

# ***Branding History at the Canadian Museum of Civilization<sup>1</sup>***

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**ABSTRACT** *In October 2012, the Canadian Heritage Minister announced that the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the country's largest and most popular museum, would be renamed the Canadian Museum of History. In addition to the new name, three strategies—a strategy of engagement, a strategy of authority, and a strategy of expansion—were elaborated by museum and government officials as part of the transformation. We examine these three strategies as an example of the Harper government's attempt to “brand” Canadian identity and history in its own image, arguing that the strategies were designed expressly to paper over near-unilateral changes in the museum's mandate and transformation. Ultimately, these changes have problematic implications for the democratic management of cultural production in Canada.*

**KEYWORDS** *Heritage policy; Marketing; Branding; Museums; National identity*

**RÉSUMÉ** *En octobre 2012, le Ministère du Patrimoine canadien annonçait que le premier musée du pays, le Musée Canadien des Civilisations, serait transformé et rebaptisé Musée Canadien d'Histoire. Il ne s'agissait pas seulement d'un changement de nom mais aussi d'un changement de stratégie de la part des responsables du musée et du gouvernement. Nous identifions en particulier trois types de stratégie à l'œuvre : une stratégie d'engagement, une stratégie d'autorité, et une stratégie d'expansion. A travers l'analyse de ces trois stratégies nous démontrons qu'elles participent d'une tentative de production par le gouvernement Harper d'une « image de marque ». Ces stratégies ont été conçues pour dissimuler la nature quasi-unilatérale des changements dans le mandat et la transformation du musée. Ces changements ont des conséquences problématiques pour la gestion démocratique de la production culturelle au Canada.*

**MOTS CLÉS** *Politique du patrimoine; marketing; branding, musées; identité nationale*

## **Introduction**

The year 2017 will mark Canada's sesquicentennial: 150 years since the British colonies in North America came together to form the Dominion of Canada. The date is eagerly anticipated by the Harper government, which is planning a series of commemorative

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events.<sup>2</sup> These events are contrived, however, to commemorate the Harper government far more than the nation's glorious (or inglorious) pasts.

Since the Conservatives came to power in 2006, several cultural institutions have been pushed into service to articulate the government's particular conception of Canadian culture, founded on the twin pillars of monarchism and militarism. The 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the War of 1812, for example, was an opportunity for the Harper government to reframe the war as a signal moment in Canada's nation-building project. A budget of \$28 million was earmarked for dramatic re-enactments, public service announcements, a website and grade school curriculum, and an elaborate exhibit at the War Museum in the nation's capital, all aiming to retrospectively situate the war as a pillar of Canadian identity (GOC, 2012; GOC, 2013). The celebrations were topped off by a four-day visit to Ottawa by Prince Charles in honour of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and marked with commemorative medals costing the government \$7.5 million (Press & Stechyson, 2012).

In October 2012, then Heritage Minister James Moore announced another project in the run-up to 2017 that would incorporate this military and monarchical genealogy: the renaming and renovation of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Located near the nation's capital in Ottawa, the national museum had been one of the country's largest and most popular, with approximately 1.3 million visitors each year (Butler, 2012; Ottawa Citizen, 2012). A site of international renown, it was deemed a logical choice as an instrument to reach Canadians and brand Canada internationally.

The Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) was renamed the Canadian Museum of History (CMH), and along with the name change comes a particular way of selling history to the Canadian public, one that reflects the Harper government's broader efforts at information management and control. Many Canadians worry that the new museum will elide more problematic aspects of Canada's past in favour of Canadian "achievements" and "accomplishments"—a Whig version of history (CH, 2012a). Critics fear that the changes will degrade the museum's international status and reputation, turning it into little more than an insular "Hall of Fame" (Gardner, 2012). Further, the museum's mandate has been reframed, from an international focus to a concern with "shared national history;" critical research has also been deemphasized (CH, 2012a).

The narrowed mandate, parliamentary actions, funding re-allocations, and private-sector partnerships that surround the museum's transformation reflect what Andrew Apter (1999) calls the "subvention of tradition." It is what happens when the government underwrites and appropriates the cultural practices associated with a particular group, putting them to use in the service of its own interests. Our central argument is that the Harper government is currently inventing its own "brand" of Canadian identity, employing the Canadian Museum of History as one among several sites of production for this new national imaginary.

Museums frequently reflect national agendas and are used as tools to shape national identity (Hinsley, 1981; Kaplan, 1994). The CMC has been no exception. Delaney (1992) described the CMC as "a site of consumption of a prescribed national identity" (p. 136). Mackey (2002) argues that a narrative of national progress was forwarded in

the CMC through the appropriation of Aboriginal peoples and myths of harmonious cultural pluralism. The CMC/CMH rebranding goes beyond identity construction to encode new norms for cultural institutions. We closely examine the effort placed on strategic campaigns around the museum claiming to include citizens and specific stakeholders in a democratic process. While these campaigns appear to encourage public participation and consultation about important changes that will ostensibly shape the museum, the agenda of conservative politicians was already being implemented prior to consultation. The initial lack of consultation about major changes is significant, particularly as it follows a period where collaboration has become standard practice in various political realms, especially where Aboriginal people and other marginalized populations are concerned (McCall, 2011). Moreover, the centrality of military and monarchical legacies to the Harper government's vision of national identity, as well as its embrace of a "Great Man/Great Deeds" vision of history, are clear in recent joint initiatives between the War Museum and the CMC. The reversion to museological practices that deemphasize consultation and minimize critique of the government while relying on big-H history appears to be a direct backlash against so-called liberal ways of interpreting the past, which challenge historical oppression and de-centre grand narratives. As Yves Frenette (2014) suggests,

Harper's efforts to reconstruct collective memory intersects with a historiographical debate that has gone on for fifteen years. It began in 1998 with the publication of retired York University historian Jack Granatstein's searing and influential book, *Who Killed Canadian History?*, which, among other things, accused university history departments of abandoning political and military history in favour of narrowly specialized studies of social history of little interest to the general public. Granatstein holds social historians partially responsible for Canadians' lack of historical consciousness and claims that they unduly emphasized the country's injustices over its accomplishments. (p. 13)

Not surprisingly, our access-to-information request yielded documents listing Granatstein (also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada) as a member of the General Advisory Committee to the Canadian History Hall (CMH, n.d.a). Similarly, McKay and Swift (2012) describe the movement as an effort to position Canada as a "Warrior Nation" focused on war and soldiers.

Against this backdrop, we examine three strategies undertaken by the museum in conjunction with government officials to transform and "rebrand" the museum: a strategy of engagement; a strategy of authority; and a strategy of expansion. Our goal is to demonstrate how branding works in practice; that is, how the Harper government's fundamental objective is to create new and positive associations among the party, Canadian cultural production, and Canadian identity.

While the study of cultural and creative production has recently tended toward issues of labour (Mayer, Banks, & Thorton Caldwell, 2009; McKinlay & Smith, 2009), we examine the *politics* of production, seeking to understand how political actors themselves influence culture through tactics of control, persuasion and incentivization. This is not to say that museum officials, practitioners, and consultants are powerless against

political elites; but their ability to act is often circumscribed by constraints like funding or revised institutional mandates.

The article proceeds as follows. We begin by defining what we mean by “branding” in the context of this argument (“Defining terms”). We then provide some background to the museum rebranding initiative, focusing first on the general branding tactics of the sitting Conservative government (“Branding the ‘Harper government’”), then on the government’s announcement and stated intentions of the CMC/CMH transition (“Politics and changes at the CMC”). We next proceed to the analysis, documenting in detail the three branding strategies—engagement, authority, and expansion—and delving into their implications for the politics of cultural production in Canada. We name the three branding strategies “Creating a culture of connectivity” (Engagement); “Installations of authority” (Authority); and “Discipline at a distance” (Expansion). The conclusion offers further analysis and summarizes the key findings.

### **Defining terms**

Branding can be defined as the strategic production and articulation of an image of a commodity, service, institution or other entity. By “strategic” we mean that the instigator of the branding (in this case, the Harper government) aims to create and control the image in order to accrue economic and cultural value for purposes of self-advantage. Such value can be amassed in a number of ways, but the primary means of value accumulation in a branding paradigm is to establish positive cognitive associations and equivalencies between the good or service (or institution) and cultural values, behaviours, and attitudes. These associations, or relationships, are then monetized in different ways, as in legal protection and propertization (Coombe, 1998); the regulation of tastes and preferences through status hierarchies (Podolny, 2008); and the monopolization of asset recognition (Lury & Moor, 2010), rendering cultural value into economic value.

Importantly, branding is not about identifying a fixed set of characteristics (e.g., a logo, slogan or symbol); rather, it is about recognizing a dynamic and contingent contextual effect. Following Lury (2004, 2011; see also Aronczyk, 2013), we see brands as “boundary objects” that shift dynamically to accommodate their circumstances. Boundary objects are like the operational centre of a Venn diagram; they are, as Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Starr describe, “both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and constraints of several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites” (quoted in Lury, 2011, p. 53). What this means for our purposes, and what we argue here, is that the CMC/CMH rebranding is about far more than the ideological reorganization of the museum to suit the current federal government’s mandate (though it is evidently about that as well); it is ultimately about establishing ongoing and robust, yet flexible, connections and patterns of reciprocal identification among the Harper administration, cultural production, and Canadian national identity, mediated through the museum site.

### **Branding the “Harper government”**

The CMC/CMH project must be understood in the context of a much broader and long-range series of image-management initiatives adopted by the Harper leadership since

its ascent to power in 2006. A central arrow in the Conservatives' image arsenal has been the reorganization and restriction of government communications, partly through internal restructuring (including the centralization of internal communications in the Privy Council Office [PCO] and Prime Minister's Office [PMO]), and partly through a vise grip on the Canadian media. Stephen Harper's relationship with the Canadian media is notoriously thorny. Press conferences and media events are few in number and tightly controlled, and national reporters are frequently denied the right to ask questions (CBC News, 2006). News reports recently revealed that the Harper government has paid upwards of \$20 million in contracts and subscriptions with media monitoring firms since 2012 (Fekete, 2014). Access-to-information documents revealed that at the outset of its term in office, the Harper government had even briefly entertained the notion of building its own press gallery, supervised by the PCO, to supersede the National Press Theatre. The new gallery would have had limited media access to ministers and other government representatives (Crocker, 2007; MacCharles, 2007).

The Harper government has also actively engaged in self-branding initiatives. Immediately following the 2006 election, several semiotic and visual devices were put into place, intended to subsume the Government of Canada into the Conservative Party under Stephen Harper. Examples include redesigning departmental websites to feature the Conservative Party's signature blue; promoting a partisan Economic Action Plan as a "whole of government" project (Canadian Press, 2011); and standardizing the language used in internal and public official communication. Shortly after the 2006 election, for instance, access-to-information requests by Canadian reporters showed that federal employees in non-partisan departments, agencies, and Crown corporations had received memos from the PMO/PCO to use the phrase "Canada's New Government" in all communications when referring to the new leadership; this phrase was replaced by "the Harper government" in 2009 (McGregor, 2013a; Raj, 2012). Stories surfaced of civil servants being terminated for refusing to use the phrase (Harper's, 2006).<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the internal and external controls placed on its communication with the public, the Harper mandate also appears to encompass the communication of the public. It is possible to view the Harper administration's work in terms of a reimagining of Canadian identity, enacted via a series of regulatory initiatives. These initiatives, which seek to re-root Canadian foundations in a monarchical and military past, modulate the symbolic and practical bases of what it means to be Canadian in the present. Subtle examples began surfacing in 2006, such as the replacement of the image of the Library and Archives building with one of the Canadian War Museum on Canada's savings bonds (Dean, 2013). Perhaps the most explicit of these initiatives was the implementation in 2009 of a new guide for immigrants to Canada who aspire to citizenship. Entitled *Discover Canada*, the guide and the citizenship test give pride of place to the hereditary Sovereign and to military battles, honours, and iconic figures. They also centrally reposition conflicts like the War of 1812, even though until recently it was viewed by historians as a marginal event on the Canadian timeline (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009).<sup>4</sup>

If the immediate effect of the Harper government's subvention of military and monarchical tradition was to reposition the war more centrally in the public imagina-

tion, a secondary impact soon became apparent in institutional critiques, which pointed to the cultural centres damaged by this government-led reallocation of cultural resources. Massive budget cuts to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Federal Libraries and Interlibrary Loans, Public Access, and Archaeology Heritage sites have made clear that existing archives and repositories are far less important to the Harper agenda than the creation of new sites of memory and agency.<sup>5</sup>

### Politics and changes at the CMC

Proposed changes to the CMC began with Canadian Heritage and its former minister, James Moore. Canadian Heritage (CH) is responsible for enacting policies and programs that deal with the promotion of the arts, cultural industries, and cultural heritage in institutions like museums. It also oversees preservation, indemnification, and the import/export of historical artifacts. CH plays a role in both material and symbolic forms of culture: both anthems and musical instruments, both cultural holidays and cultural property (CH, 2010).

In 2008, James Moore was appointed to his position as Heritage Minister by the Harper government.<sup>6</sup> In October 2012, Moore announced a major overhaul of the CMC, including plans to introduce legislation altering the museum's mandate and name. A single (nonrenewable) contribution of \$25 million would be provided by CH toward renovating a 50,500-square-foot area of the museum to transform it into a new Canadian History exhibit and a space for related temporary exhibits (CH, 2012a).

The opening of the new permanent exhibit, the "largest and most comprehensive museum exhibition on Canadian history ever developed" (O'Neill, n.d., para. 1) constituting half of the museum's permanent space, will be a seminal event in the Heritage Ministry's commemorations of the Canadian bicentennial and an opportunity for the Harper government to make a mark on Canadian history that will have long-term implications. It is unlikely that the new exhibit space will be modified for many years after construction. It is also unlikely that the museum will see another name change in the foreseeable future.

The CMC is a Crown corporation, and while formally it "operates at arm's length from the government," as outlined by the *Museums Act* (1990), CH and its minister clearly had a heavy hand in guiding its future plans. Moore's central role was highlighted when he, rather than museum officials, announced the changes at the museum to the press. His authorial intent was further cemented when, instead of suggesting that the impetus for the museum's transformation lay in needs identified by the museum, he proudly declared that he "came up with the idea of creating the CMH" while on a motorcycle trip through the Okanagan in British Columbia (CH, 2012b; PCM, 2013).

Moore has not been shy about articulating his visions for Canada in the new museum. For example, he has suggested that he would like to tell history in a way that distracts from the "cleavages" such as "East-West, North-South, aboriginal-non-(aboriginal), Anglophone-Francophone, Protestant-Catholic, city versus rural Canadians..." (Moore as cited in Boswell, 2012, para. 15). Moore suggests that the country must overcome these divisions "in order to stay united and move forward" (para. 16). Offering potential signifiers of this unity, Moore proposed the display of iconographic objects like mem-

orabilia from Terry Fox's Marathon of Hope; the Last Spike (which completed the transcontinental railroad); and the jersey worn by hockey legend Maurice "The Rocket" Richard, objects Moore saw as consistent with an uplifting national myth about Canadian perseverance in the face of adversity.

As Moore's plans were unveiled, cutbacks aimed at the CMC, LAC, CBC, and various public sector jobs raised eyebrows. Even Conservative constituents questioned Moore's expenditures on the new museum.<sup>7</sup> Despite critiques about the fiscal irresponsibility of fixing something that was not broken in tough economic times, Moore zealously moved forward with legislation that would officially enact his visions.

### **Creating a culture of connectivity**

The museum engaged three non-mutually exclusive domestic constituents about proposed changes: the general (Canadian) public; academics and professional stakeholders; and Aboriginal people. Considered from the point of view of the museum, each of these constituents was expressly consulted in the museum transition. From a critical perspective, all three consultations were opaque and partial at best. The consultation processes, designed to solicit the opinion of diverse stakeholders who would ostensibly impact the museum's decision-making, also functioned as a tool of legitimation for decisions that had already been made. By engaging in consultation and maintaining the illusion of consensus, museum officials and the Harper government successfully masked or downplayed deeply consequential changes, like new federal legislation that alters the purview of the museum.

#### *Engaging constituents*

The My History Museum initiative was a short-term project that ran through the fall and winter of 2012. At its core were two components: an interactive website ([civilization.ca/myhistorymuseum](http://civilization.ca/myhistorymuseum)) and a cross-Canada "tour" of sixteen major cities by museum officials and public relations consultants to present the contours of the CMC/CMH transition to the public. The purpose of the My History Museum project was to create a "culture of connectivity" (van Dijk, 2013) among museum officials, the federal government, and the public. Visitors to the My History Museum website, for instance, were asked, "What would you put in your national history museum? What stories would you tell? How would you reach Canadians across the country?" Users were then presented with an array of options to participate in the creation of their "very own" museum. A "Public Engagement" survey on the site encouraged users to select narratives, objects and iconic personalities that they felt should be included in the new museum, and to "like" different events featured along a timeline of Canadian history by clicking on them. While the My History Museum project appeared to take public input seriously, exactly how the concerns of stakeholders will be considered has yet to be seen.

As the museum began engaging in the public consultation process, concerns over a lack of expert input on the decision to reorient the museum were raised by a number of stakeholders, including academics and professionals. The lack of consultation about the initial decision was evidenced by protests from the Canadian Anthropology Society (CASCA), the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), the Canadian

Historical Association (CHA), and the Canadian Archaeological Association (CAA) (PCM, 2013; CASCA, 2012; Turk, 2012).

While CH did not consult widely about initial plans, in the wake of criticism about the unilateral decision to proceed, the museum began inviting select academics to participate in advisory committees informing museum content. In addition, academics as well as industry and creative professionals consulted through a series of conferences called “Living Labs.” They were brought into the CMC to do “visioning” exercises for the new exhibit on Canadian History. Early reports from that process yielded troubling results. During the wrap-up of an early Living Labs session at the CMC, a question related to consultation with minority groups was asked of David Morrison, Director of Research and Content for the Canadian History Hall of the museum. One participant told us:

Morrison said he can’t possibly meet with every ethnocultural group and even if he did he couldn’t make them all happy given the constraints in mounting such an exhibit. He has advisory committees composed of historians, including one with an Aboriginal historian. He doesn’t want to deal with political organizations, but rather with expert individuals. Doesn’t have the luxury of time, must tell a national story versus playing to identity politics. There are an infinite number of things that could be done, but there will be a national narrative, versus an ethnic mosaic.

As suggested in the excerpt above, early on stakeholders began raising concerns about a lack of inclusivity, and specifically a lack of Aboriginal consultation. To date, the museum has not made any public announcements related to Aboriginal consultation, leaving us with many questions. Why has the museum not been transparent about what they will do with information gathered during their consultations? The Canadian History Hall will certainly include Aboriginal histories, but will they serve to build a broader national narrative? Partial answers came through our access-to-information request, conversations with consultants to the museum, and email exchanges with museum staff. However, because the museum has not publically discussed consultation, many aspects remain opaque to those not immediately involved.

The CMH did attempt to engage in Aboriginal consultation in a few ways. Some of the early committees included individual scholars who identify as Indigenous and/or Métis (CMH, n.d.a.). In fall 2013, a separate Aboriginal Advisory Committee was formed, including seven members who broadly represent different areas of the country (D. Morrison, Personal communication, 2014a) as well as another new committee focused on women in Canada’s history. It is notable that both were assembled several months after the first advisory committees were formed. It appears as though the museum’s leadership initially did not believe a separate Aboriginal Advisory Committee was necessary. A secret fact sheet we obtained in the summer of 2013 indicates: “Aboriginal historians and cultural experts will be consulted on a case-by-case basis, as Aboriginal history is incorporated into the new hall” (CMC, n.d.b., p. 1).

The need for Aboriginal input to inform content in the CMH was emphasized in a July 2013 report by the consulting firm Lord Cultural Resources, which created and ran the My History Museum project. It summarized the CMC’s public consultation



process and findings, reporting that public commentary, both online and at face-to-face public events, overwhelmingly supported the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in the new Canadian history exhibit. In response to the question, “Whose perspective would you use to tell the story of Canada?”, for instance, some 250 people indicated “Aboriginal communities,” more than any other category including “the museum’s experts” (CMH, 2013).

The museum’s preliminary plans for the CMH also reflected a need for Aboriginal input. In May 2013, the CMH released a request for tender for creative design that described some of the content to appear in the Canadian History Hall (CMC, 2013b; McGregor, 2013b). The tender clearly indicated the importance of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history as well as best practices in contemporary museology. At the same time, internal documents raised concerns over the schedule of completion:

While acknowledging this duty, and opportunity [to include Aboriginal peoples in the narrative and consultation process], we must also keep in mind the serious time constraints that confront us, with 45,000 square feet before us and not much more than a year to produce something close to a detailed scenario. (CMH, n.d.a, p. 1).

As the document makes clear, expediency is a priority. However, attempts to mesh Aboriginal perspectives with other national narratives will be a formidable challenge considering the time and space constraints as well as differences in perspective. Documents obtained through an access-to-information request alluded to tensions in terms of competing histories and the museum’s need to combine Aboriginal perspectives with other narratives. That many of the violent legacies of colonization are still a reality for Aboriginal peoples means that historical narratives can also be political and contentious. In an email commenting on input from an Aboriginal historian (who was also a CH employee), Morrison (Personal communication, 2013) commented:

We asked for 100-word messages; what we have is a long and moving narrative, with way too much detail, and no clear idea of how to prioritize anything. How do we boil this down into a limited number of main topics (and hence 100 word messages)? ... There is a vast tangle of legal issues surrounding topics like aboriginal title, unextinguished rights, etc, etc, as well as detailed histories of legal challenges, and aboriginal organizations, which seem (to me) to be better dealt with in some forum other than exhibition ... (email).

In light of these competing narratives and agendas, it is not surprising that many Aboriginal people wish to reorient the museum completely. John Moses (n.d.), a Six Nations Delaware Band historian, wishes to promote research that:

underscores the need for a fully independent Aboriginal-run yet federally and industry-financed national Aboriginal cultural centre as a foil to shifting government attitudes concerning the re-presentation of Aboriginal perspectives in Canadian commemorative events and spaces. (para. 1).

Similarly, an Anishinaabe woman who attended the My History Museum public consultations opined, “If it were up to me, this new institution would not be the CMH,

but a museum which attempts to portray an (in)complete history of the land upon which we all reside” (McKiver, 2012).

We respect the opinions of many of the museum’s staff and members on the various advisory committees and do believe they extended a good faith effort in guiding the museum. However, we are skeptical about the lack of transparency, time constraints, and competing interests in the museum. Museum officials would not divulge the names of the Aboriginal Advisory Committee, and could not recall any public dissemination of the consultation process (e.g., press releases) (D. Morrison, Personal communication, 2014b).

As a point of comparison, a consultation committee consisting of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members worked for roughly four years to help formulate themes for the First Peoples Hall in the CMC, opened in 2003. They were not merely included as an afterthought, but were central in conceptualizing the entire exhibit from its beginnings (McCarthy, 2000a; 2000b). The museum was forthcoming about this process, and former leaders like Bob McGee and Gerald McMaster discussed Aboriginal consultation in interviews years before the exhibit was opened, claiming it was “a necessary part of museum development” (McCarthy, 2000a).

In contrast, new museum leaders left little time for Aboriginal consultation in the Canadian History Hall as they are working to complete planning and renovations in only three to four years. As of December 2014, consultation was ongoing, and whether and how comments will be taken into consideration remains unclear.

### **Installations of authority**

While the museum’s practices related to Aboriginal peoples have shifted, corresponding changes in leadership and legislation have also signalled different managerial approaches. In this section we investigate legislative and personnel changes, arguing that they represent a transfer of authority from the museum to the Harper government: the passing of Bill C-49 and resultant transformations to the museum’s mandate; the formation of a joint research agenda for the new CMH and the War Museum; and the changes in staff and leadership at the museum.

#### *Transformations to the museum’s mandate: Bill C-49*

In November 2012, Minister Moore introduced Bill C-49 as an amendment to the 1990 *Museums Act*, which would rename and redefine the museum. The amendment to Section 8 introduced by Moore also reflected a much more nation-centric history and audience, de-emphasizing the international reach and focus of the institution as well as removing the words “research” and “critical” (Bill C-49, 2012).

A parliamentary committee was formed to review the proposed changes. In a June 2013 meeting, a number of critics, including former CMC President and CEO Victor Rabinovitch and CAUT Executive Director James Turk, emphasized that the removal of the words “developing for research and posterity” was a signal that the museum would see a shift from knowledge production, or research, to knowledge display. Rabinovitch argued that the mandate changes would determine how the institution should allocate resources (PCM, 2013).

Moreover, critics noted the unprecedented ways in which CH was attempting to intervene in the operations of the museum and the lack of transparency demonstrated in decisions to fundamentally change it. A Parliamentary motion to amend the Bill (which was denied) suggested that the Bill “represents the government’s interference in Canadian history and its attacks on research and the federal institutions that preserve and promote history...” and “...was developed in absolute secrecy and without substantial consultations with experts, First Nations, Inuit and Métis, Canadians and key regional actors” (Openparliament, 2013).

Despite such compelling critiques, Minister Moore employed salient arguments in garnering support for his changes. Both critics and supporters agreed that the museum was in dire need of updating. Moore cited the negative influence of American cultural products on Canada, leaving Canadians unfamiliar with their own history. Referring to the 1950s Massey Commission, which suggested that Canada was being overwhelmed by cultural influences from the south, Moore evoked longstanding anxiety in Canada in relation to its national identity (or lack thereof) and cultural sovereignty in the face of America’s domineering culture industry (PCM, 2013; Berland, 2009). His argument, a classic red herring, mobilizes fear of American influence in order to deflect from the real issue at hand: the attempt of one political party to transform the brand of an already successful cultural institution in order to roll it into a broader partisan communications plan.

In fact, the debate over Bill C-49 has broken down along party lines in a number of ways, despite Moore’s insistence that it is “beyond partisanship” (PCM, 2013). Conservative proponents have supported de-emphasizing research at the museum and in promoting exchange with smaller museums, revealing an anti-intellectual antagonism. Critics argue that the museum does not need to spoon-feed Canadians celebratory versions of national history (PCM, 2013).

### *Changes in leadership*

In the summer of 2011 Harper’s cabinet appointed Mark O’Neill as President and CEO of the CMC. O’Neill was the former director general of the War Museum; staff from the War Museum have also been transferred to the CMC. Even before the passage of Bill C-49, O’Neill began referring to the museum as though the change had already taken place, using its proposed new name: “And our vision at the Canadian Museum of History is to showcase the touchstones—those seminal experiences, personalities, and objects—that have brought us all here” (O’Neill, n.d., p. 5).

Treating the changes as a done deal indicated O’Neill’s complacency. However, he also attempted to distance himself as the CMC ostensibly operates at “arm’s length” from the government. When asked at a parliamentary committee meeting how often he and the Heritage Minister meet, he responded that they probably saw each other about once a month at museum functions. When asked how many times they met to discuss the changes, he replied, “twice” (PCM, 2013). Similarly, while Moore “acknowledges it was his idea to change the museum’s name and mandate,” he insisted that the law would not allow him to interfere in the museum’s business: “At no time would I, or could I, ever tell a museum what they can or cannot display” (Butler, 2013). CH also

suggested that the direction of the museum was consistent with visions set forth by the CMC Corporation's Board of Trustees (CH, 2012a).

While CH claimed to be taking cues from the museum's leadership, it did determine what kinds of changes would be funded, and Moore had an important say in choosing decision-makers. It is probably not a coincidence that since Prime Minister Harper took office, the CMC's 11-member Corporation Board has seen an increase in appointees who reflect conservative politics, including former military officers, military defense contractors, and contributors to the Conservative Party (Table 1). Richard Gwyn, a well-known historian and political columnist for the *Toronto Star*, is one of the few appointees to the board who does not reflect a conservative agenda (CMC, 2013a).

**Table 1: CMC board members**

CMC Board Member	Current role on Board	Date appointed	Previous/current commitments
L. Gen William Leach (CMC, 2012a)	Chair	February 2012	Member of Canadian Forces and Canadian Army  Worked with defense and technology service providers Honeywell Canada and Mincom Australia
James Fleck (CMC, 2012e)	Vice-Chair	November 2012	Chairman of NGRAI, a company involved in the defense industry
Andrea Bonkowicz (Elections Canada, n.d.)	Member	November 2012	Major donor to the Conservative Party of Canada
Christopher McCreery (Government of Canada, 2010; Eye on the Hill, 2010; CMC, 2012b)	Member	April 2012	Involved in the renaming of the Canadian Navy as the Royal Canadian Navy  Member of the consultation committee that helped choose the current Governor General  Member of advisory committee responsible for overseeing War of 1812 celebrations
Claude Thibault (CMC, 2012c; Elections Canada, n.d.)	Member	June 2012	Worked in investment banking and corporate finance  Donated \$1,000 to the Conservative Party of Canada four months before he was appointed

On July 15, 2013, the CMC and the CWM released their first ever ten-year joint research strategy. (The articulation of a joint strategy between the CMC and the CWM may be telling in and of itself; though both are under the auspices of the CMC

Corporation.) Conscious of the backlash over the removal of the word “critical” from the museum’s mandate, a “working definition” of research is elaborated at the outset of the document:

The Museums consider research the systematic investigation – of sources, materials, methods, or theories – to create new knowledge and new understandings in areas of professional interest. This includes the history and cultural heritage of Canada, and the ways in which such subjects are maintained, interpreted, or shared by the Museums in their capacities as public institutions. (CMC, 2013b, p. 2)

Three themes are identified as central foci for the two museums over the next ten years: Meaning and Memory; First Peoples; and Compromise and Conflict. Without seeing how these themes play out, it’s difficult to evaluate what their impact will be on the understanding of Canadian history. But perhaps the content of this document is less relevant than the articulation of a single strategy for two formerly separate museum institutions with separate mandates.

### **Discipline at a distance**

The third strategy for the CMC rebranding is a partnerships strategy, which involves two specific objectives. One is to solicit funding from private corporate sponsors to augment funds from the government. The museum has already announced plans to raise \$5 million to “complement” the government’s funds as part of these efforts (PCM, 2013; CMC, 2014).<sup>8</sup> The other is to link up the CMC with other Canadian museums, then indemnify the CMC collection so that its cultural objects can be distributed among a vast network of other Canadian museums, ensuring that the ideological mandate governing the CMC/CMH transformation can be implemented through its circulation across the country (CMC, 2012b).

The federal Traveling Exhibitions Indemnification Program has existed since 2000. It allows for the financial protection of international and national cultural artifacts when they travel. In the 2012 federal budget, the government doubled funding for the program from \$1.5 billion to \$3 billion per year. While collections-sharing was certainly one of the more popular aspects of Moore’s proposed changes, it again makes strong recommendations for the kinds of themes and exchanges that will be supported, and privileges a nation-centric rather than a more outward-looking perspective. Spokespeople for the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) were especially effusive about the exchange of objects between the national museum and smaller institutions (PCM, 2013).

Despite CH pronouncements, there was nothing in the museum’s previous mandate that prevented updating or linkages with other museums. In fact, the museum already shared Memoranda of Agreement with over 200 other institutions (PCM, 2013). Moreover, a single allocation of \$25 million both to fund the renovations in the Canada Hall and to foster linkages with other institutions is inadequate. The museum will need to take on the burden of raising additional monies to support future linkages encouraged by CH, meaning further reliance on the private sector (PCM, 2013).

## Conclusions

If branding is at base an *image-making* strategy, it is at the same time a “*taking*” strategy. The production of a coherent, cohesive, and profitable image comes only by taking away the messy work that is inherent to deliberative democracy. It is only by decreasing the potential for and the value of critique that branding attains its desired effect. As we have sought to demonstrate, critical perspectives on the CMC/CMH transition were repeatedly denied, ignored, or subsumed by political actors into a prefabricated vision of what the transition—and by extension Canadian culture—ought to look like.

Despite the “arm’s length” relationship between the government and the CMC, the one-time offer of \$25 million by CH had strings attached. Museum staff inevitably maintain some independence, and preliminary plans for the Canadian History Hall do not completely avoid polemical topics in favour of celebratory nostalgia (CMC, 2013b; McGregor, 2013b). However, the autonomy enjoyed by staff in the past has been curtailed by shifts in the institution’s funding, mandate, and leadership. The effect experienced within the museum institution is difficult to measure, as staff have been re-assigned and laid off over the past two years.

It is through the Harper government’s subvention of the CMC that the traditions of military history and monarchical legacy are nationalized. The War of 1812 and other crown moments and military achievements signify an uplifting national mythos and attempt to establish the distinction and sovereignty of Canada from its neighbour to the south. Not surprisingly, the Harper government has harnessed the same trope of American imperialism to call for a renewed focus on big-H history itself by Canadian citizens—a move that appears even more indefensible in light of the government’s simultaneous emphasis on increasing U.S./Canada trade.

The CMH mandate follows more than a century’s worth of museological practices by which museums were vehicles for forwarding visions of national identity. However, the CMC/CMH rebrand departs from previous efforts in terms of its overt management by a single political party, its associated attempts to roll the history addressed in the museum into broader partisan communications plans, and strategic attempts to foster a feeling of inclusiveness among diverse Canadian publics while denying their actual participation. The strategies of engagement, authority, and expansion adopted by the government and museum officials sought explicitly to connect the Harper agenda with a “new and improved” version of national identity via the museum site, while conscientious engagement with stakeholders was de-emphasized—consider, for example, the cryptic way in which the museum has treated professional communities and Aboriginal consultation. This is problematic for those who see museums not just as political tools, but as “arenas for public engagement, contact zones for the meeting of diverse viewpoints, and places where authority can be shared” (Dean, 2013, p. 327).

While Minister Moore could not interfere directly in determining what the museum will and will not display, he did set the agenda for cultural production and steered the museum’s trajectory for the foreseeable future. In an economic climate in which cultural institutions are struggling (in part due to government cutbacks), major changes in the museum will have important implications long after Moore and Harper have left their positions. Conservative influence on the CMC’s leadership led decision-

makers to fix a beloved institution that was not broken, despite public outcry about the changes.

Moore did not need to introduce legislation transforming the museum's mandate in order to provide funding for badly needed updates or to encourage exchanges with other museums. Previous legislation did not preclude such updates or connections. Moreover, while Moore promoted relationships with other institutions, the \$25 million he supplied was a one-time offer; therefore, the museum will assume the added burden of raising funds from the private sector to continue his initiatives (and so that the Federal government will not have to provide additional costs incurred as a result of the changes it introduced).

Moore could have provided funds to the museum without directives on how new exhibits should be themed. Museum leaders could have been trusted to identify their own needs independently. Instead, Bill C-49 was a mechanism that allowed the Harper government to tie the museum in with broader communications plans and to make its mark on the CMC, the "crown jewel" in the nation's museum landscape. In the meantime, other aspects of the museum are in need of updating, and limited funding has meant that the institution has been forced to lay off workers (CBC News, 2013). Moreover, because the new exhibit's opening has been rolled into the country's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in 2017, expediency has been privileged over good museum practice.

While the museum elicited feedback online and through focus groups with the general public and academics across the country, exactly how these conversations will inform museum content is a mystery. The My History Museum campaign was designed as a way to mediate a polemical transition and to convince participants that the changes were their idea.

We follow Darin Barney (2007; 2010) in arguing that participation is a crucial part of democratic life; but that it should be seen as a means, not an object, of citizenship. The participatory dimensions of interactive websites and roundtable meetings exploited by the CMC/CMH strategy are poor substitutes for public engagement when they are essentially post-facto commentaries on previous decisions, rather than interventions into ideas in formation. These soft participation platforms maintain the illusion of citizen consultation and consensus, while hiding or downplaying consequential changes. Conversation documents, guides, and online surveys are excellent ways for cultural producers to gather vital ideas and information about their products pro bono; however, exhibit designers are not obliged to take all of the advice they receive into consideration.

Whether the public is convinced by the museum's feigned attempts at inclusion is questionable. Letters to the offices of the Prime Minister, Canadian Heritage, and museum leaders suggest constituents were wise to the fact that the changes had come from the Harper government's office as part of a partisan communications plan. It is probable that the museum will be engaged in defensive strategies to handle the fallout from Moore's changes for many years to come.

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## Legend

CAA	Canadian Archaeological Association
CASCA	Canadian Anthropology Society
CAUT	Canadian Association of University Teachers
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CH	(Ministry of) Canadian Heritage
CHA	Canadian Historical Association
CMA	Canadian Museums Association
CMC	Canadian Museum of Civilization
CMH	Canadian Museum of History
CWM	Canadian War Museum
GOC	Government of Canada
LAC	Library and Archives Canada
PCM	Parliamentary Committee Meeting
PCO	Privy Council Office (Canada)
PMO	Prime Minister's Office (Canada)

## Notes

1. An early version of this article appeared in the online blog *Antenna: Responses to Media and Culture*. A number of documents cited were obtained through Access to Information requests made to Canadian Heritage and the Canadian Museum of Civilization.
2. In 2009/10, the Prime Minister's Office insisted that the phrase "Harper government" replace "Government of Canada" in all federal communications (Cheadle, 2011). We deploy this phrase here to symbolize the Harper government's message control and ideological irredentism.
3. We might also note the recent tendency on Parliament Hill to feature only blue and orange lights (Conservative colours) on the trees during the holiday season, supplanting the traditional white, red and green. The comedian Rick Mercer has satirized this tendency on his TV show (see Mercer, 2011).
4. Yves Frenette (2014) notes that two thirds of the illustrations in the 2009 edition of *Discover Canada* feature war or the military, while the 2005 edition contained not even one such image.
5. Parks Canada experienced a \$29 million budget cut for the fiscal years 2012-2014, and LAC experienced a \$19 million cut for that same period (Frenette, 2014).
6. He remained until July 2013, when he was replaced by Minister Shelley Glover.
7. "Rethink," October 16, 2012, Letter to James Moore from undisclosed recipient, Kanata, Ontario.
8. In November 2013, the museum announced that it had received funding from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers for one million dollars over five years. Not surprisingly, the funding will go toward exhibits like "1867," which will "explore how the Dominion of Canada evolved from the colonies of British North America between 1840 and 1867" (CMC, 2014). The announcement was met with criticism, some pointing out the disjuncture between the museum's apparent concern with Indigenous issues and the legal battles by many Indigenous groups fighting oil production on their ancestral territories (Slaney, 2014).

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