THE FUTURE OF CANADIAN STUDIES
in 'La Gran Familia'

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THROUGHOUT MUCH OF THE INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC WORLD WHERE CANADIAN STUDIES IS A SUBJECT OF TEACHING AND RESEARCH, THERE MIGHT BE A MOVE TO INTEGRATE CANADIAN STUDIES WITH NORTH AMERICAN OR AMERICAN STUDIES. THIS APPROACH LUMPS THE STUDY OF CANADA, ALONG WITH THAT OF THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO, INTO ONE PROGRAM. THE FEAR FROM MANY CANADIANISTS IS THAT CANADIAN STUDIES WILL LOSE ITS IDENTITY IF THAT HAPPENS.



Prime Minister Jean Chretien may not have realized it, but his comments over the past few months have captured some of the ambiguities between North American Studies and Canadian Studies. On the one hand, he has praised the growth in the international community of scholars studying Canada while, on the other, lauding the fact that Canada is part of the larger family of nations in the Americas.

In recent speeches at various Centres for Canadian Studies outside of Canada, Prime Minister Chretien has praised the expansion of Canadian Studies abroad. Much of the expansion, incidently, has resulted from the generous support of the Canadian government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade which now regards culture and academic relations (including Canadian Studies) as the third pillar of Canadian Foreign Policy.

Hence, the Prime Minister can say — as he did in his Address at the Inauguration of the Chair in Canadian Studies at Université de Paris III Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris in June 2000 — that Canada is committed to organizations such as the Association française d'études canadiennes and the many Canadian Studies centres in French universities. Similarly, at Duke University last December he again praised the growth of Canadian Studies, describing it as 'a hot bed of interest in the study of Canada.'



Yet, at the same time that he was praising the growth of Canadian Studies at international universities and noting in France, for instance, that Canada shared with that country a belief that governments have a vital role to play in protecting and promoting culture, he was also playing up Canada as part of a North American community. He told the Institute for International Political Studies in Milan in 1998 that the Italian Canadians — such as those who had accompanied him as part of the Canadian trade mission to Italy — were representative of a new generation in Canada. 'Their origins are Italian,' he noted, 'but they are firmly North American ... with a North American attitude, with North American operations, with North American know-how.'

In fact, in recent months the Prime Minister has been talking a lot about a community of the Americas or 'La Gran Familia' as he likes to phrase it — to replace his earlier references to amigos who were then negotiating a trade agreement for the Americas. From the Prime Minister's perspective, this is a 'family of different cultures, of different languages, and of many races, but a family nonetheless with shared values and shared goals.' Many others, of course, disagree with him on some of these points.

The great fear of many Canadianists is that when Canadian Studies is promoted as a part of North American or American Studies it will spell the end of Canadian Studies abroad. A quick look at many of the universities where this integration has already occurred does, in fact, give cause for worry. The courses in such programs abroad focus predominately on the United States. At the University of Lodz in Narutowiczo, Poland, as just one example of which they are many, the courses offered in the NA Studies Programme all deal with the United States, and only 6 of 26 courses offered in recent years have focused on Canada.

Yet, the integrating of Canadian Studies within North American Studies Programs may will be the litmus test for the study of Canada abroad. It will put to the test what many Canadianists at home have felt for some time — if the Government of Canada did not support Canadian Studies internationally the programmes would die a sudden death. We will see. Yet it is quite possible that the North Americanization of Canadian Studies fits nicely with what our political leaders and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade want. Canada is, in their minds, very much a part of La Gran Familia and if others around the world teach and research Canada as a part of that family, then the paymasters may continue on their happy crusade. And it may be the case that only within North American Studies will Canadian Studies find a safe home. Whatever the reasons for the integration of Canadian Studies with Northern American Studies, Canadianists at home may be the ones to complain the loudest about that absorption of Canadian Studies into North American Studies abroad.