

Much to love about Canada, despite any imperfections

by Conrad Black



Canada is a magnificent country and most Canadians know that. It is not remotely in contention for being the most exciting country in the world, but excitement drama, and historical interest are ultimately generated by upheaval and often violence. I attempted, in my history of Canada, "Rise to Greatness," to show that Canadian history is in fact very interesting. This is the only bicultural transcontinental parliamentary confederation in the history of the world; it has endured without major modification to its political institutions for 153 years, longer than any other large country except the United Kingdom and the United States. And in that time, the United Kingdom lost most of the province of Ireland and the United States was just recovering from a

terrible civil war in which 750,000 Americans died (in a population of just 31 million). These were indeed exciting and dramatic events; few episodes in the last 200 years have been more celebrated and engrossing than the war between the American states and the Irish troubles. Patching together what is now a G-7 country from a group of settlements scattered along the northern border of the United States, composed of two cultural communities that did not know or like each other and whose relations are far from entirely smooth even now; agitating for independence from Britain while retaining its guaranty against the annexationist appetite of the United States (that ravaged Mexico for a million square miles in 1846), was a triumph of Canadian statesmanship, but bloodless and almost invisible.

Because our sovereignty was so ambiguous for so long: a colony until 1867, a semi-sovereign dominion until 1948, all the while counter-balancing the British and the American influences but growing at a rate that kept pace with the astonishing and unprecedented rise of the United States, Canada has only slowly asserted a personality recognizable to the world. This ambiguity is with us still, and it makes Canada vulnerable to some forms of intellectual and political faddishness far beyond the penetration such public attitudes would achieve in more self-confident nationalities such as the French, the British and the Americans.

Before addressing what I believe is the defamatory fiction that this is a racist country, I must emphasize with some fervour that I have never felt or uttered a flicker of racial or sectarian disparagement. I undoubtedly benefited from what is now called the "white privilege" of having well-to-do parents, but I am more grateful to them for bringing my brother and me up to believe that all people, ethnicities and religions should be treated equally and with respect. Everyone should be proud of what they are, of themselves and act accordingly and respect others. As I wrote in this column last

week, it is appalling that Canada is now so profoundly immersed in a quagmire of racial self-deprecation, even self-hate. It is impossible to turn on a newscast or pick up a newspaper in this country without some new protestation against the "systemic racism" (SR) of the country. There are some Canadians who are racially prejudiced, and there has certainly been some racial friction in this country in the past. Our Native policy has been generally unsuccessful but certainly in recent years, it has been well-intentioned. As I've written here before, Canada as a self-governing entity has never had any slavery and Canadians before and after they became self-governing in internal matters in 1848 had an admirable record in encouraging and accepting fugitive slaves from the United States, totalling about 40,000, and in giving refuge to anti-slavery activists, including John Brown and Harriet Tubman, who has now replaced U.S. President Andrew Jackson on the American \$20 banknote (and considered herself a Canadian).

I have no standing to claim that there has not been discrimination against non-whites, though I can certainly assert that as an employer I have never practised nor tolerated it, and I can also assert that the overwhelming majority of our countrymen is as militantly opposed to it as I am. Two weeks ago I said in what was for several years my weekly Friday appearance with that great Canadian John Oakley (my old friend from my Montreal days, Peter Shurman, was actually substituting for John on this day), on Corus' Global News Radio 640 Toronto, precisely that Canada is not systemically racist, that there are instances of racial discrimination, but that the overwhelming majority of Canadians are unprejudiced and equitable toward minorities. A cabal apparently arose within Corus among the more belligerent adherents to the SR view of Canada, and after a week of intense manoeuvre (that I was unaware of; I thought Ted Rogers' family still owned the station), John Oakley called an hour before air time and said he had been "non-negotiably"

told to tell me that my radio visits with him were cancelled permanently. I received churlish tweets from Charles Adler, apparently still on-air in Vancouver (the last time I heard him was about 20 years ago and he was somewhat sensible), apparently one of the ring-leaders of the putsch against me. I will miss speaking with John, but my voice is not exactly stilled: I have two weekly national radio slots in the U.S. and four columns on American online sites, plus this column, and reach millions of people each week. I'm sure the Corus listeners will get on all right without me. But it is indicative of how absurd and nonsensical the public discussion on these issues has become: that to declare that Canada is not a racist country is itself judged to be a racist comment. There are riots and demonstrations around the United States ostensibly about racism, but no one bothers me when I express skepticism about SR in media outlets there.

This is a recurrent phenomenon in Canada; I don't know anything about the problem with Jessica Mulroney and a social media influencer, which led to the termination of Mulroney's CTV program and the announcement by her husband, Ben Mulroney, that he would step down from many of his duties at one of his CTV programs (he remains at work at another), but I know that they are fine and fair-minded people, and like all of the Mulroneys, and Brian Mulroney throughout his life and public career (as Nelson Mandela attested), they have been implacable opponents of racial prejudice or discrimination. It was painful to read the renunciations that Ben and Jessica Mulroney felt obligated to make, Ben expressing what amounted to guilt about his "white privilege" and his vehement attack on unspecified racist practices in Canadian society. It all has an air of bloodless Stalinism, as people who are not in fact guilty of anything confess and repent. (Nor is being white or having successful parents an offence.) The commissioner of the RCMP, Brenda Lucki, acknowledged to a House of Commons committee last week that there was "absolutely systemic racism" in the RCMP. But when asked for

an example of it, she described a physical entrance test that was hard to pass for people not at least six-feet tall. The head of the Black caucus of MPs pointed out that that did not make it as racism. Lucki had previously denied there was SR in the RCMP but changed her position after being rebuked by the prime minister, who appears to find SR (aggravated by climate change and gender discrimination) under every bed and behind every bush in the country.

I don't intend to make light of the real problems. But our official obsession with this issue is an absurd displacement for other concerns. Of course racism exists and must be extirpated. But this is not a racist country; it is a good country compared to the 197 others. Let's all do better but writing as someone who has suffered minor collateral damage from the current uproar, let us banish the illusion that to recognize the merit of Canada is an act that gives rightful offence to anyone, especially not ourselves.

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