

2003

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### Recommended Citation

David Crane, *Perceptions and Realities of North America: What the Polls Say about Canadians and Americans Regarding Security and the Economy - Introduction*, 29 Can.-U.S. L.J. 167 (2003)  
Available at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/cuslj/vol29/iss1/26>

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PERCEPTIONS AND REALITIES OF NORTH AMERICA:  
WHAT THE POLLS SAY ABOUT CANADIANS AND  
AMERICANS REGARDING SECURITY AND THE ECONOMY

*David Crane*  
Introduction

This evening's session is about perceptions and realities of North America. We will be hearing from two highly qualified analysts from the firm Ipsos-Reid. I know we will not hold anything against them, because they happen to have French shareholders. This is a company that is owned in Paris, but was a Canadian company originally.

What I wanted to say by way of starting is that perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of the public matter a great deal. As much as policy makers sit around and talk about different ideas and visions for a better future, they have to do so in the context of public attitudes and beliefs. They have to use the information about public attitudes and public beliefs to help inform them on the kind of case they have to make in order to change those ideas or beliefs and what they have to do to persuade people to accept new ideas.

In our session tonight, we will be learning something about the differences in attitudes and beliefs in Canada and the United States on a variety of subjects. I think it is clear that while Canadians and Americans have much in common, after all we are both immigrant nations that sell empty spaces, regrettably, one of the other things we have in common is that neither of us has satisfactorily resolved the issue of how we integrate our aboriginal populations into the mainstream. We share that with Mexico, as well. All three countries share that common failure.

We share many beliefs, values, and experiences. When the chips are down, we are there to help each other fairly quickly. A good example of this was when the United States responded at the start of the Second World War. When there was a concern about possible threat to Canada from Nazi Germany, we worked out a number of institutional arrangements with the United States, which in a sense, have continued to this day.

In a smaller way, Canada has complemented and helped the United States in different areas, whether it was helping with the Embassy employees in Iran or when the United States felt politically that it could not continue to have a presence in Haiti. Canada stepped in and increased its activity through the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and other groups, to try to maintain law and order in Haiti. In many respects, our peacekeeping roles in the past have

complemented U.S. foreign policy, because there have been occasions and places where it was easy for Canada to go in, but more difficult for the United States. There is a history of cooperation in that respect.

From a Canadian viewpoint, we do like and admire Americans. John Turner, our former Prime Minister, said at an event the other night, "I am a strong Canadian Nationalist, but there is no country I would sooner have as my next-door neighbor than the United States." Canadians admire many things about the United States, yet they also want their own space; a little bit of distance so they can do things their own way.

What is interesting is that the origins of the two countries are quite different. Those differences influence us down to the present day. The United States was born of revolution. It has a distrust of government that goes back to that revolution; a system of checks and balances. Out of that revolution, it has the inevitable belief that it has a mission to take its revolution to other parts of the world. Canada has a parliamentary system of government that originates in the Crown. The idea of the Crown is to act on behalf of the people. So, Canadians have quite a different attitude towards the government. At the same time, we do not have any sense of ourselves as acting as a major power or a country born out of revolution, taking our ideas to the rest of the world, or perhaps even at times trying to convert other parts of the world to our way of life. Our interest much more is in what kind of world can we all peacefully live in together.

Today, the United States is a super power. This brings responsibilities and expectations that do not apply to a middle power like Canada. Inevitably, we are going to behave and have different attitudes and approaches as a consequence of that.

This evening we have two very good analysts who I would like to introduce very briefly, because their CV's are in the brochure that everybody got for this conference. Michael Colledge, is the Senior Vice President of Public Affairs and Managing Director of Ipsos-Reid. Again, that is a French-owned company based in Ottawa. He tracks Canadian attitudes and understanding on many of the issues we are concerned about at this conference. Thomas Riehle, who runs the Washington office of the same company, and looks at many of these issues, sees many of these issues from an American point of view. What we will have tonight is a chance to look at how people in each of our countries look at many of these issues and then perhaps to consider in their sum-ups what some of the consequences or implications or conclusions are that they draw from their presentations. Michael, if you want to go first.