

## Comptes rendus / Book Reviews

GORDON, Alan — *The Hero and the Historians: Historiography and the Uses of Jacques Cartier*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010. Pp. 248.

On April 20, 1534, Jacques Cartier set sail from Saint-Malo in search of a western passage to Asia. Instead of discovering a lucrative trading route, however, Cartier passed through the Strait of Belle Isle, which separates Newfoundland and Labrador, and explored the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Later that year, Cartier arrived at the Gaspé, where he erected a large cross that was interpreted by the Iroquois chief Donnacona to be an attempt to claim the territory for the King of France. Cartier then abducted two of the Chief's sons, promising to bring them back the following year, and returned to France. The following year, Cartier returned to the Gulf with his captives, as he had said he would, and went on to discover, with the help of his Native guides, the St. Lawrence River. Making his way up the river, Cartier came upon the Iroquoian villages of Stadacona and Hochelaga, on the present-day sites of Quebec City and Montreal. Intrigued by tales of enormous riches to be found in the "Kingdom of the Saguenay," Cartier would return to the area on a final voyage in 1541 only to be disappointed to find that little of value was to be found in Canada. Rather than navigate a new passage to Asia, Cartier had found a river that would prove to be crucial in French efforts to penetrate into the continent and to establish settlements in North America. However, unlike figures like Samuel de Champlain, who established the first permanent settlement in Quebec City in 1608, or Paul Chomedey de Maisonneuve, who established a settlement in Montreal, Cartier has not enjoyed a prominent place in the official histories of French Canada or in the public's imagination.

In his new book, *The Hero and the Historians*, Alan Gordon investigates the reasons that Cartier has been marginalized in the history of French Canada. By tracing Cartier's evolution from a relatively minor historical figure during the eighteenth century into a heroic one in the nineteenth century and then his return to a secondary place in the twentieth century, Gordon has produced a sophisticated meditation on the writing of history that offers insights into the nature of historical consciousness in French-speaking Canada. In his first book, *Making Public Pasts*, Gordon explored the ways in which public monuments reflected the assumptions and ambitions of particular individuals and organizations.

Given its focus on the single figure of Cartier, *The Hero and the Historians* is much more narrowly conceived, but it is clear that Gordon is using Cartier to illustrate the ways in which larger shifts in historical writing, as well as the transition to modernity in the nineteenth century, altered French-Canadian society.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, historians acknowledged Jacques Cartier's efforts as a navigator but tended not to celebrate him as one of the heroes in the history of New France. Because he had neither established a permanent settlement nor led an explicitly Catholic mission to proselytize the Native peoples, Cartier's explorations did not fit easily into the existing narratives of the period. Not until the middle decades of the nineteenth century would conservative nationalist writers begin to take another look at Cartier. If Cartier's apparently secular outlook and as well as his commercial ambitions had made him a less than satisfying figure to the clerical writers of the eighteenth century, by the 1830s and 1840s these realities would be downplayed by a conservative and clerical elite that had become much more interested in restoring the sense of order thought to have been lost in the lead-up to the Rebellions. Conservative nationalists now emphasized the religious aspects of Cartier's story, focusing on the role that priests might have played on his voyages and pointing to the erection of the cross in the Gaspé. Having been re-imagined as a figure who advanced the objectives of the Church, Cartier was presented as the type of heroic figure instrumental in the foundation of French Canada and who could be favourably contrasted with the *patriote* leadership, which was said to be secular and liberal in outlook.

Cartier's rehabilitation in the nineteenth century was thus one part of a conservative nationalist elite's response to the disruptions of the Rebellion. As Gordon points out, Cartier's rehabilitation took place in the context of rising individualism, which in turn placed a greater focus on individuals' influence on historical developments and thus helped to give rise to the so-called "great-man" approach to historical writing. Yet, while modern attitudes about individualism as well as innovations in historical research made Cartier's revival possible, his rehabilitation as a historical figure was for decidedly conservative purposes. Cartier's image was being deployed as an antidote to modernity, but that image was itself the product of modernity. Gordon thus treats Cartier's emergence as a national and heroic figure during the nineteenth century as both an exercise in nostalgia as well as part of the larger story of modernization in the province. Interestingly, by the end of the nineteenth century Cartier had become so closely associated with the conservative Catholic nationalist leadership in the province that his image failed to resonate with the new generation of urban and more individualistic nationalists. By the twentieth century, Cartier was once again relegated to the sidelines of historical memory in Quebec, in part because he was not seen as sufficiently modern.

For a society that is often said to have been unusually preoccupied with its past and interested in presenting its history in heroic terms, French Canada's reluctance to embrace Cartier as a founding father might appear surprising. What Gordon's book makes abundantly clear, however, is that French Canadians have been much more discriminating when it comes to the celebration of

heroes than is often acknowledged. Moreover, by remaining sceptical that Cartier's exploits were in fact heroic, French-Canadian historians have demonstrated a certain respect for historical accuracy in their writing. In this important book, Gordon demonstrates quite eloquently that French Canadians have constantly re-imagined the past in ways designed to fulfil their evolving desires. Furthermore, French Canadians have not hesitated to exclude from their narratives seemingly important figures if they are in some ways problematic, even if these figures, like Jacques Cartier, might have served to advance a heroic version of the past.

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LOEWEN, Royden, and Gerald FRIESEN — *Immigrants in Prairie Cities: Ethnic Diversity in Twentieth Century Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. Pp. 257.

As Roy Loewen and Gerry Friesen make perfectly clear, Canadian multiculturalism has a history that long predates the rather famous federal policy of 1971. More to the point, this history is not rooted solely in Canada's largest and seemingly most ethnically diverse cities — the great immigrant reception centres of the post-1970 era, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. In some ways, then, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities* serves as a corrective to the MTV-centric focus of most studies of Canadian multiculturalism and argues that a "distinct variation on the Canadian model of cultural diversity" developed in the urban centres of the western interior over the course of the twentieth century (p. 3). Indeed, the authors maintain that "the western prairie and its leading cities have been a forcing ground for Canada's discussions of multiculturalism for most of the twentieth century" (p. 7). But readers should not be misled by the tone of these comments, for this study is far more than just another western plea for inclusion in the larger narrative of Canadian history.

Rather modestly the authors claim that their work is largely synthetic. It is true that they have synthesized a vast amount of unpublished thesis and dissertation material as well as an expanding secondary literature related to the history and reception of immigrant groups in Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary, and — to a much lesser extent — Saskatoon and Regina. But they have also added some fascinating new research to the mix, most notably the oral histories conducted by Gerry Friesen and the reports and other work produced by scholars associated with the Winnipeg Immigration History Research Group. Moreover, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities* provides a state-of-the-art approach to the writing of both immigration and social history.

Simply put, there are no static categories of analysis in this book. Ethnicity/race, class, gender, ideology, generation, family, community, and faith are all portrayed as transmutable and interactive. In this regard, the influence of Clifford