

Myths and Multiculturalism*

Jean Burnet
york university

Le multiculturalisme n'est pas un mythe, mais plutôt une politique émanant du gouvernement fédéral et de quatre gouvernements provinciaux du Canada. Avant la promulgation de cette politique, il existait déjà des mythes à l'égard de l'importance de l'apport britannique et français à l'exploration et au peuplement du pays, ainsi qu'à l'égard de la bienveillance des Britanniques envers les autres groupes ethniques. Aujourd'hui, d'autres mythes apparaissent: celui que bien d'autres groupes ethniques sont arrivés et se sont établis au Canada il y a longtemps; celui que les autres groupes ethniques représentent un tiers de la population; et aussi celui que les autres groupes ethniques ont longtemps souffert de l'oppression des Britanniques. Des recherches s'imposent pour distinguer les faits des mythes et aussi pour atteindre une connaissance plus approfondie de ces derniers.

An outstanding Canadian sociologist, S. D. Clark (1976), three years ago used as a working title of a paper "The Myth of Multiculturalism." Multiculturalism, as a policy of the federal government and of four provincial governments, is by no means a myth. However, it governs an area of social life in which myths abound. In this article I should like to discuss first the policy and then a few of those myths.

The policy was a long time in coming. The Canadian population has always been ethnically heterogeneous. Even before contacts with Europeans the 250,000 to 300,000 inhabitants of what is now Canada constituted about 50 societies, belonging to a dozen linguistic groups. Some of the societies were nomadic bands of hunters and gatherers; others were highly structured chiefdoms of fishers and cultivators of the soil. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the French entered; in a short time those in the Atlantic region became differentiated from the rest, as Acadians; later, in the nineteenth century, another distinct ethnic group, the Métis, was to emerge as a result of interbreeding between French and Indians. In the eighteenth century the influx of British began, not as one but as several peoples — English, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh — and soon after some Germans and Dutch came. In the latter part of the nineteenth century the area of recruitment of the Canadian population was extended to all of Europe and parts of Asia, and now, particularly since 1967, it includes all of Asia, and Africa and South America as well.

*This paper was presented as an invitational address at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education Annual Meeting, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, June 7, 1979.

However, official recognition of the diversity of the population as continuing and desirable has been relatively recent. Until the 1960s governmental policy concerning immigration was based upon the principle that those who were admitted into Canadian society should be assimilable into the dominant British and French ethnic groups. Even policy regarding native peoples was dominated by that principle: it was aimed at isolation and gradual assimilation.

The immigration policy bore hardest upon those peoples who were considered unassimilable. They included peoples physically different from the dominant groups, and it is unnecessary to repeat the history, now widely considered to have been shameful, of overt and covert exclusionary measures directed against Chinese, Japanese, South Asians, and blacks. As late as the 1950s one federal minister of immigration after another had to defend regulations on allegedly scientific grounds that most natural and social scientists regarded as nonsensical; for example, the restrictions on black immigration were said to have been imposed because it had been "scientifically proven" that blacks could not endure cold climates. The Jews were also considered unassimilable, and in a recent article Irving Abella and Harold Troper (1978) have related how Canada drew the line even at admitting Jewish refugees from Nazism during the 1930s.

It is true that from the 1920s on — and the 1920s was the decade of the Chinese Immigration Act, excluding from Canada all Chinese except university students, merchants, Canadian-born Chinese returning from abroad, and diplomatic personnel — there was much talk of the Canadian mosaic. Speakers and writers indefatigably praised the situation in which ethnic groups could retain their distinctiveness and yet be Canadian, in contrast to the American melting pot as they conceived it. They vied with each other in proposing visual and gustatory metaphors such as "flower garden," "salad," and "stew" for the Canadian situation. In 1965 John Porter (1965) could say that the mosaic was the country's most cherished value.

But beyond rhetoric singularly little support was given by either federal or provincial governments to groups that wanted to maintain their old world heritages. Cultural agencies, with niggardly funding, could afford little attention to any groups other than the British, French, and natives. Private broadcasting in languages other than English and French was strictly regulated, and permitted only when it could be justified in terms of "integration"; the public corporation, the CBC, recognized only English and French and, in its Northern Service, native languages. Teaching in languages other than English and French, including Indian and Inuit languages, was proscribed, and even the teaching of modern languages was not greatly encouraged.

The turn about took place in the 1960s. It was during that decade that relations between English Canadians and French Canadians, or rather that substantial portion of French Canadians who now began to

identify themselves increasingly as Québécois, reached the critical stage out of which they have not yet passed — “the greatest crisis in [Canadian] history,” said the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1965. At the time ethnic movements were occurring everywhere in the world, and in many cases were leading to the birth of new nations. The germs of nationalism had been incubating in Quebec for a long time. Now, with a high degree of urbanization and industrialization and a rising educational level in the population, they broke out. The death of Maurice Duplessis, the Quiet Revolution of Jean Lesage, the hatching of several separatist movements, and the flaring up of terrorism from 1963 to 1970 were a few of the events of the time.

The federal government's response to the situation was the setting up in 1963 of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. The essence of its mandate was “to inquire into and report upon the existing state of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada and to recommend what steps should be taken to develop the Canadian confederation of the basis of an equal partnership between the two founding races” (Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, 1967, p. 173). It carried out a massive research program, and made numerous recommendations concerning linguistic policy, education, the world of work, and the federal capital.

The native peoples also had been touched by urbanization and industrialization. The economic developments of the post-war period had broken through their isolation. Some of them moved to urban communities, and others found industry moving north into their ancestral lands. At the same time, the technological revolution in communication made them aware as never before of what was happening elsewhere. “Red Power” began to be talked about.

That the government did not establish a royal commission in this case, but rather a committee of anthropologists to report on those natives who had Indian status and thus were of special concern to government and possibly to anthropologists also, reflects the degree to which the native peoples were still set apart from the rest of Canadian society. The Hawthorn-Tremblay report (1966, 1967), monumental as it was, dealt with only about a quarter of the Indian, Inuit, and Métis people, and not at all with the small but fast-growing number of urban dwellers among the native peoples.

As for those not British, French, or native in origin, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was enjoined, in carrying out its task, to take into account “the contribution made by the other ethnic groups to the cultural enrichment of Canada and the measures that should be taken to safeguard that contribution” (Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, 1967, p. 173). Further, two of the ten commissioners, J. B. Rudnyckyj and Paul Wyczynski, were Slavic post-World War II immigrants to Canada. Nonetheless, the first intention of

the Commission was to deal with the other ethnic groups only as they affected English-French relations. However, the briefs submitted to the Commission and the discussions at public and private hearings, sometimes highly charged, revealed that there was a host of ethnic interest groups eager to win recognition and financial support from the government. In the end, the Commission devoted Book 4 of its *Report* to the other ethnic groups, presenting an account based on a small amount of research devoted to them, data accumulated as a by-product of the examination of the status of the English and French, and other miscellaneous materials, and made 16 recommendations and numerous suggestions.

Book 4 of the *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* appeared in March 1970. On October 8, 1971, the Prime Minister announced the federal government's response, which was to accept all those recommendations directed to federal departments and agencies and to proclaim a policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework. The government pledged to provide support for such a policy in four ways:

First, resources permitting, the government will seek to assist all Canadian cultural groups that have demonstrated a desire and effort to continue to develop a capacity to grow and contribute to Canada, and a clear need for assistance, the small and weak groups no less than the strong and highly organized.

Second, the government will assist members of all cultural groups to overcome cultural barriers to full participation in Canadian society.

Third, the government will promote creative encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interests of national unity.

Fourth, the government will continue to assist immigrants to acquire at least one of Canada's official languages in order to become full participants in Canadian society. (House of Commons Debates, 1971)

The policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework, at first intended to apply to "the other ethnic groups," has increasingly over the last seven and a half years come to apply to all ethnic groups, and thus to all Canadians. For example, under the policy, research and teaching concerning the native peoples, the British Isles groups, and the French-Canadian groups, as well as the other ethnic groups, have been encouraged, although less advantage has been taken of the policy by these groups — with the exception of the Scots — than by others. The charter member groups have of course other resources; they also probably have a tendency still to consider the term "ethnic" as pejorative (Burnet, 1975a).

It is sometimes considered that, having stated the policy, the government forgot about it except at election times. However, that is far from true: multiculturalism has not been simply a campaign slogan of the

Liberal party. There has been since 1972 a minister of state responsible for multiculturalism. The Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism was established in 1973, composed of more than 100 representatives of various ethnic groups, to advise the minister; it has held three national conferences, has had regular regional and national meetings, and has made many recommendations to government (Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism, 1973, 1977). The Multiculturalism Directorate, within the Department of the Secretary of State, has carried on liaison activities with ethnic communities and with the ethnic press; initiated and developed studies and research, including studies of the non-official languages (O'Bryan, Reitz, & Kuplowska, 1976) and of attitudes towards multiculturalism (Berry, Kalin, & Taylor, 1976) and a series of histories of ethnic groups (Adachi, 1976; Anderson & Higgs, 1976; Radecki, 1976; Reid, 1976); assisted the Canadian Ethnic Studies Association to develop as a full-fledged learned society with two regular publications; sponsored activities in the performing and the visual arts; assisted in programs aimed at retention of non-official languages, and given grants for a vast array of other projects. The budget allotted to multiculturalism has been increased in times of fiscal restraint. The federal cultural agencies such as the National Film Board, the National Museums of Canada, the National Library, the Public Archives, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and the Canada Council have also contributed to the implementing of the policy of multiculturalism, as have other directorates and branches of the Department of the Secretary of State and other government departments (Multiculturalism and the Government of Canada, 1978).

That other parties than the Liberals subscribed to the policy is indicated not only by their favorable reception of it in the House but by the fact that the provinces of Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta have in their turn proclaimed policies of multiculturalism, and British Columbia is said to be preparing to follow suit. Saskatchewan in 1974 passed the Saskatchewan Multicultural Act. None of the provincial governments involved was Liberal. It is difficult to guess the extent to which the adoption of the federal policy influenced the provinces. However, since the schools are seen as having a key role to play in many of the programs of multiculturalism, and education is under provincial jurisdiction, provincial initiatives are an essential part of any picture. These have involved such measures as appointment of advisory committees or councils on multiculturalism, their members drawn from the province's ethnic groups; innumerable conferences, including conferences on curriculum; publications, including multicultural history projects, ethnocultural directories, multicultural resource lists, and periodicals having to do with heritages or multiculturalism; grants for various ethnic or multicultural projects; and expansion in the schools of the use of non-

official languages as languages of instruction and of the teaching of non-official languages as subjects, expansion of the teaching of various cultures, and introduction of multiculturalism as a topic into curricula.

The policy then is no myth; it has defects and ambiguities. Let me single out three of them. First, the name itself implies something that is hardly possible: that many cultures can be maintained in Canada. In fact, except for such isolated groups as the Hutterites, no ethnic group brings a total culture to Canada, and none can maintain intact what it brings under the impact of the new environment, social as well as geographical. It is ethnic identity that can and does persist, and selected cultural patterns as symbolic expressions of that identity. The attempt to maintain cultures has led some groups to protest against such measures aimed at promoting "creative encounters and interchange" as multicultural centres, since cultural maintenance depends on isolation. Second, the policy as proclaimed takes insufficient regard of the special problems and interests of those members of ethnic groups — in some ethnic groups a small proportion of the whole, in others virtually all — who are new arrivals in Canada; that is, the immigrants. The reason is not only the divergence of interest between the Canadian-born, whose concern is for persistence, and the immigrants, whose concern is for adjustment; it is also the administrative division of labor in the federal structure, which puts immigration under one federal ministry and multiculturalism under another. It is probable that the immigrants belonging to the visible minorities are particularly disadvantaged by this inadequacy of the policy (Burnet, 1975b). Third, while the aim of the policy can be neatly expressed as being equality, equality among ethnic groups in Canada is by no means easy to interpret. What various people concerned with the administration of the policy envisage as desirable is not clear (Burnet, 1978). But whatever its imperfections the policy exists, if not, as W. W. Isajiw (1978) has pointed out, as public philosophy, at least as part of government policy.

In the discussions of multiculturalism and in the research carried out under the policy, there are, however, many myths. It is worth considering them because the myths are themselves valuable indices of group organization and functioning. It is also worth recognizing them as myths, and not accepting them as accurate portrayals of historical or contemporary situations, which should be studied in themselves.

Those of us who grew up in Canada before World War II learned certain myths as we passed through the schools. We learned that, after the Viking visits to Canadian coasts, it was John Cabot of Bristol who first explored the eastern seaboard, followed after a time by Jacques Cartier, and that Cabot and Cartier were only the first of a number of English, Scottish, and French explorers who eventually extended knowledge of the territory that is now Canada from the east to the Pacific, and from the Great Lakes to the Arctic. The explorers opened the way for

settlers, again French and British: Louis Hébert and his successors in New France; United Empire Loyalists and American frontiersmen in the Maritime provinces and Ontario; British from the homeland, eastern Canada and the United States in the west and the far west. True, others came also, particularly to the prairies, and these, with few exceptions, were welcomed, to settle the vast lands in peace and security under the guarantees of British justice, fair play, and freedom. The mosaic was an expression of British benevolence: it caught admirably the vision of Sir Wilfrid Laurier of which Governor General Edward Schreyer reminded us at his inauguration: "I want the marble to remain the marble; the granite to remain the granite; the oak to remain the oak; and out of all these elements I would build a nation great among the nations of the world."

Recently, however, the myths of the prewar period have been discredited, and new myths have appeared, related to the policy of multiculturalism. They may be regarded as corrective of the earlier myths. They are, however, little more factual.

One myth that has become apparent as more and more groups have come to write their history as Canadians is the myth of early arrival. Many claim that their ancestors were among the first explorers to sail along Canadian shores, set foot on Canadian soil, or even settle here. The Chinese, for example, have tales of Buddhist monks who drifted from China in their junks and landed on the west coast in the fifth and sixth centuries, the Greeks of seamen who came in the eighteenth century, and the Ukrainians of Cossacks who came with the Russians and the Dane Bering, also in the eighteenth century. On the other coast, while the arrival of the Scandinavians as long ago as 1000 A.D. is authenticated, Scots, Irish, and Portuguese are among those said either to have been on board the Viking ships or to have followed soon after; and a Pole, Janz Kolna, is said to have discovered Labrador in 1476 (Kos-Rabcewicz-Zubkowski, 1966, p. 12). As for early settlers, the Chinese claim a settlement near the present site of Vancouver in 499 A.D., and the Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, and Byelorussians all claim that their ethnic fellows were among the de Meuron and Watteville soldiers who took part in the War of 1812 and some of whom settled either in Upper Canada or in the Red River colony.

However, the tales of early exploration and the early settlement are hard to substantiate. Many seem to belong to legend rather than historical fact. Also, since the implication is often that a particular culture has long Canadian roots, it needs be said that many of the first settlers of whom we know brought with them little of the culture of their homelands. Either they were mercenary soldiers whose culture was of the army camp, or they were individuals whose adventurous lives had already exposed them to the French or British culture and the French or English language of those among whom they came to live.

The interesting things about the myth of early arrival are its frequency and its relation to other myths by which people and institutions attempt to give themselves the respectability of long lineage. The tendency to consider that to have been here for a long time is to have certain rights has probably been accentuated by the use made of antiquity by Canadians of French and of British origins. The phrase "two founding peoples" in the terms of reference of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (I translate from the French version of the terms; the use of the word "races" in the English version creates problems I wish to avoid) was doubtless intended to refer to more than time in Canada; it can, however, and often is interpreted as referring simply to that, since on that level it can be challenged.

It is also notable that the common estimate of the proportion of the population that is of other ethnic origins than British, French, and native is one-third. Since the French Canadians also estimate their strength as one-third, this leaves the British and the native groups as the remaining third. The myth of the thirds has existed for at least fifteen years. It has been expressed almost routinely in speeches by politicians, including the successive ministers responsible for multiculturalism.

The first thing that must be said concerning this myth is that the exact ethnic composition of Canadian society is not known. An ethnic group is made up of those who share a feeling of peoplehood (Gordon, 1978, pp. 106-107). It is thus not definable in objective terms: there is always some self-selection involved. Further, it is now recognized that ethnic identity is not as fixed as it once was, or once was thought to be: inter-marriage is only one of the factors creating possibilities for choice. The Canadian census tries to use ethnic origin, defined as the ethnic or cultural group to which a person or his ancestor (on the male side) belonged on coming to this continent, as an objective index of the ethnic composition of the population. But even ethnic origin categories are subject to many contingencies, not the least of which are the wording of census questions, the number and order of listed categories, and the manner of collection of the census data (Kralt, 1978).

If the origin category figures for the 1971 census are used, the proportion of the Canadian population that is not British, French, or native in origin is much closer to one-quarter than one-third; it is, in fact, 25.5%. Those of British Isles origin are 44.6%, an increase from 43.9% in 1961; those of French origin 28.7%; those of native origins 1.4%. It may, of course, be argued that in claiming to be a third of the population those of other origins are simply anticipating a little, since they are the component of the population that has been steadily increasing over the past century. However, in terms of ethnic identity it may well be the group that appears to be dwindling, the English-Canadian group, that is increasing, through the process of assimilation. To the degree that language is an index of assimilation, and it is only a crude one, it is worth noting that

by 1971 English was the mother tongue of 60% and the language most often spoken at home of 67% of the population.

In discussing those of other origins as a third of the population, another myth creeps in: that of common bonds among the members of the other ethnic groups, or sometimes common bonds among all the minorities, the French Canadians, the Amerindians, and the other ethnic groups. Both forms of this myth were prevalent in the 1960s. The first was expressed when Senator Paul Yusek attempted to forge a Third Force; his efforts resulted in little, however. The latter form was expressed on such occasions as tours of the west by prominent Quebec politicians; the tours also bore little fruit in agreements between French Canadians and spokesmen for other ethnic groups.

In fact, it may be questioned whether common bonds exist. The other ethnic groups vary in many respects, among them numbers, region of concentration, time of arrival, occupational, income and educational distribution, physical characteristics, relations with their homeland, degree of ethnic awareness, and capacity for collective action. Moreover, there are among them memories of old wars and antagonisms. Indeed, even the members of a single ethnic group are usually highly differentiated, especially if some of them have lived in Canada for a long time. As for the French Canadians, they seem unaware of many of the ethnic distinctions that exist among those that they lump together as English Canadians, and of any comparison between their claims and those of other ethnic groups. Likewise, the native peoples are convinced of the uniqueness of their situation and their rights. Hence, while temporary coalitions of ethnic groups concerning specific issues such as immigration policy may occur, no Third Force is likely to emerge.

It may be asked in what circumstances ethnic groups, singly or together, tend to estimate their strength as much greater or much less than the corresponding ethnic origin categories in the census. One circumstance is, of course, the writing of briefs to the government. It is assumed that the force of such briefs varies directly with the number of potential votes that they represent. It was probably on this assumption that associations representing one particular ethnic group in a certain province prepared their briefs to the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. The related ethnic origin category was 11% of the population of the province, yet in their briefs the associations presented ingenious arguments why they should be looked upon as speaking for 25%, 50%, and, if I recall correctly, even 75% of the population. Another circumstance might well be the rise of members of the ethnic group in the social and economic hierarchy and the prominence of some of them. In recent years the upward mobility of Canadian-born members of many non-British groups and the entrance of highly skilled and well-educated immigrants belonging to those groups has probably created a feeling of being numerous.

Another current myth replaces the myth of British benevolence with the myth of British villainy and of unrelenting oppression of other ethnic groups by those of British origin. Racial and ethnic prejudice and discrimination, it holds, are peculiarly Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Celtic — peculiarly WASPish, as many say who would allow no other ethnic epithet than WASP to cross their lips. The English Canadians have created institutions that since they are built on British models and require the use of the English language put others at a disadvantage; in addition, they have exclusionary attitudes — “Anglo-Saxon arrogance” — in all spheres of private and public life. Hence, continues the myth, until those not of British origin attained the numbers and strength to wrest a measure of recognition, they were universally despised, ignored, and discriminated against. Those others were themselves, of course, not arrogant or exclusionary, and at least relatively free from prejudice.

This myth has emerged as historians have begun to explore the nativism of Canadian immigration policy and Canadian attitudes to other ethnic groups, and to write the histories of ethnic groups in Canada. They have been shocked as they have found editorial writers and politicians applying ethnic epithets and other derogatory terms to the other ethnic groups, and as they have explored violent incidents involving racial and ethnic groups. The historians treading these new paths are young; some of them are immigrants to Canada. They tend to project what they discover in documentary sources to the whole Canadian population, and to picture all Anglo-Celts as in all situations anti-foreign, anti-Catholic, and racist (Palmer, 1976).

Illustrations of the myth abound particularly in western Canada, where those of non-British, non-French, and non-native origins constitute 45% of the population, according to the 1971 census.

It was expressed in two charming National Film Board films shown on television last year on the two Sunday evenings immediately preceding Christmas. The first, “Teach Me to Dance,” was set in western Canada in 1919. It concerned two girls of 11 or 12 years of age — Lesia, who was Ukrainian, and English-Canadian Sarah. Lesia, tormented by the class bully (whose name was MacIntyre), exclaimed in Ukrainian, and had to write on the blackboard two hundred times, “I must not speak Ukrainian in school.” She also was being made to learn to recite a bombastic poem about the British Empire. Meanwhile her father had been refused credit by English Canadians “with vinegar for blood.” Sarah, visiting Lesia’s home, was delighted by a Ukrainian dance and asked to learn it. She proposed to the teacher that she and Lesia perform it at the Christmas concert. The teacher rather dubiously consented but on the night of the concert Sarah’s father forbade her to dance. The bittersweet ending of the film showed Sarah visiting Lesia in the barn the next day and dancing with her. The second film, shown on Christmas Eve, was “Raisins and Almonds.” It also was set in the west, about 10

years later, and it concerned a somewhat younger girl. She, a member of the only Jewish family in town, was at the age of 7 the town's outstanding elocutionist. As such she was invited, as she had been twice before, to participate in a church's Christmas concert. She was reluctant, since Santa Claus had in previous years brought gifts for all the other children but none for her, but she was persuaded by her parents to accept the invitation. This time the child received a gift, a doll, which she later discovered to be one of her own, outfitted with new clothes by her mother. Incidentally, according to Fredelle Bruser Maynard's memoir on which the film was based, the town was largely Scandinavian, and the church was Lutheran; however, the film leaves the impression that it was English Canadians who were so thoughtless as not to provide a gift for a small visitor at Christmas (Maynard, 1964).

The second film was autobiographical; perhaps the first was also. But to give pride of place on national television to the two films, one centring on an ethnic group that does not celebrate Christmas and the other on a group part of which does not celebrate it on December 25, and both having as theme the callousness of English Canadians to members of other ethnic groups, and young children at that, is to lift such incidents out of the status of occasional occurrences to mythic proportions.

The same myth was expressed by Sonia Cipywnyk of the Faculty of Education at the University of Saskatchewan, in a paper in which she says she is eschewing the role of academic and telling it as it was (1978). She writes:

For the ethnic child of my father's and my generation, school could be and often was, a painful place. Everything valued by one's parents, everything that made up one's after-school life, was feared, misunderstood, occasionally ridiculed, and always subtly undermined. Everything associated with the most significant landmarks of human existence, everything that was most sacred, most poignant, most satisfying — all of that was somehow second or third rate.

The Canadian — and in my day that meant the English — way meant keeping a stiff upper lip, suppressing one's emotions, doing things "properly," and, above all, shedding one's ethnicity as if it were an outer skin one could unzip and leave behind like a cocoon and, in the process, become a standard Canadian Monarch butterfly. It meant singing "Rule Britannia," "There'll Always Be an England," "In Days of Yore," and "God Save the King" every day during morning exercises. Teachers of United Empire Loyalist stock from southern Ontario were imported to make sure that all this was done "properly." "O Canada" was sung, too, but the message was clear and simple — Canadian-English.

Yet some scepticism is in order. Without questioning the British influence on social structures, including schools, and the "overwhelmingly British and French cultural perspective within most curricula" (Werner et al., n.d., p. 55), one may ask whether this was how it was or how it

felt. It is hard to believe that no English Canadian teachers in the west acted on the precept that pride in one's background and confidence in oneself were prerequisites of learning. My teachers in small-town Ontario did: I recall oral compositions in the Junior Fourth — Grade 7 — in which Benny Sussman told with bright-eyed pride of his parents' flight from pogroms in Russia, and Connie Georgas told of the Greece her parents had left. And high school teachers in ethnically heterogeneous areas of Toronto have described devising projects to enhance their students' knowledge of and appreciation for their ethnic background long before the term "multiculturalism" was current, and have told how richly rewarding they as Canadian teachers of British origin have found such projects. Presumably, teachers in the west were on the average younger, less experienced, and more mobile; presumably also they were indoctrinated, during whatever short training they underwent — John Diefenbaker's instruction in pedagogy at Normal School lasted an hour (1978) — with the importance of assimilating the non-British among whom they were to work. Yet there are at least a few indications that they did not all fear, misunderstand, ridicule, and undermine the values of their pupils of non-British origin. A recent book by an extraordinarily gifted one-time teacher in the west, *Ces enfants de ma vie*, by Gabrielle Roy (1977) reveals an exquisite sensitivity to the values and traditions of the parents of her children, and John Charyk, in the last volume of his trilogy about rural schools, tells of a teacher of British origin who profited from his time in a western school district settled by Scandinavians to learn to speak, read, and write Norwegian and Swedish and was considered by the community to belong (1977, p. 206).

The fact that neither Roy nor Charyk, a long-time teacher in east-central Alberta, was, like Sonia Cipywnyk's teachers, U.E. Loyalist from Ontario perhaps should be underlined. Young people born or bred or both on the prairies were not long in replacing the school teachers from the Maritime provinces and from Ontario in western schools, and from an early point in time they included young people of non-British origins. Presumably they generally served the areas in which people of their own ethnic background were concentrated, though Ukrainian Canadian John Charyk did not. Certainly there were schools in the Slavic belt and the German belt in which it was children of British origin who were made to feel that they were outsiders, since although English was the language of the classroom, Ukrainian or Polish or German was the language of the playground, and since it was not the English Canadians who set the standards for school lunches and manners of dressing but the Central Europeans. I interviewed a colleague whose sister and she had been the only Canadians of British origin in such a school in Saskatchewan in the 1930s and 1940s, and when I asked how the traditions of her Slavic neighbors had been regarded, her answer was prompt: "They taught

us how to live." She went on to explain that, far from despising the heritage of the Ukrainians and Poles, her father had learned from them how to construct barn and house and her mother how to provide an adequate diet under Saskatchewan conditions.

This is not to deny that school was a painful place for the child of non-British origin. But there were other reasons than the values of the school system and the attitudes of teachers and fellow-students for the pain. One reason the children of non-British origin shared with their classmates of British origin: the almost inevitable gap that opens as children grow up between them and their parents. The other exacerbated that gap: the difference in social and geographical environment between Europe and the Canadian prairie, which made the values, beliefs, and customs brought from the old land less than completely appropriate in the new.

The warmth, generosity, and openness of others as compared to English Canadians may also not have been universal. Readers of Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962) will recall that in this novel the Russian Mennonites were anything but accepting of the Indians and halfbreeds who lived near them. Those who are familiar with *Raisins and Almonds* (Maynard, 1964) know that the small Jewish child whose Christmases were bitter joined with two Norwegian Canadian friends in tormenting the Chinese keeper of a candy store. So much, by the way, for the myth that young children do not discriminate. It is easy to regard all of the intolerance and discrimination that is now being revealed to be part of Canadian history as being English Canadian, or WASPish. Perhaps it is too easy.

A particularly widespread and thoroughly accepted part of the myth of unrelenting oppression of those not of British origin is the concept of the vertical mosaic. As stated by John Porter (1965), this is a product of a British conspiracy. Recently Gordon Darroch (1979) has presented data and argument that throw strong doubt on the vertical mosaic. Darroch claims that neither the measured occupational dissimilarity between ethnic groups nor the inequality in occupational ranks of immigrant groups is very great. Further, the situation in the United States is not more open.

It is important to question the myth of oppression by those of British origin because denigration of Canadians of British origin is no firmer basis for multiculturalism than denigration of other Canadians. If we are to understand one another, we must forgo the pleasure of regarding some ethnic groups as more virtuous than others, and look instead in a detached way at the kinds of things people — all people — do in various situations. We have it on the authority of two distinguished sociologists, E. T. Thompson and E. C. Hughes (1958, p. 3), that "nothing is so devastatingly equalitarian as detachment."

What is the point of calling attention to the myths concerning ethnicity in Canadian society? In the first place, it is to point out how little still is known about the Canadian population, how much historians and social scientists have yet to do to increase our knowledge of our society, and particularly of its ethnic dimension. Canadians have neglected their past, and have left much of the study of their present to outsiders. Usually they have excused themselves by referring to the country's youth, but a centenarian is hardly young in a world where so many new nations have come into being in the last 40 or 50 years. It is hardly appropriate now simply to substitute myth for myth as society changes. It is time for historian and sociologist to deepen our knowledge of our past and of our present, and to depict it not in *images d'Épinal*, but in all its shadings.

In the second place, the myths themselves should be recognized and studied. They are not an accurate picture of how it was, but they tell how it seemed to some people, or how some people wanted or want it to be presented. The myths shaped and shape today behavior and attitudes, in ways by no means irrelevant for social cohesion. Thus they too are important, if we are to understand what we were and what we are.

NOTE

- ¹ After this paper was prepared I read with great pleasure and profit Herbert J. Gans' (1979) article in which he argues that the renewed interest in ethnicity is not an ethnic revival or a third generation return, but an emphasis on ethnic identity and symbolic ethnicity.

REFERENCES

- Abella, I., & Troper, H. The line must be drawn somewhere: Canada and Jewish refugees, 1933-1939. *Canadian Historical Review*, 1979, in press.
- Adachi, K. *The enemy that never was*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976.
- Anderson, G. M., & Higgs, D. *A future to inherit*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976.
- Berry, J. W., Kalin, R., & Taylor, D. M. *Multiculturalism and ethnic attitudes in Canada*. Ottawa: Minister of State for Multiculturalism, 1977.
- Burnet, J. *The definition of multiculturalism in a bilingual framework*. Paper presented at Conference on Multiculturalism and Third World Immigrants in Canada, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1975. (a)
- Burnet, J. Multiculturalism, immigration and racism. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 1975, 7 (1), 35-39. (b)
- Burnet, J. The policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 1978, 10 (2), 107-113.
- Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism. *First annual report*. Ottawa: Author, 1975.
- Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism. *A report*. Ottawa: Minister of State for Multiculturalism, 1977.

- Charyk, J. C. *Those bittersweet schooldays*. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1977.
- Ciprywnyk, S. Multiculturalism and the child in western Canada. In *Multiculturalism and education*. Proceedings of the Western Regional Conference, Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies, 1976, 27-50.
- Clark, S. D. *The Canadian society and the issue of multi-culturalism*. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 1976.
- Darroch, A. Another look at ethnicity, stratification and social mobility in Canada. *The Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 1979, 4 (1), 1-25.
- Diefenbaker, J. G. To be a Canadian. In *Multiculturalism and Education*. Proceedings of the Western Regional Conference, Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies, 1978, 89-99.
- Gans, H. J. Symbolic ethnicity: The future of ethnic groups and cultures. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 1979, 2, 1-20.
- Gordon, M. M. *Human nature, class, and ethnicity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Hawthorn, H. B. (Ed.). *A survey of the contemporary Indians of Canada* (2 vols.). Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1966, 1967.
- House of Commons *Debates*. Statement of P. E. Trudeau, October 8, 1971.
- Isajiw, W. W. *Multiculturalism as public philosophy*. Unpublished manuscript, 1978.
- Kos-Rabcewicz-Zubkowski, L. *Contribution made by the Polish ethnic group to the cultural enrichment of Canada*. Report presented to the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, 1966.
- Kralt, J. *Ethnic origin in the Canadian census 1871-1971*. Unpublished manuscript, 1978.
- Maynard, F. B. *Raisins and Almonds*. Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing, 1973.
- Multiculturalism and the Government of Canada*. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1978.
- O'Bryan, K. D., Reitz, J. G., & Kuplowsa, O. M. *Non-official languages: A study in Canadian multiculturalism*. Ottawa: Minister Responsible for Multiculturalism, 1976.
- Palmer, H. Reluctant hosts: Anglo-Canadian views on multiculturalism in the twentieth century. In *Multiculturalism as state policy*. Report of the Second Canadian Conference on Multiculturalism. Ottawa: Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism, 1976, 81-118.
- Porter, J. *The vertical mosaic: An analysis of social class and power in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.
- Radecki, H. *A member of a distinguished family*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976.
- Reid, W. (Ed.). *The Scottish tradition in Canada*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976.
- Roy, G. *Ces enfants de ma vie*. Montreal: Stanké, 1977.
- Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. *A preliminary report*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1965.
- Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. *Report: General introduction*. Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1967.

Thompson, E. T., & Hughes, E. C. *Race: Individual and collective behavior*. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1958.

Wiebe, R. H. *Peace shall destroy many*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972.

Werner, W., Connors, B., Aoki, T., & Dahlie, J. *Whose culture? Whose heritage?* Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1977.

Jean Burnet is a Professor in the Department of Sociology at Glendon College, York University, Toronto, Ontario M4N 3M6.