

Canada racist? Nonsense

To some extent the general Canadian 'systemic racism' self-flagellation in this country is our very own Canadian replication of American phenomena

by Conrad Black



In the absence of anything more original to write at year-end, the politics of this country are discouraging; I lamented as recently as last week the failure of any visible and audible political leader in the country to offer even a slightly uplifting version of what the late president George Bush Sr. used to call "the vision thing." Political discourse in this country appears to be confined entirely to climate change, gender issues, native concerns, and the apparently invincible, bone-crushing advance of the juggernaut of political correctness. The entire citizenry seems to have been mobilized

to hunt down, root out, pulverize, and incinerate any trace of the ghastly and abominable, ubiquitous bugbear, "systemic racism." It is an "existential" threat. The phrase means that the social and political system in this case of Canada is rotten throughout, because of its inherent racist prejudices. In practice, many people who bandy this conceptually and acoustically irritating phrase about have no idea what they mean and if asked to think about it, most would say that they believe there has been a good deal of official racism and racially discriminating attitudes and practices in Canadian history, and that to a substantial extent, it lingers yet. This is utter nonsense.

Canada is not remotely and never has been what could be described as a racist society, with a few specific exceptions I'll discuss later. Every person, even under a totalitarianism regime, possesses freedom of thought, including unkind thoughts about a sectarian or ethnic or behavioural group. Unattractive, ignorant, and even despicable as those sentiments are, every person has a right to hold them, and they cannot be extirpated by laws or regulations, but only by enlightening the holder with the evidence of the fruitlessness and injustice of his own bigotry. Freedom of expression must tolerate a certain amount of obnoxious group comment but that sort of thing cannot go very far without crossing the legal threshold and becoming an incitement to racial antagonism.

When ransacking Canadian history one finds that, apart from the natives, who enslaved each other in considerable numbers, there were never more than a few hundred slaves in New France and the early Atlantic colonies, and after the end of the Seven Years War in 1783, Lower and Upper Canada, (Québec and Ontario). Slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1833 before any part of Canada was self-governing, a condition that began in most of Canada in 1848. This was the Canadian echo of the revolutions that swept Europe in that year, driving out the king of France and bringing back the

Bonapartes and sending the long-serving chancellor of the Holy Roman Empire, Prince Metternich, packing. The governor of Canada, Sir Guy Carleton, refused to return to General George Washington the American slaves that had fallen into British and Canadian hands during the American Revolutionary War. From 1815 to 1861, Canada welcomed more than 40,000 fugitive slaves from the United States and treated them all as free people. There continued for many years to be de facto social segregation and undoubted discrimination but this reflected unease with the mixing together of non-white ethnic groups; it was contemptible and unjust but with the rarest exceptions it was not racial hatred. John Brown, Harriet Tubman, and Josiah Henson, the model for the chief character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's epochal novel Uncle Tom's Cabin (initial sale of two million copies), all lived at times in Canada. President Lincoln thanked Canadian leaders for their role in receiving slaves and breaking up anti-Union conspiracies cooked up by Southern agitators in Canada. Canada was not a place of "systemic racism" 170 years ago, and it certainly is not one now.

For many years there were outrageous quotas about the number of Jews that could be admitted to some universities and to the study of the learned professions. In the depression-racked 1930's, there was an official prejudice against the admission of immigrants and perhaps particularly Jewish immigrants. There was and to a slight degree there remains, in the most intellectually squalid corners of society, a distaste for Jews and some other groups. Of greatest current interest, the residential schools for native children were devised to take the young from the grinding poverty of their early years and equip them to participate in society. The goal was, in its bumbling Victorian colonialist manner, a positive one, and while it affronts faddish sensibilities to make the point a great many alumni of those schools, such as Harold Cardinal, have acknowledged that their attendance there facilitated the successful careers that they subsequently enjoyed. The truth

and reconciliation movement has traduced white Canada and has, deliberately or otherwise, generated more antagonism and myth-making than it has reconciliation and truth.

To some extent the general Canadian "systemic racism" self-flagellation in this country is our very own Canadian replication of American phenomena. The danger that America has always faced is internecine conflict, not foreign invasion. Abraham Lincoln was quoted to that effect here last week. The U.S. apparently saw off the last foreign threat to its serenity and preeminence in the world with the Soviet Union, (a view that may be revisited now that a resurgent China appears effectively to have had recourse to bacteriological warfare against the world). And the United States has since the end of the Cold War gradually become an atomized nation and engaged in ethnically and behaviourally-based self-criticism and even collective self-loathing. As in all things, some level of imitation pops up in Canada and the masters of the native victimhood industry in this country have exploited it with commendable entrepreneurial and propagandistic zeal. There were certainly injustices inflicted upon the native people and the present policy has not been successful. We must do better but we must also cease to portray ourselves as a nation of racists and bigots. Canada is racially as tolerant a people as there is or has ever been. We can do better but we will not do so by defaming ourselves with blood libels on the English and French colonists of Canada and their descendants.

As the year ends, the new leader of the federal opposition, Erin O'Toole, has tried to balance criticism of the residential schools with recognition that the intentions that created them were not malign. He stumbled inauspiciously, but the slightest deviation from the rigorous national self-abomination that is virtually a political catechism in this country is a ray of hope. So is O'Toole's effort, (which I doubt will be successful), to climb aboard the climate change bandwagon and adopt the bunk about zero net fossil fuel

emissions by 2050 with remedial assistance to the industries affected. What we need is real research into climate and its trends before we commit ourselves to amputating the limbs and petrifying the torso of the Canadian economy. Mr. O'Toole is finding his sea-legs as all new leaders must do, and is trying to broaden the base of Conservative support, somewhat in the Mulroney fashion, so the Conservatives can win an election without being dependent upon the NDP draining large numbers of votes from the Liberals to permit fewer than 40 percent of Canadian Conservative voters to elect a majority government. The trick is to encroach upon the centre and centre-left without demoralizing the authentic conservatives. It requires deft professionalism, and there is room for hope that O'Toole, who sought the Conservative leadership in 2017 as a red Tory and in 2019 as a Harperite, will be equal to the task.

Happy new year to all.

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