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# Canadians and Their Pasts: An Exploration in Historical Consciousness

MARGARET CONRAD, JOCELYN LÉTOURNEAU,  
AND DAVID NORTHRUP

**Abstract:** In March 2006 a group of Canadian researchers formally embarked on a collaborative project to explore how ordinary Canadians engage the past in their everyday lives. The Canadians and Their Pasts project was inspired by previous studies undertaken in Europe, the United States, and Australia that used survey data to probe people's historical consciousness. This paper will briefly summarize the findings of the earlier studies, offer preliminary results from the Canadian survey, and, where possible, reflect on similarities and differences in the consumption of the past across national boundaries.

**Key words:** history, past, public history, history survey, Canada

## *Introduction*

OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES, the “history wars” in Europe, North America, Australia, and elsewhere have prompted many professional historians to reflect more directly on public uses of the past.<sup>1</sup> Academic studies of collective memory and historical consciousness help us to understand the context in which debates over core history curricula, the content of heritage sites,

1. There is a vast and growing literature on “history wars” around the world. Many of the conflicts are referenced in Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us: Media, History, and Memory* (London: Verso, 2005) and Laura Hein and Mark Selden, eds., *Censoring History: Citizen-*

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identity politics, and historical truth have raged. To aid them in their efforts to explore how ordinary people understand and use the past, scholars have turned to surveys, a methodology not commonly associated with the discipline of history. Surveys have their limits, of course,<sup>2</sup> but they also offer compelling evidence that people orient themselves to the past in a variety of ways and that academic understandings of the past often compete for acceptance with narratives derived from locations outside of the academy.<sup>3</sup> Whether the narrative is officially sanctioned by the state and celebrated in museums, monuments, historic sites, and textbooks; the result of popular perceptions handed down in family and community contexts; or delivered by popular media such as novels, film, television, and the Internet, public perceptions of the past are often deeply rooted and difficult to dislodge. In countries undergoing regime changes, historians play a central role in recasting the official narrative and testifying before truth commissions, but alternative narratives persist in “hidden transcripts,” ready for action when the occasion permits.<sup>4</sup>

### *The International Context*

The Canadians and Their Past project uses surveys and focus group discussions to probe the historical consciousness of ordinary Canadians. Inspired

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*ship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2000). On the United States, see Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Englehardt, eds., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996), and several of the essays in Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996). The Australian experience is explored in Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003). In Canada this debate can be sampled by reading Michael Bliss, “Privatizing the Mind: The Sundering of Canadian History, the Sundering of Canada,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1991–92): 5–17; J. L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1998); and A. B. McKillop, “Who Killed Canadian History? A View from the Trenches,” *Canadian Historical Review* 80, no. 2 (June 1999): 269–99. For the Quebec version of the debate see footnote 5 and Jasmine St-Laurent, “Investigating the Ministry of Love: Public Memory, History Instruction, Culture Wars and the Media in the United States and Quebec (1990–20),” M.A. Thesis, Concordia University, 2007, and “Débat sur le programme d’enseignement de l’histoire au Québec,” special issue of *Bulletin d’histoire politique*, 15, no. 2 (Winter 2007): 7–108.

2. For a recent review of survey methods as well as an appraisal of survey error, see Robert M. Groves, Floyd J. Fowler, Jr., Mick P. Couper, James M. Lepkowski, Eleanor Singer, and Roger Tourangeau, *Survey Methodology* (Hoboken, N. J.: Wiley, 2004). The use of survey data in public policy development in Canada is discussed in Christopher Page, *The Role of Public Opinion Research in Canadian Government* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

3. Issues relating to academic and public history in Canada are explored in Margaret Conrad, “Public History and its Discontents or History in the Age of Wikipedia,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association, Saskatoon 2007* (Ottawa: 2008): 1–26, available on the Canadian Historical Association Web site: [http://cha-shc.ca/english/info/Conrad\\_CHA\\_Address.pdf](http://cha-shc.ca/english/info/Conrad_CHA_Address.pdf)

4. Annie E. Coombes, *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Ksenija Bilbija et al., eds., *The Art of Truth-Telling About Authoritarian Rule* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).



by previous studies conducted in the United States and Australia, it also draws heavily on the theoretical work by European scholars, most notably Jörn Rüsen,<sup>5</sup> Pierre Nora,<sup>6</sup> Peter Lee,<sup>7</sup> and James Wertsch.<sup>8</sup> In Canada, Jocelyn Létourneau and Peter Seixas have played key roles in advancing this theoretical dialogue. Létourneau has written extensively on history and identity in Quebec, and has participated in a lively public debate about the role of history in the future of the province.<sup>9</sup> A specialist in the field of history education, Seixas, through his Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness, founded in 2002, has brought Canadians and international scholars together on a regular basis and, in so doing, served as the catalyst for the Canadians and their Pasts project.<sup>10</sup>

European interest in collective memory and historical consciousness has been greatly enhanced by the cultural transition resulting from regime change in the Soviet Union and the steps taken to bring the countries of the European Union into closer alignment. Seizing the historical moment, two history educators, Magne Angvik (Bergen College of Higher Education) and Bodo von Borries (University of Hamburg), launched an ambitious project to ex-

5. Jörn Rüsen, *Studies in Metahistory* (Pretoria, South Africa: Human Sciences Research Council, 1993), *History: Narration, Interpretation, Orientation* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), and his edited volume *Western Historical Thinking: An Intercultural Debate* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002). See also “Historical Consciousness: Narrative Structure, Moral Function, and Ontogenetic Development,” in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. Peter Seixas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 63–85.

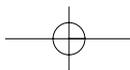
6. Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), and “Les lieux de mémoire,” *Representations*, 26 (1989): 7–25.

7. Peter Lee, “Understanding History” in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. Peter Seixas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004): 129–64.

8. James Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

9. In this debate Jocelyn Létourneau took a postnationalist approach—see, for example, *A History for the Future: Rewriting Memory and Identity in Quebec Today* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004); *Le Québec, les Québécois : Un parcours historique* (Montreal and Quebec: Fides/Musée de la civilisation, 2004) and *Que veulent vraiment les Québécois? Regard sur l’intention nationale au Québec (français) d’hier à aujourd’hui* (Montréal: Boreal, 2006)—which pit him against neo-nationalist Gérard Bouchard, whose views are most fully expressed in *La Nation au futur et au passé* (Montréal: VLB, 1999) and *Genèse des nations et cultures du nouveau monde : Essai d’histoire comparée* (Montréal: Boréal, 2000). For other major contributions, see Jacques Beauchemin, *L’Histoire en trop : La mauvaise conscience des souverainistes québécois* (Montréal: VLB, 2002) and Joseph Yvon Thériault, *Critique de l’américanité: Mémoire et démocratie au Québec* (Montréal: Québec-Amérique, 2002).

10. On August 26–28, 2001, Peter Seixas organized a symposium “Canadian Historical Consciousness in an International Context: Theoretical Frameworks,” at the Peter Wall Institute, University of British Columbia, in anticipation of the launch of his Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness (<http://www.cshc.ubc.ca>). Seixas included papers from this symposium in his edited volume *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, published by the University of Toronto Press in 2004. See also Peter Seixas, “Student Teachers Thinking Historically,” *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 26, no. 3 (1998): 310–40; “Historical Consciousness: A Scheme of Progress in Knowledge for a Post-Progressive Age,” in *Narrative Identity and Historical Consciousness: On the Psychological Construction of Time and History*, ed. Jürgen Straub (London: Berghahn Books, 2005); Peter Seixas, Peter Stearns, and Sam Wineburg, eds., *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).



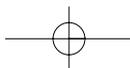
plore the historical consciousness and political attitudes among teenagers in twenty-five European countries, as well as in Israel and Palestine. Beginning in 1991, Angvik and von Borries undertook the Herculean task of coordinating a team of more than thirty historians, social scientists, and psychologists who surveyed nearly 32,000 students, most of them fourteen or fifteen years of age, and 1,250 teachers in 1994–95.<sup>11</sup> During two class sessions students and their teachers were invited to answer 280 pre-coded questions that were designed to secure information about how students evaluate history and history teaching, to determine the dimensions and structures of historical consciousness, and to map historical interpretations and political attitudes of European youth. In answering such questions as “What does history mean to you?” “What presentations of history do you trust?” and “What presentations of history do you enjoy?” the students offered researchers a complex reading of their concepts of, among other things, history, chronological knowledge, interpretations of the past, historical empathy, political attitudes, and notions about the past, present, and future. In addition, the project helped to build and maintain an international and interdisciplinary network of researchers and practitioners in the fields of history and history education.

When the findings were published in 1997 under the title *Youth and History*,<sup>12</sup> historians, teachers, and politicians alike took note of the differences among nations that emerged from the data. In the question asking students to reflect on what history means to them, for example, one of the possible answers was that it is “a chance for myself to learn from failures and successes of others.” For Europe overall there was moderate acceptance of such an assertion but there were significant outliers. Slovenia showed a remarkably low level of consent, whereas England, Wales, Scotland, and Portugal were much more open to this view. Generally, the students from Turkey agreed most strongly to the chance of learning from history, followed by Norway, Croatia, and Bulgaria.<sup>13</sup> European students reported that they enjoyed history and trusted their teachers as reliable conduits to the past, but ranked school textbooks as the least enjoyable vehicle for engaging the past and among the least reliable of sources. Although the students ranked history films the most pleasant way to engage the past, they distrusted them as a source of information. They reserved their trust for “museums and historic places” (but less so in Denmark, Hungary, and Belgium than elsewhere) and “historical documents and sources” (less so in Denmark, Palestine, and Arab Israel). Students gen-

11. The survey was conducted in 1994–95 in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Estonia, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Palestine, Israel, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Southern Tirol (Italy), Germany, Flanders (Belgium), England, Wales, Scotland, and France. Approximate national samples are 1,000–1,200 pupils for each country. Data for the Netherlands was collected in 1996.

12. Magne Angvik and Bodo von Borries, eds., *Youth and History: A Comparative European Survey on Historical Consciousness and Political Attitudes among Adolescents* (Hamburg: Körber-Stiftung, 1997).

13. Angela Kindervater and Bodo von Borries, “Historical Motivation and Historical-political Socialization,” in *Youth and History*, 63.



erally preferred family history above all others and gave low ratings to political, economic, and social history.<sup>14</sup> Religion showed the largest and clearest difference across nations in the European study and European students overall showed more religious engagement than political interest.<sup>15</sup>

Although it is impossible here to do justice to the multiple findings of the Youth and History project, it is important to acknowledge that it achieved its objectives and more. In its methodological rigor, it set high benchmarks for others to follow and it helped to shape the debate around subsequent research on the historical consciousness of Europeans.<sup>16</sup> At a fundamental level, it followed on Pierre Nora's pathbreaking work in establishing the present as a reference point for understanding the past and for imagining the future, and the individual as the means of engaging this continuum.<sup>17</sup> Questions such as "What history is required for the new Europe?" became immediately more relevant.<sup>18</sup> The project also inspired francophone Canadians, most notably Jean-Pierre Charland, to conduct similar studies on youth, history, and citizenship in Montreal and Toronto.<sup>19</sup>

While the European interest in historical consciousness was prompted in part by significant geopolitical developments, American scholars Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen were drawn to the topic by a troubling paradox in American society. Historians, politicians, and pundits, they observed, lamented the increasing ignorance of and indifference to the past on the part of the general public, while at the same time witnessing an explosion in the output of

14. Kindervater and von Borries, "Historical Motivation and Historical-political Socialization," in *Youth and History*, 86–90.

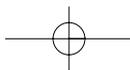
15. Kindervater and von Borries, "Historical Motivation and Historical-political Socialization," in *Youth and History*, 63–65.

16. See Nicole Tutiaux-Guillon et Marie-José Mousseau, *Les jeunes et l'histoire: Identités, valeurs, conscience historique* (Paris: Institut national de recherche pédagogique, 1998); Maria Grever and Kees Ribbens, "Wat ben ik? Nationale Identiteit en meervoudig verleden" [What am I? National Identity and Plural Pasts], ongoing project conducted at Erasmus University Rotterdam; Alan McCauley and Keith Barton, "National Identity and History Curriculum in Northern Ireland: An Empirical Study of Student's Ideas and Beliefs," ongoing research at the University of Ulster, Faculty of Social Sciences.

17. Nicole Tutiaux-Guillon "La conscience historique des jeunes: Deux enquêtes," *Historiens et géographes*, no. 396 (November 2006): 255–57.

18. Sharon MacDonald, ed., *Approaches to European Historical Consciousness: Reflections and Provocations* (Hamburg: Körber-Stiftung, 2000); Attila Pok, Jörn Rüsen, and Jutta Scherrer, eds., *European History: Challenge for a Common Future* (Hamburg: Körber-Stiftung, 2002), and Nicole Tutiaux-Guillon et Didier Nourrisson, dirs., *Identités, mémoires, conscience historique* (Saint-Étienne: Presses de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2003); European Science Foundation: "Representations of the Past: The Writing of National Histories in Europe," [http://www.uni-leipzig.de/zhsesf/index.php?option=com\\_frontpage&Itemid=1](http://www.uni-leipzig.de/zhsesf/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1)

19. Jean-Pierre Charland, *Les élèves, l'histoire et la citoyenneté. Enquête auprès d'élèves des régions de Montréal et de Toronto* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2003). See also Jocelyn Létourneau, "Young People's Assimilation of a Collective Historical Memory: A Case Study of Quebecers of French-Canadian Heritage," in Seixas, ed., *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, 109–28. For a more detailed discussion of the research relating to collective memory and historical consciousness in Quebec and Canada, see, Jocelyn Létourneau and Christian Laville, "La conscience historique comme objet d'étude savant au Canada et au Québec," *Historiens et géographes*, no. 396 (November 2006): 259–61.



books, movies, and games developed around historical themes, and the growing popularity of historic sites and museums. To gain some perspective on the alleged crisis in popular knowledge of the past, Rosenzweig and Thelen led a team that surveyed by telephone 808 randomly selected Americans and 186 Native Americans (Pine Ridge Sioux), 224 African Americans, and 196 Mexican Americans about their relationship to the past. Tested and conducted between 1991 and 1994, the survey yielded rich qualitative as well as quantitative data. Closed-ended questions consumed only about a third of the interview time (which averaged thirty minutes), to allow for follow-up questions and probing techniques. The findings were published in 1998 under the title, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*.<sup>20</sup>

Although there was no collaboration between Rosenzweig and Thelen and those involved in the Youth and History survey,<sup>21</sup> which was being undertaken at the same time, they addressed several of the issues it raised—engagement with the past, trustworthiness of sources, and significance of various pasts, for example. What made the American study highly unusual was the broad definition of history that informed the research. After pre-testing interview questions, a decision was made to use the word “past” rather “history,” “heritage,” or “tradition” in the survey to avoid a too close association in the minds of interviewees with what might have been a negative experience with history in school. In doing so, they were criticized by historian Michael Kammen for conflating “heritage” and “history,” the very issue at stake in the epistemological problem posed by “history” and “the past.”<sup>22</sup> Other words were also carefully chosen so that “trust” was used in soliciting information about the reliability of sources, and “connection” to capture significance or what mattered most to people—their connection to a national past or the past of a cultural group.

Contrary to what the alarmists were saying, Rosenzweig and Thelen found that Americans were deeply engaged in activities relating to the past. More than 50 percent had taken photographs or videos to preserve memories (83.3%), watched television programs and movies about the past (81.3%), at-

20. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). The study is summarized by Roy Rosenzweig, “How Americans Use and Think about the Past: Implications from A National Survey for the Teaching of History,” in Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg, eds., *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History*, 262–81.

21. Rosenzweig and Thelen, *The Presence of the Past*, note 18, 283.

22. Michael Kammen, “Carl Becker Redivivus: Or is Everyone Really a Historian,” *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 39, no. 2 (2000): 230–42. Drawing on David Lowenthal’s distinction between “history” and “heritage” in *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), Kammen argued that “family and pastness are clearly not the same as history and should not be conflated with it.” In addition, Kammen was concerned about the failure of the study to distinguish between *knowledge* and *interest* in the past and its focus on “nostalgia” and “enthusiasm” for the past (233–34). *The Public Historian* convened a lively round table on *The Presence of the Past* in which Rosenzweig responded to his critics. See “Not a Simple Task: Professional Historians Meet Popular History-makers,” *The Public Historian*, 22, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 35–38.



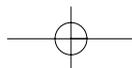
tended a family or other kind of reunion (64.2%), visited a museum or historic site (57.2%), or read a book about history (53.2%) in the previous twelve months. Further, a significant minority had hobbies and collections relating to the past (39.6%), had been involved in genealogical research (35.8%), or had taken part in a group devoted to preserving the past (20.2%).<sup>23</sup>

There were more surprises in the data relating to how connected to the past people felt when engaged in various activities. Family gatherings and visiting a museum or historic site came at the top of the list of activities that were significant to the majority of interviewees. Studying history in school came last. As might be expected, there were differences across race, gender, and age in the American study, but income/class significantly affected only one area: taking photos or videos, which requires considerable investment in equipment. Regional differences were also less prominent than expected, even on the classic North-South divide. Women reported higher levels of participation in most historical activities, especially those relating to family events and holidays, and they were less likely to be interested in the national narrative (16%), than were men (28%). Older Americans (42%) were much more likely to say that the nation's history was important to them than 18-to-24 year olds (13%).

A finding that surprised Rosenzweig and Thelen (also flagged in the European study) was the extent to which religious belief serves as a window on the past. In the United States evangelical Christians in particular engage the past to construct identities and provide meaning in everyday life. The significance of this group in American society is documented in the survey data that ranked the Bible highest as the historical book most recently read and Bible study groups as the historical organization to which many interviewees belonged. The birth or death of Christ ranked seventh in responses relating to a significant historical event.

In terms of significance, the high points in conventional national histories were almost absent. The landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth, the American Revolution, and the Civil War were trumped by narratives relating to family history and group identities. While over half of all groups surveyed felt that the past of their families was most important to them, significant differences emerged along ethnic lines. Aboriginal and African Americans ranked the history of their ethnic or cultural group higher than those surveyed in the general sample. With respect to the national narrative, nearly one in four white Americans indicated that the nation's history was important to them, but only 5 percent of Aboriginal groups and 11 percent of African Americans identified with the nation's past. White Americans were also less likely than minority Americans to see history as a vehicle for constructing a personal identity outside of the national framework. Tellingly, Native and African Americans were also more likely to construct narratives of group progress, while white Americans tended to talk about decline.

23. These findings are summarized in Rosenzweig and Thelin, *Presence of the Past*, 19.



In their data, then, Rosenzweig and Thelen found the answer to their paradox. Americans had not abandoned interest in the past, but many were not particularly interested in the national narratives that commanded the allegiance of politicians and educators. History was being put to different civic uses, most notably “to establish identity, morality, immortality, and agency.” In separate essays Rosenzweig and Thelen reflected on the implications of their findings for academic historians and for history’s traditional civic mission of connecting individuals to a shared national past.<sup>24</sup> Although they both felt that the empirical evidence vindicated their commonly shared view that ordinary people engaged history more than critics claimed, they differed somewhat in how to “read” the intense personal focus that seemed to define that engagement. For Roy Rosenzweig the potential for history to divide Americans in unsettling ways led him to urge professional historians to work harder at listening to and respecting the many ways the ordinary people engage the past. Thelen, meanwhile, saw evidence of common ground in the widespread interest in the past. This, he argued, offered many points of access for a more “participatory historical culture” in which everyone could engage.

*The Presence of the Past* was widely read by professional historians and greatly pleased many museum curators and historic sites managers whose institutions fared so well in the rankings.<sup>25</sup> It also quickly spawned a similar study in Australia. Between 1999 and 2003, an Australian team led by Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton, based at the Australian Centre for Public History, University of Technology, in Sydney, conducted 350 telephone interviews (199 women and 151 men) and 150 face-to-face interviews. The Australian survey borrowed many of the questions used in the American survey but focused more attention on identifying “sites of connection with the past” and “definitions of history.”<sup>26</sup> In addition to a general survey, the Australians targeted people working in fields of historical practice—museums, schools, and the media—as well as Aboriginal and rural Australians for both surveys and face-to-face interviews.

The results of the survey and thoughtful reactions to them by academics, museum curators, and cultural critics were published in a special issue of *Australian Cultural History* in 2003.<sup>27</sup> Although many of the findings mirrored those of the America study, there were important differences.<sup>28</sup> Religion was

24. Roy Rosenzweig, “Everyone a Historian,” and David Thelen, “A Participatory Historical Culture,” in *Presence of the Past*, 177–89 and 190–207.

25. Not all public historians applauded this finding. In his 2004 presidential address to the U.S. National Council on Public History, James B. Gardner confessed that he found little comfort in the survey results, which were based largely on a fuzzy public understanding of museums and curatorial work. See James B. Gardner, “Contested Terrain: History, Museums, and the Public,” *The Public Historian*, 26, no. 4 (2004), 13–14.

26. Louella McCarthy, “Surveying Attitudes and Charting the Future,” *Australian Cultural History* 23 (2003): 33.

27. Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton, “Australians and the Past,” *Australian Cultural History* 23: (2003).

28. For a more detailed discussion of the Australian findings and comparison of the American and Australian data, see Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton, “At Home with the Past: Initial



a less significant factor than in the United States findings, and national history had a higher ranking for Australians than for Americans. Australian women were even more engaged than their U.S. counterparts in most activities relating to the past, including Australia's national history. In contrast, Australian men were more likely to list world and European history as their principal interest. Ethnicity, other than Aboriginal, was difficult to capture in the Australian study, which would have benefited from supplementary surveys that focused on selected ethnic groups.

As in the United States, Australian respondents were most likely to engage the past through films, photographs, heirlooms, genealogy, and reunions. Nearly 16% of the respondents were involved in local history societies. Visiting museums and historic sites ranked second to family gatherings as occasions when they felt most connected to the past. School history, again, ranked low, with 30% indicating that school provided the least connection to the past of all activities they had to choose from. For most ordinary Australians, physical objects (53%) were the most important medium for connecting with the past. Places freighted with historical meaning came second (45%). Story telling (30%) fared well, as did books (27%), photographs (28%), performance, such as theatre and dance (23%), and arts and crafts (21%). Fewer than 7% mentioned the Internet, a medium of communication that did not even register in the European and American studies.

Museums ranked by far the most trustworthy of sources (92% "most" or "very" trustworthy), followed at a distance by academic historians (33%), who were judged more than twice as trustworthy as school teachers (14%). Thirty-nine percent of the respondents judged politicians "very untrustworthy" sources of historical information. For Aboriginal respondents, many of whom distrust museums, schools, and other institutions that ignore or misrepresent them, family assumed much greater authority than in the general sample, although family stories ranked high on the trustworthy scale for everyone (23% extremely and 40% very trustworthy).

Famous figures in the past came third to family (93%) and self (34%) as the focus of historical narratives. In contrast, "place" was a more distant concept. Nation trumped state in terms of both place and content. Overseas locations (the United Kingdom and Ireland, Western Europe, and Asia-Pacific, in particular) figured prominently, perhaps reflecting the war experience and immigrant links. Rural (32%) was almost twice as likely as urban (18%) to evoke a sense of the past, while community (21%) ranked second to nation (49%) and ahead of home (17%) and state (15%) as the location of historical narratives. In terms of topic of interest, family (58%) and national history (56%) were ranked high by respondents. Ancient history (20%) was more popular than military history (12%), while women's history barely made a showing

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Findings from the Survey," and Jannelle Warren-Findley, "History in the New Worlds: Surveys and Results in the United States and Australia," *Australian Cultural History* 23 (2003): 5–30 and 43–52.



(1%). Anniversaries and celebrations were ranked second last for their ability to nurture a sense of connectedness with the past. Anzac day (23%) and Christmas (21%) were the most popular days of historical remembrance. Australia Day—the equivalent of July 1st (Canada Day) and July 4th in the United States—scored only 8%. In terms of historical significance, war was by far the most common response, with migrations, economic depressions, and the Holocaust also mentioned.

Overall, the Australian study, like its American counterpart, revealed that institutions (family and museums, especially) that connect people to their personal past were most valued by the interviewees. Although surveys offer little evidence as to why this is so, or if this has long been the case, Hamilton and Ashton argue that contemporary challenges to cultural identities and social authority along with institutional shifts in the context of globalization and rapid technological change may well help to explain the historical turn in Western societies.<sup>29</sup>

### *Canadians and Their Pasts*

Canadians are Johnnies-come-lately to this survey approach to public uses of the past. Our timing has both good and bad consequences. Although it is the case that respondent fatigue and suspicion of unsolicited telephone calls have made telephone surveys harder to conduct,<sup>30</sup> the time lapse since the earlier studies enables the *Canadians and Their Pasts* team to take advantage of the lessons learned in the earlier projects. We took note, for example, of Rosenzweig's injunction to work more closely with the public in our research endeavours and we were impressed by the Australian decision to collaborate with public historians in the research process. Fortunately, Canada's national funding agency, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), has a program tailored to support such collaboration. We applied for a Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) grant and, in March 2006, we were awarded \$983,218 over five years. This enabled the seven academic investigators in the project<sup>31</sup> to work with twelve community partners:

29. Hamilton and Ashton, "At Home with the Past: Initial Findings from the Survey," 6.

30. A number of researchers have reported on the decline in survey response rates over the past decade. See, for example, Richard Curtin, Stanley Presser, and Eleanor Singer, "Changes in Telephone Survey Nonresponse over the Past Quarter Century," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2005): 87–98, and Edith de Leeuw and Wim de Heer, "Trends in Household Survey Nonresponse: A Longitudinal and International Comparison," in *Survey Nonresponse*, ed., Robert M. Groves, Don A. Dillman, John L. Eltinge, and Robert J. A. Little (New York: Wiley, 2004), 41–54.

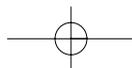
31. The academics in the project include principal investigator Jocelyn Létourneau (Laval) and co-investigators Margaret Conrad (University of New Brunswick); Kadriye Ercikan (University of British Columbia); Gerald Friesen (University of Manitoba); Del Muike (Carleton University); David Northrup (Institute for Social Research (York University), and Peter Seixas (University of British Columbia).



The Association of Heritage Industries, Newfoundland & Labrador and the Newfoundland Historical Society, St. John's; Musée acadien and l'Institut d'études acadiennes, Université de Moncton; Musée de la civilisation, Quebec City; Association for Canadian Studies, Montreal; Canadian Museums Association, Ottawa; Historica, Toronto; Canada West Foundation, Calgary; The Kamloops-Thompson Regional Historica Fair Committee and Thompson Rivers University's Centre for the Study of Multiple Literacies, Kamloops; and the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, Vancouver. As the project got underway, Parks Canada offered to help us address the historical consciousness of immigrant and urban Canadians by increasing the number of observations in five of the largest cities in the country. The Institute for Social Research (ISR), an Organized Research Unit of York University in Toronto, and its Montreal-based partner, Jolicœur & Associés, were engaged to conduct the survey.

Such a rich collaboration, which involves partner projects designed to add depth to our research, made it possible for us to put less emphasis on the survey as a means of collecting qualitative data. As a result, our survey is shorter (constructed to average twenty-two minutes of interview time) than the ones administered by the Americans and Australians. It nevertheless remains the centerpiece of our project and probes most of the issues included in the earlier surveys. In addition, it tries to get a perspective on two categories that have a particular Canadian resonance: linguistic and regional identities. Unlike the United States and Australia, but like Europe, Canada is a remarkably loose-jointed polity. It has been an officially bilingual country since 1969 and has one officially bilingual province (New Brunswick). Geographical location also plays a major role in defining Canadian identities. The complexity of the issues we address is suggested by the multiple ways that the word "nation" was used in our CURA application, in which our partners crafted their own project descriptions. In addition to the "nation" of Canada used to frame the study, we have "First Nations," the term favored by Canada's Aboriginal peoples, and identities represented as "national" in the projects based in Quebec, Acadia (a Francophone "nation" embodied in the Atlantic Provinces), and Newfoundland and Labrador. Similarly, immigrants, a growing portion of the Canadian population (18.4 % in 2001), embody at least two national experiences.

After much discussion and reflection among co-investigators and partners, we decided to conduct a national sample of two thousand interviews equally divided among five "regions" of the country (Atlantic Canada, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies, and British Columbia). The Aboriginal sample will consist of an additional one hundred interviews with mostly Plains Cree in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and Native reserves close to the city. For the Acadian over sample, one hundred interviews will be conducted in north and eastern New Brunswick and the one hundred new immigrants over sample will be undertaken in Peel (just west of Toronto). The urban over sample, which will total about nine hundred additional interviews, will focus on Montreal, Toronto, Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver.

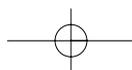


In the end, our surveys consist of 70–75 questions of which eleven are open ended so that respondents can answer in their own words rather than select an answer from a list provided. Respondents' answers to these open-ended questions are audiotaped and transcribed. The questions are organized in seven sections: general interest in the past; activities related to the past; understanding the past; trustworthiness of sources of information about the past; importance of various pasts; sense of the past; and biographical data. We also wanted to avoid the problematic relationship between the terms "history" and "the past." To do this, we offered a clear statement at the beginning of the interview suggesting that the two terms as used in the survey questions should be perceived as interchangeable: "We'd like to ask you some questions about the past. By 'past' we mean everything from the very recent past to the very distant past, from your personal history to the history of Canada and other countries." For a randomly generated third of the first three questions in the survey relating to general interest in the past, as well as in a question in the last section probing respondents' sense of the past, the word "history" was used, "the past" in another third, and, for the final third, "history and the past." Perhaps as a result of our introductory remarks, the data reveal no statistically significant differences among responses of the three groups who were asked the questions in the three wording variations.<sup>32</sup>

We developed and then refined the survey using pre-tests from September 2006 to March 2007 and cognitive testing with a series of "think-aloud" groups of selected respondents. In addition to pre-testing, versions of the survey questions were answered by people in diverse settings: Del Muise and a group of his public history students at Carleton University with family historians in Ottawa; Kadriye Ercikan with people in Cyprus; and Jocelyn Létourneau with Quebecers. Interviewing for the national survey began in March 2007.

Meanwhile, partner projects are being undertaken across the country. In 2006–07, the Canadian Museums Association hosted focus groups in museums and heritage sites in Brampton, Kamloops, Montreal, Quebec City, Saint John, and Winnipeg to explore the meaning of history in the lives of visitors and employees at these institutions. Our Newfoundland and Labrador partners also plan to use focus groups to probe more deeply into the diverse populations that make up the last province to join Confederation (1949), where people currently express even greater alienation from Canada than citizens of Quebec, a province where separatist tendencies have long been in evidence. The Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs is working with Peter Seixas to explore the nature of high school students' ideas about Aboriginal land title

32. We recognize that by conflating "history" and "the past" in this way we will be criticized for ignoring the central epistemological problem of the discipline: what is the relationship between the unorganized mass of "what happened" in the past and what we have to say about it in any given present. This issue has been addressed in Peter Seixas, Kadriye Ercikan, and David Northrup, "History and the Past: Towards a Measure of Everyman's Epistemology," Paper presented to the American Educational Research Association, New York City, March 27, 2008.



and human rights after a relatively short (160 minutes) concentrated exposure to the history of Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia, a Canadian province where much of the land mass has never been ceded by formal treaties. The Musée de la civilisation in Quebec City and the Musée acadien at the Université de Moncton are working together on a questionnaire designed to probe the impact on the historical consciousness of students visiting new museum exhibitions. In cooperation with Historica, an organization founded in 1999 to encourage interest in Canada's past, the Thompson Rivers University Centre for the Study of Multiple Literacies and the Kamloops-Thompson Regional Historica Fairs Committee are undertaking a multifaceted program to explore the impact of Historica Fairs (analogous to science fairs) on participating students in grades 4 to 9, their families, and their teachers. Finally, the Peel Heritage Complex in the Toronto area is the site of a project in which researchers and students become participant-observers to help them to develop an understanding of how newcomers connect their diverse pasts with the traditions and history of their adopted country. Our two other partners, the Association for Canadian Studies and the Canada West Foundation, support our efforts to share our research findings by sponsoring conferences in various parts of Canada.

### *The Ways Canadians Engage in the Past*

Since the national sample of 2000 Canadians is in its final stages as we go to press, and most of the special samples are still to be completed, we can only report on a few of the main themes of the survey and only at a Canada-wide level.<sup>33</sup> At this early stage, one finding is clear. Almost all Canadians who responded to our survey engage in activities where they encounter the past.

In the first substantive part of the survey, we ask our respondents about their involvement in activities related to the past. Given the time constraints of a telephone survey, and the number of other topics we wanted to address, we refined our list of activities to twelve. We also added an "any other activities" question at the end of the section to capture those activities that we did not address specifically. Many of our survey respondents reported that they looked at old photographs (82%), watched movies about the past (77%), or were keeping heirlooms or other objects to pass on to family or close friends (74%) as a way to preserve the past. Given the greater effort required, it is not surprising that fewer Canadians reported that they were engaged in preparing a family scrapbook, keeping a diary, or writing a family history (57%), or had recently visited a place from their family's past (56%). Like their American and Australians counterparts, Canadians in significant numbers reported

33. The data reported here is based on 84 percent of the interviews for the national and urban supplementary sample and have been weighted to correct for over-representation of the smaller provinces and bigger cities to allow for national estimates.



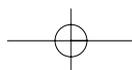
they read books about the past (54%), or visited a historic site (50%) or a museum (44%) in the last 12 months.

An affirmative response to survey questions about looking at old photographs, keeping heirlooms, reading books, or watching movies does not necessarily mean that history is a meaningful part of a person's life in the sense that it leads to reflection on the larger significance and complexity of the past-present continuum. It is, however, clear from the responses to open-ended questions that engagement in family history leads some people to an exploration of the larger historical context. Moreover, many of our respondents were prepared to commit a great deal of time to activities relating to the past. One respondent told us that he had been working on his family's history for more than ten years and in that time had attended two family reunions and had begun sharing information on computer files. He noted that he had recently accessed an online resource that yielded the name of the ship that brought his grandmother to Montreal in 1896. While he acknowledged that, in the larger scheme of his family's history, finding the name of the ship was only "a tidbit that somehow was lost," this was clearly a highlight of research activities that are integral to his everyday life.

A number of our questions specifically prompted respondents to think about the past of their family. Most often the "old pictures" respondents described were either of family members or of the houses, villages, and towns from their family's past. An interest in family history, and how it fit into a larger history of a place or time period, was mentioned with some frequency by immigrants and first-generation Canadians, but many deeply rooted Canadians, including several Aboriginal respondents in our national sample, were also preoccupied by family history. "Family is just important period," one First Nations respondent told us. "Family because you can learn where you came from. . . . I don't know; it's so hard to explain. Family is important. That's just what I think." Returning to an ancestral place, especially if it is one that goes back several centuries, is a special moment for many people. A respondent from Quebec noted:

In 1986, I returned to the village where my maternal ancestor left in France, in Tourouvre, west of Paris . . . they were building a small museum, L'Immigration Percheronne, . . . to commemorate the departure of 80 families from Tourouvre in 1624 for New France. . . . I went there and met with . . . a very small museum staff. And I went and I saw the home . . . of my maternal ancestor . . . it was my pilgrimage back to my source.

For a select number of activities, we asked our survey respondents how frequently they engaged in an activity over the past year. Not surprisingly, respondents reported that they were more likely to watch movies or use the Internet on multiple occasions than to visit museums or historical sites. The number of respondents reporting that they read more than five books (16%) was higher than the numbers who reported multiple visits to museums (6%) or historic sites (10%) but lower than the number watching more than five movies



about the past (47%) or regularly logging onto the Internet to look up historical information (23%). Again, our general finding is that activities that require more effort are done less frequently. The relationship between education and reading books about the past is strong. More than a quarter (28%) of our respondents with a university degree say that they have read more than five books about the past in the last year. The comparable figure for those with no more than high school education is 9%.

Given the explosion of Internet use over the past decade, we were not surprised that respondents who consult this resource use it frequently. Almost two-thirds (60%) of Internet users report going to the Web more than five times over the last 12 months. The extent to which the Web has opened up a new way of exploring the past was a theme mentioned by a significant number of the people interviewed. Some of our respondents reported watching historical movies or reading books about the past, and then going to the Internet to find more information. Other respondents mentioned the thrill of discovering new online sources, such as *ancestry.com*, for genealogical research.

Our “any other activities” question captured a diversity of engagements with the past. Respondents told us that they belong to local history, preservation, or heritage societies, that they collect old books or stamps, and that they are involved in activities relating to the history of their occupation or the past of their religion or ethnic group. A number of (non-Aboriginal) respondents reported that they had an interest in Native history. One respondent told us about collecting old clothing and tea cups, and how these two interests came together when she helped to organize Victorian tea parties. Another respondent told us that driving in the countryside—looking carefully at “old buildings, the styles of the barns and churches are unique”—helped him think about the past and even prompted him to “read a book on outhouses.”

Most Canadians have multiple ways of engaging the past. When we count the number of activities for each respondent we find that 60 percent report that they had participated in four to eight of the activities we asked about. Few respondents, only five percent, reported that they did not engage in any, or only one, of the activities we asked about over the last twelve months.

### *The Importance of Various Pasts*

As was the case in both the American and Australian studies, respondents told us the history of their family was the past that was most important to them. Two-thirds of the Canadians we interviewed said the past of their family was “very” important. The 66 percent figure was considerably higher than that given for any other past. Respondents were also asked about the importance of the past of the country where they were born. While less than half (44%) of the Canadian-born respondents rated Canada’s past as being very important to them, 58% of those born outside Canada rated the past of their coun-



try of birth as very important. The multicultural nature of Canada is evidenced by the finding that nearly as many of our respondents rate the importance of their ethnic or cultural group as highly (40% very important) as they rate the past of the country (44% very important).<sup>34</sup> A slightly lower percentage of respondents (36%) rated the past of their province as very important.

Although it might be expected that respondents from Quebec would be most likely of all Canadians to rate the past of their province in the highest category, this was not the case. Residents of Newfoundland and Labrador, many of whom lived in the province before it joined Confederation, were the most likely (73%) to rate the past of their province as being very important. About 47% of the respondents from Quebec rated the past of their province as very important, just 2 to 3 percentage points below the responses given by residents of the three Maritime provinces. Lower percentages of residents from Ontario (30%) and the four western provinces (ranging from 26% to 35%) rated the past of their province highly.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the percentage of Newfoundland and Labrador residents rated the past of Canada as very important (44%), a higher percentage than for Quebec (35%) and Manitoba (37%). The only provinces with a substantially higher rating than average were New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, where 52% and 50% of the survey respondents, respectively, said the past of Canada was very important to them.

After asking respondents to rank the importance of the various pasts, we asked them to tell us which of the pasts they rated as “very important” was “most important to them.” When asked this question, family overwhelming (62%) trumped all other pasts. Only two other pasts—Canada’s (8%) and the respondent’s religion and spiritual tradition (9%) approached even the 10% level. Less than 2 percent of our respondents indicated either that the past of their country of birth (if not Canada) or the region they identified with was their most important past. When it came to explaining why the past of their family was most important to them, most respondents spoke about issues of identity. Sometimes the aging or death of a parent or grandparent fueled interest in the family past, but we also have examples where respondents wanted to make sure that their children and the generations to follow understood the family’s history. Typical responses to why their family’s past was the most important past included: “because they are me and who I am” and “it gives us our roots, know where we came from.” A few respondents even talked about identity in a manner that indicated that family was both important to under-

34. To reduce potential order effects—where the answer to subsequent questions are constrained by answers to previous questions—the order in which the different pasts, except region and place of birth which were always asked last, were presented to respondents was randomized in the questionnaire. For a review of question order effects in surveys, see Howard Schuman and Stanley Presser, *Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1981) and Seymour Sudman, Norman M. Bradburn, and Norbert Schwarz, *Thinking About Answers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1965).

35. These differences are statistically significant with a *p* value for the chi square at .000.



standing the past and moving forward in the future: “it identifies who I am, gives me an idea of where I come from, where I am going.”

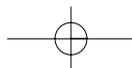
### *Trustworthiness of Sources of Historical Information*

In addition to asking respondents how they engaged in the past in their everyday lives and what pasts they saw as important, we asked them to reflect on the trustworthiness of sources of information about the past. Despite the heavy use of the Internet, few respondents (8%) judged it to be a very trustworthy source of historical information. When we asked respondents to evaluate all the sources we listed and to tell us which one they thought was most trustworthy, less than 2 percent identified the Internet. Some respondents refined their answers by pointing out that there were many sources on the Web and not all were of the same quality; others thought the Web was a very trustworthy source as it was where the most recent research was posted. Nevertheless, our respondents saw every other source of historical information that we asked about as more reliable than the Internet.

When asked which of the information sources was the *most* trustworthy, museums were rated as the single most trustworthy source by more than 40% of the respondents. Three themes emerged when we asked respondents why they thought museums were very trustworthy: the presence of artifacts and primary documents, the belief that museums were neutral and run by professionals, and the confidence resulting from using multiple sources of information in museums. Forty percent of our respondents rated fact-based historical books as very trustworthy and 19% rated books as the *most* trustworthy source of information, making books second only to museums as sources that people trust. Respondents told us books were trustworthy because the good ones “give references that you can go verify yourself.” As an echo to what respondents told us about the Internet, the fact that “there are a lot of them” gave respondents confidence. Unlike the Internet, however, respondents have a sense that books are “scrutinized more.”

Family stories were rated as very trustworthy by one-third of our survey participants and were selected as the *most* trustworthy source by 17%. Respondents stressed that family stories came from people who “actually had first-hand experience.” It was often an act of faith for those who ranked family stories as *most* trustworthy as seen in phrases such as “Cause I know they’re true” and “because they’re personal experiences.”

Historic sites (at 13%) were the only other source considered *most* trustworthy by more than 10 percent of our sample. The reasons given for trusting historical sites are similar to those given for museums and books: the involvement of professional historians, multiple sources of information, and careful research. As one respondent answered: “I think there’s a lot of research gone into it and a lot of people have put it together and lot of probably first hand information, like real documents and stuff.” As in the American and Aus-



tralian studies, school teachers ranked relatively low (but not by much) as sources of information that people found “very trustworthy” (30%). Only 6 percent of our respondents indentified teachers as “the most trustworthy” source of information on the past.

### *How Can You Find Out What Really Happened?*

Our respondents provided thoughtful responses as to why they trusted (or did not trust) different sources of information about the past. When asked the following question: “When people disagree about something that happened in the past, how do you think they can find out what is most likely to have really happened?” some of our respondents rejected the premise of the question and told us that for many aspects of the past there is no correct answer, just interpretations. Respondents often provided short, pithy answers, such as there is “no way to find out the truth” and “there are three sides to every story.” Some provided more complex and nuanced answers:

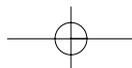
History is always biased by whoever says it; it is important to ask different sides, actual physical evidence, eyewitness may have bias, people get affected by time, over time things get remembered differently, [we get] positive or negative spin, things get filtered out and get reported differently.

The most common answer, given by about 40% of respondents, was that “research” was needed to find out what really happened. With respect to research (as a single answer, or in combination with other sources), respondents told us they would look up information in books (about 40% of the answers), go to the Internet (about 20% of the answers), search out “eye witness accounts” (about 10%), or visit museums (about 10%), libraries, (about 10%), or archives (about 5%). (The answers total more than 100 %, as many respondents gave multiple answers.)

Overall, our survey seems to confirm regional and linguistic differences that we expected to find in Canada, but not always in ways that we expected. Our preliminary findings suggest that there are often more differences within regions (based, for example, on educational, ethnic, linguistic, and rural-urban identities) than between them. We were also surprised to find that our Francophone respondents from Quebec (but not from New Brunswick) reported less interest in the past, including their family history, than Canadians in other provinces, but more research will be necessary to discover what this general finding really means.

### **Conclusions**

At this early stage in our project, it is clear that Canadians do not differ significantly from Americans and Australians at the aggregate level in their re-

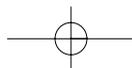


sponses to similar survey questions. Canadians engage in the past in a variety of ways, but activities that relate to family are predominant. An impressive number of Canadians are making conscious efforts to preserve the past by passing on heirlooms, preparing scrapbooks, keeping diaries, writing family histories, researching genealogies, or visiting places from their family's past. Although Canadians report that they see a number of different pasts as important, including the past of the country, the past of their family is far and away the most important past. In making their family the lens through which they engage the past, Canadians are eager to research the larger historical context in which their family is located. Most respondents do not rate family stories as particularly trustworthy but rather look to museums, historic sites, and fact-based books as sources where accurate information can be found. Our survey results also suggest that many Canadians understand that the past is difficult to access and that there may be more than one explanation to account for how events unfolded. This finding supports the growing body of evidence that raises questions about assumptions held by some academics that most members of the general public are gullible consumers of the past.

Since this is the first study of its kind in Canada, it is difficult to determine whether the historical consciousness of Canadians has increased in recent years. It may well have done so, due in part to the explosion of public history as manifested in such capital-intensive projects as CBC's *Canada: A People's History*, the *History Channel*, and its Francophone counterpart *Historia*; the founding of Canada's National History Society (1994), the Dominion Institute (1997), and *Historica* (1999); and the opening of a new Canadian War Museum in 2005. In Canada, as many as 250,000 children annually are engaged in *Historica Fairs*; Aboriginal treaty claims, a nationwide phenomenon, are rooted in historical documentation; and heritage industries are a major staple of a burgeoning tourist sector. Like other peoples faced with rapid globalization, cultural pluralism, and equity issues, Canadians generally seem to be turning to history as a way of rooting themselves in time and place. They know, consciously or unconsciously, that history matters and are eager to access accurate sources that help them put their personal and family experiences in a broader historical context.

No matter what its source, the extent of the public's engagement with the past in Canada and elsewhere is remarkable, suggesting that historical consciousness is alive and well. What is not so clear is how that consciousness will evolve. In Canada, another battle in the ongoing history wars erupted in 2007 over the Canadian War Museum's interpretation of the nation's role in the bombing of German cities in the Second World War. The museum's well-meaning efforts to explain the historiographical context in a panel entitled (now with some irony) "An Enduring Controversy" prompted a second round in a battle that began in 1992 between war veterans and the producers of a docudrama on the Second World War.<sup>36</sup> As we know, historymaking in families,

36. On the first round of Bomber Command, see a fine essay by Graham Carr, "Rules of Engagement: Public History and the Drama of Legitimation," *Canadian Historical Review*, 86, no. 2



communities, and nations has long been a contested terrain, and this is unlikely to change, even if approaches and preoccupations on the part of professional historians and the larger public begin to converge. Accepting this inconvenient truth does not mean that we as academic and public historians should abandon the field. Instead, we should see our findings as an incentive to engage the public, whose passion for the past is as intense as our own, in a dialogue about best practices in historical interpretation and in efforts to develop dispute mechanisms that serve us better than senate committees and the law courts (the routes taken by the Canadian war veterans to resolve their concerns) as arenas where differences over history can be arbitrated.<sup>37</sup> This will be time-consuming and contentious work but less damaging to the reputations of everyone involved and more in keeping with the spirit of historical inquiry than the status quo.

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JOCELYN LÉTOURNEAU is Canada Research Chair in Quebec History, Laval University, Quebec City. A former fellow of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, N.J., he is the author of *A History for the Future: Rewriting Memory and Identity in Quebec Today* (McGill-Queen's U. Press, 2004).

DAVID NORTHRUP is the Associate Director for Survey Research at the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at York University in Toronto. He is responsible for the design and management of major surveys at the Institute. He has over twenty-five years of experience in questionnaire design, data collection, and data analysis.

This paper benefits enormously from the input of Paula Hamilton and the other co-investigators in the Canadian and Their Pasts team: Kadriye Ercikan, Gerald Friesen, Del Muise, and Peter Seixas.

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(June 2005): 317–54. The second round is the subject of Pascale Salah, "An Enduring Controversy: Representation of Bomber Command at the Canadian War Museum," M.A. Thesis, Public History, Carleton University, 2007.

37. Margaret Conrad, "Towards a Participatory Historical Culture," Paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting, Vancouver, British Columbia, June 2008, [http://www.cha-shc.ca/public\\_history/papers.html](http://www.cha-shc.ca/public_history/papers.html)

