
The Other Quiet Revolution

José E. Igartua

The Other Quiet Revolution:
National Identities in English
Canada, 1945-71



UBCPress · Vancouver · Toronto

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15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in Canada on ancient-forest-free paper (100% post-consumer recycled) that is processed chlorine- and acid-free, with vegetable-based inks.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Igartua, José Eduardo, 1946-

The other quiet revolution : national identities in English Canada, 1945-71 / José E. Igartua.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7748-1088-3

ISBN-10: 0-7748-1088-2

1. Canadians, English-speaking – History – 20th century. 2. Multiculturalism – Canada – History – 20th century. 3. Nationalism – Canada – History – 20th century. I. Title.

FC141.I39 2006

971.004'11209045

C2006-902898-2

Canada

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP), and of the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

UBC Press

The University of British Columbia

2029 West Mall

Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

604-822-5959 / Fax: 604-822-6083

www.ubcpres.ca

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Acknowledgments

The idea for this book emerged out of a master's seminar I conducted at Université du Québec à Montréal ten years ago. The seminar focused on twentieth-century Canada and its historiography. Surveying recent historiographical trends, the students and I noticed that the concept of nation had received almost no analytical consideration of the type given to class, gender, and region. An invitation to McGill philosopher and political scientist Charles Taylor to discuss his work on *Reconciling the Solitudes*¹ in the seminar led to a fertile exchange of ideas, for which I would like to thank him.

Many other thanks are in order. The Social Science and Humanities Research Council provided research funding, which allowed me to hire Julie Landreville, Manon Leroux, and Pascale Ryan, all outstanding research assistants. The Faculté des sciences humaines of the Université du Québec à Montréal supplied travel assistance. In Toronto, Marie-Josée Therrien mined the Canadian history textbook collection of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), access to which was kindly granted by librarian Kathleen Imrie. Marie-Josée and Robert Sprachman were also congenial hosts during a research trip. Through Marie-Josée, I met Ken Montgomery, who was also conducting research in the OISE history textbook collection. Ken graciously shared his knowledge of postwar Canadian history texts. Ken and Marie-Josée also offered stimulating comments on that part of my research.

Wendy Watkins of the Carleton University Library Data Centre kindly arranged access to the raw data of the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion polls, and encouraged me to pursue their secondary analysis. I am also indebted to the staff of Library and Archives Canada for easy access to manuscript collections as well as microfilms of newspapers. The McCord Museum granted permission to reproduce the John Collins cartoon, while the heirs of Robert Chambers, through the kind assistance of Anita Chambers, allowed reproduction of the Chambers cartoons. Part of Chapter 5 of this

book has appeared as Chapter 3 of *Canada and the End of Empire*, edited by Phillip Buckner (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005); I wish to thank the Press for allowing me to use the material here.

I have also benefited from many an inspiring discussion with fellow historians. At the outset of my project, Gérard Bouchard shared his interests in *imaginaires collectifs* through a seminar at which I outlined my general approach to the topic of evolving representations of national identity in English-speaking Canada. Likewise, Gerald Friesen discussed citizenship and nation with me before his thought-provoking book appeared. In 2001, Phillip Buckner introduced me to other scholars interested in “Canada and the end of Empire” at a conference in London, and also to the courteous staff at UBC Press. My colleague Robert Martineau and the indomitable Ken Osborne helped me contextualize representations of national identities in history textbooks. With his usual generosity, Ramsay Cook spent a whole day with me discussing the art and business of textbook writing in the 1960s; he also offered reminiscences of his fellow textbook writers. More recently, I had the pleasure of discovering Timothy Stanley’s determined reconceptualization of Canadian history along anti-racist lines. In my own department, it was ever a delight to draw on Magda Fahrni’s rich knowledge of twentieth-century English-Canadian historiography.

I also owe more personal thanks to my family. My wife Marie-Thérèse has had the resilience and fortitude to live with an academic for nearly forty years now. My children Karine and Josée Nadine have been everything a proud father could wish for. And I now enjoy watching my grandchildren, Ben and Mia, busily constructing their own multifaceted identities. May they learn in these pages a little more of the country that is theirs to make.

The Other Quiet Revolution

Introduction: Searching for National Identities

This is a first foray into a very large territory. It charts the story of how, in a very short time, English Canada shed its definition of itself as British and adopted a new stance as a civic nation, that is, without ethnic particularities, and erected this as the Canadian model. I call this process the *Other Quiet Revolution* because it took place roughly with the same speed and over the same period as Quebec's Quiet Revolution, and because it was of similar magnitude in the cultural changes it wrought. And it was even quieter than Quebec's Revolution: it was so quiet, in fact, that historians have not bothered to investigate it as a historical phenomenon.

The analogy with Quebec's Quiet Revolution rests on the argument that before 1960 British referents occupied the same dominant place in definitions of English-Canadian identity as Catholicism did in definitions of Québécois identity; they were an article of faith for most, though, as in Quebec, not for all. Within less than ten years, these dominant referents had been displaced in both collective identities. In Quebec, religion went from the public to the private sphere (except in the school system, where the process would take quite a bit longer), a transformation that was well looked upon in English Canada. The "de-ethnicization" of English Canada, however, was a process hardly noticed in English Canada itself, and totally unseen in Quebec. This affected the uneasy realignment of the relationship between the two nations that occurred from the 1960s to the present.

But is it appropriate to speak of English Canada as a nation? In the 1960s, it became fashionable among the English-speaking Canadian intelligentsia to deny or at least to question the very existence of an English-Canadian nation. The argument against the existence of English Canada asserted that the ethnic or cultural definition of an English-Canadian identity no longer held any meaning, replaced as they were by "limited identities."¹ English Canada had vanished, replaced by a broader, civic definition of Canadian society, held to include citizens of whatever linguistic, cultural, or ethnic

origins. The view that there was no such thing as English Canada has become such a dominant paradigm in the English-Canadian discourse on identity that one scholar, Philip Resnick, has felt the need to write a book on *Thinking English Canada*, in which he argues for the recognition that English-speaking Canada is one of the “sociological” nations within the Canadian state. Resnick defines the English-Canadian nation as sharing a common language and culture; a specific territorial belonging; a spirit of live and let live; a specific mixture of conservative, liberal, and social democratic political traditions; regional diversity; and its view of its place in the world.²

Resnick’s definition of nation alludes to the concepts of nation, nationalism, and national identity, concepts that have been the object of considerable scholarly discussion over the last forty years. It is not appropriate here to review or engage this ongoing discussion, but I have drawn from it definitions that infuse the present study.³

Over the last twenty years, the work of Anthony D. Smith has produced much debate about the concepts of nation, nationalism, and national identity. Smith’s seminal book *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* offers a rich perspective for the historical and sociological analysis of nations.⁴ Smith surveyed ethnic groups and nations from antiquity to the present, and across the globe, in order to understand the potent political force of nationalism. In his most recent formulation, Smith defines the concept of nation as a “named community possessing an historic territory, shared myths and memories, a common public culture and common laws and customs.”⁵ Smith disagrees with the “modernists” who see the nation as a recent, modern, construction; he finds this “dominant orthodoxy of scholarship on nationalism” too restrictive and too ethnocentric.⁶ Smith prefers an “ethno-symbolic” paradigm for defining the nation. This paradigm “focuses particularly on the subjective elements in the persistence of *ethnies*, the formation of nations and the impact of nationalism.” It pays attention to the “relationship between various elites and the lower strata (‘the people’) they aim to represent”; it is concerned with analysis over long periods, to uncover the various links between nations and earlier, ethnic forms of collective identities; it is attentive to the “problem of collective passion and attachment” that emotionally tie people to national entities; and it stresses “the influence of subjective dimensions of shared symbols, myths, and memories.”⁷ Smith and other adherents of the ethno-symbolic paradigm focus on psychological and cultural components of nations to explain the persistent strength and attraction of the collective identities offered by the nation. Smith’s definitions of nation and of national identity attempt to cover the “historical and sociological complexity of nations” and are intended as concepts “that delimit boundaries, not ones that seek to capture often elusive ‘essences.’”⁸

Nations, in this perspective, are communities of territory, communities of institutions, and communities of the mind. They are different collective entities from states, which may comprise one or more nations. Nations are “complex constructs composed of a number of interrelated components – ethnic, cultural, territorial, economic and legal-political.” The identity that derives from belonging to a nation includes references to specific national components: “1. an historic territory, or homeland; 2. common myths and historical memories; 3. a common, mass public culture; 4. common legal rights and duties for all members; 5. a common economy with territorial mobility for members.”⁹ Smith recently defined national identity as an analytical concept as “the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identifications of individuals with that pattern and heritage and with its cultural elements.” This concept implies an interaction between individual and collective forms of identity, and a dynamic between continuity and change.¹⁰

What are the relationships between nation and nationalism? Does the nation precede nationalism, or does nationalism produce the nation? This question was at the heart of the debates on the various definitions of nation that Smith has summarized in *Nationalism* and in *The Nation in History*.¹¹ In Smith’s view, nations are a much older phenomenon than nationalism, which he defines as “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation.’”¹²

Historically, Smith argues, nationalism has taken two broad shapes. The familiar Western shape is that of civic nationalism, grounded on “historic territory, legal-political equality of members, and common civic culture and ideology.” It combines a “predominantly spatial or territorial conception” with a “community of laws and institutions in a single political will.”¹³ This definition emphasizes territory and legal institutions. Ethnic nationalism, on the other hand, emphasizes not territory but “genealogy and presumed descent ties, popular mobilization, vernacular languages, customs and traditions.” It is a form of nationalism more prevalent in eastern Europe and Asia than in the West.¹⁴ Contrary to a commonly held view, Smith argues, civic nationalism is not inherently egalitarian or liberal, and is “far from accommodating the group claims of different cultures,”¹⁵ even though it has been a conceit of Western commentators to view civic nationalism as compatible with liberalism and thus morally superior to ethnic nationalism.¹⁶ Smith warns not to push the distinction between the two forms of nationalism too far: “In fact every nationalism contains civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms.”¹⁷ The particular emphasis of a given nationalism at a given time, therefore, is a matter of historical

investigation and not a question of essence. In the case of English Canada, there were – and still are – at once elements of ethnic and civic nationalism in the representations given of the nation.

In the present work I use the term “ethnic” to indicate the dominant ground occupied by references to ethnic origin in representations of the English-Canadian nation, and the term “civic” to signal the dominance of appeals to universal values rather than to ethnic origin in later definitions of the nation. I am trying to distinguish emphases, not to set up a binary opposition between the two types of nationalism. My aim is to show how the weight of each element shifted within representations of national identity over an amazingly short period.

It can be argued that English Canada today constitutes a civic nation according to the typology offered by Smith and others, and to the usage of the term I have just outlined. English-speaking Canadians share a common territory, a common language, a common space for public discourse and the expression of its public culture – a communicational community – common laws and customs, widely shared values,¹⁸ and an increasing self-awareness as Canadians.¹⁹ I also stress that a common language is the prerequisite for the other characteristics of the English-Canadian nation. I would argue, after Benedict Anderson, that this communicational community has existed since newspapers, the telegraph, and the railway (“print-capitalism,” in Anderson’s words) defined this communicational space.²⁰ Today what defines this nation is language more than common ethnic or cultural origins, though of course a language of communication rests on the supposed sharing of cultural referents. Gerald Friesen makes the same point in *Citizens and Nation*: “The construction of modern Canada took place in two languages, in two administrative bureaucracies spawned by two ‘Europe-centred, world-imperial states,’ and in two imagined communities – French and English.”²¹

It has become commonplace in Canadian historiography to portray the setting aside of this ethnic definition by English-speaking Canadians as a gradual process, begun in the crucible of the First World War and ending with the social and economic transformations that followed the Second World War.²² Sociologist Raymond Breton has relied on this view in his somewhat Whiggish sketch of the comparative evolution of English-Canadian and Quebec nationalisms.²³ My argument in this book is that the process was far from gradual and foreordained.

Phillip Buckner has reminded us that ethnic definitions of collective identity were at the root of English-Canadian society’s original representations of itself as a British nation.²⁴ I use the term “British” here not as a synonym for “English-speaking” but to refer to a set of ethnic, cultural, political, and symbolic markers considered to be obtained by birth and education into the British culture. “British” encompasses the more specific English, Irish, Welsh, and Scottish cultures that were transplanted to Canada, but retains

an ethnic quality because it serves to define a specific “We” that excludes those not bred and raised in its culture. I argue that English-speaking Canada retained this British ethnic definition of itself until the 1960s, and then abruptly discarded it during that decade.

As the above should make clear, I am not trying to discover the essence of an unchanging English Canada. Nations are historical entities. They evolve over time and are reconfigured under the pressure of demographic, economic, social, and cultural factors. It is therefore safe to postulate that, like other nations, English Canada, as a historical entity, has undergone changes in its self-definition. The timing of this transformation, and the factors that brought it about, are significant historical questions for Canadians’ comprehension of their country’s history. Given Anthony D. Smith’s emphasis on the persistence and continuity of collective cultural identities,²⁵ the suddenness of English Canada’s remaking of its national identity also offers an interesting case in the study of nations and nationalism in general.

Nations, as I said earlier, are communities of the mind. Benedict Anderson has drawn attention to the “imagined” character of “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact.”²⁶ English Canada is obviously such an imagined community, grounded, as Resnick argues, in a shared identity. Such identities – region, gender, and class, for example – are historically formed and reshaped, as the literature on nationalism over the past twenty years has argued.²⁷ National identities are built on collective mental representations shared, in one degree or another, by those who see themselves as belonging to the nation. Therefore, a national identity exists only to the extent that conceptions of it are voiced collectively; in other words, they need to be represented, that is, in the definition of the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, called up “in the mind by description or portrayal or imagination.”²⁸

As a form of collective identity, national identities possess a number of features that sociologist Charles Tilly has codified as characteristic of public identities. The first is their relational character. By this Tilly means that identities are located in “connections among individuals and groups rather than in the minds of particular persons or whole populations.” The second character is cultural: “social identities rest on shared understandings and their representations.” The third feature is historical: Tilly calls attention to “the path-dependent accretion of memories, understandings, and means of action within particular identities.” Finally, national identities are contingent, as “each assertion of identity [may be viewed] as a strategic interaction liable to failure or misfiring rather than a straightforward expression of an actor’s attributes.”²⁹

Tilly’s characterization of public identities has a number of implications for the study of representations of national identity. First, national identities rely on repetition, on being re-presented again and again to and by the

group.³⁰ Second, national identities are historical constructs liable to evolve as the nature of the relations within and between groups that give rise to expressions of identity evolves. Third, national identities are enunciated in specific circumstances and for specific purposes. From this it follows that representations of national identity will not necessarily be coherent, either internally or over time. Thus, it is important to understand the circumstances of such expressions in order to assess their meaning.

Seeing national identities as collective, contingent, and fluid suggests the approach by which they may be studied and the loci at which they are most likely to be found. Let us further consider each of these characteristics of national identities.

The Shape of National Identities

Identities are shaped in the realm of public discourse. Although public discourse about national identity may be found in many areas of human endeavour, such as art, literature, and sport, I focus on the political arena as the public forum of choice for such discourse. Since the nineteenth century, the intelligentsia has been the main producer of representations of national identity in Western nations and elsewhere.³¹ In the postwar period, the political arena was where representations of the nation were most likely to be explicitly articulated, not only by politicians but also by the intermediaries between the politicians and the public, the media, and within the media, by newspaper editors whose specific task was to provide commentary on current events. The public also took part in this political discussion through letters to the editor, through support of political parties at election time, and by responding to public opinion surveys.

Newspapers, and in particular large-circulation dailies, played a central role in the transformation of representations of national identity in English-speaking Canada. In the postwar years, before the ubiquity of live television broadcasts gave the illusion of direct contact, newspapers provided the major means of communication between politicians and the public on issues of politics and national unity. A 1969 survey of 2,254 Canadians conducted for the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media indicated that Canadians relied more on newspapers than on radio or television for “facts, background, and interpretation,” and particularly for information on “Canadian politics and national unity.” Nearly nine out of ten Canadian households received one or more daily newspapers, and four respondents out of five claimed to read a newspaper every day; by contrast, only 68 percent claimed to watch the news on television daily. Although newspapers were rated as more important as sources of local news than of national news, where television held the edge, newspapers were believed by more than half the respondents to “represent the interest of the public at large”; two-thirds of Canadians regarded newspapers as “the conscience of

society,” and the same ratio believed that newspapers influenced their views on Canadian nationalism. Two-thirds of respondents were satisfied with the amount of editorial comment in newspapers, but one in five would have liked more.³² The editorial contents of newspapers clearly mattered to their readers.

Newspapers, then, were a major force in shaping Canadian public opinion. As studies of mass media communications have shown, the role of the media in this is complex and dynamic. The media filters reporting and commenting on news and current events through its cultural framework and its understanding of the cultural framework of its audience. Thus, it fashions the form and contents of the messages being relayed among participants in public discourse. Mass media communication is a bidirectional process in which the characteristics of the emitter and of the receiver have as much influence as the contents of the message itself.³³ Indeed, it was shown more than forty years ago that media communication acts more to reinforce than to change opinions and attitudes; this has been called the iron law of mass communications.³⁴ Recently, in *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, American political scientist John R. Zaller provided a model of the formation of public opinion as measured by public opinion polls. The model considers the level of “cognitive engagement with an issue,” respondents’ propensity to resist messages “that are inconsistent with their political predispositions,” the accessibility of an issue at the “top of the head” of the respondent, and the range of “considerations” that respondents have in mind when concerning a given issue.³⁵ Public opinion may then be at once fickle and unlikely to move a great deal in a short time. We can expect mass media “emitters” to conceive of their audience as sharing views similar to theirs, and thus to fashion arguments intended for this audience inside a broad common ideological framework.

One may criticize Zaller’s model for its unidirectionality. In Zaller’s view, public debate is fashioned by the elites and consumed by the public. But the elites have always paid some attention to the views of the public, and since the Second World War, they have increasingly paid attention to the public’s views by a new means: public opinion polls. By constraining the range of argument available to the elites to those viewed as acceptable by the public, results of polls inflect public debate, particularly when they become news themselves. But even if they were not made public, poll results in Canada were communicated to newspapers that subscribed to the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion (CIPO), the Canadian branch of the Gallup organization.³⁶

Statements of national identity are also contingent. They are offered in the context of specific rhetorical situations. I have considered two types of situation. The first type consists of enunciations of so-called conventional wisdom. The common ideological framework between speaker and audience

is often reinforced through repeated utterances of conventional wisdom. Statements of conventional wisdom can take centre stage on specific occasions that call for their enunciation, such as public holidays or other celebrations of the nation. A good example would be the editorials published on the occasion of Victoria Day, most of which presumed a common sharing in the glories of the Victorian age. Statements of conventional wisdom can also be made in an incidental fashion; their secondary place within an argument attests to the presumption of shared values to which they need only refer. For instance, in 1946, when suspected spies were arrested and denied habeas corpus after the defection of Russian cipher clerk Igor Gouzenko, newspapers grounded their arguments against arbitrary detention of suspects on a common belief in British liberties. By paying attention to this conventional wisdom, we can identify statements of national identity that are considered non-polemical by their authors.

The second type of rhetorical situation consists of explicit argumentation designed to reshape public opinion on existing issues or to shape it on a new issue. In such situations, statements about national identity take on an argumentative tone: they acknowledge different viewpoints, seek to convince those who share in the speaker's values to adopt a particular position, and disparage opposing viewpoints. Postulates about national identity are asserted in a more explicit and convincing manner than arguments resting on conventional wisdom. For example, the Canadian flag debate of 1964 forced many newspaper editors to reaffirm their support of the British values of democracy and freedom for which the Union Jack stood.

Representations of national identity are also fluid. They are always articulated in a specific context, and as the context changes, so does the emphasis on the components of national identity that need to be represented. The flag debate can again serve as illustration. When the debate began, instead of arguing against replacing the Red Ensign with a new design, newspapers hostile to the idea of a flag devoid of British or French symbols argued against the wisdom of plunging the country into a controversial debate. But as the Progressive Conservative Opposition's prolonged filibuster began to anger Canadians, these papers shifted to a condemnation of the Tories as obstacles to the expression of the will of the parliamentary majority, thereby reaffirming British principles even in the perceived abandonment of British tradition.

Finally, representations of national identity carry a strong emotional charge. Anthony D. Smith stresses the ethno-symbolic component of the "memories, values, symbols, myths and tradition"³⁷ embedded in national identity, and explains the "power and durability of nations" by their emotional appeal, based on the "collective will of a moral community and the shared emotions of a putatively ancestral community." Smith continues:

What matters for an explanation of the power and durability of nations and nationalism is that the narratives and images of the nation strike a chord with the people to whom they are designed to appeal; and that the “people” and their cultures can, in turn, contribute to the process of reconstructing the nation. Only when they can “re-present” to the mass of the population an acceptable and inspiring image or narrative of the nation can elites exert any influence and provide some leadership.³⁸

In representations of national identity, therefore, emotion often takes precedence over reason, as we will see. It is pointless to look for sustained coherence over time in statements about national identity, or sometimes even within the same enunciative situation. Such statements were made for their persuasive effect, and it is their rhetoric rather than their logical coherence that is of interest here. It is for this reason that I make abundant use of quotations throughout the book. In representations of the nation and of national identity, the vocabulary, the tone, and the style all contribute to the rhetoric, and all convey shades of meaning and connotations that are best rendered in their original formulation.

Finding Representations of National Identities

In the hunt for representations of national identities that invoked values, symbols, myths, memories, and traditions, to recall Anthony Smith’s words, I followed a two-pronged strategy. For conventional wisdom I looked in two places: newspaper editorials on days of commemoration, for example, New Year’s Day, Empire Day, Victoria Day, Dominion Day (as it was then called), and Remembrance Day; and I examined the contents of high school history textbooks, which may be said to embody a congealed form of conventional wisdom about the country’s past. For explicit and argumentative statements about national identity I looked at the debates in the House of Commons and in the editorial columns of Canadian dailies on issues concerning contested symbols of Canadian identity, for example, the flag debates, debates on immigration and citizenship, royal visits, federal elections, federal-provincial conferences, the Diefenbaker bill of rights, the 1967 Expo and centennial celebrations, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (B&B Commission), and the adoption of the Official Languages Act. Public opinion polls conducted by CIPO were used as an indication of Canadian public opinion on issues involving national identity.

For practical reasons, I restricted the selection of newspapers to major metropolitan dailies across the country that were published throughout the period from 1945 (1949 in the case of Newfoundland) to 1970 and that were available on microfilm. Each province except Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan was covered, but, because of its greater population,

Ontario received the most attention. From east to west, the papers selected for examination were the *St. John's Daily News*, the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* (known until 1948 as the *Halifax Herald* and then as the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* until December 1959), the *Saint John Telegraph-Journal*, the *Montreal Gazette*, the *Ottawa Journal*, the *Toronto Daily Star* and the Toronto-based *Globe and Mail*, the *Hamilton Spectator*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Calgary Herald*, the *Edmonton Journal*, and the *Vancouver Sun*. Except for the *St. John's Daily News*, these were all large-circulation dailies in their local markets, and their circulation on average doubled from 1946 to the 1960s (see Table 1).

Gallup polls provide some measure of public opinion on the issues debated by politicians and editorial writers. CIPO, an entity ostensibly devoted exclusively to political polling for newspapers that buy its subscription service, began polling Canadians in late 1941. Among the first subscribers were the *Calgary Herald*, the *Edmonton Journal*, the *Halifax Herald*, the *Hamilton Spectator*, and the *Toronto Daily Star*.³⁹ The CIPO polls, available from 1945 onward, provide some insight into issues deemed of public interest; the raw data from the polls, available in machine-readable form, allow some statistical analysis.⁴⁰ Over fifty such polls were found to contain questions relevant to issues of national identity. I have tabulated responses to those questions by language and province or region of residence of respondents. Because CIPO poll samples were seldom larger than two thousand, and many in the 1950s and 1960s were conducted with samples of less than one thousand,⁴¹ it is not possible to do fine-grained analyses and obtain significant results: after samples are split by language and province of residence of respondents, further breakdowns contain too few observations to support any firm conclusions. In fact, it was at times necessary to regroup observations by region rather than by province because the number of respondents in the smaller provinces was too low.

As well, despite the efforts it made to obtain representative samples by using Dominion Bureau of Statistics profiles of the Canadian population,⁴² there are some indications that CIPO's samples were slightly biased by sex, class, and linguistic ability. There were at times more men than women in the CIPO samples. They focused on the middle class, and, within Quebec, on bilingual rather than unilingual French-speaking respondents. The August 1953 poll, for instance, had slightly more male than female English-speaking respondents, but, on the other hand, more female than male French speakers.⁴³ Respondents were better off than average Canadians: more than half (55 percent overall and 62 percent of the English-speaking respondents) declared owning a car while, at most, 29 percent of Canadians owned cars.⁴⁴ The large October 1956 poll also had sex and class biases: it had a 52.4 percent male sub-sample of English speakers and a 53.5 percent sub-sample

Table 1

Circulation figures, selected Canadian dailies, 1946-66

Newspaper	Circulation period ending						Circulation increase, 1946-66 (%)
	31 March 1946	31 March 1951	31 March 1956	31 March 1961	31 March 1966		
<i>St. John's Daily News</i>	n/a	8,210	8,289	6,221	5,271	64 ^a	
<i>Halifax Chronicle Herald</i>	53,007	62,281	107,199	109,080	115,253	217	
<i>Saint John Telegraph-Journal</i>	22,156	22,761	45,838	46,274	50,579	228	
<i>Montreal Gazette</i>	43,119	61,461	95,369	124,686	136,116	316	
<i>Ottawa Journal</i>	49,625	56,809	64,437	70,111	73,199 ^b	148	
<i>Toronto Daily Star</i>	326,670 ^c	427,897	389,146	344,762	349,736	107	
<i>Toronto Globe and Mail</i>	188,617 ^c	227,549	240,935	227,671	220,891	117	
<i>Hamilton Spectator</i>	71,486	78,238	92,715	106,973	119,320	167	
<i>Winnipeg Free Press</i>	86,127 ^c	106,690	117,961 ^d	122,074 ^e	128,342	149	
<i>Calgary Herald</i>	41,213	51,243	61,068	75,948	87,898	213	
<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	44,878	67,166	97,023	114,672	134,325	299	
<i>Vancouver Sun</i>	98,304	167,187	192,465	220,129	243,286	247	

a Increase from 1951 to 1966

b Period ending 30 September 1965

c Period ending 30 September 1946

d Period ending 30 June 1956

e Period ending 30 June 1961

Source: *Canadian Advertising Rates and Data*, 19, 4 (1946); 24, 3 (1951); 29, 5 (1956); 34, 5 (1961); 39, 5 (1966).

of female French speakers. Nearly three-quarters of its respondents declared owning a car, including 55 percent of its francophone female respondents and three-quarters of anglophone female respondents in their twenties. In the Canadian population as a whole, only one Canadian in three, aged twenty and over, owned a car.⁴⁵ The sampling bias toward upper income Canadians remained true in the 1960s. In the April 1963 poll, three-quarters of respondents (and 80 percent of English speakers) declared owning a car, while at most 45 percent of Canadians owned cars that year.⁴⁶ Still, despite the sampling biases we can identify today from the raw data, CIPO results were generally relied upon to represent Canadian public opinion, and as such contributed to shaping it as well.

While CIPO polls served up an instant view of public opinion, school textbooks transmitted a form of congealed public opinion or conventional wisdom that the generation holding power wanted to transmit to following generations. American education specialist Michael W. Apple has called this conventional wisdom “official knowledge.”⁴⁷ In postwar Canada, history textbooks followed precise content guidelines that reflected politicians’ and civil servants’ considered views of the nature of Canadian history that school authorities wanted to convey to pupils. It is impossible to ascertain what students – and teachers – came to believe of what they read in these authorized textbooks, but textbooks slanted pupils’ perceptions of Canadian history by providing information and interpretation on some topics and ignoring others.⁴⁸ They conveyed specific representations of Canadian identity as fashioned by a common history. Until textbooks lost their vogue in the late 1960s,⁴⁹ English-speaking Canadian pupils from coast to coast were subjected to an Ontario-centred view of Canadian history, as Canadian textbook publishers, all established in Ontario, shaped their publications to meet the requirements of the Ontario Department of Education. One of these, the grade five text *The Story of Canada* by George W. Brown, Eleanor Harman, and Marsh Jeanneret, is said to have sold over a million copies; it was adopted in every English-speaking province and was even translated into French.⁵⁰ George W. Brown’s high school text, *Building the Canadian Nation*, is estimated to have sold over six hundred thousand copies.⁵¹ These and other Canadian history textbooks in English produced for Ontario were almost the only ones available elsewhere in the country; the other provinces’ departments of education therefore had to make their selections from what Ontario publishers produced.

From Ethnic to Civic Identities

The different angles provided by newspapers, public opinion polls, and history textbooks point to a broad picture. In the postwar period, national identity in English-speaking Canada continued to be represented as resting on British political tradition and culture. Allowance was made for the pres-

ence of French Canadians, Natives, and Canadians of immigrant origins, but these “other” Canadians were depicted as not quite on a par with Canadians of British origin. I argue this by examining political issues that provoked expressions of identity either in the conventional wisdom or in the argumentative modes.

In the 1960s, the British definition of Canada was quickly discarded. Given the very short period during which this discarding took place, the pace of the transformation was truly revolutionary. But as in all revolutions, some seeds of the other Quiet Revolution were visible before they germinated, and I pay attention, in analyzing the years preceding the 1960s, to views of the nation other than ethnic, particularly the civic views of the country put forward by civil rights advocates and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), the farmer-labour socialist coalition that became the New Democratic Party (NDP) in 1961.

The first chapter explores the range of representations of national identity in English-speaking Canada that were offered in the debates over Canada’s national symbols in the immediate postwar years. These representations offered a core of values defining Canadian national identity. Chapter 2 examines the outer limits of that core: it deals with representations of national identity that were expressed in the political arguments defending or condemning the limits put on the civil rights of certain Canadians – Japanese Canadians, detainees in the Gouzenko inquiry – and in the arguments about postwar immigration, which rested on assumptions about what the country was and what it should become or remain. These assumptions were grounded in “racial” definitions of Canada as made up of two or more “races.” (I use quotation marks for “racial” and “race” throughout the book because in the only scientific definition of “race,” namely the definition from biology, there is only one human race.) Chapter 3 then unpacks the representations of Canadian identity that were included in Canadian history textbooks. Here, too, representations were often couched in terms of “race.” Chapter 4 examines the perceived erosion of the British tradition by the St. Laurent Liberal government in the late 1940s and in the 1950s, and the recurring complaints that this erosion provoked. Emblematic of this erosion of British tradition, in the eyes of Tory Canadians, was Canada’s failure to side with Britain in the 1956 Suez crisis. Chapter 5 looks at the arguments and assumptions underlying the debate on this question in Parliament and in the daily press; the chapter also looks at relations between Canada and the United Kingdom during John G. Diefenbaker’s term in office. It shows that the Tories’ attempt to sustain Canada’s sentimental link with Britain by fostering trade between the two countries was perceived by English-speaking newspaper editors as an un-British thing to do; this set the stage for the Tories’ loss of political legitimacy in the arguments over symbols of Canada that fuelled the flag debate of 1964.

The demise of the British reference in the 1960s was noticeable in the new Canadian history textbooks that came on the market in the wake of curriculum changes in Ontario. Chapter 6 shows how mentions of the superiority of British institutions and the glory of the British Empire faded away, even as Canada's British heritage remained a part of the curriculum. But textbooks also had to account for the United States' growing influence on Canada, blindingly obvious by the 1960s. As well, textbooks were less likely to typecast Canadians of non-British origins as Others, with different values from the "We" implicit in the curriculum. But no new strong definition of Canadian identity made its way into textbooks, since the process of defining new representations of national identity had just begun in Canadian society at large.

For a time in the 1960s, the new definitions of Canadian identity that emerged remained amorphous. For some commentators, the contents of the new Canadian representations amounted to the sum of the limited identities of region, and then of class and gender, what, in 1980, Progressive-Conservative leader Joe Clark would term a "community of communities."⁵² For others, the core of the new representations of Canadian identity consisted of a denial of content: in a quite apposite phrase, sociologist Kieran Keohane has characterized the "particularity of Canada" as "the enjoyment of the endurance of the lack of particularity."⁵³ English Canada was, to borrow Philip Resnick's phrase, "the nation that dare[d] not speak its name."⁵⁴

Chapter 7 examines the 1960s English-Canadian search for adequate definitions of Canadian identity. The daily press noted the decline of British symbols within Canadian society, and searched for new definitions of Canadian identity. As Quebec's own soul-searching raised the issue of French-English relations in Canada, the definition of Canada as a binational state gained some currency, and the need to give new symbolic form to this definition infused the acrimonious flag debate of 1964.

The last chapter traces the fate of the binational concept, from the inception of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism to the adoption of the Official Languages Act of 1969. The two-nations concept briefly gained some favour as the Conservatives under Robert Stanfield adopted this definition of Canada as their official position. But it soon came to be replaced with a new vision of a civic Canada that Pierre Elliott Trudeau would make popular. The multiculturalism policy introduced by Prime Minister Trudeau in 1971 in effect declared all cultures equal. The quarter of the Canadian population not issued from what John Porter had called the "charter groups,"⁵⁵ and in particular the inescapable presence of Native nations within Canada, made it increasingly difficult to sustain arguments premised on the concept that only two ethnic groups deserved equality in Canada, a premise that had been at the core of the mandate of the B&B Commission.

I end my story there, as its sequel, the struggle to implement Trudeau's vision of Canada, is well traced, from a critical perspective, in Kenneth McRoberts' *Misconceiving Canada*.⁵⁶ Abundant industry has since been devoted to redefining Canada, for example, in political science, sociology, or literature.⁵⁷ My hope is that the historical process highlighted in this book can help Canadians gain some perspective on how the concept of Canada has evolved.

1

Being of the Breed

Canada came out of the Second World War proud of its military accomplishments abroad and of its economic performance at home. How would these translate into postwar prosperity and a continued sense of pride in the country? In the June 1945 federal election campaign, Canadian prime minister Mackenzie King banked on the country's sense of pride by promising Canadians an official flag and a distinct Canadian citizenship. Paul Martin, Mackenzie King's secretary of state, claimed in his memoirs that the idea of a Canadian citizenship came to him during a visit to the military cemetery at Dieppe in February 1945.¹ He convinced Mackenzie King to make the creation of a Canadian citizenship, together with the adoption of a "distinctive" Canadian flag, an election promise in the 1945 campaign. King made the promises at the launch of the election campaign in Winnipeg on Victoria Day. An official flag and a Canadian citizenship, King argued, would complete the task of nation-building: "The reality of nationhood has long been achieved, but certain of the appearances, the outward symbols, of nation are still lacking."² Yet, this had not been a priority item in the campaign, as the promises of the flag and citizenship were included in King's speech at the last minute. According to King's political secretary, Jack W. Pickersgill, King's audience cheered at the idea of a citizenship bill but remained indifferent to that of a national flag.³

The citizenship bill was duly introduced in the new Parliament in October 1945, but the bill died on the order paper when the session ended. The government reintroduced it in March 1946. The spring of 1946 was also marked by two other events that prompted Canadians to express their views on the symbols that stood for the country. The first was the adoption of a private member's bill by the House of Commons on 4 April, changing the name of the national holiday from Dominion Day to Canada Day. The second was the proposal, made by the Joint Committee of the House of Commons and the Senate on the Canadian flag, to recommend that the Red Ensign with the Union Jack on the fly be adopted officially as Canada's flag.

Of the three parliamentary initiatives, only the citizenship bill became law. Adopted in May 1946, it came into force on 1 January 1947. The bill renaming Dominion Day was buried in the Senate, and the report of the flag committee sank into oblivion.

Canadian Citizenship: Preferential Treatment for British Subjects?

Because it did not fundamentally change the nature of Canadian citizenship, the citizenship bill was the least contentious of these measures. But the bill nevertheless triggered a vigorous debate about the nature of Canadian citizenship during second reading in the House of Commons in April 1946. Its main object was the creation of a Canadian citizenship as a complement to the status of British subjects that Canadians enjoyed by virtue of being ruled by a British monarch. Canada, Britain, and the other dominions of the Commonwealth all lacked a law defining citizenship. In the Canadian case, three laws included definitions of "Canadian." The first was the Immigration Act of 1910, which defined Canadian citizens for purposes of immigration entry; the second was the Naturalization Act of 1914, which defined the meaning of "British subject" in parallel with similar laws elsewhere in the Empire, and the third was the Canadian Nationals Act of 1921, which defined who was considered a Canadian national for the purposes of the League of Nations and for nominations to the League of Nations' International Court of Justice.⁴ The clauses in these laws did not always agree and there were other issues to be resolved, such as the question of the automatic granting to a wife of her husband's citizenship. The 1946 citizenship bill was drafted so as to maintain the existing rules regarding Canadian nationality. Gordon Robertson, the civil servant in charge of having the legislation drafted, noted, "On the whole, while making the provisions necessary to secure a satisfactory definition of Canadian citizenship, as little change as possible has been made in the qualification. *Thus all the essentials of the common [British] status have been retained.*"⁵ "There is much to be said," he added later, "for retaining many of the traditional symbols of association [with the British Crown] that do not conflict or interfere in any way with the essentials of separate personality and status for the members of the Commonwealth."⁶

The 1946 citizenship bill's main operative clause, Article 26, declared that "a Canadian citizen is a British subject."⁷ But the idea of a Canadian citizenship did not foster much enthusiasm in Cabinet or in the civil service. Paul Martin's deputy minister, who "belonged to the old school," was opposed to the creation of a Canadian citizenship, which led Martin to ask Mackenzie King for the services of Gordon Robertson, of the Prime Minister's Office, to prepare the legislation. As for the Cabinet, "it was obvious," Martin wrote in his memoirs, "that most of my colleagues had other priorities." Martin would have preferred not to include Article 26, as "it left Canada with a

mark of inferiority," but he figured that the bill would not pass without such a clause. In the end, Martin considered the clause a compromise that was "a wise one and ensured passage of a measure that could not, and did not, seek to placate the extremists," by whom he meant old imperial diehards or French-Canadian nationalists bent on eradicating any reference to the British connection.⁸

In fact, the bill changed little in the prevailing definition of "Canadian" and in the procedures required to obtain Canadian citizenship. Most notably, it automatically made Canadian citizens of British subjects born elsewhere in the Commonwealth and residing in Canada when the act was passed. The legal provisions that made British subjects – whether they held Canadian citizenship or not – eligible to vote in federal elections and run for Parliament or be named to the Senate after one year's residence in Canada were unchanged. As well, non-British subjects would continue to be submitted to a "more exacting procedure" than British subjects in applying for citizenship, and "the Government desired to give to British subjects a higher status in this country than [was] extended to aliens."⁹ In October 1945, when he first introduced it in the Commons, Martin stressed that the bill merely codified existing legislation and kept its spirit.¹⁰ He insisted that the bill did not "remove from anyone who now has it, nor eliminate for persons born or naturalized in future, the status of British subject. A Canadian who is now a British subject will under this act continue to be a British subject. A person who is hereafter born a Canadian citizen will thereby also be a British subject ... So far as Canada is concerned the dominant fact will be that of being a Canadian citizen. With it, as a correlative, and important in the commonwealth as a whole, each will also have the status of British subject."¹¹ When he reintroduced the bill in the House of Commons in the spring of 1946, Martin described its aim as giving "a clear and simple definition of citizenship which will remove the complexities which exist in the present legislation," and to provide "an underlying community of status for all our people in this country that will help to bind them together as Canadians."¹²

During the second reading of the bill, Martin sought to rally the Progressive Conservative Opposition by recalling that Bennett's secretary of state, C.H. Cahan, had introduced a similar measure in 1931, and that he had reiterated his desire to see such a bill adopted in 1937. Martin also claimed that public opinion, embodied not only in returning soldiers but also by "all Canadians who are proud of their country," favoured the creation of a Canadian citizenship. The bill would also, Martin claimed, foster "a feeling of legitimate Canadian nationalism"; it constituted "an act of faith in ourselves and in our country." Martin argued that Canada did not suffer from a surfeit of nationalism but from a lack of national pride: "There has been too little, not too much, national pride in this country ... It is not enough to be

a good 'Bluenose' or a good Ontarian or a good Albertan. Sectional differences and sectional interests must be overcome if we are to do our best for Canada."¹³

The parliamentary debate clearly revealed two conceptions of Canada. While a few members of the CCF put forth a civic definition of Canada, without giving preference to any ethnic group, the Conservatives and the government benches considered Canada a British country. While the Conservative Opposition agreed with the principle of the bill, and the member for Lake Centre, Saskatchewan, John G. Diefenbaker, effusively remarked that the bill "achieves a lifelong dream of mine,"¹⁴ the ambiguous conception of citizenship embedded in the bill was easily grasped, and approved of, by Diefenbaker. "Canada," he pronounced, "means a citizenship which maintains in this part of North America the highest heritage of British peoples everywhere in the world. It means to Canadians, without regard to racial origin, freedom and tolerance and liberty."¹⁵ Canadian citizenship was at once a British gift and a privilege available equally to all. The citizenship bill nevertheless maintained the preferential treatment accorded British subjects in obtaining Canadian citizenship. Besides being automatically qualified to receive Canadian citizenship after five years' residence, British subjects could still vote in federal elections after only one year's residence in a riding and could vote in provincial and municipal elections according to the rules pertaining to British subjects in these jurisdictions. The citizenship bill introduced by Martin simply required British subjects to apply for citizenship before a judge once the five-year residence requirement was met.

Yet, this did not placate the Progressive Conservative Opposition in the Commons. The special treatment granted to British subjects was at the core of the debate in the Commons that occupied the House, sitting in committee of the whole, from 30 April to 16 May 1946. In accusing the government of making it more difficult for British subjects to attain Canadian citizenship, the Conservatives offered what was a clearly an ethnic definition of the nation. They claimed that Canadians were subjects of the British Crown and thus partaking in the British liberty granted by the parliamentary institutions established first in Britain and then in the Dominions. Accordingly, the Conservatives argued that inhabitants of the British Commonwealth were the most desirable of immigrants, and that belonging to the community of the British Commonwealth was a higher form of allegiance than a nationality limited to Canada. The British subject, argued Conservative MP Donald Fleming, "does not need schooling in democracy. He is accustomed to looking at things from the point of view of the British traditional attitude toward democracy, the rights of the individual, his rights before the law with all other citizens, his right to be self-governing, to determine the government by his vote at the ballot box."¹⁶ But while some immigrants were "naturally" suited to become Canadians, others just as "naturally" were

not. Some Tories insisted that Japanese Canadians could never become good citizens.¹⁷ Some on the government benches, such as Ian Mackenzie and Liberal members from British Columbia, also shared this view (discussed further in Chapter 2). Whiteness was a characteristic of Britishness.

In maintaining preferential treatment for British subjects, the citizenship bill endorsed an ethnic conception of Canadian citizenship, and Paul Martin took pains to stress the point in answer to Conservative criticism. Martin explained that the five-year residence requirement for British subjects was established by Prime Minister Borden in 1919 and that the new bill maintained the rights of British subjects in Canada.¹⁸

Some French-Canadian members of the House were not happy with this provision of the bill. Edouard Rinfret, MP for Outremont, could not help thinking that “the different treatment accorded to these [British immigrants] as against the other immigrants has something to do with the lack of complete Canadian unity” and contrasted this clause with the US practice of putting all immigrants on the same footing.¹⁹ Liguori Lacombe, the independent member for Laval-Deux-Montagnes, approved of the bill but would have liked to see the term “British subject” abandoned as a last vestige of “a narrow colonialism.”²⁰ Jean-François Pouliot, independent Liberal member for Témiscouata, Quebec, accused the Conservatives of lacking in “Canadian spirit” and of having “the spirit of subservience to Great Britain”; “such imperialists deserved only the contempt of those who were true to the British tradition.”²¹ Maxime Raymond, leader of the Bloc populaire canadien, the French-Canadian party created in 1942 to fight conscription, opposed the bill because it bore “the stamp of utter colonialism”; “Canadian citizenship is drowned in the British nationality to which it is subordinated.”²²

On the other hand, the Conservative Opposition remained suspicious of the government, continuing a practice of accusing the Liberals of disloyalty toward the Empire. Tommy Church, MP for Broadview (Toronto), spoke for the most ardent defenders of the imperial connection. In veiled terms he dismissed the bill as a sop to Quebec, the non-British province: “I believe it has been asked for by only a few people, almost all of whom are from one province. In my view, this measure represents a notice to the mother country that we do not want any more of them over here.”²³ Church then questioned by innuendo the loyalty of those who supported the citizenship bill, saying, “I am Canadian and a British subject. They are both the same. That is what the minister forgets and what the Cabinet forgets in framing this bill ... It is strange that some of those outside this house who are supporting this bill seem to favour a republic in Canada similar to what South Africa and Eire want.”²⁴

In a less acrimonious vein, the Conservative member for Eglinton, Ontario, Donald Fleming, following his party's stand on the question, approved of

the citizenship bill in principle and, stating that Confederation was a pact between Canada's two major ethnic groups, used the pact concept to defend the British tradition in Canada: "Those who say: We are grown up, we do not want to be British subjects any longer, are, in effect, asking Canadians to forfeit a generous measure of their own birthright, one of the greatest privileges provided for free men in the world to-day."²⁵ He went on: "If Canadian citizenship is to be bought at the price of a renunciation of the rights which we as British subjects enjoy in all parts of the world, we shall be paying too great a price for it."²⁶ Fleming was indignant at the idea of treating British subjects migrating to Canada on the same footing as any other immigrants. The five-year residence requirement was "a humiliation which this bill seeks to heap upon British subjects from other parts of the commonwealth. I do not think this is a basis upon which we shall build the national unity which we so much desire."²⁷

Allan Cockeram, Conservative MP for York South, Ontario, who immigrated to Canada in 1913 and fought as a Canadian soldier during the First World War, considered it "a shocking thing that the Secretary of State should put British subjects from other parts of the empire who come to Canada to the trouble and humiliation to which they will be subject under this bill."²⁸ G.R. Pearkes, the Conservative MP for Nanaimo, British Columbia, repeated his party's opposition to the five-year residence requirement for British subjects, claiming British subjects were already familiar with "the system of government and the customs of our institutions which in the main are uniform in every nation of the British commonwealth of nations." The British immigrant "will have learned about magna charta, he will know of habeas corpus and the bill of rights, and he will know something of the statute of Westminster. He is of the breed, and, being of the breed, he knows the breed; he is prepared to take the worth of the breed for granted."²⁹ British and Canadians were of the same breed; the ethnic definition of national identity could not be clearer.

Given that the citizenship bill did not change current practices, it is fair to say that the Conservatives used the bill, regardless of its actual contents, as a pretext to question the loyalty of the Liberal government to the British connection, an issue they believed would attract support from the English-Canadian public. The Conservative member for Vancouver-Burrard, C.C.I. Merritt, played to this public in professing his attachment to the British connection: "We believe in the status of British subject, and as Canadians wish to remain British subjects, because to us the British Empire or the British Commonwealth of Nations, whichever you like to call it, has been for many years in the past, and will be for many years in the future, the greatest bulwark of freedom that exists in the world."³⁰ This last point he reiterated later in the debate.³¹

His colleague from Kingston, T.A. Kidd, pursued the attack on the Liberals' lack of loyalty to the British heritage. Kidd claimed that the citizenship bill had been "the sounding board and is the instrument to make known to this house and to Canada that there is in this house an anti-British following who are not desirous of giving preference to British subjects."³² Donald Fleming feared that the bill would for all intents and purposes "put the British subject, coming from other parts of the commonwealth, in the same position as an alien coming from any section of the globe,"³³ since there was "no practical difference under this bill between the status of a British subject coming here from any other part of the commonwealth and that of a person coming to these shores from an alien land," even though he did not answer Paul Martin when the latter asked how the bill changed the current situation.³⁴ Rather, Fleming asked: "Is this any time to be reducing the value we are putting upon our rights throughout the commonwealth as citizens and a British subjects in common allegiance?"³⁵ Another British Columbia Conservative MP, E. Davie Fulton, called for the cultivation of "a real feeling of empire unity" and the realization of "the ideal of a union of all English-speaking peoples."³⁶

The sustained Conservative criticism of the citizenship bill wore down Paul Martin. On 2 May 1946, he announced an amendment to the bill removing for British subjects the requirement to appear before a citizenship judge to obtain their citizenship papers. British subjects could simply apply to the Secretary of State and sign a form; other citizenship candidates would still have to appear before a citizenship judge and swear allegiance to the Crown.³⁷

During the citizenship debate, the Conservative Opposition did not completely ignore the existence of French Canadians. Besides the definition of Canada as a British nation, which permeated most of their speeches in the House, some Conservatives also alluded to a definition of Canada as composed of two main ethnic groups: Canadians of British descent and Canadians of French descent. In the speech during which he referred to the compact theory of Confederation, Donald Fleming argued that Confederation would never have taken place without Article 133 of the British North America Act, which recognized French as an official language in the federal parliament and tribunals. To show his party's recognition of French Canadians, Fleming quoted a Conservative policy statement according to which his party was a "fruitful partnership between two great races, English and French. We affirm our belief that the two cultures are part and parcel of our future development and that Canada's true greatness depends on sympathy and understanding between these two original races and all other races that have come to join in the building of our country."³⁸ Canada, in Fleming's mind, was created by two "races," and he appealed for French Canadians to respect his own "race."

In casting French and English Canadians as belonging to different “races,” Fleming was contributing to the prevalent racialization of Canadians, a process of “constructing social categories along the lines of ‘socially imagined’ difference” that may be observed in both linguistic groups during the period.³⁹ The recurrent use of the term “race” implied fixed cultural traits and attendant moral qualities that differed among the races.⁴⁰ But the races were not just different: in English-speaking Canada, representations of Canadian identity based on race often clearly implied a hierarchy of races.

This became obvious in the parliamentary debate when Tories questioned the loyalty of French Canadians, making plain that they did not consider them as fulfilling their duties as Canadian citizens as well as did Canadians of British descent. Thus, replying to a statement by a French-Canadian member that French Canadians were more Canadian than English-speaking Canadians, York South MP Allan Cockeram took pains to recall which Canadians were the most willing to serve in the three wars that Canada fought in the twentieth century.⁴¹ Donald Fleming called for the end of “hyphenated Canadianism,” a “problem created by race” and the solution to which would be difficult. He added: “Those who exalt race before Canadian unity or Canadian citizenship do a great disservice to Canada,” perhaps not realizing how this statement could apply to himself.⁴² Paul Martin agreed, stating that “our task is to mould all these elements [of language and religion] into one community without destroying the richness of any of those cultural sources from which many of our people have sprung,” but, he asked, why were the Tories trying to “create the impression that only one group in this house has loyalty to the crown? We all have. Loyalty is not confined to any one group.” He took this as a personal matter, reminding the House that he was three-quarters French and that his wife was from the British Isles.⁴³

The racial definition of Canada put forward by the Conservatives did not find favour with most CCF members of the opposition. Saskatoon CCF MP Robert Ross Knight took the Tories to task for being inspired by a “whim of pride of race, and a bid for a preferred position in Canadian society.” He was irritated by the Conservative MP for Davenport, Ontario, J.R. MacNicol, whom Knight claimed wanted that “kind of blood” in Canada: “I am not so sure that my fellow compatriots from the British isles [Knight was born in Northern Ireland] are more easily assimilated. In fact we have living examples – I was almost going to say right here in the house – of men who have boasted about their having lived in Canada for forty years, but who have not yet shown any striking aptitude for assimilation.” He argued that “there should be no preferred position or preferred peoples in this country. Neither should there be any preferred province or provinces. We should all be on an equal footing.”⁴⁴

Another CCF member decried the hierarchy of citizenship perpetuated in the proposed bill. Alistair Stewart, of Winnipeg North, argued that the bill

created two kinds of Canadians because naturalized Canadians could have their citizenship taken away. He stated that "there has been discrimination in Canada against minority groups based on ignorance, bigotry and stupidity, and it still exists in this house."⁴⁵ G.H. Castleden, MP for Yorkton, Saskatchewan, argued that "in the hearts and minds of all Canadians there must be a realization, an acceptance of the principle of equality of people irrespective of their colour, race or creed ... Irrespective of colour, race or creed, human beings within the Dominion of Canada must be conscious of an equality with each and every other Canadian."⁴⁶ Angus MacInnis, independent Labour member from Vancouver East, attacked the incongruity of the Conservative advocacy of a bill of rights while Conservative MPs from British Columbia conceived of the Canadian citizenship as belonging to "those who speak the English language" and as reluctantly including those who speak French. He challenged the government to introduce a bill depriving Canadians of Japanese origin of their citizenship: "Then we would have found out who stands for liberty – liberty without regard to race, colour, creed or language, or just liberty for the chosen few."⁴⁷

CCF opposition leader M.J. Coldwell showed some willingness to distinguish immigrants to Canada according to their country of origin. If the federal election laws were to be modified to make them agree with the provisions of the citizenship bill, Coldwell would want the laws to make a distinction "between those who come to Canada from a country in which the institutions and language are different from ours, and those who come from countries – and I use the plural – in which there are democratic institutions analogous to our own, whether the United States, the United Kingdom, or one of the commonwealth nations." But he still argued that "anyone, of whatever colour, race or creed, who is a citizen of this country should be accorded all the rights of citizenship that every other citizen enjoys, and that there should be no discrimination whatsoever."⁴⁸

The Liberals leaned more toward the Conservative ethnic definition of the country than toward the CCF's civic definition. Even though Paul Martin claimed the bill took "a middle position" between those who wanted the barest administrative procedures for British immigrants and those who insisted that "no privileges whatever should be given to British subjects,"⁴⁹ the ethnic conception defended by the Conservative Opposition and reflected in the continued preferential treatment for British subjects was sufficiently shared on both sides of the House for the citizenship bill to be adopted without division on 16 May 1946 and to sail through the Senate.⁵⁰

The English-speaking daily press endorsed the idea of a Canadian citizenship, but it also unanimously insisted on the preferential treatment for British subjects that Canadian immigration and citizenship policies already embodied. Newspapers with a Conservative bent hinted that the govern-

ment was trying to do away with it, while Liberal-leaning papers protested against what they saw as a distortion of the facts. In Nova Scotia, the *Halifax Herald* kept its readers abreast of the debates in the House as reported by the Canadian Press, but did not take an explicit editorial position on the citizenship bill.⁵¹ Nevertheless, its feelings were clear: it considered the debates in the House of Commons on the issue a waste of time when there were pressing issues “of practical things” to be dealt with.⁵² Early in the debate, the *Herald* reproduced the Commons speech by Diefenbaker in which the Conservative MP declared that Canada was more than an expanse of land: it was a concept of citizenship that established in North America the great British traditions of freedom, tolerance, and liberty. These British traditions, Diefenbaker claimed, applied to all Canadians regardless of their ethnic origins.⁵³ The *Saint John Telegraph-Journal* approved of the citizenship bill on its adoption by the Commons: “It clears up the point that there are actually such people as Canadians, who will have the right to be so described in their passports and elsewhere. At the same time we remain British subjects and our allegiance to the Crown and all it represents is in no way changed. In the past, for immigration and other purposes, we have simply been British subjects. Now we become Canadians as well as British subjects, continuing to enjoy full privileges within the Empire.”⁵⁴

The *Montreal Gazette* had approved of the citizenship bill in October 1945: “The bill quite rightly preserves and clarifies the reciprocal rights of citizenship and voting privileges assured British subjects taking up domicile in Canada, and Canadians moving to other British territories.”⁵⁵ On 28 May 1946, however, it criticized section 10 of the bill for requiring other British subjects to reside in Canada for five years before asking for citizenship. Since this was not done in other Commonwealth countries, the paper claimed, it should not be done in Canada: “If the British Commonwealth is to be really a family of nations it should seek above all else to cherish and cultivate the sense of oneness and common interests. Apparent discrimination within a family cannot become the basis of harmony.”⁵⁶ The paper’s news stories on the citizenship bill often appeared on the front page and drew attention to criticisms of French-Canadian nationalists made by other French Canadians. But the internment of Canadians of Japanese origin did not draw attention.⁵⁷

The *Ottawa Journal* mostly kept its coverage of the citizenship bill debate to its inside pages. It did allude to the citizenship bill in an irritated editorial some time after the House passed the bill changing Dominion Day into Canada Day:

Why are our young ultra-nationalists, so influential with the present Government, in such an infernal hurry with their ultra-nationalist schemes? In

a single session of Parliament we have measures to change “Dominion Day” to “Canada Day,” to make Canadian citizenship more narrowly Canadian, and to create a “distinctive Canadian flag.” This at a time when this country is beset with tremendous problems, when the question of housing for our people has become desperately acute, and when the lack of reconversion generally is grave.

Taken singly, or even collectively, these nationalist bills are of small consequence; contain [sic] little about which any adult mind needs to grow excited. What we dislike about them is what they show of the unseemly haste of certain people in this country, many of them very close to the Government, to rid Canada of anything suggesting the British connection ... Surely it is possible to love Canada, to give her our first affection and loyalty, without going about with a chip on our shoulders in narrow nationalism, and seemingly in dislike and suspicion of other countries of our own British Commonwealth? That sort of thing isn’t Canadianism; it is an inferiority complex.⁵⁸

The “ultra-nationalist” epithet was a clear allusion to French-Canadian Liberal MPs, who were being accused of “narrow” nationalism, and of disliking and being suspicious of the Commonwealth, all of which was seen as amounting to some form of intellectual childishness. It had earlier hurled the “childish” epithet at those who had supported the Canada Day bill.⁵⁹ The *Ottawa Journal* did not in its editorial pages support the citizenship bill, but neither did it condemn a measure that seemed to gather much public support. Instead, it proudly affirmed its Britishness in the editorial published on Empire Day, a tradition maintained by “the Department of Education for Ontario, and so it cannot be touched by the zealous gentlemen of the House of Commons whose nationalistic ideas are hurt by calling July 1 Dominion Day.” The *Journal* editor insisted:

Empire Day remains Empire Day, without apologies or excuses ...

Our children must not be left unacquainted with the proud story of the British Empire in war and peace, must not be imbued with the impression that “Empire,” in this connection, is a term of contempt or reproach. At least in Ontario we must maintain our traditions, must “remember with gratitude and with hope,” as Premier Drew puts it, “all that the British Empire stands for in the world today.”⁶⁰

Toronto’s *Globe and Mail*, while a Conservative organ, approved of the citizenship bill when it was first presented in the Commons.⁶¹ Its news stories closely followed the debate in the House and highlighted John G. Diefenbaker’s attempt to attach a bill of rights to the citizenship bill, as

well as the Tories' effort to uphold the privileges of British subjects immigrating to Canada. In April 1946, it lauded the government for introducing a bill "designed to give Canadians a new sense of nationality," but denounced the idea that British immigrants should be put on the same footing as all others: "British subjects coming to this land deserve consideration, as equals, not segregation. If anything was ever designed to discourage British subjects of solid stock emigrating to Canada, it is this discriminatory provision of the Citizenship Bill."⁶² Like the *Ottawa Journal*, it was prompted to agitation by the Canada Day bill, which it saw as part of a wider plot:

There is more than a thread of connection between this strange bill and the clause in the Canadian Citizenship Bill, which would force British subjects from other parts of the world to go through the same form of naturalization which people of non-British nationality are required to accept. The philosophy behind the two is the same. It will be a sorry day for Canadians when legitimate and worthy national pride turns into a species of racial arrogance, which lays about it with hatred or contempt, for all outside our borders.⁶³

The accusation of "racial arrogance" was levied against unnamed Members of Parliament, but since they were obviously of another "race", it could only refer to French Canadians. The *Globe* raised the issue again a few days later, denouncing the government for "driving a wedge between British subjects of other than Canadian birth, and native Canadians" with the citizenship bill requirement that British subjects formally apply for Canadian citizenship. It wondered how "spiritual vandalism of this type would increase Canadianism" and observed that "the privilege of being a Canadian is petty and narrow without the larger connection with others of the same tradition of democratic self-government."⁶⁴

Some Liberal-leaning newspapers denied the Conservatives' claim that the citizenship bill was changing the requirements for citizenship to be met by British subjects, thus implicitly agreeing with the special status enjoyed by British subjects, while others more boldly put forth a civic view of Canada. The *Toronto Daily Star* stood in the former camp. It rejected the *Globe's* claim that the citizenship bill imposed a new residence requirement upon British immigrants: "There is, therefore, nothing new in providing that British immigrants must be five years in Canada before becoming Canadian citizens. There is, however, one new proviso, namely, that they must take out formal papers in order to become citizens." The act "on the whole ... accomplishes in a reasonable way what Canadians have so long desired, the establishment of a Canadian citizenship." It made the point more forcefully a

few days later: the citizenship bill, argued the paper, “does not remove one iota of the rights and privileges that are now enjoyed by British subjects in Canada. By becoming Canadian citizens, British subjects in Canada do not cease to be British subjects. In fact the new legislation declares that every Canadian citizen is a British subject.” It then repeated Paul Martin’s sentimental and practical reasons for doing so.⁶⁵

The other major Liberal newspaper, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, put forth a wholly civic definition of citizenship. Its Liberal bent did not keep it from criticizing the federal government for violations of civil rights with trenchant editorials in April 1946, on Order-in-Council P.C. 6444, authorizing the detention without legal recourse of citizens; on Order-in-Council P.C. 6577, allowing the deportation to the United States of a Canadian citizen who had deserted from the American army; and on the treatment of Canadians suspected of espionage for the Soviet Union after Gouzenko’s defection.⁶⁶ The *Free Press* approved of Diefenbaker’s proposal for a Canadian bill of rights, recalling that “the struggle for the protection of civil liberties in Canada has been a continuous one ... the struggle for a Bill of Rights for Canada must go on.”⁶⁷ In March 1946, it paved the way for Martin’s citizenship bill with a series of five articles signed by Grant Dexter, the paper’s Ottawa correspondent.⁶⁸ The text of Dexter’s series was very close to Paul Martin’s remarks on the introduction of the citizenship bill in the Commons later in April.⁶⁹ Dexter explained that “many people would have preferred to keep Canadian citizenship entirely separate from the status of a British subject. And from the nationalist point of view there is a great deal to be said for doing so.” Still, the government had decided to give “British subjects a higher status in this country than is extended to aliens” and it was necessary to maintain the status of British subjects for Canadians in order for them to keep the advantages conferred by this status in Commonwealth countries.⁷⁰ The *Free Press* did not question the bill in its editorial pages. After the bill passed in the House, the paper was content to stress its civic aspects: “Henceforth Canadians will stand together in common rights of citizenship. All who come to Canada in the future will be able to acquire the rights of citizenship.”⁷¹

The Southam chain’s *Calgary Herald* provided modest coverage of the citizenship bill debate. It had approved of the creation of a Canadian citizenship when the bill was first introduced in October 1945. The bill, it wrote then, “should be to the satisfaction of Canadian citizens generally as well as to those anticipating citizenship in the Dominion.”⁷² As the debate progressed in the House of Commons in the spring of 1946, however, the *Herald* made common cause with the Conservative Opposition in the defence of the privileges of British subjects and argued for the removal of the residence requirement in their case: “They are British subjects and no obstacle

should be put in the way of their desire to assume Canadian citizenship. The five-year residence rule should be omitted from the new act as it applies to them because it is to be presumed that they already understand and appreciate the principles of democracy and democratic government. It is an affront to the people of Britain, for instance, to oblige them to pass through a period of probation before winning Canadian citizenship."⁷³ Alberta's other Southam daily, the *Edmonton Journal*, made the same point: "A British subject from the United Kingdom or from one of the self-governing dominions ... already has most of the necessary qualifications. He speaks English, and he has been brought up under a system of laws and institutions differing only in small details from our own. He is mentally prepared for the privileges and duties of Canadian citizenship."⁷⁴

The *Calgary Herald* also used the occasion of the citizenship debate to rail against immigrants who failed to learn English or French: "There are residents in Canada for over thirty years who do not yet speak either of the official languages of the country. They have remained alien in thought although enjoying all the rights and privileges of citizenship. This is a condition that does not promote Canadian unity and progress."⁷⁵ Immigrants from non-English-speaking countries were not likely to share "Canadian" values, and some of them, in the paper's view, resisted them by refusing to learn English. The mention of French as an official language was perfunctory, as immigrants were never blamed for not learning French. For the *Calgary Herald* and the *Edmonton Journal*, British subjects were the better classes of immigrants because they spoke the language and, the papers assumed, because they shared by birth the political values of Canadians.

Out on the West Coast, the Liberal-leaning *Vancouver Sun* also approved of the citizenship bill. It saluted the improvement in the clauses concerning Canadian women who married foreign nationals and foreign women who married Canadian citizens. The paper reminded its readers that "the status of British subjects remains ... But the British subject does not have to be naturalized in order to become a citizen. He or she will be supplied with citizenship papers after the legal period of residence – five years."⁷⁶ Confusing ethnic origin with nationality, columnist Elmore Philpott emphasized that the new law would "end the disgraceful, ridiculous, and untrue practice of compelling native-born Canadians to describe themselves as 'English, Scotch, French, German' or something else equally false when filling out official papers."⁷⁷

Dominion Day or Canada Day?

The second political issue involving definitions of national unity, the re-naming of "Dominion Day" to "Canada Day" effected by a private bill passed in the Commons on 4 April 1946, strongly exercised editorial writers. The *Montreal Gazette* gave the bill front-page coverage the next day, with the

title “Canada Day-Dominion Day Issue Splits Cabinet, Muddles Parties.” Tempers in the Commons had become heated over the bill, the *Gazette* reported, and adjectives had flown across the floor.⁷⁸ In caucus, Mackenzie King had given his cautious support to the bill. King noted in his diary that he “had come to the conclusion that the bill was sound.” After all, he had argued, there were other Dominions within the Commonwealth. King wrote: “[I] therefore would be prepared to have the measure carried through at this session. On the other hand, it might be best to see how matters develop, and if need be have an adjournment of the debate. The measure [could be] taken over as a government measure at the next session. Caucus I think saw that I was quite in favour of the measure.” The next day, when he heard that the Tories had “moved a six months’ hoist,” King made sure the bill passed in the Commons. He then called independent Liberal MP Antoine-Philéas Côté, from Matapédia-Matane, Quebec, who had introduced the bill, “and congratulated him very warmly.” He continued: “I am pleased at this being a part of what has been achieved in rounding out Canada in the years of my administration.”⁷⁹

King expressed his satisfaction a little too soon. The *Hamilton Spectator* was the first to come out with an angry reaction. It did not mince words:

In one of those thoroughly degrading and senseless performances that can hardly strengthen the respect of Canadians for their Parliament, the Commons in Ottawa yesterday bludgeoned through a measure changing the designation of our great national holiday of July 1.

So Dominion Day, which recalls one of our finest achievements of statesmanship and a most enduring example of genuine unity being forged out of intense racial divisions, must now be rejected. In its place comes a term without meaning, without tradition or force. It comes to satisfy a group that, in shouting triumph at each kindergarten escape from “colonialism,” reveals only the incurable and essentially rigid, “chip-on-the-shoulder,” colonial make-up of its mentality.

It simply can’t grow up.⁸⁰

The practice of stereotyping one’s opponents as childlike was a means of othering them and affirming one’s superiority. The practice of not naming the opponents answered two distinct needs: it was a means of dismissing them, but also an acknowledgement that the explicit expression of prejudice was not socially acceptable. These rhetorical strategies would often be employed against French-Canadian opinion.

The attack on the unnamed “childlike” MPs was taken up by the *Ottawa Journal*, which saw the menace they posed to British institutions as extending to the flag and the national anthem:

There is something curiously childish about the state of mind which is obsessed with names ... But it must be in the minds of those who sponsored and those who supported this bill in the Commons that somehow they are asserting a right of self-determination which nobody questions, that somehow they are dissipating another shadow of "colonialism." It is of a piece with the contention that we should abandon "God Save the King" as our national anthem and substitute "O Canada," that we should throw out the Union Jack and put in its place something to conceal our British connection as though we were ashamed of it. There is this much that is serious in a foolish debate on a nonsensical issue.⁸¹

The paper returned to the issue a few days later. Noting that "very strong objection has been expressed by many English-language newspapers," it argued that "the Senate cannot pass the bill in ignorance of rising public feeling in the matter. The celebration of Dominion Day on July 1 is one of our oldest customs, and it seems to us little short of outrageous that 123 out of 245 members of the Commons should take it upon themselves to throw the name overboard."⁸² It revisited the issue again on 16 April 1946, lumping the Canada Day bill with the citizenship bill and the flag discussions as part of a plot by "ultra-nationalists" who were "confusing love of Canada with dislike of everything British. In their eager haste to assert our 'sovereignty' they are not even displaying good manners, are alienating the support and sympathy of many who take second place to nobody in first loyalty to Canada."⁸³ The paper did not name the "ultra-nationalists" but by claiming first place in loyalty to Canada for the British element, it was clear whom the editorial targeted.

The Saint John *Telegraph-Journal* also reacted strongly. Its editorial in the weekend issue following the adoption of the Canada Day bill saw in the bill an attack by a foe it did not name but that it clearly recognized. The bill was an assault upon Canada's British heritage and its connection with Great Britain: "All this would be a mere tempest in a teapot if it were not another manifestation of a desire by certain politicians to sever all links with Great Britain ... We should be proud to have inherited British traditions and to enjoy the privilege of belonging to the British family of nations, and it is an unhappy thing to see our representatives in the House of Commons disavowing the word 'Dominion.'"⁸⁴

The following week, the *Globe and Mail* ridiculed the notion that Dominion Day, "that honorable and historic phrase," could be an "'outmoded connotation of colonialism!'" It, too, attacked the "spirit" of those unnamed MPs who insisted on the name change and who also proposed that British subjects be subjected to the "same form of naturalization which people of non-British nationality are required to accept." In defending British subjects and

Canada's British heritage, the *Globe* argued that "a nation without a past is an anomaly. It is as imperfect an entity as a person who has lost his memory. To attempt a deliberate erasure of historical fact is to injure, not augment, national consciousness."⁸⁵ A few days later, the *Globe* reprinted a front-page editorial from *Saturday Night* that explicitly identified the author of the assault on Dominion Day. "Do [members of Parliament] think that 11,000,000 inhabitants of Canada are willing to hand over to Mr. Phileas Côté of Matapedia-Matane the right to rename all the cherished days of observance that their ancestors established and they themselves have marked from childhood up?" it asked.⁸⁶ By drawing a distinction between Antoine Phileas Côté's ancestors and those of the inhabitants of Canada, the authors of the *Saturday Night* article, and the editors of the *Globe* who reproduced it, excluded MP Côté, and by extension those who thought like him, as "inhabitants of Canada."

In mid-April, the *Halifax Herald* wondered about the purpose of changing Dominion Day to Canada Day: "Certainly, it is difficult to understand why anyone should object to the term 'Dominion' ... for any reason whatsoever. It is not a term signifying any 'colonial' or 'inferior' status. *It means,*" the text continued in italic, "*actually, 'sovereign or supreme authority; sovereignty.'*" The paper could not fathom why such a change was being put forward: "If the 'drive' were against, say, Victoria Day or Empire Day, it might be understood – even if it were deprecated and deplored. But to launch a 'drive' against Dominion Day as an assertion of Canadian sovereignty makes little or no sense, at all."⁸⁷ The *Herald* later reiterated that "there is nothing 'colonial' or 'subservient' about the term 'dominion.' It is majestic in tone, broad and all-embracing in its significance."⁸⁸

At the other end of the country, the *Vancouver Sun* expressed the surprise of "millions of Canadians, who had no idea that anything like this was coming up ... a great and historic designation is close to oblivion." By whatever name, however, Canada was "still Canada, still a free country and a fair dominion."⁸⁹ *Sun* columnist Elmore Philpott had been less exercised by the issue. Philpott claimed Dominion Day "never was popular in any part of the country, and is not really popular yet." He approved of the name change. While he criticized unnamed "super-nationalists" for not conceiving that Canada could at once be "free and sovereign" and remain within the "British family of free nations," he also attacked their opponents: "The trouble with the super-imperialists is that, right down in their hearts they resent the fact of Canada's national status. They are colonials still. They oppose every change which would help crystallize Canadian national unity – for foolish fear that the strength of such feeling would weaken and not strengthen the Britannic world kingdom."⁹⁰ Questions of national identity, Philpott noticed, called forth strong emotions.

The *Toronto Daily Star* sought to minimize the issue, recalling that Dominion Day became the official name of the holiday only in 1879. The heat generated in Parliament over the name change was “out of all proportion to the importance of the issue involved ... Dominion Day? Canada Day? Nothing would be lost if Dominion Day were still used. Nothing much will be gained by changing it to Canada Day. Nor is there any need for heat about the change.”⁹¹

The English-speaking press read the Canada Day bill as an attack on a symbol of a British tradition it held dear. So Mackenzie King allowed the bill to die a quiet death in the Senate. Meeting Senator Wishart Robertson, a member of Cabinet, on 2 May 1946, King told him, “I did not wish to either advocate or oppose the enactment of the ‘Canada Day’ bill in the senate, to allow the senate perfectly free expression of view. He [Robertson] believes that the bill will not carry there and I am inclined to think he is right. I have felt from the start too many things are being pushed forward too quickly at one and the same time.”⁹²

A Distinctive Canadian Flag

Because the flag issue did not result in a formal proposal before the House of Commons, it drew less editorial attention than the citizenship and Canada Day bills. But it provoked similar manifestations of defence of British symbols against the “ultra-nationalists” who could not comprehend that an attachment to Great Britain on the part of English-speaking Canadians did not diminish the strength of their own Canadian feelings. Once again, the *Hamilton Spectator* was first to join the fray. In an ironic editorial entitled “Hoist the Bunting,” it mocked those who used “‘flag waver’ as an invidious label for one who does not see a new and ‘distinctive’ Canadian flag as the most hysterically urgent need of the nation” and it railed against the “violently nationalistic” tendency that would label the “flag waver” as a “rabid and bigoted imperialist.”⁹³ A week later, commenting on the stop made by Lord Alexander, the new governor general, in Campbellton on his way to Ottawa, the *Spectator* congratulated the people of Campbellton for their admiration of the British Commonwealth as an “association of completely independent people” embodied by the figure of the Crown, and affirmed that “those who are unable to see this are either juveniles in thought, which is forgivable, or permanently so stultified, which is sad.” Among these enfeebled souls, some in Campbellton itself would probably be “orating to the boys at the store about ‘independence,’ and possibly sending to their local member a sample flag design of a beaver chewing down a stump.” Derision was the only argument needed against opponents cast as “childlike.” The next day, the *Spectator* affirmed that “all Canadians want to nourish true nationalism. All of them want a flag – the one we have had for generations.

All of them want a national anthem, which we have also had for generations. All of them like to be known as Canadian citizens."⁹⁴ By implication, any who disagreed were not "Canadians."

The *Ottawa Journal* castigated as "young men in a hurry" those who advocated a "distinctive" Canadian flag, and it approved of the idea of dropping consideration of the issue in Parliament: "There should be no new flag unless it is approved and welcomed by the overwhelming majority of the Canadian people, and we see no prospect at all of any such degree of unanimity. There is, of course, no urgency in the matter. We still have the Union Jack, have the Union Jack until we decide upon something else, and it has given us reasonably good satisfaction."⁹⁵ The *Halifax Herald* also considered that "questions of 'nationality' and 'flags' and 'holidays' are not urgent." It believed the "spate of oratory" that flowed for the Commons on "questions of 'flags' or 'nationalism' or 'citizenship' or the 'sad lot' of the Japanese in this country" led Canadians to lose faith in the "practical realism of their representatives in Ottawa." It laboured the point more than once.⁹⁶ The *Calgary Herald* explained to its readers why the joint Senate and Commons committee on the flag was about to put off making a decision: "The majority of the committee members favor the retention of the Union Jack in the new flag but a group of Quebec members have threatened to put up a prolonged fight against it. They want a flag devoid of that symbol of Empire and Britain. Here is a clear-cut issue. Shall a minority determine the type of the country's flag? ... To capitulate on such a vital matter to French-Canadian opposition would only inspire more demands based on racialism."⁹⁷ A few weeks later, its sister publication in the Southam chain, the *Edmonton Journal*, also endorsed the Red Ensign as "certainly the most suitable of all designs considered."⁹⁸

The Red Ensign with a golden maple leaf instead of the Canadian coat of arms was Mackenzie King's favourite design, and he strongly advocated it in Cabinet in July 1946. He had argued that a distinctive Canadian flag "did not necessarily mean a flag without the Union Jack. It meant something distinctive from the Union Jack itself."⁹⁹ The joint committee duly reported on 12 July 1946 that King's choice was the design it also favoured, after having rejected a proposal by French-Canadian members of the committee.¹⁰⁰ But the committee's recommendation had polarized its members along ethnic lines, and King was threatened with the resignation of French-speaking Quebec MPs if he forced the adoption of the Red Ensign. On the other hand, any flag without reference to Canada's British heritage would have alienated most of the Ontario Liberals. So the matter was dropped.¹⁰¹ But this prompted the Quebec Legislative Assembly, which had asked the federal Parliament in the spring of 1946 to adopt a Canadian flag, to adopt a Quebec flag.

The 1946 debates about citizenship, Dominion Day, and the flag brought out affirmations of Canada as a British nation from most federal politicians and most English-speaking newspapers. The proponents of this British view of Canada showed varying degrees of irritation at the thought that their perspective was not shared by all. They gloried in the democratic tradition of self-government embodied in the British heritage and saw it as a universal principle around which even “lesser” ethnic groups could rally. The civic components of this view were closely bounded by its dominant ethnic pre-suppositions. This was clear in the debates about the limits of citizenship which went on at the same time as Canadian citizenship was given new legal form.