

# Canada and the United States

*Our History Together and Our Next 30 Years*



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## Our History Together and Our Next 30 Years

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*This paper discusses the greatest danger to a bearable future for Canada and for the world.*

*It does not come from China, Russia, or Iran. It comes from the United States.*

*Can a deeply divided United States find a path to mutual accommodation at home?*

*The final section comes from Paul Volcker.*

W.A. Macdonald

Canada has never been more alone. The United States is now in its greatest political turmoil since the Civil War. China and Russia are showing signs of the kind of overreach that earlier led to two World Wars (Germany — 1919 and 1939; Japan — 1941) and to the Soviet Union (post-1945 takeover of Eastern Europe and the Cold War). On the non-political front, the post-Renaissance Western effort to control nature has brought the world up against climate change and, at present, the COVID pandemic. Our best hope is to recognize that just as compassion is central to personal relations, so freedom, science, and mutual accommodation are central to the functioning of countries, societies, and communities. All four are needed at all times for structural balance.

Only Canada among major advanced societies is strong in mutual accommodation as well as in freedom and science. The United States is still strong today (the global leader, though challenged by China) in freedom and science. Since 1945 (the Trump era aside) it has been strong in external mutual accommodation, but perennially challenged by its failures in domestic mutual accommodation. China has strength only in science, while Russia has only some of its lesser science strength left. The future of the United States and the world is threatened by the global shortage of strength in mutual accommodation.

Previous national overreaches were partly due to the slow initial pace of responses to them. The world needs to find better ways of preventing today's overreach countries (primarily China and Russia) from undermining the global order, which itself needs urgently to be reshaped. Ideology will not help. A hopeful view of China is steadily losing ground globally. No alternative view is yet developing on how best to contain, but still include, China in the inclusive global order — something that may yet not prove possible.

Ideology needs to be replaced by “what works.” This practical approach will over time require freedom, science, and mutual accommodation structural balances that best suit different relations within and between countries, societies, communities, institutions, and groups. The changes needed will require internal and external stability, and that stability will require the right kind of changes. In his book *Value(s): Building a Better World for All* (2021), Mark Carney, the former governor of the Bank of Canada and the Bank of England, provides the kind of discussion that will be needed over the next decades for everyone to find how best to manage the way forward in a world that stands to be very different from the Thatcher / Reagan era that ended with the financial crises in 2008.

For the West, China since 2015 has no longer been the hopeful China of the previous 25 years.

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There needs to be a new Western-led consensus on how to approach China. Several recent sets of actions by China seriously question whether China is a fit participant in a global order that can work. These actions include:

- Uyghur genocide;
- Hong Kong's forced withdrawal from a trustworthy global order;
- steady reductions in freedom under President Xi Jinping;
- COVID cover-up;
- hostage diplomacy (Canada's two Michaels); and
- technology theft.

The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union has made it easier for the EU to go softer on Russia and China than is likely to be good either for it or for the world. There are signs that degeneration from this source may already be starting in both the UK and the EU.

The United States faces fundamental existential and identity problems. China too must find a political way of dealing with its vastly changed post-Mao political and economic world at home. Both the United States and China require a minimum level of global economic and political stability to address their domestic political challenges successfully. Neither country has either one right now.

The recent important book by Graham Allison, a Kennedy School professor at Harvard, titled *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap* (2017), investigates the failure of the established power, Sparta, to cope with the rising power of Athens as a way to think about a rising China opposite a declining United States in a vastly changing world. Three huge differences between today's world and the worlds in which Athens (in the fifth century BC) and Germany (1914—45) were new rising powers provide grounds for hope. First, the United States, despite its Trump-inflicted self-harm, is on the whole still relatively stronger than China, though that advantage cannot be guaranteed forever. It should, however, last long enough for the United States to

recover the real sources of its greater strengths. Second, a majority of the world's population is middle-class and does not like war. Third, the world is simply too intertwined for either the United States or China to separate from it.

As the late Quebec premier Robert Bourassa told two of us (Dick Currie and me) some 30 years ago at the height of Canada's Quebec separatism crisis, "Even if Quebec voted to separate, it could not do so, because we are too intertwined." Accepting the reality of "intertwined" at home and abroad is the path forward for both China and the United States. Whichever one of them accepts that reality in practice will do best over both the short and the long haul. Neither will find that path very easy to follow.

### **Canada and the United States Today**

Job One of the U.S. 2020 presidential election was the peaceful transfer of power to a different president from Donald Trump at the inauguration on January 20, 2021. Despite the attempted insurrection to prevent this transition two weeks earlier, on January 6, it did happen. Job two will be the deradicalization of the Republican Party — a large, long-term challenging task with no early resolution in sight. There can be no sustained and viable U.S. politics, and thus no safe world for anyone, until this transformation takes place. Job three will be for the administration of President Joseph Biden to launch a big policy agenda (on the scale of F.D. Roosevelt during the Depression and post—Second World War reconstruction) that helps Americans address their everyday individual and collective problems.

Job one for Canada is to act to protect itself, just as it did back in 1867, against what could now happen in the United States. Canada acted very big in 1867 and for the following 20 years. It will have to go very big again — but that is a huge subject for another occasion. Job two is to reverse the weak Canadian private-sector investment performance since the 2008/9 financial crisis. And job three is to strengthen national unity on the Alberta and the Indigenous fronts.

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Canada and the United States share two very big things: a continent and the longest undefended border in the world. But there are many important things they do not share that are fundamental to their futures and that they need to understand better about themselves and the other. Americans mostly like Canadians, but they are also too self-preoccupied with themselves to see what they could learn from Canada.

Nothing can be bigger than former president Trump, whom House Speaker Nancy Pelosi described as unhinged, deranged, and dangerous when he incited insurrection on the Capitol on January 6. Mitch McConnell, the former Senate majority leader, followed with the most powerful speech of his life as he coldly disavowed Trump's false claims about rampant election fraud. He quickly abandoned that stance, in striking confirmation of Republican divisiveness disarray. The siege that followed the attempted insurrection was the result of a catastrophic failure of intelligence around an effort to physically block Congress from certifying the 2020 presidential election results. This egregious act went far beyond Trump and his many Republican Congressional enablers: it was, in fact, more about the shaping forces in the United States from its beginnings. The only thing that could have been bigger that day would have been for the insurrection to have succeeded in reversing the outcome of the election. It was a very near thing for U.S. democracy.

The four chaotic years of the Trump presidency resulted not so much from unbalanced Republican leaders and voters as from fundamental deep divisions dating from the founding of the United States. A January 14, 2021, poll showed that Trump is no ephemeral phenomenon: 64 percent of Republican voters supported his behaviour in the lead-up to the siege on the Capitol, and 57 percent supported him for re-election in 2024. Potentially one-third of the country is still in reality denial — a dangerous spot as the country tries to move forward. The support for Trump has since been trending downwards but remains sizeable.

Americans now need to take a fresh look at themselves to better understand what has brought them to this serious place in their history. To begin, they should examine the forces that shaped the country from its creation, many of which led to deep division: the excessive belief in unrestrained individual freedom; an inadequate sense of limits; an unwillingness to support needed domestic collective action (such as today's reluctance to accept masks and social distancing); a history of Black slavery, segregation, and discrimination; and a reliance on force over persuasion, as in the American Revolution and the Civil War.

Since the Second World War, U.S. weakness has been shaped by two factors: the original sins of its creation; and the overreach of its post—Second World War global role, which led in turn to its underreach in addressing growing domestic social and economic problems, including inequality. The latter, more than Trump, is the prime cause of the January 6 insurrection. On this point we can all learn a lesson from George Kennan, the respected American diplomat who spent many years in Moscow after 1945. He predicted that Russia's takeover of Eastern Europe would lead to its declining ability to do what was needed for its internal political peace. He did not foresee, however, that this external overreach would result in a domestic policy underreach so massive that it led decades later to the collapse of the Soviet Union itself. Similarly, several decades of American post-war global leadership have resulted in the U.S. domestic underreach that helped to produce the Trump global disruption. The United States after 1945 learned global mutual accommodation to its own and the world's great advantage. Trump undermined that balance, and Biden is seeking to restore it and will need help from the rest of the West. Now the United States urgently needs to learn mutual accommodation at home.

In contrast to the U.S. experience, Canada was born to protect itself from the fallout dangers of a huge American conflagration 150 years ago — the American Civil War. Canada today finds itself again

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facing a different kind of U.S. conflagration in a very divided country and, moreover, in a vastly changed and deeply intertwined world. Canada, along with most countries, needs to be reborn and reshaped if it is to find a path through the current U.S. and other global dangers to a successful place in this emerging world. Simply put, survival depends on all countries accepting that mutual accommodation is the only safe way forward. This reset will be very difficult to achieve and will take a long time — possibly more time than there will be before the cost of failure becomes too great.

Fear and anger can be good goads to action, but they are almost always bad guides to action. As F.D. Roosevelt warned when he became president of the United States in the early days of the Great Depression, “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.” Unfortunately, since then, Americans too often have become more than fearful, sometimes to the point of paranoia. Joseph McCarthy and Donald Trump did not make Americans fearful or paranoid, but each exploited those feelings for their own destructive political purposes. Trump’s recent defeat is unlikely to reduce this fear or paranoia anytime soon — not until something deeply and positively transformational within the United States takes place. Above all, Americans need a better understanding of themselves — of the way their huge strengths can be used to overcome the deep structural flaws in the United States present from its beginning. This transformation will require acting very big again, as the country did during the Great Depression, the Second World War, and the post-war reconstruction. If the \$1.9 trillion COVID relief bill can be followed by a second big infrastructure bill, the two together may be large enough to bring the needed transformational change for everyday people on enough fronts to mark a U.S. start toward domestic mutual accommodation.

The United States combines at the same time both the best of people, politically, and the most dangerously ignorant voters. As one example, during a trip in Florida, my wife and I had an interesting discussion with our young taxi driver

(early thirties) on the way from Naples to Fort Myers. We thought he might be against abortion and gay marriages, but he was not. Like Trump voters who accept the stolen election story, however, he believed that the widespread private ownership of guns had saved the United States from invasion by the Japanese after Pearl Harbor!

President Biden’s election reduces the short-term dangers coming from the deeply disturbed underlying forces at work in the United States. The aspirations of his new administration are noble and necessary, but delivery will require it to successfully navigate a long and challenging path and to get some very big and transformational things done in a deeply divided country. Rhetoric is unlikely to bring the country together. Big changes in everyday lives are probably the only way forward.

It took four days after the election to see that American voters had made the most of what was electorally possible in November 2020. The most immediate election challenge was to remove Donald Trump from the White House. Electing Joe Biden president (albeit with one hand tied behind his back until the election of two Democratic senators in Georgia in early 2021) was the only positive result possible to achieve in a single election. It has made the world somewhat safer for the moment. The next challenge is to begin what could be a 25-year process to achieve two goals that could yet prove unattainable. First, to find out who Americans really are and who they can become. Can they be united, or will they always be what they have been since their beginning — deeply divided in several ways, especially in the black/white split. Second, to discover whether they can pivot to exercise their two main strengths — freedom and science — within the limits of mutual accommodation and compassion. Today’s leader on compassion is the Pope; on mutual accommodation, it is Canada.

The United States of the last 100 years is still needed, but it is no longer enough. Its strengths lack essential domestic structural balance and require more help from other countries. Despite its

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inflexible (either/or) societal and political structures, it is essential that the country move beyond them toward mutual accommodation. Both the United States and Canada became successful after the Great Depression and the Second World War because of what they did, not only to preserve the peace but to build their public and private sectors. The U.S. military was the immediate post-war source of key technology for the private sector. During the Reagan era and increasingly in the years since, however, the United States has been a country that spends, but increasingly fails to build. Unfortunately, since the end of the Mulroney/Chrétien era, Canada has followed suit. Today, Canada may be in a better position than the United States to use the public sector to help the private sector flourish. Two big building efforts are needed — to overcome COVID and, while there is still time, to get a greener economy on its way. A U.S. building initiative on the scale of what was achieved during the five decades after the Great Depression is likely the only way to reduce divisions in that country on a sufficient scale to make domestic mutual accommodation possible.

The Biden election reduces some of the immediate dangers in the world, but one election alone cannot resolve who Americans are or the needed path forward — something that has too often eluded them in the past in very high-cost ways. However, the election provides a reasonable basis (but no assurance) for hope that what is essential will over time be done. To begin, major U.S. political and socio-cultural change is necessary, though it can likely be achieved only within the limits of the United States as a centre and centre-right country. This transformation is likely to take at least 20 years, maybe longer. Maybe it will never happen — the country's original sins may be beyond overcoming. It took Canada, for example, more than 40 years to get through the Quebec separatism crisis; earlier, it took 20 years to become a new, coast-to-coast country. Great challenges take long times to meet.

Looking ahead, Canada must expect turbulence

from all sides — nature (climate change and the pandemic); ongoing global economic and geopolitical instability and disruption; and a United States undergoing turbulent and divisive internal change as it seeks to pivot to more domestic mutual accommodation (if it indeed ever does). A successful future depends on the world's leading nations achieving a better structural balance among freedom, science, and mutual accommodation. Only one major country — Canada — has all three. Most of the Western world has freedom and science; the United States is back again on external mutual accommodation, but has never lastingly achieved domestic mutual accommodation; and, as noted earlier, China has only science, while Russia has none of them at all on an adequate scale.

The United States was formed by force and preserved by force. Canada was formed by words (persuasion) and building a railway. But it has since fallen short in substantial ways that it is now seriously addressing. Canada made one big early post-Confederation mistake when it formed an all-English-speaking federal government in 1917 to force conscription on an unwilling French-Canadian population. As a result, the ruling party at the time — the Conservatives — held office only one out of every four years for the next 100 years. The country learned its lesson. The early settlers in what is now Canada also made a big mistake after 1608 in their relationship with the Indigenous people. They did so despite the visionary equality perspective of the great soldier, politician, and explorer Samuel de Champlain, who founded the first settlement in Quebec. Canada is now, belatedly, on the long, hard path to rectifying this profound mistake through “truth and reconciliation.” Later, it made its other and deeper mistake — what former Chief Justice Beverley McLoughlin referred to Canada's treatment of its aboriginal people as a “cultural genocide” that began in the colonial period.

Canadians have always been more accepting of limits than Americans, who seek to override them regardless — one of their national traits they like most about themselves. Americans believe far more

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in freedom and individual rights than in collective action. The United States started with slavery, moved on to segregation, and continues in widespread discrimination against the Black population. That history has resulted in dangerous division. Canadians, in contrast, typically seek to overcome limits creatively. Canada's drive is more toward flexibility and mutual accommodation. Canada is better off on all these fronts than the United States.

Great countries need the right leaders and the right followers at the same time. Canada has mostly had both when they were needed. The United States has perhaps been less fortunate, but has had both at the same time often enough to allow it to become the great country it undoubtedly became after 1945. The United States has frequently lacked mutual accommodation skills at home, but its global leadership after 1945, primarily in the Western world, was a huge mutual accommodation achievement without historic precedent. Alarming-ly, the country has not well understood this success or its value. This disregard made it easy for Trump to abandon it.

Mutual accommodation is about co-operation, compromise, and inclusion. It is a big idea, equal to freedom, science, and compassion. The postwar global economic order led by the United States was one of the greatest historic achievements of mutual accommodation. It is now at risk from the centrifugal forces within and without that have led to populism in many Western countries. Today, to many nations and people, Canada is seen as a model country driven by increasingly successful mutual accommodation. It's still far from perfect, but better than most other nations most of the time. Erik Erikson, a German-born American psychotherapist, said that being an adult is to assert oneself in ways that enhance the ability of others to assert themselves. This "adulthood" is the biggest and hardest form of mutual accommodation.

In my book *Might Nature Be Canadian?* (2020), I explore the theme of mutual accommodation with a focus on the successes and failures of the

Canadian experience so far\*. Canada has a drive toward mutual accommodation. The United States, in contrast, has a strong drive toward division. There has always been a deep divergence of thinking and acting between the two countries. The United States appears to view the world as a never-ending struggle between good and evil — a deeply either/or world — and this divergence has only strengthened since early 2000. Canada leans toward the idea that there is an underlying order at the heart of things — both/and as well as either/or.

Canada has always faced its strong limits — U.S. pressures, a challenging geography, and French/English language and Catholic/Protestant differences within its own borders — by creatively containing or overcoming them. The United States, however, sees itself as a country with virtually no limits. Throughout its history, Canada's drive toward mutual accommodation, stronger than in most other countries, has allowed its increasingly diverse citizens to live together peacefully and successfully for the most part, even as they retain their own culture, language, and religion. Nature can be described as simultaneously either/or and both/and, and so, increasingly, can Canada. Is there something fundamentally Canadian about this inclination? Is this the usable history (still in short global supply) that the world needs to be tolerable in the future?

The British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said that "civilization is the triumph of persuasion over force." My book argues that the rapid spread of mutual accommodation is central to our achieving a bearable world for everyone — even for China and Russia. The biggest question facing the world is whether the United States is able to pivot to more mutual accommodation at home before it is too late. That is what the new emerging world demands — and sooner rather than later. The world cannot afford another repeat of the bad era / good era cycle — the Western pattern since the bad Napoleon era ended in 1815.

The dangerous conspiracy theory of the stolen election at the end of the Trump presidency will not

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go away anytime soon. It will further damage the already low mutual trust within a deeply divided America and threaten the U.S. pivot to much-needed mutual accommodation at home. Without doubt, this domestic U.S. divisiveness is the most perilous reality the world faces today. The United States, the only country so far capable of leading a peaceful and prosperous world, faces renewed potential domestic political turmoil on the scale of the Civil War. The rest of the world may have to do what Canada did in 1867 — reshape itself in order to live successfully with a badly disturbed United States.

Democracy is above all about the peaceful transfer of power. This transfer has now taken place after the defeat of the January 6, 2021, attempted insurrection. It was a near thing. But the United States still faces the risk of a metastasizing cancer of distrust and division stirred up by Trump's claim that President Biden stole the election from him. Can a deeply divided country in post-Trump political turmoil move on?

Despite these fears, we should not forget two huge positives that emerged from the 2020 U.S. elections: record numbers of people voted in a fair and peaceful way; and the winning Democrats have been restrained on a limited Congressional leash. Regardless of the unprecedented post-election lies and pressures exerted by the defeated President Trump, the courts and judges and the public election officials (many of whom were Republicans or Trump appointments) mostly held their ground — more than did the elected Congressional Republicans.

Biden's immediate tasks are twofold. First, to calm the country and give it reasons to hope. Healing can come later. The original sins of its founding will take a long time for Americans to overcome and move beyond. Most Americans are likely still largely pragmatic, but too many are not. So making the country work again, alongside calming it (a difficult task in the midst of its multiple current challenges) is job one. Second, Biden and the country must start a slow but steady pivot away from their deep internal divisions toward

mutual accommodation at home — an even bigger challenge, possibly, than doing so abroad. The United States must commence this process, even as it is challenged with overcoming a resurgent COVID-19 that threatens an early and sustained economic recovery.

Canadians and their leaders need to do today what their forebears have slowly but increasingly done since Canada was formed in 1867: strengthen national unity; build competitive private-sector strength; and push for social advances based on fairness to every kind of good people. Canadians need to start thinking about and discussing what they must do now to make sure that Canada will survive and prosper, no matter how badly things unfold in the United States. The rest of the world would be wise to do the same.

Joe Biden, since the election, has been doing as well as possible on minimizing domestic divisions, given the long history of the U.S. drive toward divisiveness. In the world at large, it is not yet clear what role the United States will play. The post-1945 world, led by the United States, brought increasing mutual accommodation with other countries — even for a while with Russia and China — but that era is over. The rest of the world needs to pick up its share of global mutual accommodation. The West has more to do but cannot do it all. Biden is the right U.S. leader for this task, but, even as he begins the work ahead at home, he will have to be more demanding of U.S. allies and less accommodating of others.

Canada has shown that mutual accommodation can be done. In the Canada created in 1867, the French did not much like the English (and vice versa), and the Catholics did not much like the Protestants (and vice versa). Yet within 30 years of Confederation, the country elected a French Catholic prime minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Canada's story makes one very important point — that big things take time, but they can be done.

Canada's political outlook and structure work better at delivering what most Canadians want over time than happens in the United States. Sometimes

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quickly, sometimes more slowly, Canada's politics mostly deliver what most of the public wants over time. The Orlando nightclub massacre in June 2016 is but one reason to be grateful for Canada's political system and way of doing politics. A majority of Americans want assault weapons banned, and 85 percent want stronger background checks, but their current political system cannot deliver. In Canada, when a government gets a policy wrong — the National Energy Program, for example, or the long-form census — a change of government allows for swift remedying. Not so in the United States.

The U.S. political system was seriously tested and undermined by Trump, but it has held so far, first with its career public servants and the courts, and then with voters in the recent November election. One major task remains: Americans must overcome the Trump stranglehold on the Republican Party — even if that means its break-up. The Trump years ended with some 80 percent of Republican voters detached from the reality that Trump lost the 2020 election fairly and squarely. It is extremely difficult to run a successful democracy if a sizeable number of voters are detached from the real world. Now that Biden has been inaugurated as the president of the United States, Trump's fantasy alternative universe has partially collapsed. Trump is now the “loser” he so often sneered at in his tweets and speeches. How long will it take his base to understand and act on this reality? The future of Canada and the world depends on the answer. It is unlikely to come soon.

Despite the stresses of the now ended four-year-long Trump presidency, the United States remains a land of change and the rule of law. The same is true in Canada. The primary difference between the two countries is that the more “either/or” nature of the United States brings more extremes and lost unity. Change is more tumultuous and violent there than in Canada. Trump leaves office with ongoing domestic terrorist threats and a deeply divided country. The current U.S. disunity can only be addressed effectively after the domestic violence threats subside — and that is not an easy task,

given that one poll showed that 45 percent of Republican voters approved of the storming of the Capitol. Rhetoric will not be enough to heal — perhaps the answer lies in Americans building big new shared things together.

Bill Hessler, a former foreign affairs editor of the *Cincinnati Inquirer*, visited me a few times between 1957 and 1963. He was writing about Canada and its federal politics while John Diefenbaker's minority governments were in office. He gave me one important insight about the differences between Canada and the United States: “Americans have to shout to be heard; Canadians do not have to.” Celebrity is a form of shouting. Self-serving shouting was the only way forward that Trump knew. Biden is not a shouter, but that will not be enough. Americans must learn to do mutual accommodation at home, as they did internationally before Trump. The kind of world our children and their children have will primarily depend on whether Americans can see this truth and accomplish it.

Canada, the United States, and the rest of the Western world need to move forward in two areas to get discussions about mutual accommodation going in all their countries. First, in the media, the *Globe and Mail* began it for Canada when its editor-in-chief allowed me space between 2015 and 2018 for 30 essays and four op-eds on that theme (since updated and included in my book *Might Nature Be Canadian? Essays on Mutual Accommodation*). The main print media in the United States, Britain, France, Germany, and Japan need to do some version of the same. Second, a Canada-based group of universities needs to be funded (at a total cost of \$20—\$25 million) to launch mutual accommodation study centres: at Trinity College (Canada) and the Munk Centre (global) in the University of Toronto; Trent University (Indigenous relations); and McGill University (French / English relations); in addition, at University of Cambridge and Harvard University (Whitehead's universities); and at least two predominantly Black African universities yet to be chosen.

No country has ever faced the high number of

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simultaneous enormous challenges as the United States does today — global pandemic, recovering from a deep economic downturn, Black Lives Matter racism, a deepening divide between rich and poor, a growing southern-border immigration crisis, an increasing number of mass urban shootings, and threatening climate change, all amid the greatest U.S. political turmoil since the Civil War. To better understand how great these combined challenges are, compare them with three previous big challenges — the 1930s global Depression, the Second World War, and post-war recovery. These challenges all came one decade at a time — not seven in one year.

The miracle of mutual accommodation is that it is by definition custom made — win-win and both/and. Making room for others does not force you to be someone you are not but strengthens who you are. The Renaissance brought freedom and science to what became the Western world. The world needs a new version that adds mutual accommodation to the world's freedom and science strengths. This cannot happen in any bearable way unless the United States takes the first big domestic mutual accommodation pivot. Nothing else in the world is even close in importance for a long-term positive future.

The United States was properly worried about Japan's post-war economic rise at the end of the last century. I discussed this concern at that time with Graham Allison, then the dean of the Kennedy School at Harvard. I told him not to worry: he should look outside his office at the endless group meetings on every imaginable subject posted on the notice boards. I said no country could match the United States in the sheer number of sources initiating action — action that soon enabled the country to surpass Japan. The U.S. is always at its best when it is losing ground and has no choice but to compete. We must never forget one thing about the United States: whatever you see in any week or any year anywhere is never fully the United States. Even Americans can never fully see the whole of their own country at any one time or place. There is simply too much going on in their vast and open

society. If all goes well, the United States will, two decades on, likely be able to surpass China in a similar way, but only so long as it can manage a deeply and structurally flawed election system within the original sins of its creation.

There is no doubt the United States is one of the great countries of all history. There is also no doubt that its underlying shortfalls, revealed in the Trump years, could yet bring the noble experiment of the United States to an end. It could yet break up, just as it nearly did once before with the Civil War — and as Canada nearly did during its 40-year struggle over Quebec separatism (1970—2011). Canada's threat came from geography — the break-away of any one province from Quebec to British Columbia would end the coast-to-coast country.

The last time the United States faced break-up came from a blend of geography and slavery. Next time, if there is a new threat, it will likely be a blend of geography and patriarchy. This could happen because of a profound structural political flaw in the U.S. Constitution. A majority of today's members of the U.S. Supreme Court was appointed by senators representing little more than a third of the U.S. population. It is hard to believe that the U.S. population as a whole would in these circumstances accept a Supreme Court anti-abortion decision.

An anti-abortion Court decision in Canada could not prevail thanks to the “notwithstanding” clause forced by the four western provinces at the time of the patriation of Canada's Constitution from the United Kingdom to Canada. The United States has the flaws of its unrepresentative electoral system and the original political sins of its formation. It has a lot to reflect on in order to find a way through to a more stable place. As a recent insightful *Globe and Mail* editorial put it, Trump was not the primary cause of the last four years, but a symptom of what could yet bring the great American experiment to an end.

The United States has been looming as a growing challenge to the global order since the early 1990s, when I spoke about that theme in Tokyo. Here is what I said at the Hotel Okura executive

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luncheon meeting in January 1993. “By far the most important single thing never to forget about the United States is that it is almost impossible to overestimate the lack of collective foresight of Americans. But it is also almost impossible to overestimate the power Americans can bring to bear on an issue when they at last conclude they must do so. Finally, Canadians have lived side by side with Americans for the past 125 years through the good days and the bad days. We have learned one thing in dealing with the United States. You must, and with patience and firmness you can, find a position somewhere between handing them the keys and Pearl Harbor.” The United States must now find a way to make its people think more thoughtfully about their lives together amid a rapidly changing global world. Its continuing greatness is not guaranteed. It remains a noble experiment that may yet fail.

Biden, during his first 100 days in office, told the world that “America is back.” If only that could be true! Most of those closest to Biden want it to be, but the old, pre-Trump United States can never return because a new world requires a new United States. The United States itself also needs a nation that is different. It must now pay more attention to its domestic challenges — and for that it needs mutual accommodation skills. It also needs allies who lean less on it, and on a China that leans less on the rest of the world. The U.S. middle class can no longer be leaned on as much to keep the global economy going and the Western world safe.

The post-1945 U.S.-led era was based on a post-war consensus that emerged from the 40 years of the hell caused by the two world wars, the global Depression, the Holocaust, and a Europe that almost committed suicide. The post-2020 world needs a similar consensus, but without having to get it through an accumulation of a similar high-cost failures. This huge subject requires another discussion and cannot be covered here.

Canada at any given moment is shaped partly in response to what is happening in the United States. But the total forces that have shaped Canada —

societal, economic, and geography — have produced more both/and responses, while those in the United States have produced more either/or. The United States has always been overwhelmed by the views of individual voices. It has not yet found how to sustainably contain those unbridled individual voices within the necessary limits of mutual accommodation.

There is one place where the U.S. does that successfully — in Black-inspired jazz. Unbridled individual soloists are contained within the framework of the rest of the band — soloists become band members and band members become soloists. Several decades ago, the New Yorker jazz critic Whitney Balliett described jazz as “the sound of surprise.” America, like jazz, is also the sound of surprise. Moreover, jazz is the sound of freedom (the essence of America) — of an unbridled individual freedom founded within the Black jazz framework of co-operation that America is yet to be but must become. The music of jazz needs to become the music of American society itself if it is to be a bearable country and if the world is to be bearable. Black people were initially enslaved, then segregated, and many are still discriminated against. This horrific journey has produced the distinctive American jazz music that shows its society the way forward that can include unbridled individualism contained within a consensus framework.

Understanding oneself is very important. The United States would never have allowed Trump to walk away from global leadership if enough of its voters had understood the benefits the country got from it. Canadian voters need to continue to understand how they have managed the intertwined demands of national unity, the private-sector economy, and Canada’s relations with the United States, so Canada can stay on its long path to a better way forward. The American Revolution abruptly created an “alone” United States, separated from the northern half of its continent. Quebec remained connected and supported by France from its beginning until France lost it to England in

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1759. The rest of Canada was connected initially to Great Britain, but slowly, over eight decades, it shifted over and became protected by the United States — especially between 1945 and 2000. Since then, Canada has been increasingly more alone in the world. This isolation requires it now to find new ways of protecting itself in what is becoming a more and more dangerous world for smaller countries on their own.

The United States, 150 years ago, was in the throes of a brutal Civil War. Today, it has just merged from “a near-thing” in preserving its democracy. Canada, over the same period, with some stumbles and an existential national unity threat, has steadily expanded its mutual accommodation performance. In 2021, each nation is a different kind of great country. Each one needs the other — and also needs to understand itself and the other better. The post-Trump challenge is for the United States to get its domestic challenges onto a better long-term and ever more inclusive path forward.

I started in the 1950s what became a life-long journey to explore the comparisons between the United States and Canada. I found *The American Adam* (1955), by the literary critic R.W.B. Lewis, full of challenging ideas. In 19th-century America, the great argument focused on the idea of the “new man” — the American, an innocent Adam in a bright new world dissociating itself from the historic past. Mr. Lewis reveals this vital preoccupation as a pervasive, transforming ingredient of the American mind, illuminating history and theology as well as art, shaping the consciousness of both the lesser thinkers as fully as it shaped the giants of the age. The new Adam no longer fits the post-1945 or the post-Trump world. Just as the United States needed *The American Adam* to replace the Europe it had just left, it now needs a different American Adam for a different world that is replacing the “American Century.” However, no country at present is able to replace the United States. Rather, it has to replace itself one more time, as it did after 1945.

The above discussion comes from two places: one professional, the other personal. First, from my understanding of Canada’s ongoing regional unity challenges, derived from having direct experience of Quebec, where I lived my first 20 years; Ontario, whose government I served for many years in fighting tax reform, seizing financially vulnerable trust companies, and making a major Ontario public investment in the oil sands to keep the industry alive; and Alberta, after 22 years on the Imperial Oil board (the largest Canadian oil company and largest Canadian non-financial company); as well as from helping companies with serious resources challenges in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland. Second, from my own life, which can only be described as “blessed”: by loving relationships first with my parents, then for over 60 years with my late wife, Molly Anne, and with our children, their spouses, and our grandchildren; by my residence in Canada, first in Montreal and then in Toronto; and by the modesty of the Methodist-like churches we have always attended. These blessings pervade the thinking underlying this paper and my book; each would be very different without them.

Dottie Rambo, the late American gospel singer/songwriter, captured in one of her greatest songs where Canada and the United States will likely find themselves for the next 20 years: “Too much to gain to lose.” Almost every country must start to get this message urgently. Most major countries have enough of what they need to do what is minimally required. If they fail, the result in national and global tragedies will potentially be bigger than ever before in our human history.

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*Extract from Paul Volcker's talk  
at University of Toronto, May 2015*

**O**ver a span of 75 years or so, from childhood vacations through years of official relationships and intellectual debate, I can reasonably claim acquaintance with Canada. One thing I know is that our countries are quite different in size, in geopolitical aspirations, and in some cultural instincts. I also know that the idea instilled in my youth of a unique and constructive American role “in the larger world underlay all my education and years in public service.

Now, I regret to say, internal divisiveness, angry ideological differences, huge and growing disparities in wealth, and more visibly eroding infrastructure are undercutting our presumption of a society to be emulated — what has been termed our “soft power.”

For all our vaunted capacity for innovation, the outlook for strong economic growth and financial order has come into question. We spend enormous amounts on the military and on intelligence, but it's really hard to know how to bring those resources constructively to bear.

I confess, I look toward Canada with a certain envy these days. Take my own specialty. As you know, I have had for decades a certain responsibility for, and a continuing interest in, American financial performance and regulatory policies. Unfortunately, the truth is that our vaunted system let us down badly, to the point a few years ago of requiring massive public support to fend off deep-seated recession.

From my observation, the Canadian financial world seems to have weathered the international financial crisis with relative equanimity. That hasn't gone unnoticed — the very idea of a Canadian central banker [Mark Carney] being invited to take over the Bank of England, the storied mother of all central banks, is eloquent evidence of recognition and respect.

[William A. Macdonald], a good Canadian friend of mine (I still have some despite hearing complaints up here about the so-called Volcker Rule), makes a point of extolling what he sees as the essential point of Canadian history and its

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*governance. He calls it a capacity for “mutual accommodation.”*

*Those are not exactly thrilling words, stirring the blood, inspiring fervent patriotic hymns or hailing military victories. Canada hasn't found it necessary to fight a war of independence or a civil war. When tensions arose, your leaders didn't need to claim manifest destiny or foster delusions that the American way of life was, somehow, not only pre-eminent but a model for the world. For you, the vast expanse of Canada has been challenge enough.*

*The point is that what has happened here is truly remarkable and has lessons for others. The Canadian nation, built out of different national instincts and cultural traditions, whether Indigenous or from abroad, has in the end held together. The narrow band of population stretched over 3,000 miles of difficult landscape no longer seems so subject to centrifugal forces. Remarkably, a large influx of immigrants has not only been absorbed but seems to have added life and vitality. My own observation is that this city of Toronto has itself become a true international city, in more than size, with all the cultural variety, energy, and outlook that implies.*

*I didn't come here simply to praise you. I'm not about to give up my American citizenship. I don't doubt the inherent vigour and potential of either the American economy or our constitutional system. I don't see any alternative capacity to provide a needed element of constructive leadership in a troubled world. But I am also very aware the world of 2015 is not the world in which I grew up, a world in which the capacity of the great democracies to work together with American leadership in a common cause seemed to be well understood.*

*Today we need some of the Canadian genius of mutual accommodation, of a shared order. The ability of North America — Mexico included — to work together in the common interest has been well demonstrated. Can we not, for instance, extend that degree of harmony and stretch it*

*across the Pacific? Can we reason together to deal with the common concerns about climate change? And at the same time, can we work together to make sure that a radicalized Middle East does not become a destructive force economically or politically?*

*I stand here before a large Faculty of Law. These days, eight centuries after signing the Magna Carta, we are reminded that it is indeed dedication to the Rule of Law that provides the basis for strong and open democratic societies. And the Law School is joined here by the much newer Munk School of Global Affairs. Its presence is a simple recognition of the fact that, these days, lasting success must be global success.*

*Welcome to the challenge, you Law School graduates. We need your energy, your professional commitment, and that good sense of “mutual accommodation.”*

*I add only one bit of special pleading. Some of you graduating here today, I feel certain, are from the United States. Come home! We need your perspective, we need your commitment, we need some of that sense of accommodation that has marked Canadian life.*

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