From Social Celebration to Social Deliberation: The Rise of Liberal-Pluralist Symbolism in Ontario

James Cairns
Wilfrid Laurier University

ABSTRACT This article analyzes the postwar emergence of liberal-pluralist symbolism in newspaper coverage of the ceremonial Opening of the Legislature in Ontario. It argues that in the era of Social Celebration (1900 to 1940s), Ontario newspapers framed the legislative opening as a spectacular festival of provincial unity through colonial identity; whereas, by contrast, in the era of Social Deliberation (1950s to the present), the same civic ritual is depicted as a province-wide policy debate among competing politicians, interest groups, and citizens. Viewing Social Deliberation news coverage as a specific moment that contributes to the reproduction of liberal-pluralist democracy as a whole, the author concludes that, like liberal-pluralist politics in general, liberal-pluralist symbolism encompasses contradictions, normalizes systemic inequalities, and restricts the range of legitimate forms of political action.

KEYWORDS Political symbolism; Liberal pluralism; Newspapers; Narrative and framing analysis; Ontario politics

This article examines the rise of liberal pluralism in the symbolic sphere of Ontario politics. Specifically, it analyzes changes in mass-mediated representations of a key civic ritual to better understand the evolution of dominant conceptions of political legitimacy in Canada’s largest province. By focusing on transformations in mid-twen-

James Cairns is an Assistant Professor of Contemporary Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University, Brantford Campus, 73 George Street, Brantford, ON N3T 2Y3. Email: jcairns@wlu.ca

©2010 Canadian Journal of Communication Corporation
tieth-century newspaper coverage of the ceremonial Opening of the Legislature (the day of the Speech from the Throne), the study casts light upon the historical roots of a contemporary political commonplace: namely, the assumption that extra-parliamentary citizens and groups are legitimate participants in affairs of the Canadian state (cf. Skogstad, 2003). Textual analysis of a large corpus of widely circulating newspapers demonstrates that the province’s dominant organs of public sense-making (cf. Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978) once approached and described the ritual as a spectacular festival of Ontario unity through colonial identity (what I call the frame of Social Celebration), whereas, by contrast, today’s newspapers depict the same ritual as a province-wide policy debate among competing politicians, interest groups, and citizens (what I call the frame of Social Deliberation).

Analyzing the shift from Social Celebration to Social Deliberation is important not only because it highlights developments in representations of political legitimacy in Ontario, but also because it historicizes and enables critique of contemporary forms of liberal pluralism. In spite of the tendency of liberal pluralism to portray itself as though it were natural and eternal, it is of course neither (Eagleton, 2007). Liberal pluralism is a creature of history; and if it is to remain vital, the whole political system—the liberal-pluralist “structure of feeling” (Williams, 1977, p. 132)—must constantly reproduce itself through an endless series of symbols and practices (Garcia-Blanco, 2009). It would be virtually impossible to draw a map of liberal pluralism in all of its acts, signs, and thoughts; however, it is possible to examine particular objects and events that operate in service of the system as a whole. The way in which political legitimacy in Ontario came to be represented in postwar newspaper coverage of the legislative opening constitutes precisely such a case. It marks a specific instance in which liberal pluralism is hailed, mimicked, and reproduced; and, as my analysis demonstrates, it is wrought with many of the same contradictions that plague liberal-pluralist politics in general.

A symbolic approach to liberal pluralism

The guiding principles of liberal-pluralist democracy are today so deeply entrenched in Western institutions and cultures that they are often represented as the absence of ideology altogether (Eagleton, 2007; Held, 2006). Nesbitt-Larking (2007) provides a neat summary of the liberal-pluralist perspective:

Liberalism is an ideology that stresses the importance of private property and the desirability of sustaining a society in which each person is free to pursue his or her own interests. The pluralist perspective looks upon political society as consisting of a number (plurality) of groups that are fundamentally united in their support for the regime and the authorities, even though each pursues its own advantage in competition with the others. Liberal pluralists regard the state basically as a set of responsive institutions that receive demands from the plurality of groups in society and convert them through a process of deliberation into public policy outputs. (pp. 82-83)

The bulk of the literature on liberal pluralism either aims to clarify the theoretical nature of liberal pluralism as the basis of a political system (see Galston, 2002; Rawls,
In contrast to these two traditional approaches, this article analyzes the symbolic aspects of liberal pluralism. My inquiry is aligned with the work of scholars who examine the role of liberal-pluralist symbolism in “inducing loyalty, fostering legitimacy, gaining compliance, and aiding social integration” (Baas, 1979, p. 101); or, in the language of the more critical variant of the same overall project, the ways in which liberal-pluralist symbolism “can serve to reinforce and perpetuate dominant and official models of social structure and social change” (Lukes, 1975, p. 302).

Brodie’s (2002) symbolic approach to politics in Canada is especially relevant here, as it bears directly upon the symbolics of Canadian legislative institutions (see also Gill, 2002; Weinroth, 1998), and it is the only such study that focuses on parliamentary openings. Brodie uses transcripts of Speeches from the Throne to “provide a historical record of how different ideas about Canada and “Canadianness” are evoked in order to rally support for governing practices and public policies” (p. 21). She examines federal Throne Speeches since Confederation and identifies the discursive construction of three ideal-type Canadians. The analysis is innovative and makes a compelling argument about how national myths can change over time; but, as I argue in the next section, its insights can be extended by focusing not simply upon the text of the Throne Speech, but rather upon mass-mediated representations of the whole parliamentary opening.

In political science in Canada, despite widespread acknowledgment that the legislature is a “symbol of our system of doing governance” (Whittington & Van Loon, 1996, p. 507; White, 1997), there is a dearth of empirical research that examines the symbolic character of legislative institutions (cf. Atkinson & Thomas, 1993; Malloy, 2002; Sproule-Jones, 1984; Young, 1981). By contrast, in communication studies and interdisciplinary research, scholarly contexts in which symbolic analysis is well established, scholars have virtually ignored the symbolic dimension of legislatures. This article contributes to the literature on liberal pluralism by taking a semiotic approach within the field of legislative studies.

A media history approach to civic ritual

My analysis is guided by two theoretical assumptions: 1) that by studying political symbolism, specifically civic ritual, researchers are offered “a glimpse into the logic underlying the construction of power and legitimacy” (Kook, 2005, p. 152); and 2) that “the media form our psychic environment, especially with respect to matters beyond our direct personal experience, a realm into which most aspects of politics fall” (Fletcher & Gottlieb Taras, 1990, p. 221). In the tradition of neo-Durkheimian social theory, I interpret the legislative opening as a rich site of symbolic analysis because it is a ritual: a symbolically laden, regularly occurring, subjunctive, serious, social performance (Rothenbuhler, 1998). The ceremonial Opening of the Legislature is the official start of a new legislative session, the day of the government’s Speech from the Throne, the centrepiece of the legislative calendar. As such, it is a “constitutive ritual”: a civic ceremony that invests “some individual[s] with authority to manipulate pri-
Mary rules in such a way as to be regarded as legitimate within the terms of the larger political system” (Goodin, 1978, p. 285).

At the same time, however, on the mountain of research that views news as central to the construction of political reality (e.g., Hall et al., 1978; Hartley, 1982; Sampert & Trimble, 2010; Thompson, 1995), the legislative opening is analyzed not exclusively in terms of its administrative functions or predetermined assumptions about its ability to achieve social unity. By contrast, it is interpreted in terms of how the event is invested with meaning by the media, who “make the world they report on intelligible to readers and viewers” (Hall et al., 1978, p. 55). Mainstream newspaper coverage is a rich site for examining dominant hegemonic forces, for it operates within “the general boundaries or framework of ‘what everyone agrees’ to: the consensus” (Hall, 1982, p. 87). As García-Blanco (2009, p. 842) explains in his recent study of the press in Spain, analyzing “media discourses about democracy may help us understand what democracy is commonly understood to be, both ideally and in practice.”

On the view that “the public” itself is largely constituted through processes of mass mediation (Thompson, 1995), I assume that rituals, inasmuch as they express some part of the political order, “can have social functions only via their communicative capacities”—a proposition which makes it of the utmost importance that “studies of civil ceremonies [are undertaken] by students of communication, who are equipped to analyze their specific communicative devices” (Rothenbuhler 1998, p. 104; see also Vipond, 2010).

Methodology
The study conducts narrative analysis and framing analysis of 660 newspaper stories and images relating to 22 legislative openings between 1900 and 2007. The textual corpus is drawn from four widely circulating Ontario dailies: the Toronto Evening Telegram (Telegram from 1949 to 1971), Toronto Globe (Globe and Mail since 1936), Toronto Daily Star (Star since 1971), and Toronto Sun. The method of “maximum variation” (Gobo, 2003, p. 426) sampling is based on the following principles: beginning in 1900 and proceeding in five-year increments, the corpus consists of all news items relating to the first legislative opening in a given year, appearing in any part of the Telegram, Globe, Star, and Sun published on the day of the Throne Speech as well as the day following the opening ceremonies.1

Textual analysis consisted of four rounds of coding. The first round conducted open-ended, “initial coding” (see Charmaz, 2006), to establish the boundaries of the corpus and identify appropriate categories for systematic coding. The second round analyzed every story and image in the corpus using a 17-item coding schedule derived from Foss’ (2004) narrative analysis and Gamson & Modigliani’s (1989) framing analysis. The third and fourth round counted specific features of news items with the purpose of providing numerical support for the general trends identified in round two. In Seale’s (2003) words, this is a “qualitative study supported by counting” (p. 416). In sum, the methodological approach assumes: 1) that civic rituals are narratives about political legitimacy, and that narratives “organize the stimuli of our experience so that we can make sense of the people, places, events, and actions of our lives” (Foss, 2004, p. 333); and 2) that the dominant meaning of civic ritual is articulated through the
process of news framing, which “guide[s] audiences toward a ‘dominant’ or ‘preferred’ reading[,]” reflects key aspects of the dominant hegemonic order, and “constrains alternative meanings” (Atwood-Galley, 1999, p. 112, italics in original).

Constitutionally speaking, the Opening of the Legislature performs precisely the same function today as it did at Confederation; yet, as the textual analysis demonstrates, the meaning of the ritual has evolved significantly over the course of the twentieth century. As Geertz (2000) observed and as this article demonstrates, dominant understandings about the nature of “the inherent sacredness of central authority” (p. 123) differ from place to place and can change over time. In the case of Ontario, what began as a celebration of imperial authority and social hierarchy shifted around the middle of the twentieth century to become a symbolic expression of liberal-pluralist politics. The following two sections describe the key elements of the two dominant ways of framing the legislative opening. The final sections discuss reasons for the shift from Social Celebration to Social Deliberation and explain how the liberal-pluralist way of framing the ritual, despite being more democratic in some respects, is limited by its inherent contradictions.

The era of Social Celebration, 1900 to 1940s
For the first five decades of the twentieth century, journalists approached and described the Ontario legislative opening as a popular, multidimensional celebration at Queen's Park. Newspaper stories tended to describe the event in chronological order and focus on the physical and social aspects of the occasion, as opposed to questions about policy development, partisan struggle, or debate among citizens and civic associations. As Table 1 demonstrates, the scene and setting at Queen’s Park is the primary theme of a large majority of the 235 news items sampled between 1900 and 1945; by contrast, partisan strategy and the Speech from the Throne constitute the primary theme of just over a quarter of all items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total # of items</th>
<th>Primary theme is scene and setting</th>
<th>Primary theme is Throne Speech or partisan politics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Globe</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>58 (70%)</td>
<td>25 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>45 (59%)</td>
<td>31 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegram</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>63 (83%)</td>
<td>13 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>166 (71%)</td>
<td>69 (29%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The typical newspaper story about the ritual was a long, lavish description of the event’s scene, setting, and major characters. Journalists focused on two spheres of action: 1) outside on the legislative lawn, and 2) inside the legislative building. Action outside the Legislature began with the arrival of the jubilant crowd hours prior to the official commencement of the ceremony. The ceremony was known to attract “thousands of people to the great buildings, and from an early hour streams of people were seen wending their way through the avenues and park” (“The Breakfast Table,”
Although it does not mention, as does the *Toronto Daily Star*, the “large crowd of citizens look[ing] on” ("Eighteenth Legislature Formally Inaugurated," 1930, p. 1), the caption below a photo gallery in the *Globe* captures key features of action outside: “The traditional booming of guns, the prancing of steeds of the mounted escort for the Lieutenant-Governor, the twin khaki lines of the guard of honor—these were the outward signs of the opening yesterday of the Eighteenth Legislature of Ontario” ("At the Speaker’s Reception," 1930, p. 13).

As it had been outside, the crowd was the central feature of action inside the House: “Crowds at the main entrance, crowds on the main staircase, crowds in the corridors, crowds at every entrance to the chamber, crowds in every available space on the floor and in the galleries, crowds everywhere” ("The Crowd the Feature," 1905, p. 7). The focus on where women sat was of primary concern, as prior to 1944 the legislative opening marked the sole occasion when women were permitted to sit on the floor of the legislative chamber. The event’s ritualized gender inversion was not portrayed as an incidental feature, but as a core component of the festive occasion. In the words of one *Daily Star* headline: “Femininity, Fashion, Beauty Dominated Opening of House” (1925, p. 7). Action inside the Chamber included the arrival of the lieutenant-governor, the election of a Speaker (if needed), and the delivery of the Speech from the Throne. The Speech itself was interpreted as an aspect of the larger spectacle taking place, not as the defining moment of the day, and certainly not as a political statement to be analyzed.

As the *Globe* explained in 1930, although action inside the House marked the centrepiece of the daylong event, “almost equally important was the reception in the Speaker’s Chambers” ("At the Speaker’s Reception," 1930, p. 13). The tea party was an ideal place to see and be seen “Amid Scenes of Brilliance” (1910, p. 3) at Queen’s Park, and it was notable as a social space in which “Political Views [Were] Forgotten” (1940, p. 24) among guests. It was acknowledged that “political opponents will be flying at one another’s throats” as soon as opening-day had passed, but in the liminal phase that celebrated Ontario politics and culture, even hardened enemies were “as sweet to each other as honey” (Gibb, 1935, p. 1).

In Francis’ words, “until at least World War II the worship of the monarchy and the British Empire enjoyed almost cult status in Canadian society” (1997, p. 53; see also Vipond, 2010). This helps to explain why the legislative opening was portrayed as a showcase for the “banner province” in the British Empire (“At the Legislature,” 1900, p. 6). The day revolved around the body and movements of the lieutenant-governor, who was no mere man but “the King himself” (Charlesworth, 1937, p. 189). Journalists used the parliamentary ritual to strengthen links between the colonial outpost and the imperial metropole by remarking on how the opening in Toronto echoed “Ottawa’s gorgeous ceremony, as it in turn echoes old London” (Cornella, 1925, p. 9). In one admittedly unique but nonetheless telling *Globe* story of 1930, the spectacle of Ontario’s opening was given a colourful first-person assessment by the ghost of the seventeenth-century British parliamentarian and diarist, Samuel Pepys (“Pepys at Queen’s Park,” 1930, p. 13). Who better to evaluate whether Ontario’s celebration was sufficiently lavish, British, and bold? (To be sure, the ghost gave high marks all around.)

On one hand, citizens were central to the occasion; but on the other, the role assigned to them was not that of the citizen in the republican sense of the term, but
rather than that of the adoring British subject. (Indeed, until 1947, Ontarians were British subjects.) Prior to the second half of the twentieth century, the role of citizens in the media ritual was to see and be seen. In Lardellier’s terminology (2005), spectators on the legislative grounds and news readers away from Queen’s Park became ritual participants, “spect-actors” (p. 71), through the process of “seeing with” (p. 71) their fellow Ontarians. The symbolic function of the citizen was to legitimize the power of the Empire and the state by standing before the symbols of imperial authority and cheering. In fact, it was not uncommon for newspaper stories to note specific moments of citizen cheering, as in 1910 when university students gave “three rousing cheers” before the gubernatorial parade (“Amid Scenes,” 1910, p. 3), or when “men in the galleries cheered” (“Hepburn Cheered”, p. 1) the premier in 1935.

Although clearly capable of making noise, as a rule, citizens did not speak about the contents of the Speech from the Throne or discuss political affairs in general. Unity, deference, and tradition were the order of the day. In the era of Social Celebration, dominant sense-makers understood the legislative opening to be meaningful because it provided a break from the profanity of daily political struggle and focused the collective gaze of Ontarians upon the sacred centre of the province’s hierarchical colonial order.

The era of Social Deliberation, 1950s to the present
Between the 1950s and 1970s, the core meaning of the legislative opening shifted from the scene and setting at Queen’s Park to the contents of the Speech from the Throne and competition among representatives of different political viewpoints. In a remarkably short period of time, the focus of the media ritual moved from the joyous sphere of social interaction among people in and around the Legislature to the adversarial sphere of politicking and policy debate among politicians, interest groups, citizens, and journalists across the province. What had been a spectacle of order and consensus centred around provincial High Society transformed into a forum for the clash of ideas among competing interests in Ontario society.

In the decades following the Second World War, the key elements of the Social Celebration frame were decoupled and dispersed throughout the newspaper. As Table 2 demonstrates, in place of the decaying Social Celebration frame emerged the principles and features of the new dominant news narrative: specifically, the frame of Social Deliberation. Newspapers began to analyze much more thoroughly and prominently the key policy pledges in the Speech from the Throne, government and oppo-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total # of items</th>
<th>Primary theme is scene and setting</th>
<th>Primary theme is Throne Speech or partisan politics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Globe</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>40 (34%)</td>
<td>79 (66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>45 (28%)</td>
<td>118 (72%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegram</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>55 (38%)</td>
<td>88 (62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>140 (33%)</td>
<td>285 (67%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sition interpretations of the Throne Speech, and reactions to the new session of legislative politics from extra-parliamentary observers.

The growing interest in the contents of the Throne Speech can be identified in two features of postwar newspaper coverage. First, the Speech from the Throne was placed at the centre of the “semantic macrostructure” (van Dijk, 1998, p. 13, italics in original) of newspaper stories and images. Front-page headlines and lead paragraphs now reported the most prominent items in the proposed legislative agenda, the number of government dollars pledged to support new programs, and the overall policy vision of the nascent legislative session. In 1955, for example, with the Frost administration building roads at a frantic pace, the Globe and Mail applied a soon-to-be-central symbol of the modern ritual when it placed a dollar sign in its front-page headline: “Biggest Roads Program Will Cost $200,000,000” (p. 1). Whereas it was once the splendour of the occasion that seemed to break records every year, now it was the size of public expenditures.

Second, the Social Deliberation frame is characterized by the fragmentation and proliferation of Throne Speech news. For example, the Star’s pages devoted exclusively to covering the NDP’s Throne Speech of 1990 included more than a dozen stories focusing on distinct pledges made in the Speech. The story about prospective changes to the province’s Sunday shopping policy does not refer to the analysis of the government’s auto-plan, and neither article refers to information found in the story about healthcare. The Throne Speech is interpreted as a preview of concrete legislative action, allowing journalists to situate statements in the Speech within ongoing provincial policy debates.

Two crucial changes have occurred: first, the Throne Speech has moved to the centre of the Legislature’s central civic ritual; second, it has become a point of political debate. Who debates the Throne Speech? First, politicians: the meaning of the whole event has become organized along the lines of mainstream party competition. Although exceptionally rare prior to the 1950s, first-person quotations from government and opposition MPPs are definitive characteristics of the Social Deliberation frame. In each year sampled after 1960, all three newspapers included at least one opposition voice in their coverage of the Throne Speech. On four different occasions opposition quotations appeared in six stories in a single year—in the Globe in 1975, in the Sun in 1985, and in the Star in 2001. In 2007 all three newspapers carried at least two stories including opposition quotations.

Second, deliberation includes the voices of extra-parliamentary observers. Newspaper columnists, interest-group spokespeople, and ordinary citizens are now found anticipating and reacting to the government’s proposed legislative plan. Not one opinion column relating to the legislative opening is found in any of the 60 newspapers editions sampled between 1900 and 1945. The 30 newspapers editions sampled between 1950 and 1970 include two opinion columns. By contrast, the 42 newspapers editions sampled between 1975 and 2007 include 35 columns. The columnist assumes the role of a civics teacher, a “priestly pundit, representing elites to themselves and to the populace” (Nimmo & Combs, 1992, p. 32). Divining partisan strategies from the Speech from the Throne, the columnist announces: “Well, now we know what [Tory
strategist] Hugh Segal does for his $50,000 a year” (Winsor, 1980, p. 7). The columnist assures people not to worry, for “this ‘Christmas in June’ grab-bag of giveaways is the stuff of pure political fantasy” (Goldstein, 1985, p. 17). His political senses are refined and his memory is sharp: he knows that “it has been a long time since Ontario’s people were this excited about Throne Speech day” (Valpy, 1990, p. 11). She takes sides:

What a difference from our tax revolts, when we stormed Queen’s Park to picket against Bob Rae’s NDP record tax grabs and reckless spending which sent our net debt to an obscene $150 billion. There were no bloody faces, riot gear, clubs or pepper spray. Just the odd anti-poverty creep, who would scream threats to end my life. (Leatherdale, 1995, p. 58)

The emergent column is ritualized political provocation; it succeeds when it elicits emotion through rational insight.

Citizens and interest groups offer additional assessments of the day’s political vision. Photographs of picketers or verbal reference to the political agendas of protesters at Queen’s Park appear in 1970, 1975, 1985, 1995, and 2001. A Globe and Mail article from 1980 carries the policy prescriptions of “N. J. (Sam) MacGregor ... a former Ontario Hydro employee” who had been “lobbying quietly for support from both the Ontario Government and Ontario Hydro for his idea” to reshape the province’s power system (Claridge, 1980, p 9). A 1990 front-page story in the same newspaper begins: “If Vyrn Peterson has his way, Ontario’s newest nuclear power plant will be built just down the road from this cluttered welding shop and home on the Trans-Canada Highway in Blind River” (Mittelstaedt, 1990, p. 1). The story is written in anticipation of that day’s Speech from the Throne and the decision on whether to expand nuclear power generation in Ontario. But who is Vyrn Peterson? He is not a politician; rather, he is a concerned citizen. In the same story, news readers also hear from Ed Burt, “a beef and pig farmer” (p. 1), who thinks that the idea of nuclear power in Blind River is “‘just plain stupid’” (p. 1). One Star story includes “Whitby Grade 11 student Steve Murray’s” thoughts on the effects of the dispute between government and teachers—a topic receiving only one sentence in the April 2001 Speech from the Throne (Mallan, 2001, p. A13).

Hours before the Throne Speech of 2007, the Globe and Mail quoted the head of the Canadian Auto Workers union, Buzz Hargrove, demanding the government use its Speech to help Ontario’s floundering manufacturing sector; for, in Hargrove’s words, “‘We’re in death throes as an industry’” (Howlett, 2007, p. A11). The same story also quoted Robert Hattin, the president of Edson Packaging Machinery, “a small company with 90 employees and annual sales of about $15 million,” and Derek Burleton, “an economist at Toronto-Dominion Bank” (p. A11). Even before the lieutenant-governor opened his mouth in the Assembly, these three men appeared in newspapers debating the political vitality of Ontario.

The role of the citizen in relation to the ritual today is very different than it once was. Citizens are depicted as political agents in their own right, not merely as visual confirmation of trust in the reigning political order. Citizens are shown to have their own ideas and voices, ones that often run counter to the vision of the government. Ontarians no longer gather around and cheer images of the British connection or rep-
representatives of the province’s elite classes. No doubt these bodies and symbols are still present at the ritual—the lieutenant-governor continues to enter the chamber to fanfare, and the House still hosts high-ranking officials and their guests—but the unifying element of the day is understood to be the province-wide debate over the government’s legislative plan. The focal point of the Social Celebration frame, Ontario’s spectacular display of strength and unity, has been replaced by the symbols of liberal pluralism.

The rise of a ritual of liberal pluralism
How do we explain this mid-century shift in the mass mediation of Ontario politics? In terms of its legislative function, the ritual had not changed: it continued to confer law-making authority upon the Assembly by inaugurating a new session of official politics. The ceremony itself was not significantly revised; and yet, despite continuity in its form and function, between the 1950s and 1970s the ritual’s meaning as depicted in Ontario’s mainstream dailies changed significantly.

Certainly the symbols of Canada’s British heritage were losing their public prominence during this period (Buckner, 2005; Igartua, 2006; Rea, 1985). It is reasonable to assume that symbols of the Crown in the legislative opening would similarly lose their power to captivate journalists and news readers. The timing of this development, however, is somewhat out of synch with the rise of the Social Deliberation frame. Recall that Igartua (2006) and Buckner (2005) locate the period of de-Britification in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Moreover, the decline of the British connection tells us little about why the news frame that replaced Social Celebration would become organized around political confrontation among politicians and extra-parliamentary observers.

It would be overly deterministic to say that television’s growing influence on newspaper journalism during the period caused the legislative opening to become more adversarial in nature, although it is widely accepted that “television has helped to create a more cynical, confrontational style of journalism, which has spilled over into newspapers” (Fletcher, 1981, p. 109). But again, the question of timing emerges: although it makes sense to view certain forms of adversarial coverage as being rooted in the postwar “rise of critical journalism” (Taras, 1990, p. 65)—for example, the ubiquitous critical columnist of the 1970s—it is problematic to point to increasingly aggressive TV journalism, a development of the 1960s and 1970s (Rutherford, 1990), to explain a transformation that had already begun by 1950.

The question remains: What explains the postwar expansion of the “sphere of legitimate controversy” (cf. Hallin, 1986) and the legitimization of extra-parliamentary groups within the symbolic realm of Ontario politics? What explains the initial turn toward the Speech from the Throne and the gradual appearance of citizens and interest groups within the sphere of political deliberation?

Although in retrospect this evolution can appear as though it occurred naturally—as though Ontario politics was destined to move in the direction of citizen participation—in fact, the emergence of liberal pluralism in the symbols of Ontario politics can only be fully understood after considering the role played by organized labour, social movements, and other working people in bringing about changes in the form and representation of citizenship itself in the 1940s and 1950s. As I discuss more fully below, the political gains made through struggles for stronger democracy in
Ontario were incomplete and in some ways reinforced deeply embedded systems of inequality. Nevertheless, an accurate account of the rise of liberal-pluralist symbolism in this case acknowledges the fact that the non-mediated actions by extra-parliamentary individuals and groups were instrumental in changing mass-mediated forms of citizenship.

Consider the reasons for the sudden shift in legislative opening newspaper coverage from events at the Legislature to the proposed policy agenda in the Speech from the Throne. It is logical to interpret this shift as a result of the dramatic expansion in the role of the postwar state and the concomitant increase in Throne Speech policy announcements. In the 1940s and 1950s, the provincial government extended its reach into the lives of citizens through a range of new public services and managerial practices (Baskerville, 2005; Graham, 1990; Heron, 1996). But while there is no question that Western governments around the world changed in ways that provided a greater degree of social stability to a greater number of people (cf. Eley, 2002), it would be a mistake to assume that what happened in Ontario was inspired by the goodwill of political elites—or to interpret the changes as the result of the natural evolution of Canadian democracy. In fact, the state’s decision to build up the social safety net was largely a defensive manoeuvre in the face of an increasingly powerful push from below (Eley, 2002; Heron, 1996; Palmer, 1983).

Canadian workers went on strike nearly 500 times in 1946/47, a number that includes massive work stoppages in Ontario’s motor vehicle and parts plants (Jamieson, 1968); and this was after winning the fight for the automatic union dues checkoff during the Windsor Ford plant strike of 1945. In the 1940s and 1950s, unlike the years following the First World War, labour was largely successful in seeing its wartime gains secured in permanent legislation. For example, despite the postwar lapse in the wartime government order guaranteeing “the right to organize and bargain collectively”—itself the result of direct worker action—this temporary measure was replaced in 1948 (to the great protestations of the capitalist class) by the Industrial Relations and Disputes Investigation Act, legislation that ensured “the survival of labour’s wartime gains and legitimacy” (Palmer, 1983, p. 238). Masses of people were acting in new ways that placed them squarely on the political scene. The point bears repeating: the state was not merely acting benevolently when it recognized collective bargaining rights and formally established an eight-hour workday and minimum wage. It was reacting to demands backed up by real threats from the citizens of Ontario and the growing popularity of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation—a new social-democratic political party.

By the 1960s, the province had witnessed not only the entrenchment of industrial unionism and a left-of-centre third party (which, it is worth noting, formed the Official Opposition for a period in the 1940s), but also a second wave of the women’s movement (see Rebick, 2005), and growing demands from a range of emergent activist groups (cf. Ladner, 2008; Warner, 2002). What all of this suggests is that changes in representations of political legitimacy did indeed reflect changes in the role of the state, inasmuch as the Speech from the Throne was more prominent on the front page because it was more prominent period. But to explain the expansion in the
sphere of legitimate controversy—from Social Celebration to Social Deliberation—as, first and foremost, the product of a reorganized provincial state ignores the role of citizens in bringing about institutional changes in the first place. The rise of liberal-pluralist symbolism, therefore, is best understood as the result of numerous intersecting factors, not least the struggles for a more robust definition of citizenship among non-elite political agents.

The contradictions of a ritual of liberal pluralism

It is broadly understood that struggles from below in the postwar period were partially responsible for “broadening … the conception of citizenship” within the Canadian state (Sears, 1999, p. 92). Nevertheless, it is important not to exaggerate the extent to which this broadened conception of citizenship altered fundamental power relations in Ontario. Because the maintenance of hegemony requires the active consent of subordinated groups to the system of rule that reproduces their subordination, it inevitably involves partial victories on the part of the people, or at least that ruling elites grant some concessions to subaltern classes (Baron, Finn, Grant, Green, & Johnson, 1981). Certainly gains were made in postwar Ontario in terms of improved labour legislation and increased public spending; however, as Palmer (1983) has argued, in some ways, the increasingly bureaucratized union movement with its increasingly conservative goals helped to institutionalize the subservience of labour to capital in new ways.

Moreover, as Finkel (1979) suggests, many representatives of big business actually favoured the introduction of the welfare state on the belief that it would be “the kind of reform that would have the conservative effect of preserving intact both the existing social system and the power and privileges of its economic leaders” (p. 2). The point is not to portray the postwar strengthening of liberal democracy as a ruse, or to condemn it for being insufficiently radical. As Foot’s (2005) history of the Left in Britain demonstrates, strident anti-capitalist activists have long fought to strengthen people’s political and economic capacities within current systems of exploitation, despite the potential that winning incomplete reforms might lead to widespread depoliticization. Political gains can be contradictory.

The point, in the context of this study, is that the same contradictions running through shifts in non-mediated citizenship can be observed within the emergent symbolics of liberal pluralism. The Social Deliberation news frame is wrought with the same contradictions that trouble liberal-pluralist politics in general. Certainly there have been democratic advances. For example, compared to the era of Social Celebration, media coverage of the legislative opening now reflects a dominant view of society that sees the people as legitimate actors in their own political affairs. A healthy democracy depends upon critical deliberation and self-directed action among an informed and engaged populace (Curran, 1991); it follows that a civic ritual constituted by an exchange of ideas among citizens and government is more democratic than one in which citizen-subjects worship before the embodiment of false and oppressive imperial unity. The fact that sexism and racism are no longer overtly celebrated in newspaper coverage of the Opening of the Legislature must be viewed as
a democratic gain; and there is comfort to be drawn from the fact that journalists now tend to critique, as opposed to revere, politicians and other elites of the day.

Notwithstanding these encouraging developments, the Social Deliberation frame is problematic to the extent that it depicts Ontario politics as a level playing field for the clash of competing ideas among a limitless set of political agents. The “sphere of legitimate controversy” (Hallin, 1986, p. 216) that the ritual provides has certainly expanded; but, in contrast to its self-representation, by no means is the Social Deliberation frame ideologically neutral, an open forum for political debate, equally accessible to all. As Terry Eagleton (2007) writes, “The liberal pluralist is not wrong in seeing such an open dialogue of differences as a desirable goal; he or she is just mystified to think that it could ever be adequately conducted in a class-divided society, where what counts as an acceptable interest in the first place is determined by the ruling power” (p. 175). Thus, the problem with Social Deliberation is that, irrespective of its democratic tendencies, the news frame polices the boundaries of liberal-pluralist politics and, in so doing, helps to reproduce systemic forms of inequality.

Clearly Social Deliberation is largely about conflict; and conflict is an essential part of democratic politics. But the particular type of conflict in which the Social Deliberation frame is rooted reflects the presumption of cohesion characteristic of liberal pluralism. It hides the deep-seated social conflicts of which society is actually composed, and through which unequal social relations (for example, relations of class and race) are maintained—that is, through which the dominant hegemonic order is continually “renewed, recreated, defended, and modified” (Williams, 1977, p. 112).

Where traces of these deeper conflicts appear, the Social Deliberation frame quickly draws a line between legitimate and illegitimate forms of political agency. The clearest example of this type of ideological work in action is the reactions of Toronto Sun columnists Blatchford (1995), Blizzard (1995), and Leatherdale (1995) to the 1995 protests around the first Throne Speech of Mike Harris’ Conservative government. The day after citizen protests at the legislative opening of that year, the Sun’s editorial page called the protestors “nutbars” (“Thrift Speech,” 1995, p. 10), and three of its major columnists accused them of being “antidemocratic.” Leatherdale (1995) drew a line between the illegitimate actions of some in the anti-Harris crowd and the legitimate actions of her group’s “tax revolts … when we stormed Queen’s Park” (p. 8) to protest the agenda of Bob Rae’s NDP government. Blizzard (1995) juxtaposed the legitimacy of representative government and the illegitimacy of direct action, and called for “democracy, not mob rule” (p. 6). Blatchford (1995) compared the model civic perspective of a shopkeeper who watched the Throne Speech from inside the legislative chamber to the ridiculousness of protestors listening to “shrill speeches … [and] reliving[ing] the glory of the ’60s” (p. 5) on the legislative lawn.

Although admittedly an extreme case, the collective response of the Sun columnists reflects the overarching trend of the Social Deliberation era: that is, the representation of legitimate citizen participation in the form of a reaction—not a proposition—whose shape and tone is predetermined by the reigning culture of “orthodox politics” (Williams, 1975, p. 53). Surely these same Sun columnists would agree that citizen action and political conflict are essential to Ontario politics—but
only up to a point. The moment that citizens engage in democracy in ways that expose the failings of parliamentary politics, they are labelled a threat and summarily exiled to the “sphere of deviance … the realm of those political actors and views which journalists and the political mainstream of the society reject as unworthy of being heard” (Hallin, 1986, p. 117). Non-parliamentary dissent is depicted as a comparatively less legitimate form of politics, if not as irrational, deviant, or criminal behaviour, and “the parliamentary form of the state is generalized to a ‘universal’ status” (Hartley, 1982, p. 62).

In spite of the rise of new critical perspectives within the mediated public space of civic ritual in Ontario (see Thompson, 1995)—statements from organizations such as the United Way, for instance—modern mediated processes of ritualization virtually guarantee that critical voices do not reflect “the vast pluralistic range of voices which the media are sometimes held to represent, but a range within certain distinct ideological limits” (Hall et al., 1978, p. 61, italics in original). The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Ontario Teachers’ Federation, and the Ontario Hospital Association, for example—extra-parliamentary actors who have succeeded in having their interpretations of the Throne Speech reprinted in the newspaper—are high-profile interest groups whose public authority is rooted in social structures that tend to “protect the racial hierarchy” (Greco Larson, 2005, p. 268) and legitimize the type of liberal democracy required to support what Macpherson (1992) calls “capitalist market societies” (see esp. pp. 51-66). Those left on the margins of political debate are often racialized and classed individuals, or others who challenge normative visions of citizenship in terms of gender and sexuality. Representing these groups as “nutbars,” or excluding their voices altogether, functions to delegitimize their citizenship claims, and thus feeds entrenched forms of marginalization.

This article does not deny the reality of pluralist competition; nor does it suggest that conflict within Ontario’s legislative opening or within liberal-pluralist politics in general is of a single variety. To be sure, some conflicts are more heated, more complex, more dangerous, more important than others. However, the analysis is a telling reminder that a pluralist state is only healthy when it is home to heated and appropriately structured political battle. My main point, therefore, is not that cross-class solidarity is magically produced through the ritualization of social conflict, although the textual analysis does suggest that the spectacle of rational debate has the potential to rivet disparate minds just as forcefully as spectacles that glitter and shine. The article’s aim is more modest: namely, to trace the historical emergence of a particular case of liberal-pluralist symbolism, and to argue that conflict in the case of mediated ritual in Ontario is one among countless practices that serve to reproduce and normalize liberal-pluralist politics as a whole.

Many political observers view the liberal-democratic state as “a neutral arena of debate” (Carnoy, 1984, p. 10). The presumed transparency, the taken-for-grantedness of liberal pluralism suggests reasons why its legislative institutions are rarely studied in terms of their symbolic character: Why study the absence of ideology? The functions of parliaments, the courts, elections, and other institutions are often analyzed; less frequently studied are the symbolic ways in which these institutions serve to maintain
assumptions about the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of rule. However, to play upon the pun from Corrigan and Sayer (1985):

States ... state; the arcane rituals of a court of law, the formulae of royal assent to an Act of Parliament, visits of school inspectors, are all statements. They define, in great detail, acceptable forms and images of social activity and individual and collective identity; they regulate ... social life. Indeed, in this sense “the State” never stops talking. (p. 3, italics in original)

Mass media listen to what the state states—through words, architecture, rituals, and other forms of communication—and turn this into statements. They articulate dominant assumptions about the nature of legitimate power and reinforce the ideological notion that the state expresses a general social interest (Clarke, 1983). Too often studies of the state ignore the state’s symbolic work and therefore tell only part of the story of the state’s role in maintaining power relations. Understanding the symbolic elements of this story will help us better understand hegemonic processes in all their richness.

Acknowledgements
I wish to thank Kate Cairns, Alan Sears, and the two anonymous reviewers for commenting on earlier drafts of this article.

Note
1. The reason the sample ends in a year without a “0” or “5” at the end is because there was no legislative opening in 2000, which meant that the first opening of 2001 was analyzed instead. Five years after that there was no legislative opening in 2006, meaning that the corpus concludes with coverage from 2007.

References
Amid scenes of brilliance. (1910, January 26). Toronto Globe, p. 3.
At the Legislature. (1900, February 15). Toronto Globe, p. 6.
At the Speaker’s reception following opening of 18th Legislature. (1930, February 6). Toronto Globe, p. 13.
Biggest roads program will cost $200,000,000. (1955, February 8). Toronto Globe, p. 1.
Blatchford, Christie. (1995, September 28). “If you work hard ... it is all there to gain.” Toronto Sun, p. 5.
The breakfast table. (1905, 6 February). Toronto Globe, p. 5.


Foot, Paul. (2005). *The vote: How it was won and how it was undermined*. London: Viking.


Hall, Stuart, Critcher, Chas, Jefferson, Tony, Clarke, John, & Roberts, Brian. (1978). *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the state, and law and order*. Houndmills, UK: MacMillan Education.


