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## Presidential Address: Whatever happened to the British Empire?

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[See table of contents](#)

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### Article abstract

Since the 1960s historians of the second British Empire have been seeking to redefine their field in ways that would give it continuing relevance. Unfortunately, in the process, they have lost sight of one of the most important components of the nineteenth-century empire. Even the most promising of the new approaches — the effort to reintegrate imperial history with domestic British history — is flawed by the failure to recognize, as J.C.A. Pocock has insisted, that Greater Britain included not only the British Isles but also the British colonies of settlement. Because historians of the second British Empire no longer have much interest in colonization, they have glossed over the differences between the colonies formed in the first wave of European expansion prior to 1783 and those formed during the much larger second wave that commenced in 1815 and they have underestimated the long-term significance of those colonies in helping to shape the sense of identity held by the British at home. But historians of the colonies of settlement must also take some of the responsibility for this myopia because they have lost sight of the significance of the empire to those Britons who established themselves abroad in the nineteenth century. In fact, Canadian historians have locked themselves into a teleological framework which is obsessed with the evolution of Canadian autonomy and the construction of a Canadian national identity and thus downplayed the significance of the imperial experience in shaping the identity of nineteenth-century British Canadians. It is time now not only to place the nineteenth-century colonies of settlement back on the agenda of imperial historians but also to put the imperial experience back where it belongs, at the centre of nineteenth-century Canadian history.

## **PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS/ DISCOURS DU PRÉSIDENT**

### **Whatever happened to the British Empire?**

**PHILLIP BUCKNER**

#### ***Résumé***

*Since the 1960s historians of the second British Empire have been seeking to redefine their field in ways that would give it continuing relevance. Unfortunately, in the process, they have lost sight of one of the most important components of the nineteenth-century empire. Even the most promising of the new approaches — the effort to reintegrate imperial history with domestic British history — is flawed by the failure to recognize, as J.G.A. Pocock has insisted, that Greater Britain included not only the British Isles but also the British colonies of settlement. Because historians of the second British Empire no longer have much interest in colonization, they have glossed over the differences between the colonies formed in the first wave of European expansion prior to 1783 and those formed during the much larger second wave that commenced in 1815 and they have underestimated the long-term significance of those colonies in helping to shape the sense of identity held by the British at home. But historians of the colonies of settlement must also take some of the responsibility for this myopia because they have lost sight of the significance of the empire to those Britons who established themselves abroad in the nineteenth century. In fact, Canadian historians have locked themselves into a teleological framework which is obsessed with the evolution of Canadian autonomy and the construction of a Canadian national identity and thus downplayed the significance*

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Phillip Buckner was born in Toronto and received his B.A. from the University of Toronto in 1965 and his PhD from the University of London in 1969. In 1968 he joined the history department at the University of New Brunswick. He has published extensively in the area of Anglo-Canadian relations in the nineteenth century, including a book on *The Transition to Responsible Government: British Policy in British North America, 1815-1850* and innumerable studies of various colonial administrators and an introductory essay for the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. He was also the founding editor of *Acadiensis: Journal of the History of the Atlantic Region* and the creator of Acadiensis Press and has published a number of articles dealing with the history and historiography of the Maritimes. He is the co-editor, with John Reid, of the forthcoming *The Atlantic Region to Confederation: A History*. He was also the editor of the first series of CHA booklets on "Canada's Ethnic Groups."

*of the imperial experience in shaping the identity of nineteenth-century British Canadians. It is time now not only to place the nineteenth-century colonies of settlement back on the agenda of imperial historians but also to put the imperial experience back where it belongs, at the centre of nineteenth-century Canadian history.*

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*Depuis les années 1960, les historiens du Second Empire britannique ont tenté de redéfinir leur champs de façon à en perpétuer la pertinence. Ce faisant, ils ont malheureusement perdu de vue l'un des éléments les plus importants de l'Empire du XIXe siècle. Même la plus prometteuse de ces approches — celle qui tente de replacer l'histoire impériale au sein de l'histoire domestique de la Grande-Bretagne — n'échappe pas à cet insuccès à reconnaître que la Grande-Bretagne, comme l'a souligné J.G.A. Pocock, comprenait non seulement les îles britanniques mais encore les colonies de peuplement. Comme les historiens du Second Empire britannique ne s'intéressent plus beaucoup à la colonisation, ils ont atténué les différences entre les colonies formées au cours de la première vague d'expansion précédant 1783 et celles qui se sont constituées au cours d'une deuxième vague, beaucoup plus longue. De même, ils ont sous-estimé la signification des colonies, au pays même, dans le long processus de construction de l'identité britannique. Mais les historiens des colonies de peuplement ont eux-mêmes contribué à cette myopie en oubliant à quel point l'Empire comptait pour les Britanniques qui s'établirent à l'étranger au cours du XIXe siècle. De fait, les historiens canadiens, en s'enfermant dans un cadre d'analyse téléologique obsédé par l'évolution de l'autonomie canadienne et par la constitution d'une identité nationale, ont relégué à l'arrière plan la signification de l'expérience impériale dans la construction de l'identité des Canadiens d'origine britannique au XIXe siècle. Dorénavant, il est temps de replacer les colonies de peuplement du XIXe siècle sur la planche des historiens de l'Empire et de situer cette expérience au centre de l'histoire canadienne du XIXe siècle, à laquelle elle appartient de plein droit.*

During the past two years I have had the rewarding and frustrating experience of being attached to the history department of Birkbeck College at the University of London. It was rewarding because I was able to become part of the huge network of historians in Britain. It was frustrating because one quickly realizes how little interest the vast majority of historians in Britain have in Canadian history. As a Canadian historian whose major field of interest has always been Anglo-Canadian relations in the nineteenth century, it was my rather naive assumption when I went to Britain that the increasingly sophisticated historiography of Canada ought to be of considerable significance at least to those interested in the history of European expansion overseas. Disillusion began to set in when I was invited to participate on a panel on the comparative colonization of the Americas at the annual Anglo-American Conference at the Institute of Historical Research in London. From the beginning I was somewhat uncomfortable with my role, particularly when the chair indicated that the papers should focus on the early modern era, since he believed that by 1800 the effective period of European colonization had come to an end in the Americas. And I was equally surprised when one of the first speakers justified this date by saying that by then the British had lost their Empire in America, news that I know will come as a surprise to most Canadians. In my paper quite naturally I ignored the

chair's instructions, pointing out that 1800 as a terminal date made little sense to Canadian historians since the effective period of British colonization of what would become Canada had hardly begun and reminding them that there was indeed a British Empire in North America long after that date. The response of the panel, composed of specialists of colonial and Latin America, seemed to be that this proved the irrelevance of Canadian history.

If my experience at the Anglo-American Conference was disillusioning, I was even more dispirited after attending a conference at King's College, London, which brought together virtually all of the major imperial and commonwealth historians in Britain to discuss recent trends and future prospects in the field. Of course, I knew that imperial history had undergone a very significant change of direction over the past few decades. As late as 1965 when I went to King's to do my PhD, British Imperial history was still studied in a tradition that had been established in the late nineteenth century. By the 1960s the Empire was no longer seen as an unmitigated blessing for its subjects overseas and the emphasis of the newer studies was an attempt to reassess British policy-making from a more critical perspective. Nonetheless, mainstream imperial history still focused on policy-making at the imperial centre with considerable emphasis on the relations between Britain and its colonies of settlement overseas and the emergence of the modern Commonwealth. Since Canada was the largest colony of settlement and it led in the evolution of responsible government and in the transition from empire to commonwealth, its significance remained obvious. My thesis, later considerably transformed into a book, was in this tradition, as the few of you in the audience who have read it will know.<sup>1</sup>

Until I attended the conference at King's I was not aware how completely interest in the field of imperial history had shifted. Indeed, I came away feeling a bit like John Beverley Robinson after he visited the Colonial Office in 1816. "What care they," he bitterly noted, "about those Indian names Michillimackinac and Niagara."<sup>2</sup> Since the 1960s historians of the second British Empire have largely lost interest in issues of imperial policy-making and in the colonies of settlement. With the Empire gone, these themes no longer seem as important as they once did and imperial historians have been seeking to redefine their field in ways that would give it continuing relevance. Unfortunately in the process of what David Fieldhouse described as the problem of putting Humpty-Dumpty together again,<sup>3</sup> they have left some of the pieces out. Imperial

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1. Phillip A. Buckner, *The Transition to Responsible Government: British Policy in British North America, 1815-1850* (Westport, CT, 1985). In "The Transition to Responsible Government: Some Revisions in Need of Revising" in C.C. Eldridge, ed., *From Rebellion to Patriation: Canada and Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (n.p.: Canadian Studies Group in Wales, 1989), I sought to reassert the significance of Canada in the evolution and development of the concept of responsible government.
  2. National Archives of Canada, Journal entry for 15 November 1816, John Beverley Robinson Papers, microfilm 204.
  3. David Fieldhouse, "Can Humpty-Dumpty be put together again? Imperial History in the 1980s," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* XII, 2 (1984): 10-23. Fieldhouse pointed out that the major themes in imperial history in the colonies of settlement had become

history is going in two directions, neither of which, at least at present, includes much room for the colonies of settlement.

The first — and indeed primary concern — is with the effects of imperial expansion upon the various peoples whom the British influenced in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The word “influenced” is used advisedly because ever since Robinson and Gallagher popularised the term “informal empire” imperial historians have emphasised that British influence was not confined to those areas that were formally annexed.<sup>4</sup> Since there were few parts of the world where the British did not have strategic and/or economic interests in the nineteenth century, the whole world became the imperial historian’s oyster. In recent years there has been a reaction against the use of a concept so vague and so all encompassing, but what still interests most modern imperial historians is the extent to which the British interfered with and altered the lives of the non-British peoples who were brought under imperial rule. There is, however, a profound irony in this approach. In the post-imperial age most historians do not wish to be seen as apologists for Empire and most of the early studies therefore focused on the disastrous effects of British imperialism in the third world. But more recent studies have begun to question the extent to which the imperial rulers succeeded in changing indigenous cultures in Asia and Africa. Few would disagree that imperialism had an impact nor that its impact was largely negative, but it is no longer clear that its impact was as great as previously assumed. The emphasis now is upon the ways in which non-British peoples responded to and adapted to imperial rule. Viewed from this perspective the imperial experience appears both limited and transitory in its impact, like the British Empire itself, and imperial history therefore less important than was formerly believed.

This approach inevitably means an emphasis on Britain’s Asian and African colonies, although there is a considerable interest in slavery and its legacy in the West Indies and in the relations between British people in the colonies of settlement and the native peoples whom they dispossessed. Since slavery was never very significant in New France and quickly disappeared from sight in what became British North America after 1783, Canada is of marginal interest to students of slavery. More surprisingly, it is even of limited interest to historians of the European dispossession of indigenous peoples in the nineteenth century. Partly this is because the Canadian story is less dramatic. The immigrants who flooded into Canada in the nineteenth century were not a kinder, gentler people than those who went to the other colonies of settlement and they were certainly no more sympathetic to the native peoples. But in British North America in the first half of the nineteenth century they settled primarily in areas where the Indians, weakened by

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limited to the organization of empire and an analysis “of the benefits obtained from it by varying parties,” themes which are so limited that imperial history had become “marginal” to the basic preoccupation of historians with the evolution of their own societies. But he offered no alternative vision of an imperial history which would make it less marginal.

4. See John A. Gallagher and Ronald E. Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” *Economic History Review* 2nd Ser., VI, 1 (1953): 1-15. This article and subsequent works by the same authors determined the agenda of a whole generation of imperial historians.

two centuries of contact and wars, could offer no effective resistance to the expansion of settlement and by the time that settlement moved west the Indians were coerced comparatively easily into signing treaties. There was indeed violence and resistance in the Canadian story but nothing like the prolonged and bitter violence that marked British expansion in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Once again Canadian history is relegated to the margins of imperial historiography.

There is, however, a second trend emerging in recent imperial historiography. It is the desire to reintegrate imperial history with domestic British history. As Shula Marks has noted, "Third world historians are beginning to show what empire has meant to them. British historians have largely failed to ask what Empire has done to 'us'."<sup>5</sup> The negative terms in which this question is presented are instructive. If the major thrust of imperial historiography is to emphasise the impact (usually negative) of the Empire on overseas peoples, the second thrust emphasises the impact (again usually negative) of the Empire on the people at home. In the nineteenth century the Empire was seen by its supporters as a force for modernization and progress. The newer view is that the Empire delayed modernization of the British economy and society and was a component in the decline of Britain as a world power. Indeed, in *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire: The Political Economy of British Imperialism*,<sup>6</sup> Lance E. Davis and Robert A. Huttenback argue that the Empire wasn't even a profitable enterprise for those who ran it but a continual burden on the British taxpayer. One comes away from this literature with the satisfied feeling that perhaps there is a God in Heaven after all. Although the British Empire vigorously exploited the peoples it subjugated, in the end imperialism did not pay.

Except as another item in the imperial ledger book there is limited room for Canada in this on-going debate. More promising is the attempt to show that imperialism was more than an elitist movement designed to provide outdoor relief for the British ruling class and profits for its middle class. John MacKenzie points out that there was a popular dimension to imperialism and the series which he edits on "Studies in Imperialism" has set out to explore some of the ways in which imperialism affected the emergence of

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5. "History, the Nation and the Empire: Sniping from the Periphery," *History Workshop* XXIX (1990): 112. I was directed to this quotation by a reference in the paper which Professor Peter J. Marshall presented to the Conference at King's on "An Agenda for the History of Imperial Britain," subsequently published in revised form as "No Fatal Impact? The elusive history of imperial Britain," *The Times Literary Supplement* No. 4693 (12 March 1993). I might say that in the imperial history seminar at the Institute of Historical Research in London, of which Professor Marshall was one of the convenors, there was certainly no lack of interest in the colonies of settlement and I am grateful to Peter Marshall and to his colleagues, Andrew Porter and Glyn Williams, for making me feel a part of the seminar and for providing me with many insights into imperial history.

6. Lance E. Davis and Robert A. Huttenback, *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire: The Political Economy of British Imperialism* (Cambridge, 1986).

British institutions and British public opinion.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the most interesting question posed by this approach is the issue of empire as an element in the emergence of a British national identity.<sup>8</sup> In an ironic sense Britain today is facing a crisis of identity almost as severe as that which faces Canada and for many of the same reasons. The collapse of the Empire and the imperial economy convinced the British leadership that Britain could no longer retain its autonomy and the decision to seek a new identity within a multinational European community resembles the decision of the Canadian elite, themselves motivated in part by the weakening of the imperial connection, to seek a new relationship with the United States. In both cases the decision to move towards a form of continental integration has caused a profound internal debate and unleashed various regional, ethnic and class tensions. Like all comparisons, this one has its problems. Canada's disillusionment with the empire began earlier, its integration with the United States has been more gradual and the threat posed by this integration to its identity is ultimately more serious, partly because the North American continent is dominated by one superpower, partly because American and Canadian popular cultures are so similar, and partly because Quebec nationalism is a far more serious challenge than either Welsh or Scottish. But even if Tom Nairn was wrong to forecast *The Break-up of Britain*, it is clear that the loss of empire and the retreat into Europe has been instrumental in forcing a re-evaluation of British historiography.<sup>9</sup>

This re-evaluation has had several dimensions. The first is an attempt to show that Britain was always a part of Europe: it was, in J.G.A. Pocock's words, "European, but European in its own way."<sup>10</sup> Certainly a renewed emphasis on the British relationship with Europe makes sense but it carries a danger with it. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries historians undoubtedly overstressed Britain's isolation and distinctiveness from Europe in their efforts to explain Britain's rise to greatness.<sup>11</sup> Modern historians, in their desire to explain Britain's decline from world-power status, are in danger of underestimating the significance of the Empire, particularly in the nineteenth century. In an article on "The Limits and Divisions of British History: In Search of the Unknown Subject," the New Zealand-born Pocock also insisted that central to any study of British history must be the recognition that Greater Britain consisted not only of the British Isles but included a connection with North America that was disrupted but not ended by the American Revolution and with the other "British" colonies of settlement overseas. Neither British nor Imperial historians have paid sufficient heed to this statement.<sup>12</sup>

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7. MacKenzie contributed the first volume in the series, *Propaganda and Empire: The manipulation of British public opinion 1880-1960* (Manchester, 1984), which has now grown to some dozen or so volumes.

8. See John M. MacKenzie, "Introduction" to *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986), 9.

9. Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain* (London, 1977).

10. J.G.A. Pocock, "History and Sovereignty," *Journal of British Studies* 31 (1992): 379.

11. For a perceptive discussion of this issue, see Marshall, "No Fatal Impact?", 8-9.

12. J.G.A. Pocock, "The Limits and Divisions of British History: In Search of the Unknown

What British historians have heeded is Pocock's call for a history of Britain that is not simply English history writ large. The result has been an outpouring of books and articles on Welsh, Scottish and Irish nationalism, though remarkably little on the subject of English nationalism.<sup>13</sup> Most of the work on Ireland has always been unsympathetic to British rule and much of that on Scotland and Wales has been written by those sympathetic to the recent rise of Scottish and Welsh nationalism or at least sympathetic to the view that Scotland and Wales have been the victims of English Imperialism. But to quote Pocock again, "nationalist historiography is in an important sense a double-edged weapon." It implies that the English were correct in the assumption that they took for granted: that "their institutions and history were independent of the empire they had acquired." Since "an Anglocentric and an Anglophobic historiography . . . form two sides of the same medal," he writes, an historiography "that presupposes the uniqueness and intelligibility of England will not be transformed into a historiography of Britain by the simple act of adding to it an independently constructed historiography of Scotland or Ireland."<sup>14</sup>

Nor will the theme of interaction as it is used in Michael Hecter's influential but profoundly misleading *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*.<sup>15</sup> The concept of "internal colonialism" implies that the British nation and a British national identity never really existed, that they were convenient fictions created to disguise the extension of English control over the other parts of the British Isles. Now there is, of course, an element of truth in all this. The English did become the dominant group in Britain; English became the dominant language, the English monarch the British monarch, the English aristocracy the dominant social group and the capital of England the capital of Britain. Clearly the English themselves saw the creation of Britain — and indeed the British Empire — as the Expansion of England and they confused our understanding by continuing to use the words British and English indistinguishably. Unfortunately this annoying habit was also picked up by many Scottish, Welsh and even Irish emigrants to the colonies, even though they were well aware of the distinction. Nonetheless, it is a gross oversimplification to see the creation of the modern British nation in Hecter's terms. None of the ethnic groups incorporated into Britain — including the English — had a clearly defined sense of national identity before their incorporation. In each of the areas absorbed there were factions who supported or came to support union as well as those opposed to it and, at least in Scotland and Wales, the

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Subject," *American Historical Review* 87 (1982): 311-36.

13. Two exceptions are Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1720-1830* (London, 1987) and Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, eds., *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920* (London, 1986). Unfortunately both books suffer from the same flaw as other works which try to isolate the component parts of the various nations that made up Britain and they either ignore the imperial dimension or see it in purely negative terms.

14. Pocock, "The Limits and Divisions of British History," 313-14.

15. Michael Hecter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (Berkeley, 1975).



opposition largely faded away in the nineteenth century, particularly since the benefits of integration were not confined to England.

Moreover, it is too easily forgotten that, particularly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was internal migration on a large scale within the British Isles. Years ago Kitson Clark pointed out that the new communities that developed in Britain as a result of these “folk wanderings” were composed of populations drawn from various parts of the British Isles and that they were in many ways “as intellectually remote from the old [world] as if they were in Australia or America.”<sup>16</sup> As Albert Dicey and Robert Rait wrote in 1920, “the close connexion between the different parts of one island and constant interconnexion of their inhabitants by marriage is producing a character which, whether for good or bad, is not precisely the same as that of the Englishmen or of the Scotsmen of 1707.”<sup>17</sup> Over time a British national identity did develop and the Welsh and the Scots and even the Irish played a part in its creation, and they did so without losing their own ethnic identities in the process.<sup>18</sup> The role of the Empire was an important component in the emergence of a British national identity for it helped to reconcile most Welsh and Scots to their loss of independence and it was fundamental in shaping the identity of Irish Protestants.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, it is wrong to assume that even among Irish Catholics there was no desire to remain part of the Empire. Ultimately the Celtic revival in Ireland forged a “racial challenge” to the idea of a British nation but the Repeal and Home Rule movements initially reflected, at least in part, a desire for Ireland to become “a contented province of Britain.”<sup>20</sup> There have always been Irish Catholics who were in favour of continuing the British connection — just as there have always been some Irish Protestants who sought total independence for an Irish nation — and in Northern Ireland there still are, even if they are a distinct minority.<sup>21</sup> Ironically, the collapse of the first Empire probably strengthened these feelings since the English regarded the Thirteen

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16. G.S.R. Kitson Clark, *An Expanding Society: Britain 1830-1900* (Cambridge, 1967), 7, 10.

17. Albert V. Dicey and Robert S. Rait, *Thoughts on the Union between England and Scotland* (London, 1920), 344.

18. In *The Welsh in their history* (London, 1982), 195, Gwyn A. Williams points out: “The existence of a historic British nation, dominated by but qualitatively distinct from the English polity, is a central fact in the modern history of these islands. The history of the Scots and the Ulster Protestants is inconceivable without it. The history of the Welsh is totally incomprehensible without it. The Welsh, the original British, have survived by finding a distinctive place for themselves within a British nation.” See also the sophisticated analysis in Keith Robbins, *Nineteenth-Century Britain: England, Scotland and Wales: The Making of a Nation* (Oxford, 1989).

19. See Eric Richards, “Scotland and the Uses of the Atlantic Empire” in Bernard Bailyn and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Strangers Within the Realm: Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (Chapel Hill and London, 1991), 66-114 and J.M. Bourne, *Patronage and Society in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1986), 130.

20. D.G. Boyce, “‘The Marginal Britons’: The Irish” in Colls and Dodd, eds., *Englishness*, 239, 236.

21. A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: The Roots of Conflict in Ulster* (London, 1989 ed.), 11.

Colonies as peculiarly their own, whereas the second Empire was always seen as “*emphatically British*.”<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, it is easy to overstate the implications of integration. While the British state could be repressive, it lacked the resources and the will to be totalitarian. Even in Ireland the draconian penal laws against Catholics proved ineffective and Catholic Emancipation in 1829 was a belated recognition of that reality. Indeed, anglicization was a slow process which had more to do with changing economic structures than legislation and it was not so much forced on the Celtic fringe as adopted voluntarily by those who saw the advantages of fluency in English.<sup>23</sup> As Linda Colley points out, Britishness “was never just imposed from the center”;<sup>24</sup> the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish all helped to shape British society in ways of which many of the inhabitants of England did not approve. Catholic Emancipation, for example, was adopted because of the exigencies of Irish politics but it did not apply solely to Ireland and was clearly an example of a policy repulsive to the Protestant majorities in England, Scotland and Wales, imposed upon them by the requirements of Britain as a whole.<sup>25</sup> And it is particularly distorting to believe that men and women had to choose between being British or being loyal to older, ancestral roots. As Linda Colley also notes, there was nothing unique about the forging of a new national identity in Britain out of previously different cultures and kingdoms; France and Spain were also composite structures and the invention of their national identities did not obliterate other, older loyalties in those countries. “In practice, men and women often had double, triple, or even quadruple loyalties, mentally locating themselves, according to circumstances, in a village, in a particular landscape, in a region, and in one or even two countries.” They had no difficulty in seeing themselves as being, at one and the same time, a citizen of Edinburgh or Glasgow, a Lowlander or a Highlander, a Scot and a Briton.<sup>26</sup> And when they transferred themselves overseas they had little difficulty in seeing themselves as a citizen of Sydney or Wellington or Fredericton, as a Lowlander or a Highlander or a Yorkshireman, as Scottish, Irish, Welsh or English, as Canadian, Australian or New Zealander, and yet still a Briton. Nor did their children and even later generations.

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22. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London, 1992), 144.

23. See Tim Wales, “The anglicization of South Wales” in Raphael Samuel, ed., *Patriotism: Vol. II: Minorities and Outsiders* (London, 1989), 193-203, which contains a critique of “the theoretically threadbare notion of internal colonialism.”

24. Linda Colley, “Britishness and Otherness: An Argument,” *Journal of British Studies* 31 (1992): 313.

25. Indeed, it has been argued that Catholic Emancipation aroused so much anger that “the half century succeeding 1829 actually saw much more antagonism to Catholics than that which preceded Emancipation.” John Wolfe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain 1829-1860* (Oxford, 1991), 2.

26. *Ibid*, 312-15.

As recent studies of nationalism make abundantly clear, it is time to abandon our older view of national identity as a natural development which to be complete must obliterate all other loyalties. All national identities are, to a considerable extent, artificially constructed for nationalism is always based upon the sense of belonging to what Benedict Anderson has called an imagined community.<sup>27</sup> This sense is easier to create if it builds upon an earlier sense of ethnicity — a feeling of being part of a community which has common origins (even if this is a myth as it was among the English, among the Irish, among the Scots and among the Welsh) and a set of common cultural traditions (such as a common language and/or religion and association with a specific homeland).<sup>28</sup> But few modern nations in Western Europe are built upon such foundations. Normally they are an amalgamation of a series of previously disparate ethnic groups located within a more or less arbitrarily defined geographical area. Inevitably one of those groups forms the ethnic core and its language, religion and culture become the dominant, though rarely the exclusive language, religion and culture of the new nation.<sup>29</sup> The sense of British national identity evolved in precisely this way. The English formed the core ethnic group and their language, religion and culture became the dominant but not the exclusive traditions of the new nation. Indeed, many English institutions, such as the monarchy, had to undergo a transformation and have new traditions invented for them, in order that they could serve as British institutions.<sup>30</sup> The emergence of a sense of British national identity was thus a slow and complex process. It owed a great deal to the strong sense of Protestantism shared by the majority of the population in England, Wales and Scotland and the minority in Ireland and to the prolonged Wars against Catholic France from 1689 to 1815. It also had more than a little to do with the concept of Imperial Britain. It was, after all, a Welshman who coined the term “British Empire” and a Scot who wrote “Rule Britannia.”<sup>31</sup>

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27. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983).

28. All the different parts of the British Isles were occupied by a series of ethnically and linguistically distinct groups who eventually blended together in varying permutations to form the English, the Irish, the Scottish and the Welsh peoples of the early modern period. For perceptive comments on this process see Williams, *The Welsh in their History*; Stewart, *The Narrow Ground*; and John Foster, “Nationality, Social Change and Class: Transformations of National Identity in Scotland” in David McCrone, Stephen Kendrick and Pat Straw, eds., *The Making of Scotland: Nation, Culture and Social Change* (Edinburgh, 1989).

29. I have drawn the concept of an “ethnic core” from Anthony B. Smith, *National Identity* (London, 1991), esp. 39-41, which also contains an illuminating discussion of the meaning of nationalism and ethnicity and the distinctions between the two. See also his *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (New York, 1986) and E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (2nd ed., Cambridge, 1992).

30. See David Cannadine, “The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the ‘Invention of Tradition’, c.1820-1977” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983).

31. Williams, *The Welsh in their history*, 16.

British historians have only begun to grapple with this relationship and they have focused on the extent to which the possession of a vast and increasingly alien empire “encouraged the British to see themselves as a distinct, special and — often — superior people.”<sup>32</sup> But there was another side to the Empire for the British also saw themselves as a colonizing people, destined not only to populate those parts of the globe in North America and Australasia which they erroneously considered as unsettled, but also to establish permanent and significant colonies in parts of Africa and Asia. Even where the British settlers remained in a substantial minority and where their presence would be transitory, such as India and Ceylon and later Kenya and Rhodesia and perhaps even eventually South Africa, they came to develop an “illusion of permanence.”<sup>33</sup> The migration of vast numbers of Britons overseas did more than remove from Britain the strains of overpopulation and widespread unemployment and poverty; it also created a sense of belonging to a global British community, what Sir Charles Dilke described as a “Greater Britain.”<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately historians of the second British Empire have largely lost interest in colonisation. Take, for example, two important recent surveys of the nineteenth-century Empire: C.A. Bayly’s *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* and P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914*.<sup>35</sup> In Bayly’s work emigration is barely mentioned as a theme and the colonies of settlement are relegated to the margins of the empire; indeed, they are seen as little different in kind from the other areas into which the British expanded during the nineteenth century. Dismissing those studies which have emphasised the gradual evolution of more liberal constitutional structures in the colonies of settlement as based upon “what men tell their lawyers they are doing,” Bayly argues that “the British empire from 1783 to 1830 (and in some areas beyond) represented . . . a series of attempts to establish overseas despotisms.”<sup>36</sup> Never mind that such a model has limited relevance in British North America with its representative assemblies and rapidly growing British population after 1815.

More attention is given to the colonies of settlement — and particularly to Canada — in the Cain and Hopkins’ book but emigration is interpreted as of little importance in an Empire that was created and run by “Gentlemanly Capitalists” and their collaborators in the colonies of settlement. From the perspective of Cain and Hopkins

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32. Colley, “Britishness and Otherness,” 324.

33. See Francis G. Hutchins, *The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India* (London, 1967).

34. Originally Dilke included the United States as part of his Greater Britain but in a later edition of *The British Empire* (London, 1899), 9, he accepted that the “popular usage” had limited the term to the formal empire, a pressure he had found “too strong to resist.”

35. C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World* (Harlow, 1989) and P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (Harlow, 1993)

36. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, 8-9.

Confederation was primarily “a way of improving Canada’s credit rating in London” and came about because it “suited Britain’s needs.” Canada was, they proclaim, “an artificial creation,” sustained by British capital and based upon Canadians’ preference for “informal economic dominance from London to political control by the United States.”<sup>37</sup>

What Cain and Hopkins give us is a sophisticated form of economic reductionism. They exaggerate the British role in bringing about Confederation and proclaim, rather than prove, that Canada was dominated by British capitalists after 1867. Indeed, much of the evidence they do present, on questions like the Canadian banking system and the National Policy, contradicts rather than confirms their thesis. Even if they are correct, their approach does little to explain why Canadians preferred dominance from London rather than political control by the United States. Both surveys, in fact, fall into the trap of imposing models that make little sense when applied to the colonies of settlement. Yet even imperial historians who are suspicious of simplistic models and who have a much deeper understanding of the dynamics of the colonies of settlement are inclined to de-emphasise the relevance of emigration. Peter Marshall, in an extremely perceptive essay, writes:

Empire has helped to disperse British people in the mass across the world, although it has manifestly failed to create the world-wide British identity for which some empire enthusiasts hoped. The great waves of emigration that began in the early nineteenth century had limited connections with empire: from 1815 to 1914, 62 per cent went to the United States, by comparison with 30 per cent to Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Only in the 1920s and in the 1950s, decades when emigration resumed on a considerable scale, did Commonwealth countries become the major destination.<sup>38</sup>

Viewed from an End-of-Empire perspective this statement is perfectly defensible, but it is also heavily teleological and presentist.

There is in fact a very real danger in treating the first and second Empires as a continuum and thus in downplaying the distinctiveness of the two. Perhaps 1783 was not an important point of departure; but in terms of emigration 1815 certainly was. The first period of European colonization was marked by a number of distinguishing characteristics. First, the number of migrants was never large, particularly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when all of the European colonies grew painfully slowly. Indeed, the latest estimate puts the total number of Europeans who migrated to the Americas between 1500 and 1783 at about 1,410,000.<sup>39</sup> Second, the vast majority of migrants were young, single and male, drawn from the most mobile and the least rooted elements in the home society. Many were, in fact, involuntary migrants, who moved across the Atlantic as convicts, as soldiers or as indentured servants. Even in British

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37. Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 264-65, 273, 270.

38. Marshall, “No fatal impact?”, 9.

39. Ida Altman and James Horn, eds., *“To Make America”: European Emigration in the Early Modern Period* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991), Introduction, 3.

America about 60 per cent of the emigrants in the seventeenth century arrived under some form of labour contract and the proportion was undoubtedly higher in the other European colonies.<sup>40</sup> Third, most of the migrants had limited interest in becoming agricultural pioneers. They preferred areas where they could exploit indigenous or imported African labour and develop plantations or where there was a readily accessible commodity for export. Fourth, all of the colonies established had substantial rates of return migration and a significant proportion of the early — predominantly male — settlers did not survive for long, succumbing to hardship or disease or to warfare with the indigenous people or with each other. Since few families migrated, there was considerable miscegenation between European males and non-European women, although over time a native-born European population took root in most places and began to grow slowly, largely through natural increase. In South America and the Caribbean the importance of large native populations and large numbers of imported slaves in the formation of colonial cultures has always been accepted, but historians of the Thirteen Colonies have also begun to realize the significance of native Americans, black slavery and European ethnic minorities.<sup>41</sup> The communities created during the first period of European colonization are thus best described as creole societies.<sup>42</sup>

New England and New France are perhaps partial exceptions to these generalizations since they were the most homogeneous societies in the New World and the majority of the inhabitants of both were compelled to become agriculturalists.<sup>43</sup> But they were also the parts of the New World least appealing to European emigrants. The beginnings of New England were unusual since it was founded by a voluntary migration of Puritan families, which included a number of relatively comfortable farmers who had the commitment and the resources to establish viable agricultural communities; thereafter the flow of settlers to New England was relatively slight compared to the vastly larger numbers that went to the other colonies of British America and the general profile of the emigrants not so dissimilar.<sup>44</sup> New France hardly attracted any settlers at all; no more than 27,000 emigrants ever went to New France, few of them of their own volition, and as many as 70 percent of them became return migrants. Indeed, if Peter Moogk is correct, its population was far less homogeneous than is usually assumed.<sup>45</sup> In all of the European colonies formed during this period, the ties which bound the colonies to their mother countries were weak. The emigrants did not have a strong emotional attachment to the

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40. *Ibid.*, 6-7, 10.

41. See Bailyn and Morgan, *Strangers within the Realm*, 4.

42. See T.H. Breen, "Creative Adaptation: Peoples and Cultures" in Jack P. Greene and J.R. Pole, eds., *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore and London, 1984), 221.

43. See D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History* (New Haven, 1986), 222-23.

44. Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *New England's Generation: The Great Migration and the Formation of Society and Culture in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1991).

45. Peter Moogk, "Reluctant Exiles: Emigrants from France in Canada before 1760," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., XLVI (1989): 463-505.

countries they had left behind nor did their children, particularly since the migrants usually came from a variety of sources and had departed before the emergence of a strong sense of national allegiance. As the colonists became more prosperous, they did begin to emulate patterns of metropolitan social behaviour and to emphasise their European origins but their commitment to their mother countries was conditional and one by one they gradually opted for independence, except for the West Indian colonies where the European minorities were too small to be certain that they could control their slave populations and New France where progress in this direction was curtailed by the Conquest.

The period between 1763 and 1774 did see the beginnings of a slightly different pattern, for migration to British America accelerated and began to include a larger proportion of moderately prosperous farming families who paid their own passage across the Atlantic.<sup>46</sup> The number of migrants remained small, however, compared with the period of mass migration which began after 1815. Between 1815 and 1914 some 44 million emigrants left Europe, about 10 million of them from the British Isles.<sup>47</sup> During the first few decades of this mass migration British North America was the major port of entry for British emigrants and it received nearly as many emigrants from Britain between 1815 and 1865 as the entire American hemisphere had received from the whole of Europe in the three centuries from 1500 to 1783.<sup>48</sup> During almost every single year after 1830 it received more emigrants than went to New France in the whole period from 1608 to 1763. During the 1840s the proportion of British emigrants arriving in British North America dropped from a third to about a quarter of the North American total and through the 1850s and 1860s remained fairly constant at about a tenth, at a time when increasing numbers also began to head for the other colonies of settlement, especially the Australian colonies and New Zealand. Nonetheless, the number of emigrants to British North America remained substantial for the duration of the nineteenth century. Not only was the scale of this migration unprecedented but the profile of the emigrants was dramatically different. Only a small number were convicts, most of whom ended up in Australia where they were soon overwhelmed by the free settlers, and an even smaller number were disbanded soldiers. Only a small minority received some form of assisted passage and virtually none went out as indentured servants. Rates of return migration were low during the first half of the nineteenth century and probably remained fairly low among the British emigrants and so — comparatively — were death rates among the

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46. But as Bernard Bailyn points out, nearly half of the emigrants in this period were indentured servants, only a third travelled in family groups and three-quarters were males. *The Peopling of British North America: an Introduction* (New York, 1986), 11. See also his *Voyagers to the West: Emigration from Britain to America on the Eve of the Revolution* (London, 1986).

47. Dudley Baines, *Migration in a Mature Economy: Emigration and Internal Migration in England and Wales, 1861-1900* (Cambridge, 1985), 1, 9.

48. Of course, a significant proportion of those emigrants who arrived in British North America did not remain there but continued on to the United States. The best overview remains Helen I. Cowan, *British Emigration to British North America: The First Hundred Years* (rev. ed., Toronto, 1961).

arrivals. Men may have been disproportionately represented among the earliest arrivals but not dramatically so and less and less so as the century wore on. In any event since the migration included many families gender imbalance in the vast majority of settlements did not last long and miscegenation with native peoples was rare except in areas far in advance of the flow of settlement. The speed with which European settlement spread was by earlier standards phenomenal, particularly in North America. The vast majority of the settlers were not adventurers seeking a quick profit through the exploitation of raw materials scarce in Europe or through the exploitation of forced labour. Many were drawn from moderately prosperous, if insecure, agricultural communities or were tradesmen or professionals in overabundant supply in Britain and the vast majority paid their own fares across the Atlantic.

It is undeniable that the major beneficiary of this flow of settlers was the United States. As Marshall points out, 62 percent of the nineteenth-century British migration went to the United States. What that figure obscures, however, is that an infinitely larger proportion of the non-British migration went to the United States and that a very high proportion of the migrants from the British Isles to the United States were Catholic Irish, whereas the British colonies, at least until very late in the nineteenth century, received relatively few non-British migrants and a substantial majority of the British emigrants they did receive were drawn from groups other than the Catholic Irish. This is not to imply that the majority of the immigrants who stayed within the empire did so entirely out of ideological considerations. In his study of *The Irish in Ontario* Don Akenson points out, "Probably most people who migrated before the Famine — mostly individuals with some financial resources, information on alternative opportunities, and the will to act decisively to better their chances — found the constitutional niceties and geopolitical boundaries to be a virtual irrelevance."<sup>49</sup> But "most" does not imply all. It may be an historic accident that Protestants formed a substantial majority of the Irish emigrants to British North America after 1815 while they formed a distinct minority of the Irish emigrants to the United States during this period, but it is certainly a fortuitous coincidence. That a desire to remain under the British flag was at least a factor in the minds of a substantial minority of those British immigrants who went to British colonies rather than the United States seems at least plausible.

But even more important than why the British emigrants went where they went is what they could do when they got there. By the time large-scale emigration from the British Isles began after 1815 the United States already had a substantial resident population which had laid the foundations for its own sense of national identity. English and Scottish (and Irish Protestant) emigrants had little choice, as Charlotte Erickson pointed out, but to become "Invisible Immigrants" and to merge their British identity into the American.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, they were all the more eager to do so in order to distinguish

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49. Donald Harman Akenson, *The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History* (Kingston and Montreal, 1984), 23.

50. Charlotte Erickson, *Invisible Immigrants: The Adaptation of English and Scottish immigrants in 19th-century America* (Ithaca and London, 1972).



themselves from the rapidly growing number of “alien” European and Irish Catholic emigrants who flooded into the United States. In the British colonies of settlement, however, the British emigrants and their offspring quickly came to form the majority. Where there were remnants of the earlier period of British colonization, as in parts of British North America, they absorbed them.<sup>51</sup> Where there were indigenous people, they pushed them aside. Where there were other Europeans, as in parts of Canada and in parts of British-controlled South Africa, they compelled them to abandon hopes of self-determination or leave. They did not have to abandon their sense of being British and they expected the comparatively small number of emigrants from other parts of Europe to become invisible. This does not mean that they sought to replicate every British institution; the material environments to which they went were very different from those they had left behind and with varying degrees of enthusiasm they adapted their culture accordingly. Nor did the majority seek to replicate exactly the political and social values of the Mother Country, particularly its class structure. To paraphrase Pocock they were British but British in their own way.

Moreover, literally millions of Britons came to have a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, a cousin or a niece or at the very least a relative or a former neighbour living in one of the British colonies overseas. During the nineteenth century a large part of the military forces of Britain were stationed overseas, mainly in the colonies of settlement in the first half of the nineteenth century. As travel back and forth became relatively easy there was an ever larger flow of visitors in both directions and communications between the colonies (especially the North American colonies) and Britain became ever quicker and more reliable. In the first Empire the colonists may frequently have felt that they were living on the remote, outer periphery of the British world but this was not the case for British North Americans by the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The majority of the British at home knew little about the geography and environment of the colonies and the native-born colonials not a great deal more about the geography and environment of the mother country but that did not prevent them from sharing the same imperial myths, prejudices and enthusiasms. This sense of a shared identity would grow weaker in the twentieth century but the period from 1815 to 1914 was, as Ronald Hyam has described it, *Britain's Imperial Century*, and the existence of so many British colonies abroad played an important part in confirming the British at home in their insularity from the rest of Europe and their self-confident belief in themselves as a chosen people.<sup>52</sup>

But if imperial historians can legitimately be criticized for losing sight of the colonies of settlement, then historians of colonial settlement can legitimately be criticized

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51. I would agree with Jack Bumsted that the “extent of cultural complexity in British North America around 1800 can hardly be overemphasized” and find his picture of British North America prior to 1815 entirely convincing, but his implication that Canada remained a series of culturally distinctive entities after 1815 is profoundly misleading. See J.M. Bumsted, “The Cultural Landscape of Early Canada” in Bailyn and Morgan, *Strangers within the Realm*, 362-92.

52. Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century* (London, 1976)

for losing sight of the Empire. One reads over and over again in Canadian history books the hoary old myth, long ago abandoned by imperial historians, that the British lost all interest in their colonies after the adoption of free trade.<sup>53</sup> Even those historians who have attempted to use imperial models have adopted the wrong ones. For example, the notion of collaborating elites, originally developed by Ronald Robinson, always had greater plausibility in areas where the British were a small, governing elite attempting to control a large alien population.<sup>54</sup> Even in those areas it is a crude tool for explaining why some groups welcomed and others rejected the extension of British authority and when applied to the colonies of settlement it contracts the imperial relationship to a simplistic, economic deterministic model. The “continuing economic and political collaboration” of the colonies of settlement, Robinson more recently proclaimed, “stemmed essentially from their growing and mutually profitable business connections with the United Kingdom.” The colonials voted for “empire-loyalists . . . who could keep capital flowing in.” The imperial affiliation is thus reduced to a series of “economic inputs” and colonial politics becomes “largely railway politics.”<sup>55</sup> This reductionist model may have some limited value when examining colonial negotiations with the imperial government and imperial financial interests for imperial loans — this is for example the way it has been applied with great sophistication by Peter Baskerville.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless it distorts the complexities of colonial politics and ignores the non-economic factors which underpinned colonial commitment to the empire.

Indeed, in the sense that they were committed to preserving the imperial tie, even if they disagreed about how best to do it, virtually all of the British emigrants and their immediate descendants were collaborators. But how sensible is it to describe the Irish-born William Warren Baldwin and Francis Hincks, or the Scottish-born George Brown and John Sandfield and John A. Macdonald as collaborators with imperial rule? Or for that matter the Canadian-born John Beverley Robinson, Robert Baldwin or

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53. For two recent studies on this topic, see Stanley R. Steinbridge, *Parliament, the Press and the Colonies, 1846-1880* (London, 1982) and Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism* (Ithaca and London, 1988).

54. Ronald Robinson, “Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration” in R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe, eds., *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London, 1972).

55. Ronald Robinson, “Imperial Theory and the Question of Imperialism after Empire,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* XII, 2 (1984): 45-46. For an elaboration of this theme, see Clarence B. Davis and Kenneth E. Wilburn, Jr, with Ronald Robinson, eds., *Railway Imperialism* (Westport, CT, 1991).

56. In “The Pet Bank, the Local State and the Imperial centre, 1850-1864,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 20, 3 (1985): 22-46, Baskerville talks about “collaborationist” groups and even Michael J. Piva, in “Financing the Union: The Upper Canadian Debt and Financial Administration in the Canadas, 1837-45,” *ibid.* 25, 4 (1990-91): 82-98, accepts that this is a legitimate concept so long as collaboration is not “taken to mean subordination.” See also Peter Baskerville, “Imperial Agendas and ‘Disloyal’ Collaborators: Decolonization and the John Sandfield Macdonald Ministries, 1862-1864” in David Keane and Colin Read, eds., *Old Ontario: Essays in Honour of J.M.S. Careless* (Toronto, 1990), 234-56.

Charles Tupper? Collaboration implies that there ought to have been a conflict in their minds between their loyalty to retaining the imperial tie — the desire to be British — and the defense of local interests — the desire to be Canadian. But such a dichotomy did not — indeed could not — exist in their minds because they saw no contradiction in being both British and Canadian. Superficially there is greater justification for describing politicians from cultural minorities like Thomas D'Arcy McGee or George Etienne Cartier as collaborationists or even *vendus* but this again implies that such men had abandoned one loyalty for another when at least by mid-century they no longer saw any incompatibility between their multiple loyalties.

More seriously Canadian historians have locked themselves into a teleological framework which is obsessed with the evolution of Canadian autonomy. There is nothing wrong in wanting to trace the emergence of a Canadian sense of identity so long as one recognizes that, like all other national identities, it had to be constructed artificially. To paraphrase Richard White in *Inventing Australia*:

There is no 'real' [Canada] waiting to be uncovered. A national identity is an invention. There is no point asking whether one version of the essential [Canada] is truer than another because they are all intellectual constructs, neat, tidy, comprehensible — and necessarily false . . . When we look at ideas about national identity we need to ask, not whether they are true or false, but what their function is, whose creation they are, and whose interests they serve.<sup>57</sup>

Of course, Ramsay Cook complained nearly a quarter of a century ago that the Canadian version of Portnoy's complaint was the obsession with Canadian nationalism.<sup>58</sup> But his solution was to encourage Canadian historians to focus on their more limited identities, a term invented by Cook but popularised by J.M.S. Careless in his famous article on "Limited Identities in Canada."<sup>59</sup> The exploration of issues of gender, class, ethnicity and region has greatly enriched Canadian history, not least because the study of these issues inevitably involved a comparative, transnational perspective and so rescued Canadian historiography from some of its parochialism, and there is no reason to abandon their exploration. But limited identities was always a loaded term and it is time we abandoned it, not in order to return to some mythical unified story of the evolution of the Canadian nation-state, but in order to explore the multiple identities that Canadians held during the nineteenth century.

Outside of Quebec — where regionalism was eventually fused with ethnicity to produce an alternative form of nationalism (as it was in southern Ireland) — it is simply not the case that most Canadians have seen a conflict between a sense of national identity

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57. Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1685-1980* (Sydney, 1981), viii. I have substituted Canada for Australia.

58. Ramsay Cook, "Nationalism in Canada or *Portnoy's Complaint* Revisited," *South Atlantic Quarterly* LIX (1970): 1-19.

59. J.M.S. Careless, "Limited Identities in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review*, L (1969): 1-10.

and their regional, provincial or local loyalties; and much as I admire the work of Ramsay Cook, his view of regionalism and nationalism as variants of the same phenomenon and his linking together of provincialism with Quebec separatism are quite misleading.<sup>60</sup> But regional historians must take some of the blame for this interpretation because many of them have implicitly applied a kind of Hechtian “internal colonialism” model to Canadian history, which is equally wrong-headed. In discussing the emergence of an “imagined community” in Canada that model does not work, just as it does not work in British history and for the same reasons. British North American union was not imposed by Central Canadians upon Maritimers in 1867 and it cannot be understood as solely or even mainly the extension of Central Canadian domination over the rest of Canada. The invention of a Canadian national identity after 1867 was a joint enterprise, even if the centre inevitably had greater weight in the construction of the Canadian state than the peripheries and derived greater benefits from it. In any event the creation of a Canadian state after 1867 did not immediately obliterate other, older loyalties any more than the creation of a British state had done so in Britain.

Paramount among those older loyalties was the sense of British identity held by a majority of the colonial population and an overwhelming proportion of the non-Francophone population. When John A. Macdonald declared for partisan purposes in 1891 “A British subject I was born — a British subject I will die”,<sup>61</sup> he was expressing a desire widely held, even by a substantial majority of those who voted against him in the election that followed. The roots of this sentiment lay in the period between 1815 and 1865 when the existing population of the British North American colonies had been overlaid by emigrants from Britain and their offspring. In 1815 the population of those colonies was not much more than 500,000, the majority of them descendants of those who had settled in New France and Acadia prior to 1763 and a majority of the remainder American-born emigrants or their descendants who had come as part of the Planter, Loyalist or late Loyalist migrations prior to 1815. This was in a sense the legacy of the first period of European colonization. Without further emigration the population of British North America could not much have exceeded 1,500,000 by 1861 and nearly 1,000,000 of those would have been Francophones. In fact, by 1861 the Francophone population had increased to about 1,000,000, but the total population of British North America numbered well over 3,000,000. In other words the Francophone population had increased about three-fold, almost entirely through natural increase, while the non-Francophone population had increased nearly ten-fold, largely through emigration.<sup>62</sup>

The impact of emigration was, of course, uneven. The non-Francophone population in Lower Canada peaked at just below 25 per cent, concentrated heavily in Montreal and Quebec city, with smaller numbers in the Eastern Townships. In Upper Canada the increase was phenomenal and except in a few areas just north of Toronto (and probably

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60. See Ramsay Cook, *Canada, Quebec, and the Uses of Nationalism* (Toronto, 1986), 9-11.

61. Cited in Donald G. Creighton, *John A. Macdonald: The Old Chieftain* (Toronto, 1955), 553.

62. These figures do not include Newfoundland nor does the discussion which follows, since Newfoundland had a distinctive pattern of settlement both before and after 1815.

even there) the earlier settlers were swamped. In the Maritimes, the population, which even before 1815 included substantial pockets of British emigrants, grew from perhaps 125,000 in 1815 to about 660,000 in 1861. Emigrants directly from the British Isles and their children and grandchildren must have formed the majority of the population and except in a few areas of the densest pre-1815 settlement they outnumbered the earlier settlers and their descendants. The British emigrants did not displace the earlier Anglophone migrants; they absorbed them. That Confederation took place in the 1860s was undoubtedly due to a number of immediate political and economic factors. That it took place at all was because the majority of Maritimers shared with the Anglophone majority in the United Province of Canada a common sense of Britishness and a desire to continue to live within the admittedly loose framework provided by the second British Empire. Many Maritimers did not like the terms of union that the Canadians insisted upon but in the end they accepted that to remain British they must become Canadians. It was this sense of being an extension of the British nation that bound Anglophone Canadians together in the nineteenth century and gave them a pool of British myths and images upon which they could draw — admittedly in a selective fashion.

This interpretation may offend those Canadian historians who see the imperial connection as a distorting influence which distracted Canadians from the duty of building their own distinct national identity. This interpretation rests upon the implicit assumption that there is something natural and inevitable about the creation of national identities, a proposition which flies in the face of all recent writing about nationalism. At worst, in what one might call the A.R.M. Lower colony-to-nation school, proponents of this view scour the nineteenth century looking for every hint of disapproval of imperial policies and seeking evidence of the growth of Canadian institutions that depart in significant ways from those of the mother country. A national identity, they imply, is buried in the Canadian soil only awaiting discovery by those who breathe Canadian air.

In its more sophisticated form, as propounded by Donald Creighton, the Anglo-Canadian relationship is seen as an alliance, essential for the preservation of Canadian autonomy on the North American continent, which Canadians chose to continue so long as the burdens of membership in the empire were not too great. But both approaches assume that Canadian history is ultimately intelligible within its own parameters, a fallacious assumption in the nineteenth century. Even the claim that Canadians remained British because they did not want to be Americans is tautological since it does not explain why they did not want to be Americans in the first place. In fact, a sense of being British did not have to be reinvented in the British colonies of settlement; the immigrants brought it with them when they arrived and the majority of them saw no reason to abandon it. As Pocock points out, "New Zealanders of settler stock . . . were therefore loyalists, not out of local fears and pressures or because they were passionate in a sense of deference . . . , so much as because it defined to them a global system within

which they found their identity.”<sup>63</sup> So too were most British North Americans both before and after Confederation.

This interpretation may also offend those who wish to impose an ideological interpretation on the evolution of Canadian history. A dissection of the roots and weaknesses of this interpretation would require a separate paper but put crudely it is based upon rather woolly ideological categories, it exaggerates the cultural differences and minimizes the similarities that existed and continue to exist between those parts of Europe and North America that underwent the transition to a free market and eventually an industrial economy, it ignores the extent to which Anglo-American societies on both sides of the Atlantic shared many aspects of a common culture, and it fails to recognize that individuals and parties — sometimes even governments — may have a political ideology but a society can not, unless one believes in the wholly discredited notion of national character.

The ideological perspective is most commonly associated in Canadian history with the work of Louis Hartz and his various disciples. Hartzian analysis was initially developed to explain what was considered to be the “exceptionalism” of American society (that is, to explain how and why American society differed from the societies of Western Europe from which it had sprung) and it was enthusiastically applied by his disciples to explain Canadian exceptionalism (that is, to explain how and why Canadian society differed from that of the United States).<sup>64</sup> Hartz is not much read in the United States these days and not much in Canada either, except among political scientists.<sup>65</sup> While on balance this is probably not a bad thing, Hartz was, nonetheless, right to stress that a good deal about a colonial society can be explained by examining the timing of its settlement and the attitudes and values of the settlers, even if his ideological categories and his notion of colonial fragments are rejected. The formative influence of migration patterns in American history is the central theme in Bernard Bailyn’s recent work and in David Hackett Fischer’s *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America*, which attempts to apply what Fischer describes as a “modified ‘germ thesis’ about the importance for the United States of having been British in its cultural origins.”<sup>66</sup> There

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63. Pocock, “History and Sovereignty,” 381-82.

64. See Louis B. Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York, 1955) and *The Founding of New Societies: Studies of the History of the United States, Latin America, South Africa, Canada and Australia* (New York, 1964), especially Kenneth D. McRae on “The Structure of Canadian History.” The most influential attempt to apply Hartz in Canada was Gad Horowitz’s “Liberalism, Conservatism and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation,” *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 32 (1966), subsequently becoming chapter one of his *Canadian Labour in Politics* (Toronto, 1968).

65. For a recent, sympathetic view of Hartz, see Pauline Maier, “The Transforming Impact of Independence, Reaffirmed: 1776 and the Definition of American Social Structure” in James Henretta, Michael Kammen and Stanley Katz, eds., *The Transformation of Early American History: Society, Authority and Ideology* (New York, 1991), 205-209.

66. (New York, 1989), 5.

is the danger of a kind of migration determinism in this approach, of assigning too much significance to the cultural baggage immigrants brought with them and too little to their interaction with each other, with the non-British elements in colonial society and with the new environment in which they settled. But that the patterns of settlement and the cultural inheritance of the settlers were fundamental in shaping new societies is beyond question.<sup>67</sup>

The Canadian historian who best recognized this reality was J.M.S. Careless. In 1950 he pointed out that emigration from Britain into Central Canada in the first half of the nineteenth century “had virtually inundated the earlier English-speaking population.” Canada, he concluded, has never “before or since been so British” and any study of English-speaking Canada must focus on “the influence of transferred British ideas and institutions.”<sup>68</sup> By the time he came to write his volume in the Centennial series, however, Careless was more interested in the “Growth of Canadian Institutions.”<sup>69</sup> Indeed, in “Limited Identities in Canada” he simply declared that “for English Canada the formative power lay not in the weak remnants of eighteenth-century American Empire but in the swamping power of earlier nineteenth-century British immigration.” But the Canada he saw emerging in the nineteenth century was one which lacked a clear sense of identity, a collection of “particular societies of people under a sovereign crown” who “stressed the nearer corporate loyalties of religious distinctions — Scots, English and Irish as well as French” and whose “basic scheme of values in both English and French Canada accord[ed] more readily with smaller, differentiated provincial or regional societies.”<sup>70</sup> Sid Wise took the same approach in his 1974 Presidential Address to this association, dismissing Careless’ earlier insights as too “George Brown-centred a view” and emphasising the fragmentation of British North America and the formative influence of the pre-1815 settlers.<sup>71</sup> But there were men like George Brown in all of the British North American colonies and it was men like George Brown — British emigrants and their offspring — who dominated nineteenth-century Canada. Even in the Maritimes where the earlier emigrants and their descendants formed a much larger proportion of the non-Francophone population than in Central Canada, British ideas took just as deep root.

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67. Fischer’s book was the subject of a critical debate in the “Forum” section of the *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd ser., 48 (1991): 224-30. As the various critics point out, Fischer did exaggerate the differences between the regional cultures established in the Thirteen Colonies, the extent to which those cultures underwent change through interaction with Indians, Africans and other Europeans, and the ability of the first generation to exert a controlling influence on later arrivals.

68. J.M.S. Careless, “Mid-Victorian Liberalism in Central Canadian Newspapers, 1850-67,” *Canadian Historical Review* XXXI (1950): 234, 236.

69. J.M.S. Careless, *The Union of the Canadas: The Growth of Canadian Institutions 1841-1857* (Toronto, 1967).

70. Careless, “Limited Identities in Canada,” 4-6.

71. S.F. Wise, “Liberal Consensus or Ideological Battleground: Some Reflections on the Hartz Thesis,” *Historical Papers, 1974* (1975): 12-13.

Of course, not every emigrant shared Brown's particular form of liberalism. In Britain there were conservatives, liberals and even radicals and representatives of all three came to the colonies and contributed to the political diversity of the societies they created. Indeed, the attempt to view whole bodies of emigrants, whether Loyalists, non-Loyalist Americans or the British-born, as possessing a collective political outlook was misguided. But Careless was surely correct to insist that despite these political divisions mid-nineteenth century British Canadians did conduct their disputes within "the same general framework of ideas" and that this "framework of ideas" was dominant throughout the Anglo-American world, on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>72</sup> To ascribe Canada's distinctiveness from the United States to a conservative political ideology inherited from Britain exaggerates the differences between all three societies. In the nineteenth century the United States, Great Britain and Canada (and New Zealand and Australia) were all moving in the same direction towards liberal democracy within a capitalist economy. As the essays in R.A. Burchill's somewhat mistitled *The End of Anglo-America* show, the United States did pioneer in the evolution of mass political parties, did create a legal and popular culture that was more supportive of capitalist entrepreneurship and did more enthusiastically embrace Protestant evangelicalism than Great Britain but what also emerges quite clearly is the convergence rather than divergence of values on both sides of the Atlantic,<sup>73</sup> as both countries responded in a very similar (though certainly not identical) fashion to the evolution of a market economy and the industrial revolution. The differences between the social structures of Canada and the United States are better explained by different patterns of settlement and different resource endowments and the class structures thus generated than they are by patterns of inherited political behaviour.

This interpretation will also disturb those who see the roots of modern Canada as laying in the period before 1815. Obviously if there had been no period of French colonization there would never have been a British period of colonization. In this sense the creation of British North America and Canada was an accidental consequence of the Conquest. But the attempt to write a history of French Canada separate from that of British Canada is an exercise as futile as trying to write a history of Wales or Scotland (or even Ireland) separate from that of England.

Indeed, from this perspective 1763 is a less significant date than 1815. After 1763 few British immigrants came to Quebec and even the British Government had to accept that a rational policy must be based on the assumption that the area would continue to have an overwhelming French majority. The American Revolution and the creation of a new British colony west of the Ottawa river placed a barrier to expansion in that direction but it did little to threaten the survival of a distinctive Francophone community. The

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72. Careless, "Mid-Victorian Liberalism in Central Canadian Newspapers," 223, 233.

73. It is significant that the essays in R.A. Burchill, ed., *The End of Anglo-America: Historical Essays in the study of cultural divergence* (Manchester, 1991) end up stressing how similar the societies on both sides of the Atlantic were despite their "cultural divergence" following the American Revolution.



beginnings of mass migration from the British Isles after 1815 changed the situation dramatically and led inexorably to the rebellions of 1837-38 in Lower Canada. Yet comparisons of that rebellion with modern movements of national liberation are somewhat misleading. A more appropriate comparison would be with the Irish rebellion of 1798. The Irish rebellion failed partly because of the strength of imperial forces ranged against it but primarily because both a majority of the Protestant Irish population opposed it and the Irish Catholics were internally divided. A similar pattern emerged in Lower Canada in 1837-38 where the British population overwhelmingly supported the imperial government while the French Canadian population was internally divided.

Regardless of why it failed, the rebellion put paid to the possibility of the evolution of an independent nation-state. This did not mean that French Canadians had to abandon their ethnic identity. When John A. Macdonald declared "Treat them as a nation and they will act as a people generally do — generously,"<sup>74</sup> he undoubtedly had in mind the comparison with Scotland and it was an apt one, at least in the short term. After the rebellion French Canadians could and did play a part in shaping the Canadian national identity. They were a large enough minority to ensure that their language and religious rights were protected in Quebec and that Catholic and Francophone minorities outside Quebec were treated better than they would otherwise have been. And without the presence of the large French minority Canada would not have evolved its distinctive brand of federalism. But none of this alters the fact that French Canadians had to function within structures that were largely created by the British majority and react to an agenda largely set by that majority.

There is less room in this interpretation for those American-born settlers and their children who formed the majority of the Anglophone population in 1815. Until the mass migration from Britain after 1815 the British hold on British North America remained precarious. Those American emigrants who flooded into Upper Canada after 1790 had every reason to believe that time was on their side and that British North America would eventually be absorbed by the expanding Republic. After 1815, however, the flood of British emigrants gave new meaning to the concept of British North America, a reality the United States came reluctantly to accept.

The Loyalists played a part in this development but a small one. The Loyalist migration was not very large; at most there were 60,000 of them. Indeed, given that a substantial number of the Loyalists did not stay for long but drifted back to the United States, that a substantial proportion were first-generation British emigrants to the Thirteen Colonies, and that there was a distinct preponderance of men over women, the figure of 60,000 greatly inflates the Loyalist impact. In Upper Canada the Loyalists were greatly outnumbered by the later wave of non-Loyalist American migrants; in Lower Canada they probably formed a minority even of the Anglophone population by 1815. In Nova Scotia they may have formed half the population in 1784 but could not have

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74. Cited in D.G. Creighton, *John A. Macdonald: The Young Politician* (Toronto, 1952), 226-27.

preserved even this status for very long since many left, the earlier American migrants probably had higher rates of natural increase, and the colony did receive a small, but continuing flow of migrants from the British Isles. In Prince Edward Island they were quickly outnumbered by the new arrivals from Scotland and other parts of the British Isles. Only in New Brunswick did the Loyalists and their children form the majority of the population past the first generation and even in New Brunswick by the 1840s (and perhaps even earlier) the majority of the population was composed of the British-born and their offspring.

The children of the Loyalist elite certainly tried to use their status as a means of prying rewards and honours out of the British Government but over time Loyalist credentials meant less and less in communities with a British majority. Of course, intermarriage between the Loyalists and their descendants and other migrants and their descendants created an ever larger pool of people with a loyalist ancestor, thus misleading generations of historians into inflating the significance of the Loyalists. Toward the end of the nineteenth century having a Loyalist ancestor also became something of a social cachet — like having a convict ancestor in Australia — but while it was claimed in the late nineteenth century that there were over 700,000 descendants of the “Loyalist pilgrims” in Canada, membership in the United Empire Loyalist Association remained tiny. In Ontario the Association had 165 members in 1898, rising to 518 in 1905.<sup>75</sup> Yet Carl Berger devoted a whole chapter to “The Loyalist Tradition” in *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism 1867-1914* and but a few lines to the Orange Lodge to which one third of all English-speaking adult Canadian males belonged in the late nineteenth century and which did far more to promote imperial sentiment than the United Empire Loyalist Associations.<sup>76</sup> Such is the danger of focusing on those organizations which are seen as distinctively Canadian, while ignoring the significance of the British-derived organizations to which most nineteenth-century Anglophone Canadians actually belonged and through which they expressed and confirmed their British identity.

Finally, this interpretation may disturb those who wish to see the Canadian identity as based upon Canada’s multicultural roots. Years ago W.L. Morton sought to show that because of its British traditions Canada was inherently more tolerant of diversity than the United States and from this emerged the notion of the Canadian mosaic.<sup>77</sup> Whatever Canada is or is becoming today, it is a fallacious metaphor when applied to nineteenth-century Canadian history. The British emigrants who poured into Canada in the nineteenth century were not particularly illiberal in terms of their times. The majority

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75. Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism* (Toronto, 1970), 86.

76. Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism 1867-1914* (Toronto, 1970)

77. See W.L. Morton’s 1960 Presidential Address to the Canadian Historical Association, “The Relevance of Canadian History,” subsequently republished in his *The Canadian Identity* (Madison, 1965).

took pride in the fact that Britain had been the first European nation to abolish slavery and that religious and ethnic minorities were not persecuted as they were in Russia and under despotic regimes. They believed in individual freedom. But they were not cultural relativists. Most were committed to an aggressive evangelical Protestantism and a belief in the innate superiority of the British character. They had limited sympathy for the native peoples and as scientific racism grew stronger in late nineteenth-century Britain it also became more pronounced in British colonies overseas. Although British Canadians were prepared to give limited guarantees to large cultural minorities like the French Canadians and preferred to see acculturation take place voluntarily rather than at the point of a bayonet, they never doubted that it was to the evident advantage of cultural minorities to abandon their own cultural traditions. Since the British formed the effective majority in Canada until well into the twentieth century, this must mean that a primary goal of ethnic historians should be to examine how other groups responded and adapted to and indeed resisted the extension of British culture. To treat any of these cultures as autonomous or independent of this pressure is not only misleading but distorting.

Unfortunately Canadian historians have become so enamoured of the concept of multiculturalism that they have lost sight of the British dimension by dividing Britons into their ethnic components of English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh and studying each group as if they came from a separate country and formed separate cultural minorities in Canada. Indeed, Don Akenson has gone so far as to claim that the very term "British" is a semantic nest which ought to be abandoned and replaced with the word Anglo-Celt.<sup>78</sup> This seems to me a classic example of abandoning a valid historical term for a piece of social scientific jargon. When British emigrants reached the Gulf of St Lawrence on their passage across the Atlantic they apparently began to sing "Rule Britannia."<sup>79</sup> Now they may have sung it with varying levels of enthusiasm and it may have meant different things at different times to different emigrants but that the majority identified themselves as Britons is incontrovertible. This does not mean that they did not also continue to identify themselves as English, Irish, Welsh or Scots, but those terms also meant different things at different times to different people. Ethnicity is as slippery a concept — and as problematic — as national identity and equally as artificial because it is also socially constructed and also involves a question of choice. Place of birth is a guide but no more, for one must keep in mind the warning of the Duke of Wellington, who when reminded of his Irish birth is said to have responded that being born in a stable does not make one a horse. In any event, as one prominent Australian historian has pointed out, to study the British as if they were a series of cultural minorities in those colonies where they

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78. See Akenson, *The Irish in Ontario*, 6 and *Half the World from Home: Perspectives on the Irish in New Zealand 1860-1950* (Wellington, 1990), 6-10. In *Occasional Papers on the Irish in South Africa* (Grahamstown, 1991), 100, which I only had the opportunity to read after completing this paper, Akenson accepts that there did exist in the colonies "a new synthetic 'British' (or 'English') culture." But I cannot accept that this synthetic culture was "not found in Britain" nor that British and English can be used interchangeably to describe it.

79. See the log kept by William Gliddon, 3 May 1845, printed in Ann Gifford, ed., *Towards Quebec: Two mid-19th century emigrants' journals* (London, 1981), 53.

composed a clear majority of the population is "multiculturalism carried to its logical absurdity."<sup>80</sup> Even as an analytical device for studying migration "it may be," Eric Richards has suggested, "that categories such as the Scots, the Welsh, even the Irish, are not the most useful."<sup>81</sup>

Ethnicity becomes even more complex when it is diluted by migration and by intermarriage. A few weeks ago, I overheard a conversation in London in which an Irishman was telling a friend that he recently met an American who had declared that his ancestors had come from Ireland and Scotland but had announced, to the Irishman's chagrin, that he preferred to think of himself as Scottish. But that is the point; ethnic identity is a question of self-definition. It is not a genetic characteristic like blue eyes and red hair; it is learned behaviour. To believe otherwise is to commit the Tarzan fallacy; now Tarzan may not have been genetically an ape, but he was neither a European nor an Englishman until taught to be both. If we include as Irish (or Scots or Welsh or English) all those who are descended from someone permanently resident at some point in time in Ireland, whether the individuals know what their ethnic background is, whether they know but see it as irrelevant or whether they know it but reject it for a different ethnic identity, we are implicitly condoning a form of racism.

Canadian historians have been too easily misled by the apparent ease with which questions of ethnicity can be answered by census data. The Canadian census traditionally divided the population into its component ethnic parts by defining ethnicity according to the country of origin of the first male ancestor to set foot on North American soil and they divided the British Isles into England, Ireland and Scotland. This is useful for generating statistical profiles. But what meaning do they have in understanding ethnic identity? They have none. Indeed, the question asked by the census inflated the size of certain ethnic groups.<sup>82</sup> It meant, for example, that a fourth-generation descendant of American Quaker emigrants from Pennsylvania in the 1790s who were themselves second- or third-generation descendants of German emigrants to the Thirteen Colonies became part of the German ethnic group (even though there was no such country as Germany when the original migrants crossed the Atlantic and even though those defined as German neither spoke nor understood German and had no knowledge of nor interest in their supposed homeland). It also disguised the fact that while many of the original migrants might have described themselves as English, Irish or Scottish (or Welsh if they

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80. Bob Reece, "Writing about the Irish in Australia" in John O'Brien and Pauric Travers, eds., *The Irish Emigrant Experience in Australia* (Dublin, 1991), 228. See also his "The Welsh in Australian Historical Writing" in Gavin Edwards and Graham Sumner, eds., *The Historical and Cultural Connections and Parallels between Wales and Australia* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter, 1991).

81. Eric Richards, "The importance of being Irish in Colonial South Australia" in *The Irish Emigrant Experience*, 95.

82. See Graeme Wynn, "Ethnic Migrations and Atlantic Canada: Geographical Perspectives," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* XVIII (1986): 1-15 and N.B. Ryder, "The Interpretation of Origin Statistics," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, XXI (1955): 466-79.

had been allowed to do so), it is not axiomatic that their descendants wished to do so, particularly since intermarriage between different ethnic groups frequently gave their descendants a choice of ethnic identities. It also inflated out of all proportion the group whose ethnicity was defined as English. Not only did that category encompass the descendants of most of the pre-1815 American-born emigrants, many of whom probably were more than willing to stress their remote English roots rather than their more immediate American ones by the mid-nineteenth century, but one suspects that this category grew to include everyone who was unsure of what their origins were or wished to abandon them. In any event, to define ethnicity on the basis of the census definition assumes that a person's ethnic identity had its origins at an arbitrarily chosen given point in time in the past. But why is it more logical to include as Irish rather than Scottish someone whose great-great-grandfather lived in Ireland and emigrated to America when their great-great-great-grandfather lived in Scotland and emigrated to Ireland?<sup>83</sup> It would be more fruitful if ethnic historians abandoned the meaningless charade of multi-generational analysis and concentrated on what is really important, which is to explain why individuals at a given point in time chose to identify themselves in the way that they did, how their perceived ethnic identity affected their behaviour and how they reconciled this identity with others.

Such an approach will change the way in which we look at nineteenth-century Anglophone Canada. Emigration from Britain during the nineteenth century was on a massive scale and it drew heavily from all parts of the British Isles, even if disproportionately from Ireland and Scotland. Many emigrants (but certainly not all) had a strong sense of their own ethnicity and they retained that sense upon their arrival in British North America. Indeed, most emigrants moved as part of a chain migration that linked them to friends and families at home and to friends and families in the colonies, although frequently the sheer scale of migration — particularly family migration — from certain communities in Britain meant that the chain soon became stronger on the North American side of the Atlantic. For the emigrants the bonds created by ethnicity were a critical part of what has been described as their “human capital,” for it was relatives and friends of the same ethnic origin who assisted them in the process of adjustment in their new environment. But even during the transatlantic crossing many emigrants were mixed together with emigrants from other parts of the British Isles and upon their arrival they rarely settled in self-contained ethnic communities, rarely worked or traded solely with members of the same ethnic group and rarely worshipped alongside co-religionists solely of the same ethnic group (unless they were Catholics and frequently not even then). Rates of intermarriage with the offspring of the earlier settlers or spouses from other groups

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83. This is, of course, the classic problem with the so-called Scotch-Irish, an Americanism invented to deal with the descendants of the Scottish emigrants to Ireland who emigrated to the Thirteen Colonies. The immigrant generation was clearly perceived to be and perceived themselves to be Irish but their late nineteenth-century descendants, who were totally integrated into American society, preferred to identify their ethnic origins as Scottish. See James Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill, 1962) and E.R.R. Green, ed., *Essays in Scotch-Irish History* (London, 1969).

were substantial from the beginning and became higher over time. This was particularly true of the English, the Lowland Scots, the Welsh and the Protestant Irish, less so of Catholic Highlanders and Irish Catholics, because religion was a greater barrier to a mixed marriage than ethnicity. Indeed, the gulf between Protestant and Catholic was the great divide among the British. It explains why Irish Catholics retained a stronger sense of their ethnicity than other groups and why Catholics who settled in overwhelmingly Protestant communities not infrequently converted. But over time what was gradually weakened was a sense of being English, Scottish, Welsh and (particularly for Protestants) Irish. The speed with which this erosion took place varied enormously from community to community and from individual to individual and for at least one or two generations (and sometimes longer) it was often incomplete but as memories of their ancestral home became hazier and hazier, the British emigrants and their descendants increasingly identified themselves as Canadians with Scottish or Welsh or English or even Irish ancestors.

But for the majority what did not weaken over time was their sense of being British; indeed, this sense probably became stronger during the middle and later decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>84</sup> Organizations that began with ethnic roots — like the Orange Lodge — gradually expanded beyond those roots and took on a new meaning. Holidays that cut across ethnic lines, like Victoria Day, first celebrated in Toronto in 1849, became more important than ethnic holidays. British history was taught in the schools, albeit with a Canadian emphasis; British heroes, like Nelson and Wellington and Gordon, became Canadian heroes; British victories in the Crimean War, in the Indian Mutiny, in the Boer War were celebrated and British defeats at Sebastopol, at Khartoum and at Isandhlwana were lamented. The monarchy came to be venerated in Canada as in Britain and pictures of Queen Victoria probably hung in most Anglophone Canadian homes. As in Britain imperialism had a popular dimension and several generations of the Canadian-born learned to be British even if the relevance of their particular ethnic heritage was unclear. Indeed, for many British Canadians the heritage of the whole of the British Isles became their heritage; in that sense they were more British than many of the British at home. In time this sense of British identity would also erode, a casualty of Britain's decline in the twentieth century and the dismantling of the Empire, of the increasing irrelevance of British traditions to a growing number of native-born Canadians, of increased integration with the United States and of a changing pattern of immigration. But to deny that there was such thing as a common cultural identity among the majority of English-speaking Canadians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and that it was based upon the belief that Canada was British is to deny the existence of an historical reality.

What I have outlined here is a large and controversial agenda. It is not meant to be an exclusive one which abandons efforts to understand how other issues like gender,

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84. This argument is developed at greater length in my "Making British North America British 1815-1860", paper presented at a Conference on "Changing Perspectives: Canada, the United States and Great Britain, 1783-1914", Saint David's University College, Lampeter, Wales, 19 March 1993. It is intended that the papers will be published in due course under the editorship of C.C. Eldridge.

class and locality affected nineteenth-century Canadians. Nor is it meant to imply that we should ignore the efforts of cultural minorities to carve out a place for themselves in the British society that was created by the British emigrants and their offspring. "Who gets included in the 'nation,' who excluded, by whom and when [and indeed why?] is a crucial part of the story."<sup>85</sup> It is certainly not meant to imply that we should ignore the differences between the emigrants themselves — differences that arose from varied historical experience, distinctive religious convictions, class conflict or issues of gender. It is to argue, however, that despite these differences the majority of Anglophone Canadians did share the sense of belonging to a common culture, the precise dimensions and implications of which have been inadequately explored. To do so we must place the imperial experience back where it belongs, at the centre of nineteenth-century Canadian history. Who knows, in the process, we may even be able to convince imperial historians that the imperial experience in the colonies of settlement is more relevant than has been assumed, that emigration was at least part of the explanation for the immense popular appeal of the empire in nineteenth-century Britain, that the existence of a series of little Britains overseas did play a role in shaping British attitudes in the construction of their own sense of national identity, and that Canadian history (and that of the other colonies of settlement) ought to be on their agenda.

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85. Marks, "History, the Nation and Empire," 115.