

HITTING BELOW THE BELT

2001 ONWARD

Canada is arguably the most deluded industrialized nation in the world. ~ *Jonah Goldberg, Editor, National Review, 9 June 2006*

You can tell a lot about a nation's mediocrity index by learning that they invented synchronized swimming. Even more, by the fact that they're proud of it. ~ *Matt Labash, Senior writer, The Weekly Standard, 21 March 2005*

The first years of the new millennium marked a turning point in how some American journalists and commentators viewed Canada. Bit by bit, story by story, exaggerated falsehoods – such as the September 11 terrorists snuck across the border from Canada – gained credibility as two principles of journalism – fairness and accuracy – were increasingly laid aside in favour of entertainment and cold cash. At the Canadian embassy in Washington, officials have spent years refuting the 9/11 untruth which pops up every so often in the hallowed halls of Congress and the controlled chaos of newsrooms. (The terrorists actually came from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Lebanon, and were trained in the United States – no Canadian links.)

Adding to the perpetuation of these blatant falsehoods were sinister and cynical undertones that largely didn't exist in earlier media coverage, even during the Champ Clark calls for

annexation in 1911 or the Fenian runs on the fledgling Dominion in the late nineteenth century. Sure the *Los Angeles Times* may have compared Canada to that of a chipping chipmunk but the tone was dismissive; a scolding, superior "we are better" fashion. Canada also may have been portrayed as a backwater for simpletons, yet talk of annexation by Americans had implied the country held *some* value. They wouldn't have desired it otherwise. But now a question asked during the War of 1812 resurfaced. Could Canada be an enemy?



"You seem familiar, yet somehow strange—are you by any chance Canadian?"

This *New Yorker* cartoon aptly portrays American perception of Canadians by 2001 – similar yet mysteriously distinct. (*New Yorker*, 19 November 2001)

At first glance, that seems utterly absurd. Since the Canada–U.S. Free Trade Agreement came into effect on 1 January 1989, trade has tripled between the two countries. By 2006, almost two billion dollars in goods and services was crossing the border every day.¹ Canada is also a major player in supplying the United States with reliable energy. Since 1999, Canada has been the United States’ largest supplier of oil, with statistics showing that in 2006 it provided more than 17 percent of U.S. crude and refined oil imports.² At more than two million barrels a day, that’s a greater amount than any other country. Canada also supplies the U.S. with 86 percent of its natural gas imports, which represents 16 percent of American consumption.³

But the bare facts of economics, clothed as they are in the language of international trade, are far less titillating than witty exaggerations. Especially when fear casts a pall over an entire country.

STRIKES OF TERROR

The first details of 11 September 2001 are frozen in time in the initial stories reported by the media – the hijacking of four California-bound airplanes, the collapse of the World Trade Center’s twin towers, a plane crashing into the Pentagon, another crash in a Pennsylvania field. Borders were closed, planes diverted, people evacuated. Thousands dead.

The Canadian government, now headed by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, responded swiftly to the terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. Within forty-five minutes, the country began accepting diverted aircraft. Two hundred twenty-four planes were ordered to land at airports across the country, leaving more than 33,000 passengers and crew stranded.⁴ The stories of Canadian generosity in this crisis have been well-documented. In Gander, Newfoundland (population 10,000 souls), 12,000 people stepped off planes and were given food and shelter. “The effort here is staggering,” wrote Kathy Borrus in the *Washington Post*. She had been on her way back to Washington after spending three weeks in Jordan on an USAID project. “From Gander to the surrounding towns of Norris Arm and Glenwood, our northern neighbors welcomed us.”⁵

Marian Osher and her husband Chuck walked off their plane and found themselves in Halifax. In a letter to the *Washington Post*, Osher spoke of chefs preparing gourmet meals and buses bringing people to a shopping centre to buy underwear. "In a world beset with unspeakable, evil acts of terror, the Canadians provided us with an oasis of love," she wrote. "It is surprising that we never studied Canadian history in school, but now I want to learn more about our kind and caring northern neighbors."⁶

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, the outpouring of support and grief from Canadians received relatively scant attention in the American media and it seemed, even less by the American government. A short article in the *New York Times* highlighted a perceived snub that created an uproar in the Canadian press. "Canada Miffed at Bush Omission," read the headline, referring to President George W. Bush's speech to Congress in which he neglected to mention Canada when thanking nations for supporting the United States after the attacks. "When President Bush concluded his speech on Thursday night, a lot of Canadians were left feeling out in the cold," said the paper. "A few weeks ago, Mr. Bush made a point of calling Mexico America's oldest friend. That hurt, too."⁷

On the record, Canadian officials brushed off the omission. But neither they nor their counterparts on the other side of the border could know the extent to which unfolding events would strain American-Canadian relations.

In the media, a 24/7 news cycle had developed and in the immediate days following the 9/11 attacks, numerous reports sought to explain how the nineteen hijackers had been able to carry out their suicide missions. In those early hours, the finger of blame pointed north to Canada. Two days after the attacks, the *Washington Post*'s Dan Eggen reported, "Several of the hijackers may have entered the United States shortly before the attacks by taking a ferry from Nova Scotia to Portland, Maine, according to several sources."⁸ The next day, a story by Eggen's colleagues DeNeen Brown and Ceci Connolly further detailed the suspected link between the terrorists and Canada. Under the headline "Suspects Entered Easily From Canada," the journalists reported the following:

Two suspects in Tuesday's terrorist attacks in the United States crossed the border from Canada with no known difficulty at a small, border entry in Coburn Gore, Maine, which is usually staffed by only one border inspection officer, a U.S. official said today. Another suspect appears to have slipped into the country from Canada at a border crossing at Jackman, Maine... while one or more may have ridden a ferry from Nova Scotia, docking at a port in Maine.⁹

Other media outlets publicized similar information. Among them, Barbara Crossette at the *New York Times* took a cautious approach, mentioning there had been reports of at least two terrorists entering the U.S. from Canada, but stressing the fact that both Paul Cellucci, U.S. Ambassador to Canada, and Canadian Foreign Minister John Manley said no connection had been confirmed. Still, Crossette noted that in recent years, "not only the United States but also several European countries, India and Sri Lanka have all been critical of what their officials see as a growing Canadian haven for a host of rebels and their fund-raisers."¹⁰

While a link between Canada and the 9/11 terrorists would never be found, the rumour would stubbornly persist. For some American journalists, previous information and events gave merit to storylines portraying Canada as a haven for terrorists. They pointed to criticism of the country's political asylum laws as lax and inadequate, with one frequently cited example being the case of "Millennium Bomber" Ahmed Ressam, an Algerian who was arrested in December 1999 as he crossed into Washington state with explosives to bomb Los Angeles International Airport on New Year's Eve. There were also several mentions in the *Washington Post* that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) had identified approximately 50 groups and 350 people as having ties to terrorism.¹¹

With the United States seeking to close loopholes, attention soon focused on the Canada-U.S. border. Measuring a total of 8891 kilometres (5525 miles), Canada and the United States have often boasted of the International Boundary as the world's longest undefended border. From the American perspective, that distinction now proved problematic – how to keep the border

open to trade while shutting it to terrorists. "The border is unusual – unusually undefended, unusually open, unusually busy and now under unusual scrutiny," an editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* stated concisely.¹² At the border, checkpoint delays were costing Canada too many fistfuls of dollars. Heightened security was hurting exports, leaving truckers at some border crossings idling for hours. The economies in border cities such as Niagara Falls and Windsor declined sharply, as carloads of American visitors simply seemed to vanish.

By mid-October, the media was reporting on the passage of anti-terrorism bills in Congress that included tripling the number of Border Patrol agents along the northern border. Around this time, John Manley announced that Canada would increase national security spending and tighten immigration laws. In December, the two countries would sign a "smart border" agreement that implemented travel controls and allowed pre-cleared goods to pass through customs quickly. "Chretien vowed to stand by President Bush 'every step of the way,'" concluded the above-mentioned *Los Angeles Times* editorial. "Chretien also vowed at home not to change Canada's character. Those goals aren't mutually exclusive. Even absent official proclamations, the harsher new realities of terror in North America... is likely to drive these two countries even closer together than anyone envisioned on Sept. 10."²⁸⁰

OFF TO WAR

Binational issues regarding trade and security dominated discussions in the wake of 9/11 – and so did pending military action in a new war against terrorism. With President Bush seeking allied support, the *New York Times*' Barbara Crossette wrote that in Ottawa, "Mr. Chretien is under intense political pressure, from both right and left, as he faces decisions on what to promise Washington."¹⁴ On the right, Crossette noted, were demands by conservatives for a firm commitment of military troops and a clampdown on domestic asylum laws; on the left, including many within the Liberal Party, were calls for Canada to refrain from automatically heading off with the United States on a warpath.

Whatever the debate in Canada, the American media wasn't overly interested other than to mention during the first days of air strikes on Afghanistan in early October 2001 that Canada had committed to assisting future operations with military aircraft, ships, and approximately two thousand troops. From Toronto, the *Washington Post's* DeNeen Brown said any sense of security Canadians might have felt evaporated as al-Qaida warned that nations siding with the United States would be marked enemies. "Canada is not accustomed to being considered an enemy in the world, much less a potential terrorist target," she wrote. "The Maple Leaf attached to a suitcase has long symbolized peace."¹⁵ But peace was now perceived as elusive. An Ipsos-Reid poll revealed that 66 percent of those surveyed feared there could be a terrorist attack in Canada.¹⁶ Despite that concern, the same poll indicated more than 70 percent of Canadians supported the "War on Terrorism" in Afghanistan.

That approval rating would plummet in the coming years and become a divisive issue in Canadian politics. A black mark for many occurred 18 April 2002, six months into the war, when four Canadian soldiers were killed and eight others injured after an American F-16 pilot dropped a laser-guided 225-kilogram (500-pound) bomb on a live-fire night exercise near Kandahar. Canada was in mourning. In a letter sent to the *Washington Post*, Robert Stasko in Toronto told readers he was perplexed. "What puzzles me is the limited coverage of this disaster in the U.S. media," he wrote. "Had Canadian troops killed U.S. soldiers via 'friendly fire,' there would be hell to pay. Instead, the arrest of Hollywood actor Robert Blake hogs the headlines."¹⁷

As if in response to Stasko's musings, an editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* a few days later said that while sad, tragic happenings were a fact of war. "The overheated reaction of some Canadians highlights a perennial delicacy in U.S.–Canadian relations, even without Canadians serving under U.S. command," it stated. "As the physically larger and less populated half of North America, Canada has long displayed a penchant for perceiving slights and feeling underappreciated, even abused."¹⁸ Still, the editorial warned that American interests would be better served if the government were more sensitive to foreign cultures, including Canada's. It noted that

although President Bush had spoken to Prime Minister Chrétien after the bombing, he had been slow to offer public condolences.

Nearly a year later, *New York Times* correspondent Clifford Krauss filed a story from Hubbards, Nova Scotia, the hometown of Pte. Richard Green, one of the soldiers killed in the friendly fire incident. "In Canada, a nation often obsessed with its next-door superpower, the deaths of the four soldiers have come to epitomize the widely held perception that the United States takes Canada for granted," he wrote. "The incident has also become an enduring symbol of the sacrifice that Canadians believe they make when the United States is in need but that is not reciprocated on issues critical to Canada."¹⁹ It was now early 2003 and the United States was justifying its case for war in Iraq. Added to that heated discussion, a flurry of crises would beset Canada. It would be a watershed year in Canada–U.S. relations – and insults would be hurled from both sides of the border.

NO LONGER NICE

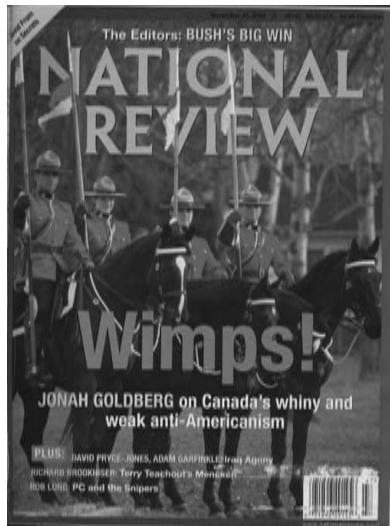
The mudslinging actually began in late 2002. While Prime Minister Jean Chrétien had enjoyed a good working relationship with his golf buddy President Bill Clinton, there was a gaping divide between the ideological stances of President George Bush, the Texan cowboy, and Chrétien, the French-Canadian lawyer. Whether deliberate or unintentional, the list of perceived slights kept getting longer. Critics pointed at Bush's decision to make his first trip as president to Mexico instead of Canada, along with his failure to thank Canada during the post-9/11 speech to Congress and his delay in issuing public condolences following the friendly fire incident in Afghanistan. Now, as the Bush administration scrambled to amass allied support for an invasion of Iraq, Canada held back. Chrétien challenged the president to show proof that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction and the intent to use them.²⁰ That position – as well as Canada's response to anti-terrorism measures in the United States – propelled America's increasingly influential conservative media to whip out its verbal assault arsenal.

On 31 October 2002, political commentator and former Republican presidential hopeful Pat Buchanan labelled

Canada a “Soviet Canuckistan” on his MSNBC show *Buchanan and Press*.²¹ He was apparently striking back at Canadian criticism of post-9/11 security rules that required fingerprinting and registering Arab Canadians seeking to enter the United States.

Jonah Goldberg, editor-at-large of the conservative *National Review Online*, had a few choice words to say too. With political pundits and military strategists examining the merits of an attack on Iraq, Goldberg proposed action of a different sort – bomb Canada. In November 2002, the *National Review*’s magazine cover featured Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers astride their horses with the word “Wimps!” stamped across the page in bold letters. The conversation-inducing image was accompanied by Goldberg’s equally provocative article “Bomb Canada: The Case for War.”

Granted, Goldberg wasn’t calling for a full-scale attack on America’s northern neighbour. Such a conquest was unnecessary, he said because “all Canada needs is to be slapped around a little bit, to be treated like a whining kid who’s got to start acting like a man.”²² The problem, Goldberg wrote, was that Canada just didn’t cut it anymore when it came to military strength. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien’s hesitancy to contribute troops for an Iraq invasion was a moot point. Even if the country did, “Canada’s role would be like Jamaica’s at the Winter Olympics – a noble and heartwarming gesture, but a gesture nonetheless,” Goldberg quipped. “Despite Canada’s self-delusions, it is, quite simply, not a serious country anymore. It is a northern Puerto Rico with an EU sensibility.”²³ Ouch.



As Canada debated whether to join in an invasion of Iraq, Jonah Goldberg at the *National Review* offered a provocative alternative – bomb Canada. (*National Review*, 25 November 2002)

To snap Canada out of its reliance on U.S. military might, Goldberg suggested the following:

We certainly don't need the burden of turning "the world's longest undefended border" into one of the world's longest defended ones. And that's why a little invasion is precisely what Canada needs.... If the U.S. were to launch a quick raid into Canada, blow up some symbolic but unoccupied structure — Toronto's CN Tower, or perhaps an empty hockey stadium — Canada would rearm overnight.

Indeed, Canada might even be forced to rethink many of its absurd socialist policies in order to pay for the costs involved in protecting itself from the Yankee peril. Canada's neurotic anti-Americanism would be transformed into manly resolve. The U.S. could quickly pretend to be frightened that it had messed with the wrong country, and negotiate a fragile peace with the newly ornery Canadians. In a sense, the U.S. owes it to Canada to slap it out of its shame-spiral. That's what big brothers do.²⁴

If models of family dynamics are to be brought into this discussion, then it's relevant to point out that while older siblings may be bullies, younger ones can be whiny name callers. There were certainly some incidents of that during this phase of the Canadian-American relationship. Around the time Jonah Goldberg's article was heading to the printing press, Françoise Ducros, Chrétien's director of communications, referred to President Bush as a "moron" during a conversation with a journalist at the NATO summit in Prague.²⁵ The prime minister initially refused her letter of resignation, but accepted it a week later under pressure from opposition parties.

Liberal member of Parliament Carolyn Parrish put another public face to the groundswell of anti-Americanism. With war in Iraq imminent, Parrish, in a moment of true television serendipity, was caught on camera saying, "Damn Americans. I hate those bastards" as she walked away from a scrum (an impromptu news conference).²⁶ The *Washington Post's* "In The Loop" columnist Al Kamen wrote, "So this was her 'personal

opinion' of President Bush? Or maybe it wasn't her opinion at all and someone channeled into her brain? This keeps happening and Americans will think the Canadians really don't like us and think we're either stupid or bastards – or both. Hmmm... You know, that timber tariff is a piddling 27 percent. Surely that could be ratcheted up."²⁷

Parrish apologized to Parliament and U.S. Ambassador Paul Cellucci, but more than a year and a half later in November 2004, she followed up her comments by stomping on a President Bush doll for a taping of the CBC satirical comedy show, *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*.²⁸ By then, Paul Martin had become prime minister, and he finally expelled her from the Liberal caucus.

In the weeks leading up to the invasion of Iraq, Canada sought to settle intense international debate on the validity of such an attack through the diplomatic channels of the United Nations. The world, Prime Minister Jean Chrétien said, "must speak and act through the UN Security Council."²⁹ At the *New York Times*, Nicholas Kristof, dryly commenting on the recent spate of anti-American comments in Canada, observed that America's international reputation must be truly suffering indeed. "When even the Canadians, normally drearily polite, get colorfully steamed at us, we know the rest of the world is apopleptic [sic]," he wrote. "Canada's incivility is a reminder that the U.S. and its allies are slugging one another to death while Iraq watches from the sidelines."³⁰ Of course, Kristof added, some Americans would argue it didn't matter that the United States was being perceived as an aggressor or as he called it, "the world's newest Libya. If the Canadians don't like us, we can always exercise the military option and push our border up to 54 – 40"³¹ – a direct reference to the Oregon boundary dispute in the early nineteenth century when the United States and Britain were negotiating possession of the Pacific Northwest (from today's Alaska-British Columbia border down to the Oregon-California border). Tongue-in-cheek remarks aside, Kristof's concern was real; global attitudes did matter, especially those of allies.

On 20 March 2003, the United States and its "coalition of the willing" invaded Iraq. Canada was not among them. In

fact, Canadians were behaving, well, very *un-Canadian*. Fans booed loudly as "The Star-Spangled Banner" was sung at hockey games. Others burned the American flag.³² The *Washington Post* reported that Prime Minister Chrétien had to ask his cabinet members and the public to stop making anti-American comments.³³ To counter this negativity, some Canadians organized pro-America rallies.

But it didn't take long before practical considerations overrode emotional objections. At the *Chicago Tribune*, Dan Mihalopoulos wrote that just weeks into the military campaign, "some Canadians are becoming worried that their anti-war stance could engender scorn and economic punishment from the United States, Canada's top foreign investor and partner in the North American Free Trade Agreement."³⁴ Canada's corporate community was so concerned about losing business that Mihalopoulos reported a delegation of approximately a hundred business leaders was heading to Washington, D.C. He also mentioned that, noticing a shift in public opinion, Chrétien's government was supporting a motion stating Canada's "hope that the U.S.-led coalition accomplishes its mission as quickly as possible."³⁵

THE SCHISM WIDENS

If conflicting stances on Iraq had placed a chill on cross-border relations, then further unpredicted events would make them positively frosty. *New York Times* correspondent Clifford Krauss wrote of 2003 as a year remembered in "biblical terms, as a year of plagues."³⁶ Krauss was actually reflecting on how events had affected Canada's tourism industry, but his words aptly describe the situation in which the country found itself. Along with the political divides over Iraq, Canada dealt with an outbreak of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) in March. The illness would kill forty-four people in Toronto. Then on 20 May, lab results confirmed that a cow in Alberta had bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or mad cow disease. The BSE case prompted the American government to ban all imports of Canadian beef immediately, a decision that sent the country's beef industry into a death spiral, with an

estimated loss of eleven million dollars a day.³⁷ A two-decades-old trade dispute over Canadian softwood lumber would also fester, with American interests competing against Canadian ones. There were raging wildfires in British Columbia and a massive power outage that affected Ontario and the northeastern United States. In the *Chicago Tribune*, Kevin Christiano, a sociology professor at the University of Notre Dame, summed it up this way:

In a kind of cosmic convergence of truly wretched publicity, news stories come beaming south about our northern cousins that seem practically designed to anger, annoy or scare Americans. The piqued politicians, reluctance on Iraq, laxity of laws, the spread of deadly diseases among animals and humans: Each is part of a string of events that threaten to upset Americans' notions of Canada as a safe, sane and supportive neighbor.³⁸

At the *New York Times*, Clifford Krauss wasn't interested so much in disagreements over trade and safety; those tended to flare up periodically. But Prime Minister Jean Chrétien's Liberal government was pushing a social agenda that made many Americans cringe. There was official endorsement regarding the legalization of same-sex marriage and a proposal decriminalizing small amounts of marijuana. Krauss reported that these types of policies reflected a shift in social and cultural values, as opposed to political ones. It seemed, he wrote, that "from gay marriage to drug use to church attendance, a chasm has opened up on social issues that go to the heart of fundamental values. A more distinctive Canadian identity — one far more in line with European sensibilities — is emerging and generating new frictions with the United States."³⁹

In the American media, some journalists didn't bother hiding their disappointment at Canada's left swing on social policies and its anti-war position on Iraq. Commenting on what he described as the new "Berkeley North," David Montgomery at the *Washington Post* bemoaned the passing of the stereotypes Americans had held for so long:

What happened to that clean cold land of Mounties, Dudley Do-Right, loons on lakes, loons on coins, cheese on french fries? What of the goofy, front-teeth-missing, bad-haircut, lovable beer-and-doughnut civilization of hosers like Bob and Doug McKenzie, the characters created by Canadian comedians Rick Moranis and Dave Thomas? Eh? Bob would ponder conundrums like: "What is a six-pack equal to in metric conversion?" That's a Canada we recognize, where everyone speaks in a crisp nasal deadpan, even the French. It is the home of a self-deprecating and polite-to-the-point-of-invisible people.⁴⁰

When it came to casting a typical image of Canadians, conservative magazine the *Weekly Standard* had some of its own. Reporting from Vancouver with an article headlined "Welcome to Canada: The Great White Waste of Time," Matt Labash opined that Canadians were "a docile, Zamboni-driving people who subsist on seal casserole and Molson."⁴¹ These northern neighbours, he wrote, "are bizarrely obsessed with us, binge-eating out of our cultural trough, then pretending it tastes bad. Plainly the two things Canada needs most are a mirror and a good psychiatrist."⁴² Labash's thoughts about Canada as a whole were no less effusive. In his view, the country was an "idyllic Rainbowland," "the perfect place for American quitters," and akin to a mildewy attic where you could stash "Nazi war criminals, drawing-room socialists, and hockey goons."

Meanwhile, Fox News anchor John Gibson aired his thoughts directly to Canadians in an article that appeared in *Macleans*' magazine, wishing Canada an un-happy birthday on 1 July 2005. "If things are so good in the multicultural, egalitarian quasi-socialist Canada," he wisecracked, "why do so many leave to come to the fearsome jungles of America? Was there a potato famine up north that we missed?"⁴³

If some in the American press were reverting to the type of mockery that had been popular around the turn of the last century, conservative television commentators went one step further, repeatedly taking verbal aim at Canada with exaggerations and blatant lies.

DOWNWARD SPIRAL

If one wants to hear controversial statements, a good place to listen in is cable news, for there, imbedded in the hard news updates on crime, politics, and world events are programs distinctly shaped around engaging and outspoken personalities. Think of CNN's Nancy Grace and Fox's Bill O'Reilly. The idea behind these shows is not hard-core news analysis per se, but often a form of discussion that entertains as much as it – or perhaps even more – than it informs.

In late 2004, President Bush made his first official state visit to Canada. The president had previously cancelled a scheduled trip in 2003, saying he needed to stay in Washington because of the war in Iraq. The announcement had led to speculation that the United States was giving Canada and Prime Minister Jean Chrétien the diplomatic cold shoulder for not sending troops to aid in the war effort there. Now, with a change in Liberal leadership and Paul Martin as prime minister, Bush headed to Canada for two days.

His public welcome party reflected the cold temperatures. As Bush arrived in Ottawa on 30 November, an estimated five thousand protesters gathered, shouting "Go Home" and other slogans as they lined the motorcade route and marched on Parliament Hill.⁴⁴ Similar rallies took place in cities across the country. CNN's conservative bow-tied host and commentator Tucker Carlson had some retorts of his own. "Without the U.S., Canada is essentially Honduras, but colder and much less interesting.... Canada needs the United States. The United States does not need Canada," he argued while interviewing Carolyn Parrish on *Wolf Blitzer Reports*.⁴⁵ That same day, while co-hosting CNN's *Crossfire* and talking about the protests with Canadian talk show host Ken Rockburn, Carlson declared, "Canada's essentially – essentially a made-in-Taiwan version of the United States."⁴⁶ Over at Fox News, conservative political pundit Ann Coulter was taking part in a panel discussion on *Hannity & Colmes*, and had this to say about her northern neighbour:

COULTER: Conservatives, as a general matter, take the position that you should not punish your friends and reward your enemies. And Canada has become trouble recently.

It's I suppose it's always, I might add, the worst Americans who end up going there. The Tories after the Revolutionary War, the Vietnam draft dodgers after Vietnam. And now after this election, you have the blue-state people moving up there. [...]

COULTER: There is also something called, when you're allowed to exist on the same continent of the United States of America, protecting you with a nuclear shield around you, you're polite and you support us when we've been attacked on our own soil. They [Canada] violated that protocol. [...]

COULTER: They better hope the United States doesn't roll over one night and crush them. They are lucky we allow them to exist on the same continent. [...]

COULTER: We could have taken them [Canada] over so easily.

ALAN COLMES: We could have taken them over? Is that what you want?

COULTER: Yes, but no. All I want is the western portion, the ski areas, the cowboys, and the right-wingers. [...]

COULTER: They don't even need to have an army, because they are protected, because they're on the same continent with the United States of America. If we were not the United States of America, Canada I mean, we're their trading partner. We keep their economy afloat. [...]

ELLIS HENICAN [*Newsday* columnist]: We share a lot of culture and a lot of interests. Why do we want to have to ridicule them and be deeply offended if they disagree with us?

COULTER: Because they speak French.

COLMES: There's something else I want to point out about the French. Is it's fashionable again on your side to denounce the French.

COULTER: We like the English-speaking Canadians.⁴⁷

A few months later, the *New York Times*' Clifford Krauss reported in a much more staid fashion that as President Bush prepared to greet Prime Minister Martin and President Vicente Fox of Mexico at his ranch in Crawford, Texas, things could be tense as differences over trade and the United States' missile defence system added to previous strains over Iraq. But then, he argued, that wasn't anything new. "With the possible exception of France, no traditional ally has been more consistently at odds with the United States than has Canada," Krauss wrote.⁴⁸ He then listed past bilateral grievances from the Cuban missile crisis to Cuban trade, Vietnam War draft dodgers and the Kyoto Protocol. "While the leaders always claim the greatest fondness for one another, more often than not they have not gotten along very well," he said. "When they have, Canadian leaders have sometimes had to pay a political price."⁴⁹

As if to emphasize that point, another potent spate of Canada-bashing remarks was unleashed in December 2005 as a heated election campaign pitting Prime Minister Martin against Conservative Party leader Stephen Harper got underway. On 7 December, during a United Nations climate change conference in Montreal, Martin chastised the United States, calling it a "reticent nation" when it came to global environmental policies. U.S. Ambassador to Canada David Wilkins warned Martin to tone down the rhetoric or risk damaging cross-border relations. "It may be smart election-year politics to thump your chest and criticize your friend and your number one trading partner constantly," Wilkins said during a speech to the Canadian Club in Ottawa. "But it is a slippery slope, and all of us should hope that it doesn't have a long-term impact on the relationship."⁵⁰ This of course, provided Martin with the opportunity to use the time-honoured "anti-American" election shtick and he retorted that as prime minister, he was the one who could stand up to the United States and defend Canada. From his television studio, Tucker Carlson gleefully entered the verbal fray with two comments in particular that would rile up the Canadian press.

Here's the problem with telling Canada to stop criticizing the United States: It only eggs them on. Canada is essentially

a stalker, stalking the United States, right? Canada has little pictures of us in its bedroom, right? Canada spends all of its time thinking about the United States, obsessing over the United States. It's unrequited love between Canada and the United States. We, meanwhile, don't even know Canada's name. We pay no attention at all.⁵¹

Canada is a sweet country. It is like your retarded cousin you see at Thanksgiving and sort of pat him on the head. You know, he's nice, but you don't take him seriously.⁵²

Tucker Carlson's colourful and non-politically correct jabs would seem outlandish to anyone who has even the simplest knowledge of Canada-U.S. relations. Of course, the United States pays attention to Canada; it also relies heavily on Canadian imports. These types of remarks can be easily dismissed with most observers saying they would have no long-term effect on American public opinion of Canada.

But following Martin's statements at the UN climate change conference, there was a darker side to some of the remarks lobbed from the American side of the border, with some not-so-subtle hints questioning Canada's allegiance to the United States. Fox News host Neil Cavuto asked on his show *Your World*, "[C]ould our neighbors to the north soon be our enemies?"⁵³



Criticism of Canada intensified after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, with some conservative commentators, including Fox News host Neil Cavuto, questioning Canada's loyalty. (Fox News, 14 December 2005)

The United States was losing patience with Canada after all the criticism over Iraq and "well, pretty much everything else," he announced. Were Canadians getting too big for their britches, Cavuto speculated as an on-screen text read "Canada: An Enemy of the United States of America?"⁵⁴

Two days later, an op-ed piece in the *Washington Times* — a competitor of the *Washington Post* in the nation's capital — raised the same question.

Douglas MacKinnon, one-time White House and Pentagon official, and press secretary to former Senator Bob Dole, asked, “Can Canada really be considered our ‘friend’ anymore?”⁵⁵ Taking a swipe at his family’s former homeland, MacKinnon said the question had to be raised because “the Canadian government not only willingly allows Islamic terrorists into their country, but does nothing to stop them from entering our nation.”⁵⁶ It seemed to escape MacKinnon’s notice that entering the United States required passing through *American* customs checkpoints, not Canadian ones.

At Fox News, there was also talk of Canada harbouring terrorists. During a conversation with Bill O’Reilly on *The O’Reilly Factor* in 2004, Fox anchor John Gibson said, “Canada’s a joke. I mean, they’re rife with terrorists, they can’t find them up there.”⁵⁷ O’Reilly later picked up the mantra in 2006, saying on his radio program, *The Radio Factor with Bill O’Reilly*, that “They’ve got all kinds of Muslim crazies up in Canada running around.”⁵⁸

Even the *New Yorker* magazine contributed to the Canada bashing, albeit in a less direct fashion. Trailing the spate of harsh anti-Canadian comments, in a 2008 article on – of all things – the peril of the penny as a unit of currency, writer David Owen alluded to lingering frustrations with Canada. This despite the country’s swing to the right with the election of Conservative Party leader Stephen Harper as prime minister in February 2006, the resolution of trade grievances on softwood lumber and BSE, and widespread American disapproval of the war in Iraq. Quoting a Canadian study suggesting the government not follow American currency policy because the U.S.’s conservative nature and love of symbolism had resisted moves to adopt the metric system and abolish the dollar bill for a coin, Owen wrote “This sort of slur from an (alleged) ally probably isn’t worth going to war over, especially now that its money is sometimes worth more than ours.”⁵⁹ Perhaps this was Owen’s flaccid attempt at crafting a joke, but the use of “alleged” seemed to imply that either a) questioning Canada’s loyalty was now “common sense,” b) he was slyly planting seeds of doubt about Canada in his readers’ minds, or c) Owen was the *New Yorker*’s version of Jonah Goldberg – less abrasive, more eloquent, but equally a pain in the royal Canadian butt.

Still, the larger question looms: Why had Canada once again become the favourite stomping doll for some American journalists and commentators? And what did it all mean?