

Phillip Buckner and John G. Reid, eds., *Remembering 1759: The Conquest of Canada in Historical Memory*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. 317p.

These volumes were published in the wake of of ‘1759 Revisited: The Conquest of Canada in Historical Perspective,’ a conference which was held at the University of London for the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham. While this particular volume is a collection of papers related to “historical memory” of this event, the second, *Revisiting 1759: The Conquest of Canada in Historical Perspective*, is focused on “the Conquest and its immediate aftermath” (vii-viii). *Remembering 1759* contains a helpful, editor-penned introduction which situates the Conquest in its historical context as well as gives an overview of its “historical memory,” thus providing readers with entry points into the eleven papers contained in this collection.

The articles are presented in roughly chronological order, from reactions in England and Canada in the immediate aftermath of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham to considerations on how this watershed is approached and in a modern context and how it could be dealt with in the future. Although these articles are not, of course, completely comprehensive in their scope – they do not contain the memory of every group and individual at every time with regard to the Conquest, for example, -- they do nonetheless cover a remarkable amount of ground, and as a collection they pay tribute to concerned intellectuals and public figures such as Abbé Lionel Groulx and Denis Vaugeois as well as groups involved the Conquest’s fallout such as Native Americans, representatives of the French government, and Quebecer separatists.

By way of making this material topical, and provocative, most of the articles refer to the controversy that surrounded the commemoration of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in 2009. One might venture to say that many of the participants at ‘1759 Revisited’ were propelled to better their understanding of the Conquest because of its strong influence on current Canadian politics, activism, and psyche. This indicates that, in addition to being united in their questioning of historical memory related to the Conquest, many of these articles are an implicit or explicit attempt to respond to this question: “Why is the Conquest still such a hot-button issue in Canada?”

In working through responses to this question, authors plumb the great variety of ways in which the Battle of the Plains of Abraham has been viewed, and thereby provide a sense of the ability of politicians, among many others, to use an historical event to very different, and at times contradictory, reasons. As Joan Coutu and John McAleer remark in “‘The Immortal Wolfe?’ Monuments, Memory, and the Battle of Quebec,” “[t]he historical understandings and interpretations of the Battle of Quebec for different groups were structured by the prevailing political exigencies of the time in which they were created” (29). One of the most striking contradictions in the interpretation of the Conquest lie in its simultaneous symbolism of unification between the inheritors of French and British cultures, as well as the division of those same groups. In other words, it has thus been a tool for appeasing the francophone population who find themselves under British rule and majority Anglophone rule as well as a rallying cry for the increased power and autonomy of Quebec. The many reactions to the Battle of the Plains of Abraham highlight the idea that accounts of history are always colored and subjective.

Just as this volume demonstrates that the meaning of a historical event is shaped by a person’s identity, my reaction to *Remembering 1759* is a result of my own background and interests. As someone whose exposure to Canadian history has been minimal, and cliché-ridden, this focused, rich picture of a significant point in my northern neighbor’s past was quite captivating. By the time I closed this book after an initial reading, I had gained a keen insight into the complex divisions between Quebec and the rest of the Canadian provinces, between the Francophone and Anglophone populations of Canada. I would recommend this well-crafted and well-written volume as an excellent read for those interested in deepening their knowledge of historical memory,

colonialism and its repercussions, the movement for independence in Quebec, Canadian government, French colonialism, and Canadian and Quebec history in general.

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