The Flag of Our Fathers? The Manitoba Provincial Flag and British Cultural Hegemony in Manitoba, 1870–1966

David W. Grebstad

Introduction

In February 2015, Canada celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Canadian flag. Since its inception, the prevailing narrative of the advent of the modern Canadian flag describes the event as an important, iconic stage of nationalist evolution from British colony to independent nation. At the moment of its genesis, however, this was not a universal sentiment; the detractors of the new Canadian flag were legion. The debate surrounding the adoption of the flag was acrimonious and fierce, and in the end only the defection of the Québec caucus of the Progressive Conservative Party to support the governing Liberal Party's new flag design ensured that it was adopted at all. The story of the national flag debate, as the episode came to be known, is well-trodden ground; less well known is the reaction in several provinces to the lack of British symbolism in the new national flag. Shortly after the modern Canadian flag was hoisted for the first time on Parliament Hill, the provinces of Ontario and Manitoba adopted provincial flags that retained British symbolism in the form of a modified Red Ensign; a design which had been used in both official and unofficial capacities as the national flag of Canada for several decades. This paper will focus on a little known chapter in Canadian history—the adoption of the provincial flag of Manitoba as a protest against the new Canadian flag.

In the year and a half following the adoption of the modern Canadian flag, the people of Manitoba engaged in their own short but turbulent debate about the creation of a unique provincial flag. On 12 May 1966, in a ceremony ensconced in imperial symbolism that emphasized the British presence in Manitoba during the preceding 300 years, the newly-minted flag of

Manitoba was raised for the first time at the Manitoba Legislative grounds in front of a crowd of 2,500 onlookers; a half-hour later the ritual was repeated at hundreds of schools around the province.[1] While the timeframe leading to the introduction of the provincial flag was short, the story of the symbolism behind the flag of Manitoba is far older and far more meaningful that this condensed timeline suggests.
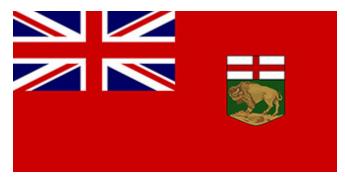
Figure 1. The flag of the province of Manitoba. Source: James Leigh and Echando una mano (user name), commons.wikipedia.org.

More than just fabric in the wind, flags serve as historical way-markers of cultural evolution. Many would be surprised to learn that the inoffensive, some may even say dull and uninspired, provincial flag of Manitoba is actually a banner symbolizing ninety-six years of the establishment and preservation of British cultural hegemony in Manitoba, and the result of an oppositional reaction to the evolving discourse of a bilingual and bicultural Canadian nationalism.[2] Over the course of those ninety-six years, Manitobans of British extraction established their cultural hegemony in the province, and when their hegemonic position atop the cultural hierarchy of Manitoba was threatened, they took steps to reinforce their status. The most overt symbolic manifestation of this reaction is apparent in the use of flags reflecting British heritage throughout Manitoba's history. The culminating point in the trajectory of this cultural hegemony was the adoption of a provincial standard that represented the pre-eminent role of British culture in Manitoba in response to an emergent national discourse embracing a cultural partnership between French and English Canada.

Cultural Hegemony—What Is It?

As an analytical tool, the concept of cultural hegemony is of great value in understanding the cultural history of Manitoba. Unfortunately, the model

of cultural hegemony is incredibly difficult to articulate, due in no small part to the fact that the progenitor of the concept, Italian Antonio Gramsci, never strictly defined what it was he meant when he coined the term.[3] Writing in the *American Historical Review*, T. J. Jackson Lears claimed the closest Gramsci came to defining his concept was to refer to it as the "spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group."[4] For the purposes of this paper, therefore, this will serve as the definition of cultural hegemony, although there remain two critical elements that must be illustrated, namely the concept of *domination* and that of *historical blocks.*

Figure 2. Antonio Gramsci in the early 1920s. Source: unknown author, commons. wikipedia.org.

As the hegemon, the dominant social class exerts domination, either explicitly or implicitly, over a subordinate class or classes.[5] Although the term "domination" may connote implications of force, in reality it is achieved through a wide spectrum of means, and should not be considered solely in the light of physical force. Economic, social and cultural means can be employed, either actively or latently, consciously or unconsciously, by the dominant social group to maintain their hegemonic status. Moreover, one should not impulsively assign a degree of malfeasance to the application of dominance. In many cases, the dominant social group's efforts to maintain their hegemony may be motivated by their belief that the pursuit of their interests is in the main beneficial to

society writ large, and in many ways their position as hegemon is reinforced by the collusion of subordinate groups.

Dominance is exercised by actors who form into social and cultural groups. To describe these social groupings, Gramsci employed the concept of an *historical block* defined as "social formations . . . that are bound by religious or other ideological ties as well as those of economic interest."[6] In any pluralistic society these historical blocks interact with each other, and in that interaction one may emerge as the hegemon, that is, the *dominant* cultural group.[7] The hegemon is determined by its ability to develop a world view that appeals to the other historical groups and, more importantly, convinces them that the interests of the aspiring historical block are beneficial and coincident with the interests of the whole society.[8] In many cases, other historical blocks that disagree with the hegemon, or aspire to be a hegemon themselves, will exhibit counter-hegemonic behaviour and attempt to replace the hegemon.[9]

Between 1870 and 1965 the British historical block in Manitoba established and maintained a cultural hegemony within the jurisdiction of the province. The make-up of this historical block was unique; although it can be described in broad terms as British, this should not be construed to imply its members were not Canadian nationalists—quite the contrary. For ease of reference this paper will refer to this historical block simply as "British" but it is more accurate to describe it as Anglo-Gaelic, Protestant, and Canadian. A key theme of this paper is that this British *ethnie*, if the term can be used, were traditionalists and nationalists who saw no conflict identifying with the wider British cultural sphere while at the same time expressing pride bordering on hubris at their Canadianism. The sentiment was perhaps best encapsulated by Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, during the tumultuous 1891 federal general election. As a driving force in the creation of Canada, and as its first Prime Minister, Sir John is an icon of Canadian nationalism. Despite this fact, twenty-four years after Confederation Macdonald announced to a crowd that "A British subject I was born, a British subject I will die."[10] This ideology, a British-Canadian hybrid or amalgam, remained consistent throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Canada, although the degree to which its members identified as British and Canadian waxed and waned over the years.[11]

It was this historical block that achieved cultural and political hegemony in Canada at the time of Confederation, exported that hegemony to Manitoba, and directed the political and economic destiny of Canada until the 1960s and the advent of what C. P. Champion has called the "Crisis of Britishness" in

Canada. In her article "Defining 'Canadian': Anti-Americanism and Identity in Sir John A. Macdonald's Nationalism" Patricia K. Wood observed:

> The [British-Canadian] ideology [was not] revolutionary; its continued support stood as testimony to the political and social power of British Canadians and their ability to recreate and entrench their power . . . the political arena became a forum in which to perpetuate ideologies of race, gender and class that sanctified the social status of British-Canadian elite and attached their destiny to the course of the nation.[12]

There are, unfortunately, detractors who are reluctant or unable to understand how flags are clues to the cultural hegemon. Such myopia fails to grasp how intimately a flag serves as a window to cultural mores and foundations. Michael Walzer succinctly illustrated the cultural importance of a flag in *Political Science Quarterly* when he wrote that "the state is invisible; it must be personified before it can be seen, symbolized before it can be loved."[13] Expanding on this notion, Alistair B. Fraser, in "A Canadian Flag for Canada," noted that "a nation is conceived through its symbols, the most important of which, for a modern nation, is its flag."[14] A flag is the physical manifestation of the intangible cultural bedrock of a society; its design a reflection of the hegemon.

The cultural history of Manitoba between 1870 and 1965 is one in which the British historical block emerged as hegemon, struggled to maintain hegemonic status amongst the emergence of competing minority world views within the province, and the development of a multi-cultural historical block in Canadian national society. While some may be tempted to disregard the relevance of flags as clues to cultural *zeitgeist*, they were, and remain, overt manifestations of cultural hegemony and indispensable indicators of the underlying cultural hegemonic actions in Manitoba's history.

John Schultz's Flag—The Emergent British Historical Block

> *After 1870, the political strength of the Métis began to wane . . . The order by which they wanted to live was disintegrating to be replaced by the way of life of a new society founded in agriculture and industry.*
>
> Jean Lesage, "The Métis of Manitoba"

In 1870, the Red River Settlement was a culturally plural society in which people of a variety of historical blocks lived in close proximity. These groups

included French and English Métis (children of First Nations–European unions), First Nations, descendants of the early Selkirk Settlers, Hudson Bay Company officials, and a number of predominantly British immigrants from Eastern Canada. While the Hudson's Bay Company filled the role of the *de jure* political authority in the region, at least as the imperial and colonial governments understood it, Alexander Begg reported that the people of the settlement had a strong voice in the management of their own affairs.[15] The *de facto* dominant historical block was the Métis. While numbers alone do not define the cultural hegemon, the Métis comprised eighty percent of the 12,228 souls that inhabited the Red River Settlement in 1870, their overwhelming numbers and their involvement in the fur and buffalo trades ensuring they provided general direction to the social life of the settlement. The Métis were not strictly culturally homogenous; but divided between French (5,757) and English (4,083) elements.[16] The two subcultures were divided along economic lines as well; some, predominantly English Métis, pursued a peasant agricultural subsistence lifestyle, whilst others, predominantly French Métis, formed a proto-industrial faction based on the proceeds of the buffalo hunt.[17] Nonetheless, there was sufficient cultural and ideological common ground to allow them to act in near unity, at least initially, during the Red River Resistance of 1869–1870.

In the decades preceding the Resistance, as the number of settlers from Canada increased, an emergent historical block, the British, began to vie for the role of cultural hegemon in the settlement. The defining cultural characteristics of the British historical block were its Anglo-Gaelic heritage and its Protestant religion. The British were linked by the ideological bonds of the British Empire, in particular Orangeism, and their economic interests focussed on securing and exploiting the natural resources of the Northwest for the good of the British Empire and the growth of the Dominion of Canada.[18]

The Métis feared, not without reason, that the annexation of Rupert's Land threatened their own cultural hegemony and economic position, and responded accordingly.[19] The story of the Red River Resistance has been told elsewhere, but the key theme is that it was an organized resistance by predominantly French Métis led by Louis Riel against a threat posed to Métis cultural hegemony by an emergent British cultural hegemon. The tendency of groups to resort to force is a natural reaction identified by Gramsci when formulating his theory of cultural hegemony.[20] It must be said, however, that as Riel's actions became more and more violent and disruptive, including the imprisonment of opponents, the seizing of Hudson's Bay Company stores and the execution of Thomas Scott, many French Métis ceased to support him.[21]

A large portion of the British historical block was decidedly and vociferously supportive of the annexation of the Red River Settlement by Canada. This faction, known as the pro-Canada party, had amongst its ranks a number of persons who have since become well-known characters in Manitoba history. Perhaps one of the most outspoken and antagonistic of them was John Schultz. Schultz openly resisted the establishment of the Provisional Government and the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia, both products of the resistance, and actively agitated against Louis Riel. He and his compatriots in the pro-Canada party saw Rupert's Land as a British birthright and Riel's resistance to the annexation as treasonous.[22] Consequently, they considered the resistance of the Métis to Canadian annexation as a challenge to the ascendant and predetermined structural supremacy of British culture in the territory. Alexander Begg remarked that the members of the pro-Canada party had "declared that the half-breeds of Red River would have to give way before Canadians, and that the country would never succeed until they were displaced altogether."[23]

Figure 3. Louis Riel and members of the Provisional Government of Assiniboia. Source: Manitoba Historical Society.

Begg then observed that:

We have reference to the hoisting of a British ensign, with the word "Canada" inserted on the face of it in large white letters. Now the fact of a British flag being hoisted would never have troubled the people of the country; for it was their acknowledged flag, and the sight of it waving in their midst, no matter at whose door, would have been looked upon with pride instead of suspicion. *But a British flag was made use of to represent the feelings and sentiments of a few men*; and we are not very sure whether Britain allows her flag to be tampered with in this or any other way. We are of the opinion that it is a flagrant breach of what is right, when anyone dares to alter or add the emblem which every true subject of the Queen looks upon with pride.[24]

Figure 4. The Union Flag defaced by the word "CANADA." Source: David Grebstad.

Figure 5. The Red Ensign defaced by the word "CANADA." Source: David Grebstad.

Schultz's choice to fly a British flag defaced with a reference to Canada was an early example of an emergent Canadian nationalism that existed *within* the context of an overarching British culture. The impetus to both create and raise the flag originated with the pro-Canada party's perception of a threat to the establishment of British cultural hegemony in the Red River Settlement, embodied as it was by the military resistance organized by Louis Riel. Moreover, Begg's assertion of an acceptance of the British flag by the majority of the settlement, including the Métis, indicates many of the residents identified themselves as British subjects directly subservient to the crown: a Métis nation within the pantheon of sub-Imperial cultures.

It did not take long for someone to tear down Schultz's flag. As Begg observed, Schultz's act was an overtly antagonistic act designed to insult the Métis and those who did not openly embrace annexation by Canada. Those of the opposite opinion played tit-for-tat: Bishop Antonine Tache recalled in his deposition to the government about the Red River Resistance that "Mr. Riel considered that if one man in the country had a right to raise a flag of his own, the same right extended to other men. The flag used by the Provisional Government was the French flag with the 'Fleur de lis,' to which was afterwards added the shamrock."[25] Riel et al. employed their flag to overtly demonstrate their cultural hegemony.

The back and forth between pro-Canada and Métis elements, and their use of culturally representative flags, was not the last event of its kind. Even if the majority of settlers, the Métis included, considered themselves subjects of the British crown, as Begg suggests, and were thus not offended by the British flag, the Métis were nonetheless not considered loyal British subjects by the pro-Canada party or the military column sent to Fort Garry. When Colonel Wolseley's expedition arrived at Fort Garry—ostensibly as a "peace keeping" force but in reality a military force sent to impose British authority on the settlement—it is telling that one of Wolseley's first acts was to raise the Union Jack above the fort proper, described by an officer who participated in the expedition:

> The troops then marched in by this [southern] gateway, and took posses-
> sion of Fort Garry after a bloodless victory. The Union Jack was hoisted,
> a royal salute fired, and three cheers given for the Queen, which were
> caught up and heartily re-echoed by a few of the inhabitants who had
> followed the troops from the village.[26]

There was no particular *need* to raise the Union Jack. The expedition met no resistance upon its arrival, the leadership of the resistance had fled and the *Manitoba Act* had been endorsed by the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia— although the latter point was unknown to Wolseley at the time. The only reason for raising the Union Jack so soon upon the arrival of the force was as an overt demonstration of British authority in the settlement. This moment is arguably the beginning of British cultural hegemony in Manitoba, although consolidating that hegemony took a number of years. As if foreshadowing the cultural upheaval that was to come, one soldier of the Wolseley Expedition even brought with him the first warrant for the establishment of an Orange Lodge in Fort Garry in his knapsack.[27]

The British Hegemon Emerges

The *Manitoba Act* of 1870 created the Province of Manitoba, established English and French as the official languages of the provincial government, and guaranteed religious and linguistic education to both cultural groups. In its first few years, the province maintained a system of equal representation between the English and French parishes of the small province that accomplished a degree of pluralistic cultural integration, at least between French and British cultural groups where there was, as yet, no dominant historical block.[28] This all changed as the numbers of immigrants of British stock vastly outnumbered the number of French Canadian émigrés who arrived in Mani-

toba in the 1870s despite attempts such as the establishment of a Colonization Aid Society for the purpose of promoting French-Canadian immigration to Manitoba.[29] The establishment of the British cultural group as the dominant block, and the subsequent subjugation and even outright oppression of non-British inhabitants, became one cause, along with the economic draw of the westward-displaced buffalo herds, of the Métis's westward exodus into what is now Saskatchewan.[30] The fact that both the established Anglo-protestant inhabitants and the English Métis of Fort Garry suffered no such oppression at the hands of the swelling British population illustrates that their cultural common ground allowed them to integrate and even assimilate with the dominant British cultural group.[31] This is reinforced by the fact that between 1870 and 1886 the population of French Métis in Manitoba decreased by 24 percent, while the population of English Métis only dropped by twelve percent.[32] The Métis's westward exodus augmented the demographic ascendancy of British stock in the new province by increasing the relative numerical supremacy of British inhabitants, and thus accelerated the ascendancy of British cultural supremacy.[33] By the mid-1880s two-thirds of the province's inhabitants were culturally Anglo-Gaelic and Protestant.[34]

The structural duality of French and English predominance in early Manitoba was short-lived, and the British hegemon quickly dismantled the political and legal structures that had maintained a balance between English and French cultural groups. Separate schooling was ended, although an allowance for after-school religious instruction was maintained. Additionally, the use of French in official government correspondence was curtailed and eventually stopped entirely in 1917. In the legislature, equal representation between French and English inhabitants based on the original parishes was replaced by proportional representation which, due to their overwhelming numbers, cemented the British as cultural hegemon in the province.[35] In time, the schoolyard emerged as a battleground where British cultural hegemony was to be psychologically established in the youth of the province.

Schoolyard or Cultural Battleground? Immigration, Education, and the Roblin Flag Policy of 1906

> *The aim of public schools in English Canada was to create a homogenous nation based on a common English language, a common culture, identification with the British Empire, and an acceptance of British institutions and practices.*

Rose Bruno-Jofre, "Citizenship and Schooling in Manitoba"

Even the surging population of Southern Ontario could not provide a sufficient number of immigrants to exploit the vast amount of available farmland in Western Canada. Consequently, the Canadian government pursued an immigration policy that aimed to bring non-traditional, i.e., non-British and non-French, immigrants to Canada's west.[36] As a result, a number of "enclaves" of immigrant populations were created in Manitoba and throughout Western Canada in which pockets of immigrants established agriculturally-based colonies.[37] The ethnic oppression that was prevalent in the initial years after the Riel resistance subsided to the point that at least some degree of multicultural integration was practiced that was characterized by an acceptance between cultural groups to live as culturally different people. For accommodation of this type to work, however, non-dominant cultural groups are required to adopt the basic values of the hegemon. Concordantly, some allowances in areas such as education, health, and labour must be made for the non-dominant groups by the cultural hegemon.[38] To this end, the non-traditional immigrants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were allowed to maintain their own schools and religious practices within their communes. As the number of immigrants increased, along with it the number of enclaves of non-integrated cultural groups, the British hegemon felt compelled to re-establish the overarching values of the dominant cultural group. This became manifest in 1906 under a unique regulation instituted by the premier, Rodmond Roblin, which was enacted in order to accommodate cultural distinctiveness, but framed within a structure in which British culture was considered predominant.

In September of 1906, the government of Rodmond Roblin instituted a new policy that required all schools in Manitoba to fly the British flag during every school hour. The penalty for non-compliance was the forfeiture of every dollar of government subsidy. Roblin cited the importance of patriotism, in particular considering the number of recent non-British immigrants to Manitoba, as the motivating factor behind the policy.[39] His statements indicate the mindset of early-twentieth-century Manitoba wherein British culture was seen as an overarching and unifying force. For example, during a campaign stop in Dufferin he explained to a crowd that his flag policy "cannot fail to inculcate feelings of patriotism and materially assist in bringing together the various nationalities in the province into one common citizenship irrespective of race or creed."[40] Later, Roblin said in the legislature:

> I would point out that the endeavour we make to create a sentiment of reverence for the flag is not especially for the purpose of reaching the children of British-born parents. While we welcome all, our duty to the British subjects is to see that the children are taught the principles of

the British constitution. No man worthy of the name of Manitoban can say we are not doing right and anyone who takes any other stand cannot be true to the obligations he holds to his King and country . . . we are here to teach to the youth of the country the loyalty due to the flag, that they may spring to its defence and maintain it in the front rank of everything that stands for justice and liberty. What we need is to get the youth filled with the traditions of the British flag and then when they are men, charged with the privileges of citizenship, they will be able to defend it when threatened and enjoy the blessings that it guarantees to those who live under its folds.[41]

Figure 6. The Union Flag flying over a school near Brandon, Manitoba, in the 1900–1910 period. Source: Library and Archives Canada.

While Roblin did enjoy broad support for his flag policy from a patriotic perspective, it was not wholly popular when considered in the context of the schools' ledger books. The school boards, even those that were predominantly British, were concerned with the costs associated with erecting flag poles and maintaining the flag since Roblin's policy did not include an allocation of funds to pay for this requirement.[42] Other school boards, such as those on Mennonite colonies, were particularly concerned as they felt that the flag policy infringed on their religious freedoms. A scandal arose when the *Manitoba Free Press* carried a story quoting a German-language Mennonite periodical that stated that Premier Roblin himself had assured the Mennonite ministers that their schools were not required to follow the flag policy in order to avoid offending

their religious freedoms.[43] When queried by the Minister of Education why they were not flying the British flag, the Mennonite ministers referred to the assurance given to them by the premier. In response the Minister of Education asserted that "neither the Premier nor any member of the Government has the right or the power to set aside the Acts of the Legislature" and the Mennonite schools were compelled to fly the British flag.[44]

Despite the fiduciary and religious concerns caused by the Roblin flag policy, his conservative government was returned to power in the 1908 provincial election with a majority, albeit reduced in number. This short but telling episode in Manitoba history demonstrates how the British flag was employed as a symbol of the British cultural group's dominance in the pluralistic society of early-twentieth-century Manitoba. It is particularly important to note that this was a *reaction* to a changing demographic in Manitoba in which increased non-British immigration produced ethnic enclaves. As Roblin's statements indicate, his government felt it necessary to use the symbolism of the British flag as a tool to inculcate Britishness, and all its rights and obligations, into the youth of the province. The mutual accommodation of diverse cultures under the panoply of British culture soon came to an end, however. Accommodation turned to assimilation in 1916 when the Manitoba legislature repealed the *Public Schools Act* and replaced it with the *School Attendance Act.* The new act made school attendance compulsory and compelled instruction in English only.[45] This sentiment was not limited to Manitoba alone; in 1916 J. O. Miller, the principal of Ridley College in St. Catharine's, Ontario, wrote in *University Magazine* that immigrants who "had no aptitude for assimilation with Anglo-Saxon stock" should be turned away.[46]

Post-War Canadian Nationalism

To say that the Great War of 1914–1918 made an impact on Canadian cultural evolution is a gross understatement. Over 1,000,000 Canadians served in that titanic conflict, 60,000 of whom never returned. The role played by the Canadian military in the war contributed mightily to the development of a more unique Canadian nationalism. After the armistice, the concept of a unique Canadian nationalism that was distinct from British grew exponentially; however, it would be incorrect to dismiss the British component completely. The new "unique" Canadian nationalism was firmly English-speaking and British.[47]

John W. Berry writes in "Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation" that when a cultural group chooses to assimilate it creates a *melting pot.* When it is forced to do so, it creates a *pressure cooker*.[48] The accommodation and assimilation

of French and other cultures that was prevalent in early Manitoba was a small representation of a broader French cultural *pressure cooker* that simmered at the national level for decades. Fifty years after the *School Attendance Act*, an even more divisive debate arose that had both national and provincial implications.

Bilingualism, Biculturalism, and the National Counter-Hegemonic Movement

The 1960s were a decade of important cultural and sociological change around the world; the British historical block remained supreme throughout the first half of the twentieth century but cracks in that hegemony began to form at the close of the Second World War. In the wake of that epic conflict, Canada redefined itself in the new world order. Québec's Quiet Revolution was a catalytic movement towards a national counter-hegemonic cultural movement by a Canadian nationalist historical block whose world view incorporated post-colonial nationalism within an ideological framework of multiculturalism. In 1963 the Liberal government of Lester B. Pearson created the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission with a mandate to "inquire into and report upon the existing state of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada and to recommend what steps should be taken to develop the Canadian Confederation on the basis of an equal partnership between the two founding races."[49] The concept of "equal partnership" was the embodiment of what many in Canada, and Manitoba, saw as a threat to British cultural hegemony. After all, Manitoba had been established on the basis of an equal partnership between French and English which had been systematically dismantled by the British hegemon. For those Manitobans leery of abdicating British cultural dominance, the most overt threat to that dominance came in the form of a new Canadian flag.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to survey the entire history of the Canadian flag debate, but it is important to understand the general theme of the discourse in order to put the emergence of the Manitoba provincial flag in context. Lester Pearson and the Liberal Party came to power in 1963 with a minority government. During the preceding election campaign, Pearson floated the idea of developing a unique Canadian flag to replace the British Union Flag as the national flag of Canada. In February of 1964, Person's concept of the flag—a sprig of three maple leaves in the middle with blue bars on either side—was leaked to the press. The reaction to the "Pearson Pennant," as it was dubbed, and to the thought of removing British symbols from the national flag in general, was swift and acrimonious. The opposition party, the Progressive Conservatives, believed that a distinctive Canadian flag already existed in the form of the Canadian Red Ensign which incorporated the coat

of arms of Canada in the fly of the familiar British Red Ensign. In the House of Commons, the leader of the Progressive Conservatives, John Diefenbaker, led a concerted effort to halt the introduction of the new Canadian flag which included a filibuster aimed at pre-empting the vote. Around the country the debate raged in the newspapers and coffee shops. One social group in particular, the Royal Canadian Legion, became extremely vocal in its support of the retention of the Red Ensign. Teaming with veterans of two relatively recent world wars during which the Canadian Red Ensign played a prominent symbolic role, the Legion was the most vociferous opponent of Pearson's Canadian flag program. Indicative of its disdain for the concept of a new national flag, at the Royal Canadian Legion convention held in Winnipeg in May of 1964, Pearson received a most decidedly cool reception from the assembled vets.

Debate raged, and eventually the current design of the Canadian flag became the Pearson government's proffered distinctive national standard. The filibuster in the House of Commons endured for some time and was only curtailed by the defection of the Québec caucus of the Progressive Conservative Party to support the Liberals. At 2:15AM on 15 December 1964 the House of Commons voted on the Flag of Canada and passed the current design by a vote of 163–78. On 28 January 1965 the bill for the Flag of Canada received Royal assent, and on 15 February 1965 the Canadian Flag was raised for the first time on Parliament hill.

During the national flag debate the fault line dividing support for Pearson's concept of a national flag free of British symbolism, and a national flag retaining some connection to Canada's British past, fell in the main between the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives. During the 1960s in Manitoba support for the Progressive Conservatives at both the provincial and federal levels was high: after the provincial election in December 1962, the Progressive Conservatives held a majority government in the provincial legislature[50] and in the April 1963 federal general election, ten of the fourteen ridings in Manitoba went to Conservatives.[51] Unsurprisingly, public opinion in Manitoba was reluctant to countenance the removal of British symbols from the national flag. The national debate that occurred between February and December 1964 elicited strong reactions in Manitoba indicative of how the population of the province saw the new Canadian flag as an affront to British cultural hegemony in Canada.

While the statements made by Manitoba's M.P.s during the flag debate must be weighed with the requirement to toe the party line, a number of Manitoba's Conservative M.P.s provided personal examples from their ridings in their arguments for the retention of British symbols in the national flag. J.

Nicholas Mandziuk, the Progressive Conservative member for Marquette, told the House of Commons on 30 June 1964 that the Royal Canadian Legion in Russell had presented him with a petition signed by 500 people asking for the Red Ensign to be retained as the national flag, and the Ukrainian Royal Canadian Legion, whose branch in Winnipeg was over 1,000 strong, passed a unanimous resolution also in favour of the retention of the Red Ensign.[52] Eric Stefanson, the Conservative member for Selkirk quoted a letter from a constituent that captured some of the concerns of Western Canadians, and Manitobans in particular:

> it is an historical fact that to a large section of our population the old flag or even the Red Ensign is and always has been obnoxious for reasons that are quite obvious. For this reason and the fact that our present federal government owes its very existence to these people, we are to have a new flag of strange design thrust upon us, a design that features prominently three maple leaves. Most of us in western Canada have never seen a genuine maple leaf, yet this is supposed to convey a feeling of unity from sea to sea.[53]

While the dominant cultural group in Manitoba remained predominantly British in the first half of the twentieth century, over time this historical block evolved to incorporate a degree of Canadian post-colonial nationalism into its British world view. Thus, even amongst the British historical block in Manitoba, substantial support for a distinctive Canadian flag existed as long as the new design incorporated elements of British heritage. For example, in April of 1964, shortly after the start of the national flag debate, the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution calling for the retention of the Red Ensign as the national flag of Canada.[54] Likewise, a provincial resolution in the spring of 1964 decreed that Manitoba schools were to no longer fly the British National Flag but the Canadian Red Ensign.[55] As Champion notes "supporters of the Red Ensign were also nationalists. Canadians' feelings reflected an innate sense of British Canadianism . . . among the public, majorities in nine out of ten provinces supported the retention of British symbols in the new national flag."[56]

The impact of the counter-hegemonic multicultural movement in Canada cannot be overstated. It is excellently described by Professors James Forrest and Kevin Dunn:

> The Anglo cultural hegemony of a British Canada established in the late 1700s, with its non-assimilationist policy stance towards Francophone Canadians came to a de facto end in the 1960s. Canada then went further

than any of the other main immigrant receiving countries in enshrining multiculturalism legally and constitutionally in the 1980s. Canada had anchored itself to a post-Britain-as-home, post-settler, post-Anglo society and culture.[57]

Such a profound change in the cultural DNA of a country was bound to produce a backlash. In Manitoba, the latent sense of British cultural predominance, even within an emergent Canadian nationalism, reacted to the threat posed by bilingualism and biculturalism with the production of a provincial flag that reinforced the concept of British cultural hegemony in Manitoba.

The Imperialists Strike Back— The Adoption of a Manitoba Provincial Flag

The interest in a Manitoba provincial flag predates the Pearsonian national flag debate and even the emergence of the bilingualism and biculturalism commission; the acrimony that arose from these two events fuelled and eventually defined the selection of the British Red Ensign as the provincial flag. Under the premiership of "Duff" Roblin, the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba began to investigate the creation of a distinctive provincial flag as early as February 1961.[58] At that time, plans were in place to have 600 "flag idea teams" of five members each working throughout the province with the intent that by 1 April 1961 a number of possible flag designs would be ready for review.[59]

Eventually, the plan for a provincial flag was shelved, although it is interesting to note that the likely design of the flag was to be a St. Andrew's Cross centred with the coat of arms of Manitoba, presumably in deference to the role played by the Scottish settlers of the Selkirk Settlement.[60] The issue was raised again in December 1963 when, as part of the planning for national centennial celebrations in Manitoba, a committee was formed under the direction of Judge C. C. Sparling to consider suggestions for the adoption of a provincial flag.[61] Again, this came to naught. The final impetus for a provincial flag, in particular the Red

Figure 7. "Duff" Roblin, the Premier of Manitoba during the period when the province adopted its current flag. Source: author's collection.

Ensign, emerged from the national flag debate and the threat to British cultural hegemony in Canada.

It is not a coincidence that the final push for a provincial flag arose at the culmination of the national flag debate. In December of 1964, when the debate was coming to an end and the Liberals were on the verge of victory, the Provincial Secretary of Manitoba, Maitland Steinkopf, announced in an interview with the *Winnipeg Free Press* that Manitoba would soon be seeking its own provincial standard. Maitland said that a "provincial flag is needed in the worst way. . . . The government has been planning to adopt a provincial standard for more than a year. But action has been delayed until now in order to allow the federal government time to settle the current dispute about a national flag."[62] The government intended to conduct two competitions to design the new flag, and given the rancour at the national level, it is unsurprising that the Red Ensign would figure prominently in the proposals. Recall that the intended design of three years previous did *not* include the Red Ensign but was based on the St. Andrew's Cross. Indicative of the popularity of a Manitoba Red Ensign in the province, the design was recommended to, and approved by, the Winnipeg and District Labour Council in December 1964. Despite this recommendation, in February of 1965 the executive of the council killed the resolution preferring to recommend to the government that it is "desirous" of a provincial flag without stipulating the design.[63]

So it was that only a month after the Canadian Flag was flown on Parliament Hill for the first time, the Honourable Robert G. Smellie, Manitoba Minister of Municipal Affairs, introduced Bill 131, "An Act respecting the Flag of Manitoba," on 30 April 1965 proposing the current Manitoba Red Ensign as the new flag of the province. Less than a week later, on 5 May, Mr. Steinkopf introduced the Act for second reading.[64] Five days later, on 10 May the third reading of the bill passed as part of an omnibus motion and the next day it was approved by the lieutenant-governor.

Although the passage of the bill seems smooth, it was not without some debate and animosity, in particular due to some other issues that arose at about the same time and are indicative of the sense of British cultural supremacy which still existed in Manitoba. On 27 April, shortly before the introduction of the Provincial Flag Act, New Democratic Party MLA Laurent Desjardins introduced Bill 112, "An Act to Amend the Public Schools Act (4)," for second reading. The aim of this act was to open up some lessons in Manitoba schools to French instruction—recall that since 1917 instruction in Manitoba schools was authorized in English only. What is important about this event, and its

coincidence with the Provincial and National Flag debates, is the reaction of the Progressive Conservative party in Manitoba. In particular, the Progressive Conservative MLA selected to speak on Desjardin's motion, James H. Bilton, expressed some particularly harsh and overtly British points of view on the subject. Bilton stated that "the terms of our confederation did *not* make Canada a bilingual nation." Additionally, reflecting a degree of paternalism, he said "the introduction of French as a language of instruction may be a poor service to Manitobans if . . . as a result they fail to learn to speak English as well."[65] These objections are particularly poignant when viewed in the light of the contemporaneous national discourse on bilingualism and biculturalism and the introduction of a unique Canadian flag that dispensed with elements of British heritage. In the end, the Act was killed by the majority Progressive Conservatives to be studied at a later date.

There may be some debate about how prevalent views such as Bilton's were in the Conservative Party. After all, Duff Roblin was a "Red Tory" and progressive in his political leanings. Under his stewardship a number of amendments beneficial to the French minority in Manitoba came to pass, however, in his chapter on Duff Roblin in *Manitoba Premiers of the 19th and 20th Century*, W. F. Neville observed that:

> there was a range of philosophical views to be found in [Roblin's] caucus (including a few recalcitrants) and in his cabinet, he had reason generally to feel well-supported by colleagues and party. Only on the language issue did he feel that opinion within the caucus-which was reflective of a considerable body of opinion in the province-required him to stop short of where he felt true justice would have led him.[66]

A question arises about how "British" Manitoba was by this time. The surge of immigration that occurred in the late nineteenth century was over a generation past when the flag debate arose. Most Manitobans were native-born Canadians, several generations removed from original British stock. There is an assumption that by the mid-1960s Manitoba was no longer "British." Of course, this is erroneous. While the number of Manitobans actually born in Great Britain was quite small by 1966, the predominant culture remained Anglo-Gaelic and Protestant. The cultural strain of Britishness which we have been describing in this paper remained relatively constant throughout the period in question: a traditionalist Canadian nationalism that saw itself as an integral part of a wider British synergy; if no longer a British colony, at the very least a charter member of the British Commonwealth. Moreover, this fails to recognize the inclusiveness of non-British into the British historical block. Even

those who may not be considered British from the strictly racial perspective can nonetheless, through exposure to the prolonged cultural hegemony of the British block, identify with the mores and traditions of the hegemonic block.

This type of traditionalism naturally gravitates towards right-leaning political parties, therefore the ruling Progressive Conservative Party was loath to acquiesce to anything that might unseat the British cultural hegemony in Manitoba. Certainly this was Liberal MLA Desjardin's conclusion when his bill was defeated. He, too, saw the new Manitoba flag as a symbolic gesture of British supremacy. On 11 May, as the legislative session was ending for the summer and his Act lay in defeat, in a fit of pique he stated:

> Now, this is a government that was progressive though in this field of unity. It brought in a great innovation, a flag for the Province of Manitoba all of a sudden—a new flag, a flag that would distract of this great Canadian flag that we have now, but a flag that might remind certain groups who were the conquering heroes. In other words, a new flag, a new rival to the Canadian flag.[67]

But the die was cast. Manitoba was to have a new provincial flag that reaffirmed the cultural hegemony of British stock in the province. The ceremony in which the flag was raised for the first time was replete with symbolic links to Manitoba's past. Numerous mentions were made about how the British flag had flown over Manitoba since it was first erected in the north by British explorer Thomas Button in 1612. To even further establish the link between modern Manitoba and its British past, the organizers of the flag ceremony ensured that one of the two official flag-raisers was Edward J. Button, a descendant of the explorer, thus establishing a linear connection of British cultural dominance in the province that extended over 300 years.[68]

Conclusion

> *So where most other Canadian provinces have unique,*
> *carefully considered designs that speak to their history and sense*
> *of identity, the entirety of the messages conveyed by our Manito-*
> *ban [sic] flag are 'we love England' and 'screw off, Pearson' . . .*
> *you would be absolutely correct in charging that our flag paints*
> *us as an unremarkable province with no discernible identity*
> *except as vindictive naysayers who fear and resent change.*
>
> —James Hope Howard
> "Slurpees and Murder: Living In, Living With, and Living Through Winnipeg"

Mr. Howard's observations have a certain resonance with Manitobans. As he argues, the provincial flag seems to represent a time and place that are no longer relevant to modern Manitobans. Howard is not alone in his views. In 2009 a group of Manitoba New Democratic Party grassroots members submitted a resolution to the party's annual convention asking for a new flag, calling the current one "a relic from the days of our former British colonial heritage."[69] Unsurprisingly, the Manitoba Progressive Conservatives, then in opposition, rallied to the defence of the banner. Conservative leader Hugh McFadyen argued that the current flag "reflects some important aspects of Manitoba's history. Certainly many of our traditions came here as a result of the British democratic parliamentary system."[70] It seems that almost fifty years after it was first flown, the Manitoba flag and its symbolic link with the British past remain contentious.

The views of Howard and the grassroots members of the NDP mentioned above are indicative of the trend surrounding flags in Manitoba. Since Schultz raised his British ensign defaced with the word *Canada*, flags linking Manitoba to a British cultural predominance have played a prominent symbolic role in Manitoba's cultural and historical evolution. They were more than simply banners; they were statements used to remind the population where Britishness sat in the pantheon of cultures that comprised the pluralistic province. First used to indicate the British birthright to the Northwest, they became symbols of not only cultural supremacy but also oppression. Later, as the British elite that formed the ruling class of Manitoba softened its outlook and tenuously embraced multiculturalism in order to facilitate increased immigration, British flags were used to remind immigrants of the overarching supremacy of British culture. Finally, confronted by a change in the national discourse centred on bilingualism and a partnership between the two founding cultures of Canada, the new Manitoba flag was created to remind Manitobans, and Canadians, that while Canada may be charting a course towards equality between French and English, in Manitoba, Britishness took precedence.

End Notes

1. Raymond Sinclair, "2500 Witness Flag Raising," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 13 May 1966. The raising of the flag was to occur concurrently around the province at 3:30 PM. The ceremony on Memorial Avenue was ahead of schedule and the flag went up at 2:59 PM.

2. The Manitoba Flag ranked 44 of 72 sub-national flags in North America in a 2001 North American Vexillological Association survey, http://www.nava.org/flag-design/survey/state-provincial-survey-2001 (accessed 23 July 2015).

3. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, edited and translated by Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1972).

4. T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (June 1985): 568.

5. Ibid., 568–69.

6. Ibid., 571.

7. John W. Berry's "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation," *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 46, no. 1 (1997): 5–34.

8. Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony," 571.

9. Ibid.

10. Sir John A. Macdonald, quoted by Patricia K. Wood, "Defining 'Canadian': Anti-Americanism and Identity in Sir John A. Macdonald's Nationalism," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 36, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 65.

11. C. P. Champion, *The Strange Demise of British Canada: The Liberals and Canadian Nationalism, 1964–1968* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010), 7–12. While the traditionalist camp always maintained an ideological connection to Britain, there was a marked increase in Canadian nationalism, especially after the First and Second World Wars, albeit still within the rubric of a wider British *ethnie*.

12. Wood, "Defining 'Canadian,'" 65.

13. Michael Walzer, "On the Role of Symbolism in Political Thought," *Political Science Quarterly* 82 (1967): 194, quoted in Alistair B. Fraser "A Canadian Flag for Canada" *Raven* 1 (1994): 30–40.

14. Fraser, "A Canadian Flag for Canada," 31.

15. Alexander Begg, *The Creation of Manitoba: Or, a History of the Red River Troubles* (Toronto: A. H. Hovey, 1871), 2.

16. Gerhard John Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 140.

17. Ibid., 93–122.

18. Tomasz Soroka, "The Canadian Orange Movement. The Concept of Political and Social Tradition," in *Place and Memory in Canada: Global Perspectives* (Krakow: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 2005), defines Orangeism as "a Protestant movement of Irish origin . . . they work for the continuation of British rule and the preservation of the supremacy of Protestantism."

19. Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 127.

20. Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony," 579.

21. Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 123–38.

22. Grant W. Grams, "Red River's Anglophone Community: The Conflicting Views of John Christian Schultz and Alexander Begg," *Manitoba History* 64 (Fall 2010): 16.

23. Begg, *The Creation of Manitoba*, 21.

24. Ibid., 31 (emphasis added).

25. Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, "Report of the Select Committee on the Causes of the Difficulties in the North-West Territory in 1869–70," *Journals of the House of Commons* 8 (Appendix 6) (Ottawa: I. B. Taylor, 1874), 31.

26. Lieutenant George Huyshe, *The Red River Expedition* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1871), 196.

27. Lillian Gibbons, "Nonsense Now, But Not Back In 1870," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 20 March 1965.

28. According to Berry, *Integration* incorporates the maintenance of some degree of cultural integrity, while at the same time seeking to participate as an integral part of the larger social network. "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation," 9.

29. Alexander Begg, *Ten Years in Winnipeg: A Narration of the Principal Events in the History of the City of Winnipeg from the year A.D. 1870 to the year A.D. 1879, inclusive* (Winnipeg: Times Print. and Pub. House, 1879), 26.

30. For an excellent example of the oppression encountered by non-British inhabitants of Manitoba, see Jim McKillip's chapter "Emboldened by Bad Behaviour: The Conduct of the Canadian Army in the Northwest, 1870 to 1873," in *The Apathetic and the Defiant: Case Studies of Canadian Mutiny and Disobedience, 1812 to 1919* (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2007).

31. Ibid., 162.

32. Jean Lagasse, "The Métis in Manitoba," MHS Transactions, Series 3, 1958–59 Season, http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/transactions/3/metis.shtml#09 (accessed 20 August 2014).

33. Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 161–62. Although this may seem like an acceptance of the "cultural clash" theory espoused by George F. G. Stanley in *The Birth of Western Canada* vice the economic theory put forth by Ens, in reality the two theories overlap. As Gramsci observed, one of the binding forces of an historical group is its economic element.

34. Morris Mott, "The British Protestant Pioneers and the Establishment of Manly Sports in Manitoba, 1870–1886," *Journal of Sport History* 7, no. 3 (Winter, 1980): 26.

35. Ibid., 22.

36. Manitoba Historical Society, *Memorable Manitobans: Clifford Sifton*, http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/sifton_c.shtml (accessed 1 July 2014).

37. For three excellent examples of such ethnic enclaves see Ella Thompson, "The Doukhobor Settlers of the Swan River Valley," *Manitoba History* 72 (Spring–Summer

2013); Lawrence Klippenstein, "Manitoba Settlement and the Mennonite West Reserve (1875–1876)," *Manitoba Pageant* 21, no. 1 (Autumn 1975); and Brock Arnason, "Nya Island I Kanada: The Icelandic Settlement of the Interlake Area of Manitoba," *Manitoba History* 27 (Spring 1994).

38. Berry, "Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation," 11.

39. "Mr. Roblin and His Flags," *Manitoba Free Press*, 15 September 1906.

40. "Premier Roblin's Appeal," *Manitoba Free Press*, 18 February 1907.

41. "Flim Flam Flag Policy," *Manitoba Free Press*, 25 February 1907.

42. "Rescind the Flag Policy," *Manitoba Free Press*, 14 December 1906; "The Flag Policy," *Manitoba Free Press*, 10 January 1907.

43. "Exemptions of the Roblin 'Flag Policy,'" *Manitoba Free Press*, 24 January 1908.

44. Ibid.

45. Rose Bruno-Jofre, "Citizenship and Schooling in Manitoba," *Manitoba History* 36 (Autumn/Winter 1998–1999), online at http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/36/citizenship.shtml (accessed 20 May 2014).

46. J. O. Miller, "The Testing of our Democracy," *University Magazine* 15 (1916): 211.

47. Tom Mitchell, "The Manufacture of Souls of Good Quality: Winnipeg's 1919 National Conference on Canadian Citizenship, English-Canadian Nationalism, and the New Order after the Great War," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1996–1997): 11.

48. Berry, "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation," 10.

49. Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, General Introduction*, Book 1, *The Official Languages*, xxi.

50. Elections Manitoba, *Historical Summaries*, http://www.electionsmanitoba.ca/en/Results (accessed 16 July 2014).

51. Parliament of Canada, *History of Federal Ridings since 1867*, http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/Parliament/FederalRidingsHistory/hfer.asp?Language=E&Search=Gres&genElection=26&ridProvince=3&submit1=Search (accessed 16 July 2014).

52. Nicholas Mandziuk, PCP, in Canada, *Debates of the House of Commons*, 30 June 1964, 4902.

53. Eric Stefanson, PCP, in Canada, *Debates of the House of Commons*, 31 August 1964, 7508.

54. "Chamber Rejects Language Resolution," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 11 April 1964.

55. "Manitoba Schools to Fly Ensign, Not Union Jack," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 14 April 1964.

56. Champion, *The Strange Demise of British Canada*, 168.

57. James Forrest and Kevin Dunn, "'Core' Cultural Hegemony and Multiculturalism: Perceptions of the Privileged Position of Australians with British Backgrounds," *Ethnicities* 6, no. 2 (June 2006): 203–30.

58. "New Flag," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 11 March 1961.

59. "Duff Thinks Manitoba Needs Flag," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 20 February 1961.

60. "Tartan, Flag for Manitoba," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 3 April 1962.

61. "Province May Get Own Flag by Centenary," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 26 December 1963.

62. "Govt. To Seek Manitoba Flag," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 12 December 1964.

63. "Drops Flag Resolution," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 17 February 1965.

64. Maitland Steinkopf, PCP, in Manitoba, *Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings*, 5 May 1965.

65. James H. Bilton, PCP, in Manitoba, *Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings*, 27 April 1965 (emphasis added).

66. W. F. Neville, "Duff Roblin," in *Manitoba Premiers of the 19th and 20th Centuries*, edited by Barry Glen Ferguson and Robert A. Wardhaugh (Regina: CPRC Press, 2010), 258.

67. Laurent Desjardins, NDP, in Manitoba, *Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings*, 27 April 1965.

68. Raymond Sinclair, "2500 Witness Flag Raising," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 13 May 1966.

69. "Manitoba Flag Called Outdated, a 'Relic,'" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 26 February 2009.

70. Ibid.