

British History is Their History: *Britain and the British Empire in the History Curriculum of Ontario, Canada and Victoria, Australia 1930-1975*

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Abstract: This article investigates the evolving conceptions of national identity in Canada and Australia through an analysis of officially sanctioned history textbooks in Ontario, Canada and Victoria, Australia. From the 1930s until the 1950s, Britain and the British Empire served a pivotal role in history textbooks and curricula in both territories. Textbooks generally held that British and imperial history were crucial to the Canadian and Australian national identity. Following the Second World War, textbooks in both Ontario and Victoria began to recognize Britain's loss of power, and how this changed Australian and Canadian participation in the British Empire/Commonwealth. But rather than advocate for a complete withdrawal from engagement with Britain, authors emphasized the continuing importance of the example of the British Empire and Commonwealth to world affairs. In fact, participation in the Commonwealth was often described as of even more importance as the Dominions could take a more prominent place in imperial affairs. By the 1960s, however, textbook authors in Ontario and Victoria began to change their narratives, de-emphasizing the importance of the British Empire to the Canadian and Australian identity. Crucially, by the late 1960s the new narratives Ontarians and Victorians constructed claimed that the British Empire and national identity were no longer significantly linked. An investigation into these narratives of history will provide a unique window into officially acceptable views on imperialism before and during the era of decolonization.

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1. «British History is Their History»: Britain and the British Empire in the History Curriculum of Ontario, Canada and Victoria, Australia 1930-1970

Within the last two decades, historians of the British World have re-examined the ways in which the British Dominions (including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and

later South Africa and Ireland) developed a unique identity centered on «Britishness». Belich (2009) argued that the idea of a Greater Britain, composed mainly of Britain and the Dominions, «was big and powerful in its day, a virtual United States, which historians of the period can no longer ignore, nor dismiss as a failed idea» (p. 472). The mass migration of Britons to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa created a series of communities with shared traditions and cultures.

Importantly, British World historians assert that the rise of colonial nationalism was not a direct contradiction to a concomitant sense of Britannic nationalism (Bridge & Fedorowich, 2003). Rather than seeing nationalism in Canada and Australia as underdeveloped due to the imperial connection, Buckner (2008) argues that residents of the British Dominions developed a legitimate form of nationalism within an imperial framework. Canadians viewed themselves as «British with a difference» or as «Better Britons», able to take advantage of the promise of the New World without the rigid class distinction and poverty of the Old (p. 8). Hopkins (2008) made the case that «before the Second World War nationalism was, in essence, a movement for self-government and statehood, not a drive for full independence, still less a campaign for creating separate, ethnically based identities» (p. 218). Canadians and Australians embraced an identity centered both on their own particular location and on a wider community of Britons.

Britishness was, therefore, a central identifier in both English-Canada and in Australia. Within the Dominions, the creation of a sense of Britishness developed largely in the late nineteenth century, and relied on British control of the seas, high levels of immigration from Britain, and economic interdependence. A shared culture emerged among these neo-Britons based on mutual interest, similar forms of government, and a pride in the British Empire. Part of this identity hinged on a shared sense of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority. This racialized identity came under increasing scrutiny after the Second World War, yet stereotyped depictions of the non-white components of the British Empire continued to be prominently displayed in texts and manuals for decades. Scholars have generally portrayed Britishness after the Second World War as static and unchanging, yet this article contends that Britishness was a dynamic force in both Canada and Australia (Goldsworthy, 2002; Igartua, 2006), evolving with the changing needs of both metropole and the colonial periphery.

This article explores the construction of «Britishness» in the publicly funded schools of Ontario, Canada, and Victoria, Australia¹. School curricula and textbooks served as a crucial forum for producing the “right” kind of citizen, a task in which all concerned members of society had a vested interest. Education in both Canada and Australia was (and is) decided at the state or provincial level, so these two territories were chosen as representative samples for the wider English-speaking communities of the two countries. Both were the second largest territories in their countries and shared similar postwar histories. Ontario and Victoria were both dominated by a major urban center, Toronto in Ontario and Melbourne in Victoria, with a large and sparsely

¹ The purpose of this study is to examine a shared culture based on a sense of British culture that gradually fell apart in the wake of decolonization. Therefore the focus is on a primarily English-speaking province of Canada, and not on the French-speaking province of Quebec, which generally refused to embrace Britishness. This study also does not focus on the separate schools of Ontario meant for Franco-Ontarians, nor does it include privately funded Catholic schools in Victoria.

populated hinterland. Both Ontario and Victoria were major centers for postwar immigration, and both made education a major priority as evidenced by the rapid rise in postwar educational expenditure. For the time period under consideration here, Ontario was the largest English-speaking province in Canada, and the center of educational publication (Clark, 2007)². Many publishers focused on creating books that met Ontarian standards, and these materials were often then used in schools throughout Canada. Victoria was also a major market for textbook publishers in Australia, and considered one of the leading states in Australian education (Blake, 1973; Munro & Sheahan-Bright, 2006). From the 1930s-1970s, Britain and the British Empire loomed large in the educational enterprise for Canadians and Australians. The deep attachment to Britishness continually evolved with the needs of Canadian and Australian educational policy-makers and textbook authors, who created a powerful vision of the national identity for schoolchildren in these two settler colonies.

Some historians of Canada have recognized the centrality of education to propagating an identity centered on Britishness. Igartua's (2006) important work on English-Canadian identity *The Other Quiet Revolution* argues that textbooks in Ontario after the Second World War portrayed Canada as an ethnically British nation. But massive post-World War II immigration to English-speaking provinces, combined with the onset of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, changed the ethnic identification of English-speaking Canada quite suddenly in the 1960s. For Igartua, the loss of ethnic British identity was the product of internal Canadian factors leading to a loss of identification with Britain³.

George Richardson (2005), on the other hand, argues that educators throughout Canada used the British Empire as a focal point of national identity. He contends that «national identity was tied to, yet separate from, the power and majesty of Britain and the empire» (p. 192). However, this identity was historically contingent on the continued viability of the British Empire. The empire remained a focal point in historical narratives for a generation after the Second World War until it was painfully obvious that it no longer remained an acceptable locus of national identity. For Richardson, it was the external collapse of the British Empire in the era of decolonization that ultimately caused Canadian educators to disengage from imperial themes.

Though scholars have examined the importance of education to English-speaking Canadians (particularly in Ontario), there have been few studies that look at other Dominions or compare their experiences. The comparative framework adopted for this article allows for a useful exploration of the evolution of Britishness in Canada and Australia. The study included an evaluation of curricula produced in Ontario and Victoria from the mid-1930s through the 1960s and a survey of thirty textbooks from the two territories under discussion. The survey included history and civics textbooks officially sanctioned by the Ontario Department of Education as stated in their annual publication «Circular 14». In Victoria, the survey included textbooks for the same subjects approved by the Department of Education and listed in the *Education*

² For more on education in Ontario, see Clark and Knights (2013); Clausen (2013); Gidney (1999); Llewelyn (2006).

³ Jatinder Mann (2016) also explores educational materials in the Canadian context in his *The Search for a New National Identity*. Though his project compares Canada and Australia, he only examines education in Canada.

*Gazette and Teacher's Aid*⁴. These materials show that Britishness was central to in Ontarian and Victorian education well after the Second World War, with Anglocentrism continuing to be a powerful force in the educational materials of both territories.

In the interwar period Ontarians and Victorians touted their sense of national belonging within an imperial context. Many educators in the early- to mid-twentieth century saw participation in the imperial mission as vital to Australian and Canadian cultural and geopolitical survival. They therefore constructed an identity that gloried in the national independence granted by the Statute of Westminster in 1931 and simultaneously emphasized the world importance of the white Dominions resulting from their participation in empire⁵.

After the Second World War this narrative persisted but educators were faced with the demise of British world influence. In the 1950s there an increasing awareness of Britain's diminished postwar political and economic status. In light of the collapse of Britain's empire in the 1960s, both curricula and textbooks shifted away from the imperial connection in both focus and historical narration. Most texts still defended the imperial heritage of Britain and the white settlement colonies.

In both Ontario and Victoria, notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority persisted well after any faith in empire remained, as educators found new ways to privilege whites over non-whites in educational materials with a variety of implicit forms of racism based on supposed levels of civilization, development, or even climate. This is perhaps the strongest point of similarity between Ontarian and Victorian responses to the failure of a British-oriented identity. The many similarities in the Canadian and Australian experience indicate that the process of decolonization affected the national identities of the British World in a profound way, forcing critical reevaluations of their central historical narratives.

2. The British Empire in the Curriculum: 1930s and 1940s

Educators in mid-twentieth century Ontario and Victoria heavily incorporated the British Empire/Commonwealth into their historical narratives. Imperial themes were prominently featured in primary and secondary curricula and textbooks in courses such as history, geography, and civics. In addition to assigned curricula and textbooks, every year there were special celebrations in which children were expected to learn about Britain, the monarchy, and the empire/commonwealth.

Official education department curricula, approved at the state or provincial level in both territories, stressed the continuing importance and relevance of the British Empire to Canadian and Australian life in the 1930s and 1940s. The curriculum demonstrated a belief that the British Commonwealth was an integral part of the world in which students lived, so much so that it merited an entire year's worth of coursework in Ontario (Ontario Department of Education, 1938). During these

⁴ Texts were accessed from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education's Textbook Collection, the Alfred Deakin Prime Ministerial Library's Australian Schools Textbook Collection, the Library of Congress, and the United States National Library of Education's Historic Textbook Collection.

⁵ The Statute of Westminster formally granted full legal independence to the Dominions of the British Empire. The only remaining political link was the monarchy, which fulfilled a largely symbolic role.

decades grade eight was frequently the last year of formal education for most children, making the dedication of a course that year toward the history of the British Empire a very significant choice. It indicated that provincial officials thought this knowledge was a basic requirement of citizenship in Ontario.

The Ontarian *Programme of Studies for Grades VII and VIII of the Public and Separate Schools* (1938) provided intriguing instructions on how to teach a course on the British Empire. Teachers were told to cover Britain for four months, the Dominions for three months, «smaller possessions» for two months, and the Commonwealth as a whole for the final month of the academic year. The time allotted to each subject in this course revealed their perceived importance to the educators who constructed the curricula. Britain, regarded as the «mother country», received the lion's share of time. The title «smaller possessions» for the non-white components of the British Empire is telling. Because these smaller possessions were not white, they did not merit as much attention as colonies of white settlement. They were therefore given only half as much time as was allotted to Britain. Canadian history was subsumed within the wider framework of empire.

The final section for the 1938 Ontarian history course dealt with the Commonwealth as a whole, and was intended to be a summation of the year's coursework. Ideally, the section emphasized the essential bonds of unity within the Commonwealth as well as its world importance. The curricula listed the elements that students should learn in this manner:

Loyalty to one King. Ties of blood and speech and sentiment. One law for all- English common law. (Special provisions in Quebec) One court of appeal- the Privy Council. Common love of freedom, justice, democracy. Importance in world affairs: A group that embraces one-quarter of the world's people. An honoured voice in international councils. A bulwark of freedom and democracy. A powerful agent for peace (p. 24).

Every educator and textbook maker needed to infuse their classes and writings with these attributes of the British Empire in mind. Britain and the empire embodied the virtues that all children should aspire to, and participation in the imperial project imbued Canada with a global significance. As a result of these curricular prescriptions, criticism of the empire or of British actions in world affairs was quite rare in the educational materials of the 1930s.

The Victorian curriculum in the 1930s emphasized purely British history more than the history of the British Empire. Whereas Ontario devoted only one year specifically for studying Britain and the Empire, Victorian educators recommended two years in elementary school. The Grade V course looked at the history of the British Isles until the Middle Ages, and the Grade VII course studied the development of Britain during the Industrial Revolution. The Grade VII course also examined the development of the second British Empire⁶, though the empire was given significantly less attention than British history (Victorian Ministry of Public Instruction, 1933).

⁶ Second British Empire is a term used to denote the era of British imperialism following the American Revolution.

Studying British history was a major component of studying Australian history, reflecting the close identification of most Victorian educators with Britain and Britishness in this period. Victorian educators were not as interested in identifying with the Empire or Commonwealth as they were with the «mother country». One author argued, «British history is their history, with its failings to be guarded against and its glories to be emulated» (Scott, 1947, p. 409). Since Australians were British, studying the history of the British Isles was a crucial component in understanding Australia's own past.

In the 1930s and 1940s the most common textbook metaphor for explaining the empire was that of the family. Authors in both Ontario and Victoria in the 1930s and 1940s referred to the British Commonwealth as a living family of nations. Britain was generally described as the parent, and the other colonies of white settlement were considered elder siblings. This metaphor proved to be extremely useful in describing both the mostly independent settlement colonies and the dependent empire. For the autonomous nations of the Commonwealth, Victorian Portus (1934) argued that:

Empires are something like families. In some families the children are sternly governed by the parents. Such parents say proudly, «Our word is law». In other families, the children have grown up, and have begun to earn their own living, and have been given latch-keys. They are really independent. Yet they continue to pay respect and obedience to their parents, not because the parents are able to enforce it, but because both parents and children wish to keep the family together and preserve the idea of family life. The British Empire is somewhat like a family of this kind (pp. 209-210).

For Portus, Australia and the other white settlement colonies remained attached to the British Empire out of love and familial attachment rather than through formal political arrangements.

A family metaphor could also be flexibly deployed to explain the lack of representation for the non-white components of the British Empire. Brown (1942) explained that:

The British Commonwealth is an «association» – one might almost call it a family – of self-governing states owing allegiance to a single king. Great Britain, or the United Kingdom, is of course the oldest member. The younger members have grown like Canada from colonies of the British Empire into nations each of which controls its own affairs and each of which also is a member in its own right of the United Nations Organization... No other empire, ancient or modern, has ever developed in this way, and the process is by no means finished for there are under the British flag, in all parts of the world, colonies and dependencies in all stages of political advancement with over fifty elected assemblies and parliaments (pp. 547-548).

For Brown, Canada and the other Dominions had simply reached a higher stage of maturity than other territories within the British Empire. Ties of close attachment,

sentiment, and shared culture united the empire more than formal political arrangements, a crucial point made by many authors.

For educators in Victoria and Ontario, membership in the Commonwealth implied a special position of importance. Goldring (1937) emphasized the significance of membership within the empire, saying:

In a world in which there are constant disagreements among nations, we should be grateful for the knowledge that the British Empire is the greatest power in the world to-day for peace, justice, and individual freedom...thus, every new-born babe in our Empire has a great heritage, namely, his citizenship in this great Empire which stands for those principles of living and conduct which are cherished dearly by people in all parts of the world. Our duty as citizens in this Empire is to be worthy of our heritage (p. 226).

For Goldring, inclusion within the British Empire provided a sense of world importance and a grand heritage that was otherwise lacking in Canadian history. This proved to be a powerful and shaping part of many historical narratives in history texts and curricula until the 1960s.

Since it was so central to Ontarian and Victorian descriptions of their own national identity, textbooks went to great lengths to defend the history of British imperialism. Daniher's (1939) *Britain and the Empire (From 1603)* is a good example of textbook portrayals of imperialism in Ontario during the 1930s and 1940s. Daniher, a teacher at the Ontario College of Schools, was in some ways critical of the empire. For instance, he criticized Lord Palmerston and British conduct in the Opium Wars of China by saying «this page of history is one that we can look upon with little else than shame. Britain's policy was dictated by greedy merchants whose tactics should have been repudiated, not upheld» (p. 211).

But Daniher argued that, on the whole, the British played a positive and vital role in world history. In the epilogue Daniher (1939) wrote that «the deepest impression that these British peoples have made and are continuing to make some very worthwhile contributions to human progress....one of the component parts of the British spirit appears to be a peculiar aptitude for public management, which may be called a "political sense» (p. 326). This «peculiar aptitude» meant that «the fostering of the true democratic ideals of freedom, integrity, good-will and good-sportsmanship has been the service which the British people seem best fitted to render to humanity» (p. 329). Since he believed that the British were naturally fit to rule, Daniher portrayed any negative outcomes of imperialism as isolated exceptions rather than the rule.

Support for the British imperial record was even more pronounced in Victoria. Clayton, Senior Lecturer at Scotch College in Melbourne, wrote several history textbooks from 1941-1946, and he was unashamedly supportive of the British Empire. His propensity to lionize the British was nowhere more evident than when he discussed their imperial involvement with India. The conquest of India was only necessary because «Indian political ineptitude was such that no efficient government was evolved; the Company was compelled to step in and produce order out of chaos» (Clayton, 1946, p. 38). The Indian Mutiny of 1857 occurred because the progressive benefits of British rule «unsettled the conservative Oriental mind. The

ignorant looked upon scientific inventions as things akin to black magic» (p. 75). Clayton was aware of some critics of empire, but nevertheless concluded his work by saying that «in spite of mistakes and failures, no one can deny that the world is a freer and a better place as a result of British thought and activity and the existence of the British Commonwealth and Empire» (p. 228). To Clayton, the British Empire was a force for good in the world, and even the failures were but minor bumps on the glorious road to progress and independence.

Underlying the work of both Clayton and Daniher was an assumption that Britons were inherently superior to other peoples. According to many texts, the British possessed a special talent for governance. By this logic it was only natural that Britain acquire and extend its empire. Doing so would greatly benefit lesser peoples who were unfit to govern themselves. Clayton and Daniher, like most history textbook authors of the day, did not indicate their specific views of a racial or cultural hierarchy. They relied instead on unstated and unsubstantiated racial assumptions that were nevertheless powerful in shaping their works of history.

Many authors, particularly for the subject of geography, were more explicit in their racialized worldview. The *Ontario Public School Geography* reader declared in 1947 that Europe was the most important continent because «it is the home of the white peoples of the world. The white races have proved themselves superior to all others in many ways. They are more eager to acquire knowledge and to put it to practical use. They are more energetic. They have greater capacity for organization, which is one of the chief characteristics of civilized man» (p. 161). Stereotyped views of Africans and Asians were incredibly common in texts in both Ontario and Victoria during the mid-twentieth century.

The underlying racial hierarchy to which most history and geography authors ascribed during the 1930s and 1940s led to several common tropes when talking about the non-white portions of the British Empire. Indians invariably garnered praise for their «ancient» civilization along Orientalist lines⁷, but most authors would have agreed with one textbook which argued «a study of India's history reminds us that it is only during the last hundred years, when India has been under British influence, that the country has progressed towards peace and prosperity. Little by little peace and harmony have come to dwell» (Stamp & Price, 1939, p. 372). British rule was often justified as a successful attempt to unify and pacify an almost anarchic subcontinent.

Africans received even harsher commentary. Even though «many groups of negro peoples are now making rapid progress», one author still confidently claimed that «the Negroes were for the most part backward and lazy, as well as being frequently quarrelsome, and so nearly the whole of Africa has come under the rule of European nations» (Stamp & Price, 1939, p. 673). These authors argued that Europeans were the only significant actors in Africa because most native Africans were seen as too primitive to possess a meaningful level of civilization.

The racial assumptions at the heart most educational materials of the time deeply affected descriptions of the British Empire. Carter and Brentnall (1945) argued that:

⁷ For more on Orientalism, see Said (1978). For a good historiographical overview of the literature on Orientalism see: Prakash (1995).

Of the native peoples, the Maoris of New Zealand are the most intelligent, the negroes of South Africa the most numerous, outnumbering the whites by three to one. These differences bring variations in government. South Africa with so many natives requires a powerful central Government, and the four separate provinces have only limited authority (pp. 222-223).

According to this formulation the amount of self-government bestowed upon any British possession should have been directly proportional to the number of whites in the territory. Indeed, he expressly stated this when talking about the Crown Colonies, saying that «wherever there is a large number of white people in the population, there is a parliament of one sort or another, made up partly of officials appointed by the Colonial office and partly of members who represent the people» (Carter & Brentnall, 1945, 226-227).

In addition to this material in regular coursework, Britain and the British Empire were touted at special school functions and gatherings. Every year there were celebrations in both Ontario and Victoria designed to instill a sense of loyalty in students. The most important of these events was Empire Day (which originated in Canada), typically celebrated in late May on the anniversary of Queen Victoria's birthday (May 24th). The *General Regulations Public and Separate Schools* (1935) of Ontario declared that Empire Day «shall be duly celebrated in every school; the forenoon being devoted to a study of the greatness of the British Empire, and the afternoon to public addresses, recitations, music, etc., of a patriotic character» (13). To celebrate Empire Day, the Ministry of Education in Ontario created an annual Empire Day pamphlet to be distributed to schools in the province⁸. The pamphlet also gave information on a Royal visit to be scheduled later in the year, as well as the King's coronation message. The 1942 message argued that Britain had pioneered one of the greatest achievements in human history: the extension of democracy. The pamphlet produced a historical argument about how important and enlightening the British peoples had been throughout their history, saying:

Wherever the Briton went, he carried with him a determination to establish law and order...He soon acquired the habit of sharing in the management of the affairs of his own community...He admitted his neighbour to the same privileges which he claimed for himself (Department of Education, 1942, p. 16).

With this celebration the Ontarian Ministry of Education strongly indicated that knowledge of, and loyalty to, the empire was a significant part of being a Canadian citizen.

Victorian educators in the 1930s similarly oversaw the celebration of Empire Day. According to the *Education Gazette*, the official news outlet from the Victorian Department of Education to teachers, the holiday was «not to be regarded as in any sense a school holiday», but should include «a public ceremonial, the parents

⁸ Both José Igartua and Jatinder Mann emphasize the importance of Empire Day, a Canadian invention in the late 19th Century, to the project of identity construction in the oldest Dominion. Neither of their works, however, compare the evolution of Empire Day with other case studies within the British World.

being present, and a suitable programme of address and patriotic songs being arranged» (Minister of Public Instruction, 1933, p. 86). *The School Paper* (Education Department, Victoria, 1932-1968), another publication of the Victorian Department of Education, regularly devoted as much space to Empire Day as it did to nationalist holidays such as Anzac Day⁹.

During the Second World War, proclamations of loyalty became even greater in both Ontario and Victoria. The Ontarian Minister of Education Duncan McArthur said that, «the Empire is the product of supremely great courage. No tale of adventure is more thrilling, none exhibits more completely the virtues of the stout heart and the iron will than that which recounts the exploits of the Elizabethan seaman who crossed the seas and discovered the lands which now form part of the Empire» (Ontario Department of Education, 1943, p. 6). And indeed, the imperial heritage given to the Dominions became one of the motivations to engage in the struggle of the Second World War:

Our ancestors in Britain, our cousins in the Dominions, have made great sacrifices to the end that democracy might be established and maintained. It is part of the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Should the Anglo-Saxon people be overwhelmed, democracy will vanish from the earth, and the progress of our civilization will lag, it may be, for centuries (Ontario Department of Education, 1942, p. 7).

Defending Britain and the empire was important because of the racial responsibility of all Anglo-Saxons to promote their way of life. This showed the conflation of racial and cultural attributes common to educational literature in both Ontario and Victoria.

Overall, it is clear that in the 1930s and 1940s the British Empire was woven throughout the educational enterprise in Ontario and Victoria. Imperial themes suffused the curriculum and provided a meaningful basis for a national sense of importance. These themes were particularly stressed during the Second World War, when imperial sentiment reached a fever pitch.

3. The Waning Importance of Empire: 1950-1970

Following WWII Britain found itself in a dramatically weakened position of world importance. Britain emerged from the war with a staggering amount of debt and a crippled infrastructure. Perhaps more significantly, the United States and the Soviet Union had clearly surpassed Britain in terms of world importance. Starting in 1947 with the partition of India, Britain gradually initiated a decades long process of decolonization, divesting itself of the vast majority of its' imperial possessions¹⁰. Post World War II curricula in Ontario and Victoria were increasingly more ambivalent

⁹ Celebrated on April 25 each year to commemorate members of the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) who fought in the disastrous Gallipoli campaign.

¹⁰ For more on decolonization within the British Empire, see: Darwin (1991); Douglas (2002); Hyam (2006); or White (1999).

towards the British Empire. They acknowledged British decline yet continued to contend that the Commonwealth was a major focal point for Canadian and Australian identity. Beginning in the late 1950s, however, there was a gradual recognition that the British Empire should no longer be a centerpiece of education in either territory. Changes to the curriculum in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in a reduction in content dedicated to the Empire, a reevaluation of national history in light of the reduced importance of empire, and a changed perspective on the non-white portions of the British Empire.

In Victoria, material on the Commonwealth was reduced in the 1950s into a course meant for Grade VI students. The attenuated curricula flatly stated: «our ties with the lands of our fathers are not quite as strong as they were in days gone by, for we are now grown up» but that nevertheless, «we have enjoyed and appreciated contacts with people of our own kith and kin and have seen that they have their problems as we have; that they have features of their way of life that mean much to them as ours do to us; they look to us for help and cooperation just as we need theirs» (Education Department of Victoria, 1954, p. 17). British people were still «kith and kin» to all Australians, and Britain was still the parent country. The only difference was that now Australia had grown up and no longer relied on Britain as a child does on its parent (Dunlop & Pike, 1960; Evans, 1957).

In part the reduction in imperial content reflected contemporary concerns that Britain was no longer able to protect and defend Australia. Although Australians still closely identified with British culture, they could no longer count on British support for their security, and so had to develop an independent foreign policy in an uncertain world. Harper's *Our Pacific Neighbours* glumly noted in 1960 that "The two World Wars have resulted in a serious decline in British power... Shortage of manpower has forced her to limit her military commitments outside Europe and the Mediterranean" (p.383). It also reflected the continuing association of the Australian identity with the wider project of the Commonwealth of Nations. Harper concluded the textbook by emphasizing that «the Commonwealth alone cannot ensure peace in the Pacific... Collaboration with the United States appears to be an essential condition for the survival of both Australia and New Zealand» (p. 406).

Ontarian curricula in the 1950s similarly began to treat Britain not as a vitally important political and economic partner, but simply as an important cultural center for Canadian history. The 1951 curricula for a Grade 9 course entitled *Canada and the Commonwealth* maintained that «Canadian democracy is a heritage from Britain» (Ontario Department of Education, 1951, p. 103). An entire unit of study was devoted to «How the British People Laid Foundations for Our Democratic Way of Life», which contained the following specific objectives: «1. To understand the influence of British social customs upon our way of life. 2. To appreciate the contribution of British standards of conduct. 3. To appreciate British achievements in the development of our religious freedom» (p. 100). British history was important because of what it could teach about the origins of Canadian history, not because it remained vital to Canada's present.

School celebrations of the British Empire rapidly began to change in light of the decline in British influence in the schools, though this process took longer in Victoria than Ontario. In Ontario, Empire Day became a focal point for teaching about other

concepts that were deemed of greater importance. The Minister of Education in a 1952 pamphlet said that Empire Day was «a day which ought to be devoted to the consideration of ideals- ideals of citizenship, of devotion to duty, and of service to others» (Ontario Department of Education, 1952, p. 2). In other words, Empire Day had more to do with character training and citizenship ethics (two major contemporary pedagogical preoccupations) than it had anything to do with concentrating on the empire itself. And, indeed, by 1956 the Minister of Education reminded instructors that Empire Day was also known as Citizenship Day, and that the primary task of the celebration was to inculcate the proper values of the good Canadian (Ontario Department of Education, 1956, p. 2).

In Victoria, Empire Day continued to be an important school event well into the 1960s. *The School Paper* published annual Empire Day programs, which often included poems or plays for children to act out on the holiday. The personal affection due the monarch was a popular theme. In 1958, in preparation for a visit by the Queen, *The School Paper* published a poem entitled «The English Rose» by Irene Gough. The poem described the pioneers who went out from England and settled in Australia, and finished: «They who went out from England were never again to see/ The lands and the fields of home with the brilliant greenery;/ But the roses sang for England as they touched Australian sky-/ The song they will sing for England as a Queen rides by» (Education Department of Victoria, 1958, p. 21). The author identified the person of the monarch with the origins of the Australian nation, thereby establishing and affirming Australia's imperial past and present.

The 1956 celebration of Empire Day in Ontario was the last such celebration, as the holiday was re-named Commonwealth Day in 1957. The theme of the pamphlet and the suggested celebrations continued to be on citizenship, albeit in a Commonwealth-wide or global sense. The official pamphlet argued that, «more and more we are coming to realize that being a good citizen should not be confined to loyalty to Canada. We have also a loyalty to the Commonwealth, and we have a loyalty to the world- a world citizenship» (Ontario Department of Education, 1957, p. 8). Throughout the 1950s, Ontarian instructors used Empire/Commonwealth Day to teach about civic virtues rather than about the empire itself. Beginning in 1961, the Commonwealth Day pamphlets began to highlight different nations belonging to the Commonwealth. The first such booklet gave a brief description of all the Commonwealth countries in Asia, focusing mostly on the economic and political problems the countries continued to have. The pamphlet described the ways Canadians assisted these nations, thereby continuing to promote a sense of Canadian superiority over Asian nations, only now along the lines of development theory rather than explicit racism. Subsequent booklets described Australia, New Zealand, and the African nations of the Commonwealth. But by 1965 the holiday changed names and direction yet again. The date was now «Commonwealth and Citizenship Day» and focused almost exclusively on Canadian themes. By 1972, Empire/Commonwealth/Citizenship Day was not celebrated in the schools of Ontario.

In Victoria, Commonwealth Day survived into the 1970s in relatively the same form as before. Numerous articles in *The School Paper* continued to emphasize the importance of the monarchy. Some Commonwealth Day celebrations included descriptions of other nations in the Commonwealth, particularly other white settler

nations like Canada or South Africa. *The School Paper* told students in 1966 that «you would have realized that Australia's dependence on Britain has lessened, although as a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations we still feel strong ties with the "mother" country» (Education Department of Victoria, 1966, p. 35). But even though the form of the celebrations remained similar, the content about Britain dwindled. No longer did Commonwealth Day celebrate the strengthening ties with the British World. It meant a deep attachment to the person of the monarch, but not to other nations in the Commonwealth, and even the attachment to Britain itself began to wane.

Not only did educators perceive that Britain had declined in power, but postwar immigration in both Canada and Australia made the assimilationist Anglo-centrism of the interwar period increasingly undesirable in a rapidly changing demographic landscape. Between 1947 and 1952 Australia received over 170,000 displaced persons from the European continent, and allowed even more immigrants to enter the country in the 1950s (Hawkins, 1991). By 1961, over eight percent of Australians were born in Europe, and the Australian population climbed to 10.8 million. Immigration of this magnitude seriously altered the demographic composition of Australia, and therefore had a profound impact on education. Canadian policy in the postwar years also encouraged immigration from the European continent. During the 1950s Canada received in excess of 100,000 immigrants per year, with a high of 282,164 in 1957 (Knowles, 2007). In the 1960s the immigration laws in both Canada and Australia broadened to include previously excluded groups of non-Europeans as well (Mann, 2016).

The large levels of immigrants entering Canada and Australia deeply affected the educational establishments of both countries. Teachers and administrators had to deal with large numbers of new students, many of whom did not speak English as a primary language. In some cases, particularly in ethnically distinct urban districts in Toronto and Melbourne, there were more immigrant children than native born. Specialized classes for immigrants were put in place to teach English and give students a quick immersion into Canadian and Australian culture. While assimilation was the dominant norm in education in both Ontario and Victoria into the 1950s, this began to change in the 1960s and 1970s as more and more educators began to clamor for greater inclusiveness in educational environments (Fresham, 1970; Hall & Dennis, 1968).

With external factors including the global rise of nationalist movements and the weakening of the British Empire, as well as the changing demographics of Canadian and Australian society, educators increasingly began to question the often explicitly racist basis for some of their historical materials, a major underpinning of the identity centered on Britishness. Textbook authors in Ontario, for instance, attempted to re-think their views on the British Empire without relying quite so much on race. In their work *Canada and the World*, Brown, Careless, Craig, and Ray (1954) gave a detailed description of how and why Asians and Africans were not in a good position to govern themselves without using an expressly racist argument. The authors accepted that race was an inaccurate historical tool. «Scientifically there are no reasons whatsoever to support any claims of racial discrimination. No race has a special share of intelligence and ability. Some peoples have simply had more favourable opportunities than others- but the natural abilities of men, black, brown, yellow, or white, do not vary from race to race» (Brown, *et al*, 1954, p. 73).

But if race was not a determining factor in historical success, what was? The authors of *Canada and the World* relied on the idea that climate determined progress. They argued that “the greatest advances in industrial development and technical skill have taken place within the temperate zones. A cool invigorating climate may have stirred up man’s genius for invention, and have led him to make bold efforts to improve his lot” (p. 53). But, by comparison, «the hot humid climate of the tropics seem to limit man’s ability to master his environment» (Brown *et al*, 1954, p. 53). Because of climate differences:

some groups of people have been forced to accept the environment much as it is, as in the central African jungles. Other people, by tremendous effort, have made great advances for a time, but once the effort was relaxed, they fell back again. Still others have won the best out of their environment and are continuing to alter the effects of the controls wherever possible, as in Europe and temperate North America. (Brown *et al*, 1954, p. 51).

This explanation allowed the authors of *Canada and the World* to rationalize the major differences in technological achievement without using explicitly racial terminology. People possessed some agency in overcoming climatic obstacles, but the nature of the climate was still paramount in determining historical progress.

Although ostensibly advocating racial equality, many texts continued to display overt racial bias when discussing the British Empire. The authors of *Canada and the Commonwealth* argued that the only chance Africans had of attaining civilization was for the British to benevolently guide them to their level. «Here, under British guidance, the wasted millions of manpower, the undeveloped resources, and the ignorant untrained human minds may be shaped into a whole new world of prosperous, civilized, self-respecting peoples» (Brown, 1953, p. 405). Africans may not have been inferior racially in any explicit sense, but they were considered ignorant and their lands undeveloped and wasted if not for white assistance on the world stage.

In Victoria, explicit forms of racism were still common in historical textbooks well into the 1960s. The text *Southern World* in 1967, for instance, noted matter-of-factly that:

It is obvious that the African peoples are at varying stages of development. Those with Arab or Hamitic blood in their veins, and the pure negroes of the Guinea Coast are adaptable and intelligent. The Bantu have not all had the same background, nor have they had the same educational opportunities, but it has been clearly shown that the African natives are quick to learn. (Browne, Coghill & Harris, pp. 427-429).

Ancestry rather than cultural opportunity continued to be a prominent feature in Victorian descriptions of Africans in particular, but most non-white groups in general.

With race-based explanations of history falling out of fashion, textbook authors in Victoria and Ontario needed to explain the rise of anti-colonial nationalism and the process of decolonization, global movements that significantly affected the Commonwealth of Nations, in a way that seemed reasonable. Ultimately, they explained decolonization as the logical outcome of the extension of autonomy that

began with responsible government given first to the colonies of white settlement (the Dominions). They argued that the British always said they would grant self-government, and that the nations of Asia and Africa were only now ready to govern themselves. This was a simple and effective way of integrating the decline of the British Empire into pre-existing meta-narratives of history acceptable to both Ontarians and Victorians.

A good example of this Whiggish explanation of decolonization is the Ontarian text *Modern Perspectives* (Trueman, Schaffter, Steward & Hunter, 1969). The textbook argued that decolonization was an inevitable historical outcome, and that Britain should be applauded for being the most farsighted nation in the process. Europeans, by ruling over other lands, brought with them «the disruptive force of nationalism, which had exerted decisive influence on European and American history» and which «would eventually reach and transform the destinies of other continents» (Trueman *et al*, 1969, p. 658). Effectively, European rule sowed the seeds of anti-colonial nationalism. When compared to other decolonizing powers, the British should be applauded for recognizing this early in the process. The authors contended that:

From the beginning, British colonial policy in Africa (as in India and elsewhere), followed a course very different from that of other European Powers. When the post-war wave of nationalism struck her African colonies, Britain was already in a position to effect a generally peaceful transfer of authority to the native peoples under her rule (pp. 697-698).

Although *Modern Perspectives* did not condone imperialism, neither did the book condemn it. And, indeed, the British were farsighted in decolonizing in a «generally» peaceful manner, overlooking the immense amounts of violence experienced in many places due to the British withdrawal from empire¹¹.

Educators in the 1960s increasingly needed to explain critical questions about the rise of anti-colonial nationalism. If the British Empire was so beneficent, why were so many of the colonized deeply opposed to it? In their work *The Making of the Modern World* (1960), Victorian authors Lazarus and Coppel argued that imperialism disadvantaged Asians and Africans economically. They said that «in these undemocratic countries the workers had little chance of improving their lot. They were often too hungry and too ignorant to do so» (p. 233). They continued:

It was usual to assume that Europeans were superior to «natives», whether civilized Indians and Chinese, or primitive Africans...This attitude often led to Europeans working unselfishly to help native peoples. Yet these people were embittered by the spirit of condescension of so many Europeans, by their way of looking down on them from very superior heights. Great benefits were brought to

¹¹ The idea that decolonization was an inevitability is explored in the context of the French Empire in Todd Shepard's *The Invention of Decolonization* (2006). Shepard argues that French intellectuals defined decolonization as a stage in a linear historical progression, thus allowing them to ignore the more difficult questions of dealing with the legacy of imperialism.

the peoples of China, India, Africa and elsewhere by the knowledge and skill of western engineers, scientists, missionaries, doctors and administrators. Without these things, little progress could have been made; there would have been no hope of ever raising the living conditions of the people (pp. 233-234).

Although much more critical of British imperialism than earlier explanations of anti-colonial nationalism, this description of the forces behind decolonization was inherently ambiguous. The authors conceded that the very nature of imperialism seemed «condescending», but the imperial record continued to be upheld. The British were doing amazing work for primitive peoples, but it was understandable that a people would reject foreign rule altogether. This explanation freed the British from any wrongdoing in the imperial mission while also superficially sympathizing with Asian and African calls for self-government.

Pedagogical constructions of decolonization produced in both Ontario and Victoria continued the trend of marginalizing non-white agency in their historical narratives. Indeed, many authors asserted with little evidence that the British plan for the decolonization of Asia in the late 1940s and later Africa was planned in advance by Whitehall, rather than arising from the intense agitation of native peoples themselves (Jackson, 2013). The text *Modern Perspectives* argued in 1969 that British power acted «discreetly and unobtrusively» in Africa, so that «when the post-war wave of nationalism struck her African colonies, Britain was already in a position to effect a generally peaceful transfer of authority» (Trueman *et al*, 1969, pp. 697-8).

Despite official rejections of racism, many Ontarian and Victorian textbooks in the 1960s continued emphasizing old assumptions of non-white incompetence as they described the contemporary events of decolonization. One Ontarian author asserted that «in brief, the peoples of Asia and Africa have found that it is perhaps easier to break the chains of colonialism than to govern themselves.... It can only be hoped that with patience, restraint, and tactful assistance from more advanced nations the new states will ultimately find appropriate and enduring solutions to their unique problems» (Trueman *et al*, 1969, p. 703). Text after text mentioned the woeful state of Asian and African economies, generally concluding that it was only with Canadian or British assistance that they could emerge out of dire poverty and ignorance (Gordon, 1971; Mahoney, 1978). Assistance in initiatives such as the Colombo Plan was used as evidence of continuing white superiority over the non-white portions of the Commonwealth.

Victorian authors stressed the importance of aiding Asian and African peoples of the former British Empire, but for very different reasons. Victorians were concerned about security in the Asian region, arguing that Australians needed to be more active in aiding Asian nations to make friends (Harper, 1960). A series of articles in the Victorian publication *The School Paper* in 1959 concluded its' discussion of India by saying «four hundred million friends would make the outlook brighter for Australia if events took a turn that threatened our security» (p. 154).

This emphasis on aiding the newly independent countries accorded well with the new narrative of British history: that the entire history of the empire was about Britain magnanimously raising the level of civilization and then granting independence to all of its possessions. Textbook authors continued to portray their countries as

sharing in the imperial mission long after independence was achieved. Despite some differences in emphasis, Ontarians and Victorians generally recycled imperial language, metaphors, and imagery as they discussed the hyphenated world.

4. Conclusion

The overall trajectory of curricula, textbooks, and annual celebrations in Ontario and Victoria were remarkably similar from the 1930s to 1970. In the 1930s and 1940s imperial loyalty reached new heights. Textbooks and celebrations were effusive in their praise of Britain and the British Empire. The 1950s brought with them increasing tension about Britain's rapid post-war decline. Textbooks took on a defensive tone that generally upheld the continuing importance of the Commonwealth. But even as educators grappled with Britain's declining position, Britishness still pervaded textbooks, curriculum, and school celebrations well into the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The 1960s produced an entirely new emphasis on national distinctiveness in Ontario, with most content about Britain and the Empire removed from the curriculum. In Australia the inability of Britain to adequately provide for security led to a re-appraisal of the political attachments to Britain. In both cases the typical historical narrative continued to emphasize national superiority if not outright racial superiority. These changes included the weakening of Britain in the post-World War II era, and a major rise in non-Anglo immigration. In Ontario, the intense French-Canadian nationalism of the Quiet Revolution also contributed to this transition away from empire.

Celebrations of Empire/Commonwealth Day gradually became less important, and courses on British history were cut. By the early 1970s, national or regional histories were more important than British or imperial history in Ontarian and Victorian classrooms. These features of historical narratives closely corresponded to external events and contemporary notions of the continuing importance of the British Empire. In a mere thirty years, then, Ontarians and Victorians lost a major focal point for their historical narratives of national identity. Britishness, once at the heart of definitions of citizenship and historical narratives, was quietly abandoned by an educational establishment that struggled to find a coherent identity to replace it.

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