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HOLLYWOOD IMAGES OF FOREIGN COUNTRIES AND THEIR IMPACT: THE
CANADIAN CASE[*]

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Hollywood's attitude toward the presentation of any given
piece of information ultimately depends on its estimate of
how the masses of moviegoers respond to the spread of
that information through fiction films.[1]

This paper argues that instead of treating images of our own country and of foreign countries as
stereotypes which it is irrational to hold, we should endeavour to correct and improve them. Our
stereotypes of ourselves and others have much to teach us.

For purposes of the paper an image is a mental picture or set of associations. Part I
emphasises that national images are susceptible of various interpretations, and hence to different
sorts of correction. In particular, American popular images of Canada are encouragingly
positive, a point overlooked by those Canadians who bemoan the acceptance of American
images. Part II tackles briefly the relation of images to reality. The flexible answer proposed
makes it possible to argue in Part III that there is benefit to be had from confronting the images
projected abroad, using them to correct the self-image.

Part I: Interpreting Images

Common American images of Canada are that it is a large country in which are to be found such
items as the Mounties the northern woods or great snows; eskimaux; half-breeds;
French-Canadian lumberjacks wearing tuques; etc. What is the meaning of such imagery?

To begin at the most general level: we have images of countries for a very simple reason.
A country is an abstraction; it is among other things: an entity in international law; a form of

government; a bounded geographical area; a collection of human beings; a social system. Abstractions of this complexity are very hard to picture, and it is harder still to keep several of them simultaneously in mind. So we make simplifying assumptions and try, in a few images, to capture what seem to be the most striking and germane features of the country we are thinking about. Hence the images of Canada's size, its northern location, and the colourful members of its diverse population.

It is conventional to claim that such images, or images serving such purposes, are stereotypes; they are, and of necessity so. Also, it is conventional to deplore them, and to wring one's hands at the daunting prospect of projecting more truthful images. That is not my approach. Quite the contrary: if these images of Canada are widespread in the United States perhaps they can tell us something about those who accept them, about the way they approach Canada. This exercise in analysing images can also be reflexive, since not a few Canadians accept the same images of their own country as foreigners do, raising the intriguing question of why the citizens of a country find it convenient to operate with stereotyped images of themselves.

Not all Canadians accept such images of themselves; some complain about their country being reduced to Mounties, northern woods, lumberjacks, etc. They seem to overlook the point that--with the exception of so-called "halfbreeds", who are usually pictured as villains--all the stereotyped images of Canada mentioned are strongly positive. The Mountie image, for example, is of a colourfully costumed federal police force that "always gets its man". Given the images of vast size and rough terrain, the Mountie image, whether legend or truth, is not one a country need disdain.

It will be apparent that the images mentioned so far have come principally from the movies, although the movies in turn drew from earlier forms of image-dissemination such as pulp fiction, comics, newspapers and, in the case of the Mounties, the stage operetta *Rose Marie* (1924), which has been filmed three times.

Those in the United States who wished to have a federal police force, to build support for it, strived mightily to give it as positive an image as the Mounties. When J. Edgar Hoover was building up the Federal Bureau of Investigation (and himself) in the nineteen-twenties and nineteen-thirties he paid particular attention to projecting the image of the Bureau and its agents, and quite consciously cultivated the mass media, including Hollywood, in order to ensure that the FBI was shown in a positive manner. This says something about Hoover as a shrewd bureaucrat and something about just how desirably positive the RCMP image was.[2]

A key difference between the RCNP image and the FRI image was contrivance. Hoover unabashedly cultivated imagery. He endeavoured to project himself, his agents and his organization in carefully contrived ways. Cooperation with and cultivation of the media was justified partly politically, since the establishment, growth and development of the Bureau was a controversial matter; and partly psychologically--to intimidate criminals and endow FBI men with pride. Hoover endeavoured to use the mass media to carry images that served his purposes and to a considerable extent he was successful. If we now smirk a little at the boosterism in those movie images of the FBI, if we now have a more jaundiced picture of Hoover, as historians we must still acknowledge the success of the public relations campaign at the time.

By contrast with Hoover's careful cultivation of images, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was in existence long before the mass media, and was not in the kind of political jeopardy that encouraged image-manipulation. For psychological purposes a self-image was

cultivated within the force that was typical of any uniformed para-military organization, an image which involved strict rules of discipline, rigid hierarchy and great attention to comportment. This self-image the Mounties built up was not, however, reproduced in Hollywood movies, which were concerned more with dramatic values than fidelity. From the nineteen-twenties to the nineteen-fifties the RCMP bureaucracy vacillated in its attitude to image cultivation in the movies. Sometimes the Commissioner would agree to cooperate and allow Hollywood to shoot at an RCMP post, at other times all cooperation would be firmly refused. Ex-Mounties living in Hollywood offered themselves as technical advisers, but to little avail. By 1926 the Commissioner, Courtland Starnes, could write of the force's "long experience" of the "unsatisfactory" nature of the Mountie image in Hollywood movies.[3]

The examples of the FBI and the RCMP, then, are contrasting cases: Hoover eagerly cultivated the image-makers; the RCMP was always reluctant; Hoover was very pleased with the results, the RCMP was usually disappointed, regardless of whether they had cooperated or not; during Hoover's lifetime no negative imagery about the FBI appeared in any Hollywood movie that I know of, but then again the same is true for the RCMP because, for all the dissatisfaction, the force was in fact portrayed in a very positive manner. RCMP files in the Public Archives of Canada contain much grumbling by senior officials. Yet what they complain about is that the free publicity is inaccurate: uniforms are travestied; men act in an undisciplined way; ranks are confused; modus operandi are distorted, and so on. They were particularly exercised by a scene in *The Wild North* (1952) in which an RCMP member lost his temper and struck a helpless prisoner in handcuffs.[4] Such behaviour would of course be a serious offence against regulations. This sort of complaint by the RCMP shows one thing very clearly: they did not believe in the old adage, "all publicity is good publicity".

Not for a moment would I suggest that all images are good images. Rather what I want to argue is that all images are instructive and that this is invariant with regard to whether they are contrived and manipulated or not. Stereotyped images are clues to what a person, or an organization, or a country *projects*; and it does not much matter whether that projection is inadvertent or contrived--we can decipher the image either way. Let me make a simple comparison. Take people's faces. Some people have what we call open faces, by which we seem to mean that the play of their feelings and reactions can be easily "read off" their features: their feelings are projected outwards. Other people are closed or, as we sometimes say, expressionless or poker-faced, and yet their very closedness, not to mention the look in their eyes, the pattern of wrinkles on forehead, temple and around the mouth, enables us to read quite a lot about them--not transient things like feelings, but all the more significant for that. They project their closedness.

The comparison, then, is this. Faces can be closed or open, just as images can be inadvertent or contrived. Both projections speak volumes.

So far I have discussed images of organizations and of persons. The same points hold for countries. After all, countries existed and had images in other countries long before there was any room for the cultivation of images, conscious or not, as there is today, with mass media disseminating highly manipulated images. Furthermore, despite attempts at imagemanagement, images once projected abroad are not under control, whether they are being manipulated or not. Images countries are trying to alter because they are "unsatisfactory" might in fact be positive; images desperately fostered might be negative.

Now to add a complication. When one country portrays another in its media the usual view is that the image tells us more about the portrayer than the portrayed. So Hollywood films

about the RCMP are usually taken as revealing of Hollywood. Pierre Berton, a Canadian journalist, has written the *locus classicus* on this, *Hollywood's Canada*, in which he argues that in close to six hundred movies set in Canada Hollywood has systematically stolen Canada's sense of identity. [5] By Canada's identity he means, although the book suggests he does not know it, the image he, Berton, happens to have of Canada and which he thinks other Canadians like him have, and which all Canadians *should* have but do not. Most simple Canadians, he seems to propose, have a self-image that is superficial, distorted, confused and ignorant, one taken from Hollywood and initially produced for Hollywood's own strictly commercial purposes. The upshot has been what Berton calls "the Americanization of the Canadian image" (p. 215). What Berton means by this is that (some) Canadians see themselves in terms of stereotypes contrived in the United States.

Some of the material in Berton's book is quite amusing, especially if you know anything of Canadian history. Berton uses stills and descriptions of all those Hollywood actors in tuques or feathered headdresses trying to look like French-Canadians or Red Indians to construct another image: an image of a crass and blundering Hollywood making a hash of the representations of a foreign country which is helpless to rectify the mess. Berton prints stills of all the different hats that Mounties have worn in Hollywood movies, noting that they are incorrect; and he tells of a melancholy confrontation he himself once had with a Hollywood producer who was interested in making a movie about the Klondike but who became progressively more worried as Berton told him that in the Canadian gold rush there was no crime, no murder, no gambling, no alcohol and even no working on Sunday. Since this scotched all possible story ideas the producer decided to shift the locale back over the border into Alaska!

This mocking image of Hollywood also has its value, since it enabled a professional writer, the Canadian Pierre Berton, to produce a commercially viable book, *Hollywood's Canada.* Yet it is a book oblivious to its own deployment of images disguised as an argument for the thesis that Canadians have been so brainwashed by Hollywood that they can no longer recognise their own distinctness. This is a thesis I want to query. Before doing so, let Berton speak for himself:

> Taken individually, no single picture, flawed though it may have been, has posed any grave consequence as far as the Canadian image is concerned. But taken together over half a century, the combined effect of 575 movies has been devastating. It is not so much that they have given the world a false picture of Canada; Hollywood pictures, after all, have given the world a false picture of almost every country, including the United States. What has been damaging is that they have given the world <u>no </u>real image of Canada at all, except that of a geographical absurdity--a vast, empty, snowswept land of mountains and pine trees.
>
> Taken together, the Hollywood movies about Canada have carried the implicit message that the Canadian image differs from the American image only in the matter of degree. They have said to the world and they have said it to the Canadians as well. They have said it especially in those motion pictures dealing with the frontier, past and present, and, . . . most of the movies have been about the frontier. The lawmen are American lawmen; the Indians are American Indians; the French-Canadians are more like disguised Mexicans than real French-Canadians. The social customs depicted are American social customs; the attitudes are American attitudes; the lifestyle is an American lifestyle. (p. 230)

Rhetoric has led to contradictions. Berton says Hollywood has given the world "no real image of Canada at all", but then he argues that it has given the world an image, an image of a geographical absurdity and of an <u>American </u>frontier. Even if absurd or false, this is an image.

Before trying to re-formulate and discuss Berton, I need to tackle the question of image and reality.

Part II: Images and reality

Berton's complaint is that the "Canada" in Hollywood movies is inaccurate: they show a Canada that never was, a Canada that is a disguised America, a Canada where prospectors drink coffee when every Canadian frontiersman drank tea. Tea is sissy to Hollywood, like Mounties who never drew their guns or socked villains on the jaw, so reality was bent to Hollywood's commercial or dramatic purposes.

All this is very confused, because in addition to arguing by contrasting his image of Canada with Hollywood's images as he interprets them, and not acknowledging that his own argument itself is part of the trade in images, Berton offers no explanation of Hollywood's behaviour other than that they always do it, and for profit. Having offered above a general explanation of why we use images at all--namely to simplify the complex, to make concrete the abstract--let me apply it to Hollywood. Movies, need one say, trade in imagery. Hollywood movies, as many observers have noticed, concentrate on plot and action. Hence setting and character are subordinate; they are but means to get at plot and action, or vehicles for these. One turns places and people into means by making it possible for the audience to recognise and locate them quickly so that they do not invite attention; attention is reserved for plot and action. In its concentration on plot and action Hollywood reduced places and people to a few salient features--the sagebrush west, the villain in a black hat, Mexicans with sing-song accents under huge sombreros, orientals with epicanthic folds, and so on. Ways of talking, bits of scenery, even certain chords in the orchestra were used as a shorthand code. A shot of the Eiffel Tower, two bars of the Marseillese, a man in beret and the audience knows that plot and action have shifted to Paris, France.

In the files of the Department of State deposited down to 1950 in the National Archives at Washington, DC., one can find a great deal of evidence that this process of coded simplification caused grief. Latin American nations, European nations, Oriental nations all at one point or another

protested to Washington about the negative or at least oversimplified and stereotypical images of their country and their countrymen to be found in Hollywood films.[6] Interestingly, there are no protests I can find from Ottawa. The main reason for this is fairly obvious: while Hollywood's code had some shorthand images for invoking Canada and Canadians, as noted, these were mostly favourable.

Berton, though, is on a different trail; he is bent on attacking his fellow-Canadians for gullibly swallowing the Hollywood image of Canada and Canadians and not noticing its lack of fit with reality. This lack of fit is not, it seems, obvious, because time and again in his book he has to explain what he is talking about. He prints photos of different styles of Mountie headgear and explains what is wrong; he reminds readers that Canada was mostly a "dry" country where alcohol was concerned; he emphasises his point about tea; and so on. His own discourse, thus, is an exemplification of his thesis that Canadians have bought Hollywood's portrait and do not any longer know themselves; his reader's presumed ignorance is such that he has to explain all this to them, to try to replace errors with truths. Coming at the matter from a different angle, I treat images as something to be learned from rather disparaged; I deny that they can be straightforwardly measured against something called "reality". Berton, however, thinks we can, as he puts it, take it that

> From the earliest days we have had our own way of doing things and
> our own way of looking at life. I don't want to pretend that our way is
> necessarily better, just that it ~s different. And it is this difference that
> gives us, for better or for worse, that distinctive identity which eludes
> so many of the panelists on the CBC's earnest television discussions
> (p. 230).

There is a Canadian identity, then, that makes Canadians different from their southern

neighbours, but it is one that has easily been obliterated and forgotten as the result of the

pernicious effect of some six hundred Hollywood movies. Forgotten not only by the *hoi polloi*,

but by readers of books such as Berton's and by those placed high enough up the verticall

mosaic of class and education to get on to television discussion shows. On the face of it this is

somewhat implausible.

There are two reasons why it is somewhat implausible. One, that it suggests the film

goer's grasp on reality is so weak that Hollywood movies can come along and dislodge it. The

other, that it offers no explanation of how people form images of countries, including their own

country. If people do abandon the real for an inaccurate image, the question of a trade-off or

pay-off is immediately raised, since such a move would appear to be very costly.

To pursue these issues would take us far afield, into the psychology of film viewing and

the social construction of the real, both of which I have discussed elsewhere.[7] Suffice it here to

say that to judge someone else's grip on reality to be weak involves denying such weakness in

oneself, and

this is suspect as a form of self-serving. And while the notion of the real as something we are

trying to grasp is useful, it is naive to think that I am currently in possession of it but you are

not. Rather are we in the midst of an endless process of correcting each other's grasp of it. One

possible correction that Canadians may be making, if Berton is right about their accepting an

American image of themselves, is that they are *choosing* to see themselves as others see them. This used to be a virtue.

My criticisms of Berton should be taken as respectful rather than debunking: he raises, so far as I am concerned, all the right questions and makes many true observations. He is right to observe the fact that Canadians drink tea, which fact Hollywood could not acknowledge. He is right that many Canadians endorse Hollywood's image of themselves. He is right, in particular, to ask, which self-image should ordinary Canadians endorse? My own preference, anticipating Part III, is for a self-image taken from Pierre Trudeau rather than Pierre Berton.

Before leaving his pioneering work, I want in one respect to correct Berton on a point of fact. He says that Hollywood did none of this intentionally, that they distorted all history indifferently, whether their own history or that of other countries. Without for a moment suggesting that it was sinister, I must emphasise that the project of Americanizing the world was conscious Hollywood project, even a conscious United States project.

The American film industry dominated the world market in films by 1918 and, as the world economy began post-war reconstruction, that industry sought the assistance of the Federal Government in resisting the attempts of foreign governments to make inroads into its success. First the Department of Commerce under its Secretaries William Redfield and Herbert Hoover, and, soon after, the Department of State, gave considerable overseas assistance to the movie industry. This was justified in the Congressional budget process with two arguments, one that trade followed the film rather than that it followed the flag--the argument from commerce. Two, that through the movies American culture and values could be exported to an admiring world--the argument from culture. These two arguments of course interlocked: selling culture and values was often treated as indirect sales talk for American goods. As Will H. Hays wrote

in 1924, "We are going to sell America to the world with American motion pictures".[8] In the context it is clear that his meaning was that American goods were what was being sold. But it is not hard to imagine how foreigners would take it that the most energetic salesmanship was being devoted to the export of American mores, since these were consistently and attractively displayed in American movies.

If foreigners were sensitive on this issue of the world being Americanised, this was also true of those Americans whose professional concern was foreign trade and foreign relations. Let me contrast two reactions I have found in the files. In 1930 there was a Canadian protest to the Department of Commerce motion picture section about a newspaper article quoting a Department of Commerce official to the effect that American movies were Americanising the world. The protest came from Col. John Cooper, the Canadian representative of the American motion picture companies operating in Canada, and his point was that such boosterism did not make life any easier for those Canadians who sought to profit by trading in American films. Although the claim of Americanizing the world through trade had been intended for domestic consumption, the head of the motion picture section of the United States Department of Commerce explained that its diffusion, however unfortunate, could hardly have been helped. "I do think of course, that undue boastfulness and particularly bumptious pronouncements to the effect that the world is being Americanized through film is a great mistake. We try to avoid this wherever possible."[9] To my reading, this United States Department of Commerce official is engaging in image-management. American movies are Americanising the world, he acknowledges, but American government officials should be discreet about saying so.

My other illustration is from the Department of State. Officials there had many doubts about the argument from culture, precisely because of the sorts of things Pierre Berton

discussed. Latin Americans, Europeans and Orientals complained bitterly about being stereotyped in American films. Such complaints were not unreasonable, for Hollywood and its market dominance were something of a cultural embarrassment to sensitive diplomats. The year before Cooper's protest, in 1929, the Economic Adviser's Office in the State Department had argued that the United States Government should not make formal representations against foreign restrictions on the import of motion picture films. While acknowledging the argument that trade follows the film, the memorandum took up the cultural issues, especially the stereotyping of foreigners and the misrepresentation of conditions in America, and suggested that dissemination of such materials was not in the interests of the United States, "The unwholesome moral effect of such pictures, especially on certain illiterate or ignorant races of the Far East, is in itself a serious responsibility for this country".[10] The response to all of this concern, by Will H. Hays, who was, between 1922 and 1945, the head of the trade organization known as the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, was always to promise to clean house; and indeed he did constantly counsel the movie companies to be more careful. Commercial considerations, however, carried considerable weight at a time when, prior to World War II, the United States was still new to being a creditor rather than a debtor nation.

How does this connect to the issue of the way and degrees of accuracy with which images capture reality? Let me put it generally: Hollywood had a tendency to see the world in American terms; the world became understandable, and sympathy with it or with parts of it could be exercised, antipathy to it or parts of it expressed, in the quick and easy manner required in plot and action movies only to the extent that other people could be made to seem just like us, with no other difference than in costumes, or accents, or any other seemingly superficial characteristics. Now this is a very interesting tendency which sprang, I suspect, not

only from the aim of making marketable plot and action movies, but also and more deeply, from

what Emily Rosenberg has called "the ideology of liberal developmentalism", namely the view

that American values are universal values, the values, so often reiterated, of life, liberty, and the

pursuit of happiness.[11] In a 1938 speech Hays went even further, and added to these values:

> There is a special reason why America should have given birth and prosperous nurture to the motion picture and its world-wide entertainment. America in the very literal sense is truly the world-state. All races, all creeds, all men are to be found here--working, sharing, and developing, side by side in more friendship among greater diversities of tribes and men than all the previous history of the world discloses. Our country represents the greatest single unity of races, people, and culture. Is it not possible that very quality enabled America to express itself by the creation and development of the motion picture?

> The screen owes much, indeed, to the country of its birth and development. It is distinctly the product of the American spirit--vision, initiative, enterprise and progress. It is of these precious American values that I want to speak . . [12]

Rosenberg analysed a key component of liberal-developmentalism as the belief that other

nations could and should replicate America's developmental experience. This seems to be

present in Hays' second paragraph. She has also connected the world-wide success of American

movies to their original manufacture for a multi-ethnic domestic audience. Thus commercial

success was explained by invoking universal values. Hidden in John Winthrop's image of the

city on the hill, one of the classic self-images of America, is the idea that America is a beacon to

all the world. Winthrop derived his image from the Gospel according to St. Matthew which

says, "Ye are the light of the world . . . Let your light shine before men, that they may see your

good works" (Matt 5:14-15). Winthrop's image permits a benign interpretation of American

universalism, values exported in a genuine conviction that the United States is a more perfect

union among men than any hithertofore achieved. Reverse the point of view, of course, and the

claim will seem insufferable. When America was founded its ideals were indeed derived from

strands within eighteenth century European thought that yearned for the emancipation and enlightenment of mankind. But since that time other countries have pursued those ideals along paths they carved for themselves and which make them bound to resent intensely the hidden message of American films that American ideals, values, *mores,* are the best-especially as they deem their own to be the best, of course.

Seen in this perspective Hollywood's presentation of Canada and Canadians as just like Americans can be taken as a great compliment. Since American values are universal, Canadians Americanized are included in the ranks of the fully human, the fully emancipated, namely, the Americans themselves. Whether Canadians themselves appreciate this compliment is another matter altogether. Canadians like Berton see it as rather backhanded. This is entirely understandable too. Like most native-born Canadians Berton has been bred into a culture that has felt a great need to distinguish itself from its big neighbour, to define itself almost from the start by the negative feature of being *not* American. The French-Canadians were not British and also not American, the Empire Loyalists were proBritish and not American, their fusion, contemporary Canadians, are not French, not British, and above all not American. There is a small snag to this vigorous assertion of difference: to the outsider, and very likely also to themselves, Canadians in many ways closely resemble Americans. This has only strengthened the need to declare distinctness, easiest expressed by denial, as we saw with Berton, and the attempt to catalogue differences ranging from tea drinking to historical experience.

Is it not interesting that Hollywood imagery of Canada permits this debate within its terms? Hollywood, we remember, simultaneously shows superficial differences, such as that Mounties wear funny uniforms, and affirms fundamental unities: Canadians are really just like

us Americans, so that big movie stars can play Canadians without any noticeable shift of gears. Thus, when American Gary Cooper joins the Bengal Lancers and cannot join as an American, he explains his funny accent to his brothers-in-arms by his being a Canadian; Randolph Scott can sail Corvette K-225 out of Halifax as a member of the RCN.

Berton, however, believes the differences between Americans and Canadians are real and deep, differences stolen and obliterated by Hollywood, and with the connivance of gullible Canadians to boot. Is all this true? My answer is that it is too simple: all imagery, Hollywood's as well as Berton's--for he attempts to replace theirs by what he deems truly Canadian imagery--as all description of any kind, is oversimplification of reality. In the case of national identities things are complex: it is easy to ask whether a statement by a physicist is true, and attempt to locate the oversimplification it contains and to overcome it, even though the attempts to answer are harder than the asking of the question. In the social sciences at times it is even hard to ask a proper question concerning the truth.

The present case is a good instance. It strikes me as very possible that such a thing as a national identity is not a given, but that it is a construct, a theoretical entity which at best is artifactual. If so, then quite possibly it is constructed through the negotiation of images. This does not mean that the image conjured up is true by virtue of being conjured. This is true in and of a piece of fiction, such as a novel or a film; in a broader context the image conjured does not become a public image yet it does at times influence it. Recall that Berton's examples were from the frontier, namely from history. So his view is that part of the deeper differences between the Canadian identity and the American identity comes from their having different histories. But we have to formulate this very carefully because, after all, histories are stories; stories partly endorsed all-too-gullibly; partly corrected by critical examination, but not ever fully. A story

links selected images of events to make a certain point. And then, even when corrected, it is more poignant than the facts it assembles. Furthermore, both Canadians and Americans are woefully badly informed about their history, to some extent from ignorance, to some extent from having myths pushed at them which have not yet been sufficiently critically examined.

Vivid is my memory of my first visit to Philadelphia when an English friend and I went on the guided tour round Independence Hall. As the guide prattled away about the awful British and the dreadful George III, our combined urge to laugh and interject became so strong that we left the tour before the loyal Americans drinking it all in became angry with us. We had been taught the history of the American Revolution, or rather, of the successful revolt of the American colonies, in British high school, and even if we assume that both the American tour guide and British school teachers were telling us only fact, the particular facts selected and the manner of their interpretation as images led to grotesquely different accounts of the same events.

The point of all this is not who was right: such history as we had was in some part myth, hence such national identity as we had incorporated depended upon some myth--for myth comes easiest to gullible audiences and we are all gullible to some extent, not only Berton'
Canadians. Since those myths, those images of our past were themselves historical products of events, were the collective memory of events, were interpretations of events and the continuing process of argument about all of these, they are, in a strong sense, a true part of history, not to be denigrated. What is deplorable is the level of argument which makes us swallow myths as true, not the particular content of the mythic images: the image itself must be remembered. Thus it is a mistake to side with either the British or the American account of the war of 1775-1783. The tour guide was unaware that the British gave a different account of events; my friend and I

were unaware of the content of American popular history. But popular history is a significant

factor, especially in the building of a national self-image. This is something similar to the lesson

we should all take from Frances FitzGerald's excellent study of High School history texts about

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *America Revised*.[13]   She finds that these text-books deal

in myths rather than scholarship and the myths are manifestly justified by the aim of the

text-books, which is not to make schoolchildren think, but rather to indoctrinate them in a

manner that is thought suitable for their future careers as American citizens. Instead of

arguing that different historical experience has made Americans different from Canadians, we

could argue that, being different, we seek legitimation in different historical myths.

Just as there is no single, simple thing, *the* history of Canada or *the* history of the United

States, but rather a series of histories by this, that or the other author, with this that or the other

point of view, writing at this that or the other time, for this that or the other purpose, so there is

no simple-minded contrast between the image of a nation and the reality. If there is a Canadian

identity it is to be found by both maintaining and superseding existing images--by correcting the

images of Canadians held by foreigners as well as Canadians. For what can the Canadian

practice of defining yourself as not Americans amount to other than negating elements of the

image Canadians have of America? If American movies caricature Canada, rest assured that

Canadians, despite their proximity, caricature America in return. Take a look at some Canadian

editorial cartoons. Take a look at Pierre Berton's book. Both tend to portray Canadians as

gullible victims of Uncle Sam, unable to recognise their own plain differences.

So we could benefit from less gullibility about gullibility and even from less naivete: the

relation of images to reality is a subtle matter which requires us to recognise that in the vague

areas of culture and nationhood such realities as there are partly derive from images and not only the other way around.

Part III: Imagery, Nations and Nationalism

Which brings me to my final section where the argument moves from Hollywood myths to the more general level~of national self-images and their sources. Both Hollywood's friendly caricatures that minimize our cultural

differences; and Berton's sentimental and nationalistic exaggerations of difference are unhelpful. Bertrand Russell has made a very interesting point about history. In <u>Education and the Social Order</u>, published in 1932, he warned that "nationalism is undoubtedly the most dangerous vice of our time--far more dangerous than drunkenness, or drugs, or commercial dishonesty, or any of the other vices against which a conventional moral education is directed."(p.l38) He toyed with the idea that in order to counter nationalism and the myths which help sustain it, history text-books should be written by the League of Nations. (Let us admit at once that this was one of his poorer ideas.) Or, again, that history should be taught by foreigners, an idea so outrageous even today that we should for that reason take it seriously. Russell's aim in making such suggestions was to emphasise that the truth is hard to come by, reality very hard to discern even in the best of circumstances, without the problems of those who promote mendacious images through blindness of cupidity. Were we to force ourselves and our children regularly to confront the images others entertain of us, how we seem to them, then we would learn much about both them and about us. For we should be much more systematic in discerning what we were not, provided also we were critical enough to ask, if that is the image they have of us and we scarcely recognise it, where did it come from, how was it formed, what sustains such an image of us in their culture? Such questions would lead us into an exploration,

not of universals and similarities between countries, but of deep and serious differences. To seek one world by emphasising our similarities is much easier than to seek it in full recognition of difference and diversity, precisely because it evades what is divisive.

One difference that is very large and very divisive is the difference between the self-image of a country incorporated in its constructed identity, and the images of it held by people in other countries. An obvious logical point is that images of <u>other</u> countries are also part of the identity-kit. So historical myths about Canada plus historical myths about the United States contribute to the Canadian identity. Furthermore, since historical myths about other countries are subject to constant tests not least of which is travel, these mythic foundations of national identity are shifting. It follows that the constructed national identity is constantly under discussion and possibly undergoing change.

So in this final part I turn attention away from popular images in the movies and towards historians and politicians as they endeavour to negotiate us out of the received images and identity and towards ones that better agree with historical research and which better explain our experience with our own country and foreign ones. First two images offered by a British historian, and then a Canadian attempt to come to terms with both United States and Canadian historical experience, and to build a sense of country that acknowledges differences but minimises the amount of new mythmaking.

Consider this image: a country ruled by "a temporary, elected, eighteenth century enlightened (if limited) despot" with a cabinet "closer to the Cabinet of Frederick the Great than to the Cabinets of Britain . . . France . . . or those of the other European democracies." The reader may well want to dispute this as a fair characterisation of the American system of government. Its author, one of my teachers at the London School of Economics in the nineteen

fifties, Donald Watt, is one of the most brilliant historians currently at work in Britain. He argues as an historian that the United States is a product of the context of eighteenth century political thinking into which it was born, and that "The President of the United States is an eighteenth century benevolent despot legitimised by popular election, checked by a popularly elected assembly and a written constitution with a Supreme Court to interpret it". Shocking though this demythologising characterisation is, can one doubt that students of United States history both at home and abroad could learn much from debating it, trying to argue out to what degree if at all it is a fair and recognisable image of the United States?

To counteract any suggestion that Watt is biased against the United States let me quote his characterisation of Great Britain: "events have shown that, in the long run, hereditary authorianism has not given way in Europe to plebiscitary populist authorianism but rather to what might be called a mixed meritocratic-plutocratic limited democracy". Decoded, I take that to mean that the United Kingdom, despite its Glorious Revolution and the franchise Reform Acts of 1832, 1866, 1887 and 1928, is ruled by a combination of money and meritocrats, with some democratic checks. That is to say, Watt is not to be read as debunking either the United States or Great Britain. Rather is he to be seen as challenging the received and conventional wisdom of myth, the images of rhetoric; to be giving, if you like, an unexpected twist to American exceptionalism. As an historian he asks whether the American revolt against eighteenth century despotism actually succeeded, or whether the model was slightly adapted but fundamentally reproduced. Of Britain he asks whether the vaunted system of Parliamentary democracy gives expression to the popular will, or whether the dictatorial powers of the King in Parliament are simply somewhat curbed by deleting the King. It is only such vividly imagined challenges to the usual pieties, I would claim, that enables us to do anything resembling serious

history. Otherwise we remain mired in the myths, mere cogs in the ideological apparatus that brainwashes schoolchildren in the name of preparing them for citizenship.

That it is a major function of the mass media to socialize the citizens of the mass society is a commonplace. For Berton to abuse Hollywood for caricaturing Canada misses this point and fails to note the possibility that Hollywood can also be read as socializing its world audience to a relatively benign, if American-centred, set of values. Given American universalism and the fact of American power his complaints are far off the point. It is much more shocking that one who pretends to be an historian engages in a nationalist counter-propaganda exercise.

Berton wanted a self-image of Canada that acknowledged difference without claim of superiority. For this we have to turn away from the mass media and learn from a thinking man's historian like Watt. Such an image of Canada that I suspect is not much known in the United States has been provided by Pierre Elliott Trudeau, former Prime Minister of Canada and, in my view, one of the most distinguished minds to have served as a statesman in this century. As a young man Trudeau and his friends lived through what is known as the Quiet Revolution in the Province of Quebec; this was the overthrow of one of the most reactionary and corrupt regimes ever to exist in North America. In middle age Trudeau entered Federal politics and within three years was Prime Minister, a post he held almost continuously for fifteen years. When he was first elected he was identified with flower power, an absurd image for so cool an intellectual. And when we read his work, Berton's claim that Hollywood managed to steal Canada's identity becomes manifestly absurd.

Here is an image of Canada that Trudeau offered the world in a 1964 book,[14] an image hotly contested by separatists in Quebec and by those small minorities in the western provinces

who want to join the United States, an image nevertheless that is a challenge both to Canadians trying to define their self-image, and to Americans who could do worse than try to do some self-definition by contrast with their northern neighbour.

> I suppose we can safely assume that the men who drew up the terms of the Canadian federal compromise had heard something of thee ideology of nationalism which had been spreading revolutions for seventy-five years. It is likely too that they knew about the Civil War in the United States, the rebellions of 1837-8 in Canada, the Annexation Manifesto, and the unsatisfactory results of double majorities. Certainly they assessed the centrifugal forces that the Constitution would have to overcome if the Canadian state was to be a durable one: first, the linguistic and other cultural differences between the two major founding groups, and secondly the attraction of regionalisms, which were not likely to decrease in a country the size of Canada.
>
> Given these data, I am inclined to believe that the authors of the Canadian federation arrived at as wise a compromise and drew up as sensible a constitution as any group of men anywhere could have done. Reading that document today, one is struck by its absence of principles, ideals, or other frills; even the regional safeguards and minority guarantees are pragmatically presented, here and there, rather than proclaimed as a thrilling bill of rights. It has been said that the binding force of the United States of America was the idea of liberty, and certainly none of the relevant constitutional documents let us forget it. By comparison, the Canadian nation seems founded on the common sense of empirical politicians who had wanted to establish some law and order over a disjointed halfcontinent.
>
> If reason be the governing virtue of federalism, it would seem that Canada got off to a good start.(p. 197)

Where to begin an analysis of this self-image and what to make of it? Trudeau was a widely travelled and deeply thoughtful man. His thesis was that those who made Canada took into account historical experience, including that of the United States, as well as the character of the parts that made up Canada, and they endeavoured to create a polity that acknowledged both. Sensitive to myth-making and inflated rhetoric about liberty, Trudeau argued for the virtues of practicality, compromise and reason. The self-image he offered to Canadians was not, you are

best, but, your founders were as sensible and wise as any group of men anywhere. Their historical situation was specific, and they did a good job. Notice in particular that Trudeau did not see the United States as a neighbour threatening Canadian identity, but rather one from whose historical experience Canada had benefitted. And despite this excellent analysis of the founding of Canada Trudeau was not complacent. He spent much of his energy in his last years as head of government in the enterprise of revising and repatriating the constitution. That is to say, the compromise he was discussing in the quotation above, the British North America Act, was an instrument of the British Parliament which created Canada from its former colonies. Trudeau felt that after one hundred years it was time for the constitution to be re-written and modernised and finally passed as an Act of the Canadian legislature; time for a new group of wise and sensible men to reflect on their own and others' historical experience.

My aim in offering Trudeau's ideas is to point to an image of Canada that is a bit less mythic, a bit less stereotyped, than anything Hollywood or Berton achieved. His 1964 image was not determinative of the reality of the final constitutional compromise. But Trudeau showed us how to use self-image as a means towards the achievement of concrete goals.

∗ An expanded version of a lecture delivered at the Hall Humanities Centre, University of
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3. Starnes to Frank L. Smith, Vitagraph Studios, 30 March 1926, N(ational) A(rchives of)
    C(anada, Ottawa) RG 18 Acc.85-86/048 vol. 7, file G-563-1(1940).
4. Ibid., Report by R.A.S. NacNeil on his trip to Hollywood, 6 November 1952.
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6. N(ational) A(rchives, Washington, DC) RG S9 811.4061/Motion Pictures.

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