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# OUR SCHOOLS

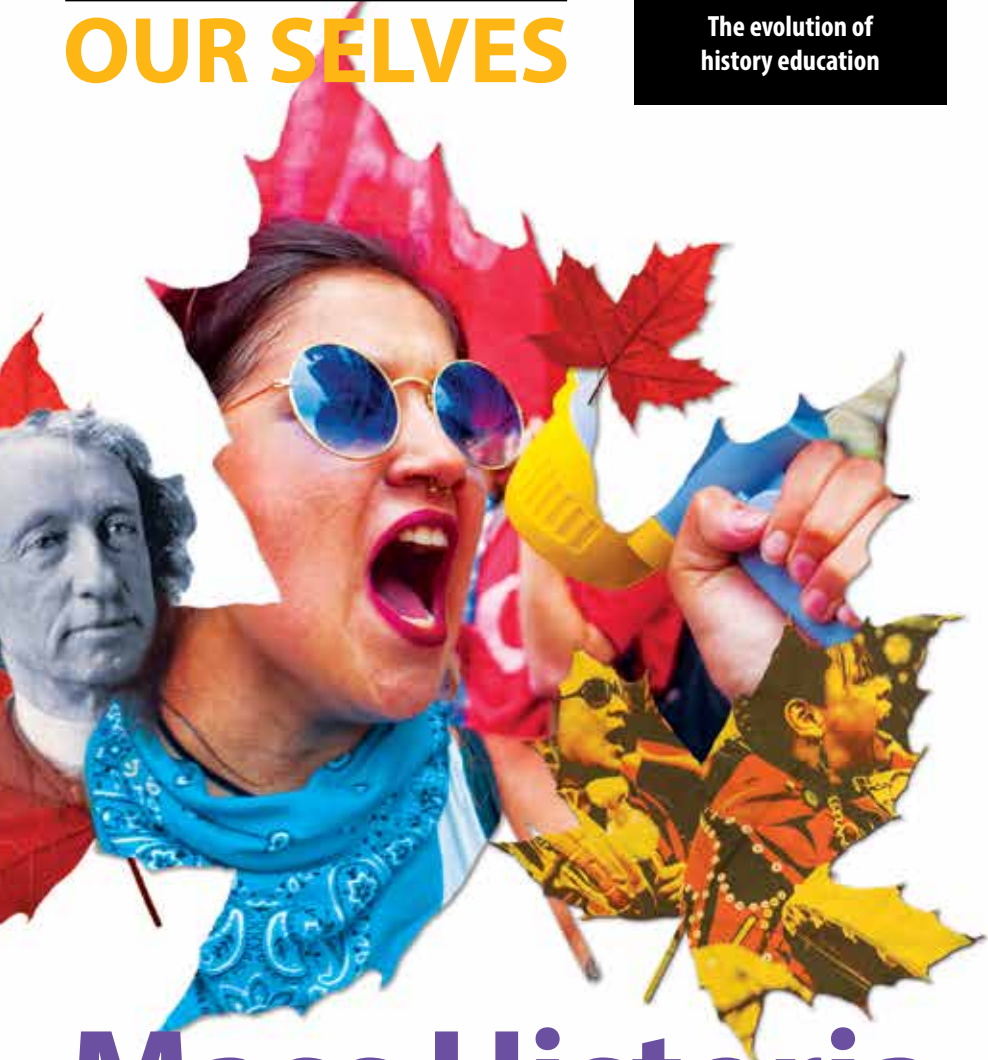
The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

# OUR SELVES

Teaching and learning at  
Edmonton's Inner City  
High School

Music, social justice, and  
history education

The evolution of  
history education



# Mass Historia

Exploring history, narrative, and  
citizenship in our classrooms



1841

1848

1857

1864

1866

1867

1870

1871

1873

1875

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OS





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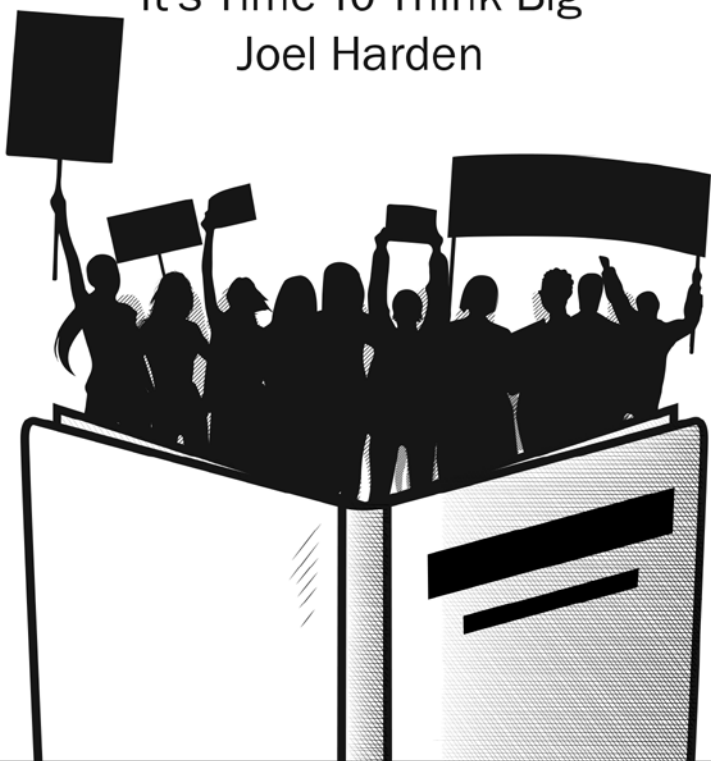
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ERIKA SHAKER

## Tell Me a (Hi)story

The lead-up to 2017 — Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> — provides an opportune moment to focus on the topic of history: how we define it, how our understanding of it has evolved (or how it hasn't), how we teach it, what we teach (and what we don't), and how all of this serves as a backdrop to the ways in which we define ourselves — inclusively or exclusively.

I admittedly have a somewhat personal stake in this topic: my academic interests and areas of focus have always been History (BA) and English (MA), and my favourite books growing up were historical fiction and mythology. I always loved examining how narratives were crafted, and to what effect — how they intersected, and how moments in history became memorialized and, in some cases, mythologized... and others were, at best, relegated to footnote status.

I'm also missing the social justice calendar the CCPA has produced for the past four years. *The Agenda for Social Change* (get it?) was about mapping out an alternative history that would provide context and details to the very basic timeline of Confederation that so often constrains what we're taught and how we think of historical evolution. It was an opportunity to prioritize struggles, victories and (in some cases), losses for labour, First Nations, women, LGBT, the environment, anti-poverty, anti-racism, social justice, equity, education, the arts....

and each year the list grew larger. By the fourth year of this publication, over 300 dates were included, along with an overview of how these moments worked together and built on each other. It was an exercise in what we, collectively, have gained...and, in too many cases, what we have lost. It was also an opportunity to examine different story lines that come together in conflict or collaboration.

So when Clare Mian offered to write an article on the teaching of Canadian history for *Our Schools/Our Selves*, the timing seemed perfect.

Two articles help frame this issue: Josh Cole has put together a very thoughtful piece on the ways in which neoliberalism became entwined with — and then eventually subsumed — the national narrative. Clare examines the history of history teaching, with a focus on what has been and what is currently taking place in classrooms across the country.

In a particularly timely piece, Rob Green critiques Quebec's new history curriculum — what's not included ("the struggles and contributions of Quebec's various minority communities are almost entirely absent"), what is (Anglophones), and in what context ("as comic-book villain intent on impeding the progress of the French majority at every turn"). He explains: "To be clear, this is not to say that the crimes of the British regime and the English merchant class should be excluded or even minimized. To remove such details would be an even worse ideological instrumentalization of the curriculum. Rather, the point here is that such crimes should not be the only thing students in Quebec learn about the history of the Anglophone community."

Inclusion of personal (his)stories in the classroom is addressed by Indigenous educators Lee Klyne and Guillermo Vodniza: "Students need to see themselves represented in the classroom, and stories generate a basic community dialogue of sharing experiences and understanding about 'us,' generating empathy to and between each other."

Megan Noel Singer, in conversation with Red Haircrow examine the ways in which First Nations experiences are taught in a higher education setting (specifically in Montana):

Decolonization in Native Studies is needed. To acknowledge some voices should be heard over others. All voices could be heard but, for

example, in our tribe there are certain people you listen to such as elders or others who have more weight or experience. Natives should have that respect from others in the class, who need to recognize there is a living aspect of a scholarship for natives. There are real world consequences for natives. It's not just abstract concepts or periodic discussion to native peoples. If others understood and respected that, maybe they would lose that privileged attitude of "If its not important to me, its not important."

Dan Scratch, a teacher from Edmonton, AB and students Naomi Jacko, Calen Little Mustache and John Thompson talk about their experiences at Inner City High School which has embraced a less hierarchical format to help privilege students' voices and students' stories:

...it is of the utmost importance that schools abandon the traditional and historical authoritarian approach to operating schools and move towards a more democratic, just, and equitable form of education. When we operate our schools and classrooms in a more relational way that empowers student voice and builds community, we can then begin to move towards establishing equitable relationships with and between students that will create the conditions for all students to find place and purpose within our schools.

Educator Bob MacDonald questions the overemphasis on the individualization of history teaching and learning. There is no question that student learning is maximized when students are "actively engaged and involved in pursuing what is most relevant and motivating to them," he says. But:

...what if the skill development and rational approach does not touch upon events and issues that have immensely contributed to Canada and citizenship? What would this mean to students' understanding of the role and contributions of women, original peoples, immigrants, alternative political parties/organizations, or social and economic movements to the formation of Canada?...This cannot be lost or glossed over in the pursuit of individual choice and individual interest.

Joel Westheimer discusses the topic of student engagement and classroom enhancement in a thoughtful piece on the use of protest

## OUR SCHOOLS/OUR SELVES

music in history education. He explains: "Using music in teaching reminds us that education is a richly human enterprise and that understanding comes not from disconnected and disembodied facts but from the ways those facts are embedded in culture and politics and diversity of forms of human expression." Rick Hesch examines the rich history and evolution of protest music in North America and its relationship with several key political and social justice movements.

Of course, music is not the only way to enhance the teaching of history, as the Graphics History Collective explains in an excerpt from their book *Drawn to Change: Graphic Histories of Working Class Struggle*.

Comics can make complex ideas interesting and accessible, and they can be read anywhere, from the classroom to the bus, and by people with varying levels of literacy. As well, comics offer readers the opportunity to piece together the incomplete information in each panel/sequence to make meaning, and thus comics can be an active and empowering form of education.

Larry Kuehn provides two articles: the first describes a multimedia project celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF): an online museum (Jesse Donaldson's *Tyee* article on the same topic is also found in this issue). The second is a retrospective that looks at 30 years of international teacher union solidarity, and the role those relationships played in the political politics of Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala.

Finally, Jon Weier has put together a piece looking at the early 1990s shift to the "new militarism" and its influence on Canadian classrooms — a marked change from the "Never Again!" videos of the 70s. He draws from two books: *Worth Fighting For: War Resistance in Canada from 1812 to the War on Terror* (a collection edited by Lara Campbell, Michael Dawson and Catherine Gidney) and *Noble Illusions: Young Canada Goes to War*, by Stephen Dale. He concludes on a more positive note:

In the past our schools led the way in educating and encouraging a generation of Canadians to question the militarism and fear of our time. They can do so again with leadership from teachers and parents committed to peace education, and from sustained political activism that demands the inclusion of these histories and ideas in our curricula.

There's little question that as a society we tend to suffer from an overemphasis on the decontextualized present, spending little time on what came before (either as points on a continuum, or in a more cyclical pattern); a whitewashed (pun intended), smoothed-out version of reality that gives short shrift to a multiplicity of events, voices and struggles that don't make the hierarchical "cut," and deliberately conceals from the rest of us those in a position to decide "who's in/who's out".

There's also little question that such amnesia — convenient, deliberate or unconscious — does us no favours, particularly given how high the stakes are today, in North America and elsewhere. We need to become much more efficient at moving forward while looking back — blinkers off, minds open, and privilege checked.

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**ERIKA SHAKER** is the Executive Editor of *Our Schools/Our Selves*.