

The Facsimile Fallacy*

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A good German wall map of North America brings out the egg of the continent's precambrian shield, the egg's nest in the sedimentary cover rocks of the interior lowlands, and the nest's supporting tree in the forked branch that rises from Panama and divided into the Appalachians and the Cordillera.

Browsing a good atlas map of North America does something very different. Now, details come to mind. Perhaps the eye falls on popular Clingman's Dome in the Smokies or Cape Breton Island, more remote now than 50 years ago. Perhaps you notice Sherman Summit, a place whose fame declined when travelers no longer took the Union Pacific west. Maybe it's the increasingly deserted Great Plains or perhaps the Kootenay Valley, winding between the Nelson Range and the Purcell Mountains of British Columbia. The valley is flanked by soldier's homesteads granted by the province of British Columbia to Englishmen who served in the trenches.

Set the atlas map down to see it as if it was a wall map, and a third thing happens. The continent becomes a set of fused images, no longer a mosaic of details--oiled rivers in Ohio, glass-encrusted highways in Nevada. North America somehow seems a place where confidence is a reasonable state of mind. Does a map of any other continent evoke the same feeling?

This probably naïve optimism is true for both Americans and Canadians, and it's no wonder. Set in Texas, *Days of Heaven* was filmed on the Canadian prairies. Apart from Indian-red grain elevators, was there any way to tell?

The border between Canada and the United States is, in other words, arguably one of the world's most geographically irrelevant boundaries. Oregonians visit Victoria and find it delightful but no great culture shock; Chicagoans visit Toronto and find the same ethnic chaos they're proud of at home; New Yorkers see Montreal as a place with the cultural sensitivities of home. Canadians abroad may bridle--many come close to foaming--at being taken for Americans, but the error is an easy one to make. The editor of *Maclean's*--as close to a national magazine as Canada has--has castigated Canadians for acting like "facsimile Americans." A Canadian novelist examining statistics on the nationality of Canadian university faculties has spoken of "national suicide." A historian of Canada concludes that Canada is "a mere satellite" of the United States.

A map of North America, then, conjures coarse red sandstones whispering of a time when New Brunswick was neighbor to Scotland. It conjures the apples of Sonoma, the box canyons of the northern tributaries of the St. John, the

knuckle-high cacti clinging to the granite shores of Vancouver Island. Does it conjure anything called Canada?

The Rockies plainly pay no attention to the 49th parallel, nor to arctic air masses. The Milk River goes one way, then blithely the next; the St. John carries the boundary one minute, then carelessly drops it. The geese are scofflaws; the ice in Labrador will not ask permission to move south again.

For the Federal Reserve, read the Bank of Canada. For the Canada Council, the National Endowments. For the CBC, PBS; for the IRS, Revenue Canada Taxation. Give Canada the maple leaf, the Mounties, the plumes of the lieutenant governors, and the British pronunciation of that word "lieutenant." But who conducted the first forest survey in Canada, except the former forester of the United States Government? Who organized the B.C. Forest Service, but Gifford Pinchot's right-hand man? Why did the idea come from for the Dominion Lands Act, which granted settlers the same 160 acres that homesteaders south of the border got? Where did the cadastral grid of the prairies come from, if not the United States public-land survey? Where did Parliament get the idea of giving the Canadian Pacific a land grant, or of setting aside a national park along its line through the Rockies? Where did the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act come from, or the South Saskatchewan Project? The answer is American predecessors. These are a geographer's examples, but when Lester Pearson despaired at the course that Canada's political campaigns were taking, what nation did he blame?

Broaden the similarities, then. Half the people of southern New Brunswick are Baptists. The Ku Klux Klan appeared in Calgary in 1924. Kamloops used to bill itself as the future Los Angeles of Canada. Go see what movies are playing in Winnepeg or Halifax or Prince George.

There are more Safeways in Canada than there are Sobeys, Steinbergs, or Loblaws. There are more McDonalds' than there are restaurants of any Canadian chain. Canada has subsidiaries of General Mills, General Motors, General Electric, General Foods, and General Tire: they're not Canadian. Canada has a domestic corporation called Clorox, just as it has a Kimberley-Clark, an Owens-Illinois, a Pepsi, a Proctor and Gamble, an International Paper, a Celanese, a DuPont, a Westinghouse, and an IBM: not one is owned by Canadians. Canada Starch is a subsidiary of CPC; the great Vanisle barges and tugs of the west coast are owned by Dillingham; Salada Tea belongs to Kellogg; GWG jeans are a Levi-Strauss property. The Canadian steel industry—names like Hamilton, Algoma, and Dominion--were established by Americans. J.P. Morgan created INCO, still one-third American owned. Alcan and B.C. Forest Products are nearly half American-owned, and American parents own all of B.C. and Quebec telephone. The Foreign Investment Review Agency recently kept Superior Oil of Texas from enlarging its holdings in Falconbridge, and the

present federal government of Canada has set out to repatriate the oil industry. Its work is cut out for it.

Go from the United States to Canada and see the results of this political, social, and economic invasion. You do not have to be a geographer infatuated with innovation waves and diffusion fields to see the same cars, one-way streets, apartment blocks, suburbs, and shopping centers. The countries share identical junkyards, railroad engines, pulp mills, wheat fields, and lobster traps. Canadians may not like hearing such things: voters may well have brought down the Laurier and Diefenbaker governments because those governments were seen to be too friendly toward the United States.

The tide of events has not been with the people of Canada, and most of them know it. Yet two cultures do not have to be wholly dissimilar in order to be different, and there is a flip side to this argument. An American comes to Canada and leaves the interstates, with their predictable hotel chains and fast-food lineups. Now he's on a two-lane road, headlight-to-headlight at night. He makes a left-turn to a gas stations or a one-of-a-kind motel sitting alone at a wide spot in the road.

He arrives by freeway in Vancouver or Toronto or Montreal and sees that the energy crisis, which has his full attention at home, is nowhere to be found here, where skylines are lit as though Arabia were still a dependency of the Seven Sisters.

Come morning, an American in a Canadian city asks in vain for the local equivalent of the South Bronx. Where are the vacant lots, the abandoned buildings, the garbage-filled gutters, the stripped cars? How can there be so much construction going on in a country staked-out on tundra? How can Canadian design, exterior and interior, be sophisticated, modern, daring? How can Sears look dowdy next to a store called Eatons? The American expects to find Canada trying hard to catch up but finds in fact that Canada is visibly ahead.

Worst of all, the Canadians look different and, in a word, healthier. They walk a lot—and actually *walk*, not saunter or shuffle or sashay. Their posture is a lot better. American men often stand as though they're trying to look tough; Canadians see no need to try.

Canada, an American soon learns, is neither prepared to wage civil war against a province threatening secession nor hesitant to give many of its votes to a socialist party. Now *there* are two real differences. True, Canada has a national police force and from time to time invokes or commits acts that stir right-wing American hearts with grudging envy. But it is Canada that socializes medicine, has all its universities on a public footing, refuses to allow oil companies to enjoy world prices, nationalizes its potash industry, talks of doing

so for asbestos, keeps its forests overwhelmingly in Crown ownership, and with the Canada Land Inventory at least begins national land-use planning.

These are not mere intangibles: the American sees Canada's political bias in the Canadian landscape. On his arrival he saw it in the bright lights of cities lit by public power corporations. He sees it now in endless unit trains bearing the Wheat Board logo, in tiny dairy farms turning out Grade A milk near Moncton with the help of federal mortgages. He sees it in public parks that shame American skinflint city councils. It's there in Air Canada and the Canadian National Railway.

The Canadian economy is extraordinarily concentrated. A CPR Chairman out to wield in the United States a power proportional to that which he has in Canada would have to gain control not only of the Burlington Northern and Conrail but of United Airlines, Anaconda, Jones and Loughlin, Sheraton, Great Northern Paper, Consolidated Freightways, Consolidation Coal, and a good-sized oil company. No American state is as good as owned by one man: can the same be said for the Canadian provinces, when the Irving interests in New Brunswick were appraised a decade ago at \$600,000,000? Read the *Financial Post* for a while, and the Canadian economy begins to seem like the favorite game of a select club.

Nor are these mere intangibles, either. An American comes to Canada and finds the Royal Bank coast to coast: there are half again as many Royal branches as there are offices of the Bank of America, the biggest bank in the United States. This is a matter of banking laws--of Canada's Parliament in this case being less hostile than the American Congress to capital agglomeration. Yet there the Royal Bank is, in town after town and holding a concentration of assets unknown in the United States. Or the American goes from Presque Isle to Woodstock and sees the potato business change from tiny farmers and perpetually failing processors to the humming and humbling plants of McCains, whose suppliers have time and money for raising fine riding horses.

The American quickly learns, too, that there is a Canadian personality -- direct, forthright, plainspoken. He saw it first in that Canadian posture. Now he sees it in apartment houses without triple-locked doors and handguns for each. He sees it in schoolchildren of every ethnic stock playing together as though they were colorblind. He sees it in the steeples of the United Church of Canada, a confederation of Methodists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians that is incomprehensibly logical alongside the sectarian chaos of the United States.

So much for facsimile Americans. So much for a facsimile American landscape. Take Canada politically, economically, socially. It is a different place, and you can see the difference.

Is the difference permanent? The diffusionist answer is: not very.

But there are other interpretations, with other answers. Canadians themselves account for their socialistic leanings as just another sign of their common sense. That common sense, whose appreciation is their only vanity, they attribute to a deterministic environment. Can such influences be real? Fifty years ago, Benjamin Cardozo of the United States Supreme Court wrote to Robert Marshall, who was tramping through Alaska's Brooks Range: "I suspect that being close to nature, as you have been during these many years, has an influence, in the end, even on one's choice of words. One no longer has any patience for thoughts or for phrases that are not genuine and honest." Is it true?

It's hard to imagine Americans getting enthusiastic about railroads. Few American teachers see an ocean of hands when they ask for the names of half a dozen mining towns. Few Americans sitting on one coast can name the towns they would drive through on the way to the other one.

Geography is almost an obsession with Canadians. Not the transcendental nature-worship that the United States has had for so many years and which still sells wall posters and perfume. Canadian geography is—well, here's that word again—sensible. It's based on a nature that is an object both of love and respect, a nature that is nurturing but also murderous.

True, you can freeze to death in Texas, and plenty of people in Edmonton live in high rises. Yet Canadians, investing in Florida at a rate that leaves Miami realtors struggling to keep their tongues in their mouths, come back from their winter vacations as sensible as ever. The actual experience of living on the edge of the north has shaped a culture that survives, at least for a time, its people living much softer lives.

I remember a student some years ago who came to the University of Victoria after a summer spent trapping near Atlin, a settlement in British Columbia hard against the Alaska panhandle. To get to his cabin, which he had built himself, he normally walked 200 miles from Telegraph Creek. With a bit of planning, he was sometimes able to get a bush pilot to save him that hike. He was not a particularly good student, because words came to him like winter's molasses. I have been in plenty of classes where Leatherstocking came up and where everyone nodded indulgently at Fenimore Cooper's romanticism, but I also remember this young man's broad shoulders, steady gaze, calm blue eyes, generous spirit, and awkward readjustment from moccasins to shoes.

His fellow students did not find him particularly unusual. If not trapping in summer, they thought nothing of welding pipelines through the Peace River or working on fishboats out of Kyoquot. When I told of hitting and crippling a deer with my car, a student who came from Clearwater, on the road to Tete Jaune

Cache, asked--almost demanded--if I had stopped the car and cut the animal's throat from mercy. He was quietly disgusted at my American answer.

For my own part I am skeptical of any explanation of cultural character. If the differences between Canada and the United States are a matter of cultures blending like ink drops in a glass of water, then it is a matter of time before the two cultures are indistinguishable. Yet if the cause of the present differences between the two can be laid, even in part, to a wilderness that Americans can no longer hope for and that Canadians can scarcely hope to avoid, the differences will not go away. So long as the countries survive, a cultural flow will continue between them as steadily as the St. Lawrence flows, and Canada will no more be emptied of its character than the Great Lakes of their water.

* Revised 2004 but not updated from the version published in *The American Review of Canadian Studies* (12:2), Summer 1982, pp. 82-86