

LET'S MAKE SENSE

OUT OF

CANADIAN HISTORY.®

Charles Hou

Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Good versus Evil	2
The Struggle for Survival	5
The Rise and Fall of Civilizations	6
The Growth of Freedom	8
Progress	10
Imperialism	12
Nationhood	14
The Northern Frontier	16
Staples	18
Metropolitanism	20
The Empire of the St. Lawrence	22
The Biographies of Great Persons	24
The Oppressor Versus the Oppressed	26
Struggle for the Border	28
Social History	30
"A Confused Heap of Facts"	32
Using Philosophies of History	33
Bibliography	35

LET'S MAKE SENSE OUT OF CANADIAN HISTORY

The main goal of history is to make sense of the past. Historians gather and analyze evidence of past events, then develop a thesis to illustrate and explain their significance. Such a thesis works for a small body of information. When interpreting events on a large scale historians come up with a superthesis – what we call a philosophy of history. Various philosophies can be used to make sense of historical events. None tell the whole story, but each provides a unique insight into the past.

Textbook authors strive to assemble all the essential facts of dates, places, events and people students should know about Canadian history, but facts alone are not enough to bring the past to life. One way to make the information more engaging is to vary the approach taken to individual units, applying different philosophies of history to each.

Brief descriptions of various philosophies are followed by suggestions on how to apply them in class.

"History which lacks a thesis is a body lacking a skeleton – it is invertebrate. It may contain exhaustive research, may be striking in detail, may throw light into dark places, but its total effect will be limp."

Allan Nevins

"The writer of popular history must discover a design, a pattern, into which . . . endlessly varied threads of research can be woven, and which will yet have meaning, intelligibility, significance for the reader."

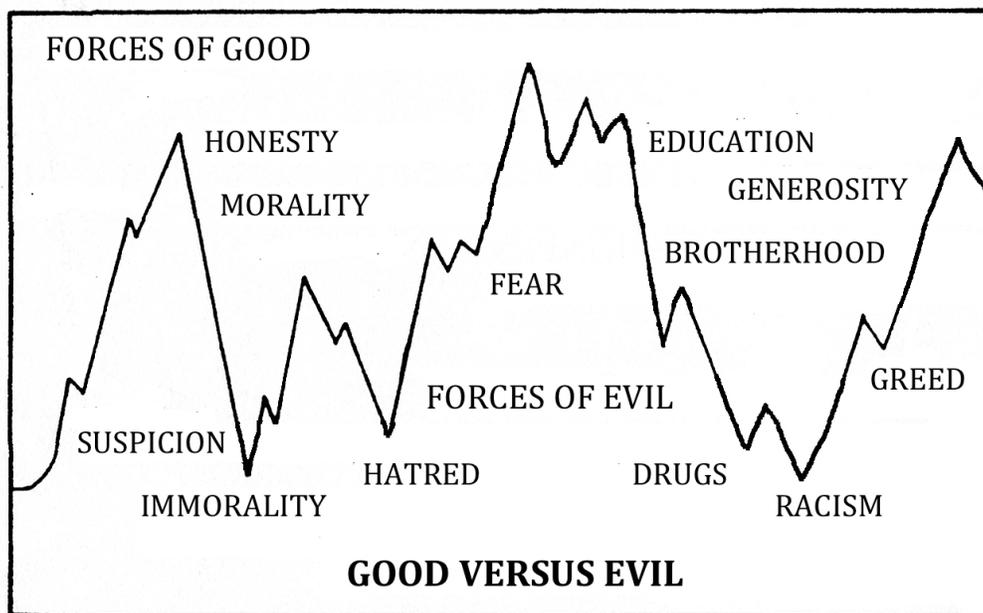
Donald Creighton

"When you read a work of history always listen out for the buzzing of bees in bonnets. If you can detect none, either you are tone deaf or your historian is a dull dog."

E. H. Carr

GOOD VERSUS EVIL

The 5th century bishop St. Augustine saw history as a struggle between the forces of good and evil. He would have viewed Canadian history with a strongly religious bias, seeing the planting of a Christian society in the St. Lawrence River basin as a triumph of the forces of good, and the destruction of the Jesuits' missionary efforts as a temporary triumph of evil. He would have contrasted the influence of the church with the often negative aspects of life such as war, alcoholism, immorality and racism. History, in the view of St. Augustine, is directed by a supreme being, and it is the historian's job to try to discover its meaning.



"That God rules in the affairs of men is as certain as any truth of physical science . . . Kings are lifted up and thrown down, nations come and go . . . but nothing is by chance."

George Bancroft

"Events of all sorts creep or fly exactly as God pleases."

William Cowper

GOOD VERSUS EVIL



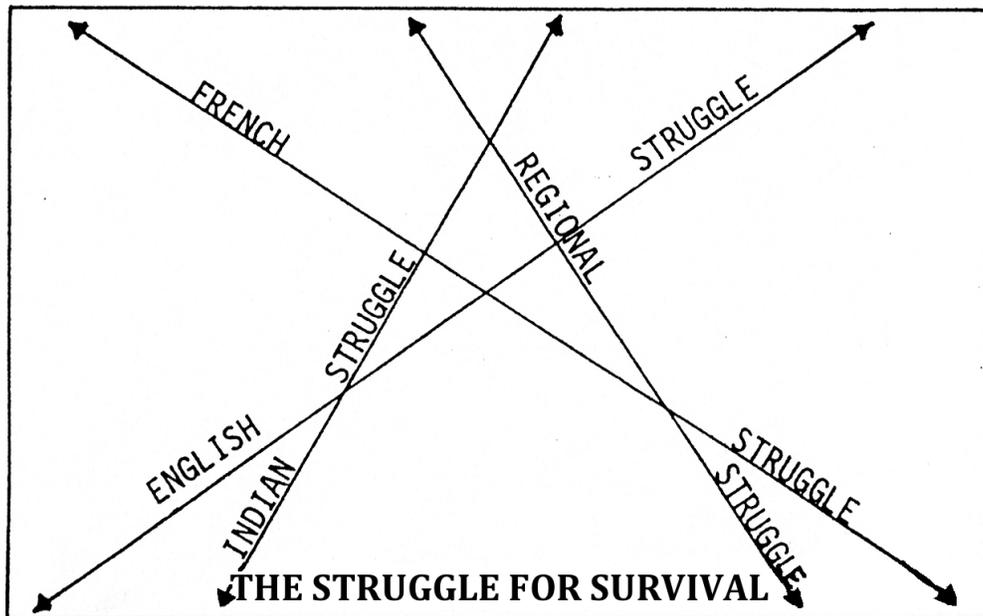
Founding of Montreal by Sieur de Maisonneuve, 1642, Don Anderson, from Confederation Life's Gallery of Canadian History



Death of General Montgomery, Quebec, 1775, LAC e010771309

THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

François-Xavier Garneau used the theme of survival to interpret French-Canadian history. He saw the history of his people as a recurring struggle for survival – first with the hostile climate, the aboriginal peoples, and British and Dutch colonists, then with their English-Canadian and American neighbours. His interpretation has merit outside Quebec, as well. It can be applied to the struggle of the First Nations to survive as a people, to the struggle of the English-Canadians to survive alongside their powerful and more numerous American neighbours, and to the struggle of the inhabitants of Canada's major regions to maintain their political and cultural identities.



"There is something at once noble and touching in the spectacle of a people defending the nationality of their ancestors, that sacred heritage which no race, how degraded soever, has yet repudiated."

François-Xavier Garneau

"There are two miracles of Canadian history. The first is the survival of French Canada and the second is the survival of Canada."

F. C. Scott

THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL



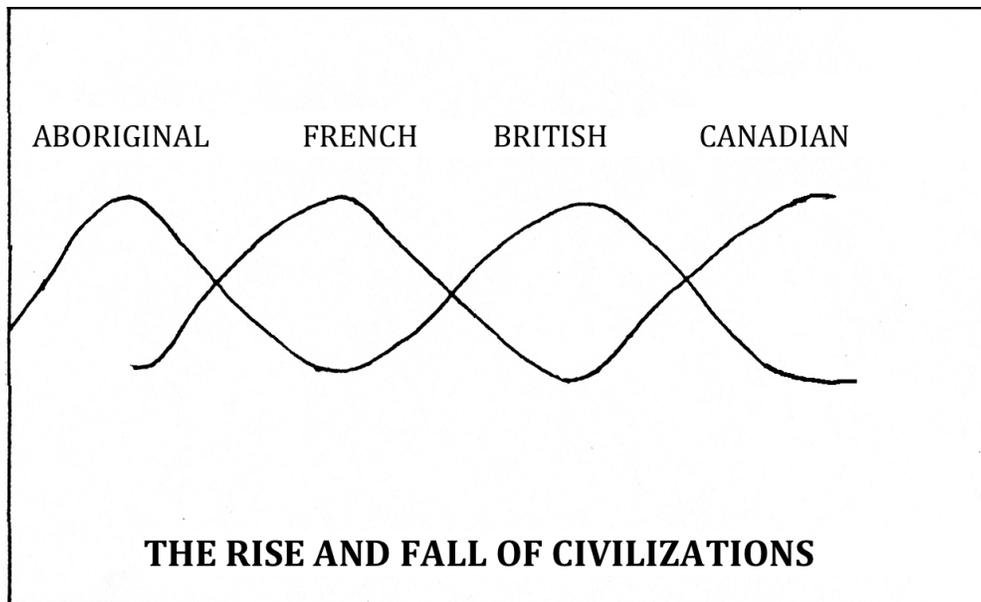
The Battle of Queenston Heights, 1812, LAC Acc. No. 1954-153-1



The Skirmish at Duck Lake, 1885, LAC

THE RISE AND FALL OF CIVILIZATIONS

Arnold Toynbee saw history as the rise and fall of numerous civilizations, each of which went through a process of birth, growth, maturation and decline. Applying this cyclical view of history to Canadian history, one might consider the rise and fall of three cultures or civilizations, and the rise of a fourth. The aboriginal civilizations occupying Canada before the first permanent European settlements were followed by the French, which was followed by the British, which was in turn followed by a competition between Canadian and American civilizations.



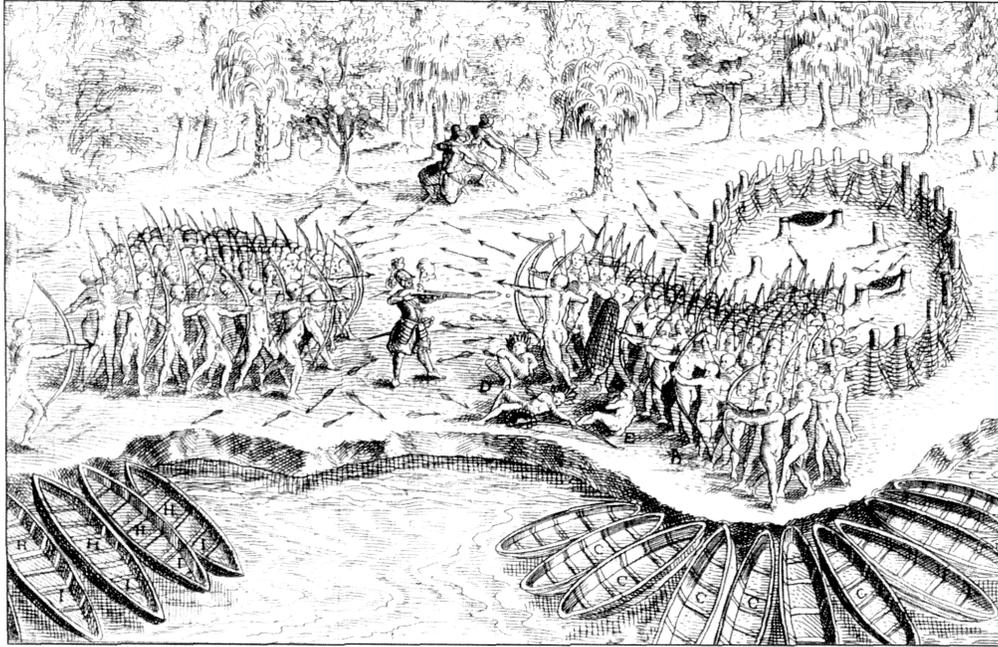
"States, like men, have their growth, their manhood, their decrepitude, their decay."

Walter Savage Landor

"Canadian history is the history of a French, a British and an American colony successively."

Tom Naylor

THE RISE AND FALL OF CIVILIZATIONS



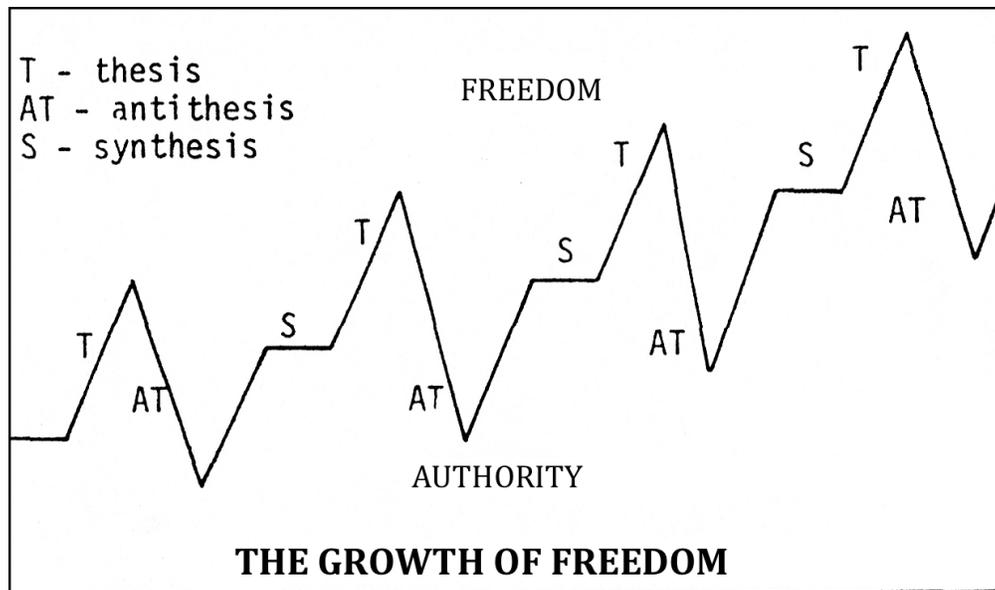
Champlain and Allies versus the Iroquois. 1609



Battle of Quebec, 1759, LAC Acc. No. R9266-2102

THE GROWTH OF FREEDOM

Georg Hegel, who interpreted history as a struggle between the forces of freedom and autocracy, would have explained how Louis XIV's autocratic government of New France (thesis) was countered by the inhabitants' concept of local freedom (antithesis), resulting in a new concept of government in which autocracy was tempered with local freedom (synthesis). Similarly, the British concept of oligarchy (rule by the Family Compact) and the loyalist concept of democracy led to the concept of self-government in local affairs, and eventually to Canada's independent commonwealth relationship with Britain.



"The history of civilized man is the history of the incessant conflict between liberty and authority."

Charles T. Sprading

"The progress of democracy seems irresistible because it is the most uniform, the most ancient, and the most permanent tendency which is to be found in history."

Alexis de Tocqueville

THE GROWTH OF FREEDOM



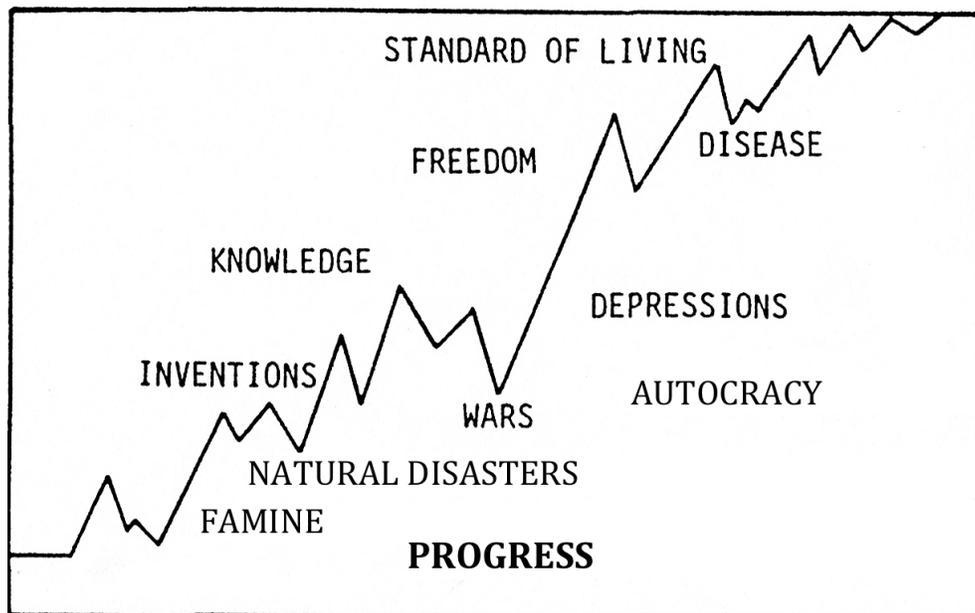
Joseph Howe defends freedom of speech, 1835, LAC Acc. No. 1972-26-764



Papineau addressing a crowd, 1837, LAC Acc. No. 1972-26-759

PROGRESS

Many historians have used Charles Darwin's theory of evolution to explain the development of their countries. Canadian history could be seen as a series of progressive steps whereby the people of the land developed from the stone age to a modern, technologically advanced society. Advances in democracy, independence, industrialization, standard of living and transportation would be catalogued, and wars and depressions would be considered as temporary setbacks in the steady march of progress. The problems caused by pollution and man's inability to control weapons which could destroy the world are more recent and potentially more serious setbacks.



"He who moves not forward goes backward."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

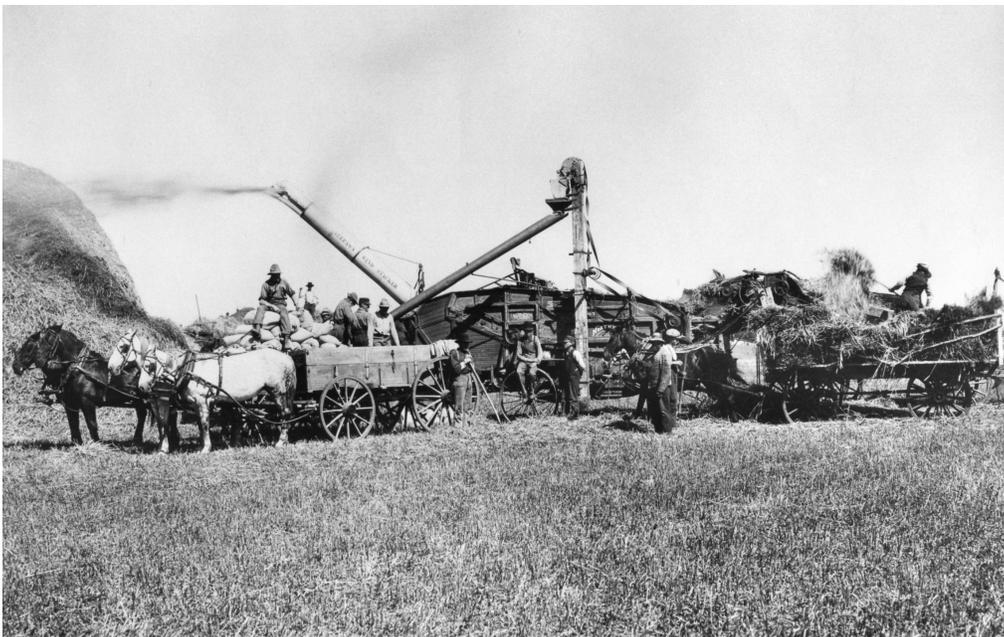
"You can't say civilization don't advance, for in every war they kill you in a new way."

Will Rogers

PROGRESS



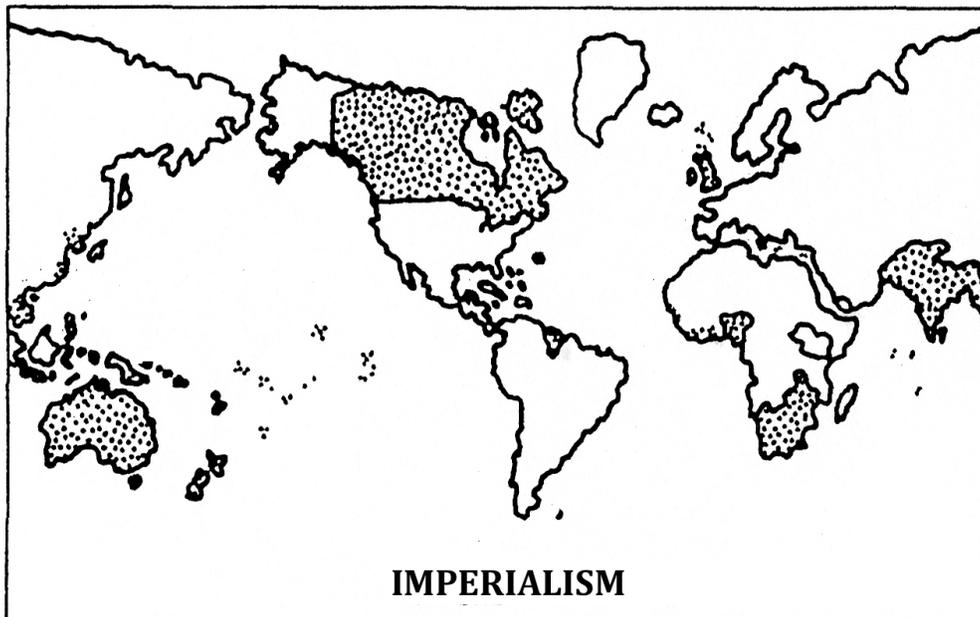
Assiniboine Hunting Buffalo, Paul Kane, 1846, National Gallery of Canada



"A busy threshing scene in Manitoba," CNR, LAC C-4673

IMPERIALISM

In the late 19th and 20th centuries some historians focused their attention on Canada's role in the British Empire. By maintaining their ties with Great Britain, Canadians were able to bask in the glory of the British Empire at the height of its power and prestige. Instead of working for the complete independence of Canada, they strove to strengthen the bonds which held the Empire together and distinguished Canadians from Americans. Conceivably, Canada might one day replace Britain at the centre of the Empire. This version of our history, sometimes called the Britannic or Blood is Thicker than Water School was a problem for French Canadians.



**"A British subject I was born, a British subject I will die."
Sir John A. Macdonald**

**"I stand in the first place for the British Empire against the world,
and within the British Empire, I stand first for Canada."
Sir Robert Borden**

IMPERIALISM



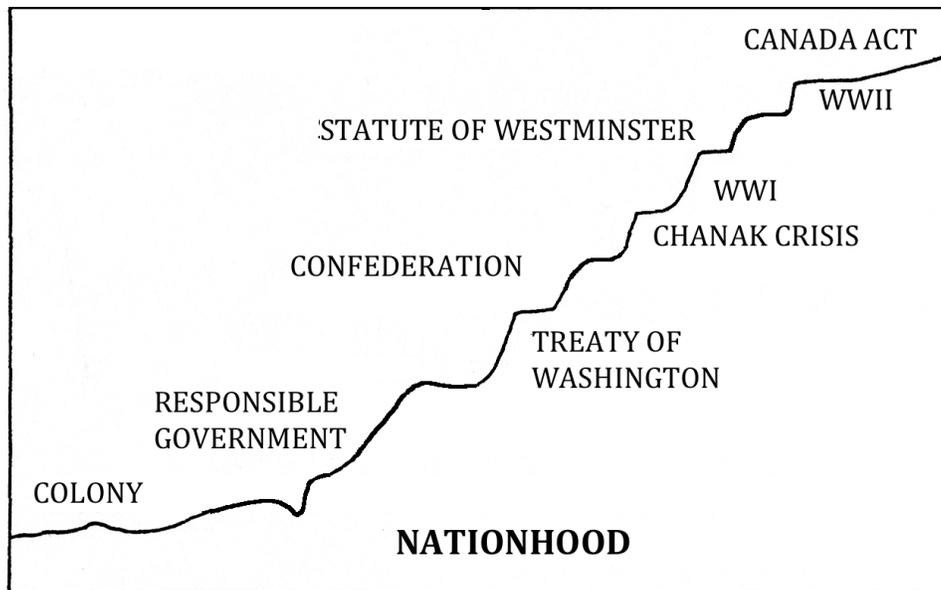
Conservative election poster, 1891, LAC c006536



1898, Canada Postal Corporation, LAC

NATIONHOOD

While some historians stressed the role of Canada in the British Empire, others foresaw her ultimate independence. They catalogued and analyzed every step in the long, gradual and peaceful process whereby Canada weakened her ties with Britain and worked toward complete independence. Arthur Lower's book *Colony to Nation* reflects this emphasis on nation-building. All those who opposed the evolution of Canada's internal self-government and her external independence are criticized by the nationhood historians, and all those who promoted her autonomy are praised. This approach emphasized politics and constitutional change.



"English historians were obsessed with politics, with recording every advance in the struggle upward and onward towards the Statute of Westminster."

Ramsay Cook

"Canadian history is the record of the struggle by which Canadians have ascended from the lowly status of dependent colonialism to the serene heights of autonomous nationhood."

Donald Creighton

NATIONHOOD



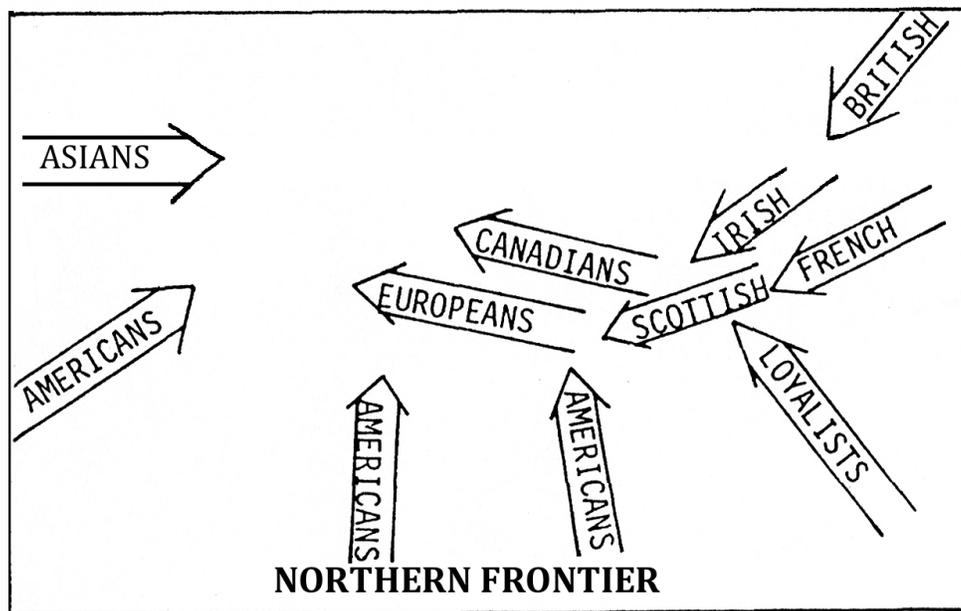
Battle of Ypres, 1915, LAC Acc. No. 1983-28-471



First Quebec conference, 1943, Ottawa Paint Works calendar

THE NORTHERN FRONTIER

Robert Grant Hamilton was one of many writers who stressed the influence of Canada's northern location on her historical development. They believed that Canada's severe winter climate reinforced the characteristics found in all northern peoples – hardiness, individualism, and love of liberty – and greatly affected her society, economy and politics. The frontier spirit influenced the explorers, missionaries, fur traders, lumbermen, farmers, miners, and petroleum workers as they moved westward and northward across Canada, and the nationalistic and romantic image of the northern frontier continues to grip the Canadian imagination today.



"We are the Northmen of the New World."

Robert Haliburton

"The North means an emptiness to be filled, a potential to be realized, a wealth to be discovered and unlocked, a future to be staked and deeds to be done that are uniquely Canada's chance and challenge."

J. Wreford Watson

THE NORTHERN FRONTIER



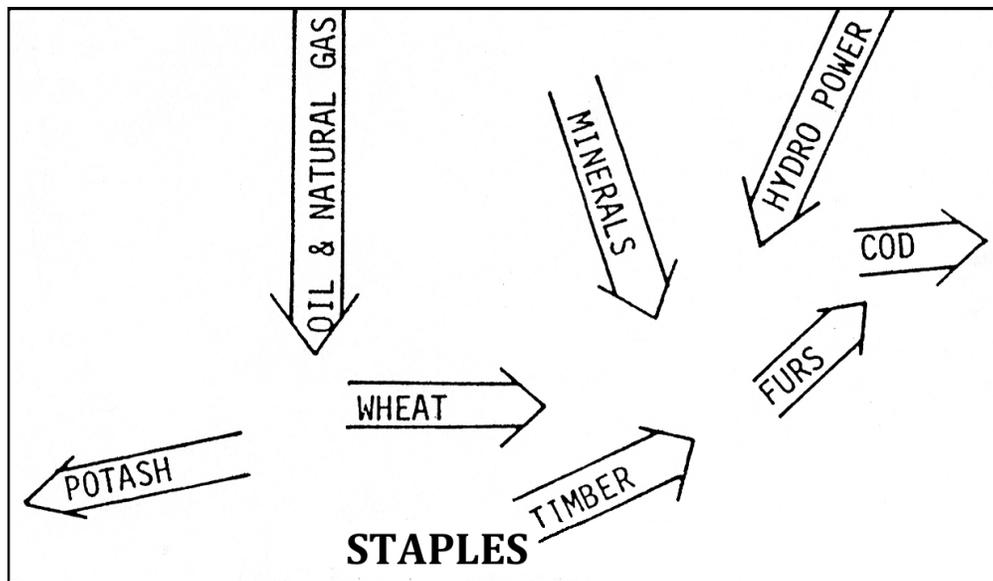
Yale and the Gold Hunter's camp, 1860, LAC R9266-1550



Chilkoot Pass, 1898-1899, LAC C004490

STAPLES

Harold Innis stressed the importance of staples or commodities in the development of Canada. He pointed out how the production and export of a few key raw materials such as cod, furs, timber, wheat, minerals, wood products and energy played a crucial role in the economic, political and social development of Canada. As Canada produced staples for markets in France, Great Britain and the United States (and for many other world markets today) she imported both goods and ideas from these countries. The production of staples also determined the growth of Canada's canals and railroads and the location of her cities.



"Canada emerged as a political entity with boundaries largely determined by the fur trade."

Harold Innis

"For the most part Canadians . . . still live off the riches we were fortunate enough to stumble on here in the first place. Our prosperity . . . is based on what we can dig or pump out of the ground or harvest from its surface or surrounding area."

Mordecai Richler

STAPLES



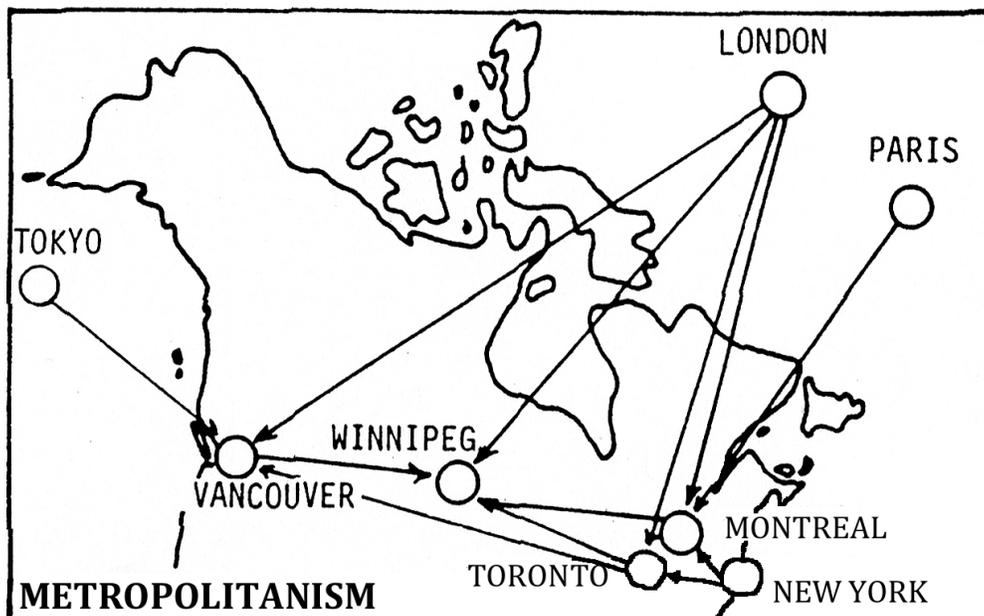
Sampson, *Maclean's Magazine*, 15 August 1943



Sampson, *Maclean's Magazine*, 15 October 1943

METROPOLITANISM

Some historians, among them D. C. Masters, have stressed the importance of large metropolitan centres such as Paris, London and New York in shaping the direction of Canadian history. Major commercial, political and cultural decisions were made in such cities and communicated to smaller centres and to rural areas (hinterlands). Toronto and Montreal were the main metropolitan centres in Canada that dominated and exploited their hinterland areas. Although numerous regional movements have arisen to protest the decisions made by the major centres, the latter still prevail.



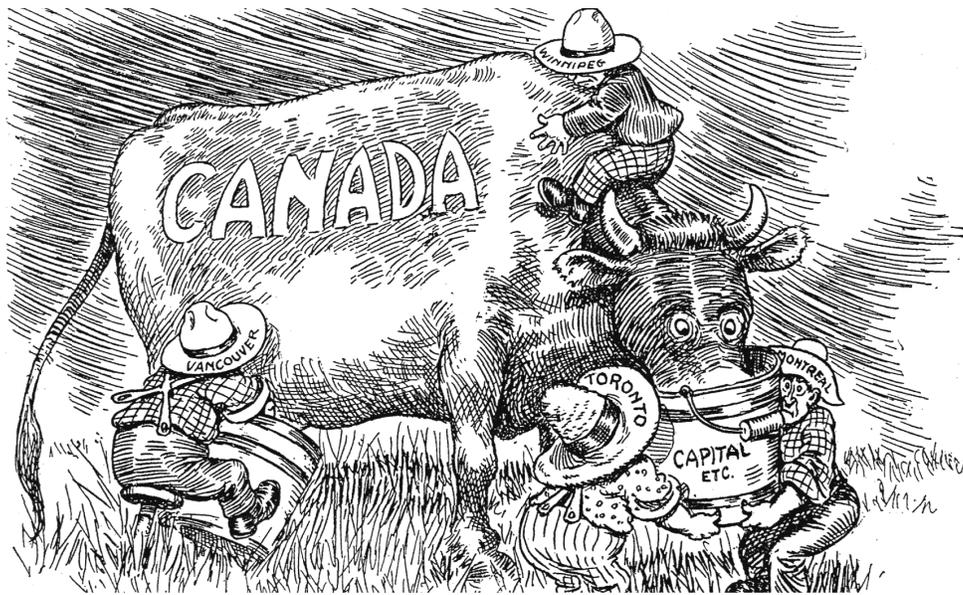
"It [Montreal] is the heart of the country and from it circulates the life blood of Canada."

George Ramsay Dalhousie

"Timber has ranked with sugar and tobacco, and possibly ahead of cotton, as a hinterland product called into existence by metropolitan demand."

A. R. M. Lower

METROPOLITANISM



ILLUSTRATING THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING FAVORABLY LOCATED

The Vancouver Daily Province, 2 May 1910



TIME FOR A NEW DEAL

The Sudbury Daily Star, 23 January 1958

THE EMPIRE OF THE ST. LAWRENCE



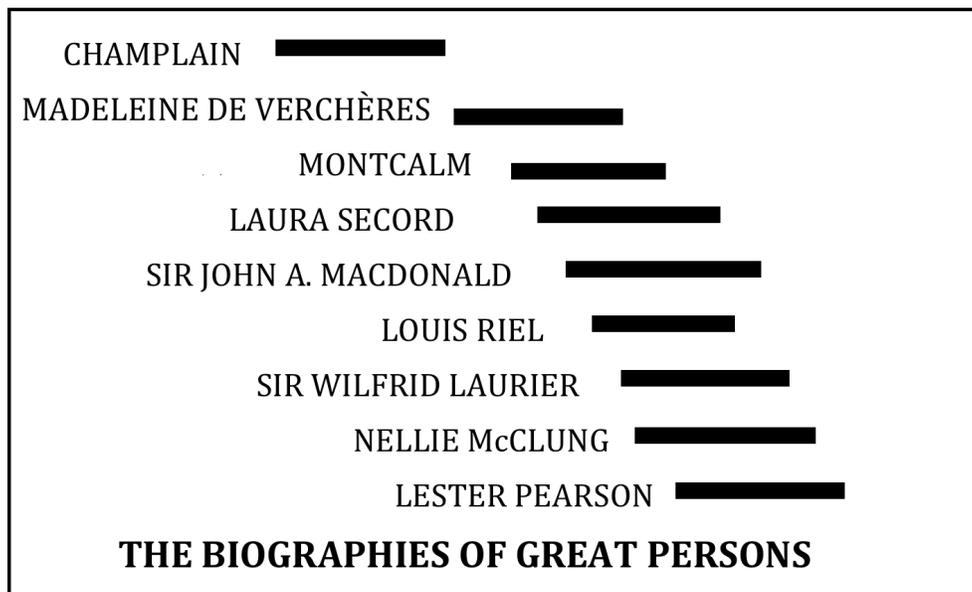
Canoe Manned by Voyageurs Passing a Waterfall, Francis Hopkins, LAC Acc. No. 1989-401-1



Hon. Donald A. Smith driving the last spike to complete the Canadian Pacific Railway, 1885, LAC c003693

THE BIOGRAPHIES OF GREAT PERSONS

Francis Parkman felt that a nation's history could be best understood by studying the dramatic incidents in the lives of heroic figures. Hence Canadian history would be studied by reading about the lives of men and women such as Champlain, Madeleine de Verchères, Montcalm, Laura Secord, William Lyon Mackenzie, Sir John A. Macdonald, Louis Riel, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Nellie McClung, William Lyon Mackenzie King, Lester Pearson and Pierre Trudeau. All aspects of our history would be seen as they affected or were affected by these major personalities.



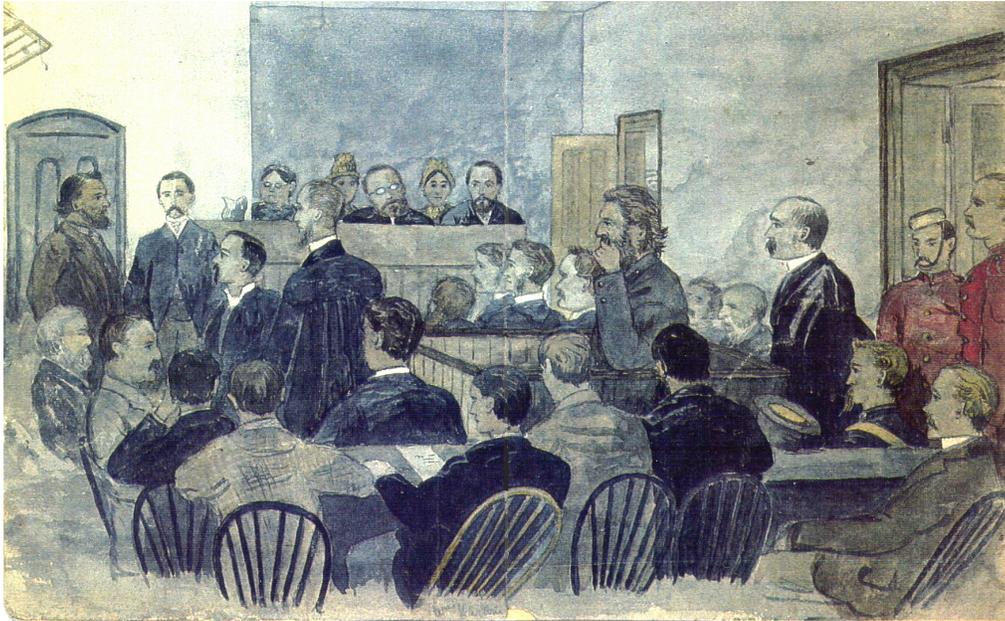
"History is the essence of innumerable biographies."

Thomas Carlyle

"History is made by living men and women, impelled by an endless variety of ideas and emotions."

Donald Creighton

THE BIOGRAPHIES OF GREAT PERSONS



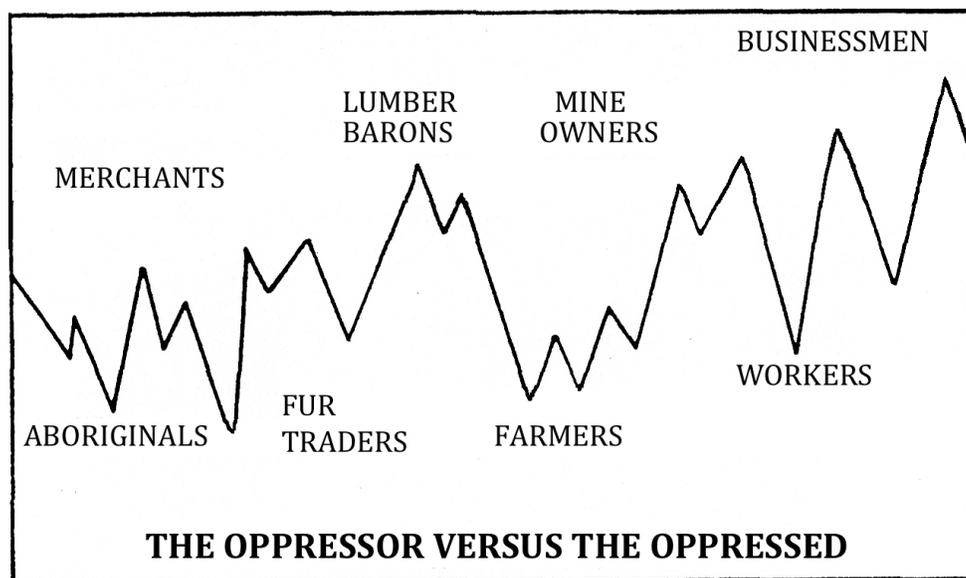
Trial of Louis Riel, 1885, Rare Books and Special Collections UBC



Agnes Campbell MacPhail, 1921, LAC C-006908

THE OPPRESSOR VERSUS THE OPPRESSED

Stanley Ryerson interpreted Canadian history from a Marxist point of view, as an economic struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed for the benefits of production. In his interpretation, the governors, intendant and bishops sent from France to Canada ruled over and exploited the First Nations and the French peasants. After the defeat of the French in 1759, the British elite continued the exploitation. Colonial wars can be considered as part of a world-wide competition between the aristocracies of European countries for resources and markets, and conflicts within Canada seen as class struggles between owners and workers.



"The farmer toils, the merchant toils, the laborer toils, and the Family Compact reap the fruit of their exertions."

William Lyon Mackenzie

"The root conflict of interests within our society is . . . a class conflict between the small class which controls the sources of wealth and power, and the other classes which are exploited by them."

F. H. Underhill

THE OPPRESSOR VERSUS THE OPPRESSED



St. Eustache, 1837, LAC Acc. No. R9266-3310

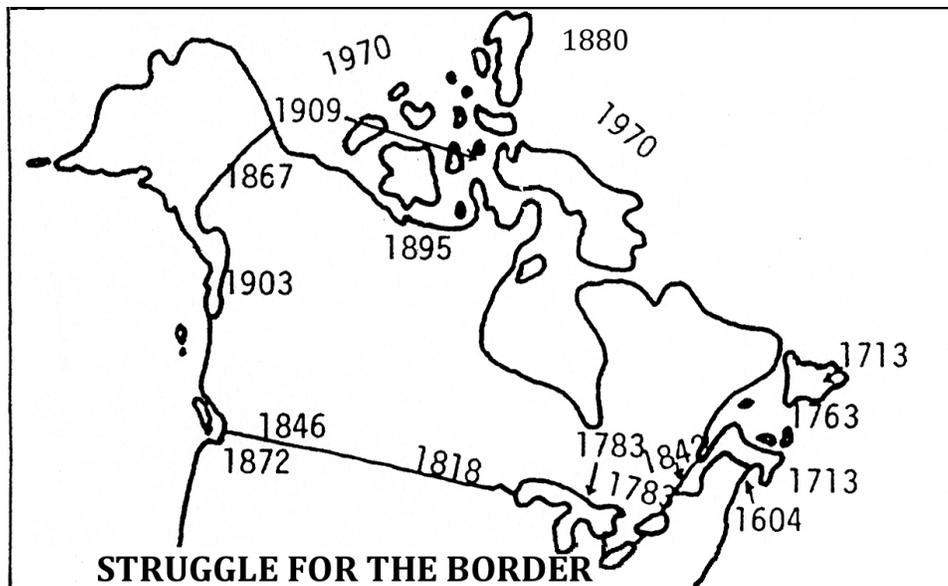


Today labor (ninety percent of the population) has to live on just ten percent of Canada's wealth -big business interests (ten percent of the population) control ninety percent of the wealth.

Ernie Walker, *The Federationist*, Vancouver, 22 December 1938

STRUGGLE FOR THE BORDER

In his book *Struggle for the Border* Bruce Hutchison focuses his attention on the development of Canada's almost 6400-km border with the United States. By studying the major personalities and events of Canadian history, he builds up the background information needed to understand the political treaties that formalized the border. He shows how a seemingly illogical and invisible line separating the two countries was actually a logical expression of the major forces that have divided them throughout their history, and how these forces are enough to maintain what is obviously an indefensible line.



"The border between Canada and the United States was forged in geography, trade routes, blood, war, threats and ultimatums."

Will Ferguson

"The boundary between Canada and the U.S. is a typical human creation: it is physically invisible, geographically illogical, militarily indefensible, and emotionally inescapable."

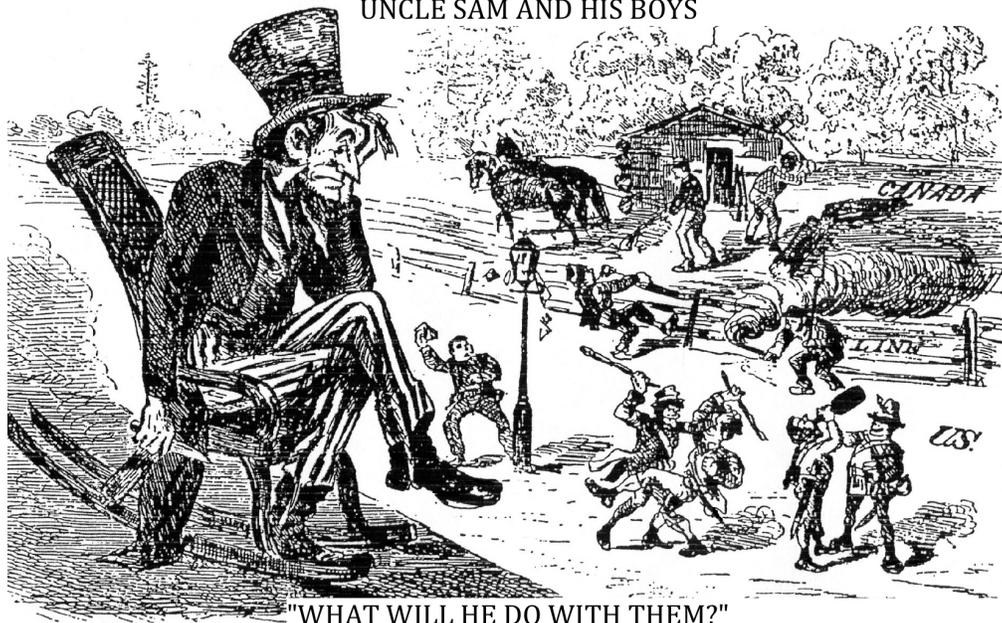
Hugh Keenleyside

STRUGGLE FOR THE BORDER



Studio portrait taken in 1882 of the surviving Six Nations warriors who fought with the British in the War of 1812, C085127

UNCLE SAM AND HIS BOYS

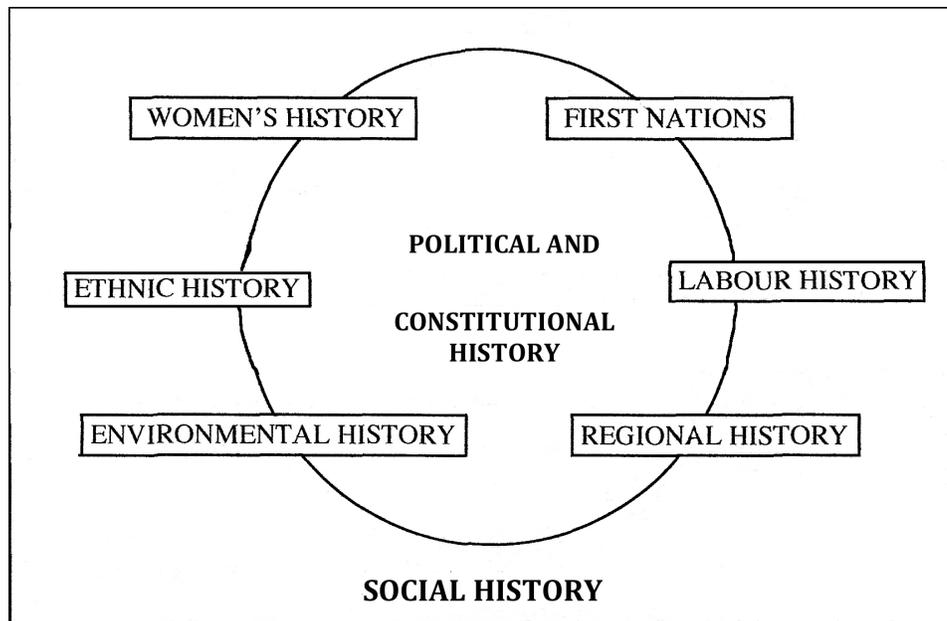


"WHAT WILL HE DO WITH THEM?"

Canadian Illustrated News, Montreal, June 1870

SOCIAL HISTORY

Until the 1970s Canadian history was dominated by political and constitutional historians who focused on Canada's evolution from a colony to a nation. Starting in the 1960s historians became more interested in topics traditionally left out of the national narrative. They began to include regional histories and to tell the stories of previously marginalized groups such as workers, women, First Nations, environmentalists, and racial and ethnic minorities. Social historians believe that the lives of ordinary people must be included in the master narrative of Canada.



"History is an adult entertainment, complex, with many sides . . . The history of Canada is multicentric. This country is too vast to be seen clearly from one perspective."

Desmond Morton

"It has been the competition and clash of those identities, regional, ethnic, class and sexual, which have given history its dynamic."

Ramsay Cook

SOCIAL HISTORY



Aboriginal women mending a birchbark canoe, 1872, LAC PA-074670

*Every Housewife can Enjoy
Electric Cooking*

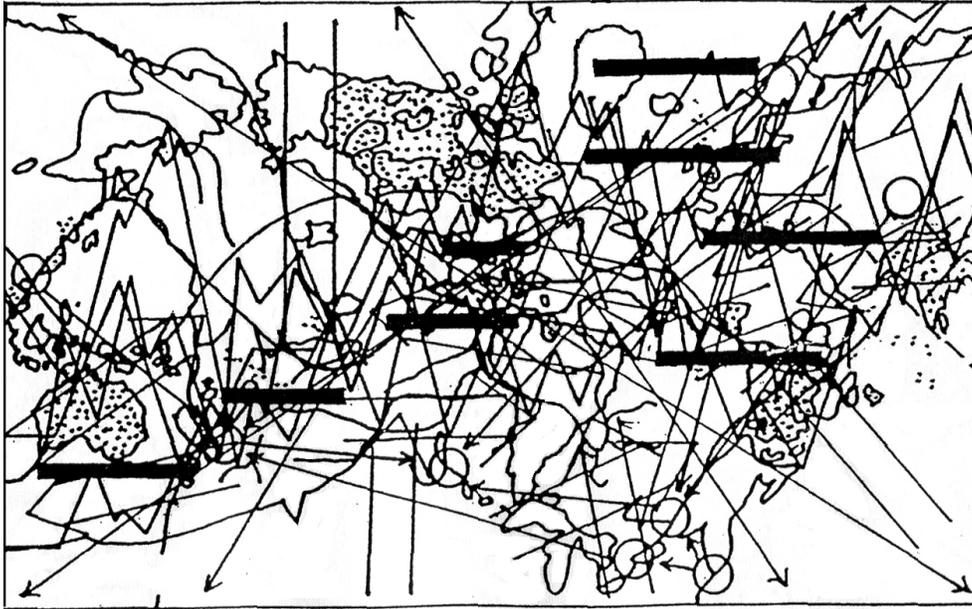
*"My Electric Range is Worth
Ten Times What it Cost Me!"*

WE HAVE RANGES TO SUIT
EVERY REQUIREMENT

British Columbia Electric Co., *The Vancouver Sun*, 30 May 1927

"A CONFUSED HEAP OF FACTS"

By combining the graphs illustrating the various historical philosophies one can visualize the confusion and frustration students experience in studying a bland consensus version of our past. One can also understand the advantages of dealing with one clearly defined theory at a time.



"History is a confused heap of facts."

Lord Chesterfield

"The difficulty in writing Canadian history has been to discover in the multiplicity of incidents and in the complex tangle of happenings a single organizing principle which gives unity and coherence to the whole."

Edmund H. Oliver

USING PHILOSOPHIES OF HISTORY

The philosophies of history outlined here may be applied in the classroom in a variety of ways. One way would be to introduce a new philosophy with each unit. The philosophy of good versus evil, for example, could be used with one unit and the struggle for survival with another. Students could then be asked to re-interpret each unit using the other philosophy. By the end of the year students should be able to interpret each unit in a variety of ways. The facts do not change but the interpretation does.

Consider the first illustration in the section on Good versus Evil, which shows Sieur de Maisonneuve founding a French settlement at Montreal in 1642. All historians could agree on the facts of the case but not on how to interpret it. Studying the illustration, St. Augustine would stress the importance of founding a Christian settlement among the heathen natives. Garneau would focus on the difficulty the French would have to overcoming the climate, hostile natives and the competition from the English settlers to the south. Toynbee would look at the fall of the First Nations civilization and the rise of the French civilization in North America. Hegel would record the failure of the French government's attempt to establish an autocratic government due to the influence of the frontier on the settlers. Innis would make clear the importance of the fur trade in the establishment of the settlement. And so on. Students are quite capable of coming up with different interpretations of events. This is also a great way to review history. History becomes an engaging and intellectual exercise as students learn to juggle facts.

Another approach would be to explain the different philosophies at the beginning of the year and have the students apply the different interpretations to several historical events or periods during the year. For example, after studying the rebellions of 1837 using one interpretation, students could be asked to write a short essay explaining how St. Augustine, Toynbee, Creighton, Garneau, Marx, Parkman, Hegel, Darwin etc. would have interpreted the same information.

An interesting examination or class discussion might be undertaken at the end of the year, in which students would be presented with an historical photograph, painting or cartoon and asked to give different interpretations of the event portrayed. Alternatively, the students could be given several well-illustrated textbooks and asked to find illustrations fitting the different interpretations.

"Philosophy asks the simple question: what is it all about?"

Alfred North Whitehead

"Having accumulated his facts, the historian must discover their logical connection with each other, the laws which rule them, and their significance for the period studied and for our time."

Allan Nevins

"An age is a chaos while one is living in it, and the past would be a chaos also if it were not interpreted for us."

Van Wyck Brooks

"The mental highways are far more important than those built of asphalt and cement."

W. Gunther Plaut

"History is about the debate between competing interpretations of events, individuals, and ideas of the past based on the utilization of historical evidence."

Bruce A. Lesh

"History is not the past, but a map of the past drawn from a particular point of view to be useful to the modern traveler."

Henry Glassic

"The "facts" may not change, but often the importance accorded to them and the historian's interpretation of them will."

Ruth Pierson and Alison Prentice

"There are many histories of Canada depending on who is telling the story and from what perspective."

Daniel Francis

"What matters in history is the great outline and the significant detail; what must be avoided in the deadly morass of irrelevant narrative."

Sir Lewis Namier

"The nation's understanding of its past and the writing of its history involves matters of mind as well as fact, of intellectual substance as well as empirical data."

A. B. McKillop

Bibliography

- An Ursuline of Quebec. *Mary of the Incarnation: Foundress of the Ursuline Monastery Quebec*, Quebec, n.p., 1939.
- Atwood, Margaret. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1972.
- Bennett, Paul W. *Rediscovering Canadian History*. Toronto, OISE Press, 1980.
- Berger, Carl. *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing Since 1900*. University of Toronto Press, second edition, 1986.
- Berger, Carl, ed. *Contemporary Approaches to Canadian History*. Toronto, Copp Clark Pitman, 1987.
- Bergeron, Léandre. *The History of Quebec: A Patriote's Handbook*. Toronto, NC Press, 1971.
- Bergeron, Léandre and Robert Lavail. *The History of Québec: A Patriote's Handbook*. Toronto, New Canada Publications, 1972?
- Billington, Ray Allen. *The Frontier Thesis: Valid Interpretation of American History?* Toronto, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.
- Bliss, Michael, "Privatizing the Mind: the Sundering of Canadian History, the Sundering of Canada." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 26, 4 (winter 1991-92), 5-17.
- Bogue, Alan. G. "Frederick Jackson Turner Reconsidered." *The History Teacher*, February 1994
- Careless, J. M. S. *Frontier and Metropolis*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1989.
- Clark, Penney, ed. *New Possibilities for the Past*. Vancouver, UBC Press, 2011.
- Classen, H. George. *Thrust and Counterthrust*. Don Mills, Longmans, 1965.
- Cook, Ramsay, Craig Brown and Carl Berger, eds. *Approaches to Canadian History: Essays by W. A. Macintosh, A. R. M. Lower, F. H. Underhill, W. L.*

- Morton, D. G. Creighton, J. M.S. Careless, M. Brunet. University of Toronto Press, 1967.
- Creighton, Donald. *The Empire of the St. Lawrence*. Toronto, Macmillan, 1956.
- Creighton, Donald. *Harold Adams Innis: Portrait of a Scholar*. University of Toronto Press, 1957.
- Cross, Michael S.. *The Frontier Thesis and the Canadas: The Debate on the Impact of the Canadian Environment*. Toronto, Copp Clark, 1970.
- Dimmitt, Christopher and Michael Dawson, eds. *Contesting Clio's Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History*. Institute for the Study of the Americas, London, 2009.
- Gagnon, Serge. *Quebec and its Historians 1840 to 1920*. Montreal, Harvest House, 1982.
- Granatstein, J. L. *Who Killed Canadian History?* Toronto, Harper Collins, 1998.
- Hutchison, Bruce. *The Struggle for the Border*. Toronto, Longman Brown and Co., 1955.
- Keilty, Greg. *1837: Revolution in the Canadas*. Toronto, NC Press, 1974.
- Saul, John Ralston. *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada*. Toronto, Viking Canada, 2008.
- She Named it Canada: because that's what it was called*. North Vancouver, The Corrective Collective, 1971.
- Strong-Boag, Veronica and Anita Clair Tellman. *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History*. Toronto, Copp Clark Pitman, 1986.
- Winks, Robin W. *The Relevance of Canadian History: U.S. and Imperial Perspectives*. Toronto, Macmillan, 1979.
- Wrong, George M. *The Rise and Fall of New France*. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1928.