

TABLE RONDE / ROUND TABLE

My Canada Includes the Atlantic Provinces

MARGARET CONRAD*

FOR A VARIETY of reasons, I approached *Canada: A People's History* gingerly. I value the CBC and I did not want it to fail in this outrageously ambitious venture — and the likelihood of failure, in my opinion, was high. As the co-author of a Canadian history textbook,¹ I am painfully aware of how hard it is to reconstruct even a brief episode in our past, let alone the whole sweep from beginning to end. What being a textbook author means for this exercise is that I know too much. I have experienced the difficulties of getting the history of Canada right for an educated audience, and I have suffered the slings and arrows of an impressive array of critics who complain about errors of fact, imbalance in content, and bias in interpretation. Fortunately, the textbook has gone into second and third editions and much has been done to correct errors and omissions pointed out to us. No one, of course, ever refers to subsequent editions.² Once the tone and focus of the criticism is set, it takes on a life of its own. I therefore have only the deepest sympathy for Mark Starowicz and his production team who are experiencing the thousand cuts from academic critics, most of whom tend to repeat each other, but who have never tried to produce history on television themselves.

I should also acknowledge that I am currently developing a course called “Canada on Film”, which means that I am deeply immersed in the academic literature in the field of historical film. Even in my sleep I can chant Robert A. Rosenstone’s mantra: “A film is not a book. An image is not a word.” I

* Margaret Conrad is a faculty member in the Department of History at Acadia University. An earlier version of this review was presented at a round table entitled “*Canada: A People's History*: The Historian’s Perspective” at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Laval University, May 25, 2001. The author is indebted to Gene Allen, Ernest Dick, and Gerry Friesen for taking the time to read and comment on this text.

1 Margaret Conrad and Alvin Finkel, *History of the Canadian Peoples*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (Toronto: Addison, Wesley, Longman, 2002).

2 A good example of this phenomenon is a recent critique by Timothy J. Stanley of the above-mentioned text based on the first rather than subsequent edition, “Why I Killed Canadian History: Conditions for an Anti-Racist History in Canada”, *Histoire sociale/ Social History*, vol. 33, no. 65 (May 2000), pp. 79–103.

understand the necessity in film-making for “alteration”, “compression”, “invention”, and “metaphor” (techniques also used in written texts), and I know the difference between a “false invention” and a “true invention” as defined by Rosenstone. In short, I try not to judge film by the standards of the book. However, I cling stubbornly to the view that historical accuracy, insofar as it can be judged, is important to both approaches. Again, Rosenstone makes the point well:

[H]owever poetic or expressive it may be, history on film enters into a world where “scientific” and documentary history have long been pursued and are still undertaken, where accuracy of event and detail has its own lengthy tradition. This tradition, in a sense, raises history on film to a new level, for it provides a check on what can be invented and expressed. To be taken seriously, the historical film must not violate the over-all data and meanings of what we already know of the past. All changes and inventions must be apposite to the truths of that discourse, and judgment must emerge from the accumulated knowledge of the world of historical texts into which the film enters.³

For reasons that I have not fully probed — perhaps, as Rosenstone suggests, I am afraid of losing control of history to others — I am not a huge fan of historical novels, historical museums, or historical docudramas. Something about their construction usually sets my teeth on edge. I am, however, a happy consumer of most documentary films and can watch the National Film Board’s *Women on the March* and *12,000 Men* repeatedly — all the while pointing out to my students the flaws in their construction, the inaccuracies, and the biases. I am greatly impressed by the 1997 CBC production on the history of Newfoundland and Labrador, entitled *East of Canada*. In my bias toward documentary I am, I suppose, quintessentially Canadian.

Marcel Martel, who commissioned this series of reviews, asked us to address three questions:

- Which history was offered by the series?
- What is the contribution of the series to Canadian history?
- What is the series’ potential as a means of civic education?⁴

In an effort not to repeat much of what has already be written on this much-reviewed series,⁵ I will take up an issue that has caused me and others some concern: the failure of the series to address in any sustained way the history of Atlantic Canada. Whether in books or on film, it is the structure of the

3 Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 79.

4 E-mail communication from Marcel Martel, March 27, 2001.

5 For a useful analysis of public and press reaction to the series, see the web site created by the Carleton History Collaborative at www.carleton.ca/historycollaborative.

narrative as much as the specific content that reveals conscious and unconscious assumptions about historical significance, and what is missing is often as important as what is portrayed.⁶ I take an autobiographical approach to my task, since my reaction to the series evolved during the course of my viewing experience.

Which History Was Offered by the Series?

Like many people, I watched the first episode, “When the World Began”, *en famille*, in my case with my 84-year-old mother, who trotted off to bed before the half-way mark. She had difficulty following the programme and found the torture sequence unsettling. Although I initially attributed this reaction to her age, I discovered that my students had a similar response. I, of course, stayed with it for the full two hours, taking copious notes. I listed a few minor errors of fact and was troubled by what seemed to me to be a tendency for the narrative to be less specific with respect to developments in Atlantic Canada than elsewhere.⁷ I bristled at the language of the script, whose authors used the generic “man” and seemed oblivious to the now widely accepted guidelines for naming Aboriginal peoples. Like others, I found the ponderous pace of the narration annoying and was disturbed by the authoritative tone of the script. History is much more contingent than this series concedes. For my taste, there needed to be more openings in the script to engage viewers in matters of meaning and contingency. Nonetheless, I found the episode well balanced and interesting to watch. I liked the “talking heads” offering voices from the past, and I had no trouble following the rapid chronological shifts that left my mother and my students in the dust. This, I concluded, was a series that would try to cover the whole of Canada, include the elites and the ordinary folk, women as well as men, and not essentialize Natives or newcomers.

Episode 2, “Adventurers and Mystics”, gave me reason to reassess my earlier judgement. Again Newfoundland was used to represent the whole Atlantic region, in this case the short-lived settlement at Cupid’s Cove. Meanwhile, Champlain’s story began in Quebec, omitting entirely the founding of Port Royal, which was not even located on the map depicting European colonization. While I liked the sequence on the *filles du roi* and the *engagés*, I was disappointed that more of the insights on environmental history developed by Ramsay Cook, one of the consultants for the series, was

6 Michel-Rolph Touillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

7 The discussion of L’Anse Amour, for example, failed to identify the site or the peoples who are believed to have created it. The Shanawdithit story was more compressed than I thought it should be, most notably in the omission of the conflict between the Beothuk and the Mi’kmaq which, like the well-explored Huron-Iroquois rivalry, warranted at least a mention. Also compressed to the detriment of Atlantic Canada was the Cartier narrative, which failed to balance the “land God gave to Cain” statement with his more positive response to what became Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick.

not included in a sustained way.⁸ The wholesale burning of forests, the efforts of Europeans to get their seeds to grow in an alien climate (so delightfully described by Lescarbot at Port Royal), and the migration of European plants and animals would have introduced audiences to what some historians consider to be one of the most significant developments in human history: the hard-won success of Europeans in rooting their ecosystems, as well as their social values, in environments around the world. At Port Royal, with its fine soil, salubrious climate, and friendly Natives, Champlain and his compatriots managed to slay the dragon of scurvy, but because his corporate backers were more interested in the fur trade than agriculture, they moved their main base to Quebec.

Acadia nevertheless survived as an area of French settlement and quickly became a pawn in international politics radiating out of London and Paris and their satellites, Boston and Quebec. If nothing else, the well-researched story of Charles de la Tour, whose first wife was a Mi'kmaq, whose daughters were sent to French convents, whose political manoeuvrings reflect the long-standing vulnerability of the Atlantic region to competing empires, and whose indefatigable colonizing efforts helped to lay the foundation of Acadia would make for dramatic television viewing. Excellent work has been done on the history of Acadia in the seventeenth century,⁹ but it is nowhere represented in this episode, which makes clear whose narrative was being developed in the series: that of the St. Lawrence heartland. Even the Mi'kmaq, who provide some of the best documented stories of early contact and are famous for their collaboration with the French and resistance to the British on land and sea, are absent from the narrative. Critics applaud the attention given to Native peoples in the series, but Atlantic Canada's First Nations disappear after the first episode.

Although the Acadians get expelled in Episode 3, "Claiming a Wilderness", they are dropped into the narrative without any real context. As a result they are again represented as the long-suffering victims of British policy, which they assuredly are, but the conditions that led the British to take such draconian action are not addressed. By essentializing the Acadians — failing to explore the conditions of their agency and nature of their alliances (again the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet are mentioned only as "Indians") — the

8 Ramsay Cook, "1492 and All That: Making a Garden Out of a Wilderness" in Pam Gaffield and Chad Gaffield, eds., *Consuming Canada: Readings in Environmental History* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1995), pp. 62–80.

9 See, for example, Naomi Griffiths, *The Contexts of Acadian History, 1686–1784* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); Elizabeth Jones, *Gentlemen and Jesuits: Quests for Glory and Adventure in the Early Days of New France* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986); M. A. MacDonald, *Fortune and La Tour: The Civil War in Acadia*, 2nd ed. (Halifax: Nimbus, 2000); John Reid, *Acadia, Maine, and New Scotland: Marginal Colonies in the Seventeenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); Sally Ross and Alphonse Deveau, *The Acadians of Nova Scotia: Past and Present* (Halifax: Nimbus, 1992); L. S. F. Upton, *Miacas and Colonists: A Study of Imperial Relations* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1979).

series misses an opportunity to make sense of this dreadful event. To understand the Acadia deportation fully, we need to hear more about the founding of Louisbourg and Halifax — two of the largest cities in the area of present-day Canada in the early 1750s — the battles of Grand Pré and Beauséjour, the activities of political priests such as Le Loutre and Maillard, and the guerilla warfare in the region before the outbreak of the Seven Years' War. To be sure, the fall of Quebec is pivotal for the colony of Canada, but the capture of Port Royal in 1710 and the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 mark the British conquest of much of the Atlantic region. I may have missed something, but the only reference I noticed to Port Royal, the capital of Acadia, was a throw-away line in the segment on the Phips expedition, suggesting that Phips “destroyed” Port Royal en route to Quebec in 1690. None of the gripping developments that erupted in the Atlantic region during the War of the League of Augsburg (1687–1696) and the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–1713) — the kidnaping by the English of women and children from the Acadian communities, privateering out of Port Royal, the capture of Port Royal itself — is even mentioned let alone animated for the viewing audience.

Why is the splendid social history of Louisbourg not represented in this series? Both the research and the setting are in place.¹⁰ Given that the third episode is only one hour long, even time allowed the opportunity to produce in-depth coverage of the Atlantic region comparable to the careful treatment of the Northwest in Episode 6 — my favourite of the series. The extra hour might also have been used to bring Newfoundland back into the narrative. During the War of the League of Augsburg, a French expedition led by Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville destroyed 36 English settlements in Newfoundland, killed 200 people, took 700 prisoners, and captured 300 fishing vessels in a campaign that marked a new level of European conflict in North America.¹¹ Where did all those Newfoundlanders come from, given that the last mention of the colony was the failure of John Guy's colony at Cupid's Cove? Why did the producers of this series not make some effort to get English and French settlers to Newfoundland and show the island's enormous significance, primarily because of its location near the Grand Banks fishery, in the larger scheme of things?

Let me hasten to add that I am not suggesting that all of these “chapters” be addressed in the series, but surely the Atlantic region deserves to be the subject of at least one of the nine episodes in the pre-Confederation period. While the Atlantic provinces may well be marginal to the national narrative in the post-Confederation period, and will no doubt be virtually ignored in the next eight episodes, it was not so in the seventeenth and eighteenth cen-

10 Most notably, Christopher Moore's award-winning book, *Louisbourg Portraits: Life in an Eighteenth-Century Garrison Town* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982); A. J. B. Johnson, *Life and Religion at Louisbourg, 1713–1758* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984); and various ground-breaking articles by Kenneth Donovan.

11 Bernard Pothier, “Le Moyne d'Iberville”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 2, p. 394.

turies. At that time, the sea-bound coast, even more than the St. Lawrence, was the site where large international forces played out their struggle for power. During this period most of the political boundaries and population patterns that persist to this day were laid down in Atlantic Canada. One would never know this from viewing this series. Episode 4, “Battle for a Continent”, focuses primarily on Quebec, and Episode 5, “A Question of Loyalty”, so compressed the implications of the Loyalist migration to the Maritimes that it prompted one of my colleagues to suggest that it was time for the region to declare independence. Indeed, Episode 5 caused me to lose sleep, and I thereafter watched taped programmes early in the day so that I would have time to recover my equilibrium before going to bed. It is not that the stories about Loyalist migrants Hannah Ingraham, Boston King, and Stephen Jarvis were not well chosen to reflect the diversity of the Loyalist experience in the region; rather, it is the uncertainty of the script and the failure of the programme to show the significance to the region of this mass migration. After a brief mention that New Brunswick became a separate colony in 1784 — there is no acknowledgment that Cape Breton was also given separate colonial status at the same time — the lens moves back to the “Upper Colony”. We learn little about the founding of Saint John, the premier Loyalist city, so well researched by David Bell and Ann Gorman Condon,¹² or the considerable impact of the Loyalist arrival on the Acadians, Maliseet, and Mi’kmaq. Despite the fine research on privateering out of Liverpool and other coastal towns during the French and Napoleonic Wars,¹³ surely the stuff of drum and trumpet history in which the series excels, the focus remains firmly fixed on the Canadas. The splendid Simeon Perkins diary, one of the richest sources of North American colonial history in this period, remains untapped. Indeed, viewers of this series would never know that peoples other than Loyalists settled in the Atlantic region.

Nor would they know from watching Episode 8, “The Great Enterprise”, and Episode 9, “From Sea to Sea”, that Canada’s first separatist movement was centred in Nova Scotia, many of whose citizens had good reason for trying to repeal the *British North America Act* that was thrust upon them. When, in a *Globe and Mail* op-ed piece, I took a swipe at the series for failing to develop Howe’s leadership in the anti-Confederation movement, I received a polite rebuff from Gene Allen and a less polite one from Ramsay Cook, but a reviewing of this episode only made me less happy with the way the four Atlantic colonies were covered in the story of Confederation.¹⁴ The relationship between the Maritimes and the rest of Canada set in place in this

12 D. G. Bell, *Early Loyalist Saint John: The Origin of New Brunswick Politics, 1783–1786* (Fredericton: New Ireland Press, 1983); Ann Gorman Condon, *The Envy of the American States: The Loyalist Dream for New Brunswick* (Fredericton: New Ireland Press, 1984).

13 Daniel Conlin, “A Private War in the Caribbean: Nova Scotia Privateering, 1793–1805”, (MA thesis, Saint Mary’s University, 1996), and *The Northern Mariner*, vol. 6, no. 4 (October 1996), pp. 29–34.

14 *Globe and Mail*, March 7 and 8, 2001; Ramsay Cook to Margaret Conrad, March 8, 2001.

period goes a long way to explain regional tensions that still characterize our nation. Although Howe eventually became a leading spokesperson for the anti-Confederate cause, he was by no means alone in his criticisms of the *British North America Act*.¹⁵ Surely, a few minutes could have been devoted to portraying the larger forces underlying Nova Scotia's repeal movement, which followed the signing of the *BNA Act*.

I could continue in this vein, but my main point is this: in the rare instances in which the series focuses on Atlantic Canada, it does so with a fuzzy lens. The references to the region lack context and are often so compressed that they do the region an injustice. This is not a failing unique to CBC. As many scholars have noted, Atlantic Canada is often ignored or badly mutilated in so-called "national" histories.¹⁶ Narratives, it must be underscored, bear witness to significance and reflect relations of power. In selecting "chapters" to represent Canada's past, the producers of the series document the widely perceived irrelevance of the Atlantic region to Canada at the dawn of the twenty-first century. It is inconceivable that the founding narratives of Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies, and British Columbia or the experience of Native peoples could be ignored in CBC's millennium celebration of Canada's history. The four Atlantic Provinces, however, are clearly marginal to the enterprise.

My other concern about the narrative in the first nine episodes has already been the source of considerable comment. By the time we reach Episode 3, the series becomes preoccupied with political and military themes, while social developments that were foregrounded in Episode 1 are less clearly rendered. Viewers are left with the impression that only Natives have gender roles and religious experiences worthy of close observation. One of my colleagues, who has a tendency to graze channels, remarked that every time she dropped into the series, she saw roughly the same scene: soldiers marching, dressed in different uniforms perhaps, but deadly to watch for minutes on end. While the personal experiences of the soldiers added a nice touch to the usual story, she had hoped to see more attention paid to European immigration and settlement in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and its implications for Native peoples in all the eastern colonies, as a counterpart to what will surely be a focus on western settlement in the period from 1896 to 1914. Indeed, the "little people", for the most part, get lost in the discussions of responsible government and Confederation — though I suppose that Prince Edward Islanders will take comfort from the fact that they are mentioned for the first time in Episode 8. The treatment of this small province

15 See Phillip Buckner, P. B. Waite, and William M. Baker, "CHR Dialogue: The Maritimes and Confederation: A Reassessment", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 71, no. 1 (March 1990), pp. 1–45; Ged Martin, ed., *The Causes of Canadian Confederation* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1990).

16 See P. A. Buckner, "'Limited Identities' and Canadian Historical Scholarship: An Atlantic Provinces Perspective", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 23, nos. 1–2 (Spring/Summer 1988), pp. 177–198, and "'Limited Identities' Revisited: Regionalism and Nationalism in Canadian History", *Acadiensis*, vol. 30, no. 1 (Autumn 2000), pp. 4–15.

highlights the narrow nation-building vision that informed the story-board of this series. Only when the Atlantic colonies contribute to the larger national project centred on the St. Lawrence are they deemed worthy of inclusion.

The series might have been better served by compressing the rebellions, responsible government, and Confederation into one two-hour episode and devoting the time thus saved into an expansion of the treatment of economic and social developments that put nation-building on the agenda. Here the ordinary folk figure prominently and offer a fascinating range of voices. In the context of a rapidly industrializing continent, the British North American colonies experience, among other things, strikes and violent outbursts by tenant farmers, canal workers, artisans, sailors, and sealers; cultural developments centred around churches, schools, universities, and voluntary organizations; new constructions of class, gender, and race; and new approaches to sports and leisure. These themes, however, do not emerge in any sustained way.

What is the Contribution of the Series to Canadian History?

While the series could scarcely be expected to add significant academic knowledge in the narrow sense, it has made a major contribution to our understanding of the past by forcing film producers, academic historians, archivists, and critics to think about how best to render our past in a visual way. Everyone involved in producing and reviewing the series — and there were many — no doubt learned something about the challenges of producing history on film. In an age when visual representation is rapidly overtaking the printed word, the series serves as a major marker in this shift.

The series also documents the growing interest in what is now called “public history”, which as a field of study emerged in the 1980s with the growing demand for knowledge on the part of cultural workers delivering history for public consumption in our increasingly leisure-oriented society. The idea of “public” history as something set apart from “academic” history troubles many historians. While my unease with the concept is due in part to my experience with the notion of public and private spheres developed in women’s history, I am also discomfited by the confrontational tone that characterizes much of the literature, most of it American in origin, that purports to advance the cause of public history. So-called “public historians” claim to be somehow better, purer, even more democratic than academic historians. The divide between public and private historians is less clear than that, and efforts to maintain it are largely a waste of time. What is presented to the public as history is usually not what is researched and debated in academic circles, only the results of these time-consuming activities, but it draws from the same body of knowledge. Ultimately, the difference between public and academic history boils down to the manner of delivery and the intended audience: academic historians research, write, and teach in university settings, often but not exclusively for each other and their students; public historians also research, write, and teach but they do these things outside a university

setting and often for a more diversified audience. Individual historians sometimes function in both settings, including many of those who served as consultants to this series. As David Glassberg suggests, public history is essentially “a collection of career paths, not a coherent subject of study”.¹⁷ Notwithstanding this insight, there is an unsettling echo of this public/academic polarization in the debates around *Canada: A People's History*.

It should be acknowledged that the application of public memory and political pressure to academic assumptions sometimes has interesting, even useful consequences. The first and most obvious benefit is that dust-ups over issues of representation and interpretation (for example, the “Out of Africa” exhibit at the Royal Ontario Museum and the Grosse Isle National Historic Site in Canada or the *Enola Gay* exhibition at the Smithsonian) often lead to a better understanding both of the historical issue being contested and of the discipline of history itself. If academic historians have anything to regret it is that they have failed to convey to the public at large the important debates around accuracy, bias, and perspective in dealing with the past and how difficult doing “good” history actually is. A great many people want to use history to confirm identity, settle old scores, win court cases, and prove superior status. While we will never stop these uses of history even in academic settings, the fact that most historians consider such uses problematic needs to be better understood outside our own narrow academic circles. Few people understand the distinction that academic historians make between “heritage” or “historical memory” and a disciplinary “way of knowing”.¹⁸ In their efforts to shape the collective historical memory by providing the “best story” about the past (always open to controversy and negotiation) and embracing a nation-building narrative (an approach that inevitably leads to questions such as “Whose nation?” and “Whose history?”) the producers of *Canada: A People's History* put themselves in a position to ensure that many academics, who are usually more comfortable approaching history as a way of knowing, would have difficulty with the format of their series.

What is the Series' Potential as a Means of Civic Education?

If civic education means introducing the general public to knowledge about Canada's past that will help them to understand the present and to make informed decisions about the future, the series will make a modest contribution to this end. Polls conducted by the Dominion Institute suggest that

17 David Glassberg, “Public History and Public Memory”, *The Public Historian*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Spring 1996), p. 7.

18 For a lucid discussion of these distinctions, see Peter Seixas, “Schweigen! Die Kinder! Or, Does Post-modern History Have a Place in the Schools?”, in Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg, *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History: National and International Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 19–37. See also David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

Canadians are woefully lacking in their knowledge of even the basic details of their past, let alone the 150 or so chapters covered by *Canada: A People's History*.¹⁹ Unfortunately, there has been little effort to measure what audiences have actually learned from viewing the series and what they might retain as part of their historical memory. This task seems to me to be an essential part of any claims made about the significance of the series and where it fits into the larger picture of how Canadians learn about, use, and understand their past.²⁰

Presumably, the CBC measures its success by the extent to which the series attracted viewers, stimulated debate, raised consciousness about contemporary issues, and instilled respect for the diverse peoples who constitute the nation currently called Canada. While the series has stimulated some public debate about Canadian history,²¹ always a good exercise in teasing out meaning of the past for the present, it is difficult to judge how wide a circle the debate encompassed. We are told that as many as two million Canadians watched the series, but I could find few people, academic or otherwise, who stayed with it much beyond the first or second episode. Two-hour programmes were just too long for anyone raised on three-second sound bites. The CRB Foundation's Heritage Minutes seem to be more successful as vehicles for civic education, both in content and of values. Students in my classrooms can recall an astonishing number of the Minutes currently in production and quickly grasp their relevance to larger issues such as the status of Native peoples or Canada's economic development. *Canada: A People's History* does not lend itself to so many repeated viewings. Although I urged my students to watch it, they did not follow my injunction. They treated it more like a book (which they are reluctant to read) than a film (which they deem fun to watch). I should have scheduled a test.

While the series does not always provide the drama that young viewers demand, it covers a great many topics and is especially strong in the area of military history. The battle of the Plains of Abraham is usually mentioned in this context and I doubt that there will be a future student of Canadian history who will not be a captive audience to that chapter of the series. Indeed, the impressive archive of visual material, both dramatic and documentary, that this series has generated will almost certainly be used for a long time to come in other films and in classrooms. To this extent it is a rich, multi-volume contribution to our stock of images.

If the goal of the series was to encourage national unity, save the CBC,

19 Desmond Morton, "Teaching and Learning History in Canada" in Stearns *et al.*, eds., *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History*, pp. 51–62.

20 See Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), for a ground-breaking study of how Americans learn about, use, and understand their past.

21 See, for example, comments on the Proclamation of 1763 in *Le Devoir* by Christian Dufour (November 11, 2000), Jean-Claude Robert (November 16, 2000), and Mario Cardinal (November 16, 2000).

and make better citizens of us all, I have my doubts that it succeeded. Nor should it. I am becoming increasingly impatient with the freight that history is being expected to carry. If we want to encourage national unity, save the CBC, and make better citizens of us all, there are probably more direct ways to achieve these ends than producing 32 hours of history television. The series may have marked a turning point in relations between CBC and Radio-Canada and should have potential for classroom discussion around aspects of Aboriginal history, English-French relations, and ethnic diversity, but I doubt that one viewing of the series changed people's prejudices or reduced the alienation felt by certain regions or cultural groups. For some people, such as my aggrieved colleague mentioned earlier, it may well have added to the feelings of discontent.

Conclusion

Academics are, for good reasons, a difficult audience to please. Trained to be critical of the way the past is rendered, we would inevitably find much to criticize in any effort as ambitious as *Canada: A People's History*. Most academic historians no longer put much stock in producing a narrative, whether in print or on film, that satisfies everyone for all time, and we are quite content to revise our stories of the past as new information and new perspectives emerge. We conclude that, like our own monographs, the CBC's effort to chronicle Canada's past must be seen for what it is: one interpretation of Canada's history at the beginning of a new millennium. The critical reaction to the series also reflects contemporary ways of being. While many critics in Quebec decry the nation-building framework that informs the series, Atlantic Canadians (or at least their Maritime variant²²) complain because they are not included in the story. It is difficult to imagine that it could be otherwise.

Meanwhile, I no longer lose sleep because Atlantic Canada is largely absent from the series. I see it rather as a golden opportunity for an enterprising film maker, even the CBC itself, to chronicle the region's rich history, beginning perhaps with an episode on the founding of French Acadia by Champlain and his band of merry men — and they were, as far as we can tell, all men. Without it other Canadians will wonder why Maritimers over the next few years are trying to steal a march on plans to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Quebec City's founding in 1608.

22 An important distinction that is often overlooked in treatments of the Atlantic region is between the "Maritimes" (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island), and Atlantic Canada (which includes Newfoundland and Labrador).