#) by Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. 1970-27-8M is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 11.8

[Totem pole with modern tombstone \(Online MIKAN no.3349323\)](#) by Library and Archives Canada is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 11.9

[In P49 – Indian Potlatch Alert Bay B.C.](#) by City of Vancouver Archives AM54-S4-: In P49 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 11.10

[Sun Dance, Blackfeet Indians \(Online MIKAN no.3368318\)](#) by Trueman / Library and Archives Canada / C-014106 is in the [public domain](#).

2.7 From Agricultural Training to Residential School

JENNIFER PETTIT, DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES, AND MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY



Figure 11.11 The Numbered Treaties cover all of the Prairie West, the western North, most of northern Ontario, and a quarter of British Columbia.

By the time the numbered treaties and the reserve system were created, Indigenous peoples in what is now Western Canada faced dire conditions. Many communities were ravaged by diseases such as smallpox, and devastated by the whisky trade. The bison, on which they relied, was almost extinct.¹ The Canadian government once again decided that the solution was model farms to accompany a policy of peasant farming through which Indigenous families were to receive “2 acres and a cow” — and through which they were not encouraged to utilize any labour-saving machinery. The government felt this would ensure Indigenous peoples would be converted to sedentary farmers, but would not be so successful that they would compete with the new settlers moving west. Not surprisingly, the plan failed. Government bureaucrats at the time blamed the supposed “lazy” nature of First Nations peoples. Historian Sarah Carter has since proven that Indigenous peoples were interested in farming, but

1. See James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Regina, SK: University of Regina Press, 2013).

that the government's policies and practices undermined reserve agriculture.² More important to the government was a new system of schools for Indigenous children.

Though they had weak results in the early schools in central Canada, the Federal Government was optimistic that expanding schools into the Prairies made sense, hopeful that the Indigenous peoples there could also be “civilized and Christianized.”³ Starving and destitute, some Indigenous peoples also hoped the schools would teach their children the skills necessary to adapt to changing conditions and, ideally, to learn a trade that would make them self-supporting. What remained to be determined though was what kind of education system would best serve the Indigenous peoples living in the West. To help answer that question in 1879, the government enlisted Nicholas Flood Davin (1840-1901), a Regina newspaper editor and the M.P. for Assiniboia West, to study the American system of industrial schools for Indigenous peoples. Notably, as was the pattern in government dealings with Indigenous peoples, Davin did not consult First Nations. He concluded that industrial schools in which children learned a trade and which were similar to those in the United States would be appropriate and useful in the West, despite disappointing results in similar schools in Central Canada. Davin also suggested that the Canadian government forge alliances with the churches to manage the schools.⁴ These “industrial” schools were costly, however, and as a result, a parallel system of day and boarding schools was also created. Boarding schools were similar to the industrial schools, but were typically smaller with a much reduced focus on trades instruction. The first of the industrial schools — the Qu’Appelle Industrial School and the Battleford Industrial School located in the future province of Saskatchewan, and the St. Joseph’s School (also known as the High River or Dunbow school) southwest of Calgary — opened in the 1880s. These schools would lay the groundwork for a system of schools that would eventually spread across the Prairies and into British Columbia and the North.



Figure 11.12 The Fort Qu’Appelle Indian Industrial School was one of the first to open. Seen here ca.1885 with teepees and carts outside the fence.

By the time the last school closed in 1996, over 130 would have operated and over 150,000 Indigenous children would have been forced to attend what would ultimately be deemed tools of cultural genocide.⁵ Indigenous children were taken from their homes, separated from their communities and families, and were forbidden to

2. See Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990).

3. See J. R. Miller, *Shingwauk’s Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1996) and John Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 1999).

4. Canada, *Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds* by Nicholas Flood Davin. 14 March, 1879. Library and Archives Canada, Record Group 10, Vol. 6001, File 1-1-1.

5. Canada, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, “Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth

speak their languages or practice their culture. Students were poorly fed; subjected to medical experiments; forced to undertake manual labour; and were subjected to physical, sexual, and mental or spiritual abuse.⁶ The legacy of this appalling treatment is still being felt in Indigenous communities today.⁷

To ensure the schools “succeeded,” the government enacted a number of measures including compulsory attendance in 1894 (and reinforced in further legislation in 1920). However, the parents of Indigenous students were not passive participants in the plans of church and state to “civilize” their children, and many did whatever they could to prevent their children from attending these schools and to demonstrate their displeasure. Parents were angered that their children were being abused and that they were taken so far away from the reserves. Parents were also upset that students were alienated from their culture, were forced to work long hours, were not properly cared for, and could not find employment after graduation. This opposition took place, however, in a power relationship in which Aboriginal peoples were unable to bring about real change. Thus, their opposition had only a limited effect. What did sway the administrators was rising costs.



Figure 11.13 St. Joseph's (Cariboo) Indian Residential School was established in 1891 as one of the several schools run by the Catholic Church in BC.

Originally thought to be a quick and relatively inexpensive way to deal with what administrators deemed the “Indian Problem,” the schools had evolved into a costly and complicated system that was not producing significant results. As a consequence, Duncan Campbell Scott (1862-1947), who was appointed to the position of Superintendent of Indian Education in 1909, changed the professed goal of schools for Indigenous peoples from integration to segregation (in the words of Scott: “for civilized life in his own environment”). In 1923 officials merged the industrial and boarding schools to create a new category of schools known as “residential schools.”⁸ Scott, though, still very much believed in a policy in which Indigenous peoples should be obliterated as a distinct community. In 1920 he made this now famous statement: “I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone.... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question....”⁹

and Reconciliation Commission of Canada,” last modified July 23, 2015, http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf.

6. Ian Mosby, “Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942-1952,” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 46, no. 91 (2013): 615-642.
7. Canada, *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Vol. 5: Renewal: A Twenty-Year Commitment. In For Seven Generations: An Information Legacy of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* [CD-ROM] (Ottawa: Libraxus, 1997.)
8. Brian Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1986).
9. Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian affairs, testimony before the Special Committee of the House of Commons examining the *Indian Act* amendments of 1920, Library and Archives Canada, Record Group 10, vol. 6810, file 470-2-3, volume 7, pp. 55 (L-3) and 63 (N-3).

Key Points

- Setting Aboriginal people down the path to become European-style agriculturalists was underfunded and purposely organized to ensure they did not compete with European newcomers on the Prairies.
- Canadian-organized schools appealed to Aboriginal people because they held out the hope of skills and opportunities that would help their people escape poverty.
- The industrial schools were augmented by boarding schools in which industrial skills were minimized, the clergy were heavily involved, and costs were managed by obliging the children/pupils to do maintenance work.
- Compulsory attendance was legislated in 1894, enabling the abduction of children from their parents by the local Canadian authorities.
- By 1909 the objectives of the schools had changed again from integration to segregation and the combination of industrial and boarding schools to produce residential schools. Superintendent Duncan Campbell Scott believed that Aboriginal peoples could never occupy an equitable position in Canadian society and was satisfied to use the schools to build a marginalized people.

Attributions**Figure 11.11**

[Numbered-Treaties-Map](#) by [Yug/ STyx/ Themightyquill](#) is used under a [CC-BY-SA-3.0](#) license.

Figure 11.12

[Distant view of Fort Qu'Appelle Indian Industrial School with tents, \[Red River\] carts and teepees outside the fence, Lebreton, Saskatchewan, \[May 1885?\]](#) (Online MIKAN no.3194883) by O.B. Buell / Library and Archives Canada / PA-182246 in the [public domain](#).

Figure 11.13

[\[Panorama of Cariboo Indian Residential School, William's Lake, British Columbia, 1949\]](#). (Online MIKAN no.4674075) by Canada. Dept. of Indian and Northern Affairs / Library and Archives Canada / e011080297_s1 in the [public domain](#).

Week 3 - Building Urban Communities



Figure 3.1 Coal sorters at work at the Atlas Mine in Alberta, n.d.

The Industrial Revolution was well underway in Britain and the northeastern United States by 1867. The systematized production of manufactured goods — woolen or cotton garments or iron tools — was made possible by a reorganization of labour, from independent and cottage-based production to one where the work was produced collectively, and increasingly with the use of machinery. The creation of low-valued manufactured products required the development of new systems of transportation. The early (or “first”) Industrial Revolution generated a parallel revolution in infrastructure that included canals, railways, and shipping.

Canada’s Industrial Revolution piggybacked on that of its neighbour and Britain. However, the most rapid transition of the Canadian economy came after 1850, and accelerated through the last half of the 19th century. Confederation — and the resulting creation of a common financial system that included a shared currency and mint — was, in fact, an enabling step in industrializing British North America. It created an open colonial marketplace without tariff barriers, facilitated the movement of investment capital, and superimposed a modern freight-handling capacity that realigned trade from north-south to east-west. Victorian Canada was, in every sense, industrializing Canada.



Figure 3.2 Industrialism didn't put an end to homespun, particularly in poorer, rural communities. But it severely reduced the economic viability of the handloom weaver and other artisans.

Industrial British North America

Start by listening to historian Craig Heron (York University) describe the industrial revolution.

In the 1860s, industry was breaking out all over. New Brunswick — dominated by forest industries and shipbuilding — was, on a per capita basis up until 1871, only a little less industrialized than Ontario and Quebec. Nova Scotia's industry was distinctively divided between the metal and coal industries of Cape Breton, and the textile mills and sugar refineries in the western part of the province.¹ Vancouver Island, with its coal mines at and around Nanaimo and the vertically-integrated heavy industries that included Royal Navy shipyards in Esquimalt and chain-making in Victoria, was another outpost of industrialization.

These parallel developments were not happenstance. By keeping local land prices high, the colonial and then provincial governments of British Columbia demonstrated a desire for wage-earning workers rather than farm settlers — a striking signal that industry, not agriculture, was central to their vision. The engagement of the state in the building of an industrial order is itself part of the suite of ideas associated with **modernity** — a concept pursued throughout this text. Industrialism, the term used to describe the new economic order emerging in the late 19th century, was thus more than a pattern of like practices and institutions; it was something to which governments, investors, and workers were all striving.

1. Margaret R. Conrad and James K. Hiller, *Atlantic Canada: A Concise History* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2006), 131-2.



Figure 3.3 Iron ore from Bell Island is loaded onto a metal-hulled ship, ca. 1903.

The economics of industrialization are staggering insofar as they require the movement of capital, raw materials, personnel, and products across huge distances. Industry requires, too, the mobilization, training, housing, and discipline of a workforce with little to no prior exposure to industrial systems. The pre-Conquest iron forges at Saint-Maurice, near Trois-Rivières, depended on fuel and ore — and labour — that could be obtained locally. By 1890, industries in Central and Maritime Canada were using iron ore from Labrador and Newfoundland's Bell Island; coking coal from Cape Breton was finding its way to Ontario; and workers in Canadian industry were migrating from one province to another, from coast to coast. Workers were being recruited from industrializing Lancashire and Yorkshire, Wales, Lowland Scotland, and Germany. Industrial workers were also coming to Canada from rural and non-industrialized corners of Italy, Ireland, Hungary, and China. The intensification of mechanized, and then automated, work ensured that peasant populations whose home countries were still mostly feudal would be thrust directly onto the cutting edge of industrialization. It also meant that untrained Canadian labour — specifically children — would find themselves very literally at the coalface.

In addition to personnel, industry requires energy. In 1867, the dominant sources of energy grew in forests or walked on four legs. Waterpower had made some inroads, particularly in rural areas where waterwheels could take advantage of local rapids. At Lachine, Quebec, the canals provided power as well, driving the Montreal area's earliest industries. Bringing energy sources into city centres, however, where other resources could be assembled, posed a challenge; a challenge that was overcome by following Britain's lead and adapting the new steam-power technologies. Within a very short time period, there was a shift in industrial and urban Canada from organic and water-based power sources to **fossil fuels**.



Figure 3.4 Horse power moved goods and people, was fuelled by oats and hay, and was adapted to work in Canadian conditions. Montreal, ca.1877.



Figure 3.5 Before steam power augmented machines, horses were regularly employed.

This change in the energy economy had the important advantage in Canada of diminishing the impact of seasonality. Waterwheels were powerful innovations and their application to the increased use of machinery in production, was literally revolutionary. Nevertheless, watercourses freeze up in Canada, which meant an interruption in power supply and in the transportation of necessary supplies along rivers. The transition from organic to inorganic energy sources changed all that. Factories could work year-round and steam-powered engines could be used to move larger and larger quantities of raw materials from source to market in shorter time. Applied to land-based transportation along rails, steam and coal could free much of Canadian manufacturing from the dictatorship of winter.



Figure 3.6 Heavy industry comes to Nova Scotia and, with it, plenty of steam and smoke. An artist's rendering of the Cape Breton coking ovens applauds the regimentation of smoky industry at the start of the 20th century.

Once factories began operating throughout the four seasons, the possibility arose for workers to take on wage-labour full time. The increasing use of cash in the Canadian economy was one attraction to doing so. Many agricultural workers went into industrial labour as a temporary measure, a step toward saving enough money to purchase a farm of their own. This was also true of immigrant industrial workers who imagined their future in Canada as independent landowners.² That transitional stage never fully ended, as rural populations in the 21st century continue to augment farm income with wage-labour. In the 19th century, however, limits on transportation made such moves increasingly permanent. By the 1870s wage-labour in many regions matched agriculture as a practical strategy for survival. The population of ready workers increased and expanded across Canada. From 1861-71 the labour force grew by about 15% and then, from 1871-81 by 26%. Its growth slowed thereafter to a still-respectable 21% and then 11% in each of the two decades that followed.³ Labour inputs, however, are only part of the equation.

The introduction of machinery, and especially steam-powered machinery, was transformative. Output could be increased dramatically, quality could aim for (and sometimes achieve) reliable standards, and the skill sets needed to do a particular job changed from that of a master craftsman to those of someone able to keep up with the metal and wood machinery. The cumulative effect was to bring down wages while raising productivity and de-skilling the workforce. New skills emerged — particularly those associated with maintaining machinery — but shoe production, for example, went from being a handicraft associated with years of apprenticeship and journeyman study, to something that was done by children. A good example is Lawson's, a tailoring business in Hamilton, that introduced 10 sewing machines in the 1860s. This led to the departure of 71 of their 100 skilled male tailors, and their replacement with 69 women (who were regarded, rightly or wrongly, as unskilled).⁴ **Mechanization** — and, in the 20th century, **automation** — would change the way work is done, but its spread was entirely dependent on the ability of capital to invest in emerging technologies. This process of intensified capital inputs on the shop floor would accelerate 30 years after Confederation.

2. British coal miners who moved to Vancouver Island in the late 19th century repeatedly indicated that they saw West Coast mine work as a stepping stone to independence on their own land. See John Douglas Belshaw, *Colonization and Community: The Vancouver Island Coalfield and the Making of the British Columbian Working Class* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 161-3.
3. Statistics Canada, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd ed., F. H. Leacy, ed. (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1983): D498-511.
4. Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 87-8.

The Second Industrial Revolution

Despite significant changes in the orientation and character of the economy until the mid-1890s, growth was not outstanding. An important measure of the health of Canada's economy is its population and, rather remarkably, from 1861-1901 Canada was a net exporter of people. The American economy was expanding more rapidly and as land and employment opportunities arose, it served as a magnet for thousands of Canadians. Additionally, many of the immigrants to Canada during this period proved to be just passing through. On balance, then, more people left than arrived. From a historian's perspective, this is a sure sign that industrialization in the new Dominion provided fewer opportunities, or less competitive opportunities, than agriculture in the western plains of North America. This was not yet a consumer-led economy so the net loss of population until 1901 did not mean the simultaneous loss of household markets, at least not in the same way it might in the mid-20th century. It did manifest a shortage of labour resources, however, in some corners of the country. As the Maritime's economy began to seize up in the 1870s and 1880s, for example, out-migration was another factor in driving investment to more populous centres in Ontario and southwest Quebec.

In the 1890s, there were several important advances in technology and technique that gave industrialization a new shape. The foremost of these was the development of the Bessemer system for manufacturing steel. Vastly stronger and cheaper than earlier forged metals, this innovation propelled the steel industry and everything that utilized steel. As well, it contributed to the further growth of coking coal production and iron mining and the building of infrastructure to transport these raw materials to processing points. The establishment of the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company at New Glasgow in 1882 was followed by the Dominion Coal Company at Glace Bay 11 years later. The Dominion Iron And Steel Company opened in Sydney in 1900, and the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company opened at Sydney Mines the same year. All of these developments reflect the accelerating transformation of the industrial order in Canada as a whole and the rise of international markets for output. It also points to a change in industrial capitalism: whereas earlier industrialization depended mostly upon bringing more labour to the task of producing goods, capital inputs were now rewarded. In Ontario alone, the amount of capital invested in the economy leapt from \$37 million in 1871 to \$175 million in 1891, rising to \$595 million in 1911.⁵ Machinery, reconceptualized workspaces and architecture, and metal-hulled ships that could move heavy goods at a fraction of the cost of wooden vessels all contributed to the changes associated with what is called the **Second Industrial Revolution**.

The change could be seen in the Canadian labour force. In 1901, the number of operatives and labourers combined (nearly 789,422) surpassed the total number of farmers and farmworkers (715,122).⁶ The proportion of Canadians living on the land was still greater than that of urbanites, but, as of 1901, the number of Canadians earning an income from wages pulled ahead of those earning farm incomes. And those wage-earning workers were doing so increasingly in industries and factories that did not much resemble what existed in the 1860s.

5. Gregory S. Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 245.

6. Canada, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd ed., F. H. Leacy, ed. (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1983): D86-106.



Figure 3.7 As late as 1910, the boundary between rural life and industrial employment was not a great one. The countryside forms a backdrop to a shoe factory in Aurora, Ontario, ca. 1910. Postcards like this one were a way of framing modernization and material progress.

Industrialization marked a significant departure from the pre-Confederation economy, and it brought in its wake social and economic changes that could hardly have been predicted. It was, however, part of a conscious strategy for nation-building and making economic policy. The most obvious expression of that strategic (and, yes, hopeful) thinking was the **National Policy**.

Learning Objectives

- Explain the rise of a working class and describe its main features.
- Discuss the ways in which age and gender shaped the historic experience of industrialization.
- Describe the strategies explored by working people to improve their conditions.

Attributions

Figure 3.1

Coal Mining, Alberta – picking coal before same leaves on conveyor – Atlas Mine (Online MIKAN no.3351151) by Library and Archives Canada is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 3.2

Habitant series – weaving loom (Online MIKAN no.3349488) by Library and Archives Canada is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 3.3

The loading pier at Bell Island by Verne Equinox is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 3.4

A horse-drawn winter tram by Tim Pierce is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 3.5

[Drawing of a horse-powered thresher](#) by [Bogdan](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 3.6

[Artist rendering of the Sydney Nova Scotia](#) by [Verne Equinox](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 3.7

[Shoe factory, Aurora, Ontario, Canada](#) by [Special Collections Toronto Public Library](#) is used under a [CC BY SA 2.0](#) license. This image is available from [Toronto Public Library](#) under the identifier **PC-ON 65**.

3.1 City Life



Figure 10.5 This grand structure embodies the neo-classical institution of the era. In this case, it is the Provincial Lunatic Asylum in Toronto, opened in 1850.

At the start of the post-Napoleonic era cities in British North America were mostly large towns. They were small in population and area, they served very local markets, and their people consisted mainly of merchants, artisans, physicians and lawyers, government and military officials, clergy, and not much more. Until the 1840s, Halifax, for example, was essentially a city built of wood; in the generation that followed, its centre would be largely rebuilt in stone and brick. By the 1860s, the most dynamic cities had grown significantly and were much more complex places.

The Modern City

Civic buildings became common and were a source of pride for the citizens. There was confidence and ambition in a young city that invested in stone buildings; the resident merchants and professionals located their mansions near the centre of town where they could be pointed to as evidence of community wealth; infrastructure like waterworks, board sidewalks, and a firehall were indicators of a commitment to the future and an enterprising attitude. The optimism of the age — the belief that a community's citizens were building a glorious society with a long life expectancy — was embodied in the move to neoclassical design in these new public and civic spaces that suggested (not very modestly) a common and timeless connection with ancient Greece and Rome.

Few of these small cities had rows of shops just yet — they typically had **public markets** where grocers, butchers,

fishmongers, and bakers hawked their wares. There was space as well for farmers from the nearby countryside to sell cash crops to the growing town population.

Michael Katz studied the people and patterns of life in mid-century Hamilton and he closely observed the transition that was underway there (and in many other cities):

[B]y 1861 some men could see that the future lay not only in trade but even more in manufacturing. By that time advocates of industry had begun a campaign to persuade the entrepreneurs of the city that the future lay in the factory as much, or more than, in the countinghouse. At first their successes remained modest. In 1861 the Wanzers moved their sewing-machine factory to Hamilton from Buffalo; someone partially manufactured shoes which were finished by hand; there were a prosperous factory that made pianos, one that manufactured hats, and, of course, the yards of the Great Western Railway and the construction of locomotives. Overall, in 1861 Hamilton remained a commercial city, though the future already was clear to anyone who read the signs. The ambitious little city would become the Birmingham [England] of Canada.¹

By mid-century some cities were ready to leave behind Katz's "commercial city." For less than a century they had developed as nodes of commerce and local trade, sometimes tentatively reaching out into a larger global economy but (with the exception of Montreal and perhaps Quebec and Saint John), as commercial towns they had reached their upward limits: Toronto held about 40,000 and Hamilton a little more than 10,000; Halifax was creeping up above 20,000 and Charlottetown 7,000. Montreal was the giant with a population around 90,000 and was thus an example of where the future might lie.

Industrialization in these days, however, meant consolidation of some producers, heavy secondary manufacturing like an iron foundry, and other similar operations that might hire a few dozen employees at best. Full-on industrialization would come later in the century and, with it, massive growth in city size and a complete overhaul in what it meant in practical terms to be a citizen.

It is worth noting, however, that from 1851 to 1861 about 13% of British North Americans lived in cities of 20,000 or more, which put the emergent confederacy above the world average of 5%. The proportions in New Brunswick and the Province of Canada were highest, at around 14% living in cities in 1851, with Canada West accelerating to 18.5% in 1861. These numbers show that more British North Americans were moving to a handful of large centres and, simultaneously, more centres were passing the 20,000 threshold to qualify as cities. Some people, in other words, "urbanized" by sitting still.²

1. Michael B. Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 4-6.

2. Leroy O. Stone, "Urban Development in Canada," in *Perspectives on Canada's Population: An Introduction to Concepts and Issues*, eds. Frank Trovato and Carl F. Grindstaff (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1994), 372.



Figure 10.6 A photograph of Toronto, 1856. Government House looms in the upper left while artisanal factories take up the foreground. Pianos were a mark of sophistication and in high demand in middle-class households. Note, too, the board sidewalks.

Sin City

The emergence and growth of cities brought to light many social problems — crime, poverty, and alcoholism being the most obvious. There were, as well, so-called moral issues like unwed motherhood, gambling, and prostitution (the last of these was not always regarded as a criminal activity in the 19th century). The response was the creation of institutions such as prisons, insane asylums, orphanages, and shelters for the poor. The protection of property (manifest in police stations, courts, and jails) and care for the weakest members of society (in asylums and hospitals) was part of a continuum of middle-class values that patrolled deviance and enforced the emerging standards. The wide support for these values was evident by the sometimes-competitive frenzy of funding and building the institutions that would mark a city as a “go-ahead” place. In the 1850s alone Halifax added to its list of government buildings the Lunatic Asylum, the City Hospital, Rockhead Prison, the Halifax Court House, and the County Jail.³



Figure 10.7 The Toronto Jail in 1835 was one of many solid-looking urban institutions that spring up around British North America.

3. Susan Buggey, "Building Halifax, 1841-1871," *Acadiensis* X, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 90.

The mid-19th century witnessed the emergence of **philanthropy** as a social phenomenon in British North America. To be wealthy was one thing; to be a **philanthropist** was something else altogether. Philanthropy had deeper roots in England where money had accumulated in the cities a century or two earlier. It was informed by Protestant values that placed a premium on doing good deeds as a means of achieving personal spiritual growth. And where one or two philanthropists could not make a project come together, an organization might. The Ladies Benevolent Society and the Hamilton Orphan Society, for example, addressed a constellation of concerns and were backed by middle-class Protestant women in Hamilton, Canada West. Their projects included a home for elderly women and an orphanage as well as a social work visitors initiative.⁴

In Montreal and Quebec, most of these institutions were Catholic, but there were Protestant operations as well. As Montreal grew, so did the Catholic institutional presence; the Protestants had to play catch-up. Civic leaders faced issues like poverty with mixed feelings: charity and care were needed but leading Protestants were fearful that their efforts would lead to more poverty and less individual effort on the part of vulnerable populations. But also, “the Montreal Protestant community was torn between the need to create its own relief network to alleviate destitution, in order to avoid forcing Protestants to compromise their souls by using the Roman Catholic system, and the prevalent ideology against making relief too easily available or too abundant.”⁵ The result was a **House of Industry** in the 1860s that distinguished between the “deserving poor” (such as the elderly) and the able-bodied poor who could work for their keep. The division in Canada East between Catholic social work institutions and privately funded Protestant institutions kept the state out of the system for the most part (unlike in Canada West and the rest of English-speaking British North America), a fact that would come to have some bearing on the shape of Canadian federalism in the years to come.

Key Points

- British North American cities were taking on the trappings of bourgeois towns the world over, including investment in substantial civic buildings.
- Manufacturing — and the desire to have more factories — was a feature of the emerging early Victorian city.
- British North American society was, overall, more urban than most countries, even though it was very rural.
- Social problems and how to address them were the focus of attention from many urban leaders.

4. Carmen J. Nielson, *Private Women and the Public Good: Charity and State Formation in Hamilton, Ontario, 1846-93* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014).

5. Janice Harvey, "Dealing with 'the destitute and the wretched': The Protestant House of Industry and Refuge in Nineteenth-Century Montréal," *Journal of the CHA 2001 Revue de la SHC*, 12 (2001): 74-5.

Attributions

Figure 10.5

[Provincial Asylum Toronto](#) by [Skeezix1000](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.6

[Toronto from the top of the Rossin House Hotel](#) by [Skeezix1000](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.7

[North side of King Street East, from Toronto to Church Streets](#) by [Skeezix1000](#) is in the [public domain](#).

3.2 Urbanization and Industry



Figure 3.21 The largest city in English Canada, Toronto covered a relatively small area. Public celebrations – like this one for the Boer War in 1901 – brought thousands into the streets. Notice how pedestrians, cyclists, streetcars, and horse-drawn wagons compete for space.

Industrialization took place in existing cities and it called into existence new — industrial — cities. There was, therefore, a changing urban landscape in some cases, but also a kind of urban template was developed for emergent cities, onto which industrial relations were imposed. Cities were sites of class struggle and the negotiation of new social relations, regardless of whether they were Canadian metropolises or small mining towns like Greenwood, BC or Frank, AB. The common denominator was the role that capital played in creating landscapes and cityscapes that gave priority to productive processes, sometimes with a brief horizon in mind.

The Dominion of Cities

Between 1871-1911, the population of Canada nearly doubled, from 3,689,000 to 7,207,000.¹ Most of that growth was in urban areas as the share of the workforce engaged in non-agricultural pursuits rose from 51.9% to over 60% in the same period.² Even in Nova Scotia, where the benefits of industrialization were not long lasting nor very deep, the impact on the scale of urban settlements was very dramatic: in the decade after Confederation, Halifax grew by 22%, New Glasgow by 55%, Sydney Mines by 57%, and Truro by 64%. From 1891-1901, a decade of

1. Statistics Canada, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd ed., ed. F. H. Leacy (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1983): A78-93.

2. *ibid.*, D1-7

immigration strongly associated with the growth of population and farm settlement in the West, Sydney tripled in size, emerging as the second largest city in the province.³

These figures, respectable though they were, are totally eclipsed by the growth of Western towns and cities. Calgary held fewer than 4,000 people in 1891, and added only 500 over the next 10 years. Then its population leapt to 43,704 in 1911 and 63,305 in 1921 with an economy built mainly around distribution, food processing (e.g., meat packing), and housing materials.⁴ In 1891, Winnipeg became the first western city to join the ranks of the 10 largest centres in Canada, arriving in ninth spot with a population of 25,642. The very next census saw it pull ahead of all the Maritime cities (including Halifax), and in 1911, it was the third largest city in the country, with 136,035 people. Likewise, Vancouver joined the top-10 in 1901, with only 26,133 people, and moved into fourth place in 1911 with 120,847. By 1921, four of the 10 largest cities in Canada were in the West, but the older eastern members of this club of leading cities were not going to be easily overtaken. Ottawa, after all, doubled every 20 years from 21,545 in 1871 to 44,156 in 1891, and 87,082 in 1911; the Dominion capital passed the 100,000 mark by 1921, but by that time its population had dropped from its best ranking of fourth (in 1901) to sixth.

None of these cities was without an important industrial component. Vancouver, Calgary, Regina, and Winnipeg each had important rail yards and repair shops associated with the CPR (as did, to a lesser degree, Kamloops, Medicine Hat, and Brandon). Industrializing the production of food was another shared feature, whether in the form of canning salmon or packing meat or shipping enormous quantities of grain. Housing materials was also important to the regional booming population. Door and sash factories and lumber mills appeared in all of the biggest cities, in addition to other expressions of industrialism such as printers, cigar makers, and newspapers. Each of the western cities, too, had a role to play in goods distribution. This involved the handling of foodstuffs and construction materials needed by an increasing population, but also the manufactured goods produced in central Canada. An example of this is the distribution system developed in the 1890s by Toronto department store owner Timothy Eaton (1834-1907). Warehouses for Eaton's goods were built in the major centres but actual stores only appeared in the West in 1905. In the meantime, one could order from catalogues and have delivered a huge variety of manufactured products — including houses as buildable kits.

3. Statistics Canada, *Census of Canada, 1931*, vol.1, Table 13 (Ottawa: 1932).

4. Max Foran with Edward Cavell, *Calgary: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1978), 70.



Figure 3.22 The Neils Hogenson House in Stirling, Alberta was ordered from the Eaton's Catalogue in 1917 as an assemble-it-yourself kit.

What is conspicuous by its absence from the western cities at the turn of the century is heavy industry. Textiles did well for a while in Winnipeg, but steel manufacturing and the production of machinery both remained an effective monopoly of central Canada. When the automobile industry arrived in Canada, it was in Walkerville and Montreal, not Edmonton or New Westminster (let alone Halifax or Charlottetown). Processing primary products with very little value added was the norm in the West. It is partly for this reason that workers in the emergent service industries — streetcar drivers, milk deliverymen, fire fighters — were important players in the trade union landscape of the West.



Figure 3.23 The clean lines of brick factories, the bold smokestacks and water towers, and the promotional branding visible on this textile mill were all indicators of industrial progress and capitalist confidence in central Canadian communities like Renfrew, Ontario.

While urbanism was spreading alongside industrialism and capitalism, the power of Montreal and Toronto was growing greater with each passing generation. In 1871, there were slightly more than 100,000 people in Montreal; Toronto — at 56,092 — was slightly smaller than Quebec City. By 1891, Montreal had a population of nearly 220,000 and Toronto was three-times the size of Quebec City at 181,000. These two economic and industrial centres were rapidly emerging as a first-rung category of cities, the country's two metropolises. In 1911, the census found nearly half a million people in Montreal and 380,000 in Toronto. By the end of the Great War, both

had passed the half million mark and the next nearest city, Winnipeg, was less than half as large with fewer than 200,000. Toronto's rate of growth and transformation was more sudden and spectacular than Montreal's but both were, even in 1900, nothing like what they had been in 1867. Both cities hosted large manufacturing operations, as did second- and third-tier cities in Ontario and in Quebec's Eastern Townships. In the immediate catchment of each of the two major cities, a metropolitan influence was obvious as the local economies became more closely knit. The foremost example of this is the so-called "golden horseshoe" at the western end of Lake Ontario: Toronto was the unchallenged heart of this conurbation that grew (and became an almost continuous urban sprawl) through the 20th century.

The links between the second industrial revolution and urbanization are described by historian Craig Heron (York University).

Urban Conditions to 1920



Figure 3.27 A survey of working-class housing in Montreal in 1903 found high density and badly deteriorated conditions.

City growth is a companion process of industrialization and, as we have seen, industrialization was enabled by Confederation. Maritime historian, Larry McCann, captured this when he wrote, "The transformation of Nova Scotia's economic structure and the growth of its towns and cities in the post-Confederation period occurred simultaneously with the province's integration into the continental economy."⁵ Larger factories replaced smaller shops and these factories, of course, were located in towns. Opportunities to earn cash wages attracted young people off the land, especially those who were unlikely to inherit the family farm. Newcomers from abroad, naturally, came ashore in large port cities and those port cities were the outlets for manufactured goods. The ability to consolidate dumps of fuel, whether wood or fossil fuels, was greater in cities that had port and rail, or even canal facilities. The cities, too, were centres of finance, and industrialism was nothing without capital.

5. L.D. McCann, "The Mercantile-Industrial Transition in the Metals Towns of Pictou Country, 1857-1931," in *Cities and Urbanization: Canadian Historical Perspectives*, ed. Gilbert A. Stelter (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1990): 88-9.

Sean Kheraj (York University), a historian of environmental questions considers the function and meaning of parks – specifically Vancouver’s Stanley Park – in the context of modern cities.

The effect was a self-reinforcing pattern. Factories moved to towns that had financial credibility (that is, either wealth or the ability to borrow wealth), infrastructure (docks, railyards, etc.) and an established workforce. This was the case in 1879 when Hart Massey closed the last of his agricultural implements business in Newcastle, ON (where it had moved in 1849 from the tiny inland village of Bond Head) and relocated everything to Toronto where it merged with its chief competitor. By 1891, Massey-Harris employed nearly 600 people.⁶



Figure 3.25 Slaughterhouses, breweries, and markets were an important part of any urban landscape, and were usually found in the very centre of cities. City Market, Saint John, NB in 1910.

While the competition was visibly fierce for investment, giving rise to a generation of civic self-promoters called **boosters**, it was no less pitched when it came to attracting and retaining a population of wage-earners. It was the ability of Canadians and immigrants to move from town to town in search of work that made industrialization possible. **Free labour** (untied to the land or to a feudal relationship) was fundamental to the transition to industrialism. This worked well enough when the economy was surging and opportunities beckoned. But when the economy troughed, workers found themselves effectively trapped in the cities where they last hoped to find work. The 1870s, for example, were marked by dramatic protests and hardship in Ottawa, Montreal, and other centres as families complained that they were starving for want of work. In Toronto, the local **House of Industry** received 2,000 applications for refuge between 1879-1882.⁷ Cities might create circumstances in which building rental housing for an emergent working class was both necessary and remunerative. In becoming a tenant, however, workers exposed themselves to impermanence and the possibility of eviction. If they lived in **tied housing** and carried debt at the **truck shop** or **company store**, their vulnerabilities could be greater still.

6. Peter G. Goheen, "Currents of Change in Toronto, 1850-1900," in *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History*, eds. Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979): 63.

7. Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 115.



Figure 3.26 Company towns like Britannia Beach, BC provided rows of identical housing to employees and created small urban-industrial nodes in otherwise rural areas.

Overcrowding was widespread. Health conditions were often poor. Sewage systems were deplorable and only began to improve in the 1890s in most Canadian cities and towns. Water supplies were regularly tainted. Immigrant, Aboriginal, and African-Canadian neighbourhoods generally endured worse conditions than those occupied by Anglo- and Franco-Canadians. Housing in some industrial areas was more like dormitories than apartments because of the extensive occupancy of single men and single women. These conditions prevailed at the very time when wealthy and leafy suburbs were being created for the owners of industry. Generally located upwind from the smoke and noise of factories and mills, these wealthy “Nob Hills” paid obeisance to the capitalist hub of Canada — Montreal — and the power of the CPR’s elite in their names. A Mount Royal neighbourhood occurs in cities all along the main CPR line. Vancouver’s upper-class Shaughnessy neighbourhood was named in 1907 for the then-president of the CPR, and there are Van Horne streets in cities across the country. The hundreds who worked in the switching and freight yards thus lived downwind and often downhill from their economic superiors and employers. Cities had always had elements of spatial segregation based on class and role, but this was being imposed on Canadian cities in a very purposeful way. Awareness of these differences in quality of life and experiences was not unusual.



Figure 3.27 A view of the Montreal docks in 1896 reveals working class housing tucked in among the factories and works yards. Note the laundry on the line in the lower foreground.

Single Industry Towns

Nanaimo, on Vancouver Island, and Sydney, NS are good examples of industrial-era towns with effectively no prior market-town existence.⁸ Instant cities of this kind quickly boasted of having the urban amenities found in other 19th century cities: libraries, schools, concert halls, breweries, hotels, restaurants, and newspapers.

The small and new industrial towns generated urban problems as well. The shocking infant mortality rates of industrial Montreal in the last quarter of the 19th century — running to 285 deaths out of every 1,000 births — barely surpassed Nanaimo in 1881 with 250 per 1,000 births. Kamloops, a booming railway and lumber mill town built atop a cattle and fur trade settlement (not to mention ancient Aboriginal villages), had an infant mortality rate of 380 of 1,000 births in 1891.⁹

What Nanaimo and most the Cape Breton mining towns had in common was the fact that they were essentially single industry communities. The same was true of Drumheller (from 1911), the Crowsnest Pass colliery towns, the Kootenay hardrock mining towns, and a great number of lumber mill towns across the Maritimes and much of the rest of the country. In British Columbia, there was a cohort of 25 towns with population of between 500 to about 2,000 people that sprang into existence around 1891. These were primarily mining towns and the largest share of them were in the Kootenays. Only a handful existed a decade earlier and some would become **ghost towns** by 1911.

In some instances, these communities were not just limited by a lack of variety of employment opportunities: they were in essence (or formally) **company towns** in which the chief employer was also the landlord, and possibly responsible for civic authority as well. Communities like these were many and they proved to be highly vulnerable to changes in the economic weather. As one historian of a New Brunswick cotton textile town observes, “by

8. This is not to say that they had no prior history as human settlements. Both were sites of permanent and semi-permanent Aboriginal communities before, during, and after industrialization.

9. John Douglas Belshaw, *Becoming British Columbia: A Population History* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), 180.

1890 there were over one hundred villages comparable to Milltown. These small towns contained over 4,500 industrial establishments representing over \$2.5 million of invested capital and almost 25,000 jobs.”¹⁰ The same historian adds that these small industrial nodes constituted “only one-fourteenth of the industrial capacity of the 46 major Canadian cities,” and yet the pattern was cast widely and echoed many of the developments witnessed in larger centres. There were representatives of this tier of industrial centres in every province and they were an important part of the Dominion’s web of industrial activity.



Figure 3.28 Calgary, ca. 1885. Even small service centres were home to warehouses and processing operations in the industrial age.

Exercise: History Around You

Street by Street



Figure 3.29 The imposition of a tramway intersection on an older streetway, like this one in Montreal in 1893, would dramatically change the way the street was used.

10. Peter DeLottinville, “Trouble in the Hives of Industry: The Cotton Industry comes to Milltown, New Brunswick, 1879-1892,” in *Labour and Working-Class History in Canada: A Reader*, eds. David Frank and Gregory S. Kealey (St. John’s: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1995): 131.

The transportation systems of the past leave indelible fingerprints on the dimensions of our cities. Take a look at the oldest part(s) of your city or town. How wide are the streets? If you live in Lillooet, BC, for example, they're extremely wide. That's also the case on the main streets of downtown Winnipeg. In Vancouver's Gastown, Water Street is perhaps a quarter as wide. In the Old Town of Quebec or around Montreal's Ville-Marie they are narrower still, as they are in the heart of St. John's.



Figure 3.30 The appositely named Breakneck Steps in Quebec City were clearly not designed for animal traffic nor for trams.

Can one conclude from this that people in the past were much thinner than they are now or that Winnipeggers need wider roads to negotiate a turn?

The answer can be found in the dominant transportation technology of the day. St. John's, Montreal, and Quebec were built with military concerns in mind and some of the topography was (and is) challenging, but what distinguishes them most from later cities is that horses were rare. Most of the carting that was done was powered by human legs. And the turning radius of a handcart is very narrow. Merchants shipping goods into the Cariboo gold towns via Lillooet had something in common with Métis freighters in Winnipeg: they made use of ox teams. The turning radius of a team of oxen pulling a wagon is necessarily very large. In between are the cities where horse traffic dominated. The warehouses of Gastown, in Vancouver, depended on fleets of carters whose moderate-sized horses had to be able to make a U-turn with a small wagon in tow. Multiple horse teams pulling larger wagons required more space — though not as much as a team of oxen — and that transition can be seen in slightly later street layouts.



Figure 3.31 A boy and a horse on Hastings Street near Carrall in downtown Vancouver, ca. 1897. Some of the oldest buildings had stables in their basements.

Late 19th and early 20th century cities were typically horse towns. The introduction of streetcars added a new wrinkle, as can be seen across Vancouver where the streetcar system rapidly outstripped the building of neighbourhoods. Streetcar tracks plunged into the forests and through the stumps of South Vancouver and Point Grey, anticipating the arrival of new housing. Before the arrival of the automobile, these various forms of transportation — foot, hoof, electricity-powered streetcar, and bicycles, too — shared the streets in a way that blends the orderly and the chaotic, as can be seen in this [1907 film](#) taken from the front of a streetcar in Vancouver, filmed by United States filmmaker (and victim of the Titanic sinking) William Harbeck.

Where you live and where you work is shaped by the dominant infrastructure of the day. Consider how your town's transportation history can be seen in the size and shape of its streets and how the physical space in which you move is, itself, a historic document.

Key Points

- Urbanization in the period before the 1920s was a diverse and uneven process.
- Two major cities — Montreal and Toronto — emerged that would dwarf all others; the growth and economic health of both was based on industrial economies.
- New cities in the West were challenging the lead held by Central and Eastern Canadian cities.
- Cities increasingly developed sections exclusively occupied by higher or lower social classes, in which conditions were very different.

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[Hogenson House](#) by [Cocopie](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 3.23

[\[Renfrew Textiles Limited factory, Renfrew, Ont.\]](#) (Online MIKAN no.3326637) by Hinchley, Harry / Library and Archives Canada / PA-100649 is in the [public domain](#)

Figure 3.24

[The Ward as viewed from Eaton factory](#) by [William James](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 3.25

[Postcard of the Saint John City Market](#) by unknown is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [McCord Museum](#) under the access number **X13436**.

Figure 3.26 [Britannia Mg & Smelting Co.'s mine, Britannia Beach, B.C.](#) (Online MIKAN no.3373553)

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[Houses for Mr. Meredith, Montreal, QC, 1903](#) by [McCord Museum](#) has no known copyright restrictions.

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[Tramway crossing under construction, Ste. Catherine and St. Lawrence St., Montreal, QC, 1893](#) by [McCord Museum](#) has no known copyright restrictions.

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[A boy and horse on Hastings Street near Carrall Street](#) by [Major James Skitt Matthews](#) is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [City of Vancouver Archives](#) under the access number **AM54-S4-: Str P175**.

3.3 Cold War Society: Cities and Suburbs



Figure 9.55 Even the smallest 20th-century cities, like Whitehorse, adopted the suburban style of housing (among them, the “rancher” and the “split-level bungalow”) and exploited peripheral land rather than building higher densities.

At the turn of this century, only one city in the Atlantic provinces surpassed the 100,000 mark in population. Halifax stood as the 14th-largest urban area in the country, with 359,111 people in 2001. St. John’s (in 20th place) had a population of 99,182, and all of the rest were below 70,000. The combined populations of Saint John, Moncton, Fredericton, and Charlottetown were hardly more than that of Saskatoon, and if St. John’s and Corner Brook were added, they still wouldn’t be a match for Halifax.

Because large urban areas make more media noise than smaller centres, because media and capital are centralized in the biggest metropolises, and because the influence of the top three or four major cities is so pervasive, it is easy to lose sight of the rather more modest urban experiences of some Canadian regions in what many commentators called the “century of the city.” Rare, however, is the city of any size that has not been impacted by many of the urban trends that define modern life, of which automobilism, suburbanization, the baby boom, multiculturalism, and commercialization of space are only a few examples.



Figure 9.56 Atlantic cities may have grown more slowly but they took on many of the suburbanized elements of much larger centres, as Moncton reveals from the air.

An Urban Country

The size of Canada — which includes many imperfectly mapped islands in the Arctic — inevitably produces shockingly low population density levels. At 3.4 per square kilometer in 2015, Canada ranks slightly ahead of Iceland and Australia among developed economies but behind the rest. And yet, the majority of Canadians live in urban centres and have since 1921. In that year, 1.65 million people lived in cities with a population of 100,000 or more (of which there were only six), out of a total national population of 8.8 million; in 1941, 2.6 million out of 11.5 million were living in that largest tier of cities (of which there were now eight); and, in 1961, 4.2 million out of 18.2 million were big city dwellers. In 1976, nearly half of the 23 million Canadians were living in 100,000+ sized cities. By contrast, the percentage of Canadians living in cities of 5,000 or fewer has fallen from 19% in 1921 to 15% in 1951 and 11% in 1971. Small-town life has become more uncommon in part because small towns became large towns and large towns became small cities, but it is clear that the social dynamics that defined the lives of Canadians before 1921 changed dramatically in the 20th century.



Figure 9.57 The City of Surrey started as several distinct villages, and that pattern has since been overlaid with a low-density suburban grid. The city now struggles to create the density that would enable improved public transit and reduced car dependence.

Suburbia

Much of that growth was taking place not in the actual cities but in their neighbouring municipalities. It is worth noting that there have been several resource extraction towns founded in the last 100 years but no new cities. The late 19th century saw the birth of every major city in western Canada (apart from slightly older Victoria and New Westminster), but the only truly new centres in the 20th century are satellites and suburbs of the largest metropolises. Mississauga, Brampton, Surrey, Laval, Markham, Vaughan, and Burnaby are examples drawn from the largest 20 cities in Canada, none of which contained more than a few thousand in 1914, all of which are very near or past the quarter-million mark now. Each of these began as peripheral, spillover, **bedroom communities** associated with a larger urban centre and, in that respect, they were very typical.¹

The setting for modernity was urban, but the lives of most Canadians in the 20th century increasingly became defined as something different: **suburban**.

Beginning in the 1920s, Canadians began a migration away from city centres to the margin. Initially, what was considered “suburban” was merely the outskirts of the original city. Suburbanization faltered in the 1930s and early 1940s and then resumed in earnest in the postwar period. At that time, larger and larger numbers of city dwellers evacuated old neighbourhoods for entirely new communities.

Suburbanization was driven by several push factors. Housing stock in the city centre had grown overcrowded due to the poverty of the 1930s (as mortgage payments were missed and the number of rental units increased) and with the arrival of large numbers of ex-soldiers after the war. Large older homes were converted to rooming houses with less privacy and aging plumbing, heating, and wiring. In Vancouver, the second Hotel Vancouver was turned into veterans’ housing, so pressing was the demand for accommodations. As well, the city centres and older neighbourhoods were increasingly associated (rightly or wrongly) with crime, violence, and — from

1. Richard Harris, *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

the perspective of Anglo-Celtic and Francophone Canadians — the presence of new immigrants and unfamiliar visible minorities. Finally, the baby boom (considered below) was underway and the need for more spacious houses was widely felt.



Figure 9.58 Suburbs have been criticized for “cookie-cutter” housing designs. In places like Don Mills, where the influence of the 1920s Garden City movement and modernist architecture can be seen, the whole design was in fact tightly controlled as a kind of social experiment in creating a livable space.

The pulls of suburbia were also numerous. Some industries were relocating to the edges of cities, and population followed. Housing prices were lower and so were property taxes. Suburban housing typically contained significantly more floor space than was available in houses in older blue-collar areas. Suburban lots — as large as 50 foot (15.24 metres) wide — compared very favourably to the 25 or 33 foot (7.62-10 metre) lot commonly found in the centre of western Canadian cities. Neighbours were, therefore, not cheek-by-jowl with one another. As suburban infrastructure grew there were highways that connected outlying areas with urban industrial nodes and the city centre. There were also new schools that were instantly a step up from the deteriorating facilities in the inner cities. Young postwar baby-boom families were attracted by all of these features.

Watch this video on the *New Super Super-Mart* to see one of Canada’s early suburban shopping centres.

Working — without much effect — against these pulls, were several drawbacks to suburban life. Urban families tended to stick to identifiable neighbourhoods before 1945 — generally, spaces that were associated with ethnicity, church, and sources of preferred types of food. In the suburbanization process, siblings did not (or could not) necessarily buy in the same areas, which meant that the supports formerly on offer between family members were more tenuous.

Culturally, suburbs were thought to be deficient. Civic amenities might include parks, rinks, and pools, but it was rare in the period from 1945 to 1970 to find art galleries or performance spaces outside of the old city cores. Zoning that forbade commercial properties from residential areas meant that there was no corner shop to turn to for small, immediate necessities; bottles of milk and loaves of bread were often delivered door-to-door, but if

a pint of cream was needed mid-week that meant a trip in the car to the nearest shopping plaza. Pedestrianism was discouraged by distances and by the sprawling parking lots in shopping strips. As shopping malls appeared for the first time in the 1950s there began a process of concentrating retail space in nodes (with “plenty of free parking”) rather than along “high streets,” a fact that contributed further to the rise of automobile dependency. Most households therefore had to have two cars at their disposal. This luxury carried with it higher energy and individualized maintenance costs, and a concomitant rise in demand for more road capacity and parking. There was as a result more air pollution and alienation from the very greenspace that once made the “leafy suburbs” attractive. In lieu of a natural town or village centre in most suburbs, the shopping mall emerged as the *de facto* focal point for social interaction. Consumerism was thus encouraged by the lack of other possible sites of community contact.

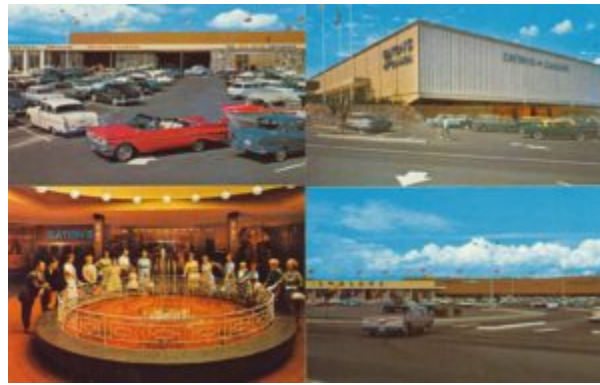


Figure 9.59 Brentwood in Burnaby was one of Canada’s first suburban shopping malls. It is simultaneously a shrine to consumerism and a way of divorcing commerce from the streetscape.

Return to Civvy Street

Readjustment to peacetime in 1945 was welcomed by a generation that had lived through economic disaster and global conflict. It was also approached with some trepidation. The immediate postwar era a generation earlier had brought unemployment, a pandemic, and labour unrest. Some of these concerns were addressed at the political level (see [Section 8.12](#)). No initiative was as comprehensive in this respect as the 1944 **Veterans Charter**.

At war’s end, there were some 900,000 men and women who had served in some capacity. The Charter provided \$1.2 billion to facilitate their reintegration. This included a one-time pay-out, cash for civilian clothing, and life insurance. Funding was available for post-secondary education at university or in vocational schools. The **Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)** was created in 1946 to assist Canadians with their first home purchase and the renovation of older homes (neglected during the Depression and not helped by material shortages during the war).² Oversight for these and other projects was provided by the newly-established Department of Veterans’ Affairs (later renamed Veterans Affairs Canada).

Legislative and social pressures combined to enable returned soldiers to reclaim their old jobs (if, indeed, they had

2. Jill Wade, *Houses for All: The Struggle for Social Housing, 1919-1950* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1994).

been formerly employed). This meant, inevitably, removing women from the industrial workforce. For returning servicewomen, however, no similar commitment was made. The end effect was to make marriage and housewifery the default career path for women who were not nurses, secretaries, or teachers.

Would suburbanization have occurred with such rapidity in the postwar years had it not been for this context? It is unlikely. CMHC brought homeownership within reach of a generation that had, less than a decade earlier, experienced record-setting levels of unemployment, cash shortages, and falling wages. The economic boost provided by the war had one other related impact that drove forward suburban growth.

The Baby Boom

As economic conditions began to improve slightly in the late 1930s, so too did the nuptiality (marriage) rate and the number of births. The earliest hint of a fertility recovery, however, was nothing compared to what would come after World War II. In 1911, there were 4.8 million Canadians over the age of 15 years, of whom 2.6 million were married; that share — about half — survived until the 1950s, when it reached two-thirds and then crept up to three-quarters in the early 1960s. In the post-war, Cold War years, being married, building a family, and — yes, being born — was the experience of a growing number of Canadians.

The declaration of war in 1939 was followed by a veritable stampede to the wedding altar. In Vancouver, for example, there was a 26.6% increase in the number of marriages registered over the previous year. To give this more perspective, it represents a doubling over the 1933 incidence of nuptiality in the city. Births would follow soon thereafter.

Nationally the number of births in 1937 was only 227,900 and then it shot up to pre-Depression rates in 1940, surpassing every year in the 1920s other than 1921, at 263,993. The **crude birth rate** rose from 20.1 in 1937 to 24.3 in 1945 and kept going up until it peaked in 1947 at 28.9. It then sagged a bit and then recovered in 1954 to 1957, when it hovered just above 28 per 1000. There were twice as many live births in 1956 (450,700) than there had been in any year in the 1930s. What is more, although the share of births that were **illegitimate** climbed during the war years from 3.9 to 4.5% of the total number of births, illegitimacy declined to a mid-1950s trough of about 3.8%.

More and more births took place in hospitals. In the 1920s, the share of hospital births was around 1 in 4; in the 1930s, it climbed to about 1 in 3, passing the 40% mark in 1939; by the end of the war, the figure was nearly 64%; by 1960, it was nearly 95%; and from 1965, it was 99%. Whatever the risks entailed in hospital births, the neo-natal and infant mortality rate fell from 81 per 1000 live population in 1931 to 1935 to 26 in 1960-1965, a remarkable achievement in public health. Likewise, stillbirths fell from nearly 32 per 1000 live births in 1931 to fewer than 12 in 1965.³

The enormity of immigration in 20th-century Canada (considered in [Section 5.11](#)) has tended to overshadow another important demographic behaviour: migration. As with the arrival of newcomers, the movement of Canadians from one province to another has had a westward bias. The other provinces and the Territories are

3. Statistics Canada, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd edition., F.H. Leacy, ed. (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1983): B1-14, B23-50.

more fully represented in British Columbia and Alberta than in any of the Maritime provinces, and this has been the case since the early 20th century. It is difficult to track interprovincial movement but we can identify out-migration patterns. From 1921 to 1961, there was only one decade in which Nova Scotia saw fewer people leave than arrived; in the same period PEI and New Brunswick (and, after 1949, Newfoundland) experienced substantial and sustained net out-migration. The decade in which this softens — the 1930s — offered up such poor economic prospects in the rest of the country that Maritimers were less likely to head “down the road.” Which suggests, of course, that interprovincial pulls are at least as important as pushes. The West was not exempt from abandonment: Manitoba was a net loser of population from 1921 and Saskatchewan from 1931. Alberta experienced net migration from 1931 to the 1950s. In fact, only British Columbia and Ontario registered net increases in migration across every decade of the 20th century.⁴ Moving to where the jobs are became a powerful tradition in its own right in Atlantic Canada in the mid-20th century.

White Flight

The ability to move to suburbia seemed, at the time, a very democratic one. But, in fact, it was one enjoyed mostly by Canadians who held steady jobs, and most of those people were drawn from the British and French context populations. New immigrants continued to pour into the old urban centres and their numbers were growing as the postwar migrations gathered speed (see [Section 5.11](#)). West Indian, South Asian, and other visible minorities took over spaces vacated by those who made their way to the suburbs. Growing diversity in urban cores contributed to still more movement to the suburbs by more established Canadian households in what has been called **white flight**.

The effect on city centres of this evacuation is important to note. Downtowns in the first half of the 20th century had been a focal point for entertainment and commerce; by the 1960s, many were gutted. Live theatre and music venues closed down, old movie palaces became dilapidated and doomed for demolition, neighbourhoods that were increasingly viewed as irredeemable slums were ploughed under to make way for freeways that would conduct suburbanites to and from work. Downtown department stores retained some customer loyalty, but the spread of suburban shopping malls were a blow from which they would never fully recover. The impact of this abandonment of the city centres can still be seen in many Canadian metropolises. Some, like Winnipeg, are a patchwork of vacant lots and are very unpopulated after dark. The leading cities, however, turned the availability of land in what was now called the **Central Business District (CBD)** to advantage by erecting the country’s second generation of skyscrapers. Built of steel, concrete, and glass, these mostly corporate-owned or chartered bank-owned towers sprang up first in Montreal (the country’s financial capital at the time and the largest city) and were as much as twice the height of pre-WWII towers. The skylines of the largest downtowns across the country followed suit and began to reflect a pattern of trademark styles. The black glass Toronto-Dominion towers were instantly distinguishable from the white-edged Bank of Montreal skyscrapers. Montreal also led the way in **suburban sprawl**, so much so that by 1996, 75% of Montrealers actually lived outside of the city proper.

Toronto’s leadership responded to the changes associated with population and spatial expansion in 1953 by creating a federated Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto. Known as **Metro**, the new administrative body took in

4. Warren E. Kalbach and Wayne W. McVey, *The Demographic Bases of Canadian Society* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 86.

the City of Toronto and the suburban municipalities of Etobicoke, York, North York, East York, and Scarborough. This new organism accomplished much but some of its projects were highly controversial.



Figure 9.60 Nanaimo is one of the oldest cities in western Canada, but that has not saved it from sprawl. Its metro population of 98,000 in 2015 covers 1,280 km². Greater Toronto (not Metro) covers 1,751 km² but contains more than 5 million people.

As the flight to the suburbs accelerated in the 1950s and pressures grew to develop more and better highway systems, a generation of planners appeared whose approach to depressed areas was to bring in the bulldozers. Some took their lead from American cities where variegated downtowns were gutted to make way for sleek, high-density social housing projects and cloverleaf overpasses. Largely because the Canadian economy and population lagged somewhat behind the Americans, some cities were spared the worst excesses of this period. Even in the United States, however, the wisdom of obliterating whole communities in the name of faster traffic flow and rationalized modern housing was being questioned.

At the forefront of the debate was New York's Jane Jacobs (1916-2006). In the mid-1950s, Jacobs began a public critique of slum clearance and urban renewal in Manhattan. Jacobs' successful crusade was noted in the Canadian media. When she emigrated to Canada in 1968 (in part to keep her draft-age sons out of the Vietnam War), she became a high-profile lightning rod for Torontonians angered at the proposed Spadina Expressway. The battle to stop the project was ultimately successful. As Ontario Premier William (Bill) Davis (b. 1929) observed in 1971:

If we are building a transportation system to serve the automobile, the Spadina Expressway would be a good place to start. But if we are building a transportation system to serve people, the Spadina Expressway is a good place to stop.⁵

The collapse of the Spadina Expressway project in Toronto coincided with the death of radical proposals for slum clearance. The Bonaventure Expressway took a bite out of Griffintown in Montreal and the Autoroute Ville-Marie displaced hundreds. The construction of waterfront expressways and viaducts through Vancouver's East

5. John Sewell, *The Shape of the City: Toronto Struggles with Modern Planning* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

End, Gastown, Chinatown, and Strathcona were stayed. These were unusual survivors, in that neighbourhoods containing ethnic minorities and Aboriginal peoples generally did not fare well in the battle with bulldozers and highways. An African-Canadian neighbourhood in Vancouver and Winnipeg's Rooster Town, a Métis community, were both cleared to make way for, respectively, a viaduct and a suburban school.⁶ Clearances of these neighbourhoods, along with the wide variety of shantytowns that existed on civic peripheries (in defiance of modern norms of property ownership and conceptions of public health), were a way to rationalize cities, to colonize neighbourhoods and pastureland alike with a modern vision of Canadian life.

Suburbanization gave the Canadians who could afford it the space they deeply wanted and a sense of building new communities that echoed the "pioneer" experience. There were significant liabilities to this trend, including the isolation of **housewives** on the periphery, the loss of access to cultural facilities, and huge environmental consequences. Publicly owned transportation systems such as streetcars were pulled out of service to create more room for privately owned automobiles. Less obvious is the extent to which private space became dominant, superseding public space. The gathering in a town square, the crowded meeting at city hall, the spontaneous spilling of crowds off a sidewalk onto the street to watch a parade or to engage in protest: these did not disappear entirely but were much less common than they had been in the pre-WWII years. The authorities could point to this change with some satisfaction because it meant that another general strike like Winnipeg's in 1919 was unlikely. The possibility of rioting unemployed workers was likewise diminished. The trade-off was several generations that retreated into their living rooms and recreation rooms to engage with the *civitas* only through a television screen.

What came out of suburbia was a population and culture unlike any before it. More highly educated and with expectations of continued prosperity, the baby boomers challenged the state to keep up with demands for services, institutions, and opportunities. As a voting population, they have been a decisive force since they first started voting in the 1960s. This was the first generation raised on television and nurtured by consumerism, a generation for which car-ownership and home-ownership was a given, if not a right. By the 1970s, more of Canada's housing stock had been built since 1945 than before, and the vast majority of that construction took place in suburban tracts. The suburbs were the cradle of what would rapidly emerge as the majority of Canadians, and gradually it became the case that these were more diverse neighbourhoods than the enclaves left behind in the old city centres.

Discounted by planners and often ridiculed (sometimes rightly) for their alleged soullessness, no exploration of contemporary Canadian culture and values would be complete without a serious understanding of the legacy of suburbanization.

Key Points

- The 20th century saw the number of large cities increase, the share of population living in large cities rise and the experience of growing up or residing in small towns retreat.
- Most urban growth in the second half of the 20th century took place in suburban

6. David G. Burley, "Rooster Town: Winnipeg's Lost Métis Suburb, 1900-1960," *Urban History Review*, XLII, no.1 (Fall 2013): 3-25.

neighbourhoods. Suburbs were attractive for economic reasons and because the housing stock and schools were new, automobilism made them (and workplaces) accessible, and shopping malls made them self-sufficient.

- Suburban life was made possible by social policies like the Veterans Charter and the CMHC.
- The end of the Depression, the start of WWII, and demobilization all contributed to the baby boom which, in turn, contributed to suburbanization.
- Abandonment of city centres led to the collapse of downtown commerce and its replacement with financial districts. It also led to massive highway projects that would obliterate older — often ethnic — neighbourhoods.
- Reactions against highways projects would rescue some Canadian centres from being paved over and would generate a renewed interest on creating livable spaces in the cities.
- Suburbia emerged as the new cradle of Canadian society and culture — a place with a gendered geography and a tendency to favour private space over public.

Attributions

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[Postcard: Brentwood Shopping Centre, Burnaby, BC, 1963](#) by [Rolly Ford](#) is in the [public domain](#).

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3.4 Rural Canada in an Urban Century

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Figure 9.61 The state's enthusiasm for science in the early 20th century is embodied in the National Observatory in Ottawa on the grounds of the Experimental Farm.

At the time of Confederation, Canada was a rural country. By the middle of the 20th century, the majority of the country was urban. Today, it's mostly urban. How did that happen? And what does that mean for our understanding of the country's history? The most obvious answer is that the late 19th-century emergence of industrial capitalism meant that waged work was available in the towns and cities of the country, and that the country's farms were able to feed this increasingly urban population.

Why were farmers able to feed so many more people? The most important change was the development of gas-powered engines and machinery. Farm mechanization had begun in Canada in the early 19th century, but increased dramatically in the years just before and after World War I. Productivity improved because mechanization meant that fewer people could do more labour on ever-larger farms. In the 1830s, most wheat was harvested by hand, greatly limiting the size of farms. Seventy years later, harvesting, winnowing, and threshing machines meant that 100s of acres, rather than 10s of acres, could be harvested and partially processed quickly and with far fewer human labourers. Many people, however, feared that all that productivity came at a cost. **Rural**

depopulation also meant that rural communities shrank. Increased productivity, too, owed much to increased use of pesticides, adding to costs and multiplying the environmental consequences of agriculture. Mechanization, pesticide purchases, and other increasingly capital intensive techniques meant that steadily fewer families could sustain the higher costs of industrial agriculture.



Figure 9.62 Steam-powered tractors quickly transformed farm productivity.

Many of those who were moving to the city did so because farming had become untenable. Often, the owners of small farms sold out to larger producers. Indeed, farms continue to grow larger to this day. While the number of farms peaked in the 1930s, total farm acreage has actually increased over the course of the 20th century. The average size of a farm in Saskatchewan in 1914 was about 200 acres; by 1936, it had doubled to 400; and by 1956, had reached over 600 acres per farm. Today, that number is around 1,700 acres. By the early postwar period, farms could no longer really be considered “family farms”; they were businesses — larger in scale, capital intensive, and demanding stable access to markets.

Improvements in transportation also encouraged the growth of farms. Larger producers found ready markets for their products, and the increased availability of trains and steamships meant that Canadian farmers and ranchers, even those far from the ocean ports of Halifax and Montreal, could get their products to markets in Britain and the Caribbean. Rail integration in the 20th century opened access to the United States market. The Prairies were Canada’s breadbasket, producing more than four-fifths of the country’s wheat and exporting large quantities overseas, but none of that was even imaginable until the completion of the CPR and the integration of the West into national and international markets.

Scale had a major impact on not only farm size and market conditions, but also on productive and gender relationships in farm households. In the 19th century, most butter and cheese production was done by women in farm households. The rise of industrial butter and cheese production in the early 20th century pushed women out of dairying, and moved them from major productive household responsibilities to largely reproductive ones such as childrearing.

The state came to play a much greater role in the countryside. In the late 19th-century, federal experimental farms in small places like Nappan, Nova Scotia; and Kamloops, British Columbia; provincial agricultural colleges in

places like Guelph, Ontario, and Truro, Nova Scotia; and statistical agencies across the country offered research, education, and support. During World War II, the federal government stepped in to regulate grain supplies and food production. State-run agencies like the National Wheat Board were created during the Great Depression to provide price stability, particularly for farmers dependent on international markets. Along with cooperatives and **marketing boards** for products like dairy and eggs, Canadian agriculture increasingly utilized market regulation to protect individual farmers against the uncertainties of international markets and price competition from the much larger United States agricultural sector.



Figure 9.63 Elements of urban life – including well-stocked libraries – could not be transferred to rural Canada, but crusades to improve literacy and education could. A “bookmobile” visits northwestern Ontario at mid-century.

The fisheries in eastern and western Canada faced similar challenges. Local inshore fisheries were increasingly at the mercy of industrial fishing operations with much larger ships, more productive gear, and direct relationships with national and international processors. In the great Depression, much like Prairie farmers, Maritime fishers turned to locally organized cooperatives and marketing agencies to allow them to compete against the industrial vessels. Factory trawlers and international markets dramatically increased the ability of the industry to harvest fish, resulting in near total depletion of major fish stocks like North Atlantic cod. By 1995, depletion was so great that the federal government had to shut down the cod fishery, effectively ending the economic viability of hundreds of small fishing communities in eastern Canada.

Canada also has a racialised dimension to its rural history. Indigenous people shaped their lives around participation in the fur trade, in small-scale agriculture, and local fisheries. Despite many political and social barriers, their successes were owing to their skills in working those distinctly rural economies. And from the 18th and 19th centuries onward, African-Nova Scotians were a predominantly rural population engaged in farming, fishing, and forestry in rural parts of the province. That explains the poet George Elliott Clarke’s reference to “Africans” “gumboing” the salty recipes of Acadian cooking with the “fishy tastes of Coloured Refugees” — their culture, too, was shaped by life on the land and the sea.

Rural Canada today faces innumerable challenges. The sheer scale of production, declining population, increasing

competition for prices and market share, and restrictive international trade agreements, and the difficulty of delivering basic social services — even schools — means that sustaining rural Canada is ever more difficult. Understanding the historic pattern helps us to better understand its complexities and its challenges.

Key Points

- The century of the city was made possible by the increased ability of farmers to feed urban populations (achieved through mechanization, chemicals, heavy capital investment, and consolidation of smaller farms into larger units able to achieve economies of scale).
- The role of the state in agriculture became increasingly important and took the form of research, marketing boards, and regulation of output.
- Rural fisheries communities were challenged by the increasing industrialization of ocean harvesting.
- In some rural areas the population became racialized: dominated by visible minorities including African Nova Scotians and Aboriginal communities.

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Attributions

Figure 9.61

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Figure 9.62

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Figure 9.63

[A group of children gather around a librarian and his Bookmobile in rural northwestern Ontario \(Online MIKAN no.4369759\)](#) by Canada. Dept. of Manpower and Immigration / Library and Archives Canada is in the [public domain](#).

Week 4 - Religious Life



Figure 7.1 The Salvation Army (aka: Sally Ann) was one of many social reform movements that included a strong religious element. Organized in ranks, the Salvation Army exemplifies the crusading zeal of some of these movements. The Rat River Salvation Army band, 1898.

There are many ways in which to contextualize reform historically. There are important economic and demographic contexts — such as booms and busts, or a surfeit or dearth of children or workers — and so one might be inclined to study reform as a response to those particular circumstances. While it is true that there are often identifiable catalysts to reform movements, it is also the case that most reform movements outlive their initial context and become much more: they become ways of viewing the world.

If this sounds vaguely religious, it should. Most movement cultures in Canada, over the last century or so, either had roots in denominational Christianity or were a reaction to the influence of organized religion. It seems safe to say that all were sustained over the longer term by a commitment to goals that were redemptive, a little millenarian, and sometimes purifying. All of the great reform movements of the post-Confederation era shared a few common catalysts and structural elements as well, not the least of which were a sense of pending disaster and a support base that was multi-provincial, if not national in its reach. There are exceptions but they are fewer than the commonalities.

These shared characteristics make it both possible and necessary to consider many of the reform movements side-by-side, regardless of their place on the nation's timeline. There is spillover between them and the same faces show up in a variety of movements; there are also deep schisms between a few and, from time to time, unflinching hostility felt by participants in one movement to the champions of another. Social reform themes arise, in large measure, from a kind of deductive logic. There is poverty and therefore there must be causes of poverty; there is crime and fear and therefore there must be causes of disorder; there is inequity and unhappiness, danger and ugliness and all of these things must arise from some cause. The answers that social reformers offered up became banners — the other kind of cause — and thus rallying points for citizens from many backgrounds. This chapter

begins with the 19th century's great social movements, and concludes with the environmental movements of the 20th century.

Learning Objectives

- Identify the major reform movements of the post-Confederation era.
- Describe the common features, tactics, goals, and beliefs of the reform movements.
- Account for the popularity and longevity of specific reform movements.
- Detail the influence of the social gospel, temperance, and maternal feminist movements.
- Assess the apparent distinctions between the first and second waves of feminism.

Attributions

Figure 7.1

[Rat Portage Salvation Army Band](#) by [Cekli829](#) is in the [public domain](#).

4.1 Social Reform

Victorian-era industrialization created conditions that called out for reform. Child-labour, sexual abuse, poverty-level pay, filthy workplaces, and slum neighbourhoods were made visible by two things: urbanization from the 1860s through to the 1920s (which brought more observers and commentators within reach of factory life) and the new investigative role of the state (in the form of Royal Commissions of Enquiry, for example). Certainly there was poverty and abuse in rural Canada, but fewer observers there to catch it and comment on it, let alone act against it. Factory-life problems became public problems.

The combination of science and urbanization — elements that were at the heart of industrialization — was key to the identification and relief of social and political liabilities. The rise of Darwinian thought and the relatively new concept of evolution transformed the public's understanding of biology and the engines of change. The **germ theory** of infection was just gaining ground as the Dominion of Canada took its first steps, so the possibility of employing strategies to avoid epidemics was increasingly well-understood. The cities were, in this context, laboratories in which social and health experiments were going to occur.

What is more, the idea of “society” was undergoing profound change. The mid- and late-19th century witnessed the rise of the scientific study of society. Sociology, political theory, and psychology are young and dynamic fields in this era, led by powerhouse thinkers like Auguste Comte (1798-1857), Karl Marx (1818-1893), Frederick Engels (1820-1895), Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). This phenomenon — increased curiosity about how society works and how it might be changed systematically — was itself made possible by the rise of the secular state. That is, by the arrival of forms of government in which the Church stood well to one side, while government (Christian, but not subservient to the clergy) was both appropriating and being handed responsibility for more and more of the social environment.

Into this mix stepped the new middle-classes. Professionals and merchants, they were — almost by definition — urban. Their ranks included the well-educated, the literate, and the people who would be tasked with dealing with outbreaks of illness (physicians), ignorance (teachers), political scandal (journalists), infrastructural disaster (engineers), and moral turpitude (the clergy). As a new spokes-class, the bourgeoisie — men and women alike — were increasingly connected to international movements and ideas. They were able to exploit their own rising importance in Canadian cities to launch programs aimed at eradicating, or at least mitigating, the worst effects of modernity.

What distinguishes this generation of reformers from the religious reformers of earlier generations is their shared concentration on social change. The **social reformers** of the post-Confederation era were less concerned with individual improvement and redemption than they were with achieving urgent, collective, society-wide change. Meeting this goal would, they believed, create an environment in which individual betterment was more likely to occur. Save society and then save the individual; ignore society and watch it crumble and take the individual with it.

Among the most vulnerable populations in the 19th and early 20th century were the elderly. Historian of institutionalization Megan Davies (York University) describes eldercare in the far west.

Key Points

- The social reform movement was a product of urbanization and industrialization.
- It was built on a bedrock of evolutionary science that taught that change was possible and desirable, and with advances in medical science that created an awareness of public health.
- It was informed by a growing body of social sciences thinking about the nature of society.
- It was led by a growing middle class — an industrial-era bourgeoisie — with the cultural capital and position to develop a common understanding of the need for social change, and the ability to attempt it.

4.2 Poverty, 1867–1945

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When the Dominion of Canada was created in 1867, governments did not assume direct responsibility for the poor. Before 1867, only the Maritime colonies had adopted English **Poor Laws**; there were no workhouses, in which the poor were given accommodation and food in return for work. Responsibility for the poor usually fell to churches and charities, and very poor people often ended up in houses of refuge, mental institutions, or prisons. Official and elite attitudes toward the poor were often negative or condescending. It was assumed that poverty resulted from a moral failing on the part of the poor. Idealistic visions contributed to such attitudes: Canada was a place with abundant land and resources where anybody willing to work was bound to prosper. This utopian vision of Canada ignored the reality that farms were very difficult to establish, that resources were highly seasonal, and that winter was a time of shortage and hardship for a large number of people.

In the last half of the 19th century, urbanization and early industrialization increased the number of urban poor. A new type of poverty appeared: poverty that resulted from unemployment — not merely seasonal job shortages, but the shortage of wage-paid jobs due to economic cycles, the closing of businesses, short-term layoffs, and trade depressions. Historians have shown that in major Canadian cities in 1901, one of every seven families could not survive on the pooled wage earnings of family members. If the poor survived at all, they did so by participating in an informal economy — scrounging, bartering, growing vegetables, or keeping animals, or taking in lodgers, if they had space. Many did not survive. Montreal, for instance, was one of the most dangerous cities in the Western World for newborn babies. At the end of the 1890s, 26% of babies died before they reached their first birthday of illnesses associated with poverty and malnutrition.

Studies of average wages in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver show that there was modest growth in real wages (which means wages after adjusting for price inflation) in the early 1900s. During World War I, rapid inflation halted the rise in real wages, and gains did not appear again until the 1920s. Then the Depression of the 1930s caused an increase in poverty due to unemployment. It has been estimated that in the winter of 1933, at the depths of the Depression, over 32% of all wage-paid workers were unemployed. In these circumstances, government began, although very slowly and at first without success, to develop policies that would help to alleviate the problem of poverty. The first universal social welfare program in Canada was the Family Allowance program,

introduced by the federal government in 1944. The small unemployment insurance program, introduced during World War II, was expanded after the war. These were the foundations of Canada's social security system or welfare state. The problem of poverty was not solved, however, and relative poverty (meaning wide gaps between low-income earners and others) persisted. Nevertheless, the social security system succeeded in reducing the impact of poverty for many families.



Figure 7.2 A poor family in The Ward, Toronto, 1913.

Additional Readings

Copp, Terry. *The Anatomy of Poverty: The Condition of the Working Class in Montreal 1897-1929*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974.

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Baskerville, Peter and Eric W. Sager. *Unwilling Idlers: The Urban Unemployed and their Families in Late Victorian Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.

Struthers, James. *No Fault of their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983.

Key Points

- Industrial and wage-labour changed the character and incidence of poverty in the post-Confederation era.
- Poverty has been linked in the pre-World War II era with inflation rates that outstripped wage

increases.

- Seasonal, sectoral, and catastrophic unemployment levels contributed to different understandings of poverty. A state response was, consequently, slow in coming.

Attributions

Figure 7.2

[Health Department photographs](#) by City of Toronto Archives is in the [public domain](#).

4.3 Women's Organizations and Reform

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Figure 7.4 At 26 years of age in 1889, Bertha Wright (later Mrs. Carr-Harris) was founder and first president of the Canadian YWCA.

Beginning in the 1870s, a number of women's organizations and clubs formed locally, nationally, and internationally. Some, such as the **Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)**, which opened a Canadian branch in 1870, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which opened its first Canadian branch in 1874, and the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC), which formed in 1893, were Canadian affiliates of international women's organizations. These and other women's groups formed during a period of huge social upheaval. At the end of the 19th century, industrialization, urbanization, and increased immigration led some women to take public action against social ills that seemed to threaten traditional family life. They felt that the way to protect women and children was to protest the evils of alcohol and attendant evils, such as prostitution, poverty, and poor working conditions amongst the lower classes. The WCTU campaigned first and foremost for

temperance (limiting the use of alcohol and encouraging sobriety) and prohibition (laws to ban alcohol entirely) because they blamed alcohol for social problems, such as poverty, immorality, and prostitution. Other groups had different mandates (education, working conditions for women, and philanthropy), but addressed the same social ills.

Inside meetings of literary clubs, temperance societies, and Christian associations, women critiqued the political and educational limitations of womanhood but were careful to maintain the conventions of their time. Many maintained a mandate to support families, children, and womanly arts, and praised the conventional roles of women. This was an effective strategy, as it was not particularly threatening to Canadian society at the time: men voted and worked, and women were responsible for children and domestic labour — although this was changing as more women were joining the paid labour force.

The WCTU shared features with other women's groups that formed during this period: a focus on Christian values and on protecting women, children, and the less fortunate. These ideals formed what historians call the “Social Gospel”: a Christian-influenced approach that brought an evangelical fervour to public reform (see [Section 7.6](#)).¹ Emerging women's clubs shared another feature: a growing commitment to a larger public and political role for women, including steps toward women's voting rights. Some were more tentative than others in moving toward women's rights to the vote (**suffrage**) but by the early 1900s many discussed it. These groups provided a discursive space for women to talk about issues ranging from education, temperance, domestic arts and social reform, to arts and crafts and literature — and sometimes, female suffrage.

The NCWC, a national umbrella organization for women's groups, formed 20 years after the WCTU arrived in Canada, and became an affiliate of the International Council of Women. Led by Lady Aberdeen (1857-1939), wife of the Governor General, its first member was the Women's Art Association of Canada. Adelaide Hoodless (1857-1910), a prominent social reformer who would be influential in the Canadian YWCA, co-founded the NCWC. The NCWC had a mandate to improve the status of women, and social conditions for women and children, but initially stopped short of supporting female suffrage. Interestingly, the WCTU influenced its formation but refused to join because the NCWC was not religious enough. Yet in 1888, the WCTU was the first large women's group to specifically support suffrage. The NCWC did not specifically endorse women's rights to vote until 1910, and many of their member organizations, including some of the local Councils of Women across the country, did not endorse, and even opposed, women's suffrage.² Thus we see a mix of radicalism and conservatism in many early women's groups.

Other women's organizations appeared in this fertile period. On the surface, national and local women's groups such as the Canadian Women's Press Club (1904), the Women's Art Association of Canada (1892), the YWCA (1870; Canada-wide in 1893), the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE, 1900), and the Toronto Women's Literary Club (1876) appeared devoted to artistic, educational, and professional or business pursuits. Many promoted service to girls and women, such as the YWCA, which emphasized the temporal, religious, and

1. See Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991).

2. Katja Thieme, “Language and Social Change: The Canadian Movement for Women's Suffrage, 1880-1918” (PhD Thesis, University of British Columbia, 2007), 31.

moral welfare of young women.³ But even outwardly more conservative groups such as the IODE (which resisted suffrage and focused on patriotism, education and philanthropy) could become vehicles of social and political change. The Toronto Literary Club was the first to publicly move in this direction, changing its name to the Canadian Women's Suffrage Association, and becoming the first Canadian group with suffrage as its main aim.⁴ Clubs could be screens for political action, and supporters of female suffrage were inevitably involved in one or more of the other women's organizations, even those that did not focus on suffrage. The Canadian Women's Press Club included female novelists, newspaper editors, and reporters and its early members included Nellie McClung (1873-1951) and Emily Murphy (1868-1933), who were prominent social reformers and suffragists. And the very fact that women were organizing and reaching out in a public way, regardless of the professed mandate or cause, was in itself a radical move for women.

While working-class women also organized and protested the inequity of society, the most prominent female reformers in the late 1800s and early 1900s were white middle- and upper-class women. Their approach to social issues seemed to blame the “fallen women” and less fortunate: reformers attempted to preserve a fading Victorian middle-class family life and their identification of the problem was sometimes the fallen themselves, rather than industrial, economic, and related societal upheavals. Some of the same women supporting female suffrage and social reform also supported eugenics (see [Section 7.8](#)), limiting immigration of non-whites, and extending the vote only to white women, due to a fear of “racial degeneration.”⁵ Others, like Hoodless, opposed female suffrage; she argued that women should exercise their influence through their sons and husbands.⁶

By association, by marriage, by family status, and by community prominence, these women had time and energy for art associations, moral reform campaigns, temperance groups, and art clubs. We can acknowledge their efforts to provide aid and to give women more power through public life, and we can acknowledge that compared to men, they were treated unequally and were subject to discrimination. But these same women had a degree of privilege not afforded to non-white and lower-class women in Canada. They were also divided in their support for a more political role. Some women, and some groups, opposed suffrage or focused only on moral or spiritual issues. Some focused on domestic science and handicrafts but moved toward suffrage, and others specifically supported suffrage as the key to relieving other social ills.

Early supporters of female suffrage have been called **maternal feminists** because they argued that their role as mothers and homemakers, as “angels of the house,” was the reason they needed more influence in society — and not, as later feminists would argue, because they ought to be treated as equal to men.⁷ Women's clubs were pivotal in that they were early opportunities for women to discuss the increasingly public roles they could play in society. We cannot dismiss them only as social gatherings for ladies of privilege, because they also led to important conversations about women's rights in society and in the political and professional realms. These groups were more radical in their context than they might appear to us, looking backward. Despite the grounding of many clubs

3. Toronto YWCA, Constitution of the Toronto YWCA, 1873, Article II, cited in Mary Quayle Innis, *Unfold the Years: A History of the YWCA in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1949), 13.

4. Alison Prentice et. al., *Canadian Women: A History, 2nd Edition* (Scarborough: Thomson Nelson, 2004), 195-196.

5. See Anne-Maria Kinahan, “Transcendent Citizenship: Suffrage, the National Council of Women of Canada, and the Politics of Organized Womanhood,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 42, 3 (2008): 5-27.

6. Terry Crowley, “HUNTER, ADELAIDE SOPHIA [HOODLESS],” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 13, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed 22 September 2015, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/hunter_adelaide_sophia_13E.html.

7. Thieme, “Language and Social Change”, 15-16.

in a narrow ideology of white women's rights, mother's rights, and Social Gospel "purity" arguments, they paved the way for women like Agnes Macphail (1890-1954), Canada's first female member of parliament. Macphail, in 1925 said: "I do not want to be the angel of any home, I want for myself what I want for other women, absolute equality. After that is secured then men and women can take turns at being angels."⁸



Figure 7.5 A good example of the rhetoric used by maternal feminists: an appeal to motherly feeling in the fight against the "Liquor Traffic".

Key Points

- The 1870s witnessed the creation of important and influential women's organizations; more followed before 1914.
- Many of these organizations shared a strong Christian orientation and concern regarding social ills, including the social and domestic consequences of alcohol abuse.
- These organizations provided a springboard for female activism, early feminism, and demand for greater female rights (including the right to vote).
- Opposition to the franchise remained an important force in women's organizations.
- Overwhelmingly, these were middle- and upper-class organizations representing white women with extensive privilege and social and cultural capital. Many were, as well, highly radical in their context.

8. Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 26 February 1925.

Attributions

Figure 7.4

Miss Bertha Wright (later Mrs. Carr-Harris, first President of the Canadian Young Women's Christian Association) (Online MIKAN no.3229086) by William James Topley / Library and Archives Canada / PA-167608 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 7.5

Have You Any Boys? : Remember September 29, Down with the Liquor Traffic! (Online MIKAN no. 2988523) by Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. 1984-4-943 W.C.T.U Dominion is in the [public domain](#).

4.4 Social Gospel



Figure 7.6 Urban missions began appearing in the late 19th century. The Toronto Mission opened in 1896 and became a centre for Social Gospel activism.

Of all the reform movements arising out of the 19th century, arguably none had as extensive a reach as the Social Gospel. Faced with the new realities of urban overcrowding, grueling factory work, and grinding poverty, Christians in North America questioned whether their focus should be on the salvation of the individual or of society as a whole. Conventional wisdom in the mainstream churches had always been that the issue of salvation was entirely a personal matter. Urbanization and industrialization challenged that perspective. Increasingly, clergymen and religious writers were of a mind that the physical environment in which the battle against sin took place was so changed by industrialism that new approaches were necessary. They found a receptive audience in the middle- and working-classes, and produced several generations of political, social, and cultural leaders as a result. The values of the Social Gospel became the fuel behind many political and socio-economic movements in the first century after Confederation, some of which were inevitably contradictory.

From the Pulpit to the Public

Two of the largest and most influential institutions in British North America at the start of the 19th century were the Anglican (or Church of England) and Catholic Churches. Wherever there were Scots, there were Presbyterian churches as well, although this was in fact a number of fractious denominations that only converged around the

time of Confederation. Methodists constituted the next most populous sect, and there were significant numbers of Congregationalists in the colonies, particularly in New Brunswick. But the two principal Christian churches — Catholic and Anglican — were head and shoulders above the competition in terms of adherents and political influence. The authority of the Anglicans was part of the very fibre of the Family Compacts in the English-speaking colonies and in anglophone Montreal; Catholicism enjoyed a near monopoly in French-Canada. Both churches were broadly engaged with civil society, providing much of pre-Confederation Canada's [educational](#), [welfare](#), and healthcare infrastructure. Bishops and Archbishops endeavoured to set much of the moral tone and brokered power between the colonial governors and the secular leadership. Their values were simultaneously very conservative (in the case of Quebec's Catholic clergy, they were defensively so in the face of Anglo-Protestant hostility) and community-minded.

Much of the history of political struggle in Canada overlaps with the history of sectarian conflict. The Presbyterian and Methodist elements objected to the authority exerted by the Anglicans in what became Ontario; the mid-19th century Reform Party was overwhelmingly drawn from the **non-conformist churches**, while the Tories were essentially the political wing of the Anglican Church. The situation was similar in most parts of pre-Confederation Canada, although clearly different in Quebec where Anglicans and Presbyterians were allied against Catholics. Sectarian turmoil was not uncommon, and it is important to recall the vigour with which Orange elements attacked the rights — and the bodies — of Catholics in Saint John, Toronto, Red River, and elsewhere in Victorian Canada. This background underlines the extent to which divisions between denominations mattered, emotionally and practically, to Confederation-era Canadians.

As the Dominion of Canada project got underway these relationships evolved and became important in new ways. The Victorian years witnessed the rise of new Christian denominations while some older sects changed their course. It is impossible to imagine these new elements occurring outside of the context of industrialism and other socio-economic disruptions in the Victorian era. The Presbyterians, Methodists, and Congregationalists — along with “Low” Anglicans — were already critical of the liturgical and hierarchical qualities (sometimes called “Churchianity” as opposed to Christianity) of the “High” Anglican and Catholic Churches, and the instances where it seemed political leaders were following the Archbishop or even the Pope rather than the electorate. But the influence of **evangelicalism** was embodied in smaller denominations like the Lutherans and Baptists, in elements within Methodism and Congregationalism (both of which were growing in popularity), and in entirely new churches like the **Salvation Army** — posed a challenge to the **established churches'** view of spiritual redemption and, implicitly, to social relations.

The 19th century evangelicals include profoundly different and distinctive voices and theological viewpoints. Many — the Salvation Army in particular — were very urban in their outlook, and all took the perspective that personal and direct salvation was a possibility. This was a critique of the older churches' mediation of the relationship between the individual and God. While this brought the individual into sharp focus, it had the almost perverse effect of making the social more obvious. The evangelicals' view, however, was one of a society made up of individuals (a view that was consistent with the rising tide of democracy), as opposed to one made up of categories and castes. “Evangelical” itself derives etymologically from “good news” — and the good news was that everyone (and thus the whole of society) could be saved.

The infrastructure of the Social Gospel included bricks and mortar as well as personnel. The centre for much of the movement's development was Wesley College in Winnipeg, a Methodist post-secondary institution established in 1888. The intersection of late-Victorian Methodism — with its redemptive message, culture of outreach, and largely working-class constituency — and the city of Winnipeg — growing at an explosive rate into the capital city of the whole West — was critical to the development of the ideals of the Social Gospel at Wesley College. Salem Bland (1859-1950) moved from central Canada to a professorship at Wesley in 1903, where he nurtured a generation of Social Gospel leaders. These include two founders of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF): James Shaver (J.S.) Woodsworth (1874-1942) and William “Bill” Irvine (1885-1962) (see [Section 7.9](#)). Wesley College students, faculty, and graduates played an increasingly vocal role in criticizing the conduct of the Great War, some of them (like Woodsworth) embracing **pacifism**, others attacking wartime profiteering. They were also active in the events around the Winnipeg General Strike ([Section 3.9](#)) and together believed that if revolution was coming, it would be a revolution of religion and the establishment of a new order, with Social Gospel evangelism at its centre.¹



Figure 7.7 The elegant, gothic sandstone facade of Wesley Hall (opened in 1895). In 1938 it became United College, and in 1967 the University of Winnipeg.

What this new — and extremely popular, entertaining, and challenging — religious movement discovered, of course, was that salvation was hard work particularly when the sinners in the crosshairs are living their lives in squalor, poverty, addiction, and ignorance. Saving souls was one thing; saving society was another.

Building a Heaven on Earth

The range of projects in which the Social Gospellers engaged was broad but they shared some core elements. Temperance was one, fighting the causes of poverty was another (although methods might differ drastically), and a representative cross-section took an interest in eugenics. In Central and Eastern Canada the focus was heavily on urban squalor and sin, while in the West there was a stronger emphasis on the project of building a new and ideal society from the ground up.

1. Ramsay Cook, "Ambiguous Heritage: Wesley College and the Social Gospel Re-considered," *Manitoba History*, 19 (Spring 1990).

Their approaches combined elements of faith and science, a feature that further distinguished them from the Anglicans and Catholics (although both of the big churches would change in this regard in the 20th century). Sometimes these combinations produced contradictions. The Social Gospel interest in eugenics, for example, arose from an awareness of advances in biological sciences. It might be argued that their commitment to the view that genes (nature) trumped environment (nurture) was inconsistent with their view that the physical world mired the individual in sin. They criticized, as well, the role of the non-evangelical faiths in matters of government, while simultaneously seeking to create a more activist and interventionist state. Regardless of these contradictions, the Social Gospellers constitute the first generation of Christian thinkers to understand sin and redemption through a science lens, and to attempt to resolve it through the further application of science and social innovation.

Social Gospellers were prepared to make full use of the arsenal of modern technology, engineering, and planning. Clean water and well-lit streets were as critical to this project as any Sunday sermon. At the same time, they recast the issues of moral failings from the individual (e.g., drinking or ignorance) to the social (e.g., alcoholism or lack of educational opportunity). As the century closed and a new one began, some of the concerns of the Social Gospellers shifted to questions associated with immigrant communities. Many of the newcomers were neither Protestant nor Catholic and were regarded by some Social Gospellers as a threat in their own right. Education might play a role in assimilating immigrants, but reformers' suspicion of the Eastern European or Asian Canadian proved hard to shake, and it would provide part of the context for the spread of eugenics across the Social Gospel movement.

Targeting Reform

The array of crusades launched by the various branches of the Social Gospel movement included high-level politics and street-level service. Missions and “settlement houses” were established among the urban poor and in Aboriginal communities. The Salvation Army became active in city centres, on reserves, and in the North. Wilfred Grenfell opened his own mission in Labrador, in 1893. Methodists in the 1880s joined with other denominations in establishing residential schools for Aboriginal students (see Sections 11.7, 11.8, 11.9, 11.10, and 11.11); support for these projects came from Social Gospellers who saw them as an instrument of assimilation into an advanced Christian- and Anglo-Canadian culture and also as “schools that met the practical and physical needs of Aboriginal peoples.”² The settlement houses were, similarly, located on the boundary between social change and **social control**: they offered daycare, some schooling, help finding employment, language classes for immigrants, and so on, but they were also centres for transferring and imposing the dominant societies' moral values to newcomers. It was this combination of targeted Christian good deeds among the poor, the voiceless, and the colonized, the moral regulation of deviant (including alien) behaviour, and efforts to counter the ill effects of capitalism and urban life that characterized most Social Gospel activities.

The Social Gospel Style

Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944) was arguably the most famous Canadian of her time. Born Amie

2. Eleanor J. Stebner, “More than Maternal Feminists and Good Samaritans: Women and the Social Gospel in Canada,” in *Gender and the Social Gospel*, eds. Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 57.

Elizabeth Kennedy in Salford, Ontario, she was influenced by the Salvation Army (still very much a new thing in late Victorian Canada), married at 18, widowed at 19 (while pregnant with her first child), remarried at 22, divorced at 29, married for a third time at 41 years, and divorced again three years later. Her travels across North America matched her tumultuous personal life: she relocated to the United States in her 20s and dedicated her life to evangelizing.

Semple McPherson was a barnstorming preacher who was increasingly associated with the emergent Pentacostal faith. Moving to Los Angeles in 1918 put Semple McPherson at the centre of what was just emerging as America's West Coast metropolis and film industry capital. Huge and elaborate stage sets were produced for her revivalist meetings, and the level of theatricality in Semple McPherson's sermons was both astonishing and of the highest quality. Her meetings were attended by as many as 40,000 at their peak, and were often chaotic and fevered; their unpredictable and inventive features influenced other evangelicals and event producers for generations. The most elaborate of her performances were not entirely unlike 1970s and 1980s stadium-venue rock concerts, and the temple she built in Los Angeles owed more to music halls than to cathedrals. Moreover, Semple McPherson crossed media by combining live performances with film and radio broadcasts. She was a superstar before the term was invented.



Figure 7.8 Small town Canadian girl makes good. Aimee Semple McPherson was already a force with which to reckon at 33 years of age when she raised the Angelus Temple on the strength of donations in cash and kind.

There was room for only one Aimee Semple McPherson, but the Social Gospel and the evangelical trend both produced her, and was influenced by her. Some of the leading figures in the movement in Canada came from the pulpits, and many learned how to be political and rally speakers from watching and hearing the evangelicals in action. On the Left, J.S. Woodsworth was a Methodist minister and Tommy Douglas (1904-1986) was a Baptist preacher. Both men went on to lead the early CCF as champions for social change. Nellie McClung (1873-1951) was defined by her Social Gospel credo as much as her father's Methodism; she sat in the Alberta legislature as

a Liberal member. Further to the Right, William (“Bible Bill”) Aberhart (1878-1943) was an ardent Baptist who established his own evangelical organization — the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute — and created the Social Credit Party as a means to achieve greater social equity through financial reforms (see [Section 7.9](#)). His successor at both the evangelical and secular level was Ernest Manning (1908-1996), who was raised in a generation that could identify its creed as simply “evangelical.” Manning went on to become one of the most successful politicians (in terms of longevity) in Canadian history, and he was the father of the late 20th century Reform Party leader, Preston Manning (b. 1942). Both Ernest Manning and Aberhart followed Semple McPherson’s pioneering work in radio as a means to reach into rural and urban households alike with social, economic, and political messages. All of these individuals shared in that evangelical, crusading, and urgent approach to modernity that demanded change based on the goal of a Christian moral civilization.



Figure 7.9 Tommy Douglas.

[Watch this undated recording by Tommy Douglas on *The Cream Separator*](#). Tommy Douglas uses a familiar clergyman’s rhetorical technique, the parable, to deliver a moral lesson that crosses into the political. Many Canadian politicians still attempt to approximate this style, which is rooted in the Social Gospel experience of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Opposition

Mainstream resistance to the Social Gospel message was powerful and persistent. The Anglican and Catholic Churches had their own agendas of social change, but these involved the preservation of social hierarchies, which, the left-wing of the Social Gospel would say, were at the foundation of social injustice. The further to the left some of the Social Gospellers moved, the more likely they were to be associated by their opponents with socialism and communism. In truth, while some of the Social Gospellers found their way toward social democracy, the Christian heart of the movement was a rampart against the secularism of communist movements. Right-wingers, too, fell afoul of the mainstream. When Aberhart attacked the banking system and attempted to dilute the national currency

(with what was derided as “funny money”), he was twisting the tail of old money in Montreal and Toronto. (His conservative evangelicalism and suspicion of international money interests also drew a charge of anti-Semitism.)

The very populism of the Social Gospel — its mass appeal and its folksy, inclusive style — was dismissed by Liberals and Conservatives as the work of “teachers and preachers.” Calls for fair treatment of labour organizations, relief to farmers caught by rising costs and falling farm produce prices at the end of the Great War, and money support for the unemployed in the 1930s were ignored by the old parties. Their intransigence across the first four decades of the 20th century cost them significant support and resulted in the creation of the United Farmers parties across English-speaking Canada, several of which formed governments at the provincial level. The Progressive Party followed, as did the CCF and Social Credit (see [Section 7.9](#)).

These Social Gospel experiments in politics also drew fire from the Left. Socialist and communist organizations were suspicious and critical of the Christian agenda of the Social Gospel, regarding it as a fruitless and delusional attempt to manage the worst excesses of capitalism. Achieving “a society of justice, equality and freedom from economic oppression,” the socialists and communists argued, would require more than “good Samaritanism.”³ Many of the country’s early 20th century hard-leftists were drawn from the new immigrant community; the Social Gospel’s record of xenophobia (perhaps articulated best by Woodsworth in his 1909 book, *Strangers Within Our Gates*) further alienated Eastern Europeans and Scandinavians who were comfortable with the politics of communism.

For Social Gospel women, the track record of the old political parties as regards temperance and suffrage spoke for itself. Women who wanted to achieve social reform through electoral politics were more likely to find a home in the newer, smaller parties than they were among the Grits and Tories. Agnes Macphail (Progressive), Dorise Nielsen (CCF), and Gladys Strum (CCF) were three of the first five women elected to Ottawa. In 1944, Strum became the first woman to head up a provincial or federal political party when she took the presidency of the Saskatchewan CCF. At the provincial level, Louise McKinney (Nonpartisan League and United Farmers of Alberta) and Roberta MacAdams (nonpartisan) were both elected in 1917. Although women would also enjoy electoral success in the Liberal and Conservative parties, the progressive agendas of early feminists both contributed to, and would be better received, in the **third parties**.

3. Eleanor J. Stebner “More than Maternal Feminists and Good Samaritans: Women and the Social Gospel in Canada,” *Gender and the Social Gospel*, eds. Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003): 62.

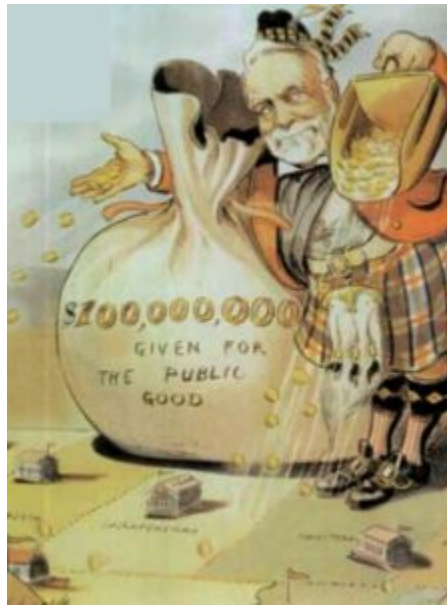


Figure 7.10 Andrew Carnegie's unparalleled campaign of personal philanthropy left a mark on Canadian cities from coast to coast. This image comes from the British *Punch* magazine in 1903.

Measuring the intellectual consequence of a movement like the Social Gospel is difficult. It was so diffuse and appeared in so many guises that it inevitably overlapped with other engines of change. For example, the Scottish-American industrialist Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) was considered by his contemporary critics as the embodiment of the rapacious industrialist, whose enormous wealth was won at the expense of terrible working and living conditions for his employees; he wrote, however, on *The Gospel of Wealth* in 1889, calling for applied philanthropy on the part of his peers. In the last two decades of his life, he belonged to a Social Gospel church in New York and contributed millions of dollars to the improvement of civic and social infrastructure, a good deal of it in Canada. Philanthropy and charity were among the evangelical values promoted by the Social Gospel, and they remain important qualities in Canadian society, but they do not necessarily speak to the goal of social redemption. Nor, on the face of it, does social legislation like the *Ontario Workmen's Compensation Act of 1914*, which was nonetheless the product of Social Gospel lobbying. What can be said with some confidence is that the influence of the social gospel outlasted its earliest spokeswomen and men, and can yet be seen in the fabric of social welfare laws and in the language of debates about urban conditions and inequality.



Figure 7.11 Vancouver was one of many Canadian cities to receive a Carnegie Library, which opened in 1903 next door to the City Hall.

Key Points

- The Social Gospel movement grew out of changes in Protestant denominations and the rise of new churches in the 19th century.
- It was informed by deteriorating social and economic conditions in cities, and approached reform in urban areas and in remote and Aboriginal communities with missionary tactics.
- Elements within the Social Gospel movement were centred on Wesleyan College in Winnipeg, where a strongly social democratic wing developed.
- Social Gospellers targeted urban and social reform and some adopted new media and performance opportunities to produce a highly theatrical style outside of the traditional pulpit.
- The influence of the Social Gospel on Canadian politics and urban landscapes remains significant.

Attributions

Figure 7.6

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Figure 7.7

[UofW](#) by [KrazyTea](#) is under a [CC BY SA 3.0](#) license.

Figure 7.8

[ASM-AngelusTemple Plaque 1923 02](#) by Foursquare Church Heritage Center is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 7.9

[Tommycropped](#) by [Samuell](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 7.10

[Carnegie-1903](#) by Louis Dalrymple is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 7.11

Postcard: [Carnegie Library and City Hall, c.1905](#) by [Rob](#) is in the [public domain](#).

4.5 Temperance and Prohibition

Alcohol consumption in Canada was prodigious in the early 19th century, and it hardly changed over the rest of the century. Any economy so heavily dependent on the production of wheat, rye, and other grains is going to quickly find a vent for surplus that involves fermentation. Some of the earliest and largest fortunes in both Upper and Lower Canada (Ontario and Quebec) were made in the brewing and distilling industries. Home manufacture was, of course, unregulated and widespread. The 19th century saw the growth of a movement culture around managing liquor production, sale, and consumption. It had many facets, and it was to prove the core movement around which many others revolved, and from which almost all 19th and 20th century reform movements would recruit their campaigners.

Drink Canada Dry

Rural drinking did not go unnoticed, nor was it without its critics. But it was different from what came after Confederation. Early attempts to “temper” or manage the consumption of liquor in British North America appear in the Canadas and the Maritime colonies in the 1830s and 1840s. These were “collective acts of individualism; each drinker who renounced the bottle was affirming the triumph of his or her will and the intent to meet the social and economic challenges that lay ahead.”¹ Viewed this way, pre-Confederation temperance was not a mass movement in that it was scaled down to the personal and the communal.

The late Victorian boom in city populations, however, propelled concern about liquor consumption to the forefront of public debate, and called for a mass and collective, rather than individualistic, response. As the economy came to value armies of men who could work in the resource-extraction sector or construction, the popularity of drink only increased. It is no coincidence that British Columbia, in 1893, boasted a resource-extraction economy with a severely distorted male:female ratio, and the highest per capita consumption of alcohol.² Nor should it be surprising to find that women’s consumption of alcohol increased in the Victorian era in step with the demand for single women in wage-labour. Wage earning, generally, was a critical element in the construction of a “wet” Canada.

So, too, was the environment. Urban reformers focused much of their energy on water quality issues for good reason. With horse manure carpeting town and city streets, pigs fouling the roads and streams, and human waste

1. Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, “‘John Barleycorn Must Die’: An Introduction to the Social History of Alcohol,” *Drink in Canada: Historical Essays*, Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993): 12.

2. Warsh, “‘John Barleycorn Must Die’”: 13-15.

disposed of in haphazard ways, there was no way that urban water supplies would remain reliable for long. The situation in Nanaimo was probably not unusual. There, as early as 1864, locals were signing petitions about water quality issues. Household sewage was being dumped by the bucket-load on the streets. Two decades later, it was finding its way into a ravine or the harbour, where it was revealed on the shoreline with every low tide. Some went into an abandoned coal mine underneath the downtown. As was the case with most Victorian towns before the construction of sewers, a “night soil” scavenger collected human waste and removed it to a dump on the edge of town. And, of course, it wasn’t unusual for people to use human manure in their gardens.³ In short, there were plenty of reasons to be concerned about the quality of drinking water; for many, the solution was tea or coffee (made of boiled water) or alcohol (germ free, available in a multitude of flavours, and often served in sociable surroundings).

Class and the Glass

The earliest and most constant critics of liquor consumption were the emergent Canadian bourgeoisie. Their liberal ideal of democratic progress and their dependence on effective employees made it inevitable that they would see liquor consumption and drunkenness as a threat to polity and productivity. One historian has argued that this economic and political agenda was complimented by the rise of evangelical Christianity across Canada in the mid-19th century. It wasn’t just that the Baptists and Methodists disapproved of liquor: their creed emphasized personal responsibility for redemption in a way that the **established churches** did not. It was, Craig Heron maintains, this constellation of forces that gave the Temperance Movement an appeal in Canada beyond what it enjoyed in Britain and the other Dominions; the movement was comparably strong in the United States as well, making this one of those cultural moments that has a continental complexion.⁴

If temperance had remained the exclusive preserve of the Canadian bourgeoisie, it would have gathered little momentum. But working people themselves were among the most vocal enemies of liquor. As a part of the community that sought greater inclusion in the political life of Canada and a better deal in the unfolding industrial era, artisans and craft workers articulated a view of respectability that denied alcohol a place in working-class culture. What is more, drink and a disciplined labour movement were incompatible. This was the position taken up by the Knights of Labor across North America (see Sections 3.4 and 3.6) and it was one that would echo through Canadian labour organizations into the 1920s.

The regulation of womanhood in the 19th century was also driving the emergent temperance movement. Maternal feminists based their claim for improved women’s rights and privileges on the strength of women’s reproductive power. In this context, women who drank to excess were jeopardizing themselves, their embryos, and the health of the nation. They were also undermining the claim made by the feminists of superior female morality. Historian Cheryl Krasnick Warsh has shown how the courts in late 19th century Ontario sentenced as many as 803 women in one year under drunk and disorderly charges; women’s share of convictions between 1881 and 1899 averaged

3. John Douglas Belshaw, *Becoming British Columbia: A Population History* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), 162-3.

4. Craig Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2003), 372-3.

16% but ran as high 24% in 1895.⁵ Women's relationship with liquor was thus complex: increasingly dangerous, but at the very heart of an emergent feminist movement.

Another motivating factor at the turn of the century was the arrival of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. Here we see the collision of different cultures of drinking and the (largely Anglo-Protestant) Canadian fear of degenerate foreigners. Xenophobia, and prairie evangelism in particular, responded to the “threat” of foreign newcomers and their use of liquor, which simultaneously “eliminated the possibility of support from immigrants.”⁶

Exercise: Documents

Temperance Posters

Consider the two pre-First World War posters promoting temperance (click on them to see larger versions). The first makes a subtle eugenicist case for temperance — can you see it? The other provides evidence that smokers don't fare well when they try out for college teams. What's wrong with those statistics?

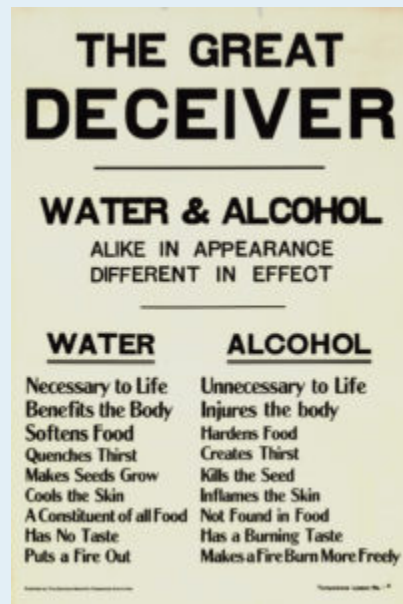


Figure 7.E1 Dominion Scientific Temperance Committee, ca.1912.

5. Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, “‘Oh, Lord, pour a cordial in her wounded heart’: The Drinking Woman in Victorian and Edwardian Canada,” *Drink in Canada: Historical Essays*, ed. Cheryl Krasnick Warsh (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993): 76-7.

6. Warsh, “‘John Barleycorn Must Die’”: 16-17.

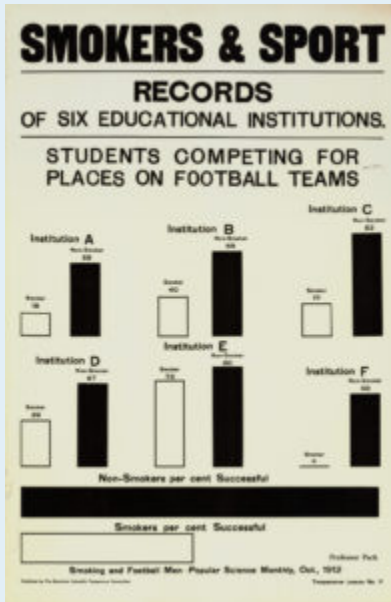


Figure 7.E2 Dominion Scientific Temperance Committee, ca.1912.

Historian of the liquor economy, drinking, and the dries Craig Heron (York University) discusses temperance.

Temperance

Before the Great War, the focus of the temperance crusade was the local and not the federal level. The possibility of regulating the sale and consumption of liquor seemed reasonable to some, and in 1878, the federal government passed enabling legislation, the *Canada Temperance Act*, which enabled the local option of prohibition through referenda. Like all referenda, the local option effectively lifts from the shoulders of legislators the burden of making a choice on behalf of their constituents. It necessitates the involvement of the local electorate in direct decision-making around an ideal that has not been expressed in the form of a policy. (Members of Parliament debate actual bills that they can see and hold and on which they may offer editorial suggestions; referenda typically ask for general agreement on a broad principal without providing any of the details.) The likelihood of winning a national referendum on prohibition was slim but at the municipal level, it might succeed.

New Brunswickers seized upon the possibility of prohibiting public consumption of alcohol in the 1880s. Ten counties out of fifteen voted in favour of prohibition, and yet the sale of alcohol continued unabated. One study observes that “Moncton was, paradoxically, a prohibitionist town in which the liquor trade continued to flourish” from 1881 through the 1890s.⁷ Enforcement issues plagued this experiment (as it would in many others); local

7. Jacques Paul Couturier, “Prohibition or Regulation? The Enforcement of the Canada Temperance Act in Moncton, 1881-1896,” *Drink in Canada: Historical Essays*, ed. Cheryl Krasnick Warsh (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993): 146-7.

police knew who was selling alcohol but were divided in their loyalties. One historian captures the situation perfectly: “relations between members of the police force and the liquor community were fluid.”⁸



Figure 7.12 Fearing for their livelihood, Toronto barmen take to the street in 1916.

No other province would advance the temperance campaign as far as New Brunswick until the 20th century. One reason for the failure of the “drys” to gain ground was the presence and power of the “wets.” Commercial distillers in Canada could be found among the wealthiest member-families of the elite. Seagram, Labatt, Molson, Keith, Wiser, Carling, O’Keefe, and — in the early 20th century — Bronfman are names associated even now with the alcohol industry, and with families who held powerful directorships in other industries (including banks and railroads) and had significant political influence as well.⁹ They employed huge numbers of Canadians and, despite the reach of the CPR, local breweries and distilleries were also competitive and important economically until the 1920s.

Of course, not everyone in the middle or working classes wanted to go dry. Working men, returning soldiers, and members of the non-evangelical churches were highly unlikely to favour diminished access to booze. Young middle class women who entered the workforce in large numbers in the Edwardian years, and during the war, were a catalyst in the development of relatively respectable drinking “lounges” and, thus, became another population opposed to temperance. But this was the face of public drinking; the consumption of alcohol in private spaces was also a target of temperance agitators, and that aligned the elites and many middle class households against temperance. Insofar as the ranks of prohibitionists overlapped with anti-Catholic forces, they drove the Catholic Church into the arms of the wets (although where they were unbothered by assimilationist Protestants, the Catholic leadership was as likely to be dry).¹⁰ There were, too, voices raised against the state regulation of liquor as a worrying example of growing governmental power.

Prohibition

The efforts of the temperance movement peaked in 1914 and were stayed by the outbreak of war. Unwilling to fight on two fronts, the issue was put to one side until it became clear that the Great War was not going to be brief. Increasingly, the consumption of liquor at home seemed an offence to the sacrifice being made abroad. Concerns

8. *ibid.*: 156.

9. Derrek Eberts, “To Brew or Not to Brew: A Brief History of Beer in Canada,” *Manitoba History*, 54 (February 2007), accessed 26 July 2015, http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/54/beerincanada.shtml.

10. Heron, *Booze*, 191-6.

were raised about productivity as well (a familiar theme in temperance circles in the industrial age). Province-wide referenda were organized, and by 1917, prohibition had arrived or was on its way in every province but Quebec, where one could buy wine or light beers, but not hard alcohol (see [Section 6.5](#)). It didn't last. Returned soldiers were upset that the country had gone "dry" in their absence and felt that they had earned the right to drink after months and years in the trenches of Belgium and France. Quebec and British Columbia were the first to abandon prohibition in favour of regulation and government-controlled liquor sales in 1921. Prohibition was lifted in three provinces and the Yukon Territory by 1921; it didn't last much longer in Alberta and Saskatchewan, but it held on longest in the Maritimes. The Dominion of Newfoundland prohibited possession or drinking of liquor from 1917 to 1924.

Thereafter, the legal and illegal production of liquor in both Dominions exploded in an attempt to meet demand for the banned substance south of the border.¹¹ American prohibition continued until 1933, creating a smuggling industry in every West Coast, East Coast, and Great Lakes Canadian town within range of an American market. While the heaviest traffic passed between the vicinity of Windsor, Ontario and Detroit, Michigan there was also extensive illicit trade between the nominally-dry Maritimes and the whole American East Coast.



Figure 7.13 Liquor stills captured during prohibition in Vancouver, 1917.

Rum-running was a feature of Vancouver's black economy as well. The chain of Gulf and San Juan Islands provided some cover, as did the multitude of tiny bays and inlets around Puget Sound. Fortunes were made on the strength of boats that could outrun Coast Guard patrols and the RCMP.¹² East Coast smugglers eluded local officials by claiming they were shipping out consignments to the Caribbean islands when, in fact, they were headed to Boston or New York. There were accusations that the Newfoundland government, under Premier Sir Richard Squires (1880-1940), "had turned the Board of Liquor Control into a covert bootlegging operation, the profits from 'private' sales going into his political account."¹³ Inland smugglers thrived as well, including those in Madawaska County (aka: the New Brunswick Panhandle) and the Kootenays in southern BC; both were remote

11. Mark C. Hunter, "Changing the Flag: The Cloak of Newfoundland Registry for American Rum-Running, 1924-34," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, 21/1 (2005).

12. Daniel Francis, *Closing Time: Prohibition, Rum-Runners, and Border Wars* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2014), 128.

13. Margaret R. Conrad and James K. Hiller, *Atlantic Canada: A Concise History* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2006), 170.

and lightly-policed areas with porous borders. On the West Coast, this was what one study calls “the respectable crime” and the ranks of rum-runners in BC included members of very well-placed families.¹⁴



Figure 7.14 The sail/steam combination ship, the *Malahat* (described as a “Mabel Brown class” vessel) was known as the “Queen of Rum Row” on the West Coast. It served as a floating liquor warehouse to smaller, faster craft and was the source of much of the wealth earned by Vancouver’s Reifel family.

Historical studies of rum-running mention women too often to suggest that their involvement was exceptional. The production of small quantities of home-brew liquor was almost certainly work that women did, but they also played frontline roles in the sale and delivery of banned cargo. One study explains that high unemployment rates in the Maritimes in the 1920s were more crippling for women than for men, a fact that propelled many single mothers — some of them, of course, war widows — into smuggling. A Mrs. Donnie Hart of Saint John stands as a good example: arrested no less than once every year between 1916 and 1924, she worked as a bootlegger in order to provide for her family.¹⁵



Figure 7.15 A liquor raid at Elk Lake, Ontario, 1925. Illegal production of liquor wasn’t a problem before regulation.

Prohibition combined several contradictory forces. It was a manifestation of democratic will, a case of state intervention in the economy, and it was instrumental in building up urban police forces as well. Simultaneously, it diminished the rights of the individual, curtailed urban enterprise, and made public policy of private morality.

14. Stephen J. Moore, *Bootleggers and Borders: The Paradox of Prohibition on a Canada-U.S. Borderland* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 56.

15. Ernest R. Forbes, “The East-Coast Rum-Running Economy,” *Drink in Canada: Historical Essays*, ed. Cheryl Krasnick Warsh (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993): 168.

It was both a modern and anti-modern force (see Chapter 10). Both sides in this debate advanced the use and sophistication of modern advertising as they campaigned for, on the one side, hearts and minds, and on the other, dry throats and vulnerable livers. The campaign against liquor, then, introduces a panoply of historical themes. It also introduces many of the key players in other crusades.

The Language of Liquor

Given the central place of liquor in the social lives of Canadians (past and present), it is no surprise to find that the vocabulary around drinking is both extensive and potentially confusing. What follows is not an exhaustive list of terms. It is weighted towards west coast usages and, worse still, none of these words are used in the past or present with razor-sharp precision, but nonetheless it may be helpful.

Where:

Saloon – Generally a drinking establishment not attached to a hotel or restaurant, usually urban. There are few restrictions on standing or moving about, and probably not much in the way of food.

Pub or Public House – These were often attached to roadside inns and “milehouses” in the mid- to late-19th century. They provided drink by the glass, and in larger take-away quantities, and often served food as well. A few survivors from that era kept the term in use and then it was revived in the 1970s with the spread of faux pubs (essentially saloons with somewhat better food and design that mimics an ideal of English or Irish drinking establishments).

Beer parlours/taverns – 20th century; a regulated and licensed private establishment in which the public can drink beer by the glass; standing at the bar is prohibited in most provinces; there is usually not much in the way of food to soak up that beer. In British Columbia, there were for many years restrictions on women’s entry (they had to use the “Ladies & Escorts” door) to restrict heterosexual mingling and, ostensibly, the sex trade. In beer parlours until the late-20th century, moreover, patrons were not allowed to carry their drinks from one table to another. Attempts to do so promoted the command to “sit down and drink your beer.”¹⁶

Boozecan, Blind pig, Speakeasy – Colloquial terms for illegal drinking establishments. These were called into existence by the increasing regulation of drink from the late Victorian-era, and especially so during Prohibition. Even after Prohibition ended in Canada, there were illegal establishments that sought to evade repressive regulation.

Who:

Drys – Advocates for the limitation, if not outright prohibition, of alcohol production, sale, and consumption.

Wets – Opponents to the above. This camp includes people who wanted to drink and also the powerful brewers, distillers, and other representatives of the liquor interests.

Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) – One of the largest and most effective anti-drink lobbies in Canada. Established in 1874, months after its first branch was announced in the United States, the WCTU emerged as a vehicle for contiguous reforms in public behaviour, the political environment, and social conditions.

Rum-runners – Vendors of alcohol (not just rum) who ship it illegally across provincial or national boundaries into territories where there are sanctions — like Prohibition — against the sale of liquor.

16. Robert A. Campbell, *Sit Down and Drink Your Beer: Regulating Vancouver's Beer Parlours, 1925-1954* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

Bootleggers – Anyone who sells liquor illegally. This term is used in the past to cover the rum-runners but its domestic face, historically, was the couple who sold cheap homebrew off their back porch, and the taxi driver who augmented his income with deliveries of bottles to homes and hotel rooms.

Liquor Control Boards – Provincial agencies created in the 1920s to regulate post-prohibition drinking and alcohol sales. These all became a major source of revenue for provincial governments.

When:

Sundays – Highly unlikely. During the era of the six-day work-week, Sunday was the only opportunity working people had to enjoy rest and leisure. That meant, too, that drinking was most likely to be heaviest on Sundays. But this was a red rag to the Temperance Movement bull — doubly bad because it combined sin with the Sabbath. Sunday closing rules were subsequently introduced in the early 20th century, and survived in most parts of Canada until the 1970s and 1980s.

When it's quiet – Music and performances of all kinds used to go nicely with a drink in the 19th century. Joe Beef's Tavern in Montreal — like many others in the Victorian era — brought together music, dancing bears, gambling, boisterous debate, and drink; low-brow entertainments became so closely associated with public drinking that reformers targeted both simultaneously.¹⁷ As Craig Heron puts it, "In English Canada, both before and after prohibition, the isolation of public drinking from music and other forms of entertainment undoubtedly stifled the growth of popular music and popular theatre in Canada, compared to what was seen in Britain and Ireland. Montreal's nightclubs were a special case, where drink and music were allowed to co-exist and, coincidentally, where Canada's most vigorous jazz scene developed. Canada's booze legislation, then, contributed to the country's international reputation as a coldly austere, culturally repressed country whose public cultural life matched its often forbidding climate."¹⁸

What to Do:

Abstinence – The anti-drink advocates began their crusade with a call to abstain from drinking. It threw the responsibility onto the individual and, in the rhetoric of reform-minded Christianity, there were moral and eternal consequences for not abstaining. The parallel moment in the anti-drug movement of the last 30 years would be the "This is your brain on drugs" campaign, launched in 1987.

Temperance – If you can't completely give up the booze then at least drink in moderation. This approach was adopted by many drinkers but by the 1870s, by fewer and fewer within the temperance movement itself. By that time, the movement had become more intolerant of drink and organizations like the WCTU called for all-out prohibition. Mid- to late-19th century temperance agitators moved the discourse around drink from a personal and individual level to a social level, and from moral consequences to social consequences; they argued that the impact of liquor extended far beyond the drinker.

Prohibition – Taking the social agenda a step further, the prohibition movement called for state intervention and the total eradication of liquor. Implicitly, this meant that the question of individual choice was resolved in favour of state and police authority. Prohibition meant that individual effort was insufficient and that moral consequences weren't driving change fast enough: legal and financial consequences had to be brought to bear, and these could (and did) include jail time.

Teetotalism – Often misunderstood as "tea"-totalism, the teetotal movement was an expression of the abstinence movement in that it promoted personal resolve and self-restraint on the liquor issue rather than legal sanctions.

Seek the help of a professional – Fortunes were made during prohibition by the producers and vendors of so-called "medicinal" alcohol. Products containing small quantities of alcohol were marketed as bitters,

17. Peter DeLottinville, "Joe Beef of Montreal: Working-Class Culture and Tavern, 1869-1889," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 8/9 (Autumn/Spring 1981/82): 9-40.

18. Heron, *Booze*, 378-9.

cocktails, and energy drinks.¹⁹ A cooperative physician or pharmacist might be able to supply what you need.

Key Points

- Alcohol consumption in Canada increased and became more obvious with late 19th century urbanization.
- The temperance movement gained extra force in Canada because of the parallel rise of the evangelical denominations, the support of working class organizations, the role of maternal feminists, and fears associated with immigrants from non-traditional sources.
- Temperance was initially implemented on a municipality-by-municipality basis. Provincial referenda followed in the Great War, at which time both Canada and Newfoundland mostly went dry.
- The end of Prohibition in Canada and its continuance in the United States created opportunities for rum-runners on every shoreline.

Attributions

Figure 7.E1

[The Great Deceiver](#) by Dominion Scientific Temperance Committee, Provincial Archives of Alberta, PR1974.0001.0400a.0011 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 7.E2

[Smokers and Sport](#) by Dominion Scientific Temperance Committee, Provincial Archives of Alberta, PR1974.0001.0400a.0011 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 7.12

[One half mile of barmen along Yonge Street during the Prohibition parade \(Online MIKAN no.3193202\)](#) by John Boyd / Library and Archives Canada / PA-072524 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 7.13

[CVA 480-215 – View of liquor stills captured during Prohibition](#) by Vancouver Police Department / City of Vancouver Archives is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 7.14

[StateLibQld 1 147135 Malahat \(ship\)](#) by John Oxley Library is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 7.15

[Raid at elk lake](#) by C.H.J Snider fonds is in the [public domain](#).

19. Jason Vanderhill, "The Daniel Joseph Kennedy Story," *Vancouver Confidential*, ed. John Belshaw (Vancouver: Anvil, 2014): 39-58

4.6 Secular Canada

Vol. XXXV, No. 1.	JANUARY, 1900
Secular Thought.	
<i>A Monthly Journal of Rational Criticism In Politics, Science, and Religion.</i>	
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Figure 10.8 Ideals of science, progress, technology, and reason had been running up against religion and faith for centuries. By the 20th century, the tide was running with the secularists.

A key feature of modernity is **secularism**, the movement away from religious belief most often manifested in the separation of church and state. Anticlericalism in the 19th century took the position that the business of the church was saving souls, not running schools or hospitals, and certainly not influencing governments. In English-speaking Canada, secularism was often a compromise solution to a culture that featured multiple denominations — mainly Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and Congregationalist — none of which could lay claim to a majority of the population. If there was not one creed that could lead, then none would. This goes some distance to explain the suspicion and, indeed, hostility felt by many Anglo-Protestants to the roles played in Quebec by the Catholic Church.

And yet, as the secular, democratic state was growing in modernist English Canada, so too was the popularity of certain faiths. The consolidation in 1925 of the Methodist, Congregationalist, and (most of) the Presbyterian churches into the **United Church of Canada** strengthened that wing of Protestantism, making it overnight the

third largest denomination in the country. Within the member-denominations of the United Church — and among the Anglicans as well — there were strong Social Gospel elements (see [Chapter 7](#)). So, while secularism and modernism called for a separation of church and state, religious activists were often political and social activists as well. While United Church adherents would generally throw their support behind the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, Catholics supported the Liberal Party, and Anglicans the Conservatives.

Organized religion, in short, still played a vital role in political and social life. This was nowhere more apparent than in the rise of evangelical Protestantism in the 20th century (aspects of which are considered in [Sections 7.6](#) and [7.9](#)). Essentially antimodernist in its outlook, sects like the Union Baptists and the Pentecostal Church tended towards a study of and adherence to what they called the “fundamentals” of scripture, and thus became known as **fundamentalists**. As Tina Block demonstrates in [Section 10.6](#), there came a tipping point in the middle of the 20th century when secularism became a defining feature of Canadian society in tandem with multicultural trends, at which point the antimodernist forces in Christianity and other creeds were marginalized.

And here we have one of those great 20th-century ironies. The Canadian regime most influenced by the Pentecostal Church and fundamentalist values was that of W.A.C. Bennett in British Columbia from 1952 to 1972. Phil “Flying Phil” Gaglardi (1913-1995), a leader of Pentecostalism in the Interior, regularly boasted that he was both a minister of the Crown and a minister of God. Yet no administration embraced modernity more. The potential of technology, engineering, and science to make a bigger and better economy was an article of faith among the BC Socreds (Social Credit Party). One lesson to be drawn from this is that elements of modernity were so pervasive that even the most conservative chapters of Protestantism could not fully resist their influence.

Religious organizations continued through the remainder of the 20th century to exercise an influence that belied their fall from popular favour. No other organization or institution has sufficient influence to partner with the state in the delivery of education, and the norm in Canada is that religious education is subsidized heavily by the provinces (so as to ensure religious schools’ adherence to provincial curricula). Indeed, disenchantment with public schools encouraged a renewed interest in clerical education in the late 20th century. Schools, however, were also the setting for a worsening crisis in credibility: disclosures of abuse of children by clergy and church-sponsored educators in various settings, but most notably at Mount Cashel Orphanage in St. John’s and in many residential schools, poured forth during the 1980s and on and continue to trouble Canadians.

Key Points

- Secularism — the removal of organized religion from the running of the state and social institutions — is one of the dominant features of modernity.
- Anticlericalism in Catholic-dominated Quebec played out differently from anticlericalism in multi-denominational English-Canada.
- Religious activists often took their perspectives and goals into public life in mainstream political organizations.
- Many denominations and faiths responded to modernism with hostility, seeing it as an agenda

for their marginalization.

Attributions

Figure 10.8

[Secular Thought Cover Image \(Jan. 1909\)](#) by J. S. Ellis is used under a [CC-BY-SA 2.5](#) license.

4.7 Religion And Irreligion In The Postwar World

TINA BLOCK, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, AND THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY

“When one looks back at the 1950s,” writes historian Doug Owsram, “religion stands as one of the great gulfs separating that age from the present.”¹ In that era, Christianity occupied a privileged place in Canadian public life, appearing in most public schools across the country, in the speeches of politicians, and even in the official mandate of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.² The decade and a half following World War II was a time of significant growth for Canada’s Christian churches: church membership levels increased, new churches were built at a rapid rate, and Sunday schools burst at the seams.

Despite clear indicators of church growth, there were also signs that Christianity was losing its hold on Canadian life during the 1950s. Consumer culture was on the rise, and Canadians seemed more preoccupied with material than with spiritual concerns. In cities across Canada, there was a growing demand for professional sporting events on Sundays, challenging older patterns of Sabbath observance.³ Religious holidays, such as Easter and Christmas, became increasingly commercialized. The church pews were filled on Sundays, but religious knowledge, interest, and enthusiasm appeared to be fading. Christian leaders feared that postwar churchgoing had less to do with genuine religious commitment, and more to do with a desire for stability and security after years of economic depression and war.

Dechristianization and the Sixties

As it turns out, Christian leaders had reason to be concerned. Levels of church involvement fell across Canada during the 1960s (the ‘sixties). Moreover, the proportion of Canadians claiming to have no religion grew from 0.4% in 1951 to 4.3% in 1971 — a sharper increase than at any other time in this country’s history.⁴ The changes were especially dramatic in Quebec. As the Quiet Revolution unfolded in that province, many clergy left religious orders and the influence of the Roman Catholic Church waned. Across the country, there were growing challenges

1. Doug Owsram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 103.

2. Gary Miedema, *For Canada’s Sake: Public Religion, Centennial Celebrations, and the Re-making of Canada in the 1960s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), xv.

3. Brian Clarke, “English Speaking Canada from 1854,” in Terrence Murphy and Roberto Perin (eds.), *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996): 357.

4. Mark Noll, “What Happened to Christian Canada?,” *Church History* 75:2 (June 2006): 248.

to the longstanding notion of Canada as a Christian nation. It was during the 1960s, according to historian Gary Miedema, “that the historic privileging of Christianity in Canadian national public life began very visibly to crumble.”⁵

Several factors account for the dechristianization of Canada during the sixties. In that decade, the Christian churches in Canada and beyond came under attack from people both within and outside their congregations. For example, in his 1965 bestseller *The Comfortable Pew*, Pierre Berton lambasted the mainstream churches as complacent and out of touch with the critical issues of the day.⁶ Charged with irrelevancy, Canada’s Christian churches were also edged out, by an expanding state, of their traditional domains of health, education, and welfare. Furthermore, a postwar wave of immigration that included many non-Christian newcomers made the notion of a uniformly Christian Canada untenable. As Canada became more religiously diverse, its public schools came under increasing scrutiny for privileging the Christian faith. In the public realm, Canada started to be represented as a multi-faith nation (rather than exclusively Christian) at state-sponsored events such as the 1967 Centennial celebrations.⁷

At the close of the turbulent sixties, Canada was a different place, religiously, than it had been when it emerged from World War II. It had not become a wholly secular country — most Canadians still maintained some religious beliefs and affiliation. However, Christianity’s position of unquestioned power and privilege in Canadian culture had come to an end, and the churches were no longer widely recognized as the cornerstones of moral authority.

Key Points

- At mid-century, materialism supplanted spirituality as a defining feature of Canadian life.
- Church-going declined in the Cold War era, and a growing share of Canadians claimed to be atheists or otherwise without religious beliefs.
- Dechristianization has been explained by a failing of the mainstream churches, the arrival of newcomers with different belief systems, and the rise of multiculturalism (which challenged the automatic pre-eminence of Christianity).
- The role of the church as arbiters and leaders in moral authority was no longer intact by the 1970s.

5. Miedema, *For Canada’s Sake*, 4.

6. Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew: A Critical Look at Christianity and the Religious Establishment in the New Age* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1965).

7. Miedema, *For Canada’s Sake*, 4.

4.8 Canada Noir



Figure 10.11 Montreal's Saint Catherine Street aglow in neon lights, ca. 1937.

Modernity brought significant social, cultural, and moral changes that not everyone was pleased to see. This produced a rolling tide of uncertainty and anxieties, some of which we refer to as **moral panics**. The temperance movement was rooted in moral panic, as were elements of eugenics. There was a succession of so-called “red scares” in the 20th century, beginning in 1918-19 with the Russian Revolution and followed by a year of general strikes in North America, a decade of unrest during the Depression, and Cold War fears of a nuclear apocalypse (which continued until the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989-91). Building a strong, moral, and disciplined nation that deferred to authority was the goal of many Canadian leaders. Many Canadian citizens did not fall easily into line.

Sins of the City



Figure 10.12 Anna Labelle (alias Mme. Émile Beauchamp) was a powerful Montreal brothel keeper before WWII who kept police on the payroll.

In a recent study of crime and society in early 20th century Halifax, Michael Boudreau makes the argument that Nova Scotian critics of modernity railed against the moral softening of an increasingly secular and ethnically diverse society. This was an essentially antimodernist position that looked backwards to a time of ethnic and spiritual simplicity. Their response to these conditions? Ironically, it involved a very secular and modernist agenda of government agencies, scientific police methods, and the employment of psychologists and other experts who could treat the criminal and the deviant.¹

What was happening in Halifax was playing out in different ways across the country. In Vancouver, long-time mayor L.D. Taylor (1857-1946) repeatedly rebuffed morality crusades, proud of the fact that his city was not a “Sunday school town.” Vancouver’s middle-class voters, however, increasingly challenged his liberal view of “victimless crimes,” and in 1928 defeated him under the banner of “New Town, Not Blue Town.”² Taylor’s relaxed attitude was replaced by an increasingly bureaucratic administrative structure that, at best, talked a good fight. Modernist responses had to be made with the human resources available and many of the people involved in administrations, police departments, and morality crusades were every bit as compromised as the people they sought to change.

1. Michael Boudreau, *City of Order: Crime and Society in Halifax, 1918-35* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012).

2. Daniel Francis, *LD: Mayor Louis Taylor and the Rise of Vancouver* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004), 150.



Figure 10.13 Race + drugs = double-jeopardy. The building beside the middle telephone pole was an opium factory in Vancouver's Chinatown, ca. 1907. Mackenzie King investigated and drew up legislation designed to end the opium trade, beginning the war on drugs even before the Great War got underway.

Modern society was urban, and urban life was a problem that needed solving. Cities, it was feared, were corrupting the morals and the very fibre of Canadians. Gambling, drinking, drugs, illegitimacy, and divorce — not to mention homosexuality — were dreaded, criticized, and policed from the 19th through most of the 20th century. Criminality was often understood in xenophobic ways that, for example, held the Chinese community responsible for gambling and opium; connected the Italian enclaves with violent crime, prostitution, and bootlegging; and connected Eastern Europeans, African-Canadians, and Japanese women with brothels. Indeed, the sex trade seems to have been widely regarded as a field into which Anglo-Celtics and Franco-Canadians could hardly hope to break. Eugenicists weighed into these conversations with their fears for the future of the race (most often meaning the British race), and alleging the corrupting moral influence of immigrants while pointing a finger at the decline of Canadian manhood (and, eventually, womanhood) through urban living.

The goal of clean, safe, go-ahead, and ethical metropolises was elusive, however. Sometimes, it was easier to promote a different vision. Throughout the mid-20th century, Vancouver and Montreal in particular enjoyed reputations as cities in which sins could be serviced. Vancouver was the northern-most stop on an entertainment circuit based in San Francisco, then Los Angeles, and eventually Las Vegas, and which covered the western United States.³ Vaudeville acts, musicians, and variety acts were mainstream elements in this network, but there was also a lively culture of strip-shows and burlesque. Night clubs and music hall-style theatres sprang up across the city centre; at one point, both Hastings Street (now the economically and socially depressed main artery of the Downtown East Side) and Granville Street were billed as the city's "Great White Way" because of the enormous quantity of neon lights that blazed outside entertainment venues. The Cave, Palomar, Penthouse, Commodore, and Isy's Supper Club (later, Isy's Strip City) dominated what passed for the respectable trade, and between them offered thousands of seats most nights to audiences and diners. On the east side, showrooms and tiny venues jostled one another for space and offered a wide variety of entertainments. Because of restrictions on the serving of liquor, some of these clubs facilitated sales of bootlegged alcohol and provided hiding spaces under the tables

3. Becki Ross, *Burlesque West: Showgirls, Sex, and Sin in Postwar Vancouver* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

for bottles brought in by customers. All had a reputation for keeping the local police happy with bribes. Some, more than others, provided a setting for the negotiation of the sale of sex. The combination of alcohol, sex, and music that had an African-American or Asian quality was viewed by critics as the triple-crown of immorality.⁴ Sex and booze and ethnicity combined then to create a very artificial air of exoticism: the sense that this was something not of Canada but, at the same time, available only in Canada.



Figure 10.14 In Vancouver's Chinatown, ca. 1936.

Montreal's burlesque world was even more famous (or notorious) at the time, mainly because Canada's largest city had a strong connection with both New York and Boston. Business elites of these American cities regularly travelled to Montreal, where they were treated to a nightlife that seemed genuinely foreign and *risqué*. Brothels, gin-joints, and gambling thrived through the first half of the century, mostly under the eye of Mayor Camillien Houde (1889-1958). Like Taylor, Houde was a populist, a man of the people, despite his snappy suits and glossy shoes. He supported fascists in the 1930s, opposed conscription and was branded a traitor by his English-speaking opponents, served time at Petawawa during WWII, and reemerged in 1945 more popular than ever. Under Houde, Montreal was an "open" city with limited restrictions on the sex trade, betting, and drinking. This was an affront to the sternly moralistic *Union Nationale* regime of Premier Maurice Duplessis (discussed in [Section 9.9](#)), and opposition to libertine Montreal grew through the 1950s. By 1955, a corner had been turned; brothels were being closed and other elements of the city's entertainment industry were in peril. Houde stepped down and a new, more censorious era began.⁵

4. John Belshaw and Diane Purvey, *Vancouver Noir: 1930-1960* (Vancouver: Anvil Press, 2011).

5. William Weintraub, *City Unique: Montreal Days and Nights in the 1940s and '50s* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1996).



Figure 10.15 The staff at *Chez Paree*, a popular Montreal nightclub, in 1951. Four years later it would be the stage for a spy scandal (see [Section 9.4](#)).

The timing of Montreal's clean-up campaign roughly coincides with Vancouver's. The Vancouver Police Department (VPD) had repeatedly found itself at the wrong end of corruption enquiries beginning the 1920s and continuing through the Depression into the postwar era. By the mid-1950s, it was clear that the rot extended to the Police Commissioner and included bootlegging, numbers running, and prostitution — all of which were being protected by the VPD. Effective opposition to such practices in both Montreal and Vancouver reflected the growing influence of a middle class committed to their small-l liberal vision of individual rights, the protection of property, the law as an instrument of morality, and professionalization of institutions like the police. They were motivated as well in the postwar era by those aspects of Cold War rhetoric that regarded anything that weakened the capitalist West as a victory for the Soviet East.

To some extent, then, the moral liberality that could be found in some Canadian cities before the 1960s was an expression of modernity and antimodernity at one and the same time. Its embrace of low-brow entertainments and rejection of law-and-order agendas, its refusal to be controlled by the state, its lust for non-rational fun, and its happy exploitation of differentness as a source of amusement — seen most graphically in the persistence of fairground freak shows but also in ethnic entertainments and **slumming** — is all directly descended from pre-modern practices. By the same token, these aspects of urban life could only be expressed in urban settings. Definitively modern cultural symbols like jazz and the blues, all-night restaurants, and cocktail lounges belong to this era.



Figure 10.16 Even in the late 1960s, neon lights and rain-soaked streets in downtown Vancouver suggested film noir rather than suburban domesticity.

So, too, did the tearing down of some of the racial and ethnic barriers that had been erected, ostensibly to protect mainstream and white society from what that society's members considered as "others." Chinatowns, like Vancouver's (the largest in Canada), "represented otherness, crime, unleashed sexuality, opium dens, gambling, filth, run-down housing and mysterious back-alleys."⁶ As a neighbourhood, it was experienced by outsiders as a largely inhospitable place until it was exoticized in the 1930s. Thereafter the ribbons of neon light, and the late-night chop-suey houses and the nightclubs, provided a legitimate urban attraction while gambling provided a less legal alternative. At that point in time, the status of Chinatowns across Canada began to shift from civic eyesore to civic asset.

6. John Zucchi, *A History of Ethnic Enclaves in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 2007), 9.



Figure 10.17 In 1946 Viola Desmond, an African-Canadian Haligonian, sat down in the Whites-only section of a New Glasgow cinema. She was ejected, roughed-up, and jailed overnight. Her subsequent legal battle, though unsuccessful, was a catalyst in the fight for greater rights among African-Canadians.

The experience of African-Canadians and African-Canadian communities was less straightforward. In the mid-20th century, performers like Oscar Peterson, Joe Sealy, and Eleanor Collins challenged **colour barriers** on both sides of the border with their extraordinary talents. But long before and well after the Civil Rights movement in the United States, African-Canadian neighbourhoods were regarded by civic and provincial leaders as problematic spaces where crime and lack of hygiene were issues. African-Canadians have thus been especially vulnerable to displacement from Canadian cities. “The Bog,” a Charlottetown neighbourhood near the city centre populated by an economically and socially marginalized African-Canadian community, was redeveloped out of existence around 1900. Vancouver’s 20th-century African-Canadian neighbourhood, Hogan’s Alley, was viewed by lawmakers and journalists as the scene of immorality, petty crime, and poverty; what locals regarded as a lively and vital community with its own African Methodist Church and businesses was bulldozed in the late 1960s to make way for a pair of highway overpasses. In both cases, the African-Canadian community never again coalesced; indeed, many of its members moved away for good.

Exercise: Documents

Les quartiers disparus

Often, historic artifacts document something other than what was intended. In the early 1960s, the City of Montreal was planning the *Autoroute Ville-Marie*, a freeway that would cut through the old downtown from one end of Île de Montréal to the other. This necessitated the removal of many buildings, homes, and businesses — along with their tenants — and the construction of large swaths of social housing. The

City sent out a team to systematically photograph these spaces and residents before they all disappeared. A selection of these photos can be viewed [here](#).

Start with the following three pictures. What looks familiar to you and what looks alien? If you were asked to document the material lives of 1960s Montrealers who were facing expropriation from their homes and offices, what could you glean from these photos?



Figure 10.E1 The expropriation of 856 rue Richmond, 17 May 1967.



Figure 10.E2 Workers at Dominion Button Ltd., 1850 rue Saint-Antoine, 31 May 1967.



Figure 10.E3 Victoriatown, Montreal, 1963.

Key Points

- Moral panics were a driving force in urban reforms in the mid-20th century, and the changes associated with modernism were among their many causes.
- Behaviour that had been tolerated in early generations increasingly came under scrutiny as middle-class city dwellers launched campaigns against gambling, drinking, drugs, the sex trade, and police corruption.
- Some cities were able to market themselves as entertainment hubs in which vices were actively promoted and ethnic differentness were presented in a positive light as exotic.
- By the mid- to late-1950s campaigns to clean up city life were carrying the day. Nightclubs were closing, ethnic “slums” were being erased, and corruption was being punished. It is worth noting that these changes took place precisely when the old downtowns were being abandoned for the suburbs.

Attributions

Figure 10.11

Sainte Catherine looking east at night by [Conrad Poirier](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.12

Anna Labelle, alias Mme Émile Beauchamp, tenancière, 1939. P43-3-2_V26_E271-01 by [Archives de la Ville de Montreal](#) is used under a [CC-NC-SA 2.0](#) license.

Figure 10.13

[CVA 677-580 – \[500 block of Carrall Street, looking north toward Pender Street\]](#) by Timms, Philip T. / City of Vancouver Archives is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.14

[Men on street in front of Sai Woo Chop Suey House at 158 East Pender Street](#) by [James Crookall](#) is in the [public domain](#).

This image is available from [City of Vancouver Archives](#) under the reference number **CVA 260-452**.

Figure 10.15

[Montreal night life. Staff of 71 runs medium-sized Chez Paree club. Weekly wage bill is \\$3000 but earnings are higher as many rely on tips for bulk of income \(Online MIKAN no.3615421\)](#) by Louis Jaques / Library and Archives Canada has nil restrictions on use.

Figure 10.16

[Granville at night VPL 43347](#) by [Vancouver Public Library Historical Photographs](#) has no known copyright restrictions.

Figure 10.17

[Viola Desmond](#) by [Hantsheroes](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.E1

[The expropriation of 856 rue Richmond, 17 May 1967.\(VM94-C1023-038\)](#) by [Archives de la Ville de Montréal](#) is used under a [CC-BY-NC-SA 2.0](#) license.

Figure 10.E2

[Workers at Dominion Button Ltd. \(VM94-C1027-084\)](#) by [Archives de la Ville de Montréal](#) is used under a [CC-BY-NC-SA 2.0](#) license.

Figure 10.E3

[Victoriatown, Montreal, 1963 \(VM94C270-1114\)](#) by [Archives de la Ville de Montréal](#) is used under a [CC-BY-NC-SA 2.0](#) license.

Week 5 - Defining Immigration



Figure 5.1 Prairie immigrants typically lived in sod huts or other simple shelters until they had the resources and time to build a house. Stefan Waskiewicz's family, LaCorey, AB, ca. 1930.

The history of immigration is, simultaneously, the history of emigration. It is very much about the motivations of people who choose to leave behind what they and generations of their forebears knew and built. The rather inelegant dichotomy of “pushes” and “pulls” fails to take into consideration other countervailing forces but it does serve to remind us that people here were once people there. A recent and beautifully succinct answer to the question “What made them leave?” tells us about the motivations for Swedes who left their homeland between the 1880s and the 1940s, but it might easily be applied to a great many other nationalities as well:

At the beginning of emigration, the main reason was the lack of hope for breaking the cycle of poverty that affected many families. Later came labour unrest, when participants were blacklisted and unable to find work. Other push factors included ... compulsory military duty for young men, degrading class distinctions, restrictions on the right to vote, the lack of a democratic spirit, the dominant position of the church, and personal reasons, such as escaping from a debt or an unhappy marriage.¹

To use the language of 21st century marketers, what Canada had to offer was a brand – democratic (socially and politically), free (in terms of movement and land availability), secular (insofar as it lacked a state church), tolerant of pacifist views (for a while), underpopulated, and capable of experiencing sustained economic growth — that was preferable to the comfortable familiarities of home. As any study of Canadian history will show, however, there were times when Canada had little to offer other than grief and maybe some money.

The first step to understanding the history of immigration to Canada is demographic. The magnitude of the flow of humans into the Dominion after 1867 has to be appreciated, as does their distribution across the cities and farms and resource-extraction towns. Who the immigrants were in terms of ethnicity and places of origin matters. The second facet is the political and economic context of immigration: that is, the policies and opportunities that framed the immigrant waves.

1. Elinor Barr, *Swedes in Canada: Invisible Immigrants* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 14.

The social context of immigration is of immense importance as well. Canada's relationship with immigrants has been uneven, to say the least. At times it was nothing short of exploitive; at other times it was xenophobic and hostile; and at others still, generous and welcoming. Recent events in Canada, including mixed messages from governments about the kind of reception Syrian refugees might expect, serves to remind us that these attitudes have a long pedigree in Canada. A historical study of immigration and immigration policy thus informs us of the ways in which past generations understood questions about recruitment, assimilation, inclusion, citizenship, and rights.

Learning Objectives

- Describe the main historic features of post-Confederation immigration.
- Account for the timing of immigrant waves.
- Explain the preferential or inhospitable treatment shown to select groups at different times.
- Identify the goals of immigration policy and the forces that led to changes.
- Assess the strategies employed by immigrant groups and communities to achieve success in Canada.
- Describe the role played by racism and nativism in the history of immigration.

Attributions

Figure 5.1

[Shelter Stefan Waskiewicz's family lived until they built their house \(Online MIKAN no.3263577\)](#) by Library and Archives Canada / PA-178587 is in the [public domain](#).

5.1 Immigration Before Confederation

From 1783 until 1812 the most important source of immigrants to British North America was the United States. Movement across the border was easy and the host community was, outside of Lower Canada, overwhelmingly and increasingly North American in its accents and values. That ended with the War of 1812. After 1815 British North America became much more British than it had ever been before.

Emigration from the British Isles was the single greatest source of settlers in the Atlantic colonies, a fact that distinguishes their society from that of the Canadas in these years. Scottish settlers under the guidance of Lord Selkirk descended upon Prince Edward Island to take up farms in the early days of the century, and they were followed in the years to come by many others. Mostly these were Highland Scots, removed from their ancestral farmlands by the process known as the “clearances.” They were followed by Irish immigrants who came to represent a significant share of colonial population by 1850.

Irish Immigrants

Ireland produced the largest waves of emigration of any European country during the 19th century. This phenomenon is often associated exclusively with the **Famine Irish**, the millions of refugees from the potato famine that wracked their homeland in the late 1840s. Irish migration to British North America, however, began in earnest much earlier. In the dying days of the Napoleonic Wars, Irish immigrants began arriving in east coast ports in large numbers. The towns of Newcastle, Chatham, and Miramichi saw hundreds arrive before 1820. Not all were Catholics but almost all were economically on the margin. Sectarian hostility between the Irish Protestants and Catholics who arrived around the same time soon spread to the larger host population.

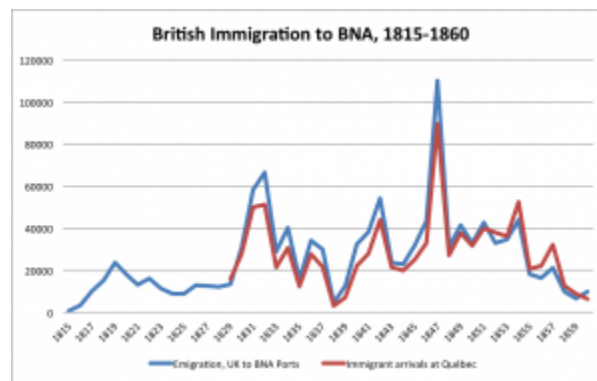


Figure 10.2 Quebec was the main point of entry for immigration to British North America through the pre-Confederation period. Spikes in Irish immigration meant that some of the traffic went to other ports. [\[Long Description\]](#)

Further Irish immigration tended to be badly timed, and the reception of the host communities was predictably muted at best, hostile at worst. The post-Napoleonic War years witnessed economic downturns in many parts of the British Isles, including Ireland. In the 1820s, as the farming frontier was growing in Upper Canada and in Lower Canada's Eastern Townships, Irish immigrants arrived. Some of these had enough money to make a go of it. They were followed in the 1830s, however, by less prosperous countrymen and women who were fleeing more severe hardship at home. Overwhelmingly Catholic, they arrived in large numbers in the St. Lawrence, and the mortality among passengers was severe.

In June 1832, Irish immigrants brought with them a hidden passenger onboard the *Carrick*: cholera. Having killed tens of thousands in Britain, the disease came ashore at Quebec City and spread rapidly to Montreal and then Upper Canada. More than 9,000 Canadians — Upper and Lower — died, the largest concentration being in Montreal.

Cholera is associated with human waste, and at the time, sewers in the towns were very poorly developed; it was common practice to dump buckets of sewage into the streets where it mixed with an abundant supply of horse manure. The Irish — poor and almost immediately shunned by the locals — found themselves in shantytowns with even worse drainage or in quarantine facilities (specifically on **Grosse Isle**) where sanitation was appalling. As a result, the Irish immigrants themselves died in huge numbers. (This was a near-global epidemic, one that originated in India and by 1835 had made landfall on the northwest coast. There, cholera joined measles, mumps, and other exotic diseases that easily claimed 25% to 35% of the Aboriginal communities they infected.)¹

Another consequence of the cholera epidemic was social and political turmoil, which was especially acute in Lower Canada where fear of a British plot to eradicate the Catholic Canadian population survived from generation to generation. Were the Irish merely instruments of British contempt for the Canadiens? Many thought so at the time. The Irish were, therefore, ostracized and discriminated against while the clergy and other spokesmen for the Canadiens whipped up feeling against the British generally. The cholera epidemic was, then, one factor among several in the 1830s that led to growing support for a rebellion.

1. Geoffrey Bilson, *A Darkened House: Cholera in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

Irish immigration in the 1840s must be placed in this context. Fear of cholera and diseased immigrants was a reality. As well, the Irish Canadians had moved into fields of work such as canal construction, which were generally regarded dimly by most English and French Canadians, and this increased the anti-Irish sentiment. The independent farmer was the antithesis of the low-wage-earning, work-camp-dwelling proletarian. “Townies” viewed the Irish navvies as rough and uncivilized and a danger to their safety. Worse still, the land boom in Upper Canada that had sustained the economy alongside the wheat boom was in a trough in the late 1840s. Immigration had been much sought after when there was a lot of land available and when it fetched a good price; when the Famine Irish arrived they were too poor to buy land, the market was depressed anyway, and no one was enthusiastic about more competition. Things, of course, were much worse for the Irish themselves. Those who were quarantined on Grosse Isle and on Partridge Island in the Bay of Fundy in 1847 had to further contend with an outbreak of typhus. Thousands died.



Figure 10.3 The scale of St. Patrick's Cathedral hints at the size of the Irish population in Montreal by 1854.

Even in Upper Canada voices could be heard criticizing the British government for shovelling out its poor into British North America. Immigration from Ireland transformed Toronto from an essentially anglophone and Protestant city to one of pluralities: by 1860 there were comparable numbers of Catholics and Anglicans, followed by smaller numbers of Presbyterians, Methodists, and still smaller denominations.² Almost all of these Catholics were Irish. Their presence gave purpose to the **Orange Order**, whose lodges stood as expressions of Protestant authority and xenophobic reaction to the immigrant masses. This arose, in large part, because the Irish tended to settle in urban areas, though not necessarily in tight ethnic enclaves. In Montreal they dominated St. Anne's Ward,³ but in Toronto they were spread throughout the east and west ends, wherever affordable housing could be found.³

2. Peter G. Goheen, "Currents of Change in a Canadian City, 1850-1900," in *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban and Social History*, eds. Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F. J. Artibise (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1984), 93-4.

3. John Zucchi, *A History of Ethnic Enclaves in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association Booklet no.31, 2007), 3.

Key Points

- The British Isles contributed the largest number of immigrants to British North America between 1818 and 1867, the Irish constituting a major share.
- Many of the 19th century immigrants were refugees from landlessness, and poverty, and/or famine.
- Conditions for immigrants were typically poor and worsened by the presence of epidemic diseases.
- The Irish, Scots, Welsh, and English immigrants of these years contributed to the diversification of cultural institutions as well as sectarian hostilities.

Attributions

Figure 10.2

British Immigration to BNA, 1815-1860, by John Belshaw is used under a [CC-BY 4.0](#) license.

Figure 10.3

[View of Montreal 1852](#) by [Skeezix1000](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Long Descriptions

Figure 10.2 long description:

Year	Emmigration, UK to BNA Ports	Immigrant arrivals at Quebec
1815	0	
1817	10,000	
1819	22,000	
1821	10,000	
1823	11,000	
1825	10,000	
1827	16,000	
1829	17,000	18,000
1831	40,000	40,000
1833	45,000	45,000
1835	16,000	16,000
1837	30,000	21,000
1839	2,000	2,000
1841	39,000	24,000
1843	21,000	20,000
1845	30,000	21,000
1847	110,000	90,000
1849	23,000	23,000
1851	26,000	26,000
1853	32,000	37,000
1855	57,000	42,000
1857	21,000	18,000
1859	7,000	7,000

[\[Return to Figure 10.2\]](#)

5.2 Immigrants by the Numbers



Figure 5.2 Immigrants from Arab countries faced a cool welcome in Canada. Tagged by the Immigration officers, three hopeful candidates in Quebec, 1908.

We have already observed that Canada was a net exporter of people from 1867-1896. Newcomers arrived, but they were very often just passing through. The end to free land in the American West in the 1890s was one factor in redirecting the tide of emigrants from Europe toward the north. Another, from 1896, were the new approaches taken by the Laurier administration under the leadership of Clifford Sifton (see Sections 4.4 and 5.4).

This is not to say that the immigration that was recorded from 1867-1896 did not matter. Hundreds of thousands were added to the mix and the composition of Canadian settler society changed significantly. British immigrants were the most numerous, but people who described themselves as German in origin increased by a third from 203,000 in 1871 to 310,000 in 1901. Three immigrant groups stand out in particular through to 1901: Chinese numbers reached 17,312 (increasing from 4,400 in 1881 to 17,000 in 1901); Russians at 19,825; and Scandinavians (Norwegians, Swedes, Icelanders, and Finns grouped together) at about 31,000. None of these groups had much of a presence in Canada prior to Confederation (although there were Chinese in British Columbia in significant numbers before 1871).

Tables 5.1 and 5.2, respectively, show the growth in population generally and the numbers of immigrants arriving yearly between 1867-1920. What may be seen immediately is: 1) the slowness of immigration's growth before the 1890s (notwithstanding a couple of spurts); 2) the fact that it was actually in retreat through most of the 1880s

and into the 1890s; and 3) the great take-off of immigration as Canada moves into the 20th century. The peak on the eve of the Great War is also unmistakable, in that it is followed by a near-collapse as the conflict rages. In the years 1911, 1912, and 1913 between 300,000 and 400,000 immigrants arrived each year, most of them from Britain and continental Europe.¹

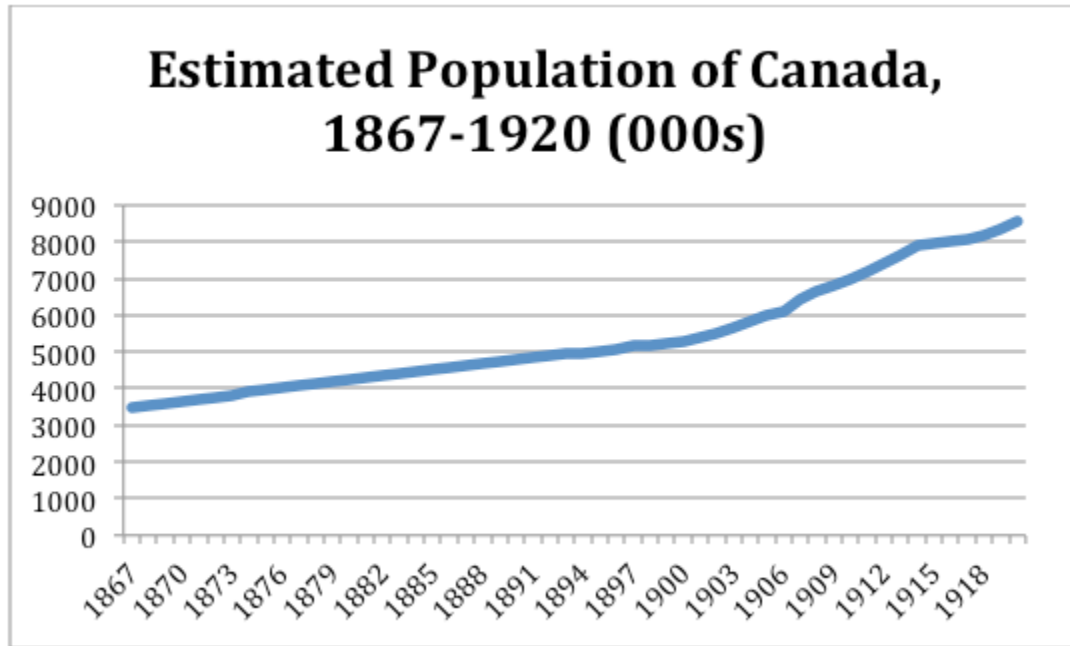


Table 5.1. Estimated Population of Canada, 1867-1920.

1. Roderic Beaujot, *Population Change in Canada: The Challenges of Policy Adaptation* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), 105.

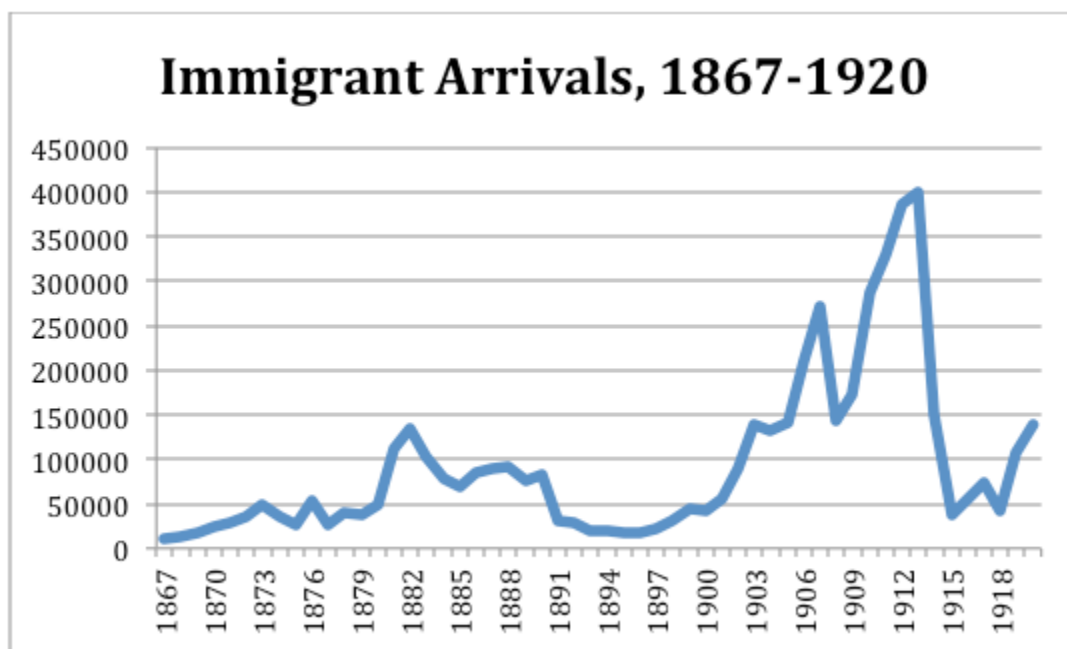


Table 5.2. Immigrant Arrivals, 1867-1920.

The complexion of the population in aggregate changed dramatically. On the eve of Confederation, fewer than one-in-five Canadians were born somewhere else, principally in the British Isles or the United States. That share started to decline almost immediately until 1911 when it pushed back through the 22% mark; as a result, a very different country was created. In 1871 there was a significant German community in Canada but otherwise French and English were the norms. By 1911, a quarter of the immigrant tide was coming from continental Europe and most of that from central, eastern, and southern Europe. By 1921, the main “ethnic” immigrant groups constituted more than one-in-eight of the population. The majority (just over half) of the foreign-born to 1931 came from Britain and Ireland; another 20% or more were born in the United States. Regardless of point of origin, as of 1921 the immigrant population in Canada was proportionally larger than in the United States.²

We know as well that immigrants in the pre-Great War period were overwhelmingly male. Men are over-represented in every age category from 10 to 14 years and up (after 65 years, the ratio of men to women nearly balanced out). This suggests that either boys were demonstrating a particular determination to emigrate from Europe and Asia or that they were preferred to daughters when it came time to move (principally because their prospective job prospects were better). In other words, families with more sons than daughters might be more inclined to emigrate than those with more daughters. As to young adults, these sex ratio imbalances had serious ramifications. In the 20 to 34 age cohorts, there were more than twice as many men as women in 1911. Women and daughters might be sent for later, but this pattern of maleness persists throughout much of the 20th century. The sex ratio among the foreign-born reaches a peak of 1.68 men to every woman in 1911 and among certain immigrant groups it could be much higher. Among the Chinese it hovered around 200:1 for decades, and among the Scandinavians in 1931 it was 268:1. These last examples are very definitely outliers, but the implications of a distorted sex ratio for marital fertility ought to be obvious.

2. Donald H. Avery, *Reluctant Hosts: Canada's Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995), 22.

What is more, we know that the immigrant population was young but adult. The foreign-born on the eve of the Great War were mostly under 40 years of age and 20-somethings was the largest cohort. Despite photogenic images of immigrant families, surprisingly few foreign-born children appear in these statistics.³ Having said that, the arrival of immigrants brought higher fertility rates, so much so that they slowed and, in places, reversed a significant downward trend in Canadian fertility rates. The estimated annual average number of births per 1,000 population in Canada in 1851-61 was 45; in 1901-11 it fell to 31 and slid to 29 between 1911-1921.⁴ Without the high fertility of immigrant communities these numbers would have been more depressed.

Distribution of immigrants provides a different sense of this change. The Maritime provinces and Quebec experienced little demographic change arising from immigration. Lebanese Christians were an important addition to Prince Edward Island, but there were few other ethnic enclaves in the region by the Great War. The share of population that was foreign born in the Maritimes was only 5.2% in 1901, rising to a little more than 6% in 1911 — a level that held nearly steady for 30 years. Quebec was similarly mostly native-born in 1901 — a comparable 5.4% of the population was foreign — but from there the share increased more markedly to 7.3% in 1911 and more than 8% in the Interwar years. West of the Ottawa River, however, 15% of Ontarians were foreign-born in 1901 and that passed the 20% mark before the Great War and continued to rise to nearly 25% in 1931. The Prairie provinces taken as a region began the century with a quarter of the population born abroad, rising to 49% in 1911. The share dropped to 21% in 1921 but that reflected the impact of immigrant fertility — the newcomers were adding significant native-born children to the population and thus shrinking their own share of the total. Still, the renewal of immigration in the 1920s created a second surge and by 1931 nearly 37% of Prairie Canadians were born elsewhere. British Columbia behaved differently from the rest of Canada in this respect, being the least native-born population of the lot. Foreigners constituted 44% of the population in 1901, rising to 57% in 1911 and only tapering slightly to 50% in 1921. From 1901 to 1961, British Columbia's population was, proportionately, the most foreign-born of all regions. Of all the regions, only the North-West Territories reversed the trend. Starting at 37% in 1901, the share of Northerners born abroad fell to 20% 10 years later and then 15% in 1921, where it stayed for the next two decades.⁵

Studies of immigrants in Canada tend to focus on their experiences as newcomers adjusting to new circumstances, or as outsiders to which the established population reacts, or as ethnic enclaves whose cultural resilience and change is subject to examination. As a demographic phenomenon, however, their profound impact is often too quickly forgotten. Within little more than a generation, post-Confederation immigrants had fundamentally transformed the population's main features while changing in significant ways its fertility, family size, and nuptial patterns. In each of these regards, they had a lasting impact.

Key Points

- Immigrants in the post-Confederation period rapidly changed the ethnic and age composition

3. Warren E. Kalbach, *The Impact of Immigration on Canada's Population* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1970), 54.

4. Warren E. Kalbach and Wayne W. McVey, *The Demographic Bases of Canadian Society* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 56-7, 134-5.

5. Warren E. Kalbach and Wayne W. McVey, *The Demographic Bases of Canadian Society* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 143.

of the population, as well as the gender ratio in many regions.

- Immigration was slow to take off but it did so between 1896-1914, and again in the 1920s, making Canada more foreign-born than the United States.
- The distribution of immigrants was wildly uneven, barely impacting the Maritimes and Quebec.

Attributions

Figure 5.2

[Immigrants, Arabs \(Online MIKAN no.3630050\)](#) by John Woodruff / Library and Archives Canada / PA-020917 is in the [public domain](#).

Table 5.1

Estimated Population of Canada, 1867-1920 (000s) by John Douglas Belshaw is used under a [CC-BY 4.0 International license](#).

Table 5.2

Immigrant Arrivals, 1867-1920 by John Douglas Belshaw is used under a [CC-BY 4.0 International license](#).

5.3 The Clifford Sifton Years, 1896-1905



Figure 5.3 Doukhobor women pull a plough, breaking the prairie soil for the first time at Thunder Hill Colony, MB, ca. 1899.

Among the most able and imaginative of Laurier's cabinet ministers was Clifford Sifton (1861-1929). Born in southern Ontario, Sifton entered adulthood in Manitoba where he established himself as a lawyer, entrepreneur, and politician. Under Laurier he was Minister of the Interior, which put him at the helm of Canada's evolving immigration policy.

In the 30 years after the *BNA Act* was proclaimed the population of the West increased at a rate that was unmatched in the history of British North America. From a few thousand around Red River and similar numbers across what would become Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905, the North-West Territories (that is, the Prairies beyond little Manitoba) surpassed 56,000 by 1881. Ten years later, this had nearly doubled to 99,000. In 1896, therefore, Sifton inherited a portfolio that was already doing well, though not as well as it might.

The Victorian Food Revolution

Mechanized farming, new crops, new transportation technologies that cut the time and distance between harvest and market, and the need to feed burgeoning urban populations were together revolutionizing farming on a global level. Over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries central Europe had become a complex patchwork quilt of ethnic, farming enclaves. Germanic settlers moved into the Ukraine, and minority religious sects — often

associated with pacifism — established farming communities with strong cooperative sensibilities. Some had reasonably deep roots but much of the lands between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea were farming frontiers in their own right. Similarly, agricultural lands were opening in Argentina on the Pampas, in Australia, and across southern Africa. In the United States three million families were drawn into the American West by the promise of homesteads. This was a global phenomenon and — as the Indigenous populations were being removed by the colonial regimes — settlers were being recruited into various farming colonies with an assortment of promises and assurances. In short, the business of finding farmers was competitive.

Sifton's timing was good. The American frontier — as the United States historian Frederick Jackson Turner announced in the 1890s — was “closed”: free land in the United States was all but gone. Sifton replied with a campaign to bill the Canadian Prairies, famously, as “The Last Best West.” Employing a variety of sales and advertising strategies and gimmicks that were startlingly innovative, Sifton and his department changed the face of Canada in the space of one decade.

Selecting Prairie Society

Sifton established a list of preferred sources for immigrants. This is interesting for a few reasons, which are worth enumerating. First, the outcome of his preferential list can be seen even now in the ethno-linguistic and cultural make-up of the Prairie West. Second, it reveals contemporary thinking about the nature of race and ethnicity. Sifton, like most of his peers, believed that ethnicity signalled essentialized qualities: that is, all Italians were, in their essence or fabric, the same. Stereotyping, then, was something he regarded as part of informed decision-making, not a case of narrow-mindedness or bigotry. Third, the composition of the immigrant pool included people whose ethnic differentness from Anglo-Protestants and Franco-Catholics (not to mention Aboriginal peoples) were in some instances profound, and that very differentness created a perceived need to build institutions and policies that would foster their assimilation. As Prairie settlers they might reasonably have been assimilated into the bilingual and bi- or multicultural heritage of the Métis; they might have been assimilated into a new, bicultural French and English Canada. Steps were taken, however, to transform these new arrivals into anglophones. And this would prove profoundly divisive among Central Canadians who were, predictably, not in agreement on the privileging of Anglo-Protestantism over Franco-Catholicism.

So who did Sifton prefer? White Americans, mostly. People who had had experience homesteading and who spoke English (and who were likely Protestants) were the principal group he hoped to recruit. Of course, Americans brought with them the possibility of disloyalty, something which made Canadian politicians generally wary. But even the Macdonald regime (more than a little America-phobic) had circulated recruitment materials in the United States, mostly in the hope of finding Canadian emigrants who could be lured back “home” to the West. Almost one million people arrived in Canada from the United States in the 14 years leading to the Great War, and many of those immigrants were, in fact, returning Canadians. Many more were German and Scandinavian immigrants to the United States who simply kept moving until they landed in the Canadian West.



Figure 5.4 African-Americans made their way to north-central Alberta, like this group at Athabasca Landing.

African-Americans, among whose numbers there were many with homesteading experience, were desirous of coming to Canada but Sifton regarded Africans and people of African descent dimly. He was inclined at first to recruit from the British Isles but recognized quickly that mixed-farming on small-holdings in the United Kingdom was a far cry from producing wheat on a quarter-section of land on the Prairies, and Sifton knew, too, that British recruiters would trawl the under-employed urban populations first. He turned his attention to continental options.

German farmers had proven their skill in various settlement projects that had occurred since the 18th century. For 100 years and more, the German states had been sending out farmers to populate borderlands in places across the Austro-Hungarian Empire and as far east as Imperial Russia. Sifton thought highly of the Germans and the Scandinavians. But the further south in Europe he turned, the less impressed he became. Italians and Greeks, in particular, he thought of as worthless to the settlement process. Jews were also to be avoided, as were Arabs.

Eastern Europeans — Ukrainians, Poles, and Russians fared better in Sifton's eyes. In an oft-quoted statement, the western booster described what he saw as the ideal immigrant:

When I speak of quality I have in mind something that is quite different from what is in the mind of the average writer or speaker upon the question of immigration. I think that a stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat, born to the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children, is good quality.¹

Sifton made this statement in 1922, 17 years after resigning his cabinet post and looking back on his works in retrospect. From 1896-1905, however, immigrants from Eastern Europe were something of an unknown commodity. And, for a cabinet minister in a narrow-minded Protestant community, they were a bit of a gamble. The Eastern Europeans' arrival in bulk numbers, their enthusiasm for mutually-supportive **block settlements**, and their overall record of success, however, converted Sifton to their value.

1. "Only Farmers Need Apply: Clifford Sifton, 'The Immigrants Canada Wants'," *Maclean's Magazine*, 1 April 1922: 16, 32-34.



Figure 5.5 Sifton's ideal immigrants. A family newly arrived from Galicia, ca. 1911.

Sifton was likewise convinced that religious sects that had strong internal cohesion and familiarity with the kind of farming that would be conducted in the West were highly desirable. These included Mormons from the United States, Mennonites from Central and Eastern Europe, and pacifist Hutterites and **Doukhobors** from Russia. Ethnicity, experience, and the likelihood of community success thus became key principles of the recruitment process.

Against this list of preferences, Sifton was highly suspicious of urban and industrial workers. In an era where “modern” was acquiring a cachet all its own and in which civic growth — even that of Sifton’s beloved Winnipeg — was a principal measure of success, there is something very 18th century about Sifton’s 20th century vision.

Sifton the Salesman

Sifton recognized early on that simply putting up posters at shipping offices in Hamburg and Liverpool would not draw the numbers he required. So in 1899 he established a network of recruiting agents in Europe under the auspices of a shadow corporation called the North Atlantic Trading Company. Shipping agents in European ports were paid to direct farm emigrants toward Canadian ports. This was a clandestine operation in part because the European countries targeted were all trying to stop the bleeding off of their population to new settlement societies like Canada, the United States, Argentina, and Australia. Sifton’s strategy paid off: in the space of a decade, the Prairie population more than doubled to 211,649 by 1901 — the greatest part of that growth taking place after the Laurier government arrived in Ottawa in 1896.

Diversity was, as a consequence of these recruitment efforts, growing rapidly in the West and in some Atlantic port towns. It was politically imperative that English Canadians be reassured that their culture was not at risk. To that end, Sifton stepped up efforts to recruit from Britain in 1903. The results were significant: 1,200 arrived in Canada in 1900 and 65,000 in 1905. This was not, however, a typically agrarian population. This Edwardian-era wave was made up of professionals, merchants, urban labourers, mineworkers, and others whose conditions in a rapidly growing and changing country were in some jeopardy. Canada was presented to them as Brit-friendly, “just like home,” and an opportunity to enjoy real social mobility — something that the entrenched class system in Britain stifled at best and prevented at worst. It was this generation that repopulated the Okanagan

Valley and southwestern Alberta, with visions of becoming “gentleman orchardists” and ranchers. It was also this generation that supplied many of the early trade union leaders and members whose experience with Britain’s new-born Labour Party would produce echoes across Canada and especially in British Columbia. On Vancouver Island, British immigrants would cultivate two contrary myths of British-ness characterized by both an ersatz upper-class Britophilia in Victoria and British-style labour militance in the coal mining towns of Nanaimo, Wellington, Ladysmith, and Cumberland. Both of these movements overlay existing Island political and social traditions so deeply that they effectively eclipsed them to the point that Britishness became part of the Vancouver Island brand.



Figure 5.6 Imperialism, steam-powered paddlewheelers, railways, and telegram systems made it possible to transplant British and Anglo-Celtic Canadian culture to the “gentlemanly” business of orcharding in the Okanagan. Kelowna, 1909.

However much the British immigrants of the pre-Great War years played a role in reaffirming imperial connections and the primacy of Anglo-Protestantism, they were not always welcomed by the locals. Canadians were often irritated by British sensibilities and signs appeared in shop windows across the country, “No English Need Apply.” There was a sense, too, that many of the British immigrants were simply impoverished social detritus, incapable of functioning in their own society let alone in Canada. Tens of thousands of children — part of a migration referred to as the **Home Children** — were plucked from British slums and orphanages and placed into apprentice-like situations on Canadian farms. Scandals and outrages plagued the Home Children project as news leaked out from time to time of horrible physical abuse and neglect of the 8 to 10 year old immigrants. It was, however, the failure of the **Barr Colony** project, an attempt to settle British farmers in a Prairie block, that drew the greatest criticism of Sifton’s office and further confirmed the Canadian belief that British immigrants made for poor farmers.²

2. Valerie Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-1997*, revised ed. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1997), 70-6.



Figure 5.7 Some 8,000 boys passed through the St. George's Home in Ottawa as part of the Home Children migration.

Post-1905

Sifton resigned from the Laurier government early in 1905, seemingly at the top of his game. The recurrent issue of sectarian, French-language schooling and the cultural agenda in the West was his last round-up. The North-West Territories had enjoyed non-denominational schools under the territorial regulations of 1901. This was slated to come to an end with the arrival of provincial status for Alberta and Saskatchewan and the extension of guarantees of separate and state-funded schools for Catholics. Laurier, who cautiously promoted the ideal of dualism in the West, would not give way and Sifton — who preferred the vision of an Anglo-Protestant West — resigned. Later, Laurier found himself obliged to change course, but Sifton did not re-enter the cabinet.

In many respects, Sifton was not only an architect of Western Canada: he was an example of what it was becoming. A relentless booster of Winnipeg and Brandon, he was an advocate of social reforms (his wife, Elizabeth Burrows, led the Brandon Women's Christian Temperance Union), and a champion of non-denominational schools in the West (often used as coded-language for anti-French or anti-Catholic education). The society he envisioned in 1896 was not one that all Canadians at the time embraced: drawn from different and diverse locales, peoples of many languages and cultures would open the economic potential of the West and, thus, Canada. In return, they would be Anglo-Canadianized and offered what Dominion officials immodestly regarded as a superior and more humane cultural alternative to that of the United States. Although many factors independent of Sifton contributed to what was to follow, the fact remains that many aspects of his vision were realized.

Key Points

- The late 19th century saw a rapid expansion in global food production to feed industrializing communities and nations. Canada's expansion into the West was part of this process.
- Canada had to compete for immigrants and did so through strategies that targeted specific

groups and whole communities.

- Clifford Sifton's term as Minister of the Interior coincides with the largest waves of immigrants to the West and thus gave shape to the population that arrived around the turn of the century.
- Sifton's preferences as regards immigrant groups were explicitly in favour of northern Europeans over southern Europeans, Whites over non-Whites, and people with experience farming in prairie-like conditions.
- Concerns among British-Canadians that their culture might be under threat was met by new recruitment of British immigrants in the early 20th century.

Attributions

Figure 5.3

Doukhobor women are shown breaking the prairie sod by pulling a plough themselves, Thunder Hill Colony, Manitoba. c 1899 (Online MIKAN no.3193404) by Library and Archives Canada / C-000681 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 5.4

Black Colony, Athabasca Landing, Alberta (Online MIKAN no.3193364) by Canada. Dept. of Interior / Library and Archives Canada / PA-040745 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 5.5

Galician immigrants (Online MIKAN no.3193424) by William James Topley / Library and Archives Canada / PA-010401 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 5.6

Pear blossoms in Mr Stirling's orchard, Kelowna, British Columbia (HS85-10-21790) by the British Library is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 5.7

Immigrant Boys for the St. George's Home, Hintonburg (Online MIKAN no.3624193) by Library and Archives Canada / PA-020907 is in the [public domain](#).

5.4 The Promised Land



Figure 5.8 A photo of John Lanquist, Gino Pakkala, and Harold Malm Sr. in Sointula, B.C.

Before the Industrial Revolution, working the land was what most people did, in one way or another. And, since it was the norm, it was nothing special.

Then cities took off in earnest, and the cities became not merely bigger versions of their former selves but industrial hives: crowded, dirty, dangerous, unhealthy, and exploitative, and subject to violent economic and political upheavals. Under these circumstances, the land acquired a connotation of relative purity; held up against the cities, the countryside positively glowed with wholesome and godly virtues. Avoiding city life and the prospect of working for someone else became the objective of many Canadians and immigrants. Owning one's own land and being one's own boss was highly desirable and it was seen, too, as having a special virtue.

God Made the Country, Man Made the Town

In a 2007 collection of essays on the settlement of the West, several scholars pursue the theme of the promised land. The suffragette, writer, and moralist Nellie McClung saw the West as a place where conditions were good for the raising of Christian-spirited, temperate (that is, free of liquor), and empowered generations — although she experienced disillusion in every regard by the 1920s and 1930s.¹ The leading Social Gospeller of his day (and eventually the founding leader of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation), J. S. Woodsworth, believed that

1. Randi Warne, "Land of the Second Chance: Nellie McClung's Vision of the Prairie West as Promised Land," *The Prairie West as Promised Land*, eds. R. Douglas Francis and Chris Kitzan (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007): 217-219.

the kingdom of God could be established on Earth and specifically “that the fertile soil of the Canadian prairies nurtured the right conditions for the growth of God’s heavenly kingdom on earth – the Promised Land....”² In this regard, Woodsworth wasn’t too far out of step with Louis Riel’s 1885 millenarian vision of the West as a nurturing refuge for an assortment of religious creeds.³ This became something of a reality for the Mennonite and Hutterite colonies that erupted on the Prairies and in pockets in southern Ontario and in the Fraser Valley. A similar, though more checkered, experience was shared by the Doukhobors.

Parallels could be drawn, too, with West Coast utopian communities. These appeared in several locations, notably at Ruskin and, somewhat more successfully, at Sointula on Malcolm Island. While these two experiments had ethnic and working-class roots, there were others that tapped into upper-class aspirations, the best example of which is Walhachin, west of Kamloops, where well-to-do English immigrants attempted to rebuild a throwback village lifestyle in 1909, one that included a cricket oval, fox hunts, and a smart hotel which boasted a dress code. Historian Patrick Dunae has written on the widespread cultural, economic, and political impact of this cohort of “gentlemen emigrants” and “remittance men” — second or third sons of money who were unlikely to inherit much if they stayed at home in Britain.⁴ There were strong anti-materialist threads in all of these enterprises, as there was in individual homesteading. These were themes that would reappear sporadically in the 20th century in the context of **back-to-the-land** movements, especially in the 1960s and early 1970s.



Figure 5.9 The hotel in Walhachin, BC, an upper-class settlement surrounded by sagebrush, rattlesnakes, and desert.

Key Points

- Agricultural settlements at the beginning of the 20th century were often associated with virtues and values that were regarded by some as superior to life in the cities.

2. R. Douglas Francis, “The Kingdom of God on the Prairies: J. S. Woodsworth’s Vision of the Prairie West as Promised Land,” *The Prairie West as Promised Land*, eds. R. Douglas Francis and Chris Kitzan (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007): 225.

3. Thomas Flanagan, *Louis “David” Riel: Prophet of the New World*, revised ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 101.

4. Patrick Dunae, *Gentlemen Emigrants: From the British Public Schools to the Canadian Frontier* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1981).

Attributions

Figure 5.8

[View of John Lanquist, Gino Pakkala and Harold Malm Sr. in Sointula, B.C](#) by UBC Library is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from the [UBC Library, Fishermen Publishing Society](#) under the digital identifier **BC_1532_1373_9**.

Figure 5.9

[Walhachin Hotel](#) by [CindyBo](#) is in the [public domain](#).

5.5 The Ukrainian Westerners

Of the Prairie immigrants, few were so visible numerically as the Ukrainians. Outwardly a homogeneous group, the Ukrainian experience as immigrants was defined far more by their internal divisions. As part of the Empire of Austria-Hungary, they came from one of the most ethnically and denominationally diverse nations on Earth. The Catholicism of Polish-Ukrainians contrasted sharply with the Orthodox Christianity of Ukrainians, who had stronger connections to Russia. Differences of dialect were important too, but the centrality of religion to the peasant life in **Galicia** produced deep rifts between the immigrant communities when they arrived in Canada.

Canadian administrators were frustrated by these divisions. They were obliged to keep immigrants who came from Bukovyna (now in northern Romania and southwestern Ukraine) separate from those originating in Halychnya (stretching west from Bukovyna to southeastern Poland), both on the land and even in the immigration sheds. The immigrants' desire was to settle in blocks, which Ottawa preferred. As was the case with Mennonites and Doukhobors, Ukrainian block settlement improved the chances of economic and agricultural success, and the block settlements tended to fill up with chain migration. Among the Ukrainians, however, there was a definite preference to settle in either Bukovynan or Halychnyi blocks, regardless of the quality of the land. In 1898 one land commissioner despaired to the deputy minister,

They are apparently an obstreperous, obstinate, rebellious lot. I am just sick of these people. They are worse than cattle to handle. You cannot get them, by persuasion or argument, to go to a new colony except by force. They all want to go where the others have gone.¹

What the land commissioner disliked were the very things that lent strength to the newcomer population: cultural integrity, mutual support, and the ability to fabricate an expatriate community based around familiar institutions and practices. Distinctive dialects survived; churches were sustained; and agricultural techniques refined in the Steppe and forests of Eastern Europe were honed further to suit conditions on the Prairies. Their ability to succeed in these respects helps to explain the scale of Ukrainian settlement; by 1914 there were 170,000 immigrants from Galicia in the West.² The strategies that made Ukrainian and other block settlements viable were antithetical to the Anglo-Celtic Canadian ideals of individualism and the family as the principal independent productive unit;

1. W. F. McCreary, Commissioner of Immigration, Winnipeg, to J. A. Smart, Deputy Minister of the Interior, Ottawa, 14 May 1897, RG 76, vol. 144, file 34215, pt.1, Public Archives of Canada, quoted in John C. Lehr, "Kinship and Society in the Ukrainian Pioneer Settlement of the Canadian West," *People, Places, Patterns, Processes: Geographical Perspectives on the Canadian Past*, ed. Graeme Wynn (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1990): 141-2.

2. See John C. Lehr, "Kinship and Society in the Ukrainian Pioneer Settlement of the Canadian West," *People, Places, Patterns, Processes: Geographical Perspectives on the Canadian Past*, ed. Graeme Wynn (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1990): 139-60.

they were also at odds with various legal practices associated with property ownership and liability, as well as representing a serious challenge to cultural assimilation. One study has argued that:

The emergence of ethnic communities played a useful role in helping their members to adjust from one linguistic environment to another, and sometimes from a rural way of living to an urban one. However, in some cases, the ethnic community acted as a brake on the individual achievement and social mobility of its members.³

Although Canadian officials might have in mind a variety of schemes for achieving immigrant assimilation, contexts varied sharply across the West and in urban centres. The question of adaptation was, more often than not, one of immigrant strategy rather than host-nation policy.

Key Points

- Immigrants from the Ukraine included people with very different and sometimes mutually hostile backgrounds.
- Established Canadians of British or French ancestry tended to view the Ukrainians as a homogeneous group.
- Building communities around block settlements enabled the survival of pre-emigration values and cultural features while sometimes dampening the need or ability to adapt to the Canadian host culture.

3. Donald H. Avery, *Reluctant Hosts: Canada's Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995), 12.

5.6 Culture and Adaptation

“There is,” writes the historical sociologist Gillian Crease, “no common standard immigrant experience in Canada.”¹ The gradations of adaptability, acceptance, material success, biological well-being, and cultural fulfillment are severe. Male immigrants who arrived in cities intent on working in the expanding industrial economy of the post-1945 period generally found far more opportunities to become integrated, to be immersed in the language of the locals, and to develop networks of friends and colleagues who might — in some measure — substitute for the loss of community from abroad, than did female immigrants. It was not unusual in these years to find immigrant households (particularly in suburban Canada) in which the father/patriarch spoke at least passable — sometimes heavily inflected — English, the children spoke with the flattest Canadian accents and were functional in one or more ancestral language, while the stay-at-home mother/matriarch remained effectively unilingual. The immigrant experience was thus gendered and also impacted by age. Some immigrant groups struggled more than others to adapt.

Take, for example, immigrants from the British Isles. Like all other newcomers they gravitated toward neighbourhoods in which recognizable institutions and languages could be found. That these were not considered “ethnic enclaves” speaks to the position of British culture in English-Canada as the **reference** or cultural **context group**. To be sure, there were class lines that structured the experience of British immigrants: In Vancouver the working-class newcomers planted themselves in East and South Vancouver where housing was affordable and where they had close access to the docks and industries where so many of them found employment; middle-class British immigrants settled in Kerrisdale and Dunbar, effectively ghettos of more plummy English and Scots accents. The landscape of denominationalism was often the clearest sign of these divisions and concentrations: well-to-do High Anglican and Presbyterian congregations to the west, Methodist, Baptist, and — after 1925 — United Church chapels to the east. Distinctions could be seen, too, in the use of recreational space: cricket ovals and rugby grounds to the west; soccer pitches (and baseball diamonds, too) to the east. In the struggle to determine how best to use the newly-created Stanley Park at the turn of the century, as historian Robert A. J. McDonald has shown, English working-class requests for a large stadium and an amusement park (all accessed by transit of some kind) were pushed aside in favour of a cricket oval, a yacht club, and contemplative gardens.²

For White, English-speaking immigrants from Britain or the United States, the acculturation process involved

1. Gillian Crease, *The New African Diaspora in Vancouver: Immigration, Exclusion, and Belonging* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 3.

2. Robert A. J. McDonald, "'Holy Retreat' or 'Practical Breathing Spot'? Class Perceptions of Vancouver's Stanley Park," *Canadian Historical Review* 45, 2 (1984): 17-53.

some challenges but comparatively few. In the West, as historical geographer John Lehr has argued, Anglophones were,

...settling a territory that, in many important respects, maintained the basic societal framework of their points of origin. They encountered familiar elements of law and administration; the creed of the ruling majority was Protestant; and English was the *de jure*, if not the *de facto*, language of all in the newly settled west.³

This was true of all parts of Canada outside of Quebec (less Montreal and the Eastern Townships), not just the settler West. Anglophone settlers constituted a replenishing of the context group, the mainstream civilization whose values and expectations were so dominant as to be invisible. Newcomers from England might complain that they had trouble overcoming the barrier of accents — Canadians strained to pierce their regional tones and the English struggled to understand Canadians — but as one English immigrant in the post-1945 period described the process,

For the first week I found people incomprehensible. We were talking the same language, and I couldn't understand what they were saying. It took about a week to get into the rhythm of the language.... So that was a bit of a shock.⁴

A whole week to break the codes of language, idiom, and tone. For non-English speaking immigrants these could take years to crack. For them, the challenges of adaptation were much greater.



Figure 5.10 Ukrainian students of English at the School for Immigrants, Vegreville, AB, 1916.

Some had a greater incentive to adapt than others. Germans, for example, constituted significant numbers in the Canadian population from the 1890s on, but the two World Wars obliged the German Canadians to develop strategies to reduce their differentness. One approach was to simply keep a low profile. In 1971 the census showed that Vancouver — better known for the large size of its Asian community than for its German diaspora — was 7% Chinese but 8% German. The German language was spoken in more Canadian homes in 1961 and 1971 than any language other than English and French. Finding a German enclave, however, was next to impossible and

3. John C. Lehr, "Kinship and Society in the Ukrainian Pioneer Settlement of the Canadian West," *People, Places, Patterns, Processes: Geographical Perspectives on the Canadian Past*, ed. Graeme Wynn (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1990): 140.

4. Marilyn Barber and Murray Watson, *Invisible Immigrants: The English in Canada since 1945* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 103.

the institutions that signalled an ethnic presence — church, community hall, specialty stores — were often very discrete.

In sharp contrast, Eastern Europeans and South Asians who arrived in large groups were often able to establish whole communities that sustained older cultural practices and strategies of mutual support (like language, shared parenting, and religion). Indeed, the church, temple, synagogue, or gurdwara often did much more than offer a spiritual anchor to newcomers in urban and rural areas: in the case of the gurdwara, it served as a political forum and a site of strategizing to influence policy-makers. A foreign-language press sprang up in many centres which both served the immigrant community and mitigated the need to assimilate into the mainstream. In particularly stark cases, like that of the Chinese community in British Columbia, ghettoization ensured that all the services needed by the community could be found within a few city blocks, the ancestral language was preserved, educational institutions arose that passed the culture on to new generations, churches and temples could be built and filled, and the need to venture out into the non-ethnic world was reduced. These institutions were social and economic hubs, capable of facilitating individual and/or group entry into the mainstream society and economy or preserving — in the face of assaults — the values and relationships that the immigrant group most treasured.

This remarkable and rich accomplishment, of course, invited further resentment of outsiders who used the term “clannish” to describe any ethnic enclave. Indeed, assaults from the Canadian host community would come in many forms.

Key Points

- Adapting to the host society and its expectations was a contextual, community, and personal experience and not a singular process.
- Even British immigrants developed strategies and institutions to enable their acceptance into the mainstream society.

Attributions

Figure 5.10

[Students of English, School for immigrants, Vegreville, Alberta \(Online MIKAN no.3368064\)](#) by George E. Dragan / Library and Archives Canada / PA-088507 is in the [public domain](#).

5.7 Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration

Canada's immigration boom was made possible and made necessary, simultaneously, by the spread of the industrial economy and mechanized transportation. The late 19th century delivered the wherewithal to move large numbers of people faster, further, and in far greater safety than ever before; there was also a rising demand for grain to feed factory towns and coal to feed industry's furnaces. These economic and technological developments happened to come along at the very moment that **racism** became a much more powerful way of looking at the world. To say that the Canadian experience included elements of racism is a little like saying that the Canadian Pacific Railway involved a little steel.

Racism is not merely a suite of regrettable or embarrassing attitudes expressed by a reliably odious share of the population at large. Racism constitutes a force in the modern world, a near- or crypto-ideological position that was broadly accepted in mainstream society as commonsensical. If one believed — as a great many did — that different races were inherently and unchangeably different from one another in terms of intelligence, morality, work ethic, personality, and health (among other qualities), and if one also believed that the mixing of races in a society or in a marriage would inevitably have the effect of diluting the strength of superior races and weakening the community overall, then policies to control for these factors were a logical consequence. The belief that race was more than a social construct obliged 19th and 20th century policy makers to erect barriers to the arrival and/or successful establishment of people belonging to “inferior” races. Racial stereotyping advanced from caricatures of 19th century Irish and Chinese immigrants to enclose Japanese and Indian arrivals, Eastern and Mediterranean Europeans, Arabs, Jews, and African-Americans. Aboriginal peoples were subject to similar discrimination and that is considered in [Section 11.1](#). Racist policies also evolved.

Cultural Demography

Through to 1914 the ethnic shape of the older parts of the country was, with a few pockets of exceptions, much as it had been 50 years earlier. White Anglo-Celtic Protestants dominated Ontario and the Eastern Townships of Quebec; while they were the clear majority, a significant Franco-Catholic population and concentrations of African-Canadians lived in the Maritimes. Quebec, of course, was overwhelmingly French and Catholic, and Quebec City especially so.

Montreal, however, was a major port of entry, and many who stepped off the ships did not proceed much further inland. Italian, Jewish, and Polish immigrants could be found in significant numbers and concentrated in specific

neighbourhoods in Montreal, which was principally an English-speaking city with a large French minority. Halifax was another entry point, and it acquired diversity in much the same way. The same immigrant groups had significant impacts on the largest industrial towns of Ontario (specifically Toronto and Hamilton) not least because those cities were magnets of employment and opportunity.



Figure 5.11 The company town of Powell River contained greater diversity among its immigrant community than most older central Canadian and Maritime communities.

The pattern from the Maritimes through Central Canada is, however, uneven. Some smaller centres — Sydney, NS, Sault Ste. Marie, and Fort William (aka: Thunder Bay) for example — attracted and retained ethnic communities while much larger cities contained remarkably little diversity. Sydney became a hub of ethnic variety for the same reason some small towns in the West — like Cumberland and Powell River in BC, and Trail and Drumheller in AB — were diverse. That is, they were all part of the emergent industrial world that globalized a particular kind of labour market. People who could work in foundries, mines, mills, and on roads and rails were circulating around the planet through increasingly sophisticated systems of recruitment, transportation, settlement, and resettlement.¹

The West as a whole was a mosaic of immigrants from Eastern and Northern Europe. Before the War, this was instantly visible in the city, town, and Prairie skylines as onion-shaped domes and Eastern Orthodox crosses topped centres of worship from the Ontario-Manitoba border to the Rockies. While cities like Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, and Edmonton announced their British loyalty as loudly as any other centre, they were also sites of acculturation and assimilation of non-British newcomers and the newcomers' parallel struggle to retain pre-emigration cultural elements.

Further west, in British Columbia, diversity was visible in communities that mixed Euro-Canadians with immigrants from both Europe and Asia. The British Columbian population before the Great War was increasingly

1. John Zucchi, *A History of Ethnic Enclaves in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 2007), 4-5.

Canadian-born (even BC-born) and the share of Chinese residents was actually falling — from one-in-five to one-in-twenty between 1881-1921. Immigrants from Japan and the Punjab lifted the Asian numbers a little prior to the War. Each of these Asian communities employed different economic and social strategies in the face of systematized discrimination. Unlike virtually all other immigrant groups, Asians were repeatedly described as unassimilable; barriers to their integration thus created a self-fulfilling prophecy of Asian separateness.

The Welcome Mat

Canadians often did little to smooth the path of newcomers. Organized labour and even native farm labourers regarded most immigrants as part of a plot to reduce workers' living standards by creating a **split labour market**. Anglo-Canadian homesteaders, too, demonstrated their own biases in the hiring of seasonal workers and tended to favour Canadian, British, American, and even German labour over Eastern Europeans. Some Prairie newcomers were thus frustrated in their efforts to earn enough money to meet the costs of setting up a homestead. Many turned, instead, to public works like road building and railway construction. Some — and this was true particularly of Slavic and Scandinavian immigrants — acquired a poor reputation with the railway companies precisely because they had achieved some success in farming. They made their farms a priority and framed their wage labour around the rhythms of planting and harvesting.² This is worth underlining: A great many rural immigrants were, nonetheless, industrial immigrants.

Nowhere was this more visible than in the mining towns of the West. In Alberta, coal mining workforces typically ran to more than 14% and as high as 25.5% Italian. Slavics (an all-purpose category that captures Russians and immigrants from the Baltic and Balkan nations) were even more numerous, constituting as much as 36% of the mining workforce in some districts. The same was true in British Columbia, where British miners were a significant factor, as were Finns, Chinese, Italians, and Americans. Employers were happy to have minority immigrants, who would work for less than the Anglo-Canadian and British miners, sometimes for a fraction of their pay. The Western Federation of Miners complained in the Sardon *Paystreak* newspaper that they were being pushed to the brink in the Kootenays by employers who were,

...importing cheap foreigners from the Minnesota iron ranges to displace union miners... [some employers] have it figured out that if they can run in Dagoes [Italians] at the rate of about two a day they will soon have the union locoed ... if [they] can get enuf [sic] of them in, wages can be cut to a whisper and Rossland mapped as a colony of Italy. Already about 35% of the Rossland pay-roll is [Italian]....³

The *Paystreak's* screed is not exceptional. The principal instrument for transmitting ideas of racially-inherent physical, character, and moral flaws was the newspaper press. Reporting on a devastating local fire in 1908, the Fernie *Free Press* assigned to the diverse community that was battling the blaze the usual (and purportedly immutable) stereotypes: measured against “the serene indifference to danger of the Anglo-Saxons” there was the Italian, “with his excitable nature and glib tongue, the Oriental, with his inherent dread of danger, and his equally

2. Donald H. Avery, *Reluctant Hosts: Canada's Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995), 29-30.

3. Quoted in Jeremy Mouat, *Roaring Days: Rossland's Mines and the History of British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1995), 96-7.

great regard for personal safety, [and] the stoic Slavonian [sic]....”⁴ The pulpit also played a role in this as was seen very clearly in the rise of eugenics (see [Section 7.8](#)). There were, too, **nativist** responses from immigrants (largely British or American) and the grown children of immigrants (providing they were White) that worked to (a) denigrate the outsider, and (b) advance the claims of the nativist to inclusion in the mainstream. This can be seen in the hostility shown toward African-Americans on the Prairies in the 1920s and 1930s by Central Europeans, whose families had themselves arrived hardly a generation earlier.

Racism thus became a bar over which some populations would attempt — with mixed results — to hurdle. Others, usually by dint of skin colour or religion, could not.

African-Americans

There are many immigrant populations in Canada who faced on arrival a dense thicket of racist attitudes. The experience of African-Americans is illuminating in this respect. Their numbers were not significant until about 1907, at which time conditions in the southern and central states deteriorated and word of opportunities on the Canadian prairies reached African-Americans struggling under **Jim Crow Laws**. Thirteen hundred reached Saskatchewan and Alberta in the years that followed. The government’s response was necessarily crafty because Ottawa feared stirring up diplomatic anger in Washington. As one study describes the tactics deployed,

Agents were sent into the South to discourage black migrants; medical, character, and financial examinations were rigorously applied at border points, with rewards for officials who disqualified blacks; American railways were influenced to deny blacks passage to Canada.⁵

Liberals and Conservatives alike pursued these strategies to stem the flow of African-American immigration. It was largely successful.



Figure 5.12 A Chinese workcamp along the CPR line, Kamloops, 1886.

4. Quoted in Leslie A. Robertson, *Imagining Difference: Legend, Curse, and Spectacle in a Canadian Mining Town* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), 57.

5. James W. St. G. Walker, *Racial Discrimination In Canada: The Black Experience* (Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, Historical Booklet No. 41, 1985), 14-15.

Chinese Communities

The post-Confederation Chinese — unlike their Cariboo gold rush predecessors — were largely drafted in to build the CPR between tidewater and the Rocky Mountains. Thereafter, some found work in the Vancouver Island coal mines but principally they settled in the cities and towns, especially along the CPR mainline. These enclaves varied tremendously in size but they hosted a familiar variety of services and institutions. Populated overwhelmingly by males (single or, if married, living there without their wives who were still in China), **Chinatowns** provided immigrants with employment in restaurants, laundries, and grocery outlets that served both the Chinese and the non-Chinese populations. Buddhist temples and clan halls (or *tongs*) provided cultural anchors while the **Chinese Benevolent Association** provided some degree of political coordination in what was a largely hostile, anti-Chinese environment. Chinese emigration — like most Asian out-migration in these years — was stimulated by agricultural crises at home (connected, in China, to drought) and political instability. Those pushes were paired with the prospect of making enough money in British Columbia (aka: *Gum Shan*) to rescue or advance family-owned farming operations in, mainly, Guangdong. A strong entrepreneurial culture was thus emblematic of the community and instruments for making capital available to members of the Chinese enclave — including the *hui* — were well developed.⁶ Living conditions, however, were often very poor: The elements that defined the Chinese experience across Canada and distinguished it from that of European settlers included wages that were a fraction of what was earned by adult White males, overcrowded living conditions in Chinatowns, and the almost total absence of family comforts. Although Chinese market farms in suburban areas became an early and important source of food in West Coast Canadian cities, few Chinese were able to become farmers nor were they able to escape the urban neighbourhoods into which they were cast. In large urban areas and even in smaller resource-extraction towns, Chinese immigrants could be found working in the homes of others as cooks and houseboys.

6. Paul Yee, “Business Devices from Two Worlds: The Chinese in Early Vancouver,” *BC Studies*, 62 (Summer 1984): 44-67.



Figure 5.13 BC Premier Amor de Cosmos pictured evicting a Chinese immigrant, 1879. The cartoonist, J. Weston, uses caricatures but his blade has two edges: The Chinese immigrant's refusal to "assimilate" means, to de Cosmos, an unwillingness to "drink whiskey, and talk politics and vote like us."

Anti-Chinese Policies

Probably no immigrant group has been as heavily managed as the Chinese. Sought out as cheap contract labour, they were recruited to meet finite economic and infrastructural goals. While some Chinese arrivals saw themselves as **sojourners** — temporary immigrants who would return to their country of origin once they'd amassed some money — many more were in for the long haul. This was not part of Ottawa's plan and so steps were taken to limit immigration and thus encourage return migration.

The **Head Tax** was the main instrument used by Ottawa to regulate Chinese arrivals down to 1923. Some 81,000 people found the wherewithal to pay this fee before it was abolished, even though it rose from \$50 in 1885 to \$500 in 1903. In this respect, the Head Tax initiative was a failed attempt to stop Chinese immigration. It was, however, a money-maker: It is reckoned that the Head Tax pulled in \$22 million for Ottawa, which equates to more than \$300 million in 2015 dollars. Not everyone in the Euro-Canadian community supported the Head Tax, though for reasons that we might now consider discomfiting. A group of Euro-Canadian women argued that reducing the Head Tax would attract more immigrants, some of whom could be employed as houseboys and cooks. The Lib-Lab Member of the BC legislature, Ralph Smith, supported this idea and one local newspaper chided him that he was worried that "his gallant wife should have to roast her comely face over the kitchen fire every day because the Chinese Head Tax makes it impossible for him to get a Chinese cook."⁷ The rate of Chinese immigration varied because of the tax and global events and, like much human movement during World War I, numbers fell.

7. Quoted in Lisa Pasolli, *Working Mothers and the Child Care Dilemma: A History of British Columbia's Social Policy* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015), 30.

After the war, immigration resumed. By this time, however, there was growing fear among the White community of the opium trade and allegations that young Euro-Canadian women were being lured into the sex trade, what was called at the time “White slavery.” Emily Murphy — a leading figure in first wave feminism, the suffrage movement, and counted among the Famous Five — wrote a series of highly popular pieces on the drug trade and its connections with Chinatown. *The Black Candle* (as it appeared in book form) was one of several diatribes against the Chinese community, one that catalyzed a revision of immigration legislation.

The 1923 *Chinese Immigration Act* terminated legal Chinese immigration and remained on the books until 1947. This complete ban on arrivals from a specified country was uniquely and exclusively applied to the Chinese. Prejudice might stand in the way of other groups but no others were treated this way in law. What immigration occurred between 1923-1947 was illegal and much of it involved reuniting spouses and family members. The 1923 *Act*, introduced on the 1st of July and thus coinciding with Dominion Day, was commemorated in the Chinese community as Humiliation Day in the years that followed. (For more on this topic, see [Section 5.12.](#))

Limits on immigration is one thing; limits on immigrants is another. Chinese populations were contained (sometimes by choice but usually by civic regulations) to small urban areas — Chinatowns. They were forbidden, in Vancouver, from purchasing homes and opening stores outside of a few blocks of the city core. Like members of some other ethnic/racial/visible groups, they were also forbidden for years from attending post-secondary institutions and specifically from pursuing degrees through the University of British Columbia School of Pharmacy, a restriction that echoed **Sinophobic** associations between the Chinese community and drug trafficking. Many of these constraints would survive into the 1970s and early 1980s.

Anti-Semitism

Parallels can be drawn with the Jewish community. By 1914 there were reckoned to be 100,000 Jewish-Canadians, roughly 75,000 of whom could be found in Montreal and Toronto. Not all Jewish immigrants went to cities and towns, and there were Jewish farm colonies to be found in Saskatchewan. Enclaves — ghettos without walls — could be found in Montreal and Winnipeg’s North End in particular, although they were less visible in the other major cities. Vancouver’s second mayor, David Oppenheimer, was Jewish and instrumental in founding the city’s first synagogue in the heart of the East End. The population that gravitated to that neighbourhood dispersed, however, as newer and poorer immigrants intruded and as the Jewish community became more prosperous. A new spiritual and educational hub appeared on the south side, but it was never an enclave in the truest sense. In those cities where the Jewish population was more concentrated, there was inevitably a higher degree of visibility. In largely Catholic Montreal this drew anti-Semitic attacks, especially in the 1930s with the rise internationally of rabidly anti-Semitic political movements.

The Jewish diaspora had more experience of minority status than any other immigrant group in Canada. Centuries of ghettoization in Europe along with religious and legislative oppression had strengthened the community’s instinct to erect institutions of mutual support, social welfare, and education. In Canada this meant that a designated burial ground was the first objective, followed by a synagogue, and related institutions for women, men, and children. The Zionist movement also spilled out of Europe and into Canadian enclaves. In 1919 the pro-Zion Canadian Jewish Congress was established and acted as a voice for the community as a whole. This did

nothing, however, to dampen Ottawa's hostility toward Jewish immigration in the 1930s. Fearful of anti-Semitic violence in Germany, Austria, and, indeed, throughout Central and Western Europe, many Jewish families hoped to find sanctuary in Canada. Ottawa responded by holding the door firmly shut. Through to 1939 Canada accepted fewer Jewish refugees as a proportion of total population than any other nation in the West.⁸

Early Japanese Immigration

The Japanese community began arriving in Canada in the 1890s. Like the Chinese, they participated in the coal mining frontier on Vancouver Island and were drawn to the cities. In Vancouver, Chinatown and the Japanese enclave were only two city blocks apart. One important distinction, however, was the important role that Japanese immigrants played in the fishing industry, principally as owners and operators of fishing vessels. While Chinese men and Aboriginal women laboured in the late 19th and early 20th century canneries, much of the fishing fleet depended on Japanese captains and crews.



Figure 5.14 Vancouver's anti-Asian riot of 1907 resulted in extensive damage in the Chinese and Japanese quarters. W. L. Mackenzie King (to whom this photo is credited) was sent by Laurier to investigate; 34 years later King would oversee Japantown's depopulation.

Like the Chinese, Japanese immigrants faced discrimination when it came to immigrant recruitment and host community hospitality. Public opinion among the non-Asian population was against them, as was demonstrated in a 1907 window-smashing and head-bashing riot led by the Asiatic Exclusion League (in which organized labour played a key role) that swept through the Chinese and Japanese quarters. This followed on the arrival of more than 8,000 Japanese newcomers earlier in the same year and the prospect of an Indian/Sikh migration north

8. Still the definitive work on this question is Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1983).

from Washington State. Heightened pressure from the non-Asian community caused the Canadian government to negotiate with Japan a **Gentlemen's Agreement** (aka: the *Lemieux-Hayashi Agreement*) in 1908. This pact restricted the number of people leaving Japan for Canada. It capped the number of men who could travel to Canada, but it left open the possibility of female migration across the Pacific by not restricting the emigration of wives. The phenomenon of "picture brides" developed from there and in the decades that followed, significant numbers of women relocated from Meiji Japan to Canada where they met, for the first time, their husbands. The picture brides endured lives with men who were hitherto strangers, many of them living in small fishing or other resource-extraction communities on the northwest coast; despite powerful Meiji traditions of female submissiveness, some women sought their own path and abandoned prescribed gender roles.⁹ As for the host community, Euro-Canadians were mostly hostile to the prospect of Japanese-Canadian family formation and the likelihood of growth from natural increase. What is more, Japanese success in the fisheries was so remarkable that new anti-Japanese restrictions on commercial fishing licenses were introduced in the 1920s. The 1923 *Immigration Act* extended new constraints to human movement between Japan and Canada to such an extent that Japanese migration was effectively as limited as that of the Chinese. The wartime and post-War experience of the Japanese-Canadian community is explored in Sections 5.11 and 6.17.

Immigration from the Indian Subcontinent

The third group to arrive from Asia came mainly from the Punjab. The Sikh migration is another in which males vastly outnumbered females. In each of these cases — China, Japan, India — Britain's relationship with the source country is important. Of the three, only India was a British colony and that factored into the treatment meted out to potential and eventual immigrants. It also informed the Indian community's strategies and tactics when it came time to fight for rights or survival.



Figure 5. 15 Immigrants from India on board the *Komagata Maru*. The group's leader, Gurdit Singh, wears a light-coloured suit.

Neither a Head Tax nor a Gentlemen's Agreement were possible in the case of India, so the method used to block migration was the **continuous voyage requirement** of the amended *Immigration Act* of 1908. Immigrants would

9. Midge Ayukawa, "Good Wives and Wise Mothers: Japanese Picture Brides in Early Twentieth Century British Columbia," *BC Studies*, nos.105-106 (Spring/Summer 1995): 103-118.

be allowed from India (or Japan) into Canada if they could demonstrate that their vessel had travelled directly to a Canadian port without putting into another foreign harbour along the way. Given the distances involved and the ships of the time, this was effectively a barrier to Indian immigration. Sikh nationalists like Gurdit Singh (a merchant based in Singapore) accepted this challenge, chartered a vessel — the Japanese *Komagata Maru* — and, in 1914, attempted to bring nearly 400 potential immigrants to Vancouver. The ship was kept in harbour for two months. The passengers seized control of the ship from its Japanese crew and waited as lawyers for the Crown argued that the immigrants had departed from Hong Kong, not India, and so were in breach of the continuous voyage requirement.

The *Komagata Maru* incident is complex in that it draws together many different threads. Some of the parties involved were anti-British and sought Indian independence; the British, for their part, were anxious about divisive Indian politics just as tensions with Germany were becoming greater; Singh — in concert with Indo-Canadians — wanted to challenge the continuous voyage requirement just as much as he wanted the immigrants to succeed in reaching Canada; the British were as interested in putting down anti-colonial upstarts as they were in blocking immigration to Canada. Euro-Canadians, for their part, demonstrated little sympathy for the passenger/migrants and seemingly held fast to their desire for a “White Canada Forever.”¹⁰ The *Komagata Maru* was driven from Vancouver harbour by the courts. Its passengers returned to India only to face jail and death at the hands of the British authorities.



Figure 5.16 Cyclone Taylor, former hockey player and no. 3 immigration officer in Vancouver in the *Komagata Maru* incident.

Anxieties about the Indian population before the war were rooted in the White community’s racist and xenophobic perspective on the world. Even so, it is in some respects a challenge to understand. There were, in 1911, fewer than 3,000 Indians in Canada and that number was roughly half of what it had been only five years earlier. Rather than

10. See W. Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia*, 3rd ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002) and Hugh J. M. Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar*, revised ed. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014).

posing a demographic threat, the community was in something like free fall. It was a fear of being overrun and outnumbered that motivated many racists at the time. H. H. Stevens, the Conservative Member of Parliament who played a key role in the *Komagata Maru* affair, for example, was terrified that Asian populations had a much higher fertility rate and an almost endless stockpile of potential emigrants on which to draw. Stevens would prove to be a lifelong opponent of any kind of Asian immigration. He and his peers saw Canada as “a White man’s country,” and regarded any arrival by visible minorities to be the thin edge of the wedge and a disaster in the making.

Racism, Health, Deviance

As historian Eryllt Jones observes, the state and medical officials gave physical health an ethnic face. Crowded housing and poor water and sewage — widely recognized as causal factors when it came to infectious diseases — were disregarded when dealing with the immigrant, working poor, and non-White races. It was race and ethnicity (and social class) that Canadian authorities believed made newcomers sickly and, as well, a fertile ground for epidemics.¹¹ Local police authorities extended this way of thinking to social behaviour. Prostitution became associated with ethnic and visible minorities, particularly Chinese, Slavic, and Italian communities. **Bootlegging** — the production and sale of alcohol — is an example of an ancient rural practice that became criminalized in the early 20th century and used as an excuse to police the ethnic “other”. Organized gambling was another thread of moral corruption that was traced back to ethnic enclaves. Finally, the import and/or production and sale of restricted drugs — from opium to heroin — was transformed from a criminal practice into an ethnic and racial crisis. Described as morally, physically, and socially “diseased,” Canada’s ethnic and racial “others” were wrapped in a language that took on scientific and epidemiological tones. Once these notions were affixed to immigrant groups, the logic of barring them from medical schools and positions of responsibility became all but unassailable.

While it is true that official anti-Asian sentiment began to decline around 1947, prejudices remained. Anti-Semitic positions proved especially resilient, as did xenophobia regarding Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and members of other minority, non-Christian faiths. Twenty years ago, the distinguished Canadian historian Desmond Morton, wrote that pre-WWII Canada was “a poor country, full of people who were generous to those they knew, mean-spirited to those they didn’t, and harsh about the distinctions.”¹² This tension between a country that needed and wanted immigration but didn’t necessarily want immigrants took new forms in the years after the Great War.

Key Points

- Racism constituted a set of beliefs about racial hierarchies and policy alternatives.
- Some regions acquired greater diversity than others, including the largest cities and the Prairie West.

11. Eryllt W. Jones, “Disease as Embodied Praxis: Epidemics, Public Health, and Working-Class Resistance in Winnipeg, 1906-19,” *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region*, eds. Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter, Peter Fortna (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2010): 207-9.

12. Desmond Morton, *1945 - When Canada Won the War*, Historical Booklet No. 54 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1995), 3.

- These were the areas where acts of racial and ethnic discrimination were most widespread.
- Anti-African and anti-Asian racism was expressed in policies and practices aimed to reduce or at least limit the size of the communities in question.
- The only European community that faced comparable discrimination was the Jewish diaspora.
- Immigrant communities developed their own respective strategies to secure survival at least and prosperity at best.

Attributions

Figure 5.11

View of part of the town of Powell River, British Columbia, and the pulp and paper plant of the Powell River Company by Harry Rowed / National Film Board of Canada. Photothèque / Library and Archives Canada is in the public domain.

Figure 5.12

Chinese camp (Canadian Pacific Railway), Kamloops, British Columbia. 1886 (Online MIKAN no.3243526) by Edouard Deville / Library and Archives Canada / C-021990 is in the public domain.

Figure 5.13

The Heathen Chinese In British Columbia (Online MIKAN no.2914880) by Library and Archives Canada is in the public domain.

Figure 5.14

Damage to property of Japanese residents (Nishimura Masuya, Grocer, at 130 Powell Rd. S.) (Vancouver, B.C.) (Online MIKAN no. 3363536) by William Lyon Mackenzie King / Library and Archives Canada / C-014118 is in the public domain.

Figure 5.15

Sikhs aboard Komagata Maru by Siddhartha Ghai is in the public domain.

Figure 5.16

Cyclone Taylor by PM800 is in the public domain.

5.8 Female Immigrants and the Canadian State, 1860s through the 20th century

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Figure 5.19 Four women outside the Finnish Immigrant Home in Montreal, ca. 1929.

In the middle of the 19th century, women who immigrated to Canada became the focus of special attention. Philanthropists and social reformers began to lobby officials of the Canadian state to help support their efforts to manage and protect this special class of newcomers. In part, the impetus behind treating female immigrants differently to men was a growing sense that the Canadian nation would be defined by the quality of the people who were settling it. As mothers – symbolically and literally – of future generations of Canadians, female immigrants were considered by architects of the new nation to be particularly significant additions to the population.

The Canadian government (like its counterparts in the United States, Britain, Australia, and other parts of the British Empire) initially resisted pressure to invest in special programmes and facilities for female migrants. The earliest initiatives were all privately funded. But by the turn of the 20th century various government bodies were supporting programmes designed by organisations such as the British Women's Emigration Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, and the Travellers' Aid Society to treat women as both a particularly vulnerable and a potentially problematic class of immigrants. For example, the earliest women-only hostels and transatlantic chaperone programmes were all fully funded by charitable and philanthropic organisations. By the beginning of World War I women-only immigrant reception homes, established and run by women associated with the British Women's Emigration Association but financially underwritten by Canada's federal government, were in place in major urban centres across Canada.¹

The Canadian government's consideration of female immigrants as a group requiring particular care came to a head after World War I. In 1920, after much lobbying by Canadian women's associations, the Canadian federal government established a special branch of the Canadian Department of Immigration and Colonization to recruit women for domestic service and other female-gendered forms of paid employment that Canadian women were unlikely or unavailable to perform, and to manage the movements of all "unaccompanied" women coming into the country. The Women's Division functioned as a separate unit for just over a decade before the government imposed restrictions to immigration during the Great Depression and the flow of immigrants dried up, making their work essentially unnecessary.²

While the Women's Division disappeared, the gendered assumptions and attitudes behind its establishment continued to play major roles in state programmes associated with newcomers after World War II. Women's sexual histories were interrogated as a part of the selection process to a far greater extent than were those of men. Local government bodies funded immigrant reception programmes that encouraged female immigrants to embrace mainstream Canadian parenting and homemaking practices. And, as had been the case since at least the beginning of the 20th century, the government barred entry to women and even deported female immigrants for past experiences and behaviours that might have been overlooked in their male counterparts. Thus, for example, in the early 20th century, unmarried women who became pregnant were vulnerable to deportation proceedings on the grounds of their immorality and the likelihood that they would require some sort of charitable assistance if they were allowed to stay in Canada.³

1. Lisa Chilton, *Agents of Empire: British Female Migration to Canada and Australia, 1860s-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Marilyn Barber, *Immigrant Domestic Servants in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991).

2. Rebecca Mancuso, "Work 'Only a Woman Can Do': The Women's Division of the Canadian Department of Immigration and Colonization," *The American Review of Canadian Studies* (Winter 2005): 593-620.

3. For the late 19th and early 20th centuries, see Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991). For the post-World War Two period, see Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006).



Figure 5.20 Awaiting deportation, Quebec, 1912.

The most consistent area of investment relating to female immigrants by the Canadian government concerns recruitment. Because household work and care for the young, the ill, and the elderly typically have been low-paid, exploitative areas of female-gendered employment, Canadian citizens in a position to be more selective have shunned this work. At the same time, prospective employers were quick to assign stereotypes to immigrant women seeking work in these fields: The newly arrived female worker was caricatured as morally suspect because of her race or ethnicity. Public fears and xenophobia in this respect produced extensive scrutiny and regular criticism of government programmes, even as the number of recruitment exercises grew. Perhaps more than any other aspect of the Canadian government's immigration work, the government's recruitment programmes associated with domestic and caregiver work represent Canada's most conservative social politics.

Through domestic servant, caregiver and nurse recruitment schemes, many thousands of women have immigrated to Canada since Confederation. Before World War I, the majority of domestic servants in major urban centres and in the Canadian West were immigrants from the British Isles. They had been recruited by philanthropic organizations heavily subsidized by the Canadian federal government. Throughout the 1920s, the Canadian government continued to invest heavily in the recruitment of British women for this work, though it also struck deals with transportation companies and community groups that wished to support the immigration of European women for domestic employment. In the period after World War II, the government began to openly recruit women for domestic work from a list of preferred European origins. For example, in little over a decade (1951-1963) over 10,000 Greek women became Canadian immigrants through such a scheme.⁴ Since the 1970s, the government has moved to a system whereby women recruited to perform domestic or caregiver work in Canada will not necessarily receive immigrant status. Rather, recruitment schemes targeting women in the Philippines or certain Caribbean countries, for example, have been structured around term employment contracts that provide the migrants with limited support and no certain future in Canada.⁵

4. Noula Mina, "Taming and Training Greek 'Peasant Girls' and the Gendered Politics of Whiteness in Postwar Canada: Canadian Bureaucrats and Immigrant Domestic, 1950s-1960s," *Canadian Historical Review*, 94:4 (Dec. 2013): 514-39.

5. Abigail Bakan and Daiva Stasiulis, *Negotiating Citizenship: Migrant Women in Canada and the Global System* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

Key Points

- Female immigrants have been treated by many administrations as a separate category of recruit and applicant.
- The ways in which prospective immigrants were interrogated for eligibility was gendered.
- Class prejudices and ethnic biases combined to create particular niches for immigrant females, specifically in areas of work that did not appeal to Canadian women because of low pay or poor working conditions.

Attributions**Figure 5.19**

[Four women on steps of Finnish immigrant home, Finnish Seamen's and Immigrant Mission, Montréal, (Québec).] ([Online MIKAN no. 3367692](#)) by Kangas, Victor / Library and Archives Canada / PA-127086 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 5.20

[Immigrants to be deported](#) ([Online MIKAN no. 3365973](#)) by William James Topley / Library and Archives Canada / PA-020910 is in the [public domain](#).

5.9 Post-War Immigration

When it comes to immigration, the century can be divided in two along the fulcrum of WWII. Prior to the war, immigration was principally understood within the context of building an agricultural colossus and assembling an army of workers to tear down forests and wrest ore from the belly of the Earth. And it took place within the context of a kind of cultural sensitivity that was mostly alert to anything that would challenge the dominance of Anglo-Celtic Protestant and Franco-Catholic “founding nations.” It was for this reason that Buddhist, Shinto, Sikh, Muslim, and Jewish immigrants in particular – alike in that none were Christian – were especially marginalized. The cataclysms of 1939-45 changed both circumstances and minds.

Post-War Refugees

After 1945 Europe opened its floodgates as hundreds of thousands sought refuge from a devastated continent. British emigrants were fleeing cities destroyed by the Blitz and diets stunted by rationing; there were, too, 41,000 **war brides** and nearly 20,000 children fathered by Canadian soldiers stationed in the UK during the war. Refugees poured out of Germany, especially in the wake of the quartering of the nation (and Berlin) into Soviet and Western zones (see Section 9.4). The same was true of Czecho-Slovaks uncertain of their country’s future and disconsolate about its immediate past. In Italy, Austria, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium refugee camps were established in the late 1940s. Called DP Camps – for **Displaced Persons** – these were the focal point of efforts to sort the human chaos into emigrant streams. (Immigrants in this wave were casually, sometimes derisively, referred to as DPs regardless of whether they had endured the camps.)

Canadians played an important role in both the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the International Refugee Organization that succeeded it in 1947. Ottawa was committed to accepting significant numbers of able-bodied refugees, although Canadian anti-Semitism continued to throw up obstacles to Jewish refugees and survivors of death camps. As the Cold War got underway, anti-Communist applicants were favoured over others: Poles and Ukrainians together represented 39% of the 165,000 in this refugee wave, followed by Germans and Austrians (11%), Jews (10%), and smaller measures of Baltic and Central European emigrants. One historical study of this migration by Franca Iacovetta points to the role of Canadian “gatekeepers” who processed applicants in what she describes as “a worldwide labour relocation program.”¹ There were many ironies and tragedies in this process, possibly the most outstanding being that anti-fascist resistance

1. Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006), 3-5.

fighters were often viewed by Canadian authorities as insufficiently anti-Soviet and they were, for that reason, less likely to be allowed into the country. This was notably the case among Jewish refugees whose animosity toward the fascists was understandably greater than their hostility toward communism.

Barely had the immediate post-war exodus tapered off in 1953 when new Cold War migrations got underway. In November 1956, as Soviet tanks rolled across a rebellious Hungary, 30,000 of some 200,000 exiles fled to Canada. There was a humanitarian agenda here, to be sure, but it is also important to note that providing sanctuary and opportunity to Soviet-bloc Europeans during the Cold War had propaganda value as well. And it cut two ways: their successful integration into a prosperous postwar Canadian democratic order taunted those who remained behind and, at the same time, anti-communist refugees spread a message among Canadians of Soviet oppression and terror.



Figure 5.21 Refugee crisis, 1956. An immigration interpreter assists with the interview of a Hungarian applicant.

The first waves of Cold War-era immigration from Europe were followed in the 1950s and 1960s by family reunification arrivals. As siblings and other relatives found their way to Canada, the majority made their way to urban Ontario. Diversity existed there before WWII but in the 1960s it became transformative. The established British-Canadianism of Toronto and Hamilton was itself being reduced to enclaves of what former Prime Minister Stephen Harper once described approvingly as “old stock” Canadians.

Ideological turmoil had consequences for Asian immigrants as well. Liberalization of attitudes toward Chinese immigration began in 1947, in large measure because China had been a target of Japan (an enemy of the Allied forces during World War II). Chinese Canadians were quick to volunteer for service in the Canadian Army in wartime and, after official barriers were dropped, they joined the Navy and Air Force as well, all of which contributed to a change in attitude in White society. In 1947, then, the 1923 *Immigration Act* was repealed and it became possible for Chinese immigrants and their descendants to obtain Canadian citizenship. Four hundred did so that year in a mass ceremony in Vancouver.²

2. Timothy J. Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy: School Segregation, Anti-Racism, and the Making of Chinese Canadians* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011).

The timing of the policy change, however, was poor. In 1949 the Chinese Revolution brought Mao Zedong (aka: Mao Tse-tung) and his Communist Party to power in Beijing. Almost immediately barriers to emigration were erected and once again Chinese (outside of Hong Kong and Taiwan) were unable to join members of the diaspora.³ Emigration from Hong Kong would continue, however, and it accelerated in the 1980s as Britain reluctantly prepared to hand over control of the colony to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1997. Large numbers of (mostly wealthy) Chinese made their way to Canada at this time, establishing a significant enclave in Richmond, BC, and appearing in most major cities. Changes within the PRC and a growing economy enabled “mainlanders” to emigrate as well, and by the first decade of the new century the Chinese community in Canada had become vastly more complex, consisting of old families – some of which had roots in Canada going back to the 1850s, most of whom had originated in Guangdong, and the majority enjoying modest incomes while still strongly oriented toward community institutions in Chinatowns – contrasting with wealthy and super-wealthy recent arrivals from Hong Kong and the PRC, a great many of whom spoke Mandarin (Putonghua) rather than Cantonese (Guangdong speech) and almost none of whom regarded Chinatown as representative of their history, experience, and aspirations. (For more on this topic, see [Section 5.12](#).)

Post-Centennial Immigration

The centennial year marked a further change in immigration policy. Up to this time, Ottawa preferred settlers from the British Isles, the United States, and Western Europe. In 1967 the government introduced a points system. Under this regime applicants were given preference if they knew either (or both) French or English, were non-dependent adults (that is, not too old to work), had jobs lined up already in Canada, had relatives in the country (to whom they might turn for support), were interested in settling in parts of the country with the greatest need for workers, and were trained or educated in fields that were in demand. The economy was still expanding and in some regions it would continue to do so for many years. Canadians have not always demonstrated sufficient mobility to fill the hiring needs of some regions, nor to fill some economic niches (especially what are often called “entry-level jobs”). Under these circumstances the new legislation was to prove key in attracting large numbers of new Canadians from sources that were considered “non-traditional”.

In the 1970s, Montreal was no longer Canada's largest metropolis, the increasingly multicultural Toronto having shot past its downriver rival. This was only the most easily observed demographic change. Proportionally greater transformations were seen in cities like Vaughan, ON. Located north of Toronto, Vaughan was a small town until the late 20th century, when it leapt from fewer than 16,000 in 1961 to 182,000 in 2001 (and it has nearly doubled since then). Most of that growth came from Italian and Jewish post-WWII immigration which, combined with immigrants from other sources, made it one of the fastest growing centres in Canada: the English Canadian population in Vaughan is, as a consequence, almost insignificantly small. Similar patterns can be seen in suburban settings like Vancouver's Richmond and Surrey, where growth rates have outstripped all other centres in Canada in the last decade or more.

Some rural areas enjoyed growth spurts in the post-WWII period. In the 1960s young American men and women fled to Canada to avoid being drafted into the United States Army for duty in the Vietnam War. Especially large

3. Wing Chung Ng, *The Chinese in Vancouver, 1945-80: The Pursuit of Identity and Power* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999).

nodes were established in British Columbia's Kootenays, in the Gulf Islands, and along the Sunshine Coast. Others followed, including **counter culture**, back-to-the-land advocates who were more pulled than pushed into Canada (see [Section 9.16](#)). At around the same time, Indo-Canadians coupled suburban living with **exurban** and rural agriculture, becoming a dominant feature in British Columbia's farming sector. Hispanic immigrants followed a similar trajectory, particularly in regions that were linked with strong farming settlements immediately south of the border.

African Immigrants

The numbers of Canadians from Africa has been growing rapidly since the 1990s. Urban areas see considerable concentrations drawn from many parts of Africa. One study on the African diaspora in Vancouver indicates that these immigrants consistently experience downward social mobility because their education and skills are often not recognized or valued in Canada. Many are drawn from professional and semi-professional careers in Africa only to find that they must pursue very low status and vulnerable jobs. Access to free farmland is not an option available to this generation of new arrivals nor, because of the diverse sources of African immigration, are social agencies comparable to the Chinese Benevolent Association. Somalians and Nigerians, Sudanese and Mozambicans lack the common set of cultural, political, and economic interests and inclinations to establish what was possible among the more cohesive Guangdongese and Punjabi immigrant communities 100 years ago.⁴

Toward a Cultural Mosaic

Although Canadian society has long been composed of diverse elements, the “two founding nations” narrative prescribed absorption, assimilation, and exclusion as strategies for managing newcomers. The idea of a **cultural mosaic** – as opposed to the American melting pot – would have been anathema to most English and French Canadians before the 1960s. Several developments produced a more inclusive society.

The first of these was purely demographic. Large numbers of Laurier-era immigrants had large numbers of children; immigrant fertility – especially in rural areas – was high. That meant that by 1960 there were at least two generations of growing numbers of what Conservative Prime Minister John Diefenbaker called “hyphenated Canadians.” Some were finding their way into post-secondary education – pioneers in their families in this respect – and were critical of narratives they encountered that privileged French and English Canadians. Additionally, incompletely assimilated urban and rural communities now represented significant voting blocks and they could not be treated with condescension by hopeful politicians. The Liberal Party, in particular, was well positioned to take advantage of these changes and did so. Diefenbaker (whose career is surveyed in [Section 9.6](#)) occupies an ironic position in this story: a German Canadian, he was critical of “hyphenation”, seeing it as a kind of second-class status. So, while he might decry special privileges to any minorities because it served to perpetuate that minority status, a growing chorus of Liberal Party voices called for more **pluralism**. As the party that was most likely in office when post-WWII immigrant families first arrived, the Liberals reaped some benefits at the

4. Gillian Crease, *The New African Diaspora in Vancouver: Immigration, Exclusion, and Belonging* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 17.

polls in gratitude. The first Chinese Canadian candidates were Liberals and the party prominently ran Italian and Portuguese Canadian candidates as well.

The changes to the *Immigration Act* in 1967 produced waves of arrivals from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. The vast majority of these **New Canadians** headed to the urban centres, especially the largest five or six cities. After 1971, despite much higher fertility rates in rural Canada, cities continued to grow at a more rapid rate, mostly from new immigration. Typically, newcomers gravitated towards lower-income neighbourhoods where rents were cheap and familiar foods might be obtained. A recent study calls these immigrant nodes within metropolitan areas “arrival cities,” landing pads for migrants who, since the 1960s, have been coming by air and not by sea or rail.⁵ These immigrants further reinforced the advantages enjoyed by the Liberal Party.

By the 1960s there had occurred, too, a change in popular attitudes. The Nazi **war crime trials** in the late 1940 that revealed the extent of the **Jewish holocaust** under the Hitler regime proved to be a turning point and spurred efforts to develop language around **human rights**. Full citizenship for many groups, however, only came into reach slowly; Asians, for example, got the vote in the 1960s (as did some Aboriginal people). At about the same time – in the early- to mid-1960s – we see the beginnings of official multiculturalism and inclusivity. The 1963 Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism didn’t issue a report until 1969 but its mandate and early claims for the precedence of English and French in Canada catalyzed a reaction among “Third Force” Canadians – Canadians whose ancestry was neither French nor English.

Espousing a new inclusivity was both a political strategy for election day and a way of breaking with the old “duality” of Confederation. The Liberals under Pierre Trudeau were simultaneously building a bilingual and bicultural society while rolling back assimilative requirements for immigrants. Rather than divide the growing immigrant demographic along ideological lines, they reasoned, it might be held together as a Liberal block if its own (various) values were respected. As early as 1969, Trudeau was quoted saying, “For the past 150 years nationalism has been a retrograde idea. By an historic accident Canada has found itself approximately 75 years ahead of the rest of the world in the formation of a multinational state.” Practices and rhetoric in the 1970s increasingly reflected these values, and was manifest in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* of 1982. This movement culminated in the *Multiculturalism Act* of 1988.

None of these changes erased the reality of bias and prejudices that confronts immigrants, but they did create a legal framework in which discrimination might be challenged. Two such challenges came from the Asian community in British Columbia in the 1980s. While Eastern European immigrants to the Prairie West experienced xenophobia and disadvantage in the 20th century, they were not taxed on entry in an attempt to both control their numbers and to generate government revenue. This, of course, was the experience of Chinese immigrants under the Head Tax regime.⁶ Nor were any European, American, or African immigrants confronted with special legislation to stop the arrival of their family members and to deter further immigration from their ancestral homeland. This, too, was the experience of the Chinese community under the federal *Chinese Immigration Act* (also called the *Chinese Exclusion Act*) of 1923. And although it is true that some German, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Turkish, and Italian Canadians were interned as enemies of the state during the two World Wars, these were

5. Doug Saunders, *Arrival City: The Final Migration and Our Next World* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2011).

6. Lisa Rose Mar, *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada’s Exclusion Era, 1885-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

predominantly select individuals who were outspoken supporters of enemy regimes and very few of them suffered extensive or permanent loss of personal property; nor did these internments constitute a community-wide, round-up based on ethnicity alone. For the Japanese Canadians in World War II, the situation was starkly different: property was confiscated, auctioned off, and never returned. The entire community, including infants and the elderly, was captured and incarcerated in camps for the duration of the war with Japan; the end of internment brought further barriers to reintegration and the prospect of deportation to Japan (see [Section 6.17](#)). Because of these significant, not to say monumental, differences in the experiences of the Japanese and Chinese communities, apologies and compensation were sought from various levels of government from the 1980s on.



Figure 5.22 Internment camp for Japanese Canadians in British Columbia.

Successive Quebec governments dealt with the issue of multiculturalism differently. Fearing that the majority of immigrants would gravitate towards or even demand schooling in English for their children, the provincial government took steps in the 1960s-1980s to close off that avenue. While a disproportionate share of immigrants to Canada from former French colonies chose to settle in Quebec (especially Montreal), there were also large numbers of immigrants who spoke neither English nor French. These newcomers – described as **allophones** – were a significant demographic and were courted by both the Liberals and the Parti Québécois, especially during the referendums on Quebec sovereignty. (See [Sections 9.11](#) and [12.3](#) for more on this topic.)

Key Points

- Post-WWII immigration included refugees from war-ravaged Europe and from communist regimes in Eastern Europe.
- New sources of immigrants were being increasingly tapped, and greater numbers were

heading to cities than to the countryside.

- After 1967 much of the focus of new immigration was in suburban centres.
- The increased diversity of the Canadian population created political opportunities; politicians seized on ideals like multiculturalism and recognized long-standing ethnic community grievances.

Attributions

Figure 5.21

[Immigration interpreter aids Hungarian refugee \(Online MIKAN no. 3298778\)](#) by Canada. Dept. of Manpower and Immigration / Library and Archives Canada / PA-181009 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 5.22

[Japanese internment camp in British Columbia](#) by [jkelly](#) is in the [public domain](#).

5.10 The Chinese in Canada

TIMOTHY J. STANLEY, FACULTY OF EDUCATION, AND UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

People from China have been in what is today called Canada since before the country existed. Indeed, 50 carpenters and shipwrights from Canton became the first permanent resettlers on Canada's West Coast when the English sea captain John Meares abandoned them at **Nootka Sound** in 1789. Ironically, their efforts at building a fur trading fort and ship consolidated the British claim to the Pacific Coast.



Figure 5.23 Washing gold on the Fraser River, ca. 1875.

Those of Chinese origin have been continuously present in British Columbia since the 1858 Fraser River gold rush, arriving at a time when the territory was a First Nations one and the non-First Nations population was a few hundred. By the 1880s, Chinese (mainly made up of people from Guangdong province in south China) were likely the second largest group in BC after First Nations. However, after Confederation in 1871, the first legislature of the Province of British Columbia ensured that people of European origins would dominate the new Dominion by taking the right to vote away from Chinese and First Nations peoples. At the time, the racialized White minority was less than 20% of the population.

By World War I, at virtually every turn, legislated discrimination surrounded people of Chinese origins living

in British Columbia. In addition to being barred from voting, they could not work for provincially incorporated companies, for the government itself, underground in coal mines, or on crown licenses. Indeed, by 1914 the province had enacted 112 pieces of discriminatory legislation against them and other Asians. In the face of this discrimination, many Chinese moved to other provinces, where discrimination was common but not as systemic. They often worked with other Chinese immigrants in labour-intensive settings that required little initial capital. By the 1940s, virtually every town of any size in Canada had a Chinese restaurant or hand laundry.



Figure 5.24 Head Tax receipt issued to Lee Don in 1918. The *Chinese Immigration Act* of 1923, which largely restricted the immigration of Chinese into Canada was passed on the same day as Dominion Day, causing Chinese Canadians to close their businesses and boycott Dominion Day celebrations every July 1, referring to the event as “Humiliation Day”.

In 1885, John A. Macdonald extended disenfranchisement to the federal level and introduced a discriminatory immigration Head Tax on Chinese workers and their families. By 1904, the Head Tax reached \$500, more than an average worker’s yearly wage. In 1923, the federal government banned Chinese immigration to Canada outright. Between 1923-1947, when the legislation was repealed, Chinese immigration to Canada effectively ended. The future Governor General Adrienne Clarkson and her family were among the handful of exceptions allowed. This discriminatory legislation prevented Chinese families from being reunited in Canada. In 1941, 95% of the married Chinese men in Canada were still separated from their families. Supposed bachelors in Canada endured years of loneliness while their wives and kin in China were caught in poverty, civil war, and the Japanese invasions of the 1930s and World War II. It was not until the 1980s that the family structure of Chinese-Canadian communities came to resemble that of other Canadian communities. In the 1980s-1990s, China became the most important source country for immigrants to Canada, moving away from the community’s historic roots in Guangdong province in south China, to northern China. Today, the Chinese community in Canada includes a majority of people who are immigrants and who speak Mandarin as their ancestral language and who come from professional and entrepreneurial backgrounds in China. At the same time, there are others who are seventh or even eighth generation Canadian whose ancestral languages are various dialects of Cantonese, Taishanese, and Hakka, but whose primary languages are English or French. As such, there are many different Chinese communities in Canada.

Throughout their history in Canada, people of Chinese origins and their Canadian-born children, have fought for full political and democratic rights, and for full participation in Canadian life. They have helped to make Canada the democratic and inclusive society that it is today. They organized associations and governing institutions to protect their interests and for mutual support. They formed political organizations designed to make China strong so that it could protect their rights. They fought for inclusion in people's idea of Canada, moving it from one that was originally envisioned as a White, European nation to one that includes all of its peoples equally.

Key Points

- The Chinese presence in British Columbia predates the Fraser River and Cariboo gold rush, but the numbers grew rapidly during that time and increased again in the 1880s.
- Chinese immigration was managed through the imposition of a Head Tax in 1885 and restrictive legislation in 1923.
- The diversity of emigrants from China has produced a complex pattern of distinct immigrant communities in Canada.

Attributions

Figure 5.23

[Chinese man washing gold \(Online MIKAN no.3192437\)](#) by Library and Archives Canada / PA-125990 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 5.24

[Head Tax Receipt](#) by [Shizhao](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Week 6 - Recreation



Figure 10.1 The 20th century produced a greater visual record than any earlier era. From flash powder exploding in studios (such as the one shown above) to miniaturized digital cameras, from silent motion pictures to 'talkies' to satellite photography, photographic technology has made it possible for us to have an occasional and unguarded glimpse of people in the past.

Modernity is the term given to a constellation of behaviours, values, and beliefs associated with the industrial, urban era. This term is associated with challenges to traditional values and ways of looking at the world and is often used in connection with 20th-century artworks, literature, and architecture. In some respects, the term is a shorthand for the 19th-century break with traditional oligarchy and feudal authority; the rise of nation-states and democratic society (with its emphasis on the rights of the individual); changes in the life-course (including the emergence of childhood as a period of dependence, predominance of nuclear rather than extended families, later first marriages, and falling fertility rates); and enthusiasm for public spectacle (such as vaudeville, movies, spectator sports, and even religious revivals). Modernity was also stamped upon gender roles and ideals of both womanhood and manhood. Science, technology, innovation, and professionalization are other facets of modernity, as is the widespread belief in progress and, implicitly optimism.

This chapter explores several themes and aspects of modernity that are now so interwoven with the fabric of life in Canada as to be almost invisible. At one time, however, they were revolutionary, or nearly so.

Learning Objectives

- Provide working definitions of **modernity** and **modernism**.
- Identify the forces behind modernization, its constraints, and its opponents.
- Describe the connections between modernism, secularism, and organized religion.
- Assess the impact of modern values on gender roles and family households.
- Account for changes in the experience of childhood and adolescence.
- Outline developments in the arts, media, sports, and popular culture.

Attributions

Figure 10.1

Studio portrait of Noel Robinson and Bill Reed in military uniforms by Philip T. Timms is in the public domain. This image is available from [City of Vancouver Archives](#) under the reference number **CVA 677-423**.

6.1 Defining Modernism



Figure 10.2 Bicycling became enormously popular in the late 19th century, particularly among women, for whom it offered a new — if sometimes provocative — independence. Mabel Williams in Ottawa, 1898.

Modernity in Canada took many forms. It is nearly impossible to connect it to any one symbol or idea. The bicycle comes close for late 19th-century modernism because it was so completely without precedent, an expression of engineering and metallurgical skills, and — very literally — an expression of the power of the individual. As production costs fell and competition in the sector rose, unit prices came down far enough by the late 1890s to make the bicycle affordable to middle- and some working-class Canadians. The growing urban centres necessitated new means of getting around (when weather permitted) and delivering goods that depended less on horses and carts and more on individual mobility. Inveterate gamblers saw in bicycles an opportunity for competition and wagering. In the first three decades after Confederation, as Glen Norcliffe states, “Bicycles and tricycles presented men and (later, when they became safer) women with a highly visible opportunity to demonstrate that they were in the mainstream of modern life.” Mass-produced and consumer-oriented, aligned with fitness (and sometimes with temperance), and widely observed in urban settings, the bicycle was thoroughly modern, at least until the arrival of the automobile.¹

Motorized transportation began its conquest of city streets shortly after streetcars had laid claim to much of

1. Glen Norcliffe, *The Ride to Modernity: The Bicycle in Canada, 1869-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 30-36.

the original downtown landscape. The movement — begun by the bicycle — from collective to individual transportation thus continued, helped along by steam-powered and, later, petroleum-powered engines. There is no doubt that the automobile constitutes one of the most powerful symbols of modernity in the 20th century, with its revolutionary technological sophistication, luxurious trappings, and — of course — speed, all of which would only advance further and further over the course of the next hundred years. The automobile was also modern in that its manufacture increasingly depended on managerial science and the refinements of the **assembly line**. As a consumer item, it cost less than a house, but more than almost anything else a Canadian family would ever purchase.

The mechanisms for extending the reach of modern systems and values in Canada were numerous and subtle. Take the rural post office, for example. Historian Jack Little has described it as “traditionally ... the centre of rural conviviality, but also serving as the main point of contact with the outside world.”² The post office system across southern Canada enabled the relatively rapid movement of information from other parts of the country. Letters home from the cities allowed one generation to describe to another how their world was changing in material and intellectual ways. Reports sent back from the farming frontier in the West or from the goldfields of the Yukon stimulated latent wanderlust. Rural towns in economically less viable regions began to leech population. Demands were made for more modern services such as telephones (which begin to appear in homes in the 1880s) and electricity (the use of which expanded rapidly after 1906).³ The telephone itself accelerated this process of disseminating modern values and ideas. Rural electrification and telephone service was vastly more expensive than the same process in concentrated urban centres, an irrefutable fact that created different rates of modernization of technologies, lives, and — inevitably — values. The idea of being so-called “old-fashioned” only makes sense when something else is considered “new-fashioned.” Thus, the horse-and-buggy, wood stove, Sunday-suit-wearing folks back East in the Gaspé or the Petitcodiac, in the outports and across the whole of PEI, were decidedly old-fashioned.

The links between modernity and energy sources are explored by York University historian, Sean Kheraj.

Little also points out how expanding and increasingly sophisticated systems of banking and communication dissolved small-town economies.⁴ This could be seen on Vancouver Island and throughout the Maritimes, where wealthy families that had once dominated their local communities and provided some degree of beneficent philanthropy began investing their money elsewhere. The CPR, the steel companies, and the farm machinery giants were all attractive options with better returns and fewer headaches than reinvesting in local industry. The railway could deliver goods from Toronto to any hamlet along a rail line. Why try, then, to produce redundant goods in a village? The effect was to make economically backward (non-modern) towns more backward still, while advancing the modern age in privileged centres of production and innovation.

In short, it wasn't the case necessarily that non-modern settlements and whole regions were choosing to lag behind in the march to modernity. There were structures at work that determined the reach of modern life. At the same

2. J. I. Little, *The Other Quebec: Microhistorical Essays on Nineteenth-Century Religion and Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 253.

3. in 1885, Ottawa became the first city on earth to have its streets all lit by electricity.

4. J. I. Little, *The Other Quebec*, 253.

time, there were opponents to modernization in rural Canada and urban Canada as well, as is shown in [Section 10.3](#). Consumerism, as discussed in [Section 10.4](#), was a powerful antidote to those forces.

There was a shifting of gears after 1945. Technological achievements and the increased role of government in the interwar years and WWII put Canada on a course for what is called **high modernism**. This is a period of large-scale infrastructural projects funded by the public purse: freeway construction, hydro-electric dams, subway systems, and urban renewal. It is also an era of intensified public involvement in the form of the **welfare state**, increased investment in secondary and post-secondary education, and the growth of the healthcare sector (which, in Canada, had a profoundly important public — as opposed to private or corporate — component). Historian Christopher Dummitt describes this watershed:

After the war, Canadians retreated from much of the emphasis on hyper-efficiency that had characterized the war years, but a widespread belief in the possibilities and benefits of control remained. This was reflected in a variety of ways. Partly, it meant managing economic and social life through the welfare state, and a host of new programs came into place, including the Veterans Charter, family allowances (1944), a new old-age pension (1951), and hospital insurance (1957).⁵

These were all features of what has been called “modern.” It crops up in many parts of 20th-century culture and is distinctive, almost instantly recognizable, as different from what one could find in the 19th century. Describing modernity can be difficult, making it a job ... a job for...

Superman

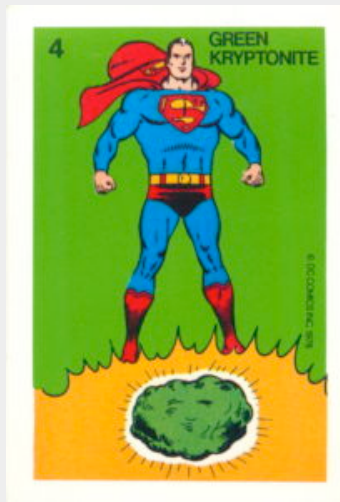


Figure 10.3 Sent to Earth from a dying planet.

Growing levels of literacy in the interwar years — a result of growth in public and mandatory education and the extension of high school education to a larger segment of the adolescent-population—fed demand for newspapers, serious literature, pulp fiction, magazines, and comic books. The last of these appeared

5. Christopher Dummitt, *The Manly Modern: Masculinity in Postwar Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 9.

in the late 1930s and very quickly settled into a recognizable format and structure. Comic strips emerged earlier in the century, and European publishers were ahead of North Americans in producing the sequentially panelled and coloured storylines that would become defining elements of the comic book. But it is the appearance in 1938 of *Action Comics* and the debut of Superman that signals a watershed in this evolution.

Superman was the creation of Joe Shuster (1914-92), a Canadian whose parents had emigrated from the Netherlands and the Ukraine, and his American cousin Jerry Siegel (1914-96). Set primarily in the fictional city of Metropolis — based on Toronto, where Shuster grew up — and at the *Daily Planet* newspaper — modelled on Toronto's *Daily Star*, where Shuster worked, *Action Comics* and its Kryptonian protagonist drew on Canadian experiences and values, some of which were rooted in a rural past while others arose from a modern urban present. The alien refugee arrives in rural North America, a generation after the first great waves of settlement spread out to colonize the West, and is raised in the morally upstanding and old-fashioned but still recognizable grain belt of the plains. Grounded in seemingly indestructible values, he moves to the big city where there is crime to fight — which he does as an independent actor and not, significantly, as a member of a police force. The famous trappings of the Superman story — a rocket-ship voyage to earth, a planet named for a recently discovered gas, a visual spectrum that includes X-rays (another recent scientific breakthrough), and an ability “to leap tall buildings in a single bound” — just as city skylines were starting to sprout upward to as much as 30 stories — speak to the modern technological world in which Shuster and Siegel lived.



Figure 10.4 Vastly less successful and memorable than Superman was Shuster and Siegel's late 1940s attempt to put the *comic* back into *comic book*.

Superman can act also as a metaphorical bridge between the modernity of the interwar years and the high modernity of the post-1939 period. Superman is famously vulnerable to two things: magic and kryptonite. As Dummitt reveals in [Section 9.5](#), interest in spiritualism, and offshoots like magic and the occult, were at a high water mark in the interwar years, and their influence reached the highest public office in Canada. Pulp novels and radio programs in the 1920s and 1930s featured sword-and-sorcery storylines and popular fictional characters with magic-derived abilities, like the Shadow. “Magic” was as contemporary to Shuster and Superman as were skyscrapers and rockets. So, too, was radiation. X-rays might be helpful but they were known to be harmful as well. Radium — like krypton gas and X-rays — had been discovered in the 1890s; by the 1930s, Canada was one of the world's two leading producers of uranium. What is sometimes called **big science** would emerge in the course of World War II in the form of the Manhattan Project.

Thereafter and throughout the Cold War, public understandings of radiation poisoning were heightened and kryptonite (a fictional radioactive substance derived from Superman's home planet) became a more plausible — and fearsome — vulnerability than, say, Mandrake the Magician (who was, incidentally and allegedly, based on Leon Mandrake, a Canadian performer).



Figure 10.5 New Westminsterite
Leon Mandrake began his career
in stage magic in the 1920s. The
comic strips he inspired would
spin off into radio series, books,
and films.

Katharine Rollwagen addresses the rise of the teenager in [Section 10.11](#), observing that high schools were necessary to the creation of this new phase in life. With the teenager came a panoply of new interests and cultural artifacts, of which the comic book was one. (Quite obviously: no teenager, no *Archie Comics*.) But comic books in the era of high modernity were also subject to greater regulation, not least because they were thought to incite serious anti-social behaviours, including homicidal impulses. As a cultural artifact that both reflects and allegedly transformed a generation's values, the humble comic book ought not to be casually dismissed.

Key Points

- Modernity consisted of technological, social, and intellectual changes and practices that began in the 19th century and accelerated through the 20th century.
- Creating systems and products that made sense of new cities and new productive systems was at the heart of modernization.
- The modern state was, by definition, a more interventionist state which took on more roles in a secular environment.
- Popular culture — including icons like Superman — can be analyzed to demonstrate the extent to which modern (and high modern) values and obsessions permeate day-to-day life and the imagination.

Attributions

Figure 10.2

[Mabel Williams with bicycle at 54 Main Street, residence of James Ballantyne \(Online MIKAN no.3191717\)](#) by James Ballantyne / Library and Archives Canada / PA-132274 has nil restrictions on use.

Figure 10.3

[Superman Card Game by Whitman \(1978\) – Green Kryptonite](#) by [Mark Anderson](#) is used under a [CC-BY 2.0](#) license.

Figure 10.4

[Funnyman1](#) by [Joe Shuster](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.5

[Mandrake the Magician Exhibit Card](#) by [Mark Anderson](#) is used under a [CC-BY 2.0](#) license.

6.2 Antimodernism

SHARON WALL, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, AND UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG



Figure 10.6 Hirshfield House in Vancouver's West End is an example of the Arts and Crafts style that recalled English village life rather than embracing modern city life.

Just as enthusiasm for modernism and wonder at the fruits of scientific and technological progress were attaining their early heights in the late-19th century, a counter-tendency we have come to call **antimodernism** developed within North-American culture. While modernism touted the marvels of progress and civilized society, antimodernists began to worry about the possibility of overcivilization, of the possibility of too much comfort, and about the physical and psychological impact of a world devoid of hard work, physical activity, and struggle.¹ For some, life was becoming all too easy.

To compensate for the possibility of overcivilization, antimodernists glorified what they called “the simple life”; to compensate for too much ease, they sought to rough it, especially in their leisure time.² Just as production was becoming more thoroughly mechanized and their work lives less physically demanding, early antimodernists fuelled an **Arts and Crafts** revival movement, took a new interest in martial arts, and took a renewed interest in back-to-nature activities. Men took up big-game hunting, while both men and women took part in canoeing,

1. T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

2. David E. Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1985).

camping, and wilderness vacations. Children were not left out either; many thought it was most discouraging to observe how, even for them, life was becoming too easy. In response, the scouting, guiding, and summer camp movements promised to take 20th-century children away from the evils of the city and back to the wonders and simplicity of nature where, it was argued, their character would be strengthened.³ Overall, antimodernists sought intense experience in all kinds of forms.

Antimodernism affected more than just leisure; it was also a way of thinking about peoples, culture, and history. Indigenous peoples were glorified and even imitated (though in very artificial ways) as “Indians” who lived the simple life.⁴ In some cases, individuals romanticized their own histories; in Nova Scotia, an entire tourist industry was built up around the notion of Nova Scotians as a simpler folk engaged more in the production of handicrafts and folktales than industrial goods, a people whose lives had seemingly escaped the touch of modernity.⁵

Not everyone was an antimodernist. One doesn’t long for the simple life or thrill at the prospect of roughing it unless one has already tasted the comforts of the good life. Most antimodernists came from comfortable middle- and upper-class backgrounds: professional men, Christian ministers, intellectuals, and others who had already felt the benefits of progress. These were people with time on their hands and a tendency toward self-analysis and reflection. Women of these same classes could also feel antimodernist sympathies. Their homes were among the first to benefit from such things as electric lighting, running water, and flush toilets, making living without such amenities while camping or canoeing seem exciting.

The critique mounted by antimodernists, whatever their gender, contained fundamental contradictions. Founders of summer camps, for example, often wanted to clean up nature, to add walk-in fridges and hot showers to make life not quite so rough. People who glorified what they called “Indians” also appropriated land on which Indigenous people still hunted and fished. In Nova Scotia, images of simple folk ignored the fact that coal-mining and industrial development were as important to the province’s history as folk ballads and handspun linen. Further, these simple, folksy creations, as much as summer camps, wilderness vacations, and a host of other goods and experiences which were valued for their connection to a pre-modern past, became modern consumer products to be marketed and sold.

As these examples suggest, the antimodernist critiques were limited; by the 21st century, we might say they were only half-hearted. Ultimately, few people ever truly wanted to turn back the clock to live a pre-modern existence. Antimodernist dissatisfaction, however, is a feeling that still lingers today as some question the merits of a modern lifestyle that we cannot truly escape.

Key Points

- Management, systemization, and regulation of daily life in the modern world was resisted in

3. Sharon Wall, *The Nurture of Nature: Childhood, Antimodernism, and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-55* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009).

4. Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

5. Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994).

some quarters.

- Some antimodernists were concerned that modern life was too soft and would lead to a weakening of the individual and society alike.
- Modern styles were also resisted as cold and artificial while older traditions and economic underdevelopment were celebrated as authentic and preferable.

Attributions

Figure 10.6

[Hirshfield House 01](#) by [Torecles](#) is used under a [CC-BY-SA 3.0](#) license.

6.3 Consumerism

TRACY PENNY LIGHT AND THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY



Figure 10.7 Large downtown department stores emerged in the Interwar years as temples to consumerism. Window shoppers outside Simpson's in Toronto view styles alongside the sizing details of Hollywood's first generation of stars (including Canadian Norma Shearer).

Magazines were important harbingers of consumerism in the 20th century. Not only did they bring goods for consumption to many through advertisements, but they also brought messages about what Canadians should consume and for what purpose. For women, they advertised products that would allow them to find and keep their husbands, ranging from beauty products to appliances, as well as goods that promised to make them good mothers. For men, they advertised products that would allow them to demonstrate their masculinity. While the advertisements (ads) used slightly different copy and language over the 20th century to reflect broader cultural interests and to suit the shifting norms and values, for the most part, the prescriptions for normal (middle-class,

white) women and men can easily be seen.¹ As such, consumerism has been an important framing concept for Canadians throughout the 20th century. And it is a concept that shapes how other groups frame their discussions around different aspects of life in Canada. For instance, the medical profession uses consumer culture to sell their services, whether it is by reinforcing the suitability of products for consumers with their expertise (for instance, “97% of doctors say this product will...”)² or by selling their own expertise as a product in and of itself, a phenomenon witnessed especially since the 1980s.³ Depending on the marketing vehicle, other groups, such as the legal profession or organized religion, can also be seen to use consumerism to promote their positions on Canadian culture.

While one could argue that the influence of consumerism is particularly subversive if consumers are not critical in their consumption, there is also evidence to show that Canadians are good at using vehicles like magazines to promote their own interests. In her study of *Chatelaine* magazine in the 1950s and 1960s, Valerie Korinek demonstrates that women successfully advocated for changes to women’s status in society through both the advertisements and articles in the magazine.³ It is important to remember, though, that these were, generally speaking, the perspectives of the privileged members of society. Marginalized groups (such as those with different racial, class, or sexuality positions) tend to be overlooked even today. In fact, one might argue that the **hegemony** of consumerism helps to reinforce existing inequalities.

Key Points

- Constructing consumerism involved educating citizens in the business of buying things they didn’t know they needed.
- Consumerism became a way of framing the economy and day-to-day life in the 20th century.
- Magazines in mid-century became vehicles for dissemination of consumerist attitudes and the promotion of group and professional interests.

Attributions

Figure 10.7

[Window shopping at Simpsons 2](#) by [Infrogmation](#) is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [City of Toronto Archives](#) under the archival citation **Fonds 1257, Series 1057, Item 4762**.

1. Tracy Penny Light, “From Fixing to Enhancing: Shifting Ideals of Health and Gender in the Medical Discourse on Cosmetic Surgery in Twentieth Century Canada,” in Penny Light, Tracy, Barbara Brookes and Wendy Mitchinson (eds.), *Bodily Subjects: Essays on Gender and Health, 1800-2000* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015): 319-346; Tracy Penny Light, “Consumer Culture and the Medicalization of Gender Roles in Interwar Canada,” in Cheryl Warsh and Dan Malleck (eds.), *Consuming Modernity: Gendered Behaviour and Consumerism before the Baby Boom* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013): 34-54.
2. Tracy Penny Light, “‘Healthy’ Men Make Good Fathers: Masculine Health and the Family in 1950s America,” in Isabel Heinemann (ed.), *Inventing the Modern American Family: Family Values and Social Change in 20th Century United States* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2012): 105-123.
3. Valerie Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.)

6.4 Leisure and Recreation

One social historian, Bonnie Huskins, has shown how public feasts became opportunities to link the middle-class element with a larger world while, at the same time, instructing citizens in the rules of good behaviour. After the French Revolution and the dispersal to other capitals of Parisian chefs, cuisine became a novel matter. The upper classes promoted its diffusion but it was really the middle classes, with their dense networks between cities in North America and Europe, who were best positioned to adopt and promote the styles associated with high-style feasting. Multi-course meals, the paring of wines with meats and fish, and even the banqueting halls themselves — not to mention the embryonic beginnings of something truly new, the restaurant — were standard features, and they were reproduced faithfully from one city to the next. A banquet of community leaders in Saint John was purposely as similar to one in Toronto or Bristol as possible so as to demonstrate a belonging to the Victorian bourgeoisie.¹ Conformity was a good thing.

The notion of **leisure time** took on new meaning in the 19th century. “Old money” — the wealth that used to be the monopoly of the very powerful — always enjoyed leisure, but the people of the cities and towns and farms expected very little leisure time. The middle classes experienced increased leisure first, as they found themselves in a position to hire others to do tasks that freed them up to indulge in interests outside of work.

A Night at the Opera

Middle-class British North America was, in some regards, an extension of new middle-class values spiralling outward from Europe from the late 18th century on. One can chart, for example, the spread of opera houses around the Atlantic rim in these years as an indicator of how **high culture** or **high style** was emerging from palaces and manor houses and into public facilities (usually operated with a profit in mind). Theatres and music halls are further examples of this expression of bourgeois values.

These venues provided opportunities to people to show off their disposable wealth and the availability of leisure time; they were also a way to promote civic and cultural values. Halifax’s two Grand Theatres first appeared in the 1780s and were known for their productions of West End farces from London, only tending toward more serious

1. Bonnie Huskins, "From *Haute Cuisine* to Ox Roasts: Public Feasting and the Negotiation of Class in Mid-19th-Century Saint John and Halifax," *Labour/Le Travail* 37 (Spring 1997): 9-36.

stuff 50 years later. In 1825 a grocer and a merchant in Montreal convinced John Molson to join them in building the city's first theatre, the Theatre Royal, where Shakespearean drama predominated.²

Similarly, public museums began to appear. Abraham Gesner (a physician, geologist, New Brunswick's first provincial geologist, and the inventor of kerosene) established the Museum of Natural History, now the New Brunswick Museum, in Saint John in 1842. It was, significantly, part of the **Mechanics' Institute** building, a landmark in most British North American towns of any size, one dedicated to the educational uplift of skilled working men.³



Figure 10.12 Molson's Theatre Royal in Montréal, ca. 1825.

A Day at the Races

Working class or proletarian tastes were different. While the middle and upper classes frequented classical theatres and parlour performances of music, those who were poorer were drawn to circuses, competitions featuring feats of strength, and races between humans, animals, and boats. Gambling was widespread and gained popularity through the century both as a kind of skill but also as a means of improving one's financial situation in an instant. Rural people in particular competed with and through their livestock and pets for reputation and money: everything from horse races to cockfights, dogfights, and bear-baiting endured in the countryside and even in some lower-class urban saloons.

Two features united these working-class leisure activities and the historical processes working on them. First, they were principally about individual skills, abilities, or fortune. They were not team sports, which was a style of recreation that was introduced with vigour in the 1870s and 1880s by middle-class reformers disturbed by working-class and agrarian pastimes. Second, industrial capitalism reduced the time available for leisure activities from 1818 on. The post-Confederation battle to reduce the length of the work day in industrial settings — the nine-hour day movement — arose because employers in the early decades of the century felt entitled to keep people at work for as much as 14 hours a day for six days a week. Leisure time, in this context, was often regarded by

2. Owen Klein, "The Opening of Montreal's Theatre Royal, 1825," *Theatre Research in Canada/Recherches Théâtrales au Canada* I, issue 1 (Spring 1980). <http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/tric/article/view/7539/8598>

3. *New Brunswick Museum*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Brunswick_Museum

employers and the middle classes as subversive. Its visibility receded to the physical margins of towns and cities, out of sight and out of mind. When it reappeared in town settings, it became heavily critiqued and policed and in some instances banned.⁴ This was nowhere more clear than in the regulation of drinking and gambling.

Public houses, or pubs, were an important part of town life from the 18th century but as evangelical Christianity gained more strength, drinking establishments fell afoul of emerging ideas of respectability. From the mid-19th century, pubs became increasingly a working-class or plebeian phenomenon. They also had an important role to play for travellers as these were among the first hotels in British North America. The “Mile Houses” of the Cariboo Wagon Road in British Columbia that ran from the Fraser Canyon to the goldfields were hotels and “watering holes,” as were the great many inns along the main roads of the older colonies.

The battle against drink itself became an important leisure time activity in the 19th century. **Temperance movements** appeared throughout British North America but rose first in the Maritimes. Amherst, Nova Scotia, contends for the title of cradle of temperance, because its Baptist congregation took up the cause as early as 1829. The appeal of temperance resided in the opportunities it presented for civic engagement by people often on the margin (like members of minority sects), a chance to criticize the moral laxity of the snobbish wealthy (who were both hefty consumers and commercial producers of liquor), and an opening for Christian proselytizing of the poor, Aboriginal peoples, and working men and women.

The popularity of drinking in some communities could be explained in its own right by the appalling state of water supplies. As suspicion of foul water as a source of disease spread so did preference for beer and liquors. Temperance was also a kind of self-policing in the absence of anything like a police force. If drinking lay behind domestic and public violence, vandalism, and disorder, and if there was no one to round up the drunks,⁵ then persuading people to give up drink seemed like a good strategy.



Figure 10.13 Curling on the Don River in Toronto, 19th century. Painting by John G. Howard.

4. Alan Metcalfe, "Leisure, Sport and Working-Class Culture: Some Insights from Montreal and the Northeast Coalfields of England," in *Leisure, Sport and Working Class Cultures: Theory and History* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1988), 70-1.

5. C. Mark Davis, "Small Town Reformism: The Temperance Issue in Amherst, Nova Scotia," in *People and Place: Studies of Small Town Life in the Maritimes*, ed. Larry McCann (Sackville: Acadiensis Press, 1987), 125-8.

The Sporting Life

Organized sports was another expression of leisure in the 19th century, although most of the organized sports familiar to us now appeared after Confederation. The wilderness sports (canoeing, snowshoeing), the more bucolic sports (curling, horse racing), and some inherited British sports (cricket, some of the Highland sports), and one sport readily associated with Aboriginal people (lacrosse) dominated. Wrestling and other forms of hand-to-hand battle were also popular. Logging camps, of course, begat logging competitions. Any structured, spectator-oriented event was typically also a drinking and gambling event. If a fight or foot race was staged, it would draw a crowd for miles and a substantial purse, perhaps as much as a week's wages. Less-structured pastimes included fishing and hunting, recreational activities that doubled as a source of food and perhaps income. In colonial society women were discouraged from participating in many of these activities; mid-century organized sports in particular were male-only propositions. Women's presence as spectators at competitions was criticized by middle-class reformers who regarded the ubiquity of gambling as corrosive to morality generally.

Class and ethnic divisions were also apparent. For example, the Montreal Curling Club was established in 1807 by and for the local Scots, and membership fees and vetting ensured the club remained exclusive. Efforts were made, as well, to make organized tournaments like horse racing a private and better-class affair but, as one historian notes wryly, "attempts to enclose race courses had only mixed results since the working class was as capable of climbing as it was of drinking."⁶ Racial as well as class boundaries were patrolled by the organizers of sporting and recreational events. Afro-British North Americans faced a "colour line" in a variety of sports: in 1835 a Niagara horse racing club specified that "no Black shall be permitted to ride on any pretext whatsoever." Historian Frank Cosentino points out that there are different ways of reading that prohibition as it could have arisen from a broad racist prejudice, or it could have been aimed at one particularly good rider; likewise it might have stemmed from a class prejudice, as all African-Canadian riders would have been drawn from a working or servant (or even former slave) class and would therefore have been unwelcome in a race made up of "gentlemen" and their grooms. Attempts to bar William Berry (a.k.a. Bob, Black Bob, "the coloured giant") from rowing competitions in 1860s Toronto seems to have stemmed more from his social class (which, of course, was informed by race) than by his skin pigment.⁷

There were other instances in which sport worked as an expression of racial and imperial values. The development of lacrosse in mid-century is an example. The modern game was appropriated from Aboriginal traditions by the non-Aboriginal community and modified significantly. The Montreal Olympic Club — a gentlemen's recreational association — began promoting the newly structured game in 1844. The Montreal Lacrosse Club was established in 1856 and produced the first set of written rules of the game a decade later. These all-White, all-male, all-gentlemen's clubs and teams would, from time to time, play against Iroquois teams from Kahnawake and Akwasasne — and typically lose. However, Victorian society took poorly to the idea of White gentlemen failing to overcome Aboriginal teams, so the results were sometimes fiddled to the disadvantage of the more skilled Aboriginal sides.⁸

6. Frank Cosentino, *Afros, Aboriginals and Amateur Sport in Pre World War One Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association Booklet no.26, 1998), 3-4.

7. *Ibid.*, 6-7.

8. *Ibid.*, 15.



Figure 10.14 The Montreal Lacrosse Club in 1867, made up entirely of non-working-class men whose wealth afforded them the privilege of play.

Recreational Travel

Tourism as a popular recreational activity developed in the 1820s, principally at Niagara Falls. The early canals and railways made it possible for large numbers of people to make their way to either the American or the Canadian side of the Falls. Beginning in the 1820s, daredevils made an appearance and by the 1830s whole ships were sent over the edge of the falls and smashed to pieces on the rocks below to entertain large crowds. In some instances animals — some local and domestic, others exotic — crammed these doomed vessels, a feature that somehow made the spectacle more exciting.

Social Life

The rise of cities and towns made it possible for people to come together behind common causes and interests. In the larger cities, men mimicked their British and American counterparts by establishing **gentlemen's clubs**, which were usually housed in elegant buildings near the centre of the business district. Membership was exclusive and selective. The Beaver Club in Montreal was the gathering place of leading figures in the post-Conquest fur trade who wanted to socialize, dine, and conduct business. The Toronto Club was established 50 years later, in 1837, as the commercial capital of Upper Canada began to consolidate its power, and the Halifax Club was established in 1862 in a grand building a block from the waterfront.

If gentlemen's clubs were bastions of patriarchal upper-class maleness, other **voluntary associations** were far less so. The first half of the century saw the spread of Mechanics' Institutes: centres for adult literacy education, debate, and access to reading materials. Many of these subsequently became British North America's earliest public libraries. They were established in the major centres of the eastern colonies, and they even appeared

across British Columbia in the 1860s. Generally the objective of the Mechanics' Institutes was to "ensure that men's leisure hours were spent in sober self-improvement rather than 'the morbid attractions of billiard tables, and saloons.'" ⁹ In some communities, Halifax for example, the Mechanics' Institute "welcomed anyone, male or female, who could pay an annual membership fee of 10 [shillings]." ¹⁰

Other voluntary associations vied for popularity. **Freemasonry** (a.k.a. the Masonic Lodge) had deep roots in North America and attracted, by the early 19th century, a constituency that was more professional than skilled labour. Other similarly semi-secret **benevolent societies** also gained ground: the **Oddfellows** and **Foresters** grew in popularity from mid-century. According to one source, "more than one-third of the Orange Lodges that existed in the nineteenth century were established during the 1850s, when approximately 550 were formed." ¹¹ Given the population of British North America at the time, it is likely that there wasn't a town with more than 1,000 people in it that didn't include an Orange Lodge and other societies as well.

Part of the popularity of these organizations lay in the rapid rate of urban growth at mid-century: so many people were newcomers and strangers that voluntary associations offered a ready-made community. They also offered links across the country. When George Walkem (1834-1908), a future premier of British Columbia, first arrived from the east in Kamloops, he walked straight from the train station to the Masonic Lodge. There he found connections who could help him find lodgings and work. Walkem wasn't the only Mason who would parlay his association life into political success. Alexander Keith (1795-1873), the Nova Scotian brewer, rose to the rank of Grand Master of Halifax Freemasonry, a position that put him at the head of parades, in front of crowds, and made him a spokesman for his brethren in the temple. ¹² Even if the Masons did not conspire to promote Keith politically, his connections across the whole of middle-class Halifax via the Lodge put him in a good position: only property owners could vote and that constituency was the same as the Masons.

A further advantage of being attached to a social group was financial: many of the benevolent societies maintained cooperative insurance funds that covered the cost of funerals, widows' pensions, and the like. Of course one key attraction was simply the opportunity to socialize with other men in a convivial environment.

Most of these associations were open to men only. Their position on the spectrum of class awareness is more complex. Some nurtured — intentionally or otherwise — a growing consciousness among workers that their interests were not always aligned with those of their employers. The men's groups were also critical in the development of a sense of **respectability** as part of a civic-minded men's organization, a trend that impacted mid- and late-19th century ideals of masculinity. Most were self-consciously Christian and, at the same time, mostly anti-clerical. The Masons were, for this reason, a target of the Lower Canadian Catholic clergy's criticisms through the 19th century. The Orange Lodge, of course, was based on a strident anti-Catholicism that was the enmity of the Catholic clergy. Some of the values of these organizations eventually migrated to the embryonic labour associations of the era.

9. Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia* (Toronto: UTP, 2001), 64.

10. David A. Sutherland, "Voluntary Societies and the Process of Middle-Class Formation in Early-Victorian Halifax, Nova Scotia," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 5 (1994): 241-2.

11. Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd edition (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 95-7.

12. David A. Sutherland, "Voluntary Societies and the Process of Middle-Class Formation in Early-Victorian Halifax, Nova Scotia," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 5 (1994): 245.

Artisans had long organized in **guilds**, some of which dated back to the Middle Ages, and these served as social supports as well. The tradition of the guild travelled to the European settlements across the Americas, but faced challenges in the 19th century with the beginnings of industrialization. Nevertheless, some guilds enjoyed boom times. Urban population and commercial growth fed the construction trades, especially carpenters whose services were in such high demand that planing and moulding mills sprang up to prefabricate some of what carpenters had been doing by hand.

As cities grew more densely packed, moreover, the risk of fire expanded. This was addressed by civic ordinances calling for more stone and brick construction. Effectively, the carpenters' success was their undoing, but stonemasons and bricklayers saw their numbers increase dramatically. In Halifax, for example, the number of carpenters quadrupled from a little over a hundred in 1838 to 408 in 1861; in the same years, the number of stonemasons grew from 50 to 223.¹³ Organizations that advocated for the stonemasons kept pace.

Women's associations tell a somewhat different story. In the absence of professional and public roles for women in the early 19th century cities and towns, there was little demand for associations that promoted and nurtured women's enterprise. Women's public engagement in voluntary associations was, therefore, frequently aligned with community and self-betterment and generally in a Protestant context. The temperance movement, already mentioned, provided an important early outlet for middle-class women's public spirit. In 1844, Halifax was home to a Female Temperance and Benevolent Society. Organizations like this one were pivotal in developing a civic sensibility.

Just as the men's associations welded mutual interest and urban respectability, the women's organizations (small though they were in number) were an opportunity to promote women's roles as nurturers within a patriarchal context and to do so within the relatively new context of city dwelling. These early female associations would bloom into more politically focused movements after Confederation.

Key Points

- The wealth of the merchant elite and the urban middle-classes supported the creation of cultural institutions like theatres and museums.
- Plebian recreations like drinking and gambling fit within the context of limited leisure time and attracted criticism from other social classes.
- Associations and clubs were important agencies of social welfare, sites of networking, and instruments of political engagement.

Attributions

Figure 10.12

[Theatre Royal Montreal 1825](#) by [Jeangagnon](#) is in the [public domain](#).

13. Susan Buggey, "Building Halifax, 1841-1871," *Acadiensis* X, issue 1 (Autumn 1980): 102-3.

Figure 10.13

[Curling on the Don River](#) by [Skeezix1000](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.14

[Montreal Lacrosse Club 1867](#) by [Jeangagnon](#) is in the [public domain](#).

6.5 Modern Culture



Figure 10.20 Descended from Black Loyalists, the Nova Scotian vocalist Portia White (1911-68) began singing in a Baptist church choir and, in the 1940s, became renowned for her command of European classical and “Negro spirituals.”

“Culture” is a concept both widely understood and impossible to define. When it comes to music, entertainments, the arts, and so on, the 20th century experienced a commodification of culture that alienated many of its forms from day-to-day practitioners. One of the great themes of sport history is the transition from “amateur” athletics (meaning top quality athletes who were sufficiently well off financially so they didn’t seek compensation for playing, running, rowing, or jumping) to “professional” athletics (originally a contemptuous term for men who were “paid to play” and later a term associated with the highest caliber of physical prowess). The same could be said of the arts generally in Canada. That is, they transitioned from an amateur phase to a professional one.

Historian of culture Maria Tippet has written of the late Victorian era as one that nurtured parlour-room musical performances, local art exhibitions, and thousands of church choirs of many denominations. Because most Anglo- and French-Canadians went to church every Sunday, it’s safe to say that they all either sang or heard singing in the company of others at least once a week. Tippet describes the Jarvis Street Baptist Church

of Toronto, with its “250 voices” in the early 1890s, as the basis for the professional and semi-professional performance ensembles that emerged in the 20th century.¹

Although we tend to understand **high culture** or **high style** as elite art forms associated with the upper classes and exemplified by opera, classical music and painting, and Shakespearean theatre, there is something of high culture in those church choirs, too. That is, the form, sound, meaning, and purpose — even the setting — of choral music was something that originated elsewhere, travelled around the world, was fairly rigid in that it wasn’t really locally modified (if at all), and was pretty much the same whether sung in Westminster or New Westminster, in Halifax, UK or Halifax, NS, in Paris or Parisville. Hymnal books provided a kind of corporate continuity within a denominational and ethnic context across the globe. What, then, of local culture? Where were its shoots likely to emerge?



Figure 10.21 Popular culture (sometimes called low, low-brow, or vernacular) began the process of massification of culture in the modern era. Daisy D’Avara, pictured here ca. 1909, was a dancehall girl in the Klondike and a vaudeville performer thereafter.

Canada’s Got Talent

Jonathan Vance, a leading historian of Canadian culture at the University of Western Ontario, has argued that the late 19th century witnessed the birth of a tension in Canadian society about cultural production. There was a hope that, in creating a nation-state, Canadian culture would emerge and flourish. When French-Canadians heard English-Canadians say “culture” they heard “assimilation.” The metaphorical ramparts around “Fortress Quebec” remained up as a consequence. What is more, ultramontanist gave pre-enlightenment European art a leg-up in Quebec, and European high-style was idealized. Meanwhile, in English Canada, the fetishizing of things British persisted. The schooling system in English Canada “celebrated British culture, idealized British history,

1. Maria Tippett, *Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

and inculcated British values.”² And, of course, cultural growth in the expanding United States was producing an alternative and distinctive tradition of painters, sculptors, architects, writers, and even historians — any of which could be drawn upon by Canadian art buyers, governments, and readers.

Canadian artists, faced with these outward orientations, struggled to earn a crust. The idea of becoming a full-time creator of music or statuary, paintings, or magazines in Canada was fraught with problems. The safest path was to imitate the things that the Europeanists, Britophiles, and North American Continentalists admired and to avoid the pigeonholing of originality. These constraints were fundamental in holding back the growth of an indigenous English “Canadian” cultural form in the pre-1914 period. Similarly, the ultramontanist and conservative ideology of many Quebec cultural leaders reinforced a rejection of the secular modernist imagination and the kind of cultural experimentation that was going on in Paris. Quebec culture at the start of the 20th century was rooted in the experience of New France and distinct from that of post-Revolutionary France; it stood apart in many ways from Anglophone cultures, as much because of its aversion to modernism as for reasons of language and religion. Canadian talent was trapped in an imitative blind alley.

Vance points out, too, the legal environment in which art was produced in the Victorian era. Copyright laws in Canada did little to protect writers, whose works could be (and were) reproduced — pirated — by presses in the United States, Britain, and even by other Canadians. Cheap knock-off copies of three-cent popular fiction — the original “pulp” novels, so-named because they were made on low grade paper — out-competed the originals, which sold for much closer to a dollar. A struggling Canadian writer might be able to get into the Dominion market at seventy-five cents a copy but could not hope to attract the sort of sales and circulation that even reputable publisher/pirates could generate. Nor could such a writer survive on pennies a copy.³ The establishment of tariffs on American publications did something to shore up publishers in wartime in particular, but Canadian presses struggled against both British and American novelists and poets who had strong markets at home. A Mark Twain, Victor Hugo, or H.G. Wells could saturate the market while a Sara Jeanette Duncan, Ralph Connor, or Lucy Maud Montgomery struggled to become recognized at home, let alone abroad. Not much would change in this regard for English-Canadian writers of fiction and non-fiction before the middle of the 20th century.

French-Canadian writers might have fared differently. There was an opportunity there to build on an early 19th century base and the histories of François-Xavier Garneau (1809-66), which predate Confederation, but the conservatism of the ultramontane establishment was powerful and effective in silencing modernist voices. Bishop Ignace Bourget (1799-1885) initiated in 1858 what would become a 30-year campaign to destroy the liberal-minded, anticlerical *Institut Canadien* (shuttered finally in 1885). What literature emerged in the early 20th century was rural-focused and idealized a pre-industrial Quebec or, perhaps more accurately, one in which industry was the exception. Although Montreal was the nation’s largest city, Quebec as a whole was more rural than urban until 1941, which explains the anti-urban focus in literature to some extent. Phillipe Panneton (1895-1960) wrote the novel *Trente Arpents* under the *nom de plume* “Ringuet” in 1938; the book was a landmark because it painted rural life as one of repeated challenges above which the protagonists could not necessarily rise, and as part of a world in which cities played a role. This was far from full-on modernist literature, but it broke out

2. Jonathan F. Vance, *A History of Canadian Culture* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2009), 168-9.

3. *ibid.*, 176-7.

of Quebec with a 1940 translation, won a Governor-General's Award, and thus constitutes an early contribution to the development of a national, pan-Canadian literature — some 70 years after Confederation.



Figure 10.22 In the US market, Wilf Carter went by the name “Montana Slim” but evidently composed under his own name.

Modern Music

There are, of course, other avenues for artistic and cultural expression. The explosion of the folk art movement in the early 20th century — an expression of antimodernism — fed the growth of fiddle music in the Atlantic provinces and in Quebec and later the development of both country and western (originally and sometimes still distinguished by loyal fans).

Wilf (Montana Slim) Carter (1904-96) is a common thread joining both the Maritime and Western traditions. Born in Port Hilford, NS, he took up yodeling as a youth, left home at 15, and became an itinerant worker across the West, including a stint as a cowboy near Calgary. Singing while playing guitar — something of an innovation in its own right — Carter is responsible for the links between Swiss yodeling and C&W vocals. His first radio appearances in 1930 in Calgary were followed by a move to New York in the mid-1930s where he polished the singing cowboy routine. Carter influenced his contemporaries — including fellow Nova Scotian, Clarence (Hank) Snow (1914-99) — and other country and western (C&W) figures like the Maritimer/vagabond Charles Thomas (Stompin’ Tom) Connors (1936-2013).

While these musical styles were rooted in **vernacular** forms that had, to some extent, developed locally in the Maritimes, they were also an expression of the globalization of entertainment. The yodeling, for example, was picked up from touring Swiss singers. And while performers like Snow and Carter were often antimodernist in their focus on the virtues of rural life, they built early- and mid-20th century careers around the modern technologies of radio, recording, and television. They also felt it necessary to move to the United States in order to achieve artistic success, a trend that would continue for generations (although in this respect, as in so many others, the nationalistic Connors stood apart — calling them out as “turncoat Canadians”).

Of all musical styles in the 20th century, no form is so associated with early modernism as jazz. Like folk/country, jazz begins as a kind of vernacular form, spreading rapidly from New Orleans across North America. (It is worth noting that early jazz contained elements of the French quadrille, and so is part of the legacy of New France.) The jazz phenomenon was aided and abetted by railways that hurried performers from one venue and town to the next. Vancouver's Patricia Hotel, for example, was home in the early interwar years to African-American jazz pioneers Ferdinand (Jelly Roll) Morton (1890-1941) and Ada (Bricktop) Smith (1894-1984). Sustained by African-Canadian communities in Montreal, Vancouver, and Toronto, jazz cross-fertilized other styles, including the big bands of the era. Of these, the one that acquired the greatest fame and popularity is Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians, led by Gaetano (Guy) Lombardo (1902-77) of London, Ontario.



Figure 10.23 The daughter of a vaudevillian, Hamiltonian Florence Lawrence is often described as the first “movie star.”

Stage and Screen

The music halls and vaudeville theatres of the early 20th century were made possible by rapid urbanization and, in return, were crucibles for talent and styles. Marie Dressler (1868-1934), Walter Huston (1883-1950), Florence Lawrence (ca.1890-1938), Mary Pickford (1892-1979), Raymond Burr (1917-93), and Yvonne de Carlo (1922-2007) all learned their craft on the music hall stage in Canada before heading to success in Hollywood. At the same time, a great many American and British actors (including Vincent Price, Jack Benny, and the Marx Brothers) honed their skills touring Canadian theatres on their way to what was now, in the 20th century, called “stardom.”

The dinner clubs and nightclubs of the major cities carried forward this tradition into the mid-20th century. As “entertainment” overtook culture and became an industry in its own right, there were plenty of what was called “marquee” talent or headliners whose musical or theatrical credentials were affirmed by appearances on live radio, in movies, and — beginning in the 1950s — television. Entertainment was rapidly becoming a fully integrated business and in every Canadian city (with the possible exception of Toronto), this was more fundamental to

the cultural lives of a greater number than professional ice hockey. Canadian talent like bebop musicians Moe Koffman (1928-2001) and Fraser MacPherson (1928-93) were part of a generation that benefited from this multi-urban cultural ecology. Musicians had the further advantage of new recording technologies that took their performances beyond the stage and even beyond live radio into “canned” performances on the air or into the home with the diffusion of phonograph technology.

For the most part, these are examples of **popular culture** from the first half of the century. They were produced for urban audiences, people who earned wages for a living. The suggestion that these kinds of entertainment can be dismissed as **escapist** misses the point: they were meant to offer relief from lives of hard work, worry about finances, wartime anxieties, and a rapidly changing, modernizing world. They were meant to provide distraction and, yes, escape. If entertainments of this kind appear to us now, in retrospect, to be unsophisticated and stilted, it has to be remembered that the years from the 1890s to 1939 saw the appearance of mediums of communication and culture that had never before existed. These were years of unparalleled experimentation in music, film, and theatre that would set the tone for the rest of the century. The energy generated by this new populist era provides, as well, as stark contrast with the stagnation and limits of high style cultural practices like opera or the symphony — something that would generate increasing concerns by elites in the 1940s and ‘50s.



Figure 10.24 J.E.H. MacDonald was a founding member of the Group of Seven. His “Dark Autumn, Rocky Mountains” was painted in 1930.

Visual Arts

If writing, music, and film-making in Canada were limited by the size of the audience before WWII, that was not the case for the fine arts. Some cultural productions will thrive in a marketplace dominated by wealthy patrons. Such was the case of the Algonquin School, also known as the **Group of Seven**. Lawren Harris (1885-1970) was heir to the Massey-Harris fortune (acquired in the production of agricultural implements and machinery) and capable of acting as patron to the Group while being an active and gifted member himself. The thrust of their philosophy was that the Canadian experience was intimately connected to the wild landscape and that the Group’s art, therefore, served a nationalistic purpose. The Group was 100% Anglo-Canadian and (despite the association of non-member Emily Carr) 100% male. Influenced by the Symbolist movement in Europe and some of the Expressionists, the Group of Seven’s output was sufficiently accessible — and the group so well connected that

their work became representative of the modern art movement as a whole in Canada. Based in Toronto, the Group of Seven used their extensive social connections and their membership in the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto (effectively a posh clubhouse for artists, writers, and performers) to advance their interests. The Art Gallery of Ontario and the National Gallery in Ottawa were quick to stock up on their work, displaying it approvingly as the work of the nation's leading artists.



Figure 10.25 Bertram Brooker's "Ascending Forms", ca. 1929.

There were many artists who did not fit within the Group of Seven paradigm. Their contemporaries in Montreal, the **Beaver Hall Group**, was equally inclusive of women and men and more fully committed to a modernist and urban sensibility that did not echo the Group of Seven's wilderness ideal of Canada. **Abstract** pioneers like Kathleen Munn (1887-1974) made connections with the Group but her outlook was simultaneously too modernist and too international for their appetites. Her friend and fellow abstract painter, Bertram Brooker (1888-1955) had his feet planted firmly in Canada, but also felt overshadowed by the Group, which he criticized in the 1930s as having become the very "orthodoxy" against which they had once railed. The Group came in for further criticism from artists in Montreal who rejected the nationalist aesthetic. The rival **Eastern Group of Painters** was established in the 1930s and one of its members, John Lyman (1886-1967), championed its successor group, the **Contemporary Arts Society**. These associations were, however, dominated by Anglophone artists. Further down the road of modernist techniques, it was **Les Automatistes** led by Paul-Émile Borduas (1905-60) who most fully embraced abstract styles and did so as a critique of what they regarded as the repressive political culture of Maurice Duplessis' Quebec and the continuing influence of the Catholic Church on daily life in the province. The *Automatistes* issued a manifesto in 1948 that was explicitly anticlerical, anti-religious, and anti-establishment. This document, *Le Refus global*, remains a powerful example of the collision of modernist and antimodernist sentiment in the arts and in society and is sometimes cited as a catalyst in Quebec's Quiet Revolution (discussed in [Section 9.9](#)).



Figure 10.26 Paul-Émile Borduas' "Composition 11", ca.1957.

Artists who were geographically, ethnically, or sexually on the margin of these central Canadian organizations worked largely in isolation, influenced by what was becoming the dominant style while developing their own. Of these artists, none is more deservedly well-known than Emily Carr (1871-1945), a British Columbian Post-Impressionist artist whose lush and flowing canvases are populated by Northwest Coast housepoles and towering cedars. While Tom Thomson's *Jack Pine* and Harris' *Lake and Mountains* are typical of a Group of Seven view in which people are conspicuous by their absence, Carr's paintings document and celebrate the interplay between landscape and Aboriginal and contemporary societies. In her works, the environment is a place in which humans must — and do — find their way and be neither dwarfed nor dumbstruck by it.



Figure 10.27 "Kitwancool," 1928, by Emily Carr.

Key Points

- While high style cultural elements could be — and were — imported from abroad, Canadian artists struggled in the first hundred years after Confederation to be recognized.
- Those artists who neither imitated British, French, or American styles nor emigrated to make their careers in larger, foreign markets, were constrained by the structure of the publication and performance businesses in Canada, and a small and divided Canadian marketplace.
- French-Canadian writers in particular turned away from urban and modernist themes and therefore became too parochial for a national audience.
- Musicians also took up antimodernist themes that celebrated the vernacular cultures of rural Canada, although the most successful moved to the United States where opportunities were greater.
- The links between urban performance venues enabled the circulation of modern musical innovations like jazz and big bands, along with various stage performance styles.
- Painting was an area where a few wealthy patrons could take the place of a mass market audience. In that environment, artists associated with the Group of Seven thrived, producing a style that claimed to reflect the wilderness as the basis of a distinctive Canadian culture.

Attributions**Figure 10.20**

[Portia White](#) by [Yousuf Karsh](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.21

Signed photograph by Daisy D’Avara of herself top-hatted in “A Contented Woman” (CVA 19-38) by [City of Vancouver Archives](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.22

[Wilf Carter, Montana Slim – label, side 1](#) by [Peter Zimmerman](#) is used under a [CC-BY 2.0](#) license.

Figure 10.23

[Florence Lawrence02 1908](#) by [Wisconsin Center for Film and Theatre Research](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.24

[Dark Autumn, Rocky Mountains – James MacDonald](#) by [J.E.H. MacDonald](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.25

[Bertram Brooker – Ascending Forms](#) by [Bertram Brooker](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.26

[Composition 11 Borduas](#) by [La Serviette](#) is used under a [CC-BY-SA 3.0](#) license.

Figure 10.27

[Emily Carr 1928 Kitwancool](#) by [Emily Carr](#) is in the [public domain](#).

6.6 A Culture under Siege?



Figure 10.28 What's showing? An early cinema or nickelodeon, so called because it cost a nickel (5 cents) to get in, on Queen Street West in Toronto, ca. 1910.

Even as modern styles were stirring the pot of creativity and innovation in the first three decades of the century, censorious clouds were gathering. The fear of the modern was expressed in antimodernist ways and through modern political movements that might, for example, admire scientific progress while simultaneously decrying the emergence in the 1920s of the modern woman.

The **Motion Picture Production Code** (1930) in the United States tamed Hollywood movies so that popular culture would not be threatened by shifts in popular moral codes. While the Code had no impact on Canadian filmmaking (such as it was at the time), it impacted the careers of Canadians in Hollywood and, of course, Canadians experienced its effects whenever they visited a cinema.

This was the case, in part, because of the Americanization of Canadian culture. The movement of goods and ideas never had much respect for the boundary lines between British North America and the United States, and the 20th century border was only more porous. Radio — and, later, television — signals swept back and forth across the international frontier unimpeded. American listeners in the northern states picked up the few radio stations producing signals in Canada, while Canadian audiences dialed in to programming that originated, principally, in New York. It was then relayed through networks of private broadcasters to cities like Bangor, Duluth, or Spokane

from whence the AM waves worked their way into neighbouring provinces. Some American programming was so popular in Canada that Canadian private stations carried the shows themselves. In many instances, American radio station owners simply bought up private broadcasters in Canada and thus extended their reach.

Radio and TV Broadcasting

By Norm Fennema, Department of History, University of Victoria

As in the United States, radio broadcasting in Canada began in the early 1920s. Because radio use began with mariners, licenses were initially available from the department of Marine and Fisheries for any interested party, with payment of a \$25.00 fee. By the mid 1920s, upwards of 30 commercial broadcast licensees — often churches or electrical equipment businesses — operated limited daytime programming in major centres such as Toronto and Montreal.

The impetus for a federal role grew in tandem with the growing availability and popularity of American programming and the apparent chaos of the American commercial system. The formation in 1922 of the **British Broadcasting Corporation** — an early model of public ownership — seemed to hold the promise of aligning the broadcasting spectrum with its nation building potential. Action was hastened by a national controversy over the cancellation of broadcasting rights of the Jehovah's Witnesses, operators of Canada's first and only national network. An ensuing parliamentary firestorm was quelled by the government's announcement of a Royal Commission on radio broadcasting — the first of many.

The recommendation of the **Aird Commission**, named for the commission president, that "broadcasting...be placed on a basis of public service and that the stations providing a service of this kind should be owned and operated by one national company" was finally realized in the passage of the 1932 *Broadcasting Act*, by which the Canadian Radio-Broadcasting Commission came into being.¹ A major victory in one of the hardest fought advocacy campaigns in Canadian history, the battle to realize the Commission's vision was led by the indomitable patriot, socialist, and anti-American nationalist Graham Spry (1900-1983).² Mandated to regulate the existing commercial stations as their operations were being phased out, the new public broadcaster formed an East-West system, partly through appropriation of the Canadian National Railway Radio network, which included a French language service. Retooled as a Crown corporation in 1936, the rechristened **Canadian Broadcasting Corporation** was hamstrung by chronic underfunding and the Depression.³ The original goal of a single public system was also contested by commercial station owners through the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB), whose lobbying efforts initiated a battle that is played out to this day with the Friends of Canadian Broadcasting — successor to Spry's Canadian Radio League. The result was a hybrid system of public and private broadcasting, with the public service continually mandated to provide "a wide range of programming that informs, enlightens and entertains" and one that "should be predominantly Canadian, serve the needs of the regions, be in English and in French, and be available throughout Canada."⁴ Nationally popular programming such as *Hockey Night in Canada* clearly fulfilled this mandate, while the French language *Radio Canada* helped engender a renewed sense of Québécois identity.

Reinjection of a nationalist *raison d'être* for broadcasting came in the context of renewed support for

1. Canada, Report of the Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting, September 1929, in Roger Bird, *Documents of Canadian Broadcasting* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1988): 52.

2. Rose Potvin, *Passion and Conviction: The Letters of Graham Spry* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1992), 2, 79.

3. Mary Vipond, "The Beginnings of Public Broadcasting in Canada: The CRBC, 1932-36," *Canadian Journal of Communication*, vol. 19, issue 2 (1994): 155.

4. *Broadcasting Act*, subsection 3(1)(m).

bilingualism and the advancement of multiculturalism in the later 1960s. This resulted in a mandated minimum of 60% Canadian content on television and 30% on radio for both systems. While leaders in news and information programming, the much greater costs of television (20 times that of radio) meant CBC entertainment and dramatic programming tended to compete poorly against American offerings.

The CBC remains an important national institution, though dwarfed in size by the commercial system, still without a guaranteed funding formula, and continually subjected to government cutbacks. Long-running programs such as David Suzuki's *The Nature of Things* (which began under Donald Ivey in 1960) and *The National* are Canadian staples, and despite its loss of *Hockey Night in Canada* to Rogers Communications in 2014, the network retains millions of viewers and experiences annual growth in online traffic.

A significant rationale for the existence of a public broadcaster was that it would provide that which a commercial system would not. The *Broadcasting Act* of 1932 was a declaration of federal sovereignty over the airwaves predicated on a conviction that radio broadcasting, in whatever form it might take, was a *prima facie* public resource, a view that seems to still be supported by most Canadians.

Hollywood and the North

Cinema could have been different from radio. After all, cinemas were not obliged to show American films; and the cans of motion picture reels, unlike radio programming, could be stopped at the border, if need be. Viewed by not one government in Canada as worthy of investment or control, the American and (secondarily) British film industries found their way into Canadian movie houses unobstructed. The world's first national film production office, the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau, was established in two stages from 1918 to 1923 and from the start specialized in the news-reel style of film-making for national promotion purposes. Indeed, the first movies made in Canada were overwhelmingly documentaries, some of them immigrant recruitment fodder about life on the plains. Although fictional dramas followed early in the 20th century — including some of the earliest war movies, drawing on the 1660 Battle of Long Sault and the War of 1812 as source material — these were to prove exceptions to the rule. This early efflorescence was soon overwhelmed by American product, which was something the Bureau actively encouraged. The first director of the Bureau, Bernard E. Norrish, was dismissive of the possible success of a Canadian film industry, commenting that Canada “had no more use for a large moving picture studio than Hollywood had for a pulp mill.”⁵ Other countries, recognizing the threat posed by Hollywood to their own film artists, imposed quotas; nothing of that order occurred in Canada. Canadian cinemas were made more deluxe — this was the era of the movie palace — so as to make the experience of moviegoing still more escapist than the film's subject matter. Hollywood might occasionally experiment with Canadian-themed movies involving Mounties (some of them singing), but otherwise the experience of entering a darkened movie house in Canada was much the same as it was in Des Moines, Iowa.

5. Quoted in “The History of the Canadian Film Industry,” *Historica Canada*, accessed 10 December 2015, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/the-history-of-film-in-canada/>.



Figure 10.29 In 1945, the city centre cinemas were still thriving. Shows were usually continuous, hence the saying, “this is where I came in.”

By the late 1930s, there was not much left of the Canadian film business. It was with the nurturing of the documentary tradition in mind that the **National Film Board (NFB)** was established in 1939. Its mission was almost immediately transformed by the outbreak of war. Still steering clear of fictional drama, the NFB now concentrated on wartime propaganda. After WWII, efforts to build a Canadian film industry continued to fail. The consolidation of the theatre chain system and its place in a vertically integrated Hollywood-based industry meant that the major American studios controlled everything from story-pitch through production and distribution. Under these circumstances, it was astonishingly difficult for a Canadian film to find a Canadian audience. By the late 1940s, the Canadian film industry was another arena in which Canadian cultural sovereignty and health was becoming a matter of some concern to policy makers as well as to artists, entrepreneurs, and social commentators.

The State and Culture in the Cold-War Era

Between them, the Group of Seven founder Lawren Harris and his contemporary and close friend Vincent Massey (1887-1967) delivered the one-two punch of 20th-century Canadian culture. Both men were born in the 19th century and were heirs to strong traditions of individualism and, more importantly, to the Massey-Harris industrial fortune. Harris’ role in the founding and success of the Group of Seven is considered in [Section 10.14](#). It was Massey, however, who would advance the question of what was to be done about Canadian culture as a whole.

Massey played a managerial role at the family firm for a while before being drawn into politics by Mackenzie King. By the mid-1920s — while still in his early 40s — Massey was playing important diplomatic roles for Canada. In 1949, he was tasked by Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent with chairing the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences, eponymously known as the **Massey Commission**.

The Commission reflected growing concern on the part of government about the impact of American culture.

Even as Canada was gaining greater autonomy from Britain in constitutional and foreign affairs areas, there was a growing reaction to the influence of the United States. Partly this was spurred on by the growing power of the federal state. WWII had laid down the foundations of a vastly increased bureaucracy and government intervention in the economy as well as in social and educational policy areas. The planning state could, quite naturally, extend its reach to cultural concerns.

The *Massey Report*, issued in 1951, was both a response to American cultural imperialism and an alarm bell. It legitimated government involvement in cultural institutions, laid out a game plan, and endorsed federal spending on post-secondary education for the first time. The Commissioners drew attention to the paucity of performance venues for the high arts and the unlikelihood of all but a handful of artists earning a living from their craft in Canada. American culture was saturating Canada and talented Canadians were heading south because in the United States they could earn a living in the culture industries. Canadian genius went out with the tide and Disney swept back in.

The Commission's recommendations resulted in the creation of the **Canada Council for the Arts** in 1957, which stimulated the growth of both literature and research in the humanities and social sciences. This second role was hived off in the 1970s into the **Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)**. Leading figures in the Liberal Party were not alone in their belief that Canada's newly won global prominence at the end of WWII meant that the country should shed some of its outward backwardness and become more refined. They sought to use culture as an instrument of a liberal and humanist nationalism and, conveniently, **Americanization** served as a nice counterweight — a palpable threat — to the health of Canadian arts and letters. This provided a further justification for Ottawa's involvement and leadership in the field.

Critics of the Commission have jumped on their nationalism as a narrowing and necessarily proscriptive view of Canada, one that held out little for people who came from cultures other than French and English. It has also been dismissed as "a bunch of stuffy college dons trying to force a good dollop of 'culchah' down the throat of a gagging Johnny Canuck."⁶ The Commissioners took pains to reassure Canadians that they had no interest in dictating tastes; at the same time, their instincts ran strongly to high culture and large institutions. New homes for the National Art Gallery and the National Library and Archives (now Library and Archives Canada) were called for and eventually delivered; the NFB was beefed up; and money was made available for a generation of big theatres that would be suitable for symphony orchestras, ballet performances, and serious theatre. The Commission also indirectly encouraged investment and enthusiasm for the arts. The Winnipeg Ballet acquired the modifier "Royal" two years after the Commission, and the Stratford Shakespeare Festival got underway in 1952. Cultural spokespeople in Quebec were, however, particularly critical of the Commission, seeing it as an intrusion on the constitutional space occupied by the provinces. Artists and consumers of art whose tastes were not those of the elites were inevitably disappointed that the Commission had little to offer the culture of working Canadians. Finally, the Commission's timing was such that it could not grasp fully the implications of the newest medium: television. Finding ways to support Canadian literature, theatre, and humanist education and research was, at the end of the day, an important investment in the development of a distinctive Canadian voice; failing to address the issue of television was like leaving down the drawbridge.

6. Paul Litt, *The Muses, the Masses, and the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 6.

The arrival on the scene of television in the early 1950s added a new technological wrinkle to the communications and entertainment industry, effectively combining the radio industry with the film industry. The old radio giants in the United States – the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) – moved easily into the television market and enjoyed an immediate technological, talent, and distribution advantage over all North American competitors, including the upstart American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). The CBC moved into television with fitful success based on its own national radio infrastructure and the cultivation of teams of writers and performers in both English and French. Early television, however, depended heavily on live performance and this presented enormous challenges in a country as wide as Canada. American broadcasters moved more rapidly into taped/recorded programming, led by ABC. In the nearly twenty years between the first appearance of television and the arrival of cable distribution in the late 1960s, American stations were as easy to access as Canadian broadcasts in all of the large markets. Inevitably the CBC began purchasing taped editions of American programming for broadcasting on their own channels within their own schedules.

The regulation of culture in the late 20th-century music industry is considered in [Section 9.15](#). Canadian television companies faced similar constraints on content and these were met without much enthusiasm or concern for quality. While Québécois audiences were able to sustain locally made, French-language programming, English-Canadian stations competed with expensively produced American dramas and comedies that could be purchased and delivered more cheaply than the price of making something in Canada by Canadians. Some exceptions occurred, including *The Littlest Hobo* (a Canadianization of *Lassie*), *Quentin Durgens, MP* (a political drama), and *The Beachcombers* (which ran from 1972 to 1990), but most efforts faltered quickly. Some, like the notorious *Trouble with Tracy*, were ostensibly produced at the lowest possible cost simply to satisfy regulators' demands for Canadian content. Documentaries and nature programs proved more durable, as did current events programs like *W5*, which debuted in 1966. Children's programming proved to be especially successful: both *Chez Hélène* and *The Friendly Giant* first appeared in the 1950s and enjoyed very long runs.

These efforts could not, however, stem the tide of American television broadcasting. Even as the Massey Commission's recommendations were bearing fruit, they were doing so in the face of an increasingly suburbanized population's infatuation with television. The history of communications, film, and broadcasting in Canada continues to reflect this bias that worked against an indigenous, homegrown creativity comparable to what one finds in other English-speaking countries.

Key Points

- Modern culture was increasingly dominated by electronic media like radio and television, both of which were dominated in North America by manufacturers in the United States.
- As Norm Fennema points out, attempts to regulate and stimulate the production of Canadian radio and visual broadcasting began in the 1930s, with mixed results over the three decades that followed.
- Cinema was not regulated and a branch plant system of American-owned screens in Canada ensured the supremacy of American-produced movies.

- The NFB gave Canadian filmmakers credibility, though principally in the field of documentaries.
- State and elite concerns for the future of Canadian culture and for the threat of Americanization was manifest in several forms, including the Massey Commission.
- The *Massey Report* led to the creation of a cultural support infrastructure that put arts and academic research funding into a kind of order. The kind of culture favoured by the Commission tended to be highbrow, for which it was criticized.
- Television escaped scrutiny for many years, by which time American programming dominated Canadian television schedules, despite a few rare exceptions.

Attributions

Figure 10.28

[Auditorium Theatre in Toronto](#) by [EraserGirl](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.29

[Strand Theatre box office showing advertising for “The Last Chance”](#) by [Jack Lindsay](#) is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [City of Vancouver Archives](#) under the reference number **CVA 1184-2590**.

6.7 The National Pastime(s)



Figure 10.30 Nothing says gentlemanly, amateur sports like cricket, especially when it's being played at Upper Canada College. Social class barriers stood in the way of cricket becoming the professional and commercialized product that it became in other Commonwealth countries.

Canadians might agonize over American and other influences on their culture (they did, and they still do) but one area that has remained largely exempt in that regard has been sports. Whether it is ice hockey or Canadian football, issues of national cultural integrity are seldom as intense as they are with regards to content on radio or television.

Robin Anderson and Russell Field explore aspects of sport history and the history of spectatorship in Sections [10.16](#) and [10.17](#). What both identify as critical in modern sports is the speed with which commercialization became not only their defining feature but also the surest test of their quality: if you have to pay money to watch it, it must be good. There were exceptions in the 20th century, and curling is merely the first that comes to mind. Lacking the explosions of activity that made for good radio and difficult to professionalize until the late 20th century, curling persisted as mostly a participant sport.



Figure 10.31 Enormously popular in places like Dartmouth, NS, curling was nevertheless slow to professionalize. Even as an amateur sport it had a low profile: it arrived at the Winter Olympics in 1924 and then disappeared until 1998.

Of the masculine sports, Canadian rugby's two branches offer perhaps the greatest contrast. In the 1880s, college teams from Ivy League institutions in the United States challenged Canada's premier university at the time — McGill — in what started out as something very much like English rugby but which quickly acquired distinctive features on both sides of the border. The mutated versions emerged as Canadian-rules and American-rules "football".¹ The link between true rugby and the Canadian Football League is to be found on the Grey Cup itself, said to be the oldest trophy in professional sports: it is awarded annually to the best team in the Canadian Rugby Union. The cup has been stolen on at least two occasions: it is either a myth or a public secret that it was abducted by members of the Canadian Rugby Union (aka: Rugby Canada). Both English rugby and Canadian rugby remained amateur sports until the mid-1950s when the Canadian variant became the **Canadian Football League (CFL)**, a fully professional operation comprised of separate eastern and western unions. Rugby retreated to university campuses and private clubs, although football by the mid-century had a grip on varsity sports as well.



Figure 10.32 Ottawa meets the Hamilton Tigers in a 1910 "football" game that looks a lot like rugby.

Lacrosse offers a contrary example of a sport that was widely played, quickly professionalized, and progressively marginalized. Lacrosse enjoyed its best years as a spectator sport in the pre-1914 period. By the 1920s, the game

1. Robert A. Stebbins, "Ambivalence at the Fifty-five-Yard Line: Transformation and Resistance in Canadian Football," *The Beaver Bites Back? American Popular Culture in Canada*, eds. David H. Flaherty and Frank E. Manning (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993): 164-7.

was moving indoors and was becoming professionalized, typically as an arm of existing pro-hockey teams like the Canadiens, the Maple Leafs, and the Maroons. Despite the game's current status as one of Canada's two national sports, it has repeatedly failed commercially; clubs have folded and been revived, and it is sustained mostly by a rabid (if small) fan base. What challenges lacrosse is the same thing that vexes the CFL: a limited television market. The most profitable pro-leagues in North America have capitalized on advertising revenues to such an extent that watching public sports in a private space (the home) has come to define the supporter experience for Americans and Canadians. The size of a sports corporation's profits were once tied to the number of fans they could bring into an arena or stadium; that has not been the case since the 1960s for the NHL, American football, or professional baseball.

As Anderson points out in [Section 10.16](#), the history of Canadian sports is intensely gendered. The intersections between the body, athleticism, the marketplace, and the crowd are facets of sports in the modern world that have drawn attention from historians, and on which much research remains to be done.

Key Points

- One of the features of the modern world is the rise of massified spectator sports. These shifted the balance from the value of athleticism as a means to personal development to the commercial opportunities of arena sports and advertising revenues.

Attributions

Figure 10.30

[Cricket, Upper Canada College, Forest Hill](#) by [Toronto History](#) is used under a [CC-BY 2.0](#) license.

Figure 10.31

[Curling on a lake in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada, ca. 1897](#) by W.L. Bishop is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.32

[Ottawa and Hamilton Tigers football game \(Online MIKAN no.3386005\)](#) by William James Topley / Library and Archives Canada / PA-009601 is in the [public domain](#).

6.8 Commercial Sport and Spectating

RUSSELL FIELD, FACULTY OF KINESIOLOGY AND RECREATION MANAGEMENT, AND UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA



Figure 10.42 A full house at Maple Leaf Gardens, 1932. Note the 1930s-vintage jumbotron.

Modern sport emerged in the second half of the 19th century under the conditions of industrial capitalism in urban contexts. Embraced by upper-middle-class professional men, who had both leisure time and a belief that the practice of physical competition would inculcate the values and skills of civic leadership, early organized sport was imbued with the ideologies and regulations of amateurism. The classed and gendered realities of amateur sport, which was almost exclusively male until the 1920s, informed global movements such as the Olympics and continued to hold sway until the 1970s.

Despite the influence of middle-class notions of respectability in establishing the values of amateur sport, sporting events were also included within the popular commercial amusements of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Often organized around one-off contests in individual sports — such as rowing, boxing, foot-racing, and horse-racing — commercial sport was associated with disreputable practices such as drinking, gambling, and rowdy behaviour among spectators. Moreover, the professional athletes who earned a living through such events were

castigated by amateur sport leaders as having sacrificed the character-building aspects of amateurism and the pursuit of sport for sport's sake.

By the 1930s, the sanctification of professionalism as a marker of ability rather than a moral failing was well underway. One of the most significant features of this shift were the spaces that were built to accommodate paying customers (spectators), most prominently in the 1920s. In the decades prior, spectator behaviour was a significant issue for entrepreneurs. Profit was tied to the respectability that was conferred upon the practice of spectating. Indeed, one of the earliest appearances of women as sport spectators was the late-19th century creation of Ladies' Days at baseball grounds. (Baseball was one of the few team sports that did not attract the interest of amateur sport leaders.) Women were admitted free to games in the hopes that their presence would improve the behaviour of the men in the stands and on the field.

By the 1920s, the built-spaces for sport had evolved considerably. Consider the case of hockey in Toronto and New York. Ontario's first artificial ice rink, Arena Gardens, opened in December, 1912 and had, according to the *Toronto Daily Star*, "room for 2,000 skaters and 7,000 spectators." Typical of arenas built in this era, when facilities were intended as much for participation as spectating, Arena Gardens' management set aside Friday nights for public skating. Cultural and economic circumstances were markedly different for commercial hockey in Toronto only two decades later, and public skating was not a feature of the arenas built in the 1920s to 1930s. The defining feature of these new sporting palaces was that, above all, they catered to spectators interested in spending disposable income on watching sporting events. The experience of the sport spectator did not occur within a vacuum, but among an increasing array of consumption possibilities in the 1920s and 1930s. The building of sport spaces needs to be understood alongside the construction of other major sites of public consumption in interwar cities, including vaudeville theatres and music halls, cinemas for the new "talking" motion pictures, department stores, and museums.

To compete in the burgeoning entertainment economy of the late 1920s, entrepreneurs located their arenas in entertainment districts. The new Madison Square Garden, for example, was built in 1925 only a block from the Broadway theatre district, far removed from its eponymous square. Investors in these facilities envisioned sport spaces that would project an aura of middle-class respectability. Architects with experience designing non-sporting spaces of consumption such as theatres and department stores were called upon to create these new arenas. In both Toronto and New York, architects sought to gentrify the practice of sport spectating without eliminating the possibility of distinctions within the arena. The nature of the seating, for example, was increasingly less comfortable as one travelled higher in the arena, and the building was designed to prevent spectators from moving between the different tiers of seats.

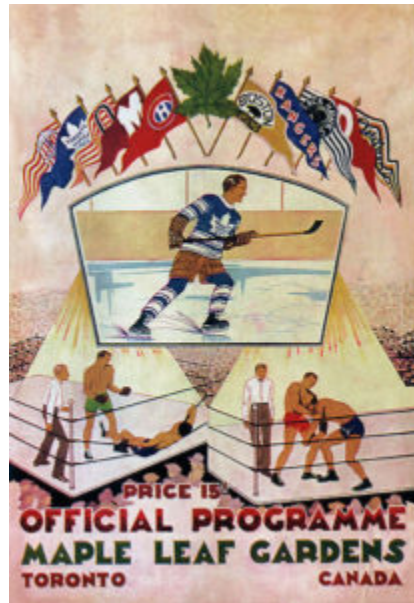


Figure 10.43 Respectable but rough. Entertainments at the newly erected Maple Leaf Gardens are very masculine but also overseen by fair-minded referees. Note that the NHL banners include 10 teams (not the so-called “Original Six” that survived the Depression and WWII). From the Leafs’ first match at Maple Leaf Gardens in 1931.

Into such spaces entrepreneurs hoped to attract a respectable middle-class spectator, one who was likely male but who would feel that the new arena offered sufficient comfort to bring a female companion. An analysis of ticket subscription records from the mid-1930s reveals that Maple Leaf Gardens attracted a crowd of middle-class men and women. But the presence of a middle-class audience does not imply that its members always spectated in respectable ways. The spectator experience cannot be easily distilled to a single experience — indeed, it was a pastiche of many different experiences. Former box-seat patrons at Maple Leaf Gardens recall the expectation to be suitably (and formally) attired, while others who were located elsewhere in the arena remember the impact that such demonstrations of respectability had on their own choices. By contrast, former spectators at Madison Square Garden recall the highest tier of the arena being the denizen of the gallery gods. Designed with the narrow confines of the boxing ring in mind, rather than the wider field of vision required for hockey, Madison Square Garden’s gallery required most patrons to stand, leaning forward, enjoying the spectacle in physical contact with one another. Within this milieu, a culture of spectating unique within the arena developed — from the practice of racing upstairs to claim non-reserved seats to the insults and projectiles that were hurled.

Many spectators took pleasure in the spectacle that unfolded on the ice surface before them, both in the speed of the game and its (often violent) physicality. But it was not the spectacle alone that attracted the spectator. Former spectators recall the many ways in which hockey spectating was a social occasion: a parent taking a child to his/her first game, a heterosexual couple going on a date, as well as couples choosing to attend with other couples. The dominant narrative is that many women entered arenas on the arms of the men escorting them to the game. Despite this, there were women who went to hockey games at Maple Leaf Gardens in the interwar years

in the company of other women. One female spectator recalled how she and five companions, all female, went to professional hockey games in Toronto every Saturday from 1925 to 1931. This dedicated group began spectating *prior* to the opening of Maple Leaf Gardens in 1931, but, with the construction of the modern, new arena, their weekly outings took on the air of an occasion as the sextet dressed in their finest each Saturday night. This woman, whose grandson recounted this story, recalled the “fashion show in the stands” where she and her friends sat in Maple Leaf Gardens’ gray seats, the cheapest seats, most distant from the ice. While sport spectating has been constructed as a masculine pastime, in the new spaces of sport in the interwar years, women in Toronto also used one of the city’s most prominent public buildings as a site for their own socializing.

Key Points

- The gentlemanly virtues of amateurism were at odds with the (largely working class) desire to be paid to play (that is, professionalism). It was also at odds with gambling and more individualistic sports like racing and fights.
- The creation of modern arenas and stadia enabled the merchants of sports to present their products in a more respectable environment that competed well against other entertainment options.
- A barometer of respectability was the extent to which women felt welcome to the new arenas and were eager to attend matches.

Additional Readings

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Howell, Colin. *Blood, Sweat, and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001). See especially Chapter 3: Money.

Kidd, Bruce. *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). See especially Chapter 5: “Brand-Name Hockey.”

Attributions

Figure 10.42

Maple Leaf Gardens, Carlton St. north-west corner Church St.; Interior, Toronto, Ont. by Special Collections Toronto Public Library is used under a [CC-BY-SA 2.0](#) license.

Figure 10.43

MLG 1931w by Kordas is in the public domain.

6.9 Sport and Leisure in Post-Confederation Canada

ROBIN ANDERSON, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, AND UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY



Figure 10.33 A shinny match breaks out in 1919 Winnipeg.

The story of sport and leisure since the mid-19th century has been shaped by many factors, but three historical processes stand out in particular. The first is **social hegemony** in sport, the process by which dominant groups define the possibilities and limits on sport, leaving outlier groups having to struggle for inclusion. The second is **fan identification and representation**, the process in which a sport grows from a haphazard set of localized experiences to a phenomenon that fuels powerful allegiances to city, region, and nation. The third is **commodification**, the process of turning what originally was an informal and voluntary set of sport and leisure practices into a thoroughly commodified cultural marketplace. We will briefly look at each of these historical processes next.

Social Hegemony in Sport

As with most cultural activities, sport and leisure in the 19th and 20th centuries reflected the wider patterns of existence, social hierarchy, and class behaviours of Canadians. While human societies have always displayed a desire for play, organized sport with its emphasis on rational outcomes and fair play began in Great Britain in the late 18th century and was exported to British North America in the early 19th century as an extension of the leisure activities of the newly arrived British middle-class. Most historians agree that Montreal's Anglophone middle-

class men defined many of the enduring structures and practices of organized sport across Canada by the middle decades of the 19th century, including drafting the first rules of play, establishing the standard playing surfaces and equipment, creating the first sport organizations, leagues and events, and articulating a set of middle-class beliefs about the social and personal value of organized sport and leisure. Their vision of appropriate sport was a limited one but one that lined up closely in its broad outlines with similar developments in Europe and the United States.

While this relatively small group of sports-minded men had the money, leisure time, and social influence to define much of the physical activity in the 19th century, less powerful groups were still able to play their games within the nooks and crannies of rural and urban Canada. For instance, many of Canada's Aboriginal peoples continued to play their traditional games, although some of these, like the richly complex and multipurpose Iroquoian stick and ball game *Tewaarathon*, came under a re-forming process in the mid-19th century to become the standardized and rationalized sport lacrosse to mimic other contained European field games. Ironically, many eastern-Canadian Aboriginal communities embraced the simplified European game of lacrosse and used their superior fitness and skills to regularly crush their white opponents. Other non-Anglo groups, including eastern European and Asian immigrants in the late 19th century, faced similar challenges to maintain their sport and leisure practices in the face of the dominant sport culture. And, while middle-class male enthusiasts refined the game of ice hockey, informal varieties of shinny (ice hockey) continued to be played on frozen ponds by rural and working class Canadians.



Figure 10.34 A visiting British watercolourist attended a Montreal v. Caughnawaga (Kahnawake) lacrosse match in ca. 1882-83 and painted six of the First Nations players.

Organized sport was also designed in the 19th century as something *men* did, and was defined as a training ground for appropriate manhood. The masculinizing aims of sport shifted over time to reflect changes in the dominant form of manhood, but the attachment of sport to men has always been its central feature. This had, and still has, the effect of alienating some men who did not identify with the cultural messages around sport. And in much greater numbers, women were overtly excluded from most organized sports. By the late 19th century, however, women began to infiltrate and eventually demand equal access and resources within sport. The 1920s was a kind of golden decade for female athletes; high-profile Olympians Fanny “Bobbie” Rosenfeld (1904-69), Myrtle Cook (1902-85), and others simply represented the pinnacle of what were thousands of active women sports participants across the country. But the struggle was not over. Women’s efforts to gain an equal foothold in sport would continue through the 20th century in the face of ideological barriers about appropriate femininity, the supposed

limitations on the female body, and overt male resistance. We live in a world today where sport opportunities are still heavily tipped in men's favour and where media sport culture functions like a virtual man cave.



Figure 10.35 Myrtle Cook crosses the line first in a 100-metre heat at the 1928 Olympics.

Fan Identification and Representation

Notwithstanding the large crowds for sporting events in ancient Greece and Rome, there was a time more recently when sport fans did not exist — and no one thought they should. Modern organized sport began in the early 19th century as private activities for the benefit of the participants alone. Over time, however, that changed. Sport spectators, known as “fans” today, emerged as an important feature of sporting life and they came to identify local sports teams and high profile athletes as representing them and their community. Sports historians refer to this phenomenon as the **representational value of sport**, and its emergence parallels the growing commercialization and **professionalization** of sport, and team sports in particular. Of course, Canada was not isolated from sporting developments elsewhere. In Britain in the early 19th century, many of the enduring patterns of sport identity and representation were established at competing public schools like Eton and Rugby; in the United States, professional baseball quickly took on representational value, following the American Civil War in the 1860s.

By the early 20th century, the notion of “following your team” was firmly established in Canada. And the energy of this identification, combined with the pocketbooks of fans, helped to drive the growth of professional sports. In Vancouver before the 1920s, as in most Canadian cities, three professional team sports — field lacrosse, baseball, and ice hockey — competed for the attention and allegiance of local fans, albeit in more limited regional settings. It was not until after WWII that city-based sport teams began to compete in leagues (such as the Canadian Football League) that were truly national in scope. Even so, the NHL lost three Canadian teams between the wars, as the league expanded into the United States in search of larger markets, and only added one — the Vancouver Canucks — before 1979. By the end of the 20th century, team sport identification had become arguably the most powerful communal attachment and experience that Canadians have. Today, the proliferation of local team jerseys worn as flags to identify fan loyalty, the ubiquitous media saturation that accompanies the games, the huge amounts of capital — both real and emotional — that are expended to support local teams demonstrate the apparently

boundless power and appeal of sport representation. Ironically, however, the majority of players on the teams we choose to represent us are not from our communities, and most leave once their playing days are over.



Figure 10.36 One jersey that never caught on. The women's Fernie Swastikas (ca. 1922) wear a symbol that was not yet associated with Nazism.

Arguably the most potent representational force in sport is its connection to nationalism. Sport nationalism was slow to develop, and had to wait for the emergence and maturity of international sports organizations in the early 20th century. The modern Olympic Games, which began in 1896, first gave Canadians a taste of sport nationalism during the interwar years, demonstrating that even **amateur** athletics had the power to capture sports' representational value. The 1928 Olympic Games produced sports heroes like two-time gold medalist sprinter Percy Williams (1908-82) and the successful women's track and field team, the so-called "Matchless Six." After the Second World War, Canada's Olympic dreams shifted to the Winter Games, seen as more naturally suited to Canada's northern character, with the success of skater Barbara Ann Scott (1928-2012) in 1948 and skier Nancy Greene (b. 1943) in 1968. Canada would eventually host three Olympic Games, in Montreal (1976), Calgary (1988), and Vancouver (2010), all of which became sites for intense national fervour and the rather dangerous emotional game of placing the fate of the nation in the hands of a very few. Canadians were disappointed most of the time.

Even more than the Olympic Games, Canadian sport nationalism has focused on international hockey. For most of the 20th century, the amateur code that governed most international sports organizations kept Canada's best professional hockey players out of international competition. For generations, the **National Hockey League (NHL)** operated in a North American bubble, but with the confidence that the best hockey players in the world were those Canadians who toiled in the NHL. That began to change with the integrative forces of globalization from the 1960s onwards. In 1972, the NHL allowed its players to participate in an eight-game series with the best players from the Soviet Union. The resulting Summit Series and all the drama that the heroic narrative provided, capped by the iconic last-minute goal by Paul Henderson (b. 1943), became the high point of Canadian sports nationalism and, in the minds of Canadians for several decades, the most important national event in the country's history. The importance of the Summit Series has begun to fade in the collective memory, but

hockey nationalism certainly has not. An estimated 16 million Canadians crowded around their television sets or joined strangers in sport bars to watch both the Canadian women's and men's hockey teams win the 2010 Olympic gold medal in front of home audiences in Vancouver.

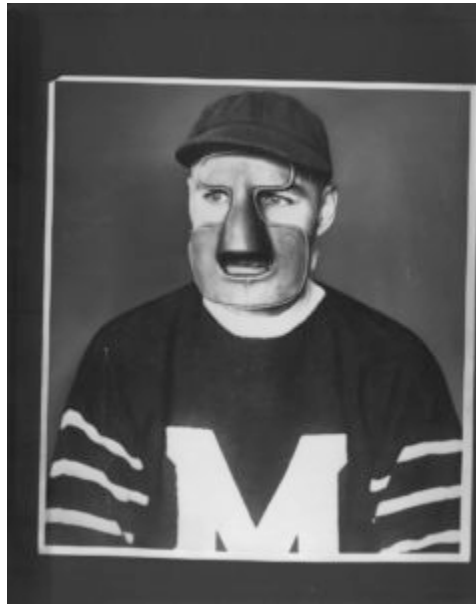


Figure 10.37 Clint “Praying Benny” Benedict (1892-1976) played for the Montreal Maroons, an NHL team that was a casualty of the Depression. Benedict pioneered the first goalie mask after breaking his nose in a game against the crosstown rival Canadiens.

Before Canadians hand their self-identity and emotional welfare over to the performance of hockey players, it would be useful to remember several important points about hockey nationalism. First, no other country in the world regards ice hockey as its most important national sport. In the United States, it is at best the fourth most popular team sport, and several other professional sports such as golf and NASCAR rate much higher in attendance and viewership. When Canada won the two gold medals in Vancouver in 2010, both against American teams, the Americans graciously complimented the Canadians and then went about their business. In some European countries, like Sweden, Finland, and Russia, hockey occupies an important place, but lags far behind football (soccer) and other sports specific to their own sports heritage. Canada has chosen a sport to distinguish itself on the world stage that no one else cares about, at least not nearly as much as Canadians do. Canadian accomplishments on the soccer, rugby, or even cricket pitch would carry far more prestige on the world's sporting stage.

We should also remember that a sport is an unusual and troubled way to define national character and purpose. Canada is one of the few countries that holds up a game as a definer of what that country is. Some cultural historians and critics have argued that Canada's lack of coherent unity or any sense of collective values has forced it to embrace an activity as a symbol of its essential nature. Some suggest Canadians are just lazy and wish to avoid the conflicts that would accompany making those important choices. So, instead of choosing specific meaningful ideals that reflect and shape what Canada is as a country — a task that other countries have done —

Canadians assign importance to the vagaries of a competitive game that presents conflicting messages to differing audiences, one that is played by a small and diminishing minority of mostly boys and men, and a game whose elite performers and major decision makers choose to work in the United States.

Commodification

The final factor that shaped the evolution of sport and recreation — commodification — is arguably the most important, and was probably unavoidable. The history of sport, after all, did not happen in a bubble, but rather paralleled the evolution of modern capitalism. As such, it has reflected the contours of social and cultural change that accompanied the industrial revolution. So, the initial emergence of organized sport forms in the mid-19th century has everything to do with the rise of industrial enterprise, the growth of wage labour, the expansion and increasing demands of the marketplace, the rapid growth of urban areas, the proliferation of industrial technology (especially advances in transportation), the invention of “leisure time,” and the growing confidence and recreational desires of the middle-class. When we talk about sport commodification, we mean the commercialization of events, which happened early, and the professionalization of players and athletes, which happened later and in some circles with greater controversy.



Figure 10.38 Parallel universes. Amateur cricket in the foreground and baseball — a game at which one could make money — being played in Willowvale Park (now Christie Pits), Toronto, 1920.

Right from the start, sport was attached to commercial opportunities, as enterprising individuals used athletic and physical activities to generate money. One-time sporting events, including prize-fights, canoe races, impromptu foot races, and strong-man competitions, were a common feature of 19th century Canadian life, and were almost always used as opportunities for gambling. One odd but typical example was the so-called “fat man” races that swept through Western Canada and the United States in the 1860s and 1870s. An advertisement in the *Victoria British Colonist* newspaper from 1872 gave readers ample notice:

Novel Race: A match has been made between two well-known Fat Men of this town, to run a foot race on the

Queen's birthday for 30 dollars a side. Beacon Hill [Park] will shake to its very base when these two great bodies are set in motion. Timid persons are requested to leave town for the day.¹

Gambling helped fuel the process of commercialization in many sports in the 19th century. And with this economic energy came sports professionalism, first with paid athletes in individual sports, and then, by the end of the century, with professional rosters in team sports. The best known and certainly most colourful professional athlete in 19th century Canada was the world single-sculls rowing champion Ned Hanlan (1855-1908). Hanlan grew up in a working-class Irish family in the Toronto area and learned to row while helping his father illegally smuggle rum across Lake Ontario. After he mastered the new technology of the single-sculls sliding seat, a skill that was crucial to his singular success, Hanlan went on to dominate the enormously popular rowing competitions in Canada, the United States, and Britain in the 1880s. Hanlan and his backers knew how to milk the entertainment value and gambling opportunities of a close and uncertain outcome, and quite often the consummate showman Hanlan intentionally slowed down to make races appear closer than they actually were.



Figure 10.39 “Ned Hanlan: Champion Sculler of the World,” a crayon and watercolour lithograph from 1880.

Sport historians are quick to remind us that even the strictest adherents of amateurism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries could not escape the needs of the marketplace, and even encouraged them. For instance, the **Montreal Amateur Athletic Association (MAAA)**, the first and most powerful multisport organization in Canada before WWI, was formed in 1881 by Montreal middle-class sportsmen to pool capital to purchase land and club facilities. If they wanted to stay afloat, the MAAA and other amateur organizations were going to have to come to terms with the cash nexus. Money was needed for facility rentals, park development and the purchase of clubhouses, event expenses (including promotion and advertising), participant rewards and prizes, and the cost of players' equipment and team accessories. All sports organizations — amateur included — charged gate admission to recover some or all of their related costs.

Amateur organizations like the MAAA were highly critical of professionalized team sports, which they saw as debasing the true spirit of voluntary recreation and the ideals of sport for sport's sake. The potent forces that came to shape team sports, particularly the representational value of sport, 19th-century civic boosterism, and

1. Ad from the *British Colonist* (Victoria, 1861), cited in Gary Kingston, "B.C.'s first "sports event" probably a cricket match," *Vancouver Sun*, (11 July 2008), accessed 13 May 2016, <http://www.vancouversun.com/news/bc-heritage/first+sports+event+probably+cricket+match/2207952/story.html>.

the overwhelming need to win, led to the practice of hiring the best players. Most major team sports moved incrementally from having the occasional paid player to stocking teams with dedicated professionals. By the early 20th century, most team sports were ignoring the voices of amateurism as they counted paying spectators filing into the ball parks, playing fields, and ice arenas across Canada.



Figure 10.40 The Vancouver Millionaires of 1913-14. Fred “Cyclone” Taylor (2nd from right, back row) was a key figure on the team and, also, in the Komagata Maru affair.

One early example of the possibilities of commodification in team sports was the **Pacific Coast Hockey Association (PCHA)**, a professional hockey operation that began in southwestern British Columbia by Frank and Lester Patrick in 1911. The Patrick brothers are remembered as creative innovators in hockey history, bringing in a slew of rule changes and practices that revolutionized the game, including the forward pass, the blue line, the use of in-play line changes, and the post-season playoff format. However, the PCHA was also a prime example of a fully commodified sports league. The Patricks owned and controlled every team in the PCHA, built state-of-the-art arenas with artificial ice, and moved teams around frequently to maximize revenue. They stocked the league with star players that were lured (some say raided) from the **National Hockey Association (NHA)**, the leading professional hockey league in eastern Canada that would become the National Hockey League (NHL) in 1917. The best known of these star players was Edouard “Newsey” Lalonde (1887-1970) and Fred “Cyclone” Taylor (1884-1979). Centralized team ownership meant that the Patricks could control player salaries and manipulate team rosters to achieve parity in the league, two issues that vex professional leagues today. The stability and public profile of the PCHA forced the NHA into a predictable east-west playoff structure for the Stanley Cup, effectively ending the challenge cup format that was in place since 1893. As a result of the Patricks’ investments, the Vancouver Millionaires were Stanley Cup champions in 1915, winning a best of three series from the Ottawa Senators three games to none. The PCHA’s Seattle Metropolitans would also win the Cup in 1917.

The opportunities for profit in sport increased exponentially in the second half of the 20th century. From the 1960s onwards, Canadians experienced an acceleration of commodification as the marketplace entered every area of life. Sport was part of this process. The revenue streams available to professional sports began to increase with television coverage in the 1960s and the delivery of commercial advertising through sports entertainment. Rising

ticket prices to games reflected the higher income levels of certain segments of the Canadian population. Player salaries also rose and soon escalated to keep step with the growing profits available in professional sports leagues. By the 1980s, sport commodification moved beyond television contracts and ticket revenues into retail sales and sponsorship agreements. Today, professional sport is a foundational element of modern capitalism because its emotional appeal is so easily attached to the capitalist marketplace.

The forces of sport commodification would eventually kill amateurism. The Olympic Games, or the “Olympic movement” as advocates prefer to call it, positioned itself early in the 20th century as the global defender of amateur principles. However, the lure of increased revenues for the Games after WWII proved too enticing even for members of the **International Olympic Committee (IOC)**, the appointed officials who governed the organization. What began as relatively small television contracts for the Games in the mid-1950s soon mushroomed in size to reflect profits to be made in media coverage. The IOC added sponsorship agreements to its revenue pool in the 1980s, as giant corporations such as McDonald’s, Coca-Cola, and Visa paid millions of dollars to be official partners for the Games. Once the commercial door was blown open by huge amounts of corporate money, it proved difficult to keep professionals out of the Games and maintain the principles of amateurism. For one, the public demanded to see the best athletes perform, professional or not. To accommodate, in 1988 the IOC allowed the international sports federations that governed each sport to define Olympic participation themselves. Most would eventually choose to abandon the amateur code.



Figure 10.41 The survival of amateurism in sports narrowed to events like the 1940 Highland Games in Antigonish. A kilted stone-thrower in action.

Today, the Olympic Games stand as the quintessential example of a thoroughly commodified sports entity. Its revenues rival the annual income of some countries, its commercial tentacles penetrate every market opportunity imaginable, and its boardroom of lawyers vigilantly polices its trademarks and other marketable symbols. But of course it is not alone. We uncritically admit today that modern sports organizations are businesses, first and foremost, and in so doing we allow them whatever latitude available to pursue their economic goals. However,

we usually fail to recognize the underlying context of expansionary capitalism that has moved sport and sport entertainment into the centre of our lives. We also fail to see the gap that has developed between elite professional sports celebrities and the rank-and-file sports fan.

Key Points

- Historians of sport observe that social hegemony works to privilege some activities and marginalize others, which in Canada has meant the middle class definition of appropriate organized games was a racialized and sexualized — white and male — space.
- Spectator sports are historically tied to the notion of the representational value of the games, which is tied to urbanization and the professionalization of playing.
- Canada's obsession with ice hockey has eclipsed interest in sports with a far greater international cachet.
- Industrialization and urbanization contributed to the emergence of leisure time and the use of disposable income to support sports enterprises. Sports became professionalized and turned into a commodity for sale.

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Attributions

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[Caughnawaga Indian Lacrosse players: study of five figures \(Online MIKAN no. 3017355\)](#) by Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. R9266-224 Peter Winkworth Collection of Canadiana is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.35

[Myrtle Cook of Canada \(left\) winning a preliminary heat in the women's 100 metres race at the VIIIth Summer Olympic Games \(Online MIKAN no.3191809\)](#) by Library and Archives Canada / PA-150994 is in the [public domain](#).

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[Ferne Swastikas hockey team 1922](#) by [Esemono](#) is in the [public domain](#).

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[Clint Benedict Montreal Maroons \(Online MIKAN no.3653185\)](#) by Hockey Hall of Fame / Library and Archives Canada / PA-048898 is in the [public domain](#).

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[Cricket and baseball – Willowvale Park](#) by [John Boyd Sr.](#) is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [City of Toronto Archives](#) under the archival code **Fonds 1548, Series 393, Item 16432**.

Figure 10.39

[Edward \(Ned\) Hanlan \(Online MIKAN no.3018711\)](#) by Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. R9266-3343 Peter Winkworth Collection of Canadiana is in the [public domain](#).

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[1914 Vancouver Millionaires](#) by [Stuart Thomson](#) is in the [public domain](#).

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[Highland Games, Antigonish, Aug. 1940, athlete throwing stone](#) by [Ronny Jaques](#) is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [Library and Archives Canada](#) under the reference number **4315254**.

6.10 Tourism in 20th Century Canada

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Figure 10.44 Air travel for business and pleasure became more common in the 1930s. Passengers at Vancouver Airport in 1937 get ready for a flight on United Air Lines *Mainliner*.

Mountains, lakes, totem poles, Mounties, moose, and a certain house said to have been inhabited by Anne of Green Gables: what do these items all have in common? They have all become staples of Canadian guide books and tourist itineraries.

Of course, sightseeing did not begin in the 20th century. Canada (and British North America before it) had long been a popular destination for travellers keen to experience its natural wonders — and pursue its animal life in the hopes of demonstrating their skill and vigour in killing it. But the scope and scale of tourism in Canada expanded dramatically over the course of the 20th century.

A number of factors facilitated this expansion.

First, technological advances played an important role as railways, roadways, and eventually air travel, dramatically reduced travel times and encouraged visitors to embark upon more ambitious vacations. The invention of the automobile was particularly transformative. Although an automobile was a rare sight in Canada

at the beginning of the 20th century, there were over 1 million cars traversing the country's roads by the end of the 1920s.¹ Gas stations, motels, and diners quickly emerged to service automobile-propelled travellers.

Second, a relatively sustained period of *economic* growth from the late 1940s to the early 1970s ensured that Canadians and international visitors possessed disposable income to spend on leisure travel.

Third, shifting attitudes toward leisure (from something to be mistrusted and frowned upon to something to be embraced and celebrated) produced a *social* transformation that facilitated the expansion of Canada's tourism industry. Canadians and international visitors thus secured increased opportunities to tour the country over the course of the 20th century. But governments, too, played an important role. And the timing of government intervention in the tourist industry is an important part of the story.

In the first three decades of the century, civic organizations and provincial authorities endeavoured to attract visitors to their locales. Some of these bodies hoped that these visitors would return to settle as investors who would bring agricultural and industrial wealth to their local communities. Others focused more directly on the money that these visitors spent in the towns they visited and tried to maximize their immediate, short-term, economic impact. The economic dislocation engendered by the Depression encouraged tourism promoters to focus their efforts even more intently on maximizing tourists' expenditures. At a time when jobs were scarce and retailers were desperate to sell their wares, many observers argued, it made sense to encourage outsiders, especially Americans, to visit Canadian communities, for in doing so they would be injecting outside money into local economies.²

Pursuing this aim, many argued, required a coordinated and efficient campaign — and thus the involvement of the federal government. In response, Ottawa created the Canadian Travel Bureau in 1934. Tasked with expanding and modernizing the nation's tourist industry, the bureau offered advice to Canadian entrepreneurs keen to profit from tourism, embarked upon hospitality campaigns that implored Canadians to treat visitors nicely, and orchestrated publicity campaigns that aimed to lure tourists (especially Americans) to visit Canada.³

1. "In Search of the Canadian Car," accessed 8 September 2015 http://www.canadiancar.technomuses.ca/eng/frise_chronologique-timeline/1920/. This was a North American phenomenon. See, for example, John A. Jakle, *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), Chapter 7.

2. On these competing yet overlapping rationales for tourism promotion campaigns, see Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890-1970* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), Chapter 2.

3. On the formation and development of the Canadian Travel Bureau, see Alisa Apostle, "The Display of a Tourist Nation: Canada in Government Film, 1945-1959," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 12, 1 (2001): 177-97, and Alisa Apostle, "Canada, Vacations Unlimited: The Canadian Government Tourism Industry, 1934-1959," Ph.D. dissertation. Queen's University, 2003.



Figure 10.45 Motor hotels (motels) were part of the commercial infrastructure of the new tourism and car culture. Built in 1946 in south Vancouver, 2400 Motel is a distinctive, bungalow-style structure that was built, like other motels across North America, along a major corridor.

Today, tourism plays a central role in Canada's economy. A recent estimate suggests that tourism is responsible, directly or indirectly, for almost 1 in 10 Canadian jobs.⁴ This development did not happen overnight. It was, instead, the product of important technological, economic, and social transformations over the course of the 20th century that were, in turn, facilitated by consumer demand, entrepreneurial initiatives, and government support and coordination.

Key Points

- Tourism advanced in the modern era, helped along by improved modes of travel that included automobiles and aircraft.
- Increased travel brought in its wake a service sector that provided fuel, food, and lodgings, as well as tourist destinations.
- Although there were signs of growth in this sector before 1945, after WWII it increased dramatically thanks to greater disposable wealth in the population and more leisure time.
- The involvement of government in the promotion of tourism from the 1930s established the industry as a credible and lucrative source of incomes and jobs. Along with the technological, social, and economic transformations that enabled the tourism phenomenon to occur, the expansion of the modern, interventionist state played a role.

Attributions

Figure 10.44

DC-3A United Air Lines NC 16071 by James Crookall is in the [public domain](#).

4. Tourism Industry Association of Canada, "The Canadian Tourism Industry: A Special Report" (Fall 2012), 7, accessed 8 September 2015 http://tiac.travel/_Library/documents/The_Canadian_Tourism_Industry_-_A_Special_Report_Web_Optimized_.pdf.

Figure 10.45

2400 Motel is in the public domain.

Week 7 - Wartime Controversies

The years from 1914-1945 are marked by turmoil, what one historical text calls “decades of discord.”¹ Not only was there conflict abroad, there was also tension at home. The workings of parliament and the democratic order in Canada underwent change, some degree of transformation, abuse, and challenge. The culture of Canada — like many western democracies — changed dramatically because of the war. The increasingly interventionist state might be ascribed to many causes but there was certainly a sense that the sacrifices of the Great War entitled all Canadians to greater security and care. There was an interesting bridge to cross here, one that took Canadians from a society of families, through the atomistic society of individuals, to a vision of Canada as a social state. Not *socialist* as yet, but the cost of two World Wars and one enormous economic Depression changed people’s expectations.

Imagine someone just old enough in 1914 to enlist or to replace a militia volunteer at their position in a factory or shipyard. Boys and girls of 15 — born just before the turn of the century — were part of that particular cohort. Some of them saw war; Canada’s substantial mortalities in Europe would ensure that many would never return home. Those who did, however, and assuming they survived the 1918 influenza pandemic as well, would reach their 20th birthday in the year of the Winnipeg General Strike — perhaps while the Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force was providing a small backstop for the anti-Bolshevik forces in eastern Russia. They’d live through a brief economic depression before the economy began to recover in earnest. Prohibition would come and go, women would enjoy unprecedented and expanding legal rights, and then, just as their work lives were getting well underway, the worst economic downturn in the history of capitalism would hit them. The whole of the 1930s — this cohort’s own 30s — would see the economic advances of the pre-war years and what recovery there was in the 1920s blow away in dust. If they weren’t married before 1929, they were less likely to marry in the next decade than any generation of 30-somethings in Canadian history. If they were too young to fight in the Great War they might well prove too old to fight in the Second World War. From adolescents to middle-aged adults, the Canada they knew was almost constantly in a state of crisis.

Does this generation matter? Given the number of young immigrant couples who arrived between 1891 and 1911, they certainly do. The birth rate — a pre-WWI baby boom — created a generation of Canadians that was too young to know the certainties of the Victorian era, too young to know a Canada that wasn’t already ethnically diverse, and old enough to grow both cautious of and eager for, change.

Learning Objectives

- Assess the impact of both wars on Canadian society.

1. John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986).

- Describe the domestic social and economic changes that took place between 1914 and 1945.
- Account for and list the significant changes in the status of women in this period.
- Outline the experience of Japanese-Canadians and Aboriginal people in wartime.

7.1 The Great War and the General Strike



Figure 3.42 A crowd on the streets of Winnipeg in the spring of 1919.

The history of labour is simultaneously the history of industry and capitalism. No event so announces the triumph of industrial capitalism as does the first industrialized war in 1914-1918. The Boer War of 1899-1902 was a testing ground for new technologies like the Maxim machine gun and some refinements in artillery. It was nevertheless, a conflict marked by an old-style dependency on horses for moving troops and cavalry charges. What erupted in 1914 was very different. The most industrialized nations in Europe were now capable of producing arms, motorized land and air vehicles, armed and mobile artillery (tanks), and chemical weapons, and putting them all into the field of battle. A century of Industrial Revolutions across the northern hemisphere brought the world to this: the possibility of killing human beings on an industrial scale. And it had also produced large numbers of humans to kill.

Earlier European conflicts faced limits based on potential army size. There was always a balance to be struck between professional or mercenary regiments and the national armies. The latter became more the norm in the 19th century as the nation-state emerged. Nowhere was this more obvious than during the American Civil War. The **standing army** was a development that coincided with the rise of the Dominion of Canada (and fear of the American standing army was a factor in Canada's expansion). There was also a trade-off, even during the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), between recruiting an army and depopulating the countryside. An army, as the

saying goes, marches on its stomach. Early industrial nations had no recourse but to recruit from the farming population, but there was always a tipping point where too many soldiers would mean too little food.

Industrialization didn't resolve that conundrum but it certainly changed the shape of the problem. Between 1750-1900 the population of Europe and Russia grew from about 146 million to 422 million; the population of the United States in 1775 was 2.5 million and in 1914 was nearly 100 million.¹ Canada's population growth was hardly less incredible: from 90,000 in 1775 it grew to nearly 8 million in 1914. Some of this growth — particularly in North America and Russia — took place on agricultural frontiers, but everywhere across the combatant countries there were now millions upon millions of industrial workers who could be pressed into service without compromising food production. At the same time, **essential industries** required essential workers. Shipyards, coal mines, smelters, munitions factories, agricultural toolmakers, and the transport sector all had to be kept humming along. Still, strip away the so-called non-essential industries and there was a huge population of workers that might be transformed into soldiers. Canada alone would find 620,000 of them, only the slenderest fraction of whom were trained to be warriors before the war.

In 1914, no one knew with certainty how long the Great War would last (see Sections 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, and 6.5). It was meant to be “Great” in its importance, not its length or body count. It would prove to be transformative in many ways — globally and in Canada — and this is evident in the history of Canadian working people.



Figure 3.43 War industries increased demand for labour even as large numbers of workers were heading overseas. A scene from a Canadian Linderman Co. plant.

Labour at War

The military and political response of working Canadians — and Canadians in general — to the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, is considered elsewhere in this text. How labour (meaning working people and organized labour) met the experience of living in a country engaged for the first time in **total war** is what matters here. The foremost measure of working Canadians' encounters with these new conditions is strike action.

1. Massimo Livi-Bacci, *A Concise History of World Population*, 2nd ed., trans. Carl Ipsen (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 31.

The war began two years after a high-water mark in labour unrest. The year 1912 saw a spike in the number of disputes and, although this barely changed in the following year, the number of workers involved plummeted from 43,104 to 4,004. In 1914, there were half as many strikes and half as many days lost. The incidence and length of strikes would continue to fall in 1915 although the number of workers involved now began to rise and would continue to do so, doubling annually from 1914-1917. In 1917 — the year of Vimy Ridge and Ypres — there were 222 strikes with 50,327 strikers involved and over a million workdays lost. This marked a return to the levels of 1912.²

What lay behind the plunge in labour disputes and then the meteoric rise in job actions as the war progressed? Canada contributed more than half a million soldiers, sailors, and other participants to the cauldron of war, and most of those individuals came out of industry. This created job shortages and, as a consequence, unemployment levels fell sharply. As the war progressed, there were gaps on the shop floors in critical industries like armaments. These gaps were filled by recruiting women into the workforce. As a result of these developments, working class families experienced a rise in wages and living standards. Less than a year into the war and these changes were being observed (unevenly) across the country. Very soon, labour shortages gave unions an opportunity to negotiate better conditions and wages.

Working people faced several issues at once. While improvements were being noted in wages, prices were also rising. Income gains were quickly being eroded. New industries like munitions were being heavily supervised and routinized. Machinists, in particular, found their work more structured and managed — something to which they objected. Skilled workmen also bridled at the idea of women taking on factory positions that had previously been the preserve of craft union members. Women were, to be sure, a highly visible sign of deskilling and, thus, a lightning rod attracting the criticism of organized labour. Untrained men were also contributing to the deskilling process and were no less a source of unease for the trade unions.

Popular perceptions of the war also changed. Within two years of the declaration of war in August 1914, it was no longer a brief and glorious confrontation between the British Empire and its rivals; the Great War had descended into a relentless and inglorious meat grinder of a conflict. Aggressive army and navy recruitment drives and talk of compulsory service were met with calls for the conscription of capital and not just soldiers. It was becoming clear that throwing more men into the trenches was not a winning strategy, and working class critics began pointing to industrialists — **profiteers** — who were growing fat off government wartime contracts.

Finally, the role of the state was changing. The *War Measures Act, 1914* gave the federal government extensive powers of censorship, arrest, and deportation, and control over the transportation sector (on land and in the harbours). It also allowed Ottawa to engage more directly in the manufacturing sector as a participant with a vested interest. As labour historian Craig Heron points out, the censoring of newspaper accounts of industrial disputes was viewed by socialists and labour leaders as an abuse of the *Act*; what's more, the introduction of prohibition in 1917 was deeply resented.³ As working-class unrest simultaneously spread across Europe and manifested itself in revolutionary socialist movements, the left wing in Canada came under surveillance by the RCMP and under fire from the Dominion government. Radical political organizations were infiltrated by police

2. Gregory S. Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 295.

3. Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1996), 47.

spies and suppressed; arrests and deportations of socialist leaders followed, which only aggravated labour's unease. Labour organizations and left-wing political movements began to turn the official wartime propaganda line back on the government: these attacks on rights were, they said, nothing less than Prussianism or Kaiserism at home.⁴

The labour movement rebounded and union membership shot up. By the end of the War, there were no fewer than 378,000 members in craft and industrial unions, as well as in the emerging civic unions that now included police, civil servants, and white-collar workers. Craig Heron points to the exceptional levels of collaboration and cooperation between craft unions and even between craft and industrial unions; these alliances facilitated community-wide bargaining in smaller industrial towns and sectoral bargaining in larger cities. He also notes a greater spirit of inclusivity that extended to women and ethnic minorities in unions.⁵

Two factors contributing to labour's growth remain to be mentioned. The first is success at the bargaining table. Wartime conditions, labour shortages, and a more muscular movement won concessions during strikes, and nothing succeeds like success when it comes to organizing labour movements. The second echoes the first: the success of revolutionaries in Russia inspired workers' movements around the world. The possibility of wringing significant systemic reforms from the state and employers was in sight; the prospect of overturning capitalism entirely and establishing a socialist political, economic, and social order was also closer than ever before. These developments provide the material and intellectual context of events in 1919.



Figure 3.44 The Canadian government's antipathy toward socialism extended to participation in an attempt to suppress the Russian Revolution. Members of the Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force (CSEF) in 1919 were few in numbers and saw little combat.

The General Strike

No single labour dispute in Canadian history is as well known and as regularly invoked as the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919. Lasting six weeks, from May through June, it constituted an important moment in the workers' revolt of the period that began in the 1890s and concludes (or at least takes a break) in the mid-1920s. The events

4. Craig Heron and Myer Siemiatycki, "The Great War, the State, and Working-Class Canada," in *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925*, ed. Craig Heron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), reprinted in *Readings in Canadian History: Post Confederation*, 7th ed., eds. R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith (Toronto: Thomson Nelson, 2006): 372.

5. Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 48-9.

in Winnipeg are important in many respects, but it is important to note as well that general strikes sprang up elsewhere: in Amherst, Nova Scotia, Calgary, Vancouver, Victoria, and in many other centres from one end of the country to the other. Some of these strikes were motivated by local conditions and others in sympathy with Winnipeg.⁶ Indeed, the rolling tide of disputes related to the Winnipeg General Strike would continue to 1925.

The idea of a work stoppage across industries had been touted for decades by the IWW and others on the more radical and industrial side of the labour movement. In the aftermath of the Great War, there were enough common issues and irritations to arouse the Canadian working class. As historian of labour, Greg Kealey, points out, “World War I, while providing specific sparks to light the flame of working-class struggle in 1919, should not be viewed as its cause.”⁷ If not, then what causes lay behind a wave of unrest that brought out more than 149,000 workers in more than 400 strikes and claimed more than 3.4 million workdays lost in 1919?

Rising unemployment was a factor. The end of war meant the closing of munitions plants. Now, too, there were hundreds of thousands of returning soldiers to inflate demand for work. In addition, ex-servicemen expected to return to their old jobs, which meant displacing women and men who had been brought into those positions during the war. All of this created an atmosphere of uncertainty in the workforce while mobilizing, at least part of, a large female workforce in protest. Politically, too, the returned troops were something of a wildcard. Some were outraged at the anti-war and anti-conscription postures struck by many on the labour-left, to say nothing of their hostility toward the Russian Revolution and its supporters. There were also instances where returned British-Canadian soldiers turned their ire against Central and Eastern European, people they described as enemy aliens, who had taken their jobs. Other veterans felt that the radical critiques of profiteering, incompetent generalship in Europe, and international capitalism were entirely on the mark. Ottawa’s disinterest in the fate of returning soldiers pushed many veterans still closer to the labour-left camp.



Figure 3.45 Some returned soldiers and the Citizens’ Committee regarded the strike as a treasonous conspiracy stirred up by Eastern European immigrants in Winnipeg.

6. See, for example, David Bright, *The Limits of Labour: Class Formation and the Labour Movement in Calgary, 1883-1929* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998), 145-61, and Benjamin Isitt, “Searching for Workers’ Solidarity: The One Big Union and the Victoria General Strike of 1919,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 60 (Fall 2007): 9-42.

7. Gregory S. Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), 294.

Divisions between craft unions and industrial unions also played a role in the growing labour militance after the war. The old tensions resurfaced in 1918-1919, following an attack by the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada on radical (and mostly western) elements within the unions. Regional leadership subsequently met in Calgary in March 1919, to form a **syndicalist** organization with roots in the old IWW: the One Big Union (OBU). International locals in the west were quickly brought into the OBU fold. Workers who were impatient for a confrontation with employers responded favourably to the OBU's radical language and rejected the AFL-TLC business union line. Precise numbers are impossible to obtain, but historians agree that anywhere from a quarter to a third of union membership in Western Canada — and specifically in Winnipeg — was in the OBU.



Figure 3.46 A crowd gathers outside Winnipeg City Hall in 1919 during the General Strike.

Of course, local conditions played a role. Events in Winnipeg arose initially from a bargaining dispute in the building and metal trades. The right to collectively bargain was one of the chips on the table and when employers would not budge, the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council (WTLC) called for a general strike. The response was unprecedented. A few days later, approximately 30,000 Winnipeggers were on strike. Public transit, the factories, the police department, fire stations, retail shops, post offices, and several utilities closed down. The Central Strike Committee — established by the WTLC — bargained with the city and employers while authorizing essential services like milk delivery.



Figure 3.47 Members and supporters of the Citizens' Committee – identifiable by their armbands and clothing – prepare to confront the strikers on Bloody Saturday.

The Winnipeg establishment came out united in its opposition to the strike. A **Citizens' Committee of One Thousand** was their coordinating body and they had deep pockets, a tight network of connections to the Borden government in Ottawa, and the full support of local and national newspapers. Describing the strike as a **Bolshevik** uprising (echoing fears of a Russian-style revolution) led by foreigners and traitors, the Citizens' Committee turned attention away from the issue of collective bargaining and raised the spectre of a revolutionary crisis.

Matters came to a head in mid-June 1919. On the 17th of June, ten OBU leaders were arrested, among them the leading **Social Gospel** Methodist minister in Winnipeg, James S. Woodsworth (see Chapter 7). The mass arrest launched a demonstration of solidarity and a final buildup of state resources that collided on **Bloody Saturday**, the 21st of June 1919. The deployment of troops, Mounties, and **Specials** — volunteer police drawn from the Citizens' Committee — in the words of one historian, turned Winnipeg into “virtually an occupied city.”⁸ The Royal North-West Mounted Police (as the RCMP were called at the time) appeared and charged on horseback into the crowd three times before opening fire: 30 were injured and two killed. The federal government's clear commitment to defeating the strike was manifest in cavalry charges against protesters, whose numbers included large numbers of Great War veterans. It was also evident in amendments to the *Immigration Act* and the *Criminal Code* that allowed Ottawa to deport British citizens and to charge strikers with sedition.

8. David Jay Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations, and the General Strike*, revised ed. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 187.



Figure 3.48 The RNWMP ride into the crowd on Bloody Saturday.

The Legacy of Winnipeg

The Panama Canal was an invisible participant in the General Strike. Opened in 1914, it cut deeply into the cost of shipping grain and lumber from Vancouver to the east coast of North America. The movement of Western products along the CPR through Winnipeg suffered badly. The effect was delayed by the War, but by 1919, it was being felt in falling wage rates and a rising cost of living in Manitoba. Winnipeg's economy never fully recovered. A decade after the strike, the city slipped out of 3rd place among Canada's largest centres and continued to become less and less consequential in the 20th century. One study has argued that the local labour unions were so demoralized by the events of 1919 and under such heavy state scrutiny, that they were thereafter incapable of fighting for competitive wages and working conditions.⁹

The strike produced other consequences, at least one of them very long-term. Six of the strike leaders were sentenced to a spell behind bars, some getting terms of two years. Woodsworth was released and almost immediately elected as an MP from the Independent Labour Party (ILP). He would go on to found the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the precursor of the New Democratic Party (see [Section 7.9](#)). Other figures, drawn from the leadership ranks of the strikers, picked up the thread of revolutionism and established a communist political party.

Among historians, Winnipeg occupies a place of contention. Was it an expression of a peculiar kind of Western radicalism or part of a larger Canadian workers' revolt? Does it constitute — as the Citizens Committee of One Thousand feared — a nascent Bolshevik revolution, or was it a local labour dispute with very limited goals: better wages and collective bargaining rights? These issues have divided labour historians for more than a generation. Recently it has been argued, perhaps unsurprisingly, that it was both a matter of local bargaining and a combination of radical rhetoric coupled to a comprehensive reaction by the authorities and the establishment.¹⁰

9. Kenneth McNaught and David J. Bercuson, *The Winnipeg Strike: 1919* (Don Mills: Longman Canada, 1974), 118-20.

10. See Reinhold Kramer and Tom Mitchell, *When the State Trembled: How A. J. Andrews and the Citizens' Committee Broke the Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

It has also been argued that the chief beneficiary of the Winnipeg Strike was the RNWMP. On the brink of being disbanded because its frontier mandate was no longer relevant, the Mounties found renewed purpose as an agency of state surveillance and subversion of leftist organizations.¹¹ What can be said with some certainty is that the events of 1919 hardened the federal and provincial state's attitudes toward labour; collective bargaining rights, welfare, veterans' support, and many other labour and social initiatives may have been postponed as a reaction to 1919. More pointedly, as one study reveals:

After crushing the Winnipeg strike, the federal government collaborated in the anti-radical **Red Scare** that businessmen and conservative journalists were promoting across the country. The workers' revolt had thus pushed the state to create more powerful, centralized mechanisms for combating radicalism than had existed in pre-war Canada.¹²

At the very least, the events of 1919 determined the size of a labour union. The state was to restrict them in such a way that one big union would become an impossibility in the future.

Key Points

- The Great War created conditions that facilitated the growth of militant labour.
- The end of the war saw a sudden reversal for working people, the emergence of divisions between returned soldiers and workers, and a state crackdown on leftist labour organizations.
- The Winnipeg General Strike was the foremost of several similar disputes across Canada that pitted a broad-based alliance of working people against an economic elite combined with imperialist factions and the armed representatives of the government.

Attributions

Figure 3.42

[Street scene during the Winnipeg Strike of 1919](#) by Library and Archives Canada is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [Library and Archives Canada](#) under the reference number **3574292**.

Figure 3.43

[War production](#) by Canada. Dept. of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [Library and Archives Canada](#) under the reference number **3371011**.

Figure 3.44

[Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force in Vladivostok 1919](#) by Raymond Gibson is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [Library and Archives Canada](#) under the reference number **3194493**.

11. See Lorne Browne, "Depression and Repression: Canada Between the Wars," *Canadian Dimension*, vol. 49, issue 2 (March/April 2015): 27-37.

12. Heron and Siemiatycki, "The Great War": 386.

Figure 3.45

[Street scene during the Winnipeg strike of 1919](#) by Library and Archives Canada is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [Library and Archives Canada](#) under the reference number **3574291**.

Figure 3.46

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Figure 3.47

[Winnipeg riot](#) by Royal Canadian Mounted Police / Library and Archives Canada is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [Library and Archives Canada](#) under the reference number **3615116**.

Figure 3.48

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7.2 Assessing Canada's War



Figure 6.6 Beginning in the 1920s, “cenotaphs” began to crop up across Canada to memorialize the fallen of the Great War. Vancouver, ca. 1924.

The British historian, Arthur Marwick, contributed to the study of 20th century war a model for assessing its impact. “Total war,” in military terms meant targeting factories and food production, and not just enemy armies. It meant, in that regard, that civilians who were supporting the enemy were legitimate targets as well. This was a change in military practice, especially in terms of the scale of casualties and damage that industrialized forces could inflict. Marwick took this understanding of war and modified it so that “total” described the engagement of the whole nation in the conflict.¹ Whether manifest in rationing, industrial employment, limitations on civil freedoms, or its impact on culture, 20th century wars have swept along far more than armies and munitions plants, even in Canada.

Marwick’s Principle looked at the changes wrought by war and measured them in four ways. First, there is what he called the extent of destruction involved, which can include the burning out of factory machines, the loss of productive capacity, and very definitely the loss of human life and ability. Second, there is the level of “participation” in a wartime society; Marwick pointed to instances where participation increases (women working in factories, getting the vote) and where it decreases (foreign-born Canadians thrown into internment camps), although he mainly shows how going through that change in participation levels can result in post-war changes in engagement, too. Third, and this pertains very definitely to the enormity of the human waste involved in

1. Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War* (London: Little, Brown, 1968).

industrialized warfare, there is the psychological impact, including the ways in which it challenges pre-war ways of thinking. Finally, there is war as a “test.” Total war is a crucible through which armies and ideas, systems, and values pass. Some survive intact, others prove wanting and are either reformed or they are allowed to die away. How did Canada fare in its first Total War?

Destruction and Loss

61,000 Canadians dead. Over 170,000 wounded. Newfoundland contributed an additional 1,305 dead and still more casualties. Twenty Canadians were shot by firing squads for the crime of desertion and another 180 condemned men were spared execution. There wasn’t much glory in this conflict, although Canadians seized upon the victories at Vimy and Passchendaele as symbols of national maturation, a culture of toughness, and indefatigable resolve. Certainly, the armed forces were forced to grow up. The militia-based model that Sam Hughes championed from 1911 to 1916 gave way to a more professional version. Borden promised grateful Britain 25,000 troops in the summer of 1914; by Armistice there were more than 600,000 men and women enlisted.

The fact that this took place under the auspices of the *War Measures Act* is significant. Canada went to war to defend liberal democratic values against what was characterized as a dictatorial Prussian militarism and, along the way, Ottawa stripped civil liberties from many, directed the militarizing of much of the economy, and introduced compulsory service. Also, income tax was introduced as a “temporary measure.” Elements of the growing role of the state could be seen, as well, in the economy as Canada’s modest demand-led economy gave way to a command-led model, in which the state became the principal client of manufacturing. Able to influence the flow of raw materials and to specify the character of output, Ottawa built up what it regarded as the essential sectors while implicitly starving others.

There was, by war’s end, a Royal Canadian Navy (albeit a very small one). Canadian fighter pilots distinguished themselves in the air — most notably William “Billy” Bishop (with 72 victories) and Raymond Collishaw (with 60) — and thereby established the foundations of a Canadian Air Force. By 1918, errors made by British leaders in London and in the field also contributed to a stronger sense of a Canadian identity.

Participation

The trade depression that began in 1912 showed no sign of recovery by the end of 1914. Had the war been as brief as touted in the press and by politicians, the economy would have hardly felt its impact. Through 1915, however, demand for production increased, soldiers in the CEF created job opportunities as they departed for the Western Front. By 1916 the search for workers meant that women, in particular, were finding employment in factories and offices.

Internment camps for “enemy aliens” were used to contain recent immigrants whose loyalties were questioned by xenophobic Canadians. Some were opened in the Rocky Mountains, where internees spent the war building much of the campsite infrastructure of the national parks.² Given that most of the internees were drawn from a

2. Bill Waiser, *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada’s National Parks, 1915-1946* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1995).

population that had been in Canada less than twenty years, their detention can be seen as an expression of nativism and an indication of just how thin the Canadian welcome mat really was.

Aboriginal people's participation in the war has also attracted comment. As Scott Sheffield writes, "First Nations that historically honoured warriors viewed the conflict as an opportunity to reinvigorate such traditions." (See [Section 6.12](#) below.) Aboriginal Canadians were welcomed into the ranks and some 200 Chinese Canadians volunteered and were accepted for service. In sharp contrast, African Canadians were not permitted to serve.

Test

Voluntarism was possibly the most profoundly polarizing issue for Canada from 1914-1918. Initial enthusiasm saw Borden's request for 25,000 troops surpassed by another 10,000 volunteers. As a proportion, English Canada was over represented. Given the long-standing, inward-looking nationalism of Quebec's most prominent statesmen, English-Canadians assumed that French-Canadians generally were cool on the war. There was some measure of truth to this. While many English-Canadians could be rallied, from time to time, with calls for loyal support of the Imperial homeland, French-Canadians were typically less enthusiastic (Laurier's "ready, aye ready" notwithstanding). Nor did French-Canadians have a profound affection for France. One hundred and fifty years had passed since the Conquest and more than a century since the French Revolution. The status of the Catholic Church and clergy in France was very different from its position in Quebec, something that Canadian priests had been pointing out for the whole of the 19th century. The whole ultramontanist movement in Quebec was a rebuke to French secularism. German attacks on France, therefore, did not automatically strike a deep chord of sympathy in Quebec.

The strong *nationaliste* strain in Quebec was opposed to supporting Britain's war. What's more, it could point to intolerance in Ontario as something worth fighting that didn't entail going overseas. Ontario introduced severe limits on French-language instruction in 1912-1913 with **Regulation 17**. Borden managed to deflect responsibility to the provincial level where even the Irish Catholic bishop was siding with the Anglo-Protestants to end French instruction. French-Canadians were outraged and the Quebec MPs in Borden's caucus pleaded with him to intervene. Huge delegations descended on Ottawa to the same end. Borden could reasonably (and probably correctly) claim that the constitution was clear that education was a provincial matter. What's more, Laurier's experience with Manitoba could be invoked: attempting disallowance was likely to be fruitless. But Laurier's actions suggested, too, that there was room to pursue negotiation and to plead for some symbolic act of generosity from the provincial legislature in Queen's Park. The Franco-Ontarian minority was alienated from the Tories as a result of Borden's inaction but their votes counted for little.

Regulation 17 had wider consequences, though. Had the issue been resolved by August 1914, Regulation 17 might have been of little consequence, but it festered well into 1915 and kept crawling out of its grave in the 1920s. It turned feeling in Quebec very sharply against Ontario. Québécois disinterest in military voluntarism and hostility to conscription may not have been shaped by Regulation 17 but it was certainly scented with it. When, in the course of the Great War, attempts to amend the law met with unyielding resistance from Anglo-Canadians, Henri Bourassa decried the "Prussians of Ontario," a reference to the German enemy. What values, then, would

a Québécois volunteer be defending in the CEF? This question was asked by French-Canadians who saw Anglo-Canadian aspirations for autonomy and true national status as bound up in intolerance and assimilationism.

Recruitment efforts in Quebec were a further contributing factor. The province was home to many of the nation's war industries so there was work to be had and wages to be earned. Recruitment into a volunteer army failed to address that fact. What's more, Hughes' efforts in Quebec were notoriously clumsy. There was only one French-speaking battalion — the 22nd (aka: the *Vingt-Deux* or "Van Doos") — and precious few Francophone commanding officers. Hughes would trot out the usual paraphernalia of imperial patriotism but "Red tunics and the Union Jack worked in Orillia, not Victoriaville."³

Setting all that aside, English-Canadian voluntarism deserves a second look. The two decades before the war witnessed huge migrations of British men and women to all parts of Canada. They were vastly over-represented in the ranks of volunteers in 1914-16, just as they are in the list of "Canadian" Victoria Crosses. It goes some distance to explain why British Columbia — with only 5% of Canada's population — contributed 10% of its war dead.⁴ Once the excitement of August 1914 had dissipated and once it was clear that the "boys" would not be "home by Christmas," Canadian-born English-Canadians coast-to-coast demonstrated a level of voluntarism that was roughly comparable to that of French-Canadians. Some could legitimately claim to be part of the essential industries that fed a total war campaign: farming, factories, and transport. Maritimers — who had few factories on which the war effort depended — were particularly unwilling to join up, which may suggest that deeper Canadian roots were hardest to pull up. English-Canadians who resolved not to be drawn into the war were often targeted as cowards. Shaming campaigns were part of the recruiters' arsenal and there were instances where white feathers — symbols of cowardice — were handed out by young women to men of service age who were reluctant to join up. None of this — not the statistics nor the campaigns of shame — served to diminish attacks in the press on French-Canadian "disloyalty." With an army of half a million, and no more than 13,000 of them francophones, the issue was bound to attract attention and it poisoned relations between Anglo- and Franco-Canadians for decades.



Figure 6.7 Women from Africville walk towards Halifax on Campbell Road, days after the explosion of the SS Mont Blanc in Halifax harbour on 6 December 1917.

3. Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada*, 5th edition (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2007), 123.

4. John Douglas Belshaw, *Becoming British Columbia: A Population History* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), 172.



Figure 6.7 The explosion of the SS *Mont Blanc* in Halifax Harbour on 6 December 1917, cost 2,000 lives and 10,000 injuries. The ship was carrying munitions when struck at low speed by another vessel, caught fire, and produced the largest pre-nuclear explosion on record. Windows throughout the city were blown out and much of the centre of Halifax was levelled.

War profiteering was another divisive feature of the war years. Corruption was rife. It dogged the career of Sam Hughes, whose teetotal morality was in sharp contrast to a caustic and bullying approach to colleagues and staff. His defense of the Ross Rifle — fine for target shooting but useless if fired repeatedly — was more about Hughes' preference for Canadian manufacturers than it was for military utility. Hughes followed a well-documented practice of securing posts and contracts for friends and families. His son-in-law was one beneficiary but the worst revelations came in the munitions scandals of 1916. These were errors on which the opposition and the labour movement both pounced. In November 1916 Borden obtained Hughes' resignation.

Psychology

Comparing levels of deference from one generation to the next is always fraught with problems. The environments in which one group defers to another change and so the sentiment may no longer be relevant. Having said that, several changes in the mindset of Canadians took place between the Edwardian years of Laurier and the roaring twenties.

Canadians' understanding of the state was profoundly changed by the war. The *War Measures Act* enabled far more direct and widespread intervention by Ottawa than had been the case before. Some of this was decidedly temporary but it exposed the possibility of state participation in the economy and in social welfare. At the end of the war Ottawa owed \$2 billion — almost all of it to Canadians who had purchased **Victory Bonds**. The beginnings of the welfare state could be seen in 1918; in the 1920s veterans' widows and veterans themselves would receive some state monies while, at the same time, mothers' allowances made an appearance.



Figure 6.8 John McCrae's poem was first published in December 1915 and, to use a 21st century phrase anachronistically, it went viral almost immediately thereafter. Here, two lines are deployed in the service of Victory Bonds.

Canadian anticlericalism — the belief that the church and state should be kept at arm's length — was always tempered by a loyalty to the congregation, sect, denomination, and chapel. Religious affiliation was, to Victorians and Edwardians, as powerful a representational quality as team sports would be in the late 20th century (see Sections 10.6, 10.16, 10.17). Religion provided a sense of belonging and community, and a common language of hymns and rituals. The Great War tested to destruction the faith of a great many Canadians (and others) and opened the possibility of seeking spiritual succour through newer and more dynamic evangelical creeds. The rising popularity of spiritualism before the war picked up momentum and delivered into the 1920s a generation that was prepared to explore eastern religions, other faiths, and the possibility of communication with spirits.⁵ William Lyon Mackenzie King, Canadians learned long after his death, was but one of many highly-placed Canadians who hoped that spiritual **mediums** could do for the dead what the telephone did for terrestrial voices (see "Mackenzie King's Secret Life" in Section 9.5).

Patriarchal values did not collapse but they were sorely challenged. Women's increased economic independence, their experience of employed work in factories (and in the public sphere generally during the war) all contribute to the creation of what historian Veronica Strong-Boag describes as girls and women of the "new day."⁶ The war inflated the incidence of widowhood in the **interwar** years; single mothers were commonplace in a way that they had not been in Laurier's day. This meant, of course, that orphanhood — the loss of at least one parent — was more widely experienced by Canadians whose fathers perished in combat or at sea. It is true that the business world was effectively closed to women and that the doors of politics were open only a crack, but the need to find work and the need to find workers in the growing economy of the 1920s was bound to change women's experiences and challenge the pre-war beliefs about the *pater familias*.

The war changed labour's relationship with elites in several countries. In Russia, this produced revolutionary communism. Western nations had good reason to fear that it would not end there. In the Victorian era, Canadian militia units were dominated by affluent young men who could afford the time to play soldier. The trenches

5. For one account of the European response, see Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

6. Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988).

of France and Belgium, however, were filled with farm boys and wage-labourers whose lives were sacrificed wholesale. The commander of the Canadian corps at Passchendaele, Sir Arthur Currie, demonstrated a chillingly accurate assessment of what victory would cost when he estimated that it would require 16,000 Canadian lives; he overestimated by 346. The scale of sacrifice demanded of this new kind of conflict threw into question class assumptions that had evolved through the industrial revolution. For some, a more democratic society — in the sense of one that was less hierarchical and automatically deferential — was what was called for. For others, nothing short of a social and political revolution was in order. Farmers, long the bedrock of Canadian political parties, broke with the Liberals and Conservatives and formed their own parties (see [Section 7.9](#)).

If the institutions of state, church, household, and industrial capitalism were challenged in ways that are sometimes difficult to measure, the tone of Canada's relationship with Britain was much more visible. From Borden's demand for greater input in war planning, through the Imperial War Cabinet, the *Balfour Declaration* of 1926, and the *Statute of Westminster, 1931*, the trend toward greater national autonomy and independence was clear. It is difficult to imagine Laurier in 1906 insisting, as Mackenzie King could in 1926, that Canada was equal in status with Britain. Nor would Mackenzie King declare in 1922, as Laurier did a mere decade earlier, that the call to support Britain in the Chanak Crisis found Canada "ready, aye, ready." Canadian affection for Britain — strong, weak, and mixed — may not have changed but deference to Mother England was no longer an easy pill for any but the most ardent Imperialist to swallow.

The Peace Dividend

The writer Lucy Maud Montgomery was troubled by the changes she saw taking place in Canadian society as the war marched on. On 17 June 1916 she wrote, "Our old world is passed away forever — and I fear that those of us who have lived half our span therein will never feel wholly at home in the new."⁷ Canada was in many ways changed by the war. Rank British imperialism gave way to a distinctive Canadian nationalism; women's roles changed as they moved into the public sphere and into the polling stations; technology advanced dramatically and, with it, war became something in which there was little glory, only gore.

Borden's experience charts some of the nation's changes. An imperialist at the start of the war, he emerged a nationalist. His quiet frustration with British commanders and the condescension they displayed toward the Canadian troops was certainly a factor. Westminster's implicit belief that the colonies should contribute resources and men without strings attached was bearable when Britain looked effective and honourable. Thereafter — from 1916, at any rate — Borden became an increasingly vocal advocate for Canada's place at the table of nations. In the spring of 1917, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George responded to Canadian complaints by including the Dominions (Newfoundland, Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand) in the Imperial War Cabinet. Canada joined in the peace negotiations in Paris, although its presence was largely for show. Nevertheless, it was an important step along a road to greater autonomy, as was Borden's successful plea to have Canada eligible for election to the council of the **League of Nations**.⁸ While this was unfolding, Borden embraced women's suffrage,

7. Quoted in Mary Henley Rubio, *Lucy Maud Montgomery: The Gift of Wings* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2011), 204.

8. The United States was prevailed upon by Britain to recognize the Dominions as separate entities from the Imperial centre, possibly the most significant symbolic gesture of all.

deficit spending, an interventionist role for government, and prohibition. These were extraordinary moves taken by a Conservative PM from whom one might not have imagined possible a decade earlier.

Borden retired from office undefeated in 1920. Laurier died in office the year before. Both the Liberal and Conservative parties were thereafter headed by men who were much younger and whose feet were planted firmly in the 20th century. For two decades, however, Laurier and Borden had wrestled, in their own ways, with issues of nationalism and imperialism. The former was inclined to a *nationaliste* perspective but pronounced strongly (sometimes strategically) on the side of imperialism. The latter was a dyed-in-the-wool imperialist who became a champion of Canada as an autonomous nation. As the “short 20th century” opened and the modern era got more fully underway, the goalposts of Victorian and Edwardian Canada were not merely moved — they disappeared from view.

Key Points

- The concept of “total war” encourages us to examine the various levels at which Canada experienced and was changed by the Great War.
- Mortality rates ran to more than 61,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders.
- The federal state became more interventionist and directly involved in the economy.
- The war divided Canadian society in many ways but especially on the issue of conscription.
- Many values and relationships that were seemingly permanent before 1914 turned out to be changeable and, in some cases, disposable.

Attributions

Figure 6.6

CVA 99-1477 – [Cenotaph and Victory Square looking south] by Thompson Stuart / City of Vancouver Archives is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 6.7

Women walking from Africville, 1917 by James & Son is in the [public domain](#), with no known copyright restrictions. This image is available from the Nova Scotia Archives.

Figure 6.8

If ye break faith, we shall not sleep : buy victory bonds by John McCrae is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from the Toronto Public Library under the call number 1914-18. Victory bonds. Item 1. L.

7.3 The Interwar Years



Figure 6.11 Architectural and clothing fashions changed dramatically in the Interwar Years, reflecting changes in social values and influences arising from ancient civilizations like Babylon and Azteca. This detail is from the ceiling of the Snowdon Theatre in Montreal, 1937.

No one knew, of course, that there would be a second World War. Not in 1918, not even in the mid-1930s. Such a thing was barely conceivable to most people and many nations' leaders did their utmost to avoid another conflict or to ignore the signs of its coming. Three themes dominated public discourse in these years and all had their roots in uncertainty.

To The Finland Station

Revolution in Russia in 1917 was a historic game-changer. In much of the western world in 1912-14, Marxist revolutionary movements were on the rise, their ascent cut off by the outbreak of war. Several factors brought matters to a head in St. Petersburg, the capital of one of Europe's least industrialized nations. The foremost of these was the conduct of the war as a battle between imperial houses, many of which were headed by blood cousins. The inability of the Russian monarchy under the Czar to alleviate famine or entertain gradual political reforms allowed its opponents — led by Vladimir Lenin and the Bolshevik Party — to sweep the Imperial regime from power and then to withdraw Russia from the war altogether.

Western members of the Triple Entente regarded this as a kind of double-jeopardy. Not only had an important ally left the battlefield (allowing Imperial Germany to focus its efforts fully on the Western Front) but a revolutionary communist government had arisen in a country where there was hardly an industrial proletariat to speak of. What might happen in states such as Britain or France where industrialization was much further progressed and an organized proletariat existed? The answer to that question came first from Germany, where social and political unrest increased as the war concluded, culminating in the November Revolution of 1918-19. The German rising was suppressed but its bloody demise inspired leftist movements across the West while terrifying conservative regimes in the aftermath of the war.

Lenin's regime in Moscow called on working-class organizations in other countries to rise up in support of the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the cause of world revolution. In part, this was a response to the international campaign to overturn the Russian revolution; even Canada sent troops to Russia to (unsuccessfully) put down the Bolshevik regime. Mostly, however, it grew out of the belief that countries undergoing their own revolution would be too busy to intervene in the USSR.

In Canada the sense of pending social and political crisis was fed by a series of general strikes and violent confrontations between workers, employers, and authorities in 1919-20. The most noteworthy of these was the Winnipeg General Strike (examined in [Section 3.9](#)). Working people were themselves fearful that the economic boom of wartime would give way to an economic depression. They were also concerned that returning soldiers would displace workers in the industries to which they were returning and/or veterans' needs would be disregarded and they would be thrust into poverty themselves. The Spanish Flu outbreak of 1918-19 was part of the background to this discontent: very nearly as many Canadians died in the pandemic over the course of one year as died in the War over the course of four.

The Influenza Pandemic, 1918-1919

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During recent periods of anxiety about the emergence of a new deadly strain of the influenza virus, attention has returned to the end of World War I, when pandemic influenza took the lives of 50 million people across the globe, and impacted the lives and futures of millions of others. Known as “Spanish” influenza only because the uncensored Spanish press was the first in the West to report the pandemic, approximately 55,000 Canadians died from the virus and its complications (bronchitis or pneumonia), compounding the human losses of the war. The most deadly of influenza's three “waves” in the years 1918 and 1919 began in September 1918. Influenza was carried west across the country by the mobilization of Canada's Siberian Expeditionary Force, sent to oppose the Red Army during a period of civil war following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The expansion of the war effort took precedence over public health.¹

1. Mark Osborne Humphries, “The Horror At Home: The Canadian Military and the ‘Great’ Influenza Pandemic of 1918,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 16, 1 (2005): 235-260.



Figure 6.12 Albertan men wearing masks during the influenza epidemic, 1918.

Influenza, though it infected men and women from all races and classes, was not a democratic disease. The death rate among the non-Native population in British Columbia was 6.21 per 1,000 people; for the First Nations it was 46 per 1,000 people.² In cities such as Hamilton, working class families were at greater risk of death than the well-off.³ Influenza, like other infectious diseases, was shaped by social inequality. It was also unimpeded by significant state preparedness.

In 1918 there was no federal health department to coordinate an effective response to the disease. Many local governments and provincial boards of health, however, attempted to implement containment measures such as public school and church closures, the wearing of masks, and providing temporary emergency hospital beds where possible. Staffing these facilities was extremely difficult because of wartime shortages of medical and nursing personnel, even in major urban centres. The volunteer efforts of women were crucial to emergency health care, and to relief for the afflicted. Women provided food, clothing, and bedding for the sick and their families.

Medical science had little to contribute to these efforts. Viruses were as yet unknown as disease agents, and influenza was not isolated until the early 1930s. Although there were attempts to create a “vaccine,” without the necessary medical knowledge, these were of little use.

Although for much of the 20th century, historical memory of the pandemic was overridden by the public commemoration of the ‘Great’ War, influenza changed the circumstances of thousands of families with the loss of siblings, parents, and kin. It was woven into their family stories. Some were scattered as children went to orphanages or lived with extended family. Widows struggled to support their children without a male breadwinner; single fathers attempted to provide care for children without their wives.⁴ Other influenza sufferers never fully recovered their health.

This dangerous variant of influenza lingered in Canada into the 1920s, and then faded from view. It had some impact on our health care system, contributing to the creation of a federal department of health in 1920. But as a blow to the aspirations of modern medicine, influenza confounded the narrative of medical progress. As a result, we still have much to learn about its history.

Economic uncertainty (grounded in clear signs of a downturn), the challenges posed by the return of nearly half a

2. Mary Ellen Kelm, “British Columbia First Nations and the Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919,” *BC Studies* 122 (Summer 1999): 25.

3. D. Ann Herring and Ellen Korol, “The North-South Divide: Social Inequality and Mortality from the 1918 Influenza Pandemic in Hamilton, Ontario,” in Magda Fahrni and Eshyllt W. Jones, eds., *Epidemic Encounters: Influenza, Society and Culture in Canada 1918-1920* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012), 97-112.

4. Eshyllt W. Jones, *Influenza 1918: Disease, Death and Struggle in Winnipeg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

million troops, unprecedented mortalities from influenza, labour unrest, and the example of a successful workers' revolution abroad thus created an environment of anxiety. Systematic planning for a post-war recovery was not possible in these circumstances and the sense that things could go badly wrong in a hurry was slow to evaporate. This sense of catastrophic possibilities — forged in the fires of the Great War and sharpened in the months after the Armistice — is the first theme of the **interwar** years.

The 1920s Boom

The economy staggered for nearly four years after the war. By 1922, however, there were signs of a recovery. The possibility existed, for the first time since about 1912, that immigration to Canada would resume in earnest. There was a sense of peacetime prosperity that echoed the Edwardian years. How long would it last? How to make it run for as long as possible? While Canadians were looking hopefully to a future of peace and jobs, they were also looking backward to the pre-War years as their reference point. There was no small amount of nostalgia for an age before the immolation of war. The “Roaring ’20s” took their cue from the “Gay ’90s.”

At the same time, the 1920s were distinctive socially and culturally. Historians have commented on their frenetic qualities, the enthusiasm for change and new ideas, new things. The rise of **art deco** — expressed in sculpture, household decoration, and most spectacularly in architecture — was one lasting element; the spread of radio and motion pictures was another; so, too, was the popularity of pulp novels, jazz music, suburban bungalows, and automobiles. Even the **flapper**, that trademark female style of the 1920s, can be invoked as a landmark of change. Skirt lengths went up, bustles — a system of cushions or a framework of wire meant to exaggerate the dimensions of the female rump — disappeared, as did padding on the bosom. Boyishly thin bodies defined by straight lines aroused fears of gender-bending and “rumours swirled about sexual perversion, or at least confusion.” The amount of cloth that went into a typical pre-war dress ensemble ran to about 17 yards; by the late 1920s it had plummeted to less than 9 yards.⁵

5. Sharon Carstairs and Tim Higgins, *Dancing Backwards: A Social History of Canadian Women in Politics* (Winnipeg: Heartland Associates, 2004), 63-5.



Figure 6.13 By 1930 dress lengths were back over the knees but the material was still a fraction of what it was before the war.

Some of these changes might seem superficial or trivial, but together they represent a reaction to the dislocation of the Great War, the loss of over 100,000 lives in combat and to disease, and a will to move on quickly from the past. In this, the 1920s were categorically “modern” in that they mark a break with the first 50 years of Confederation. Deeper needs were signalled by women who could vote and dress as they liked (and in defiance of the old arbiters of behaviour), and by radically changed aesthetics, radical politics, and contempt for the old order. One other expression of this change was the fall in fertility rates in the 1920s. Women may have been displaced from war industries but they didn’t retreat *en masse* to the home and hearth. Many continued to work, postponed marriage, and experimented with (illegal) contraceptives. Canadian family size began a sharp downward turn that even the 1940s-’60s baby boom could not completely reverse. All of this can be lumped together as a second theme: a sense that enough had been sacrificed by the people and the nation as a whole and a conviction that now Canadians might pursue the new and, ideally, prosperity.

The 1930s Depression

The economic landscape of the interwar years is examined more fully in Chapter 8 but here its roughest outlines must be drawn. The collapse of stock markets and the commodity markets in late 1929 ushered in a decade of economic hardship. For those who had money, these were great years: buyers were few and far between, sellers were many, prices were low. For wage-earning Canadians, however, this was an economic disaster that, at the time, was often compared to the Great War. What the war had been in human conflict, the Depression was in terms of economic suffering. What little welfare state existed at the end of the war was insufficient to address the kind of dislocation experienced across the country. In British Columbia, for example, there was a new workmen’s compensation program in 1916, a women’s minimum wage introduced in 1918, and mother’s pensions in 1920; some of these were subject to wrangling over the “moral fitness” of applicants and most were weakened by the

mid-'30s, if not earlier.⁶ The economic issue for politicians was as much a philosophical as a tactical one: should one interfere in the workings of the economy and run the risk of worsening matters or stand back and allow suffering to continue? Past experience taught Canadians and their leaders that trade depressions never lasted more than a few years at a time. By 1935 few believed that to be the case anymore. As a generalization, one can say that every government that was in office — federally or provincially — in 1929-30 was kicked out of office the very first chance the voters got. The economic depression thus brought with it unprecedented political discontent and a sense, too, that capitalism was taking its last laboured breaths.

This is the third of the three interwar themes: defining the role of the state in the face of economic disaster. Ottawa wrestled with this for a decade and, in that regard, the 1930s are a crucible for economic thinking and policy for the rest of the 20th century.

Key Points

- The interwar years were marked with fear of a global proletarian uprising, triggered by events in Russia.
- The 1918-19 influenza pandemic claimed nearly as many Canadian lives as the Great War and over a much shorter period of time, taking a tremendous toll on social and public health.
- Economic recovery in the “Roaring ’20s” was capped by economic collapse in the Depression of the 1930s.
- Canadians’ expectations of the state underwent profound changes from the Great War, through the 1920s, and the 1930s.

Attributions

Figure 6.11

[Snowdon Theatre](#) by [Sandra Cohen-Rose and Colin Rose](#) is used under a [CC-BY-NC-SA 2.0](#) license.

Figure 6.12

[Men wearing masks during the Spanish Influenza epidemic \(Online MIKAN no.3194045\)](#) by Library and Archives Canada / PA-025025 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 6.13

[Model wearing dress for Northway Co. advertisement \(Online MIKAN no.3544610\)](#) by Library and Archives Canada/PA-053423 is in the [public domain](#).

6. Lisa Pasolli, *Working Mothers and the Child Care Dilemma: A History of British Columbia's Social Policy* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015), 26.

7.4 The Road to WWII

Sixty years after the end of the Second World War, it is easy to misunderstand how it looked at the time.

In 1914 there were a handful of liberal democracies around the globe and there were many states in which hereditary monarchs and oligarchical systems of government dominated. In the aftermath of the Treaty of Versailles a whole cadre of new democracies appeared, including the Weimar Republic in Germany. Sun Yat-sen's revolution had toppled the Emperor in China. There was a brand new League of Nations, created with the intent of institutionalizing global communication and the perpetuation of peace. What's more, modernity was becoming more widespread as a social and cultural movement, as well as an art movement. Consumerism was on the rise, suburbs were appearing on the edges of cities across the western world, and "planning" was becoming something of a phenomenon, extending from new urban areas through whole economies. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics that took the place of the Czarist regime in Russia held out the possibility of a post-capitalist society. Technological change, much of it stimulated by the Great War itself, seemed to be accelerating. Styles of dress changed dramatically. Deference to religious authority was in sharp decline across Western Europe and the Americas as secularism was more widely and more deeply spread. In short, the interwar era seemed to have potential.

That was the situation in the mid- to late-1920s. By the mid-1930s the promise of a world of peaceable democracies was receding. Indeed, democracy was in retreat. Nations were rearming. Organized religion was terrified by anticlericalism and was backing counter-revolutions across Latin America. Monarchists were digging in their heels and throwing in their lot with anti-democratic fascists. The Soviet Union under Stalin and the Nazis under Hitler were both calling for global domination — and if two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time, then one of these two movements was going to have to yield. Modernism generally, was under attack in Germany, Italy, Spain, and even in North America as "degenerate." Racism was on the rise. The Spanish Civil War was a kind of dress rehearsal for the conflict to come but it signalled something else: the fall of democracy. As the British historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote,

Political liberalism was in full retreat in the Age of Catastrophe.... Taking the world as a whole, there had been perhaps 35 or more constitutional and elected governments in 1920. Until 1938 there were perhaps 17 such states, in 1944 perhaps 12 out of the global total of 64.¹

1. Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1996), 112.

One of those democracies, one of those increasingly rare holdouts against the tide of absolutism and despotism, was Canada.

Canada between the Wars

All was not freedoms and liberties. Canadians were largely fearful of the outside world and inclined to restrict the rights of anyone outside the charmed circle of white, Christian, male adulthood. Women's rights were expanding, it's true, but they were still something of an untested novelty in the 1930s. And they were rising from a very low baseline. Voting rights might have been won but property, welfare, and workplace rights continued to reflect the patriarchal values at the heart of Canadian society.

The situation of Canadians of colour was considerably worse and to be a woman of colour in Canada was, quite simply, double jeopardy. Asian Canadians faced restrictions in terms of their place of residence, the schools they could attend, and the professions they could join, not to mention the day-to-day humiliations of both pointed and casual racism. African-Canadians might have greater access to democratic privileges but their educational opportunities severely circumscribed, and the overall quality of life and public services in neighbourhoods like Africville on the edge of Halifax was poor. Aboriginal Canadians, too, faced impoverished conditions both on and off the reserve. Some could vote but their collective numbers were so small as to make them powerless as a constituency. The remoteness of many First Nations communities meant that they were effectively invisible to the larger Canadian polity. The Jewish community — found across the country but heavily concentrated in the largest centres and especially Montreal — faced anti-Semitic discrimination in many forms. Racism — coupled with a strong eugenics movement — was, for all intents and purposes, part of Canada's mainstream culture.

The limits on freedom of speech and freedom to meet had been tested repeatedly in the Depression. Unions were being smashed; civic, provincial, and national police forces showed little compunction when it came to riding horses into a crowd and swinging billy clubs and whips. The communist movement had been outlawed and mostly driven underground while fascist parties were generally winked at; police surveillance of unions was commonplace. A decade of high unemployment and economic disaster had been largely unalleviated by the Liberals and the Conservatives, and neither party appeared to care very much.

Having said that, the three levels of democracy in Canada — civic, provincial, and federal — meant that elections were relatively common tests of the public will. The Canadian press remained free (notwithstanding state attacks on the newspapers of the hard left). British parliamentary traditions remained strong and loyalty to Britain (complemented by continued post-Great War enmity for the Germans) ensured that Canada's position on the eve of war would be less complicated than that of the United States.

On the Brink

As relations worsened between Nazi Germany and Britain, France, and the USSR in the late 1930s, Canadians became increasingly alert to the possibility of war. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 marked the beginning of turmoil along the Pacific Rim and stimulated tensions within the Asian-Canadian community that would last until China's liberation in 1945. Italy's attack on Ethiopia (aka: Abyssinia) followed in 1935

and the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936 between the Republic (supported by the Soviet Union) and the Nationalists under General Francisco Franco (backed by fascist regimes in Italy and Germany). All of these conflicts were testing grounds for expansionist countries building martial cultures around charismatic leaders and intense nationalistic feeling.

Moreover, these invasions and contests introduced elements of total war that had not been as apparent in the Great War. Civilian casualties, for example, were not a by-product of war but an intentional objective. This was seen in every instance of the pre-WWII conflicts, including gas attacks on Abyssinian villages, the destruction of the town of Guernica by the *Luftwaffe* (German Airforce), and most spectacularly, the Japanese “Rape of Nanking” and the Empire’s application of a scorched earth policy across northern China.

Diplomatic efforts to reverse this tide failed repeatedly and embarrassingly. British and French politicians blundered through attempts at **appeasement** of, first, Italy then Germany. The Soviet Union, for its part, used the Nazi obsession with Russian power to their advantage in the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of March 1939, which effectively carved up Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries between the USSR and Germany. As a non-aggression pact, it bought the USSR two years to prepare for conflict with Germany and allowed the Nazi *Wehrmacht* to focus its energies on Western Europe.

Key Points

- By 1939 the number of liberal democracies was in steep decline. Canada was one of few remaining.
- Despite Canada’s record as a liberal democracy, the rights of as much as half its adult population were limited.
- Two of the authoritarian regimes of the interwar years explicitly and openly made plans to spread their systems across the globe.
- International conflicts in the 1930s paved the way for a world war conducted against civilian targets as often as military adversaries.

7.5 Canada Goes to War



Figure 6.17 A British Columbian regiment prepares to depart from New Westminster, 1940. (“Wait for me daddy” by Claude Dettloff)

On 1 September 1939, Germany invaded Poland, which triggered a declaration of war on the part of France and Britain on 3 September. Both New Zealand and Australia declared war on the same day. William Lyon Mackenzie King’s government, however, held back for four days.

This delay was entirely about optics. The government wished to demonstrate to Britain and, more significantly, to Canadians that the decision to go to war was one that was made by Parliament in Ottawa and it was one that was endorsed by French and English Canadian politicians alike. King feared a repeat of the divisive experience of the Great War and that fear guided his actions throughout the Second World War. The delay of four days had nothing to do with a lack of preparedness — in fact, the government was vastly more prepared for war (at least organizationally, if not materially) than was the case in 1914 — nor did it reflect concern about what the Americans might do. King was committed to supporting Britain against Germany regardless of Washington’s position. The point was to exercise the autonomy that had been won in the **Statute of Westminster** (1931) and enter the war as a free democracy.

This was not cause for celebration. Unlike August 1914, there were no raucous and patriotic parades in the autumn of 1939. Anyone over the age of 24 would have some recollection of the Great War and the parents of those men and women most likely to serve in the armed forces would keenly recall the costs of the war that was meant to end all wars. There was, too, the recollection of profiteering and corruption from the previous war. Of course, there was also the memory of economic good times, rising wages, and a return to prosperity. It was on this prospect that many Canadians hinged their hopes.

As in 1914, of course, optimists in 1939 predicted a short war that might be resolved at the bargaining table sooner rather than later. From September 1939 to May 1940, Canada — along with the rest of the British Commonwealth, France, and the other Allied Nations — was on the sidelines of what became known in French as the *Drôle de guerre*, in German as *Sitzkrieg*, and in English as the **Phoney War**. There was so little in the way of actual warfare going on that King was able to call an election for March 1940, which he won easily. Events in the winter and spring of 1940 were to dispel any possibility of a negotiated peace.

While the Allies built up their resources, Germany attacked and annexed Denmark and Norway. On 10 May 1940, the *Wehrmacht* finally turned its attention to the French Republic, which it invaded after storming through the Netherlands and Belgium. The *blitzkrieg* assault allowed the Germans to capture the majority of Allied troops stationed in France, although some 300,000 (including a Canadian battalion) escaped via **Dunkirk**.

This was a disaster of the first order for the Allies. Paris was in enemy hands, France bisected into the occupied north and a puppet state in the south, centred on Vichy. The Alliance at this stage consisted principally of the British Commonwealth and whatever **resistance armies** were able to either escape occupied Europe or disappear into underground movements. Comfortably spread across northern and central Europe, the Germans turned their guns on the USSR, launching an attack in June 1940.

The role of Canada and Newfoundland in the war at this point was principally to supply Britain with resources necessary for survival during a long siege and to prepare for a German invasion of the British Isles. Supply vessels, escorted by battleships, poured out of Montreal, Halifax, and St. John's. The **Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF)** played a key role training British pilots and engaged in the defence of the UK during the **Battle of Britain**. Apart from occupying Iceland on behalf of Britain in 1941, however, Canadian troops saw little action. Many were stationed in Britain, anticipating a German sea invasion that never came. Others were deployed to Newfoundland (recently put back under British administration) and to the West Indies.

The administrative structures necessary to success in total war were more rapidly and more fully deployed than in 1914-15. The *War Measures Act* was again invoked and the policing of potential (that is, perceived or misperceived) internal threats got quickly underway. Authority over much of the nation's productive capacity was centralized in one ministry under the leadership of C.D. Howe (1886-1960), a Port Arthur (now Thunder Bay) engineer and businessman who took charge of the newly created Ministry of Munitions and Supply. Howe recruited **dollar-a-year men** from businesses that covered the rest of their salaries to have experienced production managers at his disposal. Described as the "Minister for Everything," Howe nationalized industries, rapidly expanded industrial production, and got the government involved in the **Manhattan Project**. Just as industrial

production became more controlled and influenced by Ottawa, the state itself also changed. A commentator in 1945 observed:

The *War Measures Act* converted Canada overnight from a confederation into a unitary state; the government overrode or supplanted most of the normal procedures of peace; it became the largest and most important employer of labour; it used its fiscal capacity and monetary powers to effect maximum war production, borrowing billions, raising billions by taxation, and then bringing into play a reserve power by borrowing many millions from the banking system to inflate the economy to full war capacity.¹

From a nation burdened with crushing rates of unemployment, Canada was transformed into one of the world's leading industrial economies, a major producer of food and ships, a leader in aircraft and munitions production, and a state with a finger in many pies.



Figure 6.18 Minister of Munitions and Supply, C.D. Howe, tours an aircraft plant in 1941.

Key Points

- Unlike in 1914, when Britain's declaration of war meant that Canada was automatically at war as well, in 1939 Ottawa delayed declaring its involvement for four days.
- Prime Minister King's primary concerns were to avoid reopening the wounds that fractured Canada in 1914-18.
- Canadian involvement at the outset was small, although Canadian troops were part of the evacuation of France via Dunkirk.
- Creating an administrative structure that would mobilize the economy for an effective total war effort was a first priority.

1. Quoted in Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014), 14.

Attributions

Figure 6.17

[British Columbia Regiment 1940](#) by City of Vancouver Archives / Claude Dettloff is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 6.18

[The Hon. C.D. Howe speaks to a woman worker at an aircraft factory \(Online MIKAN no.3195719\)](#) by National Film Board of Canada. Photothèque / Library and Archives Canada is in the [public domain](#).

7.6 Status Indians and Military Service in the World Wars

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Figure 6.19 Aboriginal soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) along with elders, ca. 1916-17.

In the first half of the 20th century, Canada's **Status Indians** faced many challenges. The *Indian Act* restricted their freedoms and rights and Canadian society, which viewed Indians as an inferior and dying race, marginalised them economically and socially. Despite this reality, when Canada marched to war in 1914 and 1939, First Nations people joined the national efforts and volunteered for the military. In fact, more than 4,000 Status Indian men enlisted in each World War, the majority as volunteers. Most First Nations were supportive but it is difficult to generalise because the degree of engagement varied greatly, with some communities giving almost every able-bodied man and others almost none. While the Army experimented with segregated all-Indian units in WWI, overwhelmingly First Nations youth enlisted and served as individuals integrated into regular military units. During WWII, racial barriers combined with stringent health and education requirements to bar First Nations from the Navy or Air Force, funneling most into the Army. In both wars, when conscription was enacted it applied to Status Indians, despite their ineligibility to vote and their status as wards of the state. First Nations leaders across the country protested the application of the *Military Service Act* of 1917 to their people. The government responded in early 1918 by exempting Status Indians from overseas combative service. In WWII, Status Indians were deemed liable for conscription for home defence from 1940-45, despite nationwide protest and passive

resistance amongst Indigenous communities. When Ottawa sent conscripts overseas in late 1944-45, only a few First Nations who, during treaty negotiations, were explicitly promised that the “Queen ... would not ask her Indian children to fight for her unless they wished,” were exempted. After both wars, Status Indian veterans faced unequal access to benefits and programs provided to help veterans re-establish themselves in civilian life.

The extent of First Nations military participation and the meagre reward received for their sacrifices in peacetime raises the question of why Status Indians would volunteer and fight for the state that oppressed and marginalised them. This is challenging to answer as the decision to volunteer differed slightly between the wars and between cultural communities and individuals. During the Great War, First Nations that historically honoured warriors viewed the conflict as an opportunity to reinvigorate such traditions. Although not prevalent everywhere, warrior cultures were important amongst Plains First Nations as well as Iroquoian-speaking communities in central Canada. Perhaps surprisingly, a heartfelt connection to the British Crown motivated many First Nations enlistments; this was a legacy of historical traditions of military alliance with British since the 1600s and/or commitment to treaties negotiated with Crown representatives. Moreover, for almost all, a desire to defend their people’s ancestral territory, and by extension Canada and the British Empire, also spurred enlistment. And of course, many young men’s decisions came down to impulsiveness, a social need to join their buddies, a youthful hunger for adventure, or an escape from restrictive reserve life.



Figure 6.20 Michel Ackbee, a sniper from the Thunder Bay Band, during WWI.

In WWII, earlier motivations were still evident, but the nature of the conflict was different: this was less an imperial contest and more explicitly a war for democracy and freedom against fascism, oppression, and state racism. This meant Indigenous military service added meaning for both those enlisting and for Canadians who were pleasantly surprised by Status Indians’ patriotism. Volunteering for the military could now be a political act, calculated to win greater respect, to prove one’s worth, or claim enhanced rights. Highly decorated First Nations soldier, Sergeant Thomas Prince, stated that he “wanted to show they [Indians] were as good as any white man.”

At home, Status Indian leaders argued that “if our young men are good enough to wear the King’s uniform,” they should have the “same civil rights and privileges as our white brothers have.” The connection of military service to democracy made such arguments difficult for Canadians to ignore. First Nations people were deeply moved and motivated by the fight against fascism and wanted to participate in what became a national crusade. Canadians, and their government, typically misinterpreted the First Nations’ wartime support and contributions as evidence of their willingness to assimilate into mainstream society after the war. While they wished to take part and be accepted, First Nations people were also declaring their right to be, and to remain, distinct cultural communities.



Figure 6.21 Brothers Tommy and Morris Prince – a sergeant and a private, respectively – at an event at Buckingham Palace, 1945.

After 1945, First Nations delegates took part in the post-war Parliamentary review that led to a new *Indian Act* in 1951. While far from revolutionary, the revised Act eased some restrictions on Status Indians and extended some powers to Indian Band Councils. Overall, however, Status Indians remained on the margins of society, subject to assimilation, and denied a federal vote until 1960. Was their contribution to Canada’s war effort worth it?

Key Points

- Aboriginal people were marginalized, oppressed, and neglected by the Canadian state and yet many took up arms in support of Canada’s effort in the two World Wars.
- Conscription applied to Status Indians, a fact to which many First Nations people objected.
- Resources made available to non-Aboriginal soldiers after demobilization were not extended to Status Indian recruits.
- Aboriginal people took advantage of the Second World War’s pro-democracy rhetoric to advance their own agenda for greater liberties and recognition in Canada.

- Despite the contribution made in wartime, fifteen years would pass between the end of WWII and the enfranchisement of Status Indians.

Attributions

Figure 6.19

Elders and Indian soldiers in the uniform of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (Online MIKAN no. 3192219) by Library and Archives Canada / PA-041366 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 6.20

WAR 1914 – 1918 – ENLISTMENTS AND WAR ACTIVITIES OF INDIANS (PHOTOS OF INDIAN SOLDIERS) (Online MIKAN no.2095973) by Government is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 6.21

Sergeant Tommy Prince (R), M.M., 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, with his brother, Private Morris Prince, at an investiture at Buckingham Palace (Online MIKAN no.3191550) by Christopher J. Woods / Canada. Dept. of National Defence / Library and Archives Canada / PA-142289 is in the [public domain](#).

7.7 Immigrants and War



Figure 5.17 Christmas 1916 at an internment camp.

Perhaps the single greatest irony of Canadians' relationship with immigrants and visible minorities (including Aboriginal people) rose to the surface in the course of two World Wars. Keen to welcome nation-building immigrants but critical of their cultures and suspicious of the kind of nation they might build, Canadians tied themselves in knots when it came time to engage in military adventures.

The diversity introduced to Canada from the 19th century complicated ideas of loyalty. Recall that Anglo-Canadians were extremely suspicious of Franco-Catholic loyalties to the Vatican as articulated by the ultramontanists. The loyalty of the French at the secular level was regularly drawn into question — so often so that the apparent disinterest of Québécois in volunteering for service in 1914-17 (see [Section 6.4](#)) was both expected and viewed as demonstrable proof of disloyalty to the Crown — regardless of the fact that Anglo-Canadian numbers in the ranks were shored up mightily by recent British immigrants. French Canadians, for their part, characterized Anglo-Canadians as absurdly loyal to an absent monarch in a foreign country, rather than to the country of their birth: Canada. What, then, were they to make of the hundreds of thousands of Europeans and Asians drawn from beyond the borders of France and Britain?

Local xenophobia was, thus, amplified by the arrival of war in 1914. Germans were instantly persecuted, their property attacked, and calls raised for sweeping arrests. Germanic names were part of the landscape of British

North America for centuries and now they were Anglicized to demonstrate loyalty and to reduce visibility. Even the Ontario city of Berlin took the name of the British general in the Boer War, Kitchener. Austro-Hungarians — that is, Austrians, Hungarians, many Ukrainians, and almost everyone from the Balkans — were also targeted. The Hapsburg Empire's vilification in wartime propaganda gave license to indulge prejudice and hostility toward those Central and Southern European immigrants who had been recruited — at no small expense — to build the Canadian West's economy. What's more, eugenicists already regarded the Austro-Hungarians as a liability in the building of a forthright, strong, British nation; Austro-Hungarians were perceived by government and civic officials as inherently impoverished and therefore feckless and unhealthy as well. And now, in wartime, they were subject to arrest and incarceration in internment camps.

Anglo- and Franco-Canadians, however, proved flexible in their distaste for foreigners. At the end of WWI, when the map of Europe was redrawn at Versailles, much of the Ukraine now fell within the borders of Poland, a beleaguered nation-state towards which the public had some sympathies. To be an Austro-Hungarian was to be an enemy; to be a Pole was to be reinvented as a brave ally.

The Pacificists

Pacifism was another barrier to inclusion during wartime. Several immigrant communities were recruited under Sifton's watch with the promise that their pacifist beliefs would be honoured in Canada. For the Mennonites in particular, this was a critical assurance. In Russia, they were the target of violent repression by the Czarist regime precisely because of their anti-war stance; Canada's offer to respect their pacifism was a deal-maker.

The Doukhobor experience in this regard offers an example. A dissenting sect established in Russia and Georgia during the 17th century (if not earlier) the Doukhobors' critique of established church authority and the secular state in Russia attracted repression. This peaked in 1895 when the regime of Nicholas II sent in storm troops — in this case, Cossacks — to force Doukhobor compliance with state laws and universal conscription. These events produced an international outcry and the search for a new home for the Doukhobors (something which the frustrated Czar was only too happy to permit). Sifton's ministry stepped forward and offered block settlements in Saskatchewan and Alberta totalling more than three-quarters of a million acres. The communal-ownership model preferred by the Doukhobors was to be respected, as was their **anarchist** reluctance to engage with the bureaucratic machinery of the state. As well, the Doukhobors were reassured by revisions to the *Dominion Military Act* that exempted them from military service.



Figure 5.18 The village of Vosnesenya – Thunder Hill Colony. Its architecture and village layout were copied from the Doukhobor villages in Caucasia.

Three factors caused the Canadians to change their position on the Doukhobor agreements. The bureaucracy of the modern state became more rigorous: Sifton's replacement, Frank Oliver, began insisting on individual land registrations and pressures grew to send Doukhobor children to public schools. As tensions grew in Europe, an oath of allegiance to the Crown was required. Provincial governments were established in Alberta and Saskatchewan; now the Doukhobors had several levels of government with which to deal.

The communities fractured and the largest part, calling itself the **Sons of Freedom**, migrated to the southeast of British Columbia. There, their anti-materialist protests (which involved nude demonstrations and the burning of buildings) and their opposition to public schooling peaked in the 1920s and then in the mid-20th century. The growing state formation under W. A. C. Bennett moved to capture Doukhobor children and to educate them in facilities secure from parental influence. Arrests of the Freedomites followed. While all of these steps were taken within the letter of the law, the Doukhobor community experienced their incarceration and the abduction of their children as nothing short of state terrorism. Within only a few decades the Doukhobor experience in Canada looked very much like what it had been under the Czars.

What this history demonstrates is, in part, the conflicting currents of modernism – which involves the growth of the state, record-keeping, militarism, and the primacy of the individual — and the survival of pre- or **antimodernist** belief systems and inclinations — including the idealization of rural and communal life, spiritual versus materialist priorities, and anarchistic resistance to the very idea of the nation-state.

Key Points

- Canadian policy, and much of the public, turned against Central and Eastern European immigrants during wartime.
- Certain groups were characterized as “enemy aliens” and faced internment during the Great War.
- Pacifist colonies in the West and elsewhere in Canada were increasingly confronted by public

opinion and governments that reneged on earlier assurances of tolerance.

Attributions

Figure 5.17

[Christmas celebration at Internment Camp in Canada, W.W.I – 1916 \(Online MIKAN no.3193850\)](#) by Internment Camps / Library and Archives Canada / C-014104 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 5.18

[Doukhobor Village of Vosnesenya – Thunder Hill Colony](#) by [Themightyquill](#) is in the [public domain](#).

7.8 The Home Front



Figure 6.24 By 1943 the war was being fought on several fronts, including the front yard (though mostly the back). “Victory Gardens” – symbolized here by the woman with the hoe – were a way in which Canadians could contribute to the war effort and a way in which they came to feel engaged in what was otherwise a remote event.

As was the case in what was now described as the “First World War” or “World War I,” the Second World War called for sweeping civilian resources and involvement. The lessons of 1914-1918 were near enough in people’s memories that the idea of Victory Bonds or women working in munitions factories needed little introduction. It is unlikely that “Rosie the Riveter” did the same job in both wars, but entirely feasible that she was doing the sort of work in the 1940s that her mother, or at least women of her mother’s generation, performed two decades earlier.

The extent of Canadians’ engagement in the war was largely a function of numbers. Out of a population of 11 million, only 8 million were over the age of 18 years. This was not enough to meet both the need for a million-man army and the rapid increase in demand for food exports and munitions headed for Britain. Able-bodied men were

forced out of what were now regarded as non-essential jobs (like taxi driving, the production of sporting goods, and the sale of real estate) so that they could tackle war industries or service in the forces.¹ Conscription might be an issue that the government wished to avoid but enlisting workers from non-traditional sources was a task they hurried to manage.

Women in Industry

In March 1942, Ottawa took the unprecedented step of registering every woman born between 1918 and 1922 under an order-in-council called the National Selective Service Regulations. (Similar orders were passed that identified and regulated men from 17 to 70 years of age, and ensured that key industries — including school teaching — would not be abandoned by workers too eager to join up or find better paying work as it came along.) Within a year there were 373,000 women in manufacturing jobs (of which 261,000 worked in munitions) and another 439,000 in the service sector. Nearly one-in-three workers in Canada's aviation industry — mostly dedicated at this time, of course, to fighter and transport aircraft — were women.² Overall it has been reckoned that there were more than a million women in the full-time workforce, and that figure does not include women in the agricultural sector, nor does it include women in part-time paid labour.³

One area of spectacular expansion was shipbuilding. The collapsed economy of the 1930s witnessed a running down of capacity along the nation's waterfronts. It was thought that there were, on the eve of the war, three active shipyards in the whole country and these employed fewer than 4,000 men. This expanded to 90 yards employing over 126,000 women and men.⁴ Shipyards in wartime Vancouver alone employed some 17,000 workers — perhaps half of them women — and the several slipways were launching a Victory Ship a week between them. The Canadian fleet was, by the end of the war, probably the 5th largest on earth, a position onto which it would not hold.

1. Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada*, 5th edition (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2007), 184-5.

2. Canadian War Museum, "Democracy at War," accessed 15 November 2015, http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/newspapers/canadawar/women_e.shtml.

3. Ruth Roach Pierson, "They're Still Women After All," *The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986): 9.

4. Canadian War Museum, "Democracy at War," accessed 16 November 2015, http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/newspapers/canadawar/shipping_e.shtml.



Figure 6.25 Starting in 1942, Vancouver's Burrard Drydock hired more than 1,000 women. Here we see the union's shop stewards eating in the shipyard canteen, ca. 1942.

The war opened opportunities, too, for women at levels above the shop floor. Probably the best known and most honoured example is Elsie “Queen of the Hurricanes” MacGill (1905-80), the world's first female aeronautical engineer. She was the daughter of a prominent lawyer father and a feminist/suffragette mother — Helen Gregory MacGill — who was a pioneer woman on the British Columbian bench. Elsie MacGill's transition into management of the Canadian Car and Foundry company put her in charge of a mainly female workforce that churned out more than 1,400 fighter aircraft (Hawker Hurricanes) before the end of the war.



Figure 6.26 Elsie MacGill claimed early in her career, “Although I never learned to fly myself, I accompanied the pilots on all test flights – even the dangerous first flight – of any aircraft I worked on.”

Sea blockades meant that raw materials necessary to war industries were feared to be in jeopardy from 1939

on. Women were tasked with organizing scrap drives, salvaging metals and rubber in particular but also kitchen scraps. Bones and fat — used in the production of ammunition — were a special target; scavenging families in Winnipeg accumulated more than a million pounds of fat and bones over the course of the war.⁵ In practice, it was the children of urban areas who took the lead on salvage crusades, rather naturally lending it a competitive flavour.



Figure 6.27 Recycling never looked so stylish. Canadian women were called upon to reduce waste and serve the war effort through salvage.

The careful management of resources extended to the food supply. Britain's trade corridors were cut off so Canadian food production had to increase (difficult to do in times of labour shortages) and more had to be diverted to exports. As early as 1941, Canada was providing 77% of Britain's flour and wheat. By the end of the war a quarter of the cheese, two-fifths of the bacon, and 15% of the eggs consumed in Britain came from Canadian farms.⁶ While the Wartime Prices and Trade Board (WPTB) established limits on consumption and price-gouging, Ottawa's various agencies encouraged Canadians to turn their gardens into small farms.

Canadians could feel the war in their stomachs and see it on their plates. They could also wear the war effort because of restrictions on fabric for clothing. Excessive trim was pared back, leading to narrower lapels on men's suits and a narrower cut on women's clothes along with shorter hems. One explanation for the so-called zoot suit riots of the closing years of the war was the apparent — and unpatriotic — use of too much cloth on the exaggerated shoulders and thighs of the zoot suiters' eponymous jackets and trousers. (The fact that Vancouver's zoot suiters were mainly drawn from the Italian community in the East End may have been another local factor.)⁷

5. Ian Mosby, "Food on the Home Front during the Second World War," *Wartime Canada*, accessed 15 November 2015, <http://wartimecanada.ca/essay/eating/food-home-front-during-second-world-war>.

6. Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada's Home Front* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014), 4.

7. "Zoot Suit Riots," *Past Tense: Vancouver History*, Lani Russwurm, accessed 17 November 2015, <https://pasttensevancouver.wordpress.com/2008/03/03/zoot-suit-riots-2/>.

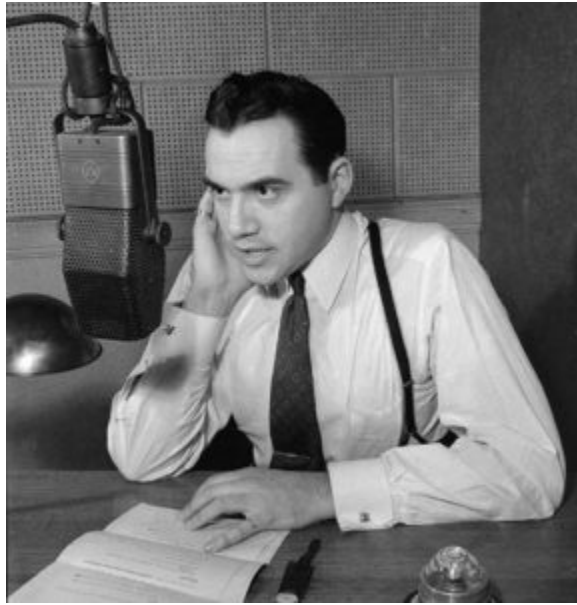


Figure 6.28 Lorne Greene (1915-87) would achieve notoriety on the CBC as “The Voice of Canada.” Assigned the task of reading out the names of soldiers and other Canadians killed in combat or at sea – and because of his deep resonant voice – he was more widely known as “The Voice of Doom.”

Wartime Cultures

While escapism defined much of the entertainment produced in the 1930s, the war provided subject matter galore. Canadian comic books enjoyed a brief period of popularity as competitive American publications were frozen out of the market. The most successful of these, *Johnny Canuck*, appeared in 1941 but did not survive the war years. Hollywood movies had all but completely superseded vaudeville by 1939; feature films and short (generally cheaply made) serials were an important means of transmitting anti-German and anti-Japanese sentiment. They sometimes featured Canadian characters (usually played by Americans) so as to give American audiences a sense of the role played by allies. The 1943 war-thriller, *Northern Pursuit*, featured the great matinee idol and action actor, Errol Flynn, portraying a Mountie who captures German saboteurs determined to disrupt Canadian-American supply lines. What is noteworthy about this film is that Flynn plays a German-Canadian whose ethnicity draws the suspicion of his RCMP colleagues until his loyalty to Canada is made clear. The Canadian film industry, small though it was, produced propaganda-inflected films, including the National Film Board’s *Canada Carries On* series (many of which were narrated by Lorne Greene). *Warclouds over the Pacific*, for example, was released on 1 December 1941, days before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, but it made clear Canada’s official perspective on the dangers coming from that direction.

Radio was, in the 1930s and 1940s, at its peak as an electronic media. The presence of the CBC at this time provided another — government-controlled — means of being bombarded with news about the war and further demands for personal sacrifice. Radio waves were not as respectful of borders as print media, so American programming and propaganda was part and parcel of most urban Canadians’ listening diet.

Many of these media traded in fear as a means of whipping up support for the war. Routine precautions — training children on the east and west coast on what to expect in the event of a surprise German or Japanese attack, or the mandatory use of black-out blinds and headlamp covers so as to confuse aerial scouts from Japan — added to the sense that there was real danger nearby and not only on the war front.

In a multitude of ways, then, the Second World War certainly felt more like a total war. It was impossible to avoid news, film, rationing, restrictions, admonitions, salvage drives, calls for volunteers, and requests for more Victory Bonds. Canadians experienced it with a mixture of emotions, though, including grateful relief that the Depression years were finally over (although fearful they might return). Full employment — even at a time of rationing and very little in the way of consumer goods to purchase — was a good thing.

Key Points

- As a total war, WWII made greater demands on Canadians on the home front than was the case in 1914-18.
- Ottawa introduced regulations to manage the supply of labour and to ensure the continuation of essential industries.
- Women entered waged labour in war industries in large numbers, taking jobs that were vacated by servicemen and newly created positions as well.
- Scrap drives were a means of obtaining scarce materials and directly involving women and children in the war effort.
- Film and radio — both mostly interwar innovations — contributed significantly to the propaganda campaign.

Attributions

Figure 6.24

[Attack on all Fronts : war propaganda campaign – World War II \(Online MIKAN no.2860024\)](#) by Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. 1987-72-105 The Hubert Rogers Collection, Gift of Mrs. Helen Priest Rogers is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 6.25

[Shop Stewards at Burrard Drydock](#) by [Skeezix1000](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 6.26

[Elsie macgill](#) by Elsie Gregory MacGill / Library and Archives Canada is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [Library and Archives Canada](#) under the reference number **3206015**.

Figure 6.27

[We're in the army now](#) by Canada. Dept. of Public Information is used under a [CC-BY-SA 2.0 license](#). This image is available from [Toronto Public Library](#) under the identifier **1939-45. Salvage. Item 12. L**.

Figure 6.28

[Commentator Lorne Greene broadcasting over the C.B.C. national network \(Online MIKAN no.3191942\)](#) by Ronny Jaques / National Film Board of Canada / Library and Archives Canada / PA-116178 is in the [public domain](#).

7.9 Japanese Canadians in the Second World War

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THE LANDSCAPES OF INJUSTICE RESEARCH COLLECTIVE

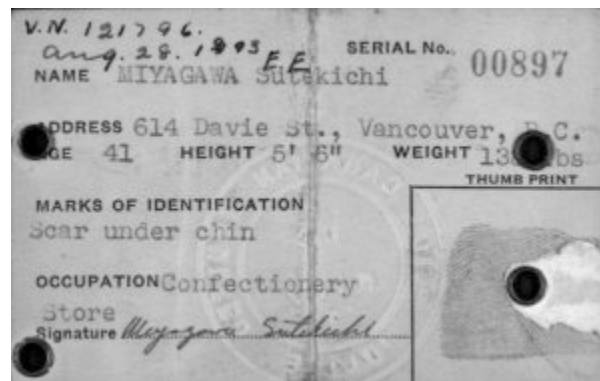


Figure 6.31 Sutekichi Miyagawa's internment identification card.

The Second World War internment of all “persons of the Japanese race” serves as a powerful reminder to all Canadians that the rights of citizenship can be legally revoked and that the history of our country is not one of racial harmony.

In September 1946, a Japanese Canadian woman named Tsurukichi Takemoto wrote officials to protest what she had experienced since Canada's entry into the war in the Pacific (7 December 1941). Alongside many others in her community, Tsurukichi had been interned in Greenwood, a former “ghost town” in the interior of British Columbia and one of several similarly isolated sites used by the federal government.

For roughly 22,000 Canadians of Japanese descent, regardless of social class, sex, age, and generation, it turned out that race superseded citizenship. Angered by the violation of her rights, in two letters dated 5 September 1946, Tsurukichi forcefully reminded government officials, “[w]e are not Japanese Nationals.” With outrage, she explained:

I did not answer until now because your letter just made me mad enough not to answer . . . Isn't the method you're using like the Nazis? Do you think it is democratic? No! I certainly think you're just like the Fascists confiscating people's property, chasing them out of their homes, sending them out to a kind of a concentration camp, special registration cards, permits for traveling [sic]. Don't you think this is the method used in dictatorship countries[?] Democracy means no racial discrimination, or is it the very opposite[?]¹

What historical conditions precipitated Tsurukichi's anger? Did her charges hit their mark? What prompted some Japanese Canadians to liken their treatment at the hands of the Canadian government to those enacted by the most brutally racist regimes of the era? These questions remain troubling today.

The Government's wartime treatment of Japanese Canadians was supported by hundreds of legal enactments, most of them made possible by the *War Measures Act*. The *War Measures Act* gave the cabinet of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King the power to regulate all persons "of the Japanese race" through Orders-in-Council: that is, declarations of law that bypassed debate in the legislature and proved resistant to judicial challenge.

Such policies had dramatic consequences for all Japanese Canadians. Property owned by Japanese Canadians was stolen, looted, destroyed, and neglected. What survived was sold without the consent of its owners. While they received some compensation for these sales, owners had no opportunity to challenge the (often highly unfavourable) terms of exchange and they lost the right not to sell. Further, the proceeds of these sales were doled out as allowances to Japanese Canadians who were struggling to support themselves while interned. Tsurukichi's letter highlights one woman's resistance to the forced sale of her family's property. Informed that government agents had sold her family's belongings for a fraction of their value, Tsurukichi became "mad enough not to answer." Family heirlooms, including fine Japanese pottery, she informed officials, "are not what you think they are": such belongings left in trust to Canadian officials had monetary value and emotional meaning that was all but discarded as they were auctioned to eager buyers while their legitimate owners remained interned. Another Japanese Canadian, whose home, 17.5 acres of land, and his personal belongings had been sold without his consent, wrote, "It does not seem just that as Canadians my family should be deprived of a home which to us meant more than just a home. It was, to us, the foundation of security and freedom as Canadian citizens."²

1. Mrs. Tsurukichi Takemoto to H.F. Green [Image 1634], and to G.B. Spain [1635], 5 September 1946, Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property Records, Vancouver Office Files, Reel C9476, *Héritage Project*, Canadiana.org.

2. Mr. Rikizo Yoneyama to Minister of Justice [Image 1448], 31 July 1944, Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property Records, Vancouver Office Files, Reel C9476, *Héritage Project*, Canadiana.org.



Figure 6.32 The roundup of fishing boats belonging to Japanese-Canadian internees, prior to sale.

Internment meant different things for different groups of people. In addition to the wartime dispossession of property, government policies required that Japanese Canadians carry special registration cards and obey curfews, face restricted mobility and communications, and live with the constant threat of arbitrary searches of their homes. As well, the internment resulted in the separation of families, forced labour for men, and for some, incarceration in prisoner of war camps in northern Ontario. When the government declared Canada's west coast a "protected area," the entire Japanese Canadian population was uprooted. Some 12,000 Japanese Canadians were sent by train to live in hastily constructed shacks and abandoned buildings in various parts of the BC interior: Greenwood, Sandon, Kaslo, New Denver, Rosebery, Slocan City, Bay Farm, Popoff, Lemon Creek, and Tashme. Approximately 4,000 were sent to labour on sugar beet farms in Alberta and Manitoba. And slightly over 1,000 who had sufficient funds established so-called self-supporting camps where they essentially paid for the costs of their own internment.

Toward the war's end, Japanese Canadians were forced to "choose" between a further uprooting to the unknown territory of Eastern Canada and exile to Japan, a country that many had never before visited. Almost 4,000 Japanese Canadians were eventually deported to Japan. All Japanese Canadians were prohibited from returning to British Columbia until 1949.

In the decades following these events, defenders of the policies have argued that they resulted from the pressures of war. In the first year of Canada's war with Japan, many politicians and social commentators expressed genuine, though ill-informed, concerns that Japanese Canadians could threaten the security of Canada's West Coast. However, the enforcement of policies that violated the rights and freedoms of all "persons of the Japanese race," rather than more targeted measures to regulate the lives of individuals specifically suspected of collusion with Japan, reflected the racist ideologies that buttressed the wartime treatment of the Japanese Canadian community. Prime Minister King expressed such ideologies in 1942 when he privately stated that "no matter how honourable they might appear to be, or how long they may have been away from Japan, naturalized, or even those who were born in [Canada]. Everyone of them . . . would be saboteurs and would help Japan when the moment came."³ Cabinet Minister Ian Mackenzie, the federal politician most closely connected with these policies similarly argued to a constituent:

3. *The Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King*, February 28, 1942, available online at Library and Archives Canada.

I do not think that any question of nationality [that is, Canadian citizenship] should prevent our having the right to advocate . . . their complete removal to their own country. Their country should never have been Canada . . . I do not believe the Japanese are an assimilable race.⁴

Such positions, as critics such as Tsurukichi Takemoto realized, were not merely the regrettable isolated actions of some Canadians who panicked at a time of war. Rather, they were part of the systemic racism that pervades Canada's history.⁵



Figure 6.33 A very young David Suzuki with his two sisters in an internment camp during WWII.

Key Points

- Following Pearl Harbor, some 22,000 Canadians of Japanese descent or nationality were stripped of their property and interned under the *War Measures Act*.
- Internees' property was often auctioned off or otherwise sold with no compensation to the owners.
- Japanese Canadians' rights were severely curtailed and, at war's end, they were encouraged to either migrate to Eastern Canada or choose exile to Japan.
- White Canadians' fears of the Japanese community were entangled in a racist notion that essentialized loyalty to the Japanese Empire.

Attributions

Figure 6.31

Back of Sutekichi Miyagawa's internment identification card issued by the Canadian Government in compliance with Order-in-Council P.C. 117 (Online MIKAN no. 3226949) by Library and Archives Canada/PA-103543 is in the public domain.

4. Letter to Godwin, 7 December 1942, File 70-25, MG 27 III-B5, Library and Archives Canada.

5. For information on the Landscapes of Injustice Research Collective and its publishing conventions, see www.landscapesofinjustice.com.

Figure 6.32

[Fishermen's Reserve rounding up Japanese-Canadian fishing vessels \(Online MIKAN no.3193627\)](#) by Canada. Dept. of National Defence / Library and Archives Canada / PA-037467 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 6.33

[David Suzuki and his two sisters in an internment camp \(Online MIKAN no. 3526055\)](#) by Margaret C. Foster, Library and Archives Canada, Acc. no. 1976-087, PA-187835 is in the [public domain](#).

7.10 Enlisted Women, Conscription, and the Zombie Army



Figure 6.29 Personnel of the Canadian Women's Army Corps at No. 3 CWAC (Basic) Training Centre, Kitchener, ON, 1944.

Mandatory military service was, for King and his contemporaries, the great bogeyman of Canadian affairs. It drove a wedge between French and English Canadians in the First World War and there was no appetite for a repeat of that experience. When asked whether he would introduce conscription, King famously replied “not necessarily conscription but conscription if necessary.” Even the Conservative Leader of the Official Opposition, Robert Manion (1881-1943) was hostile to the idea of conscription. Like Borden in 1914-17, King hoped for a volunteer army. He had luck on his side.

The Depression had two consequences that supported early enlistments. First, people were poor and desperate for a regular paycheque. “Joining up” meant an income and the government paid one’s living costs as well. It also, for a great many, meant dignity, something that was in short supply in the 1930s. In addition, many of the unemployed and working Canadians sympathized and identified with the communists (both those crushed in the Spanish Civil War and the regime in the Kremlin) and/or with the victims of German and Italian invasions in Europe and elsewhere (see [Section 7.9](#)). An anti-fascist **popular front** had formed across communist and social-democratic lines that replaced the pro-Empire sensibilities of August 1914 with something more ideological.

Demand for conscription was strong, however, in English Canadian circles, right from 1939. Its advocates argued that this was a total war and that playing catch-up with troop numbers — as Borden had — was unacceptable. The *National Resources Mobilization Act, 1940* (NRMA) passed in June, when the war was not yet a year old and Canadian troops had not yet seen combat, other than those who retreated via Dunkirk a month earlier. The *Act* allowed Ottawa to register all men eligible for service and to call them up to for home defence if needed. There was plenty of home defence work to be done and these conscripts — contemptuously described by their peers as “zombies” — could attend to that. Support among King’s Quebec MPs was muted but it was a good compromise in that it satisfied some on both sides of the question while not angering any single constituency.

By 1942, however, casualties abroad and in the Battle of the Atlantic meant that numbers needed to be replenished. Arthur Meighen was once again leader of the Conservatives and, unlike his predecessor, Manion, was enthusiastically in support of conscription. King’s strategy was to hold a plebiscite in April asking the electorate to release him from his earlier promise to spare conscripts from service abroad. Although the aggregate returns were 64% in favour of sending zombies abroad, the Quebec numbers were a very decisive 72% against. King now had the instrument in his hands to recruit and mobilize more soldiers but felt powerless to use it.



Figure 6.30 Nursing Sisters Atala Coulombe, Elizabeth Gordon, Nan Prescott, and Frances Tetlaw of the No.15 Canadian General Hospital, RCA Medical Corps, at El Arrouch.

By 1944, the Canadian armed forces incorporated more than 500,000 fighting men; 21,600 women signed on for the **Canadian Women’s Army Corps (CWACs)**, another 23,000 joined the **RCAF (Women’s Division)** and the **Women’s Royal Canadian Naval Service (WRCNS** or, simply and elegantly, the “Wrens”), and nearly 5,000 more served as nursing sisters in the armed forces. King’s insistence that Canadian troops participate in the Italian campaign split the armed services’ command and reduced the likelihood of reinforcements to either the Mediterranean front or Normandy. Both Canadian armies were in some difficulty as a result. By mid-summer in 1944 the question of conscription was back on the table. Reluctantly, in November 1944, King agreed to deploy some of the zombies. Riots broke out in Montreal and Quebec and protests among zombies in camps across

British Columbia. The mutiny in Terrace in northwestern BC was the largest military rising, with French-Canadian conscripts joined by English-Canadian zombies.

What saved King's political career in this instance was the rapidly closing window of war. By the time the conscripts reached Europe the war was all but over.

Key Points

- Voluntarism was made easy by the poor economic conditions in the 1930s and widespread working-class opposition to European fascism.
- Conscription was introduced to beef up the home defence campaign and King's government promised not to send unwilling conscripts abroad.
- In the midst of the 1944 Italian and Normandy campaigns, King broke his earlier commitment and ordered home defence conscripts — or “zombies” — into active service, producing a rash of protests.

Attributions

Figure 6.29

Personnel of the Canadian Women's Army Corps at No. 3 CWAC (Basic) Training Centre (Online MIKAN no. 3207287) by Canada. Dept. of National Defence / Library and Archives Canada / PA-145516 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 6.30

Nursing sisters of No.15 Canadian General Hospital, Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps (R.C.A.M.C.), El Arrouch, Algeria, 15 July 1943 (Online MIKAN no. 3599960) by Lieut. Terry F. Rowe / Canada. Dept. of National Defence / Library and Archives Canada / PA-213771 is in the [public domain](#).

Week 8 - Caring for Children



Figure 12.1 Tla-o-qui-aht (Clayoquot) girl, Vancouver Island, ca. 1915.

Histories of childhood present special challenges. First, assuming that one is fortunate enough to pass through childhood and not succumb to the many dangerous diseases, it is a transitional phase in life. However much it might define one, it will only do so for a certain period of time and then it is left behind. One may be a female or an Aboriginal person or a farmer for the entirety of one's life, but no one is a child for more than the first few years.

The second challenge is how to define childhood. Clearly there's the period of utter dependency that most societies would agree constitute infancy and that usually lasts four to six years. After that, what distinctions does a society and culture make between a seven-year-old, for example, and a 14-year-old? What criteria are used to define the qualities of childhood and its end? Across the many cultures of British North America and Aboriginal Canada and across many centuries, the definition of childhood has been both diverse and fluid.

Third, the history of childhood is limited by the lack of personal records. Most children in the past were insufficiently literate and rarely self-reflective enough to provide first-hand accounts of their lives. This changed somewhat in the 19th century when institutionalized education emerges as a shared aspect of child development, one that taught children how to give voice to their experiences. Nevertheless, the record in past centuries is patchy at best. And our own values and prejudices about childhood come to bear. As historian Robert McIntosh recently wrote,

The history of childhood has been reconstructed through studies of adults and their activities – and children's

responses to these. Only rarely is the agency of children recognized in the historical literature: children tend to be portrayed as passive beings who are the objects of welfare and educational strategies. The history of childhood becomes the history of the efforts of others on children's behalf.¹

What becomes clear in a study of childhood over even a relatively brief stretch of historical time is how the experience is historically contextualized. Childhood, probably more than adulthood, reveals the extent to which we are shaped less by biology and family and more by historical forces. Nature and nurture are important but it is history's hand that rocks the cradle.

Learning Objectives

- Describe what defined childhood in the past.
- Identify possible sources of information on historical experiences of childhood.
- Demonstrate awareness of different historic experiences in New France and British North America.
- Describe the role of education and schooling, including residential schooling, in the lives of children.
- Explain the relationship between childhood and work in different economic and social contexts.

Attributions

Figure 12.1

Clayoquot girl by BotMultichillT is in the public domain.

1. Robert McIntosh, "Constructing the Child: New Approaches to the History of Childhood in Canada," *Acadiensis* XXVIII, no.2 (Spring 1999).

8.1 Childhood in a Dangerous Time

It has been estimated that a quarter of all infants in 18th century New France failed to make it to their first birthday and that nearly half died before they were 10 years old.¹ Matters were no better a century later: mid-19th century Montreal witnessed infant mortality rates of 250 per thousand live births. The rate was even higher on the other side of the continent; in Victoria, Kamloops, and Nanaimo near the end of the century the rate was almost 300 per thousand.² (In comparison, the Canadian rate is now below five per thousand live births.) Conditions varied sharply from place to place but it is likely that childhood mortality (that is, dying between one's first and fifth birthday) was nearly as bad. In short, it is possible — and certainly plausible — that a third to a half of all live births in late 19th century British North America ended in death before the age of five.

Historians of childhood have struggled with these figures. What were the implications of such a high death rate for relationships and the experience of childhood? Some historians have taken the view that the high incidence of infant death (along with stillbirths and miscarriages) impacted the development of strong emotional bonds between parents and children. As one study claims,

Parents resisted making large emotional investments in their children until they demonstrated their ability to survive. The delay in naming infants and the practice of giving the name of a child who had died to a subsequent child are cited as practices which demonstrate this relative lack of attachment. Thus, a situation of high infant mortality is in a sense a vicious circle, with children valued less because they are less likely to survive, and with the lower emotional investment in children reducing their survival chances.³

Not everyone agrees with this perspective. Anecdotal accounts do not reveal emotional stinginess on the part of bereaved parents; quite the contrary. John A. and Isabella Macdonald lost their first born — John Jr. — just after his first birthday. As John A.'s biographer writes, "Of course, his parents never fully overcame their grief. Moving house in Ottawa in 1883, Macdonald's second wife discovered a mysterious box of toys: her husband quietly identified them as 'little John A.'s.'" Isabella, who had given birth at 37 years of age after a difficult pregnancy made tolerable by opium, was pushed by her grief into depression and addiction; she died eight years later.⁴ Now, it might be countered that middle- and upper-middle class couples had fewer children on the whole

1. Jacques Henripin, "From Acceptance of Nature to Control: The Demography of the French Canadians Since the Seventeenth Century," in *Perspectives on Canada's Population: An Introduction to Concepts and Issues*, eds. Frank Trovato and Carl F. Grindstaff (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1994), 25-6.
2. John Douglas Belshaw, *Becoming British Columbia: A Population History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 180-1.
3. Roderic P. Beaujot and Kevin McQuillan, "The Social Effects of Demographic Change, Canada 1851-1981," in *Perspectives on Canada's Population: An Introduction to Concepts and Issues*, eds. Frank Trovato and Carl F. Grindstaff (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1994), 40.
4. Ged Martin, *John A. Macdonald: Canada's First Prime Minister* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2013), 48-51.

dependants with a legal claim on family property. A poor reputation in these circumstances was something to avoid and something to watch out for.

Key Points

- High rates of infant and childhood mortality meant that childhoods were abbreviated in at least a quarter of all cases.
- The threshold between childhood and adulthood was delayed in New France, even though children could marry at a young age.

8.2 Childhood in New France and Lower Canada



Figure 12.2 Louis-Joseph Papineau at 10 years.

As we have seen, the French colonies of Acadia and Canada developed along rather different geographical lines. Acadia's salt marsh farms along the Bay of Fundy provided small nodes of population, genuine communities in which children would be raised surrounded by an extended family, although the communities themselves were relatively isolated, accessible principally by water. This was an environment in which agricultural work in a family setting was a powerful defining feature of life for young people. On reaching maturity they would generally try to find a place to live near their family and few would head out to the frontier of Acadia, wherever that might be.

In Canada, the long corridor of the St. Lawrence worked against “the formation of villages [so] community life did not develop strongly along the valley, and the festivals and communal work patterns of Old France did not become entrenched.”¹ Here, too, kin became the focus and locus of childhood. And the seigneurial system — until about 1820 — offered young adults the possibility of obtaining their own land close to their parents' home. Historian Peter Moogk has shown how this environment of propinquity impacted parenting, which tended toward less disciplinarian paternalism than was found in Old France; by the 1700s, evidently, this was another way in

1. Joy Parr, “Introduction,” in *Childhood and Family in Canadian History*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 10.

which Canadiens were distinct from the French of France. The irony is that early French visitors to North America commented critically on Aboriginal parenting styles, which they regarded as far too lenient and soft.

In both Acadia and Canada children were rarely sent off to apprentice in another household from a young age. While the youth of France were testing the rules in the homes of strangers, the children of the two colonies were both supported by and contained within a network of relatives. It was only when the availability of nearby land dried up that this pattern of growing up in a multi-generational kin-based community began to fracture. From the early 19th century, children were raised knowing that they would have to move away from the familial enclaves and try to develop kin networks of their own. This change signified a break with nearly 200 years of Canadien culture. It gave external, non-familial entities like the Church or the employer more authority and influence, extending to the youngest members of the community.

Church and Childhood

This connection between clergy and child-raising was most obvious in education. In 1642 Marguerite Bourgeoys (1620-1799) established a teaching order in Montreal for the education of girls — both Aboriginal and Canadien. A separate school appeared in 1664 for boys (only colonists, though). In both institutions the clergy either provided the instruction themselves or selected lay people to do so. Social class lines were observed, and fees were charged that put the best education beyond the reach of most children. Those pupils who came from poorer households were more likely to be taught domestic skills or trades than reading and writing.²

A greater focus on basic literacy for both boys and girls arose in the first half of the 18th century. Girls continued to be taught needlework and domestic skills, but they were also more likely to learn how to read and write. Some critics at this time expressed the concern that this “expanded” education would turn good farm girls into fine ladies who would shirk their role in building up the agrarian colony.³ However, the rates of nuptiality and fertility in the colony certainly don’t suggest that happened. The marriage rates show that there was a population of spinsters, but their status as “never married” can be explained in part by the number of girls who opted to join the Canadien nuns, a career path that was both respected and sought after. There were few similar opportunities for boys to be trained into the clergy. The Sulpicians, for example, recruited in France, but not Canada.

For the earliest generations of Canadien children, there is evidence to suggest a strong generational cohort. The arrival of the *filles du roi* between 1663 and 1673 resulted in a rash of marriages and births. Thus there was a decade in which a large number of first borns arrived on the scene. Twenty years later demographic historians have found evidence of a population boom echo: “Montreal had been peopled almost at one stroke ... so that practically all the immigrants’ daughters reached the age of marriage and the period of highest fertility at the same time.”⁴ Surrounded by numerous peers, the children of the children of immigrants would be responsible for forging some of the most distinctive features of Canadien culture.

2. Louise Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth Century Montreal*, trans. Liana Vardi (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 269-71.

3. Peter Moogk, “Les Petits Sauvages: The Children of Eighteenth-Century New France,” in *Childhood and Family in Canadian History*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 38-9.

4. Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants*, 55.

Key Points

- Childhood was spent surrounded by near relatives in Acadia and Canada.
- These arrangements changed in the post-Conquest period when apprenticeships and servitude in other households became more commonplace.
- The clergy in New France played an important role in raising and educating colonial and Aboriginal children and were a strong influence on notions of ideal childhood, girlhood, and womanhood.

Attributions

Figure 12.2

Louis-Joseph Papineau 10 years old by [BeatrixBelibaste](#) is in the [public domain](#).

8.3 Childhood in the West



Figure 12.3 Louis Riel, at 14 years, preparing to leave Red River for Montréal.

Historian of childhood Jennifer Brown pointed out years ago that the fur trade society brought together people who had experienced highly different childhoods. Many of the officers of the HBC were themselves orphans “recruited through the Grey Coat charity schools” of London.¹ Their connections with their peers in the company were strong, as were their relationships with Aboriginal women and wives. The HBC officers who settled at Red River did so with an eye to establishing a society near The Forks, an intergenerational community at the confluence of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers. They insisted that the company set aside resources for schooling, and when that was not forthcoming, they exercised what patriarchal authority they had in a strange land and had their *métis* sons shipped off to Britain for their education. Daughters stayed closer to home where they spent their childhood in a more Aboriginal-inflected environment.

The NWC traders did something similar. Those with connections to Montreal sent their sons and daughters alike to the St. Lawrence towns at a relatively young age. The work of Sylvia Van Kirk and Jennifer Brown on this topic

1. Jennifer S.H. Brown, “Children of the Early Fur Trades,” in *Childhood and Family in Canadian History*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 44-68.

suggests that Aboriginal mothers were highly critical of packing off children to remote educational institutions, which were, in any case, alien to their own experiences.² There was, however, the expectation that the children would return, not least so they could provide for their parents in retirement in the Red River Colony. Although the history of the fur trade in the West provides many examples of traders on fixed-term contracts who arrived, had relationships, and then departed, perhaps leaving their wives and children in the care of Aboriginal in-laws or a freshly appointed Euro-Canadian trader (a process sometimes called “turning off”), the record is also clear that many of these relationship (husband/wife; father/children) were anything but casual.

Aboriginal women approached parenting differently. First, the evidence suggests that they were accustomed to rearing fewer children. As Brown writes, Aboriginal families “were usually small, and children were commonly born three, four, or more years apart, owing to long periods of nursing that reduced the mothers’ fecundity and sometimes to post-partum taboos on sexual relations.”³ Under these circumstances an Aboriginal child could expect something close to undivided maternal attention (certainly compared to the lot of their European contemporaries). Second, Aboriginal women engaged in co-mothering, at least outside of fur trade society. Once they were brought into the fold of the European posts and forts, Aboriginal mothers often found themselves caring singlehandedly for their young while the pressures to have more children in closer succession increased.

Fertility rates in the fur trade society were by all indications closer to the habitant model than to traditional practices among, say, the Anishinaabe. For children of the fur trade this meant having many siblings, and likely a good supply of uncles, aunts, and cousins as well. Some, usually the boys, identified more strongly with their European ancestry and culture, while others, particularly the girls, viewed themselves more as Aboriginal, although it is important to underline that no one rule applied.⁴

One can only imagine the cultural and linguistic complexity of many of these communities as they became intersections not only for European and Aboriginal relationships but Scots and Anishinaabe, French and Cree, Assiniboine and Sioux, English and Hawaiian, Iroquois and Secwepemc. By contrast, life in Toronto, Quebec, or Halifax may seem two-dimensional.

Childhood was critical to the formation of the Métis nation. French fathers commonly deserted their Aboriginal wives and children, as their understanding of marriages *à la façon du pays* was that they were not permanent and that the women might one day return to their families. This was, according to historians, the pattern, and for Aboriginal communities that recognized matrilineal descent, this was not (theoretically at least) a problem. In French fur trade communities like Fort Detroit, Michilimackinac, or Green Bay, however, there were other elements of European culture present: specifically, the clergy remained there for the long haul. The Church missions helped with housing, education, and culturally orienting significant numbers of Métis children of these marriages, which grounded them in a common vocabulary of Catholicism. Economically they were traders and hunters. Socially and culturally they were linked by very long tendrils to Montreal, pre-revolutionary France, and Rome.

2. See, for example, Sylvia Van Kirk, “‘The Custom of the Country’: An Examination of Fur Trade Marriage Practices,” in *Canadian Family History: Selected Readings*, ed. Bettina Bradbury (Mississauga: Copp Clark Pitman, 1992): 70-75.

3. *Ibid.*, 48.

4. *Ibid.*, 56.

Key Points

- In the 19th century fur trade society put a greater emphasis on formal schooling, a sign of the influence of European participants.
- Marriages between European men and Aboriginal women tended to produce larger families, which had an important impact on the experience of childhood.

Attributions

Figure 12.3

[YoungLouisRiel](#) by [Ras67](#) is in the [public domain](#).

8.4 Children at Work

In almost all parts of colonial British North America, children began to work at a very young age, whether officially for an employer or to help support the family. In fact, children passed from a period of dependence and into active engagement as early as six years of age. Puberty, when it came, was a dividing line between childhood and adulthood, though not necessarily the first one crossed.

Young Labourers

Examples abound, in the 18th and 19th centuries, of children engaging early in economic activities. Some straightforward jobs were assigned to the very young. Aboriginal children were introduced to artisanal crafts and traditions from the moment they were able to participate in the simplest productive process, which is to say as young as four years. The same was true of most farm children in settler society: in New France very young children on farms were tasked with scaring birds away from crops.

However, a child's social and family circumstances or their environment often required that more complex work be taken on. Splitting fish was often the task of six year olds in outport Newfoundland during the 18th and 19th centuries. Processing fish was a wage-earning job undertaken by girls of 10 years, as was domestic labour.¹ Orphaned children under the age of six years were bound or indentured to non-relatives where they became household labour or servants. The loss of a parent in these cases necessitated an early start to a labouring life.

Seven-year olds in the anglophone British North America colonies were subject to English common law, which treated them as adults as far as work was concerned until later in the 19th century. This often meant difficult and potentially dangerous labour for working children. For example, eight-year-old boys (and sometimes younger) were considered old enough to work underground in British North America's coal mines. By 1866 there were, conservatively, 450 boys working in the mining pits of Cape Breton and Vancouver Island.²

In a colonial world that depended heavily on seagoing transportation and in which almost every town of any size was effectively a port town, it is inevitable that we would find boys were put to sea on fishing boats, in merchant ships, and in naval vessels. They did so at 10 or 12 years of age. Although most of the working children from

1. Robert McIntosh, "Constructing the Child: New Approaches to the History of Childhood in Canada," *Acadiensis*, XXVIII, No.2 (Spring 1999).

2. Robert McIntosh, *Boys in the Pits: Child Labour in Coal Mines* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 7.

this period are unknown to us, some we know by name. George Vancouver went to sea when he was 13 and José María Narváez at 14 years of age. Both were born into comfortably well-off families and so began their careers in their early teens; children of less privilege joined up younger. David Thompson, the son of a poor Welsh couple in London, was apprenticed (more correctly, indentured) to the Hudson's Bay Company at 14 years of age. Thompson's experience was not entirely extraordinary: the HBC was London-based, orphans were plentiful in 18th and 19th century London, and the company's patriarchal ethos was consistent with the role of guardian.

Farm families were large because child labour was useful and necessary. Artisanal families, too, made use of all members of the household, although typically at lower levels of reproduction. The rise of industrial workplaces and urbanization changed some of these familial relationships, some of which were very old indeed. Factories and growing towns placed working families into situations where more and more members had to go out to find work. The home was no longer also the workplace. This applied to children as well as adults.

What do we know of child labour in these years and how do we know it? Individual and anecdotal accounts of childhood work and life tend to provide more evidence than official records, especially as regards the youngest workers. In later years — in the mid-Victorian era — this would be because employers were reluctant to reveal how many extremely young or officially “underage” children they had working for them. Before then, however, it was more likely the case that very young children were not reported (or under-reported) because their contribution was necessarily small. A child whose tasks consisted of stacking wood, for example, might not be considered to be in an apprenticeship, even if that was what it was, in the early stages of unfolding. A further — and more direct — deception involved girls in what was technically boys' work; this comes through very clearly in reports from navies and merchant fleets where girls disguised themselves as boys in order to hold onto jobs at sea.

Many of these areas of employment carried huge risks. Handling domestic animals on the farm and horses in towns presented a constant hazard; many boys died underground in mines in the 19th century; children drowned or were murdered in battles at sea; slave raids or hostage-taking during Aboriginal warfare posed a millennia-old threat to indigenous children. In the mid-19th century the emergence of factory labour put children in completely new and unfamiliar environments where they were subject to mechanical hazards and oppressive supervision.

One study shows that a third of boys in a Montreal working-class ward in 1861 were employed. On the whole, boys were likely to earn more — from mine, mill, or factory work — than girls and so were sent out to work more often than their sisters:

The enlistment of thousands of children as workers in Montreal businesses reveals an aspect of industrial society that has nearly vanished today, but was fundamental to 19th century manufacturing. For many working families, basic survival was a daily challenge. Supplementary income was needed as families grew and more mouths had to be fed. Children's wages provided an important second income. And for sons of working-class families, joining their fathers in the factories was the only option. Limited schooling would have to suffice for children whose horizons were limited to urban factories. Accordingly, the Industrial Revolution expanded the industrial enslavement of children. Montreal, no less than any other industrial city of the day, did not escape this reality.³

3. Jean de Bonville, *Jean-Baptiste Gagnepetit, Les travailleurs montréalais à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Montréal: Les éditions de l'Aurore, 1975), 55.

It was a short step from agricultural labour that included all members of a family to industrial labour in which children would participate. But in this setting they were no longer being supervised by a parent or relative, nor were they part of an apprenticeship relationship in which their master fed and clothed them. The imposition of disciplinary regimes, however subtle, were part of life in every factory, even if fines and beatings were not. Children were being moulded into industrial workers by their employers: they were expected to be punctual, focused, efficient, and deferential.⁴ In this setting, employers were shaping not merely their workforce for the day but their workers for the future. At the end of the pre-Confederation period, factories were, in truth, manufacturing workers from children.

There were, too, independent or near-independent jobs to be had. Running errands, selling newspapers, helping in a small grocery — these were low-skill jobs that were available in a number of towns. Other children engaged in “penny capitalist” enterprises like selling fruit or household fuel.⁵ Girls who went into domestic service — and their number was enormous in Victorian Canada — sometimes did so on a part-time basis in several households at once, as laundress’s assistants, for example.⁶

Childhood without Parents

What is less often considered is the almost universal alienation of children from their parents. Orphanhood — whether marked by the loss of one or both parents before the child reached puberty — was extremely common. Peter Moogk suggests that nearly half of all adolescents in New France had only one parent.⁷ In the early Victorian era, when women on average had about six children before they themselves reached 35 years of age, life expectancy for adults was barely half what it is today, so it was almost certain that the youngest children would not have left home before the death of at least one parent. In some cases orphaned children under the age of six years were bound or indentured to non-relatives where they became household labour/servants.

This pattern helps to explain the rise of the orphanage as a major urban and social institution in the 19th century. There was a long tradition in French Canada of such facilities run by the Catholic Church, but during the period from 1820 to 1860 there was a wave of purpose-built facilities for orphans. Many of these were the work of Ladies’ Aid Societies, which established Protestant Orphans’ Homes. As one study clarifies, “the name ‘orphan home’ is misleading insofar as most housed more non-orphans than orphans. Children were commonly temporarily consigned to an institution by a single parent unable to manage, or by a family undergoing a short-term crisis.”⁸ For a child consigned to an orphanage, whether temporarily or permanently, this marked a significant break with family life and probably the beginning of a highly structured existence. It may have been the first and only opportunity to obtain some formal schooling.

That is, however, to put a gloss on the larger social history of the orphan experience. Dr. Barnardo’s Homes were

4. Bettina Bradbury, “Gender at Work at Home: Family Decisions, the Labour Market, and Girls’ Contributions to the Family Economy,” in *Canadian and Australian Labour History*, eds. Gregory S. Kealey and Greg Patmore (Sydney: Australian Society for the Study of Labour History and the Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1990), 119–40.

5. John Benson, *Entrepreneurism in Canada: A History of ‘Penny Capitalists’* (Queenston, ON: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990).

6. Susan E. Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 220–1.

7. Peter Moogk, “Les Petits Sauvages: The Children of Eighteenth-Century New France,” in *Childhood and Family in Canadian History*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 25.

8. McIntosh, *Boys in the Pits*, 20.

first established in 1866 in London by the Irish physician, Thomas John Barnardo, with the founder advocating what he called “philanthropic abduction” of the children of the poor. In some instances British children whose parents had entrusted them to the care of an orphanage were shipped off to the colonies (including British North America) where they became essentially indentured servants to foster families.⁹ Children in Canadian cities were likewise “plucked” from the streets by early social reformers who were more distressed at social decay than they were by the welfare of the children themselves.

Key Points

- Child labour took a multitude of forms and it was not unusual to find very young children engaged in demanding labour.
- Farm children worked from an early age; apprentices took on responsibilities from about the age of eight years. Children working in industrial circumstances, however, marked a significant break from past practices.
- Children were statistically at risk of being orphaned.

9. Craig Heron, “Saving the Children,” *Acadiensis* 13, no.1 (Autumn 1983): 172.

8.5 Childhood under Attack

The mid-19th century witnessed a moral panic over the condition of, and the perceived threat posed by, children in the streets of British North America's major cities. The same situation existed in British and American cities at the time, sparking campaigns to improve the lives of children. (Charles Dickens' novel, *The Adventures of Oliver Twist*, published in serial form from 1838 through 1839 served as an inspiration for increasing policing and philanthropy alike.)

Street arabs or urchins, as impoverished children were known, were viewed as criminals or criminals-in-the-making. They fell below contemporary hygiene standards (which were, by all accounts, pretty low to begin with) and were perceived as unsupervised. Many "child-savers" believed a solution was to put them to work; better to have them spend long days in a factory or be fostered out to a household, even if they would be exploited and ill-treated, rather than let them remain on the streets, or so the thinking went at the time. As one review of the literature put it:

The child-savers ... made proper parenting in a natural family setting the central precept of their endeavours; yet, in practice, their programmes seldom allowed such a relationship. In the final analysis they expected the regeneration of children to take place through work: for the evangelicals hard, manual labour shaped appropriate personal discipline and morality, and for the child-savers, it turned aimless street arabs into productive workers.¹

Initiatives to improve the lives of children included the promotion of education and concern for public health. In the third quarter of the 19th century the child's body became a battleground for imperial fitness. Generations of weak urban children, it was feared, would produce equally enfeebled national armies. This concern percolated out of Britain and into British North America. The reshaping and policing of childhood in the early Victorian era (a movement that would persist for the next century or more) arose out of these concerns and created much of the framework on which we continue to mount our own measure of life before adulthood.

Key Point

- Social movements in the Victorian era, including the spread of formal education, were

1. Craig Heron, "Saving the Children," *Acadiensis* 13, no.1 (Autumn 1983): 173.

manifestations of a moral panic about unsupervised children, particularly in urban areas.

8.6 Education

Formal education has a complicated history in Canada. Loyalists and other American immigrants brought with them a stronger tradition of education than what existed in New France (outside of the main towns), which much of British North America inherited. This was evident in the West during the first two decades of the 19th century when the HBC established schools at Red River for the mixed-blood offspring of its employees and when North West Company men lobbied for a school at Fort William or Rainy Lake for the education of their métis children. A basic education was regarded by these men as a critical and fair demand; they valued fundamental reading and writing skills in particular.¹

Parochial, Private, Public

In contrast, illiteracy was the norm in rural Lower Canada. Many Canadiens saw little value in formal education. Farm life was trying, subsistence farming even more so, and all hands were required to work. Even children worked at farm labour from a very young age.

In 1846 the united Province of Canada passed the Common School Act, which took education out of private hands for the most part, but the legislation had little impact in smaller, poorer districts. The law called for a tax assessment on residents to cover school construction, and the execution of the policy was to be guided by locally elected school commissioners. Poor farmers greeted the new levy with resentment and the commissions attracted the few literate residents in a community, individuals who weren't always typical of the larger population. Suspicion of education as a tool for assimilation of French speakers by the dominant English regime was rampant (and, in Lower Canada in the aftermath of the Durham Report, that was a reasonable response).²

In the growing towns of the Canadas, formal education remained something only a minority enjoyed at mid-century. In Hamilton, for example, it is estimated that barely half the population between the ages of 5 and 16 attended school. The share only crept above 40% between the ages of 7 and 13.³ Education could, of course, be delivered by private tutors in the homes of the better-off citizens, and being schooled abroad was an option for

1. Jennifer S.H. Brown, "Children of the Early Fur Trades," in *Childhood and Family in Canadian History*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 57.
2. Cole Harris, "Of Poverty and Helplessness in Petite-Nation," *Canadian Historical Review* 52, issue 1 (March 1971): 23-50.
3. Michael B. Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 38.

the children of the elites. Throughout the 19th century, the children of the more senior HBC traders and their Aboriginal wives were often sent to Britain for their education.

Educational Reform

The rise of widespread, publicly supported schooling in mid-century was one more expression of a growing democratic sentiment, one that linked education to individual accomplishment and social improvement. A better educated society was better equipped to handle democratic responsibilities and promised to be more economically dynamic. As well, it was believed that schooling could address in some measure the perceived problems associated with unemployed, disruptive, perhaps criminal, and possibly pauper children on the streets of the growing towns and cities. In the same way, too, public schooling was wielded as a weapon against social disorder that might follow in the wake of immigration. These motivations reflect a particular urban, Anglo-Saxon, and moralistic perspective on both childhood and Irish immigration.

Not everyone subscribed to the view that either concern was significant, but enough did together that they shaped the language and legislation around schools.⁴ That said, what education most boys in British North America received prior to mid-century was informal and limited. “Sunday schools” became highly popular in England in the 18th century and soon spread to British North America: these were the only educational venues many boys and girls would ever see, despite the changing views in support of formal learning.



Figure 10.10 Toronto Normal School, ca. 1856.

In the 1840s growing interest in a common project of secular education raised questions about teacher training. **Normal schools** began to appear across the colonies and the colonial administrations began to take an active role in developing curriculum and education systems. This process should be viewed in the context of the broader ethos of reform as it was emerging in the mid-century. As we shall see in [Chapter 11](#), reform took a particular shape when it came to formal politics, but more generally it called for the betterment of a broader slice of society. Old social relations were being tested. Demands were rising for greater opportunities to improve those things

4. Chad Gaffield, “Children, Schooling, and Family Reproduction in Nineteenth-Century Ontario,” *Canadian Historical Review* 72, no.2 (June 1991): 157-191.

thought to be essential to personal achievement. Education certainly fell into this category. But, as historian and social scientist Bruce Curtis has indicated, it was a potentially divisive if not explosive issue:

Educational reform ... was inextricably connected to questions of the form of the colonial state. All the fundamental questions concerning educational organization — who needed to be taught, who could educate them, what they needed to know, how they should learn it, who should pay for it — these and other questions were answered only by answering at the same time questions concerning the state: who would rule, how, of what would rule consist, how would it be financed. The struggle over education was at once a struggle over political rule.⁵

Tories, of course, wanted an education system that taught deference and loyalty. Reformers preferred a locally controlled model headed by school trustees elected by parents, and it was this model that succeeded and thrived across British North America. Its purposes were different from colony to colony, but at its heart it sought to create a commonality of experience and thus a citizenship. As Curtis points out, this kind of policy-making wasn't imposed on the public: it "constructed a public." It had a strong moral undercurrent that resonated with Protestants, elements of deference to authority that appealed to Tories, and a step toward universality that spoke to Reformers. The state, as Curtis indicates, was in the process of making civil society.

Colleges and Universities

Higher education expanded dramatically in these years. Before 1818 there existed, in addition to the Séminaire de Québec (later Laval University), only the University of New Brunswick and King's College (established first in Windsor, Nova Scotia, and then moved to Halifax). Over the next 40 years, several more institutions were established, of which nine were full universities from the start. Nearly all of them were initially associated with a single denomination:

- Catholic: Laval, St. Mary's, Ottawa, Saint Francis Xavier, Windsor College (much later the University of Windsor), and Collège de Saint-Boniface (very recently renamed the Université de Saint-Boniface)
- Church of England: King's College (in Halifax), UNB, King's College (later the University of Toronto), and Bishop's University
- Baptist: Acadia
- Methodist: Mount Allison
- Presbyterian: Queen's

Only two universities in this period, McGill and Dalhousie, were non-sectarian or non-denominational, although in the case of McGill, an English-language institution in a largely francophone city, "non-denominational" may be read as "Protestant." Half of this list comes from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, where denominationalism was a powerful force in the 19th century, one that had a significant claim on a person's identity and opportunities.

5. Bruce Curtis, "Preconditions of the Canadian State: Educational Reform and the Construction of a Public in Upper Canada, 1837-1846," in *Age of Transition: Readings in Canadian Social History, 1800-1900*, ed. Norman Knowles (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1998), 246.



Figure 10.11 McGill College, Montreal, ca. 1859.

These early universities emphasized the liberal arts and theology as fields of study. Mathematics was a speciality at the Séminaire de Québec from the days of New France. Some, including Queen's and Dalhousie, modelled themselves on the Scottish universities where sciences were a key part of the curriculum. However tolerant they might be in terms of denominationalism, the Protestant universities in particular were finishing schools for the colonial elite. These were not institutions designed to advance the opportunities of the common man and particularly not the common woman. The Catholic institutions were, of course, training centres that prepared seminarians for careers in the Catholic establishment: clerics, nuns, social workers, and teachers alike all came out of the Séminaire de Québec, for example.

Key Points

- Formal education was transitioning in the mid-19th century from being run by the clergy or offered privately by untrained women or men to being increasingly standardized and professionalized.
- Educational reforms reflected changing social values, which included growing support for widespread literacy.

Attributions

Figure 10.10

Normal School on Gould Street by Finavon is in the public domain.

Figure 10.11

McGill College, Sherbrooke Street, Montreal, QC, about 1859 by Jeangagnon is in the [public domain](#).

8.7 Historical Experiences of Adolescence at Mid-century

KATHARINE ROLLWAGEN, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, AND VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY

The idea that adolescence was a separate and vital stage of human development only emerged at the turn of the 20th century. By the end of the 1950s, when the largest cohort of children ever born in Canada reached adolescence, the depiction of teenaged children as moody and rebellious was widespread, and psychologists and educators were publishing books to help parents understand, guide, and discipline their teenagers. It's likely that many adolescents caused their parents no less and no more grief than they do today.

While “kids these days...” may seem a timeless adult complaint, several aspects of adolescent experience changed in mid-century Canada. One important change was the frequency of secondary school attendance and graduation. In 1939 in Ontario, studies showed that for every 100 pupils that started school at age five, less than half reached Grade 11 and only 12 finished high school. The secondary school curriculum was focused on academics and university preparation, and at least half of teenagers left school as soon as they could, at age 16. In farming communities, boys' education was often shortened or interrupted because their labour was needed on the farm; in urban centres, working-class boys and girls continued to contribute to the family income, either through part-time or full-time jobs. By 1951, the census recorded that 40% of young people aged 15 to 19 years were attending school. More were obtaining high school diplomas than ever before.



Figure 10.20 The baby boom generation stayed in school longer, causing demand for new facilities and more teachers. Laurentian High School, Ottawa, 1959.

As more young people remained in school, the high school became the institution most associated with teenagers and with youth culture. The growing influence of youth culture was another important change in adolescent experience in mid-century Canada. High schools gathered more adolescents together, more often, and for longer periods than any other institution. In the postwar years, more Canadian high schools had sports teams, music bands, and other extra-curricular activities to bring young people together. Since the 19th century, secondary school students had fostered their own, age-based and class-based cultures; however, when fewer teenagers attended school, the impact of that culture was not noticed beyond the schoolyard. By mid-century, adolescent trends, athletics, and activities were widely reported in newspapers and magazines, and many adults — from psychologists to journalists and medical doctors to advertising agencies — saw the high school as the best laboratory in which to study the habits, values, and desires of Canadian boys and girls. Teenaged behaviours were closely scrutinized and often criticized as deviant and — in the context of the Cold War — potentially dangerous. For example, the media, psychologists, and parents all questioned the teenaged trend towards going steady (developing longer and more serious heterosexual relationships rather than dating a greater number of people). Teenagers claimed going steady gave them the social advantage of always having a date, and that it relieved the economic pressure of spending too much on social outings. Adults, on the other hand, worried that teenagers' need to fit in reflected a tendency towards social conformity that could undermine democracy.

Finally, if adolescence was prolonged, it ended more abruptly than it had for teenagers in previous generations. School attendance, youth culture, and popular psychology encouraged the idea that the teenaged years were a distinct and crucial stage of personal development, but at the same time the generation that came of age in the 1950s and 1960s reached conventional markers of maturity — economic independence, marriage, employment — much sooner than their parents or grandparents. During the 1930s, unemployed young men riding the rails or populating the government's relief camps were unable to start their adult lives. Marriage and birth rates fell as couples delayed starting families. In contrast, during and after World War II, the growing economy meant that high school graduates — and even drop-outs — found jobs more quickly. A greater measure of economic security meant more young people could marry at younger ages. In 1950, more than a third of all Canadian women were

married by the time they were 22 years old. Compare this to the first decade of the 21st century, in which only 10% of women married before they were 25 years old.

Many adolescents at mid-century could look forward to greater access to education, more recreational opportunities, and a society that expected them to spend time with their peers, explore their own personalities, and delay adult responsibilities. However, it's worth remembering that many adolescents did not have these experiences. Young First Nations boys and girls continued to have limited employment opportunities and were forced to attend Residential schools, where many suffered physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. In Alberta and British Columbia, several thousand adolescents defined as having developmental and physical disabilities were sexually sterilized, sometimes without their knowledge or permission. Many more lived in institutions. Racial discrimination meant that Chinese-Canadian, Japanese-Canadian and African-Canadian youth were rarely represented in the media, nor targeted by retailers seeking teenaged customers. Historians strain to hear the voices of these adolescents in the historical record, and little is yet known of their experiences of growing up.



Figure 10.21 The emergent norms of teenagehood did not extend to everyone. Angakkaq was born and raised at Arviat on the west coast of Hudson's Bay. She was in her teens when she died of influenza in the 1940s.

Key Points

- Adolescence, as a stage of human development, was only widely recognized in the 20th century. It was studied and increasingly treated as a problem for adults to solve.
- Increased and prolonged enrollment in schools led to the creation of teenage culture and high schools was the crucible in which that occurred.
- Staying in school longer was enabled by an economy that could readily absorb young workers and which thereby contributed to earlier and more widespread marriages.
- Racialization of communities impacted the ability of many young Canadians to enjoy the

opportunities made available to southern, urban, and European-Canadian teens.

Additional Readings

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Sutherland, Neil. *Growing Up: Childhood in English Canada from the Great War to the Age of Television*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.

“Young in a Small Town” (1967), produced for Camera West, a CBC television program.

Attributions

Figure 10.20

A geography class, Laurentian High School. Ottawa, Ont. (Online MIKAN no.4301846) by Library and Archives Canada is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 10.21

Young Inuit Woman [Angakkaq, born ca. 1928, daughter of Aliqqut, died as a teenager of influenza in the 1940s. Her brother Louis Angalik, born in 1938, still lives in Arviat.] (Online MIKAN no. 3576505) by D.B. Marsh / Library and Archives Canada / e004665469 is in the [public domain](#).

8.8 Teenage Rampage

Another theme that recurs through the post-Confederation era and that played out mostly in urban areas is the public's fear of youth. Migration from the countryside into the cities from the 1860s brought children in tow and created the demographic conditions for an explosion of young, dependent populations. Schooling was one response to this development as a means to contain and channel the energies of children, and this became even more important after the introduction of child labour laws that incrementally stripped economic purpose from children. Fear of youth was, as well, a spur to the **rational recreation** movement of the late 19th century (explored in [Section 10.16](#)) and to the creation of a national militia. In 1913, before the Great War was fully on the horizon, the Minister of the Militia Sam Hughes outlined his vision in this regard: he claimed that one purpose of military training was to “make the youth of Canada self-controlled, erect, decent and patriotic through military and physical training, instead of growing up as under present conditions of no control, into young ruffians or young gadabouts....”¹ Prosperity in the 1920s and unemployment in the 1930s were both seen as contributing forces in the creation of dangerous youths, and these were themes that were reinvested with urgency in the post-1945 period. From zoot-suiters in the 1940s, through greasers in the 1950s, to hippies in the 1960s, the mid-20th century produced a succession of caricatures of young men and women as deviant and disruptive.² The creation of additional (and freer) high schools and new post-secondary institutions were meant to absorb some of that unbridled energy as it bubbled forth from the advancing baby boom. Historian Katharine Rollwagen comments on aspects of this moral panic in [Sections 10.11](#) and [10.12](#).

Inevitably these were principally urban concerns and they were bound up in modernity. The perceived weakening of familial and clerical influences, the loss of the discipline associated with employment from an early age, the appearance of too much leisure time, and the (presumably baleful) influence of popular culture through new media like cinema, radio, television, and recorded music was the array of modern social features that connects Hughes' “gadabouts” to teenage hoodlums, juvenile delinquents, punk rockers, and late-20th-century “slackers.” It also, of course, played out in gendered ways, as women — mothers — were rather predictably held responsible for deviant behaviour by the nation's children. Finally, science — notably in the form of psychology — was mobilized to address the issue of child and youth problems.

1. Quoted in Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada*, 5th edition (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2007), 128.

2. Joan Sangster, “Creating Social and Moral Citizens: Defining and Treating Delinquent Boys and Girls in English Canada, 1920-65,” in *Contesting Canadian Citizenship: Historical Readings*, eds. Robert Adamoski, Dorothy E. Chunn, and Robert Menzies (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2002): 338-9.

Key Points

- Growing numbers of children and youths, particularly in cities, fed a public fear of purposeless young people who might pose a threat to property, values, and public order.

8.9 Historicizing Childhood: The Changing Fortunes of Children and Youth in Canada

GEORGIA SITARA, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, AND UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA



10.18 A boy, one of the Home Children, ploughs a field at Dr. Barnardo's Industrial Farm, ca. 1900.

The experiences of children and youth underwent profound change from the 19th century to the end of the 20th century.

In the 19th century, children and youth were important contributors to the family economy. Most children learned by working alongside adults. Children's work, both paid and unpaid, was crucial to their own and to their families' well-being and survival. Only in the postwar (post World War II) era did mothers replace children as their families' secondary earners.

At the beginning of the 21st century, everyday life for most children in Canada revolved around school. This way of life, which made schooling the central organizing principle of children's lives, has its roots in the first Canadian compulsory education legislation enacted in 1870 and mandated children to attend school for four months of the year. Even then, work, family responsibilities, and other considerations meant that attendance for most children remained irregular, despite families' hopes for their children's education and future.

The idea of childhood as a time in which children did not work took over a century to put into everyday practice. The first Canadian legislation to regulate child labour, the *Ontario Factory Acts* of 1884, legislated boys, 12 years and over, and girls, 14 years and older, to work no more than 10 hours a day, six days a week. Despite the protective legislation, families' needs and individuals' survival meant that in practice boys and girls continued to work. Well into the 20th century, reform efforts and even child protection organizations expected children and youth to work. Work was considered a necessary part of their training in the habits of thrift and industry as well as responsible citizenship.

In the images and voices of children and youth, captured in the oral history video series *Growing Up Canadian*, we are reminded that they were proud to work, to bring home an income, and to make a contribution to their families.¹ In their stories, sometimes in fragments in the written record, and in surviving photographic evidence, we can see that children and youth were capable, sometimes enterprising, heroes of their own lives.

Historian Dorothy Chunn suggests that we should interpret education, labour, and other legislation as the codification of childhood and youth as a time of dependence.² In *Dominion of Youth*, Cynthia Comacchio demonstrates that by the 1920s, children and youth were growing up very differently from their parents.³

Alongside these historic shifts, children and youth continue to appear in the most unlikely places in the 20th century. Between 1880-1930, over 80,000 Home Children immigrated to Canada without their families.⁴ At least 20,000 underage soldiers enlisted and served in World War I.⁵ One of the eight On to Ottawa Trek leaders to meet with Prime Minister Robert Bennett in 1935 was 14 years old. Children and youth across Canada held a chocolate bar strike in 1947 when, to their horror and disgust, the price of chocolate bars went from five to eight cents. From the spectacular to the ordinary, children and youth made history.

1. *Growing Up Canadian*, directed by Sheila Petzold and Susan Terrill, produced by Hoda Elatawi (Montreal: National Film Board, 2003) <http://onf-nfb.gc.ca/en/our-collection/series/?ids=516825&nom=Growing%20Up%20Canadian>

2. Dorothy Chunn. "Boys Will Be Men, Girls Will be Mothers: The Legal Regulation of Childhood in Toronto and Vancouver." In *Histories of Canadian Children and Youth*, ed. by Joy Parr and Nancy Janovicek (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2003): 188-206.

3. Cynthia Comacchio, *Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920-1950* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2008).

4. Joy Parr. *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

5. Tim Cook, "'He was Determined to Go': Underage Soldiers in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Histoire Sociale, Social History* 41.81 (2008): 41-74.



10.19 Children in Edmonton protest rising prices in 1947.

Work continued to be a factor in most children's lives. In the 1940s, some youth were self-supporting by the age of 14. Neil Sutherland's work on the history of children and youth in British Columbia shows that as late as the 1960s, youth recall, "we always had things to do."⁶ Indigenous children and youth in residential school always worked more than they studied.

It is a painful irony, and it should not be ignored, that the century that invented childhood as a time of innocence and dependence also endangered children and youth in unprecedented ways. Institutions that were established in the name of protection, as Steven Maynard demonstrates, often locked danger in.⁷ Revelations about the brutal and genocidal conditions in Residential schools were made as early as 1907 by the Indian Affairs medical officer P.H. Bryce, and disturbing disclosures continue to unfold in our own day.⁸ Richard Cardinal's 1984 *Diary of a Métis Child* is a testament in a youth's own words: policies and practices established for the protection of children created suffering and have resulted in deadly harm.⁹

The lives of children and youth were transformed over the course of the 20th century and not always in a good way.

Questions for Discussion

What is the age of the historical subject in your head? Is adult the default historical subject?

What do children and youth gain over the course of the 20th century? What do children and youth lose?

In what ways did children and youth gain and lose power over the course of the 20th century?

6. Neil Sutherland, "'We always had things to do': The Paid and Unpaid Work of Anglophone Children Between the 1920s and the 1960s," *Labour / Le Travail* 25 (Spring 1990): 105-141.

7. Steven Maynard, "'Horrible Temptations': Sex, Men and Working-Class Male Youth in Urban Ontario, 1890-1935," *Canadian Historical Review* 78, 2 (June 1997): 191-235.

8. Cindy Blackstock, "Wanted: Moral Courage in Canadian Child Welfare," *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 6.2 (2011): 35-46.

9. Richard Cardinal: *Cry From the Diary of a Métis Child*, Directed by Alanis Obamsowin (Montreal: National Film Board, 1986).

Key Points

- Childhood in the post-Confederation era changed over time, and its experience varied based on geographic and racialized context.
- Children's labour was a recognizable feature of life in Canadian households until after WWII.
- Regulation of child labour was slow in coming, largely because the expectation was widespread that children's work was valuable in and of itself.
- As early as the 1920s, the transformation of childhood into a period of dependence was visible.
- The creation of more institutions and systems to regulate childhood too often created significant hazards to the welfare of children.

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Attributions

Figure 8.18

[Boy ploughing at Doctor Barnardo's Industrial Farm \(Online MIKAN no.3521627\)](#) by Library and Archives Canada / PA-117285 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 8.19

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8.10 Residential Schools



Figure 11.18 Study period at the Roman Catholic Indian Residential School, at Fort Resolution, NWT, n.d.

The goals of the Residential School system (described in [Section 11.5](#)) were explicitly assimilationist. The program existed precisely to replace Aboriginal economic practices with those of the mainstream colonial economy, substitute English and French for indigenous languages, erase indigenous belief systems with some kind of Christianity, and interrupt the transmission of social practices (including fundamental familial relationships) by capturing children and keeping them away from their parents, siblings, and other relations. This needs to be underlined: there was nothing accidental about the way the residential schools turned out; these were clearly stated goals and tactics.

In the 1960s and 1970s, as plans advanced to end the program, the consequences of a century of residential schools were everywhere visible. Traumatized children became traumatized adults. Social workers drawn from the colonizing society were sent to reserves — often with RCMP and other police supports — to “rescue” children from dysfunctional environments in which colonialism itself was heavily implicated. In the decade after 1955, as a study by Christopher Walmsley points out, “Aboriginal children in the care of the Province of British Columbia jumped from less than 1% to 34.2%, and this pattern was repeated in other parts of Canada during the same

time.”¹ Just as residential schools were being closed, the Federal Government’s monopoly over the management of Aboriginal communities on-reserve began to fray, and provincial responsibilities increased:

The principal response of provincial child welfare authorities during the 1960s was the apprehension and removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities. Known as the “**sixties scoop**,” social workers explained their actions by arguing that they were in the best interests of the children.²

Citing poverty, health concerns, and even malnutrition, the secular authorities perpetuated the alienation of children from their communities that had begun by missionaries and residential schools. Aboriginal children in care were placed with non-Aboriginal families, and some were exported to the United States. In almost every case, the link between child and ancestral culture was severed. Whether in care or in residential schools, the same outcomes prevailed: practices — especially, but not exclusively, those censured by the anti-potlatch and sun dance laws — were inadequately passed from one generation to the next; the skills taught at woefully underfunded schools prepared students for 19th century field labour but not 20th century factories or offices, let alone professions. Substance abuse on reserves, particularly alcohol, was extensive as generations self-medicated to deal with everything from a personal sense of diminished self-worth to cultural alienation to systemic poverty and — from generation to generation — to the loss of children. Whereas the reserve system and pass system were designed to keep Aboriginal people physically in check, the residential school system and the intervention of colonialist social workers and police authorities were intended to keep them culturally in check.

The enormous educational, social, and moral failures of the residential school system are now widely known. The system contained a single ineluctable contradiction: it proceeded from an explicitly racist assumption that indigenous cultures were inferior and proceeded to strip away those features with an eye to assimilating native people into “mainstream” society, but neglected to address the inherent racist and discriminatory perspectives of Euro-Canadians who would not hire, marry, work with, drink with, study with, lend money to, extend the franchise to, or vote for Aboriginal people, regardless of whether they were “schooled” or not. “Assimilation” was entirely about change, and not about inclusion. It could hardly be otherwise under the circumstances.

At the peak in the 1930s, there were roughly 80 residential schools in Canada. They were in seven of the nine provinces; there were none in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, nor were in the Dominion (later, the province) of Newfoundland. Most of the schools were located far from urban centres. As institutions go, the large brick or stone structures were universally imposing. At Kamloops (Tk’emlúps), for example, the Indian Residential School, opened in 1893, was the largest brick structure in the Thompson Valleys and, indeed, between the Lower Mainland and the CPR hotels of the Rocky Mountain national parks. An entire brickworks was established to enable its construction. On Kuper Island, at Alert Bay, and in town after town across the Prairies, two- and three-storey buildings were erected to enable the warehousing and transformation of generations of Native children.

The involvement of the nation’s Christian churches from the outset was viewed by officials as a good way to transmit Euro-Canadian cultural values, morals, and discipline. It was, as well, cheap, because missionary

1. Christopher Walmsley, *Protecting Aboriginal Children* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), 2.

2. *Ibid.*, 13-15.

groups would effectively work for free. Over half of the schools were run by the Catholic Church, most of the rest by the Anglicans, and the remainder by the United Church and the Presbyterians. Conditions varied from place to place, but few were adequately funded; by the second quarter of the 20th century, child labour was an essential component of the residential school business model. Through most of their history, the general practice at residential schools was to provide only half-day schooling; the rest of the day was dedicated to labour in the fields and workshops, and mopping the floors to keep the children busy and reduce operating costs. The schooling the students received was light on the humanities, lighter still on sciences and math, and heavy on religion and theology. Generally speaking, girls were taught domestic skills like cooking and sewing, while boys were taught basic agricultural skills and some crafts.

Children were housed in dormitory rooms. Rows of beds allowed for little privacy. Boys and girls were separated and kept separate: stories abound of brothers and sisters who were allowed no contact despite being kept in the same building. Showers and baths were spartan. Meals were Dickensian, and children suffered from malnutrition. Complaints of cold facilities are sustained by a terrible record of mortalities from illnesses, including tuberculosis (which claimed as many as 60% of the student population). Every residential school has its own sad little graveyard, and some of them aren't that little. As Mary-Ellen Kelm has pointed out, some schools kept their mortality statistics low by shipping fatally ill children home to their families, which consequently inflated mortality rates on reserves. Kelm also has noted that the transformation of Aboriginal diets to Euro-Canadian foods was part of an attempt to colonize not only the mind but the Aboriginal body as well.³ Doing so could be lethal: only recently, it has become known that nutritional experiments conducted on children under Ottawa's auspices resulted in deaths.

If the colonizing society wasn't intervening in education or abducting children from what authorities judged as poor environments, it was managing some of the health crises in which it was — once again — complicit. “Indian hospitals,” separate from non-Aboriginal facilities, were established to deal with the specific illnesses (mostly tuberculosis) that afflicted Aboriginal populations. On the whole, these Indian hospitals functioned as another element in the government's management of Aboriginal lives.

Sainty Morris

In the mid-1940s, perhaps a little later, Sainty Morris — still a very young child — contracted tuberculosis from his older brother, with whom he shared a bed in his parents' home on the reserve near Duncan on Vancouver Island. Soon thereafter, he was sent by medical authorities to the Nanaimo Indian Hospital, more than 60 km north. He passed along this account — from which I quote at some length — to a historian of healthcare Laurie Meijer Drees. One would have to have a very flinty heart indeed to read this and not be moved; more than that, however, it serves to show the severe disempowerment of Aboriginal people and the complicity of far more than a handful of officials and professionals in the business of controlling Aboriginal children.

3. Mary-Ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-50* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1998).

In the hospital the food was good. At the time we were used to our native ice cream [made from berries and fish grease whipped together...] and other food that we were raise[d] on. At that time, my family had little money, and we lived mainly off the land and the beaches. When I was in hospital, I wished I had clams, duck, and all that food from home that I could not have.

The nurses when I first got in there were funny. They were mean and there was one nurse who used the strap on us. I remember a particular time. It was when I first got to the hospital. They had what you called a rest period. It was set for an hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon. I was new there and could not force myself to sleep so I picked myself up a book, a comic book. As I was lying there reading, I remember how suddenly the book was smashed out of my hand. I got strapped! The nurse took my comic book away and strapped my hand with leather.

On the other hand, there was another nurse who was very friendly. [...]I thought she was a very wonderful friend as opposed to the other one. I wasn't the only one that was strapped. She strapped a lot of other children.

I was there off and on for, I can't remember, years, months, days. I was in there for a year and a half when they sent me to Kuper Island Indian Residential School. After being there for a while, I was sent back to the Nanaimo Indian Hospital.

[...]One day the head nurse came to see me, and she told me I was going home. I was so happy! She said, "We are going to measure you for clothing and are ordering your clothes from Vancouver. Then you are going home." A few weeks later, the nurses came and brought me to change into my new clothes. I got a bath and changed clothes, and then I asked if I could visit my friends and relatives [in the hospital]. I was allowed to visit, and they said, "We'll find you when the nurse is ready." Miss Fletcher finally showed up, and we got into her car and starting heading south, towards where my family lived.

We started going towards Chemainus [a town between Nanaimo and Duncan]. I thought we were going to a store there, but when we got to the wharf, she told me to get out. I thought, "What is going on?" She told me, "You are going to Kuper Island Residential School." I told her, "No, they told me I was going home." That's when the nurse told me, "No, I've got strict orders not to leave you until you get onto that boat." So I got onto the boat, and they brought me there....



Figure 11.19 Kuper Island Residential School.

This school was another awful place. They [the hospital staff] didn't tell my parents they were shipping me to Kuper Island! My parents didn't know where I was! My ... sister-in-law, Therese [another TB case at the Indian Hospital], she phoned my parents to ask how I was doing, and that's when it turned out they didn't know where I was. I finally wrote a letter to let them know I was at the

school. When I asked the principal why they sent me to Kuper Island, he said that I was here for a rest. Some rest that was. I tell you, I did not know why they did that!

As soon as I got there, they had me scrubbing things on my hands and knees and washing everything by hand. After I finished one place, I had to wax. I had to do every room in that school, both the boy and girl sides. The other kids were in school, and I went to class part of the time. One day they told me to go to the top dormitory and to wash the outside of the building and to be careful not to fall down. There was no rope, no safety, and if there was a streak I would have to go back and clean it. Eventually I got sick again, and I was sent back to the hospital in Nanaimo.⁴

Whether First Nations leaders found the concept of the industrial and then residential schools helpful to their people or not, the reality fell very far short. Parents often resisted sending their children away, and it was one of the functions of the RCMP and units like the BC Provincial Police to assist the clergy with annual roundups of students. It wasn't until the late 1950s that the educational curriculum improved, nor was it until then that children were allowed to visit with family over the holidays. The record suggests that a great many parents discovered that their child had died at school only when the summer holidays began.

These are the elements of the systemic weaknesses and shortcomings of the residential schools. Underfunding alone would have produced many of these negative outcomes. Tales of physical and sexual abuse operate at a different level. The principle Christian denominations were viewed by Euro-Canadian society as moral guardians; as a result, Canadians found it difficult to accept tales of abuse. Evidence began to accumulate and patterns began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1990 the leader of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Phil Fontaine (b. 1944), publicly disclosed the sexual abuse he suffered as a child in residential schools, along with his reckoning that every boy in his class was similarly mistreated. This disclosure led to others and, in 1991, a Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was convened. Seven years later, the Minister of Indian Affairs issued a formal apology to victims of sexual abuse in the schools, and a multi-million dollar fund for healing was established. While this process uncovered some very grim tales, it did not speak to the psychological, physical (in addition to sexual), and emotional abuse experienced routinely in the schools. Priests and nuns alike, as well as secular workers at the schools, were named, some charged, and some convicted of a wide range of sadistic practices. One survivor of St. Anne's Residential School at Fort Albany, ON went on record to describe the kind of abuse meted out by one nun:

I remember being in the dining room having a meal. I got sick and threw up on the floor. Sister Mary Immaculate [Anna Wesley] slapped me many times and made me eat my own vomit. So I did, I ate all of it. And then I threw up again ... Sister Mary Immaculate slapped me and told me again to eat my vomit. ... I was sick for a few days after that.⁵

Beginning in the 1950s, Aboriginal children were permitted to attend public schools for the first time, and as day-students. Family connections were rebuilt, but the residential schools remained in place for most of the youngest

4. Sainty Morris, interviewed in Laurie Meijer Drees, *Healing Histories: Stories from Canada's Indian Hospitals* (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2013), xviii-xxx.

5. Jesse Staniforth, "Cover up of residential school crimes a national shame," *thestar.com*, August 25, 2015, accessed January 31, 2016, <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2015/08/25/cover-up-of-residential-school-crimes-a-national-shame.html>.

First Nations children in the country. In 1969 the D.I.A. took over the operation of the schools from the churches, which coincided with the Red Paper and the rise of Aboriginal political organizations. However, this is not to say that there was unanimity among First Nations as to what should happen next. Gradually, the responsibility for the schools' operations shifted to local band councils. By 1986 all of the schools were in the hands of Aboriginal managers, and many had been closed down entirely. It is reckoned that 150,000 children passed through the system from the end of the 19th century to the mid-1980s.

Some of the structures are still standing: St. Eugene near Cranbrook has been converted into a luxury resort/casino and now generates revenue for the Ktunaxa First Nation; the Kamloops Indian Residential School houses offices and a museum for the highly entrepreneurial Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc. Other schools are no more: the Penelakut/Kuper Island school was demolished in the 1980s, as was St. Michael's at Alert Bay very recently — in both cases, the prohibitive costs of repair and rehabilitation were a factor, as was an unwillingness to tolerate the gloomy presence of the buildings any longer.

In 1988 Ottawa issued the first of two official apologies for the residential school experiment. Lawsuits followed and, by 2005, Ottawa had accepted a measure of culpability and set aside \$1.8 billion in a compensation fund for survivors of residential schools. In 2008 Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued a fulsome apology in the House of Commons; in an unprecedented move, the leaders of Canada's various Aboriginal political organizations attended. Although the apology was a landmark in that it involved culpability and knowledge that children placed in the care of the state were harmed, it did not accept liability. While some Aboriginal people were pleased with the apology, for many it was insufficient. When Stephen Harper announced to the G-20 in 2009 that Canada has "no history of colonialism," questions were asked with respect to the sincerity and intelligence of his apology. Aspects of the apology and the political movements arising from it are considered in the next section.

Key Points

- The residential schools were a project devised to replace aboriginal culture with a version of Euro-Canadian, Christian culture, and part of a larger concerted effort to interrupt the reproduction of cultural traditions in Aboriginal communities.
- Education and training did little to prepare Aboriginal pupils for the Canadian economy.
- The 80 residential schools located in every territory and province other than New Brunswick, PEI, and Newfoundland were operated by Christian clergy.
- Conditions were very poor, resulting in malnutrition, vulnerability to disease, and high levels of mortality.
- There were extraordinarily high levels of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse in the schools, principally by the clergy.
- The schools began closing in the 1980s; all have now been closed, demolished, or repurposed.

Attributions

Figure 11.18

[Période d'étude au pensionnat indien catholique de \[Fort\] Resolution, T. N.-O. \(Online MIKAN no.4063309\)](#) by Canada, Minister of the Interior, Library and Archives Canada / PA-042133 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 11.19

[Kuper Island Indian Residential School \(Online MIKAN no.4820442\)](#) by Canada. Dept. of Interior / Library and Archives Canada / e011156551-v8 ; e011156551_s1-v8 is in the [public domain](#).

Week 9 - Gendered Life at Home

9.1 Early Women's Movement(s) in Canada

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Figure 3.39 Mrs. Willoughby Cummings (née Emily McCausland, 1851-1930) was a key figure in the National Council of Women. As a pioneer female journalist and editor at the *Globe* newspaper, she exemplifies the activist and professional sides of first wave feminism.

Alongside and sometimes overlapping with the various social reform causes which emerged in the latter part of the part of the 19th century was the **first wave** of the Canadian **feminist** movement. While historians once identified the creation of the Toronto Women's Literary Society in 1876 as marking the official origin of a women's movement, more recent scholarship indicates that a variety of women and organizations were engaged in pursuits related to fair treatment and equal rights at least several decades earlier. The specific context of British North America as a settler society shaped by histories of colonialism and slavery had a significant influence on women's activism from the outset. Belated acknowledgement is now being given to the Indigenous roots of

the first wave in North America with documented cases of Aboriginal women demonstrating a critical gender consciousness, acting “in what they perceived to be their own best interests as women as human beings,” and most often to combat the deleterious consequences of colonialism.¹ One prominent example involved the Anishinaabe woman, Nahebahwequa (also known as Catherine Sutton), who protested in 1860 against her dispossession from land she considered a birthright, an event that arose because she had married a non-Aboriginal man. Another key element in the genesis of feminist activism was the ongoing legacy of slavery and female engagement in international **abolitionist** networks. By the mid-19th century, concerns about the injustices of slavery became increasingly connected with another kind of bondage seen to be experienced by women. It remains unclear the extent to which Black and White female abolitionists were able to easily or consistently overcome the racial divide, but there is a record of mixed race attendance at lectures on anti-slavery and women’s rights as well as mutual support for integrated education in the 1850s and 1860s. These initiatives were accompanied by efforts to secure women’s property rights, the quest for higher education, and the formation of female-exclusive church organizations. Altogether, they laid the basis for women to pursue the attainment of additional rights and play a more significant role in public campaigns for social reform. As in other national contexts, there was not a singular women’s movement in Canada as such; rather, a diverse range of activists who dedicated themselves to a wide array of political, social, economic, and cultural issues.

In the latter part of the 19th century and continuing into the 20th century, two main arguments were put forward by feminists to secure greater civil and political rights, and to achieve greater influence for Canadian women in civil society. One was premised on an **equal rights** ethos that women and men shared a common humanity, and hence, women should be able to attend university, gain access to selection occupations, vote, and etc. as a matter of natural justice. The other emphasized women’s differences from men, and in particular that their near universal role as mothers specially equipped them to participate in a wide range of reform and political campaigns. Referred to as **maternal feminism**, this form of argument emphasized that women could apply the knowledge and attributes they acquired as mothers to address various inequities and social ills. While some female activists solely employed one position over the other, many strategically used both. Nonetheless, those who came to predominate among the mainstream women’s organizations, namely middle-class Anglo-Celtic Protestant women, most closely identified with maternal feminism. They were especially prevalent in the first national umbrella women’s organization, the **National Council of Women of Canada** (NCWC), formed in 1893. They were not the only ones of course, as francophone Catholic women who became part of the provincial group, the **Fédération National Saint-Jean-Baptiste** (FNSB), founded in 1907 also saw themselves as maternal feminists.²

1. Jean Barman, “Indigenous Women and Feminism on the Cusp of Contact,” in *Indigenous Women, and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture*, eds. Cheryl Zuzack et al. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010): 93.

2. Karine Hébert, “A Maternalist Organization in Quebec: The Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste and the Struggle for Women’s Suffrage,” in *Quebec Since 1800: Selected Readings*, ed. Michael Behiels (Toronto: Irwin, 2002): 461-491.



Figure 3.40 The 1898 NCWC gathered at Rideau Hall in the company of one of its champions, Lady Aberdeen (centre) and her husband, the governor general.

One of the central issues of the first wave was the struggle for **female suffrage** which involved a protracted campaign with feminist activists laying claim to full political citizenship. While single-issue suffrage groups in Canada remained relatively small and mainly confined to urban centres until the turn of the 20th century, the large female prohibition group the **Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)** was a vocal proponent from the 1870s onward. As with a number of other women's reform groups at the time, the WCTU did not view the attainment of female suffrage as the primary goal in and of itself, but rather as a means to achieve greater political influence for social improvement. Although the suffrage campaign was dominated for the most part by Anglo-Celtic bourgeois reformers, other groups of women participated. For example, female immigrants from Iceland were supporters from early on, as were women originally from Finland, especially after their home country granted women in the vote in 1906. In the specific case of Quebec, the staunch opposition of the Catholic church to women's enfranchisement combined with the higher priority female reformers gave to advances in their legal rather than political status, meant that support for women's suffrage was more muted there and the campaign longer.

At the federal level, decades of struggle resulted in the achievement of a **partial franchise** with the passage of the *War-time Elections Act* in 1917. Against the backdrop of World War I, this legislation granted the vote to the female relatives of Canadian soldiers, a large majority of whom were of British ancestry, and withheld the vote to any immigrant citizen from enemy countries who had been naturalized after 1902. These provisions in the legislation not only meant that significant a proportion of non-British immigrants were left out entirely, but also that French Canadians were greatly under-represented among the women who were enfranchised. Although **universal adult suffrage** was introduced the next year, select populations of women and men were explicitly left disenfranchised: Aboriginal people, as well as Chinese, Japanese, and Indian immigrants.

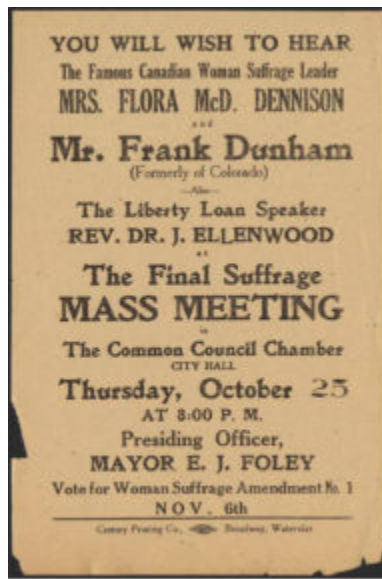


Figure 3.41 The final push for women's suffrage in 1917 saw men taking a more enthusiastic role as allies.

Other key issues garnered the time and attention of feminists beyond the vote. Working-class women, on occasion in concert with middle-class allies, attempted to oppose the inequities of industrial capitalism and inequities within the labour movement. They also specifically agitated as wives and mothers protesting high consumer prices. Farm women lobbied for legislative changes which would allow them greater financial independence and power especially as related to **homestead rights** and **dower laws**. There were still other efforts to raise the moral tone of Canadian society primarily by Euro-Canadian middle-class women. These feminists were not alone in this battle, but far more than others, they raised concerns particular to the situation of women and with a view to altering existing gender relations through the attainment of a single moral standard. Social hierarchies of class, race, religion, and colonial status were at times questioned and contested during the first wave but far more they were unquestioned and re-affirmed.³

Key Points

- Aboriginal women were early campaigners for women's rights as regards property.
- Legal and property rights were a continuing focus for several generations of post-Confederation women, especially in Quebec.
- The movement to abolish slavery provided opportunities for women to develop activist and political skills and for alliances that crossed racial lines.
- First wave feminism engaged ideas like equal rights and maternal feminism: the first emphasizing the similarities between men and women; the latter highlighting differences

3. Nancy Forestell with Maureen Moynagh, eds., *Documenting First Wave Feminisms: Canada — National and Transnational Contexts*, Volume 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

based on motherhood.

Attributions

Figure 3.39

Mrs. Willoughby Cummings (Emily McCausland Cummings) Toronto corresponding secretary of the National Council of Women of Canada by Library and Archives Canada is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [Library and Archives Canada](#) under the reference number **3214496**.

Figure 3.40

National Council of Women group at Rideau Hall, Ottawa, Ont. by Library and Archives Canada is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [Library and Archives Canada](#) under the reference number **3366133**.

Figure 3.41

Woman Suffrage: You will wish to hear the Canadian woman suffrage leader Flora McDonald Dennison and Mr. Frank Dunham, Thursday, October 25, 8:00 p.m. by Library and Archives Canada is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [Library and Archives Canada](#) under the access number **1984-4-917**.

9.2 Gendered Roles after the Wars

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Figure 10.9 Gendered roles and ideals of normalcy were transmitted through primary- school readers like the *Dick and Jane* books (produced in the United States but reprinted in Canada in French, and in corrected English in the 1950s).

Gendered roles in modern Canada have passed through a period of significant change since the interwar period, especially during the 1960s. As the work of historians Veronica Strong-Boag, Mary Louise Adams, Magda Fahrni, Elise Chenier, and others illustrate, the politics of home life and gendered family regimes was dominated by a complex set of forces following demobilization in 1945-46 and into the late 1950s. Housing shortages were experienced in many parts of Canada; the peacetime restoration of domestic goods production and consumption took a decade longer in Canada than in the United States. But the desire to impose, immediately after the war, a regime of normalization, of bread-winning fathers and homemaking mothers, persisted throughout the 1950s. It was driven in part by a new family formation manifest in the baby boom between 1939 and the late 1950s. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau have described this as an “interregnum period,” an extended era of post-war adjustment that lasted to the mid-1950s.¹ Historians situate changes in gendered roles and demographic patterns

1. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, eds., *Cultures of Citizenship in Post-War Canada, 1940-1955* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

in the context of shifting historical forces which shaped the masculine and feminine lives of men and women and their “baby boomer” children.

For the parental generation, the dark shadows of the Great Depression and the devastation of the war years motivated the search for security — for jobs, for homes, and for a restoration of feminine domesticity supported by masculine providers — and a nationwide drive towards a better life. This was especially true for many newcomers from war-torn Europe. Such hopes, however, were based on older models of gender relations arising in the era of industrialization, some of which were already dated and challenged in the period from 1914-39. The re-mapping of gender roles as Nazism was defeated and the Cold War loomed can thus be approached as a generational as well as a gendered social historical script.

The societal urge for post-war normalization and security in Canada led many towards a search for “home” as both a public-realm cultural ideal and a private-life aspiration. Explanations for origins of the baby boom itself invariably point to a postwar-gendered and generational search for security through domesticity. The gendered family regime of mothers, fathers, and children in the 1950s thus had deep historical roots yet was shaped by a quest for normalization in its context as a postwar measure. Security through normalized gendered roles was a classed (middle) and ethnically specific (white) ideal found and promoted in television advertisements and many sitcoms of the era. It was also a cultural backdrop to the public discourse that often cut across class and ethnic differences. Imposed from above through state policies and embraced from below by many Canadians, gender roles were shaped in the 1950s and early 1960s by conformity to a nostalgic sense of the past — one that was open to challenge.

Early postwar patterns in gender roles were marked by patriarchal norms. This was especially true as a new generation of fathers and mothers began to form their own families in search of what both American and Canadian journalists, writing for the middle classes, referred to as the “good life.” As I have suggested elsewhere, some wives balked at the patriarchal power (sometimes called “hegemonic masculinity”² by theorists today) it imposed, but few fathers did. Postwar family life was, as Strong-Boag puts it, an “ambivalent” experiment: many wives, mothers, and homemakers who reached maturity at this time (marriage ages were comparatively younger in the 1950s) did not look back on their home dreams with bitterness, but many other women did.³

Men’s experiences of postwar domesticity were not without problems. Notions of “masculinity in crisis”—modern men facing a challenge to their identities as men, to cite a prominent example, had been a perennial concern across many decades — though each era, since the 19th century, generated its own mythologies about how men suffer in the modern age. In the 1950s, mid-century modern men seemed to face three crises in parables of woe that found considerable space in publications, not only in popular magazines like *Maclean’s* and *Chatelaine*, but also in some of the leading sociological publications of the day, most notably *Crestwood Heights: A Study of the Culture of Suburban Life* (1956). A particular triad of social forces was seen as standing against the modern man as a self-disciplined, autonomous, inner-directed, assertive being: modern bureaucracies and the modern factory system; family togetherness, which prescribed a new dictate for fathers — play with your children

2. On this topic, see R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt. “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept”. *Gender and Society*, 19, 6 (2005): 829-859.

3. Veronica Strong-Boag, “Home Dreams: Canadian Women and the Suburban Experience, 1945-60,” *Canadian Historical Review* 72:4 (December 1991): 24-34.

as if you were, almost, one of them; and, possibly worst of all, moms as matriarchal menaces, who exerted too much pressure on sons — some of whom, it was feared, would become homosexual as a result. This last challenge to manhood was, of course, also a critique of womanhood; a mixing of messages endorsed the maternal housewife while condemning her at the same time.

With respect to lived experience, these cultural myths and storylines reflected little in terms of the enduring inequalities in gendered roles in the private and public spheres. Following the immediate postwar forced exodus of most women in non-traditional jobs, there was a slow and then accelerating return to the workforce by married women. By the early 1960s, women comprised one-third of the paid workforce. Full-time earnings, however, stood at only 59% of men's for the same labour categories and at just 54% for part-time female workers. Despite the challenges to their masculinity that most men were supposed to be facing, work-time studies of women's labour in the home as homemakers revealed an even more gender-skewed expectation that women were responsible — as an essential characteristic of their gendered role — for most infant child care and most housework.



Figure 10.10 Postwar women could find pink-collar jobs in teaching and nursing but also in industry, where they were valued for fine work — but not so much that they were paid as much as men. Women at Canadian Marconi in Montreal, ca. 1949-58.

What stands out in histories of the postwar period, at least to the rise of the sexual revolution in the late 1960s, was the equation of heterosexuality with what the state and society considered normal gender relations. **Deviance** in this respect is considered in [Section 12.7](#).

Connections between sexuality and gender roles are complex. They continue to be debated by historians today. Gender roles, if approached as shifting social and cultural responses to sexual differences, consistently demonstrate historical categories and powers that connect the body to boundaries of class, age, and ethnicity. In 2014, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) released its *Better Life Index*,

indicating that Canadian women spend, on average, some 254 minutes per day cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, compared to 160 minutes for men performing the same tasks. These 21st-century trends have deep historical roots in gender roles defined more by patriarchy than by equal partnership. Histories of the struggle for women's rights and the gendering of experience are one means for challenging those persistent norms. Now more than ever before, these confrontations with histories of inequality become apparent in legislation and official policies that embrace still-wider notions of gender and identity. In this sense, the translation of historic roles and restrictions into **postmodern** constructions of gender roles in Canada is part of a continuity of transformation, and not only a landscape of change.

In the decade of the first postwar generation, as Bryan Palmer observes, the turbulent sixties brought with it a “generation gap” in social mores and gender roles between young women and men in Canada, as elsewhere — but this came later, as the postwar generation of baby boomers reached maturity in the late 1960s.⁴

Key Points

- Normalizing gender roles in the form of bread-winner fathers and homemaker mothers was part of the postwar project of rebuilding Canadian society and its economy.
- This pursuit of a new gendered ‘normal’ has been interpreted as part of a search for security and relative prosperity on the part of a generation directly impacted by the Depression and WWII. Normalcy may have been imposed from the top but it was embraced from below as well.
- Features of these gendered roles include a strengthening of patriarchal authority and privilege for men in heterosexual circumstances.
- By the early 1960s, women were returning to the workforce in significant numbers, despite wage and other barriers to their participation.
- Historical studies of gender roles and sexuality indicate a complex pattern of ongoing transformation and show us that traditional roles are, themselves, transitory.

Attributions

Figure 10.9

[on the road](#) by [In pastel](#) is used under a [CC-BY 2.0](#) license.

Figure 10.10

[An assembly line of women working at the Canadian Marconi Company, Montreal \(Online MIKAN no.4369810\)](#) by Malak / Canada, Dept. of Manpower and Immigration / Library and Archives Canada has nil restrictions on use.

4. Bryan Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

9.3 The Second Wave of Feminism

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In 1963 feminist author and activist, Betty Friedan, captured extraordinary attention with her book, *The Feminine Mystique*. She struck a chord for many readers and a nerve among her critics. She wrote about “the problem that has no name,” the unhappiness and dissatisfaction experienced by many women in their roles as homemaker, mother, and feminine wife. At its source, she argued, was **patriarchy**. Notions of privileged males resonated with the daily experience of many women in Canada, especially in the middle-class.

Inspired by *The Feminine Mystique*, and by Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1948, translated into English in 1953), as well as by Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1970) a growing number of women across the western world, including women in Canada, launched a significant activist movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The **Women’s Liberation Movement** aimed to empower women in both their private and public lives. This **second wave feminist** challenge staged public protests, producing iconic images that were easily consumed on television screens and often sensationalized. They challenged assumptions about conventional roles for women and the “normalcy” of patriarchy, leading in Canada’s centennial year to the establishment of the **Royal Commission on the Status of Women**, which produced its report in 1970 and established the **National Action Committee on the Status of Women**. Progressive changes in gender roles, with respect to enhancing women’s power, were attempted by establishing a portfolio on the status of women in the federal cabinet and in creating an Office of Equal Opportunities in the Public Service Commission. A new *Citizenship Act* was passed in 1975 and legislation to amend the Labour Code was adopted in 1978. That same year, the *Canadian Human Rights Act* came into effect, ensuring that “equal pay for equal work” be reflected in the workforce.

These shifts in public policy and public opinion provided space for a discussion of the brutal side of patriarchy. Women’s Liberation in the 1960s — which was sometimes exuberant and even fun — was followed in the 1970s by a grim and growing recognition of gendered violence in the form of wife abuse. Friedan’s critique of a patriarchal society made possible the revelation of life stories of battered women. She offered a challenge, taken up by many readers in Canada beginning in the early 1960s, which had been largely absent in the popular discourse. Even now, out-of-sight struggles from this generation (and others) are gradually being revealed by oral

histories and life writing. With renewed local community support throughout the 1970s, the rising number of women's and family shelters provided a necessary, if distressing, measure of the problem of spousal abuse.

At this point, two generations of Canadian women — mothers who remembered the 1930s and beyond, and their daughters — could step past the so-called **generation gap** between parents and the young, to confront long histories of becoming a woman, altogether. In the 1970s Women's Studies courses and, later, programs were appearing for the first time on Canadian university campuses; daughters enrolled in these newly instituted disciplines started bringing home copies of the much reprinted *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (a key, and evolving, textbook, launched by a Boston-based feminist movement established in 1969) for mom to have look at. Old assumptions about property rights, income-earning potential for women (who often earned less than two-thirds pay for work of equal value at this time), taxation laws, and child-care responsibilities spoke to the larger picture of patriarchy's persistence during and beyond the so-called "good life" of the 1950s. That the Dominion Bureau of Statistics (replaced by Statistics "Stats" Canada in 1972) routinely recorded fathers and husbands in the conjugal family as household "heads," even in the early 1970s, is understandable: adult males earned much more as paid workers and their gendered role conformed to Western cultural practice and expectations.

Despite these feminist challenges, most barriers to gender equality held fast beyond the 1960s. The second wave had momentum, but it crashed again and again against opposition from both men and women, opposition that was as much conditioned by past assumptions, as it was just plain reactionary. The "trouble with normal," as Mary Louise Adams put it, was that the great postwar experiment in restoring a heterosexual, gendered family regime — rooted in a mythical past — had failed to live up to its billing.¹ Dismantling its structures through new laws and public policy in employment equity, day care provision, and family law reform continue to present day.

Probing these broad patterns can take us to unexpected places, as historians move from an era when "mixed marriages" described a union across Christian denominations to one in which same-sex nuptials are protected by Canada's *Charter of Freedoms and Rights*. In hindsight, from the end of the Second World War to the early 1980s, gender roles did not obliterate old boundaries, but they shifted considerably in pushing them toward more equality. Nonetheless, the ongoing task of translating legal gender equality into everyday realities in the continual making of gender roles leaves work yet to be done — throughout Canadian society, and by historians at work mapping their historical contexts in the years ahead. Present-day trends have deep historical roots. Gender roles remain defined more by patriarchy than equal partnership. It is also evident that they have been significantly challenged in histories of the struggle for women's rights.

Key Points

- The movement to improve the condition of women changed in the 1960s and 1970s, becoming variously known as the Women's Liberation Movement and second wave feminism.

1. Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1997).

- A result of this activism and a stimulus to further action was the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1970.
- Legislation aimed at achieving gender equality was introduced incrementally, although barriers proved resistant and continue to be so.

Week 10 - Sex and Reproduction

10.1 - Queer and Other Histories

JOHN BELSHAW AND TRACY PENNY LIGHT AND THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY



Figure 12.18 Herbert Norman, Canadian diplomat, was suspected by the RCMP of being a homosexual.

The literature on **queer history** is still in its infancy — although it is a robust infant. In a country in which heterosexual narratives overlapped so completely with the nation-building saga, finding queer histories constitutes a huge challenge in its own right.

In the pre-Confederation period, homosexual relations were punishable by death. This extreme stricture — seemingly never enforced — nevertheless served to keep homosexuality buried deep in the closet. After 1868 the *Criminal Code* described *same-sex relations* as an “act of gross indecency,” and a conviction could — and frequently enough did — result in severe jail time and even flogging. These laws would not change substantially for a century.

Conditions in public and private life were hardly better than in the courts. Religious authorities of every stripe regarded homosexuality as starkly immoral. Regarded widely as sexually and psychologically deviant, and criminal, homosexuality — if discovered — could, and commonly resulted in, the loss of employment and social ostracism. To be sure, there are many examples of women engaged in what were euphemistically described as “Boston marriages” and many “confirmed bachelors” whose sexual orientation was a public secret. Hidden histories of this order include Charlotte Whitton (1896-1975), the first woman elected mayor of a leading Canadian city (Ottawa), who spent more than two decades in a same-sex relationship. The accomplished film animator Norman McLaren (1914-87) was able to sustain a relationship with another National Film Board director, Guy Glover, from the 1930s to the 1980s. The possibility of living a fulfilling homosexual life was rarely possible, and examples such as these are the exceptions to the rule. Probably more typical of the 20th century experiences was that of the accomplished Saskatchewan novelist, Sinclair Ross (1908-96), whose homosexuality was only disclosed after his death.

Fruit Machines and Protest

By the mid-20th century, there were growing calls to liberalize both the perception and legal status of homosexuality as activists drew on the experiences of the civil rights and women’s liberation movements. These early campaigns were contemporaneous with increasing suspicion and surveillance of homosexuals by the intelligence community. Security circles had linked sexual deviance (which encompassed sex of any kind for any purpose other than reproduction) with political deviance, at least since the time of the First World War. Homosexuality came to be regarded as disloyal in and of itself, and homosexuals were thought to be easily turned against their own nation. The very illegality of homosexuality, of course, created an environment in which lesbians and gays were vulnerable to blackmail.

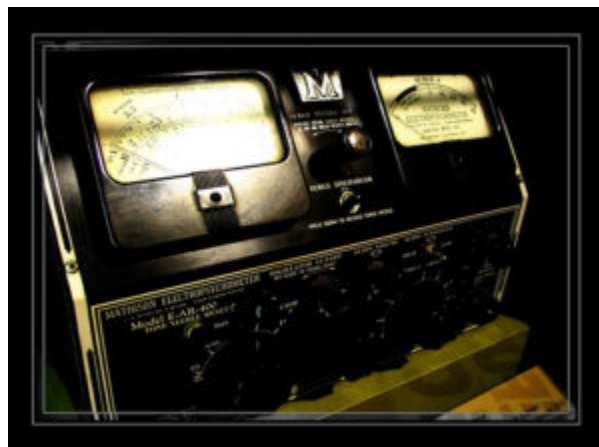


Figure 12.19 The “fruit machine.”

During the Cold War, the Canadian military and RCMP worked assiduously to root out from their ranks, and from higher levels of the civil service, anyone thought to be homosexual or otherwise sexually “deviant.” Security officials exposed subjects to homo-erotic images and used a device that measured pupil dilation to determine whether the subject was aroused. The so-called **fruit machine** was bad science, and it damaged (and destroyed)

careers, as did Cold War-era interrogations of suspected security risks associated with homosexual orientation. The distinguished, intellectually gifted, and unmarried Canadian diplomat Herbert Norman (1909-57) was grilled in the early 1950s regarding suspicions that he was gay; his subsequent suicide is thought by some to have been connected with his sexual orientation and fear of exposure.

Social standards had changed by the mid-1960s, and there was a greater appetite to decriminalize homosexuality. One catalyst for this shift was the conviction to indefinite detention (potential life sentence in an institution) of a North West Territories man, George Klippert (1926-1996), who had had sexual relations with consenting adult males on four separate occasions. As was the case with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender women and men in earlier generations, Klippert's behaviour was at first couched in a language of perversion and psychological illness. A stable and fearlessly honest man, Klippert stood in for everyone whose lifestyle might come under random scrutiny. His conviction was to be the last of its kind. Revision of the *Criminal Code* followed in 1968, and in 1969, homosexual relations between consenting adults was made legal.

[Watch this video on Pierre Trudeau's Omnibus Interview.](#) Prime Minister Trudeau, who had been the Minister of Justice only months earlier, was able with a single famous aphorism to shift standards in regard to homosexual relations between consenting adults.

Four years later, the *Diagnostics and Statistics Manual* of mental disorders — the guidebook for psychological assessment and treatment in North America — expunged homosexuality as a form of mental illness.

Megan Davies, a York University historian of institutionalization and mental health, describes the links between social constructions of mental illness and social attitudes toward sexual orientation and identity.

From Penal to Pride

Being gay prior to 1969 could lead to jail, so being “out” was both dangerous and unlikely to attract support. This does not mean, however, that gays and lesbians did not find opportunities to create cultures and to build connections before the *Criminal Code* was amended. Most major cities contained at least a few discrete venues that were known to be safe sites for queer gatherings. The Castle Hotel on Vancouver's Granville Street, the Odyssey Club in Regina, the Happenings Social Club in Winnipeg, the steambaths of Toronto, and bars along Montreal's Stanley Street were locations where gay men in particular could meet and form relationships or satisfy sexual needs. Even after changes in the *Criminal Code*, however, gay men experienced persecution by the nation's police forces. Legal acceptance of the right to quietly engage in private sexual relations did not extend to public identification of homosexuality, and a closeted existence continued to seem, for many, the best choice.

However, 1969 marked a turning point in the ability of the LGBT communities to announce their collective presence and to organize campaigns for rights. As more and more Canadians emerged tentatively from the closet, they launched one campaign after the next for “gay liberation” and “gay rights.” These campaigns met with the inevitable and strident objections of Canadians (straight and some gay) who were raised in generations

where homosexuality equated, in public discourse and the press, with sexual perversion and even predatory and pedophilic behavior. Under these circumstances, gays and lesbians who were “outed” by the police or the courts could still face stigmatization. Suicides remained a common enough occurrence as a result. Strategies of conformity did not, therefore, disappear overnight. In the short term, as one study has it, many in the LGBT community simply built “a bigger closet.”¹

Gradually, the homophile community turned to public displays of solidarity. The pink triangle used by the German National Socialist regime of the 1930s and 1940s to identify, humiliate, and persecute homosexuals (in what is sometimes referred to as the “homocaust”) was appropriated by the gay rights movement as a symbol of shared suffering and resistance. “Gay Pride” events began to appear in the early 1970s, starting very small and culminating in marches that — in little more than a decade — became major festive occasions in the nation’s largest cities.

The AIDS Epidemic and the Charter

Although there is evidence for an earlier start in Vancouver in the 1970s, many members of Vancouver’s LGBT community indicate 1981 as the year of the first official pride parade. This is significant in that 1981 also marks the beginning of the human immunodeficiency virus infection and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) pandemic in North America. The following year saw the first HIV/AIDS case in Canada. It struck demographics outside of the gay community, but AIDS was most firmly associated in the media and in the popular mind with gay sexual relations; it was, for a while, sneered at as the “gay plague.” The tragedy of HIV/AIDS — which multiplied through the 1980s and into the 1990s — was both fuel to the homophobic lobby and a spur to increased gay rights and LGBT solidarity.

Just as HIV/AIDS was beginning to chew its way along its disease vector, a further change was coming to the legal status of lesbians and gays. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 provided a new foundation for gay rights, thereafter tested and approved by the courts. Despite intermittent outbursts of homophobic violence, LGBT Canadians thereafter claimed an increasing share of civic and cultural life. In 1988 Svend Robinson (b. 1952) became the first openly gay Member of Parliament, and 10 years later, Glen Murray (b. 1957) became the first openly gay mayor of a major city (more than 45 years after Whitton was elected mayor of Ottawa). In 2001 Libby Davies (like Robinson, a British Columbia NDP MP) came out as a lesbian, the first in Parliament. As the shadows hiding homosexuality rolled back, further gains were made in the courts and legislatures. Rights to benefits and pensions for same-sex couples were granted in different jurisdictions, gays and lesbians were permitted to serve in Canada’s military, same-sex couples were allowed adoption rights, the definition of *hate crimes* was broadened to include anti-homosexual cases, and at the turn of the century, the civil laws prohibiting same-sex marriages were crumbling.

The extension of legal tolerance at first, and then actual, legally enshrined rights for gays and lesbians from the 1960s on is a manifestation of the growing **rights culture** in Canada during those years. Although LGBT Canadians could not be ghettoized in the same way as poor immigrants or visible minorities, they endured

1. Valerie Korinek, “A Queer-eye View of the Prairies: Reorienting Western Canadian Histories” in *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region*, eds. Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter, and Peter Fortna (Edmonton, AB: Athabasca University Press, 2010), 287.

significant disadvantages through the 20th century, which included the psychological and physical costs of being socially marginalized, physically threatened, and closeted. The gay community, however, had the significant advantage of cultural capital and representatives (and allies) atop some of the commanding peaks of the media, cultural industries, and the academy, and so were able to speak out in ways that other more visible minorities could not. (Contrariwise, Charlotte Whitton has been criticized for using her advantages as a white middle-class woman in power against the rights and needs of ethnic minorities in Canada.) Some of the gains made by the LGBT rights movement have acted as an example for other communities' rights, especially since the 1980s.

In 2002 a Durham, Ontario 12th grader, Marc Hall, made plans to bring his 21-year old boyfriend to prom night. The Catholic school that Hall attended, however, instructed him that this would be forbidden on the grounds that the Catholic Church did not accept homosexuality. The case wound up in court where, on the morning of the prom, the judge provided an injunction in favour of Hall. In this instance, the provincial government's stand against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, at least temporarily, trumped the religious freedom rights of the school and its board. For Marc Hall, this was a personal victory; from a historic standpoint, it was rather more. It revealed that the moral arbiters of Canadian society a half century earlier had either lost their authority or had changed their position dramatically. Far from being declared sexually insane and incarcerated, Hall was applauded across the country. The case also pointed to the strength of identity politics at the start of the new millennium, and the ways in which the Charter had rearranged the legal landscape. "Historic events" such as this one thus serve to reveal as much about the past as they suggest about the future.

A caveat needs to be registered. Historians and social scientists have drawn attention to the fact that the "rights" gained by LGBT Canadians might be considered *heterosexual* rights.² Gay marriage, for instance, "heterosexualizes" queer couples and legitimizes their unions within the boundaries of a particular notion of normal (one that includes, for example, ideals of life-long monogamy). In terms of current issues, there is ample evidence that many groups continue to be marginalized (transfolk, for instance); from a historical perspective, it is instructive to see how invisible their experiences remain in the literature. However, these histories are being brought to light by historians, many who are making good use of interviews to document experiences in the mid-20th century.

Visit the [Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony](#) website. Elise Chenier's work on archiving lesbian oral history is both a landmark and a benchmark.

Key Points

- Regulations against homosexual relations and homosexuality itself remained on the books in Canada until the late 1960s.
- Although LGBT Canadians often found ways of expressing, exploring, and pursuing their sexualities, the various pressures to conform to a heterosexual norm constituted a powerful

2. See, for an early example, Marianne Valverde, *Sex, Power, and Pleasure* (Toronto, ON: Women's Press, 1985).

force.

- The persecution of gay men in particular increased during the Cold War and, in the security and military services, dubious methods of interrogation were deployed to identify homosexual “threats.”
- In 1968 Pierre Trudeau’s government took the position that the state has no place in the bedrooms of the nation and effectively legalized homosexuality.
- The decade that followed saw the stirring of gay pride movements; the 1980s witnessed significant gay liberation and, simultaneously, the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Attributions

Figure 12.18

[E. Herbert Norman \(1909-1957\)](#), [External Affairs \(Online MIKAN no.3203917\)](#) by Canada. National Film Board / Library and Archives Canada / PA-134317 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 12.19

[The Fruit Machine](#) from [Rebel Youth Magazine](#) is used under a [copyleft](#) license.

10.2 Eugenics



Figure 7.16 Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911) was a largely self-trained British social scientist, a half-cousin of Charles Darwin, and the figure most readily associated with Eugenics. It is Galton who is credited with coining the dichotomy: nurture vs. nature.

One of the earliest and longest lasting of the reform movements was associated with the ideals of **eugenics**. Formulated in its modern context in 1883 by the English intellectual, Sir Francis Galton, eugenics took its lead from evolutionary and genetic theory, and was at the heart of what came to be known as **scientific racism**.

Gene Theory

The core idea of the eugenic theory is that genetic inheritance is a factor in the success or failure of a society. Along with Galton, the proponents of eugenics “believed that criminality, alcoholism, and feeble-mindedness were...inherited.”¹ Individuals who are mentally or physically (and, sometimes, morally) challenged are doomed, the eugenicists argue, to pass along those traits to their heirs (which, it is now widely understood, was never

1. Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1990), 16.

the case). A person with a severe mental challenge like Down syndrome, for example, was reckoned incapable of conceiving a child without Down syndrome. Poverty and laziness (often paired as personal qualities) were sometimes viewed as heritable as well. According to eugenic theory, poverty (a condition of life that can be instantly changed with money) was not caused by changes in the economy or social circumstances: it was the consequence of bad genes. Moral weakness was also aligned with “feeble-mindedness.” This was especially true as regards eugenicists’ views of sexually active women (who were responsible, it was argued, for a rising tide of illegitimate births) and sex trade workers.

The eugenicist strategy has been described as “selective breeding,” but that term does not do it justice.² “Selective breeding” invariably involves *selecting in*: that is, encouraging fit people (however defined) to have a significant number of children. But the eugenics message in Canada was more about *selecting out*: to find ways to deter the reproduction of what they regarded as fated populations who were doomed by their genes to imperil themselves, successive generations, and the nation as a whole. In this campaign, they were not alone.

Part of the late 19th century context of eugenics in English-Canada was the falling fertility rate, particularly when measured against that of French-Canada and immigrant communities (see [Section 1.2](#)). Eugenicists internationally claimed that healthy societies were at risk from this **fertility transition**. Most of these cultures were hostile to the idea of birth control because it would limit the reproduction of their own people, but the idea of sterilizing the least healthy and least valued citizens had considerable appeal.

Nazi Germany, of course, ran headlong down this path and became notorious for the forced sterilization of roughly 360,000 individuals who failed to meet one test or another of “normalcy.” The fascists did not have a monopoly on eugenics: it is reckoned that, in the United States from 1910 to the 1970s, no fewer than 60,000 “feeble-minded” citizens were forcibly sterilized. Canada sterilized proportionately fewer — the total number is believed to be slightly in excess of 3,000 — but record keeping was inconsistent and there is little doubt that a true total is unknowable.³

What is distinctive about this particular branch of social reform in Canada is that its advocates sought to change the human raw materials rather than the laws or conditions under which those humans lived. To quote the authority on this subject, historian Angus McLaren, “The eugenicists differed from most of their contemporaries not so much in envisaging a radically different future, but in supporting the intrusive social policies they felt were needed to bring it into being.”⁴ While other social reformers were encouraging redemption through personal choice and institutional supports, the eugenicists were advocating change at the sharp end of a scalpel.

A Nation of Thoroughbreds

Eugenics in Canada had two principal roots. These were the deteriorating health of urban working people and a visible increase in the numbers (though not necessarily the incidence) of mental health cases. There was no shortage of evidence that urban work made people less well and the eugenicists feared that those weaknesses

2. R. Douglas Francis, Richard Jones, and Donald Smith, *Destinies: Canadian History Since Confederation*, 6th edition (Toronto: Thomson Nelson, 2008), 173.

3. Randall Hansen and Desmond King, *Sterilized by the State: Eugenics, Race, and the Population Scare in Twentieth-Century North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3.

4. McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, 165.

would be transmitted to successive generations. As for the mentally ill, their institutionalization and observation got underway in the mid-19th century with the construction of redoubtable asylums in the major cities. It was not until the early 20th century, however, that eugenic thinking produced eugenic action. This took place at the provincial level because of the allocation of powers under the *BNA Act*, but it was only Alberta and British Columbia that moved forward with forced sterilization policies and campaigns.



Figure 7.17 The Provincial Training School for Mental Defectives, Red Deer, AB, n.d.

Originally the Albertan legislation of 1928 did not permit involuntary sterilization but it was nevertheless coercive. Patients were more likely to be discharged from an asylum or hospital if they elected to be sterilized; there was an incentive, then, to go under the knife. This was evidently insufficient as far as Edmonton was concerned, and under the Social Credit government of William Aberhart, the Board of Eugenics was given the power in 1938 to make sterilization compulsory. The Board's record of recommendations is astonishing: only 1% of cases considered were not recommended for immediate sterilization, and that tiny fraction was, in actuality, postponements. As one study of the Alberta Board of Eugenics states succinctly, "not once did it vote "no"."⁵

Scholars working in this field think that British Columbia's experiment with eugenic policies was less dramatic in its numbers. The problem is that record keeping on this score was remarkably incomplete, and what records were kept were subsequently destroyed or lost. We do know, however, that sterilizations were performed on inmates in mental health and prison facilities beginning in 1933; perhaps a few hundred were affected.

The eugenics movement in Western Canada and the application of sterilization is discussed by historian of institutionalization, Megan Davies (York University).

Fear of the Other

What these initiatives and the appeal of eugenics generally had in common was a fear of immigrants. One study points to the "convergence" of the study and management of public health, reform of educational systems,

5. Hansen and King, *Sterilized by the State*, 97.

and concerns for immigrant selection in the 19-teens as a flashpoint in the development of eugenic sentiment. According to one historian of immigration, this was made

... evident in a 1920 editorial of the *Canadian Journal of Mental Hygiene*, which observed that the feeble-minded, insane, and psychopathic found in the province of Manitoba came out of all reasonable proportions from the immigrant class, and it was found that these individuals were playing a major role in such conditions as crime, juvenile delinquency, prostitution, pauperism, certain phases of industrial unrest, and primary school inefficiency.⁶

If the project of nation building had as its goal a law-abiding, physically and mentally healthy population, these weren't just indicators of individual deviance: they were milestones of social decay and a call to action. In British Columbia, where Asian immigration was part of the landscape in a way that it wasn't east of the Rockies, the eugenics movement took on a particularly racist tone. J.S. Woodsworth — an influential figure in the Social Gospel movement — described the Chinese as a “nonassimilable element” and advocated exclusion while one asylum director in the Vancouver area, Charles Doherty, conspired to illegally deport “feeble-minded” Chinese to Shanghai. His actions were consistent with the white majority's fear that the Chinese constituted “a virulent racial plague that had invaded the unsuspecting western colonies and threatened to decimate the good works and dilute the blood of its British forebears.”⁷ With fewer rights to be stripped away than just about any other group, the Chinese-Canadians who found themselves in BC's psychiatric and mental health facilities were exiled rather than sterilized.

There was a kind of inexorable logic to it all. If the first principle of racism was correct and there was, in fact, a hierarchy of races in which northwestern Europeans stood at the top, and if genetics was a predictable business, then the intermingling of races might strengthen weaker peoples but it could only harm stronger nations. And if strong nations had their share of “feeble-minded” individuals, then weak races would have far more. It was also widely believed that the poor, the racially inferior, and the mentally inferior had higher fertility rates than Anglo-Canadians. By encouraging the immigration of lower-tiered races, Canada had thus invited into its midst people whose mental, moral, and physical fabric posed a risk to the whole of this striving, ambitious Canadian project. Doing so was described by the eugenicists as **race suicide**.

A couple of things are striking about this reform movement. First, it was championed principally by nominally **progressive** elements. In Alberta, the United Farmers (UFA) party brought in sterilization legislation and it was, in particular, the United Farm Women of Alberta who led the way in 1924, achieving legislation in 1928. J.S. Woodsworth espoused eugenicist ideas in his anti-immigrant book *Strangers At Our Gates* (1909). Tommy Douglas, the CCF leader and Premier of Saskatchewan, wrote his 1933 Master's thesis on “The problem of the subnormal family” and advocated sterilization of the mentally subnormal. As the Social Gospel moved further from theological to sociological grounds and as that sociology became more allegedly scientific, the responses to mental health became less redemptive and more clinical.

6. Donald H. Avery, *Reluctant Host: Canada's Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896-1994* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995), 84-5.

7. Robert Menzies, “Race, Reason, and Regulation: British Columbia's Mass Exile of Chinese 'Lunatics' aboard the Empress of Russia, 9 February 1935,” in *Regulating Lives: Historical Essays on the State, Society, the Individual, and the Law*, John McLaren, Robert Menzies, and Dorothy E. Chunn, eds. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002): 199-203.

We also find maternal feminists in the frontlines of the eugenics movement. Having elevated motherhood to “woman’s highest calling,” the quality of motherhood would inevitably come into question, especially if the fertility of the “defective” population was left unchecked.⁸ Both Mary Ellen Smith (ca.1861-1933) and Emily Murphy (1868-1933) were outspoken advocates of sterilization in BC and Alberta. Smith — the first woman elected to the BC legislature in 1918 (with the slogan, “Women and children first!”) and the first woman in the British Empire to hold a Cabinet seat in government — brought the issue to the provincial Assembly in 1925. Murphy — one of the “Famous Five” who were key to the 1929 “Persons Case” — was brutally frank in her opinions on the subject. In 1932, she wrote that if the state could protect the public “against diseased and distempered cattle,” then it should also “protect [the public] against the offal of humanity.” She called on the government of BC to do whatever it could to produce “human thoroughbreds.”⁹ Murphy’s position on Chinese immigration was made clear in her attacks on the “yellow peril” in the pages of *The Black Candle* (1922) under the pseudonym of “Janey Canuck”: she took the view that inferior peoples begat more inferior peoples and they were all inclined toward criminality.



Figure 7.18 The Asylum for Idiots and Feeble-Minded at Orillia, ON, ca.1910.

There were parallel movements in central and eastern Canada, though they failed to achieve legislation in support of sterilization. The Eugenics Society of Canada was established in 1925 but really only began meeting in earnest in the 1930s. More influential was the work of individuals in newly created professional fields. Dr. Helen MacMurphy held the position of Inspector of the Feeble-Minded for Ontario, from 1906 to 1919, and was another advocate of both institutionalization of the mentally “sub-normal” and sterilization.¹⁰ Like many conservative first-wave feminists she was opposed to birth control. She felt the use of birth control by the dominant Anglo-Celtic society would only cause the fertility rates of what she regarded as the better sort of Canadians to fall against the unbridled fertility of inferior peoples (whose fecundity she sought to control through sterilization).¹¹

Immigrants and members of ethnic minorities were heavily targeted by the eugenicists, as were Aboriginal peoples. “Half-breed” — a term that carried with it a certain amount of pride and distinction in the previous century — was used by the eugenicists in the 20th century in rhetoric designed to show the debilitating

8. Angus McLaren and Arlene Tigar McLaren, *The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada, 1880-1997*, 2nd edition (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997), 68.

9. Hansen and King, *Sterilized by the State*, 99.

10. McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, 30-6.

11. Erin L. Moss, Henderikus J. Stam, and Diane Kattavilder, “From Suffrage to Sterilization: Eugenics and the Women’s Movement in 20th Century Alberta,” *Canadian Psychology*, vol. 54, no.2 (2013): 105-107.

effects of intermarriage between races. With that in mind, it is not surprising to find that Aboriginal and Métis individuals were vastly over-represented in the Albertan sterilization cases. Children, who enjoyed fewer legal protections than adults in institutional settings, were also over-represented. So, too, were women. Overwhelmingly, eugenics in practice was about sterilizing girls and women whose sexuality, morality, poverty, ethnicity, and intelligence combined to constitute a perceived threat to the health and safety of the larger community.



Figure 7.19 The Provincial Lunatic Asylum in New Westminster, shortly after it was opened in 1878. It would subsequently become known as the Provincial Hospital for the Insane and, from 1950, as Woodlands School.

Hard Language

In the 21st century, we are accustomed to using vocabulary that is sensitive and respectful as regards physical and mental illnesses and challenges. The language used in the 19th century and through most of the 20th, however, was far more direct and judgmental. It is difficult to convey the level of conviction held by eugenicists if we use 21st century language. They didn't consider mental illness a "disability"; instead, they made use of a rhetoric of "retardation," "insanity," "immorality," and "idiocy." Individuals with physical challenges were regarded as "handicapped" at best, but "crippled" most of the time. People, moreover, became their affliction: individuals with what is sometimes called "sub-normal intelligence" were both "retarded" and "retards," perhaps "morons" or "imbeciles." John Langdon Down (1828-1896), for whom "Down syndrome" is named, came up with the term "mongoloids" — a disturbing reference to the physical appearance of his patients that, moreover, suggests a racist outlook as well. Individuals with physical disabilities were, of course, "cripples." Women working in the sex trade were simply and inescapably "prostitutes."

These terms enabled 19th and 20th century reformers to objectify the individuals to whom they were referring. Understanding that (for us, discomfiting) relationship between language and reform is critical if we are to understand the attraction and authority of movements like eugenics. A mental disability wasn't a challenge to be overcome: it was a permanent state that defined the individual in question and from which there was little likelihood of escape.

Whatever happened to Eugenics?

The eugenics movement survived in the post-war era to the 1970s. Involuntary sterilizations in Alberta and British Columbia actually increased between 1945 and the late 1960s. Across the country, however, the tide started to turn much earlier.

A visit to Nazi Germany in 1936 was enough to flush eugenicism out of Tommy Douglas' portfolio of social reforms. Physicians, theologians, and scientists in Quebec — those who did not share in the Anglo-Canadian terror of being over-run by Catholics and foreigners — focused their fire on the faulty science in hereditarian theory. By 1945 they had made much headway in discrediting the movement. It is worth noting that the Catholic Church came out as a consistent critic of eugenicist views, and it was particularly hostile to involuntary sterilization. This opposition derived from several concerns. One that especially mattered in Canada was the xenophobic and Protestant tone of eugenics: both the French and Irish Canadians were tarred with this hostile brush. In the years after 1945 increasing public awareness of the role played by eugenics in Hitler's program of "racial purification" and **genocide** tempered Canadian attitudes.

Nonetheless, BC and Alberta held on to their policies and practices for another generation. Facilities like the BC Provincial Hospital for the Mind (aka: Essondale, Riverview), Woodlands in New Westminster, and Red Deer's Provincial Training School for Mental Defectives (after 1977 known as the Michener Centre), saw the majority of the provinces' sterilizations in the 1950s. The westernmost provinces had something else in common: Social Credit governments, both of which fell in 1972. The Alberta sterilization laws were repealed almost immediately after the new Conservative administration led by Peter Lougheed came to office; the BC legislation was repealed without fanfare in 1973 under the New Democratic Party government of Dave Barrett (b. 1930). In both cases, the context of change was the rise of a stronger culture of individual and human rights. In the mid-1990s, the Alberta government began the process of apologizing and offering compensation to victims of involuntary sterilization. The British Columbia government did the same, but only when ordered to do so by the Supreme Court in 2006.

This is not to say that the eugenicist perspective disappeared entirely. Even in the absence of sterilization legislation, it was revealed in 1978 that Ontarian physicians were performing parent-approved sterilization on children with developmental disabilities.¹² But the social panics about high rates of unemployment, the rise of an urban criminal class, a tidal wave of illegitimate births, and the "degenerate" qualities of the immigrant population — all of which contributed to the original calls for eugenicism described above — had passed. By the 1960s, modernity was entering into middle-age, and the social transformations that were being wrought by urbanization and industrial labour were no longer news. This normalizing of modernity affected movement cultures as a whole and gave way to newer, different tensions.

12. McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, 169.

Differently Abled

Figure 7.20 Mary Macdonald, photographed in 1893 by William James Topley.

The word “eugenics” means “well born.” Mary Macdonald (1869-1933), hydrocephalic and confined to a wheelchair, would have been fourteen years old when Sir Francis Galton coined the term. She was not well born.

Her mother, Agnes Bernard, experienced “an excruciating labour,” and the infant Mary immediately displayed signs of the enlarged head that would guarantee, in the late 19th century, a lifetime of impairments. Her parents were at first devastated although, as the years passed, they would demonstrate a commitment to Mary’s welfare. Mary’s father was notoriously terrible with his finances and he struggled with alcohol, but somehow he and Agnes found the resources to hire a pair of caregivers and to pursue what proved to be fruitless medical treatments. They constructed a wheelchair-accessible gallery in their home that enabled Mary to meet her father’s visitors. Not all Victorians, it seems, were fearfully ashamed of their child’s mental and physical disabilities. Not Agnes and Sir John A. Macdonald at any rate.¹³

Key Points

- Eugenics was based on a scientific theory that posited the inheritability of intelligence and defects in intelligence, as well as morality, work ethic, and poverty.
- Eugenacists sought to reduce the impact of “inferior” peoples by means of institutionalization and sterilization, while fighting against campaigns for accessible birth control.
- No fewer than 3,000 Canadians were sterilized, principally in Alberta and British Columbia.
- Mostly, the subjects of sterilization were women, children, immigrants, Aboriginal people,

13. Ged Martin, *John A. Macdonald: Canada’s First Prime Minister* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2013), 116-17, 180.

and Métis.

- Support for the eugenicist cause came from within the Social Gospel movement and early feminist organizations.
- Official sterilization campaigns ended in the 1970s.

Attributions

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10.3 The Sexual Revolution



Figure 9.71 The Canadian-American actress, Norma Shearer, won an Academy Award for her performance in *The Divorcee* (1931).

Of the many challenges to established norms in the Cold War years, one of the more complex and lasting is the **sexual revolution**. This was, again, a social change that occurred internationally — not just in Canada nor just in North America.

Origins of the Revolution

It seems both obvious and provocative to state that sex is at the heart of the Canadian project. Whether one looks at the *filles de roi* of 18th-century New France, the bride ships of 1860s Vancouver Island, or the efforts to recruit whole households to settle the West, the idea of the family as the core productive unit in Canada is a dominant theme. So dominant, in fact, as to be largely unspoken. Historians have increasingly questioned the historic norms of family and sexual relations because of what they reveal about the ideology of Canada and citizenship and because of what they exclude.

The patriarchal structures of citizenship have been mentioned already. Men, particularly men who were

understood to be the head of household, were seen as the sole representative voice of their families. One study points out the continuity between 19th- and 20th-century patriarchy, despite what mid-century modernists might claim: “Postwar Canadians could look askance at the backward Victorians and their patriarchal families even as they continued to support a quite similar structure of family life.”¹ Married men had first call on citizenship in the modern world. In industrial communities where housing was provided by the employer, first call went invariably to married men and their families. A family sustained local shops more so than a single man; a family sustained local churches and schools as well. And families produced labourers who would not need to be recruited from elsewhere.

Women were profoundly disadvantaged in this situation. Their entitlement to waged labour was vastly less powerful than men’s. Their bodies were considered engines of population growth and thus as good as the property of the state. Women who defied social sensibilities (which advocated heterosexual marriage and reproduction) faced considerable sanctions. In one particularly harrowing 1947 homicide case in Vancouver, a murdered woman — Viola Woolridge — whom the court subsequently decided was, in life, a poor mother and an inadequate wife, was effectively put on trial for her own death at the hands of her husband. She was found wanting as an example of Canadian womanhood, and the charges against her husband/killer were dropped.² It is not too much to say that women were occasionally reminded that their defiance of what constituted normalcy could be repaid with their lives.

Challenges to the patriarchal order were led in the 1960s by what became known as second wave feminism and, later in the decade, the Women’s Liberation Movement (described by Robert Rutherford in [Section 7.10](#)). One element of this movement was a reclaiming of women’s bodies and biology in a way that inevitably addressed issues of sexuality and sexual morality. Some feminists critiqued the institution of marriage itself as inherently repressive and essentially about women’s reproductive capacity. This was a position that could be taken because, at mid-century, the question survived of whether sex served any purpose other than reproduction; women’s sexual activity, it was widely held, ought to be constrained to marriage where it served a rational purpose. Feminists in this period — and they came from a wide band of radicals, liberals, conservatives, and others — proposed that sanctions against pre-marital sex were obsolete. (Even this line of reasoning, however, often presumed the eventuality of marriage.)

Young feminists took this critique of normal into popular culture. The hippy movement advanced the case for free love (that is, sexual relations outside of the institution of marriage and an end to marital monogamy). For men, this could mean a variety of things; for women, it presented challenges as far as pregnancies outside of marriage were concerned. Whatever advances feminists and counterculture spokespersons were able to make, society still took a dim view of unmarried motherhood and illegitimacy. Finding the means to control fertility was, therefore, a critical piece in the building of a sexual revolution.

1. Christopher Dummitt, *The Manly Modern: Masculinity in Postwar Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 9.

2. Diane Purvey, “‘Woolridge Driven to Kill Wife’: Lessons on How to Get Away with Murder,” *Vancouver Confidential*, ed. John Belshaw (Vancouver: Anvil Press, 2014): 205-14.

Contraception

The significance of **birth control** changed through the 20th century. Before 1914, social sanctions against fertility controls were paired with fear of a falling fertility rate. Eugenacists tied this to race suicide, while imperialists feared the ongoing fertility transition would weaken the nation when it came time to muster soldiers for war. Although birth control and its advocacy remained punishable under the *Criminal Code*, statistical and other evidence shows that middle class couples were clearly using some measures to reduce fertility even before the 1930s. They were doing so, moreover, without much in the way of professional advice. The first family planning clinic in Canada was established in 1932 in Hamilton under the direction of Dr. Elizabeth Bagshaw (1881-1982); it operated illegally until reforms allowed it fully into the light 1969. Morality and the law notwithstanding, unwanted pregnancies were a profound economic issue in the Depression years; in wartime, illegitimacy was a greater concern.

Part of the challenge arose from the lack of reliable techniques for reducing fertility, let alone preventing pregnancy. Condoms, of course, would help, but their sale was illegal until the 1960s (although they were discretely available through most barber shops). Besides, condoms were associated in the public mind more with preventing the transmission of venereal diseases than staving off pregnancies. A great deal of publicity and propaganda accompanied campaigns to protect young men (not so much women) from sexually transmitted diseases, especially during and immediately after WWII. This issue perpetuated eugenicist sentiments with regard to race suicide and its cure, muscular Christianity. Venereal diseases were principally blamed on promiscuous women or female prostitutes (often understood by the police, the press, and the public to be one and the same) and seldom on their clients.³ Sex outside of wedlock, for any purpose other than procreation was thus bound up in hazards, as were condoms.

The context of discussions about birth control changed at mid-century. Fertility rates had recovered (thanks to the baby boom) and illegitimacy was in retreat: consequently, opposition to contraception moderated. Moralists, militarists, and eugenacists could no longer whip up hostility to the conversation about contraception as they had earlier. Indeed, moral panics about teenagers (as surveyed in Sections 10.10, 10.11 and 10.12) created circumstances that favoured a reconsideration of contraception as a positive. Folk solutions were overshadowed by scientific advances in technological barrier prophylactics like condoms and diaphragms, although these could still be notoriously difficult to obtain. Rather suddenly, in 1960, there was a new option.

In that year, an American team produced the first state-approved oral contraceptive pill. The case for **the Pill** advanced rapidly in part because it had the sanction of science behind it (even though that same science was reeling at the same time from the **thalidomide** disaster). As historian Angus McLaren describes it,

[Physicians] drew their metaphors from the science of engineering. They appeared to be more comfortable — given their references to “pelvic floors”, “follicle walls,” “cervical canals,” “storage and transport of ovum” — when regarding the uterus as a construction site rather than as a human organ. Similarly, doctors who were

3. Joan Sangster, *Regulating Girls and Women: Sexuality, Family, and the Law in Ontario, 1920-1960* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2001), 85-130.

still embarrassed to fiddle with a messy cream or floppy rubber contraption were happy to distribute a pill, a product of scientific research, a “preventive medicine” that was simply prescribed.⁴

Because the Pill was so effective, simple, clean, easily packaged, distributed, and obtained (and, by the middle of the decade, so widespread), it drew renewed but largely repositioned debate about the moral and health consequences of premarital sex and promiscuity.

Never before had sexual activity been so abstracted from reproduction. For a couple using the Pill, intercourse became purely an expression of love, or a means of physical pleasure, or both — but it was no longer exclusively a means of reproduction (not that it ever was). While this was true of previous contraceptives, their relatively high failure rates and their less widespread use failed to emphasize this distinction as clearly as did the Pill. The spread of oral contraceptive use thus led many religious figures and institutions to debate the proper role of sexuality and its relationship to procreation. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, reiterated the established Catholic teaching that artificial contraception distorts the nature and purpose of sex.⁵ These sanctions had particular resonance in Quebec, or they might have done so only a few years earlier. Despite the apparent authority of the Catholic Church, Quebec women’s fertility plateaued from 1947 to 1957, between 28 and 31 births per 1,000 women, and then halved in the next 15 years to 14.3 births. It continued to fall until 1986, when it rallied a little. From the highest provincial fertility rate in Canada before the war (rates that were, as well, higher than those in France, Britain, and the United States), the Quebec rate became the lowest from the mid-1960s to the millennium. Clearly, this could not have been accomplished without resort to contraceptives or terminations. Resistance to birth control did not, however, instantly evaporate: it wasn’t until 1969 that aiding in birth control was removed from the *Criminal Code*. Thereafter, the **Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada** became a more prominent part of the public discussion about fertility limitation. The appearance of changing sexual behaviour beginning in the early 1960s (if not earlier), then, reflected the arrival of the baby boomers into their years of sexual activity, diminished concern over falling fertility levels, and technological change. This was accompanied and complemented by the advent of second wave feminism. In Quebec, the invitation to challenge assumptions that was bound up in the Quiet Revolution also played a role. Social and demographic behaviours thus transformed in ways that were, quite simply, revolutionary.

Termination

Cold War rhetoric positioned the family as the bedrock of the Western democracies; anything that undermined the fundamental strengths of this social bond — including obstructions to fertility — was regarded dimly. And yet evidence from Ontario and British Columbia suggests that it was precisely in these years that the rate and number of abortion-related deaths was on the rise, an indicator that more abortions were taking place. Surgical terminations — abortions — were illegal, so women sought out back-alley medical facilities and interventions delivered by medical amateurs (including well-meaning women), or they turned to folk remedies involving toxic substances. Between 1921 and 1946, it is reckoned that between 4,000 to 6,000 women died of “bungled

4. Angus McLaren, *A History of Contraception From Antiquity to the Present Day* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 241-2.

5. Boundless. “The Sexual Revolution and the Pill.” Boundless U.S. History. Boundless, 21 Jul. 2015, accessed 17 Dec. 2015 from <https://www.boundless.com/u-s-history/textbooks/boundless-u-s-history-textbook/the-sixties-1960-1969-29/the-expansion-of-the-civil-rights-movement-220/the-sexual-revolution-and-the-pill-1226-9275/>

abortions.”⁶ This stands in evidence — terrible as it is — of the risks women were prepared to take in order to get a termination.

Abortion remained a shadowy part of the birth control equation until a Montreal physician, Henry Morgentaler (1923-2013), began in 1969 to challenge the existing laws by providing abortions from the nation’s first “abortion clinic.” Prosecuted unsuccessfully under the *Criminal Code* (Quebec jurors refused to find him guilty), Morgentaler became a target for the provincial state and spent 18 months in prison in 1973-1976, some of it in solitary confinement. By the time he was freed, the provincial government had changed and the Parti Québécois decided that the law was unenforceable. For all intents and purposes, abortions were now legal, at least in Quebec. The *Criminal Code*, however, was not amended to reflect the *de facto* changes until 1988. The fact that it took 20 years after the first change in abortion laws in 1968 to come up with provisions that actually allowed for and made accessible safe abortions under any circumstances is an indication of how firmly some Canadians continued to believe in the heterosexual and reproductive family as a foundational element of the culture.

The Post-Revolutionary Era

Fears of the sexual revolution leading to out-of-control fertility and illegitimacy proved unfounded. As one landmark study shows, teen pregnancies fell from 57,000 per year in 1974 to 38,000 in 1992, at a time when educational elements of birth control were advancing faster in Canada than south of the border. The authors add, “The fact that the Canadian teenage pregnancy rate was less than half that of the United States suggested that north of the border birth control education had enjoyed some success.”⁷

Marriage, too, was undergoing changes in the 1960s and 1970s. Women’s average age at first marriage actually increased in the 1970s, which meant that first births were also postponed and subsequent births fewer in number. Co-habitation out of wedlock increased in the 1960s and continued to do so into the 21st century. In Quiet Revolution Quebec, the backlash against clergy control of social and moral life produced a generation that opted for civil marriage ceremonies rather than church services, or chose a common-law arrangement. In those cases, co-habitation was as much an anticlerical political statement as it was a facet of the sexual revolution. These actions did not have the same meaning in English-Protestant Canada, but anti-establishment attitudes and an ethos of anti-conventionality certainly played a role. This could be seen as well in the shortened life-expectancy of marriages.

‘Til Death Do We Part

Escaping unhappy marriages was one area where both women and men were limited by state and church authorities that placed a high value on heterosexual marriage.

Divorce courts first existed in British Columbia, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, spreading to Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan before 1939.⁸ The involvement of Parliament was otherwise necessary and the only accepted

6. Angus McLaren & Arlene Tigar McLaren, *The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada, 1880-1997*, 2nd edition (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997), 49-51.

7. Angus McLaren & Arlene Tigar McLaren, *The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada, 1880-1997*, 2nd edition (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997), 139.

8. Roderick Phillips, *Untying the Knot: A Short History of Divorce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 195-6.

cause for divorce was adultery: physical abuse and desertion, to take only two other possible reasons to end a marriage, were not sufficient. Despite these constraints, the divorce rate climbed steadily from the 1930s on, as did the rate per hundred thousand population. In 1933, the rate was 8.8, rising to 21.4 in 1941, 42.3 at the end of the war, and peaking (for a generation) at 65.6 in 1947. The number continued to rise, but not as fast as the population. Because divorce was associated for years in the public mind with working women, the battle against liberalized divorce laws became effectively synonymous with limiting female participation in the workforce. Laws ostensibly about marriage were thus used to regulate the supply or oversupply of labour.

Divorce law in Canada prior to 1968 could be more accurately described as *anti-divorce* law because it set up barriers to ending marriages (see [Section 10.9](#)). Under the more liberal *Divorce Act (1968)*, the causes or requirements for a successful divorce case expanded from adultery to mental or physical abuse, desertion, and imprisonment of one spouse. The effect of these changes was immediate and dramatic: in 1968 there were 54.8 divorces per 100,000 population; in 1969 there were 124. The rate continued to rise, passing 200 around 1974-1975, and levelling off in the high-200s per 100,000 population in the mid-1980s. Further reforms to the *Divorce Act* were introduced in 1985 and the rate nearly doubled, peaking at 355 in 1987. Thereafter, however, the rate began to fall, heading to a rate once again below 200 per 100,000 population in the early 21st century.⁹ While the sexual revolution was a factor in these changes, so too was the declining power of religious sanctions against divorce and the increased availability of paid employment for women (which lends to a greater degree of independent security — albeit in a wage environment that still favours men). Social demographers have also identified the rising life expectancies of Canadians as a factor: marriage unto death for a 25-year-old is a much greater commitment when the average life expectancy has leapt from 64.6 (in 1941) to 80 years (in 2001) and the probability arises of being with the same partner for 55 years rather than 40.¹⁰

But the focus on divorce rates belies other, increasingly important trends. Rising common-law unions or cohabitation as a share of marriages means that there are fewer marriages *per se* that can end in divorce proper. In short, there's a difference in what we are attempting to measure. And some of this behaviour is driven by the sheer weight of the baby boom as it ages. There was a bubble in marriages in the decade after 1963 and it is echoed, 10 years later, in the rate of divorces. That is to say, baby boomers born in or shortly after 1941 were entering their marriageable years around 1963; they increased the incidence of marriages and, 10 years or so later, were getting divorced. Once that wave had passed, the marriage rates declined and — a decade later — the divorce rates did the same.

Key Points

- Laws and attitudes toward the regulation and management of fertility and the extent of the state's control over a woman's body changed throughout the 20th century, with significant new features arriving in the 1960s.

9. Lance W. Roberts, Rodney A. Clifton, Barry Ferguson, Karen Kampen, Simon Langlois, *Recent Social Trends in Canada, 1960-2000* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 126-7.

10. *Ibid.*, 79, Table 3.

- The sexual revolution was made possible by a combination of changes in attitudes toward the family unit, pre-marital or extra-marital sex, and birth control methods.
- The Pill made it possible for individuals and society to disentangle heterosexual intercourse for pleasure from sex for reproduction.
- Following on the fertility explosion of the baby boom, fertility rates across Canada — and especially in Quebec — fell dramatically during the Cold War.
- The heterosexual family unit was regarded as a fundamental piece of the Western world's strategy in the Cold War, which meant that challenges to that normative view might be regarded as dangerous.
- Reforms came in the late 1960s, when counselling birth control and abortion was decriminalized and divorce liberalized.

Attributions

Figure 9.71

Portrait of Norma Shearer by George Hurrell – 1932 by The Coincidental Dandy is in the public domain.

10.4 Youth and Moral Panics

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Sociologists use the term **moral panic** to describe what happens when a society overreacts to events or specific behaviours, usually because there is a perceived threat to the social order. Exaggerated rhetoric from the media or public figures can create the feeling that social morality is breaking down. During the 20th century, children were the focus of moral panics over issues such as comic books, dance crazes, devil-worship, and unmarried pregnancy, to name a few. In each case, young people were portrayed as victims amid calls for a new law or policy to reform social morality and protect children. Casting youth in the role of victim makes sense when we remember that Canadians increasingly saw young people as naturally innocent and easily corrupted. Many adults thus believed children needed protection and separation from the mature, adult world. Children also represented the future of the nation, both materially and symbolically, and so anything that threatened young people took on added significance.

Moral panics can appear quaint, laughable, or simply unimportant in retrospect — historians have been able to demonstrate in several cases that exaggerated rhetoric and panic was unwarranted. However, historians can learn from moral panics. Take comic books as an example. In the late 1940s, a group of Canadians — educators, parents, medical experts, and the media — opposed comics that told graphic stories of crime, and called for such comics to be outlawed. Comics were blamed for encouraging kids to be violent, prolonging illiteracy, and exposing children to hidden sexual messages. Comics did not lead to the destruction of children's minds and souls. However, the opposition to them reveals a deeper social anxiety about how family life had changed during WWII. The often-exaggerated concerns of adults also led to actual legislative changes that affected both those who made comics and their youthful consumers. So, moral panics — even if they overstate the extent, gravity, or outcomes of a particular behaviour — have consequences.



Figure 10.22 Superior Publishers ran its own line of comics until trade barriers made it easier to reprint American titles for the Canadian market.

Key Points

- Moral panics related to childhood and youth may prove to be unwarranted but, in the moment, they can produce substantive responses, as has been documented in historical studies.

Attributions

Figure 10.22

[Mysteries #8](#) by [Superior Publishers Limited](#) is used under a [CC-BY 3.0](#) license.

Week 11 - Living in Changing Environments

11.1 The Railway -- Canadian History: Post-Confederation

2.9 The Railway

Completing the Intercolonial Railway between the original four provinces was a condition of Confederation. That task could be accomplished without too much difficulty. After all, the colonies had laid some 3,200 km of track by 1865. Finding a company with the wherewithal to build a railway from Montreal to the Pacific was a whole different order of magnitude. The Grand Trunk Railway was the obvious candidate but its directors balked at the prospect of an all-Canadian route. The newly-established Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was a contender in 1873, but that plan ran off the proverbial rails when it was discovered that Macdonald's Conservative Party had received significant funds from the CPR. The **Pacific Scandal** cost Macdonald his administration, brought the Mackenzie Liberals into office, and a substitute railway company could not be found. The Mackenzie administration was not without accomplishments in this regard: in one term of office it oversaw the construction of several north-south lines that would assist Canadian exports. Returned in 1878, and faced with an almost apoplectic British Columbian body politic that was calling for "The terms [of union], the whole terms, and nothing but the terms," Macdonald resumed the search for a contractor. Again, the CPR stepped forward and the project, started in 1880, was completed in a remarkable six years. Built with heavy government subsidies and other incentives provided to the CPR Company, it represented a genuine engineering achievement. It was also a massive corporate accomplishment.

The CPR as Land Baron

The legal mechanism that made possible the distribution of western lands was the ***Dominion Lands Act*** of 1872, aspects of which were highly problematic. For one, it disregarded Aboriginal title in violation of treaty agreements. Aboriginal peoples continue to protest this situation. *The Act* had implications, too, for the provinces of the West. Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, and Quebec (and, a little later, PEI) all had exclusive control over their natural resources (with a few exceptions like fisheries), but land and other natural resources across the whole of the Prairie West and the Peace District in northeastern British Columbia were Ottawa's to control, tax, and dispense. Establishing settlers increased traffic on the railway. This increased the movement of supplies and farm equipment from east to west, it stimulated steel production in the original provinces, and as capital and sweat were invested in farms, it created a market for land and further revenues for the state. Ottawa became wealthy on western lands while western territories and provinces did not. Finally, the parceling out of western lands in sections determined a human geography on the plains that was brutally rigid. Roads were driven at one- or two-mile intervals that corresponded with the grid of sections. The effect was to separate neighbours by miles of

landscape and to leave settlers' access to fresh water and woodlots up to chance. Community and sustainability, however, were not concerns of the CPR or the *Lands Act*.

One way of speeding along the process of commodification of land involved the CPR very directly. A mammoth swath of territory on either side of the railway right-of-way — 25 million acres (roughly 10 million hectares) — was granted to the CPR as an incentive. Inevitably, this was considered some of the most desirable land on the Prairies because proximity to a railway station was critically important to the financial viability of a wheat farm in the days before gasoline-powered trucks. The CPR quickly became an integrated corporation, consisting of passenger/freight transportation, communications, and land sales (at \$2.50 an acre) combined with a recruitment and marketing arm that aimed to lure Canadians and immigrants into the West. The CPR even purchased a fleet of vessels to ship settlers across the Atlantic, and built another to extend its reach across the Pacific to Asia.

The gallows in Regina were barely cleared off following the events of 1885 when the CPR moved into an entirely unforeseen enterprise: the hotel and tourism business. After he became president of the railway in 1888, William Cornelius Van Horne (1843-1915) sought to capitalize on the growing market for travel by promoting the exploration of the Victorian version of the wilderness in comfort, in a specially designed sleeping car. “If we can’t export the scenery, we’ll import the tourists,” he is reported to have announced.¹ The company erected imposing structures like Glacier House near Rogers Pass, Mount Stephen House at Field (both opening in 1886), Fraser Canyon House at North Bend (1887), and the Banff Springs Hotel (1888), even before turning its attention to the monumental hot springs hotel at Banff. Some of these were modeled on hunting lodges, some on European chateaus, and all of them were an expression of the CPR’s role as an extension of North Atlantic civilization’s values, economy, and systems.

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Figure 2.16 As a land vendor, the CPR needed buyers and it looked overseas to find them. Notice how the branding developed by the CPR reduces Canada to something inconsequential: the Railway and Manitoba are the message.

Routes to the Pacific

The CPR's route across the West, from Ontario to the Pacific Coast, is one of the sharpest points in the history of the early Dominion. As the initial infrastructural, administrative, and economic extension of Canada, it had (and continues to have) a powerful influence on many aspects of life.

The most critical decision in routing was made at the very outset. Chicago had already emerged in the 1870s as the leading transportation hub in the interior of North America. It was possible to ship goods without interruption from western Ontario via Lakes Huron, Superior, and Michigan, directly to the Illinois port. What's more, Chicago had established its primacy in railway transportation as well. One option open to the Canadians was, therefore, to build a route across southern Michigan to Chicago and then north to Manitoba. The cost would be a fraction of any all-Canadian route, but it exposed an important national link to unpredictable relations with the United States. Canada, after all, had been founded with the threat of American invasion in mind; if defending the West against American expansionism was one reason for (a) annexing Rupert's Land in the first place, and (b) building infrastructure that would enable the quick movement of troops, then it made no sense to stake all of that on a railway that passed through American territory.

That meant shifting the route north across the Canadian Shield. The Shield contained some of the most difficult terrain that surveyors and engineers encountered, and that includes the Rocky Mountain passes. The Shield slowed down construction and ramped up costs exponentially. It also frightened off investors, particularly those in the United States.

Ottawa responded with lucrative incentives to the Canadian Pacific Railway Company of Montreal. The CPR, under the leadership of Sir Hugh Allen (1810-1882), replied with gifts of money to the Conservative Party in 1872. These donations — totaling approximately \$350,000 — were exposed in April 1873 in what became known as the Pacific Scandal. John A. Macdonald's government began to topple. By the autumn — coinciding with the Panic of '73 (a financial crisis that gripped the United States and was related directly to overbuilding of railways) — Macdonald's position was irretrievable. An election in January 1874 saw the Liberals, under Alexander Mackenzie, form a government for the first time. The economic situation was poor, however, as was Mackenzie's timing.

The Liberals put their trust in the Department of Public Works and Sandford Fleming (1827-1915), a civil engineer (and the inventor of worldwide standard time) who surveyed and approved a route through the Yellowhead Pass in 1872. The northern route would head off from Winnipeg to the Saskatchewan River Valley, and thence to Fort Edmonton and the north-central Rockies. Beyond there, the most promising option seemed to be through the Cariboo to Bute Inlet, across Seymour Narrows (at what is now Campbell River), and south to Esquimalt.

The northern route presented several advantages, the first of which was the agricultural potential of the territory through which it passed. The Saskatchewan River Valley and the parklands of the central Prairies contain good water and soil resources, and they are well-treed — an asset from a log-house building perspective and with regard to fuel. This was a sharp contrast with the more arid lands of Assiniboia, which included Palliser's Triangle, an area of poorer, brown soils that stretches, roughly speaking, along the 49th parallel from what is now mid-Saskatchewan to Lethbridge in the west and Drumheller in the north. Crossing the Rockies was going to present a challenge whichever direction was chosen, but from a farm economy perspective the northwestern route seemed the logical choice. Certainly the earliest settlers thought so. Métis who were displaced in Manitoba headed into the region, while country born and Canadian migrants formed nodes of their own, drawn by early promises of railway connection with the CPR. These small but well-established settlements were, however, an obstacle when it came to finding sufficiently lucrative land for the CPR's grant.

The company opted in 1881 for the southern route instead, heading more or less straight across the Prairies from Winnipeg to Banff and the Kicking Horse Pass. As historian of Saskatchewan, Bill Waiser, notes:

This decision, one of the most controversial in western Canadian history, completely changed the axis of development in the region by focusing attention on the southern prairies — the North-West effectively became the west. In the process, the future province of Saskatchewan became associated in Canadian minds with the flat, treeless prairie.”³

As well, the southern route meant that the most intensively farmed lands were located in an arid belt that would generate environmental and economic tragedy in the 20th century (see [Section 8.5](#)).

The southern route had repercussions in British Columbia as well. The Bute Inlet to Victoria route was swept away by Macdonald when the Conservatives returned to power. Instead, the CPR terminus would be located in Port Moody, a milltown at the head of Burrard Inlet. As a kind of consolation, and in recognition of the commitment made in 1871 regarding a railway to Victoria, the **Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway** (the E&N) was

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built by coal magnate Robert Dunsmuir to connect his mining operations at mid-island with the capital. Each of these changes improved the CPR's position as a real estate company. Each of these changes embittered local farmers, investors, speculators, Indigenous peoples, and the Métis, who saw the CPR seize the most profitable land and determine where the biggest cities were going to go — all while abandoning whole communities.



Figure 2.17 Fire trap. Hot weather, woodframe buildings, and an obvious abundance of tinder spelled disaster for Gastown/Granville/Vancouver in 1886.

Gastown to Granville

Nowhere was the city-building ambitions of the CPR clearer than along Burrard Inlet. On both the north and south shore of the fjord there had been logging operations in play since the 1850s. The largest and oldest of these, Moodyville (named for Sewell Moody, an American entrepreneur), was located on the north shore and was a poor candidate for a rail terminus from the east. At the head of the inlet was Port Moody (named for Colonel Richard Clement Moody, a Royal Engineer and Lieutenant-Governor of BC), which enjoyed good access to the mostly level Fraser Valley. This made Port Moody a prime choice for the CPR. The challenge facing the company was that speculators had reached Burrard Inlet first, buying up much of Port Moody in the hope of being bought out by the CPR at a handsome profit. Actual railway construction heading east began here and the town was, officially, the terminus until the line was finally completed. Shortly thereafter, in 1886, a devastating fire destroyed a third of Hastings Mill and its commercial area (known officially as Granville and unofficially as Gastown). The largely flat landscape was almost completely denuded of trees and stumps (as well as almost all of its building stock). The CPR announced a change of plans and extended the line from Port Moody another 24 km west, to a vast new land grant in the newly incorporated city of Vancouver. The recently-logged West Side of Vancouver was entirely within the company's grant, while the shattered and recovering parts of Granville now constituted the East End. The move bifurcated the community, an event that is manifest to this day in wealth on the West Side, poverty on the East, and street misalignments in the middle.

Describing the many ways in which the CPR and its later competitors changed the landscape, demographics, resource exploitation, economy, and townsites still merely scrapes the surface. Behind the CPR was not only a political network but also a dense web of interlocked commercial and financial boards. Directors of the CPR also sat on the boards of the Royal Bank, Dominion Bridge, Dominion Iron and Steel, and international oil companies (see Section 8.3). Donald Smith (later styled "Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal") was not only president of

the Bank of Montreal but an influential Conservative Member of Parliament for Montreal. The intersection of Hastings and Granville Streets in Vancouver provide a physical manifestation of the extent of this influence. On one corner, there was the Bank of Montreal, opposite it the Bank of Commerce, across Granville there were the offices of the federal government, and just down the hill facing the water was (and is) the CPR station itself.

Key Points

- The Canadian Pacific Railway was both a unifying and divisive instrument of Canadian expansion.
- The decision to change to a southern route created hardships in the north-central plains.
- The CPR operated as a railway and construction company, as well as a land dealer and hotel operator. It was, as well, closely linked to the Bank of Montreal and so was integrated with many other corporations.
- The choice of routes had significant impacts on the West Coast, where Vancouver was eventually selected as the site for the terminus, leaving both Port Moody and Victoria disappointed.

Attributions

Figure 2.16

[Land ticket](#) by Will Jahns is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 2.17

[Str P8 – \[Water Street looking east\]](#) (Reference Code: AM54-S4-: Str P8) by City of Vancouver Archives is in the [public domain](#).

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1. E.J. Hart, “See this World Before the Next: Tourism and the CPR,” *The CPR West: The Iron Road and the Making of a Nation*, ed. Hugh A. Dempsey (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984): 151. ?
 2. Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005), 27. ?

11.2 The North -- Canadian History: Post-Confederation

2.10 The North

At the heart of imperial expansion is the need to redraw maps, to impose new patterns of communication, and to reconfigure economic orders to fit the new paradigm. Canada — through more than two centuries of French and then British colonial effort — was not a truly northern entity. It was an inland colony that extended down the throat of the St. Lawrence River and into the gut of the continent along the Great Lakes. It related to the rest of North America through river systems that flowed into the Great Lakes and the Laurentian system. It extended no further north, in political terms, than the Canadian Shield and the height of land. Leaping over that barrier into the Rupert's Land watershed was a significant task, part of which it accomplished through the North West Company's trade network in the West before 1821. However, from 1821 (and including the merger of the NWC with the London-based HBC), Canadian influence in the West was modest. The annexing of Rupert's Land in 1869-70 flagged a movement beyond the old colonial boundaries, but these efforts primarily concentrated on Manitoba and what would become the Prairie provinces. The expansion into the North held out less drama but it was no less portentous.

The North in the Late 19th Century

At the time of Confederation, the North probably contained significantly fewer human beings than it had two (or even just one) hundred years earlier. The boreal forest regions held large populations of larger mammals — deer, moose, and woodland caribou, for example — on which a human population could survive, but the fur trade with Europeans and Canadians reduced mammal numbers to very low levels in the parkland or prairie regions. Fishing remained a reliable economic activity for subsistence communities, but the wherewithal for trade with Euro-Canadian companies was not as great as it once was.

Much of the northern human population west of Hudson Bay fell into two linguistic/cultural groups. Across the middle of the region and into the north and far west (the Yukon), Athapaskan-speakers dominated. The Dunne-za (aka: Beaver), Chipewyan, and Dene (aka: Slavey) held much of the southern part of this zone, while the Tłıchǫ (aka: Tlicho, Dogrib) dominated in the north and west of the Mackenzie River. To the east and hugging the North Saskatchewan River were the Cree, along with the relative newcomers, the Métis. European numbers were small, made up of traders, missionaries, and a handful of others.¹

To the south and east of Hudson Bay (still very much to the north of Old Canada) were Cree and Innu (aka:

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Montagnais) communities which had experienced extensive contact with the French and later the British through the fur trades emanating from Montreal and Quebec on the one hand, and HBC forts like Moose Factory on the other.

Still further north, along the Arctic and around both lips of the mouth of Hudson Bay were large Inuit populations. Limited contact with Europeans, down to the late 19th century, had insulated the Inuit from some of the worst effects of exotic diseases. And while metal imports had found their way into the Inuit toolbox, life as a whole had not (as yet) been overhauled.

Infrastructural Change

The story of the Prairie people's armed resistance in 1885 invariably points to the significance of the CPR in delivering the telling blow of Canadian military power. What is often overlooked is the role played by steamboats on the Saskatchewan River. Although northern rivers iced up annually, they were the principal highways of the region in the spring and summer months and beyond. The potential of steamboat and paddlewheeler technology on these corridors was never fully tested. The rapid expansion of rail systems saw to that. River shipping nevertheless marks an important transition from the old York Express corridor of river and lake transportation, which oriented northern trade across the middle of what is now Western Canada to Hudson Bay and then to Europe, to one that was more southern-looking.



Figure 2.18 Sandbars and freeze-ups were obstacles to river traffic across the northern plains, but steamers persisted for years. The Pas in 1929.

Perhaps this transition is most evident in Manitoba. In the years before Confederation, the Red River settlement was the metropolis of a trading network that extended from what is now North Dakota to York Factory on Hudson Bay. The chains of rivers and lakes oriented trade from the warmer semi-agricultural highlands of the Selkirk settlement to the entrepôt — and gateway to Europe — in the north. After 1912 and north of the 49th parallel, all of this was contained within the provincial boundaries of Manitoba. The arrival of Canada in 1870 meant that Winnipeg would shift its view from the north to the southeast. Instead of prairie wheat finding an outlet in the Arctic, it was pulled to Canada. Instead of Churchill emerging as a major centre of transshipment, Thunder Bay (aka: Port Arthur and Fort William) did so instead.³

A similar pattern had emerged, before 1900, in what was then the District of Athabasca (called Northern Alberta since 1905). In the 1880s, steam-powered shipping was introduced to Athabasca River and Lake with the effect of shifting trade and population into that corridor. Stretching as far north as Great Slave Lake and the Mackenzie River, this network ensured the emergence of Edmonton as the key economic node in the northwestern prairies. This region, too, was being incorporated into an economic system based in the Laurentian heartland of Canada.

Cultural Changes

The events of 1885 resulted in a substantial re-migration of Métis into the northern-Northwest. Progressively displaced — in many instances systematically so — by the incoming Canadian populations, the Métis found their economic niche was beginning to disappear. The bison hunt was at an end, provisioning forts was no longer a sustainable business for more than a few, and the freighting industry that had made such good use of the Red River cart and the Métis' ox teams was evaporating. The new steam-age transportation technology first cut them out of the southern plains and then, with extensions to the northern plains by branch lines even before 1900, the Métis were driven north of Edmonton and Saskatoon into the boreal forests. This movement, of course, had consequences for the Athapaskan-speakers of the central-north, whose resource base was now doubly strained. At Fort Chipewyan, for example, the Métis and the Chipewyan generally did not mix (nor did the French-speaking and Catholic Métis have much to do with the English-speaking and Anglican merchant class which was, to make matters more complex, a socio-economic barrier as well).⁵ Elsewhere in the Northwest there were many instances where the Métis married and/or assimilated into Aboriginal societies and re-configured their self-identity as Dene or Dunne-za.

The presence of missionaries from the mid-19th century across much of the sub-Arctic suggests cultural change was underway. Certainly cultural or at least spiritual assimilation was the missionaries' goal in these years, not service to communities or some kind of administrative interface. If they were educators, they were educators within a Euro-Canadian Christian tradition. In this respect, at least, the role of missionaries had not changed much since the days of the Jesuits in [Wendake \(aka: Huronia\)](#) in the 17th century. Scholars like Kerry Abel have questioned the extent to which the missionary message in the North was persuasive. Certainly there were different levels of exposure to the Christian doctrine, and Aboriginal bands that gathered in trading post communities were more at risk of proselytization than the more remote and nomadic peoples. And there was, to be sure, initial curiosity and even enthusiasm for the missionary message. By 1900, however, that early interest had diminished and Christianity was either peripheral or hybridized into a syncretic belief system among Aboriginal converts.

As the representatives of Euro-Canadian society in these communities, the missionaries had a special role to play. They monitored social and economic change and reported to Central Canada as conditions shifted. It has been suggested that there is a fairly consistent trend in Canadian history that sees the arrival of traders followed by missionaries, and then military or police power of some kind: commerce, Christ, and cops. This pattern is certainly evident across the North as the missionaries increasingly called upon the state to provide NWMP/RCMP backup from the 1890s-1930s.

5. [2]

6. [3]



Figure 2.19 Chipewyan people at Churchill, along with the ruins of the old fort battery, August 1926.

Economic and Demographic Change

The fur trade, however, sustained and built an economic bond between the Inuit and Euro-Canadians. As was the case in other fur trade frontiers in North America, pressure to hunt commercial species meant that Inuit attention was drawn away from subsistence hunting. Dependency grew as a result. When demand for luxury products like furs collapsed in the 1930s, many of the Inuit fur-hunting communities were pitched into poverty and hardship.

The 1920s had witnessed a boom in the fur-trade tied to the brief flicker of an international luxury market aimed at the growing middle class in Europe and the Americas. This was good news for Native trappers and traders who were being paid much higher prices for more kinds of animals than was the case even 20 years before. In part this was driven by the arrival in 1901 of the Parisian Revillon Frères fur trading company. Prices went up as Revillon went toe-to-toe with the local HBC traders. This situation, of course, invited growing competition from non-Native trappers and hunters, some of them long-residents in the region by now. The Innu of Labrador, for example, found themselves pushed further and further inland in the 1920s, trying to eke out an existence now based almost entirely on the trade in furs. The possibility of fishing and hunting for food was, by this point, so reduced that they had no option but to adopt a European diet and factory-produced Euro-Canadian clothing made available through the trade in furs.⁷

7.⁸

8. [4]



Figure 2.20 A supply runner, Komatik, arrives at a Revillon Frères post on Wakeham Bay, QC, 1928.

European, Canadian, and American intrusions into the North increased as the 19th century was drawing to a close. American whaling fleets began working the Beaufort Sea in the western Arctic and British whalers intensified their efforts in the eastern Arctic. Inuit people found economic opportunities with the fleets but they also found alcohol, sexually transmitted diseases, smallpox, and other exotic illnesses. The Beaufort ports were, according to one source, the scene of “unprecedented debauchery” and the Sadlermuit of Southampton Island were wiped out by smallpox.⁹ The difficulty of disease transmission across great distances between relatively small numbers of hosts no doubt limited the impact of any one epidemic like smallpox or measles; the increase in foreign shipping along the coastline mitigated the advantages of isolation. The original Inuvialuit people of the Yukon shore of the Beaufort Sea were effectively extinct by 1920. Even the arrival of the RCMP in 1895 could do little to stabilize, let alone reverse this trend. Changes in women’s fashions (which effectively put an end to the whale-bone corset) and the shift from whale oil to mineral oil did, however, cool the heat of change in some parts of the Arctic.¹¹

The front on which the colonization of the indigenous economy was being fought in the Yukon shifted south in 1896. At that time gold was discovered at Bonanza Creek. Canadian responses included an increased RCMP presence, but tactics devised to prevent lawlessness were ill-suited to the protection of Aboriginal interests. As was the case in the Cariboo 40 years earlier, Aboriginal fishing sites were seized and river ecosystems compromised by foreign miners. The RCMP did address Aboriginal concerns regarding the newcomers’ use of poison on traplines, but they also elected to enforce the regulation of hunting among First Nations.

Being part of Canada meant many things in this context. It meant a shift from localized subsistence economies, which depended on a mobile population able to strike out in a timely way to pursue migratory herds, spawning fish, briefly available plants, and opportunities to trade with neighbours. In its place a new infrastructure of commerce and human intercourse arrived via steam-powered vessels. Its personnel included representatives of alien belief-systems (some of which were locked in competition), law enforcement officers whose laws were

9. ¹⁰
10. [3]
12. [6]

themselves exotic and seemingly arbitrary, and a commercial/administrative environment which increasingly encouraged permanent settlement in fixed communities. Ottawa formally took on responsibility for northern populations in 1924 when the *Indian Act* was amended to include the Inuit. The Inuit, however, were not viewed as “Indians” and so fell between the administrative cracks.¹³

The Race to the Pole

The first three decades after Confederation were marked by an international fascination with the polar region. Scientific missions were the order of the day, although Canada did not engage in this particular stampede. The race to the North Pole was one aspect of this enterprise, one that set international teams against one another in highly publicized and popularized adventures. Charting the Northwest Passage was another feature of this phenomenon. All of this activity increased traffic in the region and increased the likelihood of Inuit exposure to disease vectors. It also facilitated the movement of Inuit people themselves, with Greenland Inuit reputedly appearing on both Ellesmere and Baffin Islands.¹⁵

To substantiate Canadian claims to sovereignty in the region and to counter foreign incursions, Ottawa established several missions whose task it was to make an official claim on the northern islands and seas. American and European opposition to these claims obliged still further investment in expeditions and regular patrols. Every one of these efforts brought Canada more regularly into contact with the Indigenous peoples of the region. At the same time, Canada viewed the Inuit with a curious ambivalence. The Inuit were international — they were to be found in American and Danish territories as well as Canadian — and there were few opportunities to integrate them into the growing southern economy before the mid-20th century.

Key Points

- At the time of Confederation the North was of limited interest to Canada.
- The region’s population was diverse but vulnerable. Disease and economic dislocation were the main and ongoing threats.
- The arrival of steam-powered shipping throughout the region increased integration into the continental and global economy, while exposing populations to new disease vectors.
- Population movements accelerated, as did missionary efforts to effect cultural change.
- The most dramatic short-term impact on the region arrived with the Yukon gold rush and the Beaufort Sea whaling industry. Increased activity in the fur trade in the 1920s also had significant consequences.
- Canadian territorial and sovereignty issues increased in the early 20th century, resulting in a greater state presence.

^{13.} ¹⁴
^{15.} ^{16]}
^{16.} ^[8]

Attributions

Figure 2.18

Steamer Trip on Saskatchewan River, The Pas, Man. [Str. "David N. Winton]. July 1929 (Online MIKAN no.3393978) by Canada. Dept. of Mines and Technical Surveys / Library and Archives Canada / PA-014005 is in the public domain.

Figure 2.19

Chipewyan indian, and old Chipewyan woman, Churchill; Views of old battery, Churchill Harbour (Online MIKAN no.4848722) by Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada / Library and Archives Canada, Accession 1974-366 is in the public domain.

Figure 2.20

(Hudson Strait Expedition). Komatik with supplies at Revillon Frères post (Online MIKAN no.3223225) by Library and Archives Canada / PA-055573 is in the public domain.

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1. Donald Wetherell and Irene R.A. Kmet, *Alberta's North: A History, 1890-1950* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2000), 4-5. ?
 2. In the 1870s and '80s there was a ferocious political and physical battle between Manitobans and Ontarians regarding the boundary between the two provinces. The epicentre of the dispute was the town of Rat Portage (aka: Kenora), where both provinces established a jail and a courthouse and sent in their own officials (who then fell to fighting one another). What was at stake was the gold and other mineral reserves of the region. Needless to say, Manitoba lost this battle and thus any hope of direct access to the Great Lakes. ?
 3. Ibid., 6-7. ?
 4. Lynne D. Fitzhugh, *The Labradorians: Voices from the Land of Cain* (St. John's: Breakwater, 1999), 375. ?
 5. Donald Purich, *The Inuit and Their Land: The Story of Nunavut* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1992), 30. ?
 6. Olive Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*, 3rd edition (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2002), 361-2. ?
 7. Ibid., 36-7. ?
 8. Ibid., 32. ?

11.3 Greenpeace

The 1960s ended with the apparent disappearance of an array of social movements. Some were exhausted, others lost personnel, a few accomplished their limited goals and ceased to have a purpose. Mostly, however, they were redeployed into other projects. **Greenpeace** is an example of a movement organization that combined a critique of capitalism and Cold War politics with a strong environmentalist sensibility.

Established in Vancouver in 1971, Greenpeace opened its first office in Kitsilano, a neighbourhood deeply associated with the hippy movement of the previous decade. Starting out as the “Don’t Make a Wave Committee,” the organization took the name of its first ship, the *Greenpeace*, for the organization as a whole. The catalyst was American nuclear weapon testing on a remote Aleutian island in Alaska. The Americans, British, and French had been testing atomic explosives in isolated island locations since the 1940s. With an arms race against the Soviet Union well underway, the Americans were eager to both maintain their apparent technological lead, and to do so as close to the Soviet hinterland of Siberia as possible. Environmentalists and anti-Cold War activists saw the proposal to detonate a warhead beneath Amchitka Island (the third test on the island in ten years) as offensive and dangerous. There were fears, too, that the test would cause a tsunami, and that radiation would inevitably seep into the sea.

The organization cannily incorporated journalists and media figures into its numbers. Its leaders were principally middle-class professionals who presented Greenpeace as inclusive and open; the opposite of the corporate forces it was fighting. Within a couple of years, the focus of Greenpeace’s activity had shifted to the international whale hunt and, in the late 1970s, the Newfoundland-Labrador seal hunt. This latter campaign pitted the still-mostly British Columbian organization against Newfoundland workers, and was (at least temporarily) highly divisive.

Thanks in part to the anti-sealing campaign launched in Europe, Greenpeace quickly became a global brand. Its flag and emblems could be found across the western world and in ports across Oceania. However, it retained a powerful presence in Canada. This would be seen again in British Columbia, from 1992-1996, in the **War in the Woods** — a mass protest and occupation of old growth forests that culminated in the arrest of 300 protesters in one day.



Figure 7.24 The fur trade between Canada and Europe was fundamental to the growth of colonial commerce and population but by the 1980s it had become an economic and moral battleground internationally.

Critics of Greenpeace have pointed to their record as enemies of working class people. Seal hunters and loggers — not to mention whalers as well as farmers working with genetically modified foods — have been impacted when the corporations for which they work have been targeted. Greenpeace also has a spotty record when it comes to consulting with First Nations, an accusation that was levelled against it by the seal hunting Inuit of Labrador and the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nation in whose ancestral territory the War in the Woods took place.¹ Internal divisions have wracked the organization since the 1970s, and it principally survives now as “Greenpeace International.”

From the perspective of Canada, Greenpeace did many incontrovertibly important things in the first 30 years of its existence. It raised awareness of environmental issues as they pertained to the Cold War, global capitalism and consumerism, and the difficulties inherent in policing a mobile operation like the whale hunt. As a movement, it had greater international reach than any other has that originated in Canada. In mobilizing hundreds, if not thousands, of people to put themselves in the way of corporate foes — and at the risk of being arrested and jailed — Greenpeace created a generational cadre of environmental activists and shifted the political agenda (at least in some quarters). Finally, Greenpeace carried forward many of the traditions of the social reform movements we have been studying: largely middle-class, morally forthright, redemptive, and as inclined toward prohibition of offending behaviours as it was to tempering practices. Greenpeace may be contentious in some quarters but it is in many respects an illustration of Canadian historical traditions.

1. John-Henry Harter, “Environmental Justice for Whom? Class, New Social Movements and the Environment: A Case Study of Greenpeace Canada, 1971-2000,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 54 (Fall 2004): 83-119.

Key Points

- Greenpeace originated in the anti-nuclear movement of the 1960s and 1970s, turning its attention to animal rights issues in the late 1970s.
- Increasingly associated with protests against whaling and sealing, Greenpeace became an international movement in the 1980s, at which time it refocused again on the logging of old growth forests.
- Founded in Vancouver, Greenpeace was an important late-20th century organization in Canada that drew on the traditions of older reform movements.

Attributions**Figure 7.24**

[Stop the Seal Hunt](#) by [Alejandro Hernandez](#). is used under a [CC-BY-2.0](#) license.

11.4 Oil and Gas and the New West

8.10 Oil and Gas and the New West



Figure 8.14 Leduc in 1947: its effects were, literally, explosive.

In 1947, on the 13th of February, Leduc blew in.

Let's situate that in the context of mid-century Alberta. Following a period of promising growth before 1914 and in the 1920s, the provincial economy was devastated by the Depression of the 1930s and the environmental catastrophe of the dust bowl. Alberta was a poor and scruffy place. Paved roads were a rare sight. The major cities were barely more than large towns. Winters were cold and long, and to heat their homes and businesses, Albertans depended on wood (of which there was little in the Prairie region of the province) and coal, much of it mined in the murderously dangerous mines of the Crowsnest Pass. The Second World War charged up the local economy a bit, encouraging grain and livestock farmers as well as meat-packers in Calgary, but the return to peace raised fears of a return to economic stagnation. The Great War was, after all, followed by an influenza pandemic, industrial unrest, political instability, and an economic crisis in 1921. Albertans in 1947 could be optimistic only if they made a point of ignoring the recent past.

Leduc changed everything. The first oil discovery in a field about 30 km south of Edmonton at long last vindicated a generation of geologists. According to one account, “Imperial Oil, which had drilled 133 dry holes and spent \$20 million with little to show, finally had a major discovery.” Thereafter it was madness: “The spectacular Atlantic No.3 well, which came in as a gusher in March 1948, blew wild for six months, spilling over a million barrels of oil over the surrounding fields.”¹ The discovery at Leduc followed previous discoveries of naphtha gasoline at Turner Valley near Calgary, and even older coal mining resources, so Alberta already had something of an energy industry in place. However, this discovery was the start of something vastly larger, something that would alter the face of both Alberta and Canada as a whole.



Figure 8.15 What used to be called “Turner Valley Skunk Juice” — naphtha gasoline — is piped into drums, 1914.

The Rise of the West

The oil boom of the post-war years rekindled old resentments toward Central Canada. Ottawa had enjoyed extensive control over the national economy during wartime, and the “Minister for Everything,” C.D. Howe, was still of a mind that he could accomplish whatever was in the interest of Canada as a whole, even in peacetime. That meant getting gas and oil from Alberta to factories in Ontario via a pipeline. For Albertans, this suggestion was worrying in the extreme. The carbon energy resources of the province were, they believed, the key to economic diversification. A province dependent on commodities like wheat and livestock would always be vulnerable to the booms and busts of the international market. Cheap fuel, however, could improve the quality of life and create new industries. In an age that lionized large-scale manufacturing, Alberta — and the West as a whole — still had precious little secondary production capacity. Albertans could look to Texas, another oil-rich jurisdiction, to see how its main cities had turned their wealth to good advantage. That vision would be realized in part, but not during the mid-century.

What quickly became most evident was that Alberta was in the process of a socio-economic revolution. In 1921 the United Farmers of Alberta — a political party based on cooperative values, social gospel instincts, and the primacy of the agricultural sector — formed the provincial government in Edmonton. They were succeeded in

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2. [1]

1935 by the Social Credit Party, an antimodernist, monetary reform movement/party with strong fundamentalist Christian values. These were political traditions that clearly had a religious component as well as an economic aspect. In a province that was mostly made up of homesteads and small towns, this made sense in that the local congregations were an expression of community and much of that community was doing the same thing: producing food. But Alberta was urbanizing slowly ... and then oil sped up the process.

Alberta tipped the scales to just slightly more urban than rural in 1951, 30 years after Canada as a whole. Fifteen years later, more than 7 in 10 Albertans were city folks. What's more, the rural population was not just shrinking as a proportion: it was falling in real terms as well. In 1951 the high water mark for rural Albertans was reached at 488,733; it would bottom out at 458,870 (25%) in 1976. The rural share of population steadily fell from 61% in 1941 to 25% in 1976 and further to 17% in 2011.³

This reallocation of population took place against a background of profound growth. Between 1951 and 1961, the overall population grew by 40%, much of that expansion coming from natural increase. In 1941 there were just under 800,000 Albertans, and by 1971, that number had doubled to 1.63 million. There was, too, a renewal in the arrival of immigrants, many of whom headed to the expanding cities. The population of Calgary and Edmonton, both of which had languished for nearly two decades at around 80,000 residents, doubled in the 1950s, and pushed past the half-million mark in the late 1970s. In 1941 their populations were at the bottom rungs of the top 10 largest Canadian cities, but in 1961, Edmonton was the fourth largest and the third largest in 1971, eking out Vancouver (not including its suburbs). During the same period, Calgary moved into fourth place and was 33% larger than Ottawa.

This explosive demographic growth was spurred by economic expansion, most of which occurred in the **oil patch**. Production more than tripled between 1960 and 1973. Ancillary industries associated with finance opened branch offices in Albertan cities. Calgary in particular emerged by the 1980s as a centre of the insurance industry. Economic diversification, however, remained elusive. The aging Social Credit regime faltered with the retirement of long-time Premier Ernest Manning (1908-1996) in 1968, and a new, more aggressively pro-development Conservative government came to power in 1971 under Peter Lougheed (1928-2012). Fifty years had passed since Albertans had elected one of the two mainstream parties to the legislature in Edmonton, and criticizing Ottawa for provincial woes had become an institutionalized pastime. The Lougheed administration continued that tradition while breaking sharply with the rural-oriented economic visions of the past, applying a stronger planning model, and building on the Social Credit government's investment in education and training. Their timing was perfect.

Blue-eyed Arabs

Global oil prices were remarkably flat from the 1920s to the 1970s. Whether measured in real dollars (based on 2008 values) or unadjusted prices, there had not been much fluctuation, notwithstanding a bit of a trough in the 1930s. This stability was achieved by the collaboration between the "Seven Sisters" — the largest international oil companies — and an economy-wide lack of price inflation. By 1970, however, American crude production was falling, and Washington's involvement in the 1973 Yom Kippur War in the Middle East spurred a dramatic and overnight response from the **Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)**. In October 1973

3. ⁴

4. [2]

OPEC raised the price of oil by 70%, imposed an embargo on sales to the United States, and cut output. What came to be called the “first OPEC oil shock” combined with instability in global finances (caused by the collapse of the post-WWII Bretton Woods system of currency alignments), which led to widespread price inflation, rising unemployment, industrial failures, and the beginning of an economic **recession**. In addition, some oil/petroleum rationing occurred in North America. These features of the oil crisis were felt across the Western world (targeted by the Arab-dominated OPEC nations) and were compounded by a sagging Canadian dollar, which impacted Canadian manufacturers’ exports.

These events set the stage for rising economic and political tensions in Canada. Alberta, which to this point had profited modestly on oil sales, suddenly became enormously wealthy. Its political and economic elites — described at the time as “blue-eyed Arabs” — took the centre stage of national affairs and were increasingly confrontational when it came to Ottawa’s involvement with the energy sector.

The constitutional context of the oil industry was important in these debates. Provinces control their natural resources but only until they reach a borderline. Movement of oil or natural gas through pipelines into another province — let alone exports into the United States — brought Ottawa into the equation. The Social Credit governments had done much to ensure provincial oversight when it came to internal pipelines so as to limit Ottawa’s influence. Demand from Central Canada’s growing metropolises and factories guaranteed sales whenever American markets cooled, but it also ensured the involvement of the Ontario and Quebec dominated administrations in Ottawa. In the late 1950s, both gas and oil/petroleum were being piped to Central and Eastern Canada, where they had to compete with the oil being imported from the Middle East and elsewhere. In 1961, the federal government drew the “Borden Line” along the Ottawa River to create two oil markets in Canada, and oil in the market west of the Borden Line was as much as a third more expensive.

This changed in 1973: first due to a new export tariff (introduced under Pierre Trudeau’s administration) and second with the OPEC oil shock. By this stage, Saskatchewan had joined the ranks of natural gas and oil producing provinces, which already included British Columbia and Alberta. (Moreover, BC had had its own run-in with Ottawa over energy policies when its government negotiated the Columbia River Treaty over hydroelectricity exports with the United States in the early 1960s.) The possibility of a regional protest against federal energy interventions was greater in the 1970s than in any previous decade, and the stakes were vastly higher. Ottawa took the view that Alberta was enjoying “windfall” profits, which rightly belonged to all Canadians, although Albertans felt differently. They disagreed with the National Energy Board’s assessment that oil supplies were limited in the extreme and should thus be preserved for domestic use and treated as a special commodity (with echoes of wartime control over key supplies). Albertans were determined to use oil as part of a strategy to diversify the provincial economy so that when the OPEC-produced windfall inevitably ended, Alberta would have a resilient economic order in place.

Oilers Nation

Ottawa developed several strategies. The first was to ensure energy security for Canada by slapping an export tax on shipments destined for south of the border. Even during the apparent oil shortage of the 1973 OPEC oil shock, this tax reduced Alberta’s oil profits. Lougheed responded with an increase on royalty charges on publicly-owned

(Crown) resources. Oil companies had grown accustomed to writing off royalties in their federal corporate taxes, and they hoped to weather this increase in provincial taxes by continuing to do so; however, Ottawa closed that tax loophole. It took the rest of the decade to disentangle the bad feelings and confusion over pricing and revenues.⁵

If tariffs and royalties were inadequate to the task of establishing national oil security, there were other options to pursue. The foremost of these came into play in 1975 when the federal government launched a nationally-owned oil company called *Petro-Canada* (aka *Petrocan*). In part this was a result of the Liberals having lost their majority in the House and being dependent on an NDP balance of power (which was highly pro-Petrocan). Treated with suspicion by Alberta, the new corporation was challenged to acquire high quality properties, processing capacity, and oil reserves. Despite all of this, tempers cooled as the decade came to a close.

However, matters took a turn for the worse in 1979. The second OPEC oil shock (1979-1980) saw a return to sniping between Ottawa and Edmonton. The return of the Trudeau government (restored after a 9-month Conservative administration under Joe Clark) was quickly followed by the introduction of the **National Energy Program** (or **NEP**). By this time, the price of crude oil had leapt from the pre-1973 price of \$3 to nearly \$40 a barrel.

The NEP addressed purported shortages by guaranteeing national energy self-sufficiency, taxing the fuel resource to benefit Canadians outside of Alberta, and extending still further Canadian ownership of the oil sector through the instrument of Petrocan. The whole package was based on predictions that oil prices would continue to rise over the next decade. In fact, they reversed, falling to \$10 a barrel. Ottawa was left carrying the cost of subsidies to oil-consuming industries with none of the revenue-stream that had been anticipated. Federal deficits grew and the government's popularity shrank. Opposition in Alberta was ferocious: the mayor of Calgary, Ralph Klein, advocated turning off the pipelines and snarled, "Let the Eastern bastards freeze in the dark!" — a sentiment that afterwards appeared on bumper stickers across the West. The NEP stirred up a hornets' nest of constitutional disputes, did little to support energy self-sufficiency, plunged Ottawa into debt, and undermined the principle of equalization payments. It did, however, raise the question of whether there might be a Canadian "national interest" and determined the extent to which regional disparities in wealth and opportunities should be suffered or ameliorated.

Oil Sands

The existence of oil-saturated sands along the banks of the Athabasca River had been known about for centuries. The tarry substance was used by First Nations to seal the hulls of their canoes long before the arrival of European traders. Commercial exploitation of the oil sands was, however, extremely limited until the 1970s. Its first commercial use was as a kind of asphalt road surface mined straight out of the ground. By the 1960s there were several methods available to extract the oil from the sand, but they were prohibitively expensive. The oil shocks of the 1970s changed that equation.

Following the first OPEC crisis, various companies were in a position to begin a commercial scale separation of oil and sand. At the forefront of these companies was Syncrude, which began production in 1978. The downturn

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6. [3]

in global oil prices after 1981 reduced interest in the oil sands, but improved processes, and the rising oil prices enabled Syncrude to increase production to 90 million barrels per year in 2001.

An insatiable demand for skilled and semi-skilled labour turned the neighbouring town of Fort McMurray into one of the country's fastest growing communities in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1961 there were fewer than 2,000 people in the village, and by 1971 6,800; this latter number more than doubled in the next 5 years, and then doubled again to 31,000 in 1981. It is currently reckoned to have a population of 77,000 — at least one-fifth of which is non-permanent. Criticism of the environmental implications of oil sands extraction, and the subsequent transportation of bitumen, may have taken some of the shine off of the oil sands industry, but it has significantly extended the prosperity of Alberta.

Historian Sean Kheraj (York University) investigates the history of pipeline failures and Canadians' connection with their energy sources.

Over a Barrel

The two oil crises of the 1970s had several important consequences. First, they pitched Alberta into the spotlight of national events and made a national figure of Peter Lougheed — an articulate and thoughtful politician. Second, they created significant tensions within Canadian federalism, increasing demands for decentralized authority or, what was called at the time, **centrifugal federalism**. These crises also undermined the federal formula for “have” and “have-not” provinces that was based on provincial per capita incomes and assumed that wealthy provinces would necessarily have large populations (not the case, relatively speaking, in Alberta). National equity programs were suddenly in jeopardy, which was felt sharply in the Maritimes.

For most Canadians, what mattered was how the oil crises changed their daily lives. Inflation — almost unheard of since the 1920s — was back with a vengeance. The cost of shipping food products grew dramatically, as did household food expenditures. For the first time since 1945, Canadians were experiencing, on a very broad scale, a fall in their average standard of living.

There were technological and environmental consequences as well. Gas-guzzling North American automobiles were being challenged by smaller, lighter Japanese imports. A whole new sector of the Canadian auto-industry would eventually emerge, along with the development of redesigned North American vehicle engines. Efforts to reduce gas consumption, and thus operating costs, was complemented by attempts to diversify energy sources. Experiments involving nuclear, solar, and wind energy accelerated in these years, although to little effect.

The global context of the oil crises would be felt by Canadians for years. OPEC was regarded by governments in Washington as mostly antithetical to America's “national strategic interests” (oil) in the Middle East. What began as a protest against American and European involvement in the Yom Kippur War — a chapter in the Cold War in which the USSR was supporting Egypt — catalyzed anti-Western feeling. The toppling of the Shah of Iran in 1979 (which precipitated the second oil shock) had consequences for regional affairs that would percolate

into the 1990s and the 21st century, drawing Canada into wars and interventions in Kuwait, Iraq, and Libya (see [Sections 9.12](#) and [12.2](#)).



Figure 8.16 Alberta Premier Peter Lougheed (centre) and Quebec Premier René Lévesque had a common foe in Ottawa. At a 1981 meeting of premiers.

Finally, the rise of Alberta in the 1970s — complemented by a strong British Columbian economy and the growth of the natural gas, potash, and uranium sectors in Saskatchewan — tipped the balance of power in Ottawa. The election of Calgary Conservative, Joe Clark, as PM in 1979 was one indication, however brief, that the tide was turning. The much more successful government of Brian Mulroney, from 1984 to 1993, depended heavily on **western alienation** for its success. In addition, the appearance of Western separatist sentiment and the Reform Party led by Preston Manning (son of the former Albertan Premier) had deep roots in the events of the 1970s. Reform would go on to transform the “Progressive Conservative” party into the “Conservative Party” led by Stephen Harper, another Calgarian (see [Section 12.3](#)). Ironically, Alberta became much more Canadian through this process: the oil patch created jobs that attracted Canadians from every province. Indeed, Mr. Harper (born and raised in Toronto) moved as a young man to Edmonton to take up a low-level office job at Imperial Oil before moving on to the University of Calgary to study economics.

Key Points

- The oil economy in Alberta took off in the 1940s and 1950s, and accelerated with the first OPEC oil shock in the early 1970s.
- Some of the effects of the oil boom included a dramatic shift from rural to urban life, and a rapid increase in population in Calgary and Edmonton in particular.
- Federal attempts to capture some of the windfall profits of the oil shocks in the 1970s provoked strident anti-Ottawa feeling in the West.
- Rising oil prices brought within reach the development of the oil sands, extending for decades Alberta’s oil-based prosperity.
- The oil crises of the 1970s and 1980s had international repercussions, but most Canadians felt

it in their wallets, since inflation reduced household incomes significantly and rapidly.

Attributions

Figure 8.14

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Figure 8.15

[Filling drums with oil at Dingman Well \(HS85-10-28964\)](#) by the British Library is in the [public domain](#)

Figure 8.16

[Peter Loughheed and René Lévesque \(Online MIKAN no.3575754\)](#) by Robert Cooper / Library and Archives Canada is in the [public domain](#).

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1. Howard Palmer with Tamara Palmer, *Alberta: A New History* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1990), 300-301. ?
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11.5 Fashioning a Post-War Economy

8.11 Fashioning a Post-War Economy



Figure 8.17 The path to happiness in the post-WWII era is paved not with gold but with blacktop. Consumerism as an economic growth strategy and a lifestyle is embodied in the family automobile, such as the short-lived Ford Frontenac, 1960.

Probably no period in human history has witnessed such a concentrated attempt to plan and shape the national and international economy as the years after 1944. In the middle of a devastating World War, Western, Allied governments met at **Bretton Woods** in New Hampshire to identify the tools necessary to rebuild the liberal democratic and capitalist order, assuming they could beat the Axis Powers. The **World Bank** and the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** were two institutions that emerged from Bretton Woods and, along with the **Marshall Plan** (aka the **European Recovery Plan** or **ERP**) in 1947, they were geared to restoring Europe's economic health so to avoid the kind of post-war turmoil that followed the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. As Soviet interest in participating in the ERP waned, these instruments of investment and recovery became imbued with a stronger ideological hue that reflected the sentiments of the emerging Cold War (see [Section 9.4](#)). They were about providing legitimacy for capitalism and turning off the appeal of revolutionary movements in the post-war world.

Cold War Capitalism

These measures were important to Canada for several reasons. First, although Canada was one of the very few

strong economies left standing at the end of the war, it depended on exports to survive. The United States could absorb only so much, so Western European markets were essential to a Canadian transition to peacetime prosperity. Canada engaged directly in recovery efforts in Europe for this reason, while establishing a role in the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** as an instrument for economic regeneration. The Canadian establishment also understood that the appeal of communism in Canada was enhanced in the 1940s by the alliance with Stalin's USSR, the appearance of several new communist regimes in Eastern Europe and, in 1949, the People's Republic of China. The most effective case against hard-left dissent was high levels of employment, good wages, and overall prosperity at home. Capitalism had to appear as though it was working. To that end, Canada had to strike a balance between sending resources abroad to rebuild markets on the one hand, and investing in jobs at home on the other. These two goals weren't necessarily at odds: Canada sold billions of dollars' worth of materials to the **Marshall Plan** in the late 1940s, which was a stimulant to economic growth. Almost simultaneously, from 1949 to 1953, tensions and then war in the Korean Peninsula proved to be a fillip to both the Canadian economy and anti-communist rhetoric (see [Section 9.4](#)).

More generally, Ottawa and the provinces began to intervene more actively in the economy. New infrastructural projects appeared in these years as the shift to an automobile economy was more fully underway and the demand for cheap electricity grew. Highways and hydroelectric dams were to the post-war era what railways had been to the pre-1914 Dominion. These were the elements of the command-led practices of the past that survived, although Canadian economic planners laid greater emphasis on demand-led (consumer-led) growth. Critical pieces of the puzzle involved stabilizing industrial relations (considered by Peter McNinnis in [Section 8.12](#)) and encouraging the growth of a working-class with disposable income. Economists had observed the benefits of consumerism in the 1920s and, conversely, what the loss of spending power meant in the Depression. Investing public money to create jobs — a Keynesian approach — worked during the war, and this strategy would be applied during the following three decades.

As we'll see in Chapter 9, much of this economic growth took place in the suburbs of the nation's largest cities. The engine that would drive forward a post-war Canadian economy included house construction, the development of services (sewer, electricity, telephone lines), the sale of automobiles for commuters (and gasoline, of course), and the furnishing of every home with appliances and televisions (starting in the 1950s). As Katharine Rollwagen describes below, this process enlisted people at an early age, consciously fashioning generations of consumers.

Youth and Consumerism

Katharine Rollwagen, Department of History, Vancouver Island University

Today's teen-agers are cuddled, coddled, and courted and their juvenile notions on love, life and the cosmos are eagerly sought and retailed by some of their raisin-brained elders. — Frank Tumpane¹

In the 1950s, many young people were coming of age in an era of relative abundance. Goods that families couldn't afford in the 1930s and couldn't purchase in the 1940s due to wartime restrictions on production

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2. [1]

were becoming more common. New consumer products, too, were entering the market. Between 1950 and 1960, homes in Canadian cities and towns acquired items such as automatic washing machines and electric refrigerators (rural homes often didn't have the electricity and plentiful running water these appliances required). New automobiles were increasingly abundant and affordable. Televisions were growing in popularity; the children of the 1950s were the first to grow up with access to this medium, which brought advertising into the home in a new and — some believed — invasive way.

Although young people had more products to purchase after the Second World War, they were not the first generation to be targeted by advertisers and retailers. In the early decades of the century, advertisements first began offering parents specialized infant foods and clothing. Manufactured toys increasingly replaced homemade ones, and young people had more commercialized leisure options, such as the cinema. Many store owners liked the idea that they might secure customer loyalty early in life. They offered special promotions to draw young people into their stores, hoping to ensure their business as they aged.

The 1940s presented a new opportunity for retailers to reach a somewhat captive audience of teenagers. As my research demonstrates, department stores, in particular, noticed the increase in high school attendance and paid more attention to the school-aged customers in their stores. Stores like Eaton's and Simpson's presented the teenager as a new type of customer. The teenaged customer was more mature than little sister or brother — she (or he) shopped without their mother, placed a high value on peer approval, and were decisive, savvy shoppers. Both Eaton's and Simpson's joined a North American industry trend by creating teenager advisory boards in the 1940s. These groups of high school students met weekly at department stores in Canadian cities to discuss current fashion trends in their schools and to give their opinions of store merchandise — clothing, music records, shoes, and even furniture. Also in the 1940s, clothing manufacturers began making garments in a new teen size range, and producing style lines specifically for teenaged girls and boys.

In the 1940s and 1950s, women's magazines, such *Canadian Home Journal*, ran special teenager features and advertising, while *Chatelaine* started a monthly teen column called "Teen Tempo." By the time *Chatelaine* publishers decided to start their own magazine for teenaged girls in 1966, *Miss Chatelaine*, Canadian girls had already been reading American teen magazines *Seventeen* and *Young and Modern* (also known as *YM*) for twenty years, and purchasing (or coveting) the products sold in their glossy pages. At mid-century, selling to youth had become an integral part of retail business in Canada.

Additional Readings

Owram, Doug. *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.

Rollwagen, Katharine. "Eaton's Goes to School: Youth Councils and the Commodification of the Teenaged Consumer at Canada's Largest Department Store, 1940-1960." *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 47, no. 95 (2014): 683-703.

By the mid-1950s, the Canadian economy was well into a new industrial revolution during which **consumer durables** intersected with popular culture. It was also when success was, for the first time since 1867, measured less against the benchmark of the United States (although that persisted as well) and more against Cold War enemies in the Soviet Bloc. The fact that this was political as well as economic is evident in the uneven division of spoils across Canada in the post-War years. Economic growth took place principally in Ontario and Quebec, Alberta, and British Columbia; the Prairie economies of Manitoba and Saskatchewan struggled, as did those of Atlantic Canada (the subject of [Section 8.13](#)). These **have-not** provinces benefited from equalization payments

but continued to lag behind for decades. The fact that the post-war prosperity was not universally shared is further underlined by the experiences of Aboriginal peoples (see [Chapter 11](#)).

Key Points

- The post-WWII economy was built on renewed public sector investment in infrastructure and other measures designed to stimulate the growth of consumer demand.
- Internationally, Canada was part of a project to rebuild the European economy and markets for Canadian exports, while keeping communism at bay.
- Much of the growth in domestic demand came from suburban growth and the creation of a culture of consumerism among adults and children.

Attributions

Figure 8.17

[1960 Frontenac Station Wagon \(Canada\)](#) by [Michael](#) is used under a [CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0](#) license.

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1. Frank Tumpane, “Stop Pampering Our Teenagers,” *Macleans*, May 26, 1956, 4, 65-66. ?

11.6 Post-Industrial Canada

8.17 Post-Industrial Canada

A great many Canadians continued to depend on wages and salaries in the industrial/manufacturing sector in the last quarter of the 20th century. Even so, the sector was changing dramatically. Industrialization a century ago required proximity to sources of energy, raw materials, shipping/railway infrastructure, and a source of cheap, skilled labour. The **information age** required different strategies.

High technology industries were drawn to nodes where there was proximity, principally, to workers with extraordinary skills in computer sciences. The founding of software giant Corel in Ottawa in 1985 nearly coincided with the 1984 opening of Research In Motion (RIM) — eventually renamed BlackBerry Limited — in Waterloo, Ontario, which both depended on the dense population of science and engineering graduates from nearby universities. These also were flagships of what was called the **knowledge economy**. The post-secondary sector responded with increased investment in the “mobilization of knowledge” and **commercialization**. Just as Canadian industrialists once looked south to the steel industry of Pennsylvania and the auto industry of Michigan, late 20th century entrepreneurs, cabinet ministers, and local governments wished to emulate the success of California’s **Silicon Valley**, pairing entrepreneurial vision with fresh research coming out of the country’s leading universities.



Figure 8.24 The enormous success of Corel was manifest in its \$20 million sponsorship (and subsequent rebranding) of the NHL Ottawa Senators’ new home arena in 1996.

It is probably too early for historians to judge the contrary currents flowing in the millennial decades. On the one hand, globalization was viewed as a source of deindustrialization; at the same time, labour in Asia and engineering skill in India in particular was critical to the rise of the information age. From about 2001, the knowledge economy and the **creative economy** are presented as heirs in a long succession of economic engines. Just as the agricultural revolution of the 18th century made possible, and gave way to, the industrial revolution in the 19th, they were both followed by the commercial and service revolution of the mid-20th century.

To use a well-stretched analogy, this may be making a silk purse from a sow's ear. Do we cheer the arrival of new activities so as to obscure the creaking sound from declining sectors? Without the agricultural revolution, there would not have been the food nor the people to run the industrial revolution; however, the former didn't end with the start of the latter. The agricultural and industrial revolutions had an ongoing co-dependence then and, indeed, to this day. Industrialism provided the systems necessary to mass produce electronic goods, for example, and it also established — in partnership with state capitalism at mid-century and the rise of consumerism — the intellectual means and popular market for high-tech inventions. The extent to which the knowledge economy can lay claim to the “revolutionary” qualities with which it is sometimes associated has yet to be proven.

Vancouver, Then and Now

A striking visual example of the rise of industrialism, and its retreat, can be seen along Vancouver's False Creek. Currently, the subject of a significant urban plan, it is an area that has literally been re-formed repeatedly in the city's 130 years.



Figure 8.25 The False Creek mudflats at high tide in 1890, only recently denuded of trees but still a salmon spawning ground and a source of clams.

Despite the name and the historic presence of several feeder ravines, it is not a creek at all but rather a short inlet that once had extensive mudflats at its eastern extremity. Aboriginal peoples harvested a range of foods here, including seals. Early Asian settlers grazed cattle and pigs across the marshes. European immigrants made similarly benign use of the flats until the late 1880s and early 1990s when slaughterhouses appeared on its south bank at the outlet of Brewery Creek. Waste from the eponymous

breweries joined the dumping of offal and animal scraps into the flats, and residents and the city on the eastern and northern shore began disposing of their garbage in the most inland coves. By 1910 high tide marks were littered with all kinds of debris and gore.

The eastern flats were drained and filled in between 1915 and 1917 to create space for new railyards and warehouses. The remaining shoreline west of Main Street (repeatedly threatened with further massive drainage projects) was populated with sawmills and railyards from the 1880s forward. Huge beehive burners belched sparks and smoke over the city's East End, and a towering gas plant hissed and glowed blue above Chinatown. There was little housing along False Creek before the 1970s, apart from shanty housing — mostly shabby floathouses without plumbing — and some nearby “coolie” housing (high density housing for single, and mostly poor, Chinese men). Sewage poured directly into the eastern part of the inlet, and the whole stank terribly. Shipyards joined metal-bashing and barrel-making industries along the south side of the inlet and grew at an enormous rate during the 1940s with the wartime production of “Liberty Ships.” Crossed by three bridges, False Creek was the heart of industrial Vancouver until the need for larger sorting yards pushed the lumber industry to the Fraser River; likewise, the shipyards shut down one after another because they needed bigger slips on which to build a new generation of larger peacetime vessels and a deeper, wider pond into which they could be launched.



Figure 8.26 The Big Smoke. False Creek in 1936, its size reduced by one-third and its waters choked with log-booms.

Incrementally vacated by industrial leaders, the northern portion of False Creek was spanned by two highway viaducts in 1972, with more freeways believed to be on their way. At that point, City Council developed a new vision of the area and, in partnership with the Trudeau government, began to redevelop the southwest side as a combination of street market and modest-density housing with green spaces and pedestrian seawalls. Granville Island Market was one outcome, and townhouses began to stretch eastward from Granville Bridge. Consolidating the remainder of the land represented a challenge that was solved by hosting a **World's Fair** — Expo 86. That opportunity cleared the way for converting the north shore of False Creek from industry to fairground and then to high density tower housing in the space of a decade. More glass towers followed on the eastern shoreline, leaving only the southeast corner for consolidation and bulldozing, which was done to host the 2010 Winter Olympics, and the athletes' dormitories were quickly converted into market housing.



Figure 8.27 The Swiss Pavilion dominates this view of Expo 86.

What was once — well within living memory — a smoky, rat-infested, industrial septic field is now a smart, green, sophisticated urban space. There are very few industries *per se* in the area, except for the return of craft breweries. What has emerged along the shorelines of False Creek is a highly photogenic example of the clean and urbane knowledge/creative economy.

It is easy to lose sight of the fact that the industrial core that gave Vancouver its nickname — “the Big Smoke” — was also lauded in its time. Heavy industry and shipyards were profitable and they provided jobs for thousands of skilled and unskilled workers (including more than 10,000 women during WWII) who lived in the city core, on Fairview Slopes, and in the East End. More than that, these industries were symbols of patriotism in the 1940s and through the Cold War. Mills and factories were as much an indicator of Vancouver’s modernity as condo-towers are a manifestation of the city’s postmodernity.

Similar reinventions of industrial lands can be seen in every Canadian city. Whether it is the Canadian War Museum (built on the railyard and working-class neighbourhood LeBreton Flats in Hull), the revitalized packinghouse district on the waterfront of Kelowna, or almost any new arena or stadium in the country, these **brownfield** projects re-purpose and, sometimes at enormous cost, rehabilitate industrial spaces for post-industrial use.



Figure 8.28 Myfanwy MacLeod's *The Birds* dominates a public square in the Olympic Village condo complex in a thoroughly deindustrialized (but hardly natural) False Creek, 2011.

Bubbles

Several factors brought instability to the Canadian economy after 1982. The rising cost of fuels and other components in the auto industry continued to reduce its profits. Startlingly high interest rates (close to 20%) gutted the housing sector and reduced consumer spending in the early 1980s. Growing environmental concerns rocked the pulp and paper and forest industries, resulting in a reduction of output and exports beginning in the 1980s and accelerating through the 1990s. Volatility in the stock market was also a destabilizing factor.

Between the Wall Street Crashes of 1929 and 1987, there were no major stock market disasters, but then they started to come quickly. Black Monday on 19 October, 1987 was followed two years later by the dramatic collapse of the Brazilian stock exchange; in the summer of 1990, a three-year long recession began that was linked to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait; in 1991 Japan's meteoric rise ended with what was to be a two-decade long downturn; the common European currency, the Euro, experienced a crisis of its own in 1992; five years later, the Asian economic meltdown provoked a global crash of stocks and, in the summer of 1998, the Russian economy seemingly collapsed. The century ended with the **dot-com bubble** crisis that marked the end of a stunning run for Internet investors.

This last aspect of the new post-industrial economy in some ways resembles the frenzy of railway building in the Victorian era. The Internet went from being a modest structure in the 1970s and 1980s to the **World Wide Web** — invented in 1989 and launched in 1991. It is now, along with **cellular** communications, the largest communication infrastructure in existence. At the consumer level, this is a vast and revolutionary change. More

than 80% of households now use a cellphone only, having dispensed with landlines.¹ The future of Canada Post is uncertain, and while it is still possible to send a telegram today, many do more for the sake of irony than efficiency.

Canadians observed these changes unfolding in the 1990s and were uncertain. What potential did the Internet truly present? In 1989 only 10% of Canadian households had home computers; five years later, that figure had more than tripled to 32%; in 2000 it reached 65%. Until the late 1990s, these computers were essentially word processors: household Internet usage was only about 7% in 1997. Suddenly, in 2000, this leapt to 53%, and home computers were in a position to revolutionize domestic, civil, and social life.³ Again, in the mid-1990s, this transformation was being foretold by only a handful of early adopters. Resistance to these trends can be seen in the apparent inability of print media to develop new strategies for survival, which is evident in the closure of many local newspapers. At the same time, automobile sales continued to surge (sustained by sprawling cities), so deindustrialization was far from complete. As was the case in the past, the post-industrial economy did not utterly supersede the service or industrial or agricultural economies.

Key Points

- Information technologies began in the late 1980s, and in the 1990s, began to mobilize more capital and labour, even as traditional manufacturing sectors declined.
- The knowledge and creative economies became increasingly referenced as cleaner and more sophisticated models that would replace dependence on industrial production.
- The Internet age began with a frenzy of investment that produced financial bubbles that inevitably burst.
- Technological change made significant inroads in everyday life in the 1990s, and accelerated at the turn of the century.

Attributions

Figure 8.24

The Corel Centre, now known as Scotiabank Place, in Ottawa by Steggall is used under a CC-BY-SA 3.0 license.

Figure 8.25

View looking north on Main from 7th Ave. – False Creek before fill by H.T. Devine is in the public domain.

Figure 8.26

View of mills on False Creek by James Crookall is in the public domain.

Figure 8.27

Expo 86 – Switzerland by Colin Rose is used under a CC-BY 2.0 license.

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3. ^[1]
4. ^[2]

Figure 8.28

Sculpture of a sparrow in Olympic Village, Vancouver by Guilhem Vellut is used under a CC-BY-SA 2.0 license.

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1. John Greenwood, “Why Canadians are hanging up on their landline phones,” *Financial Post*, June 24, 2014, accessed October 16, 2015, <http://business.financialpost.com/fp-tech-desk/why-canadians-are-hanging-up-on-their-landline-phones.> ?
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11.7 The North: Economy and Territory

9.3 The North: Economy and Territory

Kelly Black, Department of History, Vancouver Island University

In Canadian history, the concept of the North — What is it? Where is it? What does it mean? — has been a contested and debated subject. At various times during Canada’s past, the geographic location of the North shifted as Canada acquired, surveyed, and mapped new territory. If we ask, “Where is the North?” we may think of the provincial north (Fort St. John, British Columbia; Timmins, Ontario; northern Quebec; Labrador), the territorial north (Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut), or any land north of the 60th parallel.



Figure 9.9 The line between the north and the North is generally agreed to be the 60th parallel.

Whichever location comes to mind, all are home to a diversity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples have made these places their home since time immemorial, and each of these peoples has specific territories and traditions. The North has also been central to the creation of particular narratives of Canadian identity. Historian Shelagh Grant has written that most southern Canadians “view the Arctic in terms of southern impact, such as the effect of weather patterns, the potential of untapped resource

wealth, or simply national pride in a unique, majestic landscape.”¹ Just as the North moulds the nation, the nation fashions the North. The history of the North in Canada has been shaped by changing boundaries, changing priorities, and the development of a national, northward-looking imagination.

Canada First

The creation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867 caused some English Canadians to consider what attributes would define their new identity as Canadians. A group called Canada First was formed in 1868 when five men from Ontario gathered to consider a future as Canadians, and not as British colonists. Historian Carl Berger argued that the Canada First movement used notions of the North to promote the idea that Canadians would rise to greatness in North America and abroad because of their northern character:

[blockquote]The adjective “northern” came to symbolize energy, strength, self-reliance, health, and purity, and its opposite, “southern,” was equated with decay and effeminacy, even libertinism, and disease. A lengthy catalogue of desirable national attributes resulting from the climate was compiled. No other weather was so conducive to maintaining health and stimulating robustness.³ [/blockquote]

The idea that Canadians were hardy, masculine, and northern people stood in contrast with the United States to the south. However, Canada First members also wanted to contrast Canadians with peoples from other colonies within the British Empire. The idea that people from southern climates could not live in the North was taken directly from the concepts of Social Darwinism emerging at the time. It was used to underwrite a cool welcome to (or a door bolted against) immigration from the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, and the African-American diaspora. Social Darwinism took Darwin’s theory of evolution — survival of the fittest and natural selection — and applied these ideas to society and politics. Canada First’s doctrine argued that a northern climate meant only hardy, manly, and white peoples could live in Canada. This conveniently ignored the presence of Indigenous peoples but, to most Canadians at the time, Indigenous peoples were understood to be vanishing. With this “icy white nationalism,” as Eva Mackey has put it, whiteness, the rugged northern landscape, and climate came to signify Canada to Canadians.⁵

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3. ^[1]
5. ^[2]
6. ^[3]



Figure 9.10 The Chilkoot Pass at the height of the Klondike gold rush.

Territorial Expansion

The British government purchased “Rupert’s Land and the North-Western Territory” from the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) in 1870. Fearing annexation of the territory by the United States, Section 146 of the *British North America Act* (1867) provided for the inclusion of the vast area into the newly created Dominion of Canada. This acquisition brought an influx of settlers, particularly from Ontario, into the Red River area, and led to the Red River Resistance by the Métis and the creation of the “postage stamp” province of Manitoba in 1871. It was not until 1905 that the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan were carved out of the territory and brought into Confederation. In 1912, the current borders of the prairie provinces and northern Ontario were established.

For much of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the far North, the lands North of 60, remained largely unknown to southern Canadians. It was not until 1880 that Britain transferred possession of the high Arctic islands to Canada. However, these islands were seen to be of little value to political leaders in Ottawa. Rather than being viewed as the home of the Inuit, the Arctic was mired in myth as the site of ill-fated expeditions in search of the Northwest Passage and thought to be a place of inhospitable climate; harsh landscape; and monstrous creatures such as whales, narwhals, and walruses.



Figure 9.11 A footrace in Dawson City, ca. 1900.

The Klondike gold rush of 1896 brought an influx of gold seekers to the North (especially from the United States), and the Canadian government responded by creating the Yukon Territory in 1898. Historians Ken S. Coates and William R. Morrison note that the Klondike gold rush “is one of the few events in Canadian history — perhaps the only one — that has entered into the collective memory of the entire world.”⁷ The word **Klondike** is derived from Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, the name of the First Nation upon whose territory gold was found. The rush to riches had devastating impacts on the environment and First Nations cultures in the region, but it is the romance of the gold rush that remains ingrained in the Canadian imagination through the poems of Robert W. Service (1874-1958), the books of popular historian Pierre Berton (1920-2004), and the famous images of stampeders climbing the treacherous Chilkoot Pass route to the goldfields.

7. ⁸

8. [4]



Figure 9.12 Robert W. Service, seen here in 1941 with screen star Marlene Dietrich (1901-1992), struck gold with poetry.

[Listen to this recording of *The Cremation of Sam McGee*.](#) Service reads one of his best known poems, *The Cremation of Sam McGee*.

The gold rush reminded the Canadian government of the need to assert its sovereignty in the North, and, in 1904, the Liberal government of Wilfrid Laurier (1841-1919) commissioned the Canadian Arctic Expedition and the ship *Arctic* to help with this task. From 1913 to 1918, the Canadian Arctic Expedition journeyed through the Arctic and found major errors in previous maps. The expedition actually added four new islands to Canada's territory that were previously unknown by the government. During this time, missionaries and the Royal North West/Canadian Mounted Police established outposts throughout the provincial and territorial North. These outposts, along with the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) stores, became central to the region's colonization and administration prior to World War II.

Despite the acquisition of Rupert's Land by Canada, the HBC remained a strong presence in the North well into the 20th century. In 1920, the company marked its 250th anniversary with the release of the silent film *The Romance of the Far Fur Country*. The film reinforced the prominent role of the HBC in Canada and provided southern audiences with one of their earliest glimpses into life in the Arctic. Two years later, the American film *Nanook of the North* (*nanook* means "polar bear" in the Inuktitut language) was a huge success at the box office and contributed further to the mystique of the North and its peoples.



Figure 9.13 Poster for *Nanook of the North*.

[Watch *Nanook of the North*](#), a remarkable (if ethnographically unreliable) documentary.

World War II and the Cold War

World War II brought rapid and profound change to the North and to Indigenous peoples in the region. When the United States and Canada declared war with Japan in December 1941, the Pacific coast of North America was particularly vulnerable to a Japanese attack. To aid the movement of troops and supplies into the North, work began on the **Alaska Highway** in Fort Nelson, BC, in 1942. With Canada's permission, 10,000 American troops and workers came to northern British Columbia and the Yukon to build a 1500-mile (2400-kilometre) road to Alaska. As with the gold rush, the North was transformed almost overnight. American troops remained in the North not only to build the highway but also to facilitate defence and the transportation of military supplies across the North.

Prior to the war, it was possible for many Indigenous peoples in the North to live their lives without interacting with Canadian institutions and peoples. However, concerns about sovereignty and security quickly brought scientific and military projects into the everyday lives of Indigenous peoples. A mine near Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories supplied uranium ore for the Manhattan Project to develop the first atomic bomb. The Délı̨ne First Nation of Sahtu worked to extract the radioactive materials and were never informed by the government of uranium's deadly effects: many died from various forms of cancer linked to their exposure.⁹ Advancements in technology following the war meant that the Arctic very quickly went from a place of mystery to a place that could be accessed, studied, defended, and monitored. During the 1950s, the **Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line** was built across the North to provide radar surveillance and protection from a Soviet airborne

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10. [5]

invasion or missile attack via the Arctic Circle. Although such an invasion never came, the United States military maintained a strong presence in the North throughout the Cold War.

High Arctic Relocation

As southern Canadians came to know more about the North, the federal government extended the postwar welfare state to Northern peoples. This was not simply an offer of social programs; the federal government wanted to resettle Indigenous peoples off the land and into planned settlements in an attempt to reproduce life as it was for southern Canadians. This rapid transformation in people's lives often meant disruption of traditional ways of knowing and the break-up of family groups. The need for energy and other resources in the postwar years also brought resource extraction to the North. In the quest for resources, traditional hunting grounds were destroyed and settlements were relocated to make way for mining operations.

In the late summer of 1953, the government forcibly relocated several Inuit families from Inukjuak, Quebec, in the name of Canadian arctic sovereignty. The families, along with a single RCMP constable, were sent to Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord in the Northwest Territories as part of a government relocation program. Three other families from Pond Inlet were sent to teach the Inukjuak families to survive in the high Arctic. All of these families were told they were being sent north so that they could be provided better hunting and living opportunities. In 1955, more people were relocated from Inukjuak and Pond Inlet to Resolute. The high Arctic was completely different than the home territories of these families, and they were sent North with poor supplies and no knowledge of the terrain or wildlife. In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples found that the government relocated these Inuit families for several dubious reasons:

- To support Canadian sovereignty claims (in effect, using the relocated populations as “human flagpoles”);¹¹
- To centralize Inuit in communities where they could provide labour for the Royal Canadian Air Force and government weather station. Many Inuit did these jobs but were not paid. Their wages were kept by the government and issued in the form of credits at the government store;
- To fulfill a desire to improve the situation of Quebec Inuit whose livelihoods were thought to be under threat due to decreased game stocks; and,
- To reduce what was seen to be growing Aboriginal dependence on government assistance.

For decades, the federal government claimed that these families had moved voluntarily. Inuit rejected this claim and spoke of the intergenerational trauma inflicted by forced relocations. It was not until 2010 that the federal government issued an apology for these **relocation programs**.

Division of the Northwest Territories

Since 1867, the size and shape of the NT has been altered several times as districts, provinces, and territories were created. Prior to the 1960s, the administration and governance of both the Yukon and Northwest Territories was

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12. [6]

the responsibility of the federal government. In 1966, the **Carruthers Commission** recommended that the federal government begin to transfer these responsibilities to the people of the Northwest Territories. Following the commission's report, the capital of the Northwest Territories was shifted from Ottawa to Yellowknife in 1967 and, by 1975, a fully elected legislative assembly had been created. Gradually, control of education, local government, and social services were handed over to both territories, a process known as **devolution**.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Indigenous peoples of the North began to organize politically into groups such as the Yukon Native Brotherhood, the Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories, the Committee for Original Peoples Entitlement, and the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. These groups advocated for the protection of their culture and traditions and called for the signing of treaties and the right to determine their own future. As a creation of Ottawa, the boundaries of the Northwest Territories were artificial and did not represent the cultural and linguistic differences between Inuit and First Nations in the Eastern and Western Arctic. Inuit made up the majority of the population in the East, while Dene and Métis concentrated heavily in the West, around Great Slave Lake and the Mackenzie River.¹³ In 1982, residents voted in a plebiscite that asked if they were in favour or against a division of the Northwest Territories. Nearly 57% of voters cast a ballot in favour of the proposal. Ten years later, in 1992, residents voted on and approved the proposed boundaries for the two territories. In 1993, the **Nunavut Land Claims Agreement** was signed between Inuit of the Eastern Arctic and the federal government. The finalization of the land claim agreement was one of the last major hurdles towards the creation of Nunavut, which became Canada's newest territory on 1 April 1999.

Key Points

- The North has played an important role in the psychology of national identity since the earliest days of Confederation.
- In the early 20th century, much northern territory was divided between the Prairie provinces, Ontario, and Quebec.
- Efforts to assert Canadian sovereignty in the North were insignificant before the Klondike gold rush and increased thereafter.
- Government involvement grew and extended dramatically during World War II.
- Mineral resources began being tapped in the Northwest Territories precisely as the Cold War began, adding new concerns about sovereignty and a degree of militarization in response.
- Human populations — mostly Inuit — have been repeatedly moved in the service of Canadian claims.
- Democratic institutions were introduced in the 1960s and 1970s while, at the same time, Aboriginal peoples organized in response to Ottawa's interest in their homeland.
- One outcome was the establishment of Nunavut as a separate territory in keeping with Inuit ambitions.

13. ¹⁴

14. [7]

Additional Resources

CBC Digital Archives. The Creation of Nunavut: <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/topic/the-creation-of-nunavut>

Mapping the Way: Yukon First Nation Self-Government: <http://mappingtheway.ca/>

CBC Interactive Timeline: NWT Devolution <http://www.cbc.ca/north/interactive/devolution/>

Attributions

Figure 9.9

[60th parallel Canada](#) by [Bazonka](#) is used under a [CC-BY-SA-3.0](#) license.

Figure 9.10

[Packers ascending summit of Chilkoot Pass](#) (Online MIKAN no. 3192704) by E.A. Hegg / Library and Archives Canada C-005142 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 9.11

[Foot race, Dawson City, YT, about 1900](#) by [Musée McCord Museum](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 9.12

[Robert Service during the “Spoiler” with Marlene Dietrich](#) by Universal Studios is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 9.13

[Nanook of the north](#) by Robert J. Flannery / Pathe Pictures is in the [public domain](#).

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1. Shelagh Grant, “Arctic Wilderness – And Other Mythologies,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 32.2 (1998): 35. ?
 2. Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867 – 1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 129. ?
 3. Eva Mackey, ““Death by Landscape”: Race, Nature, and Gender in Canadian Nationalist Mythology,” *Canadian Woman Studies* 20.2 (2000): 126. ?
 4. Ken S. Coates and William R. Morrison, *Land of the Midnight Sun: A History of the Yukon* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 77. ?
 5. Peter C. van Wyck, *The Highway of the Atom* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010). ?
 6. Bruce Campion-Smith, “Ottawa apologizes to Inuit for using them as ‘human flagpoles,’” *Toronto Star*, August 18, 2010. ?
 7. Frances Abele and Mark O. Dickerson, “The 1982 Plebiscite on Division of the Northwest Territories: Regional Government and Federal Policy,” *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse De Politiques* 11.1 (1985): 2. ?

11.8 The Aqueduct and Colonialism

ADELE PERRY, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, AND UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Located at the forks of two major rivers and prone to flooding, the city of Winnipeg often seems awash in water, but an adequate supply of clean drinking water has been a continual problem for the city from its earliest days as the Red River Settlement to its incorporation as a city in 1874 to the present day. In his classic *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914* (1977), Alan Artibise explains how in the last decades of the 19th century, Winnipeg experimented with private companies and public water supply operations. They filtered river water and dug artesian wells, but still had to deal with problems like “hard” water (with a high mineral content), inadequate supply, and, more pressingly, annual outbreaks of typhoid. 1904 was especially bad: 1,276 people, or a little over 5% of 67,300 Winnipeggers, were diagnosed with typhoid.

By 1913 the ambitious settler city had decided to address its enduring problems with the water supply by building an aqueduct to transport water from Shoal Lake. Located about 150 kilometers east, Shoal Lake straddles the borders of Ontario and Manitoba, and is within Anishinaabe territory, which is covered by the provisions and promises of Treaty 3, signed in 1873. Supporters of the Shoal Lake Aqueduct were well aware of just how expensive and ambitious the plan was, and argued that the estimated cost of \$13.5 million would be well worth it to secure Winnipeg’s human and economic growth.

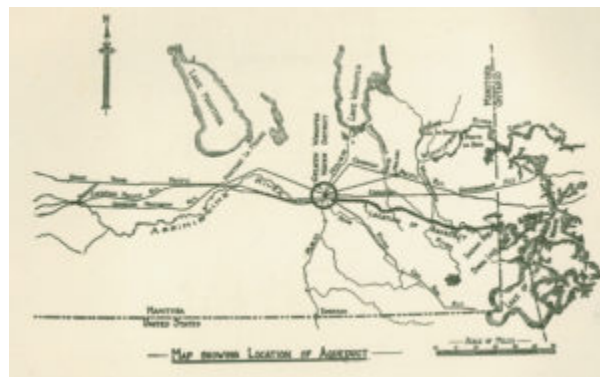


Figure 11.14 A spider’s web of infrastructure radiates outward from Winnipeg, claiming territory and water. Greater Winnipeg Water District Map, 1918.

What this plan might mean for the Anishinaabe communities at Shoal Lake rarely entered into the conversations about what the Aqueduct could do for the mainly settler city of Winnipeg. In 1914 the Federal Government used its enormous powers under the *Indian Act*, first passed in 1876, to sell approximately 3,000 acres of land belonging to Shoal Lake 40 Reserve to the Greater Winnipeg Water District (GWWD) for the sum of \$1,500. In an effort to separate “dark” water from the more palatable water destined for the city, the GWWD then built a canal and a dyke, which effectively made the community of Shoal Lake 40 an artificial island.

Shoal Lake water first flowed in Winnipeg’s water mains in 1919, less than half a year after the armistice of the Great War and a few months before a General Strike would rock the prairie city. The project carried an enormous price tag: it cost \$17 million at the time, which translates to about \$229,861,702 in 2016 terms. The Shoal Lake Aqueduct project involved the building of a railroad, telephone lines, and tunnelling under multiple rivers, and employed as many as 2,000 men at one time — all during the labour shortages of World War 1. The Aqueduct has served the city of Winnipeg well and continues to supply the city with its drinking water.

It did not take long for Winnipeggers to begin celebrating the Aqueduct as a triumph of engineering and public-minded policy. It would take much, much longer and an enormous amount of activism and advocacy from Indigenous communities for awareness to grow with respect to what the Aqueduct cost the Anishinaabe communities of Shoal Lake. Surrounded by Winnipeg’s water supply, Shoal Lake 40 nevertheless lacks a reliable source of fresh water, and the community has been on a boil water advisory since 1998. (They are not alone: as of the summer of 2015, there were about 175 drinking water advisories in Reserves across Canada.) Also, the approximately 250 people of Shoal Lake 40 lack a year-round way of coming and going from the community, and as a result, have poor waste removal, emergency services, and postal services. During the winter, they use an ice road across water, but for a few weeks every fall and spring, they face the danger of travel across thinning and uncertain ice.

The fact that the community of Shoal Lake 40’s poor water supply and any chances for ameliorating it can be tied directly to the Aqueduct that secured Winnipeg’s water supply tells us a lot about the history of colonialism in modern Canada. The relative prosperity of non-Indigenous people in 20th century Canada has come at the expense — sometimes general and sometimes very specific — of Indigenous people. Alongside the histories of World War 1, the Winnipeg General Strike, and the provision of municipal services in Winnipeg and across Canada, we also need to analyze the histories of Indigenous dispossession that undergirded the stories of settler vision, conflict, and triumph.

Key Points

- The ability to undertake large engineering projects in the 20th century recasts colonial relations between Canada and Aboriginal communities like Shoal Lake 40; the issue is not simply the taking of Aboriginal land, but any other resource that is needed by the colonial society. As is the case at Shoal Lake 40, this is very much to the detriment of the colonized people.

Attributions

Figure 11.14

[Map Showing Location of Aqueduct \(1918\)](#) by [Wyman Laliberte](#) / Courtesy of University of Manitoba : Archives & Special Collections is used under a [CC-BY-2.0](#) license.

11.9 Idle No More

MARY-ELLEN KELM, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, AND SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY



Figure 11.20 Idle No More marchers in Ottawa, 2013.

On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper rose in Canada's House of Commons to give an official apology for residential schooling. He called the treatment of Aboriginal children in the schools "a sad chapter in our history," for which "the Government of Canada sincerely apologizes."¹ Mr. Harper and the other party leaders expressed palpable remorse for the past injustices of Canadian policy, and leaders representing First Nations, Métis, Inuit peoples, women, and urban Aboriginal people gravely responded to the apology from the floor of the House.

For many Canadians, this promised to be a turning point in our relations with Aboriginal peoples. Until the 1990s when stories of abuse in the schools hit the media and the courts, most Canadians had never heard of the schools. Now the Prime Minister of Canada was admitting that a government policy had been wrong and that the attitudes that inspired the policy have "no place in Canada." More importantly, he promised a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canadians, one of shared history, renewed understanding, and new respect for all cultures,

1. Stephen Harper, "Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools," House of Commons, Ottawa, June, 11, 2008, accessed April 27, 2016, <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649>

traditions, and communities.² Two processes were meant to bring this new relationship about. First there was compensation for those who attended the residential schools. Second, the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)** was tasked with documenting the full history of the schools. Restorative justice scholars gave the Harper apology high marks.³

However, the apology was not a turning point. Its major failing was that it situated all the wrongs of government policy in the past. It did not commit the Canadian Government in any concrete way to changing its actions towards First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in the present. This was a significant mistake because a changed relationship with Canada was what Aboriginal people wanted.⁴

By 2008, Aboriginal people in Canada had already begun to shift the conversation between themselves and Canadians in really fundamental ways. In the 20th century, Aboriginal people demanded government recognition of their rights and title to the land. As a new generation of Aboriginal leaders arose, they increasingly sought resurgence — of their own cultures and communities — rather than recognition. They wanted a new relationship with Canada, the kind of relationship of sharing and mutual respect that their ancestors had expected when they signed treaties.



Figure 11.21 The Jericho Diamond Mine pit in Nunavut, n.d.

The trouble was that Aboriginal people have not shared equally in Canadian wealth. In some parts of Canada, Aboriginal people have poverty rates that are three times those of other Canadians.⁵ Less money is spent on reserve schools and Aboriginal children are ten times more likely to end up in foster care.⁶ So while Mr. Harper

2. Ibid.

3. Sheryl Lightfoot, "Settler-State Apologies to Indigenous Peoples: A Normative Framework and Comparative Assessment," *Journal of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association* 2, no. 1 (2015): 33.

4. Beverley Jacobs, "Response to Canada's Apology to Residential School Survivors," *Canadian Woman Studies* 26, no. 3/4 (2008): 223; Sheryl Lightfoot, "Settler-State Apologies to Indigenous Peoples: A Normative Framework and Comparative Assessment," *Journal of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association* 2, no. 1 (2015): 33.

5. Shauna MacKinnon, "The Harper 'Apology': Residential Schools and Bill C-10" (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Manitoba Office, January 24, 2012); Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, *Aboriginal Children in Care: Report to Canada's Premiers* (Ottawa: Council of the Federation Secretariat, 2015): 45. July 2015: 45.

6. Don Drummond and Ellen Rosenbluth, "The Debate on First Nations Education Funding: Mind the Gap," Working Paper, Queen's University Policy Studies (Kingston: Queen's University, December 2013); Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, "Aboriginal Children in Care," 7.

was apologizing for the damage done to Aboriginal children and families by residential schools, the legacies of residential schooling continued unabated.⁷

The Cree community of Attawapiskat has become emblematic of Canada's dysfunctional relationship with Aboriginal people. An isolated community on the shores of James Bay, Attawapiskat made the news repeatedly in the early 2000s. Its only school was condemned as a health hazard, and student Shannen Koostachin took her demands for a new school to Ottawa in 2007. Four years later, Chief Theresa Spence (b. 1963) declared a state of emergency over inadequate housing. What made the situation worse was that the multinational corporation DeBeers was just 80 km away making a steady profit mining diamonds from Cree lands. The agreement DeBeers signed with Attawapiskat to share the mine's benefits did not include infrastructure, such as schools and houses, because that was, they argued, the responsibility of the Canadian government.⁸ On December 11, 2012, Spence announced that she would go on a hunger strike to protest unfulfilled treaties.⁹

When Spence announced her hunger strike, she joined an already growing wave of protest and resurgence among Aboriginal people. The protest centred on government Bill C-45, a 457-page omnibus bill that loosened legal restrictions inhibiting investment in Canadian resources. The changes that C-45 introduced to the *Indian Act*, for example, made it easier to lease or surrender reserve land by removing the democratic requirement for a community-wide vote. First Nations were not consulted on any of these changes. Within a month of C-45's first reading, on 10 November 2012, four Aboriginal women in Saskatoon — Sylvia McAdam, Nina Wilson, Jessica Gordon, and Sheelah McLean — conducted a teach-in on the bill, which they publicized under the name **Idle No More**.¹⁰

For the next six months, Idle No More exemplified Aboriginal resurgence. Social media was a major force in Idle No More: by May 2013, there had been over 1.2 million Twitter mentions of the #Idlenomore hashtag. The social media profile of Idle No More underscores an important feature of the movement: it was diverse and dispersed in its power and its leadership — not linked to any mainstream Aboriginal organization. Idle No More acknowledged the importance of women in Aboriginal communities, and they often took the stage at events. To honour her leadership, the movement rallied behind Chief Spence in her hunger strike.

To emphasize the social media component is, however, to miss the incredible live experience of the movement. Hundreds attended teach-ins across the country to learn more about bill C-45, and how it violated treaty rights. Thousands marched on Parliament Hill on January 10, 2013 and participated in coordinated days of action across the country.

The Harper apology in 2008 and the subsequent findings of the TRC, released in 2015, have given Canadians ample reason to reflect on their failed relationship with Aboriginal people. Yet Aboriginal people ask not that Canadians focus on the past, but on the present and the future. TRC Chair, Chief Justice Murray Sinclair, has said that Canada will fail to uphold the spirit of the 2008 apology unless it commits to involving Aboriginal people

7. Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, *Aboriginal Children in Care*, 6.

8. Kelly Crichton, Producer, *8th Fire: Canada, Aboriginal Peoples and the Way Forward*, Documentary Series, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2012, accessed April 27, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/player/Radio/More+Shows/8th+Fire+-+CBC+Series/Doc+Zone+video/Promos/ID/2172311969/>.

9. The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement* (Winnipeg, MB: ARP Books, 2014), 391.

10. *Ibid.*, 390.

in decisions about their lands and resources.¹¹ This too was Idle No More's demand as the movement expressed renewed pride among Aboriginal peoples for their grassroots leadership and traditional methods of peaceful social change.

Key Points

- The intent of Harper's 2008 apology was to bring an end to the saga of the residential schools, but it provided little in the way of a plan for moving forward.
- Compensation and a Royal Commission on Truth and Reconciliation followed.
- Aboriginal peoples sought two things in particular: a resurgence, rebuilding of their cultures and communities, along with an equitable share of Canadian prosperity. Substandard housing conditions, water supplies, and school facilities on reserves became a focus.
- Changes to the *Indian Act* introduced in 2012 promised to further weaken Aboriginal control over reserve and traditional lands — a prospect that spurred the Idle No More movement.
- One result of these developments has been a shift in discourse among Aboriginal peoples and among Canadians generally.

Attributions

Figure 11.20

[Idle No More 2013 Ottawa 1](#) by Michelle Caron ([Moxy](#)) is used under a [CC-BY-SA-3.0](#) license.

Figure 11.21

[Jericho Diamond Mine pit Nunavut Canada](#) by [Tomchurchill](#) is in the [public domain](#).

11. APTN National News, "PM Harper Has Failed to Live up to Promise of 2008 Residential School Apology: TRC," June, 2, 2015, accessed April 27, 2016, <http://aptn.ca/news/2015/06/02/pm-harper-failed-live-promise-2008-residential-school-apology-trc/>.

Week 12 - Working Lives

12.1 Industrialization, Labour, and Historians

ROBERT SWEENEY, DEPT. OF HISTORY, AND MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND



Figure 3.8 Postcards like this one were a means to promote the industrial culture emerging in towns like Oshawa in 1910.

Canada was the first colony to industrialize, and it did so in the third quarter of the 19th century. Although well after Great Britain and Belgium, this was only a decade or so behind the United States, more or less contemporaneous with France, and well ahead of Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, and Russia. Prior to the 1970s, however, Canadian historians did not realize this. Instead, historians debated whether industrialization resulted from Sir John A. Macdonald's National Policy of 1879 or under the Laurier government at the turn of the century. Both sides attributed this late industrialization to an over-reliance on the export of staples: cod, furs, timber, and wheat. As the presumed centrality of political leaders in these narratives suggests, most historians considered industrialization to have been the result of federal government policy, rather than an organic maturation of settler colonialism.¹ Starting in the mid-1970s, two complimentary but distinct new schools of thought changed this historical debate.

In French Canada, influenced by the work of Stanley Ryerson,² researchers at the Université du Québec à Montréal pushed back the start date for industrialization in Montreal to the late 1840s when, harnessing the

1. The classic statement, which went through five editions by 1977, is Arthur R. M. Lower's *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada* (Toronto: Longmans, Green, 1946).

2. Stanley B. Ryerson, *Unequal Union: Roots of Crisis in the Canadas, 1815-1873* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1968).

hydraulic power of the locks of the Lachine Canal, the first large-scale factories were built.³ From the outset, this new research stressed the importance of social history, itself a reflection of the turbulent debates (at that time) over the national question in Quebec. Strikes by journeymen shoemakers over the introduction of machine tools and by carters opposed to the Grand Trunk railway monopoly were depicted as challenging the new industrial order,⁴ while the dire living conditions for the emerging working class became a major focus of historical work.⁵ Soon debates on method, particularly over how we should interpret census data, led to a considerably more nuanced view that challenged this early *misérabiliste* literature;⁶ at the same time, careful analysis of work processes demonstrated the significance of gender to understanding working class resistance.⁷ More recent work has shown both substantial inter-generational social mobility, most strikingly among Irish Catholics, and a serious deterioration in the status of women.⁸ The focus has remained on Montreal, the financial and industrial capital of Canada until the 1930s, but detailed studies of moulders and iron workers in the Saint-Maurice Valley and ship's labourers in Quebec City have shown how integrated 19th century labour markets were in North America.

Meanwhile, in English Canada, a group of graduate students interested in labour history built on the pioneering work of Manitoban H. Claire Pentland (1914-78) to chronicle the industrialization of Toronto and Hamilton in the 1860s and 1870s.⁹ In 1975, these young scholars created their own journal, *Labour/Le Travail*. Rejecting traditional, largely institutional, labour history and highly critical of quantitative historical sociology, these scholars focused on working class culture. They argued that skilled male craftsmen drew on a "producer ideology", which was highly critical of lawyers, merchants, middlemen and bankers, to develop their own alternate view of the world. This critical stance was presented by historians as a powerful and potentially revolutionary defence of the working man, one that spoke out strongly against prevailing business values. Workers made their mark in various institutions and movements including the **Knights of Labor** (which may have organized as many as one in five waged workers in Ontario during the 1880s), the struggle for a shorter working day, and print media – edited by "brain workers."¹⁰ The significance of class conflict in Ontario has since been questioned by the suggestion that, there, industrialization was more a case of **craft capitalism**.¹¹ More generally, the idea of a coherent working class culture has been challenged by the work of Ian McKay of

3. This idea formed the cornerstone for the highly influential interpretation of Quebec as a typical part of North America, a position first developed in Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, and Jean-Claude Robert, *Histoire du Québec Contemporain, Tome 1 De la Confédération à la Crise (1867-1929)* (Montreal: Boréal Express, 1979).

4. Joanne Burgess, "L'industrie de la Chaussure à Montréal 1840-1870 — le Passage de l'Artisanat à la Fabrique," *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique Française*, vol. 31, no. 2 (1977): 187-210; Margaret Heap, "La Grève des Charretiers à Montréal, 1864," *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique Française*, vol. 31, no. 4 (1977): 371-96.

5. Jean De Bonville, *Jean-Baptiste Gagnepetit: Les Travailleurs Montréalais à la Fin du XIXe Siècle* (Montreal: L'Aurore, 1975); Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993).

6. Gilles Lauzon, "Cohabitation et Déménagements en Milieu Ouvrier Montréalais," *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique Française*, vol. 46, no. 1 (1992): 115-42.

7. Jacques Ferland, "Syndicalisme Parcellaire et Syndicalisme Collectif: Une Interpretation Socio-Techniques des Conflits Ouvriers dans Deux Industries Québécoises (1880-1914)," *Labour/Le Travail*, 19 (1987): 48-88.

8. Sherry Olson and Patricia Thornton, *Peopling the North American City: Montreal 1840-1900* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011); Bettina Bradbury, *Wife to Widow: Lives, Laws, and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Montreal* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011).

9. H. Clare Pentland's 1961 doctoral thesis at the University of Toronto was published 20 years later as *Labour and Capital in Canada, 1650-1860* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1981). The two most influential works by this group of scholars were Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980) and Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979).

10. Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

11. Robert B. Kristofferson, *Craft Capitalism: Craftworkers and Early Industrialization in Hamilton, Ontario, 1840-1872* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

Queen's University. Initially he applied to the Maritimes the idea, developed by British historian Raphael Samuel (1934-96), that industrialization was not a simple process of factories with machines replacing older ways of making things. Rather, it was a complex process involving both hand and machine tools in an uneven development characterized by a limited number of factories servicing numerous highly competitive workshops and manufacturers. This complexity meant no single working class experience was ever possible. Indeed, this very diversity of experience contributed to the remarkable social stability of late-Victorian Canada, by impeding the growth of a shared sense of class. A new coherent critique of industrial society did emerge, but only slowly and it never represented all or even most of the working class. Furthermore, it shared rather than challenged the positivist, masculinist and — most importantly as Canada once more became a destination for immigrants — racist ideas then dominant in bourgeois society.¹²

Moving industrialization back a full generation or more changes how we conceive late 19th century Canada. Rather than a “peaceful kingdom” taking a constitutional road to democracy that slowly industrialized under the guidance of wise political leaders, post-Confederation Canada is now seen as a country struggling with the serious social and economic problems of early industrial society. Confederation, the purchase of Rupert's Land, the numbered treaties, the *Indian Act*, the Métis rebellions, and the resettlement of both the Prairies and British Columbia are now seen in quite a different light. These events were all parts of a complex process of remaking the northern half of North America into an industrial capitalist society.

Key Points

- Industrialization began earlier in Canada than in many other jurisdictions, and earlier than was long thought to be the case.
- Workers' experiences of industrialization were diverse, which had consequences for the development of a working class consciousness.
- Industrialization brought in its wake significant social transformations and challenges.

Attributions

Figure 3.8

[Oshawa's Factories \(HS85-10-22386\)](#) by [LibraryBot](#) (from the British Library) is in the [public domain](#).

12. Samuel's path-breaking analysis appeared as "Workshop of the World," *History Workshop Journal*, 3 (1973): 3-61. McKay's analysis of work in the Maritimes began in his graduate studies and then appeared in several articles, the most important of which is "Capital and Labour in the Halifax Baking and Confectionery Industry During the Last Half of the 19th Century," *Labour/Le Travail*, 3 (1978): 63-108. His Macdonald Prize-winning analysis of working class politics is *Reasoning Otherwise: Leftists and The People's Enlightenment in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2008).

12.2 Rise of a Working Class



Figure 3.15 A Canadian working class arose in the major urban centres; it was also fashioned in relatively remote resource towns like Port Essington on the northwest coast where Aboriginal, Euro-Canadian, and immigrant labour from Asia and Europe met for the first time.

The Canadian working class was emerging well before 1867. By Confederation one could say for the first time that the growth of the working class was now unstoppable. The creation of the Dominion of Canada took place precisely at that moment when widespread industrialization was visibly underway. In 1851, fewer than a quarter of Hamilton, Ontario's workers laboured in workshops of ten or more employees; by 1871 the share was more than 80%.¹ In less than two decades, Hamilton had been transformed from a market town dominated by commerce into a powerful symbol of heavy industry. Significant and startling though this change was at the time, it was dwarfed by developments in the 1890s. In that decade, Canadian economic growth simultaneously intensified in the older cities and found new fields in which to flourish in the West. The population of Canada in 1901 was 5,371,315; ten years later it was 7,206,643 – an increase of 34%. At the same time, however, the labour force grew from 1,899,000 in 1901 to 2,809,000 in 1911, a phenomenal 50% increase.² To put this into some perspective, there were only 3,463,000 people in the Dominion in 1867 — by 1911 there were close to that many working, wage-earning Canadians. The working class were motivated and shaped by different factors in the various regions of the country, although common themes were quick to arise.

1. Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 83.

2. Statistics Canada, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd ed., ed. F. H. Leacy (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1983): D498-511.

Workplace Conditions

A middle-aged factory worker in 1870 would likely remember very clearly working in settings where having a half-dozen other employees felt crowded. In the 1860s, working spaces were designed for small teams of mostly manual labourers and artisans. That was about to change.

Industrializing employers were finding their way in a new kind of business. Some came into it from their own smaller operations: small producers (some of them artisans) began employing more staff, mechanizing some processes, moving to larger spaces, and becoming manufacturers. This evolutionary model co-existed with instances where factory owners arrived ready-made from other parts of Canada, but more often, from the United States or the United Kingdom. Increased linkages across industries and systems also meant that **capitalists** and factory owners in one line of business regularly sought to close gaps in supply lines by means of **vertical integration**.

These varied circumstances created distinctive conditions of work. For example, the two principal coal mining operations on Vancouver Island in the late 19th century were owned by the London-based and investor-driven Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company (VCMLC) and the Dunsmuir family. The former sent out managers, sometimes recruiting support staff locally, and generally encouraged their workers to buy their own homes and to build community institutions. The latter was led by Scottish immigrants, Robert and Joan Dunsmuir, their son James, and a son-in-law. Robert had been a miner in Ayrshire, Scotland and James spent some of his youth learning the trade first-hand beneath Vancouver Island. Their involvement in the miners' lives was much more pervasive and included the use of company housing and stores (both as services and as weapons during disputes). The VCMLC operation had to generate dividends for shareholders, while the Dunsmuir mines were run with an eye to making money for the owners and their kin, and as such were far less arms-length operations.



Figure 3.16 Their coalminers lived in shacks but the Dunsmuir family lived in style. James Dunsmuir's Hatley Castle near Victoria has, since his death, served as a military college and Royal Roads University, as well as the home of the *X-Men* in a series of movies.

Coal mines and other resource-extraction industries in these years were a critical part of the pre-Great War economy. Providing fuel for steam power made coal important but it was also key to heating food and urban homes; cities and forest clearing had outstripped the ability of town people to find their own fuel. Likewise

the food production industries of the late 19th century existed only because urbanites — the fastest growing demographic on the planet — could not address their own food supply. The grain economy boom of the turn of the century was part of this and so, too, was the growth of canneries. These appeared in fruit- and vegetable-growing regions but they were most impressive in the fisheries. What these resource-extraction industries had in common, then, was a growing market that was certain to continue growing and, in the years between 1867 and 1914, a need for large numbers of labourers.

Craig Heron (York University) discusses the creation of workers' communities and a working class.

Race and Class

West Coast coal mines and canneries were sites of diversity, where Euro-Canadians worked alongside Chinese, Aboriginal, African-American, and Japanese labourers. These environments did not emerge by accident. Industrialization in Europe witnessed mass migrations off the land and into cities and the simultaneous conversion of peasant populations into urban industrial workers. This pattern could be seen in Scotland as farmers flooded into the factories and shipyards of Glasgow, and in Liverpool, which was awash with Irish immigrants performing all manner of labour. In Canada, there wasn't much in the way of a peasantry to convert into industry; it had to be imported from elsewhere. In places like British Columbia, the choices came down to the **proletarianization** of Aboriginal people or the import of unskilled and mostly agricultural workers from Asia. If British Columbia had a more pastoral landscape and not a lot of mineral, timber, or fishery resources, then it is likely that the population would have been very differently composed.



Figure 3.17 It would be difficult not to be simultaneously impressed by innovative machinery like this one and concerned about the displacement of labour that it entailed. The “Iron Chink” revolutionized the salmon canning industry on the Pacific Northwest coast.

Wages and conditions of work in factories, mines, and mills varied sharply according to race. Age was another factor. If the question was: Where do we find largely unskilled labour that will work under supervision in

industrial conditions at rates that will profit employers? one answer was to find labour from a displaced or stressed peasant population. Another answer: from among the child population.



Figure 3.18 Children contributed to the household income in a variety of ways, including coal gathering, which provided fuel to households and could be sold as well. A young girl in Toronto, ca. 1900.

Childhood and Labour

Boys and girls had very different experiences in wage labour. Even in urban environments girls' labour was conceived of within certain gendered boundaries: Domestic work, child-minding, and "fine-work" — textiles and stitchery — were likely destinations. Girls work was, too, comparatively undervalued so the likelihood was always stronger that boys, rather than girls, would be sent out first to find wages for the household.³ Female income levels were generally capped, too, by expectations that they would become either dependents (in a male breadwinner model) or their income was little more than a supplement to the husband's or father's wage. Boys, on the other hand, were part of a gendered culture of apprenticeships and the expectation that, with age and experience, their income levels would rise. Boys were welcomed into the workplace from the age of eight years until the late 1870s when social pressures and legislation began to push the acceptable starting age upward to approximately 12 years. Child labour practices, in this respect, varied from province to province for two reasons: labour legislation was a provincial responsibility and different industrial activities predominated across the country with practices being tailored to meet those local conditions. There was no consensus about a vision for childhood: whether children should be sent into often dangerous workplaces or into schools was one of several

3. Bettina Bradbury began considering these relationships between household members, gender, and the economy in a series of studies she undertook from the late 1970s to the early 21st century. Her earliest work — "The Family Economy and Work in an Industrializing City: Montréal in the 1870s," *Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers/Communications Historiques* (1979): 71-96 — remains a landmark.

points of debate. Child labour legislation might protect working children from some hazards but it also barred them from contributing to the **household wage**. As one study of children in mining observes,

Efforts to define children's dependence clashed sharply with the working-class family wage economy, whereby boys and girls began to labour for wages at a young age as a key survival strategy. For this reason, working-class parents were among the principal opponents of legislation aimed to restrict children's employment.⁴

Some employers echoed these working-class qualms, principally because they saw child labour laws as a way of reducing profits by forcing the employers to hire more expensive adults. On the West Coast, restrictions on child labour chased the regulation of Asian labour and vice versa. The goal of a sufficient household wage among Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal workers could be undercut by adult Chinese and Japanese labourers, who were willing to work for about the same amount as boys. The racist context of debate on the issue of child labour was something of a distraction in that the English-speaking world was moving away from the use of children in industry. On the opposite coast, for example, and in the absence of a competing immigrant population, Nova Scotian collieries boys represented a falling share of an expanding workforce from 1866-1911, during which time their presence shrank from as much as 27% of the workforce underground (at Sydney Mines in 1886 and 1891) to as little as 5.5% in 1911 (at Springhill).⁵ The tide was turning against child labour.

This change in attitude is found throughout the 1889 *Report of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital*. Established in 1887, this was the eighth investigative enquiry into social, economic, and administrative issues. One study describes it this way: "The Royal Commission ... is a testament to not only the turbulent economic relations in late-Victorian Canada, but the emergence of the Canadian state's active role in social relations."⁶ The Royal Commission's recommendations – apart from the idea of an annual Labour Day — were mostly ignored by the federal government (which claimed that changes in labour conditions were rightly in the provincial jurisdiction) but its disclosures about child labour were widely covered in newspapers and aroused public concern. In the commissioners' own words:

In some parts of the Dominion the employment of children of very tender years is still permitted. This injures the health, stunts the growth and prevents the proper education of such children, so that they cannot become healthy men and women or intelligent citizens. It is believed that the regular employment in mills, factories and mines of children less than 14 years of age should be strictly forbidden. Further, [we] think that young persons should not be required to work during the night at any time, nor before seven o'clock in the morning during the months of December, January, February and March.⁷

Under the ominous heading of "Child-Beating," the commissioners made this recommendation:

4. Robert McIntosh, *Boys in the Pits: Child Labour in Coal Mines* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 40.

5. *Ibid.*, 71.

6. Stephen J. Cole, "Commissioning Consent: An Investigation of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital, 1886-1889," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, (Kingston, ON, Queen's University, 2007): ii.

7. Canada. *Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital, 1889*, republished and edited with an introduction by Greg Kealey in *Canada Investigates Industrialism: The Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital, 1889* (Abridged) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 13.

The darkest pages in the testimony ... are those recording the beating and imprisonment of children employed in factories. Your Commissioners earnestly hope that these barbarous practices may be removed, and such treatment made a penal offence, so that Canadians may no longer rest under the reproach that the lash and the dungeon are accompaniments of manufacturing industry in the Dominion.⁸

Provincial restrictions on child labour — and on other aspects of workplace safety and laws — were only as good as the inspectors whose business it was to keep employers in line. In the British Columbia Ministry of Mines' *Annual Reports*, for example, one finds one or two inspectors in the pre-1914 era attempting to cover an industry that extended from Vancouver Island to the Kootenays and into the Cariboo. Their arrival was always anticipated, so there was little chance of a surprise inspection. The reports issued by the inspectors, moreover, indicate a willingness on the part of mine owners and supervisors to comply with the law but whenever a disaster occurred — and mine explosions in Nanaimo claimed over 200 lives in 1887-1888 — the roll-call of the dead invariably revealed children well under the legal age.

An Inspector Reports

James R. Brown, a Toronto factory inspector testified to the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital that his team had been set the task of inspecting Ontario's factories and that the work was largely completed.

Q. Did you find in many places where women were employed that they were working longer than the [1884 Ontario *Factories Act*] contemplates?

A. Not in a great number of places. I found that principally in woolen [*sic*] mills.

Q. What were the longest hours for which you found women employed?

A. Sixty-six hours a week.

Q. Did you find any opposition to shortening the hours?

A. No; in each case where I found them working that time the employers stated that they were not aware the Act had been in force, and they were waiting for some formal intimation about the matter. Of course, they stated they would comply with the Act and reduce the hours of labour, so as not to exceed 60 hours.

Q. Did you notice [...] any large percentage of children?

A. Yes; in some of them — in the cotton mills and some woolen mills, in cigar factories and knitting works, and some others.

Q. Were there many of those children below the age designated by the Act?

A. Well, I found about 40 girls under 14. Girls are not allowed under 14 nor boys under 12. I found six boys altogether nine years of age, and some ten or eleven.

9

8. Ibid., 14.

9. Canada. *Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital, 1889*, republished and edited with an introduction by Greg Kealey in *Canada Investigates Industrialism: The Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital, 1889 (Abridged)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 95-7.

Long hours were only one source of complaint among factory workers. Punishments abounded and were often arbitrary. Testimony from a 14 year old journeyman cigar maker in Montreal in 1887-1889 revealed a regime of arbitrary beatings (“a crack across the head with the fist”) when a job was done poorly and the possibility of being imprisoned in the factory in a “black hole,” a windowless room in the factory cellar for upwards of 7 hours at time.¹⁰ Adults might escape beatings but not fines; dismissals were not uncommon. Moreover, involvement in a labour organization or a strike — particularly in a leadership capacity — could result in a worker’s name being added to a **blacklist**. Canada was large enough a country that a blacklisted worker might outrun this sanction, but sometimes the sanction followed them even into the United States. Civil suits were sometimes launched against labour activists and many labour leaders spent some time behind bars. In the 20th century, as the size and distribution of industries and corporations increased, managers came to rely heavily on intelligence gathered by industrial spies. Employers, at times, sympathized with some of the social goals of workers’ organizations, or unions, and began experimenting with what has come to be known as **corporate welfarism**. This is an array of services and benefits provided by the employer (but generally outside of a collective agreement). Employers did not, however, sympathize with the unions themselves and were often ruthless in disposing of the organizations and their supporters.

Class and Gender

Women were on the frontlines of industrialization and the creation of a working class. In 1901, 53% of all Canadian females were participating in the labour force, compared to 78.3% of all males.¹¹ The labour of women was less visible than that of men in these years because of the persistence of cottage labour — or, in urban environments, “outwork.” Materials would be taken home by women workers and stitched together or in some other way refined so as to add value. This kind of labour (sometimes referred to as **sweated labour**) could easily be as gruelling as any factory work. Women were employed for both types of work in Toronto in 1868, when the *Globe* newspaper reported that some 4,000 women were either factory workers or they were engaged in outwork.¹² Overall, the mechanization and systematization of work created more and more opportunities for women to engage in wage labour. The growing obsession of the 19th century state (federal and provincial) with surveying populations and businesses means that we have suggestive (if not comprehensive) information on the range of women’s experiences in the workforce.

Women’s wages were typically a fraction of men’s, regardless of sector. The 1889 *Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital* reported that women’s wages in Ontario were about one-third those earned by men. The assumption that a patriarchal breadwinner brought home the bulk of the household wage was widespread and difficult to dislodge (and, indeed, persists in some quarters today). Women’s wages were thus trivialized as top-ups or “pin money.” As men’s wages lowered due to mechanization and increased competition for work that required fewer skills, the proportional contribution of women to the household economy became

10. Canada. *Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital, 1889*, republished and edited with an introduction by Greg Kealey in *Canada Investigates Industrialism: The Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital, 1889* (Abridged) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 214-16.

11. Statistics Canada, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd ed., ed. F. H. Leacy (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1983): D107-123.

12. Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 83.

greater and greater. Children, too, were increasingly in demand in the industrial workforce, even sometimes taking jobs that had otherwise been the preserve of adult males.

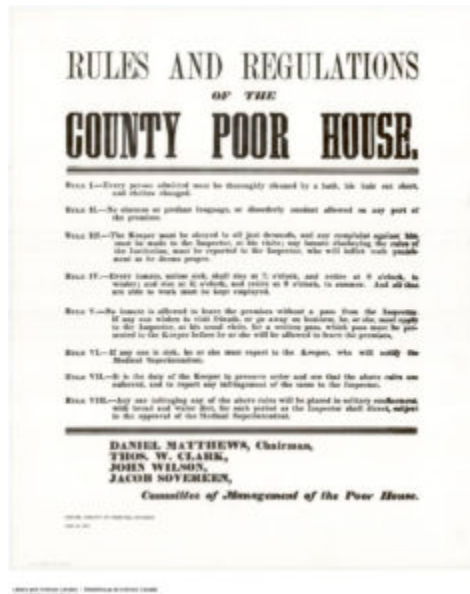


Figure 3.19 Poorhouses were disappearing but, in 1871, they were still a refuge for desperate Canadians and a source of some dread.

In cities like Montreal, living conditions were particularly bleak in the last 40 years of the century. Housing was of a poor quality and cramped; infant mortality rates were high, as were maternal mortality rates. Historian of the working-class, Brian Palmer, describes these domestic situations as potentially dangerous ones for women:

The underside of the adaptive families of Victorian Canada is a history of husbands deserting wives, of brutality in which women and children suffered the presence and power of abusive men, and of males (and, occasionally, females) appropriating the paid and unpaid labour of their spouses and offspring as well as availing themselves of sexual access to those who, emotionally and physically, had few resources to resist.¹³

By the end of the century, something like one-in-every-eight wage earners was a woman. The “needle trades” were dominated by women, and textile towns saw industrialism effectively feminized. The systematization of cigar production allowed the penetration of what was once an adult male enclave by large numbers of boys, girls, and women. Women’s involvement in the labour force increased dramatically from 1891-1921. In an era when the population overall and the size of the labour force doubled, the number of gainfully employed women expanded even more rapidly. In the professions (which include teaching and nursing), the numbers leapt from fewer than 20,000 to nearly 93,000; clerical and sales workers exploded from 8,530 to just shy of 128,000. The category “operatives,” which mostly covers industrial workers, saw women’s involvement rise from 150,649 to 240,572. However, the number of women on farms was flat and, as a share of the population, that number was falling. The

13. Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 101.

number of women listed as labourers fell from 1,049 to 441, but rebounded to 11,716 in 1931 — which suggests that the category's definition was an issue.¹⁴



Figure 3.20 Mechanization and systematic organization of the workplace were defining features of deskilling in industrial settings. Women in war production at Canadian General Electric, Peterboro, ca. 1914-18.

One distinctive aspect of women's work lives was the influence of reproduction on labour. That is, the raising of families. While boys would rise through a process of apprenticeship through journeyman to adult worker and would continue on that rarely-broken path until they retired or died, girls and women entered and withdrew from the workforce more intermittently. Girls' labour in the late 19th century was more heavily regulated (most provincial legislation kept them out of the workforce for two years longer than boys) and so they were more likely to get some formal education or take hidden work in domestic settings or outwork. If the household's income improved, girls might be withdrawn from paid work in order to contribute more to the rearing of younger siblings — a strategy that would perhaps free up adult women in the household for wage-earning opportunities. Bettina Bradbury's studies of women in industrializing Montreal show wives' participation in the workforce proceeding through life cycle stages. The highest levels of participation are likely to come before the arrival of children, dipping with the arrival of infants and then dropping severely when the household contains children between one and 10 years of age. Participation rates recover and peak once again when at least one of the children passes the age of 11 years.¹⁵

Historians have struggled to recover what class awareness and experience meant to women at this time. Statements of solidarity and a commitment to political and social reform were often tempered by the social conventions of the Victorian era. While women might have challenged some of those limitations, they perpetuated others. In some women's union locals in Ontario in the 1880s and 1890s, the membership was so reluctant to take on "unfeminine" leadership roles that they requested the appointment of male organizers.¹⁶ Associations like the Knights of Labor gave a high priority to what were considered at the time to be gender issues. It is safe to assume

14. Statistics Canada, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd ed., ed. F. H. Leacy (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1983): 86-106, D123

15. Bettina Bradbury, "The Family Economy and Work in an Industrializing City: Montreal in the 1870s," in *Cities and Urbanization: Canadian Historical Perspectives*, ed. Gilbert A. Stelter (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1990): 141.

16. Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 136.

that these positions reflect the feelings of their female membership, as well as at least a considerable proportion of the male Knights. Historian of labour, Brian Palmer, has commented on this phenomenon:

[The Knights] deplored the capitalist degradation of honest womanhood that resulted from exploiting women at the workplace; many took great offence at the coarse language, shared water closets (toilets) and intimate physical proximities that came with virtually all factory labour in Victorian Canada. Nor did the Order turn a blind eye to domestic violence and the ways in which men could take advantage of women sexually. Local assembly courts could try and convict members of the Knights of Labor for wife-beating, and the Ontario Order was a strong backer of the eventually successful campaign to enact seduction legislation.¹⁷

What all of these studies reveal is that industrialism brought women and children along with men into the urban cauldron of change in the same era. Moreover, this constituted a perceived change in the long-standing rural and commercial way of doing things. Life courses changed, conditions of work were invented out of nothing, new anxieties replaced old, and there was — in this mesh of experiences — a realization that a new social class was emerging.

Class Consciousness and Resistance

Studies of the birth of working classes identify two aspects in particular: the shared experiences of belonging to a population dependent on wage-labour in an industrializing economy, and awareness of the same. Loyalties cut across societies and cultures in many directions, muting the possibility of working people seeing themselves as members of a common socioeconomic category or class. One measure of that emerging and evolving class consciousness is the incidence of labour disruption in the 19th century.

The pre-Confederation era saw a rapid rise in labour disputes, accelerating in the 1860s. These principally involved small local associations of skilled craftsmen employed in factories. People of this generation could recall being independent craftsmen and transitioning into wage labour; now they were facing the mechanization of processes and a consequent devaluation of their hard-earned skills. These workers were generally literate and aware of political and international events. They recognized that their struggles echoed those occurring in Britain and the United States. Every strike, in this context, was like a flare sent up from a ship in distress. Inevitably, others would respond.

By 1880, it is estimated that there were approximately 165 labour organizations in Canada, some of them local, many of them international. Virtually all of these were craft-based. As such, they perpetuated many of the associational rituals and practices from pre-industrial times. Marches, banners, oaths of loyalty, and the building of assembly halls were the most visible of these. Less obvious was the role that early unions played as social safety nets.¹⁸ Almost all had a “benevolent society” component to their work that involved life insurance for members’ families. The importance of this role could be seen when industrial accidents — most spectacularly in coal mining disasters — snuffed out lives a hundred at a time. Providing for widows and orphans was thus core to their mandate and an important part of building identification between labour and its community.

17. Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 146.

18. Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), 94-6.

Table 3.1 Work force by occupational category and sex, 1891-1921

All occupations			
	Total	M	F
1921	3,173,169	2,683,019	490,150
1911	2,725,148	2,358,519	366,629
1901	1,782,621	1,544,050	238,571
1891	1,607,945	1,411,936	196,009
Owners, managers			
	Total	M	F
1921	264,245	253,825	10,420
1911	219,008	207,923	11,085
1901	84,040	81,004	3,036
1891	78,639	74,668	3,971
Professional			
	Total	M	F
1921	173,222	80,249	92,973
1911	84,153	49,817	34,336
1901	85,590	42,389	40,201
1891	58,893	33,184	19,709
Clerical and sales			
	Total	M	F
1921	389,886	262,023	127,863
1911	226,448	175,434	51,014
1901	111,041	91,402	19,639
1891	84,474	75,944	8,530
Operatives			
	Total	M	F
1921	996,020	755,448	240,572
1911	933,577	689,890	243,687
1901	663,755	498,102	165,653
1891	543,560	392,911	150,649

Farm & Farm Labourers			
	Total	M	F
1921	1,040,787	1,022,906	17,881
1911	929,847	913,067	16,780
1901	715,528	706,627	8,901
1891	734,122	722,021	12,101
Labourers			
	Total	M	F
1921	309,009	308,568	441
1911	332,115	322,388	9,727
1901	125,667	124,526	1,141
1891	114,257	113,208	1,049

Data source: Statistics Canada, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd ed., ed. F. H. Leacy (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1983): D86-106.

Rise of Management

Another development that confirmed the change in workers' status since the mid-19th century was the rise of new management styles. Management generally became more widespread and dignified as a career in its own right. This was apparent in many environments, even underground, where new techniques for extracting (or winning) coal enabled greater supervision.

The workforce as a whole was growing in the three decades before 1920 and in no category more so than in "owners and managers" (as can be seen in the table above). Starting at 78,639 in 1891, the total number grew to 84,040 in 1901, and 219,008 in 1911. The number of women in this category leapt from 3,036 in 1901 to 11,085 in 1911.¹⁹ Early in the 20th century attempts were made to rationalize systems of production that had lurched forward for 50 years without much thought given to systems. The most well-known body of thought on this subject is the scientific management model pioneered by the American Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856-1919). Sometimes referred to as Taylorism, these new approaches considered everything from the coordination of shift work, the positioning of machinery, and the inculcation of new industrial virtues like punctuality.

Taylorism was part of a growing middle class agenda of social reform that included child labour legislation, universal education, and **temperance** or **prohibition**. While Canadians beyond the working-class acknowledged that excesses of exploitation needed to be curbed and that the most vulnerable needed to be protected, an interventionist state was still some decades away. And, of course, Canadian federalism meant that social legislation would arise at the provincial level, so it would be unevenly developed and potentially idiosyncratic.

19. Statistics Canada, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd ed., ed. F. H. Leacy (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1983): D86-106.

Middle-class engagement in these issues, however, could only go so far and reformism quickly ran up against emerging class-based antipathies. These tensions would explode in the first two decades of the 20th century.

Key Points

- Industrialization produced a class of wage earners whose numbers grew rapidly in the 19th century.
- Working conditions in factories and mines were diverse but generally dangerous and unpleasant.
- Racial and gender categories divided and complicated the working-class experience.
- Children contributed to working-class household incomes, but were regularly abused in the workplace and were increasingly subjected to regulation by the state.
- Early labour organizations campaigned for improved working conditions for women and children as well as men.
- More complex systems and larger scales of production helped to produce a growing class of managers and supervisors.

Attributions

Figure 3.15

[Port Essington](#) by Unknown is in the [public domain](#).

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Figure 3.17

[The Iron Chink](#) by [upyerno](#) is used under a [CC BY 2.0](#) license.

Figure 3.18

[Young girl probably with bag of coal gathered from beside box cars \(Online MIKAN no.3194020\)](#) by Library and Archives Canada / PA-118224 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 3.19

[Rules and Regulations of the County Poor House \(Online MIKAN no.2988345\)](#) by Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. 1984-4-901 / Committee of Management of the Poor House has nil restrictions on use.

Figure 3.20

[Women working on primers, \[Canadian General Electric Co. Ltd., Peterboro, Ont. \(Online MIKAN no.3371002\)\]](#) by Canada. Dept. of National Defence / Library and Archives Canada / PA-024490 is in the [public domain](#).

12.3 Craft and Industrial Unions



Figure 3.32 Labour Day celebrations in Toronto, ca. 1900.

In the 19th century, there was little in the way of what we call **collective bargaining**. Workers regularly entered into contracts directly with employers where the terms may or may not have been standardized. Typically, employers would post a scale of pay as a means of attracting employees but variations could occur. The implications of this situation could be severe. Going on strike constituted a breach of contract between the employer and the individual employee, making the worker liable to dismissal, legal liability (including fines), and even jail time.

The British *Masters and Servants Act* still prevailed in the Dominion in the 1870s. Elements of it would survive for decades due to the divided constitutional responsibility for labour: federal and provincial laws both came into play. As one study demonstrates:

Fines and imprisonment for simple breaches of employment contracts remained available in several provinces, and in the Dominion employment jurisdiction, well into the 20th century. [...] Despite the brave promises of its preamble, the true policy of the [Dominion's labour law] was not to place employers and workers on a footing of legal equality, but to leave the provinces to their own devices while seeming to be doing something to keep the trains on time.¹

1. Paul Craven, "The Modern Spirit of the Law': Blake, Mowat, and the Breaches of Contract Act, 1877," *Essays in the History of Canadian Law: In Honour of R.C.B. Risk*, eds. G. Blaine Baker and Jim Phillips (Toronto: Osgood Society for Canadian Legal History/University of Toronto Press, 1999): 159, 162.

In short, the *Trade Unions Act* of 1872 offered little to organized labour other than to recognize its growing importance on the Canadian political and economic landscape.

Tory and Liberal politicians both recognized a constituency in the making when they looked at the working class, but their first instincts were to support employers and the economic viability of Canada. That should hardly come as a surprise. Canadian democracy before the 1870s extended only to adult male property owners: the fathers of Confederation were white-collar professionals, merchants, and landowners, not artisans (let alone factory workers). As regards labour relations, the goals of Confederation (at both the federal and provincial level) were to achieve stability and reduce the possibility of workplace and strike violence, and to do that through increased regulation of labour associations. In the face of an obvious alliance between the provincial and federal state and employers, working people took a page from the book of labour elsewhere and began to organize so as to mitigate their weaknesses and amplify their voice.

The Nine Hour Movement

Local **unions** have their own histories and, therefore, the history of labour in Canada is the tale of a great many organizational processes and struggles. As a whole, however, Canadian labour in the 19th century could turn to a handful of events that were landmarks in the development of a working class.

The first of these was the Nine Hour Movement. Spurred by similar movements in Britain and the United States, agitation for a standardized workday began early in 1872, spreading outward from a hub in Hamilton. The Movement failed at this time, damaged by the decision of George Brown's employees in the Typographical Union to pursue their own agenda separately. The ongoing political rivalry between Brown and John A. Macdonald also played a role. Macdonald saw the strike at Brown's shop as an opportunity to undermine his opponent: he supplied funds to the printers, shoring up their *Ontario Workman* newspaper through the strike. While this intervention cost organized labour their Nine Hours, it presented a separate opportunity of sorts. In the aftermath of the strike, Macdonald cleared away the most repressive of federal anti-union laws and introduced the *Trade Unions Act*, 1872.

Historians have weighed Macdonald's motivations in promoting this legislation. Was he hoping to co-opt the labour movement and to ensure it could be regulated? Was he making a concession to unions which he saw as a necessary evil and an imminent reality? Was he hoping to win the support of the emergent working class by championing their ability to organize? Alternatively, was he merely playing catch-up with Britain? There, the *Trade Union Act* of 1871 legalized unions for the first time. It has been suggested, in this regard, that Macdonald was anxious to ensure that Canada remained appealing to potential British emigrants and worried that an archaic attitude toward labour organizations would deter engineers and other skilled workers from coming to Canada. Whatever Macdonald's motivations, the *Act* opened up enough room that year for the establishment of the first attempt at a national labour centre: the Canadian Labour Union (CLU).

The CLU had the misfortune of arriving just as a severe economic downturn took hold. It collapsed within three years. In the next decade, however, local Trades and Labour Councils would be established in the major cities, and from these would arise the successor institution, the **Trades and Labour Congress** of Canada (TLCC) in 1883.

This organization had far greater staying power and survives to this day (though considerably altered) in the form of the **Canadian Labour Congress** (the **CLC**).

Craft Unions

The older crafts — accessed through long apprenticeships — were the first to organize and did so before Confederation. Craft unionists had employed several tactics to secure favourable conditions in the workplace. One of their concerns regarding skilled workers — raised repeatedly — was that mechanization, new production systems, and intensification of supervision would cost them their independence and devalue their experience. As **deskilling** progressed, some of these unions advised their members against training new craftsmen so as to control the supply (and thus the price) of their labour. They also opposed competition from prison labour, unapprenticed workers, child labour, and the exploitation of immigrant workers who might accept lower wages.² The craft workers are sometimes described as the aristocracy of labour, the best paid and most highly skilled community of workers. **Respectability** was highly valued among craft workers and their ideal in terms of **industrial relations** was a respectful relationship with employers in which they would be treated as equals in an emergent liberal democratic order. This meant that, at times, the craft workers' inclination was to draw a line between themselves and unskilled labour.

The Knights of Labor

Several omnibus labour organizations flourished and then fizzled-out in the period between Confederation and 1920 — three in particular. Of these, the first provides a transition between the old crafts-based organizations and the new trade unions. It recognized the connected agendas and priorities of labour in the broadest sense. This was the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor.³



Figure 3.33 A Knights of Labor procession in Hamilton, ca. 1885.

2. Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History*, (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1989), 16.

3. Because the Knights began in the United States, the American spelling of “labor” is always applied.

Drawing on the traditions of secret societies, benevolent associations, and religious symbolism, the Knights had at least as much in common with fraternal orders — like the Masonic Lodge — as they did with the trade unions that followed. Founded in Philadelphia in 1869, the Knights crossed the border into Canada in the 1870s.

The Knights were enormously popular for several reasons. They drew all trades and crafts under their umbrella, included men and women, promoted temperance with regard to alcohol, and in the early years, their organization was shrouded in the mystery of secret rituals. The movement — and it was a movement in that it touched many aspects of life and spoke to a whole way of being, and not just industrial relations — was deeply imbued with the idea of a respectable working class. The older, skilled crafts that shared a common tradition of artisanal training and discrete organization in an era when unions were illegal put their stamp on the attitude and approach of the Knights. Its membership, however, was much broader.

In Canada, the Knights were noteworthy for their organizational skills and also for pulling into one body workers from English- and French-Canada. The Knights were also popular in the less industrialized communities of the West and extremely popular among workers in British Columbia. Their vision of a revitalized and reformed society, economy, and democracy had an enormous and general appeal in an era of rapid change and wild fluctuations in employment opportunities:

Somehow their moral outrage and vision of a more communitarian alternative caught the mood of thousands of anxious workers, who were prepared to take a stand against the dominant social and economic developments of the late 19th century. The sense of a great moral crusade was in the air.⁴

The Knights, of course, had enemies; in Canada the Catholic Church of Quebec was in the forefront. Archbishop Taschereau (1820-98) went so far as to issue an excommunication decree which forbade good Catholics from membership in the Knights.⁵ Did the Archbishop's fulminations matter? The Vatican told him to retreat, and in the year that followed nearly two-dozen new local assemblies of the Knights were established in Montreal.⁶ (The Knights did, however, drop the "Noble and Holy Order" title in the 1880s because Catholic members and clergymen were troubled by the apparent connection with Freemasonry.) The Knights had less success in Nova Scotia, where workers were reluctant to join this international organization. There, an indigenous working-class body — the Provincial Workmen's Association — filled the space that was elsewhere occupied by the Knights.

Although the Knights were largely inclusive, the door was not open to everyone. Bankers, lawyers, stockbrokers (and speculators in shares), and liquor vendors were not welcome — nor was Asian labour. The Knights were partially colour-blind in that they included African-Americans and African-Canadians. However, Asian immigrants constituted the one visible minority for which the Knights had no tolerance. The Knights backed Asian exclusion laws in the United States and in Canada, and portrayed Chinese labour as an army of potential strike breakers. Race riots in the Pacific Northwest targeting Chinese-Americans resulted in deaths and confirmed the Knights' adamant hostility to Asian workers. This was part of the appeal (and part of the limitation) of the

4. Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1989), 26.

5. Nive Voisine, "TASCHEREAU, ELZÉAR-ALEXANDRE," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed 29 June 2015, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/taschereau_elzear_alexandre_12E.html.

6. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 131.

Knights in British Columbia, where anti-Asian workers' groups abounded from the 1860s through the early 20th century.

The rhetoric, it must be said, was complex. What non-Asian workers had to say went well beyond a racist objection to working alongside Chinese labourers or losing their place in the workplace to immigrants. On Vancouver Island in the mid-1880s, the Knights argued that Chinese labour had a deleterious effect on the confidence and ability of young people. "Our boys," complained the Knights at Nanaimo, "grow up to near manhood without an opportunity to earn any part of their living such as they might have were there no Chinese, and such as boys have in other parts of the world." The mine manager went so far as to invoke fear of adolescent delinquency:

where Chinese labour is easily procured white youths from 15 years of age and upwards do not find such ready employment as elsewhere, and consequently are not so well trained in habits of industry. [There] is growing up amongst us a class of idlers who will not conduce to the well-being of the state.⁷

The impact of Asian workers on non-Asian youth, however, was at the end of the day another arrow in a quiver that overflowed with objections — real and imaginary.

The Knights began to fade in the 1880s, although they survived as active participants in labour negotiations here and there until the eve of the Great War in 1914. Their slide was a manifestation of the very economic uncertainty that the Knights wanted to address. As competition for jobs intensified, the opportunities to wring concessions from employers evaporated. Internal divisions over the Knights' rather tepid position on industrial militance cost them support. Workers increasingly wanted results and, if needs be, confrontations with recalcitrant employers. Dual membership in craft unions and the Knights allowed some workers to enjoy the philosophical and sociological ambitions of the Knights while fighting more concerted battles for better wages and working conditions through their unions. In 1886, the dangers of dual unionism came to the fore when the Knights endorsed cigar makers who were not part of the Cigar Makers' International Union (CMIU). This created competing associations in the same trade. Tobacco processing had a presence in every town of any size in Canada and the CMIU membership was outraged. Thereafter, the cigar makers began an exodus into a different kind of association.

7. Canada, Sessional Papers, *Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration*, no.54a (Ottawa: 1885): xvii, 88, 158.



Figure 3.34 Historic view of the Inland Cigar Factory in Kamloops, 1895. Note the presence of child workers.

The International Craft Unions

The Knights' loss of support fed the growth of a new labour centre. In the United States, this took the form in 1886 of the **American Federation of Labor (AFL)**, headed by the cigar makers' leader, Samuel Gompers. The same year, the Canadian equivalent — the Trades and Labour Congress — was established as a federation of local Labour Councils in the major cities. Canadian unions were the rule, not the exception at this time. Gompers' goal, however, was to unite Canadian and American workers along international craft lines.

While Canadian politicians were engaged in nation-building, skilled workers were simultaneously looking to international organizations for their future. Immigrants to Canada brought with them the labour traditions of their homelands and awareness that there were organizations onto which Canadians might graft their own. Some of the first international unions in Canada were based in Britain, but it was American craft unionism that led the way. Coopers, iron moulders, and shoe makers established cross-border alliances and shared strategies back and forth. Withdrawal of labour (in a strike) was invariably countered by employers with the introduction of new workers who were referred to as **strikebreakers** or, in the colloquial, scabs. Strikers had to adopt tactics to keep out strikebreakers, whether at the factory door or at the international border. Violent conflict between strikers and strikebreakers was a common occurrence and US-based organizations helped Canadian craft unions by discouraging American workers from playing the strikebreaker role, and by providing financial resources to sustain their Canadian partners.

International unionism of this kind took place in an industrial environment dominated by Great Lakes cities like Toronto, Buffalo, Hamilton, Cleveland, Windsor, and Detroit. Workers moved back and forth over the borders and across the lakes, raising the prospect of American strikebreakers showing up during Canadian disputes, and vice versa. There was also the possibility that, during strikes, factories on one side of the frontier would flood markets

on the other side with goods in such a way that the striking union's position would be undermined. Speaking with one voice had distinct advantages and clearly many Canadian craft workers agreed. The AFL-TLC alliance would prove to be a very long-lasting one.

AFL influence over Canadian locals increased through the 1890s, and in 1902 AFL elements took control of the TLC at its annual conference. The AFL's Canadian organizer, John Flett, was elected president; Knights and Canadian unions alike were expelled.

Industrial Unions and the IWW

The 1902 break with non-craft and purely Canadian organizations, however, left a gulf in the state of labour organization.

The process of deskilling was one factor in the rise of industrial labour. Another was the creation of wholly new industries unrelated to the sorts of things done by craft workers 50 years earlier. A good, and often militant, example was the street railway sector in the major cities, most of which were run by private businesses and none of which could be said to displace an older mode of production.

Both new industries and deskilling led to growing numbers of workers with limited skills to defend themselves, and a greater likelihood that they would face instability over their working career. Once work had achieved a degree of mechanization and automation, or where it had been reduced to the simplest of physical labours, it was possible to create a class of workers for whom apprenticeships held no attraction and few advantages. This class of less skilled worker, however, was an interchangeable part, easily dismissed and easily replaced. In addition, the industrial worker lacked the cultural capital of the craft and even the trade worker. There was no associational tradition, no history of organization or mutual support on which to erect a new movement. Industrial workers were often new immigrants with limited abilities in French or English which put them at a further disadvantage. If they were recruited by labour agents they might be obliged to work to repay their immigration costs, so they were financially vulnerable, too, and sometimes fearful of deportation. Nevertheless, no class of workers posed as significant a threat to the ascent of capitalism as the industrial workers, particularly in the form of the Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW).



Figure 3.35 Organizing men and women, Canadians and immigrants alike, the IWW took the novel approach of printing materials in several languages and using songs to transmit their message. The chief songwriter of the IWW, Joe Hill, has an important connection with Canada.

The qualities that made industrial labour desirable from the perspective of capitalism, also made it dangerous. The very mobility of the unskilled meant that they were difficult to discipline. They were most often found in resource extraction industries like the silver mines and smelters of the Kootenays in BC, where single (or at least wifeless) men dominated. The Western Federation of Miners (WFM) organized many of these workers and preached a radical doctrine that disturbed the AFL-TLC. Their low skill levels meant that they moved from one industry to the next, from road building to dock work to mills and lumber camps. This interchangeability made it possible for the IWW to talk about **one big union**, an organization that took in everybody, including Asian-Canadians. As one West Coast Socialist Party leader said in 1912, “workers must get wise to the fact that what is needed is bigger unions and less unions.”⁸

Employers certainly didn’t pull their punches in response. A pronounced lack of solidarity from the crafts unions did not help matters, but employer intrigue, use of private security companies, subversion of the unions, and deployment of local militias both punished and galvanized the industrial unions. A good example of this is the 1903 waterfront strike in Vancouver, led by the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees (UBRE) against the CPR. The local labour leader, Frank Rogers, was elevated to the ranks of “labour martyr” when he was shot to death on the docks. The UBRE’s position became increasingly untenable but strike activity spread to the coal mines at Extension on Vancouver Island. There, the WFM was engaged in its own struggle, one that was painted by the CPR (one of the main clients for coal from the Extension mine near Ladysmith) as an illegal **sympathy strike**. John Hinde, describing the reaction of authorities in Victoria, Ottawa, and the boardrooms of the CPR, captures the intersection of class-warfare and nationalist sensibilities of the time:

8. R.P. Pettipiece, quoted in Mark Leier, “Solidarity on Occasion: The Vancouver Free Speech Fights of 1909 and 1912,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 23 (Spring 1989): 56.

Fearful of sympathy strikes, an unambiguous statement of union and working-class power, the authorities subsequently led a frontal assault on the strikers and their unions. [...] they viewed the Extension strike as part of a wider conspiracy by illegitimate revolutionary socialist organizations affiliated with American labour interests to disrupt the Canadian economy and to corrupt Canadian workers, and were therefore determined to crush the union.⁹

This confrontation hurt the WFM, which began a downward spiral from which it never recovered. Some of its American leadership — the most noteworthy being William “Big Bill” Haywood (1869-1928) — shifted their energies to a new industrial union, the Industrial Workers of the World.

The IWW (nicknamed the Wobblies on account of the way some immigrant members pronounced the W’s), was the antithesis of the parallel layers of craft unions organized along skill lines and working in a particular industry. The Wobblies called for a singular labour organization to which every individual worker could belong. It was mobilized by one idea: the defeat of capitalism.

Not only did the IWW propose to dismantle the **business unions** of the AFL and dilute the skill pool within the craft and trade unions, it proposed to overturn the system entirely and favoured a socialist alternative. The instrument with which the IWW proposed to accomplish this was an all-encompassing labour action, a **general strike**. Building toward this goal involved several sectoral strikes along the way.

The Pre-War Labour Revolt

Labour unrest was increasing from 1896 on, but it spiked in the years leading to the Great War. In 1901, there were 99 strikes and lockouts. This number peaked in 1907 at 188, and then again in 1912 at 181. The number of employees involved leapt from 285 in 1901 to more than a thousand in each of 1903, 1910, 1912, and 1913. What was most dramatic, however, was the aggregate number of working days lost. In 1901, it was 737,808 but by 1911 it had reached 1,821,084.¹⁰ Labour relations were badly unsettled and strikes got both longer and more numerous between 1910 and 1913.¹¹ This pattern includes the dramatic Canadian Northern Railway (CNR) strike of 1912, which involved some 7,000 railway construction workers drawn from more than a dozen different language groups.¹²

Whenever workers in pre-WWI Canada went on strike, they knew that they were stepping into a legal minefield. The right to strike was not enshrined and striking was the equivalent of breaking a contract, which subjected workers to the possibility of federal state intervention. Immigrant workers faced deportation. In some industries, particularly during wartime, labour stoppages were tantamount to treason. Even in peacetime, the militia was not infrequently dispatched to protect strikebreakers and evict strikers from company housing. In these circumstances, the interest of the state and capital were unambiguously aligned.

Of the international trade unions in this period, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) stands out. It had

9. John R. Hinde, *When Coal Was King: Ladysmith and the Coal-Mining Industry on Vancouver Island*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003), 133.

10. Statistics Canada, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd ed., ed. F. H. Leacy (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1983): E190-208.

11. Statistics Canada, *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd ed., ed. F.H. Leacy (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1983): E190-197.

12. Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History*, (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1989), 43.

a powerful influence in the coal- and metal-mining communities in Nova Scotia, Alberta, British Columbia, and elsewhere. The UMWA followed craft union strategies, focusing on working conditions and wages, but it would be an error to understate its militance. In the hardrock mines of the Kootenays and the collieries of the Crowsnest Pass, the UMWA emerged as the dominant international trade union. The union was in Lethbridge, too, and in 1906 there erupted a strike that lasted for nine months. What was significant about this confrontation — one of many in a period marked by intensifying labour-capital conflict — is the role played by the state. A 32 year old bureaucrat in Ottawa, William Lyon Mackenzie King (1874-1950), the Deputy Minister of Labour since 1900, was sent to Alberta to diffuse the situation. (Winter was coming and there were fears of a “coal famine” on the Prairies.) This third-party bargaining was a novel approach and it had the effect of reducing the strikers’ strength even though the employer might have buckled. King followed this up with the *Industrial Disputes Investigations Act (IDIA)* of 1907, legislation that inserted the federal government as a third-party in specific kinds of labour disputes. Whenever the *IDIA* was invoked, strikers were required to return to work in a cooling-off period while bargaining proceeded. The effect was to build up stockpiles of goods so that the employer was no longer desperate for a settlement.¹³ The unions, naturally, hated this.

It was this context of growing confrontation and frustration at the intransigence of employers, government, and business unions, which radicalized parts of the Canadian workforce and labour movement. The Wobblies’ appeal reflects the limitations of craft unionism, particularly in sectors that would not be organized by the crafts. Faced with some of the worst and most dangerous working conditions, the posture of the IWW and the One Big Union (OBU) movement became more radical. It took on employers but it also took on the law. The Free Speech protests of 1909 and 1912 in Vancouver, are a good example of confrontations in which the Wobblies played a key role, and which were not specifically about working conditions or wages.¹⁴



Figure 3.36 Mounted police arrive at Oppenheimer Park to put down a Free Speech demonstration in Vancouver, 1912.

The militance of the pre-Great War years crested in 1912 but threatened to resume in 1914. As far as the anti-labour elements were concerned, in this regard the war arrived just in time. Wartime conditions and the radicalization of the working class globally, however, would present very different conditions in the period from 1914-1920.

13. H. Blair Neatby, “KING, WILLIAM LYON MACKENZIE,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 17, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed 29 June 2015, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/king_william_lyon_mackenzie_17E.html.

14. Mark Leier, “Solidarity on Occasion: The Vancouver Free Speech Fights of 1909 and 1912,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 23 (Spring 1989): 39-66.



Figure 3.37 Southeastern British Columbia was, in the 1890s, a constellation of small-to-middling mining towns. These hardrock miners from the Tariff Mine near Ainsworth were heavily influenced by labour organizations out of the nearest metropolis: Spokane, Washington.

Key Points

- The creation of an industrial working class created new tensions in Canadian society.
- The ability to organize into defensive associations or unions arrived in the 1870s.
- Craft unions represented the most skilled and best paid workers, and presented the respectable face of labour.
- The Knights of Labor originated in the United States and organized workers from across many crafts and industries into one body.
- Individual craft unions pursued a more confrontational approach and built international bodies to advance their interests, with the AFL emerging as the dominant labour organizer.
- Deskilling and new kinds of work produced a population of less skilled industrial workers who, in the absence of support from the international craft unions, established industrial unions.

Attributions

Figure 3.32

[Labour Day parade](#) by [Papa November](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 3.33

[Knights of Labour Procession on King Street](#) by [W. Farmer](#) is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [Library and Archives Canada](#) under the reference number **3386883**.

Figure 3.34

[Historic view of the Inland Cigar Factory](#) by [City of Kamloops Museum and Archives](#) / Canadian Register of Historic Places taken in 1895 is copyright by Canadian Register of Historic Places and is available solely for personal, educational and non-commercial public use.

Figure 3.35

[Cover of The Rebel Girl](#) by [Joe Hill](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 3.36

[Mounted police at a “Free Speech” demonstration on the Powell Street Grounds, 371-971](#) by Major James Skitt Matthews / City of Vancouver Archives is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 3.37

[Tariff Mine near Ainsworth](#) by Unknown is in the [public domain](#).

12.4 The Great Depression

The 1930s Depression is profoundly and deeply associated, in the popular mind, with the prairie **Dust Bowl**, one of the greatest environmental catastrophes in Canadian history. It was, in fact, something like a ticking time-bomb.

The British sent an expedition across the Prairies in the 1850s, led by John Palliser (1817-1887). Thereafter, his name was given to a tract of arid land along the 49th parallel. *Palliser's Triangle* was identified as the northern tip of the Great American Desert, a region identified in the 1820s as stretching like a wall north from Texas and west from the 100th meridian to the Rocky Mountains. In 1874 a corps of 275 North-West Mounted Police, led by Commissioner George Arthur French (1841-1921), were dismayed to find Palliser's Triangle so inhospitable. Sent to the West to begin the process of the Canadian occupation of Aboriginal lands, French's troops struggled to find drinkable water and, when they met up with Sioux soldiers, French "impressed upon them the fact that we did not want their land."¹ He wasn't lying. There was nothing about the region to suggest any farming potential to French and the Mounties. Thereafter, the plains and prairies entered into a wet period, the landscape turned a more promising shade of green, and its agricultural limitations were brushed aside by a Canadian government eager to populate the region with producers of food and consumers of manufactured goods.

Elsewhere on the prairies, and deep into the American plains as well, the prevalent form of agriculture in these years was dry land farming, which involves breaking the soil (with iron or steel ploughs) to a significant depth to release the moisture captured below ground. Once that moisture is used by the crops or evaporates, there is little to hold together the topsoil other than broken plant roots. After a generation or so under the plough, that part of the soil's integrity vanishes as well. A drought — even a single year with little or no rain — could cause significant and widespread damage.

The "southern route" taken by the CPR ensured that Palliser's Triangle was quickly surveyed and homesteaded. Improved grain prices in the 1920s led to more aggressive and widespread sod-busting across the prairies. When drought began in 1930 — an unfortunate coincidence with the Wall Street Crash — the reach of modern agriculture across the centre of North America had reached a new peak. Everything came to a head in the 1930s due to bad choices in the distribution of land, the heavy and sudden resettlement of the West, an over-aggressive and industrial approach to soil use, the elimination of trees as windbreaks (instead, trees were used as fuel and building material for homesteads), a booming economy in the 1920s, and the depletion of aquifers.

1. Quoted in David C. Jones, *Empire of Dust: Settling and Abandoning the Prairie Dry Belt* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1987), 8.

The Dirty Thirties

Palliser had recognized — more than 70 years earlier — that the southern Prairies were subject to drought conditions and these, as it turned out, were cyclical. The conditions in the early 1930s were ideal for dust storms. Prairie topsoil was picked up by the wind and blown from the southwest as far as Hudson’s Bay. Dust storms became increasingly common (and larger) as the Depression wore on. In 1935, one pan-continental storm turned the skies black for days and reduced visibility to a matter of feet. Dunes of dust obliterated whole farms, leaving the landscape unrecognizable. The influential 1941 Canadian novel *As For Me and My House* by Sinclair Ross describes “dust clouds lapping at the sky” and the constant intrusion of dust under the windowsills and doorsills, and into clothes, food, and the pores of exposed skin.²



Figure 8.4 Southern Saskatchewan in the Dust Bowl years, ca. 1930-1935.

A quarter million Canadian farmers — the greatest number from Saskatchewan — fled this catastrophe between 1931 and 1941 by heading for British Columbia (mostly) and Ontario. Those who remained behind received some support from a relief effort mustered by private citizens and government. The Dust Bowl changed the farming landscape of the prairies, and it would have a long-term impact on farming practices. It also created a new diaspora out of first- and second-generation Westerners who had left behind other homelands to become homesteaders and were now environmental refugees. As well, the Dust Bowl contributed significantly to the growth of distinctive political ideologies and attitudes that propelled reform movements on the right and left.

When the Wall Street stock market crashed in October 1929, a dogmatic position of non-interference in the economy was orthodoxy. It was embraced by Canada’s federal Liberal and Conservative parties alike. Given that the core electorate in these years was still decisively in Ontario and Quebec (where economic diversification dampened some of the worst impacts of the crisis) and the Maritimes (which, already in poor shape, didn’t experience the 1930s as a disaster of quite the same magnitude), the instinctive caution of federal politicians should have come as no surprise.

2. Sinclair Ross, *As For Me and My House* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1941), 26.)[footnote] If this wasn’t enough, the West faced two other plagues: grasshoppers and hailstorms. More than a few contemporary writers have referred to these hardships as of biblical proportions.

A Perfect Storm

Even by 1928, more than a year before the stock market disaster, there were signs of trouble. Commodity prices were wobbling and new house construction was slowing. Population growth was another issue. The inter-war years (1919-1938) began with substantial out-migration from war-torn Europe, which decreased almost as quickly. Immigration from China was effectively stopped by the *Chinese Immigration Act, 1923*. Growth in the population of Canada was coming from a natural increase (births over deaths) more than immigration for the first time since the 1870s, despite the fact that the number of men of marriageable-age was reduced by the mortalities of 1914-1919.

Indebtedness was another factor leading to a fall. The arrival of new combine harvester technology in the 1920s meant that farm families borrowed to mechanize their output. As well, families were graduating from the sod-huts and simple wood frame cabins of homesteaders into larger and more expensive homes. In addition, automobiles were becoming more common, many of which were bought on credit.



Figure 8.5 On the eve of the Depression, combined harvester-threshers reduced the need for itinerant threshing crews, and pitched farmers into debt. High Prairie, Alberta, 1930.

There were external factors to consider as well. International currencies were in trouble, most spectacularly in the Weimar Republic (Germany). The system of mutual dependence produced by Germany's obligation to pay **reparations** after the Great War meant that all countries had a significant stake in what was occurring in Weimar. In addition, most North Atlantic economies had returned to the gold standard (a commonly-pegged way of insuring the value of a nation's currency), but at the pre-WWI rate, which significantly disadvantaged several currencies.

Another factor often overlooked is the inexperience of new stock markets. Until 1914, the City of London was the unquestioned financial capital of the world. As the interwar years began, there was growing competition for this title from financial hubs and stock exchanges in Paris, Tokyo, and New York, among other places. Decentralized control over the global investment economy pulled capital in different directions, increasing risks (and exposure to inexperienced brokers) while adding little to the building of a global fiscal safety net.

Thus, the stage was being set for a massive economic collapse by inflated currencies, the popularizing of gambling

on the stock exchange, over-extension of household and industrial credit, heavy capital investment in machinery and buildings, a teetering international monetary and capital network, and a bubble in the commodities exchanges. When trade on the New York Stock Exchange crashed on **Black Tuesday**, 24 October 1929, the die was cast.

Living with Depression

In late 1929, no one could know for certain how long it would be before prosperity returned; few would have guessed that a whole decade of economic pain would pass before the economy could be urged back to life. The axiom that “generals are always ready to fight the last war” was, in fact, coined in the 1930s to describe the economic strategies that were wheeled out to deal with the crisis. Ill-equipped to tackle either the fiscal complexities of the Depression or the social catastrophe that it produced, governments in Canada (for the most part) shied away from interfering and hoped for the best.

The collapse of the international commodities market dramatically impacted the Canadian and Newfoundland economies. What, after all, was the commodities market but another term for the **staple economy**? Both Dominions had been producing unprocessed goods for trade abroad since the 16th century and, despite some progress in central Canadian manufacturing, they were doing much the same in the 20th century. Grain dominated, closely followed by wood products (lumber and paper) and minerals. These were precisely the commodities that bottomed out. The monoculture of Prairie farming was effectively vapourized by the Crash and the Dust Bowl. In British Columbia, the company towns and logging camps that relied on transient labour (much of it comprised of single males) were likewise hit hard. Migrant workers from the prairies and BC’s own seasonal workers followed a cycle of working across the West and then back to Vancouver to ride out the winters. The city’s oldest neighbourhood was carpeted with hotels, “flophouses,” brothels, vaudeville theatres, and saloons to take advantage of this traffic. The financial crisis occurred as the annual migration to the west coast hotels was underway, and when the 1930 work season arrived, vastly fewer jobs were available. As a “mecca to the unemployed,” Vancouver continued to attract large numbers of unemployed through the course of the Depression, with explosive results on several occasions.

Similar conditions prevailed on the East Coast. Unemployment and a stagnant economy was nothing new to the Atlantic region, but the old strategy of out-migration and seeking greener pastures was no longer available. The United States closed the door to Maritime immigrants, the Prairie West was wholly unattractive, and Canada established restrictions on immigration from Newfoundland. While seasonal work — as a way of making a living — survived in some regions, the appearance of full-time and continuous work in industry and in the office sector complicated matters. It was no longer just a matter of surviving until the next season of work came around; unemployment in the 1930s meant, for many people, the loss of full-time work. As unemployment climbed to 20% across the Atlantic region, in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, relief costs propelled one county after the next to consider bankruptcy.



Figure 8.6 Unable to afford gasoline and having disposed of their buggies, many Canadians gutted their cars and hitched them to horses during the Depression. These hybrid vehicles were called, bitterly, "Bennett buggies" after the Prime Minister.

The mechanization of farming across the Prairies had made possible massive increases in productivity while reducing the year-round value of family labour. Farm boys and farm girls were increasingly surplus to the family farm and, as they got older, they looked increasingly to urban or other rural pursuits. Some found work with threshing crews — teams of men and women who moved from farm to farm (at harvest time) along with the newest machinery for processing the wheat crop. These crews depended heavily on temporary workers who were hired and dismissed seasonally. Labour mobility was a critical part of the farm economy, and the cash income of threshing crew workers was important for the household economy as well. With the collapse in grain prices compounded by the Dust Bowl, seasonal work became immediately scarce, and impoverished by their inability to produce or sell grain, family farms found it a real burden to feed these temporary workers. The eldest sons in particular often were compelled to seek work elsewhere, to try to survive on their own, typically in cities and mines.

It is important to note that the impact of the Depression was felt well beyond the corridor of cities and farms in southern Canada. The 1920s had witnessed a boom in the fur-trade tied to the brief flicker of an international luxury market. This was good news for Native trappers and traders in the North, as was the arrival in 1901 of the Parisian Revillon Frères fur trading company; prices went up as Revillon went toe-to-toe with the local HBC traders. This situation, of course, invited growing competition from non-Native trappers and hunters, some of them by now long-residents in the region. The Innu of Labrador, for example, found themselves pushed further and further inland in the 1920s to eke out an existence that now was based almost entirely on the trade in furs. The possibility of fishing and hunting for food was by this point so reduced that they had no option but to adopt a European diet and Euro-Canadian clothing made available through the trade in furs.³ The 1929 Wall Street Crash echoed even on the Labrador plateaus west of Nain and Kaipokok, and they would not be relieved — like the rest of the country — until the outbreak of the Second World War.

No Relief in Sight

As the Depression deepened, governments across Canada typically did very little. Conventional economic

3. Lynne D. Fitzhugh, *The Labradorians: Voices from the Land of Cain* (St. John's: Breakwater, 1999), 375.

thinking called for a hands-off approach to economic downturns, and most provincial and federal administrations were very conventional in their thinking.

In retrospect, Mackenzie King was fortunate to have lost the election in 1930 because the worst years occurred under the Conservatives led by R.B. Bennett (see [Section 6.7](#)). The Conservatives arguably were inclined even more than the Liberals to allow the Depression to run its course, but they had no way of knowing how deep the troughs could get. Although by 1931 things were very bad, a slight hint of recovery arose in 1932 or, at least, things weren't worsening as badly as in 1929-31. When 1933 came along, the Canadian economy plunged headlong into the deepest trade depression in its history. Unemployment reached 30%, and real GDP shrank by more than 10% in both 1931 and 1932. Some recovery would occur in 1934, but setbacks followed in 1935. Throughout these years, the federal government took a minimalist approach, holding onto its faith in a temporary readjustment and an unassisted return to prosperity. The electorate and the unemployed did not share that faith.

Thanks to the Depression, the 1930s would witness a dramatic politicization of the Canadian people. A variety of new partisan strategies would be explored at the ballot box, including the social democratic CCF (provincially and nationally), the monetarist Social Credit Party in Alberta, communist parties that could evade restrictions on their legal status, and even some fascist parties (see [Sections 6.8](#) and [7.9](#)). However, the issues of unemployment, dispossession, homelessness, and even hunger were so acute that they could not wait for election day. Unemployed workers, transients, and their supporters repeatedly took to the streets to register their bitter disappointment and to challenge authority.

Nowhere was this life of politics beyond the ballot box more visible than in Vancouver. Beginning in 1930, there were public demonstrations calling for action from civic, provincial, and federal levels of government. City charters limited what municipal authorities could do, and their tax base was drying up rapidly. Seizing homes in default of outstanding property taxes in a market like the 1930s only encumbered city governments. In the absence of anything like unemployment insurance, and with only a very limited welfare state in place, cities were the first stop for the unemployed looking for "relief." This category of support could include anything from food (or chits for food), temporary housing, cash for necessities, clothing hand-outs, and/or work. Anglo-Canadian Protestant ethics made the case against relief as weakening recipients' resolve to find employment, creating dependency, and as being demoralizing. Potential recipients likewise often found it shameful and degrading to accept, let alone ask for, relief. In language that spoke to heterosexual and patriarchal norms, people said it wasn't manly. The sense that unemployment was the fault of the unemployed, however, began to dissipate in 1931 when it became clear that the Depression was the inevitable by-product of an international economic collapse. The result was that cities like Vancouver resisted giving relief, and the unemployed only asked for relief when they already were desperate. By 1931, many were desperate.

Social welfare is constitutionally a provincial responsibility. Provincial governments were hardly better off than the local authorities, and they were inclined to reinforce the message that it was first and foremost a local (that is, civic or municipal) matter. At the same time, they demanded that Ottawa address a problem that was clearly national in scope and made worse (in the case of many provinces) by the presence of migrant and out-of-province workers looking for relief or **dole**.



Figure 8.7 The hobo jungles took many forms. This early structure housed 14 unemployed men; things would soon get much more desperate. Vancouver, 1931.

Conflict erupted in 1931, and again in 1933, in public demonstrations and around homeless men's camps also called **hobo jungles**. Vancouver was especially attractive to the unemployed because it was at the end of the rail line, and the winter weather was relatively mild and tolerable. Communist activists and evangelicals campaigned in the hobo jungles. Both treated the unemployed community as a powder keg. The City of Vancouver (and other urban governments) responded by evacuating the jungles and relocating their residents to federally-built and Department of National Defence-run **Relief Camps** outside of the city limits, sometimes in remote parts of BC. Others were established in the national parks of the Rocky Mountains. In the National Park Branch camps, some of the infrastructure of holidaying (such as campgrounds and facilities) was created by unemployed workers; but the unemployed in the Relief Camps mostly performed meaningless routine work, colloquially referred to as **boondoggles**.⁴ The unemployed worked for 20 cents a day (hence the nickname of the camps as the "Royal 20 Centers") and under military-style discipline, which bought the city a little time that ran out quickly.

By 1933 conditions had worsened to such a point that the resident unemployed were clamouring for relief. What the City could offer in terms of projects or payments was by this stage very limited. Police surveillance of the unemployed was met with street fights and the occupation of public buildings and department stores. In 1933 the communists organized the Relief Camp Workers' Union, which mobilized the extremely alienated unemployed across the region to abandon the camps and put their issues directly before Prime Minister Bennett. The **On-to-Ottawa Trek** set off from Vancouver on 3 June 1935 but was stopped in Regina, the site of the RCMP headquarters. Trek leaders headed on to Ottawa to meet with Bennett, but the discussion was cut short and quickly degenerated into name-calling. Once the leaders were back in Regina, a rally was called for the 1st of July — Dominion Day — in Regina's Market Square. The Mounties' riot squad surged into the crowd of 1500-2000 people (most of them local residents) with truncheons swinging. The Trek leadership was arrested, one constable and one protester died, and the campaign was broken.

4. Bill Waiser, *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada's National Parks, 1915-1946* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1995).



Figure 8.8 Unemployed workers board boxcars headed east from Kamloops, BC for the On-to-Ottawa Trek, 1935.

On the face of it, the **Regina Riot** seems extraordinary, but in the context of the Dirty Thirties, it was not. Conditions that led to the **Battle of Ballantyne Pier** were unfolding even as the Trekkers left Vancouver. Local dockyard workers had gone on strike and were replaced with strikebreakers brought in by the Shipping Federation (an organization of waterfront employers). Fifteen days after the Trekkers left Vancouver, the strikers marched to the waterfront, led by a Great War veteran and decorated hero. Confronted by mounted and armed City police, BC Provincial Police, and Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the march rapidly turned into a melee. Fighting continued for three hours across the East End, culminating in 24 arrests, about the same number hospitalized, and untold numbers injured.



Figure 8.9 The Battle of Ballantyne Pier spills into residential streets as Mounties pursue strikers down the sidewalk.

New Dealers

Another casualty of these events was R. B. Bennett. His counterpart in the United States, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945), launched a “New Deal” program shortly after his election in 1933, aimed at

stimulating the economy through spending. This was heresy, in the context of conservative economic thinking, but it was attractive to legislators and civil servants because it put them in a position to act rather than defend inaction. Even Bennett seemed changed by this example. Beginning in January 1935, he endorsed economic intervention by the federal government. He introduced the **Bank of Canada** and the **Canadian Wheat Board**, but did not pursue economic pump-priming or efforts to spend his way out of the crisis. The electorate, worn out by conflict, hardship, and lack of government solutions; shocked at the violence inflicted on Canadians by Canadians; and convinced that the wealthy and snobbish Bennett was flinty-hearted tossed out the Conservatives in October 1935 and returned Mackenzie King's Liberals.

Despite the rhetoric suggesting a greater sympathy for the unemployed, King turned out to be no more an interventionist than Bennett. King's Liberal counterpart in BC, Thomas Dufferin "Duff" Pattullo, however, launched his own "Little New Deal" that, warts and all, demonstrated **Keynesian** thinking was gaining traction in some parts of Canada. King's response was to reintroduce the hated relief camps, albeit with some slight improvements and significantly more isolation than before. These initiatives were not enough to still significant urban unrest. On 20 May, 1938, unemployed protesters occupied the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Hotel Georgia, and the main Post Office on Hastings Street at Granville. A month later, on Sunday, 19 June at daybreak, the Vancouver Police oversaw the largely peaceful evacuation of the Art Gallery; and at the same moment, the RCMP stormed the Post Office with teargas and truncheons. A window-smashing campaign followed and, hours later, a demonstration of support took place at an East End park where 10,000 to 15,000 locals gathered.



Figure 8.10 "Citizens Protest Police Terror" at Oppenheimer Park on Bloody Sunday.

The Regina Riot and **Bloody Sunday** were merely the worst episodes in a long decade of street battles between various police forces and the unemployed. The war that terminated the economic Depression would force a reconsideration of economic orthodoxy in a way that the financial crisis had not, and the events of 1929-1939 would shape more than a generation of Canadian political culture. The sustained popularity of the CCF and Social Credit, mistrust of Ottawa and civic police forces, and a widespread tolerance for state intervention in the economy were only a few of the ways in which this one decade would transform Canada.

Key Points

- The 1930s Depression consisted of several events, including the Dust Bowl and the collapse of the commodities market.
- Economic and environmental disaster produced an out-migration from the Prairies, particularly from Saskatchewan.
- Seasonality in employment was deeply impacted with bad results for tens, if not hundreds of thousands of itinerant and semi-itinerant Canadian workers.
- The downturn profoundly affected all parts of Canada, some more deeply than others.
- Successive Conservative and Liberal governments developed few plans to directly reform the economy or introduce social welfare measures like employment insurance.
- The massification of unemployment and the concentration of the jobless in cities like Vancouver created conditions that led to violent street battle confrontations with police forces.

Attributions**Figure 8.4**

[A dust storm over the prairies](#) is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from the [Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan](#) under the item number **S-A295**.

Figure 8.5

[Combined Harvester-Thresher operated by tractor \(Online MIKAN no.3337608\)](#) by Library and Archives Canada / PA-040497 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 8.6

[Bennett Buggy](#) by [Steve Smith](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 8.7

[The "jungle" of the unemployed, summer of 1931. \(Reference code: AM54-S4-: Re N10.06\)](#) by Matthews, James Skitt, Major / City of Vancouver Archives is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 8.8

[Strikers from unemployment relief camps en route to Eastern Canada during "March on Ottawa"](#) by Unknown is in the [public domain](#). This image is available from [Library and Archives Canada](#) under the reference number **3194934**.

Figure 8.9

[Battle of Ballantyne](#) by [Bobanny](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 8.10

[Citizens protest police terror](#) by [Bobanny](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Week 13 - Review

13 - Thinking About Canadian History



Figure 12.1 The National Film Board came under heavy fire in the early 1990s when it produced a 3-part series, *The Valour and the Horror*, on what it claimed were less-than-noble moments in Canada's WWII record. The CBC aired the series and was excoriated by politicians and veterans alike.

Just as 1914-1918 marks a watershed in the history of the modern world, so does 1989-1991. The end of the Cold War signalled to some a turning point in international affairs and, thus, the end of the “short 20th century.”

Francis Fukuyama (b. 1952), an American political economist, argued in his 1992 book *The End of History and the Last Man* that the centuries-long struggle between competing ideologies was essentially settled and that liberal democracies with market economies had won. It wasn't that “history” itself was over but that the idea of history as an unfolding of alternative models of social and economic relations was done. This constitutes a response to Karl Marx — the 19th century political economist — who predicted, instead, the inevitable triumph of the industrial proletariat, the elimination of national governments and states, and the emergence of global (though not Soviet) communism.

One could debate endlessly whether Fukuyama was on target, premature, or a decade late. His work nevertheless underscored the fact that the world had reached a watershed in the early 1990s. The growth of the nation state since the 18th century — as an idea and a phenomenon — had dominated thinking about history for two centuries. The Western perspective was severely linear and, after the mid-19th century, evolutionary as well. Nations developed from antiquity through feudalism, absolutism, capitalism, and sometimes communism, to something

new. Each nation moved along this course at its own speed because its economic needs favoured one system over the last. This view was at the heart of Marxist theory but also the models of most other Western thinkers, journalists, and — importantly — historians. For example, the **Whig historians** of the 19th and early 20th century argued that the history of humanity was a constant movement forward — progress — toward a better and better society. However, the Whigs were no Marxists; they were small-l liberals who believed that greater freedoms — from feudalism or monarchism, for example — led to greater happiness and a better nation state. For the most part, the business of writing history has been bound up with the question of how nations form and operate. This has been done in the service of the idea of a Fukuyama-esque *history*, the unfolding of a nation's story from beginning to end (or more cheerily) to a continuously brighter and better future.

If History (with a capital “H”) existed to serve (and serve up) the national story of progress, it was deeply rooted in modernity. The modern age, with its emphasis on social and technological progress, was both the environment of the state and a measure of its success. Democracy, a wider distribution of wealth and opportunity, and the latest infrastructural fashions were the means and ends simultaneously. The blueprints of modernity, as we have seen nearly two centuries ago, would inevitably require revision.

At the end of the Cold War, the balance of global power changed dramatically. International bipolarism was over, and when the stand-off between the two superpowers evaporated, the necessity and perhaps the possibility of mutually assured destruction (MAD) also went out the door, even though more nations had joined the “nuclear club.” The urgency felt by successive governments in Canada to deliver the “good life” so to make communism look less appealing was effectively gone as well. Beyond foreign affairs and domestic policies, however, the “end of history” also suggested the end of the meta-narrative. In this new postmodern era, the saga of the nation had outlived its purpose. History — that assembling of stories about the past that offer insights into the affairs of humans then and now — could shift its focus away from what the popular historian Pierre Berton (1920-2004) called “the national dream.”¹ The spotlight could now fall on stories that had either been viewed as unimportant or irrelevant to the main event, or to histories that actually countered modernity's forward march.

The most visible facet of that postmodernist trend in the writing of history has been post-colonialism. At one stage in the history of Canada — for something like 200 years — colonization (biological settlement and populating) and colonialism (the intentional suppression of Indigenous peoples) were regarded approvingly as two of the foremost elements of the Canadian project. Through that lens, “Aboriginal history” was almost an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. Post-colonialism made room for histories of First Nations that provided other perspectives and, from time to time, spoke with Aboriginal voices.

This chapter engages with several of these ideas. What was Canada like in the first decade or so at the “end of history”? In what ways was the postmodern made manifest in domestic, social, economic, and international affairs? How had our world and historic view changed? Could Canada continue to hide from its colonialist past in a post-colonial world? Canada's emerging international and domestic preoccupations are explored, including the fringe political movements of the day. As the meta-narrative of Canadian history began to fray, it became possible to look with some detachment at the ways in which national identity and alternative identities were

1. Berton's history of the CPR, *The National Dream*, was first published in 1970 and was followed the next year by *The Last Spike*. Both describe the project and the politicians and capitalists behind it in heroic, nation-building terms. These are, in all likelihood, the best selling Canadian history books ever. A great popularizer of history, Berton was also a champion of the nationalist school.

constructed in the 20th century, which included challenges to the “normal” that were increasingly launched in the 1980s, 1990s, and the new millennium. If the histories that sustained the national project were no longer vitally necessary or particularly welcome in the academy, what replaced them? As the postmodern world fractured storylines into increasingly specialized fragments, historians began to question whether a national history was even possible. This chapter explores some aspects of the newer historical interests, including two considerations of digital histories.

History Wars

The idea that historical method has responded to this changed world is also engaged in this chapter. If the focus of historical research is no longer the political history of the state, it moves from the parliamentary archives into different places and employs different tools while asking different questions. *History* itself changes along with the society that has emerged at history’s end.

The writing of history proceeds unevenly for many and diverse reasons. In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a sudden explosion of excellent social and political history for three reasons. First, as a response to the baby boom and a national Cold War-era commitment to further education (which, notably, replaced an earlier ideology of exclusivity), there were vastly more university and college campuses and seats available to a rising generation. Second, that cohort was itself more diverse than any other in Canadian post-secondary education to that time, and it brought to the seminar table its own concerns about society and the stories we tell. Third, out of that hothouse came a generation of scholars — larger than any before it — with a shared cultural experience and language that enabled the transformation of historical studies. The benefits have been a rich legacy of investigations into the society and culture of Canada with the chief liability being a bottleneck of Cold War-era academics whose views continue to dominate as successive generations of historians strive to be heard.

By way of an example, we can look at histories of the West. Valerie Korinek, an authority on Prairie and queer history, offers some insight into where Canadian history has failed to go, and calls for Western historians in particular to pay attention to the late 20th century:

This was a time of considerable transformation for the Prairie West (some might argue Western ascendancy, albeit uneven) as it reconfigured from a primarily rural to an urban place, as it became an economic powerhouse, and as demographic shifts made it an increasing social and political force within the country. This transformation needs to be explored and assessed historically. Regretfully, Western historians have failed to participate in enumerating and evaluating these substantive historical changes in the second half of the twentieth century....²

It is not fair to say that Western Canadian historians are stuck in the past (insert winking emoji here), but the truth is that contemporary or even post-centennial histories are rare. What Korinek identifies is, in part, the challenge of **contemporary history**. How old do events have to be before they slip from one side of the ledger (made up of Politics, Economics, Sociology, etc.) over to the other side (where we find History)? There’s no ironclad rule on this front. The 20th century historian Kenneth McNaught (1918-1997) is said to have claimed that everything

2. Valerie Korinek, “A Queer-eye View of the Prairies: Reorienting Western Canadian Histories,” in *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region*, eds. Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter, and Peter Fortna (Edmonton, AB: Athabasca University Press, 2010), 281.

after World War One constituted “current events.” To someone born in 1918, that might make some sense but, as all historians come to realize, that boundary is always in motion. The historians who came of age in the late 1960s — mostly born in the 1940s — might be excused for feeling uncomfortable with histories of life after 1939, although that has not held back everyone. Alvin Finkel’s *Our Lives: Canada after 1945* and Doug Owram’s *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* show baby boomers successfully tackling the mid-century as an historical environment. However, as Korinek points out, older discourses persist, narratives become embedded within narratives, and we risk becoming unaware of the changes that history might reveal to us.

In *Canadian History: Pre-Confederation*, I describe the current state of historical writing, including [the conflict between generations of historians](#) that took place in the 1990s. The so-called **History Wars** pitted the older **nationalist historians** against the rising generation of scholars who argued there was no longer one meta-narrative of the Canadian experience. Building a national identity out of a shared historic experience was the task set before modern historians; **deconstructing** those stories to show how they implicitly privileged certain groups and perspectives was the challenge taken up by newcomers to the field.

The nationalist historians went down swinging.³ While their leading figures — Jack Granatstein among them — remained productive but increasingly marginalized from the innovative work in the discipline, their advocates did not completely surrender the battlefield. Efforts to recast Canadian history as something comfortably familiar were undertaken in the last decade by conservatives who regard the Pearson years and its “pennant” as the point in time when Canada drifted from its moorings. For example, a cohort of British, imperialist, and fans of military history sought to restore a common curriculum of nation-serving historical studies in the schools and universities. They failed... mostly. While English-Canadian historical research turns its back on nationalist histories, nationalist views are increasingly embedded in the teaching of French-Canadian history in Quebec. “The History Wars,” writes University of Guelph historian Mark Sholdice, “are really not about history, but rather politics.”⁴ The great English historiographer E. H. Carr wrote: “The facts speak only when the historian calls on them”; the historian “decides to which facts to give the floor...”⁵ We make those decisions based on, among other things, the politics around us and the politics we live, be that green, feminist, conservative, separatist, religious, or nationalist. It isn’t that political history is at an end; rather, the net we cast to capture political change must necessarily be larger.

Learning Objectives

- Account for the rise of “identity politics” in the post-Cold War era.
- Identify ways in which historians have adapted their craft in a postmodern world.
- Outline the ways in which the Canadian national character and symbols have been crafted and changed since Confederation.

3. There is no universally accepted collective noun for historians, but the phrase, “an argumentation of historians” is sometimes preferred.

4. Mark Sholdice, “The History Wars in Canada,” *Toronto Review of Books*, May 5, 2013, accessed January 27, 2016, http://www.torontoreviewofbooks.com/2013/05/the-history-wars-in-canada/#_edn1.

5. E. H. Carr, *What is History?* 2nd ed. (Markham, ON: Penguin Canada, 1987), 11.

Attributions

Figure 12.1

[Office national du film montreal](#) by Chicoutimi is used under a [CC-BY-SA-3.0](#) license.

13.1 Identity Politics

The historic experience of *Canadiens* — the descendants of the settlers of New France — has been different from the rest of Canadians. As a result, a separate and distinctive identity came easy for the Québécois. The same is not true of most non-francophone and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada, most of whom are descended from immigrants who arrived after Confederation. With few exceptions, these newcomers cannot lay claim to an ancestral landscape within Canada, although some groups have been able to scaffold a separate identity onto the different ways in which they have experienced Canada. In some instances, this is an outcome of the persecution of their linguistic and artistic culture by Anglo-Celtic assimilationists, education systems, and marketplaces. Some recalcitrant groups (like the Doukhobors, for example) have even faced jail time for failing to conform. Experiences like these have fused identities that are as powerful as — if not more powerful than — conventional nationalism.

There have been times when Quebec's French-Canadian population has reached out to *les Francophones hors-Québec*. These francophones number approximately a million, against the six million in Quebec, and they include a quarter-million *Acadiens*, a half-million *Franco-Ontariens*, 70,000 *Franco-Colombiens* in BC, and more than 50,000 *Franco-Albertains*. The Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission took seriously the historic and current condition of French-Canadians across the country but, outside of New Brunswick where francophones represent more than 30% of the total population, and in parts of northern Ontario, the electoral power of this group was small, and the strength of its collective identity was not enough to turn heads in Ottawa or in Quebec City.

Despite these limitations, *les Francophones hors-Québec* constitute in total, and in their various parts, an important identity group, one of the earliest to emerge anew in the post-WWII period. There are many others, so many that a comprehensive list would be nearly impossible to assemble. However, among the earliest and most important, we can include Aboriginal Canadians, women, Westerners, and Japanese- and Chinese-Canadians. These groups stand out because they each had a grievance against the status quo, sufficient numbers to create political noise, and were either widely distributed so as to be an issue everywhere or tightly concentrated so as to create an important constituency in one or two locales. Respectively, they were able to bind together over issues of colonialism, patriarchy, and **regional disparities** in federalism; the experience of internment and dispossession during the Second World War; and a legacy of racism that included the Head Tax and legal barriers that divided families for generations. To be an Aboriginal person anywhere in Canada was to experience at least some — probably most — of the ills of colonialism; likewise, women everywhere were exposed to systemic sexual discrimination.

The 1960s saw the rise of **identity politics** that mobilized these groups in ways that proved impossible in the past. The factors driving the change varied, but the common consequences were an abandonment of loyalty to one party or another; a weakening of the connection with the conventional story of Canada; and a sense that a collectivity or a whole branch of Canadian society had experienced abuse, neglect, and a lack of authority. The three decades that followed witnessed the emergence and consolidation of still more identity groups.

African Canadians and people whose identities and orientations were not heterosexual were part of this eruption of identities. Northerners; the Inuit; rural Canadians; fundamentalist Christians; individuals who had been managed by the state because of their mental health: in each instance, their “identity” became a critical factor in building a political, economic, social, and civic role. It was no longer enough for politicians or merchants to roll out their wares and see what appealed; in the late 20th, they had to go to where the identities were. Politicians and others were told they had to speak to issues like residential schools, abortion, compensation for racist policies, religious education, self-government, language preservation, and homophobia — issues that had been kept off the table for the first century of Confederation.

Hidden Histories



Figure 12.11 The largest of British Columbia's mental health asylums was variously known as Essondale and Riverview. Deinstitutionalization of mental health patients in the 1980s depopulated facilities of this kind.

The late 20th century witnessed increasing interest in the histories of groups that hitherto had eluded study. Aboriginal Canadians, “ethnic” Canadians, and visible minorities were more intensively studied, as were women who, because of patriarchal lenses, had never really been in focus. Working people were also more fully examined. Three other categories joined these ranks in the years after the 1960s: children (explored by Georgia Sitara in [Section 10.9](#)), the incarcerated, and people whose sexuality fell outside of the heterosexual paradigm (the subject of [Section 12.7](#)).

Megan Davies (York University), a specialist on the history of madness, [discusses conditions in asylums](#) in Canada in the 20th century. For reasons you might easily imagine, there are few firsthand accounts

from inmates or patients. French social theorist Michel Foucault's book *Madness and Civilization* (1964) continues to inspire scholars to ask questions about institutionalization and social power. Davies' account of asylums and forced sterilization provides a sense of how the growth of state power played out in the area of mental (and often social and/or moral) deviance. In the second video, Professor Davies addresses deinstitutionalization and how it contributed to the growth of a new kind of identity.

This multitude of voices and stories is viewed as one of the key qualities of the postmodern era. Multiculturalism is part of a long-running nationalist narrative of “tolerance” in Canada, a storyline that has minimized difference and maximized themes of inclusion. However, this is only one version of nationalism in Canada. In Quebec — particularly in the context of the 1995 referendum — nationalism had an exclusive flavour. Inevitably, these nationalisms wind up being measured against one another. As Eva Mackey observes, in the context of the Quebec sovereignty campaigns, “the demands of *French* Canada are equated [by Anglo-Canadians] with intolerance and racism, and *English* Canada, in opposition, is constructed as the opposite, a modern tolerant nation.” Differentness, therefore, is implicitly deployed — ironically — as a tool of unity.¹ And yet, this unity itself has limits as feminist and postmodernist critics have pointed out.

By the mid-1980s, these critiques were erasing smug nationalist perspectives on the country's history. Systemic racism, sexism, cultural genocide, and impoverishment were being revealed, often by historians. The new histories that were emerging at this time gave identity groups their own narrativized mandates, setting up a postmodern, post-colonial, post-patriarchal Canada in which the old constants — like the Liberals and Conservatives alternating in Ottawa — were not simply being questioned but gutted. (Just as the Tories were reduced to 2 seats in 1995, keep in mind that the Liberals fell to third party status in the Commons in 2011 with only 34 seats.)

One of the keys to the rise of identity politics is the right to have an identity, which should be obvious but often it is not. Gays, lesbians, members of ethnic and/or visible minorities, married couples with different racial ancestries, individuals and groups belonging to religious creeds that constitute no more than a minority in their communities, and even women were unable to advance their cause until their identity was recognized. Very often this recognition came in the form of anti-discriminatory legislation. The 1953 *Equal Pay Act* in British Columbia served to identify groups that had suffered from discrimination and established that they had a right to complain when they were oppressed on the basis of that identity.² Later in the 20th century, in 1988, the Japanese-Canadian community won an apology and wrung compensation out of the Federal Government for the humiliating internment of WWII and the state's confiscation and sale of their property in the 1940s. (Although 22,000 people had been interned, only 1,400 received compensation for property losses prior to the 1980s.)³ Many Canadians, including Pierre Trudeau, opposed this move, claiming that it would open the floodgates for similar complaints based on past actions. Indeed, subsequent claims were made, although few achieved as much compensation as that awarded to the survivors of internment. The larger effect of the **redress** settlement made to Japanese-Canadians was the way in which it raised human rights abuses in Canada as a historic issue that needed

1. Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 4-16.

2. Dominique Clément, *Equality Deferred: Sex Discrimination and British Columbia's Human Rights State, 1953-1984* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2014), 86.

3. Audrey Kobayashi, "The Japanese-Canadian Redress Settlement and its Implications for 'Race Relations'," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 24, no. 1.

to be confronted. This redress has served to validate other identity groups — such as residential school survivors — whose claims of abuse are not isolated to the distant past, since they took place in the post-war era when human rights was a concept well known to government, the media, and the public.

The following two sections explore aspects of identity politics in Canada over the last century and more recently. The images that shaped a mainstream Canadian identity can be contrasted with the ways in which some groups were consciously excluded and punished for differentness.

Key Points

- One feature of the Canadian experience has been the development of many, separate, and sometimes conflicting identity groups, of which French-Canada is merely the most obvious.
- “Identity politics” became more visible in the 1960s, and gained importance later in the 20th century.
- The very fact of embracing multiculturalism and diversity has offered support to the growth of identity politics while, conversely, building a sense of shared experience and, thus, unity.
- Identity politics contributed to the destabilization of the political *status quo*, which led to the loss of hegemony by the federal Liberal and Conservative parties.

Attributions

Figure 12.11

[Building for Chronic Male Patients](#) by [Niall Williams](#) is used under a [CC-BY-SA-2.0](#) license.

13.2 Building a National Identity



Figure 12.12 Inventing images that evoke a Canadian tradition distinct from that of Britain or the United States has been a minor industry in Canada. Here, Catholic traditions meet Quebec folkways in *Our Lady of the Snows*, 1909.

A British subject I was born — a British subject I will die.

— John A. Macdonald, 1891¹

John A. Macdonald functions as something of an official repository of stirring and/or aggravating quotes. He spoke these words on the campaign trail in 1891 when the Liberals were arguing for closer economic ties to the United States. Evoking fear of annexation — economic certainly, political probably — Macdonald summoned up what he thought was core to being Canadian: British subjecthood. In Macdonald's day and age, being part of the biggest imperial chain on the planet was something to boast about, and he was counting on other Canadians to feel the same way when he uttered this statement. He was, however, on the record as preferring a kind of arms-length colonial relationship with Britain in which the Dominion was utterly loyal but mostly autonomous. The Canadian High Commission in London was an expression of this: established in 1880, the High Commissioner represented Canadian interests in Westminster and to the Crown, a slight reversal of the role played by the Governors-General.

More than a century later, what is the national identity? Canadians are not “British subjects,” regardless of the fact that the Queen of Canada is also the Queen of Britain. It is difficult to imagine a Prime Minister today invoking that connection the way Macdonald did (successfully, by the way) in 1891. Was there ever a common agreement

1. John A. Macdonald, from 1891 election campaign speech: “As for myself, my course is clear. A British subject I was born — a British subject I will die. With my utmost effort, with my latest breath, will I oppose the ‘veiled treason’ which attempts by sordid means and mercenary proffers to lure our people from their allegiance.” Macdonald opposed the US commercial treaty proposed by the Liberals.

on that identity? No. The Provincial Rights movement of the late Victorian era eroded loyalty to the larger nation even as the Dominion struggled to establish its *bona fides*. Fealty to region did not end with Confederation; it survived throughout the 20th century, and not only in Quebec. A symbolic language of identity at odds with the national equivalent has consistently acted as a counterweight to the notion of Canadian-ness.

These debates and divisions are important to note because they all contributed to the building of national and provincial identities. In addition, they go some way to explaining why the history of Canada is so elusive.

Jack Little, a historian at Simon Fraser University, considers how early tourist accounts contributed to a national sensibility among Canadians.

Making Canada, Making Canadians

In the language of 21st century marketers, Canada had a weak “brand” at the start of the post-Confederation era. Was it a British colony or a free nation? The citizens were British subjects ... which meant what, exactly, in Quebec? Was Canada a North American nation or an extension of the British Isles and, maybe, Western Europe as a whole? Such issues did not trouble the Americans who had nowhere to look but North America. They cut themselves loose from Europe in the 1780s and built their own continent-wide empire. The word *patriot* — which derives from the words *pays* and *patris*, thus meaning loyalty to the country of one’s father — was looked at askance in Canada because it was associated with American revolutionaries in the 18th century and the *Patriotes* of Lower Canada who led the 1837 rebellion against imperial authority. As well, for some more imperially-oriented Canadians, being a “nationalist” implied loyalty to the nation-state as a structure rather than to the larger ideals of the the empire, the Crown, and so on. The search for a common denominator, a shared bond that was both affectionate and inspiring was underway.

What was Canada in 1867 other than a collection of colonies? They’d fought no great battles together and, in fact, they’d sparred with one another from time to time. Adding on three more colonies by 1873 did nothing to change this. Settling and exploiting the West became something of a common project, although Westerners might argue that their disadvantages under the National Policy ought not be considered a source of national identity or pride. In the 19th century, the mechanisms for overcoming this alienation, or at least disinterest, were limited. There was no national media (unlike in Britain where *The Times* of London circulated widely) and there was no national education system (again, unlike in Britain); in point of fact, education proved to be one of the most divisive issues in the early days of the two Dominions.

Imperialists jumped on adventures like the Boer War as a means of manufacturing national consciousness, much as English-Canadians had thrown themselves into the 1885 events in the West. While nationalists might call for a Canadian Navy, imperialists believed that a Canadian investment in the Royal Navy made the whole Imperial fleet a symbol of Canada. The persistence of royal imagery in these years suggests that Britain was a stronger source of icons than the Dominion itself. Certainly the monarch appears on Canadian postage stamps and currencies to the exclusion of any other leader until the 20th century. Other more Canadian traditions were, however, making an appearance. When Macdonald proclaimed himself a British subject forever in 1891, his campaign poster — “The

Old Flag, The Old Policy, The Old Leader” — had him astride the shoulders of a factory worker and a farmer (both of whom look well pleased), brandishing a variant of the Red Ensign. The “old flag” in this case wasn’t the Union Jack after all, but a colonial model with the Union Jack prominent in the upper corner. The flag was far from “old” and using it in this way was meant to inspire a sense of Canadian tradition.

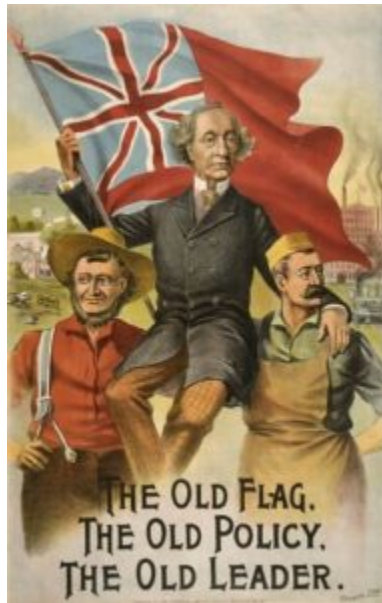


Figure 12.13 Is this a statement of emergent Canadian nationalism?

Artistic representations like this one cannot be underestimated as a source of Canadian identity and part of the process of what historians call “the invention of tradition.”² Posters were more easily mass-produced and more colourful than the photographs of the time, and the Post Office served as a distribution system. The Federal Government could issue these images, as could the national political parties. In fact, the Post Office itself, with a presence in almost every community of any size, was an instrument in shaping the Canadian idea.

Putting a Stamp on Canadian Identity

Across the Western world in the late 19th century, several strategies were exploited to build national sentiment in both new and old countries. Monuments and statuary were used in Germany, France, and the United States to good effect. Caricature icons also became a vehicle for people’s collective identity, such as “John Bull” for Britain and “Uncle Sam” for the United States. National holidays — the 4th of July in the United States, *La Fête Nationale* (aka: Bastille Day) in France on the 14th of July, the monarch’s birthday in Britain (celebrated in June since the 18th century), many “Independence Days” in Latin America, and countless saint’s days — constituted another convention and mechanism for identifying and rallying around a national storyline. Similar strategies were deployed in Canada, but with less grip.

Nationalist statuary in Canada is, for whatever reason, less dramatic and less effective than in other countries.

2. Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-14.

Busts of royals show up everywhere, but there are few national heroes who got that sort of treatment before 1914 and even fewer after 1930 (see Alan Gordon’s discussion of “Monuments and Memory” in [Section 12.12](#)). There are, moreover, no enormous triumphal arches in the major cities, no equivalent to New York’s Statue of Liberty (1886), and — despite the importance of the Notre-Dame Basilica in Montreal — no national cathedral. Attempts have been made to create a personification of the nation in the form of “Johnny Canuck,” a sort of all-purpose character who appeared in newspaper cartoons and other visual forms from the late 1860s on. Typically, a fine physical specimen wearing a Mountie-style Stetson and riding boots, Johnny (sometimes “Jack”) Canuck (in these iterations at least) served as a counterpoint to John Bull and Uncle Sam (the former being corpulent and the latter what Shakespeare might call “lean and hungry”). Canuck, however, doesn’t appear to stand for anything — prosperity? freedom? ironic detachment? — and so hasn’t seen much action over the years. What’s more, there was no feminine equivalent: nothing to match Britain’s Britannia, America’s Columbia, or France’s Marianne.

Generally, national holidays have proved more durable and effective. The monarch’s birthday (now held on the 24th of May) was transplanted from Britain. Dominion Day (renamed Canada Day in 1982) was celebrated on the first anniversary of the *British North America Act* and every 1st of July thereafter. Labour Day followed and was officially recognized by Ottawa in 1894, even though it had been celebrated by trade unionists since 1872. (Saint-John-Baptiste Day is older than both, but it had a much rougher time acquiring government sanction and did not become a parallel national holiday until 1925.) Thanksgiving in Canada was an imported American event grafted onto existing celebrations of the harvest and was proclaimed a national holiday in 1879. These days off from work may not seem to have much to do with building Canadian identity, but they were an effective means of disseminating shared customs and practices (turkey dinners, parades and marches, and picnics in civic parks) to both established Canadians and newcomers who needed to be assimilated into the mainstream culture. Such tactics could be seen perhaps most clearly in Canadian classrooms. Even in the absence of a national education program, the infrastructure of schooling contained many secular images designed to promote a national identity. Portraits of the current monarch adorned most classrooms, as did maps that underlined Canada’s enormity. Well into the 20th century images of the current Prime Minister gazed down on rows of schoolchildren as well. In offices across the country, one could find portraits of Laurier or Macdonald — depending on whether the occupant was a Liberal or a Tory — long after the two statesmen were out of office, which is a symbol of the power of patronage and party loyalty more than a shared national character.



Figure 12.14 A gathering of national personifications from Britain and the United States.



Figure 12.15 Johnny (or Jack) Canuck appears more as an “everyman” character, often scowling at Uncle Sam’s antics and invariably being a good son to Britain.

Another venue for disseminating a national identity was still more humble and assuming. The 1890s ushered in an era of unprecedented image-making expressed through postage stamps.”³ Pre-Confederation stamps included

3. Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 281-282.

images of a beaver and symbols of the British connection; these were followed, after Confederation, by three decades of stamps bearing the likeness of Queen Victoria. As a reminder of the country's principal loyalties, this use of the Queen's likeness was itself a powerful message. Then, in 1898, the first post-Confederation stamp without any relation to the Queen appeared, which was a map of the world in which Canada is prominent at its centre and the lands of the British Empire are highlighted in bright red. Thereafter, historic themes are gradually explored, including five commemorative stamps that appeared in 1908 to mark the tercentenary of the founding of Quebec City (and thus Canada and New France). Nothing more would be done on this theme until 1917 when a commemorative of the Charlottetown Conference of 1864 was produced.

A similar venue for imagery is the national currency. Paper currency was in circulation from before Confederation, and images of logging recur, for example, on the 1898 dollar bill. The more widely-circulated 25 cent bill — the “shinplaster,” so called because of its small size and square-ish shape — was, however, the preserve of royal imagery. The first coin minted in Canada did not appear until 1908. Like many of its contemporary bills and stamps, it featured a royal head (Edward VII) and — more subtly — a winding vine of maple leaves. In the case of both postage and currency, the appearance of “Canada” was itself a simple and subtle building block of national identity.

All of these modes of expressing and shaping a national brand experienced a boom in the 1930s as Canada gained greater independence from Britain, although some of the key elements had already been established. Royals, political leaders, and maple leaves were among the most favoured themes. The creation of the CBC shifted the symbolic language of national identity to radio waves; advances in photography and photographic publication in magazines and other documents were also important. Historians Ian McKay and Robin Bates have demonstrated how the provincial tourism industry of Nova Scotia took advantage of developments in printing to disseminate, within and beyond, images with strong historic reference points.⁴ This process, which they call the “making of the public past,” created a new and arbitrary iconography. Parallels can be found in every province, examples of an emergent national consciousness at the regional level. McKay and Bates have demonstrated that this process introduces a shift in focus from “history” to “heritage”:

If both draw on the actual events of the past, history as such necessarily upholds a notion (however nuanced and qualified) that some stories about the past are better — more accurate, complex, verifiable, ethical — than others. [...] Unlike history, heritage does not advance falsifiable positions, not even when it comes to us arrayed in the forms of history: “It uses historical traces and tells historical tales, but these tales and traces are stitched into fables that are open neither to critical analysis nor to comparative scrutiny.”⁵

Heritage speaks to group identity in a manner that History cannot. We hear references to “our railway heritage” or “our fiddle-music heritage” that are meant to evoke an inclusion (suggested by “our”) and, by definition, an exclusion (not everyone is “we” or “us”). In addition, heritage elevates an iconography of the past without problematizing conflict. “Our railway heritage” or “our prairie homestead heritage” looks very different to a Canadian of settler descent whose ancestors were given a quarter section of free land and another whose Aboriginal great-grandparents' land was seized, carved up, and given away.

4. Ian McKay and Robin Bates, *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

5. *Ibid.*, 15.

Such simplifications and mythologizing explain, in part, the durability in the Canadian mind of Anne of Green Gables, the Cariboo gold miner, the homesteader, Champlain and the heroic age of New France, and the Franklin Expedition. These are symbols that are comprised overwhelmingly of European faces and values, in which Aboriginal peoples are noticeably missing. Asian- and African-Canadians are similarly conspicuous by their absence. By creating a language of national heritage that excludes other stories, this focus on the Euro-Canadian narrative (invariably told as a narrative of success) eclipsed other possible identities and narrowed the possible stories available to be told.



Figure 12.16 Green Gables Heritage Place in PEI is a shrine to a literary character but, of course, the house was merely the inspiration for Lucy Maud Montgomery's imaginary setting. What "heritage" is actually being commemorated?

Advancing these images and others became part of the national project (and parallel provincial and regional projects as well). The same processes occurred in other countries, and we continue to see these enterprises today, if we take the time to look.

Two Founding Nations

At the time of Confederation, there was little appetite in English-Canada (especially Orange Ontario) for a dualist vision of the country. Catholicism was regarded by many leading anglophones as treasonous, and French people were characterized as backward and superstitious. Anglophones and Protestants, by contrast, were regularly depicted as vital, aggressive, dynamic, and tough-minded. Anglicizing the West — the clearing away of the French-Catholic Métis — was not an accident, and French-Canadians generally were on solid ground when it came to fears of assimilationist intentions on the part of their neighbours. If the English-Canadians could not eliminate the French fact in reality, they would often do so symbolically. For proof one has only to remember the lyrics to Canada's other national anthem, *The Maple Leaf Forever*, which thrillingly recounts the defeat of Montcalm by "Wolfe, the dauntless hero," and the fact that the "thistle, shamrock [and] rose entwine the Maple Leaf" implied that the fleur-de-lis was not allowed to take its turn.

Listen to the original version of *The Maple Leaf Forever*.

Most often, nationalistic music excludes the foreign but, in the case of *The Maple Leaf Forever*, it actually excludes a core group of Canadians. As one specialist explains:

Rather than representing the nation as a whole and serving purposes beneficial to everyone, nationalist music acquires more specific functions, perhaps the dissemination of a restrictive set of ideological values or the aggrandizement of a ruling group or an elite oligarchy. Music presents the nation with a way of preserving its past and thus writing the history of its present.... By injecting nationalist sentiments into national music collections, scholars and government agencies alike *ipso facto* make room for some residents of a nation while taking away space from others.⁶

Dualism clearly presented problems when it came time to imagine Canada as a product. How to build it? How to maintain it? If the strength of the Dominion derived from its British traditions and military might, then how does one celebrate the culture of a different — and ostensibly defeated — culture? Military symbols were among the most powerful of the Victorian and Edwardian eras through to the Great War. It is no accident that the North West Mounted Police uniform is modelled on that of a British regiment in occupied Ireland: the red tunics announce Britishness. Moreover, the force was recruited exclusively from anglophone Canada. The Mounties are the symbol of Canadian authority *par excellence* in the West; read differently, they are evidence of intolerance for a dualistic national ideal.

And yet dualism emerged in the 20th century as the most durable of the national myths. “Two founding nations” has its roots in the *BNA Act*, which seeks to preserve French and Catholic institutions at the provincial level. The French-Canadians who negotiated the constitution argued that the provisions of the *BNA Act* would also enable the co-building by both French and English of a larger country. Anglophone contemporaries understood it differently: French-Canadian Catholicism was now corralled within one province where it would stay. Again, one may turn to the separate schools debates across the country in the pre-WWI era for evidence of how these two visions were mutually exclusive. Gradually in the 20th century, there opened up a little more tolerance in some areas, while in others the space for dualism closed further and faster.

Several landmark events fostered a growing nationalism that contained space for both French and English sentiments. The Great War marks a turning point in this respect, since it was a source of pride for Canadians with respect to the performance of the nation’s troops in the face of extremely grim circumstances and under what was generally thought to be poor British leadership. It was also divisive, however, in that the conscription crisis divided French and English Canada. There followed a series of events that both built on the embryonic patriotism fostered by the war and downplayed the contentious issue of conscription.

The first of these is the Halibut Treaty of 1923, an agreement struck directly between Canada and the United States without the involvement of Britain. Shortly thereafter, in the same year, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King attended the Imperial Conference in London, at which it was agreed that Commonwealth countries could now pursue their own foreign policy initiatives independent of the Empire. Effectively, this agreement put an end to the Canadian Imperialist dream except insofar as Canada remained an important part of a loose alliance of

6. Philip V. Bohlman, *World Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 94, quoted in Robin Elliott, “Maple Cottage, Leslieville, Toronto: (De)Constructing Nationalist Music History,” *Institute for Canadian Music Newsletter*, ISSN 1705-1560, accessed June 22, 2015, <http://sites.utoronto.ca/icm/0101b.html#n30>.

nations with Britain at the centre. These changes were enshrined in the Balfour Declaration of 1926 and the Statute of Westminster in 1931. In 1939, *O Canada* was officially declared a companion national anthem, alongside *God Save the King/Queen* — a symbolic but important change.

In these years as well, both the Liberal and Conservative Parties nationally took steps to reduce internal fissures between French and English elements. The Liberals enjoyed far greater success in this regard by adopting an informal or de facto policy of alternating leadership between English and French Prime Ministers.⁷ Following the Second World War, it became possible for the first time to hold “Canadian citizenship” under new 1946 legislation. Finally, in the 1960s, three events occurred in close succession. Under the Pearson regime, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was established in 1963, made a preliminary report in 1965, and concluded with a full report in 1969. Its existence and six years of work did much to change the tenor of nationalist discourse in the country. Coincidentally, the replacement of the Red Ensign with the Maple Leaf flag in 1965 was seen as a nationalist step that placed further distance between Canada and the Imperialist (implicitly anti-*nationaliste*) vision. Finally, the celebration of the centennial of Confederation in the form of Expo '67 in Montreal was another step toward a thaw in English-Canadian attitudes toward dualism. The fact that this took place against a backdrop of growing French-Canadian nationalism and separatist feeling was, of course, ironic.

What is sometimes regarded as the genius of Pierre Trudeau was his ability to move beyond dualism to a multicultural nation state. This was an expression of the reality in Canada's cities in particular, but also the West generally, which were home to a multitude of ethnicities for whom the French vs. English debate in central Canada was less and less meaningful. The nationalism of Bourassa (essentially a dualistic vision of Canada as a continent-wide home for French and English alike), the nationalism of Maurice Duplessis (which fostered a view of Quebec as French-Canada in its entirety and closed off from the rest of Canada), and the nationalism of the Diefenbaker-Pearson years (which espoused a “de-hyphenated” national identity) were thus superseded by a national pluralism in which multiculturalism was a dominant value.

Heritage Fare

In 1972 a popular CBC radio show host, Peter Gzowski (1934-2002), opened a competition to find a Canadian equivalent to the phrase “as American as apple pie.” The winning submission came from a Sarnia, Ontario woman, Heather Scott, who suggested “as Canadian as possible under the circumstances.” Generations that followed have been, on the whole, more or less content to agree. Indeed, the popular self-perception Canadians have is of a humble nation not given much to flag-waving, which is certainly a convenient place to land after decades of Union Jack-waving that only divided Canadians.

Yet the symbolic language of national identity continues to constitute a small industry. Every national monument or park, every backpack bearing a Maple Leaf flag, and every debate about Quebec's place in Confederation (never English-Canada's place in Confederation) is part of that discourse. So, too, are nationalistic uses of sports:

7. However, there is some slight of hand involved in this alternation. While it is true that Laurier was succeeded by King, St. Laurent was not King's choice -- he would have preferred his Finance Minister Douglas Abbott (1899-1987), an anglophone from Montreal. Following St. Laurent, Lester Pearson's rise was meteoric, given the Nobel Prize for Peace, so it is difficult to imagine any other contender at the time from any part of Canada becoming PM. In addition, while Pierre Trudeau's ascent was also dramatic, it is easy to forget that the field was made up of many credible candidates and that the leadership convention vote went to an unprecedented four ballots before Trudeau won 50.9% of the vote against the now entirely forgotten Bob Winters (1910-1969) who had a very credible 40.3%.

lacrosse was declared the national sport in 1859 and demoted to “Canada’s National Summer Sport” in 1994 when hockey was elevated to a parallel status for winter. (The fact that the professional leagues in both sports play from autumn into late spring is evidently neither here nor there.) Olympic and other international competitions have been exploited for nationalistic momentum and examined by journalists and scholars alike for signs of “what it means to be Canadian.”⁸

The struggle to construct nationalisms leans heavily on history, and history has tended to serve nationalism. One need only think of early accounts of the NWMP/RCMP as a bold and venturesome extension of Canadian will — as opposed to a brutal and often clumsy and undignified imposition of foreign rule — for an example. As historians Laura Peers and Robert Coutts point out, as Canadian history has privileged the accounts of Euro-Canadian experiences, it has necessarily downplayed Aboriginal stories:

Prior to the 1980s, Aboriginal people were seldom mentioned in either scholarly texts or at historic sites; when they were, the discussions emphasized colonial control over Aboriginal people within historical narratives that celebrated the establishment of that control. Thus, the choice of sites, figures, and events for commemoration emphasized “great men” (such as explorers) and their discoveries, military forts as representations of the establishment of European control in a region, and technological advances associated with nation building such as water locks that facilitated shipping.⁹

In thinking about the history of Canada one must, therefore, make space for the history of the “idea” of Canada. Too often that gets bound up in notions of “Canadian heritage,” which it is not. What the concept of *Canadian-ness* has accommodated and left out tells us, as historians, a great deal about the society that people in the past thought they were building, and the place in which they believed they lived.

Lament for a Nation

One of the most powerful 20th century essays on the state of Canada appeared in 1965. *Lament for a Nation* was a social conservative reply to the decision reached by the Liberal government of Lester B. Pearson to host American nuclear missiles on Canadian soil. It was written by George Parkin Grant (1918-1988), a philosophy professor at McMaster University in Hamilton.

Grant took the position that human freedom is the end-goal of history. He maintained that Canada had a special role to play in that process by dint of being a North American country steeped in French and British political philosophical traditions, and yet distinct from the republic to the south with its powerful legacy of slavery. Continentalism was, in this respect, the enemy. Grant was alert to the changes in symbolic language that pointed in that direction: to him the loss of the Red Ensign flag was a signal that Canada was casting off one of the ropes that tied it to European perspectives. Like many Canadian nationalists, his vision of Canada was one that engaged globally and led internationally, rather than one tied to a North American economic engine: material wealth was less important to him as a measure of national greatness than engagement globally.

8. If I sound cynical on this score, it is only fair that you should know that I am wearing a Canadian soccer jersey in support of the women's team in the 2015 World Cup.

9. Laura Peers and Robert Coutts, “Aboriginal History and Historic Sites: The Shifting Ground,” in *Gathering Places: Aboriginal and Fur Trade Histories*, eds. Carolyn Podruchny and Laura Peers (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 276.

Lament was viewed at the time (and has been almost revered since) as a radical statement of Canadian nationalism in the face of creeping Americanism. Was Grant on the outside looking in? Or was *Lament* a manifesto of elite despair? Indeed, one can hardly imagine someone more entitled to the title “establishment figure” than George Parkin Grant. He was the grandson of two Canadian Imperialists: on his mother’s side George Robert Parkin and on his father’s side George Monro Grant. His mother’s sister, Alice Parkin (1880-1950), married Vincent Massey (1887-1967, of the Massey-Ferguson agricultural implement fortune) who became from 1952-1959 the first Canadian-born Governor-General. Raymond Massey (1896-1983), uncle Vincent’s brother, was one of the great Broadway and screen stars of the mid-century, a celebrity in his own right. Grant’s father and his mother’s father Parkin were both principals of Toronto’s elite private school Upper Canada College; grandfather Grant was president of Queen’s University. Historian, polemicist, and politician Michael Ignatieff (b. 1947) is the nephew of George Grant, an indication of how the value of a Canadian establishment pedigree continues to carry weight.

Exercise: History Around You

The Mountie always Gets his Man

Consider the noble Mountie. Strikingly clad in his scarlet tunic, astride his noble steed, the leather of his high riding boots and the jet-black of his thick belt. Atop his head is a cute pillbox hat tilted coyly to one side with a strap pulled tightly under his clean-shaven chin.

Wait, that can’t be right....

Yes, the earliest iteration of the Mountie uniform included a hat more usually associated with 20th century bellhops, elevator operators, cigarette girls, and car valets. Its successor was a white pith helmet (*pith* being another word for cork) that stood tall on the wearer’s head and which is mainly thought of today as having something to do with imperialists in the tropics and Africa. The flat-brimmed Stetson was the third-time-lucky alternative.



Figure 12.17 Members of the North West Mounted Police detachment at Fort Walsh in 1878, photograph by Auderton George. At that time, NWMP wore hats that were perfectly designed to keep the sun in their eyes and the rain streaming into their faces.

Does it matter? Perhaps. As representatives of Canadian authority in the West, there's a reason why the Mounties looked like the Royal Irish Constabulary or a regiment sent in to suppress a rising in Rhodesia. These were the shock troops of Canadian imperialism and an expression of Anglo-Canadian virility. As a familiar icon of Canadian culture, how has this been used? How does it continue to be used?

In 1995 the image of the RCMP (and its predecessor the NWMP) was sold to the Disney Corporation. Canadians were outraged. Only a few years earlier, Constable Baltej Dhillon, a Sikh-British Columbian member of the force, achieved national notoriety when he won the right to wear his turban in place of the Stetson. A chorus of Canadians were equally outraged at that development as well. As historian Michael Dawson points out, “many people considered the Mountie to be an important national symbol” and, in some respects, an inviolate symbol at that. He adds:

Mythologies, like the one surrounding the Mountie, are instrumental in forming a cohesive bond of shared English-Canadian sentiment — a sentiment essential for English-Canadian nationalism given Canada's proximity to the United States and the necessity of developing some response to an increasingly boisterous Quebec nationalism.¹⁰

Look at ways in which you encounter images of the RCMP and the archetypal “Mountie.” Consider the pose, the backdrop, the circumstances (royal visit, Canadian trade delegation abroad, opening of a public building), the material and medium (photograph, plastic doll, film, cartoon, music), and the typology of the individual Mountie (male, female, Euro- or Asian- or African- or Aboriginal-Canadian). What is the message being transmitted? What does it say about the force and/or Canada? Is it a national icon, a shorthand for Canada as a whole, or something satirical? If this is a part of the national identity, one based in historical traditions, then it deserves scrutiny.

10. Michael Dawson, *The Mountie from Dime Novel to Disney* (Toronto, ON: Between the Lines, 1998), 1-5, 25.

Key Points

- The history of the nation must include a history of national images.
- Canada's ability to generate coherent and widely accepted icons and symbols of the national character, values, and binding events has been challenged by divisive historical circumstances.
- There are many means of transmitting a nationalist message, including anthems, postage stamps, national holidays, and currency.
- Heritage and history get bound up in one another, as the former expresses common experiences that are meant to be unifying but are often insufficiently problematized from a historical perspective.
- Dualism grew through the 20th century as the dominant national trope, and was succeeded after the 1960s by multiculturalism.

Attributions**Figure 12.12**

[“Our Lady of the Snows” – A Strictly Canadian Character \(Online MIKAN no.3622536\)](#) by Keystone View Co. / Library and Archives Canada / PA-207560 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 12.13

[The Old Flag – The Old Policy – The Old Leader \[Sir John A. Macdonald\] : 1891 electoral campaign \(Online MIKAN no.2834401\)](#) by Library and Archives Canada, C-006536 is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 12.14

[The Great Rapprochement](#) by [AnonMoos](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 12.15

[Canada's Pork Opportunity](#) by [Skeezix1000](#) is in the [public domain](#).

Figure 12.16

[Green Gables House front view](#) by [Markus Gregory](#) is used under a [CC-BY-SA-3.0](#) license.

Figure 12.17

[Police Fort Walsh 1878](#) by [Jean Gagnon](#) is in the [public domain](#).

13.3 Monuments and Memory

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Figure 12.34 The western aspect of “The Response.”

In May 1939, only months before the outbreak of the Second World War, King George VI presided over the inauguration of Canada’s National War Memorial in Ottawa. Dubbed “The Response,” the memorial presented an idealized view of Canada’s reaction to the First World War, and its inauguration was rich with symbolism evoking triumphant patriotism and devotion to the monarch. This monumental unveiling represents the culmination of a period of monument building in Canada. Indeed, most monuments still seen on Canada’s streets date from the era between 1890 and 1939. Although monuments continued to be raised after WWII, the monumental landscape was largely established by 1939, reflecting the values of that era.

Canada was not alone in these efforts. A similar process began slightly earlier in Europe, Britain, and the United States, as 19th century nations sought ways to honour important people and commemorate events. They began building monuments for reasons associated with what English historian Eric Hobsbawm has called “the mass-production of traditions.”¹ As nations industrialized and grew in size, they began to formalize and ritualize

1. Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions, Europe, 1870-1914,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-14.

symbols of power and national cohesion. Monuments aided this process in a number of ways. As memorials, they helped perpetuate memories and aid civic education by recognizing great leaders and accomplishments; they helped direct common values, offering examples of civic virtue for mass consumption. Thus, monuments helped shape a sense of national history that was closely linked to national institutions: they presented political, ideological messages. Yet, while official monuments attempted to enshrine an official narrative of Canada's past, monuments could be hotly contested, since different groups saw history differently.

Certainly, there had been monuments raised in Canada prior to the industrial revolution. In the 18th century, American soldiers occupying Montreal during the American Revolution destroyed a bust of George III standing in a city square in Montreal, which demonstrated the deep and contested meanings monuments represented for people. In 1809, following the death of Admiral Horatio Nelson in the Battle of Trafalgar, Montreal raised another and more enduring monument to the hero, an action that was repeated around the British Empire.² In the 1820s, Lord Dalhousie tried to pacify local sentiments by placing a monument honouring both Wolfe and Montcalm in Quebec City. In the middle years of the century, other heroes, such as Generals Wolfe and Brock, as well as events such as the Battles of Sainte-Foy and Ridgeway, were also memorialized by monuments. However, it was not until the late 1880s that Canadians begin to raise monuments in significant numbers.

Between 1885 and 1922, the lives of eight Canadian statesmen were celebrated with monuments on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, linking central Canadian politics to a particular vision of historical significance. However, away from the capital, monument raising focused on other heroes and events, and reflected other ideas about history. For instance, at Quebec City in 1898, civic leaders argued over the best depiction of Samuel Champlain in the monument they were building. The interpretation that emerged from these disputes purged Champlain's religious identity to make him simply the governor of New France, a precursor of Canada's Governor-General.³ After WWI, the focus in much of the country turned away from great figures towards the common soldiers who had laid down their lives to defend their hometowns. As historian Jonathan Vance documents, Canadian communities from Coast to Coast designed and built monuments to honour the local sons who had fought for king and country in the Great War, which culminated in the unveiling of the National War Memorial.⁴ This phenomenon was less pronounced in Quebec where the war had been unpopular and where monument building in the 1920s turned instead to heroes of Quebec's past.⁵ Despite efforts to stamp a singular message on Canada's monuments, the histories they told could be highly contentious.

2. On the history of the "Napoleonic columns" in Canada, see John Douglas Belshaw, *Canadian History: Pre-Confederation* (Vancouver, BC: BCcampus, 2015), [Section 11.1](#).

3. Ronald Rudin, *Founding Fathers: The Celebration of Champlain and Laval in the Streets of Québec, 1878-1908* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

4. Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1997); see also Vance's article, "Documents in Stone and Bronze: Monuments and Memorials as Historical Sources," in *Building New Bridges/Bâtir de nouveaux ponts: Sources, Methods, and Interdisciplinarity/Sources, méthodes et interdisciplinarité*, eds. Jeff Keshen and Sylvie Perrier (Ottawa, ON: University of Ottawa Press, 2005), 185-195.

5. Alan Gordon, *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montreal's Public Memories, 1891-1930* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).



Figure 12.35 Memorials have ceased to be the monopoly of heroic figures and leading politicians as “Enclave” (the 1992 Ottawa Women’s Monument to women murdered as a result of domestic violence) attests.

Two University of Toronto historians offer different perspectives on commemoration and public celebrations. Cecilia Morgan offers her thoughts [here](#),
and [here](#),
and her colleague Ian Radforth makes his observations [here](#).

Key Points

- Monuments and memorials have been used to assert authority, acknowledge the legitimacy of members of a society, and craft the basic outlines of history itself.
- Outwardly straightforward, monuments and statuary in Canada have often been divisive and interpreted (or reinterpreted) in conflicting ways.

Attributions

Figure 12.34

[National War Memorial in Ottawa \(1\)](#) by [R. Wolsak](#) is used under a [CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0](#) license.

Figure 12.35

[MintoParkMemorial](#) by [Padraic Ryan](#) is used under a [CC-BY-SA-3.0](#) license.

About the Author and Contributors



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