



Citizens and Nation: An Essay on History, Communication, and Canada

Gerald Friesen

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Grandmother Andre told stories in front of a campfire. Elizabeth Goudie wrote a memoir in school scribbles. Phyllis Knight taped hours of interviews with her son. Today's families rely on television and video cameras. They are all making history.

In a different approach to that old issue, 'the Canadian identity,' Gerald Friesen links the media studies of Harold Innis to the social history of recent decades. The result is a framework for Canadian history as told by ordinary people. Friesen suggests that the common peoples' perceptions of time and space in what is now Canada changed with innovations in the dominant means of communication. He defines four communication-based epochs in Canadian history: the oral-traditional world of pre-contact Aboriginal people; the textual-settler household of immigrants; the print-capitalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and the screen-capitalism that has emerged in the last few decades. This analysis of communication is linked to distinctive political economies, each of which incorporates its predecessors in an increasingly complex social order.

In each epoch, using the new communication technologies, people struggled to find the political means by which they could ensure that they and their households survived and, if they were lucky, prospered. Canada is the sum of their endeavours. "Citizens and Nation" demonstrates that it is possible to find meaning in the nation's past that will interest, among others, a new, young, and multicultural reading audience.

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