

KEEP EXPLORING, CANADA.

WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED.

Buy this iconic blanket

The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) point blanket, a valuable trading commodity designed in England in the late 1700s, aided in the establishment of the HBC's monopoly over the fur trade in what is today known as Canada - a key factor in the construction of the settler colonial state. This association has imbued the blanket with iconic status in the aesthetic landscape of "Canadiana" (Decter & Isaac, 2015). The blanket's current position as a prestige product references and romanticises two structural aspects of Canada: the nation itself and one of its foundational units, the nuclear Christian family home (Barman, 1997), built upon the colonial domination of Indigenous women (Bhandar, 2016).

\$325.00 - \$550.00

- 1 +

Now in stock

Add to bag

Customers that purchased this blanket also bought...

...into the notion that the legal frameworks woven into the fabric of colonial nostalgia (El-Enany, 2016) are universal and essential, rather than contingent constructs. The corporation, private property regimes, and the nation state are all nourished in the public imagination (in part) by colonial capitalist lore.

As seen in:

- *An Epic Tale*, an image-rich biography of the HBC, delivered by the company to history teachers across Canada in 2018 to aid in the pedagogical reproduction of colonial capitalist lore
- Regrettably, my own kitchen: as a non-Indigenous (but non-white) Canadian, the aesthetics of Canadiana operate upon me in contradictory ways. I once purchased a travel mug adorned with the blanket's iconic stripes, perhaps drawn to the prestige associated with the design or searching for visual means of concretising my Canadian identity.

Fabric of a nation

The English textile company that manufactures the blanket today has also developed fabrics for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and has designed a number of distinctive British military uniforms, including the iconic scarlet garb of the Queen's Guards: a symbolic convergence of the aesthetics of nation, empire, and commerce.

The fine print

- Genocide: The blanket continues to be associated with the inoculation of Indigenous populations with smallpox - despite continuous attempts by historians, journalists, and the company itself to acquit the HBC blanket of this charge. From 2011 - 2016, artist Leah Decter and Anishinaabe curator Jaimie Isaac hosted a participatory art project based around the blanket to confront institutional denial about Canada's colonial past and present. The result was a rich tapestry of complex and intersecting narratives sewn by participants into HBC blankets.
- Symbol of epistemicide: The economic devaluation of the blanket as a result of extensive gifting in Indigenous potlatch ceremonies drew colonial ire in the 1800s (Bhandar, 2016). Perceived as an attack on the sanctity of private property, potlatches were outlawed from 1855-1951. During this time, colonial officials characterised the potlatch as threat to Christian sexual morality - the press began generating sensational (often false) news headlines on the topic of potlatches such as "Indian Girl Sold for 1,000 Blankets" (Barman, 1997).

References

- AW Hainsworth, 2020. Hainsworth: The Fabric of a Nation. [company website] Available at: <<https://www.hainsworth.co.uk/about/>> [Accessed 1 July 2020].
- Barman, J., 1997/8. Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1900. *BC Studies: The British Columbian Quarterly*, 115(6), p. 237.
- Bhandar, B., 2016. Status as Property: Identity, Land and the Dispossession of First Nations Women in Canada. *Dark Matter*, [online] Available at: <<http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2016/05/16/status-as-property-identity-land-and-the-dispossession-of-first-nations-women-in-canada/>> [Accessed 1 July 2020].
- Coulthard, G. (2014) *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Decter, L. and Isaac, J., 2015. Reflections on Settling Narratives of Denial. In: G. L'Hirondelle Hill & S. McCall, eds., *The Land We Are*. Winnipeg: ARP Books. pp. 98 - 129.
- El-Enany, N., 2016. Brexit as Nostalgia for Empire. *Critical Legal Thinking*, [online] Available at: <<https://criticallegalthinking.com/2016/06/19/brexit-nostalgia-empire/>> [Accessed 16 June 2020].
- HBC, 2017. Hudson's Bay Company Delivers An Epic Tale to Schools Across Canada in collaboration with Canada's History Society [press release]. Available at: <<https://www3.hbc.com/press-release-container/hudsons-bay-company-delivers-an-epic-tale-to-schools-across-canada-in-collaboration-with-canadas-history-society/>> [Accessed 1 July 2020].
- Knollenberg, B., 1954. General Amherst and Germ Warfare. *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 41(3), p. 489.
- Reid, M., 2018. *An Epic Tale*. Canada's National History Society & HBC Heritage Services. Available online at: <<http://www.hbcheritage.ca/books/>> [Accessed 1 July 2020].

Sahar Shah

University of Warwick

Sahar.Shah@warwick.ac.uk