Forging an Identity in Bronze : Nation-Building Through Ottawa's Memorial Landscape

*Sculpter une identité dans le bronze : célébration de la nation à travers le
paysage mémoriel d'Ottawa*

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FORGING AN IDENTITY IN BRONZE : NATION-BUILDING THROUGH OTTAWA'S MEMORIAL LANDSCAPE

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This article examines the physical changes to the memorials in Canada's capital region, as well as the motives driving those additions and modifications. In recent years, Ottawa's memorial landscape has changed in a number of profound ways. Memorials are just as much a reflection of who or what they commemorate as they are of the time in which they were built, as well as the ideologies and interests of the people who play a role in the development and design process. Moreover, a city's memorials, particularly those in a national capital, are a part of the everyday environment and the broader cultural fabric. As such, this paper will question if Ottawa's latest memorial additions have increasingly reflected the goals of Stephen Harper's Conservative government.

Cet article examine les changements apportés aux monuments commémoratifs dans la capitale du Canada et son environnement, ainsi que les raisons de ces ajouts et modifications. Au cours des dernières années, le paysage commémoratif d'Ottawa a changé de manière importante. Les monuments commémoratifs sont tout autant le reflet de ce qui est commémoré ou de ce qu'ils commémorent, que de l'époque à laquelle ils ont été construits. Ils reflètent tout autant les idéologies et les intérêts des personnes impliquées dans le processus de leur mise en place ou de leur conception. En outre, les monuments d'une ville, en particulier ceux d'une capitale nationale, font partie de l'environnement quotidien de celle-ci et d'un tissu culturel plus large. Dans cet article, nous nous demanderons si les dernières modifications ou additions au patrimoine commémoratif d'Ottawa ont pu refléter les politiques du gouvernement conservateur de Stephen Harper.

Canada's national capital city features a landscape rich in statues, memorials, and monuments. All around Ottawa, the urban landscape includes memorials to war, to individuals, and to specific moments in history, with subjects ranging from small conflicts to world wars, commemorating individuals who made their mark on a local, national, or global stage, and dealing with concepts such as national identity and Canadian culture. In recent years, Ottawa's memorial landscape has been changing in a number of profound and telling ways. Debate surrounds the design and placement of the War of 1812 Monument, unveiled in late 2014, and the forthcoming Memorial to the Victims of Communism. In light of these changes, it remains vital to be aware of how these various sites of memory are employed for larger political ends, and to understand the broader goals politicians and policymakers may have in mind when deciding not only what will be commemorated, but also what shape such a monument might take.

The examination of the evolution of Ottawa's memorials, including what is and is not included, and how events and people are remembered in stone and

bronze, involves a number of different emotions and ideas. These memorials do not exist in a vacuum; rather, they are part of the everyday environment and the broader cultural fabric, and are locations where new memories and experiences can add or subtract from their original meaning. In addition, memorials are just as much a reflection of who or what they commemorate as they are of the time in which they were built, as well as the ideologies or interests of the people who play a part in the development and design stages. As memorial scholar Kirk Savage notes, “Public monuments do not arise as if by natural law to celebrate the deserving; they are built by people with sufficient power to marshal (or impose) public consent for their erection” (SAVAGE 1994: 135-136). With time, effort, and treasure expended to create a new memorial, an examination of the motives behind that process is revealing.

The Role of Memorials in Society

Memorials have long assisted in the creation of a national narrative and identity, focusing “the attention of the public on specific events of the past in order to foster a collective orientation toward those events and to keep their memory alive in some consistent way in the present day” (ZUCCHERO 1999: 7). Adding to the built environment by representing a part of a national history in stone and metal serves as a physical touchstone and visible reminder. And yet, that reminder can be subjective, depending on how a certain story is presented to the citizenry. Alluding to historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, Edward Said argued:

The invention of tradition is a method for using collective memory selectively by manipulating certain bits of the national past, suppressing others, elevating still others in an entirely functional way. Thus memory is not necessarily authentic, but rather useful (SAID 2000: 179).

Similarly, according to Yvonne Whelan:

Commemorating an individual or an event, public monuments are not merely ornamental features of the urban landscape but rather highly symbolic signifiers that confer meaning on the city and transform neutral places into ideologically charged sites” (WHELAN 2002: 508).

Those in positions of authority therefore possess the ability to construct a very specific history meant for public consumption, and thereby shape that account to nurture a particular set of ideas.

In describing the connection between public commemoration and identity, Diane Barthel writes, “if war is politics continued by other means, preservation is also politics continued by other means. These ‘means’ revolve around the act of commemoration” (BARTHEL 1996: 80). From this, we gain a deeper understanding of the important role memorials play in the construction of a national narrative. Barthel reinforces this significant function of memorials when she continues:

Sacrifice is an important concept and considered crucial to a nation's survival. If people are no longer willing to sacrifice for their nation, can the nation long exist? Commemoration serves to encourage future acts of sacrifice, as it promises the would-be heroes that they will not die in vain and that they will be remembered by future generations (BARTHEL 1996: 80).

Thus, memorials do not just help a society honour and remember the past, but also promote and reinforce notions of patriotism and nationalism.

When those memorials are located within a capital city, they take on additional relevance. Capital cities serve a dual function; like any city, they are places of business and politics, but they also are symbolic of the nation. John H. Taylor describes this as a “metaphorical role,” as capital cities are “used as vehicles for the ‘Invention of Tradition’” (TAYLOR 1989: 79). The memorials, buildings, and street layout are intended to “be an imposing evocation of the dignity and power of the state” (GORDON and OSBORNE 2004: 621), while conveying a sense of grandeur and importance, instilling in the visitor these very same concepts. Suitably, Ottawa's National Capital Commission (NCC), the federal agency tasked with overseeing the planning and use of federal properties within the capital region, concurs:

The role of a national capital is to reflect the character, identity, symbols and values of its people. Commemorations play a key role in achieving these goals, as they express enduring values, connections to the past and aspirations for the future (National Capital Commission 2006: 2).

Ottawa's Existing Built Environment

In a short trip around Ottawa's core region, passing by such sites as the Parliament Buildings, the Supreme Court, the National Gallery of Canada, and

other similar government and cultural institutions, a different memorial or statue is encountered at seemingly every turn. Parliament Hill is dotted with statues of monarchs and politicians, where those to Queens Victoria and Elizabeth II join monuments to John A. Macdonald, Thomas D'Arcy McGee, and John Diefenbaker, among others. Away from the Hill, a statue of Samuel de Champlain marks the early European exploration of Canada, while representations of First Nations peoples can be found in a sculpture of an Anishinabe scout and the National Aboriginal Veterans Memorial. Other memorials, to culture, icons, and ideals, include the Terry Fox monument across Wellington Street from Parliament Hill, a statue of jazz musician Oscar Peterson, the Canadian Tribute to Human Rights, and, also located on Parliament Hill, the Women Are Persons! monument. Memorials to war, conflict, and the military are prevalent around the capital city; the list includes, but is by no means limited to, the National War Memorial, the Peacekeeping Monument, and the Canadian Phalanx sculpture.¹

Personal and political motivations have long been driving factors behind the creation of memorials, the above memorials included. For example, in 1901 Henry Harper, a close friend of future Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, drowned in the Ottawa River when attempting to save a woman who had fallen through the winter ice. In order to commemorate not only his friend, but also the noble manner of his death, Mackenzie King led the effort to erect a fitting memorial. The result is a statue of Sir Galahad, from King Arthur's Round Table, placed just outside the gates of Parliament Hill and meant to symbolize the heroism and gallantry exhibited by Harper (National Capital Commission 2011: 3).

The National War Memorial, dedicated in 1939 and located in Confederation Square, in the shadow of Parliament's East Block, also serves as a useful case study through which to reflect on the more contemporary War of 1812 Monument and the Memorial to the Victims of Communism. A piece of the Ottawa landscape for over seven decades, the National War Memorial has functioned as a location for demonstrations, fundraising drives, and remembrance ceremonies. Similarly, nearly since its beginning, the National War Memorial has often been at the centre of debates and disagreements concerning how it should or should not be used, and whether or not those uses honour or disparage the veterans being commemorated.

¹ The responsibility for adding a monument to the Ottawa landscape had long belonged to the National Capital Commission, but as a part of the 2013 federal budget, that mandate largely shifted to the Department of Canadian Heritage. This change, and its implications, will be discussed in

The proposal to create some sort of memorial to the Great War was made before the war was even halfway over. The first suggestion for a National Memorial came from Sir Robert Laird Borden, Canada's war-time prime minister, who in September 1915, stated: "It is my desire and intention that some splendid monument shall be erected in this country, perhaps in the capital of the Dominion, which will commemorate the men who responded so splendidly to the call of duty" (Department of National Defence 1943).

David L.A. Gordon and Brian S. Osborne have detailed how, for Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie King, turning Ottawa into a distinguished and grand capital city was paramount, and creating a ceremonial landscape was central to this plan. They note:

Indeed, for much of the 20th century, the planning of Ottawa – and of Confederation Square in particular – was much influenced by [Mackenzie] King's sensitivity to, and cultivation of, the national imagination. In particular, he blatantly manipulated the national identification with wartime sacrifices and the evocative power of the symbolic commemoration of the 'blooding' of the nation in global conflict to further his mission of building a capital suitable for a nation that was shedding the last of its colonial ties (GORDON AND OSBORNE 2004: 620).

From the floor of the House of Commons, Mackenzie King asserted, "In every country in the world the spirit of the nation has found some expression of the regard to great events in the form of permanent monuments if the occasions have been sufficiently worthy of such recognition from the national point of view" (Government of Canada 1923b: 2685-86). As such, the construction of the National War Memorial would assist in furthering Mackenzie King's dream of transforming the capital, and by extension, the nation, into an international player, one that celebrated and honoured its own noteworthy history, traditions, achievements, and icons through memorialization.

However, the development of a memorial to honour and remember Canada's World War I dead met with resistance early in its planning stages. These objections, reflected in Parliamentary debates from the time, stemmed from a number of reasons, including cost, redundancy, or the message implied by such a structure. For Labour MP James Shaver Woodsworth, a new memorial was seen as unnecessary, considering there already existed commemorative plaques

and inscriptions on public buildings honouring the sacrifices made to the war effort, while at the same time, memorials and battlefields in Europe were in the process of being preserved and turned into important sites of memory. As he said, “There are any number of reminders of the war and its futility and I cannot see any necessity for spending money on still another” (Government of Canada 1927: 1465). The idea of building another memorial also raised the question as to what this new statue could add, or, conversely, what might be lacking in already existing memorial efforts. The war had inflicted such a great cost – in terms of lives, dollars, a sense of security, and human emotion – that spending money to memorialize a war still so fresh in the minds of all Canadians was controversial.

Following the end of the war, Canada was saddled with a large debt; spending scarce funds on a monument seemed to be an irresponsible use of the government’s budget. Ordinary citizens and Members of Parliament all voiced concerns over the government using much needed money to build a monument to the fallen, while living veterans suffered in poverty and harsh conditions, “walking the streets today without work” (Government of Canada 1923a: 1021). Labour MP William Irvine suggested that a stone memorial – no matter the design – would not be sufficient to fully honour the fallen Canadians; a statute, instead of a statue, would be more appropriate. By taking legislative action to provide for the welfare of veterans, he believed Parliament might best “give a shred of reflection of the liberty for which [the soldiers] died, that would be an embodiment of a shadow of the ideal for which they poured out their blood” (Government of Canada 1923b: 2689). MP Woodsworth read aloud a letter from a female constituent, in which she wrote:

May I suggest that instead of spending money on the fallen, [the government] spend the money for the clothing, feeding and sheltering of the men who had the great misfortune to return to Canada with their lives. It is no fault of theirs if they are not among the so-called “glorious dead” ... We dress up the dead with cenotaphs, etc., and we refuse the living bread (Government of Canada 1923b: 2687).

According to Mackenzie King, the issue was one and the same. He responded to Woodsworth, saying “If it is a choice between living without bread and living without a spirit that is ready for sacrifice, I think the majority of men would prefer the spirit of sacrifice to bread.” What is more, he asserted that:

It is the spirit of heroism, the spirit of self-sacrifice, the spirit of all that is noble and great, that was exemplified in the lives of those sacrificed in the Great War ... and the nation will be dead the minute it loses that vision. It is that vision which the government wishes to keep alive in erecting a monument of this kind (Government of Canada 1923b: 2687).

A review of the House of Commons debates associated with creating the National War Memorial shows that MPs from opposition parties voiced any opposition or uncertainty, only to be rebutted by those from Mackenzie King's Liberal Party. For the Prime Minister and the Liberals, the monument issue transcended the basic costs of construction; at its heart lay the very essence of what it meant to be Canadian.

Despite the objections raised over building any sort of new war memorial, the movement to create a national monument was obviously successful. The final design of the National War Memorial includes twenty-two bronze figures, representing the various branches of the military involved in the war, marching through a granite arch. Although the figures – including two mounted on bronze horses – are shown holding weaponry and pulling a field artillery piece, their postures and facial expressions do not convey aggression, but instead evoke a mixture of hope combined with weariness. These men and women are not going off to war, but instead are returning from battle and looking ahead to the peace they fought and sacrificed for, while also serving as a reminder to their fellow citizens of what that peace cost, in both treasure and lives.

The Conservative Agenda

As the lesson of the National War Memorial shows, politicians have long used commemorations of war to promote a national identity and foster a sense of unity amongst citizens. Over the past few years under Stephen Harper, the federal government has continued this practice, while also advocating for the Conservative party's larger emphasis on a more muscular, militarized Canadian history. In so doing, they have created a culture that scholars Ian McKay and Jamie Swift have dubbed "Warrior Nation":

In Canada today a determined right-wing elite is making full use of government power to change how we think about our country and its history. Canada, the 'new warriors' declaim, has nothing to do with peaceful accommodation and steady improvement in the public good prompted by movements for fairness. Rather, it was created by wars,

defended by soldiers, and kept free by patriotic support of the military virtues (MCKAY AND SWIFT 2012: xi).

This effort also included “undoing 40 years of a Liberal narrative and instead creating a new patriotism viewed through a conservative lens” (TABER 2011). Decisions made by the Harper government regarding what to spotlight, and what to downplay, when celebrating Canadian history have increasingly taken on a partisan slant. Journalist Andrew Cohen, after detailing historic anniversaries that received little attention from the Conservative government, such as the patriation of the British North America Act and the establishment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, asks, “See the pattern here? To the Conservatives, peacekeeping, the Charter, even the founding of NATO in 1949 – are achievements of Liberal governments. Why celebrate them?” (COHEN 2015).

It can be argued that the Conservative government, or any political party for that matter, would not necessarily be inclined to tout the accomplishments of their political rivals. Yet the Conservatives continue to act in ways that give reason to question their motives. In 2011, the Harper government renewed the prominence of Canada’s historic ties to the British monarchy in a number of ways. Over the summer, the prefix “royal” was returned to the Canadian navy and air force, and that fall, the government ordered all Canadian embassies and missions to display a portrait of Queen Elizabeth. As noted by McKay and Swift:

The application of ‘Royal’ to institutions left and right may seem comical, but one would be ill-advised to minimize the extent to which the British sovereign is a deeply meaningful symbol of whiteness, hierarchy, and authoritarian rule (MCKAY AND SWIFT 2012: 288).

For Canadian military historian Jack Granatstein, these moves went too far, stating in an interview, “Nobody was pushing for this. The idea of rolling back the national symbols to make them more British is just loony. Who does Harper think he’s appealing to?” (TABER 2011). *Globe and Mail* journalist Jane Taber has put forward one theory for Harper’s actions, based around party politics and regional strengths.

For Mr. Harper and his Conservatives, the payoffs could be great: a new pride in the country, an ability to shape the view of new Canadians and, politically, the potential to marginalize the Official Opposition NDP,

who could be forced more and more to defend Quebec's interests against all others. Quebecers are not as supportive of national symbols and the monarchy as is the rest of Canada" (TABER 2011).

By restoring the symbolic connection to the British monarchy, Stephen Harper was thus able to reinforce the power of his party and government while evoking ideas and emotions linked to traditions and customs of a bygone era. At the same time, Harper potentially took a chance to put the NDP in a tough position, considering the strong support that that party received from Quebec voters in the 2011 federal election.

An additional change that was met with fierce criticism was Bill C-7, originally Bill C-49, an act first proposed in the fall of 2012 by James Moore, the then-Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, and passed in November 2013. The act's main focus was to modify the mandate of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in line with renaming the institution the Canadian Museum of History, in order to create a "national institution that celebrates our achievements and what we have accomplished together as Canadians" (MOORE 2013). One specific concern for those who expressed displeasure at the change was the perceived narrowing of the museum's mandate. Prior to the act, the museum was to "increase, throughout Canada and internationally, interest in, knowledge and critical understanding of and appreciation and respect for human cultural achievements and human behavior..." (Library of Parliament 2012: 3). The act amended this to read, "to enhance Canadians' knowledge, understanding and appreciation of events, experiences, people and objects that reflect and have shaped Canada's history and identity, and also to enhance their awareness of world history and cultures" (Library of Parliament 2012: 3). Beyond the fact that the new mandate directed the museum to solely target a Canadian audience, the elimination of providing a "critical understanding" of history raised alarms that "the museum's job is now to popularize history, rather than probe the past" (GEDDES 2013). The Canadian Historical Association (CHA), an organization comprised of over 1,000 professional historians, also weighed in on the changes, with the president of the organization, Lyle Dick, sending a letter to Mark O'Neill, the president of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. The letter, expressing the CHA's concerns, noted that, "critical understanding should be a goal of an institution in terms of encouraging visitors to consider multiple perspectives, critical analysis, and texts and displays that challenge master narratives, rather than simply venerating national heroes" (DICK 2012). Rather than being a site of education and exposure to Canadian history in its entirety – the good, the bad,

and the ugly – critics feared that the museum would instead become a cheerleader for an uplifting and feel-good Canadian history.

Another worry held by the CHA was the overriding impression that the changes to the mandate were politically motivated. Dick wrote:

We are concerned that the government's decision to transform the [Canadian Museum of Civilization] into the [Canadian Museum of History] fits into a pattern of a politically-charged heritage policy that has been emerging in the past few years. Alongside the substantial public funds that were directed into the celebration of the bicentennial of the War of 1812, this initiative appears to reflect a new use of history to support the government's political agenda – that is, the highlighting of particular features of our past favoured by leading ministers of the current government. If so, this would be a highly inappropriate use of our national cultural institutions, which should stand apart from any particular government agenda and should be run instead according to sound professional standards and principles of non-partisanship (DICK 2012).

This is not to say that the changes to the museum's mandate were met solely with doom and gloom. There were those – Jack Granatstein among them – who believed the Canadian Museum of Civilization could benefit from an overhaul, with a different slate of exhibits able to more fully chronicle the depth of Canadian history and culture (Library of Parliament 2012: 5). Nevertheless, a perceived system of partisan-driven attempts to alter Canadian public memory and history, through commemorations, celebrations, and names, had been reinforced by the latest policy moves made by the Conservative government. During House of Commons debates regarding Bill C-49, NDP MP Pierre Nantel voiced his concerns, saying:

I am asking the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages [Moore] to explain to us how we can trust him when he is telling us not to talk about partisanship, although we see that he has favoured a certain part of our history so far, in terms of promotion (Government of Canada 2013a).

Instead of believing that the Conservative government instituted the changes in order to improve the overall design of the museum, ulterior motives were suspected and feared. It would be easy to assume that this is yet another

example of the clichéd battle between Conservatives and supposed Liberal academics, or between political rivals. However it also reveals the level of distrust that some historians, museum officials, politicians, and others associated with the process, have towards Harper and his attitude regarding the size and shape of Canadian history, based largely on Conservatives' past behavior.

Commemorating the War of 1812

It is in light of this political environment that the analysis now shifts to considering recent and upcoming additions to Ottawa's memorial landscape. The unveiling of the War of 1812 Monument, on November 7, 2014, served as a concluding note to Canada's two-year-long celebration of the 200th anniversary of the war. In September 2012, the National Capital Commission issued the call for designs, open to any professional sculpture artist who was either Canadian or a permanent resident. The call indicated that submissions should "recognize the courage and bravery of those who served during the War of 1812 and successfully defended their land in the fight for Canada" and "create a monument that will foster Canadians' enduring pride in their shared history" (National Capital Commission 2012: 1). The winning design, created by Toronto-based artist Adrienne Alison, demonstrates how the demographics of the combatants may have made commemorating the war so appealing to the Harper government in the first place. Entitled "Triumph Through Diversity," the monument features seven bronze figures:

A Métis fighter firing a cannon; a woman bandaging the arm of a Voltigeur; a Royal Navy sailor pulling a rope; a First Nations warrior pointing to the distance; a Canadian militiaman raising his arm in triumph; and a member of a British Army unit, specifically the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, firing a musket (Canadian Heritage 2014).

As its title indicates, the monument thus represents not only the diversity of those who fought in the war, but also highlights the country's multicultural history. By commemorating the War of 1812, the federal government is therefore able to emphasize how this one event involved individuals from across a number of categories, "the kind of racial, linguistic and gender inclusiveness that every government brochure, poster and ad campaign inevitably strives for" (TAYLOR 2012). In so doing, the Conservatives are able to thereby attempt to appeal to those same present-day demographics, while

showcasing a diverse Canadian population standing together to defeat invading Americans.

The monument site is located near the southeast corner of the East Block of Parliament, on the lawn of Parliament Hill overlooking Confederation Square and the National War Memorial. Prior to the war monument's placement, the statues on the grounds of Parliament Hill only commemorated political figures, including Fathers of Confederation, prime ministers, and royalty. The War of 1812 Monument seemingly trespassed into this environment, geographically linking the war to national leaders and icons (GEDDES 2014). Of course, war is a political act, and many of those same leaders memorialized on Parliament Hill led Canada during wartime. Nevertheless, by placing the War of 1812 Monument where it is, particularly when other locations could have easily been found, the federal government appears to be giving priority to that conflict above all others. During a Canadian Heritage Committee meeting in December 2011, in response to a question regarding a potential site selection, MP Moore replied, "But we do want it to be prominent...To have a direct connection to Parliament is important, so right on Parliament Hill or right near Parliament Hill is what we're looking at (Government of Canada 2011a). Moore never expanded on, nor was he pressed, as to why the memorial had to have a "direct connection" to Parliament. In earlier comments, he had asserted that Canada lacked many pre-Confederation events worthy of national celebration, but that the War of 1812 stood out.

Without the War of 1812, the French fact in North America is not protected. Without the War of 1812, aboriginal Canadians would have suffered the same fate as American Indians. Without the War of 1812, Canada's territorial integrity would not be defined relative to the United States. Without the War of 1812, you don't have an expression of Canadian identity that sowed the seeds for Confederation in 1867, after the Quebec and Charlottetown conferences (Government of Canada 2011b).

A desire to place the monument in a central location, where it would be easily accessible to a large number of people, is understandable. But even considering Moore's words, that the war set the future country on the path towards Confederation and brought together diverse peoples, the need to create a physical link to Parliament remains tenuous.

In addition to building the memorial, commemorative efforts included travelling museum exhibitions and military reenactments, and the Royal Canadian Mint and Canada Post released a series of collectable coins and stamps, all part of the nearly-\$30 million the Conservative government spent on the bicentennial. For James Moore, the cost was seen as a “reasonable amount,” considering the importance of the war in pre-Confederation history (FITZPATRICK 2012). The eminently quotable Jack Granatstein concurred in part, claiming that the money spent was worth it if it helped Canadians learn more about history, particularly an era that might get short shrift in the classroom. However, referencing the cuts in the 2012 federal budget that eliminated close to \$10 million from the Library and Archives Canada budget, Granatstein said:

This is also a government that's slashing the national archives dramatically and killing the national library by cuts. On the one hand they're good for history and on the other hand they're bad for history – you sometimes wonder if they really know what they're doing (FITZPATRICK 2012).

The Conservatives appeared to be talking out of both sides of their mouths, spending millions of dollars to celebrate history, while at the same time gutting access to historical research and materials. The budget cuts reduced the Library and Archives Canada workforce by twenty percent, resulting in the elimination or downsizing of critical functions.

People who arranged for loans of material in the collection, specialists who preserved microfilm, digital experts and reference librarians were tossed out. Training was cut. Half the LAC circulation staff who dealt with analog material – what the rest of us call books and documents – were fired. The library also killed its interlibrary loan program (BOURRIE 2015).

The President of the Canadian Library Association (CLA), in a letter sent to James Moore, described the important role libraries play in society, providing access to information and preserving the documentary heritage of the nation. Most pointedly, the CLA noted that libraries “support our government”:

For example, the federal government celebrates anniversaries of historic importance to Canada; the website of the Department of Canadian Heritage indicates its support for many of these events, including this

year the Diamond Jubilee and the War of 1812. In a few years we will celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation. And where does the government find the materials that provide the context for these commemorations – the photos, diaries, letters, sound clips, unpublished documents and published histories? In its libraries and archives (ADAMS 2012).

Mark Bourrie asserts, “History is also often hidden by governments that want to write their own narrative of what a country’s about” (BOURRIE 2015). By decimating the budgets for libraries and archives, by limiting the availability of and access to historical documents, the Harper government made it more difficult for Canadians to independently study their shared histories, while simultaneously championing a specific vision of Canadian history.

The Memorial to the Victims of Communism

Another Harper-era addition to the Ottawa landscape is the planned Memorial to the Victims of Communism, described by the Prime Minister as one that “would honour for all time the hundreds of millions of men, women and children who have struggled and continue to struggle against the tyranny of communism, those who lived and those who, tragically, did not” (HARPER 2015). According to the Tribute to Liberty, the organization driving the effort to construct the memorial, the purpose of the memorial will also be to “bring the suffering of these victims into the public’s consciousness” (Tribute to Liberty 2014). Regardless of those high-minded goals, the memorial is surrounded in controversy, beginning with the intended design.

The original plan for the memorial consisted of an eleven-metre tall viewing platform positioned across from seven concrete “folds,” triangular planes set parallel to each other and rising in height to over fourteen metres. The folds will be covered in three-dimensional “memory squares,” each representing a victim of communism and about the size of a fingerprint, lending a tactile feature to the memorial (ROSENFELD 2014). In the preliminary design stage, the memory squares, when seen from the viewing platform, would create an image of rows of dead bodies, with a life-size concrete cast of a dead body placed on the ground in front of the folds. The end result, a proposed memorial that was all hard angles, was met with strong criticism. Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson was one such critic, calling the design a “blight” and saying “It’s very stark, I don’t find it particularly attractive...” (BUTLER AND CHIANELLO 2015). Shirley Blumberg, a member of the jury that chose the winning design, claimed

that the model “selected by the jury was, I think, particularly brutalist and visceral” and “won’t move people to think that there could be a better world. To me it’s just focusing on evil” (MACGREGOR 2015).

In response to the outcry over the initial design, in late June 2015 the National Capital Commission released a revised plan for the memorial, featuring two fewer concrete memory folds, a much smaller, more compact memorial footprint, and a lower profile, with the heights of the viewing platform and memory folds nearly halved. The new plan removed the model of a dead body, while the image created by the small memory squares “will be a composition of a series of faces of people of all ages who escaped the oppression in communist countries and found refuge in Canada” (National Capital Commission 2015: 30).

Nevertheless, the chosen location for the memorial has also been cause for concern amongst critics. The memorial will occupy a prominent spot on Wellington Street, between the Supreme Court of Canada and Library and Archives Canada. Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC), the federal department overseeing the growth and development of buildings and grounds around Parliament Hill, had previously allocated the land as the site of a new Federal Court of Canada building, so as to create a “Judicial Triad,” with the nearby Supreme Court and Justice Building, that would mimic the “Parliamentary Triad” composed of the East, West, and Centre blocks of Parliament (Government of Canada 2007: 25). The Long Term Vision & Plan for the Parliamentary Precinct, the principles and framework guiding Parliament Hill’s evolution, had been updated by PWGSC as recently as 2007. The update, “ordered by the incoming Conservative government” and receiving “all-party support,” reiterated the long-held intention for a judicial building to occupy the site in question (BUTLER 2015c). The Conservative plan to instead use the parcel of land for a memorial flew directly in the face of the urban design strategy.

NDP MP Paul Dewar, a critic of the memorial’s location and the lack of transparency in the decision-making process behind that choice, voiced his concerns during House debates, stating:

Mr. Speaker, no one disagrees with the idea of the memorial, but what is with the high-handed attitude of the government? Putting the monument in front of the Supreme Court actually violates the national capital plan that the government and this Parliament approved. The minister [James

Moore] is ignoring the plan. He is also ignoring the concerns of architects, he is ignoring the Mayor of Ottawa, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and local citizens. How hard is it for the politburo over there to actually listen to people, change its mind and change the location of the monument? (Government of Canada 2015a)

Dewar's comments reflect a number of issues surrounding the proposed memorial. The idea for building a memorial to the victims of communism has received widespread support across party lines, including in statements made by party leaders (Tribute to Liberty 2014). In September 2014, Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin wrote a letter to the deputy minister of PWGSC in which she expressed concern that some of the proposed designs (possibly including the final selection) could convey "a sense of bleakness and brutalism that is inconsistent with a space dedicated to the administration of justice" (GEDDES 2015a). In February 2015, the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada issued a statement calling for the federal government to move the memorial's location, arguing that the site "represents Canada's democratic values and respect for justice," and as such, a building associated with the Department of Justice would be more suitable to sit on the plot of land (Royal Architectural Institute of Canada 2015). Memorial selection jury member Shirley Blumberg took exception to the placement, stating in an interview with the *Ottawa Citizen* that the location was "inappropriate" for a memorial of that subject matter, and that the site "is so centrally placed that [a memorial to the victims of communism] would seem to quite overshadow Canada's true history" (BUTLER 2014).

Of particular worry is what Dewar referred to as the "high handed attitude of the government," and that in addition to ignoring mounting criticism, the very process by which the site was selected is suspect and "fraught with secrecy" (BUTLER 2015d). According to Paul Bedford, a member of the National Capital Commission's Advisory Committee on Planning, Design, and Realty, and thus tasked with advising the government on the best use of public land in the capital area, the committee was never asked to comment on the proposed location of the memorial (GEDDES 2015b: 25). What is more, Bedford said that the decision on the memorial location "started from the top: Here's the site, no arguments," suggesting that it was the Conservative government calling the shots, despite protests from experts in the fields of urban design and planning (GEDDES 2015b: 25).

Since its creation in 1959, the National Capital Commission (NCC) had been the agency most responsible "for conveying a sense of national unity in capital

design, as well as making the capital a symbol of the two 'founding' cultures, the French and the English" (TAYLOR 1989: 92). As such, the construction of any new memorials would fall under the purview of the Crown corporation. However, as a part of the 2013 federal budget, much of that responsibility shifted from the NCC and instead moved to the Department of Canadian Heritage. With that shift, decisions are being made directly by the government, rather than an agency at arm's length. Larry Beasley, the chair of the NCC's Advisory Committee on Planning, Design and Realty, in conversation with *Maclean's* magazine, said:

As I understand it, the monument is basically sponsored by the government and has been implemented through a department of the government. The NCC is put in the position of an approval authority, but it's much more constrained than if it was managing the project from the beginning (GEDDES 2015c).

Other developments further support the contention that the NCC has become a rubber stamp for the government, or, in the words of architect Barry Padolsky, "a tool of the political whims of the prime minister and a couple of his ministers" (EGAN 2015). The memorial had originally been slated for the Garden of the Provinces and Territories, a small park across Wellington Street from Library and Archives Canada (National Capital Commission 2013: 3). In 2013, Rona Ambrose, then the Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, requested "the NCC's board of directors to change the land-use in the judicial precinct to allow the Memorial to the Victims of Communism to be built [on the Judicial Precinct site]," to which the board agreed, without mandating an amendment to the Long Term Vision & Plan prior to any memorial construction (CHIANELLO 2015a). Two years later, as discussions were again underway regarding the future of the memorial, the Conservatives appointed five new members to the NCC board, lending additional weight to charges the Harper government was trying to tip the scales in its favor (CURRY 2015).

In June 2015, MP Paul Dewar, after submitting an access to information request three months prior, obtained:

The 2012 correspondence between Citizenship Minister Jason Kenney, a monument booster, and Rona Ambrose [...] In it, Ambrose writes: 'Though this site is currently available for this memorial, it remains a strategic site for our departmental real property program.

Should our program needs evolve, and in accordance with the National Capital Commission Comprehensive Commemoration Program and Policy, we would initiate discussions with both the National Capital Commission and the Tribute to Liberty group for the relocation of this memorial' (SPEARS 2015).

For Dewar, this was the “smoking gun showing that the plan that had been put in place originally was changed only because of political interference” coming from Conservative ministers (SPEARS 2015).

It is telling that the full name for the memorial is the “Memorial to the Victims of Communism – Canada, a Land of Refuge.” Canada is thus positioned as a destination for those fleeing oppressive regimes, where they found freedom and safety. Canada is seen as a shining light in the darkness, a symbol of a new beginning offering immeasurable opportunities. As good as that sounds, however, there is nothing inherently “Canadian” in the memorial itself. The memorial is instead viewed as an effort to appeal to the eight million Canadians – immigrants and offspring – who have an origin in communist countries. Accordingly, “The project has been heavily steered and promoted by Multiculturalism Minister Jason Kenney, who has long been tasked by the Conservative Party to gain new support in Canada’s ethnic communities” (CURRY 2015). Tribute to Liberty, the charity advocating for the memorial’s construction, lists on their website twenty-eight “Canadian communities affected by communism in their homelands,” all of which could therefore be sources of future Conservative votes.

The entire situation regarding the Memorial to the Victims of Communism thus appears to be a clumsy, muddled mess, with political goals ultimately driving the decision-making. The Conservative-friendly board of the NCC, which ignores the advice of urban planning experts, is itself disregarded by the federal government. And should the board object to any memorial plans, the federal cabinet, under the National Capital Act, is empowered to simply overrule any decision. The Department of Canadian Heritage told the *Ottawa Citizen* that the final site chosen for the memorial “was deemed favourable” by Tribute to Liberty, thereby giving preference to the wishes of a private organization, despite the mounting number of objections pertaining to the allocation of city land (CHIANELLO 2015b). When pressed, supporters for the memorial’s design and location tend to skirt the issue. For example, when the *Ottawa Citizen* asked Rona Ambrose’s office about her involvement with the site change, a spokesman noted that she was no longer the Minister of Public Works, and

directed the line of questions elsewhere (SPEARS 2015). Likewise, “The NCC has been doing its best to distance itself from the memorial project, referring almost all questions to Canadian Heritage” (BUTLER 2015d). When critiques or questions are posed, in both the House and the Senate, with regards to the design or location of the memorial, Conservative defenders merely reiterate that the monument is meant to honour the more than 100 million people who lost their lives under communist regimes, and that the Conservative government means to uphold its commitment, made in the 2010 Speech from the Throne, to commemorate those victims (Government of Canada 2015a; Government of Canada 2015b). Despite remarks to the contrary, Conservative politicians repeatedly assert that any disapproval with the process by which the memorial is being built is equivalent to a rejection of any type of commemorative effort. Ultimately, the fate of the memorial remains up in the air. Groundbreaking had been planned for the summer of 2015, but delays associated with the redesign and land use have pushed Canadian Heritage’s timetable to a fall 2016 completion date.

Using Memorials to Tell a Story

John Bodnar has described the field of public memory as “a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication, its future” (BODNAR 1992: 15). And, as David Lowenthal notes in *The Past is a Foreign Country*, historical understanding is affected by its interpretation and display, and history can “change” – so far as the general public is concerned – depending on which facts are emphasized or minimized in museums, memorials, and other forms of public memory (LOWENTHAL 2002). Constructing a memorial to war, loss, and the darker sides of humanity is, to say the least, a complex issue. It is a matter that requires transforming private, intimate feelings into a display suitable for public consumption. In particular, it involves a society interacting with, and adding to, the existing built environment in response to a need or desire to commemorate historical events and horrors.

The importance of each of the memorials discussed here is strengthened when they are considered with regards to their place within the construction of a larger Canadian identity. Monuments and memorials, particularly when located within a national capital, are intended to remind visitors of the grandeur and gravitas of the city, the nation, the government, and the populace. In this context, questions surrounding a memorial’s design, location, subject matter, or intention are not to be taken lightly. It is not just an issue for the city of Ottawa.

It is not merely a difference in aesthetic preference. And it is not simply a case of partisan disagreement. Rather, what is memorialized, in what manner, and where a memorial is placed, can indicate which events and people are considered meaningful to a society.

With regards to the National War Memorial and Confederation Square, a precedent already exists that politicians and the public can follow when constructing a new memorial. William Lyon Mackenzie King's use of the National War Memorial to signal a mature and self-determining Canada provides a lesson for Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the Conservative Party, and the Canadian people concerning the significance of memorials in creating a national narrative. On the surface, what Harper is attempting to do through the construction and placement of the War of 1812 Monument and the Memorial to the Victims of Communism is nothing terribly new; there are many examples of how the ideologies of a specific era or administration affected how a memorial was designed. Further, the basic premise for the memorials is an understandable one; cities worldwide also feature memorials to wars and to victims of communism. However, the recent actions taken by the Harper government, particularly pertaining to the Memorial to the Victims of Communism, are not only dismissive of the heaping amounts of criticism, but are going to great lengths to appeal to specific voting blocs. For example, the government's share of the costs associated with the Memorial to the Victims of Communism has been estimated at \$3 million, over half of the roughly \$5.5 million final price tag. Yet that does not include the value of the land on which the memorial will sit, which has been estimated to be between \$16 and \$30 million (BUTLER 2015a; BUTLER 2015b). The government willingly bequeathed a prime parcel of capital property to be used for a questionable memorial.

As shown, politicians are able to use the construction of memorials to stress certain events over others, possibly currying favor with specific demographics or further a political agenda. For Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party, it has been important to change "Canada's national channel by promoting institutions that reflected hierarchy and authoritarianism, values that the Conservative leadership held dear" (MCKAY AND SWIFT 2012: 25). This involves emphasizing the military, British royalty, and a more muscular, small-c conservative Canadian identity and history. *Maclean's* journalist John Geddes has written, "Harper's top election strategists, including the late Sen. Doug Finley, have framed patriotism, especially linked to military heritage, as a key element in the Conservative brand" (GEDDES 2013). Therefore, if Conservatives are claiming patriotism and the military for themselves, then to

be against Conservative policy is to be unpatriotic, as seen when Conservative politicians claim that anyone questioning the location of the Memorial to the Victims of Communism is somehow questioning the very validity of the memorial's subject.

So with all that, what does the future hold for Ottawa's memorial landscape? The process of building something that is imbued with as much meaning as a memorial is fascinating. We must consider what compels groups of people to go through the time, effort, and cost to build something that, by and large, has little-to-no functional value beyond the symbolic. In 2017, Canada will be commemorating the 150th anniversary of Confederation, and the Conservative government has framed many of their recent commemorative efforts as a part of that broader celebration (Government of Canada 2013b: 232-233). How will Canada's sesquicentennial not only reflect the objective already outlined by the Conservative Party, but also be shaped by the existing memorialization of Canadian history?² If a memorial commemorating the victims of communism is added to Ottawa's built environment, what about memorials to the unpleasant parts of Canada's own past, such as the Somalia Affair, or the residential schools and mistreatment of aboriginal communities? Our history is never as neat and tidy as we might like, and while constructing monuments and memorials typically serves an uplifting cause, thereby foregrounding specific wars and events to further promote the dominant perception a nation or society has of itself, we need to also recognize what is not commemorated, the reasons why, and who has the power to make those decisions.

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² This article was written prior to the October 2015 federal election. Should the Conservatives remain in power, or if the Liberals or NDP form the government, it remains to be seen what shape future commemorations will take.

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