

Birth of a New Ethnicity

- 1 Social change is sometimes difficult to see. It's like looking at yourself in the mirror every day and not noticing that you're aging. But once in a while it's useful to pull out the high school yearbook and take note of the transformation.
- 2 The survey we conducted for *The Globe and Mail's* New Canada project asked people what makes them proud of Canada. Over all, things such as the beauty of the land, the country's high ranking by the United Nations and our role in peacekeeping came out at the top of the list. Among young Canadians, those in their 20s, other factors made them proud: multiculturalism, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, bilingualism, having people from different cultural backgrounds living in peace.
- 3 These are the elements of the new Canadian mythology, one created in the period between the late 1960s and the early 1980s and codified as official in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Perhaps it is not surprising that these are sources of pride. After all, this is the only Canada that young people have ever known, and one quite different from that of their grandparents.
- 4 One of the biggest changes in Canada over the past twenty years has been the emergence of a more deeply entrenched pan-Canadian national identity. It was once thought that attachment to Canada was quite weak, with local attachments being more important. This is no longer the case. Waves of new immigrants from non-European countries chose to come to Canada, not to any particular province. Young Canadians, at least outside Quebec, are far more likely than older Canadians to define themselves as Canadian first, rather than in terms of their province.
- 5 The "I am Canadian" marketing phenomenon tapped into something real: Canadians are very proud of their national identity. With no trace of irony, they proudly yell about how modest they are, and patriotically proclaim that they have no patriotism. Despite our claim to a modest and deferential nationalism, our nationalism has become as emotional and assertive as anyone's. The introduction of the Charter of Rights was explicitly designed to unite all citizens in a pan-Canadian community, and it worked. Outside Quebec, a real national consciousness has been created—this despite simmering regional resentments and disaffection from the federal government.
- 6 The result has been the emergence over the past 20 years of a new ethnicity—simply Canadian. As more young people consider themselves ethnically fractioned—half of this and a quarter of that—fewer will have a strong connection to an ethnic group other than Canadian. In the 2001 census, when asked about the ethnic origins of our ancestors, fully 39 per cent of us said "just Canadian," and this number grows higher every year. The very term "ethnicity" is an awkward one, but it fits: We are creating a new multiracial, multicultural boundary-free ethnic group called "Canadian."
- 7 These are large and significant changes. Take immigration, for example. In 1946, almost half of all Canadians (46 per cent) said our immigration policy should ensure that Jews do not come to Canada. In 1961, 40 per cent of Canadians

said that we should prevent the immigration of non-whites. Today, almost no one holds such views.

8 And, although many of us still consider our ethnic background important to us, virtually no one under the age of 30 thinks that a similar ethnic background is important when choosing a spouse or friends. Canadians date, marry, work and hang out with people from all kinds of backgrounds. What you believe, not where you come from, matters. For most Canadians, their ethnicity is a mark of personal identity, but in no way grounds for exclusion.

9 In surveys in France, Britain, Italy, the United States and other countries, anywhere from 30 to 50 per cent of people say that relations between different ethnic groups are a big problem; in Canada, just 12 per cent say this. In Canada, 81 per cent of those under 30 say immigrants are having a positive effect on our country, which is a significantly higher number than found among older Canadians, and significantly higher than young people in other countries, according to a major international study conducted for the Pew Research Center for People and the Press, an independent group based in Washington, D.C. In the United States, about one in three Americans say blacks and whites should not marry each other. In Canada, fewer than one in 10 hold that belief, and almost no one under 30 does. It is not merely starry-eyed back-patting to highlight these very real differences between Canada and other countries. They are real facts that define our national identity.

10 Canada integrates immigrants better than any other country in the world today. You might think we would rejoice in this, but instead some among us still choose to worry about multiculturalism, about "ethnic ghettos," and about whether immigrants retain too much attachment to their country of origin. Some—the Fraser Institute in its report *Canada's Immigration Policy: The Need for Major Reform*, for example—seek out an anti-immigrant backlash, fail to find it, but still warn ominously that it could come any day now. They seek out an anti-immigrant backlash that never materializes and refuse to acknowledge the reality of the country: People from different backgrounds are getting along better every year, not worse. While some remain uncomfortable with the changing face of Canada and project their own insecurities onto the country, young Canadians are simply not concerned.

11 Many Canadians do worry that immigrants are not adopting Canadian values quickly enough. However, immigrants come to share the same values as other Canadians relatively quickly. Our survey showed that within one generation, the children of immigrants have virtually identical values as other young Canadians. Moreover, even first-generation Canadians take pride in Canada for the same reasons as non-immigrant Canadians.

12 That's the good news. However, although Canadians' attitudes toward diversity have changed, this does not mean that we live in a colour-blind society. Most Canadians, regardless of ethnic background, continue to believe that racism exists, and this belief is higher among immigrants. For example, about 65 per cent of young visible-minority immigrants believe the police show bias in their treatment of blacks and aboriginals. This experience of lived racism is a reality. In

particular, new immigrants are not doing as well economically as they used to. In 1980, after being in Canada for 10 years, immigrants were earning as much as native-born Canadians. Today, those who've been here 10 years only earn about 83 per cent as much as native-born Canadians. Some groups, particularly some visible-minority groups, are threatened with social exclusion. In our survey, 61 per cent of Canadians agreed that success depends more on "who you know" than on how hard you work. This sense that many opportunities may be closed to new immigrants is a potential source of tension in the new Canada.

13 Moreover, the issues of Quebec and aboriginal peoples have not been addressed in the New Canadian nation. The claims of these groups, to different rather than simply equal status, do not fit easily with the official ideology of individual rights articulated in the Charter. Non-aboriginal Canadians outside Quebec continue to ignore the fact that almost half of francophone Quebecers would like to secede from Canada and that aboriginal peoples have outstanding land claims and treaty rights. English-speaking Canadians express great affinity with and solidarity for aboriginal peoples and francophone Quebec, but appear to be unwilling to make any sacrifices to do anything about this.

14 One of the most important changes in Canada over the past decade has been Canadians' embrace of trade and globalization as part of the New Canadian national identity. Canadians are more engaged with the world than every before, more prepared to work abroad, and see this international engagement as key to Canadian prosperity. "Internationalism" has now been incorporated into Canadians' identity. Consistent with our multicultural nature, Canadians believe we have a moral obligation to other countries, we would like to encourage the adoption of Canadian values abroad, and we believe these can be furthered by trade and engagement with the world.

15 Comparing who we once were to who we are today can be startling. It is not so long ago in Canada that aboriginals on reserves couldn't vote, non-whites could not immigrate, and there were quotas to make sure there weren't too many Jews at Canadian universities. When your kids get hold of the old yearbook, they no doubt laugh at your funny hair and strange clothes. In much the same way, the beliefs of Old Canada are equally anachronistic.

16 The New Canada is the Canada that we hoped to create in the 1970s. The values in the Charter of 1981 may not have reflected who we were as a country then, but it is those values which have created who we are as a country today. This is exactly what we'd hoped for.