Set in Stone? Conflict and Compromise in Orillia, Ontario

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ABSTRACT

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The past decade has seen an international wave of public debate regarding monuments and commemorative practices, as societies attempt to come to terms with histories of colonialism, slavery, and white supremacy. In Orillia, Ontario, controversy has proliferated around a monument to Samuel de Champlain, erected in 1925 to commemorate "the advent of the white race into Ontario," and seen by many as offensive to Indigenous peoples and people of colour generally. In 2017 the monument was removed for refurbishing, and the Samuel de Champlain Monument Working Group (SCMWG) was struck to consider options for its potential remediation, in the spirit of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Up to the present, the process has yet to yield definitive results. Based on archival research, newspaper reporting, and two participant interviews, this study examines the SCMWG process as it has unfolded in the community and seeks to evaluate its effectiveness in addressing the problematic aspects of the monument. My conclusions are two-fold. First, I find that the discourse surrounding the process skewed towards a minimalist understanding of the monument's embedded symbolic meanings, and as such failed to engage with a robust understanding of its problematic messaging. Second, I find the twin goals of honouring the TRC and representing popular public opinion to conflict with one another, to the detriment of the former. Overall, while based in a good faith intention, the SCMWG thus far has proven a missed opportunity to engage meaningfully with the project of "reconciliation" with Indigenous peoples.

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INTRODUCTION

A town trademark and symbol of civic pride for many residents of the small Ontario city, the statue towered over Orillia's Couchiching Beach Park for nearly one hundred years. It has loomed large in the city's mythology as a quaint lake-side hamlet nestled in the heart of cottage country, alongside Steven Leacock's visions of "maple trees and broad sidewalks, trim gardens with upright calla lilies, houses with verandahs."[1] Its likeness adorns postcards, tourist brochures, commemorative coins, and even a short-lived project of relief scrip during the Great Depression.[2] To some, "It's a miracle something as beautiful as the Champlain Monument exists."[3] To others, it's known colloquially as "the racist statue." Miranda Minassian, a local resident, recounts: "The first introduction I had to the statue [laughing] was somebody actually saying to a group, 'We'll meet at the racist statue after school.' And I was like, 'What racist statue?' because I up to that point hadn't really spent any time in Orillia. And then we went down and met at the racist statue, and I was like 'Oh shit'!"[4]

The Champlain monument stood over thirty-six feet high, and included a twelve-foot bronze statue of Champlain atop a tall plinth (fig. 1), flanked on either side by two additional sets of figures: a Recollect friar, representing "Christianity" (fig. 2), and a *coureur de bois* trader, representing "Commerce" (fig. 3), each with two Indigenous figures crouching at their feet.[5] Centred in the plinth is a bronze in-set plaque, reading as follows:

> 1615-1915. Erected to commemorate the advent into Ontario of the white race, under the leadership of Samuel de Champlain, the intrepid French explorer and colonizer who with fifteen companions arrived in these parts in the summer of 1615, and spent the following winter with the Indians, making his headquarters at Cahiagué, the chief village of the Hurons, which was near this place. A symbol of good will between the French and English speaking people of Canada.[6]

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[1] Stephen Leacock, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (Toronto: Penguin Modern Classics, 1931 [2017]), 2.
[2] Randy Richmond, *The Orillia Spirit: An Illustrated History,* 2nd edition (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2017), 88.
[3] Kate Grigg, "LETTER: Champlain Monument sculptor 'transcended human nature'," *Orillia Matters*, 18 April 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/letters-to-the-editor/letter-champlain-monument-sculptor-transcended-human-nature-1378965, accessed 14 April 2022.
[4] Miranda Minassian, in discussion with the author, 1 February 2022.
[5] Michael D. Stevenson, "'Free from all possibility of historical error': Orillia's Champlain Monument, French-English Relations, and Indigenous (Mis)Representations in Commemorative Sculpture," *Ontario History* 109, no. 2 (Fall 2017), 213.
[6] Champlain Tercentenary Committee, "The Champlain Monument at Orillia," Orillia Public Library (Orillia), Orilliana collection, 2.

To many contemporary viewers, the language of the plaque is plainly racist. Similarly disconcerting is the layout of the complete tableau: Champlain and his settler companions tower above the Indigenous figures who cower as if in supplication – in his popular history of Orillia, Randy Richmond describes them as appearing in a "subservient position"[7] – a clear symbolic representation of unequal power relations. Minassian was one of the organizers behind a "Decolonize Orillia" protest rally staged against the Champlain monument on July 1,st 2020, a follow-up to a similar demonstration a year prior. "This is a symbol of white supremacy, in our park, and it needs to go," she said at the time.[8] Attendees held placards reading "Tear down monuments to colonialism and genocide," and carried a Canadian flag with "Genocide" written across it.[9] Days prior, the monument's pedestal was vandalized with red paint.[10]

[7] Richmond, *The Orillia Spirit*, 60.
[8] David Dawson, "'Racist' monument 'can't go up again,' protestor says," *Orillia Matters,* 1 July 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/racist-monument-cant-go-up-again-protester-says-6-photos-1549600, accessed 13 May 2022; Minassian quoted in Nathan Taylor, "Canada Day rally planned to protest Champlain Monument's return," *Orillia Matters,* 29 June 2020, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/canada-day-rally-planned-to-protest-champlain-monuments-return-2525346, accessed 13 May 2022.
[9] Nathan Taylor, "'It's time to join them in this fight,' says protest organizer," *Orillia Matters,* 1 July 2020, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/its-time-to-join-them-in-this-fight-says-protest-organizer-10-photos-2533900, accessed 13 May 2022.
[10] Nathan Taylor, "Base of Champlain Monument vandalized," *Orillia Matters,* 26 June 2020, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/base-of-champlain-monument-vandalized-2521757, accessed 13 May 2022.

Figure 1: Champlain Tercentenary Committee, “The Champlain Monument at Orillia,” Orillia Public Library, Orilliana collection, 3

Figure 2: Champlain Tercentenary Committee, "The Champlain Monument at Orillia," Orillia Public Library (Orillia), Orilliana collection, 4

Figure 3: Champlain Tercentenary Committee, "The Champlain Monument at Orillia," Orillia Public Library (Orillia), Orilliana collection, 6.

The monument itself, however, was not present at the demonstration. In 2017 Parks Canada, its legal owner, had the statue removed for refurbishing and restoration, and all that currently remains in the park is its empty pedestal. The controversy raging in the community has been over whether or not it will be put back and in what form, and at present the debate is far from over. While many Orillia residents and local political figures have advocated for its return to the park, many others have said it is well past time for the statue to be removed permanently. Given the language of the plaque and the monument's symbology, one could be forgiven for wondering not why it was removed, but rather why it took so long for such action to be taken. In 2018 Konrad Sioui, at the time Grand Chief of the Huron-Wendat First Nation at Wendake, called it "degrading and preposterous," and said of its potential return, "Not only would such an action undermine and challenge reconciliation efforts with Indigenous Peoples, but it would also

perpetuate a disgraceful perception of our Peoples as being submissive, subservient and obedient to the French Crown, while portraying them as an inferior class of citizens."[11] But it would seem, as Star reporter John Barber writes, "this is how mainstream Canada inches towards reconciliation."[12]

The monument was originally conceived in 1913 as a commemoration of the tercentenary of Samuel de Champlain's visit to the region in 1615, when he and an entourage of over a dozen Frenchmen spent the winter as a guest of the Huron-Wendat village of Cahiagé and participated in a military raid on the neighbouring Iroquois.[13] Delayed by over a decade owing to funding issues and the First World War, the monument was finally unveiled on July 1, 1925, to a crowd of some 10,000 onlookers and visiting politicians, by which time it had become an explicitly nationalist project, claiming to stand for "the promotion of good feeling between the English and French-speaking people of Ontario and Quebec."[14] A thorough overview of the monument's early history is provided by Michael Stevenson in *Ontario History*.[15]

After its removal for refurbishing in 2017, Parks Canada, in response to concerns repeatedly raised about the monument since at least the mid-1990s, and seeing an opportunity to honour the Calls to Action of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), engaged the City of Orillia in a process of community consultation to decide what should now be done with it: Should it be returned? If so, should it be altered somehow? Should it be done away with altogether? The Samuel de Champlain Monument Working Group (SCMWG) was formed in the Fall of 2018, a seven-member panel, including representatives of Rama and Huron-Wendat First Nations, to steer this process towards "an appropriate path forward for Orillia's Champlain Monument that is respectful and representative of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous

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[11] Sioui quoted in Frank Matys, "Orillia's Champlain Monument 'offensive and degrading': Sioui," *Simcoe.com,* 10 April 2018, https://www.simcoe.com/news-story/8382446-orillia-s-champlain-monument-offensive-and-degrading-sioui/, accessed 13 May 2022.

[12] John Barber, "Orillia's Champlain monument is a controversial landmark. Now, restoration aims to change our views," *The Toronto Star,* 14 September 2018, https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2018/09/14/orillias-champlain-monument-is-a-controversial-landmark-now-restoration-aims-to-change-our-views.html, accessed 13 May 2022.

[13] Hale to Fraser, 1 February 1913, Archives of Ontario (Toronto), Champlain Monument Committee fonds, F1152, MU528, folder "Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1913-1914."

[14] R.A. Farquharson, "10,000 Canadians Pay Homage to Dauntless Son of France and Cement Bonne Entente," *The Globe, Toronto,* 2 July 1925; Champlain Tercentenary Committee, "The Champlain Monument at Orillia" brochure, 1926, Orillia Public Library, collection Orilliana, folder "Champlain Monument (2), 1."

[15] Stevenson, "'Free from all possibility of historical error'," 213-237.

perspectives."[16] In its *Final Report & Recommendations,* issued in July 2019, the Working Group recommended the immediate return of the Champlain figure only, with further consultation slated to take place to decide what to do with the other figures and the wording of the plaque, which would "be updated so that it will honour the original intent within the context of contemporary knowledge and wisdom."[17]

However, as of the time of writing, none of the SCMWG's recommendations have yet been implemented, and the process appears to have stalled. In July 2020, Parks Canada issued a press release announcing the return of the Champlain figure would be deferred, offering no timeline and as explanation stating that, "After further consideration and discussions with concerned parties, it has been determined that it would be appropriate and respectful to approach the implementation of these recommendations in a holistic manner."[18] In August 2021, Parks Canada then announced that the process had been once again stalled indefinitely. This time it was announced that, as a response to that summer's revelations of hundreds of unmarked graves at former residential school sites across the country,[19] the representatives from Rama First Nation and the Huron-Wendat First Nation would no longer be participating in the Working Group process.[20] At present no plans are in place for its resumption, and the fate of the monument remains in limbo.

This thesis will explore this recent history of Orillia's Champlain monument, and the process undertaken in an attempt to resolve the controversy surrounding it and move towards participation in Canada's national "reconciliation" project. Through a combination of archival research, newspaper reporting and letters to the editor, documentation produced by the SCMWG, and two participant interviews conducted in February 2022, I will unpack various interpretations of the monument's intent and meaning, and interrogate the dynamics of the process that led to its

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[16] Samuel de Champlain Monument Working Group (hereafter SCMWG), *Final Report & Recommendations,* July 2019, https://www.orillia.ca/en/visiting/resources/Samuel-de-Champlain-Monument-Working-Group---Final-Report-and-Recommendations.pdf, accessed 13 May 2022.
[17] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 25.
[18] Parks Canada (news release), "BREAKING NEWS: Return of Champlain Monument deferred," *Orillia Matters,* 23 July 2020, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/breaking-news-return-of-champlain-monument-deferred-2585510, accessed 14 May 2022.
[19] Dirk Meissner, "Discovery of unmarked graves chosen as The Canadian Press news story of 2021," *Global News,* 14 December 2021, https://globalnews.ca/news/8449652/residential-schools-canada-news-story-2021/, accessed 14 May 2022.
[20] Nathan Taylor, "BREAKING NEWS: Return of Champlain Monument 'deferred'," *Orillia Matters,* 25 August 2021, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/breaking-news-return-of-champlain-monument-deferred-4252782, accessed 14 May 2022.

indefinite adjournment. I situate my work within the broad literature on commemoration and nationalism in Canada, with analysis informed by recent scholarship on colonialism, settler subjectivity and reconciliation. I build particularly on the work of Michael Stevenson, whose archival research on the development of the Champlain monument project offers a cogent narrative of its creation and the motivations of its founders, as well as some of its controversial legacy up to the beginning of the 21st century.[21] His study "provides critical insight into the role of local entrepreneurs in fostering civic pride, the part played by external events in dictating the pace of the monument's construction, and the long-term significance of historical memorials in fostering a distinct municipal identity in Canada during the twentieth century,"[22] and he strongly criticizes the monument's racist and Eurocentric misrepresentation of the historical relationship between Champlain and the Huron. Temporally my inquiry picks up where Stevenson's concludes, as movement towards the remediation of the monument begins to ramp up in the mid-2010s and culminates in the SCMWG process in 2019-2021. While I extend my critique of the monument's inherent racism somewhat further than Stevenson, my work owes much to the contextual grounding of his study. In this thesis I ask how the lofty goals of the national "reconciliation" project can be felt and enacted at the local level, and the role commemorative practices can play in this process. At the same time, I ask how barriers to such projects can continue to remain in place despite professions of willingness to engage with them, and through what means liberal settlers continue to minimize or ignore the ongoing harms of colonialism.

The literature on monuments and commemoration in Canada is substantial and growing.[23] Much is focused on the connection between memorial and commemorative practices and projects of

[21] Stevenson, "Free from all possibility of historical error."
[22] Stevenson, "Free from all possibility of historical error," 215.
[23] See Brittney Anne Bos, "Forging Iconographies and Casting Colonialism: Monuments and Memories in Ontario, 1850-2001" (doctoral dissertation, Queens University, 2016); Alan Gordon, *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montreal's Public Memories, 1891-1930* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001); Katharyne Mitchell, "Monuments, Memorials, and the Politics of Memory," *Urban Geography* 24, no. 5 (2003), 442-459; Cecilia Morgan, *Commemorating Canada: History, Heritage, and Memory, 1850s-1990s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016) and *Creating Colonial Pasts: History, Memory, and Commemoration in Southern Ontario, 1860-1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015); H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec's Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Russell Johnston and Michael Ripmeester, "'That Big Statue of Whoever': Material Commemoration and Narrative in the Niagara Region," in *Placing Memory and Remembering Place in Canada,* eds. James Opp and John C. Walsh (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 130-156 and "A Monument's Work is Never Done: the Watson Monument, Memory, and Forgetting in a Small Canadian City," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 13, no. 2 (2007), 117-135; Brian Osborne, "Constructing Landscapes of Power: the George-Etienne Cartier Monument, Montreal," *Journal of Historical*

nation building and identity formation, within which questions related to public or collective memory tend to loom large. Many scholars take the work of Maurice Halbwachs as a point of departure in this regard, he being "the first to systematically explore the ways in which present concerns determine what of the past we remember," according to Barbara Misztal.[24] He writes, "A remembrance is in very large measure a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from the present."[25] A follower of Durkheim, for Halbwachs a distinction between history and memory is key to understanding the constitution of group identities, as groups interpret the events of the past in ways that reflect their understanding of themselves as a collectivity.[26] In this way the construction of collective memory is key to the maintenance of identities in the present. "In today's societies," Misztal writes, "'collective memory' refers not so much to living memory as to organized cultural practices that supply ways of understanding the world and provide people with beliefs and opinions that guide their action."[27]

The nature of the distinction between history and memory is important for many scholars analyzing the dynamics of modern practices of commemoration. Pierre Nora's landmark multi-volume work on *"lieux de memoire"* (sites of memory) stakes out a claim that modern societies are marked by the supplanting of embodied cultural memory by official historical discourses – a "conquest and eradication of memory by history" – anchored to specific sites to perform a pedagogical function vis-à-vis the nation-state.[28] For Nora, "Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name…History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer."[29] For all its poeticism, Nora's formulation offers a division between history and memory too absolute for many historians, and a categorical distinction between them remains elusive. For the purposes of my own inquiry, I take Alan Gordon's point: "Public history is often a work of recovering the past. Memory, on the other

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Geography 24, no. 5 (1998), 431-458 and "Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in its Place," *Canadian Ethnic Studies/Études ethniques au Canada* 33, no. 3 (2001), 39-77; Ronald Rudin, *Founding Fathers: The Celebration of Champlain and Laval in the streets of Quebec, 1878-1908* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Stevenson, "'Free from all possibility of historical error'."

[24] Barbara Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, McGraw-Hill Education, 2003), 50.

[25] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory,* trans. by Francis J. Ditter & Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper & Row, 1950 [1980]), 69.

[26] Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering,* 50-54.

[27] Barbara Misztal, "Memory and History," in *Memory Ireland: Volume 1: History and Modernity,* ed. Oona Frawley (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 12.

[28] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989), 8.

[29] Nora, "Between Memory and History," 8.

hand, captures specific events and individuals unhistorically."[30] That is, memory can distort history to serve particular ends bound up in the process of remembrance, which serves important functions for the creation and maintenance of collective identities and group membership. Gordon continues, "Public memory is a discourse about identity and power…Public history constructs a narrative of the past in support of the present. Public memory, in turn, relies on public history, but it conscripts aspects of public history, further enshrining them in defence of present power relationships."[31]

History can be put to use (and indeed, manipulated) to pursue projects of political and cultural hegemony[32] by various actors in their own times. In the era of the nation-state, national entities have depended for their social cohesion upon the deployment of various techniques aimed to inspire a sense of shared past among their members. H.V. Nelles observes, "Hegemony cannot be asserted; it must be negotiated between citizens and elites through the creation and manipulation of symbols. The instruments of nation-making are most notably flags, anthems, idols, monuments, and civic architecture. But these pieces of cloth, music, and stone must be given emotional life by shared perceptions of their meaning."[33] The Champlain monument is one such instrument, its "emotional life" intimately woven with that of the city itself.

Important touchstones here are the work of Benedict Anderson, and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. For Anderson, modern nations are imagined communities: "In face," he writes, "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."[34] In his now-classic book on the subject, Anderson focuses historically on linguistic cohesion and the printed word as the primary vehicle through which nations and nationalism were developed. Remembrance and forgetting play key roles in the construction of national identities, as populations are conditioned to conceive of historical events in ways that reinforce the structure of national feeling, unhistorical as these remembrances may be.[35] Read alongside Anderson, Ranger and Hobsbawm's work is illuminating. In their 1983

[30] Alan Gordon, *Making Public Pasts,* 6.
[31] Gordon, *Making Public Pasts,* 168.
[32] Here I refer to hegemony in the Gramscian sense. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from The Prison Notebooks,* trans. & eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971 [2010]).
[33] Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building,* 229.
[34] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 1983 [2006]), 6.
[35] Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* 187-206.

edited volume of the same name, they introduced the notion of "the invention of tradition" to explain some of the tools and techniques with which group structures, and nations in particular, can be constructed. They describe various ritual activities, commemorative practices, and cultural conventions presented as unchanging and rooted in antiquity, in order to shore up the foundations of novel contemporary social structures.[36] "All invented traditions," Hobsbawm writes, "so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion."[37] As a "comparatively recent historical innovation,"[38] nations and nationalisms require the use of such techniques to induce a necessary sense of membership and belonging, particularly as older forces of social structuration – such as premodern customary forms of community belonging, for example, or fading aristocratic conventions – are weakened by various forces of modernization and industrialization.[39]

These insights frame my discussion of the Champlain monument – like all statues and monuments – as an object imbued with specific social and political agendas, drawing on particular representations of history and formulations of public memory to make claims in, and on, the present. As Jewel Spangler reminds us, "Monuments do not tell us objective facts about the actual past. They tell stories that reflect the perspectives of those who commission, pay for, allow, and craft monuments. They are artifacts of those who commemorate."[40] Christine Sypnowich, lead researcher of the Queen's University-based project "Toppling Monuments: Colonial Trauma, Justice, Heritage and Restorative Healing," writes, "They have a double life, both seeking to represent a certain narrative, but also figuring themselves as part of a larger narrative about the monumentalizing endeavour, a narrative that changes with time."[41] Indeed, this is crucial to the analysis that follows, as I argue that misapprehension of the purpose of monuments as such leads to an obfuscation of the ideological work they perform – in this case, a triumphalist narrative of colonialism and white supremacy rather than an "accurate" portrayal of a specific historical event.

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[36] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983 [2012]).
[37] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition,* 12.
[38] Hobsbawm, "Introduction," 13.
[39] Hobsbawm, "Introduction," 4-5.
[40] Jewel Spengler, "What's in a Monument? Part I: Robert E. Lee and Confederate Memory," *Active History,* 13 August 2018, http://activehistory.ca/2018/08/whats-in-a-monument-part-i-robert-e-lee-in-charlottesville/, accessed 1 June 2022.
[41] Christine Sypnowich, "Monuments and monsters: Education, cultural heritage and sites of conscience," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* no. 55 (2021), 476.

The period of the Champlain monument's creation – from its inception in 1913 to its eventual erection in 1925 – fits squarely within an era during which monument and statue projects were pursued in Western states with a particular ferocity – referred to by Brian Osborne as "statuemania."[42] Cecilia Morgan names the period of the 1870s – 1920s "the heyday of public commemorations" in Canada, highlighting the nascent state's preoccupation with nation-building and anxiety about its shaky ideological foundations during the decades after Confederation.[43] She describes "a political, cultural, and social climate in which forming historical societies, building monuments, and staging pageants seemed not just important but necessary."[44] Brittney Ann Bos traces the development of monument construction in Ontario from the mid-19th century, noting that the commemorative landscape of the province was shaped by anxiety that "the British fabric of the Canadian nation appeared to be unraveling," which led to a spate of monuments celebrating British identity and imperial institutions.[45] This makes monuments to Champlain in Ontario an interesting exception to this iconographical rule, yet points to the utility of the man's image for the construction of regimes of national feeling.

The organizers of the Champlain Tercentenary Celebration[46] sought to characterize their commemoration project as worthy of national significance, rather than a simply local project, and they succeeded. Indeed, at the most immediate material level, the production of the monument was made possible by financial contributions from the federal government, the provincial governments of Ontario and Quebec, the district of Simcoe and the town of Orillia, alongside numerous smaller private subscriptions.[47] This connects it immediately to the broader politics of state formation and colonial nationalism, both as these projects were being carried out in early twentieth century period of which the monument is an artefact, and in the current manifestations of those extant institutions.

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[42] Brian Osborne, "Constructing landscapes of power", 434; see also Eric Hobsbawm, "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914" in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition,* 236; Stevenson, "'Free from all possibility of historical error'," 214.
[43] Morgan, *Commemorating Canada,* 44-46.
[44] Morgan, *Commemorating Canada,* 72.
[45] Bos, "Forging Iconographies," 188-191.
[46] The earliest-dated sample in the Archives of Ontario Champlain Monument Committee fonds of the Executive Committee letterhead is a letter dated from September 1913, and names 21 members of the Advisory Committee and 5 Executive Officers. See Hale to Fraser, 30 September 1913, Archives of Ontario (Toronto), Champlain Monument Committee fonds, F1152, MU528, folder "Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1913-1914."
[47] "Summary – Champlain Tercentary Fund," 8 November 1924, Archives of Ontario (Toronto), Champlain Monument Committee fonds, F1152, MU529, folder "Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence 1924."

Credited with the founding of Quebec and often indeed the country itself, Samuel de Champlain in particular has been the subject of numerous commemorative efforts in Canada during the late 19th and early 20th century; historian Patrice Groulx counts seven unique Champlain memorials in North America.[48] Champlain has proven a versatile figure, able to embody a range of intentions on the part of a variety of what Johnston and Ripmeester call "memory entrepreneurs,"[49] serving the federal nation-building project even as he could simultaneously represent the more parochial perspectives of French-speaking Catholics in Quebec.[50] Rudin, writing of the work towards the erection of a Champlain monument in Quebec in 1898, highlights conflicting accounts of Champlain's career and what it could symbolize differently for francophones versus anglophones; he nonetheless points out that at the turn of the century, "Champlain was a pan-Canadian figure, and a hero to the English and French, because he had founded the first permanent European settlement on 'Canadian' soil and was the first person to hold the title of 'governor' in what would become Canada."[51] In 1908 major celebrations and a historical pageant were organized to commemorate the tercentenary of Quebec, in which Champlain figured prominently. As in Orillia, they were, writes Nelles, "designed to establish and broaden the middle ground of understanding between English and French Canadians, and to inspire a new consciousness of shared nationhood."[52]

Bos links the construction of monuments and the marshalling of public memory in Ontario explicitly to the formation of white racial identity in the context of Canadian colonialism: "The production of social memory in Canada is informed by its past (and present) colonialism. Memories of the nation cannot be separated from the settler society that produces them."[53] This can be plainly seen in the case of the Champlain monument, with its aim to commemorate "the enterprising and intrepid man who discovered the Great Lakes and first penetrated 'these ancient wilds'."[54] The Canadian state during the first decades of the twentieth

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[48] Patrice Groulx, "In the Shoes of Champlain," in *Champlain: The Birth of French America,* eds., Raymonde Litalien and Denis Vaugeois, trans. Käthe Roth (Montreal: Septentrion and McGill-Queens University Press, 2004), 335.
[49] Johnston and Ripmeester, "That Big Statue of Whoever," 132
[50] See Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building;* Rudin, *Founding Fathers*.
[51] Rudin, *Founding Fathers,* 55-59.
[52] Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building,* 154; see also Morgan, *Commemorating Canada,* 60-63
[53] Bos, "Forging Iconographies," 22.
[54] "Resolutions passed at a meeting held under the auspices of the Orillia Canadian Club, on February 6th, 1913," Archives of Ontario (Toronto), Champlain Monument Committee fonds, F1152, MU530, folder "Champlain Monument Orillia, Misc. Papers, Pictures, etc."

century was marked by an undisguised colonial and white supremacist ideology, and the narrative of Champlain as hero-explorer depends for its gravitas on the racist political myth of *terra nullius*. This triumphalist narrative cannot be separated from the violence inherent to the projects it celebrates.

This thesis aims to contribute to the existing literature by moving from the broad analysis of the ideological power of commemoration and monument-building towards a specific account of how the process of change might occur in a small settler-majority Canadian city. It concerns itself with questions of structure and agency, and looks inside this moment of community soul-searching to ask how such conflict over meaning and representation can be negotiated at the local level. The politics of nation and empire come to be felt most viscerally, and enacted in their most granular aspects, in the day-to-day realities of the local. Referring to the work of Niagara-region historian Janet Carnochan, Morgan writes poignantly that the local is where "narratives of nation and empire took on concrete and embodied meaning and significance for men and women and for their descendants. Without the local context as a staging ground in which national and imperial affairs might be experienced, these processes remained abstract and disembodied."[55]

At the same time, events in Orillia have unfolded within the context of a reckoning around questions of monuments and commemoration taking place at an international scale, and I aim to contribute to these debates as well. While the issue of how to deal with extant monuments to people or institutions deemed problematic to contemporary publics is hardly new, it has been given a new exigency in recent years by the efforts of movements for racial justice. Particularly with the expansion of Black Lives Matter movements, protests against police brutality, and the discourse around "reconciliation" with Indigenous peoples, calls have grown for the removal of monuments linked to histories of racism, colonialism, and the transatlantic slave trade. In Canada, recent years have witnessed intense scrutiny of monumental tributes to such figures as

[55] Morgan, *Creating Colonial Pasts,* 12.

John A. Macdonald,[56] Egerton Ryerson,[57] and Edward Cornwallis,[58] prompting many communities to strike commissions tasked with deciding whether and how to heed calls for their removal. Removing or recontextualizing such monuments and place names has come to be seen as part of the movement towards "reconciliation" with Indigenous peoples, inspired by the TRC; as Nancy Janovicek notes, "[T]he TRC Calls to Action have changed the dialogue about commemoration."[59] The TRC has been cited by many municipal initiatives on the issue, and indeed the Samuel de Champlain Monument Working Group lists the TRC findings as an inspiration and key guide for its work.[60]

Orillia has for nearly two centuries been structured by colonial policies of settlement and social ordering, profoundly influencing the ways that subjectivities have been shaped around particular narratives of conquest and civilizational dominance. I ask how – or indeed, if – efforts to change those narratives can be part of meaningful movement towards reparation for the legacies of colonialism. There is a wide range of potential understandings of what Orillia's Champlain Monument communicates, and it carries multiple different messages to different viewers, based on a number of situational factors and levels of interpretation. In Chapter One I unpack some of this divergence of received meaning through the analysis of primary sources including archival documents, letters to the editor of local newspapers related to the statue, literature produced by the Samuel de Champlain Monument Working Group, and my own interviews. I make use of the analytical tools of cultural theorists Roland Barthes and Stuart Hall to dissect the process of meaning-making in this context, as communicated through the monument's iconography and the

[56] "John A. Macdonald statue removed from Victoria City Hall," *CBC News,* 11 August 2018, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/john-a-macdonald-statue-victoria-city-hall-lisa-helps-1.4782065, accessed I June 2022; see also Timothy J. Stanley, "Commemorating John A. MacDonald: Collective Remembering and the Structure of Settler Colonialism in British Columbia," *British Columbia Studies* no. 204 (Winter 2019/20), 89-113.
[57] "Toronto university changes name amid controversy over Canadian educator's legacy," *CBC News,* 26 April 2022, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ryerson-toronto-metropolitan-university-1.6431360, accessed 1 June 2022.
[58] Cassie Williams and Anjuli Patil, "Controversial Cornwallis statue removed from Halifax park," *CBC News,* 31 January 2018, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/cornwallis-statue-removal-1.4511858, accessed 1 June 2022; Tom Fraser, "Edward Cornwallis, Public Memory, and Canadian Nationalism," *Active History,* 13 March 2018, http://activehistory.ca/2018/03/edward-cornwallis-public-memory-and-canadian-nationalism/, accessed 1 June 2022.
[59] Nancy Janovicek, "What's In a Monument? Part II: The Edward Cornwallis Monument and Reconciliation," *Active History*, 14 August 2018, https://activehistory.ca/2018/08/whats-in-a-monument-part-ii-the-edward-cornwallis-monument-in-halifax/, accessed 26 April 2022.
[60] SCMWG, *Final Report*, 2.

text of the accompanying plaque. Despite this potential for multiple interpretation of its meaning, I assert that there remains an ethical imperative to identify the *dominant* messages of the Champlain monument and acknowledge their potential to perpetuate problematic discourses and cause harm. We should take it at its word: at its core, the monument claims to honour "the advent of the white race into Ontario." That is, it is a monument to systemic white supremacy, and this should be foregrounded in any discussion of its ultimate fate. Instead, I argue that discourse surrounding the monument has attempted to refocus attention on the red herring of benign "original intentions" and frame the monument's primary fault as a lack of "historical accuracy," both of which serving to redirect attention away from analysis of its more sweeping and damaging ideological assertions.

In Chapter Two I analyze the process undertaken by the SCMWG to resolve the community conflict over the monument. I delve in more detail into the events outlined above, including via newspaper reports and my interview with Melanie Vincent, the representative of the Huron-Wendat First Nation on the SCMWG. I argue that there exists a marked tension between the desire for a consultative, democratic solution to the conflict and principled commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. If the results of the SCMWG's outreach efforts can be considered representative, it appears a majority of Orillia residents favour the return of the Champlain statue to its former location, whether in its original form or with additional interpretive material appended. In my analysis, this demonstrates a lack of good faith commitment to the task of truth-telling. Faced with a popular reluctance to confront the legacy and current manifestation of colonialism, the successful implementation of such "reconciliation" projects depends on principled leadership and commitment to difficult and potentially unpopular change, and it appears this was lacking in Orillia's case. The tension between expressed intentions and the feasibility of their implementation is the subject of my inquiry.

CHAPTER ONE: MANY MEANINGS

At the heart of the controversy over Orillia's Champlain monument lies the question of its meaning: what it represents, or what it has come to represent over the near century of its existence. In their *Final Report & Recommendations* document, the Samuel de Champlain Monument Working Group (SCMWG) wrote, "As the deliberations of the Working Group continued to unfold, it became apparent that we are very much still in the 'Truth' stage of Truth and Reconciliation."[61] As a conflict resolution project, the SCMWG Group process was predicated on the assumption that voices raised in opposition to the monument were at least worth hearing out, that there was indeed some "truth" that needed to be exposed. That *something* needed to be changed was the point of departure. The group's inquiry sought to home in on specifically what made the monument problematic or offensive and seek out a compromise solution based on that diagnosis.

In the public consultation survey responses and letters to the editor sent to local news outlets,[62] the vast majority of expressed opinions diverge not on the question of whether racism should be condoned or tolerated, but rather on *whether or not* the Champlain monument constitutes a racist public statement. This chapter seeks to interrogate the various and varying messages the monument inheres and communicates, and the strategies through which this attempt at truth-seeking may have been obstructed. First, I want to build support for the argument that the Champlain monument clearly does constitute a celebratory expression of white supremacy and colonialism. Proceeding past this crude "yes or no" formulation, I then interrogate how it is that, in the context of a process explicitly dedicated to uncovering uncomfortable truths and resolving longstanding conflict, defenders of the monument have framed their opposition to its removal in ways that downplay or deny its racism. By what tactics was a process mandated to address and confront racism turned into one that excuses it? I argue that the analysis of the SCMWG is rooted in a foundational impulse to rehabilitate the monument by justifying its "original intentions" as ultimately benign, and within which the question of its meaning and the discourses it supports is reduced to one of "historical accuracy," which in this case obscures the harm it has caused, and continues to cause.

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[61] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 24.

[62] Results of the SCMWG survey are included in the published *Final Report*; for this project I reviewed 25 letters to the editor on the topic of the Champlain monument published by *Orillia Matters* and *Simcoe.com*

In my analysis, monuments are understood to constitute important cultural texts, subject to interpretive reading within historical work. "Whether they remember the victors or those they conquered," notes Penny Enslin, "each monument can be considered as a text, a narrative of specific memories and identities, to be read in time and space – in other words, historically but with an eye on the future as well as within the landscapes they occupy in public spaces."[63] Importantly, Alan Gordon points out, such texts are subject to a range of potential readings: "Public memory is a discourse, not a unified text. The contested nature of public memory suggests that a multiplicity of meanings, audiences, and memories intersects through the public past."[64] That is, there are many ways to "read" a monument, influenced by but not necessarily constrained to the intentions of its creators. For Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman, though monuments may have particular authors with particular intentions in mind, "meaning is produced intertextually and recursively," meaning that viewers will bring their own experiences and assumptions to their reading of its messages.[65] Johnston and Ripmeester similarly point to the polysemy inherent in monuments and memorials, and the agency of individuals in forming their own interpretations based on the discursive resources at their disposal.[66]

Some of the basic terms of semiological engagement offered by Roland Barthes are instructive here. He points to the multiple levels of meaning present in any sort of representational image-making: denotative and connotative meanings. The former refers to the most intentional and explicit messages encoded into the work – "the *analogon* itself," or the subject to which it directly refers – while the latter is comprised of its indirect or unspoken communicative content, "the manner in which the society to a certain extent communicates what it *thinks* of [the *analogon*]."[67] In his classic example, Barthes dissects a Panzani pasta advertisement for its various levels of denotative and connotative signification: a string shopping bag shows a cascade of fresh vegetables alongside various Panzani products, conveying

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[63] Penny Enslin, "Monuments after Empire? The Educational Value of Imperial Statues," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 54, no. 5 (2020), 1335.
[64] Alan Gordon, *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montreal's Public Memories, 1891-1930* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001), 173.
[65] Owen J. Dwyer and Derek H. Alderman, "Memorial landscapes: analytic questions and metaphors," *Geojournal* 73, no. 3 (2008), 169-170.
[66] Russel Johnston and Michael Ripmeester, "'That Big Statue of Whoever': Material Commemoration and Narrative in the Niagara Region," in *Place Memory and Remembering Place in Canada*, eds. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 135.
[67] Roland Barthes, *Music, Image, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 17.

connotative meanings of freshness, the return from the market, "Italianicity."[68] Stuart Hall suggests that the distinction between connotation and denotation functions on an analytical level only – in actual practice, both levels of meaning are almost always active in any system of signification. However, the distinction remains useful, he argues, because "signs appear to acquire their full ideological value – appear to be open to articulation within wider ideological discourses and meanings – at the level of their 'associative' meanings (that is, at the connotative level)."[69] It is through an understanding of the function of connotation that we can apprehend some of the ideological work done by systems of representation. Signs make use of images to communicate second-order messages. An outstretched open hand becomes more than simply the image of a hand when it symbolizes a directive to stop. A profile of Queen Elizabeth on a Canadian loonie refers to a real-life person, but signifies allegiance to Britain, and the authority of the monarch as a guarantor of the money's value.

Barthes further highlights the relationship between words and images used in tandem to convey particular messages, to evoke specific meanings from images that could potentially be open to multiple interpretation – that is, to restrict the potential for polysemy. "In every society," he writes, "various techniques are developed intended to *fix* the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs…the text *directs* the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him [sic] to avoid some and receive others."[70] Text appended to image can offer what Barthes calls "anchorage," an attempt to reign in a reader's interpretation to a specific set of intended messages, to drive home particular points.[71] Most monuments include such an attempt at anchorage in the form of plaques or other signage. Indeed, these are usually referred to as *interpretive* elements, in that they help guide the viewer's interpretation of what they are seeing. In their study of the memorial landscape of St. Catharines, Ontario, Johnston and Ripmeester observe that in fact, "Memorials take many forms, but plaques often serve as the main channel through which a selected mnemonic narrative is articulated."[72]

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[68] Barthes, *Music, Image, Text,* 33-35.
[69] Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79,* eds. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis (London and New York: Routledge, 1980 [2005]), 122-3.
[70] Barthes, *Music, Image, Text*, 39-40.
[71] Barthes, *Music, Image, Text,* 38-39.
[72] Johnston and Ripmeester, "That Big Statue of Whoever," 137.

Importantly, despite the potential for different interpretations of meaning, these texts are nonetheless not neutral in the expressions of meaning they privilege. Johnston and Ripmeester highlight that certain sets of interpretations come immersed in normative discourses, and furthermore that viewers are always subject to "mnemonic socialisation," such that "the preferred reading becomes the naturalised symbol or dominant code."[73] This borrows language from Hall's seminal work on audience reception and the process of meaning-creation. For Hall, meaning is never fixed by the architect of a particular message but rather constructed at the moment of reception, and there is always a negotiation through which specific meanings emerge from this encounter. He writes of dominant or preferred readings as those which have been "naturalized" as part of a given society's dominant social order or hegemonic common sense; they are always communicated with a discursive weight behind them that helps to ensure correspondence between the sender and receiver. This is rarely an exact correspondence, but by and large messages are received within their intended terms in societies with a strong dominant-hegemonic structure.[74]

Given this slippage and ambiguity between intention and interpretation, how are we to assess where the Champlain monument's "true" meaning lies? While such questions may elude definitive answers, I insist they are not value-neutral. As historians, we must engage not only with interpretations of the past but also the ways the past is put to use in the present, where, as public memory, it generates particular kinds of meaning and as such supports particular ideological projects. I conjecture that the discourse advanced by the SCMWG process ultimately failed to deeply consider this multivalence and its implications, instead opting for a minimizing approach to the question of meaning and intention. This is the result, I argue, of a conflicted project rooted in a motivation to avoid offending the sensibilities of Orillia's settler residents, to assuage feelings of settler guilt and complicity while seeking a lowest common denominator of structural change.

In her doctoral dissertation, Brittney Anne Bos analyzes the commemorative landscape of southern Ontario, adopting as a principal methodology the visual analysis of monuments themselves. She seeks to create "a useful communication bridge between visual analysis and

[73] Russel Johnston and Michael Ripmeester, "A Monument's Work is Never Done: The Watson Monument, Memory, and Forgetting in a Small Canadian City," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 13, no. 2 (2007), 120-121.
[74] Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," 117-127.

historical research…to move beyond visual representations as simply illustrations within the history field."[75] She offers a multi-level process of reading statues and monuments as primary sources, in combination with more traditional documentary sources, in order to divine multiple layers of meaning embedded in their material structures.[76] In one of her case studies, a monument to Major General Isaac Brock is shown to carry meaning which far exceeds that of its formal structure, to become at the symbolic level a representation and valorization of "British values," "public anti-Americanism, proclamations of Parliamentary and monarchical superiority, and a justification of white colonial domination over Indigenous populations."[77]

Following a similar analytical trajectory, a robust reading of the Orillia's Champlain monument begins at the immediately formal level of iconic representation – the physical objects, iconography, and layout of the figures constituting its material form. The monument shows us Samuel de Champlain himself, a missionary figure with a cross upheld above his head – though based on an engraving of Jesuit missionary Jean de Brébeuf,[78] the historical figure depicted is in fact the Recollet friar Joseph le Caron[79] – and a *coureur de bois* apparently trading for animal skins. The Indigenous figures are meant to depict members of the Huron-Wendat First Nation, the inhabitants of the area at the time of Champlain's arrival, as indicated on the plaque. This is the most literal, denotative level of the monument's message.

Dwyer and Alderman suggest meaning can be divined partially through interrogation of the narrative aspects of statues and monuments, by asking after their "plot," the main characters they portray, who is depicted with individual agency and who is symbolic of an undifferentiated mass.[80] Clearly the protagonist, Champlain stands tall above the other figures. A CTV News writer describes him "peering out over nearby Lake Couchiching like a Spanish Conquistador."[81] In the eyes of Patrice Groulx, "Champlain advances with a conquering stride," and the historian

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[75] Brittney Anne Bos, "Forging Iconographies and Casting Colonialism: Monuments and Memories in Ontario, 1850-2001" (doctoral dissertation, Queens University, 2016), 26.
[76] Bos, "Forging Iconographies," 28-29.
[77] Bos, "Forging Iconographies," 40.
[78] Vernon March, "Re: design for Champlain monument at Orillia, Ont.," Archives of Ontario (Toronto), Champlain Monument Committee fonds, F1152, MU 528, file "Correspondence 1913-1914."
[79] Patrice Groulx, "In the Shoes of Samuel de Champlain," in *Champlain: The Birth of French America*, eds. Raymonde Litalien and Denis Vaugeois, trans. Käthe Roth, 335-345. (Montreal: Septentrion and McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 342.
[80] Dwyer and Alderman, "Memorial landscapes," 170.
[81] Terry Pedwell, "Samuel de Champlain monument: Hurtful or educational?," *CTV News,* 7 July 2019, https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/samuel-de-champlain-monument-hurtful-or-educational-1.4497644?cache=piqndqvkh, accessed 13 May 2022.

notes that Champlain monuments – and in this the Orillia production is no exception – invariably portray the man armed with a sword, an intimation of the shadow of imperial violence behind his diplomatic actions. "In both statues and gatherings," Groulx writes, "Champlain was invariably the bearer of the message that violence was justified by the greatness of the mission."[82] Miranda Minassian describes Champlain as standing in a "victory pose,"[83] and points out that directly opposite the monument in Couchiching Park stand three First World War-era cannons, which point towards the neighbouring Rama First Nation.[84] "It is *contextualized* by those cannons," she says. "This is, you cannot say that this is not a monument to the conqueror, when it sits next to the conqueror's tools!"[85]

The placement of the figures in the monument performs substantial symbolic work as well, as many have pointed out. There is a clear hierarchy expressed in the positioning of Champlain at the top – "like the king," observes Melanie Vincent[86] – with the other two Europeans at a middle tier, as the four Hurons, "naked except for loincloths, assume inferior positions at the feet of the white men, passively submitting to the power of commerce and scripture."[87] Many have taken offense to the monument on the grounds of this positioning of the human figures, pointing out that in reality the encounter between Champlain and the Huron was one marked much more by mutual exchange and respectful rapprochement than this would imply.[88] I return to these questions of historical accuracy below.

Importantly, two of the three Europeans here depicted have identities as specific historical persons. The Indigenous figures are nameless, shown as passive recipients of European spiritual and trade goods, stand-ins for the Huron people as a generalized group. There is

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[82] Groulx, "In the Shoes of Champlain," 343.
[83] Miranda Minassian, in discussion with the author, 1 February 2022.
[84] Nathan Taylor, "'We did it together': Trio confesses to spray-painting cannons at park,"*Orillia Matters,* 5 July 2021, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/we-did-it-together-trio-confesses-to-spray-painting-cannons-at-park-3932482, accessed 16 June 2022.
[85] Minassian, 1 Feb 2022.
[86] Melanie Vincent, in discussion with the author, 25 Feb 2022.
[87] Colin McKim, "GUEST COLUMN: Champlain: Crown of creation or a strutting dandy?" *Orillia Matters,* 9 March 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/letters-to-the-editor/guest-column-champlain-crown-of-creation-or-a-strutting-dandy-1311461, accessed 19 June 2022.
[88] See Colin McKim, "Monument may be brought up to date," *Orillia Packet & Times,* 8 September 2001, Orillia Public Library (Orillia), Orilliana collection, folder "Champlain Monument (2)"; Frank Matys, "Orillia's Champlain Monument 'doesn't tell the whole story': Lawson," *Simcoe.com,* 11 August 2017, https://www.simcoe.com/news-story/7494275-orillia-s-champlain-monument-doesn-t-tell-the-whole-story-lawson/, accessed 16 June 2022; John Barber, "Orillia's Champlain monument is a controversial landmark. Now, restoration aims to change our views," *Toronto Star,* 14 September 2018, https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2018/09/14/orillias-champlain-monument-is-a-controversial-landmark-now-restoration-aims-to-change-our-views.html, accessed 16 June 2022.

evidence that the Champlain Tercentenary Committee (the memory entrepreneurs behind the monument project) and sculptor Vernon March did attempt to achieve a faithful rendering of the Huron figures, soliciting historical information from archivists and anthropologists during the years of the monument's modelling and construction, and it seems the substantial criticism received led to changes in the dress and physiognomy of the Indigenous figures.[89] At the same time, Rama First Nation Elder Sherry Lawson recounts that men from the Chippewa First Nation sat as models for March as he finished his design.[90] This suggests a conflation of one distinct group of Indigenous people for another in the sculptor's work, a criticism often leveled at settler depictions of Indigenous peoples. At the connotative level, then, these figures represent a composite and generalized *indigeneity*, deployed to illustrate by juxtaposition the civilized qualities of the European figures. According to Groulx, "The superiority of civilization over barbarism could not be better illustrated."[91]

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 47th Call to Action reads, "We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and lands, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and *terra nullius*, and to reform those laws, government policies, and litigation strategies that continue to rely on such concepts."[92] As a text, the monument is steeped in the discourse of "discovery" and the mythology of *terra nullius*. The figure of Champlain stands here not just for himself, nor just for the French, but for Europeans as such – and as such, fundamentally linked to white civilization and domination of the Indigenous peoples of territory claimed by Europeans. If this connotation doesn't come across clearly enough via the figures themselves, the in-set plaque offers anchorage to the scene that removes ambiguity: this is to commemorate "advent of the white race into Ontario." The ostensible march of civilization was cast in explicitly racial terms, at a time when restrictions on the rights of Indigenous peoples in Canada were at perhaps their most severe. The period during which the monument was

[89] Hale to March, 14 February 1917, Archives of Ontario (Toronto), Champlain Monument Committee fonds, F1152, MU528, folder "Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1915"; Hale to March, 16 January 1920, Archives of Ontario (Toronto), Champlain Monument Committee fonds, F1152, MU528, folder "Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence 1919-1920"; Michael D. Stevenson, "'Free from all possibility of historical error': Orillia's Champlain Monument, French-English Relations, and Indigenous (Mis)Representations in Commemorative Sculpture," *Ontario History* 109, no. 2 (Fall 2017), 222-226.
[90] Patrick Bales, "That's 'Biindigen' to Orillia," *Barrie Examiner,* 12 September 2015, A2.
[91] Groulx, "In the Shoes of Champlain," 342.
[92] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), *Final Report, Volume 1: Summary, Honouring the Truth, Reconciling the Future* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company Publishers, 2015), 327.

conceived and erected saw the consolidation of the residential school system, including amendments to the Indian Act that gave government agents the power to force attendance upon any First Nations child.[93] This discursive context is crucial.

This racialized discovery narrative was strongly reinforced by speeches given the day of its unveiling in 1925. Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King remarked via telegram how Champlain "made that daring journey through trackless forest to redeem for civilization so large a part of what is now the Province of Ontario."[94] Speaker of the House Rudolphe Lemieux heralded the "pioneers of Canada," who

> planted here a new society in the principles of the purest religion; they subdued the wilderness before them; they built temples to the true God where formerly had ascended the smoke of idolatrous sacrifices; they broke the first sod where now extend fields and gardens, and stretching over hills and valleys which had never until then been reclaimed, can now be seen in the autumn, the waving of golden harvests.[95]

In its reporting on the event, the *Mail & Empire* wrote that the festivities were to "mark the tercentenary of the arrival of the white man and the implanting of an old civilization in a new world."[96] As recently as 1970, the *Orillia Packet & Times* was still writing of the monument in terms of "open[ing] up a continent to the white man," and hailing its depiction of "the gulf between the civilized and savage worlds."[97]

Commenting on Rama First Nation's withdrawal from the SCMWG process, Chief Ted Williams wrote, "For Rama, Champlain and other 'explorers' mark the beginning point on a road of destruction to our Anishinaabe way of life." He criticized the monument as supporting "narratives that uphold colonial history" and described Champlain as someone "who contributed so much to the attempted erasure of Indigenous peoples."[98] Amanda Dale, a Mi'kmaq resident of

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[93] TRC, *Final Report, Volume 1,* 61-63.
[94] Quoted in "Champlain Tercentenary Celebration Banquet," *The Orillia Packet,* 9 July 1925, Archives of Ontario (Toronto), Champlain Monument Committee fonds, F1152, MU 529, file "Correspondence 1924."
[95] "Mr. Lemieux's Oration at the Unveiling," *The Orillia Packet,* 2 July 1925, Archives of Ontario (Toronto), Champlain Monument Committee fonds, F1152, MU 529, file "Correspondence 1924."
[96] "Two Races Combine to Honor Hero Adventurer Champlain," *Mail & Empire,* 2 July 1925, Orillia Public Library (Orillia), Orilliana Collection, file "Champlain Monument (2)."
[97] "Orillia Initiative Created Our World-Famous Statue," *Orillia Packet & Times,* 23 July 1970, Orillia Public Library (Orillia), Orilliana Collection, file "Champlain Monument (2)."
[98] Quoted in Frank Matys, "Champlain Monument a 'point of pain' for Chippewas of Rama: chief," *Simcoe.com,* 10 January 2022, https://www.simcoe.com/news-story/10548417-champlain-monument-a-point-of-pain-for-chippewas-of-rama-chief/, accessed 14 June 2022.

neighbouring Muskoka, writes, "many Indigenous peoples see keeping the statue intact and displayed as an intergenerational reminder of the oppression and harm done to their ancestors; the colonization that continues to happen today."[99] Minassian observes: "It's a victory monument. It is a monument to colonial victory. That is the message that it sends. And that, I don't think that can be disputed."[100]

In its "Background" section, the SCMWG *Final Report* document states that the monument "was erected to commemorate the advent into Ontario of Europeans under Champlain's leadership, and as a symbol of goodwill between the French and English."[101] This is a nearly verbatim repetition of the text on the monument's in-set plaque, essentially replacing its "white race" with "Europeans," suggesting the former term's offensive aspects can be sidestepped by a change in word choice. The document later states, "While the monument is certainly a testament to the skill of the artist and *the values of its visionaries*, the lack of on-site interpretation detailing the history of Champlain's arrival in the area and his interaction with First Nations leaves visitors without context."[102] Its third official recommendation reads as follows: "That the text of the original Monument's 'in-set plaque' be updated so that it will *honour the original intent* within the context of contemporary knowledge and wisdom."[103]

These excerpts suggest that those aspects of the monument's message seen in contemporary eyes as problematic or offensive owe to misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the "original intent" of its erection. That is, its denigrating view of Indigenous peoples, or its positioning of a triumphalist narrative of white supremacy, were not integral aspects of the monument's intended meaning but rather incidental to it, at worst the result of ignorance rather than malice. This assumption seems to be shared by many participants in the debate. Historian Michael Stevenson, for example, notes the prevalence of racist attitudes towards Indigenous peoples at the time of the monument's creation, but nonetheless characterizes the monument's anti-Indigenous racism as "casual, unconscious prejudice."[104]

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[99] Amanda Dale, "LETTER: 'Historian' is suggesting Indigenous voices be silenced, discredited," *Orillia Matters,* 12 August 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/letters-to-the-editor/letter-historian-is-suggesting-indigenous-voices-be-silenced-discredited-1634418, accessed 19 June 2022.
[100] Minassian, 1 Feb 2022.
[101] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 4.
[102] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 24, my emphasis.
[103] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 25, my emphasis.
[104] Stevenson, "'Free From All Possibility of Historical Error,'" 230.

I had hoped to track the evolution of the phrase "advent into Ontario of the white race," though the extant archival records offer little insight in this regard. In the earliest example, a letter from a member of the Champlain Tercentenary Committee to provincial archivist Alex Fraser in 1913, whiteness is named explicitly without qualification: "we should try to arrange for the erection of a monument as Ontario's contribution to the great Frenchman who was practically the first member of the white race to explore her 'ancient wilds'."[105] The phrase appears fully-formed on the Champlain Tercentenary Celebration official letterhead as early as September 1913 – "To mark the three hundredth anniversary of the advent into Ontario of the white race"[106] – and would go on to appear on numerous promotional pamphlets and commemorative literature for the monument. While there was some discussion over the final wording for the monument's in-set plaque, none challenged this basic phrasing vis-à-vis whiteness.

This should not be surprising to students of race and racialization in Canadian history: this was an era when ideas of racial superiority and the civilizing mission of empire went hand in hand. A 2001 editorial in the *Orillia Packet & Times* plainly stated as much: "We have in the monument an eloquent illustration of Imperialist Canada's attitudes towards aboriginals around the turn of the 20th century in this country. Those attitudes were bigoted, unjust, and devastating."[107] These were the later days of the era of Canadian nationalism proudly yoked to the British Empire, famously described by Carl Berger as "that movement for the closer union of the British Empire through military co-operation and through political changes which would give the dominions influence over imperial policy."[108] The monument was explicitly such a nation-building project, using the figure of Champlain to symbolize and encourage a Canadian patriotism that straddled the French-English linguistic divide, while rendering Indigenous people essentially as props to this central narrative structure.

As noted by Hobsbawm and Ranger, commemorative practice and the invention of traditions often reach a fever pitch at times of great societal transition, particularly in the face of

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[105] Hale to Fraser, 1 February 1913, Archives of Ontario (Toronto), Champlain Monument Committee fonds, F1152, MU 528, file "Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1913-1914"
[106] Hale to Fraser, 30 September 1913, Archives of Ontario (Toronto), Champlain Monument Committee fonds, F1152, MU 528, file "Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence, 1913-1914"
[107] "Editorial: Champlain monument needs some explaining," *Orillia Packet & Times,* 31 August 2001, A6, Orillia Public Library (Orillia), Orilliana collection, file "Champlain Monument (2)."
[108] Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the ideas of Canadian imperialism, 1867-1914*, 2nd edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970 [2013]), 3.

rapid technological changes.[109] Osborne similarly muses of the "statuemania" period leading up to 1914, "Perhaps the nineteenth-century predilection for memorialized history was an expression of a growing loss of identity in a rapidly changing world, and reflected an anxiety about unregulated remembering."[110] This anxiety could be observed in speeches given during the unveiling of the Champlain Monument in 1925. In his address during the banquet, Sir George Henry asked, "We are citizens of the British Empire. But are we in the Empire in an interested way? Are we versed in its history, do we know its advantages, are we acquainted with the hidden spring of its meaning?"[111]

As debate unfolded in the Orillia community around the Champlain monument in 2018 and 2019, much of the criticism it faced coalesced around the charge of historical inaccuracy: that is, the problems with the monument came to be understood to stem from its incorrect portrayal of the historical relationship between Champlain and the Huron. This criticism issued from many quarters, in support of many different approaches to remediation. In a 2018 letter to Orillia City Council, Konrad Sioui, Grand Chief of the Huron-Wendat First Nation, wrote: "[I]t is important to remember that the Huron-Wendat Nation saved Champlain from certain death, and in no way does this degrading and preposterous statue reflect the strength and diplomacy of our ancestors or their status as visionary allies to the French, nor does it accurately portray history."[112] Local historian Bruce McCrae argued in favour of keeping the monument fully intact via a different appeal to historical accuracy, writing, "Despite what many commentators assert, Orillia's Champlain Monument by that young Briton is strictly the 300th anniversary commemoration of 1615-16. Attribution beyond end the Wendat/French era in 'Huronia' beyond 1649, conflation with Anishinaabe/English colonization two centuries later, or association with repressive post-Confederation policies likely beyond this young Briton's perception, is lacking

[109] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983 [2012]), 4-5
[110] Brian Osborne, "Constructing landscapes of power: the George Etienne Cartier monument, Montreal," *Journal of Historical Geography* 24, no. 4 (1998), 434.
[111] Quoted in "Champlain Tercentenary Celebration Banquet," *The Orillia Packet,* 9 July 1925, Archives of Ontario (Toronto), Champlain Monument Committee fonds, F1152, MU 528, file "Champlain Monument Orillia, Correspondence 1924."
[112] Quoted in Dave Dawson, "Could city council weigh in on debate over future of Champlain monument?," *Orillia Matters*, 7 April 2018, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/could-city-council-weigh-in-on-debate-over-future-of-champlain-monument-886349, accessed 14 June 2022.

context."[113] Conversely, one Orillia letter-writer, arguing in defense of the SCMWG recommendations of a reconfiguration of the monument's figures, stated that it "represents a very selective depiction of historical events. It does not acknowledge the role of Indigenous society in enabling Champlain and his party to survive, travel and return home to France on several occasions."[114] Stevenson highlights this historical inaccuracy as the monument's principal failing, writing "the celebration, according to the monument's plaque inscription, of the 'advent into Ontario of the white race' and the desire to strengthen ties between English and French Canada trumped any possible intention to portray Champlain's complex interaction with Huronia's Indigenous population in an equitable and historically accurate manner."[115]

In its *Final Report,* the SCMWG shares these concerns. "Despite its grandeur and artistic merit," the document reads, "the Monument has faced scrutiny for its singular, colonial perspective."[116] It continues, "Undeniably a remarkable artistic achievement honouring the French explorer, the Monument falls short in its accurate depiction of the reciprocal relationship Champlain had with the Huron-Wendat people and the important role they played in his trade mission and survival."[117] This conclusion rightfully gestures towards the larger symbolic stakes of the monument, but quickly moves towards its recuperation by a narrowing the scope of its critique to the question of "accuracy." It converts a probing of ideological commitment to colonialism into a question of mistakes or errors in judgement, and as such assumes that the monument could thus be remediated and rehabilitated if only its mistakes in accuracy could be corrected. This rests on the belief that the telling of history is the monument's primary purpose, ignoring its larger representational politics and the ideological projects in which it has been embedded.

How can we account for this disjuncture? While the simple charge of bad faith may be applicable to an extent in some cases (I will return to this question in Chapter Two), I am more interested in interrogating the limits to *good faith* engagement with such a project of attempted

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[113] Bruce McRae, "LETTER: Local historian offers 'appropriate solution' for Champlain Monument," Orillia Matters, 11 August 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/letters-to-the-editor/letter-local-historian-offers-appropriate-solution-for-champlain-monument-8-photos-1626719, accessed 19 June 2022.
[114] Janet Houston, "LETTER: Monument reflected 'very selective depiction of historical events'," *Orillia Matters,* 4 August 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/letters-to-the-editor/letter-monument-reflected-very-selective-depiction-of-historical-events-1623404, accessed 19 June 2022.
[115] Stevenson, "'Free From All Possibility of Historical Error,'" 216.
[116] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 4.
[117] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 5.

"reconciliation," how a putative willingness to compromise can produce such a limiting scope of vision. Recent scholarship on settler colonialism suggests a more nuanced reasoning, embedded in settler subjectivities at an often-subconscious level. Mark Rifkin mobilizes Raymond Williams' concept of "structures of feeling," to describe how "the ordinary 'emotional knowledges' of non-Natives work to circulate, instantiate, and normalize settler sovereignty."[118] He draws on Williams' suggestion that cultural hegemony is best understood as an ongoing, iterative process rather than as a "formed whole," and seeks to expose how settler colonial hegemony comes to congeal through the everyday affective experiences of non-Natives in an ongoing way.[119] To this end he offers a formulation of "settler common sense," which "suggests the ways the legal and political structures that enable non-Native access to Indigenous territories come to be lived as given, as simply the unmarked, generic conditions of possibility for occupancy, association, history, and personhood." That is, settler colonial control over Indigenous lives and lands is enacted partly in an affective register, worked out particularly in arenas that do not appear to deal directly with questions of colonization.[120] The concept "seeks to address how the legalities, administrative structures, and concrete effects of settler governance get 'renewed' and 'recreated' in quotidian phenomena by non-Native, non-state actors."[121] Eva Mackey builds on the work of Rifkin and others to introduce "settled expectations" as a "powerful and polysemic metaphor for the taken-for-granted settler frameworks and practices of entitlement and expectation of ongoing privilege."[122] She studies the anxiety that is produced when the presence of Indigenous peoples and institutions act as reminders to settlers that questions of land and sovereignty are in fact far from resolved, and explores the lengths to which settlers will go to restore the sense of certainty on which they based their assumed sense of privilege.[123]

Many scholars have explored this affective dimension of settler colonialism, highlighting the fear and anxiety experienced by settlers when they are forced to confront the realities of

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[118] Mark Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense: Queerness and Everyday Colonialism in the American Renaissance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 12.
[119] Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense,* 9-10.
[120] Mark Rifkin, "Settler common sense," *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 4 (2013), 322-323.
[121] Rifkin, "Settler common sense," 326.
[122] Eva Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations: Uncertainty, Land and Settler Decolonization* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2016), 11.
[123] Mackey, *Unsettled Expectations*, 35-36.

ongoing dispossession and oppression of Indigenous peoples in Canadian society and culture. Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker write,

> Exposure to our own settler colonial complicity, and the overwhelming uncertainty of imagining life without our settler colonial benefits, provokes an unpleasant emotional reaction which can and frequently does manifest as fear – in this case, a fear of being exposed and further illegitimated, or a fear of having to confront a painful disjuncture between our self-image and the evidence of our actions.[124]

In their influential essay, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," Eve Tuck and K. Wayne argue that, acting from a place of anxiety and guilt about their implication in the ongoing project of colonization, settlers undertake a range of actions that function as "excuses, distractions, and diversions from decolonization," which they call "settler moves to innocence." These are "those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve settler feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all."[125] Building on this, Lowman and Barker describe settler "moves to comfort" as specifically "emotional shifts" that allow settlers to restore or maintain a sense of themselves as good and moral in the face of evidence of their implication in structures of colonialism.[126]

The concept of settler moves to innocence and comfort offers a useful frame to interpret many of the interventions in the debate that shift focus away from larger symbolic politics and towards the question of historical accuracy. In a guest column for *Midland Today*, journalist Colin McKim wrote, "This quest to call out oppression and seek equality is noble and I support it fully. Unfortunately, in their zeal, those fighting the good fight can sometimes miss the mark as they have in the case of Samuel de Champlain."[127] Orillia resident Jimi McKee argued against making any structural changes to the monument, to him "a great piece of art," which "doesn't depict Natives as subservient to Champlain. It shows extremely intelligent, healthy original

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[124] Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker, *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st century Canada* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2015), 94-95.
[125] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012), 9-10.
[126] Lowman and Barker, *Settler*, 99.
[127] Colin McKim, "COLUMN: Champlain does not belong among oppressors," *Midland Today,* 11 August 2020, https://www.midlandtoday.ca/local-news/column-champlain-does-not-belong-among-oppressors-2614443, accessed 19 June 2022.

people wanting to learn something new."[128] Gregory Cufaro, also of Orillia, similarly wrote, "The images of the Indigenous people in this monument to our Canadian history (a shared history) show the powerful outlines of courageous, powerful individuals, not weak and subservient victims of unfair oppression and degradation."[129] These are not merely denials of harm, but are impulses rooted in a desire to restore a sense of "settled expectations," a sense of fundamental goodness that feels threatened by the suggestion that a revered and beloved monument may symbolize ongoing violence and dispossession. The monument has for nearly a century occupied a very prominent position in the social imaginary of Orillia and is an object of deep emotional investments for many of the city's residents. Many letter-writers and survey respondents referred to this cultural legacy of the monument, insisting that to remove it would be to "rewrite history," and to cut away an integral part of Orillia's very identity. Viewing these responses as anxious reactions to threats to an ordered settler way of life brings the stakes of the monument debate into focus.

To characterize the primary problem with the Champlain Monument as one of historical inaccuracy is to mistake form for purpose, to obfuscate the forces of colonial triumphalism and white supremacy that stood behind the "original intent" of its creation. A measure of historical accuracy may have been a concern for both Vernon March and the members of the Executive Committee, but it was an adjunct to the primary goals of the monument. The *purpose* of the monument was not simply to portray a historically accurate representation of the first encounter between Champlain and the Huron, but rather, to use Gordon's phrasing, to create an *unhistorical* tribute to a particular set of values contemporaneous to its creation.[130] Its inherent white supremacy is inseparable from historical content. As one Orillia resident wrote plainly in 2019, "The Champlain Monument was conceived to celebrate the opening of Canada to European commerce, and as the original plaque recorded, was a recognition of the role of the

[128] Jimi McKee, "LETTER: Champlain Monument is a 'great piece of art'," *Orillia Matters,* 28 February 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/letters-to-the-editor/letter-champlain-monument-is-a-great-piece-of-art-1263647, accessed 19 June 2022.
[129] Gregory Cufaro, "Champlain monument part of Orillia's cultural heritage," *Simcoe.com,* 16 April 2018, https://www.simcoe.com/opinion-story/8392074-champlain-monument-part-of-orillia-s-cultural-heritage/, accessed 19 June 2022.
[130] Gordon, *Making Public Past*s, 6.

white race using religion and commerce to subjugate Indigenous civilization."[131] The SCMWG *Final Report* recommended the immediate reinstallation of the figure of Champlain, an "update" of the language on the plaque, and that the other figures to be subject to "further consultation with First Nations," in hopes that "future work, with the aim of re-imagining their presence in the immediate vicinity of the original Monument, will result in a meaningful and concrete example of Reconciliation."[132] These recommendations are governed by a minimalist and literalist understanding of the monument's meaning, and appear rooted in a fidelity to settler perspectives and feelings of discomfort in conflict with the stated goals of reconciliation, a subject to which I now turn in Chapter Two.

[131] Janet Houston, "LETTER: Monument reflected 'very selective depiction of historical events'," *Orillia Matters,* 4 August 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/letters-to-the-editor/letter-monument-reflected-very-selective-depiction-of-historical-events-1623404, accessed 19 June 2022.
[132] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 25.

CHAPTER TWO: CONSULTATION AND COMPROMISE

Orillia's Samuel de Champlain Monument Working Group (SCMWG) published its *Final Report & Recommendations* document in July 2019. Though it does not make reference to specific Calls to Action issued by the Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the document quotes the Commission's 10 general principles of reconciliation[133] and frames the group's operating principles with clear reference to the TRC's work:

> The final recommendations of the Working Group were not arrived at lightly; the information presented herein demonstrates the complexity of the issue and controversy surrounding the Monument. They were developed after careful consideration of the information available to us through the public consultation process, input from subject experts, research of the current debate over monuments in general, and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As mandated, the recommendations are meant to be respectful and representative of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives and seek to honour the past within the context of contemporary knowledge and wisdom.[134]

The SCMWG was comprised of seven voting members.[135] I spoke with Melanie Vincent, who sat on the Working Group as a representative of the Huron-Wendat First Nation at Wendake, the inhabitants of the region at the time of Champlain's arrival in the area in the early 17th century and key allies in the New France fur trade. "The features of the Indigenous peoples there in the statue are Huron-Wendat," she said, "So we are directly involved, and when it comes to our Nation we are the ones to speak for ourselves, right?"[136] She was joined by a representative from the Chippewas of Rama First Nation, whose reserve territory has faced Orillia across Lake Couchiching since its establishment in the 1830s.[137] Orillia city council was represented by Councilor Tim Lauer, and though not voting members, the city's Manager of Culture and Mayor Steve Clarke were also heavily involved in the Working Group

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[133] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report, Volume 6: Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 16.
[134] Samuel de Champlain Monument Working Group, *Final Report & Recommendations*, July 2019, 2. https://www.orillia.ca/en/visiting/resources/Samuel-de-Champlain-Monument-Working-Group---Final-Report-and-Recommendations.pdf. Accessed 14 April 2022.
[135] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 8.
[136] Melanie Vincent, in discussion with the author, 25 February 2022.
[137] "Community History," *Chippewas of Rama First Nation* website, no date, https://www.ramafirstnation.ca/community-history/, accessed 2 July 2022.

proceedings.[138] The group also included representatives from Parks Canada and the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, and two "Citizens at Large" from Orillia, who responded to a public call for submissions and were vetted by City of Orillia representatives.[139]

In addition to focused meetings between subject experts and the Working Group, a "robust" public consultation was a primary component of the SCMWG's activities, seeking to "encourage participation and fully understand the issues" involved in the controversy. [140] It aimed to be a "fulsome and inclusive" process, and included the creation of several tools to facilitate public education and engagement: the publication of a two-page discussion paper and a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document, the organization of three public workshops in Orillia and four discussion meetings held in neighbouring Rama First Nation, as well as a public questionnaire.[141] It was not made clear how exactly the consultation results would work their way back into the Working Group's final recommendations, though the group stated in its FAQ that "Results will be used to guide the deliberations of the Working Group."[142]

The Working Group process was thus driven by two primary motivations: on the one hand, an expressed commitment to the principles and the Calls to Action of the TRC; on the other, a desire to be seen as taking place within a legitimately democratic, consultative process of public decision-making. Orillia residents were encouraged in publicity material to "Have Your Say."[143] This was meant to be a platform for the community to come together with various other stakeholders to collectively reckon with the task of "reconciliation" with Indigenous peoples as it related to the Champlain monument. Laudable as they both may be in their own right, I argue that these twin motivations were in fact in conflict from the project's inception, and that the attempt to achieve a balance between the two allowed a meaningful fulfilment of neither. What was framed by the Working Group document as moving towards "a meaningful and concrete example of Reconciliation"[144] was in fact a deeply compromised solution to the problems posed

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[138] Dave Dawson, "Working group tasked to plot future of Champlain Monument," *Orillia Matters,* 13 August 2018, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/working-group-tasked-to-plot-future-of-champlain-monument-1013295, accessed 2 July 2022
[139] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 8.
[140] SCMWG, *Final Report*, 2.
[141] SCMWG, *Final Report*, 8.
[142] "Champlain Monument Working Group – Appendix 4: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)" *City of Orillia* website, no date, https://www.orillia.ca/en/living-here/champlain-monument-working-group.aspx#How-will-the-information-from-the-consultations-be-used, accessed 22 June 2022.
[143] SCMWG, *Final Report*, 10.
[144] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 25.

by the monument, an outcome determined by this core conflict at the centre of the SCMWG's mission.

As of the time of publication of the *Final Report,* the only concrete recommendation offered by the Working Group was the immediate re-installation of the Champlain statue in Couchiching Beach park, with more changes to come to the plaque and the configuration of the figures, pending further consultation with First Nations. Why issue a final report with such crucial work yet to be completed? The removal of the statue had caused outrage in the community, and several letters to the editor indicated increasing frustration with the process itself. As *Orillia Matters* columnist Colin McKim observed, "the loss of this remarkable work of art is felt as strongly as if a vital part of the community had been severed and removed."[145] Clearly, the SCMWG was subject to significant public pressure to return the monument to the park: as Miranda Minassian noted, "That city want[ed] that statue back up. Overwhelmingly."[146] It appears that this pressure played a major role in determining how the work of the SCMWG was carried out to that point.

In July of 2020, however, Parks Canada announced that they would delay the return of the statue to the park, "to allow for additional progress on the implementation of the [SCMWG] recommendations."[147] Then, in August of 2021, both the Chippewas of Rama First Nation and the Huron-Wendat First Nation chose to withdraw from the SCMWG process altogether, citing the recent uncovering of hundreds of unmarked graves on former residential school sites as having dramatically changed the context of the debate surrounding the monument and rendering further participation inappropriate.[148] According to Melanie Vincent, this necessarily renders the findings and recommendations of the *Final Report* invalid.[149] At the time of writing no further plans have been elaborated by Parks Canada or the SCMWG.

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[145] Colin McKim, "COLUMN: Champlain does not belong among oppressors," *Orillia Matters,* 5 August 2020, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/column-champlain-does-not-belong-among-oppressors-2613111, accessed 2 July 2022.
[146] Miranda Minassian, in discussion with the author, 1 February 2022.
[147] Nathan Taylor, "Decision to delay return of Champlain Monument gets mixed reviews," *Orillia Matters,* 24 July 2020, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/decision-to-delay-return-of-champlain-monument-gets-mixed-reviews-2587355, accessed 2 July 2022.
[148] Nathan Taylor, "Return of Champlain Monument in Orillia 'deferred'," *Orillia Matters,* 25 August 2021, https://www.orilliamatters.com/midland-news/return-of-champlain-monument-in-orillia-deferred-4253455, accessed 2 July 2022.
[149] Melanie Vincent, in discussion with the author, 25 February 2022.

In what follows I look in further detail at the history of the conflict over the Champlain monument and the SCMWG process. I ask how local political considerations shaped the structure of the process itself and displaced the reconciliation project from the centre of its functioning. I briefly examine some other examples of similar processes that have taken place in other Canadian communities and ask how the Orillia process could have been handled differently. I ultimately conclude that a dearth of effective and principled leadership from the City of Orillia or Parks Canada led to a compromise that lands far from a genuine enactment of values of "reconciliation," and the ultimate failure of the SCMWG project to fulfil its goals.

Orillia residents and members of local Indigenous groups had been voicing concerns about the Champlain monument for over 20 years before Parks Canada launched the SCMWG process. In late 1996 several individuals, including residents of Orillia and Rama First Nation, had formed a "Unity Advisory Committee," which sought to have a new plaque added to the tableau which would attempt to remedy its denigrating portrayal of Indigenous peoples.[150] The group wrote to their Member of Parliament Paul Devillers with this request, affirming in their letter that "A true spirit of Canada recognizes and respects all cultures of our mosaic."[151] Correspondence between Devillers and Sheila Copps, then federal Minister of Canadian Heritage, demonstrates that the issue had been brought to the attention of relevant political authorities, and indeed Copps assured that a meeting would be set up to discuss the new plaque.[152] This meeting apparently never took place, however, and the efforts of the Unity Advisory Committee seem to have come to naught.[153]

Debate was reignited in the Summer and Fall of 2001, apparently in response to a letter to the editor sent by a visitor to Orillia, suggesting the monument belonged in a museum rather than a public square.[154] In August the *Orillia Packet & Times* ran an editorial that stated, "The

[150] "Minutes, Meeting of the Plaque Committee," 21 November 1996, Orillia Public Library (Orillia), Orilliana collection, file "Champlain Monument (2)."
[151] Cody to Devillers, 2 December 1996, Orillia Public Library (Orillia), Orilliana collection, file "Champlain Monument (2)."
[152] Copps to Devillers, 24 March 1997, Orillia Public Library (Orillia), Orilliana collection, file "Champlain Monument (2)."
[153] Michael D. Stevenson, "'Free from all possibility of historical error': Orillia's Champlain Monument, French-English Relations, and Indigenous (Mis)Representations in Commemorative Sculpture," *Ontario History* 109, no. 2 (Fall 2017), 234.
[154] Colin McKim, "Monument may be brought up to date," *Orillia Packet & Times,* 8 September 2001, Orillia Public Library (Orillia), Orilliana collection, folder "Champlain Monument (2)."

Champlain Monument in Couchiching Beach Park is a racist work. There can be no debate there." Advocating for the addition of new interpretive material rather than a tearing down of the monument, it added, "The solution is simple in the extreme, and the shame of it all lies in this community's disinterest in taking steps to solve the problem."[155] Parks Canada officials again promised to address the issue, but again apparently no action was taken.[156]

After Parks Canada removed the statue from the park for refurbishing in 2017, the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) also took a proactive stance to make changes to the monument. The ETFO, referencing support for the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, pledged to contribute $25,000 towards the construction of an art installation in the park that would "address the bias and insensitivity of the current Monument."[157] Melanie Vincent remembers her first involvement in the process surrounding the monument beginning when teachers from Orillia approached the Huron-Wendat government seeking their opinion and collaboration on the matter, "very ashamed of the fact that this statue would be put back in place."[158] An ETFO representative would later sit as a member of the SCMWG.

In the Spring of 2018 letters were sent to Orillia City Council and Parks Canada by Konrad Sioui, Grand Chief of the Huron-Wendat Nation at Wendake, calling the Champlain monument a "travesty" and imploring both parties to seek a collaborative way forward following its removal for refurbishing, to "seize the opportunity to make things right."[159] At the same time, the "statue wars" debates were gaining momentum in Canada over figures such as John A. Macdonald and Edward Cornwallis, and in the United States over military and political representatives of the Confederacy. While some argued that the case of Champlain was not comparable to these other figures because of his more respectful relationship with Indigenous peoples, in the wake of the Idle No More movement public discourse in Canada has increasingly made space for critiques of colonialism writ large. To many, these ongoing arguments about

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[155] "Editorial: Champlain monument needs some explaining," *Orillia Packet & Times,* 31 August 2001, A6, Orillia Public Library (Orillia), Orilliana collection, folder "Champlain Monument (2)."
[156] Mike Tenszen, "Agency admits monumental gaffe," *Orillia Packet & Times,* 14 September 2001, A3, Orillia Public Library (Orillia), Orilliana collection, folder "Champlain Monument (2)."
[157] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 7.
[158] Vincent, 25 February 2022.
[159] Quoted in Dave Dawson, "Could city council weigh in on debate over future of Champlain Monument?", *Orillia Matters,* 7 April 2018, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/could-city-council-weigh-in-on-debate-over-future-of-champlain-monument-886349, accessed 14 June 2022

history and commemoration were clearly connected to matters concerning the monument in Orillia. It was in this context, during the summer of 2018, that Parks Canada and the City of Orillia initiated the SCMWG process, to respond to the growing controversy.[160]

Both Minassian and Vincent spoke in terms that suggested a qualified optimism at the outset about the potential for the process in the community. "We are in the era of 'reconciliation' that everyone is talking about and then there is a lot of statues that are really questioned across the country in different cities as well," said Vincent. "Orillia is not one, there's more than one situation like that, so that was one of them. But because of the fact that we have an *opportunity*, because the statue was removed, to be restored, and we said 'Well, they're putting a lot of money into restoring a statue like that? Like, why don't you put money into making things better with the relationship with the Indigenous Peoples, right? And make things right.'"[161] Before the end of the process, however, both had significantly lowered their expectations. Minassian said she had hoped contemporary events would have meant a public response more sympathetic to the need for change, but the reaction from the community skewed sharply otherwise: "[I thought] now is the time, people are ready. *People are ready*. And people are *not* ready."[162]

Over the course of its 2-months-long consultation process, the SCMWG received 1080 responses to the questionnaire, the majority of which came from residents of Orillia;[163] apparently this was the highest number of responses to any survey attempted by the city.[164] According to data tabulated in the *Final Report*, 42% of respondents said they had read the discussion paper and FAQ, with an additional 20% reporting to have read only the discussion paper. Fewer than 7% had attended a workshop.[165] The *Final Report* did not contain further data on workshop attendance, though one newspaper report indicated that about 100 people had participated.[166] Facilitators reporting back from the workshops did note in the *Final Report,* however, that "A

[160] Dave Dawson, "Working group tasked."
[161] Vincent, 25 February 2022.
[162] Minassian, 1 February 2022.
[163] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 13.
[164] Dave Dawson, "City is calling for the return of Champlain Monument to the park," *Orillia Matters,* 21 June 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/city-is-calling-for-the-return-of-champlain-monument-to-the-park-1518099, accessed June 30, 2022.
[165] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 15.
[166] Dave Dawson, "Orillia council in favour of returning Champlain Monument" *Barrie Today,* 25 June 2019, https://www.barrietoday.com/local-news/orillia-council-in-favour-of-returning-champlain-monument-creating-accompanying-narrative-1538886, accessed 2 July 2022.

strong lack of education regarding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was present." They also noted the absence of "certain demographics that could add differing perspectives such as residential school survivors and youth."[167] This illustrates one of the ethical hazards of such a populist approach: anyone can participate, whether or not they have engaged with educational materials on offer or in meaningful consideration of the issues involved. A public consultation may create space for the airing of opinions – and these were in no short supply in Orillia – but this does not necessarily ensure a robust, good faith public conversation will ensue.

Seventy percent of questionnaire respondents indicated that they wished to see the monument re-installed "as is, with the addition of educational and interpretive pieces adjacent to the monument."[168] The return of the monument *without* any new additional material was not given as an option in the questionnaire. One wonders what results may have looked like had the option to make no changes been presented, particularly considering the responses to Question 4, which asked what should be done with the wording of the in-set plaque. 43% of respondents said they wanted it returned "as is," with the remaining 57% electing to "update the wording."[169] In any case these results show a marked hesitancy to change the configuration of the monument on the part of a significant proportion of Orillia's citizenry. The fact that only a relatively slim majority would choose to change the wording of a plaque honouring "the white race," points again towards a defensiveness among the settler population at the prospect of changes to the landscape that would challenge their assumed cultural dominance. As Timothy J. Stanley writes, "The depth of emotion that surrounds what, at the end of the day, are tiny interventions in much larger cultural landscapes…demonstrates the strength of the grip of settler colonialism's construction of collective remembering, which is almost entirely silent on the ongoing effects of colonialism."[170] Minassian put it more bluntly: "You're saying that white feelings matter more than brown feelings."[171]

The *Final Report* stated that it represented a consensus among all seven of its members.[172] It seems clear, however, that there was significant difference of opinion vis-à-vis

[167] SCMWG, *Final Report*, 19.
[168] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 16.
[169] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 18.
[170] Timothy J. Stanley, "Commemorating John A. Macdonald: Collective Remembering and the Structure of Settler Colonialism in British Columbia," *BC Studies,* no. 204 (Winter 2019/2020), 97.
[171] Minassian, 1 February 2022.
[172] SCMWG, *Final Report,* 23.

the monument between members of the SCMWG. On June 24, 2019, weeks before the release of the official report, Councillor Tim Lauer and Mayor Steve Clarke, both participants in the Working Group, gave a presentation to Orillia city council on the results of the public consultation. Following the presentation, the council voted with near unanimity to ask Parks Canada to return the monument to the park in *its original form*, with the possibility of adding new interpretive material. "I want to make absolutely clear, Mayor Clarke and I are not bringing forward the consensus opinion of the committee," Lauer said. "We are bringing forward our interpretation of the consultation period and this motion is meant to represent what we believe is the majority sentiment in the community." Councillor Mason Ainsworth said he had heard "very loud and clear" from constituents that this was the path they preferred.[173] In a release issued June 27, 2019, Rama First Nation Council noted "direct and indirect hostility…aimed at First Nation Peoples" during the consultation process, and stated in response to the city council motion, "The creation of a new plaque, the development of education programming, curriculum development and additional art installations are *minimum* elements of a responsible reconfiguration and are in keeping with Canada's national reconciliation project."[174] Sharp criticism of the Orillia city council decision also came swiftly from Chief Konrad Sioui of the Huron-Wendat, who said the motion undermined the work of the SCMWG and called it "contrary to the principles of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples that are being promoted across the country."[175]

Through her participation in the SCMWG process, Melanie Vincent found that Clarke and Lauer had approached the project with a "very paternalistic" attitude, and with clear sympathies towards the opinions of Orillia's population at large. They treated the controversy as an electoral issue, she said, siding with what they perceived as popular opinion on what should become of the monument. In effect, "They were there to protect the statue," she observed.[176] Indeed, shortly after the publication of the *Final Report,* Clarke stated that its recommendations "do not reflect what we heard loudly and clearly from the community," intimating a failing on the part of the Working Group. He emphasized that though he "respects 'the democratic process'

[173] Dave Dawson, "Orillia council in favour."
[174] "Rama Council 'committed to reconfiguration' of Champlain Monument," *Orillia Matters,* 17 July 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/rama-council-committed-to-reconfiguration-of-champlain-monument-1590392, accessed 2 July 2022, my emphasis.
[175] Dave Dawson, "Huron Wendat 'deeply disapproves' of city resolution to bring back Champlain Monument," *Orillia Matters,* 18 July 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/huron-wendat-deeply-disapproves-of-city-resolution-to-bring-back-champlain-monument-1591105, accessed 2 July 2022.
[176] Vincent, 25 February 2022.

[of the SCMWG] and doesn't 'want to detract from that'," an "overwhelming majority" of the Orillia community wanted to have the complete monument returned, in its original form, with additional interpretive material added to the tableau.[177]

Vincent said that despite conflict the Working Group nonetheless did put forward scenarios that felt satisfactory at the time, including the potential reconfiguration of the figures of the monument, which formed the basis of the recommendations. When the *Final Report* was published, it appeared to participants that a reasonable compromise had been reached.[178] However, the publication of the *Final Report* did not put an end to the controversy in the community. *Orillia Matters* described the city as "divided over the decision."[179] Orillia resident Jack Gourlie wrote in a letter to the editor that "The citizens of Orillia are somewhat disappointed with the working group's process and one-sided viewpoint."[180] Douglas Brown wrote that the recommendations were "offensive to a majority of Orillians," and that they would "mutilate [the monument] in the spirit of political correctness and appeasement."[181] Meanwhile, protests against the monument's return were held on Canada Day in 2019; "It can't go up again," insisted Emerson Nanigishkang of Rama First Nation.[182] In June 2020 the base of the monument was vandalized with red paint,[183] and another protest was held on Canada Day 2020.[184] Simcoe North MP Bruce Stanton publicly raised concerns about the timeline for the monument's return

[177] Dave Dawson, "Champlain returning to a city divided over the decision," *Orillia Matters,* 26 July 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/champlain-returning-to-a-city-divided-over-the-decision-1608445, accessed 30 June 2022.
[178] Vincent, 25 February 2022.
[179] Dave Dawson, "Champlain returning.".
[180] Jack Gourlie, "LETTER: Orillian challenges federal minister to weigh in on Champlain Monument," *Orillia Matters,* 6 August 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/letters-to-the-editor/letter-orillian-challenges-federal-minister-to-weigh-in-on-champlain-monument-1624408, accessed 2 July 2022.
[181] Douglas Brown, "LETTER: 'Defacing' Champlain won't achieve reconciliation, citizen says," *Orillia Matters,* 29 July 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/letters-to-the-editor/letter-defacing-champlain-wont-achieve-reconciliation-citizen-says-1611235, accessed 2 July 2022.
[182] Quoted in Dave Dawson, "'Racist' monument 'can't go up again,' protester says," *Orillia Matters,* 1 July 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/racist-monument-cant-go-up-again-protester-says-6-photos-1549600, accessed 2 July 2022.
[183] Nathan Taylor, "Base of Champlain monument vandalized," *Orillia Matters,* 26 June 2020, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/base-of-champlain-monument-vandalized-2521757, accessed 2 July 2022.
[184] Nathan Taylor, "'It's time to join them in this fight,' says protest organizer," *Orillia Matters,* 1 July 2020, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/its-time-to-join-them-in-this-fight-says-protest-organizer-10-photos-2533900, accessed 2 July 2022.

after attending the 2020 protest.[185] Apparently swayed by these concerns, Parks Canada announced shortly thereafter that it would defer the implementation of the SCMWG recommendations until it had carried out further consultation with First Nations groups, with no specific timeline specified.[186]

Finally, in August 2021 it was announced that the representatives from the Huron-Wendat and Rama First Nations would be withdrawing from the SCMWG process altogether, and that Parks Canada would defer the Working Group's recommendations indefinitely.[187] Vincent says the Huron-Wendat representatives were first informed of Rama's decision to withdraw, and they swiftly decided to follow suit. She said the discovery of unmarked graves on former residential school sites during the preceding months was "a trigger" for the Huron-Wendat to leave a process that already felt soured. "It's just another layer of issues that are adding up to a lot of issues that were already piled up in terms of Indigenous peoples and the treatment, the unfair treatment, that the colonizers have put on us, and this is another reminiscent of that…It was little too much."[188] In January 2022, Rama First Nation Chief Ted Williams wrote in a letter to Clarke that the monument was "a point of pain" for the community. "We hope," he wrote, "that rather than continue to ask us to support ongoing narratives that uphold colonial history and celebrate individuals such as Champlain…you will join us in ways of reconciling through education and commit to acts that are founded in anti-racism."[189] When announcing the deferral, Parks Canada said in a statement that it "look[s] forward to continuing these relationships based on recognizing rights, respect, collaboration, and partnership."[190] This acknowledges that the issue is far from resolved, but as of the time of writing no plans to follow up on Chief Williams' invitation have been made public.

The TRC states in its executive summary that, "Together, Canadians must do more than just *talk* about reconciliation; we must learn how to *practice* reconciliation in our everyday lives…To do so, Canadians must remain committed to the ongoing work of establishing and

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[185] Nathan Taylor, "Stanton questions timing of Champlain Monument's return," *Orillia Matters,* 21 July 2020, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/stanton-questions-timing-of-champlain-monuments-return-2578571, accessed 2 July 2022.
[186] Taylor, "Decision to delay."
[187] Taylor, "Return of Champlain Monument in Orillia 'deferred'."
[188] Vincent, 25 February 2022.
[189] Quoted in Frank Matys, "Champlain Monument a 'point of pain' for Chippewas of Rama: chief," *Simcoe.com,* 10 January 2022, https://www.simcoe.com/news-story/10548417-champlain-monument-a-point-of-pain-for-chippewas-of-rama-chief/, accessed 2 July 2022.
[190] Quoted in Taylor, "Return of Champlain Monument in Orillia 'deferred'."

maintaining respectful relationships."[191] That is, meaningful reconciliation will be a continuous process that requires renewal and reaffirmation, and the participation of individuals as well as institutions. Indeed, Christine Sypnowich insists that what is needed are not "once-and-for-all decision, but 'talking circles' that seek wisdom from disadvantaged communities, their knowledge keepers and elders, moments of ongoing conversations about monuments, commemoration, and re-commemoration."[192] Had the Huron-Wendat and Rama First Nations not withdrawn from the process, perhaps further consultation could have yielded more a definitive and satisfactory result. It appears, however, that the SCMWG process and the surrounding discourse in the community has led to a fraying of relations between the City of Orillia and the Huron-Wendat and Rama First Nations, rather than the construction of collective trust and closer connection. It seems clear that genuine resolution of the Champlain monument issue will only be achieved through work towards the repair of these relationships, but how that will be carried out remains to be seen.

What could have made a more successful process possible? Events that led to the removal of a statue of John A. Macdonald from outside of City Hall in Victoria, BC, offer an interesting contrast to what transpired in Orillia. The city established a "Witness Reconciliation Program" in 2017, which included the founding of a "City Family," a group of representatives of the city and the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations whose aim would be to facilitate action on the TRC Calls to Action.[193] The group cites 5 specific TRC Calls to Action that implicate municipal-level governments, and seeks to find collaborative approaches to their implementation.[194] It was this process that led to the recommendation to remove the Macdonald statue, which was accepted by city council in the summer of 2018.[195] Rather than the trajectory of cities like Orillia, where the question of a specific problematic statue or monument led to the creation of an advisory

[191] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Final Report, Volume 1: Summary, Honouring the Truth, Reconciling the Future* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company Publishers, 2015), 21.
[192] Christine Sypnowich, "Monuments and monsters: Education, cultural heritage and sites of conscience," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* no. 55 (2021), 479.
[193] "Witness Reconciliation Program," *City of Victoria* website, no date, https://www.victoria.ca/EN/main/city/witness-reconciliation-program/witness-reconciliation-program.html, accessed 1 July 2022.
[194] "Five TRC Calls to Action for Municipal Government," *City of Victoria* website, no date, https://www.victoria.ca/EN/main/city/witness-reconciliation-program/five-trc-calls-to-action-for-municipal-government.html, accessed 1 July 2022.
[195] Stanley, "Commemorating John A. Macdonald," 91.

committee to address the issue, in this case the advisory committee was struck in order to attend to TRC principles in a holistic way, which led it in turn to address the issue of the statue. Stanley notes that the decision to remove the statue drew immediate backlash from Victoria citizens who felt the decision was wrong and the process unjust.[196] "For Indigenous people, Macdonald's statue was a barrier to their entering city hall;" he writes, "hence, steps towards reconciliation required its removal. Even though the members of city council overwhelmingly recognized the need for this, public reaction indicates that most Victorians did not."[197] Nonetheless the decision taken by council stood: TRC principles were given priority over popular consultation and the statue was removed.

Another more local example is the remodelling of the Champlain-Wendat Park in Penetanguishene, Ontario, which opened in 2016.[198] In his letter to Orillia city council in 2018, Huron-Wendat Grand Chief Konrad Sioui made reference to the park project as a positive example of collaboration between settlers and Indigenous peoples towards reconciliation in commemorative practice and urged Orillia to pursue a comparable path.[199] In our conversation Vincent also cited Penetanguishene as a case where the reconciliation process felt like a success. She said the city reached out to the Huron-Wendat First Nation, "respectfully," to ask for their opinions on how to create a monument that depicted an encounter between Champlain and the Huron-Wendat that would show a more equal relationship. She explained,

> So we did that, and today now the park has been launched and it's open, it's public, so there's a huge statue of Champlain and a Huron-Wendat chief…[and] in the park there's the four clans of our Nation, there are different plaques, provincial plaques, y'know, explaining the history and all of that. So, we have a good, we have a *great* example of what could be done. Properly…It's a great, great, great example of collaboration, of respect, of reconciliation, right? But then, Orillia… No.[200]

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[196] Stanley, "Commemorating John A. Macdonald," 92-94.
[197] Stanley, "Commemorating John A. Macdonald," 106.
[198] Travis Mealing, "Historic statues unveiled along Legacy Walkway in Penetanguishene," *Simcoe.com,* 10 June 2016, https://www.simcoe.com/news-story/6717723-historic-statues-unveiled-along-legacy-walkway-in-penetanguishene/, accessed 2 July 2022.
[199] Quoted in Dave Dawson, "Could city council weigh in on debate over future of Champlain Monument?", *Orillia Matters,* 7 April 2018, https://www.orilliamatters.com/local-news/could-city-council-weigh-in-on-debate-over-future-of-champlain-monument-886349, accessed 14 June 2022.
[200] Vincent, 25 February 2022.

In both of these counterexamples, the voices of Indigenous peoples were centred in the discussion of commemorative practice and recognized as holding important epistemic privilege vis-à-vis questions of reconciliation. These values may have been present in the case of Orillia's SCMWG process as well, but they were forced to vie for primacy with the repeatedly expressed intention to attend to "both Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives" in the group's deliberations. With this orientation, a compromise solution was always the best-case scenario. Put simply, the orientation towards popular will displaced the centrality of the goals of truth-seeking and racial justice.

In many ways this was a question of leadership. The Champlain monument and the land on which it stood is the property of Parks Canada, and though it was repeatedly mentioned throughout the process that the final decision on what to do with it would ultimately rest with Parks, the agency opted to enact the SCMWG process rather than take decisive action of its own accord.[201] The Working Group was not given decision-making power, however, acting rather in an advisory capacity. The City of Orillia likewise had no formal power over the fate of the monument – clearly a point of frustration for many citizens as they considered it part of their local heritage.[202] Vincent said that Parks treated the Huron-Wendat with respect and that she understands their position, but that the agency was caught "between a rock and a hard place," having to answer to both the implicated First Nations and the citizens of Orillia. "Parks Canada just never wanted to decide," she said. "They couldn't just say, 'Hey, we're respecting this'."[203]

Minassian thinks the entire SCMWG process was just "another way to draw this out," to avoid having to make a definitive decision that may prove unpopular. She called it an "abdication of responsibility" on the part of Orillia's city government. She insists the city should have taken the initiative to have the statue removed from the start of the process, that though the final decision is in the hands of Parks Canada, if the city had made such a position clear Parks certainly would have followed suit. "One of the levels of government of the white institution should have said 'This is not right, and we're not putting it back'," she told me.[204]

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[201] Dawson, "Working group tasked."
[202] For example see Bruce McCrae, "LETTER: 'Custody and maintenance' vs. 'ownership and preservation'," *Orillia Matters*, 5 October 2019, https://www.orilliamatters.com/letters-to-the-editor/letter-custody-and-maintenance-vs-ownership-and-preservation-1730312, accessed 2 July 2022.
[203] Vincent, 25 February 2022.
[204] Minassian, 1 February 2022.

Commitment to democratic political mechanisms may not always be easily compatible with the imperative to make difficult and complicated cultural change. "Letting the people decide" may putatively honour the former, but basic majority rule is a far cry from genuine and holistic democratic inclusion. As the Victoria case demonstrates, enacting change based on ethics of anti-racism and decolonization is long-term work, and requires commitment to these principles at the potential expense of contradicting majority opinion and risking unpopularity. It also suggests that proactive and holistic commitment to the "reconciliation" project transcends any specific practice of representation or commemoration, and that courageous, principled leadership is required to guide such action. Vincent said, "I believe that things could be influenced by who is involved…If you have a mayor or a person, or someone… a *leader*, a leader in the community that is really for reconciliation, it'll change everything."[205]

Writing of efforts to recontextualize extant monuments to problematic figures, Joanna Burch-Brown cautions, "Many forms of recontextualization that are politically viable will gain easy public agreement precisely because they do not really change the significance of the objects in question."[206] As I argued in Chapter One, the SCMWG's recommendation to return the Champlain statue and reconfigure the rest of the monument's figures falls short of genuinely remedying the colonial and white supremacist narrative embedded in its forms. At the same time, this solution was far from satisfactory for a large number of Orillia residents, and indeed its city council, who wished to see the monument returned in its original form: even the proposed compromise was not enough to gain conclusive public agreement. This begs the question of what the next steps might be for the larger project of "reconciliation" in the charged context of the City of Orillia, and how it might be worked towards in a way that implicates the public in a meaningful way.

David B. Macdonald points to important differences between limited "liberal" and expansive "transformative" conceptions of what reconciliation might be taken to mean.[207] He

[205] Vincent, 25 February 2022.
[206] Joanna Burch-Brown, "Should Slavery's Statues Be Preserved? On Transitional Justice and Contested Heritage," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* (2020), DOI: 10.1111/japp.12485, 10-11.
[207] David B. Macdonald, "Paved with Comfortable Intentions: Moving beyond Liberal Multiculturalism and Civil Rights Frames on the Road to Transformative Reconciliation," in *Pathways of Reconciliation: Indigenous and Settler Approaches to Implementing the TRC's Calls to Action*, edited by Aimée Craft and Paulette Regan, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press (2020), 3-30.

observes that most Canadian settlers are still in the early stages of coming to a full consciousness of the scope of change necessary to enact transformative reconciliation, and don't have a strong sense of their own culpability in or responsibility for the reconciliation process. "While they are acquiescent to the need for the government to work towards reducing inequality, and even settling land claims," he writes, most Canadian settlers "are not self-reflective in terms of their own responsibilities and positionalities."[208] The apparent unwillingness of a large number of Orillia residents to countenance the removal of the Champlain monument from Orillia's Couchiching Beach Park does not bode well for a larger conception of a reconciliation agenda. As Miranda Minassian laments, "We're not talking about finding these murdered [Indigenous] women. We're not talking about reparations for unceded land. We're not talking about the contracts that you are breaking *right now*. We're not talking about any of that. We're not talking about First Nations' drinking water. We're not talking about any of the things that actually impact First Nations people in this country. We *can't even* get people to take down a racist statue."[209]

At the time of writing the Champlain monument remains in storage, with no publicly articulated plans in place to move the issue forward from its current standstill. This is the result of a process that, while operating from a place of good faith, was hampered from the start by its framing as a popular consultation and the attendant perceived need to honour the opinions of a settler-majority public far from ready to accept substantive change. To meaningfully enact changes consistent with the TRC Calls to Action would have required decisive leadership willing to take bold action, and it appears that in the case of Orillia there was no such leadership to be found.

[208] Macdonald, "Paved with Comfortable Intentions," 29.
[209] Minassian, 1 February 2022.

CONCLUSION

The debate over Orillia's Champlain monument has not taken place in a vacuum. Across the Western world in recent years, individuals, governments, and civil society institutions have been called upon to address their connections to pasts fundamentally shaped by colonialism, slavery, and white supremacy, and how those connections are maintained via commemorative practices. Crucial to this process has been a revaluation and reconceptualization of what precisely is being represented by particular statues and memorials, but the implications of the debate far exceed the strictly symbolic. Meaningful and material reparation for past injustice also requires fundamental shifts in public culture, the arena in which meaning is created and oppressive hegemonies are maintained.

In many regions of the United States, calls for the removal of monuments to figures representing the Confederacy have made international headlines, and become flashpoints for clashes between racial justice movements and right wing and white nationalist militants. Its most spectacular and disturbing iteration was 2017's "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, which sought to prevent the removal from a city park of a statue of Confederate general Robert E. Lee.[210] After years of court battles, the Charlottesville statue was finally removed in 2021, with plans in place for the bronze to be melted down and remade into a piece of public art by a local African-American Heritage Center.[211] Another monument to Lee, this one in Richmond, was taken from its public pedestal and moved to the city's Black History Museum along with eight other Confederate monuments."[212]

The monument to Edward Colston in Bristol, United Kingdom, has also drawn the ire of Black Lives Matter protestors, who tore down the statue of the 17th century slave trader and threw it into the city's harbour during a protest in 2020.[213] Once retrieved from the water, the

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[210] Jacey Fortin, "The Statue at the Center of Charlottesville's Storm," *The New York Times,* 13 August 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/13/us/charlottesville-rally-protest-statue.html, accessed 1 June 2022; see also Louis P. Nelson, "Object Lesson: Monument and Memory in Charlottesville," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Form* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2018), 17-35.

[211] Eduardo Medina, "Charlottesville's Statue of Robert E. Lee Will Be Melted Down," *The New York Times,* 7 December 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/07/us/robert-e-lee-statue-melt-charlottesville.html, accessed 1 June 2022.

[212] Deepa Shivaram, "Richmond's Robert E. Lee statue will move to the city's Black History Museum," *NPR News*, 30 December 2021, https://www.npr.org/2021/12/30/1069081021/richmonds-robert-e-lee-statue-will-move-to-the-citys-black-history-museum, accessed 1 June 2022.

[213] Haroon Siddique and Clea Skopeliti, "BLM protestors topple statue of Bristol slave trader Edward Colston," *The Guardian,* 7 June 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/07/blm-protesters-topple-statue-of-bristol-slave-trader-edward-colston, accessed 1 June 2022.

toppled statue was exhibited in a Bristol art gallery, on display horizontally and still covered in graffiti, alongside information about Colston's role in the slave trade and the actions of Black Lives Matter protestors. A commission struck by the city has since concluded that the statue should be likewise displayed permanently in a city museum, a document of both the statue and movement in opposition to it.[214]

To many in Canada, monuments to figures such as John A. Macdonald have come to represent colonialism writ large, and the Canadian settler state's oppression of Indigenous peoples in general. Statues of Macdonald have been targeted by racial justice and anticolonial activists across the country, as his pivotal role in the creation of the residential schools for Indigenous children has become widely discussed in Canadian media. As discussed in Chapter Two, in 2018 Victoria, BC city council voted to remove a statue of MacDonald from in front of city hall.[215] During 2021, similar conclusions were reached by city councils in Kingston, ON and Charlottetown, PEI.[216] Meanwhile, in Montreal and Hamilton, Macdonald statues were toppled by protestors frustrated by their cities' inaction on the issue; in both cities the ultimate fate of the statues has yet to be decided.[217] Following years of opposition to his commemoration given his violent policies towards Indigenous peoples, in 2018 Halifax, Nova Scotia city council voted to remove a statue of city founder Edward Cornwallis from a municipal park;[218] for historian John Reid, it was "unmistakeable that the Cornwallis statue was an assertion and a resounding

[214] Steven Morris, "Damaged Colston statue should be displayed in museum, commission finds," *The Guardian,* 3 February 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/03/damaged-colston-statue-should-be-displayed-in-museum-commission-finds, accessed 1 June 2022.
[215] "John A. Macdonald statue removed from Victoria City Hall," *CBC News,* 11 August 2018, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/john-a-macdonald-statue-victoria-city-hall-lisa-helps-1.4782065, accessed 9 July 2022.
[216] "Sir John A. Macdonald statue moved from Kingston, Ont., park," *CBC News,* 18 Jun 2021, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/sir-john-a-macdonald-kingston-park-1.6070709, accessed 1 June 2022; Kevin Yarr, "Sir John A. Macdonald statue quickly removed after Charlottetown council decision," *CBC News,* 1 June 2021, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/prince-edward-island/pei-sir-john-a-macdonald-statue-removed-1.6048245, accessed 1 June 2022.
[217] "Activists topple statue of Sir John A. Macdonald in downtown Montreal," *CBC News,* 29 August 2020, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/defund-police-protest-black-lives-matter-1.5705101, accessed 1 June 2022; Bryann Aguilar, "Sir John A. Macdonald statue toppled during rally in Hamilton," *CTV News,* 14 August 2021, https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/sir-john-a-macdonald-statue-toppled-during-rally-in-hamilton-1.5547380, accessed 1 June 2022.
[218] Cassie Williams and Anjuli Patil, "Controversial Cornwallis statue removed from Halifax park," *CBC News,* 31 January 2018, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/cornwallis-statue-removal-1.4511858, accessed 1 June 2022.

expression of imperial triumph."[219] In Toronto, after a statue of Egerton Ryerson – one of the architects of the residential school system – was torn down by protestors outside of the university bearing his name, the university administration decided not to replace it, in fact deciding to rename their institution as a gesture of reconciliation.[220]

These are but a handful of examples among many more, and it is in this context that the shortcomings of the Samuel de Champlain Monument Working Group (SCMWG) process in Orillia come into sharper relief. The struggle over the monument's future is not yet concluded, and the city's next steps through the "reconciliation" project not clearly charted. Parks Canada's decision to remove the statue for refurbishing presented an opportunity to play a part in the international movement to reckon with the symbolic legacies of settler colonialism, and in this thesis I have aimed to demonstrate that, though the monument is currently not standing, to date this opportunity has largely been missed.

In Chapter One I explored how the Champlain monument carries deeply embedded sympathies to white supremacy and the colonial project of which the Canadian state is the current manifestation, and argued that any meaningful appraisal of its impacts must take these connotated messages into full account. I found during the Samuel de Champlain Monument Working Group (SCMWG) process a widespread tendency to minimize the scope of interpretation, to obfuscate its broader meanings via a myopic focus on the "accuracy" of its most explicit symbolism. This represents a failure to engage with both the specific message of the monument itself and the ideological dimensions of commemorative projects in general. I maintain that this is rooted in a settler colonial ideology that defensively seeks to alleviate feelings of discomfort and guilt that arise when the assumed cultural dominance of white settlers is challenged.

In Chapter Two I argued that the SCMWG process was not capable of achieving substantive change because its mandate was structurally compromised from the start. Its stated commitment to the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) were necessarily handicapped by its simultaneous desire to be perceived as a consultative process that would

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[219] John G. Reid, "The Three Lives of Edward Cornwallis," *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* 16 (2013), 38.
[220] "Toronto university changes name amid controversy over Canadian educator's legacy." *CBC News,* 26 April 2022, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ryerson-toronto-metropolitan-university-1.6431360, accessed 1 June 2022.

attend to the opinions and perspectives of Orillia's settler population. This inability or unwillingness to propose and execute decisive action in the interest of the reconciliation project at the potential expense of popular support was a failure of leadership, and prevented the SCMWG from coming to a conclusion that would enact meaningful change. If such change is to be achieved in the future, it will take courage, conviction, and commitment on the part of settlers to take responsibility for their implication in the ongoing maintenance of settler colonialism.

For all ink that has been spilled considering the remediation of monuments to problematic figures, consensus on how to do so most effectively remains elusive. Many advocate the outright removal, and often destruction, of problematic statues and monuments. Arianne Shahvisi likens the rhetoric of colonial monuments to "slurring speech acts," highlighting the harm that such objects enact upon members of contemporary publics in ways similar to the use of racist epithets; she advocates "removal or relocation to a carefully curated exhibitions [which] offers a surer way of protecting against harm."[221] Others argue that the best approach is to leave them where they are, but to append additional interpretive material which could recontextualize the messages they send while leaving the original artworks intact, as was suggested by the SCMWG. In any case, Christine Sypnowich notes that the best efforts to address problematic monuments will focus on their educational potential, and as such, "Monuments should catalyse a process of ongoing dialogue with the communities traumatised by this colonial past, and the monuments that glorify it."[222] Joanna Burch-Brown similarly writes, "Removing a monument or renaming a building is a historical moment in itself, which can make a lasting impression in public memory and become part of both written and oral records of events…The moments and the debates building up to [removal] are potentially powerful pedagogical opportunities."[223]

Whatever its ultimate fate, as the city of Orillia continues to struggle towards a resolution to the Champlain monument controversy, it will be crucial anchor the discussion in larger debates about colonialism and white supremacy, and it will necessarily be a long-term, ongoing process. Simply put, it has always been about more than the statue, and potential solutions must be as well. As Andrew Nurse writes, "Addressing the past involves a commitment over time. It

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[221] Arianne Shahvisi, "Colonial monuments as slurring speech acts," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 55, no. 3 (2021), 456.
[222] Christine Sypnowich, "Monuments and monsters: Education, cultural heritage and sites of conscience," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* no. 55 (2021), 477.
[223] Joanna Burch-Brown, "Should Slavery's Statues Be Preserved? On Transitional Justice and Contested Heritage," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* (2020), DOI: 10.1111/japp.12485, 7.

involves an intentional effort to ensure that the past is not forgotten through public education as well as changes in institutional memorial landscapes and archival practices. This process needs to be meaningful and visible."[224] The process that has unfolded in Orillia was certainly visible, though it has yet to deliver on its promise to confront Canada's past with truth and bravery. I hold out hope that this is not yet a completely foregone conclusion.

[224] Andrew Nurse, "Harvard and Slavery: The Moral Responsibility of History," *Active History,* 11 May 2022, http://activehistory.ca/2022/05/harvard-and-slavery-the-moral-responsibility-of-history/, accessed 9 July 2022.

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