

Bill Macdonald at Celebrate Magic Canada Dinner

The last time Jeff McBride was here, I said, “You have probably already thought this, but magic would not be magic if it really was magic.” He agreed, but said he had not thought that before. He then said that real magic comes from limits that force creativity.

Canada’s magic is the kind of mystery and miracle that comes from having the right leaders and followers at the right time, who have the required creativity—to do what it takes.

Canada shares with the United States the New World of North America. It differs from the United States in three fundamental ways. The United States has a drive toward division; Canada towards mutual accommodation. The United States sees the world as a never-ending struggle between good and evil—a world of winners and losers, without mutual accommodation. Canadians, by contrast, lean to the idea that there is underlying order at the heart of things. Canada has always faced strong limits to creatively overcome: a harder geography; French-English; and a very large manifest destiny neighbour. By contrast, the U.S. sees itself as a country with virtually no limits.

Here are just some of the many amazing events that have shaped a magic Canada worth celebrating:

- 1848 was a year of revolutionary reform in the Western world. French Catholic Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine from Quebec and English Protestant Robert Baldwin from Ontario led the only non-violent reform movement of that year which never lost its democracy. When Lafontaine was defeated in his Quebec seat, he won a by-election in Ontario. When Baldwin was defeated in his Ontario seat, he won a by-election in Quebec—amazing for a country where the French did not much like the English; the Catholics did not much like the Protestants; and vice versa.
- Only twenty-nine years after Canada was formed, this same dynamic saw a majority English Protestant national electorate elect Laurier as its first French Catholic Prime Minister.
- Following the Quiet Revolution in Quebec in 1960, the country’s leadership showed rare political foresight. Prime Minister Pearson launched the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission and recruited three progressive leaders from Quebec to his government: academic Pierre Trudeau, labour leader Jean Marchand and Gerard Pelletier, the editor of La Presse, the largest French language newspaper in North America. At the same time Progressive Conservative Ontario Premier John Robarts, and Union Nationale Quebec Premier Daniel Johnson, launched the Confederation of Tomorrow Conference.
- Finally, in the great Quebec separatism battles of the Trudeau, Lévesque, Davis and Lougheed era, Trudeau wanted two things: no French language primacy in Quebec and Quebec inside Canada; and Lévesque wanted

the opposite—French language primacy and Quebec outside Canada. Then the Western Premiers came along and forced the “notwithstanding” clause as part of the Charter of Rights and Freedom. This gave Lévesque a route to French language primacy, which kept Quebec in Canada. It also did something more. By giving politics the final word over the Charter, Canada does not have the highly politicized Supreme Court that the United States has.

This small bit of our history reveals some of the magic which is solidly rooted in its miracle/mystery story.

The late Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa captured Canada in a single unmatched sentence: “One of the world’s rare and privileged countries in terms of peace, justice, liberty and standard of living.”

Now, a quick final word on where we are heading:

- My book should be out shortly after September 30th of this year.
- Trent University will hold a book launch academic symposium in Toronto on November 20, 2019.
- We are at the very early stages of exploring the possibility of multiple academic and mutual accommodation study centres—on Canada and global at the University of Toronto: on Canada’s indigenous mutual accommodation failures and success at Trent; on Canada and Quebec at McGill; globally at Harvard and Cambridge (Whitehead’s two universities); and hopefully two largely black universities in Africa. Success will depend primarily on getting the right academics, who can see this study area as good for his or her academic career.

Peter Howard wrote a book in 1945 called *Ideas Have Legs*. Mutual accommodation is an idea that needs legs now if the new different world that is upon us is to be bearable.

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