

'Acute, Sustained, Profound and Abiding Rage': Canada Finds Its Voice

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By **Stephen Marche**

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Canada is living through an era of acute, sustained, profound and abiding rage. The source is President Trump; the object is the United States. The president, commander of the most powerful military the world has ever known, has declared repeatedly that he intends to soften up the Canadian economy in preparation for annexation. Americans, from what I can tell, don't seem to take this possibility seriously, even though he undertook the task in earnest last week by imposing a 35 percent tariff. The American threat to our sovereignty, so sudden, so foolish, is reshaping Canadian life.

All over the world, as the United States retreats from the global order it created, nations are reforming their priorities, changing their institutions and, as a result, changing their identities. By 2027, Japan's military budget will have swelled 60 percent in five years. Germany, too, is having to remilitarize, though it is having

difficulty finding willing troops; the stigma against combat has been inculcated for several generations. Brazil has already begun trading with China in Chinese currency, discovering a means of avoiding contact with America altogether. These are all drastic changes in how these countries exist, in who they are. But perhaps nowhere is the change more profound than in Canada.

In response to America's threats, Canada is in the middle of the greatest explosion of nationalism in the country's history, far more substantial than the nationalism of the 1960s. Then, Canadian identity emerged and proliferated through books and music and the national broadcaster, the CBC, as well as through official policies of bilingualism and multiculturalism. The entire time, Canada was integrating economically and militarily with the United States. Now the province of Ontario has banned all sales of American alcohol. [More than two-thirds](#) of Canadians say they plan to buy fewer American grocery products this year. Canadian travel to America continues its steep decline, although that may have less to do with political resistance than with the fact that the United States has made spectacularly clear that foreigners within its borders may be subject to detention, and possibly even violence, without recourse.

People on both sides of the border hope that this economic antipathy is temporary. (There's no replacement for bourbon.) But the second Trump administration has established a more enduring truth about the United States: It is no longer a country that keeps its agreements. Mr. Trump has violated the deal he himself struck in his first term. You should do business with such people only if you have to. According to [a poll from February](#), 91 percent of Canadians want to rely less on the United States as a trade partner.

The question is how to extricate ourselves from America, and how painful that will be. "Our old relationship with the United States, a relationship based on steadily increasing integration, is over," Prime Minister Mark Carney [declared](#) during his victory speech after winning the federal election. "The system of open global trade anchored by the United States — a system that Canada has relied on since the Second World War, a system that while not perfect has helped deliver prosperity for a country for decades — is over."

This turn away from America is not only a Liberal Party position. “I was — I think it’s fair to say — probably the most pro-American prime minister in Canadian history,” Stephen Harper, whose administration lasted from 2006 to 2015, [recently told](#) the Midwestern Legislative Conference, a cross-border meeting of American and Canadian lawmakers, before acknowledging that he advised the current Liberal government to diversify as rapidly as possible. “We just cannot be in a position in the future where we can be threatened in this way.”

The first liquefied natural gas shipment from Canada to Asia [arrived](#) in South Korea in mid-July. China is buying our crude oil rather than America’s. This is Canada’s future.

Beyond trade, it is the talk of annexation that has most deeply changed Canadians’ sense of themselves. The Canadian military has been designed, almost exclusively, to fulfill commitments to our alliances. For that reason, it is small and elite — a little over 70,000 troops. Actually defending the country’s borders has never been a matter anyone had to think much about.

I would understand if Americans at this point considered the possibility of annexation too outlandish to be taken seriously. But the United States has shown itself capable of the most outlandish possibilities. A year ago, the idea that the U.S. Marines [would be deployed](#) to Los Angeles in support of masked agents who don’t always identify themselves would have been seen as dystopian fiction. The motto of the United States has changed from “In God we trust” to “Nothing is true, everything is permitted.”

When countries backslide out of democracy, invading neighbors is typically the kind of justification autocratic leaders use to suspend their own laws. Ask the Ukrainians. If Mr. Trump does intend to run for a third term, an “emergency” at the northern border is exactly the kind of pretext for the suspension of constitutional norms it might require.

In response to this threat, two options are being discussed north of the border. The first is nuclear weapons. The other is whole-society defense. That latter is how the Finns survive living next to Russia, a much larger neighbor intermittently collapsing under the weight of incompetent government and exploding outward with imperialist

ambition. Canada has a long tradition of conscription during global crises and world wars, but it is not a country that revels in its military.

The mind-set of Canada is changing, and the shift is cultural as much as economic or political. Since the 1960s, Canadian elites have been rewarded by integration with the United States. The snipers who fought with American forces. The scientists who worked at American labs. The writers who wrote for New York publications. The actors who made it in Hollywood. Mr. Carney himself was an icon of this integration as chair of the board of Bloomberg L.P., the financial news and data giant, as recently as 2023.

As America dismantles its elite institutions one by one, that aspirational connection is dissolving. The question is no longer how to stop comparing ourselves with the United States, but how to escape its grasp and its fate. Justin Trudeau, the former prime minister, used to speak of Canada as a “post-national state,” in which Canadian identity took second place to overcoming historical evils and various vague forms of virtue signaling. That nonsense is over. In several surveys, the overwhelming first choice for what makes the country unique is multiculturalism. This, in a world collapsing into stupid, impoverishing hatreds, is the distinctly Canadian national project.

Even after Covid and the failure to create adequate infrastructure for new Canadians, which lead to a pullback on immigration, Canada still has one of the highest rates of naturalization in the world. This country has always been plural. It has always contained many languages, ethnicities and tribes. The triumph of compromise among difference is the triumph of Canadian history. That seems to be an ideal worth fighting for.

Canada is now stuck in a double reality. In a recent [Pew Research Center survey](#), 59 percent of Canadians identified the United States as the country’s top threat, and 55 percent of Canadians identified the United States as the country’s most important ally. That is both an unsustainable contradiction and also a reality that will probably define the country for the foreseeable future. Canada is divided from America, and America is divided from itself. The relationship between Canada and America rides on that fissure.

Margaret Atwood was, and remains, the ultimate icon of 1960s Canadian nationalism and also one of the great prophets of American dystopia. “No. 1, hating all Americans is stupid,” she told me on “[Gloves Off](#),” a podcast about how Canada can defend itself from America’s new threats. “That’s just silly because half of them would agree with you,” and “even a bunch of them are now having buyers’ regret.”

Large groups of people in Canada, and one assumes in America, too, hope this new animosity will pass with the passing of the Trump administration. “I can’t account for the rhetoric on behalf of our president,” Gov. Janet Mills of Maine [said recently](#) on a trip to Nova Scotia. “He doesn’t speak for us when he says those things.” Except he does. The current American ambassador to Canada, Pete Hoekstra, is the kind of man you send to a country to alienate it. During the first Trump administration, the State Department had to apologize for offensive remarks he made, which he had at one point denied. He has also said the administration finds Canadians “mean and nasty.” Such insults from such people are a badge of honor.

But it’s the American system — not just its presidency — that is in breakdown. From the Canadian side of the border, it is evident that the American left is in the middle of a grand abdication. No American institution, no matter how wealthy or privileged, seems willing to make any sacrifice for democratic values. If the president is Tony Soprano, the Democratic governors who plead with Canadian tourists to return are the Carmelas. They cluck their disapproval, but they can’t believe anyone would question their decency as they try to get along.

Canada is far from powerless in this new world; we are educated and resourceful. But we are alone in a way we never have been. Our current moment of national self-definition is different from previous nationalisms. It will involve connecting Canada more broadly rather than narrowing its focus. We can show that multiculturalism works, that it remains possible to have an open society that does not consume itself, in which divisions between liberals and conservatives are real and deep-seated but do not fester into violence and loathing. Canada will also have to serve as a connector between the world’s democracies, in a line that stretches from Taiwan and South Korea, across North America, to Poland and Ukraine.

Canada has experienced the second Trump administration like a teenager being kicked out of the house by an abusive father. We have to grow up fast and we can't go back. And the choices we make now will matter forever. They will reveal our national character. Anger is a useful emotion, but only as a point of departure. We have to reckon with the fact that from now on, our power will come from only ourselves.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/10/opinion/canada-america-allies.html>

Two ways to do this come to mind. Hurt Americans, as much as we can, in their pocket books. Don't buy American if we can help it. Strawberries is a good start. All those other countries growing our fruits and vegetables can use our business as they too deal with Trumpian bullying. See how many things American we can avoid. And, grow more of our own and be willing to pay more for them.

Second, if we are going to get hurt more than Americans, be willing to pay the price for an economic restructuring with trade relationships shifted as much as possible elsewhere. If all we can deal with are dictators, maybe Xi Jin Ping has better reasons than Donald Trump for being one, governing and policing 1.5 billion people with no democratic history or traditions. (Putin and Kim Yong Un are a different matter.) Proceed with "nation building" pronto; Canada's economic future depends upon some "big project" revenue generators coming online quickly. First Nations welfare depends upon it too. An imploding federal government would be bad for even the most remote First Nations. But Mr. Carney must be sincere about, and follow through on, his vow to place First Nations prosperity at the centre of such initiatives.

We will have to deal with all the fifth-column Trump-types amongst us, those who stupidly would love to join the States. (If they think we would have more say, autonomy, and prosperity that way, they are fools. We would just be looted by carpetbaggers of every kind, otherwise taken for granted.) Let them have their say, but don't give ground. They are as blind as all the Trump crowd are, stubborn in their willful ignorance truncated in a morally-pretentious but defective and deficient worldview. Be a democrat; this means far more than voting. It means citizenship, paying attention and speaking up in public forums, sometimes at risk of backlash.

We need not be suckered by Trump's charge that Canada has been getting "free" military protection from the States. Whatever "security" we have gained from the grossly massive American war machine—obscene because of forces in America itself that have metastasized it—this is incidental, if not entirely oblivious to Canadian interests. The "umbrella" that shields us is only about America, and Canada's place is only as a buffer state over which Russian or Chinese missiles and bombers can be shot down. Maybe foreign troops would be inclined to land in Canada, but again, this would just allow a war to be fought on Canadian soil, which the Americans would be happy to do. Even in the World Wars, America has shown it ultimately fights for its own interests. Sure, we need to rebuild our armed forces—another blind spot in Justin's blooming narcissism but now, an annual gone to seed—but only because they have become an embarrassment neglected by short-term profit-takers. TJB