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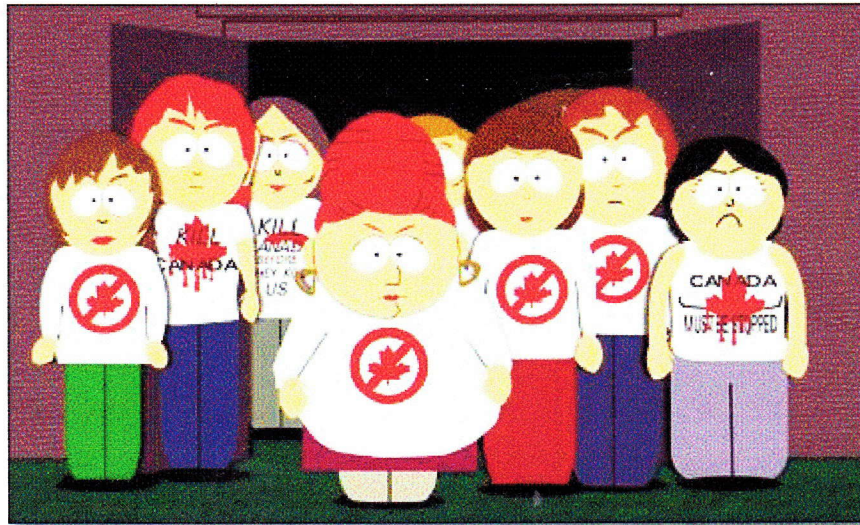
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Courtesy South Park

Canadians have a sense of humor--er, humour--about themselves. They loved the 'Blame Canada!' number from 'South Park'

It's About Time!

Finally, all of America understands the sweetness and simplicity of its long-ridiculed neighbors to the north

By **B. J. Sigismund**
 NEWSWEEK WEB EXCLUSIVE

Feb. 15 — They were so sure they'd won, David Pelletier kissed the ice and Jamie Salé began to cry. The audience roared, "Six! Six!," indicating that the skating routine had gone flawlessly. But minutes later, the scores came in unexpectedly low. At the event's end, the Russians got the gold.

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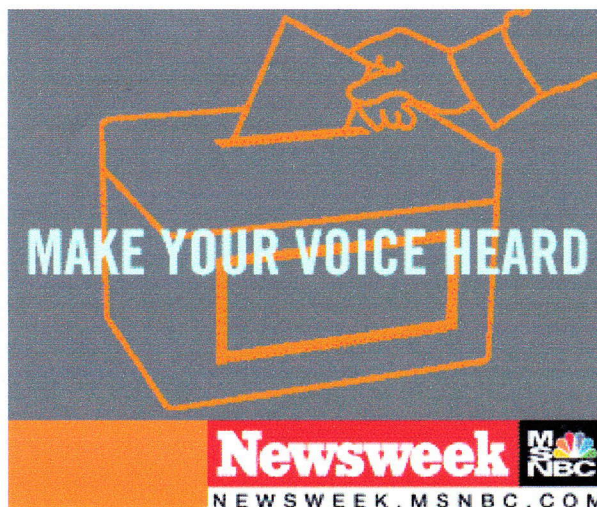
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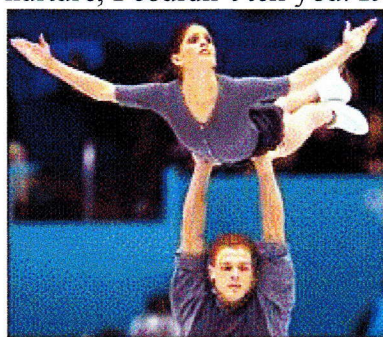
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AND HOW DID the young Canadians take the news? They shook hands with the winners, smiled big for the cameras and graciously accepted their silver medals. "We're not bitter," Salé said at a press conference two days later. "We're so proud of what we've done." Added Pelletier, "Our own gold medal is winning the hearts of everybody."

How very *Canadian*.

But for better or for worse, that's pretty much how we Canadians behave. We're low-key. Generally unassuming. And not up for a big fight. Nature or nurture, I couldn't tell you. It's just the way we are.

'On Monday night, the country saw firsthand what what we Canadians have dealt with for years,' writes the author

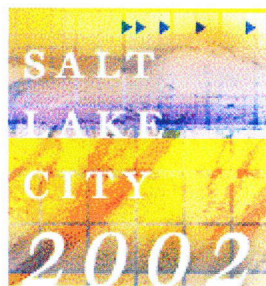


Lionel Cironneau / AP

During this week, I watched the skating scandal grow and explode with a tiny grin. I know in my Canadian heart that the team would never have fought this battle if the American public hadn't egged them on so

forcefully. Had the pairs skate not been televised—leading to much watercooler chitchat and more importantly, nonstop media coverage—Pelletier and Salé would be going home with silver instead of the shared gold.

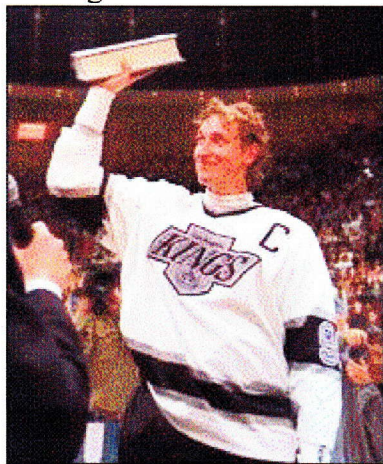
But on Monday night, the country saw firsthand what what we Canadians have dealt with for years. Again and again, my people have been burned by the rest of the world. We've been abandoned and, most painful of all, ignored. But it's been happening so long, in fact, we think it's kinda funny.



Canada's most famous export, Wayne Gretzky, left at the height of his career to play hockey for the Los Angeles Kings

RELATED NEWS Starr: And Justice For All

Let's get the celebrity stuff out of the way first. To list the many famous folks who've deserted their homeland for America would not be very Canadian of me, dignified people that we are. But I will briefly indulge. Everyone knows about Michael J. Fox, Mike Meyers, Pamela Anderson and Peter Jennings. But what about Jim Carrey, Keanu Reeves and William Shatner? Matthew Perry—heard of him? What about Leonard Cohen? Joni Mitchell, Celine Dion, Alanis Morissette and Shania Twain? For Pete's sake, what about Ashleigh Banfield?



Our most famous export, Wayne Gretzky, left us at the height of his career to play hockey for the Los Angeles Kings. Not only that, he went Hollywood at the same time, marrying actress Janet Jones.

Hard feelings? A few. But really, not such a big deal.

Americans will go to Europe, Australia and the Far East, but rarely even think to go north for a vacation. When I tell people I was born in Vancouver, they'll say they've "really been meaning to get there." Some people tell me they like Montréal, but only because they get to practice their French. Of course, lots of folks have had wild weekends in Toronto. "It's just like New York," they say, "only smaller."



The American press has historically paid no attention to Canada. The Dionne quintuplets of Ontario were an exception

The American press has historically paid no attention to Canada. We're only in the headlines after something freakish or scandalous. The Dionne quintuplets of Ontario—the first set of five babies in recorded

history to live longer than a few days—caught the world's attention during the Great Depression. In the 1970s, former prime minister Pierre Trudeau gained notoriety abroad for his flashy wardrobe and bachelor lifestyle. (He dated Barbra Streisand for a time and later, his wife Margaret was famously seen dancing at

Studio 54 wearing no underwear.) Runner Ben Johnson, who hailed from Toronto, was the most famous Canadian of all time after winning the 100 meter dash at the 1988 Olympics—until the next day, when he tested positive for steroids.

But you know what hurts most? Americans don't even make *fun* of us all that much. The British? They're parodied beyond belief, luv. The French? *Le ridicule!* But Canadians—most of the time, you don't even know we're alive! And then, even when you *do* poke fun at us, we love you for it. My entire extended family raced out to see 1999's potty-mouthed "South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut" because of the hysterical "Blame Canada!" number. All that hoopla a couple years ago over Molson's "I am Canadian!" commercial? We adored the attention. Heck, we didn't even mind that stupid 1983 movie "Strange Brew," which once and forever convinced the world that we all say "aboot," "oot"—and most famously, "eh?"

We just don't care to argue about things all that much. We're even too kind to wage battle with ourselves. Some folks in Quebec want to secede. But you don't see us fighting a civil war, do you?

The most serious example of our neglect came on Sept. 20, 2001. In the days after the terrorist attacks, Canadians reached out in many ways to their neighbors below the 49th parallel. They flew the American flag, donated money and laid flowers in front of the U.S. embassy. Then, in his legendary speech nine days later, President Bush thanked virtually every country on the planet for their kindness and support. All but Canada.

So really, what Canadian would be surprised by the ill treatment that Pelletier and Salé received in Salt Lake City? Ironically, they may just get the last laugh. The two are more famous now than they ever would have been had they got the gold the old-fashioned way.

Canada will feel intense pride in celebrating the skaters. Until they move to New York, of course.



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