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We Remember: Before, Now, and Later

History clenches every nation's common public memory, but mankind must accept the past and live the present and future with purpose and faith. Researching and questioning the existence of a common public memory will not resolve current problems and appears foolish, especially when the earth's entire history provides superfluous evidence verifying history's relevance. Jack Granatstein and Michael Ignatieff discuss the importance of maintaining a certain kind of history curriculum through which Canadians, whether African-Canadian, European-Canadian, or Asian-Canadian, can identify themselves and connect with other Canadians. However, considering the influx of immigrants each year, such a goal appears highly unattainable unless Canadian history is indeed "force-fed" to them, as Granatstein suggests. Ignatieff pinpoints this issue by stating, "You only 'force-feed' ideas which you think are going to make an essential difference." The past has confirmed that successful change has never occurred instantly and requires an abundance of patience and integrity, two qualities that rarely traverse the earth's course.

Establishing a universal history for the past has engaged and still is occupying much time and effort, yet this concept does not exist as a new trend. Perhaps the recurring contention in the Middle East between the Western and Islamic forces represents the greatest and most controversial example to support this position. From the First Crusade, which began in 1095 to the Gulf War in 1990 and the current occupation of Iraq, an extended time of peace between these two forces has never occurred. Also, the long history of anti-Semitism, including the Crusades, World War Two, and the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict, justifies the fact that a shared memory of public events is far from being a new trend. Both Granatstein and Ignatieff agree that a common public memory does not occur as a trend but rather on an ongoing basis. At the beginning of their interactive discussion, Granatstein recalls the example of the NATO-Belgrade war. "Slobodan Milosevic was committing genocide (again) and the world, sensitized by the Holocaust and remembering Serb actions against Croats and Bosnians several years ago, could not accept this." Owing to the world's common public memory of the Holocaust, in this case, people did not feel it was right to accept genocide. Similarly, Ignatieff relates the ongoing bitterness between English Canadians and French Canadians. "Our national experience has been recurrently bedeviled (as well as enriched) by the fact that English and French Canada do not share the same history of 1759...our politics has been defined by the quarrel over the meaning of that moment." One moment in the past has the potential to alter and influence the future; the more complex our humanity becomes, the more we will need to focus on the present and thus effectively prepare for the future.

Our increasingly technologically-oriented present has reinforced the concept of the common public memory and continues to rapidly influence and shape our future. Past events will always contribute to a subsequent sequence of events, and however much we advance in any area, history will never forget to leave its mark. Owning a computer or mobile phone does not allow or even help men and women to forget the past. The internet

brims over with material proof of a lively common global memory. Advancements, including explorations, voyages, and discoveries, have made history sparkle, even if only for a short while. For example, recall the discovery of electricity or Columbus's legendary voyage to the Americas. Such memorable events overflow the course of history, and with more technology, we will simply be able to find out even more about these events. On the other hand, many individuals who in the past have contributed to the scientific world have had their discoveries, such as nuclear power, abused by ill-meaning groups. Therefore, technology means the same for the future as science meant for the 19th century—advancements will propel a common public memory forward and will emphasize our shared story all the more. Neither Granatstein nor Ignatieff discuss the effects of technology and whether or not it affects the shared public memory, but Granatstein does capture an eye-opening thought: “The way [history] is taught—or not taught—has shaped a tuned-out generation that can use a computer and surf the Net, but that knows almost nothing about anything of importance...” Ignatieff concurs with this small detail: “I don't want to see [history] elbowed out of the school because other things—computers, business studies whatever—seem more relevant.” Yet both Granatstein and Ignatieff do not seem to realize that computers, the internet, or email accounts are the products of a shared history, the natural need to “make [history] together” (Ignatieff) by way of connecting our “common cultural capital.”

Nothing should be done to invigorate a common history, as mankind's story includes the histories of every nation and does not exclude any one part of the world. Does Darwin represent a segment of British history? No, he represents a scientific revolution all over the world. Does Mendel represent a segment of Austro-Imperial history? No, he represents the discovery of genetics all over the world. What would happen if Austrians learned only Austrian history and Iranians learned only Iranian history? Yes, every nation would possess a common public memory but would live without knowledge of one another. Ignatieff hits the bull's eye: “So we do have common cultural capital—but we share it with other countries, and it is not as distinctive, not as Canadian, and not as historical as we like to think it.” Instead of reorganizing and restructuring history curricula, schools should prioritize the teaching of history and realize that communicating any kind of history will involve “discovering the truth about [history's] argument” (Granatstein). Granatstein continues to state, “We study [history] to learn how our predecessors lived and erred and, if we can, to learn from their mistakes in the (often vain) hope we will not repeat them.” Too many times, leaders and nations have dwelled in the past, which has handicapped the immense potential of the present, instead of using knowledge of the past advantageously towards the future.

In conclusion, history has proved that it cannot disappear. Wars can never disappear. Poverty can never disappear. Sickness can never disappear. Corruption can never disappear. Yet our connected history has produced success, happiness, growth, and prosperity. History has shown contrasts, and Canada, the country we are so fortunate to live in, advocates the diversity of every individual. In the words of Shakespeare, “What is past is prologue.” Indeed, the future of mankind will build upon what it has already established. As time progresses, the common public memory of the past will continue to

fuse and intertwine all nations' destinies together based on what each individual accomplishes now, in the present.