

NORTH AMERICA'S PLACE IN THE WORLD OF TODAY

An address by the Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. Louis S. St. Laurent, to the Economic Club of New York, on November 19, 1951.

... I chose the subject, "North America's Place in the World of Today", full well knowing that many of you members would be more competent to treat it than I might be; but I did so because, being a Canadian, I necessarily look at it from a somewhat different point of view, and I thought that a view of North America's place in the world of today from the Canadian angle might help to make the position clearer from your point of view here in the United States.

It is, of course, only the blind ones among us in North America today who do not realize we are directly concerned about what is happening in the rest of the world. It is always true, in some degree, that North America is concerned with what is happening in the rest of the world, just as it has always been true—since Columbus' time—that North Americans have been affected by the really important changes in the world outside this hemisphere. But it seems to me that the degree of concern has changed.

Before 1914, most North Americans, whether they lived in the United States or whether they lived in Canada, did not feel the need of paying much attention to what was happening across the Atlantic or on the other side of the Pacific. And we had little sense of responsibility for international affairs outside this hemisphere. For that, there were historical as well as geographical reasons.

In the 18th century, when the thirteen English colonies on the Atlantic seaboard cut their political ties with England and established the United States, this nation practically turned its back on Europe and faced westward across an almost empty continent. The vast energies of the early settlers in this country, and of the thousands and thousands who later joined them, were concentrated on the development of a free and expanding society in North America. All you asked from Europe was to be left alone—to be left in peace—to live your lives in your own way—in what is has become the fashion to call "the American way".

In Canada, our development was somewhat different. At the time of your War of Independence, the Canadian population was still almost exclusively French-speaking. The St. Lawrence valley had been ceded to the British Crown only a dozen years before, and the leaders of your revolution expected to find ready support among the French-speaking Canadians for their revolt against the English. There were several reasons why they did not get that support. One was that the traditional enemy of the average French-speaking Canadian of the 18th century was not the remote English nation across the Atlantic, but the English-speaking people of Boston and New England, the English-speaking people of Albany and the Hudson valley, with whom they had been trading scalps for a century and a half.

In any event, Canada did not join in your revolution, and we Canadians retained our connection with the British Crown, and hundreds of refugees from your War of Independence moved northwards to lay the foundations of English-speaking Canada. In Canada, these immigrants were called Loyalists, and though they were loyal, they were determined to maintain the political connection of their new home with old England, most of them were also determined to manage their own affairs.

The political freedom you achieved by the sudden stroke of revolution, we achieved more slowly, more gradually, but we did achieve it by evolution. Without breaking our tie with the British Crown, we transformed a disunited group of small colonies into a single nation, stretching, like yours, from one sea to another, and I venture to say, just as free as the United States. But our continuing political tie with