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Nativism - Or Just Plain Prejudice?

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begin and will, in their turn, reinforce the preservation movement on whose work they will have drawn.

SHANE O'DEA

Nativism — Or Just Plain Prejudice?

The books reviewed here are only a few of the many that have appeared of late which deal with manifestations of prejudice in Canadian history. A host of recent ethnic and labour histories, for example, have broached the same subject. Of the four books being considered here, one deals with assaults on the rights of French-speaking and Roman Catholic Canadians and the other three with the treatment meted out to Asian immigrants in British Columbia. Two of the books are mainly factual narratives; the others are chiefly concerned to analyze or explain the prejudice involved.

Professor J.R. Miller's *Equal Rights: the Jesuit Estates Act Controversy* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979) takes us back to Honoré Mercier's legislation of 1888. Although this concerned only the province of Quebec and passed both houses of the legislature without a single dissenting Protestant vote, it aroused a furore among the Protestants of Ontario and resulted in the formation of the Equal Rights Association which attacked the language and school rights of French Canadians and Roman Catholics. Most people have regarded the Equal Rights movement much as Sir John A. Macdonald did — as "one of those insane crazes" on the part of the "ultra Protestants which can only be compared to the Popish Plot". While recognizing that "dislike of the French" had much to do with the agitation, Macdonald also attributed it to a revival of the "demon of religious animosity which I had hoped had been buried in the grave of George Brown" (p. 176). Professor Miller is not satisfied with this simple explanation. He has a grab-bag of causes, ranging from English Protestant fears about the aggressive character of Roman Catholicism and French Canadian nationalism to disappointment over the National Policy and the hard times. This multitude of causes 'explains' the Equal Rights movement, making it ineluctable as it were: "Rather than being an aberration, the work of a lunatic fringe, it was the logical if unfortunate product of the times and circumstances" (p. 198).

Considering the intellectual basis of the movement — a mixture of half-truth and fantasy, myth and prejudice — one would assume that its leaders could only be rabble-rousers and demagogues, not to say plain bigots. But Professor Miller will not have it. The 'Noble Thirteen' who emerged from the Parliamentary debate of 1889 and the movement they helped to found are not to be dismissed in this way. "Could one dismiss a movement that included the moral righteousness of a John Charlton, the Orange fervour of a Colonel O'Brien, and the bril-

liance of a D'Alton McCarthy?" (p. 76). Evidently not. All the same, when men seriously propose, in a country which was perhaps three-fifths English or Protestant and two-fifths French or Catholic, to attack the rights of the latter group under the dishonest slogan of 'Equal Rights', one wonders if moral righteousness or brilliance are appropriate terms. If Professor Miller had given us a sizeable excerpt from a typical speech by any one of the three — something he does nowhere throughout the book — he would be embarrassed to make laudatory comments on the bigoted views which they habitually expressed.

For those who may not be impressed with the intellectual and moral credentials of the 'Noble Thirteen', Professor Miller has a further argument to offer. It appears that many of these men and the other leaders in the Equal Rights Association were really reformers at heart. They were active in the temperance movement and other good causes, and were concerned with "the plight of the ill-housed and the ill-fed. . . . It is this social concern, coupled with traditional suspicions of Catholic and French Canadian peculiarities, that explains the amalgam of social reforms and cultural nationalism that underlay the Equal Rights movement" (pp. 196-7). They were especially concerned with the evils wrought by rapid urban and industrial growth, and with the lot of the labouring classes. In their bigoted attacks on the rights of French Canadians and Roman Catholics they had merely got slightly mixed up in their targets: "In the 1880s the E.R.A. did not fully appreciate that their foe was not Mercier but Massey" (p. 198). This is plain silly.

Professor Miller is right about one thing: the Equal Rights movement had very serious consequences. But for some strange reason he refuses to give the movement full credit for all of its destructive achievements. Professor Miller persists in regarding the assault on the language and school rights of the Franco-Manitobans as an indigenous development which owed nothing to the influence of McCarthy or the Equal Righters. Thus he denies them any share of the triumph, something which contemporary observers always rightly accorded them. Professor Miller also neglects what happened further west where the Territorial Legislature at Regina was quick to emulate Manitoba by similar attacks on the school and language rights of the minority. In short, he is much too modest in reciting the depredations of the Equal Righters. Instead, he confines himself to a rather tortuous account of the movement's effect on Ontario politics. Here he fails to make clear the extent to which the provincial Conservatives, under W.R. Meredith's leadership, went all out to identify themselves with the anti-Catholic and anti-French campaign of the Equal Righters, and the degree to which Mowat and the Liberals resisted their onslaught. These developments were to have important consequences in federal politics, and it is hardly surprising that Macdonald and other Conservatives rejoiced to see Meredith defeated in 1890. Unfortunately, this did not deter Meredith from a similar campaign in 1894, nor did it put an end to the anti-French and anti-Catholic blight which continued to infect the Ontario wing of the Conservative party,

with disastrous consequences for its federal fortunes. The success of the Equal Righters in curtailing French Canadian rights outside Quebec contributed greatly in the long run to the present alienation of that province. Of all this Professor Miller seems oblivious.

Professor Miller emerges from his study with the conclusion that the Jesuit Estates controversy prompted English-Canadian nationalists to stop talking and act, which they proceeded to do until the end of World War I. The episode also bequeathed to Canadians a stronger antipathy to "that bogey, the Jesuit" (p. 200). These seem very slim pickings indeed, and much too vague. Having robbed the Equal Righters of the credit for their achievements in Manitoba and the West, he might have been much more specific in detailing their accomplishments elsewhere. On the basis of these meagre results Professor Miller should have produced an article, not a book.

Whereas Miller is concerned with explaining the actions of those who exploited racial and religious divisions in Canada, Ken Adachi's *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1976) examines the experience of one of the groups that has suffered most from racial intolerance. About half of Adachi's very fine history of the Japanese Canadians is devoted to the period from the first arrivals of Japanese immigrants in the late nineteenth century up to World War II. Their history in these years is, of course, that of British Columbia since all but a fraction (22,000 out of 23,149 in 1941) lived in the western province, and mainly in the south-west corner at that. The story of the early years is an interesting one and sets the stage for the deplorable treatment which befell these people following Pearl Harbour. The denial of the franchise by the provincial legislature in 1895, almost at the outset, was the basis for a never-ending succession of discriminatory acts. The franchise bar was used to exclude them not only from municipal, provincial and federal office, but from various occupations and professions. The Law Society and the Pharmaceutical Council, for example, required applicants for admission to those professions to be on the voters' list, and the same device was used to exclude the Japanese Canadians from the professions of forestry, the police force, public health nursing, the post office, and many other occupations.

The importance of the franchise makes it all the more regrettable that the courts failed to secure it for the Japanese Canadians and the other immigrants, notably the Chinese and the East Indians. A court case launched in 1900 by Tomey Homma, a naturalized Japanese Canadian, brought a ruling by Chief Justice McColl of British Columbia that the provincial legislation was *ultra vires*, and this was upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada. Unfortunately, in December 1902, the Privy Council — in one of its more idiotic judgments — reversed this ruling. The power of the Dominion government to confer naturalization was upheld, but this carried with it no right to suffrage, at least none that a province was bound to respect. Canadian citizenship thus became an empty

formality so far as rights (but not duties) were concerned. The constant discrimination and rebuffs by white society, which complained at the same time that Orientals were "inassimilable", reinforced the strong family and community ties of the Japanese Canadians and promoted their isolation in such ghettos as 'Little Tokyo' in Vancouver. Adachi depicts very well the tensions between the Issei or first generation immigrants, who dominated most of the organizations, and the second generation Nisei who were beginning to chafe at the rule of their elders and to form new organizations, such as the Japanese Canadians Citizens League (1936), to agitate for the franchise and other reforms.

For one who experienced the evacuation and the detention as a child, Adachi's account is surprisingly dispassionate and objective. What he says about the responsibility for the decision to evacuate all the Japanese Canadians from the coastal areas is of particular interest. The precautionary measures which the Federal government took following 7 December 1941 failed to allay the fear and hostility which had long been manifested by the people of British Columbia towards the Japanese Canadians. "But public feeling might have remained less hysterical if the politicians had not inflamed it in the first place and had not influenced the cluster of professional patriots, veterans associations, service clubs, farm groups and labour unions who began to present organized demands for expulsion around the middle of January" (p. 202). Among these politicians were a number of British Columbia M.P.s, including Ian Mackenzie, a member of the King Cabinet, R.W. Mayhew, Howard Green, A.W. Neill, and Thomas Reid, and, on the Vancouver City Council, Alderman Halford Wilson. By the end of December they and others, supported by such newspapers as the Vancouver *Sun*, were leading a massive campaign to force Ottawa to move all the Japanese Canadians east of the Rockies. At a crucial meeting in January 1942, federal representatives (from the R.C.M.P., the Army, the Navy, and the Department of External Affairs) contended that nothing further needed to be done, but the delegation of British Columbia politicians was "breathing fire" (p. 203). Escott Reid wrote long afterwards: "I felt in that committee room the presence of evil." They were speaking of the Japanese Canadians "in the way that the Nazis would have spoken about Jewish Germans" (p. 204). The partial evacuation ordered by the King government on 14 January again failed to placate public opinion. In a parliamentary debate at the end of January, Green demanded that "we be protected from a stab in the back" (p. 206) and Mayhew reiterated false rumours about the treachery of the Japanese population of Hawaii. Only Angus MacInnis, the lone C.C.F. M.P. from British Columbia, tried to counter the hysterical prejudice of Green and the others.

On 27 February 1942 the Mackenzie King government caved in and ordered the total evacuation of the Japanese Canadians from the coastal areas, first to the interior of British Columbia and then in increasing numbers to east of the Rockies. Adachi's account of their trials and tribulations during the next four

years and more is detailed and poignant. Pillaged of their property, which was sold for a fraction of its value by the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property, harried from pillar to post, wracked by anxiety as to their future, and divided among themselves as to what course to pursue, it is easy to understand how nearly seven thousand adults, in despair, signed papers agreeing to go to Japan after the War. Yet three-quarters of the evacuees were Canadian citizens and sixty per cent of them were Canadian born, many of them barely able to speak Japanese. The government availed itself of the War Measures Act to continue its persecution of the Japanese Canadians after the War, and once again the courts failed to protect them. When the government was challenged in its determination to deport to Japan all those who had signed 'repatriation' papers and had not revoked them prior to 2 September 1945 (the date of Japan's surrender), both the Supreme Court and the Privy Council upheld the government. The plan for forcible deportation was dropped only because several of the Supreme Court justices dissented on some particulars of the government's action. In the end, 3,964 adults and children went to Japan 'voluntarily', although that is a loose use of the word considering the circumstances under which they had signed.

Adachi's concluding chapter, "A Blessing in Disguise?", recounting the spectacular success of the Japanese Canadians after the War, is not to be mistaken for a happy ending. There had been too much anguish and injustice for that. The west coast ghettos were broken up, the Japanese Canadians dispersed across the country to areas where the pre-war prejudices of British Columbia were relatively absent, and the Nisei were liberated from the inhibiting power of the Issei immigrant generation. Yet it was the very virtues inculcated by their parents that carried the Japanese Canadians through the trials of the War and prevented them from lapsing into defeat and bitterness in the years that followed. By April 1949 the last of the government's restrictions on their freedom of movement was removed, and they had even won the franchise federally (1948) and provincially (1949).

There are many interesting points which emerge from Adachi's history. One is the contrast between Canada and the United States in their treatment of people of Japanese ancestry. Although the American authorities seem to have been harsher in the beginning, they relented much more readily. The courts of the United States provided some protection, property claims were dealt with much more generously, the former United States Attorney General later publicly acknowledged that the evacuation had been unjustified, and the Justice Department made a formal apology to all Japanese Americans for its part. In contrast, the Canadian courts proved to be a broken reed, property claims were dealt with in a niggardly fashion which did not begin to compensate for losses, and the leading politicians never expressed regret. Mackenzie King did not do so even in his diary, and years later, in the 1960s, the Honourable Howard Green not only denied that the evacuation was "an evil act" (as Escott Reid claimed),

but maintained that it had been "a matter of life and death" (p. 367). Thomas Reid (now a Senator) and others repeated long discredited stories about spies on fishing boats and other myths in order to justify what had been done. Yet no Japanese Canadian was ever charged with a disloyal act, let alone found guilty of one.

One serious shortcoming in Adachi's study is his failure to consult the papers of Mackenzie King and the other leading politicians involved in the evacuation. There are a number of crucial instances, in January and February 1942, for example, when recourse to private papers (of which there is an abundance) is absolutely essential for a proper judgment. If it were not for this weakness, Adachi's history would remain the definitive one for years to come.

Barry Broadfoot's *Years of Sorrow, Years of Shame: the Story of the Japanese Canadians in World War II* (Toronto, Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1977) examines the same events through the oral reminiscences of those who experienced the evacuation. On a topic such as this, one would expect an outpouring of hate and bitterness, but mercifully the intervening years have filtered out much of that. The victims have rationalized what they went through and sometimes can even recall the happier moments. The stories may not be history but they ring true, confirming with countless individual experiences what Adachi has told us in his history of the group. Perhaps they are best thought of as a valuable supplement to history, bringing out the human side in a way that other history does not. Broadfoot has also included some interviews with Caucasians, people who were brought into contact with the Japanese Canadians in one way or another, and most of whom tried to help them. A few, however, are found repeating the long discredited tales of espionage and sabotage in an effort to justify what was done. Broadfoot does not intervene editorially to set the record straight. One wonders if he should not have done so on occasion.

Peter Ward's *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Towards Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978) also examines the evacuation from the Caucasian perspective. His book is a survey of anti-Orientalism in British Columbia from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century and is largely concerned with popular racial attitudes towards Canadians of Chinese, East Indian, and Japanese extraction. Ward observes that Canadians who like to think of Canada as a mosaic have been slow to acknowledge their racist past. He sets out to repair that omission so far as the west coast whites are concerned, drawing on the literature of the time, as well as the reports of two royal commissions of 1884 and 1902. According to Ward, racist hostility towards Orientals rested upon a set of stereotypes which remained static. He analyzes the content of the stereotypes which made up the popular image of "John Chinaman", for example, and finds that he was unclean, diseased, immoral and depraved, and an economic threat. Above all, he was the "unassimilable Asian". That the Chinese could never be assimilated was an axiom among west coast whites; they

would always be an alien presence in the heart of west coast society. It is characteristic of stereotypes that they are proof against observation; indeed, they act as a screen or filter against contrary evidence. Thus, even though the Chinese lived in their midst, the whites had only a most superficial knowledge of them. The stereotypes acted like self-fulfilling preceptions and their content remained fixed throughout the years. Ward surveys anti-Oriental hostility from the time of the gold rush. The Chinese were excluded from the provincial franchise in 1871 and from the municipal one in 1876. A succession of anti-Chinese measures by the provincial legislature and agitation by various anti-Chinese associations followed in fluctuating cycles. The importation of thousands of Chinese labourers to build the C.P.R. in the 1880s brought renewed agitation and a Royal Commission of 1884, whose moderate report provoked an uproar and a further spate of hostile legislation. Ward deals with the Vancouver riot of 1907, in which white mobs attacked both Chinese and Japanese ghettos, and with the Komagata Maru incident of the summer of 1914, which gives him an opportunity to touch briefly on the situation of the East Indian. The later chapters are devoted increasingly to the hostility and prejudice directed against the Japanese Canadians.

Ward finds that racism was endemic in British Columbia and rested upon an extremely broad consensus. It cut across all sections of the population — politicians, trade unionists, businessmen, clergymen, journalists, and others. While racism was not leaderless, Ward does not think that either popular leaders or popular journalism played a predominant role. The demagogues who appeared from time to time simply publicized broadly shared prejudices. It follows naturally (if uncomfortably) from Ward's theory of popular stereotypes that where all are guilty, no one is responsible for what happened. The outburst of demands for evacuation of the Japanese Canadians which followed Pearl Harbour was "both widespread and largely spontaneous" (p. 159). Thus, except for the suggestion that they might have done more to allay public anxiety, the politicians and other leaders of society fare leniently in Ward's account. They are portrayed as simply bowing to public hysteria, not as helping to create it as Adachi contends. Of the two conflicting views, Adachi's is supported by a greater weight of evidence and is much more convincing, in spite of his failure to consult private political papers. The politicians had so long pandered to public prejudices, and continued to do so after the crisis came, that they cannot be acquitted of responsibility on the ground of an allegedly spontaneous outburst of public anxiety over a non-existent threat to military security.

Ward hurries over the war years to the post-war period when moderation and common decency finally prevailed. Given the durability of the stereotypes for nearly a century, they disappeared with surprising suddenness in the post-war years, not only those connected with Japanese Canadians but those pertaining to people of Chinese and East Indian ancestry as well. One is a bit incredulous at this happy result, and the few reasons which Ward gives, although plausible,

hardly seem sufficient to account for it. On the whole, however, he has provided a useful survey of racial prejudice among British Columbia whites. It is a shabby story, hopefully never to be repeated.

Ward is the only author of the four to employ the term nativism, using it interchangeably with racism. It appears in a sufficient number of recent books, however, that some discussion of its appropriateness to the Canadian scene is perhaps not amiss. Ward uses the word as John Higham defined it, viz., as the "intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign. . . connections" (p. ix). This seems to fit the case of the Japanese Canadians and other immigrant groups who have suffered from racial prejudice but it is hardly warrant for importing the term nativism into Canadian usage. The ellipsis actually contains in parentheses the words "i.e., un-American".[1] To replace it with the phrase 'un-Canadian' would at once invite ridicule. Higham considered that the term nativism was "distinctively American", and that through all its manifestations ran the "connecting, energizing force of modern nationalism".[2] Fortunately, this is something of which Canada has had little experience. There might be a case for regarding D'Alton McCarthy and the Equal Righters as English Canadian nationalists, but the British Columbia whites who vented their hatred on Orientals, and especially on the Japanese Canadians, were hardly such; they were simply racial bigots. Higham also pointed out that the three currents or channels through which American nativism has flowed have been anti-Catholicism, anti-radicalism, and Anglo-Saxon racism.[3] Canadians have certainly not been exempt from these prejudices, or from the xenophobias to which they give rise — far from it — but, unlike Americans, they do not have a tradition of them, chiefly because they have lacked a strong common nationalism which could nourish them. The diversities and particularisms of Canada have generally provided an uncongenial environment for persistent xenophobia. British Columbia's treatment of its minorities of Asian extraction must be regarded as an aberration which Ward's analysis does much to explain. At all events, to read Higham's excellent study is to realize how very dissimilar the American and Canadian experiences have been, and how inappropriate the term nativism is to the Canadian scene.

Are we finally finished with this sort of thing, whatever we call it — nativism or just plain prejudice? Probably not, for one should never underestimate the ingenuity of human nature in finding ways of tormenting one another. Moreover, now that our immigration policy since 1967 has admitted 'visible' minorities on a much greater scale than ever before, it remains to be seen how persistent racial prejudice may prove to be. At least this time provincial

1 John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1955), p. 4.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

legislatures, instead of aiding and abetting discrimination as formerly, can be expected to support the side of decency. Hopefully also, human rights commissions and other agencies may give the protection which the courts so lamentably failed to provide in the past.

LOVELL CLARK

The History of Art in Canada*

An historian cannot be entirely comfortable reviewing publications on the history of Canadian art. The authors of such books usually come from backgrounds and concern themselves with questions different — often far different — from those of the historian. Though the disciplines of history and art history sometimes come close to one another, they retain their distinctiveness and both are different from art criticism. Most writers on Canadian art history concern themselves primarily with the analysis of style, technique and influence. The history of subject matter is relatively neglected as is the social infrastructure or cultural context of art. Canada has yet to produce, except in Barry Lord, a writer concerned with the social history of art.[1] And it has yet to produce a writer interested in the broader culture of which art is a part; if art history in Canada is distinct from history, it is even more divorced from literary history. It must be realized, however, that the history of art in Canada is only beginning to come of age. Its genesis might justifiably be dated as recently as the 1960s and its initial focus located in the work of R.H. Hubbard and J. Russell Harper, then both of the National Gallery of Canada.

Until quite recently Canadian universities have given Canadian art almost no standing and even now only a very marginal one in English Canada. The universities have tended to retain their allegiance to the Great Tradition, in which Canada plays almost no part. While it would not be unusual for a university history department to have one-quarter of its staff as specialists in Canadian history, it is doubtful that a single anglophone university's art history division reaches anywhere near that proportion. The contribution of gallery curators, especially of curators of the National Gallery, to Canadian art scholarship deserves, therefore, adequate recognition. When no others, save amateurs, journalists and the curious savant, were in the field, curators did the work and their contributions still surpass others in quantity if not always in quality.

* Because of the limitations of space, I have chosen to deal only with post-Confederation books, a decision which forces the omission of several important works such as J. Russell Harper's *Krieghof.*

1 Lord, *The History of Painting in Canada: Towards A People's Art* (Toronto, NC Press, 1974).