

Jose E. Igartua. *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945-1971.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007. viii + 277 pp. \$34.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7748-1088-3.



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The problem of national identity in Canada has, by turns, fascinated, frustrated, obsessed, and disgusted scholars, politicians, and ordinary citizens for many years. Some deny that Canada has or ever had a true national identity; others suggest there are many kinds of identity in Canada, all competing with and influencing the others. Some wish the whole issue would just go away, yet contemporary events from provincial premiers' conferences to religious articles worn by schoolchildren constantly remind us how relevant and immediate questions of identity can be.

In the particular case of English-speaking Canada, the most significant questions have long been when and how Canada changed from a British colony into a modern country with a sense of self. Pick any event, large or small, glorious or otherwise, from the last few centuries, and there is probably someone who pegs it as the birth of Canadian identity. At last check, only the Royal Commission on the Transport of Goods through Canadian Ports (1903-1905) and the Bricklin venture still remain without champions.

Jose Igartua, thankfully, does not simply propose another "Heritage Minute"-worthy tale of how Canada became a nation. Instead, he considers how English-Canadian identity changed from one that was based on ethnicity (British origins) to one based on shared civic values. The former was inherently exclusive, as Canadians of Japanese descent learned firsthand during and after the Second World War; the latter offered the possibility, even if it was not fully realized, to recognize French Canadians and other non-British cultural groups as full participants in Canadian life, rather than merely "Others" to be tolerated grudgingly. By implication, this civic conception of Canada also permitted the existing ambiguities of English-Canadian cultural identity to endure. Igartua draws on Anthony Smith's theories of nationalism to provide an intellectual framework for the book, and these ideas are explained clearly and concisely in the introduction. The study that follows is largely empirical and never gets bogged down in obtuse theoretical discussions, so it should be accessible to a wide readership.

The shift from ethnic to civic nationalism is important in its own right, but it has been identified before by writers such as Michael Ignatieff and Richard Gwyn (neither of whom appear in the bibliography). It is usually associated with Pierre Trudeau's legislative and constitutional achievements, especially the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.[1] Igartua locates this shift in an earlier period. In the 1960s, he says, English Canada experienced a "Quiet Revolution" no less profound or rapid than the one which created modern Quebec at the same time, hence the book's title (p. 1). He considers this revolution through a series of case studies, in which English Canadian "conventional wisdom" and "argumentative statements" about identity, as expressed in political rhetoric, newspaper editorials, school textbooks, and public opinion survey results, are revealed and analyzed (pp. 9-12). At the end of the tale, Igartua asserts that while English Canadians have not come up with an indisputable national identity, they have changed the terms in which that identity can be discussed and developed.

This work is a direct challenge to the notion that English-Canadian identity evolved through a "gradual process, begun in the crucible of the First World War and ending with the social and economic transformations that followed the Second World War" (p. 4). Igartua finds that post-1945 English Canada still thought of itself very much as a British society in a British Empire-Commonwealth. Attempts in 1946 by the Liberal government to introduce a new flag, a separate Canadian citizenship, and change the name of Dominion Day to Canada Day drew the ire of many English Canadians, who generally saw these as thinly veiled repudiations of Britain by French Canada. Even a decade later, most Conservatives and some Liberals were outraged by the Canadian government's refusal to back Britain in the Suez Crisis. As the author notes, however, this initial fury subsided when it became clear that Britain was acting in a narrowly self-interested way, one which had no concern for Canada or any other part of

the Commonwealth. While John Diefenbaker and the Conservatives adopted pro-British messages in their winning 1957 election campaign, the idea of English Canada as a purely British nation was showing cracks. When Diefenbaker threw a public tantrum over Britain's attempt to join the European Economic Community in 1961 on the grounds that the mother country was ignoring the interests of the Commonwealth, he was widely derided in Canada. Canadians still felt sentimental ties to Britain, but they could also see and accept that the two countries had differing priorities.

The critical changes that underpin this English-Canadian Quiet Revolution are discussed in chapters 7 and 8, which respectively center on the 1964 flag debate and the responses to the work of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (hereafter the B and B Commission). The flag debate was the moment in which the old view of Canada as a British nation, still fervently espoused by Diefenbaker, no longer held enough interest for newspaper editors and the general public to justify the stalling and grandstanding of the Conservatives in Parliament. Many Canadians (especially francophones) enthusiastically embraced the new flag, while a substantial number of others simply resigned themselves to it (p. 188). With that, the Union Jack and the unofficial Red Ensign, which had long served as convenient symbols for the old Tory worldview, were supplanted by a flag that bore no trace of either of the two "founding nations," a fitting banner for the emergent civic nationality that Igartua identifies.

The work of the B and B Commission is likewise essential to Igartua's model, as it "awakened [English Canada] to the issues raised by Quebec's Quiet Revolution" (p. 197). While there was a predictable backlash from many quarters against the nationalist messages from Quebec City and the conciliatory posture of the federal Liberal government, there was also a dawning recognition that Canada was not simply a bifurcated state composed of two monolithic ethnic groups, but was

instead an agglomeration of individual citizens with equal rights. "The concept of equality," Igartua argues, "lost its racial connotation as it came to be grounded in a universalistic, human rights premise." The basis of support for Trudeau's vision of Canada, embodied at first in the Official Languages Act of 1969 and eventually in the Charter, was established here (p. 222).

Throughout the book, Igartua's focus is on responses, rather than stimuli. This is reasonable enough, since it demonstrates how English Canadians drew on their sense of identity to deal with the challenges of the postwar decades. The evidence and analysis of political discourse in *The Other Quiet Revolution* is very thorough. There are, however, some case studies in which more background information would be helpful to those not well-versed in postwar Canadian politics. For example, in the discussion of the reaction to the revelations of Soviet diplomat Igor Gouzenko affair and the subsequent trials of a number of suspected spies in chapter 2, there is barely any establishment of facts before the discussion of newspaper editorials begins (p. 49). None of the accused are mentioned by name. While footnotes lead the reader to specialist works on the topic, a few sentences to establish the context at the outset would still be very useful. By contrast, there are concise but informative background narratives provided for discussions of the postwar deportation of Japanese-Canadians and the Suez Crisis before the discourse analysis begins, and this approach could have been used more consistently throughout.

Chapters 3 and 6 examine the terminology, values, and attitudes disseminated in classrooms across the country. Due to the concentration of textbook authors and publishers in Ontario in the postwar decades, students in the Maritimes and the West learned a story of Canada that was both pro-British and centralist (pp. 64, 139). Igartua recognizes the problems that this pedagogical hegemony posed, but it would be interesting to

know more about the responses and criticisms that must have emerged among educators, students, and parents in other provinces. School boards may have felt compelled to buy Ontario texts for practical reasons, but that does not necessarily mean that they concurred with all of the content. This is significant when one is attempting to discuss identity politics across all of English Canada.

Another element of the chapters on education that merits more attention is the longevity of the attitudes such texts instilled. Igartua is primarily concerned with impact of school curricula and textbooks at the time that they were in use. In the immediate postwar years, for example, there was a common message of pride in British heritage and imperial achievements, but by the 1960s these were giving way to a less ethnocentric view of Canada's past, albeit one that still gave francophones, natives, and other non-British groups short shrift. While this transformation within the educational establishment is obviously important, how long did the influence of the older approach survive among the general population? Surely not everyone who attended school in the 1940s and 1950s stayed on top of developments in Canadian historiography in the following decades and adjusted their views accordingly, and this is just as true for succeeding generations. With this in mind, it might have been useful to examine the lingering effects of older ideas on public opinion over time. This is the greatest challenge for any scholar who wishes to pinpoint a major upheaval in something as fundamental as national self-perception. There is no doubt, as Igartua emphasizes, that collective identities are malleable and responsive to changing context (pp. 5-6). But the "stickiness" of ideas among populations is also important. Consider, for example, the outcry over changing the name of Dominion Day to Canada Day in 1982, a move which some still consider an act of Liberal perfidy a quarter-century later. This example alone does not negate Igartua's thesis, but it does demonstrate that while the "British-

ness" of Canadian identity may be insignificant in the present, there are still many who understand the country's past largely through that lens.

This is a book with a carefully delineated purpose and scope, and Igartua acknowledges a number of topics which he does not discuss in detail, such as the role of culture (e.g., art, literature, and sports), the influence of the United States, the changing nature of the Empire/Commonwealth, and the interaction of French Canadian and English Canadian identities. In addition, there could be more attention given to the role of immigration in redefining identity. There is a discussion of the types of immigrants that Canadians found desirable in the late 1940s (not surprisingly, British subjects were high on the list), but far less about how the immigrants that did arrive from other parts of the world in this era influenced English-Canadian identity. These absent themes leave the reader with only a partial picture of the transformation that took place in the postwar decades, and that is a shame. As Edmund Burke complained of the French Revolution, a nation cannot cohere and survive if it is only based on abstract compacts and rights.[2] The intriguing model of an English-Canadian Quiet Revolution that Igartua proposes cries out for a fuller, perhaps synthetic work that encompasses more of the *Zeitgeist* than is found here. That said, the ideas in this book lay useful foundations for undertaking such a wide-ranging project.

Notes

[1]. Michael Ignatieff, *The Rights Revolution* (Toronto: Anansi, 2000), esp. chapter 5; Richard Gwyn, *Nationalism without Walls: The Unbearable Lightness of Being Canadian* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996), esp. chapter 9.

[2]. Ignatieff, *The Rights Revolution*, 127.

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