

alive. If registered nonvoters would get off their duff, they could change the prevailing distribution.

**JB:** There is a certain hypocrisy about keeping these numbers from the general public—because we all know that they are leaked all over the political community. Washington has been abuzz on election day with people phoning their contacts within the networks. Everybody knows what's going on -- except the public. The public has been treated as if they can't be trusted to behave themselves.

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## THE CANADIAN IDENTITY

By Seymour Martin Lipset

From Lipset's **CONTINENTAL DIVIDE: THE VALUES AND INSTITUTIONS OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA** (New York and London: Routledge, 1990)

National identity is the quintessential Canadian issue. Almost alone among modern developed countries, Canada has continued to debate its self-conception to the present day. One of its leading historians notes that it "has suffered for more than a century from a somewhat more orthodox and less titillating version of Portnoy's complaint: the inability to develop a secure and unique identity. And so...intellectuals and politicians have attempted to play psychiatrist to the Canadian Portnoy, hoping to discover a national identity."<sup>1</sup> As if to illustrate his point, Margaret Atwood comments ironically, "If the national mental illness of the United States is megalomania, that of Canada is paranoid schizophrenia."<sup>2</sup>

The reasons for this uncertainty are clear. Canada is a residual country. It is that part of British North America that did not support the Revolution. Before 1776, Anglophone Canadians possessed the same traits that distinguished other American colonists from the British. Then...the new nation to the south developed a political identity formulated around the values set out in the Declaration of Independence. Americanism became and has remained a political ideology.<sup>3</sup> There is no ideology of Canadianism, although Canada has a Tory tradition derived from Britain and is, like the United States, descended from a North American settler and frontier society....

Incidentally journalists and others are going to find this year that they can't get network exit poll results as easily as they used to. They are used to walking over to the ABC or NBC news bureau and finding a fullfledged operation to hand them data. That used to be funded by corporate public relations—not by news. It was done because there was a competitive environment. That's all gone, now that the networks are pooling their efforts.

Given the contrasts between the Canadian historical experience and the American one, it is not surprising that the peoples of the two countries have formed their self-conceptions in disparate ways. The United States, as we have seen, was organized around what Abraham Lincoln called a "political religion." As a result, as Sacvan Bercovitch notes, both left and right take sustenance from the American creed. Canada never developed its own universalistic ideology....<sup>4</sup>

...[T]he ideology of the American Revolution provides a *raison d'être* for the Republic — it explains why the United States came into being and what it means to be American. But Canada "arrived at freedom through evolution in allegiance and not by revolutionary compact." Hence, its "final governing force...is tradition and convention."<sup>5</sup> The country could not offer its citizens "the prospect of a fresh start...because (as the Canadian poet Douglas Le Pan put it) Canada is 'a country without a mythology.'<sup>6</sup> To justify separate national existence, Canadians have deprecated American values and institutions, mainly those seen as derived from an excessive emphasis on competition, which they once identified as an outgrowth of mass democracy and equalitarianism but which in recent years are explained by their intellectuals as endemic in the hegemonic capitalist values and institutions.

Canadians have tended to define themselves not in terms of their own national history and traditions but by reference to what they are *not*: Americans. Canadians are the world's oldest and most continuing un-Americans.<sup>7</sup> "Without at least a touch of anti-Americanism, Canada would have no reason to exist."<sup>8</sup> Evidence drawn from "popular fiction, westerns, science and spy thrillers"

documents "persistent...Canadian fears" about the United States.<sup>9</sup> Until fairly recently, the predominant form that negation took was conservative, monarchical, and ecclesiastical....

In a comparative study of modern democracies published in the early 1920s, James Bryce also noted such persistent differences flowing from divergent histories.<sup>10</sup> Like many Canadian and British writers, Bryce viewed most dissimilarities between the two North American democracies as reflecting credit on Canada. It did not exhibit the "spirit of license, the contempt of authority, the negligence in enforcing the laws" found in the United States and other populist countries. He stressed the enduring adherence of both Canadian language groups to prerevolutionary values.<sup>11</sup> Their concern with "order and harmony" reflected "the ideals of authority and natural hierarchy."<sup>12</sup>...

Whatever the motives of different groups, the conception Canadians had of what was good about Canada and bad about the United States influenced their values and behavior. Those who said that Canadians — by not being as materialistic, achievement-oriented and competitive as Americans — were morally superior taught their children not to be as competitive or aggressive. The stress in Canadian schooling on the value of high culture, as distinct from functionally practical subjects, both described and influenced the content of education....

The cultural and structural differences among western countries generally and between Canada and the United States in particular have declined in some respects. The diffusion of values, the comparable economic changes, and the development of rapid transportation and almost instantaneous communication seem to be producing a common western culture. Yet, many traditional national differences persist, some in weaker form, and new ones emerge (an example is the rate of unionization, which is now much higher in Canada than in the United States). As Gwyn notes, Canadians have become "a quite distinct kind of North American...utterly unlike [those in the United States] in their political cultures so that they are as distinct from each other as are the Germans from the French, say, even though both are European just as Canadians and Americans are both North Americans."<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, in Prime Minister Mackenzie King's words, "if some countries have too much history, [Canada] has too much geography."<sup>14</sup> Unlike the United States, it finds little to celebrate: no revolution, no declaration of independence, no civil war to free the slaves. Its first (1867) constitution was drawn up by conservatives who

did not express themselves "in popular language. They did not speak the language of the Rights of Man or of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." That constitution, argues Philip Resnick, was the legitimating "document of the Canadian counter-revolution."<sup>15</sup>

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Ramsay Cook, *The Maple Leaf Forever: Essays on Nationalism and Politics in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), pp. 188-189.

<sup>2</sup>Margaret Atwood, *The Journals of Suzanna Moodie: Poems* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 62.

<sup>3</sup>See Seymour Martin Lipset, "Why No Socialism in the United States?" in S. Bialer and S. Sluzar, eds., *Sources of Contemporary Radicalism*, vol. 1 (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1977), pp. 74-79, 81-83, for other references.

<sup>4</sup>Sacvan Bercovitch, "The Rites of Assent: Rhetoric, Ritual, and the Ideology of American Consensus," in Sam B. Girgus, ed., *The American Self: Myth, Ideology and Popular Culture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), pp. 5-6.

<sup>5</sup>W. L. Morton, *The Canadian Identity* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), p. 86.

<sup>6</sup>Bercovitch, "The Rites of Assent," p. 24.

<sup>7</sup>Frank Underhill, *In Search of Canadian Liberalism* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1960), p. 222.

<sup>8</sup>Blair Fraser, *The Search for Identity: Canada, 1945-67* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), p. 301. See also S. D. Clark, in H.F. Angus, ed., *Canada and Her Great Neighbor: Sociological Surveys of Opinions and Attitudes in Canada Concerning the United States* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1938), pp. 243, 245.

<sup>9</sup>Robin Winks, "'Whodunit?': Canadian Society as Reflected in its Detective Fiction," *The American Review of Canadian Studies* (Winter 1987-88) p. 377.

<sup>10</sup>James Bryce, *Modern Democracies*, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1921), pp. 495-496.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 467, 501-502.

<sup>12</sup>John Charles Weaver, "Imperiled Dream: Canadian Opposition to the American Empire, 1918-1930" (Ph.D. diss., Department of History, Duke University, 1973), pp. 159-160.

<sup>13</sup>Richard Gwyn, *The 49th Paradox: Canada in North America* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), p.11.

<sup>14</sup>From a speech to the House of Commons, Ottawa, June 18, 1936.

<sup>15</sup>Philip Resnick, *Parliament vs. People: An Essay on Democracy and Canadian Political Culture* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1984), p. 16-17.

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