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Signing on: A Contractarian Understanding of How Public History is Used for Civic Inclusion

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Abstract
What makes public history more than just another hill to fight over in culture war politics? In this paper I propose a novel way of understanding the political significance of how public history creates and shapes identities: a contractarian one. I argue that public history can be sensibly understood as representing groups as a society's contracting parties. One particular value of the contractarian approach is that it helps to elucidate the phenomenon of "signing on," where a marginalized or oppressed group is offered membership in a society without the social order being meaningfully changed.

Keywords Public history · Collective memory · Contractarianism · Social and political philosophy · Applied ethics

1 Introduction

Public history certainly seems to be political. Protests target statues for removal. Governments send militarized guards to protect statues. The Canadian government is considering a national memorial for victims of the residential schools system while contending with the fact that the national "Victims of Communism" memorial has many bricks celebrating Nazis (Noakes 2021). Accepting that public history is politically important, what is the best way to understand that political importance? What is the best way to talk about the politics of public history that captures history as something that has political importance beyond just being an incidental front in the culture wars?

In this paper, I argue for understanding the politics of public history in terms of contractarianism. Public history works to shape the public and through that who has moral and political priority within a society. I will show that contractarianism not only provides a useful conceptual frame for understanding how public history works in the abstract, it also makes sense of how public history is currently used in political context. Importantly, the

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contractarian framework can be used to understand how public history is used to incorporate groups into the national narrative while offering those groups few or no material benefits.

There are five sections to this paper. First, I provide an overview of the account. In the second section I lay out the connection between history and identity, which is crucial to understanding public history in contractarian terms. In the third section, I offer a framework for how contractarianism maps on to my account of public history and then defend it by appealing to actual uses of public history. In the final two sections, I articulate the phenomenon of what I call "signing on." This uses the contractarian framework to make sense of public history being used for predatory inclusion, where groups are invited to "sign on" to the social contract without changing the contract's terms.

2 Section 1: Overview

In this paper I give an account of how public history can be understood in contractarian terms and show how this can be used to explain how public history is used as a means of malign social inclusion. I call this phenomenon "signing on:" a social group is invited to sign on to the social contract without substantially changing that contract's terms. Signing on is a useful concept because it both shows a distinctive way that bad public history statues can be harmful and gives substance to the intuition that some forms of historical recognition are little more than lip service.

I take my inspiration from Charles Mills' *The Racial Contract* (1997). In that book, Mills provides an account of what he calls the Racial Contract, a sometimes-tacit, sometimes-explicit agreement between the "people who count" which forms the historical explanation and normative justification for social origins (3–4). While Mills is writing in the context of race, I take his account as a model and apply it in the context of nation. The result of this is that a nation can be understood not only as being underlain by a social contract between contracting parties, but that this contract can be understood as a kind of domination contract between the people who matter and over the people who do not. I explore this further in the fourth section, along with an introduction to the idea of signing on.

The natures of these contracting parties are established in part by public history. Public history plays a significant role in establishing both national and public identity (Abrahams 2022; forthcoming; Anderson 2006). Specifically, and explored in greater detail next section, national identities are at least partially historical. Nations extend into the past, and historical events are used to delimit the nation's historical boundaries (Abrahams 2022: 752). Public history—and here I focus on statues and plaques as paradigmatic works of public history—ties that history to a particular location and the public that inhabits that location (op. cit.). In this way, public history makes the past people and events it represents in some way definitional to its relevant public: this historical past helps make these people who they are. To return this to the contract metaphor, what I propose is that the groups who are included in the nation in public history can be thought of as the contracting parties supporting the social contract.

The paper that follows develops and defends this account. In the next section I present the full account of public history and collective identity that underpins my use of the contract metaphor. In section three I further develop the contractarian understanding of public history and show that the contract metaphor fits for both normative justification and

historical description sides of Mills' account. Lastly, I survey examples to explicate the phenomenon of "signing on," where groups are offered inclusion in the social contract without substantially changing the terms which led to their subordination or exploitation.

3 Section 2: Public History and Identity

In this section, I give an account of public history as history and show how history plays an important role in the construction of collective (especially national) identity. "History" is often used colloquially to refer to past events or things that are finished. I have in mind a more restrictive sense of "history," by which it refers to an active process of reconstructing and presenting a particular perspective on the past (Gordon 2001, xv). History, in this sense, is not the past but rather something that is done. This perspective of the past does not present past events inertly but rather as having significance and standing in certain causal relations with other past events. So, for example, placing John A. Macdonald within Canadian history does not just give the perspective that some person John A. Macdonald existed, but that he has some significance to the history of Canada and his actions stand in certain causal relations to other events within Canadian history (perhaps as the first of many political leaders or someone who represents a development in national consciousness). History's ties to significance give it a mythological function where it may be used to imbue past events with a special, almost mystical, sort of significance (Blustein 2008, 188). Nevertheless, it is governed by a norm of truth: as much as history's narrative quality lends to past events being presented as stories, the past events are supposed to have actually happened (Blustein, op cit.). To borrow a phrase, while historians may make history they do not make it up.

Public history comprises works of history which are available to the public. While I will discuss an idea of the public more later in this section, for now it is sufficient to take a lay understanding of the public: roughly, the common areas of a city, community, or other similar area, and the people who either populate or frequent those areas. Paradigmatic works of public history are plaques and statues of historical figures or events. For example, Canada has many statues celebrating John A. Macdonald as the country's first Prime Minister. These statues often present a historical narrative roughly along the lines of "Macdonald is a foundational figure without which the goods of Canada and Canadianness would not be possible." Under certain conditions, other objects may also be public history. Striking natural features and historical buildings may be preserved as history, offering a perspective like "here is how the city used to be; the city now has developed from this preserved item." I underline that the statues, plaques, trees and houses that make up public history are not merely used for history, they are properly works of history themselves. They are part of the active process of reconstructing and presenting a particular perspective on the past and so are as much works of history as any documentary or academic book. Understanding public history in this way will prove useful for grasping certain ways that the past is put to political ends or otherwise contested.

Understanding the connection between history and identity, and consequently public history and public identity, will prove fundamental to understanding public history in contractarian terms. I focus on national identities as the paradigmatic case of history-based identities. While national identities are not the only history-based identity, focusing on them is justified on three grounds. The first is that contemporary practices of public history emerged along-

side the contemporary rise of nationalism (Gordon 2001, 33). This means that both phenomena are reacting to many of the same influences.[1] Such that this paper is a work of non-ideal theory, and my account of public history is contingent upon the social context surrounding practices of public history, using national identities as a paradigm of history-based identities keeps that context relatively fixed. The second justification for focusing national identities is that many public histories are specifically national histories. Macdonald was a figure in Canadian history; Edward Colston, whose statue in Bristol was deposed, was presented as a significant figure in English history; even Christopher Columbus, while not American, is often presented in the context of American history.[2] Lastly, nations are commonly understood as a basic collective unit entitled to political self-determination (Hobsbawm 1990: 102, 163). This makes national identities a good choice for showing the political import of public history. While other history-based identities also help to shape who does and does not matter, this political import is more readily available when looking at national identities because of how nations are taken to interact with political sovereignty in the contemporary world.

With respect to the idea of a public identity, I understand "public" in an ordinary language sense. This is because I am not trying to give an analysis of what the public ultimately is, but rather the role it plays with respect to the importance of public history in contemporary context. The understanding of the public that I take up is one that sees the "public" as roughly but not exactly the same as "the people." This is the public and the people who are appealed to by politicians for legitimacy, the referents of that political "we." I am interested in three particular connotations of this sense of the public. The first is that the public is the seat of authority. The public authorize and set in motion official actions by the state and its corresponding government. The second is that the public is a source of legitimacy. This is to say that state or government action is legitimate if on behalf of or in the interests of the public, even if the public does not necessarily authorize that action. Official actions may be evaluated based on whether or not they serve the public. The third important connotation of this sense of the public in which I am interested is that it defines a set of people who are given a kind of priority. It identifies people whose interests are elevated above others. This is particularly relevant with respect to shifting designations or attributions of "the public." David Graeber offers the comparison between two sentences: "the transit strike disrupted the public" and "the transit strike disrupted commuters" (Graeber 2015: 98–99). The difference between the two sentences is not (or not merely) that they designate two different groups of people as affected by the strike, but that the former sentence elevates the affected group to a politically significant category. Together, these three connotations are what leads the idea of the public to designate who does and does not matter morally and politically.

History defines national identities by delimiting those identities.[3] Such that nations extend through time, historical events are what set the nation's boundaries (Anderson 2006: 37). The most important boundaries set by historical events are beginnings. So, for example,

[1] Crucially, they were influenced by a geographical and social dislocation brought about by mass migration from rural to urban areas which in turn created a disjunction between traditional and modern social formations.

[2] With respect to Columbus within American history, this often takes the form of Columbus being a discoverer of the Americas and forming the start of civilization as a racialized settler project.

[3] This is not the only way that nations are defined, of course, but since the focus of this paper is public history I will focus on the role of history. For other ways that nations come to be defined, see *Banal Nationalism* (Billig 1995) and *Branding the Nation* (Aronczyk 2013).

a history which gives John A. Macdonald a foundational role in the creation of a Canadian nation defines being Canadian as being part of a group founded by Macdonald. What comes before Macdonald, according to this history, may inform the Canadian identity but lies beyond the historical extension of "Canadian." Further events chart the progress of the national identity across time; for Canada such events might be the attack on Vimy Ridge in World War One and the Summit Series in 1972. To be Canadian, on this understanding of history, is to be a member of a group which is defined by its involvement at Vimy Ridge and in the Summit Series.

Past events may be organized into different historical narratives. One way of referring to the narrative which defines the national identity is the "master national narrative template" (Anderson 2017: 3–5). This narrative is considered a template because it is used to organize past events according to a central, nation-defining narrative (op cit). The history I provided in the previous paragraph, of Canada being defined by Macdonald, Vimy Ridge, and the Summit Series, would be part of a "colony to nation" narrative for Canada. This history sees Canada as part of the European rationalist tradition, beginning as a colony and growing to become an idealization of the British-colonial vision. An alternative narrative would be what Stephanie Anderson calls the "multicultural mosaic," where Canada is a patchwork of national groups developing through history to realize the ideal of liberal tolerance (Anderson 2017: 19). Instead of beginning with Macdonald, this understanding of Canada might begin earlier, before European settlement. Instead of Vimy Ridge and the Summit Series, Canada-defining events might be the Persons Case or the policy of official multiculturalism.[4] This second, multicultural narrative will prove important in the fifth section. For now, what is important is to identify that that while national identities are historically defined, there is not necessarily a single, necessary nation-defining history.

These two conceptions of the Canadian national identity give different people priority with respect to claiming membership in Canada. The former colony-to-nation narrative prioritizes European settlers and their descendants. The good of Canada and the Canadian people is tied to an idea of national development and ideal of economic progress. In contrast, the multicultural mosaic narrative allows more people a claim on being Canadian. By this narrative, the good is centred more on moral rather than economic development, a growing civic inclusiveness, and generally affirming the righteousness of the Canadian people. Altogether, the different historical narratives give different conceptions of who is essentially Canadian and, therefore, who matters more when pursuing the good of the Canadian public. The difference between the colony-to-nation narrative and the multicultural mosaic narrative is the difference between the Canadian state maintaining its legitimacy because it pursues rational economic development and it maintaining its legitimacy because it successfully includes diverse cultural groups.

With such stakes, national histories are often contested. Different groups argue for the priority of different nation-defining narratives. One way that a national narrative is given priority is by being concretized (often literally) into public history. Public history does not just give a historical narrative priority (by representing that narrative in, for example, a large stone monument) but it ties that history to a particular location (Abrahams 2022). The public location, then, creates a connection between the history and the public place (op. cit.). A Macdonald statue will create a connection with the city of Victoria by being outside Victoria

[4] The Persons Case, from the early 20th century, was a legal challenge asserting that women were legally persons.

City Hall or the town of Picton by being placed in the middle of Picton's main road. Public history, then, represents the history relevant to a location.[5] Through this connection, public history plays a part in shaping the public. The history represented in the public history helps shape a history-defined identity. The historical events delimit the history-defined identity, determining who is part of the group and who is not. The public history ties that identity to the location in which the public history is situated. Here is Canadian history, the people of this public area are the Canadian people.

Understanding public history in this way helps understand the political contests over statues and other commemorations. What is at stake is not (or not just) honouring the subjects of those commemorations, but the definition of the public itself. The conflict over the Picton Macdonald statue, for example, concerns in part who the Canadian people are and where is their territory. In turn, through definition of the public, what is at stake is moral and political priority within civil society. Such an understanding also shows why public history statues are worth paying attention to in particular. Public history is not merely a political symbol because history plays a specific and important role in defining national identities. Statues, plaques, and the other sorts of public history I have discussed provide a particular connection between history and territory, which distinguishes them from other sorts of historical works like books or shows. In the following section, I argue in favour of understanding public history in contractarian terms. The transition comes naturally: I am already discussing how public history relates to the composition of political society. What the contractarian approach allows is to look at public history as helping to define the contracting parties who go through with that composition. This, in turn, helps elucidate how public history is used to allocate not just moral and political priority, but also entitlements and duties.

4 Section 3: A Contractarian Understanding

The contractarian model I want to pick up is that lain out by Charles Mills in *The Racial Contract* (1997). By Mills' model, the Racial Contract is a sometimes-tacit, sometimes-explicit agreement between the "people who count" which forms the historical explanation and normative justification for social origins (3–4). In particular, as a work of non-ideal theory, the Racial Contract offers an "x-ray vision into the real internal logic of the sociopolitical system" (5–6). While I am applying Mills' analysis as a model, it is worth noting that the connection between race and nation is tighter than mere analogy. Nations have historically been thought of in racialized terms, and ethnic nationalism is still a force in contemporary politics.[6] Accordingly, to support the application of Mills' analysis, in this section, I show two things. The first is to affirm the normative side of the application: that public history represents individuals and groups as members of the contracting parties who create the sociopolitical order. The second is to support the descriptive side of the application, which

[5] The phrasing "relevant to" is chosen so as to accommodate public histories of immigrant communities which represent past events from their country of origin.

[6] For the historic conflation of race and nation, see John Buchan's propagandizing for the First World War, which he presented as a conflict where the English-speaking races pursued their national destinies (McKay and Swift 2012: 69). For a more recent example, see the rise of ethno-nationalist politicians such as Hungary's Viktor Orbán, who on February 8, 2018 stated, "We must state that we do not want to be diverse and do not want to be mixed: we do not want our own colour, traditions and national culture to be mixed with those of others."

requires showing that public history is indeed used to establish groups as contracting parties for the sociopolitical order.

As I argued in the previous section, history works to shape history-based identities, especially national identities. It does this by delimiting the historical path of the group: they are defined by past events which are significant (or significant in specific ways) to that group and not to others. Public history ties this history to specific locations. This in turn serves to help shape the public: the people in the area surrounding the public history are defined by that history. They are the public to which, for example, Canadian history applies. To the extent that the public is taken in the commonsense way I outlined in the previous section, this public is given a sort of moral and political priority, especially as a seat of authority and source of legitimacy. It is through this priority that the public effectively play the role as contracting party. As Mills notes, the contracting process is essentially one of identifying the people who matter and the people who, at least politically, do not (Mills 1997, 11). This often involves not just assigning privileges and duties but also creating or acknowledging entitlements to land and resources (op. cit.). This entitlement to land and resources well captures how public history ties a public to a territory: by tying a people's history to the land, it makes the land that people's land. Most valuably, however, contractarianism gives a coherent way to talk about how the identity-shaping nature of public history has political consequences. Public history defines a people and ties that people to a location. These people, through contractarianism, are understood as a contracting party in society and this explains their political priority.

Understanding public history in terms of contractarianism might appear unmotivated if not for the fact that it does a good job of capturing how public history has in fact been used. Take, for example, the way public history tends to centre on firsts. Writing about public history in early 20th-century Nova Scotia, Ian McKay and Robin Bates note the wide range of "primary occurrences" chosen for celebration (McKay and Bates 2010, 348). These include but are not limited to: the first milled wheat, the first apples grown, the first church, and the first public gardens (op. cit.).[7] These firsts constitute a sort of Lockean land claim: by being presented as historical firsts, these past events are in turn represented as improvements upon the land thereby granting legitimate ownership to the improving parties.[8] In the context of Nova Scotia, these "improving parties" are taken to be the "five distinct white races" which compose Nova Scotia's "native types" (Nova Scotia Department of Highways 1936, quoted in McKay and Bates 2010, 9). I propose that these groups be understood as contracting parties: they are presented as the essential people of Nova Scotia who are given moral and political priority. The public history presents them, white European settlers, as the first people of the land whose firstness entitles them to that land. This entitlement to the land in turn gives them and their descendants the right to accept or exclude others as members of society. As McKay and Bates note, the government pamphlet celebrating Nova Scotia's "native types" pointedly excludes both Afro-Nova Scotians and Mi'kmaq (11).

[7] It is worth noting that these examples are drawn from promotional material put out by the Dominion Atlantic Railway, highlighting the connection between public history and tourism. This is a rich topic, but a philosophical treatment of it lies beyond the scope of this paper.

[8] There is a further story about which firsts are deemed relevant improvements upon the land but that is beyond the scope of this paper. For more, see Barker's discussion of the doctrine of discovery in "For Whom Sovereignty Matters" (2005, 4–17).

A further piece of evidence for how public history is used to craft a public can be found in historically inaccurate pieces of public history. For example, the Fletcher Stone of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia was initially interpreted as showing Norse runic symbols, and was celebrated for showing that Nova Scotia had Norse heritage. The stone, which was allegedly discovered in 1812 by army surgeon Richard Fletcher became famous in 1880 when Henry Phillips, jr. pronounced that the markings on the stone were Norse fragments of a saga (317). That the stone established Norse heritage for Nova Scotia was significant because it not only affirmed the idea of Nova Scotia having Norse (and thus white and European) origins, it gave Nova Scotia claim to North America's first white and European settlers (319). The Stone was highly celebrated: it was made a central tourist attraction from 1880 through the 1940s and was heavily promoted by the provincial guidebook *Historic Nova Scotia* (323). However, it was eventually debunked: the markings on the stones were made with a technique common in the 19th Century, well after the 10th and 11th Century explorations of Erik the Red and Leif Eriksson. Olaf Strandwold, who had proclaimed the stone's text to read "Leif to Erick raises this monument," was revealed to have no understanding of Old Norse and had simply invented the translation (321;325). Importantly, even after the stone was debunked as anything special, the stone was still celebrated as a heritage object; as a piece of public history, even a false history, its role as affirming Nova Scotia's Norse heritage was too important to abandon (325). What would have destroyed its value, McKay and Bates note, was if the markings had been shown to be of "Indian provenance" (324). The stone's value was in including the Norse as a contracting group—extending that same priority to the Mi'kmaq would have been unacceptable. The value (and potential disvalue) of the Fletcher Stone shows how public history is used to determine "the people" of Nova Scotia.

If Nova Scotia shows how public history is used to establish and constrain the number of possible contracting parties, examples can be found in Australia to show how history can be used to expand the included contracting parties. Elizabeth Povinelli writes about the land claims process, which was coming into being in the context of a reexamination of the Australian identity (Povinelli 2002, 22–25). One of the results of this reexamination was an attempt to make Australia's indigenous nations internal to the Australian identity, formalized in part by the public history of the Welcome to Country (or Acknowledgement of Country) ceremony, which acknowledges indigenous Australians as the "Traditional Custodians of country" (National Indigenous Australians Agency). Povinelli notes that incorporating the "indigenous" as a concept into the national identity plays the role of grounding Australia not in colonial conquest, but in indigenous settlement (Povinelli 2002, 26).[9] I will discuss the consequences of this phenomenon of "signing on" in the next two sections. For here it is enough to note the following: the Welcome to Country ceremony works as a piece of public history to include indigenous Australians as a contracting party who make up Australia. It identifies indigenous Australians as people who matter in the context of Australian identity and have a claim on the nature and origins of Australianness.

In this section, I have offered a way of understanding public history in contractarian terms. Public history, by way of shaping public identity, works to determine who does and does not receive moral and political priority within a society. The people or groups given priority can be thought of as contracting parties to the social contract in the model of Mills' Racial Contract. This non-ideal contract is a domination contract, which is held between

[9] While the Welcome to Country ceremony is not a physical work of history like the statues I have discussed, its particular connection of history to territory makes it an apt inclusion in this discussion.

the people with priority and held over the people without. The contract metaphor helps to clarify how public history turns the priority of history into real political power: the public as shaped by public history become the contractors who make up society. It is their needs and desires which inform the contract's content. The appeal to contractarianism is bolstered in examining how public history has in fact been used. Cases drawn from Nova Scotian public history show how public history was used to establish the "native types" of Nova Scotia, and thereby delimit who was a contracting member of society. From Australia, the Welcome to Country ceremony was used to include indigenous Australians as contracting members of society. Now that I have provided the basic model, I would like to move to demonstrating its explanatory virtue, specifically that it captures the phenomenon which I call "signing on."

5 Section 4: Signing on

I have argued for understanding public history in contractarian terms. Specifically, I have argued that contractarianism is a valuable way of understanding public history's role in creating and sustaining identity, and its moral and political consequences in light of that role. In this section I want to explore two explanatory virtues of my account. The first is that the contractarian account is adept at handling joiners: people coming to the community and becoming members within that identity group. Call this the phenomenon of signing on. People, individually or collectively, are invited to "sign on" to the social contract thereby accepting the contract's terms. Such that the social contract covers a society's moral and political arrangements, signing on is taken to cover agreeing to that society's moral and political arrangements. The second, much more significant phenomenon that the contractarian account captures is how signing on is used to obviate entitlements and duties.

It is a feature of human existence that people move around from place to place, and that this entails leaving old communities while joining new ones. One sort of this movement that is taken particularly seriously is immigration when a person moves from one nation to another. In contemporary society it is often the expectation that people do not just move to a new place, a new national location, but that they join the new nation. In contractarian terms, the joiner can be thought of as signing on to a new social contract, agreeing to the moral and political arrangements of the new society. This signing on may even be represented by a special ceremony: national joining through immigration is usually accompanied by a ritual or set of rituals. There are a set of applications, tests, and investigations to check whether someone's request to join the nation is genuine followed by some sort of ceremony where the joiner recites some kind of sworn oath.

Signing on to a contract is a way of showing assent to the content of that contract. Following Mills' analysis of the Racial Contract, the social contracts which underlie national societies endorse skewed distributions of power. These contracts grant some groups of people—often those of a racialized or gendered ingroup—dominating power over others. What the metaphor of signing on captures is that the dominated people who have been contracted over may be offered the chance to sign on without changing the terms of the contract, thereby effectively assenting to their own continued domination. They will no longer merely be contracted over as before, but they will still suffer from the same exploitative social order that the original contract established. This is not merely a theoretical consideration: the phenomenon of signing on finds itself historically instantiated in what Canada has called

Enfranchisement. This legal strategy, aptly originated by John A Macdonald, involved offering members of Indigenous Nations Canadian citizenship. By accepting citizenship, those people would forfeit any entitlements they had held as members of Indigenous Nations including, critically, benefits which had been owed to them through Crown-Nation treaties. Accordingly, anyone who accepted Enfranchisement would be joining a Canadian nation still fully centred on exploiting Indigenous Nations and those nations' land. Such that inclusion in the nation is made conditional on forfeiting entitlements, signing on can work as a form of predatory inclusion.

These illustrative examples both apply to individuals; a person recites a citizenship oath or renounces their Indigenous status. However, the phenomenon of signing on exists at the group level too and this is achieved through uses of public history. What I have provided so far in this paper is an argument that public history helps shape and maintain public identities, especially national ones. The way history shapes identity can be thought of in contractarian terms, where public history establishes the contracting parties and an order of who does and does not matter. Contractarianism allows the phenomenon of signing on, where a party signs on to the social contract without changing the contract's terms. In the next section, I complete the argument by showing how public history has been used to pursue the phenomenon of signing on: people or groups are offered inclusion in the social contract through having significant past events memorialized in public history but this is done in a way that does not fundamentally alter the arrangements determined by the social contract.

6 Section 5: Public History and Signing on

Signing on happens through public history when a group becomes included in the public through public history but the way the public is shaped is not substantially changed. Since I am interested in public history as history, I will leave to the side cases where a work of public history might be used for some non-historical end (such as a simple representation of values) and focus on the two main ways that public history achieves signing on historically. Both involve placing a group within a nation-defining historical narrative that does not substantially challenge or upend the status quo. I will term the first "enfranchisement," after Canada's policy of Enfranchisement. In cases of enfranchisement, the group is assimilated into the existing social order as if there was never a conflict or cleavage. For the second, I will adopt Alfred Archer's analysis of "consigning to history" (2021). In such cases the group in question is acknowledged as wronged or otherwise at odds with the mainstream, but the harms (or even the group's identity wholesale) are placed firmly in the past. I treat them in turn.

The Australian Welcome to Country ceremony, as discussed in Sect. 3, is an instance of enfranchisement. The ceremony works to situate the roots of Australia in pre-European history, encompassing indigenous settlement. This works as enfranchisement because it effectively occludes the historical conflict between European (and European-descended) settlers and the island's indigenous inhabitants. Casting Australia's indigenous nations as specifically indigenous Australians occludes the fact that "Australia" was something forcibly imposed upon them. Such that this history affects the identity of Australianness, Povinelli notes that it works as a kind of sanctification (Povinelli 2002, 26). Australia is given a pre-European origin, creating an authentic essence of the nation apart from settler colonial-

ism. Such that settler colonialism is a part of this history, it is contingent, a mistake, rather than essentially constitutive of Australianness. And the consequences of basing the Australian identity upon this history have direct, political consequences. The Australian state recognizes "native title" but this is a category that exists relative to colonial rule (Povinelli 2002, 156). Inclusion within the Australian state qua indigeneity, then, is contingent upon adhering to mainstream expectations (which in the Australian context will be those of white, European-descended Australians) of pre-colonial authenticity (Povinelli 2002, 48). Title to land is only granted if the people living there demonstrate that they still hold "ancient rules, beliefs, and practices" (Povinelli 2002, 37). Altogether, the Welcome to Country ceremony is a piece of public history that enfranchises indigenous Australians such that they are included in the identity of Australianness in a way that the legitimacy of Australia is neither challenged nor threatened.

"Consigning to history" works as a form of predatory inclusion by adopting a group into a historical narrative in such a way that that group exists entirely within the past (Archer 2021). This has the effect of denying or otherwise limiting the claims and entitlements the group might have within the present (op cit.). Thomas King has written about this in the context of North American Indigenous politics. He creates the distinction between "dead Indians" and "live Indians" (King 2012, 53).[10] He defines the "dead" extensionally through a series of historical and cultural referents, all of which situate the "dead Indian" in the past (54–59).[11] The "live," in contrast, are the actually existing indigenous people alive in the present. Politically, this distinction between the "dead" and the "live" plays out as effectively denying Indigenous claims to land or reparations from colonial mistreatment: the "dead Indian" is buried in the past and with that goes anyone to whom reparations might be owed (King 2012).

There are a number of ways that consigning to history can work through public history. The most straightforward way is to present a group as dead and gone. Archer surveys a number of such cases. For example, monuments in the West of Scotland which celebrate past industrial workers occlude both the continued effects of de-industrialization and the fact that the West Scottish working class still exists (2021). He also draws on critical approaches to Holocaust memorialization and identifies that public commemorations of atrocity can work to morally seal the atrocity in the past (op. cit.). This moral sealing can work to exclude people who still feel resentment for that past atrocity, their sentiment disowned by the nation at large (op. cit.).

To these examples, we can add another more fine-grained case drawing from work by Gordon-Walker et al. (Gordon-Walker, Alvarez Hernandez and Ashley, 2018). They identify a distinction between public history that commemorates events and public history that commemorates experiences of events (Gordon-Walker et al. 2018, 92). Commemorating the experiences of events rather than the events directly has the effect of centring the history on something that is far more temporally limited. The experiences of events are more readily

[10] It is worth noting that King chooses the term "Indian" because it captures the otherwise-nonexistent collective defined within the settler imagination by their opposition to the project of colonial settlement (King 2012, 6–8).

[11] His referents include but are not limited to Indigenous people in traditional dress (Sacheen Littlefeather at the 1973 Academy Awards), non-Indigenous people in imagined-traditional dress (Mel Gibson in *Maverick*), geographical place names (Dead Indian Canyon), team mascots (Chicago Blackhawks), corporate mascots (Crazy Horse Malt Liquor), named product lines (Jeep Cherokee), and new age health services (sweat lodge therapy) (King 2012, 74–81).

kept in the past, along with the people who had those experiences. Events, in contrast, are more readily understood as parts of ongoing processes with material consequences. This allows for cases like Canada's Community Historical Recognition Program (CCHRP) being used, in 1990, to offer symbolic reparations for the internment of Italian Canadians in lieu of monetary compensation (93). The suffering of Italian Canadians is consigned to the past, and does not ask challenging questions about present arrangements as might a focus on those people's dispossession. Just as King's "dead Indian" fits seamlessly into the past, the internment of Italian Canadians is entered into Canada's national narrative as just another step along the path of moral improvement (94). The focus on memorializing experiences rather than events, then, works as a kind of consigning to history. The past is incorporated into history as a series of experiences rather than events, and the experiences are firmly in the past.

Both enfranchisement and consigning to history show how public history is used to achieve signing on, and how that signing on is oriented towards malign ends. The Welcome to Country ceremony is a piece of public history that invites Australia's Indigenous nations into the category of "Australian." By being integrated into the category of "Australian" they are invited to enjoy the moral and political order that Australia provides. However, the ceremony invites a signing on to a historical narrative that elides claims Australia's Indigenous nations have against Australia. As Australia is turned from something that was imposed on indigenous nations into something that began with them, tough questions about how Australia's moral and political order are rooted in the exploitation of a non-consenting outsider group are hidden away. The Welcome to Country ceremony may be used as a means of including members of Australia's indigenous nations in the Australian national identity, but it does this without seriously changing the existing moral and political order.[12]

The consigning to history cases show groups invited to sign on to a moral and political order that has buried them in the past. Groups may be internalized into the national narrative, and thereby the national public, but in a way that denies claims that group may have based on past mistreatment. The CCHRP case shows this most directly, as the creation of public history is offered instead of monetary compensation for internment. Italian Canadians are thereby invited to sign on to the Canadian social contract, but only in such a way that the moral wrong of internment is consigned to the past. They are accepted as Canadian, but only so long as they accept the existing moral and political order without much change.

7 Conclusions and Connections

I have spent this paper arguing in favour of understanding public history through contractarianism. Public history helps shape a public, and that public carries a sort of moral and political priority. That priority is used to understand the groups public history incorporates into the public as contracting parties. This contractarian understanding is particularly valu-

[12] The Welcome to Country case suggests a further example, where the Australian state begins giving such a ceremony without the actual assent of many (or even any) actual indigenous people. This could be thought of as a case of forged signing on. To the extent that settler states appropriate the symbols of colonized nations to shore up their own legitimacy, I think the ability of my account to make sense of this sort of forged signing on is an explanatory virtue.

able when put in the context of signing on, where groups are offered incorporation into the public but without changing the terms of the social contract.

I end with noting a few points where my work connects with other work on history, heritage and nationhood. First, it offers an enrichment of current work on the harms that statues can do. Much work on the harms done by bad public history statues focuses on how they can, in one way or another, wrongfully or harmfully exclude someone. So, for example, Johannes Schulz (2019) writes that bad public history statues can be a source of alienation and I elsewhere (forthcoming) offer that statues can be a source of ontic injustice. In contrast to wrongful exclusion, the account I have provided shows how bad public history statues can be a source of wrongful inclusion. I underline that this is an enrichment and not a challenge (I suspect that wrongful inclusion can easily be absorbed by Schulz's account as a kind of alienation) but it nevertheless offers a valuable new perspective. It is not enough for public history to merely represent some group's history, how that group's history is represented matters too.

A second connection is with Zofia Stemplowska's paper (2022) on applying the demands of distributive justice to public history. Her account holds that priority in commemoration should be given to victims of injustice. The contractarian model fits well with distributive thinking and opens up a new avenue for thinking about commemoration. Beyond questions about the distribution of attention, commemoration can investigated for how it distributes moral and political priority. A third connection can be made with work on multicultural nationhood. In "Multicultural Citizenship within Multicultural States," Will Kymlicka notes worries faced by cultural groups about integration into states without a corresponding pluralizing of the sense of nationhood (2011, 294). Such integration could constitute a noxious form of assimilation. What I have provided in this paper shows not just how signing on—enfranchisement especially—can be used as a strategy for assimilation, but how these same worries can persist within multicultural nations.

As a final point, the account I've provided in this paper helps give articulation to a persistent worry about cultural politics. Cultural issues like public history are important because they are connected to deeply important political issues like the distribution of moral and political priority. However, these issues are only tenuously connected to more material questions of politics and so public history is vulnerable to being turned into a mere symbol. Inclusion is not offered as a means to justice but rather as a substitute for it. Here the paper connects not just with the work of Povinelli and King but also Glen Sean Coulthard, who has written about the many strategies of inclusion and reconciliation the Canadian state has used to pursue the goal of Enfranchisement (2014). The account of signing on helps us understand how there is still some important power to that symbolic inclusion while at the same time inclusion, on its own, is not enough.

While the examples I have invoked in this paper have been largely critical, centring on the malign strategic uses of public history, this should not be taken to condemn strategic uses of public history or even signing on specifically. Civic inclusion is a laudable goal, at least in the abstract, and it would certainly be a strange conclusion to hold that the public history of cultural groups is always a malign influence. What I hope to have achieved here is the opposite; I hope that this understanding the relationship between public history and civic membership makes possible a better discussion on how the end goal of civic inclusion can be pursued without falling into the pitfall of merely symbolic victories.

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