

# Canada Watch

PRACTICAL AND AUTHORITATIVE ANALYSIS OF KEY NATIONAL ISSUES

## DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

### Knowing ourselves

The concept of Canadian Studies owes a great deal to Thomas Symons and his landmark 1975 report *To Know Ourselves*. In that report, Symons detailed the degree to which Canadian post-secondary institutions had previously failed to integrate and promote curricula and research on their own country. In subsequent decades, especially among the newer universities, like York University,

BY COLIN COATES

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institutions embraced the project, creating research centres and offering multi-

disciplinary degree programs under the rubric of "Canadian Studies." The Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies is one of the products of that enthusiasm, benefiting from an endowment provided by the Canadian and Ontario governments and private benefactors who wished to recognize the legacy of former Ontario premier John Robarts.

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## EDITORIAL

### Editorial: The politics of evidence

This issue of *Canada Watch* is the outcome of collaboration between the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies and the Politics of Evidence (POE) Working Group, an inter-university collaboration convened by Professor Natasha Myers. This working group brings together over 40 faculty and graduate student members from York University, the University of Toronto, Ryerson University, and other universities across the country. It was formed to "raise public awareness and to challenge existing barriers to research and the dissemination of research findings, whether such barriers come from the public or private sectors. By interrogating the uses and abuses of evidence, we seek to highlight where science and technology in Canada intersect with issues of social and environmental justice." You can read more about POE resources and activities on our website at <https://politicsofevidence.wordpress.com>.

BY JODY BERLAND

Jody Berland is professor in the Department of Humanities and senior faculty associate of the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies, York University. She is author of *North of Empire: Essays on the Cultural Technologies of Space* (2009), co-editor of *Cultures of Militarization* and other books, and co-editor of *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* ([www.yorku.ca/topia](http://www.yorku.ca/topia)).

While science is rarely at the forefront of political controversy, the current government has acted strategically to silence government scientists and to render their findings invisible. As detailed by articles in this issue, the Harper government has cancelled the long-form census, eliminated the office of the National Science Advisor, closed libraries, testing labs, parliamentary offices, and research programs, and interfered with researchers' communi-

cation with the public. When research is veiled or cherry-picked by government offices, the policy implications of the research cannot be properly addressed. Further, some advocates of policy outcomes based on scientific research are targeted as hostile to the national interest. This practice is consistent with a notable and unprecedented centralization of power in the Prime Minister's Office.

Scholars in Science and Technology Studies and in the history and anthropology of science and social science have shown that "science" and its evidentiary rules have evolved through

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Three decades before the release of Symons's report, British Columbian newspaper editor Bruce Hutchinson had called his description of the nation *Canada: The Unknown Country*. Written primarily for an American audience, the title worked for a Canadian readership as well. Hutchinson won the Governor General's award for non-fiction for this publication. One would not choose such a title today—not after the growth in support for the scholarly examination of the country. The study of Canadian literatures, histories, and societies increasingly became a legitimate field of inquiry.

Canadian governments, particularly at the federal level, have played a significant role in encouraging Canadian Studies at home and abroad and in developing expertise in a wide range of scientific and social scientific areas. Government scientists, historians, and statisticians engaged with their university-based colleagues in furthering knowledge. Of course, the collection of information is never devoid of power-knowledge relations. But the recent sea change in Canadian federal government practices has starkly revealed the dangers of decisions to end such data collection or to limit the exchange of information between government employees and the public.

The articles in this issue of *Canada Watch* address a series of issues in which the current Canadian government has actively suppressed the study of the country and discouraged the dissemination of knowledge. Taken together, the essays encourage us, as citizens of the country, to recognize the impact of decisions to end the mandatory long-form census, to slash funding to public institutions such as Library and Archives Canada, to obstruct research into environmental and health issues, and to refuse to examine issues of pressing social concern.

One further example of such federal government cutbacks was the total withdrawal of support in 2012 for inter-

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national scholars who conduct research on Canada. Since the 1970s, successive federal governments had provided financial assistance to individual scholars and international associations of Canadian Studies, expanding the network of specialists to include some 7,000 scholars in 70 countries. With the sudden decision to end support, the larger associations had to let go long-serving administrators, reduce scholarly activity (conferences and journal publications), and, crucially, curtail financial assistance for young scholars to travel to Canada for research. (For more information on such decisions, see my [activehistory.ca](http://activehistory.ca) posts: <http://activehistory.ca/2015/02/who-killed-canadian-studies/> and <http://activehistory.ca/2015/06/if-stephen-harper-doesnt-support-canadian-studies-why-should-we/>.) One of the effects of previous government funding had been to create a cadre of Canadianist specialists in many countries who were able to provide independent and informed commentary on significant cultural and political issues. The current government's actions translate into a wrong-headed and ultimately self-defeating

attempt to control such independent views. In effectively closing one of the older Canadian Studies centres in the United States, a Duke University official was reported to have exclaimed, “If Stephen Harper doesn't support Canadian Studies, why should we?” Canadians can perhaps be forgiven for being ill prepared for a federal government that demonstrates open hostility to the independent and scholarly study of our own country.

Jody Berland, senior fellow at the Robarts Centre, with the assistance of Jennifer Dalton and Natasha Myers, has edited this collection of essays examining a series of decisions that restrict the collection and dissemination of knowledge about Canada. This project developed from an initiative of the Politics of Evidence Working Group, and the Robarts Centre is delighted to provide the venue to encourage discussion of these fundamental issues. We are particularly grateful to the authors of the essays and to Jody for her editorial prowess. Laura Taman, administrator of the Centre, shepherded this collection through the publication process.

There is no excuse for complacency about the study of our country. The current government's decisions are harmful to the intellectual fabric of our nation. We should keep in mind that the cumulative effect multiplies the impact of the individual policy decisions. Ultimately, we Canadians bear the responsibility for “knowing ourselves.” 



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