



BOOKS

A Brace of Canadians

The Unfinished Canadian: The People We Are

Andrew Cohen, McClelland & Stewart Ltd, Toronto, 2007, \$22.95, hardcover, 270 pages.

Canadians: A Portrait of a Country and Its People

Roy MacGregor, Viking, 2007, \$35.00, hardcover, 344 pages.

REVIEWED BY DAVID T. JONES

Perhaps mindful of the quip that the classic definition of a boring headline is “Worthy Canadian Initiative,” many Americans are willing to do anything for Canada except learn about it. Fortunately, *The Unfinished Canadian: The People We Are* and *Canadians: A Portrait of a Country and Its People* are both distinctly readable volumes, possibly reflecting the fact that the authors are journalists rather than academics, with the reporter’s eye for detail. Both are primarily designed as vehicles for Canadians to talk about themselves, but they offer us an opportunity to “listen in” to what is driving (and bothering) our close allies and economic partners.

Roy MacGregor’s *Canadians* is the more optimistic of the pair. He follows a path blazed by an iconic Canadian political observer, Bruce Hutchinson, in his *The Unknown Country* (1942). MacGregor takes the reader across the country province by province, as he rides former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s fun-

eral train into history, recounts the funeral ceremonies of Maurice “Rocket” Richard as the backdrop for the Canada-hockey nexus, extols forgotten heroes such as World War I combat ace Will Barker, and travels through the empty north to meet native “First Nation” Canadians.

On a lighter note, he recites a list of Canadian inventions ranging from caulking guns to the Wonderbra, including the creation of highway center lines. Perhaps that last development was necessary to provide an answer to the question, “Why does a Canadian cross the road?” Answer: “To get to the middle.” But, essentially, MacGregor views Canada as a “bumblebee”: no observer can understand how it flies, but it does — and will continue to do so.

Cohen is less sanguine and more barbed, with no signs of mellowing since his previous book, *While Canada Slept: How We Lost Our Place in the World* (2004), created a major fuss among his countrymen. Rather than employing the classic travelogue to show us his country, he constructs a variety of prototypes that collectively make up his *Unfinished Canadian*. These include the “Hybrid Canadian,” a mixture of input from England, France and the United States and the “Observed Canadian,” via whom Cohen sorts through musings by a variety of outsiders who have written about Canada.

In his discussion of the “Unconscious Canadian,” he cites a popular TV program that surveyed viewers to identify the nation’s greatest citizen to demonstrate Canadians’ woeful igno-

rance of their history.

The chapter on the “American Canadian,” exploring ritualized anti-Americanism, will probably be of most interest to U.S. readers. The author suggests that politicians’ disrespect for their southern neighbors constitutes “pandering to the lesser instincts of an insecure people.” Ultimately, Canadians remain happy to accept the U.S. security “subsidy” that permits them to spend expansively on social programs while scolding Washington for fiscal irresponsibility.

Yet instead of his compatriots’ diverging from Americans (as argued by one recent sociopolitical text, Michael Adams’ *Fire and Ice*), Cohen believes there is actually increasing *convergence* in economic attitudes, political practices and lifestyles, though Canada is moving more rapidly toward the U.S. than vice versa.

Cohen has already generated considerable media angst back home with his caricature of the “Capital Canadian.” In that chapter, he trashes Ottawa as a national capital that makes the least of its opportunities, filled with uneventful architecture, poor urban planning and cuisine that is “unflavored and unfavored.” But to be fair, John F. Kennedy memorably pilloried Washington, D.C., as a city “with Southern efficiency and Northern charm.” So one might reasonably conclude that there is hope for Canada’s capital, as well.

Neither volume examines the Quebec/national unity conundrum. Such timidity is regrettable but hardly surprising, for it is the rare English-speaker who can deal with Franco-



phone Canada in other than platitudes. For sophisticated analysis of the evolving relationship between that province and the rest of the country, try Chantal Heber's *French Kiss* (Alfred Knopf, Canada, 2007).

That said, Americans seeking a better understanding of their northern neighbors — and how they see themselves — will find a good deal of wisdom in these books.

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The Way Forward

Iraq: Preventing a New Generation of Conflict

Edited by Markus E. Bouillon, David M. Malone, and Ben Rowsell; Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007, \$25.00, paperback, 349 pages.

REVIEWED BY KEITH W. MINES

There is no shortage of books on what went wrong in Iraq. They bear evocative titles like *Fiasco*, *The End of Iraq*, *Squandered Victory* and *Losing Iraq* and lay out essentially the same story: too few troops, spotty planning and needlessly aggressive de-Ba'athification led to the growth of a Sunni insurgency, which morphed into full-blown civil war as the disenfranchised Sunnis came to associate Iraq's new Shi'ite and Kurdish rulers with the occupiers. What they don't tell us, with a few exceptions, is what to do now. So it is refreshing to

have this short volume, focused primarily on the future and on what it will take to stabilize Iraq and "prevent a new generation of conflict."

Iraq: Preventing a New Generation of Conflict stems from a conference co-sponsored by the Canadian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Peace Academy in May 2006. One of the editors is a senior policymaker and accomplished author; another served as Canada's first representative in post-Hussein Iraq; and the third is head of the Middle East Division at the International Peace Academy. In addition to extremely strong analytical skills and long experience with peacemaking and nationbuilding, the three share a studied neutrality.

The book's 17 contributors are equally impressive, having been carefully selected for their longstanding, deep understanding of Iraq. Many of them provide much-needed perspective by citing the 20-plus years of conflict that preceded the current round.

Part One, "Iraq in Turmoil," covers the social, political, economic and confessional state of Iraq "three wars later." It is in Part Two, "Toward a Stable Peace," however, that the book really takes off, particularly in the four chapters on the country's political structure and options.

As laid out in the introduction, the book's premise is that "it is primarily relations between Iraqis that perpetuate the violence in that country, and any solution must start with them." To this end, Nicholas Haysom writes of what it would take to forge an inclusive and enduring social contract. Forum of Federations analyst David Cameron makes perhaps the most important contribution in the book when he argues that the federation that Iraqis forged with international assistance in 2004-2005 is essentially unworkable but fixable. He offers

detailed ideas on how to do so, and get Iraq to a balanced and functional federation.

Similarly, John McGarry looks at what it would take to fix Iraq's federal structure, arguing for the creation of "liberal consociational institutions," which would "focus on democratic preference rather than on predetermined ethnic or communal categories." Finally, Brenden O'Leary wrestles with the thorny question of federalizing natural resources.

The book also offers a strong introductory section and a solid conclusion by the editors. What it does not include, regrettably, is any commentary by citizens of that beleaguered nation. Despite the organizers' best efforts, travel challenges and the dearth of Iraqi analysts who combine analytical skills and neutrality meant that only a handful of them were able to attend the conference — and none contributed anything in writing. Also missing from the book is a submission by the veteran United Nations envoy and adviser Lakhdar Brahimi, who gave an exceptional speech at the conference but did not pen an essay.

Nonetheless, if U.S. policymakers could read just one book on Iraq, this should probably be it. It is penetrating, neutral, asks all the right questions and lays out far more new ideas than anything else currently available. Its intention to "build a grand political settlement" may seem like a stretch. But if we are ever to get beyond the current spate of ill-informed, politicized and shallow analyses of the way forward, this is the place to begin. ■

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