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# Canadian Political Culture: The Problem of Americanization

Paul W Nesbitt-Larking



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## Canadian Political Culture: The Problem of Americanization

PAUL NESBITT-LARKING

Living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant; no matter how friendly and even-tempered the beast, if I may call it that, one is affected by every twitch and grunt. Even a friendly nuzzling can sometimes lead to frightening consequences.

—Pierre Trudeau, speech to the National Press Club,  
Washington, D.C., March 25, 1969

For a very long time, and certainly since the American Declaration of Independence in 1776, the destiny of Canada has been shaped through its complex interconnections with the political words and deeds of those other European descendants who live to the south of us. Canada is, and always has been, an American nation. Carved and crafted from a process of “defensive expansionism”<sup>1</sup> in which the harsh wilderness of this northern part of the American continent was stitched together in east-to-west chains of settlement, often “in defiance of geography,”<sup>2</sup> Canada, in its very existence and longevity, is a major North American achievement. Less obviously, political and governmental life in Canada reflects two centuries of an ambivalent relationship with Americans and their way of life during which Canadians have alternately incorporated and rejected American influences. Americans are a self-confident people who share a common heritage grounded in an evolving covenant to sustain the most perfect political system of freedom and opportunity. Through their enterprise and determination, Americans have translated the ideals of their founders into enormous economic, cultural, military, and political achievements. It is no idle boast to claim that the United States of America is the greatest nation on Earth.

When Americans are asked to name their “best friends” in the international community, most name the British; when they are asked with whom they conduct the most international trade, Japan is mentioned most often. These responses strike many Canadians as curious. Canada is in fact America’s largest single trading partner,<sup>3</sup> and, when probed, a majority of Americans express a strong and genuine affinity toward Canadians. What these findings reveal is best expressed by former prime minister Pierre Trudeau in the above quotation: a combination of benign ignorance and careless presumption. Americans do not think much about Canada or Canadians at all, and when they do, they think of Canadians as Americans, with some curious characteristics, who happen to live

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in another place. Over the past two hundred years, Americans have made gracious and consistent overtures to Canadians to join them in their great republic, and they have never been able to understand the apparent stubbornness with which a succession of Canadian leaders has resisted. American leaders have frequently regarded Canada as an odd little anomaly with its monarchical traditions and its chronic French-English tensions. Such Americans approximate Trudeau’s elephants: they do not know their own strength and therefore are often unable to appreciate the damage or the offence they cause. Trudeau’s tone is mild in its mockery, and it is possible to argue that his choice of animal attributes too much benevolence to the Americans. The American approach to Canada, as the U.S. has crafted its independent foreign policy throughout the past eighty years, might better be described as “bearlike” in its angry malevolence rather than elephantine in its passive tolerance. Whenever it is hungry, hurt, or under a perceived threat, the bear is prone to attack, lashing out against all who offend it or merely get in its way. While the Americans have uttered no serious threats to invade Canada since the late nineteenth century, they have interfered aggressively in our domestic and foreign affairs and, in so doing, have acted in ways that are at best insulting and undiplomatic and at worse in contravention of established international law and precedent. An egregious instance of undiplomatic interference was the ambassadorship of Paul Cellucci. Appointed by President George W. Bush, Cellucci was ambassador to Canada from 2001 to 2005. Using his ambassadorial role as a partisan bully pulpit, Cellucci lambasted Canadian governments for their domestic and foreign policy positions, far exceeding the bounds of normal diplomacy.

While it is possible to argue about the extent to which the American impact on Canada has been elephantine, bearlike, or both, it is indisputable that it has been of great magnitude. Our economy is dominated by American capital. American direct investment in Canada is currently about US\$306 billion, and U.S.-based corporations own many of Canada’s most profitable industries. Over 50 percent of all foreign direct investment in Canada comes from American corporations.<sup>4</sup> Since the 1950s, Canada’s military strategy and structure have been shaped in deliberate synchronization with those of the United States through a series of bilateral and multilateral agreements. Military and geopolitical cooperation with the U.S.A. has intensified since 2006 under the Conservative administration of Prime Minister Stephen Harper. Whether we refer to it as “culture” or the “entertainment industry,” Canada is dominated by American material. The vast majority of the movies or TV shows we watch or the magazines we browse through originate in the United States. In political terms, the American influence has also been profound. Many of our major political institutions have been deliberately shaped to reflect, if not entirely replicate, their American counterparts, including federalism, the Senate, the Supreme Court, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Our political practices and processes have also come to approximate the American pattern in certain ways. In the early twentieth

century, Canada adopted the American practice of selecting political leaders through holding large-scale party conventions; in recent decades, commentators have referred to the "presidentialization" of the role of Canada's prime minister. Political campaigning and party financing have become more professionalized and Americanized in recent decades, notably under the prime ministership of Stephen Harper. At the deepest level, many Canadians have been enthusiastic followers of the American way of political life and have come to admire American political values and beliefs. These Canadians have attempted to convince other Canadians of the superiority of the American way and to encourage them to incorporate American values into Canadian political parties, institutions, and practices. The struggle between those who value American political ideals and those who wish to preserve a distinctive Canadian set of ideals has been raging since the Declaration of Independence in 1776. In presenting the principal features of this ideological conflict throughout this paper, I shall explain why I believe Americanization is potentially so damaging to Canada and Canadians, and how eternal—or at least periodic—vigilance is the price of remaining Canadian.

### POLITICAL CULTURE AND IDEOLOGY

Unlike most concepts in political science, "political culture" has a clear and definite beginning. The term was invented by Gabriel Almond and first used in an article in 1956.<sup>5</sup> Like other American political scientists of his era, Almond was determined to develop political analysis into a more rigorous and scientific discipline than it had been in the early decades of the century. The United States had emerged from the Second World War as the leading military, moral, and economic power in the world, with associated opportunities and dangers. In order to exert a meaningful influence on an unstable and rapidly changing environment, the American state required detailed and accurate analyses of political character in other parts of the world. Aware of the imprecision of existing accounts of political life in other countries, Almond adapted the "structural-functionalist" sociological framework of Talcott Parsons as a basis for developing a systematic understanding of political characteristics. In introducing political culture, he said: "Every political system is embedded in a particular pattern of orientations to political action. I have found it useful to refer to this as the political culture."<sup>6</sup> By this, he meant that it is possible to identify coherent and distinctive patterns of beliefs, values, and attitudes toward political institutions and practices among each of the world's political communities. Almond and his colleague Sidney Verba attempted to identify such political orientations among the citizens of England, Mexico, Germany, the United States of America, and Italy in *The Civic Culture*.<sup>7</sup> On the basis of their analyses of responses to survey data, Almond and Verba produced portrayals of the distinctive political cultures of each country based upon rigorous methodological techniques and consistent quantified measures.

Almond and Verba's study generated great interest and admiration and gave rise to over a decade of research based upon their model. The systematic study of political culture was undertaken in many countries, including Canada.<sup>8</sup> Despite its widespread success and acceptability, the approach also attracted its critics. Prominent among the criticisms were the following: that in its assumption of the civic perfection of the United States of America, the political culture approach provided an arrogant, partial, and distorted image of political values, beliefs, and attitudes in other countries; that there were serious methodological flaws inherent in attempting to capture something as deep, nebulous, and "holistic" as culture merely through adding up a series of quick responses to questions by individuals; and, perhaps most damning of all, that in the increasingly turbulent and conflictual years of the 1960s and early 1970s, the approach could offer little to explain mass discontent, institutional paralysis, sudden change, or socioeconomic breakdown. By the mid-1970s, the huge research industry generated by Almond had dwindled to almost nothing, and political scholars turned their attention to other matters. In the Canadian case, the decline of interest in political culture was marked by a series of influential anti-American articles, reflecting a more general pro-Canadian assertiveness that was prominent at the time.<sup>9</sup>

Regrettably, in turning away from the "Americanized" version of political culture, the Canadian political science community abandoned a very important subfield of enquiry. With all its faults, the path-breaking work of Almond had alerted us to the importance of how people feel about political issues and how they make sense of their political experiences. In criticizing Almond and others for their failure to achieve the exacting standards of full scientific rigour, it is easy to overlook the obscurity of the concept of culture and the difficulties inherent in working with it. Raymond Williams referred to *culture* as one of the two or three most difficult words in the English language.<sup>10</sup> Ongoing disputes at the core of political science over the very meaning of *politics* itself attest to the continued controversies surrounding this concept. When politics and culture are put together in a composite concept, definitional difficulties are multiplied.

Despite these challenges, it is possible to adapt the core of meaning inherent in Almond's approach, adding to it insights derived from other scholars in the field. The central criticisms of Almond pertain to the manner in which the concept was (ab)used—both methodologically and ethically—rather than to the concept itself. In building on Almond, my own definition of political culture incorporates the following additional insights. First, political cultures should be seen as events as well as states of affairs; political cultures are generated, produced, reproduced, modified, and even transformed by people in their daily activities; and people are strongly conditioned through their socialization to the symbolic worlds into which they are born and in which they grow up, but they also, in their turn, contribute to the reproduction of those symbolic orders. Second, political cultures are literally mundane or everyday; many of the political values, beliefs, attitudes, and symbols that we hold most dear are so taken for granted and unquestioned that we are

often not aware of them. Third, I define *politics* more broadly than Almond, as the manner in which people come to decide on the appropriate distribution of valued resources, as well as on the making of those rules that govern us. The processes of politics are both cooperative and conflictual; politics happens everywhere there are things to be distributed and rules to be made. To summarize, political cultures happen as people, operating in an already constituted symbolic field of political cultural concepts and practices, convey to each other conceptions of the distribution and uses of valued resources and of the making of decisions and rules.

As I conceptualize them, political cultures are vague, nebulous, and shifting phenomena, and they are difficult to measure in any precise way. One of the most promising ways in which to explore political cultures is through the employment of the related concept of ideology. Political cultures consist of loose and semi-formed ideas, beliefs, and feelings about political institutions and practices. Ideologies are partial appropriations from political cultures, arising from the conscious and deliberate attempts of the intellectual leadership of particular social groups (known as *ideologues*) to achieve a definitional monopoly of the political world that will be accepted by as many people as possible and that accords with the particular interests of their group. Ignoring the complexities and subtleties of political cultures and focusing on a narrow and self-interested band of values and beliefs, ideologues seek to convince others of the way things are, the way they ought to be, and, less obviously, the way it is possible for them to be. In so doing, ideologues hope that their "construction of reality" will convince others to effect political change in their favour. Ideologues employ a range of political movements and associations to achieve their ends, including political parties, political institutions, interest groups, the media, the bureaucracy, and the educational system.

Canadian political culture has provided fertile "clay" for a broad range of ideologues who have attempted to mould and shape it according to their particular interests. Arguably the most important ideological struggle over the past two hundred years has been that between "individualism" and "communitarianism." Canadian political culture, in contradistinction to the American political culture, has managed to sustain a balance between these two principal ideological tendencies. As will become clear in the next section, another way of saying that communitarianism continues to be part of the Canadian equation is to say that Canadians have been consistently seduced by the promise of the American dream but have periodically drawn back in order to develop and sustain distinctive institutions and practices that counter American values.<sup>11</sup>

### INDIVIDUALISM AND COMMUNITARIANISM

The quantitative approach to political culture, developed by Almond and his followers, did not recognize the importance of the ideological opposition between individualism and communitarianism. The reason for this is readily apparent: the

model of political reality devised by Almond came from an ideological individualism so profoundly entrenched and successful that it had come to dominate the American political culture. It rarely occurred to American students of political culture to think beyond the limits of their individualistic premises. The entire apparatus of methodology, questions, and comparisons among nations was premised upon this unquestioned individualism. It seems hardly surprising that when Almond and his colleagues applied their benchmarks, the United States routinely emerged as the most "perfect" political culture.

Students of political culture in Canada, however, have enjoyed full access to three other approaches to the study of political culture that have enabled them to reflect upon the Canadian experience of individualism versus communitarianism. These are the "fragments" approach, associated with Louis Hartz, Kenneth McRae, and Gad Horowitz;<sup>12</sup> the "historical-developmental" approach, best expressed in the synthesis offered by Seymour Martin Lipset;<sup>13</sup> and the more recent empirical attitudinal surveys of Michael Adams, Matthew Mendelsohn, and Edward Grabb and James Curtis, among others.<sup>14</sup> There are large-scale differences between the three approaches with respect to their theoretical presuppositions and methodological approaches. What unites them, however, is their propensity to portray the evolution of Canadian political culture as an ongoing struggle between the American forces of possessive individualism on the one hand and the European forces of conservative order and socialist collectivism on the other hand. *Possessive individualism*, a phrase originating in the work of C.B. Macpherson, is a distillation of the essence of the pure ideology of individual property rights and freedom from interference, first developed in the work of John Locke.<sup>15</sup> The term *communitarianism* best combines the anti-individualistic impulses of traditional conservatism and socialism. As its name implies, communitarianism is a belief system that stresses both the logical and the moral necessity of thinking about political life in terms of the requirements of the community or the collectivity, rather than in terms of the isolated and abstracted individual. In considering those distinctively Canadian forces that have opposed possessive individualism throughout the past two centuries, communitarianism is best able to convey the alternating right-wing and left-wing critiques of American liberalism.<sup>16</sup>

The fragments approach to political culture argues that the principal "white settler" societies were established by ideologically homogeneous and cohesive colonies of Europeans, whose founding characteristics established the ideological parameters of those societies throughout the succeeding generations. Louis Hartz describes the powerful and pervasive force of liberal individualism in the United States, arguing that, even in the twentieth century, its domination of the political culture can explain the early death of American socialism, the reluctant collectivism and populist character of the New Deal era, and the anticommunist vehemence of McCarthyism.<sup>17</sup> Kenneth McRae illuminates the importance of feudalism in the French-Canadian fragment, as well as loyalty to the British Crown among the English-Canadian



fragment, in the establishment of a society in Canada that, while fundamentally sharing in the liberal individualistic ethos of the American political culture, exhibited elements of a political culture of cautiousness, moderation, gradualism, compromise, and order.<sup>18</sup> McRae also makes reference to the incursion of modest doses of left-wing culture with the settlement of parts of the Canadian west by later European fragments ideologically committed to socialism.<sup>19</sup> These themes are further amplified by Gad Horowitz in his seminal account of the development of ideologies in Canada. Horowitz goes much further than Hartz and McRae in pointing out the critical importance of the communitarian elements in Canada's historical development.<sup>20</sup> Horowitz also moves his analysis away from the Hartzian notion that the founding ideologies of the fragments "congealed" early and remained unchanged.

The manner in which historical developments, notably major events, shape the emergence of a political culture was explored in detail in the work of Seymour Martin Lipset. Over a thirty-year academic career from the 1960s to the 1990s, Lipset developed a comparative analysis of the political cultures of Canada and the United States. On the basis of his understanding of comparative patterns of settlement, formative historical events, such as the American Revolution and the Canadian "counterrevolution," and a broad array of sociological data on such matters as crime rates, divorce rates, and church attendance, Lipset came to concur with Horowitz that differences between the Canadian and American political cultures are profound indeed<sup>21</sup>:

My central argument is that the two countries differ in their basic organizing principles. Canada has been and is a more class-aware, elitist, law-abiding, statist, collectivity-oriented, and particularistic (group-oriented) society than the United States....The United States remained throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries the extreme example of a classically liberal or Lockean society, one that rejected the assumptions of the alliance of throne and altar, of ascriptive elitism, of mercantilism, of noblesse oblige, of communitarianism.<sup>22</sup>

While Lipset stressed the fundamentally liberal individualist character of both Canada and the United States and argued that, in the global context, "the two resemble each other more than either resembles any other nation,"<sup>23</sup> his framework of comparison, like mine, was between the two countries, and the distinctions are substantial enough to be noteworthy.

Recent empirical surveys of Canadian and American attitudes sustain the view that Canada is a more communitarian polity. Michael Adams's data reveal that, over the past decade, both Canadians and Americans have been shifting their attitudes away from support for traditional authorities toward greater individualism. However, Americans have moved strongly in the direction of possessive individualism, competitiveness, patriarchy, and exclusionary defensiveness. For their part, Canadians have diverged from the American path and shifted strongly toward

socially oriented individualism, self-expression, and fulfillment through altruism and inclusiveness.<sup>24</sup> Both Adams and Edward Grabb and James Curtis highlight the important point that, while the American South skews the United States toward its characteristic values of possessive individualism and exclusionary defensiveness, Quebec skews Canada toward socially inclusive individualism and a comfort with statism, secularism, and communitarianism. In a key table summarizing measures of individualism, Grabb and Curtis's data show that for three out of the four variables that achieve significant national differences, the United States is more individualistic. Moreover, the pattern of American individualism is as strong in the north as it is in the south.<sup>25</sup> Matthew Mendelsohn, in a summary of his findings, remarks that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Canada remains "more collectivistic, more open to diversity, more supportive of state intervention, more deferential, and more prepared to find solidarity with people in other countries than its southern neighbour."<sup>26</sup> This is despite a decade of globalization, continental economic integration, federal and provincial neoliberal fiscal policies, and the consequent erosion of the Canadian welfare state.

Despite the historical pervasiveness of communitarian elements in Canada's political culture, and the eloquent passion of many of its supporters, possessive individualistic ideology is currently in global ascendancy.<sup>27</sup> If there is a communitarian response to these trends, it is to be found in the reactionary and defensively hostile impulses of religious and nationalistic fundamentalisms. Such social forces have grown in panic response to the rapid onset of a global economy and culture seemingly bereft of morality and meaning. Canadians have worked hard to sustain a more balanced and inclusive communitarian polity that celebrates diversity, openness, and polyethnic traditions. Given the current political landscape in the United States and beyond, such a balance seems increasingly challenging to sustain. In the next section, I turn my attention to the dangers for Canada associated with incorporating too much possessive individualism and narrow defensiveness: the problem of Americanization.

## THE PROBLEM OF AMERICANIZATION

To speak of Americanization as a problem is not to adopt a narrowly ethnocentric, anti-American point of view. A large majority of Canadians were horrified at the attacks of September 11, 2001, in which thousands of innocent lives were lost, and chose to express their solidarity in empathetic support and acts of kindness. Canadians continue to express strong bonds of affection for Americans and an admiration for many aspects of the American way of life, notably the exuberant spirit of entrepreneurship. There is even a small minority of Canadians who would welcome a union of the two countries. Equally, not all Americans are defensive, possessive individualists. American scholars, notably Robert Bellah and Robert Putnam, have adopted a critical perspective regarding the consequences of the early and monopolistic domination of individualist liberalism as the American

creed and its continuing effects on the American polity. Equating individualism and libertarian freedom with "Americanism" itself has permitted the ideological intolerances of authoritarian populism and "witch hunts" and has discouraged forms of state-led and communitarian solutions to America's problems that have been made possible elsewhere. Globalization, in its economic, cultural, and militaristic forms, represents the universalization of Americanism in the form of global capitalism, global media, and American military presence overseas.

Americanism is rapidly becoming so dominant that communitarian ideological perspectives are in jeopardy. Ideologies in themselves do not die, but given the will and the opportunity, ideologues can so determine and shape political culture that a given people come to believe that only one ideological position is desirable or possible. A political culture can be so imbued with a particular ideological orientation that all others dwindle and fade. Once this is in process, political support for previously existing institutions, practices, and discourses that run counter to the interests of the prevailing ideology falls away. The institutions and practices of the Canadian nation-state have been built on the basis of a political culture characterized by some degree of communitarianism. Once these diminish beyond a certain point, Canada itself is in question. This point was grasped, in a work of brilliant insight, by conservative scholar George Grant in 1965. In his *Lament for a Nation*, Grant understood that the uncritical adoption of American technocratic politics and economics, as well as the culture of populist consumerism, would undermine Canada to the point where its continued existence ceased to be relevant. He noted, "The impossibility of conservatism in our era is the impossibility of Canada."<sup>28</sup> Put simply, Grant was arguing that if nobody loves the country or regards the relationship between the generations as a communitarian trust, then the nation-state itself will become little more than a practical container. The subtitle of Grant's book is "The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism." There has never been a massive Canadian nationalism—at least not in English Canada—but there have been assertive moments of resistance to Americanization. The continued viability of Canada depends upon the capacity and willingness of Canadians to recognize those economic, cultural, and political signs of the eroding Canadian balance, and to work tirelessly in order to redress the imbalances.

For two decades, Canada's principal political parties and political leaders have been actively promoting economic policies of Americanized possessive individualism. At the federal level, with the marginal exception of the early 1980s when the Liberal Party attempted to forge a limited new "national policy," both Liberal and Progressive Conservative governments have driven the ideological agenda toward free-market solutions. As with the construction of any ideological perspective, the politicians have argued that their proposals are not merely sound but that they "have no choice." In the 1970s, the Liberals argued that too many demands had been made on the federal system and that it was impossible to continue to provide the kind of extensive and responsive public service that had

been developed throughout the 1950s and 1960s. They promoted monetary and fiscal policies that increased unemployment, facilitated a decrease in the public sector, and squeezed middle-class incomes through higher interest rates and taxes. In the 1980s, the Progressive Conservative Party pointed out that Canadians had been victims of fiscal irresponsibility, and they began to talk of the need to cut the national deficit. They continued the trend against communitarianism in Canada through their modest attempts at public sector cutbacks, their privatizations and deregulations, but mostly through their two free trade agreements and the introduction of the regressive goods and services tax. The Progressive Conservative government hoped that these policies would stimulate noninflationary growth in the economy. In the 1990s, the emphasis on the national deficit intensified, and the Liberal Party perpetuated the trend toward Americanization with its massive cuts to the federal public sector as well as cuts in transfer payments to the provinces. The radical downsizing of the federal government inevitably had an impact on the provinces. In some of them, notably Alberta and Ontario, right-wing governments went even further than the federal Liberal Party in radical reductions to the size and scope of the public sector on the basis of American-style populist individualism, promoting a generalized distrust of government and large-scale tax cuts designed to curtail redistributive policies.

In the 1990s, two new major parties came onto the federal scene. One of them, the Reform Party, which became the Canadian Alliance, was a strong proponent of possessive individualism and committed to further radical cuts in public spending. It advocated reductions in transfers to individuals and regions, large-scale tax cuts, and the diminution of the power of the federal state to enforce national standards. The Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative Party united in 2003 to form the Conservative Party of Canada. Its new platform continued the general thrust of Canadian Alliance policies, calling for tax cuts, deregulation, and greater powers to the provinces. Of all the political parties and politicians in contemporary Canada, very few have been active promoters of policies to enhance the communitarian essence of Canada, or even to slow its decline. The Liberal Party under Prime Minister Paul Martin redressed the balance to some extent, restoring funds to public services, such as health, education, and social assistance; Canadian culture; Aboriginal peoples; and foreign aid. Despite these trends, however, the fiscal strategy of the Martin government simultaneously transferred massive resources and fiscal authority to the provinces while increasing military expenditure and cutting personal and corporate taxes. The combined impact of these measures was to jeopardize the longer-term revenue potential of the federal state, rendering it decreasingly able to act on behalf of Canadians and to devise renewed programs of national scope. Since the Canadian federal election of 2006, the Conservative government has accelerated these trends toward tax cuts, deregulation, and devolution of powers to the provinces. Moreover, the Harper administration has integrated Canada more directly into the



American orbit by bringing Canada's foreign, defence, security, environmental, and trade policies into line with those of the Americans.

Behind the political parties have been the most important special interest groups. Many prominent corporate organizations, such as the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, have actively promoted greater economic integration into the United States, as well as policies designed to cut the public sector and reduce taxes on the corporate elite. The corporate elite has been strongly supported by most of Canada's leading journalists, intellectuals, and academics. Some of them have, while attacking collectivism, continued to promote the rhetoric of a united Canada, which cherishes its distinctiveness. In this respect, they have offered some resistance to Americanization insofar as they have advocated the old-style orderly and conservative forms of "elite accommodation," through which Canada's distinctive communities are able to achieve a *modus vivendi*. In other words, they have advocated the kind of political arrangements that the Progressive Conservatives attempted to promote in the 1980s with the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords. The ideals of such accords, based upon bilingualism and multiculturalism in a finely balanced Canada consisting of "a community of communities," continue to be supported at the highest levels. In modified form, such is the agenda of the current Liberal and Conservative parties.

The problem for Canada is that the refined and noble politics of cultural pluralism and mutual respect have been promoted through anachronistic and elitist political practices from which most citizens have felt excluded. This is why Michael Adams and others have detected a growing wariness on the part of Canadians regarding traditional authorities. The politics of elite accommodation also runs directly counter to the anticollectivist impulses of economic possessive individualism. The cultural message of economic liberalism stresses narrowly defined rights, absolute freedom from restraint, and a rejection of those virtues associated with family, community, and society, such as love, tolerance, charity, duty, loyalty, and patriotism. There are signs that the hold of such qualities in the Canadian political culture is diminishing. An angry Canadian public rejected the Charlottetown Accord in 1992. The accord had been designed to provide a new compromise among Canadians in terms of their constitutional rights, as well as to restate the commitment of Canadians to a unified nationhood and distinctive national identity. Canadian voters punished the architects of the plan, the Progressive Conservative Party, by almost completely rejecting them in the federal election of 1993. In their place, English Canadians supported the Reform Party, while many Quebecers turned to the Bloc Québécois; both political organizations did not accept bilingualism and multiculturalism.

The decline in support for the traditional parties, the growing disrespect for politicians, the growth of support for narrowly defined single-issue political movements, and a generalized sense of the atomization of political society all point

to a growing individuation of Canada's political culture.<sup>29</sup> The rapidly declining trust in Canada's political institutions, political parties, and politicians is reported in Neil Nevitte's *The Decline of Deference*.<sup>30</sup> Nevitte's data demonstrate that "confidence in governmental institutions is declining while non-traditional... forms of political participation are increasing. In political matters, people are becoming less deferential, less compliant, more inclined to speak out..."<sup>31</sup> Similar findings are reported by Harold D. Clarke and his colleagues in *Absent Mandate*, which also tracks Canadian public opinion in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>32</sup> Clarke et al. report strong declines in partisan loyalty and attachment over these decades, in conjunction with growing disaffection, detachment, and negativity concerning politicians and parties.<sup>33</sup> Their final chapter is entitled "The Politics of Discontent," and a key feature of that chapter is their characterization of an "angry and cynical" electorate.<sup>34</sup> Concluding their work, Clarke et al. refer to the Canadian political situation as one of "permanent dealignment," by which they mean a consistently fragmented and volatile relationship between citizens and parties.<sup>35</sup> In the context of such permanent dealignment, communitarian attachments to persons and places become strained. Despite the fact that dealignment and disaffection can be dangerous to a political community, blind deference is no better. Deference is always a thin and brittle basis for a political community and is, in the final analysis, as damaging as possessive individualism. Disaffection and the decline of deference are, therefore, in some respects positive forces and represent the kind of assertive enhancement of political efficacy and political participation that Adams refers to as "the balance of individual autonomy with a sense of collective responsibility."<sup>36</sup> However, in contemporary Canada, the principal ideological forces that have picked up on the mood of popular anger and cynicism offer individuated solutions that serve to amplify people's negativity, deepening and broadening their defensive possessiveness rather than encouraging their communitarian imaginations to seek new ways in which to invigorate the body politic. Canadian multiculturalism has come under siege from a barrage of antiterrorist discourses, the rebirth of strands of xenophobia, and the increased securitization of the Canadian state.

Canadians have demonstrated that they are not bound to the traditional political parties and that they are prepared to vote for new "antiparty" parties in numbers large enough to designate them as the Official Opposition in the House of Commons. The Canadian Alliance represented an American-style populism that it made hegemonic in Western Canada. For fourteen years, the Bloc Québécois offered the only true communitarian option in Canada, one that was, of course, grounded in demands for a distinctive and independent Quebec state to reflect the aspirations of the people of Quebec. To some extent, the success of Quebec nationalism is a reflection of the poverty of any true pan-Canadian national vision, either inside French Quebec or in the rest of Canada. The recent election of the New Democratic Party to Official Opposition status, driven by its successes

in Quebec in the 2011 federal election, represents a continuation of the communitarian option, even as the party attempts to moderate its "socialist" image to appeal to a broader constituency. Current political discourse in Canada is punctuated by the claims and counterclaims of single-interest groups to which citizens are encouraged to adhere on the basis of their narrowly defined personal and individual desires. Among the most recent crop of such groups are gun owners angry about gun control, victims of crime angry about the lack of compensation in the criminal justice system, and religious traditionalists angry at the right of civil marriage being extended to gays and lesbians. At present there is little to unite the various single-issue groups other than a shared belief in entitlement based on a conception of the state as a repository of goods and legal precedents that are "up for grabs."

The impact of the changing composition of Canada's political culture, as well as of the ideologues of possessive individualism, has been acutely felt. Despite the efforts of small Canadian nationalist groups, such as the Council of Canadians, and an assortment of individuals, including some prominent politicians and journalists, the federal state has been radically Americanized in the past few decades: NAFTA and the GST are accomplished fact; Air Canada, Canadian National Railway, and Petro-Canada, corporations designed with explicit public and nation-building purposes, have been partially or totally privatized; major regulatory agencies, such as the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, have lost much of their regulatory powers; federal Crown corporations, notably the CBC, have suffered enormous budget cuts; and there have been radical reductions in the size and scope of the state, with more to come. The effects of these cuts have reverberated in the quality of life at the provincial level: the "social safety net" has been lowered; universal provision of social services, which nurtures a communitarian ethos, has been rapidly replaced with "means-tested" and limited provision of social services, which targets and stigmatizes the poor; public systems of health care and education are being eroded to the point where partial privatization of so-called core or essential services seems highly probable; the gap between the rich and the poor is increasing as the middle class, which carried much of the burden of redistribution in the 1980s, becomes increasingly reluctant to share.

In furtherance of these trends, the liberal-individualistic message of radical decentralization is currently being hotly promoted by Canada's richest and most influential special interest group, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. The Canadian Council of Chief Executives and the Conservative Party are both promoting a new Canada in which principal socioeconomic and political control is devolved to the provinces and in which there is little more than some vague sentiment and occasional sports and entertainment extravaganzas to hold the country together. If there is radical decentralization in the future, those ties of common citizenship that bind us will fall away, and the already weak pro-Canada

voices will become even weaker. There is growing evidence of parochial assertiveness and a "beggar-thy-neighbour" attitude among opinion leaders in Canada's more affluent provinces, British Columbia and Alberta. As the voices for a pan-Canadian vision diminish, the logic of an independent Quebec state will increase. Once Quebec has gone, the remaining nine provinces and the territories will have very little left to hold them together. As they enter further into the liberal-individualistic ethos of free trade in the North American continent, an ethos buttressed by new World Trade Organization agreements that severely restrict the scope of sovereign states in controlling capital flows, so the patent absurdity of continued independence for a culturally fractured, socioeconomically divided, and geographically split Canada will become increasingly clear. We will have rationalized Canada out of existence.

## CONCLUSION

Given the ideological assault of Americanizing possessive individualism on Canada's political culture, and the efficacy of that assault in terms of major changes in public policy, what is the prognosis for Canada? The spirit of self-centred individualism and defensive exclusionism does not bode well for the continued existence of Canada. Traditional conservatives would argue that any nation that has lost its sense of organic connectedness is in poor health. When the sentence "The West wants in" became the rallying cry for the foundation of the Reform Party, it was taken to mean that the western provinces wished to partake of the benefits and burdens of full and equitable citizenship. Regrettably, the sentence has come to be associated instead with a narrowly focused acquisitiveness, opportunistic rent-seeking, and an unwillingness to share natural advantages with those persons and regions less fortunate in the country. Under such circumstances, it seems improbable that the wealthier provinces, such as British Columbia and Alberta, will be able to see much sense in sustaining Canada as a unified nation-state. The deficit-cutting and public sector-gutting economic policies of the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party are actively promoting this fragmentation. And yet some modest signs of Canadian distinctiveness remain. As mentioned earlier, public opinion research reveals Canadians in the late 1990s to be more communitarian, statist, committed to social order, and supportive of public health care than Americans.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, it is always possible that the decline of public provision, the growing inequality, and the increasing immiseration of the poor will so offend the communitarian impulses of our political culture that Canadians will reject further trends toward possessive individualism.<sup>38</sup>

On the cultural front, there seems little evidence of patriotism or spontaneous love of country. There are occasional glimpses of nationalistic pride, such as when Canada won two hockey gold medals in the 2002 Winter Olympics. But other than in these infrequent moments, it simply appears that few Canadians

care very much. Over a century ago, the French intellectual Ernst de Renan referred to a nation as an act of will, as "a daily plebiscite." There seems to be very little active will to nurture Canada. While it is possible to be reserved in one's patriotism, our continued silence in the context of accelerated Americanization is deafening. Not only is there an atmosphere of listless apathy about the nation, but also increasing numbers of English Canadians have exhibited an unwillingness to accept the claim of Quebec to be a nation within Canada. Such an uncompromising stance would be welcomed in the radically individualistic melting-pot homogeneity of the United States, but it makes little sense in Canada. It is possible that there are sufficient numbers of French Quebecers who could be persuaded to remain in a Canada of "two solitudes" united through mutual and distanced respect. The ultimate consequence of the logic of hard-line opposition to distinctive status is to drive those moderate Quebecers into the welcoming arms of the separatists.

Canada is in jeopardy. Our neighbours to the south have consistently stated that they would welcome Canada as a part of their great country. Such a solution might make sense. Here we might recall the sarcastic and self-pitying vitriol of George Grant, who said: "Perhaps we should rejoice in the disappearance of Canada. We leave the narrow provincialism and our backwoods culture; we enter the excitement of the United States where all the great things are done."<sup>39</sup> Such an eventuality would be a tragic loss to a world that desperately needs the model of polyethnic and multicultural tolerance provided by Canada. Perhaps, given the newfound assertive and anti-elite rebelliousness of Canadians, we will simply reinvent the country and craft something new, authentic, and beautiful. Perhaps, in this globalized, postmodern age in which Canada's greatest claim to international distinctiveness is to be a country that is so tolerant of pluralities of differences among its own citizens that it really has no substantive core, Canada will actually become the first "post-nation": an address with no fixed identity, whose very openness will be an exemplar to the remainder of the world whose new soft tribalisms will gradually infiltrate the remainder of the planet, including America, imbuing them with Canadianism and creating the ultimate global village.

#### NOTES

1. The phrase comes from H.G.J. Aitken, "Defensive Expansionism: The State and Economic Growth in Canada," in W.T. Easterbrook and M.H. Watkins, eds., *Approaches to Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), pp. 183-221.
2. W.A. Mackintosh, "Economic Factors in Canadian History," in Easterbrook and Watkins, eds., *Approaches*, p. 15.
3. United States International Trade Commission, *U.S. Trade Balances, by Partner Country 2010*, available at [http://dataweb.usitc.gov/scripts/cy\\_m3\\_run.asp](http://dataweb.usitc.gov/scripts/cy_m3_run.asp). Accessed June 29, 2011.

4. Statistics Canada, *Foreign Direct Investment (Stocks) in Canada (2010)*, available at [http://www.international.gc.ca/economist-economiste/assets/pdfs/FDI\\_stocks-Inward\\_by\\_Country-ENG.pdf](http://www.international.gc.ca/economist-economiste/assets/pdfs/FDI_stocks-Inward_by_Country-ENG.pdf). Accessed June 29, 2011.
5. Gabriel Almond, "Comparative Political Systems," *World Politics* 18 (1956), pp. 391-409.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 396.
7. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Boston: Little Brown, 1963).
8. See Jon Pammett and Michael Whittington, eds., *Foundations of Political Culture: Political Socialization in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976); Richard Simeon and David Elkins, "Regional Political Cultures in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 7 (1974), pp. 397-437; John Wilson, "The Canadian Political Cultures: Towards a Redefinition of the Nature of the Canadian Political System," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 7 (1974), pp. 438-483; Elia Zureik and Robert Pike, eds., *Socialization and Values in Canadian Society: Political Socialization* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1975).
9. Donald Smiley, "Must Canadian Political Science Be a Miniature Replica?" *Journal of Canadian Studies* 9 (1974), pp. 31-42; C.B. Macpherson, "After Strange Gods: Canadian Political Science 1973," in T.N. Guinsberg and G.L. Reuber, eds., *Perspectives on the Social Sciences in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 52-76; Alan Cairns, "Political Science in Canada and the Americanization Issue," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 8 (1975), pp. 191-234.
10. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976), p. 76.
11. This point is elaborated by Stephen Brooks, *Canadian Democracy: An Introduction*, 6th ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 44, who attributes a range of economic and cultural policies to a series of deliberate "refusals in the face of Americanizing pressures."
12. Louis Hartz, *The Founding of New Societies* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964); Kenneth McRae, "The Structure of Canadian History," in Louis Hartz, *The Founding of New Societies*, pp. 219-274; Gad Horowitz, "Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 32 (1966), pp. 143-171.
13. Seymour Martin Lipset, *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
14. Michael Adams, *Fire and Ice: The United States and Canada and the Myth of Converging Values* (Toronto: Penguin, 2003); Matthew Mendelsohn, Canada's Social Contract: Evidence From Public Opinion. Discussion Paper P101 (Public Involvement Network, Canadian Policy Research Networks, November 2002); Edward Grabb and James Curtis, *Regions Apart: The Four Societies of Canada and the United States* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2005).
15. C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962). The dominance of possessive individualism in the American tradition has been well established in the key political cultural contributions to American society, notably Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Doubleday, Anchor, 1969); Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harvest, 1955); David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American*

*Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986); and Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

16. Sylvia Bashevkin, "The Politics of Canadian Nationalism," in Paul Fox and Graham White, eds., *Politics: Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1995), pp. 40-47.
17. Hartz, *The Founding of New Societies*, pp. 107, 111-112, 119.
18. McRae, "The Structure of Canadian History," p. 239.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 270.
20. Horowitz, "Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism in Canada," p. 148.
21. General interpretations of the comparatively communitarian character of Canada, proffered by McRae, Horowitz, and Lipset, are rejected by Janet Ajzenstat and Peter J. Smith, "Liberal-Republicanism: The Revisionist Picture of Canada's Founding," in *idem.*, eds., *Canada's Origins: Liberal, Tory, or Republican?* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995), pp. 1-18. Not only do they claim that there is little Tory conservatism in the Canadian political tradition, but they go further in regarding the Upper and Lower Canadian establishments of the nineteenth century as fundamentally "liberal," and their principal rebel opponents, such as Mackenzie and Papineau, as "civic republican." While this is not the place to engage in detailed debate with Ajzenstat and Smith, I am in fundamental disagreement with their characterizations. Not only do they ignore the abundant evidence of elitist, ascriptive, affective, and particularistic practices on the part of the governing classes, but they also promote the idea that "civic republicanism" is "antiliberal." The ideology is better interpreted, by Louis Hartz among others, as "left" or radical liberalism. While it is true that Mackenzie and Papineau "scorn...the nineteenth-century liberal constitution" (p. 8), the basis of their opposition is not antiliberalism, but antiauthoritarianism. There is little evidence to support the claim that the nineteenth-century rebels were against the basic principles of possessive individualism. Their rallying cry was not for the abolition of capitalism but for responsible government and genuine democratic rights.
22. Lipset, *Continental Divide*, p. 8.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 214, 219, 225. Neil Nevitte has recently produced comparative survey data to illustrate the fact that, in the context of the advanced industrial nations, Canada and the United States are often closer to each other than to any other nations. He goes further and argues that Lipset's claims that Canadians are more deferential, law-abiding, and passive than Americans are not supported in his data. See Neil Nevitte, *The Decline of Deference* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996), pp. 105-106.
24. Adams, *Fire and Ice*, pp. 39, 97, 123.
25. Grabb and Curtis, *Regions Apart*, p. 181.
26. Mendelsohn, *Canada's Social Contract*, p. 1.
27. The historical tradition of communitarianism and collectivism is mentioned in numerous sources, including Rand Dyck, *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches* (Toronto: Nelson, 1996), p. 286; and Michael Whittington and Richard Van Loon, *Canadian Government and Politics: Institutions and Processes* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1996), p. 99; and Brooks, *Canadian Democracy*, pp. 52-55.

28. George Grant, *Lament for a Nation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), p. 68.
29. Peter Dobell and Byron Berry, "Anger at the System: Political Discontent in Canada," in Fox and White, *Politics: Canada*, pp. 4-9; and Maclean's/Decima polling data, *Maclean's*, January 2, 1995.
30. Nevitte, *The Decline of Deference*, pp. 56, 79, 267, 291. Nevitte uses his data to interpret recent changes in the Canadian political culture as evidence of a general move toward postindustrial, postmaterialist, and postmodern values, pervasive throughout the West, and he specifically downplays the "Americanization" thesis. Nevitte's method of calculating the degree of "Americanization," outlined in footnote 2 on page 314 of his book, is designed to assess the "cultural lag" thesis that Canadian value changes lag behind those of the United States. Nevitte takes a series of dimensions in which he measures the change in both Canadian and American values from 1981 to 1990. One of these dimensions is "confidence in government institutions." According to Nevitte's data, "confidence in government institutions" declined from 49.6 percent in 1981 to 31.8 percent in 1990 in the United States, a decline of nearly 18 percentage points. In Canada, the comparable change was from 36.9 percent in 1981 to 29.4 percent in 1990, a decline of 7.5 percentage points. Using his calculus of "cultural lag," Nevitte declares Canada to be the leader of the trend in 1990 (Table 9-2, p. 292). The fact that the U.S. figure in 1990 more closely approximates the Canadian figure in 1981 than the Canadian 1990 figure approximates the American 1981 figure—Nevitte's criterion for Canada as the cultural leader—is, in my opinion, inadequate as a measure of the degree of Americanization. It is, of course, possible to argue that the Americans are becoming more like Canadians. However, it seems equally plausible to postulate that the profound loss of confidence, tracked in the American data, has a more moderate, yet still substantial, echo effect in Canada.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
32. Harold D. Clarke, Jane Jenson, Lawrence LeDuc, and Jon H. Pammett, *Absent Mandate: Canadian Politics in an Era of Restructuring*, 3rd ed. (Vancouver: Gage, 1996).
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 61, 65, 67.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-180.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
36. Adams, *Fire and Ice*, p. 123.
37. Footnote 12. See also George Perlin, "The Constraints of Public Opinion: Diverging or Converging Paths," in Keith Banting, George Hobreg, and Richard Simeon, eds., *Degrees of Freedom: Canada and the United States in a Changing World* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), pp. 71-149.
38. For data in support of these claims, refer to Statistics Canada, *Canada at a Glance, 2000* (available at <http://www.statcan.ca>), "Persons with Low Income after Tax." The percentage of Canadians with low incomes declined only marginally from 3,744,000 in 1993 (13.1%) to 3,163,000 in 2001 (10.4%). Given the economic boom of this era and the conservatism of the measure (*after-tax income*), the failure to deal with poverty is troubling. The failure was particularly pronounced among children. In 2002, 35 percent of female-headed sole-parent families had low incomes according to Statistics Canada. A United Nations report on *Child Poverty in Rich Nations* (2000) calculated the Canadian child poverty rate at 15.5 percent. More detailed—and disturbing—data on child poverty

are contained on the Campaign 2000 website (<http://www.campaign2000.ca>), which states in its 2004 report that more than a million Canadian children continue to live in poverty and shows an increase in child poverty between 1989 and 2000. This is despite pledges made by all major Canadian political figures in the late 1980s to eradicate child poverty by 2000.

39. Grant, *Lament*, p. 8.

## X NO Canada and the United States— Separated at Birth

MICHAEL ADAMS

Canada's history has been dominated by three great themes: building a nation and holding it together, providing a growing list of services to the Canadian people, and managing our relations with the United States.

At the time of the American Revolution, Canada was a collection of British colonies that remained under the protection of the British crown rather than join the republican experiment launched by the thirteen colonies to the south. Thanks to that revolution, we even inherited some American Tories who stood loyal to the British Empire and migrated north.

To put it in a social values context, the American colonists rejected the traditional authority of the British crown while the Canadian colonists deferred to it, or, in the case of Quebec, fashioned a pragmatic compromise between the authority the British won on the Plains of Abraham in 1759 and that of the Roman Catholic Church.

From the late eighteenth century until 1867, the northern colonies remained under British rule, although increasing numbers of colonists demanded that their governments be more responsible to them than to the colonial administrators in Britain and their agents here. Some firebrands even instigated rebellions—one in Upper Canada (Ontario) in 1837 and another in Lower Canada (Quebec) in 1837 and 1838. These were revolts against an elite of appointed officials, not revolutions against the British regime, and in neither case was there significant loss of life. Early Canadians valued a liberty based on order over a freedom derived from the chaos of mob rule, which they believed prevailed in the new republic to the south.

Whereas America was conceived in violent revolution, the Canadian colonists were counter-revolutionaries whose cautious leaders were unable to negotiate the compromises necessary for their reluctant Confederation until 1867, nearly a century after the American colonies broke from Britain. While the Canadian colonies were slowly and laboriously brokering a larger union, America was deadlocked over slavery, lurching unrelentingly toward—and ultimately embroiled in—a bloody civil war that took the lives of 620,000 soldiers representing 2 percent of the population at that time, or nearly 6 million Americans in today's terms.

In his Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson dedicated his country to the ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Not to be outdone in the evocative slogan department, a century later Canada's Fathers of Confederation could see no higher pursuits than peace, order, and good government.

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