# "The Right Kind of Children": Childhood, Gender and "Race" in Canadian Postwar Political Discourse

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**Abstract:** Located within newer anthropological writing on the cultural politics of childhood that is in part inspired by feminist work, this paper explores constructions of childhood in the parliamentary discourse of the immediate postwar period in Canada. Political debates from this period are located within a postwar political economy marked by an expanding welfare state, Cold war dynamics, and shifting understandings of both "race" and childhood itself. Federal parliamentary debates provide the material for an examination of how discourses of universalized as well as gendered and racialized childhoods emerged and were deployed in the project of nation-building.

**Résumé:** Cet article se situe dans le domaine des écrits anthropologiques les plus récents sur les politiques de l'enfance qui sont inspirés en partie des travaux féministes. Il explore les conditions de l'enfance dans le discours parlementaire de l'après-guerre immédiat au Canada. Les débats politiques de cette période se situent à l'intérieur de l'économie politique de l'après-guerre marquée par l'expansion de l'État-Providence, la dynamique de la guerre froide et des transformations dans la compréhension des concepts de "race" et même de l'enfance elle-même. Les débats parlementaires fédéraux font l'objet d'une analyse qui révèle comment les discours d'universalisation aussi bien que de particularisation des enfances, du point de vue du sexe et de la race, ont émergé et se sont déployés dans le projet de construction de la nation.

Anthropology has a long tradition of contributing cross-cultural cases to the literature on child development and socialization but a renewed anthropology of childhood is beginning to augment studies of "child development" in different cultural settings with analyses of the "cultural politics" of childhood in the context of national and global arenas.[1] In this paper I show why part of this project must involve critical attention to how various "childhoods" are produced within and are central to political discourse. Using a single set of data: postwar Canadian federal parliamentary debates of 1945-55, I demonstrate how constructions of universalized, gendered and racialized "childhoods" were linked to nation-building in diverse and unequal ways.

The newer work on the cultural politics of childhood, has drawn in part upon feminist research for inspiration and direction. In the pioneering collections, *Children and the Politics of Culture* (Stephens, 1995) and *Small Wars: the Cultural Politics of Childhood* (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent, 1998), the respective editors note parallels between the experiences of women and children and draw attention to the utility of the analytical models provided by feminist writing for child research. In so doing they echo earlier articles by sociologists who also explicitly linked feminism and child research (e.g., Alanen, 1994; Oakley, 1994; Thorne, 1987).[2]

Child research stands to gain from feminist work that directs attention to the production of gendered childhoods, for example, girlhoods and boyhoods, within wider systems of power. It can also benefit a great deal from the feminist insight that gendered categories are in turn structured by such variables as nationality, class, "race"/ethnicity, sexuality, disability and generation in ways that challenge the privileging of "woman" as an ontological category (see Marshall, 2000).

Greater attention to diverse and unequal childhoods is an important part of a more general challenge to constructions of childhood as a still often-naturalized category. A reluctance to engage more fully with both the

diversities and inequalities of childhood may reflect the relative "mutedness" of children and childhood in anthropology (Caputo, 1995; Gottlieb, 1998) and/or a "strategic essentialism" deployed to establish the legitimacy of child research. Here too, however, there are useful warnings from feminist work on the limitations of such a strategy. This paper builds upon feminist insights by paying explicit attention to both gender and racism in its analysis of constructions of childhood in Canadian political discourse.

In this study the Hansard index was used to locate all debates where children or childhood might be directly or indirectly discussed during the time period of 1945-55. Using a deliberately wide scope, each itemized debate was then read through for references to "children," "boys," "girls," "juveniles," "young people," and/or related institutions such as "schools," and "families." Key debates of the period included those dealing with family allowances, education, citizenship and immigration, and Indian affairs. Pages containing such references were photocopied and filed by year. From these files more specific references to universalized, gendered and/or racialized children were identified.

While recognizing that there was no straightforward link between parliamentary discourse and the experiences of variously constructed children of the time, I suggest that the political talk of the powerful provided a context within which diverse and unequal childhoods were understood and lived. In the particular historical context of postwar Canada, the constructions of childhood in political discourse moreover illuminate tensions and contradictions in the project of nation-building at this time. Notably, while the ostensible needs and rights of Canadian children as a universalized collectivity were made discursively central to various political projects, constructions of more specifically gendered and racialized children, were distanced from or located outside of these same projects. Analysis of this particular site of political discourse illustrates the need for more critical analyses of discourses of childhood—both general and specific as they are located and deployed within wider relations of power.

## Childhood and Political Discourse

In a special journal issue on the topic of Children and Nationalism, Stephens called for much more research to be done on the "roles children and childhood have played in the development of modern nation-states" (1997a: 11). Pointing out the striking parallels between the dichotomies of female/male and child/adult she argued that the "hardening" of both was part of capitalist and modern nation-state development. With feminist scholarship on the gendered quality of these processes well advanced, what was needed, she suggested, were more analyses of the positioning of "the child" within these projects (Stephens, 1995: 6).

In order to respond to such a call it is necessary to broaden anthropological analysis to include more systematic examination of the "large-scale social arenas ... active in the constitution of difference" in contemporary states (Greenhouse and Greenwood, 1998: 8). My particular focus on parliamentary discourse is inspired by the work of van Dijk, who has argued, in the case of European racisms, that critical analysis of parliamentary discourses (as one of many forms of elite discourse), is important for anti-racist work, because such talk disproportionately influences the "production of public opinion and the dominant consensus on ethnic affairs" (1997: 33). Here I extend this insight to the topic of children and childhood suggesting that federal politicians frequently invoked children and childhood to legitimate diverse political goals and that this political discourse disproportionately contributed to and reproduced dominant ideas of childhood.

The centrality of children and childhood to political discourses both past and present has already received some attention within an interdisciplinary "childhood studies." Some scholars have described how, for example, the sacralization of "the child" in contemporary Western and Westernized settings means that political claims made "in the name of the child" are particularly powerful (Cooter, 1992; Jenks, 1996). Jenkins (1998) in his *Children's Culture Reader* discusses how in recent U.S. political campaigns both Republican and Democratic parties tapped into an "established mythology of childhood innocence" that located "children ... in a space beyond, above, outside the political" (1998:2). The myth of the innocent child, he points out, has been useful to both the political left and right and has been used in support of and in opposition to American feminism (1998:7).

While Jenkins' discussion centres on the deployment of discourses of a universalized "child" in political debate, he also points to the ways in which such constructions obscure the lived reality of diverse and unequal childhoods. Similarly Stephens, also writing of U.S. political debate in the 1990s, noted how: "notions of the universal child, with pre-established needs and interests, tend to short-circuit more far-reaching political debates about ... the place of various groups of children—differentiated by class, race, ethnicity, religion, gender and geographical location" (1997a: 8).[3]

A useful analysis of the ways in which political and other public discourses of childhood articulate with wider divisions and inequalities is found in Mankekar's (1997) examination of Indian textual representations of Ameena, a young Muslim girl who was "rescued" from marriage with an elderly Arab. She points out that the frequent use of children in political discourse occurs because: "childhood symbolizes an essential innocence that transcends politics and culture" (1997: 52) but then reveals through her specific case study how "far from being 'pre-cultural' or apolitical discourses of childhood were profoundly implicated in the politics of gender, sexuality, community and nation" (1997: 26). These observations point to the need for more critical analyses of political discourses of childhood, both universalized and more specific, in different historical and geographical contexts.

## Childhood and Nation in Postwar Canada

After a period of war-time turmoil and loss, postwar Canada was characterized by political stability, unanticipated prosperity and an expanding welfare state. The immediate postwar period in Canada is often viewed retrospectively as the beginning of a "golden age" of universality given impetus by a concern for children. While several policy initiatives (e.g., in education and health) were partially legitimated through reference to the needs and rights of universalized Canadian children, the provision of universal family allowances in 1945 has been identified as the clearest marker of this project (i.e., Comacchio, 1993: 242). The provision of the federal allowances (while not without controversy given its federal origins and its overlapping with areas of provincial jurisdiction) was justified in part as a means of investing collectively in children—the nation's "greatest asset."

Dominique Marshall has argued that in Quebec, reforms such as federal family allowances marked a "peculiar moment in the history of modern ideas about childhood" (1997: 409). In particular she argues that the discourse of "children's rights" reduced wartime promises of "enhanced democracy" for all citizens to a narrower focus on a category in whom everyone allegedly shared a common concern (Marshall, 1997: 410). This political focus, she argues, defused counter claims from the left (i.e., for "worker's rights") and from the right (i.e., for "parental rights") and thereby contributed to the creation of an alliance that was crucial to the forging of the welfare state (Marshall, 1997: 429).

The political centrality of childhood was accompanied by changing views of child development. By the postwar period medical advances and the rise of psychology had facilitated a shift of attention from the physical

survival of infants toward the psychological health of all children. The new emphasis was paralleled by the decline of previously dominant hereditarian/eugenic thinking and the rise of environmentalist theories of child development (Gleason, 1999; see also Iacovetta, 1998). The environmentalist understanding of childhood was supported by and in turn supported the universalist thrust of social policy.

Political discourses of childhood were also integrally connected to Cold War concerns and rhetoric at this time. In Canada, there was an interpenetration of expressed concerns about familial "security" and national military "security." Family allowances and other "investments" in education and health were justified as a means of demonstrating that capitalist democracy was more successful than communism in providing for its citizens-especially its children.

Stephens' research on Cold War America argues that children at this time were constructed as the "atoms" of society whose "'natural' needs for security, stability, clear and firm gender differentiation, and protection from ... dangers called for and legitimated the construction of a complex national defense apparatus" (Stephens, 1997b: 112). Likewise scholarship on Canada has pointed to how the raising of "normal" children became linked to a national project of defense against both external and internal enemies (Whitaker and Marcuse, 1994; Adams, 1997).

Along with the identification of childhood as a crucial site of nation-building, there were constructions of the nation itself as a child. Gullestad (1997) in a study of childhood and nationalism in Norway points to the ways in which analogies drawn between "the nation" and "the child" serve a mutually constituting and naturalizing function. A similar process is present in the postwar Canadian parliamentary debates where a simultaneous construction of both nation and childhood as natural and "developing" categories was evident in numerous references to the nation as "young" and "growing up." During debate over the 1946 Canadian Citizenship Act (which defined citizens for the first time not as British subjects but as Canadians) it was claimed, for example, that the nation was "newly come of age but already sufficiently mature to accept proudly its high place in the world" (Croll, April 9, 1946: 694).

Williams' (1995: 203) analysis of the "interpenetration of ... kinship and nationalist ideologies" illuminates the many other references found in Canadian political discourse of this period to the nation as constituting a "family." Canada for example, was described as being built by "forefathers" and located within the "family of

the Commonwealth." In a debate on immigration policy it was suggested that just as: "men and women in Canada plan their families... it is time we started to plan our Canadian family" (Croll, December 14, 1945: 3527). A conflation of "child," "family" and "nation" was further demonstrated in the suggestion (in the debates over citizenship) that just as fathers understood their maturing sons' moves to autonomy as part of a natural process, so too Britain would not interpret new citizenship provisions as evidence of any decreasing filial love (Michaud, May 3, 1946: 1172).

Along with the construction of the nation as a growing child was an extension of the nation into the future through its children and "children's children." The frequent references in political discourse to "future generations" may be understood in the context of Yuval-Davis' observation that in settler nations such as Canada which lack a shared myth of common origin, a myth of "common destiny" becomes crucial to nationalist discourse (1997: 19). This, combined with the modern Western identification of childhood with "futurity" (Jenks, 1996: 100-101), makes the invocation of "children" as the benefactors of various state initiatives a powerful trope. In what follows I look more closely at the positioning of universalized children vis-à-vis the nation.

## Universalized Childhood

Universalized children, often described as "Canadians of the next generation," "citizens of tomorrow" or "future citizens" (and less frequently as "young Canadians" or "young citizens"), were consistently constructed as being in a transitional stage of apolitical dependency and vulnerability requiring state and parental protection.

References to "Canada's children" emerged with particular force in debates over federal versus provincial jurisdiction. Advocates of greater expenditure by the federal government in education and health developed the discourse of children as national "assets" with whom the future of the country rested. As one politician among many argued: "the greatest asset any nation can have is the children of the nation, because they will be the citizens of tomorrow. If we are to have a healthy and progressive Canada we should be taking very practical steps to see that the health and educational standards of our children are steadily improved" (Argue, January 20, 1954: 1285).

Interestingly the debates reveal that the naturalizing of the nation, on the one hand, and child/adult dichotomies and inequities, on the other, occurred in the context of a more concrete debate over the age-based boundaries of childhood and adulthood. On the one hand, for example,

there were repeated suggestions largely by Canadian Commonwealth Federation (CCF) politicians that suffrage should be extended downward from the age of 21 because of the civic maturity demonstrated by younger, overwhelmingly male, recruits during the war (e.g., Coldwell, April 29, 1946: 1038; MacInnis, April 26, 1948: 3317). Along with claims that teenaged Canadians had been "formidable opponents" in battle (Argue, May 19, 1950: 2671) were additional suggestions that increased education had created a new generation of Canadians whose knowledge made them qualified to vote at an earlier age than their "forefathers" (e.g., Coldwell, April 18, 1950: 1653-4).

In apparent contrast however, arguments were made in favour of extending the upper age limit for family allowance payments to students over 16. The provision of family allowances (which were credited with improving school attendance and retention rates) was said to be necessary to allow parents to support their children through a lengthening period of financial dependence. These discussions revealed shifting and contested boundaries of childhood and adulthood, but they did not weaken the dichotomy itself.

The language of investment in children through increased federal involvement in the funding of services was self-consciously universalistic, emphasizing that all children had the same "rights." For example, in a debate over federal assistance to education it was argued that such assistance would ensure that "Canadian children" received "their birthright" whether they were "English or French... protestant, catholic, jew or gentile [sic]; and regardless of race, colour, the economic standing of its parents or the part of Canada in which it is born" (Noseworthy, January 26, 1953: 1337).

Such investment was also described as a necessary part of shaping children into "Canadianism" through state institutions, especially schools. Greater federal involvement in a provincial arena was repeatedly advocated as necessary to ensure the equality of educational opportunity that would forge class, racial and national unity out of diversity and inequality. "A country composed of so many racial groups," it was argued "needs to place special emphasis on education in order to ensure the development of that unity within a federal system that is so essential for national development" (Churchill, March 20, 1952: 632).

As these examples suggest, the discourse of universalized childhood was self-consciously juxtaposed to problematized images of diversity and inequality among children as part of an argument for more centralized federal control. Such arguments were made in the face of

resistance to greater federal responsibility for children on the part of some politicians—what is also of interest here is that detractors also drew upon discourses of childhood in framing their objections.

One representative from Quebec, for example, described federal efforts as a threat not only to provincial autonomy but also to "the natural right of parents to have their children educated in their own language and in the religious principles of their own creed" (Gauthier, February 9, 1955: 1003). Another pointed out that it was essential that Quebec "remain a place where our children will have the freedom and the right to speak the tongue and practice the religion of their forefathers" (Cardin, May 4, 1954: 4401). Others made reference to the right of the two founding "racial groups" of the country (British and French), to ensure the flourishing and development of their respective cultures through children (Girard, March 23, 1954: 3276). Such claims challenged invocations of ideally universalized Canadian childhood by introducing an alternative analogy between Quebec and its children.

The counter discourses employed by some politicians from Quebec point to the need to look beyond the constructions of universalized Canadian childhood to other, more differentiated categories of children in the political debates. In what follows I focus upon two axes of differentiation: gender and "race."

## Gendered Nation, Gendered Childhoods

As feminist analyses have pointed out, nations are not only "young" or "old" but also gendered (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Nagel, 1998)—an observation that points to the need to pay attention to analogies between gendered nations and gendered childhoods. In the overwhelmingly male-dominated political discourse of the postwar federal debates, Canada was commonly constructed as "male." It was also clear that the ongoing reproduction of the nation flowed through the father (i.e., "forefathers")-son line according to what Delaney (1995) has described as a monogenetic theory of male reproduction common to many modern nationalisms.

Several scholars have noted how the postwar period saw a self-conscious attempt on the part of the state to shore up a domestic order predicated on male breadwinners and dependent women and children (see Whitaker and Marcuse, 1994: 16; Owram, 1996). Through intervening to support nuclear families based on heterosexual marriage and childrearing (e.g., through the provision of family allowances), the state reinforced particular family forms, as well as sexual and gendered and generational roles—in what has been described as a new public patriarchy.[4]

The gendered quality of political constructions of the nation was paralleled in gendered constructions of adult-child relations. As Stephens points out for the U.S. political discourse of this time, domesticated women were constructed as caring for particular privatized children while in the public arena men espoused concern for generic children of the nation (Stephens, 1997b: 120). Likewise in the Canadian postwar parliamentary debates, the few references to women usually emphasized their maternal and domestic role as exclusive caregivers, primary educators and transmitters of culture to children.

Some of the available literature on this period focuses on the implications of changing constructs of childhood for women—pointing for example to the ways in which childrearing advice insisted on full-time mothering under the tutelage of (usually male) professionals who constructed mothers as the "problem parent" (Arnup, 1994; Gleason 1999).

Along with producing particular constructions of gendered adult-child relations, Canadian parliamentary political discourse most commonly constructed children as either ungendered "children" or "youth" or as masculinized "boys," "young men" or "sons." While there were some examples of references to "boys and girls," "young men and women," or "sons and daughters" (where the sequential prioritizing of male children indicated their precedence in imagination of male politicians), independent references to "girls," "young women" or "daughters" were infrequent.

Marshall has suggested that the "the notion of universal entitlement" which brought children into the public sphere and "pointed at children as individual subjects" (Marshall, 1997: 321) was particularly important for girls who had been largely excluded from earlier political visions. Unlike women, who were receding from the public sphere in the postwar period, she suggests the imagery of both boys and girls in government materials showed them as autonomous subjects outside of the domestic realm (Marshall, 1997: 427-9).

In the parliamentary debates reviewed here, however, it was male children who continued to be most often and consistently linked to the project of nation-building. Thus, for example, it was suggested (in debate over a new flag), that national unity had "been cemented with the blood of Canadian boys in two great wars" (Rowe, November 14, 1945: 2123-2124). Investment in citizens of the future was also gendered when it was argued that federal support for post-secondary education would allow "able young men" to attend (Bruneau, October 17, 1951: 129) or (as the same speaker indicated) that a proposed federal youth department would offer

vocational guidance to the "young men of today" (Bruneau, December 1, 1953: 499).

As these explicitly gendered references suggest, in political discourse gendered adults and children were linked in differentiated ways to a gendered nation. The children in which the nation was urged to invest were most frequently either implicitly or explicitly boys or young men, while girls were distanced, usually through omission, from the nation-building project. There was a similar differentiation apparent in constructions of racialized children.

## Racialized Nation, Racialized Childhoods

While there is little evidence that newly hegemonic environmentalism served to destabilize "naturalized" gendered and generationed categories at this time, there was some evidence of its impact in political debate regarding "race" and its significance in children's lives.

Postwar Canada experienced some challenges to official racism linked to economic growth that increased demand for immigrant labour from previously "non-preferred" regions of Central, Southern and Eastern Europe, a rejection of Nazism, human rights initiatives of the United Nations, the de-colonization movement, and lobbying by various racialized groups within Canada. Federal reforms after the war included the extension of full citizenship rights, including the federal franchise, to those of South Asian, Chinese (in 1947) and Japanese (in 1948) descent. Early provincial reforms included Ontario's 1944 Racial Discrimination Act and Saskatchewan's 1947 Bill of Rights.

Parliamentary talk of the period which sometimes questioned the ontological status of "race" itself. But more commonly, however, the concept of "race" was retained while ideologies of "racial" superiority or inferiority were rejected. Thus, for example, one politician stated: "there is no master race in this world. There is good and bad in all races" (MacKenzie, June 15, 1950: 3684). Another argued that because social science had demonstrated "no fundamental differences between races as far as inherent mental ability or superiority/inferiority are concerned" immigration should be based on "cultural factors or ethnic factors" (Dinsdale, February 18, 1955: 1289).

"Race" in the federal parliamentary debates was frequently used as a synonym for nationality as in the Irish, Ukrainian "races" or the "French Canadian" and "Anglo-Saxon" race but colour terminology, for example, the "white race" (already juxtaposed to "Indians," the "Japanese," "Chinese" and "Negroes" in the interwar period), was also common.

The meanings and politics of race and racism articulated with shifting meanings and politics of children and childhood. This was apparent in the ways in which children and childhood were invoked in anti-racist challenges. Masculinized youth, for example, were sometimes invoked by the left (i.e., CCF politicians) in favour of reforms as, for example, when attention was drawn to the perceived contradiction of "young men" who had fought against the concept of a "master race" returning to racist legislation at home (e.g., MacInnis, November 21, 1945: 2387; MacKay May 2, 1947: 2732). Likewise a need to ensure a non-racist future for children was part of the reformist discourse as, for example, it was argued that a bill of rights would work against discrimination thereby ensuring that: "our children may grow together in dignity and in grace, with equality and justice, and above all in brotherhood" (Stewart, September 13, 1945: 138).

Contemporary researchers have noted how children are often constructed as "innocent" of racism (e.g., Troyna and Hatcher, 1992). In the context of postwar challenges to "race" and racism in Canada, racially innocent childhoods were contrasted with adult prejudice and as in the U.S. civil rights debates of the same era, schools and classrooms were constructed as crucial locations of anti-racist challenge (see Goldin, 1998). Thus for example, it was claimed that "Children are not born with prejudices; when they are at school they get on as well as any children do" (Stewart, April 9, 1946: 700). Funding for agencies doing anti-racist work was described as important for children who were being "taught tolerance in the school" but were encountering "intolerance in their homes, in business circles, and in other fields" (Noseworthy, April 13, 1953: 3776).

The construction of childhood as a site of racial innocence was clear in a speech by the CCF member Angus MacInnis who repeated an anecdote he had introduced in earlier debates. He spoke of how in Vancouver: "even when racial discrimination and racial prejudice were at their height ... I could walk out any day and see youths of various colours, various nationalities and various racial origins walking together. I would see girls who were Chinese, Japanese, Scotch, English, Irish and every other nationality walking arm in arm along the street. ..." He added that the principal of a nearby high school had told him that children only became aware that "someone is Jewish ... Japanese or ... of some other nationality" when they left school (MacInnis, April 13, 1953: 3774).

In a rare reference (in this period) to anti-Black racism, another CCF member reported on the case of a "coloured boy" being prohibited from entering an ice rink in Toronto. The story emphasized the childhood sol-

idarity of his "white school friends" who responded to the adult racism by also refusing to enter (Matthews, December 17, 1945: 3699-700). Here there was an identification of childhood (in this case childhood peer-culture) as a site of racial innocence and/or transcendence that existed in opposition to adult racism.[5]

The suggestion of race-less children was a powerful trope in anti-racist political discourses but another striking way in which children emerged in debates over issues of "race," was in the context of repeated claims about the "suitability" of various ethnicized/racialized groups as measured by their children's "Canadianess." A frequent claim made at this time, for example, was that the children of earlier "non-preferred" European arrivals had successfully assimilated to "Canadianess" in a single generation thereby ostensibly confounding racist assumptions of inherent unsuitability and/or inferiority (and demonstrating the validity of environmentalist understandings of children's development).

Claims that the "sons and daughters" of various racialized or national collectivities were a "credit to the country," were central to arguments over citizenship and immigration. The retroactive logic was applied in a self-congratulatory way by one politician who pointed out that many members of parliament were the sons of immigrants and had thereby demonstrated that "Their parents were the right kind of stuff. They produced the right kind of children, and they have been a credit to Canada" (Ferguson, February 9, 1951: 249).

The "right kind of children" were most commonly identified by their (largely masculine) accomplishments of military service and/or university education and/or professional status. Thus the "sons and daughters" of Ukrainian settlers were described by a Social Credit member as having "paid the highest price at Hong Kong, at Dieppe and on the beaches of Normandy in defence of this country" (Holowach, February 18, 1955: 1294) while another CCF member pointed to the fact that they were "occupying positions of distinction in every walk of life" (Stewart, February 4, 1947: 114).

The claim that those who had produced the "right kind of children" were retroactively demonstrated to have been the right kind of immigrant for Canada both challenged and reproduced notions of "racial" inferiority and superiority. The statements were most frequently made about the children of previously "non-preferred" Europeans who, as in the U.S. of this period (see Barrett and Roediger, 1997; Sacks, 1997), were experiencing a simultaneous process of upward class mobility and redefinition from racialized Other to 'white" ethnic. The result was that the environmentalist argument regarding child

development was in practice most supportive of a broadening of "whiteness" rather than a wholesale rejection of "race" and "racism." This process illustrates not only how "race" in Canada has been "a moving target through time and space" (Backhouse, 1999: 11) but the ways in which ideas about childhood were part of this process.

Non-white or non-whitened categories of childhood were much more ambiguously linked to environmentalism and therefore alleged capacity for "Canadianess" than the universalistic discourses of childhood suggested. Although there were some attempts to use examples of children who had grown up to become doctors and lawyers as examples of the "suitability" of Asians (e.g., Coldwell, May 3, 1946: 1179) such claims were rare. More frequent were speeches that alleged that the children of parents of Japanese descent had "no chance" of assimilating (e.g., Pearkes, April 9, 1946: 70) and/or that the children of "mixed marriages" would never gain acceptance and would threaten the nation (e.g., Stirling, April 9, 1946: 72).

The withholding of environmentally created "Canadianess" from children of Asian descent was not confined to a few right wing politicians but was also implicit in Prime Minister Mackenzie King's speech of 1947, when he suggested that despite a repeal of the Chinese Immigration Act and revocation of order-in-council restricting naturalization, immigration from the "Orient" would continue to be restricted in order to ensure no "fundamental alteration in the character of our population" (Mackenzie King, May 1, 1947: 2646).

A similar logic was also apparent in a passing reference by a Conservative speaker to immigrants from Africa. While pointing out the lack of scientific basis for racial inferiority, (suggesting instead that each new "cultural group" simply needed three generations to become assimilated), he went on to add that an individual "whose culture is that of the heart of darkest Africa" was unlikely to "adjust suitably to our Canadian way of life" (Dinsdale, February 18, 1955: 1290). In this argument, "culture" replaced "race" but the denial of the capacity for environmentally shaped childhood was clear.

A category of non-white racialized childhood that appears frequently in the parliamentary debates is that of First Nation ("Indian") childhood and constructions of these children reveal some of the contradictions of the period. In the case of First Nations, there was a long history of inferiorizing the entire racialized category through constructions of "aboriginal infantilism." In the postwar period, however, such discourses encountered some contest. While some politicians continued to describe "Indians" as just "grown-up children" (Dion, October 24,

1945: 1454) others argued that it was time to stop "treating the Indians like children [and] allow them to live normal adult lives" (Croll, June 15, 1948: 5262). Some politicians also replaced earlier discourses of "wardship" with references to our "red brothers" (e.g., Castleden, August 27, 1946: 5483).

Challenges to aboriginal infantilism were closely linked to environmentalist arguments regarding child development. Some politicians, for instance, pointed to inadequate health services and segregated residential schools suggesting that these were responsible for high rates of illness, poverty and the existence of "a different psychology from white children" rather than "pigmentation or racial background" (Young, June 23, 1948: 5757-5758). Examples of co-education with "white" children were at the same time lauded by the CCF member, Coldwell, who noted that Indian children had the "same kind of ability as the average white child" and that skin colour made no difference to aptitude or intelligence. Such children were not, however, fully imagined as part of universalized Canadian childhood. In a telling slip even Coldwell contrasted Indian children to "Canadian" children before correcting his error by stating that "Indians are of course Canadians" (Coldwell, June 26, 1954: 6797).

Unlike the whitened "Canadian" children of many European immigrants, First Nations children were often portrayed in terms of either unrealized potential or regression from a promising start. Although there was attention given to those who had participated in military service and occasional references were made to children who had become adult professionals (e.g., Campbell, May 13, 1946: 1452), First Nations children were less often constructed as having provided perceived "good service" to Canada as adults and the focus on their (now environmentally created) "deprivation" reinforced negative constructions and "solutions" predicated on government intervention. Individual cases then were less successful in establishing the credentials of the racialized collectivity. Significantly, status Indians would not achieve the federal franchise—a crucial marker of legal adulthood—until 1960.

Despite challenges to racism and environmentalist thinking about childhood, these differentiated constructions of racialized childhoods suggest the limits of the universalized child in postwar Canada. The universalized Canadian child, with whom the nation was equated and in whom the nation was being urged to invest, was most frequently identified either implicitly if not explicitly as male and white. Those outside of this gendered and racialized location were in a much more ambiguous rela-

tionship to the project of nation-building. A dramatic example of the way in which some children could be positioned as central to the nation while others were excluded occurs within a speech of a Social Credit member who argued as follows:

> I believe that we are all brothers under the skin, but I should like to see us keep our places ... it must be borne in mind that the present Canadians, whose fathers came here, pioneered, fought and struggled to develop this country, could see their children and their grandchildren utterly dispossessed. ... Canada was explored, settled and developed by two great races. ... the French and the British people. ... Have their fathers no rights to see their children well provided for in this land they strove to gain for them? Have their children no rights to be well born into an environment in which they can succeed and be happy. ..." (Blackmore, February 11, 1947:342).

## Conclusion

The centrality of discourses of childhood in political projects both progressive and regressive suggests the need for more critical analysis. In this paper I have examined one site of postwar political discourses of childhood and suggested that at this period both nation and childhood were naturalized through reference to one another.

Reading across categories of universalized, gendered and racialized childhoods in the postwar parliamentary discourse, however, leads to the conclusion that despite the importance of the discourse of universalized childhood in the forging of the welfare state, gendered "boys" and "girls" as well as racialized "white," "whitened" and "non-whitened" children were differently and unequally positioned vis-à-vis this project.

A focus on political discourse may appear distant from the real lives of children but it can facilitate the examination of the ways in which differently constructed children were and are targeted and/or neglected by the state even while "children" and "childhood" are discursively central to political rhetoric in support of state projects. Marshall suggests that universalized standards of childhood contained costs for those who did not meet with its standards. Her discussion reveals how poor children and families in particular became more vulnerable to stigma and disciplinary moves by the state even while prosperity was facilitating the spread of ideal "modern" childhoods marked by domestication, extended schooling and economic dependency. Likewise Stephens in her work on discourses of childhood in Cold War America suggests that invocations of the need to defend a univer-

salized child coexisted with nuclear testing sites and research on radioactivity which disproportionately victimized the children of particular minority groups—notably aboriginal populations and religious minorities (1997b: 116).

The finding that political discourse relies not only on constructions of childhood but that these constructions are variously universalized, gendered and racialized, points to the need for much more critical attention to the particular location of different categories of children. Such examinations can be part of an anthropology of childhood committed to the need to illuminate how "prior social histories, material structures and relations of unequal power place various groups of children into different sorts of relations to national projects" (Stephens, 1997b: 116). While this requires a deconstruction of naturalized discourses of childhood—a project that is not without costs, it nonetheless offers a critical childhood studies that has explicit links to analyses of social inequality more generally. This paper has suggested how anthropological attention to political constructions of childhood can be part of such a project.

## Notes

1 This paper was written with the support of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Standard Research Grant. Research assistants Neil Runnalls and Sonja Justesen assisted with the extensive archival data collection. Some related writing on the intersection of feminism, anthropology and childhood studies can be found in Helleiner, 1999a. Further analyses of constructions of racialised childhoods in the parliamentary debates of the interwar period can be found in Helleiner (1999b; in press, 2001).

2 Another important body of work influencing the newer child research by anthropologists is the "childhood studies" literature more commonly associated with sociology, e.g., James and Prout, 1997; James, Jenks and Prout, 1998 and Jenks, 1996.

3 Clearly the point made here continues to be relevant to the present where Canadians have heard commitments to a universalized "children's agenda" in successive federal budget speeches. In the meantime eroding supports and services on the ground impact differently classed, gendered and racialized children and childhoods in unequal ways.

4 In Canada support for returning (overwhelmingly male) soldiers included medical care, disability support, land purchase assistance, subsidized housing, guaranteed return to jobs with seniority, allowances for those without, preference in public service, free tuition and living allowance for those in studies (Whitaker and Marcuse, 1994: 16).

5 Discrimination against children of Asian descent was clear in practices that restricted the ability of Canadian citizens to sponsor their "Asiatic" children for immigration. Efforts to sponsor children from China, for example, ran into a series of bureaucratic obstacles including lack of access to application

offices, the use of x-rays to establish age and identity, and sustained challenges to their familial status (e.g., allegations that they were not acceptable because they were adopted children and/or children of second or extra-marital relationships).

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