

People Say the 'Darndest' Things About Canada

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There is a Canada Day poster that boldly states, "We have good reason to be proud of being Canadian!" And then it goes on to say "Here's Why!"

Now, I can understand this poster being given to immigrants applying for citizenship, but it seems a bit odd for it to be given to your bonefide Canadian. Shouldn't a Canadian already be proud of being Canadian? Do we need to prove it to ourselves?

You might think so when a premier says, "Two things hold this country together. Everybody hates Air Canada coffee, and everybody hates Ontario" (Newfoundland premier Brian Peckford in 1979). You can't refute a certain truth to it when Ontario premier David Peterson said, "The thing that keeps this great country together is that everybody hates Ontario; and the thing that keeps Ontario together is that everybody hates Toronto; and the thing that keeps Toronto together is that everyone hates Bay Street [where the TSE is located]." You might think there's a problem when everybody hates everyone.

It is perhaps most damning when Canada's most prominent feature is considered a flaw, "If some countries have too much history, we have too much geography" (Prime Minister Mackenzie King in 1936).

To some extent Canada's vast 'dominion' makes Canadians feel distant toward one another. How can you dispute it with titles like, "Boy Meets Girl in Winnipeg and Who Cares?" (Hugh MacLennan—novelist, 1960), and "If You're So Good, What Are You Doing in Saskatoon?" (Title for popular Prairie drama of the early 1980s). Edmonton probably gets it the worst with comments like, "Edmonton, like acne, is to be endured" (Mordecai Richler in 1976), or "Edmonton isn't exactly the end of the world, but you can see it from there" (Calgary mayor Ralph Klein).

What is perhaps most difficult about Canada is the fact that Canadians tend to compare themselves to Americans. For, "without at least a touch of anti-Americanism, Canada would have no reason to exist. Of all general definitions of the Canadians this is the most nearly valid: twenty million people who, for anything up to twenty million reasons, prefer not to be Americans."

But a funny thing about Canadians is that "Canadians don't feel part of this country unless they're out of it. There is nothing to link a person from Winnipeg with someone from Quebec, unless they're in Venice together, sitting in St. Mark's Square, drinking cappuccino. Suddenly, you have something in common" (Theatre director Robert Lepage in 1990).

Oprah Winfrey probably said the best thing about Canadians, "We [the Oprah Winfrey Show] get 3,000 letters a week, a lot from Canada. One thing about Canadians, they don't mail me their electric bills and ask me to pay for them—like some Americans have—and don't send me dirty responses when I don't. I love that."

Now there is something to be proud of, eh?

Bibliography: Olive, David. Canada Inside Out. How We See Ourselves, How Others See Us. Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1996.