

Compare the sheer number of words thrown about during a daily news cycle and it's apparent that the amount of anti-Canadianism in the American media is miniscule. So then, a comment here, another one there, what could be the harm? It's not that simple. Take for example, the negative press and calls for french fries to be renamed "freedom fries" in 2002 after France expressed strong opposition to the American push for a United Nations mandate authorizing military action against Iraq. Charting American opinion of France, Gallup polls show that from 1992 until 2002, between 70 and 79 percent of Americans held a favourable view of the country.<sup>1</sup> But within the span of one year, those friendly feelings plummeted to 34 percent. By 2008, despite five years of steady increases, the percentage of Americans with a positive view of the French still hadn't reached pre-2002 levels.

What's even more interesting is that as this favourability rating deteriorated between 2002 and 2003, so did trade relations. A study published by the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics and Political Science found that American imports from France dropped roughly 15 percent while U.S. exports there decreased by approximately 8 percent when compared to other OECD or Eurozone nations.<sup>2</sup> The study also reported a similar drop in American business and vacation trips to France.

Analysis of American feelings towards Canada from 1992 until 2008 reveals a similar, although not nearly as drastic statistical tumble in fuzzy feelings during the first years of the war in Iraq. From 1992 to 2002, Gallup polls document a steady favourability rating hovering between 89 and 92 percent.<sup>3</sup> But beginning in 2003, Gallup charts a slight drop in positive opinions of Canada, bottoming out at 86 percent in 2005 before climbing back up to 92 percent in 2008.

What's interesting is that Gallup's recorded dip in favourability ratings differs widely from similar surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Asking a nearly identical question — "Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of Canada" — the Pew Global Attitudes Project found that in the summer of 2002, 83 percent of Americans held a favourable impression of Canada, but less than a year later, in May 2003, that opinion had declined to 65 percent.<sup>4</sup> By 2005, while the favourability rating had jumped to 76 percent, it was still below the poll results of 2002.

Explanations of this discrepancy vary, but it's worth noting that the Pew Global Attitudes Project records a much higher number of "Don't know/Refused" responses — 11 to 14 percent compared to Gallup's "No opinion" rates of 2 to 4 percent. And although the polls were taken during the same period, from 2003 to 2005 there were several abrupt differences between the two countries on various political, economic, and social issues which could have negatively impacted American opinions depending on the month in which a survey was conducted. Regardless, the overall trend in American attitudes towards Canada reveals two key findings. First, unlike what happened with France, cross-border trade remained strong even when American popular opinion of Canada became less favourable. Second, it seems that the war in Iraq negatively affected attitudes towards Canada more than the erroneously reported Canadian link to the 9/11 terrorists. Perhaps this is due to the abundance of positive media coverage detailing how Canada helped the United States during and after the 9/11 attacks. In their own way, these reports may have balanced out the negative terrorist stories. But once the afterglow faded, it seems American public opinion fell as the media took aim at Canada during the build up to and start of the war in Iraq.

Chronicling attitudes from the Canadian side of the border, surveys by the Pew Research Center reveal that sentiments were only slightly more positive than those in the United States, with America's image in Canada falling from a 72 percent favourability rating in 2002 to 63 percent by 2003, a nine-point decline.<sup>5</sup> But the report also noted an intriguing difference in the Canadian

psyche. While Canadians' view of the United States as a country dipped, their opinion of the American people did not.

A 2006 report by The Strategic Counsel in Toronto reported a parallel schizophrenic tendency in Canadians over a slightly longer time frame.

The study showed that in 2001, 23 percent of Canadians considered Canada's relationship with the United States to be at "the best of friends" level (Table 5.1). By March 2006 that had dropped to 11 percent.<sup>6</sup> Yet the same poll revealed that 70 percent of Canadians said they respected Americans while fundamentally disagreeing with the U.S. government (Table 5.2).<sup>7</sup>

TABLE 5.1 How do Canadians see our relationship with the United States?

	Nov 2001	Nov 2002	Nov 2003	Mar 2006
Like family to each other	10%	5%	4%	6%
The best of friends	23%	17%	10%	11%
Friends, but not especially close	47%	49%	45%	46%
Cordial, but distant with each other	18%	25%	32%	30%

Source: The Strategic Counsel, *Canadians' Perceptions and Attitudes Towards the United States*. 27 March 2006.

It appeared Canadians were mentally separating their personal opinion of Americans formed during holidays, business trips, and everyday encounters from dissatisfaction with the Bush administration's policies, which included two wars. Still, friendly perceptions were slow to rebound, with The Strategic Counsel finding that between 2006 and 2008 the percentage of Canadians who considered Canada's relations with the U.S. at a "best friends" level increased by a mere two percentage points to 13 percent, considerably below the 23 percent reported in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.<sup>8</sup> This dismal rise in favourability ratings seems to suggest deeper issues than policy differences that shift with the changing of administrations, for by the time

TABLE 5.2 Level of agreement with the following statement: "I value and respect the United States and its citizens — it's just that I disagree fundamentally with their government."

	Mar 2006
<b>NET Agree</b>	<b>70%</b>
Very much agree	29%
Somewhat agree	41%
Somewhat disagree	17%
Very much disagree	9%
<b>NET Disagree</b>	<b>26%</b>

Source: The Strategic Counsel, *Canadians' Perceptions and Attitudes Towards the United States*. 27 March 2006.

the 2006 and 2008 polls were conducted, the bilateral relationship was once again viewed in positive terms by both governments. Possible reasons for this gap between diplomatic sentiment and popular public opinion abound. Although officially committed to efforts in Afghanistan, Canadians were becoming increasingly weary as the number of war casualties climbed. There was also the divergence in cultural and social values, as well as the fact that many of this decade's twenty-something Canadians grew up under the shadow of 9/11 and their college minds were shaped during one of the most tumultuous periods in Canada-U.S. relations.

Whatever the cause, personal opinions are shaped by circumstances, experiences, relationships — and even persuasive arguments voiced by the media. That's what makes the repeated negativity towards Canada on Fox News troubling as the network influences millions of Americans. Launched in 1996, Fox News Channel quickly became the fastest growing cable network in the United States. In 2005, for instance, the prime-time audience for Fox News increased by 9 percent while its main cable rivals experienced declines — 11 percent at CNN and 2 percent at MSNBC.<sup>9</sup> That success tapered off in 2006 when, for the first time, Fox News experienced a double-digit drop in viewership.<sup>10</sup> Still, the Republican-leaning network has continued to secure the largest number of viewers, with its programs dominating the Top 10 list of cable news shows.<sup>11</sup> Bill O'Reilly's *The O'Reilly Factor* alone has averaged a nightly audience of roughly two million, making it the most-watched show on the cable news networks.<sup>12</sup> So when O'Reilly or other conservative Fox News hosts and commentators have taken a swing at Canada, plenty of Americans have noticed.

Of particular concern are the remarks about Canada as a haven for terrorists. Unlike clearly outrageous comments that have been made — such as Tucker Carlson comparing Canada to Honduras — these ones have struck a menacing note that pry on new-found fears. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Americans were inundated with colour-coded terrorist threat barometers and media updates on Guantanamo Bay detainees. In this tensely suspicious environment, when public figures like Bill O'Reilly have insinuated that Canada harbours terrorists, or members of Congress including then-Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton

as well as Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano have mentioned that the 9/11 terrorists crossed into the United States from Canada, it lends automatic validity to baseless rumours undermining Canadian security and the country's image.<sup>13</sup> Even if retractions are issued after a comment was made — as in the case of Democratic Representative Rubén Hinojosa of Texas who told a congressional committee “as we all know, terrorists entered the U.S. from Canada on Sept. 11, 2001”<sup>14</sup> — there's no way of knowing whether the people who read or listened to the original statement also heard the apology.

The grossly exaggerated and often false statements about Canada also reflect the realities of today's media landscape, especially that of television. In a throwback to the days of William Randolph Hearst, Joseph Pulitzer, and yellow journalism, the push for higher ratings and larger corporate profits in the United States has encouraged a paler but still potent kind of sensationalism. Take for instance the headline-grabbing coverage of socialite Paris Hilton's stint in a Los Angeles county jail for a probation violation in 2007.

The gnarled roots of this kind of celebrity-saturated, quick-flash news creep back to the 1970s and the proliferation of news consulting firms. One such company, Frank N. Magid Associates, has been hugely influential although little known to the public. Derided by some journalists for its effect on local television news, Magid pioneered the use of market research and consultancy work to revamp newscasts into the “action news” style that is seen today.<sup>15</sup> There's the flashy graphics and car chases; short hyped-up stories; chatter between anchors and reporters; and an extraordinary focus on clothes and appearance, which has led to impeccably coiffed and dressed staff who look like they've stepped out of a fashion magazine — and never walked outside of the newsroom. While the strategies hawked by news consultants like Magid have raised station ratings and profits, it has cost journalism dearly. For what else can be expected when a newsroom's premise is based on giving the audience what they want to see instead of what they should know?

The resulting shallowness worries those in the profession. In the 2008 *State of the News Media* report, almost 80 percent of journalists

surveyed thought the news didn't pay enough attention to complex issues; more than 60 percent said the line between reporting and commentary was becoming increasingly blurred.<sup>16</sup>

This is where commentators like Bill O'Reilly come in. With the Internet providing instant access to the latest stories, and around-the-clock news coverage hampering the popularity and profits of newspapers and traditional television evening newscasts, cable news networks are in a tooth and nail fight for viewership. In competing for the attention of Americans, the cable outlets are using cutting-edge graphics (CNN's touch-screen election maps), controversial headlines (remember Fox's "Canada: Friend or Foe?"), and punchy slogans (Fox's "We Report. You Decide."). This intense rivalry for the eyes and ears of the public has lent pseudo-legitimacy to rash generalizations and exaggerations. So O'Reilly is allowed to say Canada is a terrorist haven because the controversial statement might bring in a larger audience, which means a bump in ratings, greater profits, and so on up the corporate ladder of monetary success. In this kind of system, commentators are rewarded for their inaccuracies, fear mongering, and top-down approach.

There's another side to the proliferation of cable news networks and news blogs: they encourage people to turn to sources that reflect their own views. Gone are the days when Walter Cronkite's CBS evening newscasts gathered Americans of differing political stripes around the same television set. News has become much more partisan with "conservatives" turning to Fox News and *National Review Online* while "liberals" stick to CNN and the *Huffington Post*. A classic example is blogger Chris Kelly's (no, not the Ottawa Senators hockey player) entry on the *Huffington Post* when the *National Review*'s cruise ship stopped in Vancouver in August 2007. Referring back to Jonah Goldberg's "Bomb Canada" article in 2002, Kelly wrote, "I hope no one in Canada gets offended when people like Jonah Goldberg write ugly nonsense. They don't really mean it. They're just trying to be vile, as a substitute for how men might talk."<sup>17</sup> Before criticizing Goldberg, Kelly took aim at the publication itself, saying the "*National Review* isn't really a magazine at all, it's just a club where a certain kind of chin-challenged endomorph can

sniff deeply of his own fingers and experiment with cruelty as a counterintuitive answer to everything.”<sup>18</sup> This polarization of the media into two camps, one championing liberalism and the other conservatism, has led to an “us against them” mentality that’s increasingly reflected in conversations among Americans (imagine the horror among my Democratic friends if they knew I chatted with Republicans and vice versa — I say this only partly in jest).

The partisan lines that have been etched so firmly into the American landscape reveal the United States is in the midst of an identity crisis, one that places average Americans at a crossroads when it comes to their country’s future direction. The question they’re faced with is this: Will the United States remain standing on the foundation of its conservative, capitalist past or will it embrace the values of social liberalism espoused by Canada and Western Europe? The 2008 election further underscored this stark choice. Obama, who evoked memories of Pierre Trudeau’s first campaign with his Obamakins and inspirational calls for change, campaigned on platforms of universal health care, tuition tax breaks, and expansion of the Family and Medical Leave Act — policies that all sound very Canadian-like. On the Republican side, Senator John McCain stumped market-based solutions to fix the country’s economic, health, and education woes, and went so far as to declare that Obama’s policies sounded “a lot like socialism.”<sup>19</sup>

In this ideological struggle, the media has become the prime battleground for influencing the votes and minds of Americans. We see Fox News taking on the role of the nation’s conservative conscience while mainstream newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* often reflect Democratic positions. This helps explain why many of the Canada-bashing comments since the September 11 attacks in 2001 have come from the likes of Tucker Carlson, Ann Coulter, and Bill O’Reilly. For in many conservative circles, Canada is the prime example of what *not* to become. What would happen if the United States brought in universal health care? Look at Canada with wait times so long citizens are crossing *into* the United States to pay cash for care. What would happen if the United States expanded its

social programs? Look at Canada where taxes are so high those with ambition pack their suitcases and run to Lady Liberty (or to Alberta). Of course, this is an exaggeration, but the point is still there. From defence to health care and a host of other social welfare services, Canada is a living, breathing example of a North American country sans unbridled capitalism. So while some blue-blooded journalists muse of Canada as utopia, others in the conservative media see it as a mediocre hell.

What then can be predicted of future American media coverage on Canada-U.S. relations? One could reasonably presume that the election of a Democratic president whose philosophies align more closely with Canadian policies would bode well for relations and positive news coverage about Canada, at least in "liberal" media circles. Of course, among "conservative" outlets the Canada bashing may continue as the administration's policies on issues such as health care and education are criticized.

In 2008, as Senator Barack Obama ran for the presidency, his action plan to pull the United States out of its recession raised concerns of possible anti-Canadian sentiment and caused some early hiccups in bilateral relations. During the Democratic primaries, Obama's anti-NAFTA remarks were widely publicized in both countries. While Obama was attempting to grab the votes of middle-class Americans hit by job losses in the manufacturing sector, it could be argued there was an ever-so-faint whiff of anti-Canadianism in his statements, whether deliberate or not.<sup>20</sup> For if the United States were to edge toward protectionism — as Congress did in the February 2009 federal stimulus package which included a "Buy American" provision for steel, iron, and other manufactured goods used in public works projects — any resulting policies would inevitably affect the massive cross-border trade relationship with Canada. That's why the Canadian government, along with the European Union and prominent American corporations, lobbied heavily for a caveat in the stimulus bill to clarify that "Buy American" couldn't violate international trade agreements.

Looking at the media industry itself, there's the decline and subsequent slow growth in audience for Fox News in 2006 and 2007 to consider. These developments have led to speculation

that the cable news network may have associated itself too closely with the Bush administration and a Republican agenda, and lost viewers as America tilted left heading into the 2008 election.<sup>21</sup> If this trend continues and Fox News shuffles shows or attempts to remake its image, this could mean a drop in the amount of Canada bashing heard on the network. Also, as President Obama champions socialist solutions to fix societal ills, conservative commentators may shift their attacks from Canada to the president and his administration.

Or the future could hold more Canada-bashing comments. From Confederation onward, waves of anti-Canadianism in the American media correlate with periods when major government policies differed between the two countries. That trend, no matter how great relations seem at the present, can be expected to continue, in spite of, or perhaps because of, ever-increasing bilateral interconnectedness.

Either way, one thing is certain – the coming decades will see less comprehensive coverage of Canada in the American media. Gone are correspondents like the *New York Times*' Jay Walz, the *Chicago Tribune*'s Eugene Griffin, and the *Los Angeles Times*' Stanley Meisler. In 2007, the *Washington Post* shuttered its Canadian bureau, following in the footsteps of other American media outlets, including the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. A few American wire correspondents were left to pick up the slack. While the *Post*'s foreign news manager said at the time that the paper planned to continue and possibly increase its coverage of Canada, a CBC News article noted what had happened at the *New York Times*. In the year after the *Times* closed its bureau, the CBC reported that the average number of feature-length articles about Canada decreased by 23 percent.<sup>22</sup> Why? Wire correspondents cover breaking news, leaving the feature stories and analysis for other journalists. As there are no more Canada-based journalists daily pitching ideas to their foreign desk editors at major newspapers, there's simply less coverage. It's hard to rely on freelancers who send sporadic pitches, or beat reporters and correspondents based in the United States. That would be like having a journalist in Los Angeles covering a story in Mexico City. You can make all the phone calls

you want, but without living there, you miss the nuances, the talk on the street, the information from cultivated sources. In the end, it's a vicious cycle. Reduced coverage of Canada means fewer Americans will know or care about the country, which will result in even fewer stories about it.

A dearth of Canadian correspondents will also ultimately result in Americans having greater misconceptions and minimal general knowledge about their northern neighbour. Take a second and ponder this — how much do you really know about Mexico? Japan? Germany? Can you name the head of their governments? All of these nations are major trading partners with the United States, yet stereotypes abound. Canada, trumping each of these countries when it comes to a trade partnership with the U.S., suffers from the same American apathy. And when a major story breaks in Canada — as it is guaranteed to at some point — there will be no correspondents there to cover it. Sure, American reporters may be flown in or write about it from their desks, but the coverage will be basic, lacking in the depth and knowledge that's gained by living in a country and understanding both Canadian and American concerns. At that point, who will be left to defend Canada?