

CANADA — U.S.A. UNION TERMED ESCAPISM UNB INDIA ASSOCIATION FILM SHOW

Question: "Do you believe that it is inevitable that Canada and the U.S.A. join politically?"

Reply: By Thomas J. Condon, Assistant Professor of History, U.N.B.

Historians find it difficult to deal with the word "inevitable." Absorbed in fashioning explanations or why a particular event took place at a particular point in time, a word such as "inevitable" is likely to sound like an oversimplification if not a profanity. Prognostication falls into the same category and tends to evoke a reaction of inward bristling. My answer to your question, therefore, may well be tinged by an historian's way of viewing things. I personally see scant likelihood of the United States and Canada joining together in any kind of formal political union. There is hardly anything in the Canadian or American past to suggest the existence of a strong undercurrent running in such a direction. One can only assume that this question is related to the present sense of frustration which Canada is experiencing in forging a proper role for itself in the face of shifting and uncertain world trade patterns.

It strikes me that the question you have posed is far more widely discussed here in Canada than it is in the United States. The frequent — and quite correct — Canadian criticism of American indifference towards and unawareness of Canada and things Canadian may partially explain this disparity. Certainly there is little in the popular press in the United States on this question and

less by way of public discussion or debate. And I would find it difficult even to imagine that there are many Americans sitting idly around, gleefully rubbing their hands together, waiting for just the right moment to pounce upon their unsuspecting good neighbor to the north.

There is little to suggest that the United States would encourage or even welcome a political merger of the two countries. Indeed, there is far more in the history of the last century and a half to suggest quite the contrary — that the United States is in no way opposed to the existence of a strong friendly neighbor, independent and democratic on its northern border.

To explain the current interest on this side of the border in the question of North American political union is a more complex task. Explanations couched in terms of Canada's present economic problems can only go so far. Much more involved, as I see it, is something that can be called a deep-seated Canadian *malaise*. By this I mean the existence of a general attitude which has tended to prefer the splendid contemplation of the possibilities of Canada to a wrestling with the realities of Canada's past and present. The mere formulation of the question of affiliation with the United States is an illustration of what I mean. It represents an escape mechanism at play here — preoccupation with contemplating the future, the what-might-be, instead of a coming to terms with past and present.

As a result of their history, Canadians have had a great many possibilities to contemplate. Looking successively to France,

Great Britain, and the United States, Canada has been overwhelmed by a plethora of possibilities, of models on which to base its own institutions and on which to shape a distinctive national identity. Tempting, too, for contemplation have been such ideal abstractions as Commonwealth, Biculturalism, and Confederation. These abstractions have invariably been seen not as realities in the making but as possibilities in becoming.

In a sense the bill of fare has been too tempting and too rich, and Canada has leaned now towards one model and now towards another. Accepting all influences but committed to no single one, Canada has developed a love-hate ambivalence towards each of the models individually. Accompanying this has been a sharply mounting sense of apprehension that the opportunity for creating a truly distinctive national identity may have been lost somewhere along the byways of history.

To be sure all of these models have influenced the development of Canada. And yet Canada is not simply one of these models "writ small," nor even the sum of them. Canada is something else. It is not a new France in America. Nor is Canada a British America. But far too often explanations of what Canada is have been fashioned in terms of the degree to which Canada has approached or departed from any given model. Writers have tended to dwell overlong on the influences to which Canada has by its history been subjected and not long enough on the way in which the people and geography of Canada have combined and transferred with great subtlety these imported influences.

It has somehow seemed easier for writers to deplore the peculiar historical and geographical circumstances that have forced Canada to look south and east than to probe intensely into the

Under the auspices of the India Association there will be a film show on Friday, March the 1st in the Tartan Room, at 7:30 p.m. The following films will be shown:

1. "Vadya Vrind" or Feast of Musical Instruments. This film was made in response to a request from the British Broadcasting Corporation for Television. Intended as an introduction to Indian music for a non-Indian audience, the role of the major instruments comprising the orchestra — violins, sarangi, sarod, mantra bahar, veena, flutes, and the percussion instruments—tabla, mridangam, manjira, jalatarang, and the tanpura is explained fully.

2. "Himalayan Tapestry": Brings out the scenic grandeur of the picturesque Kashmir Valley, and the handicrafts of the people which in beauty of artistic conception and execution vie with the best traditions of the world.

3. "A Village in Travancore": Pictures the life of a family in a village in the southern end of India. Their work and their beliefs, their joys and sorrows, the intensity and restraint of their love—are vividly presented.

4. The Fable of the Peacock: Shows the surpassing beauty of the Peacock-dance. The peacock dances to captivate its mate. This sight will make your hearts dance with the peacock. Girls who are easily susceptible to the charms of the male should not see this film.

Remember, you are cordially invited whether you are a member of the India Association or not. Be sure to come—you will enjoy the evening. So come to—

THE TARTAN ROOM at
7:30 p.m. on
FRIDAY, MARCH 1st.

nature of its own history — its North American history. Like the United States, Canada really has two histories. One is the history of a colonial relationship, its connection with Great Britain or France. The other is the history of Canada's development as a new nation in the community of nations. Far too much has been written of the former to the real neglect of the latter.

Much has been written, for example, in an attempt to demonstrate that in the constitutional crisis of 1776 within the empire that the Loyalist position of Canada was right and the independent position of the United States was wrong. And yet for all the ink which has been spilled over this, it remains essentially an unreal question. There is no right way to national self-determination. Each nation must find its own way and pay its own price. And yet in belaboring this question and others, study has been deflected away from the far more pertinent questions about the actual institutional development of Canada.

Thus despite the many excellent histories of Canada that have been written, the single, most perplexing question still remains of what is Canada? The unsatisfactory nature of the answers thus far given is amply

attested by the intensity with which the present generation of writers and students is pursuing this question. As I see it, the answer cannot be found in chasing after such unreal questions as whether Canada should annex itself to the United States or whether the United States would accept Canada if it did. This is escapism. Rather will the answer be found by tackling with intellectual vigor and candor a critical self-analysis to determine how the many influences which have impinged upon Canada have been distilled into something called Canadian.

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