

other flawed sources, including the administrative correspondence and newspaper reports on which Curtis relies, would risk scholarly euthanasia. In the meantime, Bruce Curtis has shown us what we can learn from census making and what we cannot do with its results.

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Gerald Friesen — *Citizens and Nation: An Essay on History, Communication, and Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. x, 307.

Does history have a public purpose? This is not the same as asking whether history is political. The answer to the latter question is always: authors invariably have a subject position, however masked, and their narratives or analyses invariably deal with power, however distantly. Instead, the troublesome question of a public purpose links history to some esteemed or shared goal. In the 1990s Michael Bliss and Jack Granatstein lamented the fact that so many academic histories no longer served to nourish a common sense of nationality, setting off an ongoing squabble when social and “progressive” historians in particular took umbrage at what seemed an attempt to harness the writing of history to the making of hegemony. Gerald Friesen has now produced a superb brand of left history (well, mildly left) that seeks to explain “why Canada is a meaningful public identity” (p. 227).

Citizens and Nation is billed as a series of reflective essays exploring how the overall Canadian experience has constructed the present. It is, then, a history for today, drawing upon the findings and techniques of that social and cultural history sometimes blamed for undermining or unraveling the public’s belief in an imagined community. The book harks back to a genre of patriotic history (Friesen makes reference to W. L. Morton’s *The Canadian Identity* of 1960) more common a generation ago. Unlike previous works, *Citizens and Nation* concentrates on the experience of what used to be called “the folk”. It is populist as well as patriotic, an assertion of “the creativity of every citizen, not just the powerful few” (p. 228). Friesen does discuss carefully and effectively a range of interpretations championed by historians, past and recent, about the shape of Canadian life, but he relies upon a small number of key texts about ordinary people, usually authored by them, to understand that life: a film documentary of a Dene family; some memoirs and one set of interviews; even Ken Dryden’s 1993 biography *The Moved and the Shaken*. This is the most novel and striking attribute of *Citizens and Nation*.

These documents become the means of exploring Friesen’s conviction “that the way in which a society communicates shapes popular assumptions about how the world works” (p. 5). He focuses his attention on the prevailing modes of communication during four grand epochs, variously entitled the “oral-traditional”, “textual-settler”, “print-capitalist”, and “screen-capitalist”, each of which is treated in a separate section composed of two essays. All of these societies, he argues, have left a legacy and marks on the Canadian identity. Shades of Harold Innis? Not quite:

though Innis the historian, rather than the communications theorist, does figure a great deal in this work, Friesen draws more on the ideas of a sociologist like Anthony Giddens, among others, by emphasizing how the prevailing mode of communications determines perceptions and relations of time and space. The Aboriginal emphasis on speech, on storytelling, fostered and embodied both a sense of timelessness and a sense of rootedness in a landscape that was fixed in the individual's memory. Print slowly abstracted the settlers and the industrial workers from their world, creating a sense of past, present, and future, producing a day of hours and minutes as well as public and private spaces, and a world in which both time and space could be refashioned to serve the great god Profit. Following Benedict Anderson, Friesen finds in print-capitalism the agent of two imagined communities, one French and the other English, fictions of a sort nourished by a rich variety of newspapers. Its offspring, screen-capitalism, has exacerbated the pressures of time, collapsed distances, and fostered both abundance and insecurity, apparently leaving the citizenry and the nation in a state of siege because of global communications systems. These bald assertions, of course, do an injustice to a series of sophisticated arguments that delve into such issues as the inadequacies of the staples thesis, the import of Christianity, the development of the media, the nature of politics (from the "thunder gusts" of the settler age to the organized parties of print-capitalism and the apparent political disenchantment of today), never mind the socialist contribution to public policy, the significance of the outpouring of public grief over the death of Diana Spencer, and much else. In sum, *Citizens and Nation* is an impressive performance, made all the more so because Friesen writes in such a graceful and lucid fashion.

This does not mean that *Citizens and Nation* is always persuasive. There is a quality of special pleading about some of Friesen's arguments. Early on, for example, he cites and approves Innis's observation that Aboriginal culture is central to the development of Canadian institutions. Nowhere does he make clear how a population that was decimated, its land appropriated, and its mind colonized could continue to exercise much influence upon the shape of the Canadian experience, except perhaps as that Other which helped to define the dominant society. Honouring the Aboriginal becomes an exercise in political correctness that masks the fundamental fact of conquest. Likewise, Friesen later seeks to explain away the growing sense of disengagement that characterizes the contemporary response of his ordinary citizens to the realm of High Politics. "Frank and Roseanne might claim to ignore politics, but they did know who determined the bus fare, who ran the school, who was in charge of garbage pick-up and safety in the streets, who built the highways, who funded the hospital, and who decided foreign policy" (p. 201). Knowledge, however, is not participation: Friesen neglects the lack of popular agency that bedevils public life in contemporary Canada, as elsewhere in the affluent world. That neglect is part of a larger problem with Friesen's approach. He does note, for example, how the burdensome debt to the Hudson Bay Company afflicted the life of Elizabeth Goudie and her family, his example of settlers, in Labrador during the 1920s. But he does not analyse or assess in any depth the relations of power, the actions and operations of elites and leaders, the ways in which authority has determined the shape of the

Canadian experience. We are left with the assertion that “the crucial measures of adaptation and community-building — the acts deserving the term ‘historic’ — are those undertaken by ordinary citizens” (p. 224).

Nor am I convinced that this testimony to “the genius of common people” (p. 229) will serve a nationalist purpose. It is hard to imagine that his people’s drama will play well in Quebec, because the separate struggles and achievements of French Canada are muted and absorbed into the larger Canadian narrative. It is also hard to imagine that the emphasis on the ordinary, on Grandmother Andre (the Dene), on the Knight family (his workers), on Frank and Roseanne (the contemporaries) will satisfy that taste for heroes and villains which so often characterizes the mythologies of patriotism. That is especially because the trials and tribulations of these interesting souls do not appear particularly Canadian. Although Friesen is careful to emphasize the importance of place, notably in a finely crafted conclusion, their stories of adaptation seem responses to broader, transnational phenomena like orality and literacy, the workings of the marketplace, and the advance and retreat of the state which could well occur in a variety of different locations.

Admittedly, this postmodern cannot be counted a friend of the notion that history ought to have a public purpose. Constructing narratives that endorse hegemony or justify resistance or celebrate identity might best be left to the popular historians. Other kinds of readers will presumably give the patriotic message a more sympathetic hearing. In any case, the book deserves a wide audience: *Citizens and Nation* is an excellent work of synthesis, both original and interesting, that should foster new debate within the profession of Canadian history, if not the wider Canadian community.

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Peter Gossage — *Families in Transition: Industry and Population in Nineteenth-Century Saint-Hyacinthe*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999. Pp. xviii, 299.

In the preface to *Families in Transition*, Peter Gossage comments upon “an unfashionable emphasis in this book on quantitative analysis”, which might not have been his choice were he beginning this study today (p. xvi). We should be grateful that this work did not fall victim to the hemlines of historical fashion, for he follows with a monograph that showcases the strengths of quantitative research in his examination of the dynamic relationship between economic change and demographic patterns. The role families played in this relationship between industrial capitalism and demographic change has attracted much attention from demographic historians. Gossage joins this vast literature with a study that traces this complex interaction during the late nineteenth century in the small industrial centre of Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec.

Gossage proceeds with a logical and well-defined study, beginning by placing