

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Whiteness in Canada: History, Archives, Historiography

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Abstract: *This article opens with autobiographical reflections outlining how the author came to study the histories of race, racism, and whiteness in Canada; namely, through a biographical examination of Canadian academic and public intellectual Watson Kirkconnell. The article then discusses the author's engagement with the scant Canadian literature on race science/scientific racism. After defining whiteness and discussing its relationships with gender and class, the article provides suggestions for future research on race and whiteness in Canada; in particular, the need for definitional, temporal, and geographical specificity; the need for original archival research and collaboration with archivists; and the importance of biographical research. Drawing connections between the past and present, the article concludes by stressing the importance of this research.*

Keywords: Canadian history, cultural history, environmental history, eugenics, historiography, history of Maritimes, immigration, intellectual history, multiculturalism, race, racism, social history

Résumé : *L'article commence par des réflexions autobiographiques décrivant comment l'auteur en est venu à étudier l'histoire de la race, du racisme et de la blanchité au Canada, notamment au moyen d'une analyse biographique de l'universitaire et intellectuel public canadien Watson Kirkconnell. Il compose ensuite avec les rares écrits canadiens sur le racisme scientifique. Après avoir défini la blanchité et discuté de ses relations avec le genre et la classe, l'article propose des avenues de recherche concernant la race et la blanchité au Canada – en particulier la nécessité d'une spécificité définitionnelle, temporelle et géographique; la nécessité d'une recherche originale dans les archives et d'une collaboration avec les archivistes; enfin, l'importance de la recherche biographique. En établissant des liens entre le passé et le présent, l'auteur conclut en soulignant l'importance de cette recherche.*

Mots clés : histoire du Canada, histoire culturelle, histoire environnementale, eugénisme, historiographie, histoire des Maritimes, immigration, histoire intellectuelle, multiculturalisme, race, racisme, racisme histoire sociale

Early in 2013, while I was in the midst of researching my undergraduate thesis, a thick envelope landed on my desk. In the envelope were photocopies of a file titled “Anglo-Canadian Futurities” from the Watson Kirkconnell fonds at the Esther Clark Wright Archives at Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Thomas Watson Kirkconnell (1895–1977) was a university professor and administrator, a prominent Baptist layman, a vociferous anti-Communist, a poet, and a translator of European poetry. Attempting to increase public awareness of so-called New Canadians’ artistic output and foster pride in their ancestry (acting from the belief that this would make them better citizens), he translated entire collections of poetry from Icelandic, Hungarian, and Polish, as well as individual poems from a variety of other European languages. He also established the annual survey of “New Canadian Letters” in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, which he compiled for three decades. Through speeches, letters to the editor, and articles, he defended continental Europeans during the heated interwar debates about their suitability as immigrants. Similarly, during the Second World War, he defended Canadians of non-British, non-French European descent against charges of disloyalty.¹

For these efforts, he received a host of honours. He was made an Officer in the Order of Canada, a Knight Officer in the Order of Polonia Restituta, and a Knight Commander in the Order of the Icelandic Falcon. Also, he was awarded the Gold Medal of Freedom by the Hungarian Freedom Fighters, the Schevchenko Medal and the Great Schevchenko Plaque by the Ukrainian Canadian Committee, the Lorne Pierce Medal in Literature by the Royal Society of Canada, and the Humanities Research Council Medal, in addition to a dozen honorary degrees from universities in Canada and abroad. He was, according to a plaque in the Watson Kirkconnell Room at the Esther Clark Wright Archives, an “apostle of peaceful understanding,” the “founder of Canadian multiculturalism,” and a “champion of human freedom.”²

I had begun researching Kirkconnell’s activities as a cold warrior but had become intrigued by later claims that he had, through his promotion of cultural pluralism, been an important figure in the development of multiculturalism. Trying to get a sense of his intellectual development, I started working through his voluminous files chronologically. I had visited the archives a few months earlier but had overlooked this “Anglo-Canadian Futurities” file, identified as dating from 1921–22.³ I began reading and was quickly baffled. What were the Nordic,

1 On Kirkconnell’s life and thought, see Daniel R. Meister, *The Racial Mosaic: A Pre-History of Canadian Multiculturalism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2021), esp. chap. 1. For an analysis of his translation efforts, see Judith Woodsworth, “Watson Kirkconnell and ‘The Undoing of Babel’: A Little-Known Case in Canadian Translation History,” *Meta: Translators’ Journal* 45, no. 1 (2000): 13–28.

2 A list of honours can be found in Watson Kirkconnell, *A Slice of Canada: Memoirs* ([Toronto], published for Acadia University by University of Toronto Press, 1967), Appendix I; while a picture of the plaque can be found in J.R.C. Perkin and James B. Snelson, *Morning in His Heart: The Life and Writings of Watson Kirkconnell* (Hantsport: Lancelot Press for Acadia University Library, 1986), 49.

3 Kirkconnell, “Anglo-Canadian Futurities,” folder 23, box 4, Esther Clark Wright Archives, Acadia University (hereafter given in the following format: WK23–4, ECWA).

Mediterranean, and Alpine races, and did their histories really go back thousands of years? Why was Kirkconnell suggesting that they were somehow the key to understanding Canadian society and, in particular, rural Ontario? Why was he raging against something called “Neo-Malthusianism?” Why was this somehow all women’s fault? What was meant by “dysgenic?” Why was he opposed to the presence in Canada of Slavic, Jewish, and all “non-white” peoples? And more importantly, what did this document mean for the historiographical consensus – in Baptist history, at least – that Kirkconnell was “the father of Canadian multiculturalism?”⁴ So I began my initial foray into the history of race, and more specifically into the history of race science/scientific racism and the related concept of whiteness.

As I learned in the course of my research, studies of whiteness have demonstrated that, while many nominally white people often viewed themselves as not belonging to a race or having a racial identity, whiteness is, in fact, a socially constructed racial category that accords much privilege to those deemed white.⁵ “Whiteness” refers to this constructed racial identity. Scholars of whiteness, however, point out that since the emergence of scientific racism (around the late nineteenth century) until relatively recently, nominally white people were not blind to

Based on contextual evidence, I suggest the document was written in the winter of 1919–20. Meister, *The Racial Mosaic*, 266n58.

⁴ Kirkconnell first made this claim before it was repeated by his successor at Acadia University, J.R.C. Perkin. Kirkconnell, letter to the editor, *Spirit of Canada*, 20 Feb 1976, and enclosure, “The Father of Canadian Multiculturalism,” WK27–29, ECWA; and Perkin, “There Were Giants On the Earth in Those Days: An Assessment of Watson Kirkconnell,” in *Canadian Baptists and Christian Higher Education*, G.A. Rawlyk, ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988), 89–128, at 96 and 109. Similar claims about Kirkconnell and multiculturalism have since been widely made in the historiography. See for instance Howard Palmer, “Reluctant Hosts: Anglo-Canadian Views of Multiculturalism in the Twentieth Century,” in *Multiculturalism as State Policy: Conference Report of the Second Canadian Conference on Multiculturalism, Ottawa, February 13–15, 1976* (Ottawa: 1978), 81–118; N.F. Dreisziger, “Watson Kirkconnell and the Cultural Credibility Gap Between Immigrants and the Native-Born in Canada,” in *Ethnic Canadians: Culture and Education*, M.L. Kovacs, ed. (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1978), 94; George Bonavia, “Bibliographic Access to Ethno-cultural Material,” in *The Bibliographical Society of Canada: Colloquium III*, National Library of Canada, Ottawa, 19–21 Oct 1978 (Toronto, 1979), 76–81; C.P. Champion, *The Strange Demise of British Canada: The Liberals and Canadian Nationalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 45; Dirk Hoerder, *To Know Our Many Selves: From the Study of Canada to Canadian Studies* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2010), 198; and Heather J. Coleman, “Watson Kirkconnell on ‘The Place of Slavic Studies in Canada’: a 1957 speech to the Canadian Association of Slavists,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 58, no. 4 (2016): 386–97.

⁵ The discussion in this paragraph draws on Meister, *The Racial Mosaic*, 13–19, in which I examine the concepts of race, whiteness, and settler colonialism in more depth. On the use of the term “nominal,” see Carlos A. Hoyt Jr., *The Arc of a Bad Idea: Understanding and Transcending Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), xv. Whiteness as racelessness has been referred to by Barbara Flagg as the “Transparency Phenomena;” see her *Was Blind, But Now I See: White Race Consciousness and the Law* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

their racial identity.⁶ Historically, people of European descent commonly self-racialized as white, considering themselves members of *a* white race and later *the* white race (Caucasian). Examining the history of whiteness in the period between roughly the 1890s until about the 1960s therefore involves examining race science/scientific racism, “a system of ‘difference’ in which one might be both white *and* racially distinct from other whites.”⁷ Within this system of difference, those of European descent believed that there were multiple European races and that these races could be ranked hierarchically. Although skin colour was perhaps the ultimate arbiter of difference, dividing European from non-European, European races could be identified using other physiological markers including head shape, stature, and eye and hair colour. For this reason, theorists refer to whiteness as having two sets of boundaries: outer boundaries, dividing white from non-white, and inner boundaries, separating various grades of whiteness.⁸ But the precise ranking of European races was neither universally agreed on, nor was it stable over time. Thus, theorists also refer to whiteness as a set of “contingent hierarchies”: a ranking of white races in which the order was determined by the dominant racial thinking of a particular place and time.⁹

In addition to time and place, whiteness was and is also shaped by gender and sexuality. Most fundamentally, racial categories, including that of “white,” are preserved through the maintenance of sexual boundaries. This logic is starkly illustrated by the infamous “one drop rule,” codified into law in some American states, which held that any person with even one African ancestor, or “one drop” of “black blood,” was considered “black.”¹⁰ Similar logics were at work in the

⁶ As I have suggested elsewhere, the idea that “races” exist as biological or scientific realities (as opposed to social constructions) is false but not necessarily prejudicial; this position is sometimes referred to as racialism. Racism is the belief that races are a biological reality, *and* that they can be ranked hierarchically; *and/or* that race is a determinant of intelligence, behaviour, culture, relations, etc. Racialization is thus a process by which the idea of race is projected onto people, relationships, and practices. There is much debate about when racism first emerged, but for one insightful discussion, see Vanita Seth, “The Origins of Racism: A Critique of the History of Ideas,” *History and Theory* 59, no. 3 (Sept 2020): 343–68.

⁷ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 6. Emphasis in the original. Jacobson argues that in the United States, the late eighteenth-century idea of a more singular whiteness was fractured by the 1840s and then reconsolidated from the 1920s through the 1960s (see esp. 13–14, 38–45, 91–93, 201–2).

⁸ Steve Garner, *Whiteness: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), chap. 1. Indeed, skin colour still played a role in determining whiteness among European races, with the supposed “swarthiness” of Slavic peoples being routinely pointed to as a sign of inferiority.

⁹ Garner, *Whiteness*, chap. 4.

¹⁰ Floyd James Davis, *Who is Black? One Nation’s Definition* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1991). See also Debra Thompson, *The Schematic State: Race, Transnationalism, and the Politics of the Census* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). This racial logic was fairly unique to North America, for “other New World slavery and post slavery societies tended to favour a racial/corporeal hierarchy that made room for an ‘intermediary class’ of people who were ‘neither white nor black,’ also called a ‘coloured’ or ‘mestesos’ caste.” Barrington Walker, “Killing

blood quantum rules created to define and constrain indigeneity.¹¹ Scientific racism thus placed a great deal of importance on reproductive choices. Although the usual concern was that nominally white women would reproduce with nominally non-white men, eugenicists were also concerned about the demographic balance of “fit” (nominally white, healthy, wealthy, Anglo-Saxon) and “unfit” (unhealthy, poor, members of inferior nominally white races). Eugenicists tried to address this in two ways: “positive eugenics” encouraged the fitter elements in society to reproduce, while “negative eugenics” attempted to prevent the unfit from reproducing. After imbibing this literature, young Kirkconnell was desperately anxious about the small size of Anglo-Canadian families, particularly in rural areas. Blaming the wives, he condemned the childless Anglo-Saxon woman as a “selfish sexual pervert” and “as great a social pariah as the prostitute.”¹²

Nominally white women were not merely victims of patriarchal white supremacists and eugenicists who wished to control reproduction; they were also often active participants in the eugenics movement and the construction and maintenance of racial boundaries. Women’s organizations, such as the International Order Daughters of the Empire for instance, actively opposed the immigration of peoples of African and Asian descent, operating from assumptions about racial hierarchies.¹³ Feminists too were leaders in their own right, for first-wave feminism in Canada coincided with and was a driving force in the social purity movement and attendant moral panics of the early-twentieth century, which were deeply racialized.¹⁴ Maternal feminism held that women were

the Black Female Body: Black Womanhood, Black Patriarchy, and Spousal Murder in Two Ontario Criminal Trials, 1885–1894,” in *Sisters or Strangers: Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, 1st edition, Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta, and Frances Swyripa, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 89–107, at 104n35, citing Carl M. Degler, *Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).

¹¹ On blood quantum in the Canadian context, see Pamela D. Palmater, *Beyond Blood: Rethinking Indigenous Identity* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011); and Darryl Leroux, *Distorted Descent: White Claims to Indigenous Identity* (Winnipeg: Manitoba University Press, 2019).

¹² Quoted in Meister, *The Racial Mosaic*, 48. Fear of homosexuality also shaped eugenics. Kirkconnell, for instance, warned that single children experienced an “arrested development” that could lead to “homosexual offences.” Kirkconnell, “Anglo-Canadian Futurities,” 33–34.

¹³ Meister, “IODE (Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire),” *Canadian Encyclopedia* (2023), <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/imperial-order-daughters-of-the-empire>.

¹⁴ On race and feminism in Canada, see Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885–1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, [1991] 2008); Valverde, “‘When the Mother of the Race is Free:’ Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism,” in *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women’s History*, Franca Iacovetta and idem, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 3–26; Janice Fiamengo, “Rediscovering Our Foremothers Again: The Racial Ideas of Canada’s Early Feminists, 1885–1945,” *Essays on Canadian Writing* 75 (2002): 85–117; Jennifer Henderson, *Settler Feminism and Race Making in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Cecily Devereux, *Growing a Race: Nellie L. McClung and the Fiction of Eugenic Feminism*

responsible for the private sphere of the home, and nominally white women zealously embraced the job of defending the home from external ills. Canadian feminist Nellie McClung expressed this sentiment most clearly when she wrote, “Women are naturally guardians of the race.”¹⁵ But the ills from which they sought to guard the household and the Anglo-Saxon race – including drugs and sexual exploitation – were most often seen as originating with peoples racialized as non-white. An infamous example is that of Emily Murphy’s widely read and influential book *The Black Candle*, which “raised the spectre of white women being lured through drugs and taken into opium dens; although sexual practices are only hinted at, there are enough hints to indicate that the fear of miscegenation was a profound one.”¹⁶

Murphy was also concerned about nominally white non-Anglo-Saxons: “Within a generation or so,” she warned, “prolific Germans, the equally prolific Russians, and the still more fertile yellow races, will wrest the leadership of the world from the British.”¹⁷ Elsewhere she expressed her belief in some of the tenets of scientific racism, writing: “I think the proximity of the magnetic pole has something to do with the superiority of the Northmen. The best peoples of the world have come out of the north, and the longer they are away from the boreal regions in such proportion they do degenerate.”¹⁸

The suffrage movement in particular drew on and was limited by racial hierarchies.¹⁹ For instance, in making the argument for nominally white women to obtain the right to vote, nominally white suffragists repeatedly made the argument that it was unjust that supposedly inferior immigrant men were allowed to vote but they were not. “[T]he mother, wives, the sisters of our most intelligent citizens, children of our own Empire are placed side by side with felons, Chinamen, and idiots. Is this fair?” asked British Columbian suffragist Maria Grant in 1897.²⁰ Although nominally white suffragists as a whole “favoured exclusionary immigration laws, and supported racial restrictions on the vote,” there were exceptions.

(Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005); and Lykke de la Cour, “Eugenics, Race, and Canada’s First-Wave Feminists: Dis/Abling the Debates,” *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, & Social Justice* 38, no. 2 (2017): 176–90.

¹⁵ Nellie McClung, *In Times Like These* (Toronto: McLeod and Allen, 1915), 25. However, as Valverde notes, race was a “slippery” concept, sometimes used by feminists to describe all of humanity, sometimes just Anglo-Saxons, sometimes referring to nations, and sometimes referring to ethnicity. Valverde quoted in Lara Campbell, *A Great Revolutionary Wave: Women and the Vote in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2020), 123.

¹⁶ Valverde, *Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, 112. See also Catherine Carstairs, “Deporting ‘Ah Sin’ to Save the White Race: Moral Panic, Racialization, and the Extension of Canadian Drug Laws in the 1920s,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 16, no. 1 (1999): 65–88.

¹⁷ Emily F. Murphy, *The Black Candle* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1922), 47.

¹⁸ Emily Ferguson [Murphy], *Janey Canuck in the West* (Toronto: Cassel, 1910), 38.

¹⁹ On this subject, in addition to the works already cited, see Joan Sangster, *One Hundred Years of Struggle: The History of Women and the Vote in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), esp. chap. 1.

²⁰ Quoted in Campbell, *Revolutionary Wave*, 122.

Though a lifelong eugenicist, McClung was comparatively more tolerant, at one point arguing that “every human being has a right to vote.”²¹

Race, gender, and class all shaped the construction and maintenance of whiteness as a racial category. Mariana Valverde notes that both feminists and anti-feminists made arguments about “the similarities between the ‘lower’ classes and the ‘lower’ races,” in keeping with the racial hierarchies of the day.²² Many American studies of the intersection between whiteness and class have focused on the working class. Specifically, they have examined how nominally white working class people (but especially the Irish) did not ally with oppressed and enslaved African Americans but instead shaped an identity that emphasized their whiteness and freedom.²³ Less work in this vein has been done in the Canadian context, although David Goutor’s research has shown that organized labour and nativist, predominantly anti-Asian, movements were deeply intertwined, particularly in British Columbia.²⁴ Additionally, some of the few anecdotal examples of Anglo-Canadians racializing continental Europeans as non-white (as opposed to the more common denigration as white but still racially inferior) come from nominally white working-class people.²⁵ Kirkconnell’s early writing, which focused on rural Ontario, made the argument that a race’s vitality was tied to the vigour with which it exerted itself. Anglo-Canadians’ unwillingness to perform hard labour and instead outsource this to “inferior Europeans . . . Italians, Pollacks, and the like” would lead to them being “outbred by the more virile (because strenuously employed) inferior races. It is one of the surest signs of racial decline when a nation calls in outside peoples to do its heavy work,” warned the physically frail young man.²⁶

²¹ Campbell, *Revolutionary Wave*, 141; and McClung, quoted in Devereux, *Growing a Race*, 136.

²² Valverde, “When the Mother of the Race is Free,” 8.

²³ The foundational work remains David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991), though it treats “the American working class” as consisting entirely of nominally white males.

²⁴ David Goutor, *Guarding the Gates: The Canadian Labour Movement and Immigration, 1872–1934* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).

²⁵ According to Howard Palmer’s research, “native born and British workers called themselves ‘white men’ to distinguish themselves from the southern and eastern Europeans they lived with.” Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 59, citing newspaper articles in Alberta dating from 1888, 1900, 1917, and 1918.

²⁶ Kirkconnell, “Anglo-Canadian Futurities,” 18, WK23–4, ECWA. The connection between “strenuous employment” and virility led young Kirkconnell to condemn unions as being essentially racially detrimental. On his poor health, see Kirkconnell, *Slice*, 8, 86, 99, 120, and 134. The racialization, and gendering, of certain professions is another avenue for further research, such as the Chinese Canadians in laundries and restaurants, or African Canadians as railway porters. Even more broadly, we might consider how farming was seen as the exclusive domain of nominally white people, as Canadian officials attempted to keep out African American farmers who wanted to come to the Prairies and stymied Indigenous peoples’ ongoing agricultural work by denying them adequate land, tools, and autonomy.

As the foregoing suggests, much of what we understand about whiteness in the North American context comes from studies of the United States. Indeed, when I first began my research, while there were numerous studies of race and whiteness, there were almost no studies of scientific racism in Canada.²⁷ Some of the classic works I first consulted, such as *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*, which deals with the United States and Britain, did not mention Canada even in passing. As a result, I stuck largely to the history of eugenics; at least there I had Angus McLaren's *Our Own Master Race* as a guide. Indeed, McLaren had singled out the eugenicist bent of an overlooked work of Kirkconnell's and suggested that he needed reassessment.²⁸ But when I later re-read McLaren's work more closely,

²⁷ There were, to be sure, a number of important texts on whiteness in Canada published prior to 2013, such as Daniel Coleman, *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Ian McKay and Robin Bates, *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twenty-First Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010); Andrew Baldwin, Laura Cameron, and Audrey Kobayashi, eds., *Rethinking the Great White North: Race, Nature, and the Historical Geographies of Whiteness in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011); and Timothy J. Stanley, *Contesting White Supremacy: School Segregation, Anti-Racism, and the Making of Chinese Canadians* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

However, I was looking for – and am referring specifically to – works addressing the history of scientific racism in Canada, which detail its establishment of whiteness as a racial category. Indeed, it was not until I picked up Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, that I began to understand the primary materials with which I was wrestling. I later found John P. Jackson and Nadine M. Weidman, *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004) to be of great help in identifying and understanding the varied racial theorists I was encountering in primary sources. Additionally, Garner, *Whiteness*, is one of the best introductions to whiteness theory although it does not engage with the Canadian context; hopefully the publisher grants Garner's wish to amend this in an updated edition (181n1). A more recent piece of journalism provides an accessible introduction to the concept; see Robert P. Baird, "The Invention of Whiteness: The Long History of a Dangerous Idea," *The Guardian* (20 April 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2021/apr/20/the-invention-of-whiteness-long-history-dangerous-idea>.

Scholarship on scientific racism in Canada has only increased since the time I began my studies; see for instance Barrington Walker, "Following the North Star: Black Canadians, IQ Testing, and Biopolitics in the Work of H.A. Tanser, 1939–2008," in *Contesting Bodies and Nation in Canadian History*, Patrizia Gentile and Jane Nicholas, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); and Deidre McCorkindale, "What Colour is Intelligence? Kent County and the Tanser Study" (PhD diss., Queen's University, forthcoming). A sampling of recent scholarship on the history of race and racism in Canada more broadly includes Timothy J. Stanley, "John A. Macdonald, 'the Chinese' and Racist State Formation in Canada," *Journal of Critical Race Inquiry* 3, no. 1 (2016): 6–34; Laura Madokoro, Francine McKenzie, and David Meren, eds., *Dominion of Race: Rethinking Canada's International History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017); Catherine Laroche, *L'école du racisme: La construction de l'altérité à l'école Québécoise (1830–1915)* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2021); Catherine Laroche, *School of Racism: A Canadian History, 1830–1915*, trans. S.E. Stewart (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2023); and the other articles in this forum.

²⁸ Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in the United States and Britain Between the World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885–1945* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990), esp. 78–79.

I realized that it presented Canadian eugenicists as being concerned with a singular “white race” (Anglo-Saxon); the kind of fixation with numerous white races that I had found in Kirkconnell’s early works was not described in the literature.

My graduate work continued wrestling with the history of Canadian multiculturalism and Kirkconnell’s role – if any – within it. Reluctantly convinced that a single biography was too narrow for a doctoral thesis, I broadened my approach to examine Kirkconnell and two of his contemporaries, Robert England and John Murray Gibbon.²⁹ Gibbon was a publicist for the Canadian Pacific Railway who promoted cultural pluralism primarily through folk festivals, and who is perhaps best known for popularizing the “mosaic” metaphor. England was an Irish immigrant to Canada who taught school in a predominantly Ukrainian district in rural Saskatchewan. After briefly studying sociology, he went on to work in the Canadian National Railway’s Department of Immigration and Colonization. Digging into England’s life, I soon found myself following in the footsteps of Howard Palmer (1946–91), a pathbreaking historian and leading figure in the rise of Canadian ethnic studies in the 1970s whose research was tragically cut short by his early death. In particular, his essay “Reluctant Hosts: Anglo-Canadian Views of Multiculturalism in the Twentieth Century” remains an important jumping-off point for studies in the field. Palmer identified England as a significant figure in this history and had interviewed him on more than one occasion, with the intention of writing an article about his life.³⁰

This path led me to the archives and special collections at the University of Calgary in spring 2018 to examine some of Palmer’s unpublished research. There I found that in an early paper, Palmer argued that “Canadians knew little or nothing of the racial pessimism of the eugenicists or of Madison Grant” (an American racist whose book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, popularized the tenets of scientific racism). However, after uncovering plenty of evidence to the contrary, he amended this stance – though still downplaying the influence of scientific racism in Canadian society – by arguing that there “appears to have been a more highly developed Anglo-Saxon racial mythology in the race-conscious United States than in Canada.”³¹ Unfortunately, despite mountains of evidence detailing the histories

²⁹ For the possibilities inherent in biography, see Meister, “The Biographical Turn and the Case for Historical Biography,” *History Compass* 16, no. 1 (2018); and Meister, “Historical Biography in Canada: Historians, Publishers, and the Public,” in *Different Lives: Global Perspectives on Biography in Public Cultures and Societies*, Hans Renders and David Veltman, eds. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), 21–40.

³⁰ Howard Palmer, “Reluctant Hosts,” 81–118; Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 202n53; and Tamara Seiler, correspondence with the author, 15 Nov 2018.

³¹ Howard Palmer, “English-Canadian Elite Responses to Foreign Immigration, 1896–1930” (Unpublished paper, University of Alberta, n.d. [197?]), 35–37, quote at 36, folder 32, box 6, Howard Palmer fonds, University of Calgary, Archives and Special Collections (UCASC); and Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 168 (cf. 33, 40, 59, 112–13). On Grant, see Jonathan Spiro, *Defending the Master Race: Conservation, Eugenics, and the Legacy of Madison Grant* (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2009). Despite Spiro’s help, for which I am grateful, I have been unable to locate any documentation detailing Canadian sales figures for *The Passing of the Great Race*.

of racism in Canada, subsequent studies have repeated variants of this myth of Canadian exceptionalism. The trend has been to downplay the role of the intellectual movement that fostered the idea of multiple “white races” and its attendant obsession with those deemed inferior. Some relatively recent examples include political scientist Garth Stevenson’s suggestion that race was an American preoccupation and that Canadians were more concerned with language, or historian Jatinder Mann’s claim that multiculturalism was able to emerge in Canada partly because whiteness was not deeply entrenched in the national psyche and that whiteness was largely centred in the province of British Columbia.³²

The research I had already completed directly contradicted these claims. I had traced the influence of race science/scientific racism in Kirkconnell’s thought, had found that the same body of literature had informed England’s published works, and saw a similar impulse in Gibbon’s writings. These three public intellectuals were major figures responsible for the earliest expressions of cultural pluralism in Canada. Beyond this, I had identified some references in the historiography to the influence of scientific racism on Canadian Members of Parliament, and I had also read some heated debates about the “Nordic race” in the Canadian press in the 1920s.³³ So Palmer was right in the limited sense that Americans had more actively mobilized around scientific racist thought and used it to successfully press for more restrictive immigration policies that targeted continental Europeans.³⁴ Yet it was clear to me that James W. St. G. Walker’s argument that racism was a “common-sense” idea for most Canadians

However, Kirkconnell borrowed the book from the Toronto Public Library, suggesting it was available to interested Ontarians.

³² Garth Stevenson, *Building Nations from Diversity: Canadian and American Experience compared* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014), 267; Jatinder Mann, “The Introduction of Multiculturalism in Canada and Australia, 1960s–1970s,” *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 3 (2012): 483–503, quote at 484; and Mann, “‘Anglo-Conformity’: Assimilation Policy in Canada, 1890s–1950s,” *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 50 (2014): 253–76, at 255. However, Stevenson’s subsequent comments disparaging Indigenous peoples belie his contention that Canadians are relatively free of racism. See Allan Benner, “Stevenson stripped of emeritus status,” *The Standard* (15 Aug 2018), <https://www.stcatharinesstandard.ca/news-story/8840868-stevenson-stripped-of-emeritus-status/>.

³³ The Members of Parliament included Hume Cronyn (London, Ontario) and H.H. Stevens (Vancouver, British Columbia); see Donald Avery, *Reluctant Host: Canada’s Response to Immigrant Workers, 1896–1994* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995), 269n108; and Patricia E. Roy, *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man’s Province, 1914–41* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 32 and 250n17. For an overview of some of the debates in the press, see Meister, *The Racial Mosaic*, 111–12.

³⁴ The reasons for the divergence between the American and Canadian histories are complex but important factors include the usefully ambiguous Canadian immigration legislation, which permitted the exclusion of “any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada,” and the mitigating influence of the railroads, which profited from continued immigration and had great influence in shaping policy. Common to both countries, however, was the heated debate that surrounded the issue, though Americans engaged in a much greater degree of violence.

was entirely correct and, more than this, that scientific racism had been more popular and influential than had previously been recognized or admitted.³⁵

Indeed, ideas about race, shaped by race science/scientific racism, structured the debates over immigration during the interwar years and limited the earliest expressions of pluralism that developed during this period, or so I argue in *The Racial Mosaic*. Having quite accidentally stumbled into the history of scientific racism in Canada, I tried to make sense of it, initially by interpreting Canadian archival materials through a largely American secondary literature. In some senses, I wrote the book I was looking for when I began, and I hope it will be of some use to the students who come after me. In it, I sought to intervene in the literature on the history of race in Canada in a particular way; namely, to introduce greater specificity by historicizing the development, spread, and influence of race science/scientific racism in Canada, with particular attention paid to the concept of whiteness. The process of researching and writing the book has left me with ideas about some basic lines along which research on the histories of race, racialization, and racism in Canada might be fruitfully conducted, to which I will now turn.

First, the need for definitional specificity: we ought not speak of race, racism, racialization, and whiteness without defining these terms in relation to the period under study.

Race is not a biological reality but rather is a social construction – this is a tenet of the social sciences. But beyond this fundamental point there is little consensus: the definition, origins, and causes of racism are all hotly debated. Whether there are one or multiple racisms, whether racism(s) require the idea of race, and how to eliminate racism(s) are equally contentious questions. It is tempting to point to the 1970s as the moment when these debates began in earnest, when sociologists such as John Rex, Michael Banton, and Robert Miles all weighed in on the subject. But at least since the advent of biologically based theories of race, race has always been a debated subject. As early as the 1940s, scholars such as Franz Boas and Ashley Montagu systematically dismantled many of the fundamental tenets of scientific racism.³⁶ Yet the sustained popularity of racially essentialist and frankly racist ideas point to the very real need for scholars to continue to combat biological determinism, including racism and the very idea of race.³⁷ Meanwhile, even those

³⁵ James W. St. G. Walker, “Race,” *Rights, and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies* (Toronto: Osgoode Society for Legal History and Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 13.

³⁶ See for instance Jacques Barzun, *Race: A Study in Modern Superstition* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1937); Franz Boas, *Race, Language, and Culture* (New York: Macmillan, 1940); and Ashley Montagu, *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942).

³⁷ On this trend, see Angela Saini, *Superior: The Return of Race Science* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2019).

aligned against these concepts continue endlessly debating the fundamental concepts and questioning if any progress has been made.³⁸

One reason for the volume, shape, and fruitlessness of these debates is that one important fact is often forgotten:

Race is not simply a social construction; it is a particular kind of social construction – a *historical construction*. Indeed, like other historical constructions – the most famous of course being class – it cannot exist outside of time and place. To follow Edward Thompson's celebrated discussion of class, race is also 'a fluency which evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any given moment and atomize its structure.' Race, no less than class, is the product of history, and it only exists on the contested social terrain in which men and women struggle to control their destinies.³⁹

Despite this, many critical race theorists have concerned themselves exclusively with the United States and/or Britain, or have been broadly theoretical without grounding in a specific national context.

For instance, if scholars can get through David Theo Goldberg's style, they will find in his early works, *Racist Culture* and *The Racial State*, a series of arguments about the philosophical foundations of racism. These he located in liberalism and modernity and saw as being expressed in the creation of modern states. In my reading, the arguments these two books present rely on historical claims about the origins of race, racism, and liberalism that are not adequately demonstrated. And while Goldberg calls for historical specificity, he has not provided it in his works, even when he seeks to make his arguments specific to region. I would therefore argue that what the Canadian historian of race can take from these theorists is not any definitional specificity but rather a reminder to be on the lookout for the ways in which race, liberalism, and the state intersect and may in fact be related.⁴⁰

³⁸ I disagree with those who suggest that definitional specificity for the Canadian context has been provided by critical race theorists such as David Theo Goldberg.

Rather than resulting in specificity, this surfeit of theorizing has led to a multiplicity of definitions. For a detailed and accessible overview of the foundational debates, see Kawuki Mukasa, *Belonging: Constructing a Canadian Theology of Inclusion* (Toronto: Kamu Kamu, 2005), 12–67; and for an expansive and more recent examination, see John Solomos, *Race, Ethnicity, and Social Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2023).

³⁹ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 1. Emphasis added. Whiteness too "is a historical and social construct that has persistently undergone change. It is not a singular idea, but a fluid amalgam of sometimes contesting interpretations and practices." Linda Martín Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), 15.

⁴⁰ See Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and Politics of Meaning* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 1993), which should be read in conjunction with the reviews by Antoinette Burton in *Contemporary Sociology* 24, no. 5 (1995): 595–96, and Robert Gooding-Williams in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 19, no. 1 (1996): 224–25; Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden: Blackwell, 2002), which should be read in conjunction with the review by Andrew Valls in *Constellations* 13, no. 4 (2006): 589–92; Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden: Blackwell, 2009), which should be read in conjunction with the reviews by Manuela Honeyegger in

In short, while the theoretical debates about race have their value, historians must resist getting mired in them. Our studies of the past will reveal ways of understanding and employing race that will be specific to that time and place, and we should not be distracted from seeking that understanding. For instance, it simply will not suffice to avoid examining the historical meanings of the term “race” on the grounds that “it is often impossible to be sure what late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century writers and speakers intended when they referred to race.”⁴¹ Although it is often difficult to discern, in many cases historians can shed light on a particular figure’s interpretation of race and most often, their interpretation of the race science of their day. From the late-nineteenth century onward, race was a new science, believed to have insight into and powerful implications for all of humanity, and the use of the term for studies of this period must always be placed in the broader context of international race science/scientific racism and its changes over time and place.

Second, the importance of studying whiteness, not as a vague, all-encompassing category, but as a specific idea and construct, with a specific history in Canada, albeit one that has varied over time and region.

Historical studies of whiteness have generally followed one of two approaches. The first and earliest consisted of studying how various groups “came to identify, and be identified by others as white – and what that has meant for the social order.”⁴² This sort of bottom-up approach seeks to understand how various European immigrants self-racialized as white.⁴³ The second is a more top-down approach, which seeks to understand how the nominally white elite in North America used race science to construct the boundaries of the white racial category, determine its inner hierarchies, and defend both its inner and outer boundaries. An essential third type of study are those that examine how the outer boundaries of whiteness were maintained, the material consequences of this racism on those it oppressed, and the ways in which this oppression was resisted.

Review of African Political Economy 37, no. 126 (2010): 541–42, and David Scott Fitzgerald in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 10 (2011): 1695–96, as well as the round table in *Patterns of Prejudice* 44, no. 1 (2010).

⁴¹ Michael Banton, “Historical and Contemporary Modes of Racialization,” in *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice*, Karim Murji and John Solomos, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 55.

⁴² Peter Kolchin, “Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America,” *Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (2002): 154–73, quote at 155. Much of this early literature focused on the (self-)racialization of Irish and Jewish peoples. Foundational texts on how whiteness was constituted legally include Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707–91; and Ian Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York University Press, [1996] 2006).

⁴³ However, it is important to not let American examples dominate interpretations of Canadian history. As Carmela Patrias rightly warns, claiming that immigrants’ integration into Canadian society was merely a matter of them becoming white would be to oversimplify complex processes. See her *Jobs and Justice: Fighting Discrimination in Wartime Canada, 1939–1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 3–15.

Because racial categories are relational, this third type of study in particular contributes to our understandings of both the oppressed and their oppressors.⁴⁴

Although there is a large body of literature on how racial discrimination was enacted against various racialized groups, with legal histories being a particularly fertile subfield, the Canadian historiography has generally lacked studies of the first two types, the top-down and the bottom-up. With regards to the first approach, Vic Satzewich's research found that "peripheral Europeans" (specifically Ukrainians) turned to crafting a political, not a racial, identity in North America – though surely the two cannot be fully separated.⁴⁵ As for the latter, Carmela Patrias' study of discrimination in Canada during the Second World War offered a nuanced examination of racism and discrimination against "peripheral Europeans." She found that one clear expression of discrimination against various European groups was their exclusion from the "better neighborhoods" in Canadian cities through the use of legally accepted housing covenants.⁴⁶

This brings us to the role of geography. In all historical studies of race, racism, and racialization, we need to pay close attention to place for, as George Elliott Clarke put it, "In Canada, different regions produce different forms of white supremacy."⁴⁷ Indeed, it is important to remember that given the vast geographic sweep of the country and its varied patterns in settlement (all in the context of various forms of colonialism) the alchemy of race in Canada was not a uniform process.⁴⁸ Little of this crucial mapping has been done, though some initial studies are suggestive. Historian James Walker's work on housing covenants, which Patrias drew upon, demonstrated that they primarily targeted people of Asian descent in British Columbia, people of African descent in Nova Scotia, and eastern and central Europeans and Jewish people in central Canada.⁴⁹

The existing research suggests that in British Columbia, whiteness was consolidated much earlier than in the rest of Canada and was constructed in opposition to

⁴⁴ This relationality is especially the case in studies of slavery in Canada. See Harvey Amani Whitfield, *Biographical Dictionary of Enslaved Black People in the Maritimes* (Toronto and Fredericton: University of Toronto Press and Acadiensis Press, 2022); Whitfield, *North to Bondage: Loyalist Slavery in the Maritimes* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016); Marcel Trudel, *Canada's Forgotten Slaves: Two Centuries of Bondage*, George Tombs (trans.) (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 2013); and Frank Mackey, *Done With Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal, 1760–1840* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

⁴⁵ Vic Satzewich, "Whiteness Limited: Racialization and the Social Construction of 'Peripheral Europeans,'" *Histoire sociale/Social History* 33, no. 66 (2000): 271–89. Cf., for instance, Debra Thompson, "Is Race Political?" *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 41, no. 3 (2008): 525–47.

⁴⁶ Patrias, *Jobs and Justice*, 8.

⁴⁷ George Elliott Clarke, "'How White Are Your Whites?' A Response to Daniel Coleman's *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada*," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 38 (2009): 207–20, quote at 217n15.

⁴⁸ The struggle for intellectual historians is to avoid inducing what Ian McKay has called the "vertigo of placelessness." McKay, "A Note on 'Region' in Writing the History of Atlantic Canada," *Acadiensis* 29, no. 2 (2000): 89–101, quote at 92.

⁴⁹ Walker, "Race," Rights, and the Law, 190–92. For an important work on whiteness in the Maritimes, see McKay and Bates, *In the Province of History*.

Asian Canadians, despite the presence of Indigenous peoples (since time immemorial) and the presence of African Canadians (since the 1850s).⁵⁰ For example, some of the earliest uses of the term “Caucasian” (as a blanket term for people racialized as white) by federal politicians are found in discussions relating to British Columbia.⁵¹ There, concern with Asian peoples was paramount, while in the Maritime provinces and in certain regions of Quebec and Ontario whiteness was primarily conceived of in relation to Blackness, no doubt given the pre-Confederation history of African slavery and the settlements of free African Canadians in the regions.⁵² The majority of so-called peripheral European settled on the Prairies, and it was there that the Ku Klux Klan not only briefly thrived, but also narrowed the grounds of inclusion and targeted not just African Canadians but also essentially all those considered non-Anglo-Saxon (and often the non-Protestant as well).⁵³ Is there then something to the hypothesis that where those racialized as non-white are a very small minority, racism by nominally white elites increasingly turns from policing the outer boundaries of whiteness to policing the inner boundaries just as closely? Further research may provide some answers. Consistent across the settler colonies of Canada, however, is the presence of Indigenous peoples, so close attention needs to be paid to how whiteness was constructed in opposition to a racialized Indigenous identity or identities.⁵⁴ Relatedly, how did the construction and maintenance of racial categories and boundaries differ in urban and rural environments?⁵⁵

⁵⁰ On their settlement, see Crawford Killian, *Go Do Some Great Thing: The Black Pioneers of British Columbia*, 2nd edition (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 2020).

⁵¹ See, for example, House of Commons, *Debates* (27 March 1903), 598, but also Timothy J. Stanley, “The Aryan Character of the Future of British North America:’ Macdonald, Chinese Exclusion, and the Invention of Canadian White Supremacy,” in *Macdonald at 200: New Reflections and Legacies*, Patrice Dutil and Roger Hall, eds. (Toronto: Dundurn, 2014), 115–40.

⁵² Whitfield, *Biographical Dictionary*; Whitfield, *Blacks on the Border*; Trudel, *Canada’s Forgotten Slaves*; Mackey, *Done With Slavery*; and Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, fiftieth anniversary edition (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, [1971] 2021).

⁵³ On the Klan in Canada, see especially James Pitsula, *Keeping Canada British: The Ku Klux Klan in 1920s Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013); and Allan Bartley, *The Ku Klux Klan in Canada: A Century of Promoting Racism and Hate in the Peaceable Kingdom* (Halifax: Formac, 2020).

⁵⁴ Attention to settler colonial studies is crucial for scholars engaged in critical studies of whiteness because attempts to racialize Indigenous peoples led to some of the earliest, most explicit and enduring racist legislation in Canada: the *Indian Act*. Examining the reciprocal relationship between race science/scientific racism and settler colonialism will help us better understand the evolution and spread of both. Recent research in this vein includes Chris Andersen, “*Métis:*” *Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Personhood* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014); Travis Hay, *Inventing the Thrifty Gene: The Science of Settler Colonialism* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2021); and Mark Munsterhjelm, *Forensic Colonialism: Genetics and the Capture of Indigenous Peoples* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2023).

⁵⁵ Studies of Chinatowns in Canada reveal the ways in which whiteness also shaped urban spaces, often through attempts to segregate peoples racialized as non-white in bounded regions. See for instance Kay J. Anderson, *Vancouver’s Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875–1980* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991).

Regardless of the area under study, we need to be cautious when studying whiteness. Whiteness studies must not be allowed to displace or overshadow studies that foreground the experiences of those racialized as non-white; that is, those who suffered under the systems constructed and maintained by nominally white elites.⁵⁶ And while heeding Jacobson's call to "admit of a system of 'difference' by which one might be both white *and* racially distinct from other whites" (under which discrimination against various European groups was technically racism), historians should not equate the experiences of these adversely racialized white peoples with the experiences of those racialized as non-white.⁵⁷

Third, the need for a rigorously empirical approach; that is, recognizing the importance of original primary-source research.

While the critiques made of whiteness studies have been unduly harsh, it does not follow that they are entirely without merit.⁵⁸ This includes the observation that some arguments are made without sufficient evidence, though this is more an American concern than a Canadian one given the lack of historical studies of whiteness in the latter. Still, the present-day importance of studies of race and whiteness are so great that this scholarship must be unimpeachable, and theoretical claims must be thoroughly, if subsequently, historicized.

Turning to the pragmatic matter of how to conduct this research, similar to the three ways of approaching the history of whiteness outlined earlier, scholars have identified various ways of approaching colonial archives. Each of these is important for historians who study the histories of race and racism in Canada. First is reading "against the grain" to identify and reconstruct the self-understanding of historical actors and give people from the past agency in making their own history. Second is reading "along the grain," or using the categorizations and ordering of colonial archives to reveal "how colonial sense and reason conjoined social kinds with the political order of colonial things," and how this

⁵⁶ As George Elliott Clarke has argued, such projects "must not omit previous, anti-racist scholarship . . . one needs the black presence to render Canadian 'raced' whiteness most visible." Clarke, review of *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada*, by Daniel Coleman, *University of Toronto Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (2009): 179–81, quote at 181. See also his "How White Are Your Whites?"

⁵⁷ Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 6. As he put it, "This is not to argue that race is freighted the same way from period to period or from case to case. No one who has looked into this country's maze of segregation statutes, miscegenation codes, housing covenants, slavery laws, or civil rights debates could ever suppose that being a 'Celt,' say, was tantamount to being some kind of European 'Negro.' My point here is not to equate one racial experience with another, but rather to demonstrate the inadequacy of modern notions of 'ethnicity' in rendering the history of whiteness in American social and political life," 9.

⁵⁸ I refer here to Eric Arnesen, "Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60 (2001): 3–32; and the more balanced assessment of Kolchin, "Whiteness Studies."

“common sense” was subject to revision and actively changed.”⁵⁹ And the third involves rejecting the primacy of the archives and expanding sites of knowledge to include fiction, oral history, and all manner of sources.⁶⁰

With regards to the first two approaches, there are definitely more historical documents in archives that lay out historical understandings of race and whiteness. However, there is still much work to be done in gathering and analyzing them, combining them with studies of literature, oral histories, and other sources. Some of these archival documents will be happened on by chance, while others will be the result of concerted efforts (by historians and archivists in collaboration) to revisit past figures and events. There is also much more work to be done in crafting an explanatory framework for these settings that is attentive to both the transnational aspects of these histories as well as their national particularities. Such works, I have suggested, will benefit from specificity with respect to definitions, time, region, and individuals. This brings me to my last point.

Fourth, the importance of biographical research.

Sociologists Vered Amit-Talai and Caroline Knowles said it best: “States are not political actors. Ethnic and racial groups are not political actors. People are political actors who produce, mediate, contest, and experience the outcomes of racial and ethnic distinctions. If we are going to have any hope of demystifying concepts as complex as race, ethnicity, and identity, then we need both to diversify and to resolutely populate the scenarios we examine.”⁶¹ Micro-historical and biographical studies are incredibly important for adversely racialized, enslaved, or otherwise oppressed peoples, and they are also important for studies of their oppressors, those who made and maintained racial hierarchies.⁶²

For the historian, the challenge is to balance an analysis of the micro with the macro, but too often the latter wins out. Studies sometimes try to solve this riddle

⁵⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 9.

⁶⁰ For an accessible overview of these varied approaches to archival research, see Michelle T. King, “Working With/In the Archives,” in *Research Methods for History*, 2nd edition, Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire, eds. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 15–30, esp. 19–22. On whiteness specifically, some helpful essays can be found in Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, ed., *Topographies of Whiteness: Mapping Whiteness in Library and Information Science* (Sacramento: Library Juice Press, 2017); see also Mario H. Ramirez, “Being Assumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative,” *American Archivist* 78, no. 2 (2015): 339–56.

⁶¹ Vered Amit-Talai and Caroline Knowles, “Against Parochialism and Fragmentation,” in *Re-Situating Identities: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*, idem, eds. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996), 9–17, quote at 14.

⁶² For a new example of the former, see Whitfield, *Biographical Dictionary*. See also Lisa A. Lindsay and John Wood Sweet, eds. *Biography and the Black Atlantic* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); and Paul Lovejoy, “Biography as Source Material: Towards a Biographical Archive of Enslaved Africans,” in *Source Material for Studying the Slave Trade and the African Diaspora*, Robin Law, ed. (Stirling: Centre of Commonwealth Studies, University of Stirling, 1997), 119–40.

by seeking a “representative” individual in whose mouth the supposedly prevailing attitude of a particular decade can be found. Such an approach works well for an initial survey, though there is a tendency for the individual to vanish, along with a great deal of useful context and nuance. Left unanswered are questions such as: How did these individuals come to hold such beliefs? How did they change over time? Who was challenging those beliefs?⁶³ A series of biographical studies can answer such questions and help historians obtain a fulsome understanding of past figures and their times. And, after this painstaking work is completed, later works of synthesis can address individuals (and their representativeness) in a more accurate, nuanced way. This was to be Palmer’s approach. In “Reluctant Hosts,” Palmer took a decadal approach, naming some figures of significance he had already identified.⁶⁴ However, he had also planned a larger study, “English-Canadian elite opinion toward immigration and ethnicity in the twentieth century,” that would take a biographical approach and examine the attitudes of Robert England, J.S. Woodsworth, Nellie McClung, Mackenzie King, John W. Dafoe, John Murray Gibbon, and Watson Kirkconnell.⁶⁵ Many of these figures have now received closer biographical treatment, although there is more work to be done in fleshing out Kirkconnell’s relationship to the emergent far-right in the 1960s and ‘70s.⁶⁶ For, as his case shows, although whiteness was consolidated, white supremacy lived on.

* * *

The Racial Mosaic documents how, through a process of intellectual and emotional engagement, Kirkconnell came to accept the equality of “peripheral

⁶³ As French sociologist Jean-Claude Passeron put it, in a different context: “Here the pertinent features are sought in and through biographical functioning . . . they are produced by the anonymization of the actors in the story . . . conceived of as the interchangeable agents of a structure of change which could have done without biographies and hence strictly speaking without individuals having a personal identity.” Passeron, “The Script and the Corpus: Biographies, Flows, Itineraries, Trajectories,” 317–40, quote at 320–1, in *Sociological Reasoning: A Non-Popperian Space of Argumentation*, Rachel Gomme (trans.) (Oxford: Bardwell Press, 2013).

⁶⁴ Palmer, “Reluctant Hosts.” For a challenging critique of standard units of periodization such as decades, see Michael Dawson and Catherine Gidney, “Persistence and Inheritance: Rethinking Periodisation and English Canada’s ‘Twentieth Century,’” in *Contesting Clio’s Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History*, Chris Dummitt and Michael Dawson, eds. (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2009), 47–74.

⁶⁵ Palmer, “Reluctant Hosts”; and Palmer, “Description of Project,” folder 32, box 6, Howard Palmer fonds, UCASC.

⁶⁶ On Woodsworth, see Allen Mills, *Fool for Christ: The Political Thought of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); on Dafoe, see Kurt Korneski, *Race, Nation, and Reform Ideology in Winnipeg, 1880s–1920s* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015), chap. 4; and on McClung, see Michelle Swann and Veronica Strong-Boag, “Mooney, Helen Letitia (McClung),” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 18, University of Toronto/Université Laval, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mooney_helen_letitia_18E.html. There are various biographies of King, but for a contextualization of his approach to immigration policy see Robert F. Harney, “‘So Great a Heritage as Ours’: Immigration and the Survival of the Canadian Polity,” *Daedalus* 117, no. 4 (1988): 51–97.

Europeans" but remained convinced of the racial superiority of peoples racialized as non-white. In the 1920s, he had been unconcerned with hybridity, bizarrely arguing that "half breeds" always died out. By the 1950s, however, he recognized that such children did survive, though he argued that they were prone to various diseases as well as "psychic confusion and unhappiness." As such, Kirkconnell opposed interracial marriages, privately describing them as "the obverse calamity of incest."⁶⁷ Throughout the 1960s, while he was prepared to publicly praise the nominally white student body at Acadia University for its supposed lack of racial animosity, he privately remained convinced that peoples of African descent were lower in intelligence than nominally white people and praised research that purported to prove this hypothesis.⁶⁸

From at least the late 1960s until his death, Kirkconnell also returned to the anti-Semitism of his youth. He had long walked a tightrope between naming members of any ethnic or religious groups involved in Communist groups, including Jewish people, and condemning anti-Semitism. In the 1940s, for instance, he sat on the Board of Jewish-Gentile Relationships (which became the Canadian Conference of Christians and Jews, and eventually the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews). This stance won him no friends. In 1944, he complained to the director of the Canadian Conference of Christians and Jews, Claris Silcox, "if one ventures to mention the fact of Jewish contact with Communism, the unfailing response is a universal roar of 'anti-Semitism'."⁶⁹ But within a few years he had begun to lump the two groups together.⁷⁰ And within two decades, he had descended to implying that Jewish people were responsible for the Second World War, and he had begun a search for evidence that the number of those who perished in the Holocaust was inflated.⁷¹

This quest led Kirkconnell to reach out to various "revisionist historians" and Canadian fascists for help with his project, even as he denied associating with such groups.⁷² He began with the American historian and notorious Holocaust

⁶⁷ "Summary of an address by Dr. Watson Kirkconnell to the Toronto Personnel Association, March 10th, 1953. What Canadians Shall We Hire?" Typescript and notes, WK4-27, ECWA; and Kirkconnell, "Anglo-Canadian Futurities," 19 ("half-breeds").

⁶⁸ Kirkconnell, "Canada's Race Problems" (typescript, n.d. [1953?]), 1-5, WK14-28, ECWA; and Kirkconnell, letter to Prof. Audrey Shuey, 5 Oct 1966, WK7-60, ECWA.

⁶⁹ Kirkconnell, letter to Silcox, 22 Nov 1944, WK6-47, ECWA.

⁷⁰ See for instance Kirkconnell, letter to Rev. Harold R. Stephens, 6 Sept 1947, WK4-27, ECWA. Preparing to give a lecture on Communism to a meeting in Windsor, Ontario, he remarked, "I gather that the Communists and Jews of Windsor would like to give me a rough ride."

⁷¹ Kirkconnell, "Leviathan, Behemoth, Kraken," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* 2, no. 4 (1968): 161-70. This was first brought to light by Jack Lipinsky in his "The Agony of Israel": Watson Kirkconnell and the Canadian Jewry," *Journal of the Canadian Jewish Historical Society* 6, no. 1 (1982): 57-72, at 68-69. Kirkconnell first floated his Holocaust denial in a poem; see "My Name is Legion" in Kirkconnell, *Centennial Tales and Selected Poems* (Published for Acadia University by University of Toronto Press, 1965), 78-89, at 80.

⁷² Pierre Berton, "Dr. Watson Kirkconnell's Interesting Political Associates," *Toronto Star* (25 March 1959), 25; and Berton, "In Which the Readers Have the Last Words as Usual," *Toronto Star* (14 April 1959), 27. See also Kirkconnell's correspondence on this matter, especially with Berton, in WK25-60, ECWA.

denier Henry Elmer Barnes. Barnes, in turn, encouraged him to contact Michael Bandi. Barnes described Bandi as “a substantial person who has given a great deal of attention to the subject” and one who Kirkconnell would be “safe” in writing. Little is known about Bandi other than that he was a Hungarian immigrant living in Ontario who corresponded with Adrien Arcand, Canada’s best-known fascist and Nazi.⁷³ Acting on Barnes’ advice, Kirkconnell wrote a letter to Bandi, which opened with his admission that he was “convinced in a general way that the propaganda figure of six million liquidations in the Nazi concentration-camps is 95 per cent legend.” He then revealed his reason for writing was to “track down specific documentation, since without much backing any man who spoke out would inevitably incur press crucifixion,” no doubt recalling the mockery to which he was subjected after implying water fluoridation was a Communist plot to weaken western minds.⁷⁴ If Bandi sent a response, Kirkconnell did not save it (which would be uncharacteristic), but the correspondence and tracts Kirkconnell did retain on the subject now rest incongruously alongside letters registering his continued support for the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews.⁷⁵

Kirkconnell and other superficially respectable Canadians in the 1960s and 1970s had to cautiously engage with more prominent members of the far right. Pecking away at typewriters in the darkness of their dens, they sought out safe networks of correspondents from whom more supposed evidence could be collected. Similar-minded Canadians today face no such barriers. The internet provides access to a torrent of racism, anti-Semitism, connections to like-minded people around the country and the world, and, if desired, the cloak of anonymity. With a smartphone in their pocket, anyone, anywhere, at any time, can spread racism online – with offline, real-world consequences. This continuity between past and present is not theoretical: despite our own country’s reputation for multicultural tolerance, Canada has in fact become an outsize exporter of hatred.⁷⁶

⁷³ See Bandi, letters to Arcand, 21 and 31 Jan 1963, folder 6, box 2, MG30-D91 Adrien Arcand fonds, Library and Archives Canada. The first letter references additional correspondence between the two not found in the files but indicates that Bandi was also a correspondent of Paul Bassinier (often called “the father of Holocaust denial”). In the second, Bandi identifies himself as a Hungarian immigrant seeking to clear the “good reputation of my native country and people.”

⁷⁴ Barnes, letter to Kirkconnell, 3 March 1961; and Kirkconnell, letter to Michael Bandi, 8 March 1961, WK16–41, ECWA. The remainder of the correspondence can be found in the Harry Elmer Barnes papers, Box 57, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming. On the fluoridation issue, see Meister, *The Racial Mosaic*, 248.

⁷⁵ In WK5–47, ECWA, note for instance his copies of “How Many Jews,” *The Cross and the Flag* (July 1961), 11; and *Population Bulletin* 21, no. 5 (1965), which discussed Israel; as well as his handwritten calculations of Jewish population figures. The latter magazine was published by an anti-Semitic, anti-Communist, and anti-immigration organization in the United States called the Christian Nationalist Crusade, founded by Gerald L.K. Smith.

⁷⁶ Thomas Daigle, “Canadians Among Most Active in Online Right-Wing Extremism, Research Finds,” *CBC News* (19 June 2020); “Online Prejudice Spreading Like Wildfire, Cannot Be Left Unchecked; Race Foundation,” *Kamloops Now/Canadian Press* (2 Aug 2022); Adam Toy, “Calgary neo-Nazi Group Claims

To understand how this came about, we need more historical studies that connect shifting notions of whiteness, the continued reliance on race science/scientific racism, and the periodic surges of radical right-wing activity in Canada.⁷⁷ The field is ripe for research, and the stakes are only getting higher.⁷⁸

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Responsibility for Hanging Racist Banner Over Macleod Trail,” *Global News* (19 Aug 2022); and Omar Mosleh, “‘Kind of Terrifying’: Numbers Show Racist Great Replacement Conspiracy Theory has Found Audience in Canada,” *Toronto Star* (14 June 2022).

⁷⁷ Especially needed is a study of the evolution of racism in Canada in the aftermath of the Second World War. Perhaps relatedly, we also need a study of the shift from the language of “race” to the language of “ethnicity.” In her pathbreaking study of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Eve Haque sought to answer the question of how language came to be “the site for articulating exclusions which can no longer be stated in terms of race and ethnicity.” She concluded that “in the post-WWII era, where delineating difference on the basis of biological racism had become verboten, the Commission provided the ideal public process for transforming the racialized hierarchy embedded in the white settler national narrative onto the terrain of culture – with language acting as the critical technology for marking cultural difference.” However, given the numerous examples of racial discourse provided in her study, it seems that racial essentialism persisted well into the postwar era, and I think this bears investigating. See Haque, *Multiculturalism Within a Bilingual Framework: Language, Race, and Belonging in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 4; Haque, “Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework: A Retrospective,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 46, no. 2 (2014), 120; Meister, “The Racial Mosaic: Race, Cultural Pluralism, and Canadian Multiculturalism” (PhD diss., Queen’s University, 2019), chap. 7; and Anthony Q. Hazard Jr., *Postwar Anti-Racism: The United States, UNESCO, and ‘Race,’ 1945–1968* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁷⁸ In July 2023, a man was charged with both terrorism and hate propaganda for his role in the far-right, neo-Nazi group known as the Atomwaffen Division (designated by the Canadian government as a terrorist organization). The RCMP have called this case the first of its kind in Canada. See Richard Raycraft, “RCMP Charge Ottawa Man Tied to ‘Violent Far-Right Ideology’ with Terrorism Offences,” *cbc News* (5 July 2023), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/rcmp-changes-terrorism-atomwaffen-1.6897459>.

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