

The 'Heritage Minutes' and Canadian collective memory: An
analysis of the use of nostalgia and nationalism to build a unifying
cultural memory

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Abstract

Since its beginnings as a nation, Canada has been a country characterized by plurality, regionalism and internal differences. It struggles in search of a unifying national identity and self-definition. Owing to its multicultural status, proximity to the United States, the vastness of its territory, its colonial past and its high immigration levels, Canada endures an on-going identity crisis. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the political and cultural elite in Canada became preoccupied with this identity crisis. In 1991, the privately owned Charles R. Bronfman Foundation initiated a series of television vignettes called the 'Heritage Minutes'. These spots were intended to encourage Canadian collective cultural memory and help to build a unifying Canadian national identity. This dissertation examines the 'Heritage Minutes' as examples of how the nation's past can be used as a resource to aid in the formation of collective national memories and create a sense of national unity and identity within Canada.