

“Kanada...Come!”

By now you're all familiar with those ubiquitous Canadian heritage commercials. You know, the little vignettes of such inspiring moments as the institution of Responsible Government (“It’s a Canadian ideal”) and the creation of Superman (one of the first of many Canadian celebrities to find work south of the border). One particularly telling clip is the vignette depicting the arrival of explorer Jacques Cartier in what was to become known as Canada. The native people welcome Cartier and his followers, inviting them to “Kanada”, their word for village. Cartier’s interpreter, at a loss, improvises and says that the native chieftain is welcoming them to the nation of “Kanada”. Another member of the expedition respectfully suggests that “Kanada” refers to the village, but the interpreter sticks to his guns, and as Cartier mutters the word to himself meditatively you can see that these jokers have stumbled upon the national monicker that we still cling to today. This little scene neatly crystallizes a few of the elements of Canada: racial and cultural collision, language barriers and the like. It also marks the genesis of one of our country’s most tenacious inner demons: the ongoing Canadian identity crisis.

For one of the worlds’s richest and most wonderful countries, Canada is ridiculously insecure. It may stem from the fact that we are such a diverse cultural mosaic with a history of compromise and co-existence. There’s no one cultural or political ideology that everyone can swear unwavering allegiance to, nor should there be necessarily. Diverse peoples can live in peaceful and productive partnership under a central authority; however, as cultures the world over tilt towards tribalism, the Quebecois and other social and cultural groups in Canada have begun to lobby for greater self-determination, even separation. Canada, neurotic nation that it is, has since flown into a seemingly endless flurry of constitutional tinkering designed to settle once and for all just who we think we are. Even now, months after the constitutional referendum, ominous advertisements from “Canada’s Private Broadcasters” are warning us that, “If we’re ever going to understand each other in this country, we need to talk”.

In recent news, perhaps the most striking symptom of Canada’s fragile self-image is our current hand-wringing angst over how the new American president feels about Canada. Does he have any idea we exist? If so, does he care? Will he develop a rapport with Mulrone? Should he bother to develop a rapport with our

political pariah of a prime minister anyway? These are the questions on every Canadian journalist’s lips, even if Clinton isn’t inviting them to read his. The new American President has for the most part been blissfully ignorant of Canadian concerns thus far, and it’s ruffling more than a few political feathers up north.

Our American neighbours, not ones to engage in such aimless soul-searching, are preoccupied with themselves and the multimillion dollar inauguration extravaganza with which they’re hailing their new chief. These are people who know what they want, though they are rather blindly faithful as they throng lemming-like to venerate the first political alternative to come along in over a decade of Republican rule. Are the Americans worried about whether Mulrone will accept Clinton? Pshaw, Poppycock. “Not gonna do it”, as a former chief executive was wont to say. They’ve got things like the economy to yak about, something Clinton has promised to focus on. Canada has similar financial woes but, eternally insecure, is making nail-biting news of such things as the fact that Clinton visited Mexico’s President before he visited our prime minister. Sends

chills up the spine, doesn’t it?

Granted, the U.S. of A. is our nearest neighbour and biggest trading partner, and we can’t afford to ignore them. After all, we’re still negotiating NAFTA and all sorts of delicate trade disputes (“little bumps in the road” as the departing George Bush nostalgically referred to them recently); however, there’s no reason to slavishly follow every move they make. If the Americans were actually paying attention to us they might be amused by the constant attention we give them. It’s hard to look dignified and aloof with your nose pressed up against the glass, and we might be more impressive diplomatically if we showed a bit more self assurance. More importantly, the Canadian media and especially our politicians should concern themselves more with pressing domestic concerns like the recession and the constitution. The Americans can take care of themselves, and Canadians should do the same. If “Kanada” is ever to feel secure in its national identity, it should look to its own village instead of gazing anxiously at its neighbours.

Sean McQuaid
Editor-in-Chief



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