INTRODUCTION

THE VEXING QUESTION OF WHO FOUNDED CANADA

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We know that the 1867 Confederation deal gave impetus to the idea that the country had two founding nations—the French-Canadian and English-Canadian inhabitants of the original four provinces. More than a century later, by the time of the 1982 patriation of the Constitution and adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canada—long since transformed into a vast land bounded by the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic oceans—was being styled a nation of three founding peoples: French, English and Aboriginal. More recently, along the same lines, there has been a push to formally redefine modern Canada as the legacy of three founding nations, strengthening the position of Indigenous peoples within what philosopher John Ralston Saul has described as the "triangular reality" of Canada's genesis and evolution.

The terms employed in conceptualizing Canada's origins are contentious, and we shouldn't be surprised. They are, in a sense, sweeping generalizations about when Canada was founded, who did the founding and what, even, is meant by "Canada" or "nation". How are "nations" different than "peoples"? Can a nation be comprised of multiple sub-nations? Where do the "founding" provinces fit in? What, indeed, does "founding" actually mean? There are more questions: Can provincial boundaries delineate "peoples" or "nations"? How do language, ethnicity, religion, culture and citizenship intersect with the questions above? How do official bilingualism and multiculturalism relate to such problems? Where do the Irish-Canadian, Chinese-Canadian, Jewish-Canadian, Muslim-Canadian communities and myriad other "hyphenated" groupings fit into the "founding" framework?

Our intention in curating essays for the present edition of *Canadian Issues/Thèmes Canadiens* was to have insightful contributors confront some of these

questions and offer a wide range of perspectives on the "founding nations" of Canada. We are grateful that they have done just that, supplying an array of fresh ideas—let's call them "founding notions"—on a subject that is at least as old as Confederation and, like Canada itself, enduringly vexing.

Jack Jedwab, executive vice-president of the Association for Canadian Studies, sets the frame for discussion with the results of a nationwide survey that shows there is no clear consensus among Canadians about whether the country is best imagined as a "bicultural compact" between French and English, a tripartite entity that includes indigenous peoples as a founding force, or a political pact between four founding provinces. At the same time, Canadians are most likely to characterize the "predominant vision of the federation" as a "multicultural country with two official languages."

Among the country's founding peoples, insists McGill University professor Charmaine A. Nelson, were black Canadians—both enslaved and free—whose contributions to the settlement and development of the nation have been, and will continue to be, overlooked unless "another paradigm" displaces the traditional model of thinking about how Canada came to be.

University of Calgary law professor Kathleen Mahoney, a major architect of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, argues that the "living lie" that Canada was the product of "two founding peoples, the British and the French," must be directly challenged and formally corrected—"through an Act of Parliament, a Proclamation, or a Parliamentary motion," ideally during the Canada 150 celebrations in 2017—to recognize First Peoples as pivotal partners in nation-building. "The indigenous population provided land for settlers," she states, "entered into trade agreements and peace and friendship treaties with them, and fought alongside them in colonial wars."

Dr. Avigail Eisenberg, University of Victoria political scientist and expert in indigenous governance, calls attention to the risk of even looking for founding peoples or moments in Canada's past when the country's present challenges—including ongoing struggles over Quebec's future, multiculturalism and Indigenous rights—become even more complicated in the context of that search. "It makes better sense," she argues, "to resist a politics that treats the question of who is a founding people as settled or celebrates an episode in the past as a founding moment."

Legal scholar Sébastien Grammond examines the issue through the lens of Supreme Court rulings and highlights the creative ambiguities present in certain high court decisions that prove "compatible with a vision in which a person can belong to many peoples simultaneously"—including language-based, provincially framed, and coast-to-coast national conceptions of identity.

Philosophy professor Jocelyn Maclure argues that any search for "an unequivocal definition of the country" will prove fruitless in a Canada where "multiple identities abound." Expressing the view that "it is possible to achieve a balance between federalism, multinationalism and multiculturalism," he posits that Canada is simultaneously based on a founding pact between pre-existing governments but also on conceptions of nationhood that can encompass both "Canadian" as a whole and a "min-

ority national identity"—such as that embraced by most Québécois, or one rooted in belonging to one of the hundreds of Aboriginal nations across Canada.

To Tom Flanagan, the University of Calgary political scientist and historian, it is "pointless to debate whether a group of people does or does not constitute a nation" because such assertions of identity are ultimately bound up in the quest to secure and exercise power. Whether English-Canadian, Québécois, pan-Canadian or Aboriginal, talk of nations, he says, is best understood as a series of "rhetorical constructs" that distract and divide.

But Jean Teillet, an aboriginal rights lawyer and the grand-neice of 19th-century Métis leader Louis Riel, argues that acknowledgement of the Métis people as a founding nation of Canada—"the only Aboriginal nation that actively and positively participated in the negotiated founding of this country," she states—would underscore the fact that "we are the product today of Aboriginal exclusion," while encouraging Canadians "to tell new and better stories about Canada that include Aboriginal peoples."