

Oh, Canada, stop the whining

By Bruce Gilley

Disparaging the United States has been a Canadian tradition since the War of 1812. Now that an American leader has, for the first time in memory, offered some gentle ripostes, Canadians are playing the victim.

Unless they pull out of the national nosedive, the country may never recover.



Canadian leaders for years have warned of the dangers of "sticking our finger in the eye of America." PHOTO BY ELAINE THOMPSON /Postmedia Network

I grew up in Calgary and am familiar with the deeply woven forms of anti-Americanism that define the national identity. The joke goes that Canada is the world's oldest continuous civilization of anti-Americans.

Until the end of the Cold War, most of this was merely the constructive friction of a close partnership. However, the safety brought by the Soviet collapse freed Canada to display its anti-Americanism more openly. "I like to stand up to the Americans. It's popular," then-prime minister Jean Chrétien said in overheard comments in 1997.

The George W. Bush years pushed Canadian disdain to a whole new level. When Harvard academic Michael Ignatieff returned to Canada to run for prime minister as the Liberal party leader in 2006, he established his bona fides by condemning the country that had made his career.

The anti-American invective from the Canadian Broadcasting Corp., meanwhile, echoes the anti-British bombast that poured forth from the Voice of the Arabs radio in Gamal Nasser's Egypt. The CBC also produces a steady stream of anti-American cultural elites, such as former governor-general Michaëlle Jean, whose husband in 2006 made a conspiracy theory documentary that accused the U.S. of colluding with Iran's hostage-takers in 1979.

Canada's high priestess of literature, Margaret Atwood, fires off anti-American volleys knowing that her left-leaning readership in America will accept them with their famous good-naturedness. Her dystopian 1985 novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, describes a fundamentalist Christian society in New England that forces women to bear children. It is an unabashed hate letter to the American founding.

Disgusted Canadians often migrate, today accounting for 821,000 American residents, enough to fill a major Canadian city.

"I don't think we can keep sticking our finger in the eye of America and somehow feel that they won't react," warned Liberal Senator Jerry Grafstein in 2002. He had proposed a national day celebrating the U.S. following the 9/11 attacks

as a way to combat “endemic” anti-Americanism in the country.

The following year, future Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper described the Liberal government as “driven by a petty jealousy of American power. Over and over, we hear a stream of small-minded, undignified, anti-American comments passed off as foreign policy.” His moderation was abandoned after 2015 under Justin Trudeau, whose father, Pierre, wore his anti-Americanism as proudly as the roses in his lapel.

The younger Trudeau’s ascension could not have been more ill-timed. After a national love affair with Barack Obama, Canadian elites foamed at the very idea of Donald Trump. “Perhaps Canadians who are in the habit of blindly signalling their contempt for a duly elected president should consider the fact that they are insulting the American electorate every time they make another tired Trump joke,” wrote retired Manitoba judge Brian Giesbrecht before the 2020 election.

The plea fell on deaf ears. So, as Trump prepared to take office for the second time in 2024, he finally let loose. Liberal mismanagement of the country, and the bilateral relationship, he charged, had rendered the country “not viable.” It was as if 200 years of Canadian identity was finally coming home to roost.

The subsequent meltdown in Canada has been alternately endearing and enraging. If it continues, it could fuel a catastrophic break with the United States.

I’ll be in Canada this summer, as usual, visiting the family cottage in British Columbia. In years past I have never worried about my Oregon plates, since there are plenty from Washington state as well. But for the first time, I may back the car into the boatyard lot and conceal my origins.

Meanwhile, I hope my former countrymen will spend some quality time in front of a mirror.

First published in the [Calgary Herald](#)