

A Vision Beyond Reach: A Century of Images of Canadian Destiny. JOSEPH LEVITT. Ottawa: Deneau Publishers, 1982. iv, 237 p. ISBN 0 88879 047 3 \$14.95 pa.

Joseph Levitt's study of the development of ideas of Canadian nationhood is particularly timely as both Quebec nationalism and Western separatism pose challenges to the viability of Canada. Professor Levitt's book is also timely because it shows the general reader that debate between Canadians about internal politics, Canadian-American relations, and Canada's role in international affairs is not a recent aberration, but has been part of Canadian life for the past century. And, perhaps more important, the book demonstrates that out of diverse images of Canada a distinct Canadian nation has emerged.

Through the writings of various men of letters — academics, public servants, journalists, and freelance writers — Levitt traces the development of various images of Canadian destiny from the 1880s to the present. As he points out in his Introduction, he does not intend to explain or defend the ideas of any of these writers, but rather calls upon them as “witnesses of the past” so that we might better understand contemporary images of Canadian nationhood. Levitt begins with an examination of the writings of journalists John Willison, John Dafoe, and John Hopkins. All three advocated the maintenance of strong imperial ties with Britain, yet realized that Canadians must, at the same time, have control over their own affairs. During the 1880s and 1890s, none of these writers expressed concern about the threat posed to Canadian culture or the economy from the United States, but assumed that British institutions and traditions in Canada were sufficient to justify and maintain her existence as a separate nation.

Despite the clash between Quebec and the rest of Canada during the conscription crisis of the First World War — a clash, it is argued, that was based on different views of nationhood — Canada's development in the early twentieth century was not impeded by domestic unrest. The interwar years saw the first visible effects of the “American way of life” on Canada and the development of a defensive nationalism which sought to demonstrate that Canada was indeed different from the United States. While historian George Wrong and journalist John Dafoe responded to this intrusion of American culture by emphasizing a Canadian identity based on British heritage and history, others, like historians Arthur Lower and Frank Underhill, set out to discover the distinct Canadian identity which made Canadians different from both the Americans and the British.

Canada's involvement in the Second World War did much to strengthen growing consciousness of Canadian nationhood. In the years that followed the war, Canada's status as an autonomous member of the international community was firmly established. During the postwar years, all aspects of Canadian life also became increasingly Americanized. Historians such as Donald Creighton and W.L. Morton sounded a warning that Canada was becoming, if it had not already become, a satellite of the United States. The Canadian national identity, they argued, was being destroyed by American dominance of the Canadian-American alliance in the Cold War, high levels of American investment in Canada, and exports of Canadian resources to the United States.

Levitt notes that not one of the dozen writers whose work he examines ever bothered to define what he meant by a nation. Each one assumed their readers knew

what a nation was. But, as Levitt points out, at least five types of nationalism are found in their writings: political, economic, linguistic, cultural, and geographic. These various forms of nationalism, Levitt maintains, are indicative of the complexity of Canadian nationalism.

Professor Levitt does not seek to judge the merits of the beliefs of the writers he examines, but lets them speak through their published works. Although the ideas of these men are well represented in the book, Levitt's failure to make extensive use of archival sources is a major flaw in his research. Canadian archives have collections under the names of nine of the twelve writers he examines, and for four of the nine the extent of the archival collection ranges from twenty-one to fifty-five linear feet. Therefore, a considerable portion of their writings has not, whether intentionally or accidentally, even been studied. This is unfortunate because anyone who is familiar with archival holdings is aware that it is within an individual's personal correspondence and private papers that a researcher often finds the frank opinions and unguarded statements which are frequently carefully purged from published works.

Perhaps because of the limited use of archival holdings, Levitt's study offers little about Canadian nationalism that is not already available in Carl Berger's *The Writing of Canadian History* (1976) or Ramsay Cook's *The Maple Leaf Forever* (1971). *A Vision Beyond Reach* provides yet another survey of the men and ideas which have contributed to the development of Canada as a nation. What was needed — and remains to be done — is a thorough study of Canadian nationalism using the extensive collections in Canadian archives.

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