

Roots Nationalism: Branding English Canada Cool in the 1980s and 1990s

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In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Canadian nationalists worried about the influence of the United States on Canada's economy and foreign policy, and worked to promote and protect Canadian culture. This phase of nationalism is often seen to have come to an end with the election of Brian Mulroney in 1984 and the signing of the US-Canada Free Trade Agreement in 1988. In fact, Canadian nationalism did not disappear in the 1980s, but it did change form, moving away from cultural and economic concerns to take on a more consumer-oriented and branded nature, exemplified here by the tremendous success of the company "Roots". With its liberal use of Canadian symbols — beavers, canoes, and maple leaves — Roots allowed Canadians to purchase identity and proudly display their country's cool image to the rest of the world. "Roots nationalism" was a product of the globalizing world economy, of the growing emphasis on branded clothing and lifestyles, and of the particularities of the national crisis in Canada.

Dans les années 1950, 1960 et 1970, les nationalistes canadiens craignaient l'influence des États-Unis sur l'économie et sur la politique étrangère du Canada et ils se sont attachés à promouvoir et à protéger la culture canadienne. Beaucoup estiment que cette phase du nationalisme s'est éteinte avec l'élection de Brian Mulroney en 1984 et avec la signature de l'Accord de libre-échange en 1988. En fait, le nationalisme canadien n'a pas rendu l'âme dans les années 1980, changeant plutôt d'habits pour laisser choir sa livrée économique et culturelle afin de loger davantage à l'enseigne de la consommation et des marques de commerce, comme en témoigne le succès phénoménal de la compagnie Roots. L'usage abondant de symboles canadiens — castors, canots et feuille d'érable — par l'entreprise a permis aux Canadiens

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de s'acheter de l'identité et de montrer fièrement l'image branchée de leur pays au restant de la planète. Le « nationalisme à la Roots » fut un produit de la mondialisation de l'économie, de la place grandissante des vêtements et styles de vie de gravitant autour des marques et des particularités de la crise identitaire canadienne.

IN THE LATE 1980s English Canadians purchased thousands of thick, brightly coloured “Roots” sweatshirts, featuring an enormous beaver logo over a bed of maple leaves. The Roots sweatshirt embraced the materialism and athleticism of the 1980s with quality fleece and a *souçon* of vintage chic — jogging and aerobics had swept the nation, and a new generation of wealthy, young, urban professionals was placing more emphasis on quality and authenticity. Even more importantly, the Roots sweatshirt was a proud symbol of Canada — significant in an era when free trade negotiations were just beginning, leading some Canadians to fret about the future of the country while others wanted to flaunt Canadian business strength. Since its brilliant success in the late 1980s, Roots has continued as the main outfitter of Canadian patriotism. In 1998 the Canadian Olympic Committee chose Roots to dress the Canadian team at the Winter Olympics in Nagano. Roots’ nifty poor-boy caps, most notably worn by gold-medal-winning snowboarder Ross Rebagliati, became another instant hit — and an international symbol of Canadian cool — worn proudly by international celebrities as diverse as Princes William and Harry and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Over the past two decades, Roots, along with other companies such as Molson (a beer company whose leading brand, Canadian, features a maple leaf) and Tim Hortons (a chain of coffee and doughnut shops created by Canadian hockey great Tim Horton that capitalizes on Canadians’ love of doughnuts and coffee) has created a new type of branded nationalism in Canada.

Roots nationalism lacked the larger politics of earlier versions of Canadian nationalism, but it was well suited to branding Canada in the competitive global marketplace of the late twentieth century. It also marked a significant departure from previous manifestations of Canadian nationalism. This helps explain why many commentators today mourn what they see as the loss of Canadian nationalism, while others, looking at a new form of assertive Canadian-ness, wonder how Canadians ever became so patriotic.¹ Unlike the situation in other countries such as China, Korea, and the United States, which have had strong consumer-nationalist campaigns in which the focus was on buying goods produced in that country, in Canada this form of consumer nationalism has never been particularly strong.² Our reliance on American-

1 John Wright, Gregory Millard, and Sarah Riegel, “Here’s Where We Get Canadian: English-Canadian Nationalism and Popular Culture”, *American Review of Canadian Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1 (2002), pp. 11–34.

2 Dana Frank, *Buy American: The Untold Story of Economic Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003); Laura C. Nelson, *Measured Excess: Status, Gender, and Consumer Nationalism in South Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

made consumer goods made it impossible. Instead, over the past two decades, Canadians purchased branded symbols of nationalism, despite fairly widespread knowledge that the companies producing these products, such as Roots, Molson, and Tim Hortons, were often owned or operated by Americans.³ Roots nationalism may thus be a peculiarly Canadian form of nationalism, embedded in Canadians’ weary acceptance of Canada’s close economic relationship with the United States. It is also a consequence of Canadians’ inability to create other meaningful forms of nationalism. Canada’s multicultural heritage makes ethnic nationalism impossible, while the ongoing struggle with Quebec separatism and other forms of regionalism has made it difficult to create what some scholars have described as voluntary or “civic” nationalism — a common understanding of what it means to be a citizen.⁴

Canadian Nationalism in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s

In the 1950s and early 1960s, Canadian nationalism was dominated by what Philip Massolin has described as a “tory” tradition.⁵ Nationalists such as Hilda Neatby and Vincent Massey worried about vulgar American television shows and decried the impact of the American mass media on English-Canadian culture, while historian Donald Creighton railed against the continental orientation of Canadian foreign policy. In 1965 philosopher George Grant published his *Lament for a Nation*, which argued that Liberal continentalism had turned Canada into an American branch plant and had destroyed Canada’s chance to build “a more ordered and stable society”.⁶ Although Grant was lamenting the loss of Canada’s imperial connection with Great Britain, a new generation of young people, some of them members of the New Left, took inspiration from his slim tome.⁷ These committed young Canadians wanted to see Canada emerge as an independent player on the world stage, free of American influence and imbued with its own unique culture. Quebec separatism posed an obvious threat, but many English-Canadian nationalists thought that the Trudeau vision of a bilingual and multicultural nation could overcome Quebec’s discontent and build a better society. As Michael Ignatieff put it in *Blood and Belonging*, “The Canada I thought I belonged to was, believe it or not, an example to the rest of the world. We were a bi-national, bi-ethnic federal community, living proof that different races, different languages, could live together within the framework of a single state. In my imaginings, I turned that dull but intricate contrivance Canadian federalism,

3 Roots operates out of Canada, but is owned by two Americans. In 1995 the American conglomerate Wendy’s purchased Tim Hortons. Molson is actually Molson Coors, the fifth largest brewery in the world.

4 Anthony J. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hanover, NH : University Press of New England, 2000).

5 Philip Massolin, *Canadian Intellectuals, the Tory Tradition and the Challenge of Modernity, 1939–1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

6 George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965), p. 4.

7 Massolin, *Canadian Intellectuals*, p. 271.

into a moral beacon to the whole benighted world.”⁸ Members of the Waffle, a socialist movement within the New Democratic Party, believed that nationalism and socialism would go hand in hand to create a radical new nation.⁹ The “new nationalism” of the 1960s and 1970s, in both its leftist and centrist forms, went beyond narrow patriotism into a much grander political imagining of what Canada could be — a perfect example of civic nationalism.

The so-called “new nationalism” fed on long-standing concerns about American economic and cultural dominance. In 1957 the Royal Commission on Canada’s Economic Prospects, headed by nationalist Walter Gordon, recommended limiting foreign economic control. When Gordon became finance minister under Lester B. Pearson in 1963, his first budget proposed a 30-percent tax on foreign takeovers of Canadian companies. The government was forced to withdraw the controversial provision, but, under Gordon’s continuing pressure, the Liberal government commissioned economist Mel Watkins to write a report on foreign investment in Canada. Watkins’s report, released in 1968, recommended greater state control over investment and changes to taxes and tariffs. Frustrated by the government’s lacklustre response, Watkins turned to socialism and became one of the leaders of the Waffle movement.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Walter Gordon, along with University of Toronto economist Abraham Rotstein and journalist Peter C. Newman, formed the Committee for an Independent Canada to lobby for stricter measures against foreign investment, providing a more moderate alternative to the Waffle movement.¹¹ A report by Liberal Herb Gray in 1972 recommended the establishment of an agency to screen foreign investment, resulting in the formation of the Foreign Investment Review Agency in 1973. Thus, by the early 1970s, protecting Canadian industry and preventing a further escalation of foreign investment had become a key political issue for the Trudeau government.

Nationalists also drew on old fears about the ubiquity of American mass culture. The Massey Commission, which met from 1949 to 1951, recommended an ambitious programme to fend off growing Americanization by providing more support for universities, public television broadcasting, and the arts.¹² It was not enough. In 1969 Carleton University professors Robin Mathews and James Steele published a scathing critique of the dominance of American professors in Canadian universities and their inability to teach

8 Michael Ingatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journey into the New Nationalism* (Toronto: Viking, 1993), p. 109.

9 John Bullen, “The Ontario Waffle and the Struggle for an Independent Socialist Canada: Conflict within the NDP”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 54, no. 2 (1983), pp. 188–215.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 191.

11 Sylvia Bashevkin, *True Patriot Love: The Politics of Canadian Nationalism* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 22–23.

12 Paul Litt, “The Massey Commission, Americanization and Canadian Cultural Nationalism”, *Queen’s Quarterly*, vol. 98, no. 2 (Summer 1991), pp. 375–387; and *The Muses, the Masses and the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

Canada to Canadians.¹³ The 1975 Symons Report on Canadian studies, *To Know Ourselves*, drew attention to how little the universities taught of Canadian literature, politics, economics, and geography.¹⁴ At the same time, Canadian cultural production boomed. A bevy of new authors including Margaret Atwood, Rudy Wiebe, and Timothy Findley reinvigorated Canadian literature. Small Canadian presses sprung up, including Coach House Press (1965) and House of Anansi (1967). New theatres, including the Factory (1970) and the Tarragon (1970), produced Canadian playwrights. A vastly expanded university system established Canadian studies programmes and offered more courses in Canadian history and literature.

The excitement of the “new nationalism” is often seen to have come to an end with the election of Brian Mulroney in 1984, the signing of the United States-Canada free trade agreement in 1988, and the globalizing world economy of the 1990s. Prominent nationalist Mel Hurtig entitled his 1996 memoirs *At Twilight in the Country* and mourned his failure to stop the Free Trade Agreement.¹⁵ Myrna Kostash refers to the “Great Rupture of 1988, the year of the federal election that decided Canada would sign the Free Trade Agreement”.¹⁶ In *Hip and Trivial: Youth Culture, Book Publishing and the Greying of Canadian Nationalism*, historian Robert Wright claims that Canadian youth “have little of the nationalist fervour with which so many of their forebears were imprinted”.¹⁷ Sylvia Bashevkin argues that, by the 1990s, English-Canadian nationalism had been weakened by “regional and ideological cleavages”, including identity politics, and that it increasingly adopted a trans-national orientation.¹⁸ In his book on Walter Gordon, often described as the father of the “new” Canadian nationalism, Stephen Azzi declares that by the 1990s Gordon had definitely “lost”.¹⁹ Yet nationalism was far from dead, as Raymond Blake points out in his article on the 1988 election. Brian Mulroney consistently sold free trade as a “national project”, part of his effort to strengthen Canada economically and to unite it politically.²⁰ Similarly,

13 Robin Mathews and James Steele, eds., *The Struggle for Canadian Universities* (Toronto: New Press, 1969).

14 T. H. B. Symons, *To Know Ourselves: The Report of the Commission on Canadian Studies* (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Studies, 1975).

15 Mel Hurtig, *At Twilight in the Country: Memoirs of a Canadian Nationalist* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1996).

16 Myrna Kostash, *The Next Canada: In Search of our Future Nation* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2000), p. 317.

17 Robert Wright, *Hip and Trivial: Youth Culture, Book Publishing and the Greying of Canadian Nationalism* (Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, 2001), p. 215.

18 Sylvia Bashevkin, “In the Shadow of Free Trade: Nationalism, Feminism and Identity Politics in Contemporary English Canada”, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2000), pp. 109–127.

19 Stephen Azzi, *Walter Gordon and the Rise of Canadian Nationalism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), p. 188.

20 Raymond B. Blake, “The Canadian 1988 Election: The Nationalist Posture of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and the Progressive Conservatives”, *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, vol. 30 (2003), pp. 65–82.

Michelle Weinroth persuasively argues that the Liberals made successful use of a nationalist discourse in their anti-deficit campaign of the mid-1990s.²¹

Indeed, by the 1990s many Canadians seemed to be more patriotic than ever. In 1993 Molson launched the popular “I am Canadian” advertising campaign. Its icon, Joe Canadian, introduced in 2000, became a national hero for his “rant”: “I can proudly sew my country’s flag on my backpack. I believe in peace keeping, not policing; diversity, not assimilation; and that the beaver is a truly proud and noble animal.”²² Bands like the Tragically Hip, the Rheostatics, and the Spirit of the West belted out their own version of Canadiana. Canadians tattooed maple leaves on their arms, legs, and backs.²³ Canadian authors regularly topped best-seller lists. The Council of Canadians, a left-wing nationalist group established in 1985, had more than 50,000 members in the late 1990s — far more than the Committee for an Independent Canada ever had.²⁴ Anti-Americanism, nearly always a corollary of Canadian nationalism, reached new heights at the turn of the century with Canada’s decision to stay out of Iraq and its greater acceptance of gay marriage. In his influential best-seller, *Fire and Ice: The United States, Canada and the Myth of Converging Values*, Michael Adams argues that Canadians and Americans are becoming more different, as Americans become more religious and authoritarian in orientation and Canadians become more tolerant and open.²⁵

Roots Nationalism

Roots nationalism is not entirely unprecedented, nor is the phenomenon unique to Canada. A variety of American companies such as Coca-Cola, Ralph Lauren, and Tommy Hilfiger have wrapped themselves in the American flag, while IKEA swathes itself in Swedish colours and Swatch adopted a modified version of the Swiss flag as its trademark.²⁶ Moreover, celebratory nationalism has always had a place in Canada — Canadians have gloried in their adventures in settling their fierce northern land, their heroic accomplishments at Vimy Ridge, their display of culture and verve at Expo ’67, and their last-minute defeat of the Russians in the 1972 Summit Series. Other

21 Michelle Weinroth, “Rituals of Rhetoric and Nationhood: The Liberal Anti-Deficit Campaign, 1994–1998”, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2 (Spring 2004), pp. 44–79.

22 Ira Wagman, “‘Wheat, Barley, Hops, Citizenship’: Molson’s I Am [Canadian] Campaign and the Defense of Canadian National Identity through Advertising”, *Velvet Light Trap*, vol. 50 (Fall 2002), p. 85.

23 This trend may have started in the early 1980s, when swimmers Alex Baumann and Victor Davis tattooed maple leaves on their chests. Randy Starkman, “Canada Gets Under the Skin”, *Toronto Star*, August 10, 2004, p. E8.

24 Brent Patterson (interviewer), “The Council of Canadians at 20”, *Canadian Dimension*, vol. 39, no. 1 (January/February 2005), p. 21.

25 Michael Adams, *Fire and Ice: The United States, Canada and the Myth of Converging Values* (Toronto: Penguin, 2003).

26 Mark Pengergast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola: The Unauthorized History of the Great American Soft Drink and the Company that Makes it* (New York: Macmillan, 1993); Teri Agins, *The End of Fashion: How Mass Marketing Changed the Clothing Business Forever* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000).

companies have made their own attempts to brand the symbols of Canada — the CPR packaged the wilderness to promote tourism from the British Isles at the turn of the century, and the Hudson’s Bay Company used its fur trade past in its marketing campaigns.²⁷ Paul Rutherford points out that a variety of companies, including Molson, the Bank of Montreal, and Red Rose Tea used Canadian patriotism to sell their products in the 1970s.²⁸ What is new is the degree to which Canadians have been willing to drape themselves in branded products such as Roots and Molson Canadian gear, embracing them as part of a Canadian way of life. Roots is part of a revolution in marketing perhaps best associated with Ralph Lauren, who, beginning in the 1970s, surrounded his products with a vision of an upper-class life of country estates, polo-playing, and safari travel, insinuating that, by buying his products, the consumer too could live this life.²⁹ By buying Roots, one could be proudly Canadian, while imagining an idealized Canadian life filled with summer camp, wilderness parks, successful athletes and celebrities, and urban fashion.

In exploring Roots nationalism, we must pay careful attention to the Roots story, one of the main marketing tools that Roots has employed. Until quite recently, Roots did not advertise extensively. Instead, the products were imbued with meaning through their visual iconography, through the telling of the Roots story, and through the décor of the Roots stores, some of which were designed to feel like summer cottages. Much as advertising historians such as Roland Marchand, Jackson Lears, Paul Rutherford, and others have “read” advertisements,³⁰ I will “read” the Roots story, as it appears in the store’s advertisements, but also as it has been told by Geoff Pevere’s celebratory coffee-table book, *Team Spirit*, by a CBC *Life and Times* documentary called *The Roots Boys*, and in numerous other journalistic profiles.³¹

27 E. J. Hart, *The Selling of Canada: The CPR and the Beginnings of Canadian Tourism* (Banff: Altitude Publishing, 1983); David Monod, “Bay Days: The Managerial Revolution and the Hudson’s Bay Company Department Stores, 1912–1939”, *Historical Papers* (1986), p. 191.

28 Paul Rutherford, *The New Icons: The Art of Television Advertising* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), pp. 91, 95.

29 Tom Pendergast, “Polo/Ralph Lauren Corporation”, *International Directory of Company Histories*, vol. 42 (Chicago: St. James Press, 2001); Stephen Koepp, “Selling a Dream of Elegance and the Good Life”, *Time Magazine*, September 1, 1986, pp. 40–49; Michael Gross, *Genuine Authentic: The REAL Life of Ralph Lauren* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003).

30 Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920–1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Rutherford, *The New Icons*.

31 Geoff Pevere, *Team Spirit* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1998); Ray Landry, *The Roots Boys: The Life and Times of Michael Budman and Don Green* (Toronto: CBC Home Video, 1998); David Livingstone, “Team Karma”, *Saturday Night*, February 1987, pp. 31–35; Ian Austen, “The Roots of an Unlikely Empire”, *Maclean’s*, September 12, 1983, pp. 36–37, and “Beaver Fever”, *Canadian Business*, April 15, 2002, p. 46ff; Robert Collinson, “Making Good in Yuppieland”, *Chatelaine*, September 1984, pp. 76, 188–192; Stephanie Nolen, “Fame, Friends and Fortune”, *Maclean’s*, April 13, 1998, pp. 40–41; Deborah Fulsang, “On a Roll: They Gave us Hippy Shoes, Leisure Chic and that Hat. But after 25 Years, the Roots Boys Have Only Just Begun”, *Flare*, October 1998, pp. 144, 146; “Happy Campers: When They Created Roots, Michael Budman and Don Green Sold Funny Shoes, Now They Sell the Canadian Dream”, *Toronto Life*, October 1993, p. 50.

The Early Years

Michael Budman, a natural salesman, moved to Toronto in 1969 after a stint of teaching in Detroit. His sidekick, the calmer Don Green, arrived a couple of years later after dropping out of Michigan State University and spending two years lounging in Jamaica. High school fraternity buddies in Detroit, the pair also knew each other from childhood summers spent at Camp Tamakwa in Algonquin Park. Both grew up in privilege — Budman is the son of a wealthy aluminum siding salesman, and Green's father was an auto-parts manufacturer and private art collector.³² Unlike many young Americans who came to Canada in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they were not draft dodgers.

Looking for business opportunities in Toronto, Budman and Green considered yogurt, waterbeds, futons, and flowers before trying to obtain the rights to Anne Kalsø's minus heel shoe, known as the earth shoe in the United States. Kalsø, a Danish native, was studying yoga at a monastery in Brazil in the 1950s when she noticed what she regarded as the excellent posture of the native Brazilians. She concluded that, by walking on soft surfaces, they kept their heels lower than their toes, creating the same benefits as the yoga mountain stance.³³ Kalsø's "minus heel shoe" emulated the pose with a depressed heel. The shoes were first marketed in Europe in the 1960s. In the United States, Raymond and Eleanor Jacobs released them as "Earth Shoes" on "Earth Day" in 1970. Apparently, Kalsø had given them the right to market the shoes after checking their astrological charts.³⁴

Budman and Green tried to obtain the rights to the earth shoe from Raymond Jacobs but failed. Undaunted, they decided to make their own version. Trolling through the Toronto phone book in search of shoemakers, they first contacted Bata, but the vast shoe-making empire wanted nothing to do with them. The second, the Boa Shoe Company, was run by Czech immigrant Jan Kowalewski and his sons, whose family had once made shoes for Czar Nicholas II, but were now, according to Roots lore, in the business of snake-skin platforms.³⁵ Kowalewski took a quick look at Kalsø's shoe and said that he could improve it. Court decisions tell a less amusing tale. Kowalewski specialized in custom-made shoes for customers with orthopaedic problems, but the company had gone into debt and needed either to sell the business or to find a partner. Budman and Green approached Kowalewski, and together they created a new design for the shoe, drawing on Kowalewski's expertise and Budman's and Green's experience of wearing the earth shoe.³⁶

32 Ellie Teshler, "Roots: Grooving on Casual Chic", *Toronto Star*, September 18, 1983, p. B2.

33 "Earth Yoga Origins: The Anne Kalso Story" [online article, retrieved June 24, 2004], <<http://www.earthfootwear.com/story.asp>>.

34 Bruce Lambert, "Raymond Jacobs, 69, Co-Founder of Earth Shoe Company in the 1970s", *New York Times*, March 20, 1993, p. 10.

35 Austen, "The Roots of an Unlikely Empire", p. 36; Pevere, *Team Spirit*, p. 31.

36 *Natural Footwear Ltd. v. Hart Schaffner & Marx*, 579 F. Supp 543, December 8, 1983.

Budman and Green ordered 125 pairs, and the first Roots store opened on Yonge Street, just north of Yorkville, in August 1973. On the first day, they sold seven pairs, and on the following Saturday they sold 30. The next weekend, with back-to-school shopping in full gear, there were line-ups around the block. Budman and Green enlisted comic and camp buddy Gilda Radner to help out in the store, while another Second City friend, Dan Akroyd, used his part-time job as a laundry truck driver to help out with deliveries, beginning a long relationship between Roots and celebrity.³⁷ Budman and Green bought the Boa Shoe Company, and the Kowalewskis became employees. The family continues to work for Roots today. The business exploded, and within two years Roots had opened more than 40 stores across Canada, the United States, and Europe, most of them in the United States.³⁸

The Roots boys were savvy enough to realize that the market for a funny-looking shoe probably would not last (in fact, they began closing stores in the United States as early as 1976), and by the mid-1970s they had begun to expand into leather goods and more standard shoes.³⁹ They were smart; the company marketing Earth Shoes in the United States closed its doors in 1979. Pevere claims that the Earth Shoe bubble burst when a Detroit doctor advised against wearing them, but this seems unlikely. Some podiatrists and doctors asserted that the negative heeled shoe might be harmful, but medical research on the issue was inconclusive.⁴⁰ It was just a fashion whose time was up.

Roots Moves On

In 1975 Roots began producing sweatshirts with a small Roots logo at the side. Apparently, Budman and Green were working out at Upper Canada College — an elite private school in the tony Toronto suburb of Forest Hill — when they noticed the athletes’ sweatshirts. According to Pevere, the sweatshirt “tapped a well of positive associations for the Roots boys: it spoke of team effort and timelessness; health, fun and youth; and of the reassuring promise of something immutable.”⁴¹ They gradually extended their clothing line, moving into letter sweaters, leather jackets, pants and blazers, and a line of sweatpants and sweatshirts. In 1982, when Green’s first child Anthony was born, they created a line of children’s clothing. At this point, much of their business was in Europe, and, with editor Robert Sarner, they started an

37 Pevere, *Team Spirit*, pp. 32, 122.

38 Philip H. Dougherty, “Positive About Negative Heels”, *New York Times*, June 5, 1975, p. 58.

39 *Natural Footwear Ltd. v. Hart, Schaffner and Marx*, 760 F.2d 1383, 1392.

40 Pevere, *Team Spirit*, p. 40; Norman Hartley, “Canadians Pussyfoot Around with Earth Shoes, Come up with the Zero Heel”, *Globe and Mail*, May 1, 1975, p. W5; Carolyn J. Knowles, “Negative Heel Shoe”, *Journal of the American Podiatry Association*, vol. 68, no. 4 (1978), p. 256; Paul R. Scherer, “A Clinical Study to Determine the Effects of Wearing Earth Shoes”, *Journal of American Podiatry*, vol. 65, no. 5 (1978), pp. 422–433; Jerry Knight, “More Than the Heel Was Negative”, *Washington Post*, September 8, 1977, p. D13.

41 Pevere, *Team Spirit*, p. 113.

English-language magazine in Paris called *Passion*. In 1983 Budman and Green opened the successful “Roots Department Store” in Toronto, selling clothes, bags, cosmetics, books, and furniture.⁴²

A year earlier Budman and Green had started the Beaver Canoe store with another Camp Tamakwa alumnus, Howard Perlmutter, and his son Lloyd Perlmutter, to sell Camp Tamakwa canoe instructor Omer Stringer’s hand-crafted canoes in Toronto’s upscale Hazelton Lanes. Stringer’s “Beaver Canoes” sold for \$1,600, along with rugged bags, plaid shirts, insect repellent, and Beaver Canoe sweatshirts. The two sides fell out, and the Perlmutters took full control the following year. The store sold outdoor clothing and sweatshirts similar to Roots until it went bankrupt in 1992. In 1994 Budman and Green bought back the logo and re-launched it in 2003.⁴³

In 1985 they launched the Roots Athletic Line, featuring an enormous beaver logo festooned across the chest in a wide variety of bright colours. The “Roots” sweatshirts became a must-have for high school students across the country. A retail expert from the United States, speaking in Toronto in 1986, complained that “96.6% of the people wear Roots sweatshirts and the other 3.6% wear Beaver Canoe”.⁴⁴ Gradually, Roots also moved into a broader range of casual urban and outdoor clothing, feeding into long-standing mythologies about Canada as a “northern” nation and as “wilderness”. Roots Canada spoke of beaver and maple trees — a Canada where everyone went camping (or at least to the cottage) on weekends and had an intense need for rugged khakis and warm fleece.⁴⁵ With its combination of proud Canadiana and summer-camp “chic”, its Canadian business grew substantially in the 1980s and 1990s, from just 16 retail outlets in 1983 to 36 in 1989 and to 55 in 1996.⁴⁶

In 1996 Roots opened Greenbud, a 70,000-foot clothing factory in North York, to produce clothing for Roots stores and other companies.⁴⁷ Roots reached new heights in 1998, when the company outfitted the Canadian team at Nagano. In return for providing each athlete with five sets of clothes, Roots got the right to market the clothes, and the Canadian Olympic Association received a royalty from the sales.⁴⁸ Canada’s spiffy uniforms, especially the

42 Geoff Pevere, “The Roots of Roots”, p. 37; Ian Austin, “13 Hot Stops in Toronto”, *Flare Magazine*, January 1985, p. 30.

43 “From Woods to Roots”, *Macleans*, January 19, 1987, pp. 6–7; Christopher Shulgan, “Brand Renew”, *Ottawa Citizen*, October 4, 2003, p. E3.

44 Sandra Matheson “Outspoken Retail Critic Finds Toronto Lacking”, *Toronto Star*, November 6, 1986, p. C07.

45 Ross D. Cameron, “Tom Thomson, Antimodernism, and the Ideal of Manhood”, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, vol. 10 (1999), pp. 185–208; Carl Berger, “The True North Strong and Free”, in Peter Russell, ed. *Nationalism in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1996), pp. 3–26.

46 This was traced through the *Directory of Retail Chains in Canada* (Toronto, Monday Report on Retailers, serial).

47 David Graham, “Roots Canada Ltd. Opened a New 70,000 sq-ft Can\$3 mil Apparel Factory in North York, Ontario”, *DNR*, vol. 26, no. 161 (August 21, 1996), n.p. (found under Business and Industry).

48 Nolen, “Fame, Friends and Fortune”, p. 40.

poor-boy cap, were hot items of trade in the athletes’ village. They were an even bigger hit at home — Roots sold more than half a million poor-boy caps that winter along with a broad range of other Olympic clothing, to the dismay of some athletes who felt that Olympic clothing should only be worn by Olympians.⁴⁹ In 2002 Roots outfitted the Americans as well, giving a tremendous boost to its expansion into the American market.

Following the lead of Ralph Lauren and, more importantly, of Richard Branson, whose Virgin brand covers record stores, an airline, and soft drinks and whose biography Budman apparently keeps in his office, Budman and Green also began extending the “brand” into new areas.⁵⁰ They began “Roots Home” in 1998, with cutlery, beds, linens, leather furniture, and dining room tables.⁵¹ They made another attempt to enter the hotel business (they had previously opened a lodge in Aspen) with Roots Lodge at Reef Point in Ucluelet, British Columbia, decorated with Roots furniture and bedding and promoted by snowboarder (and possible marijuana smoker) Ross Rebagliati. (Apparently some locals labelled it “Reefer Point Lodge”).⁵² In one of the most peculiar extensions, they launched a line of vitamins with Boehringer Ingelheim (Canada) in 2001.⁵³ Copying Branson, they also went into the airline business with Roots Air in 2001. In 2003, after a failed takeover of Lululemon Athletica, they launched their own line of yoga wear.⁵⁴

Not everything Budman and Green touch has turned to gold. The ski lodge in Aspen was a financial disaster, causing Roots to lose money and shut down numerous shops in 1991, the only year in which the company says it failed to make a profit. The lodge at Ucluelet closed quickly.⁵⁵ Roots Air crashed after just six weeks in the sky, and the vitamins quickly disappeared from the shelves. It remains to be seen whether Roots can create the “lifestyle” brand its founders desire. Business journalist Ian Austen argues that Roots stores are badly organized, carry too broad a range of products, and are too dependent on the tourist or novelty market. He asserts that the brand has no sense of direction. David Howell, vice-president of NPD Fashionworld Tracking, which conducts a monthly survey of 7,000 households, explained to journal-

49 Patricia Best, “Higher, Faster, Stronger”, *Toronto Life*, July 2001, p. 47; Nolen, “Fame, Friends and Fortune”, p. 41.

50 Christopher Wahl, “Fasten Your Seatbelts: We All Want Air Travel to Get Better. Is Branding a New Airline with a Sexy Image the Way to Go?”, *Saturday Night*, March 24, 2001, p. 44; Richard Branson, *Losing My Virginity* (New York: Times Business, 1998).

51 Jean Fraser, “Fashion-forward to The King and I”, *Edmonton Journal*, November 24, 1998, p. E3.

52 “Roots Checks in to BC Resort”, *Marketing Magazine*, November 2, 1998, p. 1; “Designer Summer Camp”, *Vancouver Magazine*, Summer 1999 [online article, retrieved June 24, 2004], <http://www.vanmag.com/cityguide/away_roots.html>.

53 “Roots Canada & Boehringer Ingelheim Partner to Launch New Multivitamins for Canadian Families”, press release, February 7, 2001 [online document, retrieved May 3, 2003], <http://www.roots.com/new_canada/html/pr_roots_vitamins.html>.

54 Rick Westhead, “Lululemon Cashing in on Karma”, *Toronto Star*, June 24, 2003, p. C01.

55 Jillian Dickens, “The Wild West Coast”, *Western Investor*, January 2004, p. 1 [online article], <<http://www.westerninvestor.com/regional.tofinojan04.pdf>>.

ist Ian Austen in 2002 that measuring Roots' retail sales is impossible because the survey does not cover sales to foreign tourists. Howell declared, "I think of them as a novelty player. I don't think of them as an apparel company."⁵⁶ Since Roots is notoriously closed about financial information, its financial success is not discernable, but the impact it has had on Canada is indisputable. At parks, university campuses, and sporting events — or anywhere Canadians gather — it is easy to spot Roots T-shirts and sweatshirts. Many Canadians buy Roots as quintessentially Canadian gifts for foreign friends, and tourists apparently buy Roots products in bulk, given the number of outlets in key tourist destinations and airports.

Roots and Canadian Nationalism

Canadians and tourists alike embrace Roots as a symbol of Canada, but there is little indication that Budman and Green initially intended to turn their business into an icon of Canadian pride. The name suggests that the company always wanted to stress its place in Canada, but in fact the name Roots had to do with feeling connected to the ground through one's feet. Green claims he saw the word while looking through an old girlfriend's textbooks and that he liked its "all natural, organic ring."⁵⁷ They did choose a Canadian symbol, the beaver, for a logo, but their initial logo — a much less elegant and rounded beaver than the one in use today — was also the logo of their beloved Camp Tamakwa. In the 1970s Roots put more emphasis on quality, craftsmanship, and comfort than it did on its connection with Canada. The advertisement that appeared most frequently in the *Toronto Star* and *New York Times* featured a negative-heeled shoe and sported the headline, "You don't blow an extraordinary idea on an ordinary shoe." Only the fifth sentence of the rather lengthy text mentioned Canada, saying, "Only the finest grade Canadian hides are selected." Roots' first expansion efforts took the company primarily into the much larger American market. In 1975 Roots had 44 stores — ten in Canada, two in Europe, and 32 in the United States.⁵⁸

As Roots branched into clothing in 1979, it was hit with a lawsuit by American clothier Hart, Schaffner and Marx, which had a New Jersey division called Roots. Roots had to get all its clothes out of the United States just before Christmas that year and was only allowed to sell shoes. The lawsuit dragged out for six years, impeding Roots' expansion into the larger American market.⁵⁹ With their enterprise in the United States shackled, Budman and Green put their efforts into Canada and Europe. Budman temporarily settled in Paris, while Green continued the business in Toronto. In the early 1980s almost half of the company's production was still exported.⁶⁰

56 Austen, "Beaver Fever".

57 Pevere, "The Roots of Roots", p. 57.

58 "What Roots Has You Can't Patent", *New York Times*, November 16, 1975, p. 288.

59 *Natural Footwear Ltd. v. Hart, Schaffner & Marx*, 760 F.2d 1383, U.S. 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals.

60 Austen, "The Roots of an Unlikely Empire", p. 37.

When Roots began copying athletic team clothing, it employed a broad range of Canadian symbols, including maple leaves, old CPR advertisements, Algonquin memorabilia, and even Aboriginal headdresses. (The Aboriginal imagery, which tended to see First Nations people as part of a colourful landscape of tepees and canoes, has disappeared in the more politically correct and post-Oka 1990s.) The Roots boys have claimed that they were the “first people to put ‘Canada’ on clothing”, and Budman and Green are repeatedly embraced by Canadian chroniclers for having harnessed Canadian symbols and demonstrating to Canadians how wonderful they really are.⁶¹ The fact that Budman and Green are Americans fails to tarnish the myth. Instead, journalists comment that it takes two Americans to recognize the value of Canada, feeding into the trope that observers around the world envy Canada, while Canadians themselves are modest and unassuming. One essay claims, “Although they were Americans, perhaps because they were Americans, they recognized the marketability of Canadian-ness and chose to use one of Canada’s national symbols, the beaver, as their corporate logo.”⁶² Journalist Leslie Smith agrees: “[W]e have to admit that it took two Americans to make us finally feel pride in our home and native land.”⁶³

The Roots boys are undoubtedly sincere when talk about their positive summer camp experiences in Algonquin Park, their love of the Canadian wilderness, and their affection for Toronto, where they both make their home. That they have been able to bundle their personal predilections into a recipe for profit tells us something about how Canadians themselves envision their nation. The Roots image of Canada, much like the image of many 1970s-era English-Canadian nationalists, is centred in Ontario and, more curiously, in an upper-middle-class summer camp experience that may actually be more typical of Americans than it is of Canadians.⁶⁴

Why have Canadians embraced branded Roots clothing with such gusto? Visible branding on clothing began in the 1950s, when European couture houses began using their names to sell products such as scarves, perfumes, and bags in the American market.⁶⁵ In the 1970s it took off with designer jeans and shirts sporting logos by Lacoste and Ralph Lauren. In the 1980s, as the fitness movement exploded, a variety of logo-branded sweatshirts came on the market, including sweatshirts from Hang Ten, Adidas, and Daniel

61 “Michael Budman and Don Green: Co-founders and Owners”, *Contemporary Canadian Biographies*, available on CD-ROM (Toronto: The Gale Group, 1997), n.p.

62 *Ibid.*

63 Leslie C. Smith, “From Birchbark to Birchwood: Roots Branches Out”, *Ottawa Citizen*, July 2, 1997, p. E2.

64 Sharon Wall points out that the camping movement in Canada was largely centred in Ontario, and that some elite summer camps in Ontario were dominated by American campers while others had a significant American clientele. Sharon Wall, “‘Negotiating Modernity’: Nature and Nurture at Ontario Children’s Camps, 1920–1955” (PhD dissertation, York University, 2003), pp. 51–52, 260, 266–269.

65 Agins, *The End of Fashion*, pp. 28–30.

Hechter. In Canada, however, Roots sweatshirts were the most popular.⁶⁶ The national anxiety over free trade and the perceived need for national cohesion in the mid-1980s laid the ground for Roots' phenomenal success.

English-Canadian nationalism took a nosedive in the early 1980s. In 1980, 40 per cent of Quebeckers voted to separate from Canada. That same year, the National Energy Policy infuriated oil-rich Alberta and angered the Regan administration. The recession of 1981–1982 hit hard, with large job losses and inflation. A new constitution, negotiated in 1981, failed to win Quebec's approval. Also that year, the Committee for an Independent Canada closed shop. When Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was elected in the fall of 1984, he promised American businessmen in New York, "Canada is open for business again."⁶⁷ He abolished the Foreign Investment Review Agency and replaced it with Investment Canada, designed to encourage, not prevent, foreign investment. He killed the National Energy Policy and signalled the possibility of a free trade agreement with the United States. While the business community applauded, many Canadians worried about what this would mean for Canadian sovereignty. At the same time, many Canadians were uncomfortable with Reagan's military build-up and his Strategic Defense Initiative (the Star Wars programme). A strong peace movement emerged — in 1985 more than 300,000 Canadians belonged to peace organizations, 85 per cent supported a nuclear weapons freeze, and more than 90 towns and cities had declared themselves nuclear-weapons-free zones.⁶⁸ The refusal of the United States to admit the iconic Canadian author Farley Mowat in April 1985 and the voyage of the American ice-breaker *Polar Sea*, which thrust its way through Canadian waters without Canadian permission that August, further inflamed anti-Americanism. The Council of Canadians, a citizens' group formed to lobby against free trade, took its first public act when it dropped a Canadian flag on the deck of *Polar Sea* as a grassroots assertion of Canadian sovereignty.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, Roots launched its athletics line, and Canadians bought Roots sweatshirts in droves. Interestingly, Roots was not the only company to sell Canadiana successfully at this time. A clothing store in Vancouver called POW WOW, which opened in 1984, sold Canadian T-shirts, along with a variety of Aboriginal and Wild-West themed clothing.⁷⁰ Tim Hortons, the donut shop associated with Canadian pride, underwent dramatic growth in the middle of the 1980s while Country Style and Mr. Donut remained stable.⁷¹

66 Bonnie Hurowitz, "Buyers in a Lather for Sweatshirts", *Toronto Star*, December 20, 1979, p. D04.

67 "A Secret Plan for Free Trade and Sovereignty", *Maclean's*, November 11, 1985, p. 15.

68 Michael Clugston, "Refining the Arguments Against Arms", *Maclean's*, March 4, 1985, p. 16.

69 Council of Canadians, "Our History" [online document, retrieved May 19, 2004], <http://www.canadians.org/display_document.htm?COC_token=23@@d2dd60a97737b558457842c9585851e&id=6&isdoc=1&catid=5>; "The New Race for the North", *Maclean's*, August 19, 1985,

pp. 16–19.

70 Dianne Rinehart, "Looking Good: Going Native", *Flare*, April 1985, p. 26.

71 Steven Penfold, "The Social Life of Donuts: Commodity and Community in Postwar Canada" (PhD dissertation, York University, 2002), pp. 281–282.

At the Shamrock Summit in March 1985, when Mulroney and Reagan clasped hands with their wives to sing “When Irish Eyes are Smiling”, the two leaders signed an agreement to “halt protectionism in cross-border trade in goods and services”.⁷² That fall, the three-year Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada, headed by former Liberal cabinet minister Donald Macdonald, also came out in favour of free trade.⁷³ Initially, as Sylvia Bashevkin shows, support was high — an Environics poll put support at 65 per cent in June 1985 — but the Americans took a hard line in the negotiations, and, as Canadians had more time to debate the issue, support began to fall. Not long after a tentative agreement had been reached in October 1987, free trade had the support of just 40 per cent of the population. By October 1988, Environics was showing that support had fallen to only 31 per cent.⁷⁴ As Canadians became increasingly alarmed about the “selling out” of Canada, they supported Canadian business and expressed their pride in Canada by buying Roots.

Roots took full advantage of the 1980s conditions to expand its business rapidly across Canada, doubling the number of stores between 1983 and 1989.⁷⁵ Roots sweatshirts became the ultimate in high-school cool. Some stores had line-ups. In its marketing, Roots emphasized the quality of its sweatshirts and the care with which suppliers were selected. But relatively little was said about the nationality of the company’s suppliers, probably because one of them, Russell, was an American company.⁷⁶ Only in the 1990s did Roots emphasize that its products were almost 100-per-cent made in Canada, probably in response to growing protests on university campuses about sweatshop-made products and concern across the United States and Canada about out-sourcing in the wake of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

By the 1990s the free trade debate was over, but other political conflicts threatened Canadian national unity and posed a particular danger to the bilingual, multicultural dream of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1990 the Meech Lake Accord, a constitutional amendment that recognized Quebec as a “distinct society”, went down to defeat when Elijah Harper, the lone Aboriginal member of the Manitoba legislature, used procedural delays to prevent the accord from coming to a vote. That summer, a fierce stand-off unfolded in Oka, Quebec, when the town decided to expand its golf course to land long claimed by the Mohawks, sparking a vigorous national debate about Aboriginal land claims. Two years later, Canadians voted against the Charlottetown Accord, which included another attempt to recognize Quebec as a distinct society, in a national referendum. A severe national recession in

72 “Free Trade”, *Maclean’s*, September 16, 1985, p. 24.

73 G. Bruce Doern and Brian W. Tomlin, *Faith and Fear: The Free Trade Story* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1991); Michael Hart with Bill Dymond and Colin Robertson, *Decision at Midnight: Inside the Canada-US Free-Trade Negotiations* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1994).

74 Bashevkin, *True Patriot Love*, p. 128.

75 *Directory of Retail Chains in Canada* (Toronto, Gale Group, serial).

76 Livingstone, “Team Karma”, p. 33.

1990–1991 added to Canadians' distress, leading to greater hostility towards immigrants and multiculturalism. Many English Canadians became further enraged with Quebec when 49 per cent of Quebecers voted to separate from Canada in a 1995 referendum. In her study of Canadian nationalism in rural Ontario in the 1990s, *The House of Difference*, Eve Mackey found strong demands for a united and more patriotic Canada and an end to special "status" and privilege. Her informants demanded that people embrace being Canadian first and let go of their hyphens.⁷⁷ In the 1990s Roots nationalism had the advantage of being completely divorced from the bilingual, multicultural dream. Roots spoke to a Canada everyone could supposedly share — the flag, Canadian athletes, and the great outdoors. After being hit hard by the 1991 recession and the failure of the lodge in Aspen, Roots experienced steady growth throughout the 1990s, moving from 26 stores in 1993 to 117 in 2001. Not surprisingly, Roots' presence in Quebec was proportionately smaller than it was in the rest of the country.

Unlike Tim Hortons or Molson, which produce quite affordable products, Roots apparel was primarily directed at the middle- or upper-class customer. In the 1990s Roots made a greater attempt to reach beyond its middle-class base, opening up mall kiosks selling less expensive items such as non-leather bags and hats, partnering with Petro-Canada to sell toques and scarves for just \$9.95 with a fill-up, and distributing Roots toques with cases of Molson Canadian beer.⁷⁸ Just as Tim Hortons customers were able to buy and display a little bit of an imagined (and affordable) Canada when they purchased their morning coffee, and Molson customers could celebrate Canada with the price of a beer, Roots customers could also purchase an idealized (and reasonably priced) version of Canada that they could wear proudly.⁷⁹

By the 1990s Roots was fully accepted as an authentic Canadian symbol. The Canadian government even decided Roots apparel was an appropriate gift for visiting dignitaries. In 1998, at a meeting for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) finance ministers at Kananaskis, Alberta, Finance Minister Paul Martin gave them all Roots jackets. Harry Adams, the director of public affairs for finance, revealed, "What we were trying to capture is the symbol of Canada — young, energetic and forward looking."⁸⁰ At the controversial 1997 APEC Summit in Vancouver, the government gave each of the 14 leaders identical brown leather Roots jackets, valued at \$710 each.⁸¹ In

77 Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002; 1999).

78 Austen, "Beaver Fever"; "Molson Offers up Hockey Fantasy", *Marketing Magazine*, vol. 105, no. 4 (January 31, 2000), p. 3.

79 Steve Penfold, "'Eddie Shack was no Tim Horton': Donuts and the Folklore of Mass Culture in Canada", in Warrne Belasco and Philip Scranton, eds., *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 48–66.

80 Celeste McGovern, "Jus' Plain Folks", *Alberta Report*, July 16, 1998, p. 32.

81 Chris Wood, "A Summit Engulfed by Crisis: Alarm Grows over Asia's Worsening Financial Turmoil", *Macleam's*, December 8, 1997, p. 38.

1998 at Nagano, the Canadian Olympic Association allowed Roots to make the company’s logo almost as large as the lettering of “Canada” on the famous poor-boy caps, underlining the idea that Roots was Canada.⁸²

While considerable controversy raged over global trade agreements and their social implications in the 1990s, the government of Canada was intent on proving its ability to compete globally and on expanding international trade.⁸³ Under Jean Chrétien’s leadership, premiers and businesspeople — “Team Canada” — embarked on a yearly series of high-profile trade missions around the world, starting with China, to promote Canada’s products and services. Roots was the perfect brand for a “Team Canada” nation: energetic and confident in the global marketplace, with quality goods and feel-good presence. When foreign relations were about the market, as they seemed to be in the post-Cold-War and pre-terrorist 1990s, and Canada needed to represent itself through its products, Roots had the perfect amount of northern wilderness appeal and “cool” cachet. Yet Roots has never confined itself to Canada. In the late 1980s, with its court case resolved, Roots once again began expanding into the American market. Roots USA features America just as visibly as Roots Canada promotes Canadian symbols. In Salt Lake City in 2002, Roots outfitted the American Olympic Team employing the American flag and colours to equal commercial success. As sales of US berets reached somewhere between 20,000 and 100,000 per day, Don Green told the *Globe and Mail*, “[T]here’s a new country out there and it’s called Roots.” In another interview he reported, “Post 9/11 people feel so proud to wear clothing proclaiming the USA. This phenomenon is not going to end Feb. 24 [the date the Olympic Games ended].”⁸⁴ At the 2004 Games in Athens, Roots outfitted the teams from Canada, the United States, Great Britain, and Barbados. Roots is a global success with stores across the United States, Asia, and Europe. Its Asian stores sell a broad range of Canada-themed items, while the American stores sell more US-oriented gear, reflecting the relative appeal of the “Canada” brand in various global locales.

Countercultural Cachet

One of the media phenomena of the mid-1980s was the emergence of the “yuppie”, prompting much bemused commentary on how socially conscious “hippies” had turned into status-conscious “yuppies”. By focusing on the apparent contradiction between “hippie” and “yuppie”, the media ignored the continuities and similarities. In *The Conquest of Cool*, Thomas Frank shows that the greatest legacy of the counterculture may be in business, especially

82 Admittedly, the Canadian Olympic Association is a private organization, not a government organization.

83 Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2002); Stephen Clarkson, *Uncle Sam and Us: Globalization, Neoconservatism and the Canadian State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

84 Austen, “Beaver Fever”.

advertising and branding. Business embraced the countercultural ethos of revolution, creativity, and the need for continual change.⁸⁵ Like any good brand, Roots (and, by extension, Budman and Green) regularly re-invents itself. Like Starbucks and The Body Shop, Roots is in the business of selling “meaning” and “values”. In 1983 Green declared that Roots was “a good example of how a very human-oriented business can be carried on in the ’80s through the use of integrity, quality and honesty”.⁸⁶ In 1987 Budman told a reporter, “I really love Roots, and I don’t feel like I own Roots. I love the team that I’m on.”⁸⁷ Sometimes the meaning of Roots is nationalism, sometimes it is the wilderness, sometimes it is honesty or “soul”, and sometimes it is “healthy lifestyles”, but the overall design is to show how beneficial Roots consumption can be. Notably, the Roots “team” is non-unionized and relies on low-paid service and garment workers.

The meaning of Roots moves with the times, much like the Roots boys themselves. In the 1980s, as the aerobics movement took hold, they talked more about their commitment to fitness and their exercise routines. In 1985, as the Roots Athletics Line was taking off, Budman and Green were shown jogging in the pages of *Flare* magazine. “We’re dedicated to being fit and healthy,” the magazine quoted Budman, and announced that the two had taken “advanced aerobic classes” that had had “a positive effect on our lives”, in addition to jogging, swimming, cycling, and, of course, canoeing.⁸⁸ Like many Canadians, Roots embraced environmentalism in the late 1980s, with T-shirts that read “Save the Planet”, “Save the Rainforest”, and “Be Ozone Friendly”.⁸⁹ In the 1990s media reports showed Roots more focused on balance, *feng shui*, and yoga, and its advertising campaigns featured slogans like “The more we experience, the more we understand true beauty.”⁹⁰ Despite moving steadily with the mainstream, Roots has managed to keep a hint of rebellious countercultural chic. Budman and Green are invariably described as two “hippies” who went into business together, but, like many of their generation, they were never very radical. In a 1975 interview, Budman and Green emphasized that their “shoe is not a way to save the world”. Instead, they took pride in the company’s rapid growth and their North York factory, which employed 150 people.⁹¹

In the 1980s Budman and Green were regularly profiled as the ultimate yuppies, due to their ostentatious lifestyle and their appeal to status-conscious customers. Family also became an important part of the Roots story in

85 Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

86 Budman added, “We’re shoemakers sticking to our last.” See “Roots’ Designs are Based on Quality, Affordability”, *Toronto Star*, April 11, 1985, p. D4.

87 Livingstone, “Team Karma”, p. 35.

88 “The Buddy System”, *Flare*, November 1985, p. 40.

89 Jane Mussett, “Fashion with a Message”, *Toronto Star*, June 21, 1990, p. B1.

90 Roots advertisement, featuring Jason Priestly and his dog, in *Flare*, December 1996, p. 24.

91 Hartley, “Canadians Pussyfoot Around with Earth Shoes”.

the 1980s. Don Green met his wife Denyse just a few months before Roots opened. She visited him at the store, began helping the long line of customers, and became one of Roots’ first employees.⁹² After living together for eight years, the two married in 1982. Three years later, Budman wed architect Dianne Bald. Journalists make much of the close relationship between Budman and Green, invariably including a mention of their neighbouring cabins on Algonquin Park’s Smoke Lake. “We’re just two best friends who love athletics and love hanging out together. This business is our life but we want to have fun with it.”⁹³ Their wives are heavily involved in the business, and Pevere reports that none of the clothing makes it onto the rack until it has been approved by Budman and Green and their wives Dianne Bald and Denyse Green.⁹⁴ They embarked into children’s clothing only when they had children of their own, and they use their children in the marketing campaigns, much as they frequently used themselves as models. Budman claimed in 1989, “I love matching my [three-year-old] son’s clothing and he likes to match me.”⁹⁵ Like other baby boomers, Budman and Green see themselves as pioneering a progressive parenting style with close emotional ties to their children. Thus the family motif, though it could easily be interpreted as traditional, is actually about re-inventing and improving parenthood.

The rebellious aspect of Roots has continued in the 1990s, with its attempt to employ hip-hop icons in its advertising campaigns. In the 1990s Roots also began to play with marijuana references. This was an attempt to gain countercultural credibility, but also had appeal to Canadians who wanted to condemn the American war on drugs, while flaunting Canada’s somewhat more liberal drug policies. In 1996, in the midst of growing hippie nostalgia, Budman and Green called their manufacturing company “GreenBud”, a play on their names, but surely no accidental reference to the leafy psychoactive plant whose use was surging. They also jumped on the opportunity to employ snowboarder Ross Rebagliati, who nearly lost his gold medal at the Nagano Olympics after testing positive for marijuana, as their poster boy. In Roots’ first national television advertisement, Rebagliati waxed in stoner style: “My roots ... while I’d have to say my friends, my sport, being here [a loon cries out as Rebagliati sits at the end of a deck in the sunset], which is all about spiritual opportunity.”⁹⁶ In typically cautious form, however, when Green was asked if Roots endorsed marijuana use by signing Rebagliati, Green responded, “We absolutely do not condone the use of marijuana.”⁹⁷

Roots’ anti-corporate image does not extend to having a sense of humour

92 Ellen Bot, “Stylist Takes Simple Path to Beauty”, *Toronto Star*, April 12, 1984, p. B15.

93 Teshler, “Roots: Grooving on Casual Chic”, p. B2.

94 Pevere, *Team Spirit*, p. 88.

95 “Line of Comfy Clothes for Baby Rooted in Family Experiences”, *Toronto Star*, May 11, 1989, p. J3.

96 “Ross Rebagliati Featured in First National TV Commercial for Roots Canada Ltd.”, *Globe and Mail*, October 21, 1998, p. B29. Text taken from the advertisement on Roots web page: <http://www.roots.com/new_canada/html/pc_commercials.shtml>, retrieved May 7, 2004.

97 “Rebagliati Signs Roots Deal But Won’t Change Lifestyle”, *Calgary Herald*, March 12, 1998, p. F9.

about its brand. During the sweatshirt craze of the mid-1980s, a number of knock-offs appeared, the most famous of which was the “Rats-Pathetic” T-Shirt, with a picture of a rat instead of a beaver. Roots threatened the student-run company, called Poetry from the Groin, with legal action, and the students settled out of court for \$2,000. In the fall of 1986 Roots got an injunction against University of Western Ontario student Gerald Schwartz, who was selling a beaver skeleton with the name ROTS. Schwartz was ordered to pay \$575 in costs. Roots also challenged a company called Yupco, which came out with an “official” yuppie sweatshirt called HOOTS.⁹⁸

Roots embraces the widespread nostalgia for the vibrant youth culture of the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, only the cleanest, most wholesome parts of the 1960s cling to its four-thread sweatshirts and high-quality leather. Realistically, Roots clothing, including its bomber jackets, Continental line, old athletic symbols, and camping chic, is far more resonant of the 1950s than it is of the 1960s. The company’s rhetoric, on the other hand, and its ability to change with the times — moving from hippie shoes to 1980s athletic sweats to early twenty-first-century yoga gear — bears far closer resemblance to the 1960s and the whims of the affluent baby-boomer generation. For this generation, being a successful business innovator goes hand in hand with maintaining an edge of counterculture chic and nostalgia.

Conclusion

Internationally, nationalism is often associated with the horrors of World War II or with ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. By contrast, nationalism in Canada has often been quite positive. The bilingual-multicultural dream has helped to promote tolerance, and in the 1970s and early 1980s, as Steven High has pointed out, the nationalist discourse was useful in terms of preventing plant closures and stalling the process of deindustrialization.⁹⁹ The notion that Canada is a kinder, gentler place than the United States has played a key role in the preservation of medicare. Even so, there are dangers to nationalism. Nationalism tends to create an “us” versus “them” attitude, which can easily turn into xenophobia and racism, even in Canada, as Eve Mackey’s work shows. Roots nationalism is empty of the positive aspects of Canadian nationalism — the emphasis on tolerance, diversity, and community. Moreover, despite Roots’ promotion of environmentalism, it feeds into one of the biggest problems we face as a planet — over-consumption. Branded nationalism might have some usefulness in promoting Canada on the world stage, but it leaves Canadians with little sense of Canada’s history or values.

98 Donn Downey, “Unrepentant Student Dreams of New Spoofs”, *Globe and Mail*, October 4, 1986, p. D08; Livingstone, “Team Karma”, p. 34

99 Steven High, “ ‘I’ll Wrap the F*#@ Canadian Flag Around Me’: A Nationalist Response to Plant Shutdowns, 1969–1984”, *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, vol. 12 (2001), pp. 199–225.

The historiography of English-Canadian nationalism in the years after World War II often reeks of nostalgia for the 1970s. Yet nationalism has not disappeared. Canadian literature continues to make waves, while English-Canadian films rarely attract an audience. Waffle and the Committee for an Independent Canada have been replaced by the Council of Canadians.¹⁰⁰ Canadian history, literature, politics, and economics have a far more secure place in the university curriculum than they did in the 1970s. Federal elections are fought on the issue of health care — the so-called “national trust” that is said to define Canadians. Certainly, important nationalist battles associated with the 1970s have been lost — free trade seems to be here to stay — but it must be recognized that Canadian nationalism, albeit in a rather different form, is stronger than ever. Roots nationalism has little to recommend it, other than non-union-made quality leather goods, thick sweatshirts, and a very cute beaver, but it is a way for Canadians to express pride in their country and to distinguish themselves from their American cousins. In his book *A Great Duty*, Len Kuffert points out that many nationalist commentators of the 1950s and 1960s were propelled not by a fear of American culture *per se*, but by a fear of a mass culture they saw as unenlightening and tawdry.¹⁰¹ Roots nationalism is perhaps their worst nightmare, but it is perfectly in keeping with a globalized, commercialized world.

100 The Council of Canadians has approximately 100,000 members, while the Committee for an Independent Canada probably had fewer than 5,000 (Azzi, *Walter Gordon*, p. 177).

101 L. B. Kuffert, *A Great Duty: Canadian Responses to Modern Life and Mass Culture, 1939–1967* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003). Thanks to Mike Dawson for this insight.