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Presidential Address: Ramsay Cook and the Writing of Canadian History, or What Can Ramsay Cook Still Teach Us?

DONALD WRIGHT*

Abstract

Ramsay Cook (1931–2016) rewrote Canadian history. Distinctly uncomfortable with nationalism, like his intellectual hero George Orwell, he insisted on pluralism. His best-known contribution to Canadian historical writing was the idea of limited identities, which he refined across the length of his career but never abandoned. He also embraced federalism, bilingualism, multiculturalism, and minority rights as the best guarantees of difference. Herein lies the distilled essence of Ramsay Cook the historian.

Résumé

Ramsay Cook (1931-2016) a réécrit l'histoire du Canada. Profondément mal à l'aise face au nationalisme, à l'instar de son héros intellectuel George Orwell, il a défendu avec force le pluralisme. Sa contribution la plus célèbre à l'historiographie canadienne réside dans la notion d'« identités limitées », qu'il a affinée tout au long de sa carrière sans jamais y renoncer. Il a également fait du fédéralisme, du bilinguisme, du multiculturalisme et des droits des minorités les meilleures garanties de la diversité. C'est là que réside l'essence même de l'historien Ramsay Cook.

I

> *Each recent president has sat in his or her lonely study, aware that some future, and doubtless lesser, Carl Berger or Serge Gagnon will one day seek to find the distilled essence of this historian's philosophy in the reflective and witty words pronounced from the presidential podium.*
> –Ramsay Cook, 1984

* I would like to thank Greg Kealey, Linda Kealey, and Molly Ungar, who read an early version of this paper and offered thoughtful comments and corrections. Part of my discussion of limited identities appeared in Donald Wright, "Sesquicentennial Cerebrations," *Acadiensis* 46, no. 1 (2017): 145–51.

A few years ago, during the long COVID winter of 2021, I read every single presidential address to the Canadian Historical Association.[1] Although a monumental task, it was also a fascinating task, or at least it was to me.

My interest in the history of history — in historical writing, in the historical profession, and in historians — began a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, at Mount Allison University in the fall of 1984. In my first-year Canadian history course, the professor started each unit with a brief historiographical foray: English Canadian historians say this, he said, but French Canadian historians say that, while social historians say something else altogether. To a nineteen-year-old green-as-grass kid, it was heady stuff. I had assumed that history and the past were the same thing. They are not, of course. And I was hooked. I could not have imagined that forty-plus years later I would be still thinking about the writing of history and its change over time. And yet, here I am.

Reading every presidential address meant rereading Donald Creighton's presidential address. Speaking to a packed and very hot auditorium at the University of Ottawa in 1957, Creighton taxonomized presidential addresses. There are three kinds, he said. Taking a chance, some presidents "compose philosophic discourses on the nature and meaning of history." Playing it safe, others "prepare good solid papers on the subjects of their current research." And yet others split the difference between the "daring" of a philosophical treatise and the "prudence" of a research paper to address the state of their field. For his part, Creighton intended to split the difference. "There is," he added, "a good deal to be said for this third course. It combines a high degree of safety with a fair amount of latitude. It is the wise way, the good way, the middle way."[2] Creighton's wise, good, and middle way quickly went south, however, when he lamented the state of Canadian historical writing and publicly insulted Frank Underhill, his colleague and nemesis.[3]

Fast forward twenty-seven years, it was Ramsay Cook's turn to address his peers at the University of Guelph. Cook knew enough to know that he did not want to repeat his thesis supervisor's performance. "Only a rare bird, a Donald Creighton," he said, "ever dares sing out-of-tune." But that didn't bring him any closer to "a suitable, or at least passable, subject for a presidential address." And so, the sleepless nights began to accumulate. "Each recent president has sat in his or her lonely study," he said,

> aware that some future, and doubtless lesser, Carl Berger or Serge Gagnon will one day seek to find the distilled essence of this historian's philosophy in the reflective and witty words pronounced from the presidential podium. So let me at once forewarn that future historiographer: after long contemplation, and an abandoned attempt at philosophical profundities, I have decided to abide by the eleventh commandment of the York history department: "Thou Shalt not Commit Historiography."

Against this backdrop, Cook opted to give a good solid paper on the relationship between religion and reform in late nineteenth-century English Canada.[4]

Reading Cook's reference, in the winter of 2021, to "some future, and doubtless lesser, Carl Berger" was eerie because, in effect, he was speaking to me from the grave: I am that future and lesser Carl Berger.[5] For the past of couple of years, I have sought — and, for that matter, I am still seeking — the distilled essence of Cook's philosophy. But since I did not study at York University, I am not bound by its injunction, meaning I intend to commit historiography. Specifically, I intend to take my cue from both Creighton and Cook. From Creighton, I intend to reflect not on the philosophy of history but on the writing of history. And from Cook, I intend to present a research paper, one rooted in the archives and anchored with a lot of footnotes, because I am, by instinct and disposition, cautious, or to use Creighton's word, prudent. My subject today is the "distilled essence" of Ramsay Cook, not the man, although that will be implied, but the historian, in what made him tick, and in what we can still learn from him.[6]

II

> *Nationalism, as a subject worthy of careful study, excited me, perhaps because it represented such a potentially destructive ideology in the Cold War world of the 1950s. The contemporary world seemed to confirm the conclusion that internationalism belonged to the left, nationalism to the reactionary right.*
> –Ramsay Cook, 2005

In his final year at United College, now the University of Winnipeg, Cook enrolled in a fourth-year seminar on Eastern European national-

ism with a visiting professor.[7] Originally from Minnedosa, Manitoba, William Rose had gone to Oxford on a Rhodes Scholarship and from there to Leipzig University to do a PhD. But when the First World War broke out, he happened to be in Silesia, Poland, where he was effectively interned for the duration of the war as an enemy alien of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He quickly learned the Polish language, fell in love with the Polish culture, and after the war, completed a PhD in Polish history at Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Later, he built his career at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire and then at the University of London where he became the director of the School of Slavonic Studies. Now retired, he had returned to Manitoba to teach part time at his alma mater. As Cook did in all his courses, he jumped in with both feet, struggling, in his words, "to pronounce Eastern European names and to distinguish between Pan Slavs and Slavophiles."[8] But Cook never "got" his professor's take on nationalism. His interest in, yes. But his take on, no. Long story short, Rose saw nationalism as a positive force in history, leading to national independence and the end of empire. He even insisted that nationalism could be a force for "moral regeneration and the rejection of materialism."[9] However, Cook was a kid from the prairies with what he called "an instinctive suspicion that what passed as nation-building in Ontario" was really "industrial tariff protection" to be paid for by the western farmer in the form of more expensive farm machinery.[10]

In his seminar with Rose, Cook read Johann Gottfried Herder, the eighteenth-century German philosopher and intellectual father of nationalism who insisted that the nation consisted of a people, or a *volk,* with a shared ethnicity and language. Indeed, Herder used *volk* as a synonym for nation and even fatherland, and he argued that the nation was the natural basis of the state. Reading Herder against the backdrop of "the Second World War and the destruction of most of Europe's Jews," and reading him against the backdrop of the prairies that did not have, and never would have, a shared ethnicity and language, Cook, frankly, "disliked him." Nationalism, he concluded, belonged to "the reactionary right."[11] Still, the seminar had been transformative because it taught him that nationalism could be its own field of study.

A year or two later, Cook discovered Herder's intellectual opposite in the stacks of Douglas Library at Queen's University. He was a twenty-three-year-old MA student writing a thesis on Canadian liberalism in wartime, specifically its fragility.[12] Interested in the larger

history of liberalism, he read the Magna Carta; he studied the Habeas Corpus Act and the English Bill of Rights; and he devoured Lord Acton, the nineteenth-century British thinker and author of *The History of Freedom and Other Essays*. Where Herder emphasized the *volk*, Acton understood that was a dead end. A nation founded on "race," he said, is a nation founded on a "fictitious unity." Moreover, the idea that "the State and nation must be co-extensive" is a lie; and the "divided patriotism" stemming from "the presence of different nations under the same sovereignty" is not a bad thing, it is a good thing because it resists "centralisation," "corruption," and "absolutism."[13] "The co-existence of several nations under the same State," Acton argued, "is a test, as well as the best security, of its freedom."[14] Herder could not explain Canada. But Acton could. "On first reading Acton," Cook wrote, "I thought of Canada."[15] After all, Canada was — and is — made up of more than one nation and more than one language and it was — and, again, is — made up of more than one ethnic group.

Around the same time, Cook read George Orwell and discovered an intellectual hero. In 1955, he was a summer research assistant for one of his professors at what was then called the Public Archives of Canada. Looking for something to read in the evening, when he was not in the archives, he wandered into an Ottawa bookstore not far from his apartment on Elgin Street where he picked up a copy of *England Your England and Other Essays* by George Orwell. Having read Orwell's fiction,[16] he was keen to explore his non-fiction. And so, by day, he ploughed through the papers of Wilfrid Laurier and Robert Borden, and by night, he read and reread Orwell. One essay stood out: "Notes on Nationalism," a sustained, devastating, and, in Cook's estimation, "brilliant" critique of nationalism,[17] a dangerous, power-hungry ideology that assumes "human beings can be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labelled 'good' or 'bad.'" Meanwhile, nationalists nurse "victories, defeats, triumphs, and humiliations"; they traffic in "the most flagrant dishonesty"; and yet they remain convinced of their rightness.[18] They also see the past as something mutable and up for grabs:

> Such things as the Inquisition, the tortures of the Star Chamber, the exploits of the English buccaneers (Sir Francis Drake, for instance, who was given to sinking Spanish prisoners alive), the Reign of Terror, the heroes of the Mutiny blowing hundreds of Indians from the guns, or Cromwell's

> soldiers slashing Irishwomen's faces with razors, become morally neutral or even meritorious when it is felt that they were done in the "right" cause.[19]

Indeed, "every nationalist is haunted by the belief that the past can be altered."[20] It was Orwell at his best, and it stopped a young Ramsay Cook in his tracks, confirming his instinctive distrust of nationalism.

Cook understood that nationalists — of all stripes — were haunted, or consumed, by the desire to write history to suit their purposes and meet their ends. He did not like it. In fact, he hated it, because nationalism gets in the way of history, and it distorts our understanding of the past. Drawing on Orwell's distinction between patriotism (which he defined as "devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life") and nationalism (which he described as "inseparable from the desire for power"),[21] Cook devoted himself to Canada, and in that sense, he was a patriot. But he was not a nationalist. He was an anti-nationalist.[22]

III

Contrary to the general belief, the problem of Canada has long been one of too much nationalism, not too little.
–Ramsay Cook, 1964

As an MA student at Queen's, Cook enrolled in a graduate seminar in French Canadian history. Co-taught by Arthur Lower and Fred Gibson, it "opened a whole new world" to him that, because of Canada's two solitudes, he barely knew existed.[23] Moreover, that world was on the cusp of something revolutionary. Quebec's traditional, defensive, and Catholic nationalists were being challenged by a new generation of intellectuals, journalists, and politicians who talked about a modern, bureaucratic, and secular Quebec that was master in its own house. With Lower's encouragement, Cook began reading *Le Devoir*, then edited by André Laurendeau, a neo-nationalist.[24] Next, a classmate introduced him to *Cité libre*, a left, progressive, small-circulation periodical edited by Pierre Trudeau. *Le Devoir* and André Laurendeau; *Cité libre* and Pierre Trudeau; neo-nationalists, on the one hand, and *citélibristes,* on the other: Without fully appreciating it, Cook had a front row seat at the prelude to the Quiet Revolution.[25] He was hooked.

In 1961, he met Pierre Trudeau for the first time. He had read his early essays in *Cité libre* and he had read — "voraciously"[26] — *La Grève de l'amiante*, or *The Asbestos Strike*, in which Trudeau offered a detailed and sustained critique of a traditional Quebec nationalism that was unable to meet the demands of a modern, urban, and industrial society.[27] As guests at the wedding of Blair Neatby and Jacqueline Côté, they fell into a conversation about politics, specifically Lester Pearson and the Liberal Party. In time, they became friends. Cook continued to read Trudeau's essays in *Cité libre* and was especially impressed with "La nouvelle trahison des clercs," published in 1962. Riffing on Lord Acton, Trudeau insisted that "it is not the concept of nation that is retrograde; it is the idea that the nation must necessarily be sovereign."[28] From here, he proceeded to critique nationalism in general and Quebec nationalism and English Canadian nationalism in particular. At the same time, he offered a generous vision of Canada as "a truly pluralistic and polyethnic society."[29] In his words, Cook was "bowled over."[30]

Cook's front-row seat to what had become the Quiet Revolution turned into an onstage role when he translated — with his wife Eleanor Cook — "La nouvelle trahison des clercs" for publication in *The Canadian Forum*.[31] There was no turning back. In *The Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, *The Montreal Star*, *Saturday Night*, and *The Canadian Forum*,[32] on CBC radio and CBC television, and in essays, articles, and lectures, Cook explained Quebec to English Canada. As a professor of history at the University of Toronto and as a public intellectual who believed in the marketplace of ideas, Cook occupied the intellectual and literary space between academic writing, on the one hand, and journalism, on the other, drawing on the past to make sense of the present.[33] And because he was interested in a very timely subject, Cook was often invited to speak to different student groups on campus. One former undergraduate student recalled making a point of going, "just to hear what he had to say."[34] In 1962, Cook developed a fourth-year seminar in the history of French Canadian nationalism that required a reading knowledge of French. And he worked with Macmillan of Canada on two books, one a collection of his essays on French Canada, the other an anthology on French Canadian nationalism that included editorials, articles, and statements in translation.[35]

Cook was nearing one of the central insights of his career, first stated in 1964. "The answer to French-Canadian nationalism is emphatically not English-Canadian nationalism," he said. Indeed, "contrary

to the general belief, the problem of Canada has long been one of too much nationalism, not too little."[36] Quebec nationalism, especially separatist nationalism, and English Canadian nationalism, especially English Canadian nationalism that could not find a place for French Canada and the French language, were, he said, "mirror images."[37] In 1958, in his very first scholarly article on Wilfrid Laurier, Robert Borden, and the unresolved school question in Manitoba, he clearly sided with minority religious and minority language rights. "Faced with an electorate which refused to accept cultural duality," he concluded, "the politicians readily succumbed to the temptation to sacrifice minority rights on the altar of political success."[38] And in his doctoral thesis on J. W. Dafoe, Cook admired his subject's anti-imperialism, but criticized his attitude to French Canada and Franco-Manitoban language rights.[39] Later, he would criticize his thesis supervisor's parsimonious attitude to French Canada and Franco-Ontarian language rights: To Donald Creighton, Cook said, "all French Canadians look the same."[40] Ultimately, Cook distrusted English Canadian nationalism for the same reason he distrusted Quebec nationalism: It was ethnocentric, he believed. As he once told a colleague, the "all pervasive culprit in English Canadian nationalism is Anglo Saxon moral unity."[41]

Of course, not everyone appreciated his criticism of English Canadian nationalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[42] David Sheps, an English professor at Sir George Williams University, described Cook's anti-nationalism as "hysterical" and "modish."[43] Gad Horowitz told Cook that he was still fighting the Orange Lodge.[44] Daniel Drache dismissed him as one of the "leading spokesmen for the bourgeoisie" who "are in the process of dismantling the Canadian state economically."[45] Goldwin French acknowledged the Actonian ideal of several nations in one state, but if Canada is to resist the United States, "must it not become in itself the emotional core of a new nationalism?"[46] And Donald Smiley objected to one of his essays in *Saturday Night*, the title alone explaining his objection: "A Nationalist Intellectual Behind Every Maple Tree."[47] Cook did not care. "Your letter," he told Smiley, "adds to a mild amusement that I have been experiencing in discovering that many of the same people who applauded my criticisms of French-Canadian nationalism in earlier articles are now upset when I apply the same rules to their nationalism."[48] Later, Smiley used words like *tendentious*, *self-contradictory*, and *nonsense* to describe *The Maple Leaf Forever*, a collection of Cook's essays. And he disagreed with the notion that a state "dominated by a single cultural group is inherently illib-

eral." What about the United States? Smiley asked.[49] You might ask Black Americans what they think, Cook replied.[50]

As a public intellectual who said what he thought, Cook took his lumps. They came with the gig. Besides, his anti-nationalism had created the intellectual space necessary for what is almost certainly his key contribution to English Canadian historical writing: limited identities.

IV

It might just be that is in these limited identities that "Canadianism" is found, and that except for our over-heated nationalist intellectuals, Canadians find this situation quite satisfactory.
–Ramsay Cook, 1967

Although Maurice Careless often gets the credit,[51] it was Cook who first coined the term *limited identities*. Later, he would describe it as something "tossed off" at the end of a 1967 review essay.[52] It was, but it was more thoughtful than he intimated. Reviewing six new books that, each in their own way, contemplated "the Canadian navel" against the backdrop of Canada's centennial celebrations left Cook in a cranky and combative mood.[53] He likened the authors to a bunch of "National Liberation Frontists" and, in a carefully chosen epigraph, he effectively compared their appeal to the national unity of Canada to Chairman Mao's appeal to the national unity of China, and by 1967 it was clear what China's Great Leap Forward meant for its minority nationalities.[54] From Cook's perspective, Canada's "academic nationalists" had started from the wrong premise: "Perhaps instead of constantly deploring our lack of identity, we should attempt to understand and explain the regional, ethnic and class identities that we do have. It might just be," he added, "that it is in these limited identities that 'Canadianism' is found."[55]

In a second and less well-known paper, presented to the Royal Society of Canada in 1967 but published in 1968, Cook argued that the nation, when used as a "central focus," had "distorted" Canadian historical writing in English and in French and "narrowed" our understanding of the past. Again, he urged historians to develop different categories of analysis, including region, ethnicity, and class, to write "the social, intellectual, religious, economic, labour, and agricultural history of Canada." He also reminded his audience that "were it not

for the anthropologists we should know almost nothing of the North American Indian": Is it because, he asked, they "muddy the otherwise clear image we have of our nation, one and indivisible?" The rhetorical question implied its own answer.[56]

Representing a powerful alternative to the Laurentian thesis, limited identities provided a conceptual opening to the rewriting of Canadian history.[57] Indeed, its strength lay in its open-endedness. Or, as Careless put it, where Americans pledged allegiance to "one Nation, under God, indivisible," Canadians lived, quite satisfactorily, in "one nation, eminently divisible."[58] Within a few years, limited identities included gender, in addition to region, ethnicity, and class,[59] making it time to update limited identities itself. Surveying recent Canadian historical writing by Louise Dechêne, Michael Katz, Nikki Strong-Boag, Carol Bacchi, Wendy Mitchinson, David Frank, Bryan Palmer, and Greg Kealey — that "well-stoked engine" of working-class history — Cook concluded that Canada "is not made up of what I once carelessly called 'limited identities.'" Rather, it's made up of "unlimited identities": "provincial, urban, regional, class, and even sexual." These different approaches, Cook said, "are valid and worthwhile because they lead to a more complex, and therefore more accurate, account of the Canadian past." Moreover, it "has been the competition and clash of those identities" which has given "our history its dynamic." Cook acknowledged that "national experience" still mattered, but the days of history as "nationalist apologetic" were over.[60]

On one or two occasions, Cook attempted to disown limited identities, once joking that Maurice Careless was "welcome to it."[61] After all, "The phrase I had coined to challenge a musty orthodoxy threatened to become another received truth, a cliché, an atrophied centennial cerebration." However, Cook never recanted "the conviction that lay behind the phrase."[62] As he told a friend in 1992, "I still think that Canadians have what I once called 'limited identities,' and this is one (perhaps the only one) of our virtues."[63]

Bottom line, he wrote in 2000, Canadian history was plural, not singular, and it included "workers and farmers, museums and asylums, women and men, housemaids and prime ministerial table rapping, businessmen and beekeepers, west and east, environment, culture, and religion." Indeed, "pleas for a return to so-called national history, especially when defined as political and diplomatic history," left him "cold." Still, he wondered, had he not "conceded victory to the enemy, 'national identity'"? "In attempting to deconstruct 'national identity,'

I had allowed the possibility that other identities were inferior consolation prizes for citizens of a country too anemic to have nurtured a proper national identity." Perhaps, he now argued, he should have described region, ethnicity, class, and gender as "equally valid identities." But that was not quite right either. Taking his cue from British historian Linda Colley, who argued that identities are "not like hats" because we "can and do put on several at a time," Cook now talked about multiple identities. If Colley's negative comparison of identities to hats was helpful, it still did not fully capture the complexity of identity because, at the end of the day, identities are not something that we put on, or for that matter, take off. Instead, we wear them all the time and they intersect one with the other, something Cook intuited, although he did not use intersection, and he certainly did not use intersectionality. After all, both limited identities and unlimited identities had assumed that identities are discrete, that they are neat and tidy, when they are not. Going back to the drawing board, Cook offered what he called his "millennium cerebration": "Identities, neither limited nor unlimited, but rather multiple, relational, shifting, [and] contingent."[64]

Thinking about her relationship with her thesis supervisor, Franca Iacovetta believes that Cook, at least as a supervisor, was already thinking about identities not as discrete, or self-contained, but as multiple, relational, shifting, and contingent long before his millennium cerebration, that he had gotten past "the somewhat stilted language of limited identities" much earlier.[65]

In 2009, Cook was invited by his alma mater to deliver the inaugural H. Sanford Riley Lecture in Canadian History. Speaking to a large audience in Convocation Hall at the University of Winnipeg, he asked, "Who broadened Canadian history?" It was a clear response to Jack Granatstein's 1998 polemic *Who Killed Canadian History?*[66] Canadian history, Cook began, is "alive and well," not "subverted or sundered or murdered."[67] To make his point, Cook did not list book after book on this or that specialized topic (although he did some of that and, in the process, confirmed what his former colleagues and friends have said about him, that he was an omnivorous reader). Instead, he looked at large-scale demographic, economic, and political changes across English and French Canada, as well as the rapid expansion of higher education and the growth of PhD programs. The old history — the history that he had been taught at United College and later studied at Queen's and the University of Toronto with Arthur

Lower and Donald Creighton — could neither contain nor explain these enormous, even tectonic, shifts. Something had to give, and it did in the form of history from the bottom-up written by a new generation of historians from diverse backgrounds.

History had not been killed. But it had been broadened by, among other people, Franca Iacovetta: "She nicely symbolizes my explanation for the emergence of a new, fuller understanding of Canadian history: a second-generation woman of Italian working-class origin, the first in her family to attend university and then graduate school, now a Professor of History at the University of Toronto. Work of this quality surely deserves better than Jack Granatstein's slur: 'multicultural mania.'"[68]

In his Riley lecture, Cook took a final stab at identity, casting a wide and generous net that included, yes, a nod to national identities. "Having been lucky once, let me try again: multiple identities: national | limited | transnational. That conceptualization, I think, would help us better understand both the Canadian past and the world in which we live."[69] If it lacks the pithiness of limited identities, it contains a lot of thinking, reading, and writing about Canada. It's also optimistic and forward looking, and avoids the blame game inherent in trying to identify who killed Canadian history when no one had.

What do the terms *limited identities*, *unlimited identities*, *multiple, relational, shifting, {and} contingent identities*, and, finally, *multiple identities: national | limited | transnational* have in common? All are variations on the letter *s*. Adding *s* to a word complicates that word, and thus the past, but it is more historically accurate, in this case, to talk about identities, not identity. In addition to being a foreign country, the past is also a plural country, a point Nikki Strong-Boag made in her 1994 presidential address and Chad Gaffield made seven years later in his presidential address.[70]

Where Donald Creighton was distinctly uncomfortable with the letter *s* — Canada had a single story, and he was its author — his Saskatchewan-born and Manitoba-raised doctoral student was perfectly comfortable with it:[71] Canada never had a single story, and he was one of many authors. "There are many ways of being Canadian," Cook insisted.[72] And there are many ways of writing Canadian history. To this end, he contributed to the political, intellectual, cultural, religious, women's, Indigenous, and environmental histories of Canada.[73] Looking at the range of his interests and his scholarship, Cook once likened himself to a grasshopper who jumped from topic to topic, landing long enough to write an article and sometimes a book, before

jumping to the next topic.[74] To quote Bryan Palmer, "He did not stand still," and that was a strength, not a weakness.[75]

One of the last topics he landed on was multiculturalism. And it's that word, multiculturalism, that I now want to examine, because, like anti-nationalism and limited identities, it constitutes part of the "distilled essence" of Ramsay Cook.

V

The trick for a country like Canada — and in an increasingly multicultural world, for many other nations — is to establish a workable balance, to imagine a community of communities that is real.
–Ramsay Cook, 2004

In a 1964 address on English Canada and French Canada to the Ontario Welfare Council on Intergroup Relations in Port Elgin, Ontario, Cook described English Canada as "pluralistic"; he referred to its "many faces"; and he talked about it as a "multi-voice society," meaning it didn't speak with a single voice. Yes, some voices were intolerant, he conceded. But, on balance, "we are not all Orangistes and Pastor Shields," a reference to Thomas Shields (1873–1955), aka the Battling Baptist. From his perch at the Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Shields denounced, across the first half of the twentieth century, liberal Protestants and Roman Catholics in equal measure. Finally, Cook raised the important question of "so-called new Canadians." As a group, they are not opposed to French Canada's claims for equality, he argued. In fact, new Canadians "understand better the value of a multicultural society than either French or English-speaking Canadians."[76]

Curiously enough, Cook was not initially thrilled with Trudeau's 1971 statement on multiculturalism. In fact, he was openly "hostile" to it according to the civil servant responsible for implementing the new multiculturalism program through the Department of the Secretary of State: From Cook's perspective, it was, in the words of Orest Khrulak, "a craven effort to buy the ethnic vote. But more than that, it threatened bilingualism and undermined national unity."[77] Whatever Cook's initial misgivings, he quickly embraced multiculturalism as a set of policies, as a value, and as a goal. If it had always been a historical fact, or what he called "the normal state of things" in the small prairie towns that he had grown up in,[78] it was now a thing to be recognized and even studied. In 1981, he wrote to John Roberts,

then the minister of state for science and technology, arguing that the research focus of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council should not be Canadian studies, however it is defined, calling it "nationalist cant" and "nationalist clap trap." Simply put, it is unfair to those scholars who study "the history, literature, [and] economics of countries from where our own multicultural population has come."[79]

Beginning in the early 1990s, Cook's commitment to multiculturalism deepened.[80] Through multiculturalism, Canada could become a "genuine" and "horizontal" mosaic. He was not naive. "Tensions, nativism, even racism are too often in evidence. If Sikhs have won the right to wear their turbans with RCMP uniforms, there are still bigots who wear buttons bearing racist slurs."[81] Speaking to the Ontario Select Committee on Constitutional and Intergovernmental Affairs in May 1990, he suggested that the Canadian Senate could be given an expanded role in "enhancing our multicultural character." Minorities, he added, "can never have too much protection."[82]

Canada's multicultural character was very much on his mind a few months later, in January 1991, when he declined an invitation to contribute to *"English Canada" Speaks Out*, a collection of essays — edited by Jack Granatstein and Ken McNaught — on English Canada's response to the failure of the Meech Lake Accord and the growing threat of Quebec separatism. What does English Canada want? Where are its lines in the sand? Granatstein and McNaught intended to find out.[83] Cook attended an early meeting but quickly decided it was not for him: too much nationalism, too little multiculturalism.[84] In a letter to McNaught he wrote: "I was uneasy about the references to 'multiculturalism.' While I share some reservations about the way this concept has been implemented and manipulated, I also think it has some important social and cultural aspects that are worth supporting. The idea that Canada, outside Quebec, can be some sort of homogenous cultural community is, in my view, both unrealistic and undesirable."[85] In follow-up letter, he added that the project's nationalism may be moderate, but all nationalism is, as a matter of course, "ethnocentric": "My reading suggests that 'extreme' nationalism is always what others practise; 'moderate' nationalism is what we practise. I have never had any success in convincing anyone of this view, but I still believe it — nationalism — is like pregnancy: there is no such thing as having it moderately." Cook conceded that nationalism is something "that most people find attractive." However, "I am just not made that way." [86]

Canada's constitutional crisis and steady march to a second referendum proved Cook's thesis that Canada has too much, not too little, nationalism, or what he once called that "nineteenth-century snake oil."[87] At the same time, Canada's changing immigration patterns strengthened his commitment to multiculturalism as the best way to manage an ethnically and religiously diverse society. In a fascinating letter to McNaught, who believed that multiculturalism had been a divisive failure,[88] Cook laid it on the line: "Once we admit that we need immigrants then we are admitting that we will have a multicultural society."

> Multiculturalism is, in my view, a way of integrating new immigrants into Canadian society in a less painful way than was the case in earlier decades. It does not mean preserving unchanged the cultures of every group that arrives — how could that happen with our schools, universities, and mass communications? But neither does it mean preserving unchanged our society as we think it exists or existed.[89]

Cook was right, because far from separating, or worse, ghettoising, new immigrants, the main thrust of multiculturalism has been integrating new immigrants.[90] As well, Cook did not worry about the problem of divided loyalties. "As for immigrants maintaining their loyalties to their homelands, what's new? It started with the British — as my father demonstrates — and is part of every generation of immigrants. And what about Jewish Canadians and their commitment to the state of Israel? Indeed, what about the Queen?"[91]

Premised on anti-nationalism, limited, unlimited, and relational identities, and multiculturalism, Cook's vision of the past, present, and future was curious, expansive, generous, liberal, and humane. Or, to use the word Adele Perry used to describe Cook's scholarship and his scholarly practice, it was capacious.[92] In his final lectures and addresses, Cook returned again and again to the themes he had developed over the course of his career: identity, diversity, complexity, equality, and minority rights, including language rights, women's rights, Indigenous rights, gay and lesbian rights, and religious rights. Imagine a world where the hijab is not seen as some kind of threat, he told Ryerson University's Class of 2007. "I think that's the sort of world into which we are now invited to be citizens."[93] If we don't choose that world, he believed, then we may have to follow the advice that an Italian woman felt compelled to give to her son: "*Scappa, che arriva la patria* (Run away, the fatherland is coming)."[94]

Across the length and breadth of his career, Cook defended a basic truth that he first articulated in 1964: "A society characterized by diversity is much more likely to be a healthy society than one characterized by conformity."[95] Of course, the meaning of diversity changed over time, and Cook changed with it. In 2016, he and I exchanged a lot of emails. We were working on a collection of his greatest hits, a series of his most important essays, articles, and reviews. Our working title was *Ramsay Cook and the Writing of Canadian History*, although for the most part we referred to it as *The Cook Book*, or just the book. In one of his last emails, he shared something that he had read that morning in a *New York Times* column comparing the open and tolerant vision of Sadiq Khan, the newly elected mayor of London, to the closed and intolerant vision of Donald Trump, the presumptive nominee for the Republican Party. At the very moment Khan was elected mayor of one of the world's most diverse and cosmopolitan cities, Trump was promising to ban non-citizen Muslims from entering the United States, including, in effect, the mayor of London. The columnist quoted Khan, praising his ability to wear many hats and his willingness to celebrate diversity: "I'm a Londoner," Khan said, "I'm a European, I'm British, I'm English, I'm of Islamic faith, of Asian origin, of Pakistani heritage, a dad, [and] a husband."[96] The quotation struck a resonant chord in Cook: It is "the finest description of (Un) limited Identities that I have so far seen," he said. "Let's put that in the book!"[97] Four days later, he had a stroke.

What can he still teach us? A lot, I think. What Eleanor Cook once said about Northrop Frye — that more than any other writer of, not in, but of, this country, he taught us how to see — can be said of Ramsay Cook.[98] Federalism, bilingualism, multiculturalism, and minority rights belong to all of us: They are the best security, to use Lord Acton's phrase, of difference, broadly defined.

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Endnotes

1 See Donald Wright, "Presidential Addresses to the Canadian Historical Association, 1922–2022," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 33, no. 1 (2023): 17–52.

2 Donald Creighton, "Presidential Address," *Annual Report of the Canadian Historical Association* 36 (1957): 1

3 "What makes a man do that?" Frank Underhill asked one of his former graduate students. Margaret Prang did not have an answer. See Donald Wright, *Donald Creighton: A Life in History* (University of Toronto Press, 2015), 222–23. On the Creighton–Underhill rivalry, see R. Douglas Francis, *Frank Underhill: Intellectual Provocateur* (University of Toronto Press, 1986), 159–60.

4 Ramsay Cook, "Tillers and Toilers: The Rise and Fall of Populism in Canada in the 1890s," *Historical Papers | Communications historiques*, 19 (1984): 3. See Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing, 1900–1970* (University of Toronto Press, 1976); Serge Gagnon, *Le Québec et ses historiens, de 1840 à 1920 : la Nouvelle-France de Garneau à Groulx* (Presses de l'Université Laval, 1978); and Serge Gagnon, *Quebec and its Historians: The Twentieth Century* (Harvest House, 1985). Molly Ungar, one of Cook's thirty-seven doctoral students, reports that no one at York obeyed that commandment. Personal communication with the author, 16 May 2025.

5 In 1997, Carl Berger delivered a paper on Ramsay Cook's career at a conference, hosted by the University of Ottawa, to mark his retirement from York University. Afterward, Cook wrote him to say thanks and to gently challenge some of Berger's insights. He added: "The paper probably makes me sound more consistent than I have been — but you can leave that to anyone foolish enough to take up this subject again." This means that in addition to being Carl Berger the Lesser, I am also foolish! Ramsay Cook to Carl Berger, 27 October 1997, box 4, file 6, B2008-0012, Carl Berger Fonds, University of Toronto Archives (hereafter cited as UTA).

6 For introductions to Cook's scholarship, see Marcel Martel, "A Rare Bird on the Earth: Identities and Nationalisms in Ramsay Cook's Canada," *Annual Review of Canadian Studies* 38 (2018): 61–76; and Carl Berger, "Ramsay Cook: History, Nationalism, and Religion," foreword to *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian Canada*, by Ramsay Cook, 2nd ed. (University of Toronto Press, 2016), xi–xx.

7 On Cook at United College, see Donald Wright, "Ceci n'est pas Ramsay Cook: A Biographical Reconnaissance," in *Clio's Lives: Biographies and Autobiographies of Historians*, ed. Doug Munro and John Reid (ANU Press, 2017), 103–34.

8 Ramsay Cook, "Introduction," in *Watching Quebec: Selected Essays* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), x.

9 Daniel Stone, ed., *The Polish Memoirs of William John Rose* (University of Toronto Press, 1975), xvi.

10 Ramsay Cook, "Who Broadened Canadian History?" Riley Lecture, University of Winnipeg, 2009. On another occasion he said that national policy is often Ontario policy. See "Distinguished Canadian: Ramsay Cook," interview with Vincent Tovell, 27 May 1972, CBC Archive, accessed 23 February 2026, https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/video/1.3595352.

11 Cook, *Watching Quebec,* x. Guy Laforest believes that Cook misread Herder and was too quick to dismiss nationalism, believing that "une autre lecture, plus nuancée, de la pensée herdérienne et de la nature du nationalisme dans le monde contemporain" is possible. Of course, Laforest never agreed with Cook. See Guy Laforest, "Herder, Kedourie et les errements de l'antinationalisme du Canada," in *L'engagement intellectuel: mélanges en honneur de Léon Dion*, ed. Raymond Hudon and Réjean Pelletier (Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1991).

12 See Ramsay Cook, "Canadian Liberalism in Wartime: A Study of the Defence of Canada Regulations and Some Canadian Attitudes to Civil Liberties in Wartime, 1939–1945," (MA thesis, Queen's University, 1955). See also Ramsay Cook, "Canadian Freedom in Wartime, 1939–1945," in *His Own Man: Essays in Honour of Arthur Reginald Marsden Lower*, ed. W. H. Heick and Roger Graham (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974). In his master's thesis and in this essay, Cook was especially interested in the internment of Japanese Canadians. In 1962, he described the Japanese as "the most mistreated minority in Canadian history." Ramsay Cook, "What About the Bill of Rights?" *Canadian Forum*, March 1962.

13 Lord Acton, "On Nationality," in *The History of Freedom and Other Essays*, ed. John E. E. Dalberg Acton (Cosimo, 2007), 288, 285, 289.

14 Acton, "On Nationality," 290. Cook often quoted this sentence. See Ramsay Cook, "A New Awakening?" *Canadian Forum*, June 1964, 50; Ramsay Cook, *Canada and the French Canadian Question* (Macmillan, 1966), 5, 103; Ramsay Cook, *The Maple Leaf Forever: Essays on Nationalism and Politics in Canada* (Macmillan, 1971), 6; Cook, *Watching Quebec*, x.

15 Ramsay Cook, *The Teeth of Time: Remembering Pierre Elliott Trudeau* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 12.

16 In 1976, *Saturday Night* invited a handful of prominent Canadians to identify the book, or books, that most influenced them in their late teens and early twenties, that time in their lives when they were "testing boundaries" and coming into their own. Looking back at his

twenty-something self, Ramsay Cook listed three books, including *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. "I had already read *1984* and liked it, so I went in search of Orwell (who was then, as now, my main intellectual hero)." As a writer, Orwell understood the corrupting influence of greed, the sophistry of politicians, and the willingness of people in power — and of people with power — to lie, deceive, and gaslight, making *Animal Farm* a little book about a lot of things: revolution, violence, corruption, hypocrisy, history, and the use of history, as when one pig (Napoleon) rewrites the Battle of the Cowshed to minimize the role of a rival pig (Snowball). See Sandra Martin, "The Book That Changed My Life. Or, at Any Rate, Altered It. Twenty Versions of Exhilarating and Mind-Wrenching Experience That (Usually) Happens Once in a Lifetime," *Saturday Night*, May 1976, 31–39.

17 Cook, *Teeth of Time*, 11.

18 George Orwell, "Notes on Nationalism," in *England Your England and Other Essays* (Secker and Warburg, 1953), 41, 43. "Every nationalist," Orwell wrote, "is capable of the most flagrant dishonesty, but he is also — since he is conscious of serving something bigger than himself — unshakeably certain of being in the right." Ramsay Cook marked this passage in his copy of *England Your England and Other Essays*.

19 Orwell, "Notes on Nationalism," 52. Beside this passage, Cook wrote "Doublethink," a term Orwell invented in *1984* to mean the ability to believe two contradictory things at the same time. For example, "War is peace."

20 Orwell, "Notes on Nationalism," 53. Cook marked this passage.

21 Orwell, "Notes on Nationalism," 42. Cook underlined this passage. I am grateful to Markham Cook for sending me photographs of the marginalia in his father's copy, purchased in June 1955, of *England Your England and Other Essays*. In 1960, a young Ramsay Cook clipped a book review from the *Toronto Star* by Kildare Dobbs. Reviewing *The Rejection of Politics* by George Woodcock (*Toronto Star*, 20 January 1960), Dobbs cited George Orwell's distinction between patriotism and nationalism. Cook highlighted this part of the review, and tucked it into a file, which became part of his papers at York University. See box 21, file 693, F0293, 1988-009, George Ramsay Cook Fonds, York University Archives (hereafter cited as YUA). Forty-six years later, Cook quoted Orwell on the difference between patriotism and nationalism in a lengthy epigraph in *The Teeth of Time*, and drew on it to explain Trudeau's anti-nationalism and, in effect, his own. See Cook, *Teeth of Time*, chap. 3.

22 See Charles Thompson (Tom) Faulkner, "Ramsay Cook: An Evaluation of an Historian's Nationalism in Canada," (master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1972).

23 Cook, *Watching Quebec*, x. "My interest in Quebec was born at Queen's," he said. Ramsay Cook, interview with the author, 14 July 2014.

24 "No English Canadian who has read this serious Montreal daily at any time since its founding by Henri Bourassa can feel anything but regret that we have nothing to compare with it in English Canada. And the most impressive feature of the newspaper has always been its editorial page." See Ramsay Cook, "André Laurendeau: Canadien ou Canadian?," *Canadian Forum*, April 1962, 8. Cook later described his relationship with *Le Devoir* as a "love affair" that was "long, faithful, and rewarding." See Ramsay Cook, "Bourassa to Bisonette: The Evolution of Castor-Rougeisme," in *Watching Quebec*, 135.

25 See Michael Behiels, *Prelude to Quebec's Quiet Revolution: Liberalism versus Neo-Nationalism, 1945-1960* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985).

26 Cook, *Watching Quebec*, xii.

27 "I will not shrink from emphasizing those aspects of nationalist thought which are a burden on the present, and harmful to free and honest action." Pierre Trudeau, "The Province of Quebec at the Time of the Strike," in *The Asbestos Strike*, ed. Pierre Trudeau (James Lewis and Samuel, 1974), 8.

28 Pierre Trudeau, "New Treason of the Intellectuals," in *Against the Current: Selected Writings, 1939–1996*, ed. Gérard Pelletier (McClelland and Stewart, 1996), 151.

29 Trudeau, "New Treason of the Intellectuals," 178.

30 Cook, *Teeth of Time*, 15. When Trudeau was contemplating the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada in 1968, Cook played a role in drafting and then circulating a petition encouraging him to run. John English, *Citizen of the World: The Life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau*, vol. 1, *1919–1968* (Knopf, 2006), 447–48. See also Cook, *Teeth of Time*, 40–67. One petition simply stated, "Pierre Elliott Trudeau is a good shit (merde)." It was signed by June Callwood, Peter Gzowski, Trent Fayne, Jenny Gzowski, and Barbara Frum. It is not clear who started the petition or how it ended up in Cook's papers. See "Pierre Elliott Trudeau is a good shit (merde)," n.d., ca. January 1968, box 23, file 742, F0293, 1988-009, George Ramsay Cook Fonds, YUA. One thing, however, is clear. Cook's and Trudeau's friendship had deepened, and their anti-nationalism had toughened. Writing in *The Toronto Telegram*, Douglas Fisher and Harry Crowe described Ramsay Cook as the "Morden, Manitoba edition of Pierre Trudeau." Douglas Fisher and Harry Crowe, "The Four Pillars of Trudeauism," *Toronto Telegram*, 30 January 1968. Cook and Trudeau shared an interest in the scholarship of Elie Kedourie, whose 1960 book called, simply, *Nationalism* confirmed their instincts: The principle of national self-determination was a source of conflict and instability. In fact, Fisher and Crowe quipped, "When

historian Ramsay Cook looks in a mirror he sees Justice Minister Trudeau, and when Mr. Trudeau looks, he sees Professor Cook. It is Elie Kedourie, brilliant scholar of nationalism and the nation state, who is holding the mirror." Douglas Fisher and Harry Crowe, "The Key to Trudeauism" *Toronto Telegram*, 31 January 1968. See also Douglas Fisher and Harry Crowe, "Tandem of Professor and Politician," *Toronto Telegram*, 1 February 1968. In 1968–69, Cook held an appointment at Harvard University. Writing to a colleague in Toronto, he reported that "Elie Kedourie is coming over for dinner tomorrow night, so we'll have a good time denouncing all nationalists!!! Kedourie, by the way, for all his anti-nationalism, is tremendously anti-American. I guess nobody is clean." Ramsay Cook to Kenneth McNaught, 23 January 1969, box 2, file 3, B1997-0031, Kenneth McNaught Fonds, UTA. See also Cook, *Teeth of Time,* 13.

31 See Pierre Trudeau, "The Multi-National State in Canada," *Canadian Forum*, June 1962, 52–54.

32 On Cook's early articles in *The Canadian Forum*, see Patrice Dutil, "Ramsay Cook's Quest for an Intellectual Phoenix, 1960–1968," in *Nation, Ideas, Identities: Essays in Honour of Ramsay Cook*, ed. Michael Behiels and Marcel Martel (Oxford University Press, 2000).

33 The term *public intellectual* means different things when applied to different people. To quote Doug Munro, "The term evades ready definition because of the range of individuals to whom it is applied is so amorphous, the issues they confront so varied, the methods they employ so contrasting, and the circumstances and contexts within which they function can be so different." For example, Cook was not a cultural critic, nor was he a public ethicist teaching Canadians the difference between right and wrong. But he cared deeply about certain issues, especially minority rights, the excesses of nationalism, Canadian federalism, and the constitution. And he cared about art, books, and ideas. To these ends, he contributed to public debates and ongoing conversations in newspapers and magazines, on television, and on the radio. It was an obligation, even a moral imperative. See Doug Munro, *J. C. Beaglehole: Public Intellectual, Critical Conscience* (Steele Roberts, 2012), 64. For the different meanings of — indeed, the largeness of — the term *public intellectual* in Canada, see Nelson Wiseman, ed., *The Public Intellectual in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2013).

34 Charles Beer, interview with the author, 8 March 2023

35 See Cook, *Canada and the French Canadian Question*; Ramsay Cook, *French Canadian Nationalism: An Anthology* (Macmillan, 1969).

36 Cook, "New Awakening?," 50. In 1966, he made it one of the central themes of *Canada and the French Canadian Question*. "My view is that we have had too much, not too little, nationalism in Canada, and that our

various nationalisms are the chief threat to the peace and survival of Canada." Cook, *Canada and the French Canadian Question*, 4.

37 Cook, *Watching Quebec*, xiii

38 Ramsay Cook, "Church, Schools, and Politics in Manitoba, 1903-12," *Canadian Historical Review* 39, no. 1 (1958): 23

39 Ramsay Cook, *The Politics of John W. Dafoe and the Free Press* (University of Toronto Press, 1963).

40 Ramsay Cook to Eugene Forsey, 9 August 1977, vol. 42, file Cook, Ramsay, MG 30 A 25, Eugene Forsey Fonds, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter cited as LAC).

41 Ramsay Cook to Carl Berger, 14 January 1973, box 1, file 3, B2008-0012, Carl Berger Fonds, UTA. Cook joked that the subject of "Anglo Saxon moral unity" merits "a full scale study — well funded, of course."

42 Looking back on Cook's career, his doctoral student Ralph Heintzman felt that he sometimes carried his anti-nationalism "too far." "Yet fifty years later it's not hard to see the great evil nationalism is now working in the world, in its alliance with populism. From that point of view, Ramsay's anti-nationalism is still relevant today." Ralph Heintzman, personal communication with the author, 2 December 2024

43 David Sheps believed that Ramsay Cook was living in the nineteenth century, not the twentieth. In a long letter to Carl Berger, he referred to the "hysterical anti-nationalism" of "people like Ramsay Cook — who seem to operate psychologically strictly in an inbred family context — reacting against the racist excesses of their forefathers, instead of responding in terms of political & social reality in today's North American context. The irrationality of nationalist mythology dialectically breeds the further irrationality of modish anti-nationalism. People like Cook understand nationalism only in 19th century European terms (largely a product of imperialist & chauvinist peoples) & hopelessly fail to understand the very different nationalism of colonial peoples in the 20th century (who are asked to forsake their own natural aspirations because of the mess made of things by their imperial masters — therefore, it is the colonized once again who are asked to suffer — in the name of reason — for the mistakes of the colonizers — this applies to English Canadians, French Canadians, Negroes & 'third-worlders')." David Sheps to Carl Berger, 18 October 1966, box 1, file 2, B2008-0012, Carl Berger Fonds, UTA.

44 Gad Horowitz told Ramsay Cook that Trudeau is still fighting Duplessis and that he is still fighting the Orange Lodge. "Both are dead." Gad Horowitz to Ramsay Cook, 9 November 1966, box 23, file 740, F0293, 1988-009, George Ramsay Cook Fonds, YUA.

45 Daniel Drache, "The Canadian Bourgeoisie and its National Consciousness," in *Close the 49th Parallel: The Americanization of Canada*, ed. Ian Lumsden (University of Toronto Press, 1970), 4.

46 Goldwin French, Review of *Canada and the French-Canadian Question*, *Queen's Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (1966): 446.

47 See Ramsay Cook, "A Nationalist Intellectual Behind Every Maple Tree," *Saturday Night*, April 1970, 19–22.

48 Ramsay Cook to Donald Smiley, 27 March 1970, box 11, file 261, F0293, 1988-009, George Ramsay Cook Fonds, YUA.

49 Donald Smiley, Review of *The Maple Leaf Forever: Essays on Nationalism and Politics in Canada*, *Canadian Historical Review* 53, no. 1 (1972): 75–78. Bill Morton also criticized *The Maple Leaf Forever* for taking its anti-nationalism too far. See W. L. Morton, "Nihilism Is Worse Than Nationalism," *Globe and Mail*, 17 April 1971.

50 In the preface to the second edition of *The Maple Leaf Forever*, Cook said what he thought of Smiley's review. Although he did not refer to Smiley by name, he wrote, "One critic went so far as to suggest that the history of the United States refuted my contention that a homogenous nationalist state was an intolerant one. Since by definition homogeneous means an unwillingness to tolerate heterogeneity, the point seems self-contradictory. Certainly, black Americans would think so." Ramsay Cook, "Preface to the Second Edition," *The Maple Leaf Forever: Essays on Nationalism and Politics in Canada* (Macmillan, 1977), x.

51 See Maurice Careless, "'Limited Identities' in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 50, no. 1 (1969): 1–10.

52 Ramsay Cook, "Identities Are Not Like Hats," *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 2 (2000): 262.

53 Ramsay Cook, "Centennial Cerebrations," *International Journal* 22, no. 4 (1967): 660. The six books under review included *The Canadian Political Nationality* by Donald Smiley. Ramsay Cook said what he thought. It was "tedious"; its historical section was "brief and often superficial"; and its prescriptions were "tepid, to say the least." Cook, "Centennial Cerebrations," 661.

54 Cook, "Centennial Cerebrations," 660, 659.

55 Cook, "Centennial Cerebrations," 659, 663.

56 Ramsay Cook, "Canadian Historical Writing" in *Scholarship in Canada, 1967: Symposium Presented to Section II of the Royal Society of Canada in 1967*, ed. R. H. Hubbard (University of Toronto Press, 1968), 80, 81.

57 On listening to Maurice Careless's paper to the American Historical Association, before it was published in the *Canadian Historical Review*, Donald Creighton felt "very depressed": "I am a very old fashioned nationalist who is completely out of tune with the present." Donald Creighton, diary entry, 30 December 1967, vol. 65, file 6, MG 31 D 77, Donald Creighton Fonds, LAC.

58 Careless, "Limited Identities," 1.

59 That Canadian historians had ignored women's history did not surprise him: The profession has been both small and "dominated by men." Ramsay Cook, "Introduction," in *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada*, by Catherine Cleverdon (University of Toronto Press, 1974), viii. See also Ramsay Cook and Wendy Mitchinson, eds., *The Proper Sphere: Woman's Place in Canadian Society* (Oxford University Press, 1976). On Cook's role in her career, see Wendy Mitchinson, "No One Becomes a Feminist to Be Appreciated," *Canadian Historical Review* 94, no. 3 (2013): 436–58.

60 Ramsay Cook, "The Golden Age of Canadian Historical Writing," *Historical Reflections* 4, no. 1 (1977), 144, 141, 148, 149, 148. In 1993, Cook revisited limited identities: "One of the sweet ironies in the arid debate between 'nationalists' and 'limited identitarians' on historiography is that neither side appears to recognize that class, ethnicity and gender describe what groups of Canadians have in common, while 'nationalism' most often provokes divisions — 'regionalism'!" Ramsay Cook, "The New History of Atlantic Canada," *Acadiensis* 23, no. 1 (1993): 146.

61 Ramsay Cook, "Nation, Identity, Rights: Reflections on W. L. Morton's *Canadian Identity," Journal of Canadian Studies* 29, no. 2 (1994): 12. See also Cook, *Teeth of Time*, 136.

62 Cook, "Identities Are Not Like Hats," 262. Cook himself referred to limited identities as a "new cliché." Ramsay Cook, "Multiculturalism and Canadian Historiography," unpublished paper, n.d., ca. 1990, 18, box 2, file 3, F0293, 1993-036, George Ramsay Cook Fonds, YUA.

63 Ramsay Cook to Robert Fulford, 26 May 1992, box 11, file 4, Robert Fulford Fonds, McMaster University Archives and Research Collections.

64 Cook, "Identities Are Not Like Hats," 263, 262, 265.

65 Franca Iacovetta, personal communication with the author, 26 March 2025.

66 Jack Granatstein never liked limited identities: "Limited identities were almost openly anti-nationalist: it was not the nation that mattered, but 'smaller, differentiated, provincial or regional societies'; not Canadians as a whole, but the components of the ethnic mosaic; not Canadians as a society, but Canadians in their social classes." Granatstein also stated — erroneously — that Cook had "largely repudiated the interpretation that became attached to his phrase." Jack Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (HarperCollins, 1998), 74

67 Ramsay Cook, "Who Broadened Canadian History?," H. Sanford Riley Lecture, 19 October 2009. Copy in possession of the author.

68 Cook, "Who Broadened Canadian History?" See also Franca Iacovetta, "One of Ramsay's Girls: Feminists and the Historian's Craft," *Canadian Historical Review* 100, no. 1 (2019): 80–85; Franca Iacovetta, "Working-Class Girl, Feminist Historian, Collective Solidarities," *Canadian Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (2023): 407–31.

69 Cook, "Who Broadened Canadian History?"

70 "For the first time," Nikki Strong-Boag reported, "we see the possibility of constructing *narratives* that have some real claim to representing the Canadian *peoples*" (emphasis added). Veronica Strong-Boag, "Contested Space: The Politics of Canadian Memory," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 5 (1994): 12. Historical thinking, Chad Gaffield argued, has moved "from the singular to plural in conceptualizing the past. As historians of education began replacing 'literacy' with 'literacies,' for example, other scholars started using 'families' rather than 'the family,' and 'identities' rather than 'identity.'" Chad Gaffield, "Historical Thinking, C. P. Snow's Two Cultures, and a Hope for the Twenty-First Century," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 12 (2001): 11–12

71 See Wright, *Donald Creighton,* 318–19.

72 "Distinguished Canadian: Ramsay Cook."

73 In an unpublished paper on environmental history, Cook drew on the letter *s* when he concluded: "Canada, to state the obvious, is not an environment, but many environments, each with its own history of change. Canada will remain an environment without a history until each of its many environments is fully described and analyzed." Ramsay Cook, "Canada: An Environment Without a History," Themes and Issues in North American Environmental History, University of Toronto, 24–26 April 1998, box 2, file 14, F0293, 2001-045, George Ramsay Cook Fonds, YUA.

74 Ramsay Cook, interview with the author, 27 August 2015.

75 Bryan Palmer, personal communication with the author, 24 September 2024.

76 Ramsay Cook, "An English Canadian Looks at French Canada," 16, 17, 21, box 7, file 142, F0293, 1988-009, George Ramsay Cook Fonds, YUA. Cook also referred to "the many coloured coat of English Canada." A biblical reference to Joseph's coat of many colours, it is not clear what Cook meant. Was Cook implying that English Canada, like Joseph, was favoured? After delivering his address, Cook went to Muskoka for a two-week holiday. On his return he was stunned to learn that his lecture had been reported by *The Montreal Star* under the headline "Stop Yelling Secession, Quebec Told." *Montreal Star*, 16 July 1964. He immediately wrote to George Ferguson, the editor. Because of his sympathy for Quebec, he is seen as a "vendu" in English Canada, he said. But based on this news report, he will be seen as an "Orangiste" in French Canada. Ramsay Cook to George Ferguson, 30 July 1964, box 1, file 4, F0293, 1988-009, George Ramsay Cook Fonds, YUA. Ferguson ran both a correction and an extract from his address. "Professor Ramsay Cook is a distinguished and articulate friend of French Canada." In fact, "the greater part of Dr. Cook's address, as the extract

shows, was devoted to criticizing the narrow and intolerant nationalism of some English Canadians and to show that English Canadians had been guilty of separatism in reverse by limiting, and on occasion even denying, French Canadians the right to live according to the dictates of their culture outside Quebec." See "No Temper Here" and Ramsay Cook, "Nationalism: Double-Edge Sword," *Montreal Star*, 4 August 1964. See also Ramsay Cook, "Nationalism Is a Blade That Can Cut Two Ways," *Financial Times*, 10 August 1964. For its part, *Le Devoir* ran a more sympathetic report of Cook's address. "Le conferencier a signalé que la jeune generation de Canadiens de langue anglaise manifeste beaucoup plus de sympathie et d'intérêt à l'endroit des Canadiens français que leur aînés." "Un universitaire de Toronto : le Québec n'a encore rien propose de 'bien précis.'" *Le Devoir*, 15 July 1964.

77 As a director in the Department of Secretary of State, Orest Khrulak met with Canadian academics and journalists to explain the government's new policy of multiculturalism in 1972–1973. He met with Harold Troper, Irving Abella, Howard Palmer, and Ramsay Cook, among others. "I didn't know Ramsay. But I knew of him. He was an important university figure, and I wanted to talk to him." Khrulak explained that some academics were curious, even receptive. Others were hostile. "Ramsay Cook was hostile. He wasn't at all interested in hearing what I had to say or in learning about multiculturalism. To him, it was a craven effort to buy the ethnic vote. But more than that, it threatened bilingualism and undermined national unity. Quebec and Quebec's place in Canada were more important than multiculturalism. He didn't give me an opportunity to explain what multiculturalism was or what we were doing. He wasn't even interested in it. His strong reaction was surprising, and I left discouraged." Of course, "his reaction wasn't new. A lot of people told me that it was about buying the ethnic vote. But his strong opposition surprised me. He just didn't want to hear what I had to say. His vehemence bothered me. It was discouraging." Indeed, "I had expected more openness from Ramsay. But for him, it was all about Quebec and the crisis of national unity." Orest Khrulak, interview with the author, 22 August 2023. See also Orest Kruhlak Interview, 3 August 2010, Densho Digital Archive, accessed 23 February 2026, https://ddr.densho.org/media/ddr-densho-1000/ddr-densho-1000-296-transcript-835e516ed7.htm. Although Cook got past his initial and negative reaction to multiculturalism, Bernard Ostry did not. As late as 1993, he described it as "the nastiest vote-buying scheme ever devised by either major party." Bernard Ostry to Kenneth McNaught, 21 October 1993, box 3, file 8, B97-0031, Kenneth McNaught Fonds, UTA. A young Jim Miller, however, quickly embraced multiculturalism. And in a generous defence of multiculturalism, he drew on Ramsay Cook's

centennial cerebrations and its recognition of limited identities. "All of this leads me to believe that the true Canadian identity is diversity, and that diversity is beneficial. Our national character is not monolithic but plural, not specific but diverse, not exclusive but ecumenical, not insular but open and receptive." J. R. Miller, "Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity," unpublished paper, 27–29 October 1978, Third Canadian Conference on Multiculturalism, vol. 35, file 10, R11212, LAC.

78 Cook, *Watching Quebec,* viii, x.

79 Ramsay Cook to John Roberts, 3 December 1981, box 3, file 53, F0293, 1988-009, George Ramsay Cook Fonds, YUA.

80 See Ramsay Cook, "Canadian Studies in a Multicultural Post-Nationalist Canada," *Annual Review of Canadian Studies* 18 (1998): 49–62; and Ramsay Cook, "Canada: A Post-Nationalist Nation?," in *Shifting Foundations of Modern Nation-States: Realignments of Belonging*, ed. Sima Godfrey and Frank Unger (University of Toronto Press, 2004). In her eulogy to her father, Margaret Cook, joked that her father's commitment to multiculturalism could be seen in the cars he drove: a Fiat, a Citroën, a Volvo, a Saab, and a Subaru. Margaret Cook, memorial service for Ramsay Cook, 23 October 2016. Of course, Cook's fondness for foreign cars often came back to bite him: They seemed to be always breaking down and he could never find a mechanic to fix them. Viv Nelles, interview with the author, 2 March 2025.

81 Cook, "Multiculturalism and Canadian Historiography," 21. In his presidential address to the CHA, Cook made a reference to the "great challenges of our time," including "the failure of multiculturalism." It is not clear what, exactly, he meant. Cook, "Tillers and Toilers," 4.

82 Ramsay Cook, "Ontario Select Committee on Constitutional and Intergovernmental Affairs: Senate Reform," 16 May 1990, box 2, file 5, F0293, 1993-036, George Ramsay Cook Fonds, YUA.

83 See Jack Granatstein and Kenneth McNaught, eds., *"English Canada" Speaks Out* (Doubleday, 1991). Although he did not contribute a paper in the end, Michael Behiels was an early supporter of the project. "English-speaking Canadian historians have contributed to the crisis of unity in Canada over the past generation by preaching a vision of 'limited identities' and criticizing the need for a pan-Canadian 'political' nationalism. There has been very little overt criticism of the modern variants of Québécois nationalism." Michael Behiels to Kenneth McNaught, 28 January 1991, box 3, file 7, B97-0031, Kenneth McNaught Fonds, UTA.

84 *"English Canada" Speaks Out* contained one essay on multiculturalism and it offered a dissenting and highly critical view of multiculturalism. "The new Canada should be built on a foundation of individual needs and rights, but it should also seek to facilitate the enrichment of the

common culture by all citizens. It should emphatically reject the tribalism that has thus far disguised itself with the rhetoric of multiculturalism" (italics in original). Al Meghji, "Multiculturalism in the New Canada," in Granatstein and McNaught, *"English Canada" Speaks Out*, 242.

85 Ramsay Cook to Kenneth McNaught, 13 January 1991, box 3, file 7, B97-0031, Kenneth McNaught Fonds, UTA.

86 Ramsay Cook to Kenneth McNaught, 19 January 1991, box 3, file 7, B97-0031, Kenneth McNaught Fonds, UTA. McNaught felt that Cook had misunderstood the project's purpose and that he was unfairly tarring it with his anti-nationalist brush. If nationalism, McNaught said, "means serious commitment to a tolerant, yet purposive and independent Canadian state, we can readily accept it." Kenneth McNaught to volume contributors, 1 February 1991, box 7, file 16, B97-0031, Kenneth McNaught Fonds, UTA. Writing to Eugene Forsey, he reported: "Ramsay feels that we are too much animated by 'nationalism.' I have remonstrated with him, amicably, that he is wrong to equate our wish to perpetuate the Canadian experiment of tolerant, mutually helpful federalism with the kind of nationalism he opposes so vigorously in Quebec. Despite Ramsay's most excellent previous analyses of nationalism, I think he is blinkered, somewhat, by his enviable Quebec friendships, [and] that he should, by now, use 'nationalism' a bit more discriminately." Kenneth McNaught to Eugene Forsey, 21 January 1991, box 7, file 16, B97-0031, Kenneth McNaught Fonds, UTA. Publicly, McNaught took a gentle swipe at Cook when he argued that Canadians have "enshrined the notion of 'limited identities,' a 'community of communities,' a patchwork quilt of ever more important groups, provinces, regions." However, "our most imminent peril now is the foolish, fissiparous faith that the parts are greater than the whole." Kenneth McNaught, "Nationalism Need Not Be Forgotten," *Kingston Whig-Standard*, n.d., copy in box 7, file 5, B97-0031, Kenneth McNaught Fonds, UTA.

87 Ramsay Cook, "Artful Codgers," *Globe and Mail*, 23 April 2005.

88 See Kenneth McNaught, "Three Myths and the Canadian Continuum," *Round Table* 82, no. 327 (1993): 315–22.

89 Ramsay Cook to Kenneth McNaught, n.d., ca. winter 1994, box 3, file 8, B97-0031, Kenneth McNaught Fonds, UTA.

90 See Daniel Meister, "Who Killed the Canadian History of Multiculturalism?" *Active History*, 12 March 2024, https://activehistory.ca/blog/2024/03/12/who-killed-the-history-of-canadian-multiculturalism/. See also Phil Ryan, *Multicultiphobia* (University of Toronto Press, 2010). Finally, Will Kymlicka, a world scholar of multiculturalism, insists that if multiculturalism was "a political bargain to help address the national unity crisis," it was not a "crude bargain": "There were also

important values and principles that inspired and guided the policy." Moreover, "something like 'multiculturalism within a bilingual framework' is the only possible basis for Canada to survive as a country. The only way to keep Quebec in the country is to re-affirm duality in the form of official bilingualism. But the only form of duality that can be politically sustained is one that does not come at the expense of ethnic groups, excluding them from public space and state resources. I see no other viable formula for keeping the country together." Will Kymlicka, "The Three Lives of Multiculturalism," in *Revisiting Multiculturalism in Canada: Theories, Policies, and Debates*, ed. Shibao Guo and Lloyd Wong (Sense Publishing, 2015), 19. Will Kymlicka influenced Cook's thinking about multiculturalism, citizenship, and the accommodation of difference. See Cook, "Artful Codgers."

91 Ramsay Cook to Kenneth McNaught, n.d., ca. winter 1994, box 3, file 8, B97-0031, Kenneth McNaught Fonds, UTA.

92 Adele Perry, "Ramsay Cook and the Writing of History in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 100, no. 1 (2019): 86, 91.

93 Ramsay Cook, convocation address, Ryerson University, spring 2007. Copy in possession of author. I would like to thank Molly Ungar for bringing it to my attention and sharing her copy with me. See also Ramsay Cook, convocation address, York University, October 2000, York University Digital Library, accessed 23 February 2026, https://digital.library.yorku.ca/york-university-computing-and-network-services-fonds/honorary-degree-2000-fall-convocation-ramsay-0.

94 Ramsay Cook, "Who Belongs Where?," in *Canada, Quebec, and the Uses of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (McClelland and Stewart, 1995), 21.

95 Cook, "An English Canadian Looks at French Canada," 17.

96 Roger Cohen, "Sadiq Khan vs Donald Trump," *New York Times*, 9 May 2016.

97 Ramsay Cook, personal communication with the author, 9 May 2016.

98 "More than any other writer of this country, Northrop Frye has taught us how to see." Eleanor Cook, "'A Seeing and Unseeing in the Eye': Canadian Literature and the Sense of Place," *Daedalus* 117, no. 4 (1988): 228.