MIGRATION IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF CANADA'S HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

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With much of Canada's historic growth fueled by multiple waves of migrants, the country is sometimes described as a nation of immigrants. A 2016 ACS-Leger survey reveals that nearly three in four Canadians acknowledge that they "have an ancestor that comes from another country." Some two in three Canadians agree that "with the exception of Canada's aboriginal peoples everyone that settled in Canada is an immigrant." With over 31 million non-Aboriginal Canadians in 2011, that would make for a very substantial number of immigrants (clearly not in line with the official census figure of just below 6.8 million immigrants). The one in five foreign-born Canadians is the second highest share in the world (behind Australia). In Toronto, our largest city, nearly half the population is foreign-born.

One would think in a country where migration has played so central a role that there would be satisfactory knowledge about its immigration history. Surveys repeatedly reveal that a majority of Canadians think it is important for Canadians to know the country's history. Officials have repeatedly stressed the importance of such knowledge and have supported multiple programs aimed at enhancing it. But it's what specifically we should know about Canada's past that continues to be the object of ongoing debate. Inevitably, educators need to make choices about the content of their history curriculum and decisions are by no means easy.

Amongst other Canadian historians, Jack Granatstein has expressed concern with educators prioritizing social over military and political history (J. L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* 1998). Social histories focus on such things as immigrant and community narratives that presumably risk weakening the shared national narrative and thereby soften individual attachment to Canada. A strong Canadian identity is purportedly

enhanced when there is an emphasis on the political and military aspects of our narrative as opposed to the social history some observers believe is omnipresent in the country's classrooms.

Canadians tend to give themselves reasonably positive assessments when asked about their knowledge of the country's history. As regards knowledge of the country's immigration history, one in two Canadians believe they possess a good knowledge. That said, only about one in ten believe they have a *strong* knowledge of the country's immigration history. It's worth noting that the country's francophone population acknowledges a considerably lower rate of knowledge of immigration history compared to the national average, while allophones' self-assessment exceeds the average.

Despite the generally positive self-assessments of immigration history knowledge, another survey reveals that Canadians report greater awareness of various subjects other than immigration: the First World War, the Great Depression, Confederation, the history of British, French and indigenous Canadians and the Conquest. It's fair to assume that knowledge about history is horizontal and not zero sum. That is to say that those knowledgeable about Canada's social history are also the most likely to be knowledgeable about its political history.

When Canadians are asked what they find most interesting about Canada's history, their top three responses are the daily lives of Canadians; immigration and the experiences of diverse communities within Canada; and military history. Political history ranks closer to the bottom of the list. (Source: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, March 2013).

It is worth noting that those Canadians saying they possess a strong knowledge of the country's immigration are the most likely to declare they're very

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE THAT ARE VERY ATTACHED TO CANADA, BY MOTHER TONGUE, ON THE OF SELF-ASSESSED KNOWLEDGE OF THE HISTORY OF IMMIGRATION TO CANADA, 2016

	I have a good knowledge of the history of immigration to Canada		
Very attached to Canada, by mother tongue	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree
Total	88.2%	70.0%	60.1%
French	63.6%	35.9%	28.8%
English	92.6%	80.8%	76.6%
Other	86.4%	65.3%	65.5%

SOURCE: LEGER MARKETING FOR THE ASSOCIATION FOR CANADIAN STUDIES, WEEK OF JANUARY 11TH, 2016

attached to Canada. As observed in Table 1 some 88% of Canadians who purport to have a strong knowledge of Canada's immigration history say they're very attached to Canada. On the basis of mother tongue, 93% of English Canadians reporting a strong knowledge of Canada's immigration history have a very strong attachment to Canada compared with 64% of francophones and 86% of the country's allophones. Hence, there is no empirical support for the idea that learning about the history of immigration undercuts attachment to Canada. Indeed, the opposite appears to be true. Amongst the country's ethnic minorities, it is those indicating the highest levels of knowledge of immigration history who also describe themselves as the most attached to Canada. That's not counterintuitive; many immigrants and their children likely value the idea that the migration experience is depicted in the national narrative and not excluded on the basis of a flawed view that doing so detracts from political history.

But the belief that one knows a lot about the history of immigration does not necessarily mean that they have a good handle on it. For example, more than seven in 10 Canadians subscribe to the view that throughout its history Canada has always welcomed immigrants. This incorrect view is held to a fairly similar degree regardless of the perceived degree of knowledge about immigration history on the part of Canadians. The table below provides an illustration of how self-assessed knowledge of immigration history informs this view.

IMMIGRATION POLICIES AND PERCEIVED KNOWLEDGE OF IMMIGRATION HISTORY

If self-assessed knowledge about the history of immigration doesn't imply a fully informed view about the settlement challenges encountered by

TABLE 2: EXTENT TO WHICH CANADIANS BELIEVE THAT "THROUGHOUT HISTORY, CANADA HAS ALWAYS WELCOMED IMMIGRANTS" BASED ON SELF-ASSESSED KNOWLEDGE OF THE HISTORY OF IMMIGRATION TO CANADA, 2016

	I have a good knowledge of the history of immigration to Canada			
Throughout history Canada has always welcomed immigrants	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
True	74.3%	72.2%	77.0%	66.4%
False	24.3%	24.4%	16.3%	17.4%
I don't know	1.5%	3.4%	6.7%	16.1%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

SOURCE: LEGER MARKETING FOR THE ASSOCIATION FOR CANADIAN STUDIES, WEEK OF JANUARY 11TH, 2016

newcomers, do those claiming greater knowledge at least have more genuine awareness when it comes to immigration policies? Table 3 reveals that Canadians are divided in their understanding of certain key facts underlying the country's immigration and citizenship policies: that Canada very carefully selects those admitted to the country; that knowledge of English or French is a requirement for immigration; that Canada's population growth is highly dependent on immigration; that an applicant for citizenship must have spent at least four years in the country. More Canadians appear to be able to distinguish what is accurate from what it is inaccurate when it comes to immigration and citizenship policies, but on certain issues a large plurality of Canadians simply don't know. On a question about the demographic importance of immigration, most Canadians seem to underestimate the country's dependence on newcomers for population growth.

TABLE 3: SELECTED STATEMENTS AROUND IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP POLICIES DEEMED TRUE OR FALSE BY CANADIANS, 2016

	True	False	Don't Know	Total
Canada carefully selects most of its immigrants	46%	32%	22%	100%
You have to speak and/or write English or French to get Canadian citizenship	44%	36%	20%	100%
Immigration will soon be Canada's only source of population growth	38%	44%	18%	100%
You can apply for citizenship within less than a year after immigrating to Canada	16%	38%	46%	100%

SOURCE: LEGER MARKETING FOR THE ASSOCIATION FOR CANADIAN STUDIES, WEEK OF JANUARY 11TH, 2016

Are those individuals who describe themselves as more knowledgeable about Canada's immigration history better able to respond correctly to key facets of the country's immigration and citizenship policies? The 2016 survey results reveal that on some matters, those affirming stronger knowledge are indeed better informed about policies. But on some issues, there is less certainty.

TABLE 4: SELECTED STATEMENTS AROUND IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP POLICIES DEEMED TRUE BY CANADIANS ON THE BASIS OF SELF-ASSESSED KNOWLEDGE OF THE HISTORY OF IMMIGRATION TO CANADA, 2016

	I have a good knowledge of the history of immigration to Canada		
Those describing the statements below as True	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree
Canada carefully selects most of its immigrants	54%	50%	41%
You have to speak and/or write English or French to get Canadian citizenship	59%	46%	38%
Immigration will soon be Canada's only source of population growth	51%	43%	32%
You can apply for citizenship within less than a year after immigrating to Canada	24%	17%	13%

SOURCE: LEGER MARKETING FOR THE ASSOCIATION FOR CANADIAN STUDIES, WEEK OF JANUARY 11TH, 2016

CONCLUSION

In a country where one in five Canadians are foreign-born and migration has and continues to be vital to its economic, social and cultural development, a basic knowledge about the history of immigration is an essential part of the national narrative. An informed view of the history of immigration does not seem apparent judging by the survey data presented above. And yet with nothing more than anecdotes, some historians want us to believe that there is already far too much of such history and that it serves to obstruct the promotion of a "unified" historic narrative that strengthens national identity. The contrary appears far more likely. A good knowledge of immigration history — with its failings and successes — will serve to make a large share of the population feel a greater sense of inclusion in an ever evolving national story and ultimately a stronger sense of attachment to the country.