

'Patriotism, Eh?' The Canadian Version

How does patriotism look north of the 49th parallel? Ms. Cook explores the answers to this question and examines the "quiet nationalism" that characterizes Canadians' views of themselves and their nation.

By Sharon Anne Cook

IT'S 8:15 a.m. on a typical day at Anyschool, Canada. Adolescents are charging down hallways, slamming locker doors, tripping over one another and any unwary supervising teacher, trying to make it through the classroom door before the playing of the Canadian national anthem. Most will manage it; some are stranded in mid-flight. A teacher might have to remind them to "stand at attention." Instead, they remain still-ish (just like their swifter friends in the classroom), looking unhappy, staring vacantly until their purgatory ends after this single demonstration of national respect demanded of students. There is no Pledge of Allegiance, no hand on the heart, not even a working knowledge of the words to the anthem.

Many students, however, could quote verbatim the Molson Canadian beer commercial from April 2000:

I have a Prime Minister, not a President; I speak English and French, not American; and I pronounce it "about," not "a boot." . . . I can proudly sew my country's flag on my backpack. I believe in peacekeeping, not policing; diversity, not assimilation; and that the beaver is a truly proud and noble animal. . . . My name is Joe! And I am Canadian! Thank you.¹

Here we have it: patriotism, Canadian-style, apparently composed of vague anti-American pride in our presumed peacefulness, our diversity, and the lowly beaver. And courtesy, too, represents a proud Canadian value: the "oath" ends by thanking the listeners. This bland self-identification with qualities perceived to be less abrasive or aggressive than those defining the American character, voiced more politely than pronouncements of American patriotism — available for

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mass comparison on television or in film — is what most Canadians would define as Canadian "nationalism," the closest thing we have to "patriotism."

What are the roots of this seemingly pale thing we might call Canadian Patriotism, and how has the formal school curriculum intersected with popular notions of what it is to be a patriotic citizen? One of Canada's best-known philosophers, John Ralston Saul,² argues that Canada's contribution to the world has been to build a new type of quiet nationalism, characterized most fundamentally by the tradition of compromise between our three founding peoples: French, English, and First Nations.³ And it is no coincidence that Saul is husband of the woman who has just retired from the office of governor general, a quintessentially Canadian political institution. Adding to its heterogeneous mixture, Canada has welcomed a larger percentage of immigrants compared with its population base than has any Western nation over the past century, Saul asserts, including the United States. The concepts and proclivities underpinning this tradition of compromise — self-effacement, careful and endless debate on a shifting agenda of priorities, the notion of "limited identities" to describe the range of competing factors (regional, linguistic, racial, and ethnocultural among others) in every Canadian's sense of self — all of these are incompatible with strident patriotic fervor. In fact, patriotism is actively feared as having the potential to undo this frail consensus.

Through the school curriculum, particularly in the prescriptions for history and social studies, objectives for citizenship training in this country have privileged understanding through debate rather than patriotism. Both curricular and school authorities have consistently taken the position that, while loyalty is good, patriotism is to be approached with caution. In recounting

the Canadian government's efforts to whip the nation into unified support for the First World War, the authors of one leading textbook for eighth-graders note that, although English Canadian supporters of the draft eventually triumphed, "the price of victory was steep. . . . It was Quebec against the rest of Canada. The bitterness lasted for years to come."⁴

PATRIOTISM AND CANADA'S THREE CULTURES

Canada is a tricultural and, since 1971, an officially bilingual nation. The often-uneasy relationship between French and English Canadians has been a feature of our national life from the 1840s, when the infamous Durham Report suggested that the greatest kindness to French Canadians would be to gradually eliminate their language and culture. No matter what Lord Durham thought was best for the colony, one can only marvel at the resilience and vigor of French Canadian life, whether in the "home province" of Quebec or in one of the many minority francophone communities across Canada. French Canadians are here to stay, but their interests have been pitted against the English majority views on many occasions: the two rebellions in western Canada (in 1869 and 1885) both had a strong subtext of French Canadian dissatisfaction, as did the

major eastern Canadian rebellion in Lower Canada (Quebec) in 1837; the threat of the draft almost split the nation in two during both World Wars, as noted above; and the rise of modern Quebec separatism remains a persistent worry for most Canadians. The "French Canadian fact," as it is delicately termed in many school curricula, has forced Canadians to emphasize the need to protect unity rather than patriotism while respecting customs and traditions that arise from this linguistic community. For a province like Alberta, this takes the form of requiring students to respect the franco-Albertan community, along with Ukrainian Canadians and First Nations groups, and to accept that "some people prefer to live in or belong to a special community so they can keep their customs and traditions."⁵ Few Canadians feel that the luxury of patriotic fervor is possible or wise in the face of French Canadians' needs and aspirations to protect their language and culture.

One essential element of the Canadian style of patriotism derives from our British forebears. From the earliest Canadian-produced history readers dating from the 1860s, Canadian children learned about their political, economic, and moral indebtedness to Mother Britain. Canadians waited until 1982 to produce a formal constitution under the Canada Act, and our ties

Patriotism in American Overseas Schools: **What Ought to Be Taught**

Thousands of U.S. citizens live abroad in communities whose mission is to support the nation's military and diplomatic corps. If these communities are large enough to require a school of their own, they are likely to be a lot like their counterparts stateside. There will be a bank, a commissary, a shopping center, athletic fields, teen centers, chapels with services for all faiths, and such support services as police and fire departments.

But there are also important differences. Many members of these overseas communities are deployed for many months at a time in support of U.S. military missions, and many of those so deployed will be parents of students in our overseas schools. Under these circumstances, the realities of the hardship of service to the nation are easy to bring home to students. But we also need to teach them about the substantial contributions that our military forces have made to building our own country and to supporting democracy and opposing tyranny and oppression around the world.

The American overseas community is proud of its contribution to the national goals of fostering freedom and democracy, whenever and wherever they are in jeopardy. Whatever their age, Americans overseas all support the mission of making the world a better and safer place. That is my perspective on patriotism, and it is a message we need to deliver clearly to youngsters in our schools overseas and at home. **K**

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to Britain have been cemented through a political system closely modeled on the British, a judicial and education system with strong echoes of British values, and large-scale British immigration. Public values rooted in respect for reserve, fair play, and hard work remain closely linked in popular perceptions to our heritage in the British Empire.

In the early 20th century, Canadian schoolchildren were challenged, as one textbook of 1910 put it, to civilize “a vast solitude of uncultivated plains, unbroken forests, and lonely mountains”⁶ by using these same British values. Today, curricular guidelines phrase objectives in environmental terms: responsible citizens must “promote diversity and . . . not compromise the natural world for any species in the future.”⁷ As the challenge has been framed in school materials, then, the demands of taming Canada’s vast geography while acting respectfully toward the environment and remaining mindful of British values of fair play have remained in the forefront of educators’ concerns. And yet, even here, one does not find a patriotic impulse to that duty. Issues associated with the immensity of the land, the husbanding of resources, and the protection of border and region have traditionally portrayed Canada as the junior partner, first to Britain, then to the United States — a willing partner, to be sure — but deferring to those with access to more resources, larger populations, greater appetites. National patriotism seems unnecessary if one already finds inclusion in the family of a respected imperial power, whether British or American.

The influence of the third major component of Canadian culture, Canada’s First Nations, in producing a muted sense of patriotism most likely derives from the early and sustained economic partnerships that the English and the French each developed separately with the aboriginal peoples through the fur trade. There is no doubt that occasional flashes of violence erupted in this relationship. Instances such as the Battle of Long Sault in 1660, in which Dollard Des Ormeaux and his 16 companions were overcome by Iroquois, continue to live in French Canadian annals and in history textbooks read by generations of Canadian children. Aboriginal and Métis peoples’ resistance to the fledgling Canadian government’s “manifest destiny” over western Canada, in addition to starvation and disease, resulted in the North-West Rebellion in 1885 in what is now Saskatchewan. Nevertheless, examples of violent resistance are relatively rare beyond the 18th century, as the fur trade provided the underpinning for

western development through the patronage of the Hudson Bay Company for the British and the North-West Company for the Scots and French. The First Nations and Métis peoples were *commercial* allies, providing a practical reason to resolve any disputes peacefully. This tradition was further reinforced by the establishment in the late 19th century of the North-West Mounted Police (now the Royal Canadian Mounted Police), a force that Canadian children are taught continues to work closely in dispute resolution all through Western and Northern Canada.

The evocation of partnership with First Nations peoples is of course, belied by the appalling poverty and distress of many native communities in Canada. Yet the official curriculum — however that might be subverted in practice — underscores the unity of purpose. The Northwest Territories curriculum, for example, asserts that “whatever one might desire for the future of the territories, it is a fact that we — easterners and westerners; Dene, Métis, Inuit and non-Natives — live together now, sharing our lives in a single, vast political jurisdiction.”⁸

PATRIOTISM AND PEACEKEEPING

The Canadian tradition of peacekeeping probably developed naturally from such initiatives in the 1870s as the creation of the North-West Mounted Police to remove rum-runners from the West and to make the area compatible to settlement. Clearly, it was also reinforced during the Cold War by the establishment of the United Nations, an institution to which Canadians and especially the Canadian education establishment gave strong support. Doubtless, the widespread enthusiasm for the United Nations — characterized by student UN assemblies held from the 1950s across Canada and overt support through curriculum documents — was partly due to the UN Charter’s provision for maintaining international peace through the use of collective security forces. This approach was developed as a reasonable way to ensure that the horrors associated with the Second World War would never again occur. It was a Canadian, Lester Pearson, who successfully organized a UN peacekeeping force during the Suez Crisis, an accomplishment duly recognized by the international community through the Nobel Peace Prize in 1956 and celebrated in virtually every Canadian history textbook since. Whatever the cause, Canadian schools and institutions have seen Canadians as peacekeepers since that time at least and have im-

mortalized this image through texts, popular films, and commemorative statues.

PATRIOTIC ABERRATIONS

This is not to say that Canada has never experimented with patriotic values or excess. It has done so fairly often and, predictably, in xenophobic ways that have excluded many and privileged the usual few. As elsewhere, Canadian patriotism has been most evident during periods of national crisis when Canadians' safety or that of the nation-state has been thought to be endangered. The Chinese during the building of the transcontinental railway in the 1880s, German and Italian Canadians during World War I, Ukrainian and Japanese Canadians during World War II, French Canadian nationalists during the FLQ terrorism of the late 1960s and the invocation of the War Measures Act in 1970 — all suffered the loss of civil liberties, of the presumption of innocence, or of the right to earn a fair living wage. Clearly, Canadians can make no claims to treat minority interests more fairly than is done elsewhere.

PATRIOTISM, CANADIAN-STYLE

Counterpoised to the occasional political aim of invoking patriotism has been the official position of the education establishment (which, however, has not been immune to the xenophobic assumptions of any given era): suspicion toward the extremes of propaganda. One persistent dispute in eastern Canada involved cadet training in the schools from the 1890s to the end of World War I. By 1923, the National Council of Education worried that high school history could become a means to promote patriotism. It argued that "history should not be prostituted to the service of propaganda."⁹ The concern was that combining historical and civics education in the same curriculum would increase the propagandistic potential of history and social studies courses to an unacceptable level.

Rather than promoting explicit patriotism, Canadian curricula have typically celebrated our pride in democratic institutions; the 1952 curriculum guideline for history in Canada's largest province, Ontario, called on students to develop such vague qualities as "tolerance, respect and good will;"¹⁰ the current civics guideline calls on young people to become "informed," "purposeful," and "active" citizens, by, for example, demonstrating "an understanding of the various ways

in which decisions are made and conflicts resolved in matters of civic importance."¹¹ One cannot be certain about the meaning of such statements; they are surely a long way from overt patriotism, however.

It is an open question as to how persuasive this educational discourse of "peace and good government" rather than spirited patriotism is to the general public. However, there is some evidence that it reflects general Canadian norms. During the winter of 2004, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation — which provides a national radio and television service to all parts of Canada — ran one of the "Greatest Canadian" contests, modeled on the British contest that had resulted in Churchill's being proclaimed as the "Greatest Briton." Whom did Canadians choose as their "Greatest," casting 1.2 million votes for the winner? A Churchillian political master, perhaps, like Pierre Elliott Trudeau or Lester Pearson, holding the country together during times of strife? A famous hockey player, or even a hockey commentator? A scientist? All of these, and others as well, were nominated and promoted with an embarrassing level of hype. But no, we chose a mousy, slight man with wispy hair and a sharp, reedy voice, a former Baptist minister, premier of Saskatchewan, leader of Canada's left-wing New Democratic Party. Best known these days as Kiefer Sutherland's grandpa, Tommy Douglas was hailed as the best this country has ever produced because he introduced the first universal medicare program in the West, setting the stage for this unique Canadian national health plan. This is the type of person who most captures the Canadian imagination and symbolizes our pride: the little guy from Saskatchewan who ensured that everyone would have the right to health care. If contests to discover the greatest Canadian reveal something of the national psyche, then perhaps we can also find here the national aspirations of Canadians: a tradition of populism that encompasses environmentalism and peaceful dispute resolution; health care for everyone; public life grounded in an ethic of fairness, honesty, and plain hard work rather than glitz and glitter. Maybe that is the true definition of patriotism, Canadian-style.

1. Molson Canadian advertisement, first aired in April 2000; actor: Jeff Douglas, Canadian; director: Kevin Donovan, American. Viewable on the Web at www.canadianaconnection.net/iam.html.

2. See for example, John Ralston Saul, *Voltaire's Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in the West* (Toronto: Viking Press, 1992).

3. John Ralston Saul, *Reflections of a Siamese Twin: Canada at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: Penguin Press, 1998).

4. Elspeth Deir and John Fielding, *Canada: The Story of a Developing Nation* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 2000), pp. 336-37.

5. Ministry of Education for Alberta Curriculum Guideline, Social Studies (Elementary), 1990, Grade 3, p. 23.

6. *Ontario School Geography, Authorized by the Minister of Education for Use in Forms IV and V of the Public Schools and in the Continuation and High Schools* (Toronto: Educational Book Company Limited, 1910), p. 83.

7. Ministry of Education Curriculum Guidelines, British Columbia, Social Studies K to 7, 1998.

8. Government of the Northwest Territories, "Education, Culture, and

Employment Curriculum Guideline, Junior Secondary Social Studies," 2002, n.p.

9. George F. Tomkins, *A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum* (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall, 1986), p. 226.

10. Ontario Department of Education, Grades IX and X Social Studies, History Curriculum Guidelines, 1952, pp. 9-10.

11. Ministry of Education, Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10, Canadian and World Studies, Civics, pp. 65-69. **K**

Patriotism in Question

In 1972, Michigan stipulated that I sign a loyalty oath before it granted me my first teaching license. It was a politically charged era, especially on the campus of the University of Michigan, and this requirement threw me into a quandary. Would endorsing this prerequisite to teaching in the state be consistent with my embrace of our true democracy, a government "of, by, and for the people," or would it be an act that would compromise necessary and protected freedoms? Unbeknownst to me, the U.S. Supreme Court was deliberating on the same issue at the same time. In April 1972, the majority decision upheld the constitutionality of loyalty oaths that require an "affirmation" to "uphold and defend the Constitution [and to] oppose the overthrow of the government . . . by force, violence or by any illegal or unconstitutional method. [This would] assure that those in positions of public trust were willing to commit themselves to live by the constitutional processes." Six years previously, the Court had struck down "disclaimer" oaths that required public servants to avow that they were not and never had been members of the Communist Party.

I signed Michigan's oath. To uphold the spirit of our democratic ideals has become the cornerstone of my social science teaching practices spanning 28 years in public school classrooms from Michigan to Oregon. Although I am no longer required to swear my allegiance, investigating the concepts cherished by the framers of our Constitution has been central to the curriculum I teach, whether my students and I are excavating prehistory, mapping ancient civilizations, or debating contemporary global issues. Nothing in the examination of societies within authentic historical contexts precludes asking questions relevant to democratic ideals: How does this society view justice? Whence does power come, and how is it distributed? What protections are in place to safeguard against the abuse of power? What happens when empires or nations compete for power and resources? How are natural resources exploited or protected, and who determines this? Do tensions exist between social classes? What social institutions are in place for resolving conflicts? How is human labor valued? How do traditions forge identities? How does change occur?

My students are lively and eager to explore diverse political, economic, and cultural systems from multiple points of view. They come to understand that living in the United States in the nascence of the 21st century is both a privilege and a responsibility. They feel that, in order to navigate the road from the innocence of childhood to the responsibilities of adulthood, they must ask such questions as "What is more just for more people more often?" They are becoming adept at viewing the world in its complexities, rather than accepting people and ideas and decisions at face value.

Over three decades of teaching, I have come to a deep understanding of the commitment I made in swearing my loyalty to a governing system dedicated to the virtues of democracy and equality for all — both those within our diverse society and those across a global mosaic of cultures. Every day in my classroom, teacher and students alike put into practice the patience and courage of citizenship. Being patriotic, my students and I are constantly learning, is not simply embracing "America right or wrong." Being patriotic requires the audacity to explore equally what is right *and* wrong about our nation and the courage to accept responsibility for both. **K**

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