

“Race” and Racism in the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 1922-2021

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Résumé de l'article

À quelques exceptions près, les articles de la Revue ont représenté la race et le racisme conformément à la sagesse conventionnelle de l'époque. Bien que la « race » en tant que catégorie d'analyse n'ait pas occupé une place prépondérante pendant la majeure partie des cent ans d'existence de cette revue, l'évolution du concept et son rôle dans l'interprétation de l'histoire canadienne peuvent être perçus à travers les volumes annuels. Dans les premières années, la « race » était considérée comme allant de soi ; il était admis que l'humanité était divisée en groupes fixes appelés « races » et que la « race » pouvait être un facteur de causalité dans l'histoire. Pendant et après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, l'importance de la « race » a été remise en question, et son existence a même été niée. Au cours des dernières décennies, les articles de la revue ont commencé à reconnaître le racisme profondément ancré dans les structures sociales et économiques du Canada, ainsi que son impact sur le colonialisme intérieur et sur d'autres formes de discrimination sanctionnée. Le racisme, plutôt que la « race » biologique, est désormais considéré comme un facteur de développement du Canada. Cette compréhension soulève des questions sur les récits dominants de l'histoire canadienne et appelle à de nouvelles versions de notre passé collectif.

“Race” and Racism in the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 1922-2021

JAMES W. ST.G. WALKER*

Abstract

With few exceptions, Journal articles have represented “race” and racism in step with the conventional wisdom of the times. Although “race” as a category of analysis has not been prominently on the agenda for most of the Journal’s one hundred years, the evolution of the concept and its role in Canadian historical interpretation can be discerned through the annual volumes. In the early years, “race” was taken for granted; it was accepted that humankind was divided into fixed groups known as “races,” and that “race” could be a causal factor in history. During and after World War II, there were some challenges to the significance of “race,” and even some denials of its existence altogether. In recent decades, articles in the Journal have begun to recognize the racism deeply embedded in Canadian social and economic structures, and its impact in domestic colonialism and in other forms of sanctioned discrimination. Racism, rather than biological “race,” is now being seen as a factor in Canada’s development. This understanding raises questions about prevailing accounts of Canadian history, with consequent calls for new versions of our collective past.

Résumé

À quelques exceptions près, les articles de la Revue ont représenté la race et le racisme conformément à la sagesse conventionnelle de l’époque. Bien que la « race » en tant que catégorie d’analyse n’ait pas occupé une place prépondérante pendant la majeure partie des cent ans d’existence de cette revue, l’évolution du concept et son rôle dans l’interprétation de l’histoire canadienne peuvent être perçus à travers les volumes annuels. Dans les premières années, la « race » était considérée comme allant de soi ; il était admis que l’humanité était divisée en groupes fixes appelés « races » et que la « race » pouvait être un facteur de causalité dans l’histoire. Pendant et après la Seconde Guerre mondiale, l’importance de la « race » a été remise en question, et son exis-

* I am grateful to the editors of the *Journal* for their useful advice, and especially to Ben Bryce for his extraordinary assistance and patience while I was researching, writing, and revising this paper.

tence a même été niée. Au cours des dernières décennies, les articles de la revue ont commencé à reconnaître le racisme profondément ancré dans les structures sociales et économiques du Canada, ainsi que son impact sur le colonialisme intérieur et sur d'autres formes de discrimination sanctionnée. Le racisme, plutôt que la « race » biologique, est désormais considéré comme un facteur de développement du Canada. Cette compréhension soulève des questions sur les récits dominants de l'histoire canadienne et appelle à de nouvelles versions de notre passé collectif.

Writing in the April 2022 issue of *Intersections*, French-language editor Jean-Philippe Warren reminded us that “*in the past*, history was taught in such a way as to support the dominant discourse and preserve the privileges of the powerful by emphasizing nation-building.” CHA president Steven High declared that *today*, “a deeper understanding of the ongoing structural violence of settler colonialism and the politics of race have forced a fundamental rethinking of Canadian history.” And vice-president of the CHA, Donald Wright, looked to *the future*: “Clearly, questions of indigeneity, settler colonialism, resilience, reconciliation, memory, and decolonization will occupy the attention of historians in the coming years in the same way that they will occupy the country. The good news is that we are well placed to contribute to this urgent, if difficult conversation.”¹

The guiding question for this examination of “race” in the *Journal of the CHA* (and its predecessors) is first and most fundamentally, how have “race” and racism been represented, interpreted, and challenged in our *Journal* during the past 100 years, and can we identify any patterns in their treatment over time? I would also hope to invite a discussion over the contention that we as historians are “well placed” to contribute to progressive changes in society itself.

First, a caveat: not all the papers delivered at the CHA annual meetings were published in the *Journal*, and therefore it is not necessarily a reflection of the meetings, let alone the profession. From 1971 to 1998, each issue carried a list of titles not published, and judging by their titles alone, it would appear that unpublished papers directly or indirectly relating to “race” greatly outnumbered those that were published.²

Still, by looking only at the annual publications, some patterns can be discerned in representing, interpreting, and challenging “race” and racism in the *Journal*. It is immediately apparent that “race” as a category of analysis has not been prominently on the agenda for the

Journal for most of its history, but despite this limited treatment, it is possible for a reader to gain an impression of how "race" featured in interpreting Canada's national narrative, not only in historical writing but in popular attitudes and official policies. In the era when Scots, Irish, and Jews, *inter alia*, and especially the English and French, were listed in the census and immigration reports, and in public discourse, as "races," the *Journal* reflected this understanding and its consequent implications. Subsequently, as society hesitantly became more open to reforms in racist practices during and after World War II, the *Journal* carried its own reinterpretations, for example with quotation marks implying that "race" was not such a fixed characteristic after all, leading eventually to overt assaults on the very concept of "race." Most recently, there have been *Journal* entries offering revelations of deeply embedded and continuing racism in our country's experience which are questioning the established account of a liberal and racism-free democracy.

The Terminology of "Race"

With Andre Siegfried's *The Race Question in Canada* (1907) and Lionel Groulx's *La naissance d'une race* (1919) already in the historian's library when the *Journal* began, not to mention the legacy of Lord Durham's assessment of relations between "the two races," racial identity in the early issues consisted of English and French.³ Yet when George Wrong wrote "The Two Races in Canada" in 1925, he insisted that the two founding peoples "are in fact of the same race." The French in Canada came from northern France and were a mingling of Celts and Teutons, just like the English. Still, Wrong did continue to identify the English and French as "the two races in Canada" in his article.

Other Europeans were appearing in the *Journal* by the mid-1930s, all designated as "races," as Western settlement became an item of historical interest.⁴ On the prairies, "those races close to the soil," like Ukrainians and Hungarians, were distinguished from "the commercial races" such as the English, Syrians, Jews, and Chinese.⁵ It was, however, the original "two races" who formed Confederation in 1867, "our bi-racial pact."

A 1944 article was the earliest to put the term "race" in quotation marks when dealing with the English and French,⁶ and there were suggestions in the *Journal* that it was culture, not biology, that distinguished the two groups.⁷ Anthropologist A. G. Bailey went fur-

ther, launching a frontal attack in 1947 on the very notion of “race,”⁸ though the term remained in use without modifiers in subsequent issues.⁹

Another move away from racial identities was signalled by Alfred Dubuc in 1965, with the hypothesis that cleavages in Canadian society between 1760 and 1940 should be analyzed “not chiefly on ethnic lines but primarily according to social classes.” “My purpose,” Dubuc added, “is not to deny ... ‘racial clashes’ in Canadian history.” Rather, he was hoping to explain the “historical reality more correctly than [in] the studies inspired by the Durham Report.”¹⁰ This shifting analysis did not inhibit Prime Minister Pearson in announcing the establishment of a Royal Commission to develop a Confederation based on “an equal partnership between the two founding races.”¹¹ But the idea of racial difference among Canadians of European origin was gradually replaced during the 1960s “with the cultural category of ethnicity,” as “increasing emphasis was placed on skin colour as a marker of race. This eroded the differences between the so-called ‘white races’” but did not eliminate “race” from historical consciousness; it simply “further marginalized people of colour.”¹²

Developments in “Race” and Racism

Carl Berger’s essay on John George Bourinot offers an insight into the racial thought of a nineteenth-century historian and its mid-1960s critique. For Bourinot, “the central thread of Canadian history was the progress of self-government to full freedom in an imperial union, [and] the motive force in this process was ‘racial’ capacity.” Accepting “race” as a causal factor in history, and believing that the “Teutonic race,” to which both the English and the Normans belonged, had a special affinity for self-government, Bourinot concluded that the conquest was a “blessing,” an opportunity for the two “races” to realize their joint racial destiny for political freedom.¹³

Other scholars found nonracial explanations for historical developments. For example, Olive Dickason argued that when Europeans first claimed the right to dominate Indigenous peoples in the Americas, they based it not on racial superiority but on religion. Then, when Indigenous populations proved reluctant to embrace Christianity, the French in Canada blamed the failure on the Native character.¹⁴ As Michel Duquet observes, racism was not yet a developed ideology in seventeenth-century Europe. Human differences discerned by Euro-

peans visiting Africa and North America had to be explained by other factors, such as environmental conditions.¹⁵

Jeffrey McNairn offers an analysis of British travelogues that provides some clues for the transition to overt racism in the nineteenth century. During the emancipation debates *circa* 1829–34, travellers used the free African Canadian communities of Nova Scotia to test whether formerly enslaved individuals could prosper in freedom. Their books “became part of the broader British conversation about race and emancipation.” The evident poverty of Black Nova Scotians led to the conclusion that they had been freed prematurely and were better off enslaved. After the Emancipation Act, travel accounts revealed a “hardening of racial attitudes,” McNairn concludes. Black poverty could be explained thereafter by racial inferiority.¹⁶ David Sutherland follows this transition through the response of Black people to their exclusion from mainstream political and institutional life in mid-nineteenth-century Halifax. Their emerging sense of group identity led to the establishment of their own Black institutions. Intended to break down racist barriers, these organizations were regarded by whites as evidence of Black self-separation. Collective survival was achieved, Sutherland notes, but the cost was the entrenchment of white racism and deliberate segregation.¹⁷

An explanation for the development of “scientific racism” appears in Pierre Simoni’s analysis of the Larousse *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*. In seventeen volumes published between 1865 and 1875, the dictionary’s various articles justified colonialism and the subjugation of “inferior races” by white Europeans. Simoni writes that contact with Indigenous populations provided evidence of gaps in technical skills and material possessions that could be explained in racial terms, and the orthodox scientific apparatus of the times, particularly anthropology, complied.¹⁸ In the British sphere, the antislavery movement and, especially, the “experiment” of Sierra Leone as a home for free Blacks (including Black Loyalists from Nova Scotia), provoked increasing interference in Native jurisdictions.¹⁹ White domination, and the theory of “race,” were firmly established by the late nineteenth century as traced through the articles published in the *Journal of the CHA*.

“New Canadians”: Immigration, Antisemitism, and Multiculturalism

One of the earliest articles dealing directly with immigration in the *Journal* was on the *Komagata Maru* affair in 1914. Eric Morse’s 1936

study outlines the main facts in the standoff and eventual departure of the ship and its South Asian passengers, banned by discriminatory orders-in-council excluding persons of “Asiatic race.” But, in step with his times, Morse is not entirely sympathetic to those passengers. In his interpretation, Gurdit Singh, leader of the expedition, intended to provoke political unrest in India, not to open Canadian immigration. With the ship anchored in Vancouver harbour, the passengers were starving, yet their leaders, “though clearly liable, refused to supply food or water.” The South Asian community in BC was “seething with sedition” and there was “collusion between the Hindus on board and those on shore to prevent the vessel’s departure.” All this revealed “the subversive and revolutionary character of the whole enterprise”; the ship’s exclusion was therefore justified. Morse did allow himself a concluding note of irony. When HMCS *Rainbow* finally forced the *Komagata Maru* to set sail, “the nucleus of the new Canadian navy, intended as an imperial gesture, had first been used to prevent the landing of British subjects on British soil.”²⁰

Policy makers’ and nationalists’ opposition to immigration on grounds of “race” was not limited to concerns about people from Asia. Don Avery’s article on the immigration of foreign railway workers exposed the depths of “Canadian racial nationalism.” Before World War I, opposition to Chinese workers led employers to recruit central and southern Europeans, who were also regarded as “racially inferior.”²¹ Howard Palmer explores the response of Alberta society to the influx of Europeans in the 1920s, in particular the resurgence of “nativism,” which Palmer explains as “an amalgam of ethnic prejudice and nationalism,” a phenomenon that “has been endemic in Canada.” When the railway imported “inferior” European types, the locals feared they would undermine Anglo-Saxon institutions and “contaminate” Alberta’s “racial purity.”²²

In his 2000 Presidential Address, Irving Abella described the organized resistance to Jewish immigrants, including those fleeing Nazi Germany in the 1930s. He quotes George Stanley, a future president of the CHA, who praised the government for its restrictive policies, warning that a more flexible system would result in Canadian universities being “flooded with Jews.” The 1939 Conference of Canadian Universities unanimously passed a resolution calling for the rejection of any refugee who might take a job from a Canadian, and deportation for those already here. In the postwar era, thanks considerably to the efforts of Canadian Jewry, immigration and employment

discrimination gradually eased.²³ In the meantime, there was a campaign to sponsor refugee professors at the University of Toronto. The program had limited success. The Immigration Branch remained opposed, following their director Frederic Blair, who "was himself discriminatory and anti-Semitic." In the end, only twenty refugee academics were hired between 1935 and 1945, half of whom were Jews.²⁴ W. P. J. Millar reveals an evident increase in antisemitism at the University of Toronto School of Medicine *after* World War II. Although public policy was changing, admission of Jews to the School declined as a proportion of the student body, though Jews had higher Grade 13 averages than successful applicants who were not Jewish.²⁵

Multiculturalism was a demographic fact in Canadian life from before 1922, when the Association was launched, but its recognition was slow to arrive in public policy, and in the Association's *Journal*. Watson Kirkconnell introduced a kind of "proto-multiculturalism" in a 1940 article on the ethnic press, declaring that "assimilation is proving a slow process." Many European immigrants were "still cherishing their ancestral cultural life," yet at the outbreak of war these immigrants had a higher rate of enlistment than the Canadian average.²⁶ Jean Bruchesi, in his 1952 Presidential Address, pointed out that almost a quarter of Canada's inhabitants were of neither English nor French origin. They could become "true Canadians," without forsaking their maternal tongue, customs, or religious faith, "having the same rights and the same obligations as we have."²⁷ Two years later, Maurice Careless welcomed a "new kind of nationalism ... wherein basic community differences continue to exist and the whole national structure recognizes the fact."²⁸ By 1960, W. L. Morton's Presidential Address could declare that "one of the blessings of Canadian life is that there is no Canadian way of life, much less two, but a unity under the Crown admitting of a thousand diversities."²⁹

Kevin Woodger explores the hesitant (and incomplete) path toward multiculturalism through the files of the Boy Scouts and Canadian Cadets. Although the national organizations tended to be "agents of Anglo-conformity and settler colonialism," at the local level they became more accommodating of "white ethnics." "The slow postwar extension of whiteness beyond the Anglo-Saxons (and northern Europeans), as well as the growing conception of a Canadian civic identity during the 1960s," gradually eliminated the "racial differences" among European immigrants and their descendants. The 1969 *Boy Scouts Handbook*, however, still emphasized British and

French as the two founding peoples and detailed the different origins of Euro-Canadians. Canadians of all Asian backgrounds “were lumped into the generic category ‘Asiatics,’ while African Canadians were not even listed.”³⁰

Antiracism

Patricia Roy’s 2008 account of Japanese Canadians’ community revival after the war, and especially in the 1970s, is a tale of overcoming racism and the devastating effects of one of the most blatant racist episodes in Canadian history, namely the displacement and property dispossession of Canadians of Japanese birth or heritage.³¹ More explicitly about antiracist activism, Rosanne Waters’s 2013 article gives a thorough canvassing of African Canadian advocacy groups and their transnational influences between 1945 and 1965.³² Closely linked thematically, Carla Marano’s 2014 article assesses the Universal Negro Improvement Association at both the international and the local Toronto levels. Marano describes the racism in Toronto and in federal immigration policies to explain the attraction of the UNIA, and shows how, through “race pride” and the celebration of Black culture, the organization “became a cornerstone in Toronto’s Black community.”³³

Artistic expression could be used as opposition to anti-Black racism. For example, Canadian rap music, as Francesca D’Amico describes, addressed the musicians’ sense of exclusion “from a nation that has consistently imagined itself as White,” while at the same time confronting the exclusionary practices they encountered. Canadian rappers, D’Amico argues, challenge “the marginalizing narrative of Canadian history.”³⁴ Cheryl Thompson suggests that Black minstrelsy, that is minstrel shows performed by Black troupes, could be intentionally subversive of certain stereotypes. The liability of minstrelsy, both by Blacks and by whites in Blackface, was that it could in fact sustain impressions of the contented slave and the backward, happy-go-lucky image of Black people. Thompson discusses both forms and their appeal for white Canadian audiences, who, she contends, shared a Southern white nostalgia for plantation life and had their own superiority confirmed by representations of Black inferiority.³⁵

The earliest direct assault in the *Journal* on “race” as a concept was A. G. Bailey’s “Anthropological Inquiry” of 1947, mentioned previously. Bailey decried “the distressing history of the specious ideas

of race and racial superiority.” Such ideas, he wrote, “are not merely of academic interest. They underlie persistent mass attitudes.” He referred to the “so-called Anglo-Saxon race” and scoffed at G. M. Trevelyan’s notion of “Celtic blood.” Though he seems to acknowledge the possibility that “hereditary subdivisions of the species homo sapiens” do exist, his overwhelming message was that “a pure racial type is an abstraction.”³⁶

The most powerful denunciation of “race” and racism, and a call for an “anti-racist scholarship,” is Tim Stanley’s 2002 article “Bringing Anti-Racism into Historical Explanation.” “Academic work on this project can take the form of trying to understand the dynamics of racist systems.” Stanley proceeds to deconstruct the segregation of Chinese Canadian students from Victoria schools in 1922, their subsequent “strike,” and eventual readmission, but only after the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 excluded immigrants of “Chinese race” and thus “school segregation was no longer a necessary strategy to maintain a racist social order.” Segregation did not result from differences between Chinese and European Canadians, he argues. Most Chinese children were Canadian-born, fluent in English, in good health, and with academic performance above their class average. Rather, it was separation and categorization that created the ostensible differences. The Chinese were categorized as foreigners, though they arrived in BC about the same time as Europeans, and both groups were trespassing on Indigenous lands, yet European dominance is rendered natural and just by labelling non-Europeans as “others.” Stanley concludes that “races” are constructs and fluid, and “their invention can be traced historically.”³⁷

The experiences of Canada’s Indigenous peoples with deeply embedded racism have received some significant exposure in the *Journal*, with contributions illustrating the policy implications of a racial belief system and displaying an evident antiracist intention to change public perceptions as well as historical interpretations. The 2015 CHA meeting hosted a roundtable discussion on James Daschuk’s Macdonald Prize-winning book *Clearing the Plains*. The book “chronicles the heart-breaking tale of human devastation wrought by government policy, disease, and environmental change suffered by Plains Indigenous peoples,” and “paves the way for putting genocide at the centre of our national historical narrative.” Daschuk avoided using the term “genocide” in his book, but he did so in later interviews and presentations, and he helped to launch a national discussion that brought the racist

nature of nineteenth-century policies of deliberate starvation and “ethnic cleansing” to public attention. “Such revelations,” one discussant noted, “fundamentally alter our nation’s origin stories.” While disclosures about the residential schools were already challenging a benign view of Indian policy, Daschuk took the narrative beyond the schools “to a broader and longer view of the trauma of settler colonialism.”³⁸

During the 2021 roundtable discussion of his Ferguson Prize-winning book *Barbed Wire Imperialism*, Aidan Forth remarked that Indigenous reserves contributed to Canada becoming a “racialized state.” The reserves “detained and segregated” Indigenous populations, “while re-ordering colonial spaces according to registers of race and social class.”³⁹ Robin Brownlie’s 1994 account of an Indian agent in 1920s and ’30s Ontario confirms the impact of government policy through a case study at the intimate reserve level. Theoretically committed to promoting self-sufficiency and independence, the reality of the agent’s supervisory responsibilities led him “to quell any aboriginal attempts at political self-assertion, and to restrict the expenditures from band funds which might have allowed [its members] to develop economic autonomy.” Brownlie challenges then-conventional assumptions of the positive purpose and benefits of reserve life by describing the failure of the vaunted goal of assimilation, and the marginalization, poverty, and dependency of the band members.⁴⁰ Like the later Daschuk and Forth roundtables, Brownlie’s article exposes the attitudes inherent in the policy and administrative structures that perpetuated the domination of racially defined “Indians” and reinforced their distance from the mainstream Canadian population, well beyond the settlement era. P. Whitney Lackenbauer, on the other hand, offers a detailed and sophisticated analysis of Indigenous agency in contests with their local Indian agent, revealing a more complex relationship than might be understood from the formal power structures. “Tragedy” and “victims” are not necessarily the most appropriate terms in all contextual circumstances.⁴¹

A New History?

Two decades into the twenty-first century, we seem to be approaching that “deeper understanding” that Steven High recognized, and a “fundamental rethinking of Canadian history” could be underway. This is occurring as public as well as academic attention is paid to questions of colonialism and “race.” Witness the widespread use of

territorial acknowledgements at Canadian universities; the introduction of Black and Indigenous studies programs; "cohort" or "cluster" hiring of racialized faculty to staff these initiatives; equity, diversity, and inclusion committees; dedicated research grants and scholarships; and a general sensitivity to the legacies of past injustices that permeate contemporary society. Parallel developments have been occurring off campus, in the international Black Lives Matter demonstrations, the "summer of reckoning" following the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls Reports, the discovery of unmarked graves on former residential school sites, even the removal, relocation, or repurposing of statues commemorating traditional heroes such as John A. Macdonald, Champlain, Lord Cornwallis, and Egerton Ryerson.

The *Journal* has reflected social and historiographical developments in the past, sometimes but perhaps not always in front of the crowd. In his 1997 Presidential Address, Jim Miller lamented that "our profession seems alarmingly to be receding from prominence in public discourse."⁴² Since then, the tide would appear to have turned. Besides the items already discussed above, in the "Antiracism" subsection in particular, the *Journal* has carried an array of papers and panel discussions demonstrating historians' increasing commitment to an engagement with public issues, including racism and colonialism, by providing historical insights. For example, in his 2000 article "Imagining the Great White Mother and the Great King," Wade A. Henry offered the visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada in 1901, during which First Nations were invited to participate in a celebratory "Powwow," as a "glimpse into Canadian attitudes towards Natives during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." The inclusive gesture was intended to demonstrate British justice toward Indigenous people, representing Canada's identity as a benevolent nation, while the image of Queen Victoria as the Great White Mother was used to reinforce "the racial superiority of whites," and "to maintain the hegemony of white Canadians."⁴³ In a similar vein, Robin Jarvis Brownlie dissects two 1820s poems about Tecumseh, "whose life and death provided material for [Anglo-Canadian] nation-building." The poems allow "insight into the racialized discourses British Canadians fashioned in the postwar half-century," for in a period when Britain's key Indigenous allies from the War of 1812 were being dispossessed of their lands, Tecumseh's portrayal as violent and vengeful justified imperial

control over the First Nations, while his martyrdom in the British cause strengthened Canada's attachment to a "righteous empire" in distinction to the United States, "a threatening, unjust power."⁴⁴

There is, clearly, a symbiotic connection between racism and colonialism, and it is in this context that "race" has most often been discussed in recent contributions to the *Journal*. There is another article in this centennial collection with a detailed analysis of Canadian colonialism; nevertheless, the topic deserves some recognition here in a consideration of Canada's experience of racism and its treatment by Canadian historians. Even the official census, Michelle A. Hamilton points out, shapes "the way an imperial power imagines its colonial communities, primarily through its classification of ethnic or racial identities."⁴⁵ Of particular interest in this scholarship, representing "the new importance of the histories of colonialism and imperialism,"⁴⁶ is its thematic adoption of transnationalism and intersectionality. Issue 2 of the 2007 *Journal*, as an example, carries eleven articles discussing international colonialism, including its impact on Canadian First Nations.⁴⁷ A CHA panel discussion on Jean Barman's Macdonald Prize-winning *French Canadians, Furs, and Indigenous Women*, noted that the book "provides an important context of colonialism, global economies, and the complicated nature of cross-cultural encounters."⁴⁸ In her 2017 Presidential Address, Joan Sangster traces the reinterpretation of Canadian history through four twentieth-century, predominantly non-Indigenous, national organizations which "led to some small cracks in colonialist thinking." The Indian-Eskimo Association (later the Canadian Association in Support of Native Peoples), deliberately sought to "change hearts and minds" through "the creation of new historical writing," influenced "by postwar discourses about human rights and by an emerging emphasis on multiculturalism." The Company of Young Canadians, a government-sponsored group, had its origins in the Student Union for Peace Action in the 1960s, with its "racial analysis of class" and of the "colonization of the Indian from a radical left perspective."⁴⁹ The Student Union for Peace Action had community projects among First Nations in Saskatchewan and African Canadians in Nova Scotia, among others.

The pattern of "race"-relevant roundtable discussions continued with a 2018 session on Sarah Carter's *Imperial Plots*, another Macdonald Prize winner. The book describes the discrimination faced by Indigenous women and also by "'alien races' of immigrants on the Prairies." In her own comment, Carter explains that her book "examines

the complex intersection of ethnicity, race, gender and class," which "establishes the racialized and gendered architecture of the homestead system and Dominion Land exploitation that was the foundation of settler colonialism in Western Canada."⁵⁰ And Adele Perry's Presidential Address the following year delves into the nature and consequences of "the structural and material conditions of an ongoing colonial project that provides resources to settler communities [e.g., water], and impoverishes Indigenous ones." Perry adds, as a result of the TRC and surrounding discussions "What it means to be a historian of Canada has been changed."⁵¹ In the same issue, Allan Greer sums it all up with "Settler Colonialism and Beyond." First came imperial/commercial penetration, such as the fur trade, and then settler colonialism began with the Loyalists and reached "a continental scale" in the Confederation era. The dispossession of the First Nations, along with the reserve and residential school systems, in effect eliminated the Indigenous presence to make way for settlers and should "be seen not simply as things the government of Canada did, but as functions constitutive of what Canada was (and is)." As a result, "The time may be ripe, then, for a renewed history of the Confederation era, one that unites the history of state formation with that of settler colonialism." But "settlers are no longer the main threat." That role belongs to "extractivism," "the predominant form of intrusion into Native spaces in recent decades," through the exploitation of timber, hydro, minerals, and petroleum that leaves flooding, depletion of fish and game, and impure drinking water in its wake. Greer argues that if we understand that other forms of colonialism preceded, existed alongside, and succeeded settler colonialism, we may be able to overcome the "settler-colonial mindset" that takes "settler colonialism for granted, as normal and natural."⁵²

Reflections

Ideas of "race" and its role in Canadian history have evolved considerably over a hundred years, and they continue to evolve. Assessing the *Journal's* analyses, in light of the April 2022 issue of *Intersections* with which this paper began, in the *past* we find, as Jean-Philippe Warren observed of the profession as a whole, that *Journal* publications conveyed a conservative, colony-to-nation orientation that excluded the contributions of certain groups and their reforming campaigns from Canada's story. There was a glimmer of sophistication after World War II, no doubt influenced by a flood of antiracist literature chiefly

from American historians and anthropologists,⁵³ capped by the *UNESCO Statement on Race* of 1950,⁵⁴ but it took another decade for the biological term “race” to be replaced by “ethnic group,” originally applied exclusively to European immigrants and their descendants.⁵⁵ Multiculturalism, as a fact and a formal policy, is only hesitantly explored in the *Journal*.

There was a shift, albeit not particularly dramatic, in the 1960s. Carl Berger described the racial philosophy of J. G. Bourinot in his 1965 CHA article, while indicating that such a framework had passed out of usage for historians. Meanwhile, public policy implemented and reinforced the popular understanding of racial differences and their consequences for racialized minorities, including restrictive Indian and immigration policies, well into the 1960s. By the 1970s, social history and critical theories were dominating the classroom, and we see glimpses of that in the *Journal* as some members of a new generation of historians were submitting papers. The “deeper understanding” began to appear in the *Journal* in the 1990s, when some published papers were exploring Canadian and international developments in racial mythology. Acknowledgement of Canada’s colonialist heritage, and participation in the global phenomenon of imperialism, began in about 2000, contributing to a fundamental reconsideration of our historical understanding. Racism, colonialism, and genocide are *today* being interpreted not as a “dark chapter” in Canadian history but as a part of the basic plot.⁵⁶ As Karine Duhamel reminds us, “Reparative reconciliation ... means going beyond acknowledgement; it requires re-storying the very foundations of Canadian nation-building.”⁵⁷

In a notice sent to members on 19 September 2022, the CHA reported on a recent Roundtable on Rethinking the Undergraduate Canadian History Survey. Included was the comment that “one of the frames [of analysis] most often adopted — and appreciated by students — is imperialism. Introducing Canadian history using imperialism’s preconceptions allows us to present a common-sense history about structural power dynamics and restitution’s central place in the narrative.”⁵⁸ If the “deeper understanding” of recent historical scholarship is now being incorporated into the undergraduate curriculum, surely we must be entering Donald Wright’s *future* where issues such as colonialism, racism, and reconciliation will occupy historians as they will occupy the country. But what of Wright’s corollary, that we as historians are “well placed” to contribute to this urgent and difficult conversation?

In addition to the evidence found in papers published in the *Journal*, there are other indications of where historians, and the CHA as a professional association, are “placed” in the debates for overcoming systemic injustice. Consider, for example, the frequent treatment of these issues in *Canadian Historical Review* articles and book reviews, especially in the past decade, and the *Review’s* “Recent Publications Relating to Canada” feature which, until December 2018, displayed an impressive output of monographs, journal articles, and dissertations that demonstrate increasing scholarly work on subjects like “race” and colonialism, and on community-based human rights movements. Indicative too are actions of the recent leadership of the CHA, as signalled by titles selected for prizes, public statements in support of progressive causes and interpretations, and the (controversial) acceptance of the term “genocide” to describe the impact of settler colonialism.

In the middle of the last century, the Indian-Eskimo Association set out to change people’s “hearts and minds” through historical writing.⁵⁹ This remains a worthy objective for the Canadian Historical Association and its *Journal*.

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Endnotes

- 1 Jean-Philippe Warren, “The Printemps érable Ten Years Later: Political-Epistemological Lessons from the 2012 Quebec Student Strike”; Steven High, “Blockades and the Maple Leaf Flag”; and Donald Wright, “Chalk One Up for Us,” all in *Intersections* 5, no. 1 (2022): 3–6, 1–2, 55–6. Emphasis added.
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- 16 Jeffrey L. McNairn, "British Travellers, Nova Scotia's Black Communities, and the Problem of Freedom to 1860" *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada* 19, no. 1 (2008): 27–56.
- 17 David Sutherland, "Race Relations in Halifax, Nova Scotia, During the Mid-Victorian Quest for Reform" *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada* 7 (1996): 35–54.
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