

Wagon Burners or Nation Builders?: How Canadians Remember First Nations in the National Capital Region

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Ottawa prides itself in being a culturally rich and vibrant city. It is home to over a dozen museums, many historic sites, 850 parks and sixteen national monuments. As the nation's capital, Ottawa serves several purposes: it is a home of the arts, the major place of politics and government, and a guardian of the nation's history. In the National Capital Region, there are monuments and memorials for aid workers, police, peace keepers, knowledge, Samuel de Champlain, Canada's Confederation and Canada's involvement in wars. Out of all of these structures, only two relate specifically to First Nations: Joseph Brant in the Valiants Memorial, and the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument. This is surprising, given that the National Capital Region sits on unceded Algonquin territory, and that the region was used by First Nations as a trade route since time immemorial. In *Reflections of a Siamese Twin: Canada at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century*, John Ralston Saul states that Canada was founded on "three deeply rooted pillars, three experiences – the aboriginal, the francophone and the Anglophone;¹ yet this foundational triumvirate narrative is often discounted for one that focuses on the English and French. This paper critiques the Indigenous-themed monuments found in the National Capital Region with particular focus on Joseph Brant in the Valiants Memorial. In doing so, this paper suggests that the First Nations individuals commemorated are only remembered because of how they are located as subordinated compared to the rest of people in Canada.

In both cases, the monuments for Joseph Brant and Aboriginal Veterans focus on and commemorate Indigenous involvement in war. Because of what happens in a war—death, violence, hand-to-hand combat—these monuments are representing Indigenous peoples as violent warmongers, which coincides with a prevalent stereotype that affects First

Nations. The warrior stereotype represents First Nations as people who are violent by nature and thirst for the violence that comes with military conflict. This can be correlated to the idea of the savage. The term savage goes back to Jacques Cartier, who described the people he encountered as *sauvage*, a French word that could mean someone who is savage, "someone who resided in natural surroundings," or "something that was not domesticated".² By the seventeenth century, the term had become prevalent in English³, and was used by authors and scholars who were writing about North America. Thus, because Indigenous peoples did not display the same markers of culture that Europeans did, they were seen as being savage. This savagery correlates to ideas of the warrior, a stereotype that portrays First Nations as being inherently war-like and vicious, when in fact they (and Native Americans in the United States) had the self-determined right to protect their homeland from settler-invaders from Europe⁴. Furthermore, they were no more violent than settler-invaders in their day-to-day lives.

I would also argue that with the intent to exterminate non-white peoples, the settler population was substantially more violent and bloodthirsty than the Indigenous population. These so-called Savages were obstacles to settlement and progress, and killing them was seen as justified due to their lack of civility and humanlike traits.⁵ In many ways, this stereotype

¹ John Ralston Saul, *Reflections of a Siamese Twin: Canada at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1997), 81.

² J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 31.

³ Oxford English Dictionary, "savageness, n.". *OED Online*. December 2011. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/171438?rskey=4OwYw9&result=4&isAdvanced=true> (accessed January 20, 2012).

⁴ Carol Cornelius, *Iroquois Corn in a Culture-Based Curriculum: A Framework for Respectfully Teaching About Cultures* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), p.3-4.

⁵ Cornelius, *Iroquois Corn*, 4.

is continually perpetuated by the modern media when First Nations take action to protect their territories. First Nations warriors, as seen in the Kanehsatake-Oka Conflict of 1990 and the Six Nations Reclamation of 2006, are depicted as being violent, not listening to authority, unwilling to negotiate as well as uncivil to the non-Indigenous population. Thus, by commemorating Indigenous peoples who participated in violent conflicts, the Canadian state is causing the remembrance of Indigenous peoples to be focused on a negative stereotype that still remains today. This is especially problematic when the *Indian Act* is considered.

The *Indian Act* is an oppressive example of race-based legislation implemented by the Canadian government without First Nations input in 1876. It is the only kind of legislation still in existence in the world, with South Africa having abolished its apartheid policies in the early 1990's. When the Indian Act was introduced there were 100 amendments, but over the next thirty years there were 195 additional amendments that described what Indians could and could not do according to the law⁶. This included the implementation of the band council system, forcing Indians to relocate to reserves, preventing three or more Indians from congregating together, prohibiting selling certain goods and alcohol to Indians, forbidding Indians from selling their crops, making children attend residential schools, enfranchising Indians without their consent, and making illegal many Indigenous ceremonies and rituals.⁷ Furthermore, First Nations who enlisted in the armed forces, upon returning home after the First and Second World Wars became enfranchised, meaning they lost their Indian status. Because they no longer had Indian status, these individuals would have lost any of the "rights and benefits" (something I use loosely) they would have as Indians, including living on a reserve. In a time where racial tensions were still high, living off-reserve could have presented a considerable number of challenges to these individuals. Although I do not mean in any way to discount the contributions First Nations men and women made to the war efforts, the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument is commemorating

the fact that many of these people ended up being treated even worse after they came from the wars than they did before they left is incredibly disheartening. At the same time, this style of memorialisation is representative of what I feel is the overall intent of the memorials of Indigenous peoples in the National Capital Region: to remember how assimilated Indigenous individuals are the best kind of Indigenous people. This is best examined through the statue of Joseph Brant found in the Valiants Memorial.

Born in 1742, by the time Tyendeniga, who is more commonly known as Joseph Brant, reached adulthood he had renounced the traditional Mohawk spirituality, became a practicing Christian and helped to translate several religious texts into Mohawk.⁸ His adoption of British culture and involvement in the military suggests his willful assimilation into the Western way of life. There is a common misconception that First Nations were coerced and manipulated into choosing sides during the American Revolutionary War, when actually the nations that got involved did so out of their own volition. In fact, "[...] Indians chose their fighting partners, or in some cases chose not to fight at all, according to their definition of where their interest lay."⁹ The Mohawks had close ties with the British settler population in the area at the time, because then-Superintendent of Indian Affairs of William Johnson had developed a relationship with them, due in part to his wife, Molly Brant, was Joseph Brant's sister. As a result of their contributions during the American Revolutionary War, Brant and other Haudenosaunee loyal to the British were awarded a tract of land in 1784 that was six miles on either side of the Grand River in Haldimand County, becoming the reserve Six Nations.¹⁰ Another parcel of land created for Mohawks near present-day Belleville, Ontario, was given the name Tyendinaga after Brant.¹¹ Additionally, the City of Brantford, Brant Township and Tyendinega country were all named in Brant's honour. The fact these lands were given to Brant and his followers, and more importantly that he is remembered by name in several places, suggests that the British saw him as an important ally and in many

⁶ Boyce Richardson, "The Fantastic World of the Indian Act" in *People of the Terra Nullius: Betrayal and Rebirth in Aboriginal Canada* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 95.

⁷ Richardson, "The Fantastic World of the Indian Act", 97-105.

⁸ More, Marlene. "Brant Research" (2005). In a personal communication from Janet McGowan.

⁹ Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens*, 94.

¹⁰ Olive P. Dickason, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2009), 104.

¹¹ Dickason, *Canada's First Nations*, 104-5.

ways equal to them in military ability. What is not acknowledged is the fact that Brant is highly disliked by many Mohawk due to his involvement in the surrender of their traditional territory in what is present-day New York State. As a result, who sees Brant as a revered figure depends entirely on their cultural context.

The time period in which Brant lived was one when non-Native and First Nation relationships were respectable, and the reason for this was due to the fact that the settlers *wanted* First Nations allies. The change in this relationship was the result of First Nations not wanting to be subjected to the rules and regulations forces on to them by the colonial population. As Daniel Francis explains, “As Native people showed antagonism to the ambitions of the colonizers, however, relations between the two groups deteriorated. Euro-Canadians began to demonize the Indian, especially the [Haudenosaunee]. No longer were Indians noble savages extending the hand of friendship. Instead they became the ignoble savage, the wicked, bloodthirsty redskin of so many history books and cheap novels.”¹² Following the War of 1812 and the North West Rebellion, Indigenous people started to disappear from textbooks, unless they were shown as adversaries to the settler population¹³, a trend that continued into the twentieth century. Thus, the Canadian “national dream has always been about not being Indian...There was no place for the “savage” in the world the newcomers were building. Canadian history, as Stephen Leacock said, was the struggle of civilization against savagery. There was never any question on which side Indians stood.”¹⁴ First Nations then became an Othered figure, and were seen more considerably different than the settler population.

The renowned cultural theorist Stuart Hall is best known for his ideas concerning representation, the Other and race. An examination of his theories in relation to these concepts is necessary to understand the possible meanings that can be derived from the statue of Joseph Brant in the Valiants Memorial Hall says that “Representation *is* an essential process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between

members of a culture.”¹⁵ Thus, meaning within a culture – for words, people, landscapes, art and other objects – is created by those from within that culture. For example, in contemporary Western culture, *F. catus* is seen as a somewhat friendly albeit occasionally temperamental house pet, while in ancient Egypt, cats were seen as divine, god-like creatures. Without representation then, we would not be able to make sense of our world: “Representation is a complex business and, especially when dealing with ‘difference’, it engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilizes fears and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper levels than we can explain in a simple, common-sense way.”¹⁶ The ‘difference’ being referred to here by Hall is that constructed through race. Joseph Brant is not wearing the same style of clothing as the rest of the people in the Valiants Memorial: instead of shoes he is wearing moccasins, he is the only one with a feather in his hair, and he is the only one with a Mohawk hairstyle. At the same time however, he is wearing a collared shirt and what look like regular pants. By wearing two kinds of clothing simultaneously he is not only representing himself as an Other figure, but also someone who has been assimilated. When his statue is examined within the context of the Valiants Memorial, Joseph Brant is being represented as a First Nations individual who conceded to the idea that Indigenous cultures were inferior to that of the settler population.

In its most basic form, the monument is a commemoration of military conflict and war. Kirk Savage explains that “The impulse behind the public monument was an impulse to mould history in its rightful pattern. And history was supposed to be a chronicle of heroic achievements, not a series of messy disputes with unresolved outcomes.”¹⁷ Therefore, by depicting an assimilated Indian, the memorial is suggesting that unlike the popular phrase from the late nineteenth century, wherein the government thought they had to “kill the Indian to save the child,” the only “good Indian” is one that has fully assimilated into settler culture. The fact that war monuments exist suggests that “Because

¹² Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2000), 221.

¹³ Francis, *The Imaginary Indian*, 167.

¹⁴ Francis, *The Imaginary Indian*, 223.

¹⁵ Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 15.

¹⁶ Hall, *Representation*, 226.

¹⁷ Kirk Savage, “Introduction” in *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War and Monument in Nineteenth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4.

memorials endure as places and rituals, communities are consciously made to confront wars that are a part of their history.”¹⁸ The war in this case is the war on Indians and Indianness. Why include Brant in the Valiants Memorial and not Riel, Poundmaker or Tecumseh? Riel, Poundmaker and Tecumseh were also involved in military conflict and were crucial to the development of Canada as it is today. The difference is that unlike Brant, those men did not assimilate into settler culture, and actually were vehemently opposed to it.

Theoretically, both the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument and the Valiants Memorial could be excellent examples of how the Canadian government is being inclusive and commemorating Indigenous persons for their contributions to Canada. Instead, the National Aboriginal Veterans monument functions as a constant reminder of how the First Nations men and women who served during the First and Second World Wars were treated more poorly after they returned than before they left. Furthermore, in selecting Joseph Brant to be the sole Indigenous person in the Valiants Memorial, the National Capital Commission, and by extension the Canadian government who oversees them, is—for those who know their historical figures—a constant reminder of why the assimilation of Indigenous peoples was so desired by the Canadian state. Although the representation of Brant in the memorial looks stereotypically First Nation, I believe that the representation of Brant is more Mohawk than Brant was himself. By leaving behind his culture, language and traditional attire in favour of Christianity, the English language and British fashion, Brant willfully and completely integrated himself into the rapidly growing province of Upper Canada. By using Brant in the Valiants Memorial, the NCC is suggesting that in order for Indigenous people to be accepted in Canada, they have to assimilate into the settler culture. Of course, this is contrary to the message that Canada broadcasts to the world and itself as being accepting of multiculturalism and cultural difference. And if this notion is applied to the rest of Canada as a whole, it ultimately suggests that in order to be accepted as a “true Canadian”, you have to adopt the norms, values and mores of the dominant culture, which is Anglophone, Christian (or secular), and be unwilling to question what is going on around you.

¹⁸ James Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape: The American Experience and Beyond* (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc, 1988), 11.

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