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**CONTEMPORARY
ORANGEISM
IN CANADA**

Identity,
Nationalism,
and Religion

**James W. McAuley
Paul Nesbitt-Larking**



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Identity, Nationalism, and Religion

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PREFACE

What does Orangeism look like in the diaspora, and what happens to Orange ideals and values as they move across oceans and through the decades and centuries? These are the core questions that motivated our research into the Orange Order in Canada. Our monograph, *Contemporary Orangeism in Canada*, is an exploration of the political identities and perspectives of the remaining members of a fraternal organization in decline. Once a highly influential organization embedded in the heart of Protestant English Canada, the Orange Order now depends upon the service, creativity, and commitment of a declining number of aging men. Based upon a series of in-depth interviews as well as content/discourse analyses, *Contemporary Orangeism in Canada* explores perspectives on religious faith, support for the Crown and the monarchy, attitudes toward the State, government, and public policy, and orientations toward community belonging. Among other focuses, our book considers the role of Protestantism in a secular and multicultural setting, attitudes toward immigration and integration, and responses to the recent expansion of socially liberal policies. *Contemporary Orangeism in Canada* will be of interest to students of Canadian society, members of fraternal organizations, members of the Orange Order, and students of religion and politics.

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Our book brings together the voices of a small number of dedicated and loyal men, who continue to serve and support the Orange Order in Canada. Our research participants freely and generously gave of their time and their perspectives in a series of meaningful interviews. We were welcomed into homes and Orange halls, and we are most grateful for the kind hospitality of those Canadian Orangemen who volunteered to share some of their time with us.

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Introduction

Abstract This chapter briefly sets the agenda for the study of the contemporary Orange Order and Orangeism in Canada and establishes a preliminary historical contextualization for the book, explaining its rise to prominence and its more recent post-war decline. A series of research questions, related to the continuity of Orangeism in the context of contemporary Canada, is briefly presented. Following this, a short description of each of the succeeding chapters is offered. This chapter continues with a brief presentation of three theoretical perspectives that inform the analyses: Social Identity Theory/Self-categorization Theory; memory and commemoration; and English Canadian exceptionalism. This chapter concludes with a brief description of methodologies undertaken to interview the research participants and to conduct content/discourse analyses of *The Sentinel*, the Canadian Orange journal.

Keywords Orange Order · Orangeism · Canada · Social Identity Theory · Commemoration

It is coming up to forty years since Houston and Smyth made the claim that Orangeism in Canada: “is a peripheral movement restricted to a minority of aging participants and incomprehensible to most observers” (Houston and Smyth 1980: 160). If Orangeism was peripheral in the late 1970s, today it has become almost invisible, and the aging participants are now older and even fewer in number. Why then have we

turned our academic attention to a fraternal movement that now seems so marginal? Our research into what remains of the Orange Order in Canada serves two social scientific purposes that we find compelling. First, from a historical and structural perspective, throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Orange Order had a dominant sociopolitical, religious, and economic presence in Canada. Historians have ably explained its decline in the context of Canadian developments (Houston and Smyth 1980; Wilson 2007; Smyth 2015), but none has examined the decline in the comparative framework of the fate of the Orange Order in Northern Ireland. How far do the trends that have influenced the decline in Canada reflect more general trends in Orangeism, and how far are the circumstances in the Canadian context unique? McAuley and his colleagues have examined in detail the contemporary Orange Order in Northern Ireland (McAuley 2010, 2016; McAuley et al. 2011). In this book, we examine the contemporary Orange Order in Canada in light of both that framework and contemporary Canadian sociopolitical life, which Nesbitt-Larking (2007, 2012, 2014), and Nesbitt-Larking and Bradford (2015) have investigated. In so doing, we reveal a series of fascinating comparisons and contrasts. We do this through our analyses of a range of primary and secondary documents, and in particular our content and discourse analysis of *The Sentinel*, the major publication of the Orange Order in Canada.

We also describe the reflections and responses of eighteen Canadian Orangemen, who generously devoted hours to conversations with us on contemporary Orangeism in Canada. Their information and insights furnished an invaluable resource as we attempted to address the experiential question of what it is like to be an Orangeman in contemporary Canada. It is their own words that inform the drive and direction of our book. This is the second major purpose of our research. Recent research on everyday resistance has uncovered the ways in which the marginalized and the oppressed are able to negotiate relations of power without access to conventional resources (de Certeau 1988; Scott 1990). How do women, ethno-racial and religious minorities, peasants, GBLTQ (gay, bisexual, lesbian, transgendered, queer) minorities, and others assert themselves and gain any influence in settings in which they are marginal and lack access to the dominant structures of power? Our work in this book builds upon certain insights derived from this scholarship, but applies them to the more mundane setting of a small community of aging white males in contemporary Canada. These are the members of the Orange Order. Our central purpose

here is to explore the political realities of this once-dominant political and societal brotherhood, whose influence and status have undergone substantial diminution.

In the past, the Orange Order in Canada exerted substantial social and political influence, promoting the virtues of a united British Empire and the broad vision of a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant society. The central research challenge of our project is to investigate the continued relevance of the Orange Order (as an institutional and organizational presence) and Orangeism (as an ideology) in contemporary Canadian society. Historically, the presence of the Orange Order looms large. With its origins in the early nineteenth century, and its formal beginnings in Canada in 1830, the Orange Order is associated with loyalism and conservatism in such pivotal movements as the anti-rebellion forces of 1837 and the anti-Riel forces in the 1870s. Orangemen dominated Toronto politics in the first half of the twentieth century, and Sir John A. Macdonald and John Diefenbaker were just two of the prominent politicians who were Orangemen. Indeed, so dominant was the Order in Toronto from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries that the city was referred to as “The Belfast of Canada” (Smyth 2015), both by its allies and its enemies. From its beginnings in the early nineteenth century, the Orange Order in Canada peaked in membership and influence in the 1920s. In 1921, the population of Canada was just under 8,800,000. At that time, the Orange Order consisted of at least 100,000 members (a conservative estimate), with many more who had been through an Orange Lodge or were related to a member (Wilson 2007: 21). In 1980, Houston and Smyth reported: “fewer than twenty thousand active members in the country and their average age cannot be less than fifty years” (Houston and Smyth 1980: 167). By June 2013, there were only 2,536 men (personal communication) remaining in the Orange Order across Canada in a population of 35,154,300. While the numbers do not tell the entire story, there is no denying the fact that contemporary Orangeism in Canada has been in serious decline since the 1950s (Smyth 2015). Throughout our interviews and examinations of contemporary Orange Order documents, we detect a sense of dignity and hope combined with a realistic appraisal of where Orangeism stands in Canada today. There is a certain poignancy about the decline in the ranks of Canadian Orangemen, evidenced in the words of Ontario West Grand Master, Dennis Glazier in 2011, who wrote:

The past year for this executive has been challenging to say the least. This in no way should be considered negative as we were up for each and every opportunity and welcomed them all ... Our mission is to promote the Orange Order and do whatever possible to continue the operation in many communities; however, we must be realistic. If the ownership of a building is crippling a lodge and their membership is not evolving for tomorrow, the lodge has to consider redevelopment by amalgamation or selling the property. On a sad point, the year has again fallen witness to departed brothers which [sic] the Grand Secretary will give tribute. (Grand Orange Lodge of Ontario West 2011: 10, 12)

The Report of the Grand Secretary of Ontario West for 2011 indicates that only around thirty men became new members in the previous year, while at least seventeen were recorded as having passed away (Grand Orange Lodge of Ontario West 2011: 17, 18). While the year in review confronted the Association with the serious challenge of locating sufficient qualified men to fill various ceremonial offices, the spirit of pride and loyalty remained in place.

Our book is a detailed analysis of the ideas and ideals of those men who have kept the faith and who continue to meet, to organize, and to promote their Orange principles, increasingly now cut off both from Northern Irish roots and their own Canadian heritage. Throughout the book, we attempt to describe and analyze these perspectives with honesty, respect, and a critical orientation. The sociodemographic and structural insertion into contemporary Canadian society makes it inaccurate to describe them as marginal and as an oppressed minority. Being white, Protestant, and male carries with it a range of structured and historically conditioned privileges. These are further sustained by the adherence of most members of the Orange Order to a highly conventional and conservative belief system. It is, however, also inaccurate to describe contemporary Canadian Orangemen as members of a dominant elite. Throughout their history and even when they held a great deal of influence, they were outsiders to the establishment and excluded from the ruling classes. While their loyalty might have served a useful purpose in legitimizing the imperial order, their tribalism and literalism rendered them too crude and rough-hewn for the arenas of political and diplomatic life. In contemporary Canada, lacking now in numbers, social status, and influence, they share in common with the oppressed an invisibility and, if they are recognized at all, the popular portrayal of their core beliefs in stereotypical and negative ways that they are decreasingly able

to correct in the court of public opinion. And yet, a few of them carries on and the Orange Order survives. If they cannot be said to practice everyday *resistance*, they are certainly practitioners of everyday *resilience*.

Among the most compelling reminders of this is the annual Toronto Orange Parade. The longest-running continuous Orange parade in North America, it is now coming up to its 200th year. In the heyday of the Canadian Orange Order, there would have been thousands marching and tens of thousands out to cheer along the thronged sidewalks. In recent years, with great effort, the Orange Order has been able to gather a few hundred marchers. However, their audience has dwindled to a few pockets of bemused bystanders, who while not hostile are only fitfully curious. What is it that compels the fidelity of these men in an era which in so many ways runs counter to their beliefs and interests? What are their hopes and their lamentations? How do they manifest their pride? How far do they recognize and support those emergent political projects of nation and tradition that might be regarded as relatively compatible with their belief systems? Do they regard them as a lifeline?

The reactionary return to a more assertive British Canadianism (Buckner 2005; Champion 2010), promoted by the recently defeated Conservative government as part of a strategy to undermine the legacy of post-war Liberal Canada, offered some support to the principles that Canadian Orangemen have traditionally espoused. How far did this opportunity in political cultural leadership resonate with the Orangemen? Did they enthusiastically endorse the Harper Conservative Party's royalist agenda? Who do they regard as allies and as adversaries? How do they contend with the "hidden injuries of class" (Sennett and Cobb 1973), and what they perceive to be an ungrateful political community? In general, how do they manifest their political beliefs? Given the decline in their membership, how far do they adhere to the orthodoxies and narratives of "faith, crown and state" (McAuley and Tonge 2007, 2008), and how far have they attempted to adapt and modify in order to rebuild? In order to address these and related questions, we conducted extensive semi-structured interviews with eighteen mostly older Orangemen in Southern Ontario from 2012 to 2014. We also undertook a content and discourse analysis of *The Sentinel*, the official publication of the Canadian Orange Order.

To anticipate the general direction of our findings, our Orange Order interviewees displayed a sense of anchoring and pride in their Protestant heritage, loyalty to the Crown and a comfort at being a part of a British