

Museums as Sites for Historical Understanding, Peace, and Social Justice: Views From Canada

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This article examines a range of issues surrounding the proposition that museums are excellent sites in which historical understanding can be deepened, thus raising the possibility of peaceful resolution to conflict and the achievement of social justice. The article begins by arguing that Canada is a case study worthy of detailed exploration. A settler state with a significant aboriginal presence, Canada is unique in its official commitment to multicultural and bilingual identities, and its traditional identity as a country extolling human rights, social justice, environmental responsibility, and peacekeeping. These markers of nationhood have become increasingly problematic in light of the Conservative government's insistence upon unifying narratives of nationhood privileging military glories, ties to the British monarchy, and constitutional achievements. This reinvention of the nation has been visible in many places, but especially in commemorative practices, sites of memory, and museums. Recent and ongoing changes to the museum landscape have ignited much discussion about the nature and role of national museums. The author offers a summary of recent scholarly work by public historians on museums in contemporary society and considers museums that explicitly assert an agenda of social responsibility, before introducing the reader to three major national museums in Canada: the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the Canadian Museum of Civilization (soon to be the Canadian History Museum), and the Canadian War Museum. Finally, the article introduces readers to the articles that follow in this special issue.

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The articles that constitute this special issue examine the role of museums in promoting peace and social justice through develop-

ing historical understanding and historical consciousness. By telling stories about the past for an audience in the present, history museums operate in the belief that knowing what has happened in the past helps us understand who we are, and for some this is a first step in the long process of achieving social justice and perhaps even resolving conflict. By bringing difficult subjects, traumatic experiences, and injustices into the open, by making them visible, and by finding ways in which visitors can critically engage with them, these museums play an essential role in contemporary society. This is not an uncomplicated proposition, and there are many examples from around the world where museums have encountered criticism and even hostility for daring to talk about controversial subjects, for revealing hitherto hidden stories, and for challenging accepted beliefs or cherished memories. This special issue has as its particular focus recent developments in Canada where three national museums have come

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under scrutiny in different ways and for different reasons.

Why is Canada a particularly worthy focus for these questions? First, Canada is a hybrid nation that not only shares identities with many countries in the world, but is often held up as an example of a highly successful multicultural, multilingual federated nation. Despite conflict and difference, its two colonial peoples, French and English speaking, have shaped a nation constitutionally grounded in the concept of the two founding nations (France and Britain) that is manifested in an official policy of bilingualism. Yet, it is a settler state that shares its sense of nationhood with the aboriginal or first peoples—the Inuit, and the First Nations (Native Americans), and the mixed-origin Metis. These shared, sometimes competing, claims of national origins have been complicated, as in many western nations, with significant immigration from Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, Oceania, and Africa. Canada's official policy of multiculturalism makes it unique in the world, and arguably offers the greatest hope for achieving historical understanding with a view toward peace and social justice within the boundaries of a single nation.

Canada also has a unique military history. While Canadians have fought wars against each other (between First Nations, and between French and English, sometimes with First Nations allies), with its neighbor to the south (the War of 1812), and overseas (imperial wars such as the South African War, the two world wars, the Korean War, Afghanistan and, in significant numbers as volunteers in the Spanish Civil War and Vietnam), the national story has until recently been one that emphasizes our role in peace-keeping rather than war-making. That we are a nation of peacekeepers is persistent enough to confuse Canadians as to the nature of our current involvement in Afghanistan. With a Conservative government that has been re-branding national identity in ways that emphasizes the country's military past, Canada has a unique story to tell when it comes to exploring how conflict and peace, dissonance and harmony, competing interpretations and common understandings, injustice and justice are represented.

Canada also has a significant number of national museums in which these stories of nationhood, history, and memory are presented to the

public, and although this in itself is not unique, what is significant is that Canada's museum landscape is changing rapidly in ways that are important and deserving of attention for anyone concerned with the ways in which museums serve as sites for historical understanding, restitution and social justice. For the first time a national museum will be opening outside of the national capital region centered on Ottawa. The Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR), which will open in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 2014, is a Canadian first in another sense, for it is a museum that grew out of a private initiative, and that therefore enjoys both public and private funding. The first national museum with an explicit mandate to speak to human rights issues in Canada and around the world, the museum has faced calls for government intervention, and for a suspension of construction until special interest's demands are met, even before its doors have opened.

No less controversial has been the Conservative government's announcement that the world-renowned Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC) is to be remade into the Canadian History Museum, a remaking due to be ready for the nation's sesquicentennial in 2017. Besides debates over what stories are going to be told, and an apparent shift away from the core collections of the museum, critics have questioned the current government's commitment to museums as sites for unbiased critical engagement with the past, accusing it of wanting a museum that merely celebrates the nation's achievements.

Meanwhile, the Canadian War Museum (CWM) has after some delay decided to open an exhibition on peace for the first time in its nearly 10-year history. Perhaps this will help mollify those had hoped for a peace museum, or at least a war and peace museum, rather than one solely dedicated to war and military history. The museum has already come under careful scrutiny, most notably when its display on the Allied bombing campaign in Europe generated conflict, leading to political interference that forced changes to be made.

It is hoped that these case studies from Canada will encourage further discussion about whether national museums need to be socially responsible, should promote social justice, and even encourage social activism for the betterment of society. This introduction will begin by

setting out some important contexts for the articles that follow. First, I offer a brief overview of some of the work done in public history concerning the changing role of museums in contemporary society. Second, I turn to some recent insights into how museums can function as sites promoting historical understanding, peace and social justice. Third, I set out some essential histories for the three major museums under discussion. Finally, the introduction examines the ways in which our contributors improve our understanding of the way museums can function best as sites of conscience and engines of change.

Museums in Contemporary Society

What are museums for? At their most elemental, museums are treasure boxes of artifacts and objects. We trust museum professionals to collect what is important, to archive and conserve what they have collected, and, at some point, we expect them to offer a selection of their holdings for exhibition and display. We enjoy visiting museums not only to admire the objects on display but also to learn something about what they mean. Moreover, according to a number of international surveys, it seems that museums are one of the trust worthiest of the places and ways in which we learn about the past (Ashton & Hamilton, 2003; Rosenzweig & Thelen, 1998). We think museums are safe places to tell difficult stories, and to offer perspectives on controversial, difficult and even traumatic subjects (Cameron, 2006; Ferguson, 2006). They are places we go not only to admire and to wonder, but also to learn, to improve our understanding, to discover more about ourselves and the world we live in (Pedretti, 2007).

It should not surprise us, then, that museums themselves can be controversial places, whose collections and exhibitions are often scrutinized, criticized, and debated, both internally and externally at a variety of levels. While this is true of any museum, and of course of many other institutions and forums, it seems especially the case with museums that carry in their mandates an obligation to serve the nation (Dean & Rider, 2005). As Benedict Anderson (2006) reminds us, the museum, like a census or a map, shapes our sense of belonging to a nation and our imagining of the national community. National museums often state this goal explic-

itly in their vision and mission statements. For example, the [National Museum of Ireland's \(2013\) website](#) tells us that the museum aims to be "that authoritative voice on the relevant aspects of Irish heritage, culture and natural history." India's [National Museum, New Delhi's website \(2013\)](#) notes that the museum will "serve as epitome of national identity." The [National Museum of American History \(2013\) website](#) reveals that the museum's purpose is to "explore the infinite richness and complexity of American history. We help people understand the past in order to make sense of the present and shape a more humane future." Museums, then, are both backward and forward-looking; they are both temples and schools, where the past speaks to our present, and on occasion where we meet our present selves, in the hope that our futures will be better. There is a lot at stake in what happens in museums and in the ways museums work.

The Purpose of Museums

The purpose, role, and function of museums have been discussed and debated by scholars from a variety of disciplines over the past three decades, but especially in the fields of museum studies, anthropology, and my own field of public history. Three particular aspects of this scholarship stand out for me in the context of a special issue on how museums play a role in enhancing understanding in order to resolve conflict and achieve social justice. We might summarize them as trends in which museums are concerned to become arenas for public engagement, contact zones for the meeting of diverse viewpoints, and places where authority can be shared.

Active Visitorship

First, there has been a growing awareness that museums are not places where the public simply consumes and digests what is presented to them. Rather, visitors are identified as active agents in their learning. Researchers have found that visitors come with both expectations and knowledge, that they make use of what they see, and that they leave having made it their own. They are active, not passive, learners. Museums have responded by paying careful attention to exhibition processes and display strategies, with

a particular emphasis on finding ways in which visitors can interact with what they see, and sometimes make choices about what and how they see, through performances, digitization, virtual representations, and access to objects. Visitors are sometimes even asked to surrender themselves to another persona, to become someone else in order to reach a fuller understanding of past experience. There is a dynamic, sensory aspect to museum displays where visitors are encouraged to choose, to think, to touch, smell, hear, and speak, as well as to see. Museums are no longer places of silence (Witcomb, 2011).

Contact Zones

Second, researchers have recognized that museums have become more than temples displaying treasures and schools for learning. James Clifford's (1997) characterization of museums as "contact zones" has captured what happens in a museum when visitors from different backgrounds interact, where museum professionals interact with communities. This has encouraged a shift in museums toward thinking more engagingly with the communities they serve, and this has raised important questions about exclusion and inclusion. National museums, for example, search for new ways of ensuring inclusivity in their exhibition spaces, often drawing attention to global or trans-national contexts such as travel, tourism, migration, migrant labor, and to the question of beginnings and origins, and well as to notions of belonging. Spaces are increasingly given over to explore cultural, political, social, economic, and religious diversity, to differences of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. Recognition has been given to the notion that the nation has evolved or developed differently for different members of the national community (Kaplan, 2011; Karp, Kreamer, & Levine, 1992).

Controversy

Third, this shift in modes of representation has been accompanied by a good deal of scholarship exploring those instances when things go wrong, and when museum practices and choices provoke controversy. In tracing the genealogy of such controversies, scholars have argued that museums need to be much more transparent in their decision making processes and have traced

the ways in which museums have responded. In particular, there has been an important shift in museum practice toward shared authority with the public. Rather than assuming an expert role, whose authority is unchallenged and the veracity of its decisions unquestioned, museums have learned to put much more emphasis on community consultation, and on bringing communities into the exhibition process. While this "shared authority," a concept established by Michael Frisch (1990), is in some ways necessarily limited, constrained by the power, authority and responsibility of the museum, it has on occasion become a process of *sharing* authority, where, in the case of museums, exhibition spaces have been surrendered to communities to shape the stories that are being told (Crooke, 2011; Dodd & Sandell, 2001).

Museums then have become places for active learning and engagement, where diverse views come into contact with each other, and where on occasion authority has been shared with the public. This is reflected in the declaration by one of the newest national museums, the Museum of New Zealand—Te Papa Tongarewa: "Te Papa is New Zealand's national museum, renowned for being bicultural, scholarly, innovative, and fun. Our success is built on our relationships with and ability to represent our community" (Museum of New Zealand, 2013).

Museums as Sites for Social Justice

In a lecture on museums campaigning for social justice, the Director of National Museums Liverpool, David Fleming (2010) summarized the new museums as "audience-focused, educational, community-orientated, democratic, open to debate, diverse, socially responsible." Elaborating on what a socially responsible museum looks like, he drew attention to the values that Liverpool has set itself including a commitment to social justice and the power of museums to "promote good and active citizenship, and to act as agents of social change." This translates in practice to a prioritizing of the education and learning goals of the museum, nonhierarchical administrative structures, an acceptance of change and a willingness to take risks, a commitment to widening and deepening access, to networking "on a grand scale," to consulting widely and creating audience-

centered programming, and to “tackle difficult, contemporary issues, or issues with a contemporary relevance.” In taking these positions, Liverpool is acting in accordance to what a myriad of international studies tell us, that the public wants socially responsible museums which tackle complicated and difficult issues: 60% of Australians polled over the telephone and 82% polled on leaving a museum thought so, numbers comparable to findings in Canadian museums (Ashton & Hamilton, 2003; Ferguson, 2006). The public sees museums as safe places where conflicts and injustices can be brought into the open in the hope that optimism and hope can be restored and a degree of resolution achieved for a better future.

What does this actually look like in practice? Fleming gives an excellent example: a socially responsible museum “will make the links between the architectural splendour of modern Liverpool, and the obscenity of the slave trade which so enriched Liverpool merchants.” At the heart of the matter, then, is storytelling. What stories have been told in museums and how well do they suit present needs and future aspirations? What stories have been left out, hidden from view, too painful or controversial or divisive to be brought out into the open? Susan Opatow’s (1990) critical and theoretical engagement with the concept of moral exclusion has provided an important tool in exploring how museums address injustice. Exploring two Holocaust museums, Opatow (2011, 2012) shows that while museums have been sites of “exclusionary memory,” they contain within themselves “inclusionary possibility”:

When historical museums address moral exclusion by interpreting the past for contemporary visitors, they recall what some might choose to forget, contradicting and disrupting prior discourses about what happened and how that had been possible. This can foster understanding, discussion, and deeper knowledge so that people in contemporary society can learn from past injustice and violence that was widespread. (2011, pp. 209–10)

This can, of course, lead to debate and controversy, because those who would like to continue forgetting, or whose self-interest is served by these erasures, resist attempts to realize the possibilities of inclusion, or when representations of the past are seen as undermining political, economic, social or cultural interests. It can be difficult to find ways to display, let alone

reconcile, opposing viewpoints and different understandings of the past, particularly when the stakes are not only representing history to the present, but shaping memory and history for the future. This is a complicated process, necessitating negotiation not only between different and competing stakeholders, histories, memories, and identities, but also between celebratory history and conflict history, between shared and competing heritages, and, as Hamber (2012) has recently argued, between engaged critical history and nostalgia for the past.

One group of museums that openly sought to challenge established narratives and raise historical consciousness formed the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience in 1999 (Sevcenko, 2010). Its founding members included the District Six Museum in South Africa, the Liberation War Museum in Bangladesh, the Workhouse Museum in the United Kingdom, the Gulag Museum in Russia, the Maison Des Escalaves (House of Slaves) in Senegal, and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in the United States. It now has 17 accredited sites of conscience (International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, 2013).

The Coalition is a worldwide network “dedicated to remembering past struggles for justice and addressing their contemporary legacies.” Programs offered at the sites have the declared purpose of making “explicit connections between past and present,” fostering “dialogue among diverse stakeholders,” and to “open avenues for citizen participation in other human rights or transitional justice efforts.” Most revealingly, in terms of a commentary on the assumed role of the traditional museum, the Sites of Conscience insist that

By initiating new conversations about contemporary issues through a historical lens, places of memory can become new centers for democracy in action. But the power of historic sites is not inherent; it must be harnessed as a self-conscious tactic in the service of human rights and civic engagement (International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, 2013).

Each of the member sites is located in, and often situated on, places of struggle, exploitation, resistance, and trauma. A number are associated with poverty and work: beside the Tenement Museum and the Workhouse Museum now stand the Tea Plantation Workers Museum in Sri Lanka, two migrant worker’s museums in South Africa, and Belgium’s Bois du Cazier

Museum dedicated to the victims of the largest industrial tragedy in the country's history.

Others, notably a significant number in the United States, focus on the experience of immigrants. Rather more have their origins in political and other forms of persecution: apartheid (the District Six Museum in South Africa), victims of military oppression in the Philippines, Ecuador, Guatemala, Chile and Argentina, and of Soviet political repression in Russia. Others are dedicated to remembering the horrors of slavery (the Maison des Esclaves in Senegal, the Zanzibar Former Slave Market in Tanzania), the Holocaust (the Memorial at Terezin, Czech Republic, the Jasenovac Memorial Site in Croatia), and other genocides (the Srebrenica-Postočari Memorial Center in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Cambodia).

The existence of these sites dedicated to historical understanding, peace, and social justice invite a larger question: what is the role of national museums in educating their publics on similar issues? In fact, the United States Parks Service was one of the founding members of the Coalition, presumably because it recognized that many of the sites under its care held difficult memories and histories. There are museums associated with the Coalition that are recognizably history museums, such as the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, the Japanese American National Museum, the New Mexico History Museum, the (American) National Civil Rights Museum, and the State Museum of the Political History of Russia. The Ghana Museums and Monuments Board that administers the National Museum in Accra as well as two museums in former slave depots, is a Coalition member. Several museums are explicitly dedicated to peace. The Kyoto Museum for World Peace not only promises to offer "an honest and critical view" of the second world war and Japan's militarist past, but to promote peace "by conveying the tragic realities of war and illustrating the efforts of those who oppose war," while the Gernicka Peace Museum in Spain has expanded its original remit to document the bombing of Gernicka in the Spanish Civil War to focus on peace. In Sweden, Cultural Heritage Without Borders is an organization "dedicated to rescuing and preserving tangible and intangible cultural heritage touched by conflict, neglect or human and natural disasters." These are

very general mandates, and strikingly they are similar to those of several national museums throughout the world, but perhaps no more than the new CMHR.

Contested Spaces in Three National Museums

The landscape of Canada's national history museums is undergoing a dramatic transformation, the most significant changes since the 1989 opening of the nation's flagship and much-heralded CMC in the national capital region (Ottawa-Gatineau, straddling the Ontario-Quebec border).

Canadian Museum of Human Rights

The CMHR claims to be "an embodiment of Canada's commitment to democracy, freedom, human rights, and the rule of law." Its "organizational values" included "objectivity, innovation, and inclusiveness" and its mandate is to "enhance the public's understanding of human rights, to promote respect for others, and to encourage reflection and dialogue" (*Canadian Museum for Human Rights*, 2013). Of the three museums that are the focus of this special issue, the CMHR is the one that most fully embraces the possibilities of Fleming's (2010) socially responsible museum and has the potential to realize Opatow's (1990, 2011, 2012) inclusive museum. The museum will feature an *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada* gallery and its largest exhibition space (9,500 square feet) is a gallery devoted to Canada's human rights history covering potential topics as diverse as residential schools, disability rights, LGBT rights, Japanese-Canadian forced relocation, the Chinese head tax, migrant workers and Stolen Sisters (abducted and murdered aboriginal women).

Smaller galleries will consider the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other historical international developments in human rights articulation and practice, and contemporary human rights issues and activities. The *Breaking the Silence* gallery centers on the five genocides and mass atrocities formally recognized by the Canadian government (in addition to the Holocaust, these are the Armenian genocide, the Holodomor, Rwanda, and Srebrenica), among other mass atrocities. The museum will also include two temporary exhibition spaces.

Along with many socially responsible and inclusive museums, the CMHR features a *Take Action* gallery that encourages visitors to “engage in dialogue and reflection about human rights” (Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Gallery Profiles, 12 September 2012, posted online by CBC News, 4 March 2013). In terms of consultation and community networking, the museum’s Content Advisory Committee ran a cross-Canada public engagement tour in 2009–2010 with a follow up round in 2011–2012, and has sought advice from a wide range of human rights specialists and organizations.

Prior to the release of the 2012 planning document, the CMHR had attracted a good deal of criticism especially from groups representing Ukrainian-Canadians, Canadians from the former Soviet Baltic states, of Hungarian and Slovak descent, and Polish-Canadians. These groups have waged a campaign insisting that too much space has been allocated to the Holocaust and too little to the Holodomor, the sufferings inflicted on eastern Europeans by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, and the internment of Ukrainian and other immigrants during the world wars. (Adams, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2012; Adams, 2011; Basen, 2011; Bitoni, 2010; Lewis, 2011a, 2011b). It remains to be seen if the space devoted in the *Breaking the Silence* gallery will be sufficient to answer these demands, although signs are good (Knelman, 2013). On the document’s release, Palestinian-Canadians were quick to lobby for greater attention to their story in the museum (Hicks, 2013).

Canadian Museum of Civilization

What stories should be told and how much space should be devoted to each is at the heart of current discussions associated with the CMC, being reconstituted as the Canadian History Museum (CHM). When Heritage Minister James Moore announced that the CMC was going to become the CHM, he noted the importance of promoting “national achievements and accomplishments” (Butler, 2012; Civilization museum’s \$25M rebranding, 2012; Museum of Civilization to become history, 2012). Within months, the mandate of the CMC (articulated in the 1990 Museum’s Act) had been changed; the old museum’s responsibility to promote “critical understanding” was removed, leaving an

emphasis on enhancing “appreciation and respect.” The new mandate also removed the museum’s specific commitment to ethnographic, anthropological, archaeological, and historical research (Parliament of Canada, 2012).

The key spaces within the CMC allocated for the new focus (some 44,000 square feet) has been on the museum’s second and third floors. The treasure box that is Canadian architect Douglas Cardinal’s signature museum contains several separate museum and gallery spaces. On the lower floor are the Children’s Museum, the First People’s Hall, and the Grand Hall featuring west coast aboriginal communities. These will remain as part of the CHM. The major transformation will happen on the museum’s second floor where the Canadian Postal Museum no longer exists, where only fragments of the Canada Hall (the main place where the story of Canadian history after the arrival of European peoples was told) will stay, and the Canadian Personalities Hall (featuring key figures in past and contemporary Canada), which was situated on a mezzanine level above the Canada Hall, has been dismantled.

The Canada Hall was a space devoted to the social, cultural, and economic history of Canada, traced through time and space (beginning with the settlement of Atlantic Canada by the Norse and ending with contemporary northern territories). After some criticism of the absence of constitutional, political and military history, the Hall enjoyed a retrofit where stories such as the deportation of Acadians were added (Dean & Rider, 2005). The Hall’s modular construction allowed for more recent changes including displays featuring the Winnipeg Labor Temple and General Strike, the Rebellions of the 1830s, and the constitutional formation of Canada in 1867.

As Minister Moore mentioned in his announcement, difficult stories, such as the internment of Japanese Canadians, were barely visible in the Canada Hall and the new museum will have the space to tackle different and contentious stories avoided in the CMC. Changes to the mandate, however, have raised concerns in the media and among historians that the new museum will focus on a linear narrative of constitutional, political, military, and economic accomplishment. Certainly the museum director promises to “present the national narrative” and “Explore the major themes and seminal events”

in Canadian history; visitors “will come into direct contact with the touchstones of our history: Champlain’s Astrolabe, the Last Spike, historical portraits, artifacts of our nation’s founders, “relics” of our national sports and athletic accomplishments” ([Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2013](#)).

Of course, each of these objects carries the potential of telling different and difficult stories. Champlain’s astrolabe could tell the story of European exploration of new lands and negotiation with First Peoples, but it could also tell the story of assumed cultural superiority whose legacy was the trauma of the residential school system and continued inequalities in modern times. It could lead to a discussion about how we commemorate the past, centered on the striking, but controversial Champlain monument visible from the museum ([Phillips, 2003](#)). The Last Spike could be used not only to celebrate the achievement of a railway network from coast to coast, but to present histories of inequality, whether the appalling working conditions of those who built the railway or the injustice of the Chinese head tax imposed despite the significant contribution of Chinese Canadians to the building of the railway.

Even Rocket Richard’s famous No. 9 hockey sweater, noted by Minister Moore as one of the museum’s treasures, offers the chance not only to celebrate the role of hockey in Canadian history and identity, but to address class difference, and competing cultural and linguistic identities at the time of the Richard riots. If museum staff are given the freedom to tell these stories, as by rights they should under the terms of the Museum’s Act, then the CHM could become a world-leading space in which the public can engage with difficult topics, dark histories and injustices, with different perspectives and competing points of view, as well as with stories of achievement.

The transformation of the museum has taken place at a time of politicized debates over heritage policy. This has included millions of dollars assigned to celebrate the War of 1812, interpreted as a foundational event for the formation of Canada with an emphasis on celebration and commemoration rather than critical engagement. Other opportunities for celebration, such as the anniversary of the landmark Canadian Charter for Rights and Freedoms, were allowed by the Conservative government

to pass almost unnoticed, possibly because it was an achievement of a previous Liberal government. The current government’s determination to promote the country’s military past, seen in a range of changes from the rewriting of guidebooks for new citizens to new monuments and commemorative coins, stamps and street banners, has led to accusations that Canada is being rebranded, as [McKay and Swift \(2012\)](#) have called it, “a warrior nation.” All of this, critics suggest, does not bode well for the chances of the CHM becoming an inclusive museum or one that will place its primary focus on social responsibility.

Canadian War Museum

One small sign of the government’s placing of greater importance on military history was when it ordered the picture of the National Library and Archives building be replaced on Canada’s savings bonds by one of the new CWM. The CWM opened in 2005 on the anniversary of the ending of the Second World War. It was the result of a high profile public campaign by veterans’ organizations that wanted a new museum to replace the old war museum located near the National Gallery on Sussex Drive at the heart of the capital. The genesis for the new museum was a campaign by veterans’ organizations against a permanent gallery dedicated to the Holocaust in the old war museum. The Holocaust, they argued, was not part of Canada’s military history. This successful campaign had highlighted the poor state of the museum’s buildings and storage facilities, and so lobbying began for a brand new museum. The result was the spectacular building designed by Canadian architect Raymond Moriyama that rises from the Lebreton Flats alongside the Ottawa River, not far from Parliament Hill. It offers 440,000 square feet dedicated to the country’s military history and the history of Canadians at war ([Dean, 2009](#); [Hillmer, 2010](#)).

Before the museum opened there was opposition to devoting resources to a new museum dedicated to war and military history. Some lobbied for a peace museum, or for a war and peace museum ([The Canadian Peace Museum, or the Canadian Museum for Peace and the Future, 2004](#); [Van der Veen, 2004](#); [Grisdale, 2007](#)). The debates revolved around the importance of war in the nation’s history, and the

extent to which war shaped Canadian identity, but there was never any doubt that the veterans' organizations' vision for the museum would be realized. There were controversies, however, notably over the CWM's decision to commission paintings referencing the murder of a Somali civilian by members of the Canadian paratroopers which led to some veteran's calling for a boycott of the museum's opening (Dean, 2009). Much more outcry greeted the curatorial decision to reference German civilian deaths during the Allied bombing campaign of the Second World War and to indicate in the wording of a display panel that some at the time doubted the morality of the campaign. Historians have since debated whether the bombing campaign really achieved its goal of bringing the war to a quicker end. Veterans' complaints led to a parliamentary enquiry which, although it acknowledged the validity of the display's perspectives, insisted that it should be changed, and the museum accepted this. Sometimes dubbed Canada's "Enola Gay" controversy, the dispute over the CWM's bomber campaign display has cast a similar shadow over curatorial independence as did that famous controversy in the United States (Bothwell, Hansen, & Mac-Millan, 2008; Dean, 2009; Hillmer, 2010).

The debate over the place of war and military history in the general narrative of Canada's emergence as a nation has taken place at a time when various anniversaries of the First and Second World Wars are happening, when anxiety has grown over how we will remember those who lived through those wars as the last veterans pass on. It resonates with contemporary discussions about the apparent abandonment of the much-cherished memory of Canadian forces as United Nations peacekeepers in favor of fighting the war in Afghanistan. Canada is one of the few nations to have invested so much in a new national museum dedicated to war and military history at the beginning of the 21st century. Another national museum seems to be turning away from its focus on ethnography, anthropology and archaeology, and on social, environmental and cultural history, and compromising its commitment to further critical understanding of the past with a commemorative agenda (Taylor, 2012; Butler, 2013; McGregor, 2013). The newest national museum, dedicated to human rights, has provoked opposition to a perceived imbalance of emphasis on Canadian

aboriginal history and on the Holocaust. Museums in Canada today are troubled places, rife with staff discontent and allegations of political interference ("Human rights museum staff," 2012; "Human rights museum board," 2012; Brodbeck, 2012).

The Present Issue: Peace, Conflict, and Human Rights in Canada's National Museums

This special issue consists of 12 contributions, in addition to the Introduction, and a brief prefatory essay. Three articles are from established scholars: Bonny Ibhawoh of McMaster University, Jill Strauss of the John Jay College, and Miranda Brady of Carleton University. Each focuses on one of the three national museums noted earlier, and although all can be thought of as public historians, their approach is interdisciplinary. Nine shorter articles, with an accompanying preface by myself, are contributions from masters students in Carleton University's MA in Public History program: Angela Beking, Victoria Campbell, Erica Fagen, Lara Lavelle, Robin Long Mullins, Valerie Luchak, Candice McCavitt, Emily Macdonald, and Christine Whitehouse.

Canadian Museum for Human Rights

Encouraging positive social change is at the core of the mandates of the growing number of museums dedicated to human rights. As Bonny Ibhawoh argues in the first article of this special issue, the meaning and historicity of the past has been central to human rights scholarship because of the need to make connections with the present. Ibhawoh examines the difficulties faced by curators and historians in trying to find ways to address the complexity of the nature of human rights. While some prefer a historically specific definition, particularly one located in the adoption of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, others argue for a more elastic interpretation that focuses the ideas upon which concepts of justice rest in various societies.

Ibhawoh argues that these debates have become sharpened by the emergence of human rights in the public sphere. He helpfully distinguishes between human rights museums—those that focus centrally on human rights—and hu-

man rights museology—committed to certain practices that promote responsible citizenship and social activism. Human rights museums also have to work within political and institutional contexts which shape not only how they position themselves in the way they represent the past, but do so with an eye to the future. In his deep discussion of the choices open to him while creating a Global Human Rights Timeline for the CMHR, Ibhawoh sharpens our understanding of the nature, meaning and scope of human rights.

The next contribution explores the types of stories visitors to the CMHR might expect to encounter. It offers nine case studies, whose genesis is first explained in a brief essay authored by myself (see Dean, this issue). The nine contributors were all students taking my graduate seminar on “museums, national identity and public memory.” Their work focused on specific topics that might become part of what was then conceived as the Canada Zone in the CMHR. The essays explore human rights and social justice in a variety of contexts, from cases seeking to establish individual or collective human rights against the state to attempts to define individual human rights in relation to other individuals. Some relate only to Canada, others reflect the fact that events must be seen in their global context.

As Anna Reading (2003) has noted with regards to Holocaust museums, digital interactivity has become one important way in which the past is conveyed and visitor experience enhanced. Each author of these exhibition proposals for the CMHR offer ideas about ways in which the meaning of the stories that they researched might be presented to visitors through interactive displays, performances and games. Representing these stories in such a dynamic way will help the CMHR realize its goal of encouraging citizens to “take a stand for human rights in their community, their country, and beyond” (Murray, 2011).

Canadian War Museum

Jill Strauss offers us a review of a current peace exhibit that is a remarkable departure for the CWM. Long in the making, *Peace: The Exhibit*, features zones that encourage visitors to reflect on the ways Canadians in the past organized, intervened and negotiated for peace.

The exhibit covers experiences such as First Nations treaties, conscientious objectors, Spanish Civil War brigades, peace associations and movements. Strauss traces the curatorial commitment to this being a truly visitor-centered exhibition. Besides a range of educational activities, visitors are invited to respond to the exhibition by offering written responses that are visible to others. They are also asked to explore their understanding by juxtaposing photographs pasted onto the sides of cubes to create their own visual image of peace.

Such reflexive activities reinforce the general point that while the exhibition cannot cover all subjects, histories and memories, each visitor brings their own conception of peace and will hopefully leave with more understanding, but that they, themselves, will determine what form this takes. For this reason too, the zones are not situated with a linear narrative in mind—visitors can explore the exhibition in their own way. In their article exploring the value of Moral Exclusion Theory for peace education, Opatow, Gerson, and Woodside (2005) note Georg Simmel’s suggestion that transitioning from war to peace is far more difficult than the reverse (p. 311). One way to achieve this goal is to educate the public in the history of peace activism, but it remains to be seen how *Peace: The Exhibit* will play out in the context of a national museum dedicated to war and military history.

Canadian Museum of Civilization

In the final contribution, Miranda Brady argues that an opportunity has been lost in the remaking of Canada’s major history museum. The experiences of aboriginal peoples who were forced into the residential school system is only briefly mentioned in the CMC’s First People’s Hall, and was entirely absent from the museum’s Canada Hall. Brady proposes that the re-configuration of the museum as the Canadian History Museum offers the opportunity for all Canadians to understand the trauma of the residential schools and to begin to engage with its legacy. She notes that the ongoing processes of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has generated a considerable archive—written, oral, visual—that constitutes an extraordinary resource, but that the Canadian History Museum appears reluctant, or perhaps

lacks the ability, to make this central to its makeover of Canadian history. The TRC's presence in the Canadian cultural and political landscape will be visible through its National Research Centre in Winnipeg rather than in the nation's capital. Brady demonstrates that the politically influenced "feel good" narrative of the past which seems to have discouraged engagement with the darkest side of Canada's past complicates Michel Foucault's proposal that museums are mirrors of ourselves and the spaces we inhabit.

This is an opportunity missed because, as Brady notes, citing psychologists [Berndsen and McGarty \(2012\)](#), enabling visitors who may not know about the residential school system and who may be unaware of the traumas inflicted there can be given the chance to take "the perspective of people who have experienced harm from one's own group can bolster a commitment to positive social change" (p. 1316). There could be no better case for the argument that history museums, in presenting the past to a public in ways that enhances historical knowledge and understanding, can play a vital role in developing social awareness, critical engagement, and change for the betterment of all.

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