

## **America's Blind Spot: Why Americans Ignore Canadians**

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I happened to peruse an article on the comparative international views of the United States in *The American Interest* a couple of days ago, just after I read a similar article in *Florida Trend Magazine*. Both issues this month looked at America's positioning from the point of view of countries elsewhere around the world. Both articles seemed quite balanced, thoughtful and insightful treatments. Both articles selected representative commentators from a dozen countries, and both overlooked Canada.

Curious.

This nation of, "assistant professors," as Michael Kinsley of Slate.com labeled Canada a decade ago, was again thought unimportant by America's elite. What is it in the American psyche that so assiduously underestimates its neighbor to the north?

Is Canada an undeveloped country, politically, and therefore backward and uninteresting; an unproductive country, economically, and therefore poor and uneducated; a socially backward country and therefore without modern ideas?

No, indeed; quite the contrary on all points. In fact, Canada shares a relatively long history of development with "America" along a number of fronts. Just before I canvassed these articles, I read that Ontario -- a central Canadian province -- is now the leading jurisdiction in North America for the production of automobiles, with more auto plant construction to be announced soon. Canada's level of economic productivity has for quite some time made it America's # 1 trade customer and vice versa. And so, the economic links between the two

countries are very close, as many have said, highly integrated, and both share a high standard of living.

Could it be that we are dealing with a nation of dullards, even if we understand Canada to be a development nation? Is all their money going into hockey rinks and igloo construction? Is their education system so confounded as to be incapable of producing sufficient scholars in order to produce even a single incisive commentary by even a single notable scholar on the United States?

No again.

Educational attainment and international test scores reveal Canadians in primary, secondary and post-secondary institutions surpassing American public school "achievements" on average. Moreover, Canada has at least two national newspapers and three national television networks where commentators are reasonably active. In fact, there are scores of academic journals published north of the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes where scholars communicate regularly with reasonably intelligent ideas.

Is it that Canadians don't know anything about America?

No again.

Canadians watch an astonishing amount of American news and "cultural" programming on their televisions and via the Internet, on a daily basis. They consume hundreds of periodical publications, and they learn "American" history in the elementary grades probably better than Americans.

Is there nothing to relieve us of this paradox, this mystery of the blind spot?

Here are a couple suggestions.

It is precisely because Canadians know so much about Americans -- without patriotism or favor -- that Americans are unnerved. Canadians are by comparative international standards, and on an individual basis, quite accomplished, and when Americans meet Canadians individually they are perplexed.

Why?

None of America's national assumptions work very well with Canadians, who after all are foreigners.

America's well-known super-power status and shall we say, superpower complex, its inherent industrial and military superiority, and it's the wealth among individuals are not particularly impressive to Canadians. Canadians know Americans are not a super-race; Americans do not necessarily have an enviable "civilization" -- with regrets to Newt Gingrich -- and the level of prosperity in America is not in the least unknown in Canada. In a word, Canadians are not "hoodwinked." They are not deferential.

Canadians endure Americans' pretensions. To Canadians, Americans are plausible and amusing; successful and interesting; loud and brash; democratic and political, fascinating and fun -- even if they can't play hockey.

The reason why Americans don't pay attention to Canadians is because Americans have this faint dread, this nagging idea that Canadians might be their equivalent. And a super-power nation cannot have peoples to its north that are its equivalent.

Better to ignore them.