



Americans are better at political diversity than we are

By JOHN IBBITSON, Globe and Mail

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Many Canadians define themselves in opposition to America. Not only are these people insufferable, they are wrong.

Canada, according to the morally superior school, is tolerant, liberal and diverse, while America is intolerant, conservative and unequal.

So please explain Canada's intolerant, conservative, unequal record in electing women and minorities, compared to the United States.

At the moment, there are eight women who are governors of American states: Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Kansas, Michigan, and Washington. The record is nine. Twenty-two states have had women governors at one time or another. Arizona has had three.

Catherine Callbeck, of PEI, is the only woman ever to have been elected first minister in Canada. (Both American and Canadian territories have been exempted from the comparison.) Kim Campbell won the job of prime minister by becoming leader of her party, but she was trounced in the next election.

As authors Linda Trimble and Jane Arscott observe in *Still Counting: Women in Politics across Canada*, "Most of the 20 women who have served as party chiefs were chosen to lead moribund, ailing, or soon-to-be decimated political parties."

Are things getting better? Heck, no. B.C.'s Leader of the Official Opposition, Carole James of the NDP, is a woman, and Newfoundland and PEI have women as interim opposition leaders. But the odds do not favour Canada electing another woman premier any time soon. And as for a woman Canadian prime minister? A president Hillary Clinton would be unlikely to meet one, even if she served two terms.

When it comes to representation by immigrants and visible minorities, the Canadian record is no better.

The United States has one governor of South Asian descent, Bobby Jindal of Louisiana. Deval Patrick is Massachusetts' first African-American governor, while New Mexico governor Bill Richardson is Latino.

Unless you consider PEI's Robert Ghiz a visible minority (his grandfather was Lebanese/Syrian), Canada's first ministers are as white-bread a bunch as any of their predecessors since Confederation.

Many Canadians were excited by the arrival of Adrienne Clarkson and then Michalle Jean as governors-general who symbolized Canada's immigrant experience. But they were appointed to a position that is largely ceremonial.

The United States, conversely, is on its second consecutive African-American secretary of state. Two of the last three secretaries of state have been women. The American secretary of state is one of the most powerful people on Earth.

While Canadians attempt to manufacture diversity, Americans just go out and achieve it. Stéphane Dion is appointing women candidates over the objections of riding associations in hopes of pushing up their numbers in caucus. But Nancy Pelosi became Speaker of the House of Representatives all on her own.

Almost half the populations of Toronto and Vancouver were born offshore, yet the political power structures in those provinces remain overwhelmingly European and male. Meanwhile, in racist, intolerant America, it is now certain a woman or African-American will secure the Democratic presidential nomination.



This doesn't make the U.S. a paragon, far from it. Representation by women in Congress hovers around 16 per cent, far less than it should be; poverty, incarceration, teen pregnancy and other grim indicators are still dominated by African-Americans and Latinos.

But aboriginal Canadians are also hugely overrepresented in those statistics. And while lifting more black and Latino families out of poverty remains a fiercely debated obsession of American governments - state and federal, Republican and Democrat - Canada's response to aboriginal poverty is to shrug hopelessly and change the subject.

Where is the charismatic son of Chinese immigrants who rises from multicultural Toronto or Vancouver as the new voice of the new Canada? Where is the generation of women politicians who are clear contenders for the leadership of their party? Where is the aboriginal candidate whose message of hope and reconciliation inspires us all?

Canada talks a good multicultural, inclusive, tolerant game. But it has no Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton, no Bill Richardson, Condoleezza Rice, Nancy Pelosi or any other women or persons of colour in positions of great power.

In America, where power is everything, success in politics is a matter of money and image. In Canada, money and image matter less. But you'd better be a white male, or the odds get pretty long.