Protecting Canadian Culture: The Massey Commission:

Television was a powerful cultural influence. Many Canadians saw world events unfold through an American lens as they watched popular newscasts from the United States. Children of the 1950s grew up identifying more with American culture and values than any generation before them. In 1949, the Liberal government of Louis St. Laurent established The Massey Commission to investigate the state of Canadian culture. When the Commission reported in 1951, it suggested that Canadian culture needed to be protected from U.S. influences. Measures taken as a result of its recommendations included the following:

* Canadian television would be used to promote national communication and cultural education in drama and music. The CBC, which already had a national radio network, was put in charge of the development of television. It opened its first two stations in Toronto and Montreal in 1952. Two years later, four more cities were added. By 1960, 90 percent of Canadians had a television and access to the CBC.
* The National Film Board (NFB) would be strengthened
* The government would become involved in funding universities and the arts. Consequently, the Canada Council for the Arts was created, which awarded grants to writers, artists, and theatres

Another important step in the protection of Canadian culture was the creation of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, or CRTC, in 1968. This agency would regulate the amount of foreign material broadcast over the airwaves and impose rules requiring Canadian content.

Each of these measures encouraged the growth of the arts and culture in Canada and had a profound effect on Canadian identity in the post-war years.

Consider Both Sides:

1. Offer three supports of the idea that the CRTC fosters a culture of excellence. Offer three supports of the idea that it fosters a culture of mediocrity.

Aboriginal Communities in Transition:

The post-war years were times of transition for Aboriginal communities. Those who had served in the military during the war – 3000 status Indians and thousands more non-status Aboriginal people when they returned home. Aboriginal soldiers were denied the same benefits as other veterans.

Educational Issues:

Education was always a concern for Aboriginal people. For many decades, Aboriginal children were forced to leave home to attend residential schools. Here they were isolated from their home communities and forced to abandon their culture and language. The purpose of the schools was the assimilation of Aboriginal children into mainstream Canadian culture.

Although compulsory attendance in residential schools ended in 1948, many remained in operation during the 1950s. In fact, as a result of the baby boom, the 1950s were peak years in the residential school system – with 76 schools in operation. The last residential school did not close until 1996. Residential schools were underfunded and relied on the forced labour of their students. Students in many facilities received poor education.

In response to the demands of Aboriginal parents, the federal government began to fund off-reserve education. By 1960, thousands of Aboriginal youth were attending provincial schools with certified teachers and modern equipment. However, teachers were often not trained to meet the needs of Aboriginal students. This, and the fact that many students had to commute long distances by bus or board far from home, worked against their academic success.

Changes to The Indian Act:

In 1951, a number of changes were made to The Indian Act that governed the lives of First Nations people. Women gained the right to vote in band elections, and potlatches and wearing traditional regalia were no longer illegal. However, The Indian Act maintained the federal government’s power to define Indian status and band membership and continued the political and economic lives of Aboriginal people.

Application and Analysis:

1. The term “cultural genocide” is first used by lawyer and Holocaust survivor Raphael Lemkin in front of the United Nations in 1944. Research the meaning of this term, and decide whether or not Canada’s treatment of First Nations people qualifies as “cultural genocide”.