

# THEORIZING GENDER IN CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP: LESSONS FROM THE CBC'S GREATEST CANADIAN CONTEST

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In this article, I have used the 2004 Greatest Canadian contest as an example of media's educational function. Contrary to mainstream discourse of gender-neutral citizenship, this contest reiterates a notion of Canadian citizenship as masculinized, classed, and raced. Gramsci's concepts of "hegemony," "ideology", and "common sense" and Arnot's concept of gender and class "codes" anchor this analysis. Drawing on Canadian feminist and critical race scholarship, and contrasting feminist liberal and feminist postmodern perspectives, I have explored the complications of gender and democratic citizenship, and exposed the limitations of liberal democracy for realizing equity and social justice.

Key words: informal education, media, feminism, Antonio Gramsci

Se servant du concours « The Greatest Canadian » organisé par la chaîne anglophone de Radio Canada en 2004, l'auteure illustre dans son article la fonction pédagogique des médias. Contrairement au discours dominant sur la citoyenneté non sexiste, ce concours réitère la notion de citoyenneté canadienne au masculin avec distinction de classe et de race. Les concepts d'« hégémonie », d'« idéologie » et de « bon sens » de Gramsci et le concept de « codes » de genre et de classe d'Arnot servent d'assises à cette analyse. Puisant dans des recherches sur les femmes et les races au Canada et s'éloignant des points de vue libéraux et postmodernes féministes, l'auteure explore les complications liées au genre et à la citoyenneté démocratique et expose les limites de la démocratie libérale pour l'atteinte de l'équité et de la justice sociale.

Mots clés : éducation informelle, médias, féminisme, Antonio Gramsci

Throughout the twentieth century, Canada, like other democratic countries, introduced policies and programs that suggested a new concept of citizenship. These democracies extended the right to vote to women and First Nations peoples, and opened public institutions to religious minorities. Human rights legislation enshrined basic freedoms and prohibited fundamental forms of discrimination. Maternity and eventually parental leave legislation recognized the social value of children and parenting. The expansion of public schooling, post-secondary education, health care, and community services acknowledged that citizenship confers both individual and social rights and obligations, and implied that all citizens receive equal treatment, regardless of gender, class, ethno-racial, or other types of differences.

Despite this century of steady efforts and apparent progress, evidence suggests that, formal rights and official discourses aside, images of Canadian citizenship that privilege certain groups over others are continually learned and reproduced. From critical and feminist perspectives, I approach learning as engagement in social life and social change. This stance removes learning from the bricks-and-mortar boundaries of schooling, and broadens educational studies beyond youth. In this analysis, I draw particularly on Antonio Gramsci's (1971, 1975) concepts of hegemony, ideology, and common sense, and share Adamson's (1980) understanding that, for Gramsci, "all of society had to be understood as a vast 'school' and acted upon from that point of view" (p. 142).

Using media as a source of education and community as the site, I see the 2004 Greatest Canadian contest as an educational project. In considering this contest, I focus on two central questions. The first question concerns the interaction of gender, class, race, and ethnicity with Canadian citizenship. The writings of Gramsci, Madeleine Arnot, Kate Nash, and Wendy Brown inform this discussion, and the work of Canadian feminist and critical race scholars Janine Brodie, Lynn Smith, Malinda Smith, and Linda Trimble contextualizes it within Canada's social and political development. Using key Gramscian concepts as well as Arnot's concept of gender and class codes, I argue that the outcome of the Greatest Canadian contest of 2004 both reflects and reinforces common sense notions of citizenship and socially encoded inequalities.

Secondly, I contemplate a question that is part of a critique of democratic citizenship: Can liberal democracy deliver on its promise of equality of opportunity for all citizens?

#### THE GREATEST CANADIAN CONTEST: AN OVERVIEW

In the fall of 2004, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) English-language television network launched the Greatest Canadian contest, which resembled similar projects conducted in several countries. Viewers nominated individuals who, in their opinions, represented the greatest Canadian. From submissions nominating over 10,000 individuals, the CBC made available on its website a list of the top 100 nominees.<sup>1</sup> Viewers voted for their favourite nominees through the contest website or telephone number. In the contest's final weeks, attention and voting focused on the ten most popular nominees. Each week, a different advocate presented an hour-long documentary about one of these ten contest finalists; nominee profiles also appeared on the website.

The educational role of the media was evident throughout the contest. One part of the contest website, for teachers, encouraged schools to integrate the contest into their curriculum with downloadable lesson plans. Another part of the website, for adults, encouraged Greatest Canadian office pools and parties, and included downloadable posters and buttons. Another section contained Greatest Canadian recipes. Because the CBC aimed this contest and its associated activities at a broad range of Canadians, the CBC assumed an educational function in both schools and community-at-large.

As the contest proceeded, many viewers and commentators noted, some with dismay, that the top nominees were men, and nine of them were white. The weekly advocates reminded viewers that all were well-respected individuals within their fields and throughout Canadian society and, often, of international fame and importance. The telecommunication invention of Alexander Graham Bell has had global implications and brought him international renown. Frederick Banting's discovery of insulin and his provision that the drug not be commercialized made him an important scientist and qualify as a great Canadian. Many policies introduced by Tommy Douglas, Lester Pearson,

and Pierre Trudeau have come to represent the domestic and international relations stance for which Canada has become acknowledged (and self-acknowledged). Terry Fox and Wayne Gretzky have inspired people in Canada and beyond, one for his determination in the face of adversity, the other for his athletic achievements, and both for their quintessential nice guy Canadian image. Don Cherry shares Gretzky's connection to hockey and athleticism, and has become a media celebrity through his "Hockey Night in Canada" show. John A. Macdonald, our first Prime Minister, has an obviously major place in Canada's history books. Finally, the most contemporary of these Canadian icons, David Suzuki, has helped turn public attention to environmentalism, an issue that is currently conflated with notions of open, wild space present in Canadian mythology; it seems likely that his popularity is due to this conflation, which has the effect of symbolically whitening Suzuki's identity.

As deserving as most of these individuals might be of the Greatest Canadian label, the demographic make-up of the ten most popular nominees is curious. In a country that prides itself on diversity, tolerance, and fairness, only David Suzuki is a member of an ethno-cultural minority group. None is a woman, or a member of a First Nations community, or obviously poor. Why are people from these groups so absent from the outcome of this contest and, presumably, from the consciousness of Canadians considering what citizenship means in this country today?

#### BUILDING AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This analysis of the outcome of the Greatest Canadian 2004 contest is grounded in the social theoretical constructs of Antonio Gramsci and Madeleine Arnot, focussed on considerations of class and gender. The feminist political philosophical arguments of Kate Nash and Wendy Brown exemplify a central debate about the potential for liberal democracy to close the social rifts described by Gramsci and Arnot, and achieve social equality.

*Key Gramscian Concepts*

Gramsci's outline of the process of hegemony, the role of ideology, and the development of common sense provided an entry point for me to explore both socio-political contestations and stability. As Gramsci (1975) explains,

The 'normal' exercise of hegemony is characterized by a combination of force and consent which balance each other so that force does not overwhelm consent but rather appears to be backed by the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion. (pp. 155-156)

The first element of hegemony, then, is that it produces consent among people to accept the group in power and live within existing structures. Those in power might have to make occasional concessions to groups of citizens whose support is sought; at other times, they must simply dominate groups whose support cannot be won. Second, hegemony involves the production of what Gramsci (1971) calls "historically organic ideologies...[that] 'organise' human masses,...[and] form the terrain on which men [sic] move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc." (pp. 376-377). As ideologies permeate both culture (Gramsci's "civil society") and politics, they settle into people's unconsciousness to generate a "sedimentation of common sense" (Gramsci, 1975, p. 173), a shared understanding that the workings of society have a natural logic and are meant to be the way they are.

*En-gendering Liberal Democratic Citizenship*

In the past few decades, some feminist and critical race scholars have taken up elements of Gramsci's work, adding concerns with gender, race, and ethnicity to Gramsci's focus on class. Madeleine Arnot's (2002) concept of gender and class "code" is consistent with Gramsci's analysis of power and interest in class relations. By "gender code," Arnot refers to "the mode of transmission of gender relations through school knowledge/pedagogic structures" (p. 8). School introduces class differences to children, whose gender socialization has begun in the class-specific context of their families. The pressure to conform to expectations based on multiple characteristics creates what Arnot refers to as "competing power structures" (p. 115.). Consequently, the

expectations for middle class girls are different from those for middle class boys, and the expectations for middle class girls are different from those for lower or upper class girls. In her work, Arnot limits the concept of codes to gender and class; I include race and ethnicity, which I believe operate in similar ways and are vital to an analysis of democratic citizenship.

A legacy of the Enlightenment, Western liberal democracy emphasizes the qualities of reason, self-determination, and individual potential. These qualities have been gendered as masculine and men have come to embody the qualities of the complete citizen, while women have been regarded as “psychologically unbalanced and unable to articulate a political consciousness” (Dillabough & Arnot, 2000, p. 25), and have been relegated to the margins of citizenry. By extension, many of women’s historical contributions to social life – child bearing, family care, home work – have been consigned to the private sphere. In short, because qualities are first gendered and then valued, men and masculinity retain predominance and power in citizenship.

Mainstream discourse and the practice of liberal democracy provide an example of hegemony at work. The overarching ideology of neoliberalism, qualified by masculinized ideals, promises opportunity and equality. This ideology and the common sense notions that flow from it attract the consent of men, who recognize themselves in the conceptualization of the ideal citizen, and of women who trust that the rights accorded in contemporary liberal democracy have finally offered them equality with their male compatriots. Likewise, it attracts the consent of the elite class and white citizens who recognize themselves in the discourse, and lower class and ethno-racial minorities who have assurances of possibility. Eventually, acceptance of the mainstream discourse of citizenship becomes a matter of common sense, in Gramscian terms, and today’s neoliberal ideology becomes central to the maintenance of an existing hegemony. Members of oppressed or marginalized groups come to understand life as a series of competitions in which participants, citizens, have an equal chance of success. Manoeuvring through life’s competitions, citizens demonstrate their freedom by making choices. According to common sense, great citizens are those who make the smartest, most respected choices, achieve

success, and prove the veracity of the ideology and its related discourse. Differences between men and women or among classes and races become depoliticized and individualized in discourse, if not in experience.

Arnot (2002) disrupts this neoliberal ideology, arguing that gender and class are coded in society, codes that support the existing hegemony and power relations. She distinguishes between a masculine working class that emphasizes the quality of physical strength and a masculine bourgeois or professional class that emphasizes the quality of intellectual capacity. Organized around bourgeois values, schools place students in a setting where identities and codes collide. Working class boys learn to be compliant, even though compliance is encoded as a feminine trait and creates a tension with their rougher gender and class code. Working class girls can learn to resist their placement in the class hierarchy by taking on a feminine bourgeois quality such as docility, although that quality involves their continued submission to boys and men (Arnot, 2002, pp. 115-116). Gramsci's and Arnot's analyses, then, illustrate how hegemonic institutions and discourses of liberal democracy distract the attention of the oppressed and marginalized from problems of material and social relations, and seduce them with an ideological premise of individual rights, freedoms, and potential. Seen from this perspective, as a tool in the struggle to ameliorate power imbalances inherent in gender and class relations, liberal democracy has not worked.

Kate Nash (2000, 2001) accepts the contention that liberal democracy is gendered as masculine. Nash (2000) writes:

In liberal democracies the rights of citizens are ostensibly to civil freedoms, political participation, and social well-being *as* individuals. In fact, as the cultural politics of citizenship conducted by social movements makes clear, only *some* citizens have full entitlement to individual rights. (p. 157 italics in the original)

Like Wendy Brown (2001, 2000), she illuminates a series of explanations for women's exclusion from power and citizenship within a liberal democracy. Borrowing from Derrida, Nash (2001) refers to the "undecidability of 'women,'" while Brown (2000) describes the "paradoxes" of life in liberal democracy. The first complication arises when women are treated as a homogeneous category, so that differences

among them are overlooked, and class, race, or other types of divisions are maintained and exacerbated. The second complication, an apparent contradiction of the first, emerges when women's gender-based marginalization is discounted by an insistence that all citizens be treated as individuals. Third, rights can be overly applied to women, solidifying their position as inferior to (i.e., needier, less capable than) men.

For Nash, the presence of this undecidability, or ambiguity, creates the value of liberalism as a progressive force. Recalling the use of liberalism by first-wave feminists, Nash (2001) argues that their "counter-hegemonic use of liberalism went beyond 'official' liberalism insofar as it used the undecidability of 'women'..., oscillating between the construction of women as abstract individuals and as feminine, and specifically maternal, women" (p. 260). For Nash, democratic citizenship is, effectively, liberal. By making use of their undecidability, women have made and can continue to make social and material gains. By exploiting liberal democracy's inability to work as a tool to ameliorate power imbalances, marginalized groups can actually make liberal democracy work.

Brown (2000) adds a fourth level of undecidability or paradox in her analysis, which leads to her ultimate rationale for rejecting liberal democracy. Introducing a postmodern thread into the discussion of citizenship and gender, she raises a new objection to liberal democracy. At its heart, liberal democracy promises to deliver the modernist dream of progress. What Brown unearths is that, although postmodernism has struck down the authority of the concepts of truth, reason, sovereignty, and progress, it has not replaced them with other guiding concepts. As she explains, "we have ceased to believe in many of the constitutive premises undergirding modern personhood, statehood, and constitutions, yet we continue to operate politically as if these premises still held, and as if the political-cultural narratives based on them were intact" (Brown, 2001, p. 4). Despite the appearance of an occasional improvement for women and other groups experiencing discrimination, Brown concludes that, as a strategy to achieve equality, democracy cannot be made to work. Differences in conclusion aside, Brown, Arnot, and Nash agree that gender, like class and other types of social divisions,



operates discursively, structurally, and experientially in contemporary liberal democracies.

#### CITIZENSHIP IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CANADA

The Greatest Canadian contest was meant to spur debate, reflection, and learning about a contemporary vision of model Canadian citizens. Given the current context of liberal democracy of this country, what does citizenship mean in the early twenty-first century? As Nash (2001) points out, "in contemporary Western liberal democracies, what we are faced with is a variety of coexisting liberalisms" (p. 257). Linda Trimble (2003) distinguishes between post-World War II "welfare" or social liberalism, which "recognizes the need to balance liberty with equality and solidarity" (p. 142), and the more recent "neoliberalism," which emphasizes "a particular brand of liberty – economic freedom – at the expense of other pillars of citizenship – equality and solidarity" (p. 143).<sup>2</sup> As Brodie and Trimble (2003) explain, "Since the 1980s, then, the postwar formula has been progressively eroded by neoliberalism – a new set of assumptions about governance which, it is argued, is a necessary response to the ever-intensifying impacts of globalization" (p. 5). Brodie (2002) adds that neoliberalism has "been accompanied by the federal government's almost complete withdrawal from the social policy field, the termination of universal entitlements, a denunciation of the very idea of the social and of collective provision, and a widespread erosion and reconfiguration of social programs" (p. 378). Even Canada's post-World War II experiment with the welfare democracy project, which extended the professionalization of women's work and the movement of women into the public sphere, begun earlier in the century, maintained male privilege in policy and practice, from the regulation of publicly funded, employment-related insurance programs to salary differentials.

Within Canada's official citizenship discourse, there is no reference to such ongoing problems. As an example of this discourse, the Canadian Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Citizenship has produced a document to help immigrants to Canada prepare for their citizenship application. That document opens with these words:

Canadian citizens enjoy many rights, including equality rights, language rights and religious rights, just to name a few. But Canadians also have responsibilities. They must respect Canadian laws, and respect the rights and freedoms of others. Canadian citizens must also be willing to get involved in their communities to help make Canada a better place. Canada has a long tradition of welcoming newcomers because they increase the diversity and richness of Canadian society. Canadians are proud of the peaceful and tolerant society they have built. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2004, p. 3)

On the surface, this opening statement is reassuring; however, further exploration of how discourses of tolerance, equality, and freedom appear in society erodes that reassurance. Driven by capitalism, which is by nature competitive, and histories of patriarchy and imperialism, today's neoliberal democracy in Canada is fraught with ongoing social divisions. As Arnot (2002), Nash (2000), and Brown (2000) agree, these are more than differences of gender, class, race, or ethnicity; they are also differences in power and privilege and, ultimately, choice determined on the basis of such characteristics. Focusing on gender, Trimble (2003) notes,

When one examines the expectations of citizens, and the attributes of "good" citizenship, it becomes clear that the citizen is normatively male. The characteristics, roles, duties, and values associated with the traditionally male-dominated public territory of business and government determine what citizenship is all about.... Performing "men's work" became key to women's citizenship claims, as illustrated by the extension of the franchise to white women after the First World War, during which women were central to the Canadian war effort. Similarly, working outside the home, running for office, gaining educational qualifications, and entering the professions have illustrated that traditionally female duties and virtues have not been reassigned. Women remain largely responsible for childcare, domestic duties, and unpaid work in the home and community. The conception of women as nurturing, often dependent, self-sacrificing, and emotional has not been fundamentally challenged. (p. 138)

In her discussion of Canadian race politics, Malinda Smith (2003) extends feminist gender-based critiques to outline similar tensions between equality and inequality for racialized citizens. As she states,

“Canadians have been shaped both by support for the principle of equality and, at the same time, by political and legal support for inequality among diversities” (p. 110). Historically, extreme examples of ethnic or race-based inequality are evident in the internment of Ukrainian Canadians during World War I or of Japanese Canadians during World War II. Concerns about so-called racial profiling, particularly in the post-9/11 period, are an example of ongoing politics of race.

The question remaining is whether or not liberal democracy offers a strategy for eliminating social divisions among Canadian citizens. Some Canadian feminists share, sometimes tentatively, Nash’s optimism on this point. Feminist legal scholar and jurist Lynn Smith (1999) reviews the progress made for women and other marginalized groups through Canada’s legal system. This includes the expansion of basic citizenship rights, the pressure from various groups to transform the concept of citizenship, the complication of the public/private divide in policy and legislation, and the transformation of related concepts such as liberty and equality, particularly following the adoption of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982. Smith recognizes that gender equality is constrained by “the strength of the connection [of citizenship] with maleness, and the continuation of the practical barriers to women’s participation in political life. It [i.e., universality and equality] will take considerable time to accomplish, and the outcome is uncertain” (p. 158).

Whether or not faith in liberal democracy is deserved, the impact of gender (or class or race or ethnicity) on experiences of Canadian citizenship indicates that a seemingly benign, reassuring mainstream citizenship discourse is riddled with problems. Common sense insists that some citizens are not only greater, but also more trustworthy, than others. Gender, class, and ethno-racial differences are socially encoded and conveyed to (and by) Canadian citizens through discourse, institutions, and structure. Drawing on these links between Gramsci’s and Arnot’s concepts, I posit that Canada’s neoliberal ideology and the common sense that accompanies it work in concert with firmly constructed gender, class, and ethno-racial codes to influence the options and choices of citizens. A project of Canada’s mass media, one of Gramsci’s (1975) “organs of public opinion” (p. 156), the Greatest

Canadian contest both reflects and reinforces an existing hegemony and social codes, and its results indicate that social divisions continue to shape notions of Canadian citizenship.

#### THE GREATEST CANADIAN CONTEST: A CASE STUDY

I understand the Greatest Canadian contest of 2004 as a case study and I make sense of its outcome from the feminist and critical perspectives that I have outlined above. First, though, it is important to qualify the learning from this contest. Because participation was far from random, it is impossible to discern the learning. The contest reached into schools, workplaces, and various other community sites. Furthermore, the technology of the contest enabled individuals to vote repeatedly for their favourite nominees, presenting an opportunity to skew results. Finally, the contest was presented on the English television network only. Even if it does reflect accurately the sentiments of English-speaking Canadians, it might not reflect the sentiments of French-speaking Canadians or, for that matter, members of other linguistic groups. These are some of the pragmatic limitations of this case study.

The educational function of projects such as the Greatest Canadian contest lies in its overt focus on teaching about Canada's history and culture, as well as its more covert purpose of presenting images of gender and class codes, examples of what is frequently described by critical educators and scholars as the hidden curriculum. In a poll conducted as part of the contest, participants listed the following elements of greatness (in order of declining importance): legacy, passion, leadership, genius, and humour (*The Greatest Canadian*, 2004). Despite their different qualities and contributions to Canadian society, most of the top nominees represent this notion of greatness, which itself becomes a masculine quality. John A. Macdonald is, literally, the father, the patriarch of Canadian confederation, the first citizen of this country. His place among the nominees is a reminder of one of the binaries attached to the male/female divide, that of production in the public sphere/reproduction in the private sphere. There is no female icon similar to Macdonald because the gender code assigns productive responsibilities to men, and societal structures have made it difficult for women to counter that element of the code.

Alexander Graham Bell and Frederick Banting made obvious use of the masculine quality of intellect in their scientific pursuits. Known for his achievements in our national winter sport of hockey, Wayne Gretzky epitomizes masculine physical qualities such as speed and accuracy, a love of the "active out-of-doors life" (Belotti, 1975, in Arnot, 2002, p. 115), and psychological qualities such as competitiveness and discipline. His reputation as the "smartest player" (*The Greatest Canadian*, 2004), rather than a rough player, is also evidence of his manifestation of part of a code that lays out expectations for middle class boys and men. For his part, Terry Fox demonstrated related qualities such as fitness, determination, and vision, setting himself a rigorous challenge and then rising to it.

The ways in which four of the remaining top nominees realize elements of a gender code are, in some ways, less obvious. Trudeau, Pearson, Douglas, and Suzuki have gained a place in Canadian mythology largely as protectors of social roles and purposes that are encoded as feminine, rather than masculine: dialogue, peacefulness, and concern for other people and the planet. Even so, they retain typically masculine qualities such as public service, intellect, and leadership, and convey the bourgeois values that Arnot (2002) argues are fostered through schooling. And Trudeau's reputation as a sexy, charismatic man cannot be forgotten.

Hockey commentator Don Cherry is the last of the top-ten nominees. He shares Gretzky's association with the masculine athleticism of hockey, although he never achieved similar greatness as a hockey player. From hockey to social issues to politics, he has an opinion and he speaks his mind. With his tough guy outspokenness, he embodies qualities coded as masculine, working class, and Anglo-Canadian, even as his custom-tailored suits indicate his shift into an upper class and celebrity status. As a public figure in Canadian society, he functions as the working class man who has "made good," a living example of the promise of neoliberal ideology. Even Cherry seemed to concur with this analysis when he stated, "I think the people, the working-man people, made a statement here, that you don't have to be a college graduate to be a good Canadian" (*I'm good, but not the greatest: Don Cherry*, 2004).

Although fans who share Cherry's affiliation with working class masculinity and his manifestation of neoliberal ideology might find his manner and opinions entertaining and refreshing, his detractors are more likely to find him offensive. As the CBC's news release commenting on Cherry's inclusion among the top ten nominees states, "The number of votes for Cherry raised eyebrows – and ire – among some pundits, following his series of politically incorrect remarks" (*I'm good, but not the greatest: Don Cherry*, 2004). Cherry's propensity to offend might actually help explain his ultimate popularity in the 2004 Greatest Canadian contest. In the months preceding and during the contest, his repeated, blatant, on-air social and political commentaries eventually earned him a censure from the CBC, the network which also produces his "Hockey Night in Canada" show. The public uproar following this censure suggests that his popularity in the 2004 Greatest Canadian contest reflects support from his loyal fans as well as the anger among other viewers, hockey fans, and civil libertarians who thought that the CBC itself behaved undemocratically.<sup>3</sup> We will never know the precise reason for Cherry's popularity in the contest, but what is made especially clear in the contrast between Don Cherry and Wayne Gretzky is the way in which multiple, clashing class codes help characterize a complex hegemony and constitute Canadian society.

Although the top ten nominees in this contest were men, there were women among the top 100 nominees. The most popular women in the contest were Shania Twain (18<sup>th</sup> place), Nellie McClung (25<sup>th</sup> place), Celine Dion (27<sup>th</sup> place), and Laura Secord (35<sup>th</sup> place). In their own ways, these four women continue to indicate the operation of gender, class, and ethno-racial codes. Most notably, Twain personifies what Loftus (1974 in Arnot, 2002, p. 115) sketches as an acceptable image of female beauty: she is fun and flirtatious, without the overt sexuality of another music industry celebrity, Madonna. With her widespread appeal across classes, Dion portrays both Purvis's "perfect wife and mother" of the bourgeois class and her "good woman" of the working class (Purvis cited in Arnot, 2002, p. 114-115): a loyal wife, a loving mother, a romantic spirit, as well as an industrious, steady worker. Having risen to fame and fortune from the lower or working class, both Twain and Dion offer proof that the promises of Canada's liberal democracy can be realized, and illustrate a

pathway to success that Canadians can recognize by way of common sense. They are more than musical performers; they have become marketing brands around which entire businesses are created, and through which hegemonic ideologies and codes are reinforced.

Two other female nominees, both historical figures, achieved relative popularity in this contest: Nellie McClung and Laura Secord. What might Nellie McClung's popularity in this contest mean? She upheld many feminine characteristics, notably through her family and community service and her work with the temperance movement. These connect her to the feminized task of teaching and guarding morality, and to the feminine role as "the moral vessel through which a notion of citizenship is cultivated" (Dillabough & Arnot, 2000, p. 26). McClung, also an outspoken defender of women's rights, penetrated the wall dividing women's private and men's public realms. An author and a politician, having served in the Alberta Legislative Assembly in the 1920s, McClung was one of the "Famous Five" women living in Alberta who successfully petitioned to have women included in the definition of persons and accorded all attached rights (Fiamengo, 2000).

Dillabough and Arnot (2000) address these apparently contradictory images of woman in liberal democracies:

[O]n the one hand, a daughter of the nation state thought to instill a moral 'ethics of care' (Gilligan, 1982, 1986) in society through her connection to the private sphere; and on the other hand, an active social agent with membership in a political collectivity. (p. 33)

Fiamengo (2000) explores these and other tensions present in the understanding of McClung's life and contribution to Canadian democracy and gender equality. Trying to "restore women to the historical record," (Fiamengo, 2000, p. 71), feminist accounts in the 1970s and 1980s presented McClung as "a sort of poster child for feminism's assault on male history as the record of military campaigns, economic crises and legislative squabbling" (pp. 71-72), despite her acknowledged elitism and discriminatory views. Although she campaigned for women's right to vote, for example, she also campaigned against similar rights for immigrants to Canada. More recent and less sympathetic interpretations challenge this view of McClung as a hero for Canadian

women and, as Fiamengo states, “McClung’s racism has become a taken-for-granted blemish on her politics” (p. 74) for some contemporary feminist scholars.

Like that of Nellie McClung, the narrative of Laura Secord calls to mind the legacy of British imperialism in Canadian nation-building and notions of the Canadian female citizen. What Tate (2005) calls “the Laura Secord legend” (p. 227) recounts her emergence as a Loyalist heroine in the War of 1812. Tate explains that Secord’s precise role remains somewhat mysterious because of both her own tendency to alter details in subsequent retellings of her actions, and the variety of and variations in print and, increasingly, online accounts of her story. There is general agreement that her contribution to Canadian history involves hiking some 32 kilometres (or 20 miles) to warn the British of an impending attack by the Americans on Beaver Dams, Ontario (Morgan, 1994; Tate, 2005). Despite the ongoing differences in the details of Secord’s story, exactly how she heard of the planned attack, for example, she has become “a perfect Canadian heroine. She was a woman who displayed bravery and tenacity in the face of multiple adversities. More importantly, she was a Loyalist who assisted the British in their struggle with the Americans” (Tate, 2005, p. 227).

In a country that often defines itself in contrast to its American neighbour, Laura Secord represents one conception of the great Canadian; however, her show of bravery, determination, and endurance, qualities gendered as masculine, has been softened and feminized by her role in this incident as the one who communicated the timely warning rather than fought the winning battle, and by her appearance in feminine period dress (called to mind in the logo of the chocolate company that carries her name). Furthermore, as Morgan (1994) points out, the narrative of Laura Secord exemplifies the ethno-racial overtones of the mainstream Canadian discourse of citizenship.

But most serious of all, in the majority of accounts, was the threat of the “Indians” she might meet on the way. If Secord’s commitment to Canada and Britain had previously been presented in cultural terms, ones that could be encouraged by the colonial tie and that might transcend race, it was at this point that her significance as a symbol of white Canadian womanhood was clearest. While her feminine fragility had been the subject of comment throughout stories,



and while her racial background might have been the under-lying sub-text for this fragility, it was in discussions of the threat of native warriors that her gender became most clearly racialized. (p. 209)

What is most striking about the presence of both Secord and McClung among the popular women in this contest is not what they actually did, but that they are recognized today as great Canadians, at least great Canadian women. Although Fiamengo (2000) argues for a nuanced, historically contextualized reading of McClung, "so that, for instance, essentialist appeals to a feminine essence are not dismissed as inevitably limiting but understood as productive, strategic and historically powerful modes of address" (p. 83), the selection of a greatest Canadian demands that contest participants do away with nuance and context. What is important here is that McClung's and Secord's names are invoked in the Greatest Canadian contest as lived examples of equality and progress realized. They and their narratives continue to fit into contemporary discourse of citizenship. As they are called to mind for some people today as great Canadians, they indicate how the particularities of codes, ideologies, and notions of common sense change over time and across place to maintain, not supplant, existing hegemonic power relations. Together with Shania Twain and Celine Dion, the images of McClung and Secord convey an ideal of female citizenship that embodies complex gender, class, and ethno-racial expectations. Their placements in the contest confirm both the discourse and the practice of liberal democracy in Canada today. Women are citizens of this country, and some of them are even good, admirable citizens; however, none of them is able to rise to the top echelon of this contest. None is a truly great Canadian. Shania Twain and Celine Dion might not measure up to greatness in the eyes of many Canadians (myself included), but in their arenas, they are as great as Wayne Gretzky is in his. This is an illustration of what Arnot (2002) refers to as the "illusion of meritocracy" (p. 114) that the ideologies of our liberal democracy deliver to women, the lower class, and members of other marginalized groups. I would further argue that discursive shifts in the twentieth century, including the recognition of equality rights, exemplify

the concessions that, from time to time, must be made by the ruling class to maintain its hold on hegemonic power.

#### CONCLUSION

The outcome of the 2004 Greatest Canadian contest is consistent with the conclusion that historical and contemporary iterations of liberalism have alleviated some, but not eliminated, social and political inequities in this country. As Smith (2003), Trimble (2003), Brodie (2002), and Smith (1999) assert, Canada remains a place where inequalities operate among citizens. Canadian citizenship is learned and experienced throughout civil society, and remains coded as masculine, professional or upper class, and white (as well as heterosexual, able-bodied, etc.). Neoliberal ideology serves to maintain, rather than disrupt, a longstanding hegemony that brings citizens together through a common sense understanding of equality, opportunity, and success. A mass media project such as the Greatest Canadian contest serves as both a reiteration of this ideology and common sense, and a source of lifelong, life-wide education about democratic citizenship.

If Brown, rather than Nash, is correct in her still inconclusive conclusion about the inability for liberalism to serve as a strategy to achieve equity, then she raises an unsettling quandary for many contemporary democratic states, including Canada: Where do citizens, especially those in marginalized groups, go from here? Some feminist political theorists, such as Susan Bickford (1996), have attempted to develop a perspective to help move beyond this political impasse. Drawing heavily on the work of Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa (see, for example, Anzaldúa, 2002) and of Hannah Arendt (see, for example, Arendt, 1981), Bickford proposes the insertion of elements that have been missing from democratic theory and practice: an acknowledgement of differences among citizens both as individuals and as groups, the unavoidability of resulting conflict as experiences and interests clash, and a commitment to listening to one another and making changes.

Although it is true that these are often absent from political and social institutions and processes in democracies, even Bickford's hopeful suggestion does not address the resistance of the powerful to listening and changing, in effect, to ceding power. It does, however, clarify that

patience is required to see social justice and equity realized. It further suggests that such change will be accomplished not through liberalism itself, but rather through an ethical conviction and an open process of coalition-building. These preliminary steps can both accommodate Brown's analysis of the modernist project of liberal democracy and help citizens move beyond a state of stagnation. They are, in my opinion, worthy of further study and pursuit. In Gramscian terms, they might be necessary to construct a desirable counter-hegemony, to first decode and then dismantle the various social codes that Arnot describes, and to achieve a different outcome for future considerations of Canada's great citizens. In all of this work, community will remain the classroom of greatest importance for lessons on how to understand democratic citizenship and how to build real equity, and the media will continue to mirror success or failure in that endeavour.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.CBC.ca/greatest>

<sup>2</sup> Trimble (2003) further outlines the emergence of "neoconservatism," which values "order, stability, and continuity" (p. 145) and constrains individual liberty to achieve those goals. An obvious manifestation of neoconservatism in Canada is the development of the Canadian Alliance Party and former Alliance members' continued prominence in the Canadian Conservative Party. In this country, unlike the United States, neoliberalism seems to be retaining a hold, however tenuous, even in the face of neoconservative discourse and politics.

<sup>3</sup> If this interpretation of Don Cherry's popularity is accurate, it presents a further glimpse into how hegemony works. As Canada's national media outlet, the CBC typically bolsters hegemonic ideology and common sense. With the Greatest Canadian contest, it created a space, perhaps inadvertently, in which citizens could "push back" against hegemonic structures and institutions, in this case against the CBC and its decision to censure Cherry for his "political incorrectness." Still, the space for resistance is contained and broad consent remains in place.

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