

**MA Minor Research Paper**

*Selling Canada:  
How 'Branded Nationalism' Has Shaped the Nation*

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

Canada's retail industry is fast paced, innovative, and continues to gain growing attention and respect as a key player in international markets. Canada's growth and development as a nation was driven from the late nineteenth century to the present through trade, retail, as well as by a growing emphasis placed upon consumption and strategic branding practices. Canada's growth and development as a country and as an identity, can be intrinsically linked to its iconic brands that have come to symbolize Canada, provide images of Canadiana, and define for many what it means to be a Canadian. Thus, revealing that the growth of Canada's retail industry and its relation to ideas of Canadian identity and nationhood – and aspects of culture that these encompass – can be viewed from a 'branding' perspective and analyzed both historically and in the present. In this minor research paper, I argue that through 'Branded Nationalism,' the Canadian retail industry had and continues to have a fundamental influence over the development of Canada as a nation, in both social and economic terms, while contributing to the development of a national identity among its citizens and in the country's overarching narratives of development.

In this paper, I will take a historical view by analyzing the development of consumption, branding and branded nationalism, and the ways in which iconic Canadian department stores have influenced the growth of Canada as a nation, while arguing that through their cultural, social, and economic contributions, they directly introduced, influenced, and fostered increased levels of modernity, consumption, and nation building during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Canada. Department stores' historic contributions and influence over the nation's increasing tendency towards modernity, consumption levels, and nation-building led not only to

*selling goods* to Canadians, but *selling Canada* to Canadians, by weaving brand narratives within the narratives of Canadian nation.

## **1.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONSUMPTION, BRANDING, AND BRANDED NATIONALISM**

### ***CONSUMPTION:***

Theorists of modernity and post-modernity agree about the centrality of consumption to the introduction of present-day capitalism and contemporary consumer culture. Historically, the emergence of large-scale consumerist desire is said to have originated in early modern Europe, primarily surrounding dress and household items found around the world. In the mid- to late nineteenth century, the expansion of consumerism in North America was marked by a new found abundance of accessible goods and services, the prolific development of large-scale retail footprints, and the spread of consumerist values into social spheres.<sup>1</sup> Many theories around consumer culture and the growth of consumption have been explored, providing explanations for why mass consumption developed, what it meant and continues to mean to society, and what these new objects and consumer goods represented and encouraged amongst consumers. Among the most prominent theorists, French sociologist and philosopher Jean Baudrillard argued that consumption was an active form of relationship to objects, societies, and the world. Baudrillard described consumption as a mode of systematic activity and global response, which had powerful influence over the world's entire cultural system. He believed that objects and materials were not the 'object[s] of consumption,' but rather the 'object[s] of needs and satisfaction of needs.' In his view, consumption was an activity consisting of the systematic manipulation of signs, which had

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Trentmann, *Beyond Consumerism: New Historical Perspectives on Consumption* (London: Sage, 2004), 373-376.

no limit or saturation point for consumers.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, Baudrillard believed that signs, not the physical objects themselves, were consumed. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis research connected fetishism and the symbolism of commodities, as they represent the indirect expression of the real nature of a consumer's hidden relations with their desires. Freud's nephew and mass-marketing expert, Edward Bernays, used his uncle's theories surrounding commodity fetishism as tools for the manipulation of the minds of the masses in order to drive consumption on behalf of large U.S companies during the early years of the twentieth century. Similar to Baudrillard, Bernays claimed that a *thing* may be desired not for its intrinsic worth or usefulness, but because a person has unconsciously come to see a *symbol* of something else in it – the desire for which they may be ashamed to admit to themselves and/or to others.<sup>3</sup>

Contemporary marketing and business scholars, David Burns and Jeffrey Fawcett respectively, argue that the acquisition and possession of products can be viewed as the keys to the development of the *self* in consumer culture, as the products themselves become vessels that contain image. Furthermore, they suggest that most products in a consumer culture are acquired by individuals with the objective of absorbing the meaning associated with them into one's self.<sup>4</sup> These arguments are expanded by marketing and cultural branding researcher, Douglas Holt, who describes the act of consuming in four interrelated dimensions – consuming as experience, integration, classification and play. Holt describes consuming as *experience* as the emphasis placed on the emotional states that arise in consumers during acts of consumption. This refers to the ways in which objects and the act of consuming them alter how consumers feel and what

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<sup>2</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Systems of Objects* (London/New York: Verso, 1996), 199-204.

<sup>3</sup> Harvie Ferguson, *The Lure of Dreams: Sigmund Freud and the Construction of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1996), 203.

<sup>4</sup> David Burns and Jeffrey Fawcett, "The Role of Brands in a Consumer Culture: Can Strong Brands Serve as a Substitute for a Relationship with God?" *The Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* 15, no. 2 (2012): 29.

they experience in their daily life. Consuming as *integration* describes how consumers acquire and manipulate object meanings, while integrating self and object to allow themselves access to the object's symbolic properties. This indicates that by engaging in the act of consumption, individuals begin to absorb the symbolic properties from an object and incorporate them into their personal identities. Consuming as *classification* explains how consuming is a process in which objects – when viewed as vessels of cultural and personal meanings – can act to classify their consumers into various categories or classes. This suggests that the symbolic properties of an object directly relate to how it is classified and organized into daily social life, signifying that these classifications would also apply to the individual who is consuming the object in terms of socio-economic status. Finally, Holt describes consuming as *play*, as consumers using consumption objects to play and develop the relationship between the fourth dimension and the previous three.<sup>5</sup> This implies that individuals are able to manipulate, combine, and curate the three previously discussed dimensions of experience, integration, and classification and create a fourth dimension of consumption in the process.

Arjun Appadurei, a socio-cultural anthropologist who studies objects as *things*, believes that both commodities and things are of independent interest to anthropology, and as valuables, they are at the heart of economic anthropology, exchange theory and social anthropology.<sup>6</sup> Appadurei argues that the commodity situation in the social life of any *thing*, can be defined as the situation in which its exchangeability for some other *thing* is made apparent.<sup>7</sup> This exchangeability for some other *thing*, that he refers to, could be viewed as an object in exchange for a feeling, a

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<sup>5</sup> Douglas Holt, *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004): 2.

<sup>6</sup> Arjun Appadurei, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

social message or a sense of status to a consumer. Thus, he reiterates previous theorists' work on the symbolic nature of objects and how these signs, feelings, classifications, and experiences can affect and influence both the daily life of a consumer and the personal and collective identities of the individual.

Taking into account this survey of relevant theorists and their arguments surrounding consumption and objects in mind, I argue that the mass growth of consumer culture in Western societies from the late nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century is the result of the symbolic, psychological, cultural, and experiential changes to and associations of consumer objects. Prior to mass-production and mass-consumption, consumer goods had always represented a satisfaction of needs for society, but they quickly began to represent new levels of demand, desire, and thirst of customers that could scarcely be quenched even during a time of increased industrialization, globalization, and urbanization. The unrelenting drive to meet these new consumer "needs" resulted in Western social movements of mass-consumption, and branding strategies. These strategies portrayed the intangible and symbolic nature of tangible objects, marketed consumption as a social movement and activity, and encouraged consumers to continue buying past the point of their immediate material needs in order to promote mass-production, mass-merchandising, and mass-consumption.

***BRANDING:***

Creating 'brands' and engaging in the act of 'branding' have been foundational to successful business strategies for companies since the mid-to-late nineteenth century. In an ever-increasing commodified social landscape where mass-consumption quickly became a characteristic of daily life, businesses found a way to successfully attract consumers to not only their products, but to what their products represented. Although many scholars argue that the

origins and success of ‘branding strategies’ are relatively contemporary, the original prototypes of what can be considered as ‘branding practices’ can be seen in historical hieroglyphics, seals, family crests, currency, and transactions. The evolution of ‘brands’ and ‘branding’ has encouraged movement toward the ability to create a greater complexity of the branded object, through the addition of images, meaning, values, and characteristics that become associated with the object itself.

Business scholars, Karl Moore and Susan Reid, have argued that both tangible and intangible aspects of brands and the act of branding, are as old as civilization itself, in the form of what they refer to as proto-brands. They make their argument based on their findings that brands, no matter their period from history, display two undeniable characteristics related to the conveyance of information to stakeholders: information with the purpose of indicating the origin of the product and information about the quality of the product. The development of early language is said to have arisen around the need to converse about both religion, and business transactions, the latter of the two being the main point of interest for this discussion. The need to converse about business transactions developed an even greater need for the development of language, symbols, and writing to aid in these transactions by keeping a record of who was involved, what was being exchanged, and for what value, in the form of pictorial symbols that represented the identities – or brands – of the people involved.<sup>8</sup>

Branding and marketing scholar, Tom Blackett, has also provided insight on the origins of branding by describing it in its passive form as the ‘object by which an impression is formed,’ and in its active form as the ‘process of forming this impression.’ He contextualizes this by describing the origins of the word ‘brand’ from its roots as an Old Norse (north Germanic

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<sup>8</sup> Karl Moore and Susan Reid, “The Birth of Brand: 4000 Years of Branding.” *Business History* 50, no. 4 (2008): 419-430.

language) word ‘brandr,’ which means ‘to burn.’ From these origins, Blackett argues that the word made its way into Anglo-Saxon language and even into contemporary usages as a way to mark livestock through the use of burning a stamp onto the hide of the animal to display ownership by a particular person, their reputation, and the quality of their products, more commonly known as ‘branding’ today.<sup>9</sup> Although ‘brands’ and ‘branding’ are often thought of as being a late nineteenth century and early-to-mid twentieth century occurrence, the act of contemporary branding strategies aim at achieving the same things that its historic prototypes did – that is, to provide information about the origin and quality of the product in order to convey something uniquely identifiable about the object that will appeal to consumers.

Although it is possible to trace branding practices back to ancient times, the importance of brands and branding strategies drastically increased during the mid- to late-nineteenth century thanks to the industrial revolution and its increased levels of production, distribution, accessibility for consumers, and competition among competing businesses. This allowed branding to become a strategy used to build loyalty to a particular product, supplier, or manufacturer. The introduction of branding as a business strategy in the nineteenth century provided a means through which a product could become something more than just a physical object, it could become something that symbolized a human value, a way of thinking, or a specific lifestyle.<sup>10</sup>

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought waves of commodification, industrialization, and urbanization, to North America. The increased development and visibility of retail giants in the early to mid-twentieth century, consisting of retail chains (large grocery,

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<sup>9</sup> Tom Blackett, “What is a Brand?” *Brands and Branding*. Ed. Rita Clifton & John Simmons. London: Profile Books Ltd. (2003): 13-14.

<sup>10</sup> Burns & Fawcett, 30-31.

clothing, and variety or five-and-dime stores with multiple locations across the country), department stores, and manufacturing or Business-to-Business (B2B) companies from which other retailers purchased their stock, provided highly visible mechanisms for modes of advertising and the introduction of business strategies to create and increase levels of demand among consumers.<sup>11</sup> By the middle years of the twentieth century, North American consumers saw increased access to a wide breadth of goods from international markets, consistent levels of employment, and increased disposable incomes. This encouraged the development of buying and consumption as a social activity and not simply a household chore or errand, and introduced consumers to large retailers that would change the North American retail industry forever.

Branding as a cultural process and a business strategy demonstrates how a brand can act as a primary tool through which a specific image or group of images is associated with a tangible product.<sup>12</sup> Contemporary communications professor and branding expert, Sarah Banet-Weiser, describes how the primary difference between commodification and branding lies in the brand's often-intangible value as a cultural phenomenon, which extends beyond the consumer good. She argues that the cultural process of branding demonstrates the transformation of everyday lived culture to brand culture, ultimately shaping not only consumer habits, but also political, cultural, and civic practices in society.<sup>13</sup>

Scholars Stefan Jaworski and Don Foshier argue that human beings have always been radically affected by the brands that they live within and are surrounded by, including the physical environment, social landscape, and the nation within which they live. They describe how human beings live within brands and 'branded systems' that inevitably shape the way they

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Critical Cultural Communication: Authentic TM: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 4;5;11.

act, think, and are perceived both by themselves and by others. The introduction of branding placed an emphasis on the symbolic nature of commodified objects while promoting those meanings, signs, and values to individuals to increase levels of consumption. However, branding as a business strategy can be applied to any type of commodified messaging, as shown in the development of branded nationalism strategies. Jaworski and Fosher explore how the core values and essence of the brand identities of nations, both large and small, are able to disperse throughout the populations that live, reinforce, and spread these values, which in turn creates a cyclical circle of brand-building.<sup>14</sup> This suggests that if anything tangible or intangible can be commodified, consumed, or branded with specific messaging, the individual's act of consuming and living within these branded systems reinforces the branded messaging being pushed at them and being integrated into their personal and collective identities. With the introduction of *branded-nationalism*, branding strategies were no longer just being applied to tangible products or intangible services to convey certain signs, meanings, and values in association with the products, but could be directly applied to the identity of a person or a nation as a whole.

***BRANDED NATIONALISM:***

With the development of branding as a business strategy and the newfound notion of associating a business or its products with intangible values and symbols, western brands began to influence much larger socio-cultural identities in the form of what was introduced as *nation-branding* and later known as *branded nationalism*. Communications professor, Melissa Aronczyk, defines nation-branding as the “result of the interpenetration of commercial and public-sector interests to communicate national priorities among domestic and international

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<sup>14</sup> Stefan Jaworski & Don Fosher, “National Brand Identity and its Effect on Corporate Brands: The Nation Brand Effect (NBE),” *Multinational Business Review* 11, no. 2 (2003): 99-100.

populations for a variety of interrelated purposes.”<sup>15</sup> Nation-branding and the practice’s ability to combine aspects of heritage and modernization, domestic and foreign concerns, while marketing moral ideologies to the public and inflecting ideas of national identity, allows brands to offer a version of nationalism rooted in a set of unified commercial interests, rather than in purely governed and political ones.<sup>16</sup>

Due to increased levels of globalization, throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, nation-branding strategies have spread beyond the traditional western economic base and been incorporated into projects of *nation-building* worldwide.<sup>17</sup> Nation-branding campaigns used by businesses can reflect national anxieties and aspirations to connect with their customers, unite their nation in a common sense of purpose and national pride, and provide opportunities to weave together business narratives with the narratives of nations.<sup>18</sup>

Nation-branding is not only promoted by a nation as an international marketing strategy, but it is also appropriated and accepted by a receiving country as a pattern of consumption itself – thereby contributing to the image of the nation both at home and in international markets.<sup>19</sup> With the introduction of nation-branding and nation-building as social, economic, and cultural phenomena, states and nations were soon viewed as *similar to goods* that could have a brand attached to them and brands were viewed as *similar to the states and nations* in which they resided.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Melissa Aronczyk, *Branding the Nation: The Global Business of National Identity*. (USA: Oxford University Press, 2011): 16.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Shuling Huang, “Nation-Branding and Transnational Consumption: Japan-Mania and the Korean Wave in Taiwan,” *Media, Culture, and Society* 33, no. 1 (2011): 1.

<sup>18</sup> Nadia Kaneva, “The Branded National Imagination and its Limits: Insights from the Post-Socialist Experience,” *Strategic Review for Southern Africa* 39, no. 1 (2017): 117;133.

<sup>19</sup> Huang, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Jordan, “Nation Branding: A Tool for Nationalism?” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 45, no. 3 (2014): 283.

The many definitions and descriptions of nation-branding and its interconnected relationship to nation-building, lead to a discussion surrounding the development of *branded nationalism* and its influence over a nation's narrative and an overall national identity for its people. As previously mentioned, Burns and Fawcett have argued that the most profound way that consumer culture affects individuals involves the intangible role that tangible products play in the development of their identities.<sup>21</sup> Branded nationalism, as a method of creating national identity, has gained considerable attention from contemporary scholars, from a multitude of both positive and negative perspectives, on its influence over economic, political, cultural, social and commercial matters worldwide. I argue that through the introduction of practices of *branded nationalism*, the Canadian retail industry has had a fundamental influence over the growth and development of Canada as a nation, while contributing to the development of a Canadian national identity among its citizens. For this portion of this paper, I will only highlight those scholars whose thoughts are relevant when identifying branded nationalism from a socio-cultural and commercial viewpoint, by identifying how Canadian businesses have engaged in nation-branding, nation-building, and branded nationalistic strategies, specifically in the retail industry, and how effective their efforts were.

Historian Catherine Carstairs' discussions surrounding the branded nationalism phenomenon in reference to a variety of North American brands, reveals that these strategies have been used and continue to be used by global brands today. Carstairs argues that a variety of American companies, such as Coca-Cola, Ralph Lauren, and Tommy Hilfiger, have branded themselves as purely American, integrated their brands' narratives with those of the country, and

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<sup>21</sup> Burns & Fawcett, 28.

have ultimately “wrapped themselves in the American flag” on the global stage.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, she identifies Canadian companies who have attempted to brand the symbols of Canada through their product lines, their corporate identity, and their company heritage.

Carstairs discusses a diverse set of Canadian companies – retail businesses ranging from travel, retail, and beverage companies – who are all credited with using patriotism and branded nationalism to their advantage in an attempt to brand the unique symbols of Canada through their product lines, corporate identity, marketing, and company heritage. Carstairs describes the Canadian Pacific Railway’s (CPR) use of branded nationalism strategies in their marketing by examining how the company packaged the Canadian wilderness as natural, wild, and vast, in order to promote Canadian tourism domestically and internationally, as a way to entice Canadians to travel in their own country and attract foreign travelers to the Canadian tourism industry as well.<sup>23</sup> Carstairs also examines Canadian retailer Roots, and argues that it is a primary example of Canadian branded nationalism, in that the brand allowed Canadians to “purchase Canadian identity” and proudly display their country’s ‘cool’ image to the rest of the world through Canadiana-imagery, specifically through imagery related to beavers, canoes, and maple leaves.<sup>24</sup> Carstairs pulls from historian Paul Rutherford’s discussion of other examples of Canadian companies using branded nationalism. This included beer company Molsen Canadian, whose 1970s marketing campaigns regularly asked their customers to “raise a glass of Canadian honour” – suggesting a glass of Molsen Canadian beer specifically – for their wonderful nation.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Catherine Carstairs, “Roots Nationalism: Branding Canada Cool in the 1980s and 1990s,” *La revue Histoire Sociale / Social History* 39, no. 77 (2006): 240.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Rutherford, *The New Icons: The Art of Television Advertising*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 91.

Another example included Red Rose Tea's various marketing campaigns during the 1970s of relating Canadian identity to its previous imperial mother.<sup>26</sup> The company's advertisements showed British 'tea experts' claiming it was a 'pity' that Red Rose Tea was available "only in Canada," in hopes of convincing Canadians to try the brand, by creating the impression that even the British deemed it superior to England's selection.<sup>27</sup>

Historian Steven Penfold has similarly linked Canadian coffee and donut chain, Tim Horton's, to Canada's national identity by arguing that the brand's symbolic use of Canadian social culture reflects and perhaps influences 'Canadian behaviour.' By examining both the brand and its iconic product – the donut – Penfold discusses how the Tim Horton's donut became more than just an edible commodity and instead came to represent an "edible symbol of Canadianess."<sup>28</sup> With Tim Horton's founder viewed as the Canadiana archetype – a "white northern boy born into a life of hard work, hard winters, and hockey rinks, who made good on sweat and talent to play Canada's national pastime of hockey in its golden age at the professional level" – the donut brand established relatable forms of Canadian culture by playing upon the long-standing belief that Canada's climate and geography created a distinctive identity, exhibiting the national pride surrounding Canadian hockey, and emphasizing the air of anti-Americanism that persisted in twentieth century Canada.<sup>29</sup>

Additional examples of Canadian companies using patriotism and branded nationalism as business strategies can be found in department stores – specifically Eaton's, Hudson's Bay Company, and Simpson's – and in their attempt to link Canada's identity and history as a nation

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Steven Penfold, *The Donut: A Canadian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008): 1.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 165-167.

with their own, through their business practices and extravagant displays of nationalism.<sup>30</sup>

Historian James Opp provides insightful discussion of the use of nationalism and patriotism in department store retailing. He examines the outrage that was felt by consumers surrounding the Hudson's Bay Company brand's transition to a more 'modern' brand image in 1965, when the company left its historic roots and heritage-brand identity behind. With the company's expansion into more urban markets, HBC wished to create a more contemporary cosmopolitan brand image and unveiled a new image – The Bay/La Baie – reflected in a new logo that projected a more modern disposition in both design and what it represented for the department store in the twentieth century. Opp argues that for some customers, the launch of the new name and logo diminished the existing image of HBC, by displacing its association with Canada's seemingly 'heroic history.' Opp discusses the outrage displayed by Canadian customers who viewed HBC as a 'Canadian institution' and argued that the brand had always conveyed historical associations and images such as those linked with fur trapping and trading posts. Moving away from references thought of as being so integral to the growth and development of Canada, HBC's transformation was equated with a loss of history for many customers. When the company returned to its original name, typeface and logo in 2013, and began to market its national history as an integral part of its brand once more, the majority of consumers felt that it was a welcome return to Canada's history.<sup>31</sup>

These Canadian companies who used patriotism or branded nationalism as business strategies, presented their products and their brands to consumers as a 'way of Canadian life.'<sup>32</sup>

These companies realized how to connect with their Canadian customers on a personal level,

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<sup>30</sup> Carstairs, 241.

<sup>31</sup> James Opp, "Branding 'the Bay/la Baie': Corporate Identity, the Hudson's Bay Company and the Burden of History in the 1960s," *Canadian Historic Review* 96, no. 2 (2015): 223;254;255.

<sup>32</sup> Carstairs, 241.

encourage foreign interest in the Canadian way of life, and presented both *Canadian brands* and *Canada as a nation* in a positive and exciting portrayal. The CPR, Roots, Molsen Canadian, Red Rose Tea, Tim Horton's, and Canadian department stores such as Hudson's Bay Company, Eaton's, and Simpson's are examples of companies that can be viewed as 'heritage brands' of Canada, that are symbolic and representative of Canadian values, tradition, and national identity.

Using this foundation of Canadian companies and their use of branded nationalism strategies, this paper will focus on examining the integral role that the Canadian retail industry has played in the ongoing growth and development of Canada as a nation and as an identity. At the centre of this discussion will be a case study on the introduction of Canadian department stores in the nineteenth century and how they quickly became positioned as the *founders of branded-nationalism* in Canada throughout the twentieth century. Retail scholar, Regan Beckett, argues that national identity, in relation to the construction of fashion capitals, has been extensively used by department stores as a marketing tool, to encourage economic growth through consumers' loyalty to their national brands.<sup>33</sup> These nation-based fashion identities are developed through the mythmaking of a fashion heritage, with the word *heritage* conveying a sense of authenticity through longevity, and *fashion* as an integral part of a nation's culture. While Beckett refers primarily to fashion capitals in her research, her arguments can be easily applied to any retail format that has used this type of marketing. The purpose of 'heritage brands' is not to label each company as distinctly 'Canadian,' but instead to convince the consumer to associate the company with a country's *culture and heritage*. Therefore, the brand by association becomes almost synonymous with the unique characteristics that represent a specific nation and

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<sup>33</sup> Regan Beckett, "On the Fragmentation of Canadian Fashion: Marketing in a Global Economy," PhD dissertation, Ryerson University, 2012, 7.

its national history.<sup>34</sup> By demonstrating the historic contributions that Canadian department stores have made to Canada's growth and development through their representation of modernity, their encouragement of consumption, and their dedication to nation-building and branded nationalism strategies, I argue that department stores not only *sold goods* to Canadians, but *sold Canada* to Canadians, through interweaving narratives of their brand with the narratives of the country.

## **1.2 FOUNDERS OF BRANDED NATIONALISM IN CANADA: DEPARTMENT STORES**

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the role of consumption and retailing in western society was in a constant state of evolution and development, and department stores have been viewed as key institutions in this ongoing development. Historian Bill Lancaster, has argued that the format of department stores has existed for so long that they have ultimately become embedded into the modern consumer's psyche and they have formed an integral part of the pattern of everyday life.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, historian Claire Walsh argues that the well-known department stores of the nineteenth century should be viewed as "part of an ongoing process of retail development," as the seeds or prototypes of the department store format – both structural and in terms of business strategies – can be dated back to the eighteenth century by looking at the large-scale 'mansion-style' shops of that period, and their similarities to what we now consider specific characteristics of department stores. Walsh demonstrates how many of the techniques that are credited as 'unique' to nineteenth century department stores – such as window shopping,

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<sup>34</sup> Carstairs, 241.

<sup>35</sup> Bill Lancaster, *The Department Store: A Social History* (London/New York: Leicester University Press, 1995): 3;201.

browsing, displays, interior design, shopping as a social activity etc. – have long-standing histories rooted in the large-scale shops in Europe throughout the eighteenth century. The change that is seemingly apparent in the nineteenth century lies in the ways in which large retailers were able to find ways to scale these ideas and strategies, capitalize from them, create a larger cultural and social context around them, and introduce the technology of the nineteenth century to improve them, in order to increase efficiency and profitability for their companies.<sup>36</sup> These eighteenth century shops, such as London-based Harding, Howell & Co., gradually grew into businesses that came to resemble nineteenth century department stores in terms of scale and breadth of products displayed, that can be dated back to 1796<sup>37</sup>

Into the twentieth century, department stores were highly visible because of their architectural presence and often ostentatious publicity and advertising methods.<sup>38</sup> Scholar Edward Weiss argues that the groundbreaking department store format was based on the basic concept of a group of stores under one roof, which allowed them to display and sell a wide variety of merchandise classifications in specifically labelled departments. The introduction of department store formats has been frequently distinguished from older retailing methods, through their level of capitalization, diversity of merchandise, innovative methods of selling, and their unique structure and styles of management and operations. They have been termed as *cathedrals*

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<sup>36</sup> Claire Walsh, “The Newness of the Department Store: A View From the Eighteenth Century,” *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939*, edited by Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999. 47;68;69.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathon Glancey, “A History of the Department Store,” *BBC Culture*, 2015, Web, <http://www.bbc.com/culture/bespoke/story/20150326-a-history-of-the-department-store/index.html>, Retrieved 18 March 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Geoffrey Crossick & Serge Jaumain, *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999): 8.

*of commerce*, referring to their magnificent scale, their loyal congregations of consumers, and their ability to provide new social spaces.<sup>39</sup>

Historian David Monod has argued that department stores were the pioneers of modern marketing, as they were the first big establishments to offer the public a wide range of goods and services that were popularly advertised at labelled fixed prices, and sold on both cash and credit terms. Size was everything to department stores, as it was their greatest attraction and the chief source of their low prices.<sup>40</sup> All of these aspects of the department store model allowed them to provide consumers with access to mass-produced products from all over the world, display their goods in both big and breathtaking ways, purchase inventory in bulk thereby lowering their cost and the retail selling prices, provide customers with a leisurely and experiential shopping experience, all while iterating their position in western society as commerce-based representatives for the nation in which they resided. Although some department store chains expanded across national borders, it was the phenomenon itself which became an international retail format, as department stores came to learn from one each other and adopt competitor's methods and strategies in their own nations.<sup>41</sup>

In Canada, department stores may seem to have always been there. According to retail leader James Bryant, department stores “were born and grew up concurrently with the nation itself.”<sup>42</sup> In the same way that the 1870s and the 1880s marked the full-fledged emergence of French and American department stores, the 1890s in Canada marked the development and

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<sup>39</sup> Edward Weiss, *Selling to and Through the New Department Store* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1948): 7;9.

<sup>40</sup> David Monod, *Store Wars: Shopkeepers and the Culture of Mass Marketing, 1890-1939* (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 1996): 116;122.

<sup>41</sup> Crossick & Jaumain, 14.

<sup>42</sup> James Bryant, *Department Store Disease* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1977): 11.

explosion of Canadian department stores.<sup>43</sup> Canadian retail giants looked to their European and American predecessors for inspiration, appearing during the formative years of Canada itself in the mid nineteenth century. The three most prominent Canadian department store chains, Hudson's Bay Company, Simpson's, and Eaton's, will be collectively analyzed in the following three sections to determine how, as Canadian institutions, these department stores came to encourage, foster, and represent *modernity, consumption, and nation-building strategies*, during the age of mass retail and the golden age of Canadian department stores in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### **1.3 DEPARTMENT STORES REPRESENTING MODERNITY**

From late in the nineteenth-century to early in the twentieth, Canada's retail landscape changed and evolved dramatically, reflecting, and likely influencing, the increased innovation, industrialization and modernization of Canada as a nation. With the continued growth of department stores across the urbanizing and industrializing West, they soon became symbolic and representative of the emergence of modernity throughout the entire nation.<sup>44</sup> Canadian department stores during this period were considered 'modern' in every aspect of their retail business - their buildings were massive in construction, their advertisements clever and persuasive, their displays impressive, their services extensive, their prices low and their assortment vast.<sup>45</sup> Hudson's Bay Company, Simpson's, and Eaton's department stores evolved from trading posts, general stores and small shop-keeping operations into mass merchandising

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<sup>43</sup> Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011): 22.

<sup>44</sup> Donica Belisle, "A Labour Force for the Consumer Century: Commodification in Canada's Largest Department Stores, 1890 to 1940," *Labour/Le Travail*, 58 (Fall 2006),: 117.

<sup>45</sup> Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 13.

companies operating in cities across Canada. They offered their customers a wide breadth of goods and product offerings. The innovation articulated by Canadian department stores served to convey the vision of modernity that the nineteenth century arguably came to represent, through technological, industrial, and economic advancements.<sup>46</sup> More and more customers began to encounter this expression of modernity in tangible, public, and accessible forms while shopping in department stores.<sup>47</sup>

### **Modernity - *Distribution Innovations***

During the nineteenth century, Canadians gained greater accessibility to goods through a variety of retail distribution methods, resulting in increased consumption levels. The railway network has been considered the key factor in Canada's development as a nation, because it facilitated an increase in demand and the development of substantial markets, thereby increasing consumption levels across the country.<sup>48</sup> In the late nineteenth century, the majority of Canada's population came from rural areas or small towns – 3.3 million inhabitants in rural areas compared to the 1.5 million people living in larger towns and cities across the country.<sup>49</sup> With the majority of Canada's population located in rural areas, modern innovations needed to be introduced in order to meet the needs and demands of Canadians. The development of the Canadian railway and CPR's grand opening in the late nineteenth century meant that the historic 'Canadian Frontier' was melting away, along with its old days of "whiskey peddlers and gamblers, log towns, and an unfenced prairie landscape."<sup>50</sup>

Thanks to this ongoing growth of the Canadian rail system during the nineteenth and into the twentieth century and the concomitant proliferation of freight transport options for

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<sup>46</sup> Crossick & Jaumain, 8.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Pierre Berton, *The Great Railway* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1972): 97.

<sup>49</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 22.

<sup>50</sup> Berton, 313.

companies, customers across the dominion could – for the first time – easily access retailers’ goods in an efficient and cost effective way.<sup>51</sup> Department stores quickly recognized the potential of using the Canadian rail system in their retail operations to assist them in their pricing strategies, distribution processes, and target market reach. The Canadian railway network made it possible for the large department store chains to buy from suppliers in bulk, which gave them quantity discounts that lowered their cost per unit, thereby lowering the retail prices for their customers. Furthermore, on the heels of the Canadian railway came a new mode of retail distribution that utilized the rail system to provide Canadians with a wide variety of goods, in the form of the mail-order catalogue business.<sup>52</sup> The introduction of mail order catalogues from the late nineteenth century and early mid-twentieth century allowed customers – especially those in rural areas across Canada – to access a vast assortment of high quality and low-priced products from a variety of mass retailers, reinforcing the widespread demand for and importance of railway distribution to society.<sup>53</sup> Hudson’s Bay Company was one of the first department stores in the Canadian market to utilize this modern retail format when the company introduced its mail order catalogue in 1881, although it only circulated until 1913.<sup>54</sup> This modernization was followed by Eaton’s introduction of its iconic catalogues that circulated between 1884<sup>55</sup> and 1976,<sup>56</sup> and Simpson’s – later known as Simpson’s-Sears – development of its general

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<sup>51</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 26.

<sup>52</sup> Berton, 313.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Hudson’s Bay Company, “Catalogues,” *HBC Heritage*, 2018, Web, <http://www.hbcheritage.ca/history/social-history/catalogues>.

<sup>55</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 21.

<sup>56</sup> Ontario Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, “Eaton’s Catalogues Through the Years,” *Archives of Ontario*, 2018, Web, <http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/en/explore/online/eatons/catalogues.aspx>. Accessed 24 Jan 2018.

merchandise catalogue in 1953,<sup>57</sup> which Sears Canada continued until 1993.<sup>58</sup> These catalogues became uniquely embedded in these department stores' retail operations and brand identities, thus reflecting the modern innovations Canadian society was undergoing. Department stores chains gave these innovations their institutional stamps of approval by integrating them into their daily retail operations.

### **Modernity – Mass-Merchandising**

Another example of modernity expressed in the history of Canadian department stores is their use of mass-merchandising techniques, which included visibly marking prices, providing merchandise in branded packaging, strategically arranging stock, encouraging customers to browse, offering goods from distant markets, and retail specialization through the use of specific departments. By buying in bulk and lowering prices, department stores were able to provide their customers with a money-saving-advantage, thereby closing a previously existing gap between lower class and upper class Canadians and places where they could and *should* shop. Department stores promoted what Belisle describes as a 'democratic nation,' by emphasizing the notion that mass retail democratized and neutralized luxury.<sup>59</sup> In this sense, 'democracy' refers to the increased power of the consumers – or masses if you will – in that department stores curated a diverse variety of high quality products that they made available to everyone, no matter their socio-economic standing, encouraged browsing and other non-committal window shopping habits, and department stores catered their prices to Canadians' financial situations through their bulk-buying practices. While both elegant and modern, department stores also positioned

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<sup>57</sup> Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN), "The Story of the Mail Order Catalogue," *Virtual Museum*, 2018, Web, <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/edu/ViewLoitDa.do?method=preview&lang=EN&id=253>. Accessed 20 January 2018.

<sup>58</sup> Sears, "The Sears Catalogue," *Sears Archives*, 2018, Web, <http://www.searsarchives.com/catalogs/index.htm>. Accessed 20 January 2018.

<sup>59</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 14;58.

themselves as welcoming and accessible institutions, in a way that earlier retail establishments were not, as they promoted democracy through their emphasis on the principle of free entry – the right to look around the store without the obligation to make a purchase. This made department stores into public attractions similar to movie palaces, theatres, or museums and the sense of entertainment that they provided.<sup>60</sup> The mass-merchandising techniques found in department stores attracted all sorts of loyal customers by emphasizing affordability, quality, diversity, approachability, and consistency in their retail operations. Department stores did not become symbols of modernity simply by locational chance, but they benefitted from the involvement of large-scale capital in support of introducing the latest technical innovations – as diverse as plate-glass windows, customer lifts, and cash registers – and integrate them into their retail operations and mass-merchandising strategies.<sup>61</sup>

### **Modernity - Labour Force**

Aspects of modernity can also be seen in department stores' diverse labour force. This is especially true when analyzing the transition from the traditional general store or shopkeeper and its characteristic 'patriarchal family' made up of the proprietor and his wife, to a large and diverse workforce made up of both men and women of a variety of ages. For a long period, department stores' preferred personnel were generally young single males, contrary to much of contemporary literature's fascination with the 'shop girl.' However, as department stores began to hire more and more female assistants while disregarding social anxieties about the apparent independence of these young women, they soon became symbols of a new style of retailing

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<sup>60</sup> Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986): 19-20.

<sup>61</sup> Geoffrey Crossick & Serge Jaumain, *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store, 1850-1939* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999): 8.

representative of the shift to modernity in various socio-economic ways.<sup>62</sup> Although in the early days of department store retailing the workforce was predominantly made up of male workers, Canadian department stores' transition to mass-retailing in the late nineteenth century required a larger and more diverse workforce to meet their business needs.<sup>63</sup> In Canada, department stores generally required more than one hundred staff members per store to work throughout their numerous departments and floors, unlike their predecessors, the general stores and small shops.<sup>64</sup> Department stores also began to hire more women due to their ease of interacting with and selling goods to female shoppers – who proved to be the majority of department store customers. Furthermore, women were paid less than men and this was attractive to business owners who were motivated by the profits of their enterprises.<sup>65</sup>

Between 1890 and 1940, the Hudson Bay Company, Eaton's and Simpson's, employed women to work as salespeople, elevator operators, waitresses, cleaners, cooks, secretaries, hair stylists, beauticians, buyers, garment-makers, fashion models, personal shoppers, packers, telephone operators, publicists, advertising illustrators, and product demonstrators. However, even with the higher employment rates and variety of roles, many women still only worked part-time hours in entry level positions. Belisle states that by the 1930s, only half of the women employed in Canadian department stores worked fulltime hours with merely a few attaining management positions with seniority over other staff members. The vast majority of female workers were single and financially independent, although some married and widowed women were also employed in some of the larger stores. Even with the ongoing industrialization, urbanization, and modernization in Canadian society during the nineteenth and early years of the

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<sup>62</sup> Crossick & Jaumain, 8-16.

<sup>63</sup> Belisle, "A Labour Force," 117.

<sup>64</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 14.

<sup>65</sup> Belisle, "A Labour Force," 117.

twentieth centuries, the hiring of female workers was met with discontent from traditionalists who Belisle describes as ‘moralists,’ who believed and adhered to dominant ideologies in society.’ Moralists during the early twentieth century believed that department stores were threatening the stability of the family unit by hiring both single and married women who left home – and their families – in order to earn their own wages.<sup>66</sup> Department stores offered various employment opportunities, room, and board to their staff members, which gave them a reputation as providers of stable, and rewarding workplaces and employers for both men and women across the country.

### **Modernity – *Department Stores as a Modern Curse***

Between 1890 and 1940, Canada’s biggest department stores became symbols of Canadian consumer modernity and marketed their stores not only as democratic and public spaces that all Canadians could enter and benefit from, but also as providers of comfort, luxury and success to all Canadians.<sup>67</sup> Although this progress was viewed positively by many looking towards a more innovative and industrial future where big brands led the way, many small business owners and shopkeepers viewed the department stores’ as their enemies and as antithetical to rural ways and economies.<sup>68</sup> Department stores were regarded by many traditionalists as the *modern curse* to both capital and labour, determined as their owners were to change the status quo to meet the demand for ever greater profits.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, however, many small businesses attempted to adopt department stores’ business strategies in order to remain competitive, by modernizing their store layouts and displays, developing credit systems,

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<sup>66</sup> Belisle, “A Labour Force for the Consumer Century,” 117-118.

<sup>67</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 194.

<sup>68</sup> Belisle, “A Labour Force,” 117.

<sup>69</sup> Joy Santink, *Timothy Eaton and the Rise of his Department Store* (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 1990): 205.

reorganizing accounting processes, and making profound changes in their distribution systems.<sup>70</sup> Department stores presented new ways of organizing sales, relating to customers and employees, and organizing urban space that was also available for other retailers to copy, imitate, and adopt. Small business owners were left with no choice but to modernize like their large-scale competitors, or be left behind in the dust. It was precisely because department stores were a symbol of this modernity that many independent shopkeepers felt threatened by them, and that traditionalists and moralists criticized the big chains for these immoralities.<sup>71</sup>

Although department stores' innovative business practices, marketing strategies, diverse hiring practices, and customer-focused approaches all were sources of opposition and disapproval from many, they irrefutably contributed to the modernization of both the Canadian retail industry and Canada as a nation in terms of economic, social, and cultural development. Department stores served as the cutting-edge of modernity in Canadian society, and their innovative retailing practices led to increased levels of consumption – providing customers with newfound access to a wide variety of goods at affordable prices and promoting consumption as a social practice in their branding and marketing practices.

#### **1.4 DEPARTMENT STORES: ENCOURAGING CONSUMPTION**

Increasingly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, department stores exposed customers to modern mass-marketing, mass-merchandising, and mass-retailing in the form of *consumption*. Department stores promised to ‘democratize luxury,’ by attempting to close the gap between lower income families and ones with a higher income. This definition of

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<sup>70</sup> Cynthia Wright, review of *Store Wars: Shopkeepers and the Culture of Mass Marketing, 1890-1939*, by David Monod, *The Canadian Historical Review* 78, no. 4 (Dec 1997): 1-2.

<sup>71</sup> Crossick and Jaumain, 8.

‘democracy’ was used by department stores to promote a new consumerist philosophy that portrayed *consumption of goods* as a means of “creating individual happiness” and “enriching all of humankind.”<sup>72</sup> Scholars Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain argue that today’s ‘consumer culture’ was formed from the cultural history of consumption in which consumers, distributors, and producers symbolically came together to create new methods of production and selling practices, resulting in better access to products for customers. This ‘consumer culture’ that Crossick and Jaumain describe is one in which groups constituted by class and gender could find social definition and their personal identity through the acts of buying and consuming for purposes greater than use-value and needs.<sup>73</sup> Belisle argues that while department stores did not invent modern retail entirely, their influence over the retail industry, their size, and their ongoing success did make them harbingers of modern consumerism.<sup>74</sup>

### **Consumption – *Mass-Marketing Techniques***

The introduction of mass-marketing techniques in Canadian department store operations during the late nineteenth century helped to encourage consumerism in both local customers and customers across the nation who shopped through their catalogues. Historian David Monod argues that the last three decades of the nineteenth century laid the social foundations and created the business incentives for mass-marketing. From the late nineteenth century onward, the pace of economic life in Canada accelerated thanks to the ongoing development and promise of railway transportation options, consistent increases in population growth, and the development of larger manufacturing establishments, which led to shifts in marketing patterns. Between the 1870s and 1880s, Canadian marketing practices began to change dramatically. Demand had been growing

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<sup>72</sup> Donica Belisle, “A Labour Force,” 117.

<sup>73</sup> Crossick & Jaumain, 2.

<sup>74</sup> Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 13.

consistently since at least the beginning of the century, alongside the ongoing growth of the nation, but the gradual expansion of consumption had occurred within an existing system of commerce; all that was needed for consumption to take off was an increase in the availability of goods and the number of shops accessible to customers. This increase can be seen in the expansion of department store retailing in Canada during the late nineteenth century. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, shoppers and business people alike were introduced to the consumer society as new forms of distribution were created, advertising became considerably more refined and influential, channels of trade were simplified, and the pace of marketing quickened. Increasing demand from a growing population sparked revolutionary transformations in supply and distribution, and it was these changes in the nature of retail operations that made the mass-market such a remarkable phenomenon.<sup>75</sup>

The introduction of mass-marketing during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century increased competition, shortened credit terms, and introduced the need for more turnover in carried stock, while accompanied by population movements, new transportation technologies, and increases in disposable income. All of these conditions made department stores retailing more difficult in that the chains had to market more aggressively against their competitors, run their operations on tighter profit margins, anticipate consumer taste, and quickly respond to demographic changes. The mass-market was formed by the availability and affordability of goods provided by large retailers, but consumers' spending choices and attitudes also determined the goods that were available and the ways in which they were marketed.<sup>76</sup>

Department stores engaged in strategies to relate with their customers and employees, to facilitate the developing culture of consumption by urging them to buy goods and services as a

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<sup>75</sup> Monod, 103-110.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 196;348.

means of enhancing psychic well-being and social standing, rather than fulfilling basic needs of existence.<sup>77</sup> Jan Whittaker describes department stores as “breeding grounds for consumerism,” as they created narratives that valued and interpreted consumer goods as having personal and symbolic meanings, thereby structuring their customers’ relationship to *things* in general.<sup>78</sup> The most recognizable marketing strategy used by department stores to shift society to a higher level of consumption, was the conversion of items that had previously been considered luxuries – cosmetics, toys, and dress up clothes for instance – to everyday necessities.<sup>79</sup> Department stores also encouraged consumerist ideology and the ‘democratization of luxury’ by making purchases more flexible, affordable, and reasonable, through the introduction of various payment offerings to their consumers.

### **Consumption - Democratization of Luxury & Payment Strategies**

The ‘democratization of luxury’, a term used by contemporary observers and historians, suggests not only the increased materialism and demands of the whole population, but also reminds us that prior to the era of mass production, distribution and consumption, many goods were out of the reach of all but the wealthiest of Canadians.<sup>80</sup> Department stores enforced ideas surrounding ‘democracy’ and stressed their own role in the democratization of fashion and consumption through their introduction of fixed prices, flexible payment options, and welcoming atmosphere for all who wanted to peruse their offerings.<sup>81</sup> Prior to the appearance of department stores in Canada during the late nineteenth century, people were only able to obtain goods by trading and bartering in small, local markets, trading posts, independent shops, and general

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<sup>77</sup> Porter Benson, 3.

<sup>78</sup> Jan Whittaker, *Service and Style: How the American Department Store Fashioned the Middle Class* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2006): 4.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>80</sup> Santink, 249.

<sup>81</sup> Crossick & Jaumain, 7.

stores.<sup>82</sup> With the introduction of mass-marketing and mass-merchandising strategies, department stores were soon able to offer their customers a variety of evolving payment methods including cash, credit, and installment-purchase. In the past, people traded or bartered goods that they could offer, for goods that they needed, and worked very hard while dreaming of what they might later acquire in life, living by the notion of *effort* and its *reward*, as explored by Jean Baudrillard. Using this ideology, the introduction of credit options awarded objects to people before they were *technically earned*, which would have previously entailed working towards the goal of purchasing something and saving up enough money to make that possible. In other words, a person's *consumption* of the object preceded the *effort* that would have previously been involved in procuring it.<sup>83</sup> The development of credit allowed the majority of consumers to make purchases that they would not have been able to make – or justify – otherwise. Department stores' credit options provided financial freedom while developing a consumerist mentality among consumers to make impulsive purchases and encourage them to worry about the finances later. This 'democratization of luxury' deconstructed these prior notions of effort and reward in the sense that lower to middle class people no longer had to work long hours in labour-intensive roles just to achieve the visual signs representative of wealth and success – through their professional position, what they wore, and what type of home they lived in – and were able to purchase items that were previously too expensive or out of reach for their families through the use of the credit system.

By the late nineteenth century and with the continued development of large-scale retailers and department stores in the Canadian shopping landscape, customers were offered both cash and credit payment options. In poorer areas of Canada, large stores offered credit to their

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<sup>82</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 15.

<sup>83</sup> Baudrillard, 158-159.

customers to give them the opportunity to shop in their stores and buy what they needed with the promise to settle their accounts at a later point in time. Furthermore, the affluent and wealthy deemed it demeaning to pay for their goods on delivery and also demanded credit terms for their purchases, their reasoning purely social rather than economic. By the early twentieth century however, middle-class consumers were paying up front with cash in the majority of their local shops, including department stores. Consumers were newly empowered by the introduction of the mass-market which led to the middle-class' cash-dominated system, while the wealthy remained far more indebted to local shopkeepers than the poor, simply because of their existing personal relationships with stores and their tradition of credit.<sup>84</sup>

Although most retailers before the first World War resisted the total abandonment of credit in order to retain their core customers, they could not afford the same luxury with their own suppliers. By the First World War, independent retailers offered their customers the option of buying goods and services with credit accounts that would be collected on a monthly or annual basis, resulting in retailers having to buy from their suppliers more frequently and in smaller amounts in order to pay off their own debts. With a tightening of mercantile credit due to retailers' increased bulk-purchasing practices and the state of the war-time economy, large retailers were forced to move away from traditional forms of credit, in order to maintain good relationships with their suppliers. As a result, retailers were given shortened credit terms which provided them with less time to pay their suppliers, meaning that their customers would need to be more efficient with their payments as well. Switching to a cash-only payment system would have solved the supplier problem, but was viewed as risky to retailers who feared offending some of their most loyal customers and feared losing potential profits. Instead, the vast majority

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<sup>84</sup> Monod, 160-163.

of large retailers improved the credit system to allow them to pay their suppliers more efficiently, while still offering flexibility to their clients who needed it.<sup>85</sup>

Department stores in Canada began offering a new form of credit to their customers called the *instalment* method in the early twentieth century, which allowed customers to buy the goods they wanted or needed, with the agreement to pay the retailer according to a pre-arranged schedule, with interest calculated according to the length of time between delivery and the final payment. Unlike the traditional credit system which required retailers to keep track of their customers' accounts in a personal and familial way, the introduction of the instalment method led to a much more 'institutional relationship' between the buyer and seller, in that the bond between the customer and the merchant became entirely legal, with a pre-authorized payment plan agreed on by both parties prior to delivery.<sup>86</sup> These shifts in payment options demonstrate how department stores embraced structural changes to traditional retail operations in order to maintain and prioritize their customers' loyalties and to encourage increasing levels of consumption. As shopping became more accessible, flexible, and convenient through the affordability of goods and services and the reliability of customer service and standards, thanks to the innovations of department stores during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, shoppers all over the dominion sought mass-produced goods and engaged in consumerist activities.<sup>87</sup> As they grew, large retailers increasingly employed creative retail strategies to appeal to their growing customer base, and a key factor of this was identifying *who* exactly that was.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 163-164.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 163-165.

<sup>87</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 29.

### **Consumption - Targeting Women as the Primary Customer**

Between 1890 and 1940, Canadian department stores became “havens for women,” according to Belisle.<sup>88</sup> Department store founders quickly realized that their core customer base was made up of female shoppers. Furthermore, as women continued to become integral consumers, shopping and consumption activities were reconstructed in the new age of department store retailing in order to accommodate their new “gendered identities.”<sup>89</sup> Monod’s description of shopping and consumption activities as becoming “gendered” – associated with the female sex – reveals how social activities began to change and how department stores needed to adapt. Instead of aiming to establish familial loyalty and personal relationships through small talk and credit, large retailers soon found themselves ‘courting’ their female customers to encourage loyal and frequent consumption.<sup>90</sup> Department stores’ marketing campaigns appealed to female shoppers as they offered complimentary lavatories, coat and parcel check, semi-private nurseries, and writing rooms, all the while catering to their customers’ every need with ease and pleasure through exemplary customer service. In accordance with dominant ideologies, wives and mothers believed that it was a women’s duty to take care of their husbands, children, and household, and purchase goods that proclaimed their family’s social standing. Similarly, single women were expected to purchase goods and engage in activities that would make them appear both sexually and domestically attractive to suitors and potential husbands. Department stores happily reinforced these ideals and offered merchandise and services that encouraged women in these endeavours and thus facilitated these roles, resulting in Canadian female shoppers spending the majority of their shopping budget in large department stores.<sup>91</sup> As department stores

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>89</sup> Monod, 115.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 156.

continued to encourage consumerism through their mass-marketing and mass-merchandising strategies, prolific female shopping and consumer excess were soon celebrated – by department stores – as symbols of the roaring new age and its new women in the early to mid-twentieth century.

As previously discussed, women were also incorporated into the department store workforce to match the sex of the clerk to that of the shopper and thus to encourage a sense of familiarity and comfort for the new consumer. Retail practices were altered to accommodate the new retail situation that department stores had discovered, including carefully segregating male and female goods, using advertising to show women how their bodies should look, and rearranging shop floors to encapsulate patriarchal ideas about the female temperament, with impulse items featured at the front and staple items residing in the back. These changes in the early twentieth century reveal how department stores adopted a new approach and attitude towards catering to consumption, and to their female-dominated consumer bases. Department stores quickly became particular symbols of the emerging and newly feminized consumer society that would expand throughout Canada during the rest of the twentieth century. Monod offers that there is no way of knowing the statistics on whether men were shopping less, but the perception was that ‘buying’ was increasingly becoming a female activity.<sup>92</sup>

This new age of consumption-focused retail was met with negative critiques aimed at both women – portrayed as culprits – and department stores – who played on their supposedly base needs and wants. Women – as the primary shoppers in the traditional household, were perceived as destroying the well-being of their husbands, families, communities, and nation because of their “weak natures and lusts for goods,” despite the fact that department stores

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<sup>92</sup> Monod, 114-120.

encouraged and took advantage of these new patterns and styles of consumption.<sup>93</sup> Women were heavily criticized because they began to integrate department stores into their frequent social routines. As the primary consumer that department stores began targeting through their advertising, product lines, and beautiful displays, female shoppers began to take advantage of the many services that these stores offered them. Furthermore, as new payment methods were introduced by department stores and many women began working themselves, female shoppers found more flexibility in their household budget and disposable income to buy what they desired when they wanted it. Anti-consumerists and traditionalists, referred to earlier as ‘moralists,’ were particularly concerned that department stores were placing a consistent emphasis on feminized consumption. As a consequence, the big chains were criticized for “encouraging female shoppers to become greedy, vain, and to want beyond their needs,” and their husband’s salaries.<sup>94</sup> According to Monod, these changes in department store retailing led to the redefinition of consumer activity as a form of “vicarious promiscuity (shopping around), sensual gratification (sampling or trying on), and seduction (most commonly through advertising and store layouts).”<sup>95</sup> By supposedly encouraging vicarious promiscuity, sensual gratification, and seduction – specifically targeted towards women – department stores were given a large part of the blame for the rise of consumer culture and role that women played in it.

As manufacturing became more streamlined during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to department stores transitioning their operations to be vertically integrated, companies were able to reduce costs for the average consumer, while encouraging a growing consumer culture with increased access to

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<sup>93</sup> Belisle, “Crazy for Bargains: Inventing the Irrational Female Shopper in Modernizing English Canada,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 92, no. 4 (2011): 582.

<sup>94</sup> Belisle, “A Labour Force,” 117.

<sup>95</sup> Monod, 115.

affordable yet high quality goods. The big chains were critiqued for laying their goods out in garish, low-priced displays, offering new and exploitive forms of payment, and targeting seemingly vulnerable female shoppers through their advertisements and retail strategies. Department stores were seen as “tempting consumers to their destruction,” and “feeding the desire to acquire” which underlay the development of mass consumption.<sup>96</sup> The existence, magnitude, and increasing prevalence of department stores, and their prolific advertising and publicity initiatives, communicated the centrality of consumer capitalism to everyday life, while making consumption seem normal and desirable. This in turn led to the universalization of a particular form of consumerism in Canada, and of a particular national identity for Canadians.<sup>97</sup>

## **1.5 DEPARTMENT STORES AND NATION-BUILDING STRATEGIES**

Donica Belisle argues that by capitalizing on the classical liberal economic belief that business growth spurred national development, Canada’s largest retailers claimed to their consumers that their very existence helped to bring about “progress for humankind,” or more specifically, for Canada.<sup>98</sup> The Canadian public’s ongoing perception of Canadian department stores as national icons, specifically Hudson’s Bay Company, Simpson’s, and Eaton’s, has been influenced by department stores’ publicity which posed their corporations as part of Canadian national identity and a myth-symbol complex.<sup>99</sup> By representing modernity through their use of new technological advancements and innovations in their business practices, encouraging consumption through strategic mass-marketing and mass-merchandising techniques to

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>97</sup> Donica, Belisle, “Rise of Mass Retail: Canadians and Department Stores: 1890 to 1940,” PhD dissertation, Trent University, 2007, 100.

<sup>98</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 50.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 234.

democratize luxury, and presenting a new retail format that was appealing, relatable, and empathetic towards customers, department stores were able to integrate themselves into Canada's evolving narrative of a modernizing, urbanizing, and industrializing nation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In order to analyze how the big Canadian department store chains used nation-building strategies to incorporate their brand image into the national identity of the nation, I will now review terms previously discussed in section 1.1. As previously mentioned, Aronczyk describes the term 'nation-branding' as a process through which aspects of heritage and modernization, domestic and foreign concerns, marketing moral ideologies and a specific national identity are combined in corporate marketing strategies.<sup>100</sup> Businesses use nation-branding campaigns to reflect national concerns, anxieties, and aspirations in order to connect with their customers, unite their nation in a common sense of purpose and national pride, and to weave together their business narratives within narratives of their host nation.<sup>101</sup>

Through the use of certain business and marketing strategies including self-proclamation combined with high levels of visibility and exposure, welfarism and paternalism initiatives, as well as showcasing authoritative power, Canadian department stores engaged in nation-building initiatives to brand their companies as purely Canadian. They claimed to represent the Canadian people, and sought to contribute to national self-consciousness on both individual and collective levels. The Canadian public's ongoing perception of Canadian department stores as national icons, specifically Hudson's Bay Company, Simpson's, and Eaton's, has been influenced by department stores' publicity of themselves as part of Canadian national identity and symbols of it entirely. By representing modernity through their support of new technological advancements

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<sup>100</sup> Aronczyk, *Branding the Nation*, 17.

<sup>101</sup> Kaneva, "The Branded National Imagination and its Limits," 117;133.

and innovations in their business practices, encouraging consumption through strategic mass-marketing and mass-merchandising techniques to democratize luxury, and presenting a new retail format that was appealing, relatable, and empathetic towards customers, department stores were able to integrate themselves into Canada's evolving narrative of a modernizing, urbanizing, and industrializing nation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### ***Nation-Building - Self-Proclamation & Exposure***

Since the 1890s, Canada's largest mass retailers, including Hudson's Bay Company, Eaton's and Simpson's, have proclaimed that they have been uniquely positioned to make particular contributions to Canadians' economic, social, and cultural development. Examples of these claims can be seen in their self-identified roles in the development of Canada and the influence and role they played in Canadian consumer society that they advertised consistently. Simpson's department store referred to itself in 1894 as "Canada's Most Magnificent Store" and in many of its later advertisements and described its business in 1898 as a "commonwealth of Canadians, for Canadians, by Canadians." Similarly, Hudson's Bay Company, did not let its customers forget that it had helped to "create Western Canada," as the company stated in its advertising that since their start in 1670, the company's traders had "governed Rupert's land, fed, clothed, and supported the natives, and held the future of Western Canada in trust for the British empire," as seen in a 1921 issue of "The Beaver." HBC also continued to argue that fur was the foundation upon which the growth of Canada occurred and that future progress in the nation would be driven by the "same great company who made the beginnings" in 1920. Furthermore, Eaton's department store consistently referred to itself as "Canada's Greatest Store" and in 1925 stated that it was the "largest institution of its kind under the British flag."<sup>102</sup> These self-

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<sup>102</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 50;52;234.

proclamations aided Canadian department stores in their daily retail operations, but also in linking their histories with the historical narratives of Canada as nation-building strategies.

Donica Belisle argues that the majority of white and English-speaking Canadians were able to recognize aspects of themselves and their identities in department store advertising. Most importantly, they were treated well and, above all, fairly by department store salespeople no matter their socio-economic standing. Most Canadians were able to find common values, messaging, and symbols representative of both dominant and more modern ideologies that persisted throughout Canadian society in department stores. Customers were also able to trust their deepest fears, anxieties, and desires with department stores because they truly believed that these institutions could provide solutions to their problems, for a small price of loyalty and payment for goods. With their large-scale size, innovative business practices, and their innate ability to read the changing consumer market while encouraging their own consumption-based ideologies, department stores became dominant commercial figures – arguably considered to be Canadian institutions – in Canadian society, that were relevant, relatable, and highly visible to their consumer base.

Department stores used their business practices, advertising campaigns, and their manipulation of their brand image in the media in order to create their own brand narratives and gain high levels of exposure. For example, Canadian department stores were dedicated to their brands' consistent visibility and many placed full-page advertisements multiple times a week in their cities' newspapers promoting new products, new prices, and new self-proclamations.

Department stores also became embedded into the everyday life of Canadians through their 'non-committal footprint' where Canadians could browse their departments, lunch in their restaurants, and take advantage of their restrooms and nurseries, resulting in thousands of Canadians

incorporating Hudson's Bay Company, Eaton's, and Simpson's into their daily lives, habits, and routines, regardless of if purchases were made or not. Belisle argues that department stores' promotion of national identities, combined with customers' acceptance of department stores' role in the building of "modern Canada" and the impacts that these stores made on their everyday lives, eventually made the link between mass-retail and Canadian identity self-evident.<sup>103</sup>

### ***Nation-Building - Creating Loyalty Through Paternalism/Welfarism***

As most department stores started out as small shop-keeping operations, and paternalism and welfarism were the main social models by which most merchants governed their small shops, and later, their department store empires. The mercantile enterprise had always been considered an extension of the household to which it belonged, and became a surrogate family for employees in their charge. Corporate welfarism became especially predominant in department store operations between the 1890s and the Great Depression, as a way for large corporations to give back to their communities, their employees, and to retain a positive brand image and brand association within society. Canada's largest stores offered extensive corporate welfare programs that included health benefits, medical attention, financial assistance, insurance offerings, pension plans, and many other beneficial services not often found in retail workplaces at this time.<sup>104</sup> Canadian department stores built their institutional identity from the inside out, by engaging with their employees like retailers had never done before. Department store employees were treated with paternalist affection, rewarded for good performance, and were given a sense of commonality with not only their individual store, but also with the many stores across Canada that comprised their employers' retailing empires.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 47;77;235.

<sup>104</sup> Belisle, "A Labour Force," 118;130.

<sup>105</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 235.

With a growing amount of women employed in the department store workforce and the societal concern of the destruction of the feminine virtue, many department stores in Canada also paid special attention to maintaining their female workers' respectability, by providing them with boarding options, with the appointment of welfare secretaries to oversee any issues or problems that would arise, and by providing education opportunities to gain the social skills necessary to be good wives, mothers, and housekeepers. Department stores also promoted their welfarism initiatives through their in-house staff newsletters and magazines that cultivated support for company objectives, while also providing celebratory news and photographs of staff members, written and creative employee submissions, reports on employee activities, descriptions of welfare programs and company policies, and notices of upcoming events and store promotions.<sup>106</sup>

Eaton's, one of Canada's most influential department stores, showed its leadership in its welfarism and paternalism initiatives by influencing many other companies to do the same.<sup>107</sup> These initiatives enticed potential employees to apply to department stores for jobs, created loyalty among current employees by providing them with support and assistance, but also acted as governance structures over employees to ensure good behaviour and the 'right' kind of values, morals, and principles within their stores. Key amongst those foundational values was the importance of department stores in Canadian society and the materialism, consumption, civility, and politics that were encouraged by Canada's largest retailers. These values were aggressively advertised by department store employees on behalf of the institutions to customers, further solidifying department stores' authority over daily social life and the national narrative as a whole.

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<sup>106</sup> Belisle, "A Labour Force," 121-123.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 118.

## **Nation-Building - Authoritative Power**

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, department stores were not only representative of increasing levels of modernity, consumerism, and national identity, but were also considered to be authoritative powers over society as *national institutions*. Department stores presented themselves as authoritative powers in regard to national celebrations and as irrefutably intertwined with the national narrative and the country's loyalty to the Crown, as seen in their incessant emphasis placed on patriotism. Department stores implied to their customers that it was both *normal* and *desirable* to embrace England as Canada's mother country through extravagant celebrations and advertising campaigns. These celebrations were viewed as representative of the consumer nation and national identity that department stores helped to construct – one that was decidedly English-speaking and British. Though Canada had become a Dominion in 1867, many English Canadians continued to express their affection for their 'mother country' as a symbol of history, heritage, and tradition until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Recognizing the pride in Britannia that dominated English Canada, department stores created flashy and sentimental expressions of patriotism to win public affection and customer loyalty, specifically seen in Hudson's Bay Company's, Eaton's, and Simpson's use of the union jack and other British paraphernalia in their advertisements. Royal visits to Canada prompted elaborate patriotic displays put on by department stores, reiterating their importance and influence over the nation, while demonstrating that it was their *place* and *duty* to lead these celebrations happening in large city centers, further integrating their heritage brand names into the nation's identity and history.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 54-58.

From a business standpoint, department stores correctly assumed that ‘national fervor’ was an appropriate driver for the selling of goods that conveyed images of Britannia, while reminding Canadian customers of the department store’s influential and important role in ‘modern’ Canadian society. Belisle argues that department stores’ celebration of Britannia, reflects the ways in which they promoted a specific form of Canadian nationalism among its customers, one that paid particular homage to English Canada, Canadians of British or European descent, and capitalism. By associating their companies with British tradition and Canadian pride, Canadian department stores positioned themselves as respectable and trustworthy brands that both honoured tradition and heritage, while also making room for innovation.<sup>109</sup>

Between the late nineteenth century and the mid twentieth century, a widespread yearning for a collective identity was emerging in English Canada. After Canadian Confederation in 1867, the large-scale acquisition of territory by the Federal Government, and the incorporation of new provinces from the late nineteenth century to 1905 when Saskatchewan and Alberta became provinces, the country soon became home to multiple geographies, cultures, politics, and languages, leaving many ‘Canadians’ unsure of their own identity and how they fit into the nation’s identity as a whole – especially one that was dominantly presented as white and English-speaking. Department stores in Canada tapped into the social and political anxieties of the Canadian people by using their authoritative power to provide a collective identity coast to coast through the familiarity and comfort associated with their brand names and various locations across the country.<sup>110</sup> The consistency in branding, operations, store merchandising, service levels, and employment opportunities meant that Canadian department stores could weave themselves into the sub-identities of many different provinces across Canada, and be

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 236.

viewed by all of their customers in a familiar and comforting way through brand-recognition. These anxieties for a collective identity existed well into the mid-twentieth century, but by establishing their institutional hold and influence over Canadian consumers and the national identity of Canada, Canadian department stores continued to shape and contribute to the ongoing development of Canadian nation-building and branded nationalism.

### **CONCLUSION:**

In my analysis of the founders of Canada's retail industry – large department store chains such as Hudson's Bay Company, Eaton's, and Simpson's – I have argued that Canada's growth and development as a country and as an identity, can be intrinsically linked to its iconic and historic brands. These brands represented modernity by influencing technological and social advancements, encouraged changing consumption patterns through the introduction of nuanced business practices, and used nation-building strategies to reinforce their position within the nation's commercial, social, and cultural landscape. Thus, they reflected and influenced the changes, growth, and development happening in Canada during the late nineteenth century into the mid twentieth century. This paper aimed at arguing that through 'Branded Nationalism,' the Canadian retail industry has had and continues to have a fundamental influence over the development of Canada as a nation, in both social and economic terms, while contributing to the development of a national identity among its citizens and in the country's overarching narratives of development.

As I demonstrated in this analysis, department stores were dedicated to representing and encouraging *modernity* in all aspects of their business practices, through their introduction of new methods of distribution, mass-merchandising techniques, and changes in their labour force.

That dedication and the policies that followed from it, contributed to the creation of a culture of *consumption* through mass-marketing strategies, the introduction of new payment methods, and a growing emphasis placed on women as the primary target market. By heavily reflecting and influencing the change and innovation that was already going on in Canada, they were able to use *nation-building strategies* through their self-proclamation and media exposure techniques, paternalism and welfarism initiatives, as well as using forms of ‘authoritative power’ in representing what ‘Canada’ – as a brand in itself – looked like on a global stage.

Despite the negative criticisms that Canadian department stores received during their heyday – regarding their beliefs, practices, and strategies – they unquestionably became dominant figures in Canada’s retail history and in the everyday lived experiences of Canadians during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and now into the twenty-first century. When considering department stores and their roles in the ‘making of Canada,’ it is crucial to acknowledge that they stimulated innovative economic development, normalized consumerism as a way of life, and democratized access to previously unattainable ‘luxuries’ by creating a new form of consumer culture and retail experience for their Canadian consumers. However, Canada’s department stores also helped to promote a specific kind of nation – one that worked to increase profits, endorse race and class privileges, and promote messages of materialism and consumption among Canadians.<sup>111</sup> Department stores across North America became agencies of a class-based culture, carrying out the so-called “gospel of good taste, gentility, and propriety” to those who could afford its goods and services.<sup>112</sup>

Although Donica Belisle has made similar arguments to James Bryant and other scholars about department stores’ influence over Canadian national identity, she also points out it is

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 80-81.

<sup>112</sup> Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 4-5.

important to recognize the role that department stores had – while weaving themselves into the fabric of the national narrative – in consistently defining Canada as a white, capitalist, materialistic, and ultimately Protestant nation. Drawing on the vast archives of department store literature and advertising, Belisle claims that department stores reinforced a sense of national identity that placed white Canadians as superior to non-whites, Indigenous peoples were thought of as ‘amusing primitives’ at best, and people of African and Asian descent performed the labour that made imperial consumerism and mass-retail possible. These beliefs can be easily seen in the department store’s determination to appeal primarily to middle and upper-class Canadians with their aim of supposedly democratizing luxury, through their written and visual advertisements targeting people of different races as inferior, and through the values and morals of the paternalist figures – department store founders – that were conveyed through both the public and internal workings of the companies. Although Canadian department stores were known for their welcoming environment and excellent customer service to many Canadians, it is important to admit their encouragement of discrimination toward ‘unfavourable’ customers – specifically racialized minorities and low-income Canadians – in the form of internal employee magazines and external advertising that advocated this prejudiced behaviour.<sup>113</sup>

Through the use of both written and visual advertisements, department stores were able to construct their *ideal* Canadian, during a time when Canadians themselves were uncertain of what that meant and were in desperate need for a collective national identity. Aside from their advertisements, department stores confronted Canadian customers’ anxieties personally and directly through their eye-catching array of merchandise in physical settings designed to break down the customer’s resistance to spending money and to exploit their sense of class position

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<sup>113</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 80;81;156.

and personal attractiveness. Department stores were successfully able to convince Canadians of their ‘unattractiveness’ or ‘unworthiness,’ while intentionally providing a ‘solution’ to their problem, by offering goods and services that would solve the problem at hand and integrate the department store brand into the customer’s psyche.<sup>114</sup>

Historic Canadian department stores have continued to be ‘glamorized’ and linked with Canadian national identity into the twenty-first century. For example, the still-existing Hudson’s Bay Company – one of the world’s fastest growing department groups today – refers to itself as “Canada’s Iconic Department Store” in its nameplate, and through its heritage stripes collection ranging from iconic striped point blankets to its recognizable Olympic mittens, it continues to draw on its history and Canadian heritage to build its retail brand.<sup>115</sup> Canadian department stores have come to symbolize Canada, images of ‘Canadiana,’ and what it means – or is thought of as meaning in a historical context – to be a ‘Canadian.’ While Canadian department stores undeniably contributed to Canada’s development as a nation in social, economic, and cultural ways, there were other motives at play, and to blindly romanticize the department store is to romanticize Canada’s beginnings as a colonizing nation as part of Canadians’ history, Canadians’ identity, and the ongoing contemporary narrative of Canada today. By analyzing the development of consumption, branding, and branded nationalism, as well as the ways in which iconic Canadian department stores have influenced the growth of Canada as a nation through their contributions to and influence over the nation’s increasing modernization, consumption levels, and nation-building strategies, I argue that department stores not only *sold goods* to

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<sup>114</sup> Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 4-5.

<sup>115</sup> Erica, Alini, “Here Are Our 10 Picks for Canada’s Greatest Brands of all Time,” *Global News*, 2017, Web, <https://globalnews.ca/news/3455610/from-parkas-to-potatoes-the-greatest-canadian-brands-of-all-time/>, Retrieved 20 March 2018.

Canadians, but attempted to *sell Canada* to Canadians, by weaving brand narratives within the narratives of the Canadian nation.

National brands are often believed to be an integral component of a country's identity, as their iconic products become shared memories that are "embedded in childhood" that allow us to ground ourselves in our nation's identity during an increasingly globalized and diversified time in Canadian society.<sup>116</sup> To become a national brand, or an 'iconic brand,' businesses need more than longevity, as in order to be 'iconic,' a brand must "start with its story and end with an experience."<sup>117</sup> Market researcher Interbrand's 2017 "150 Iconic Canadian Brands" report describes iconic Canadian brands as having three distinct characteristics, including clarity, authenticity, and engagement.<sup>118</sup> The report identifies iconic Canadian brands as authentic, as trend setting, and as connected with values traditional to the narratives of Canada as a nation.<sup>119</sup> By providing emotionally engaging experiences, iconic brands make Canadians proud to claim them as their own, and "if they went away, we would miss them in our lives."<sup>120</sup>

It can be argued that many Canadian retailers have looked to Canadian department stores for inspiration as trailblazers throughout the twenty-first century in how to link their brand images with the dominant ideologies and national narratives of Canada. Examples of this are seen in Canadians' personal, social, and cultural relationships to Canadian-born companies, similar to the relationships that many still have with Canadian department stores. Canadians can easily associate Tim Horton's with ordering a "Double-Double" before an early morning hockey practice, Bombardier Recreational Products (BRP) with cold winter days spent on snow-ridden

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Interbrand Canada, "Interbrand 150 Iconic Canadian Brands: Our Time to Grow," *Interbrand Canada*, 2017, Web, [http://interbrand.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Interbrand-150-Report\\_2017-06-28.pdf](http://interbrand.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Interbrand-150-Report_2017-06-28.pdf), Retrieved 21 March 2018, 7.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

skidoo trails, or Canadian Tire with buying your first pair of skates or your first bicycle. Furthermore, Canadians can look at companies such as Indigo & Chapters and know that it is considered “Canada’s Biggest Bookstore,” walk into a Lululemon Athletica store and feel like they have been transported into the easy-going Canadian West Coast culture that the company is known for, or go into a Roots store and feel the sense of natural adventure that they would feel as if they were really in Algonquin Park. The Canadian fashion industry proudly covets brands such as Holt Renfrew, Club Monaco, and Aritzia for their ability to maintain unique Canadian style and find success and respect in international markets. These are just some of the brands that Canadians are often proud to claim as their own, as they instill memories of family histories, childhood activities, and monumental moments in the everyday lived experiences. Canadian department store’s irrefutable influence, dominance, and leadership during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has led to the continued use of ‘branded nationalism’ strategies into the twenty-first century, by companies who desire to one day be known as ‘iconic’ brands as well. These brands, both historical and contemporary, are not simply *proud to be Canadian*, but they are proud to be *selling ideas* of what ‘Canadian’ really means.

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