3

Marrying Americans

The Identity Politics of the Election(s)

What I’m Hot For: Escape.

What I’m Looking For: Residency in your socialist paradise of tolerance and understanding.

Why Get to Know Me: I’m trapped in America, for Christ’s sake! Help get me out of here!

Travis, 27, male, Seattle

Red State/Blue State/Whose State? An American Election in Canada

On the evening of the 2004 US election, I was invited to no less than three parties to watch the proceedings, both at private gatherings at friends’ homes and publicly organized events in downtown Toronto bars. I opted for the venue within easy walking distance of my apartment: the home of a graduate philosophy student friend. Another friend of mine (and American expatriate) cut teaching her evening philosophy class short to make it to the liquor store on time and when she arrived at the party announced that the store was unbelievably busy and with long lineups. In fact, the cashier told her that liquor stores across the city were as busy that night as on the average New Year’s Eve. What was it about the American election that brought Canadians together to drink in such numbers?

Doubtless, the outcome of this particular election was of especial significance to peoples across the globe, but Canadians had the solution in the event of a Bush victory: we could provide a place of political sanctuary and means of emotional rescue for the disenfranchised.
Democratic supporters. In other words, we could provide refuge not only because of our geographic proximity, but also because our ideological and moral distancing from the practices and discourses of right-wing Republican certitude. After all, we didn’t send troops to Iraq, we have legalized gay marriage, have lax marijuana laws, and universal health care. Celine Dion notwithstanding, what’s not to love? Our American cousins, as it turns out, seemed to be thinking along the same lines. Indeed, the CTV national news announced that on the day following the election, hits to the Canadian immigration website were up by 500 percent.

If migratory patterns were about to undergo a seismic shift in the wake of the Democrats’ defeat, so too were the borders that ostensibly separate the United States from Canada. On November 3, the day after the election, the map of North America was literally, or rather, virtually, redrawn on an Internet meme that circulated as widely and rapidly as rumors of an impending stampede of “blue state refugees” heading north. The meme, which was emailed to me by several different individuals and listservs (on the day of its launch), depicts a map of North America in which the “blue states” (along the eastern and western coasts of the United States) merge with Canada to form a single country described as the “United States of Canada” and colored in pink, whereas the remaining “red states” (mid-West and southern states, plus Alaska) were labeled as Jesusland, colored in green. What the new map suggests is that the states in which the Democrats won a majority are politically aligned with and share similarities with the more socially liberal welfare state called Canada than with the rest of the United States of America. The assignation of Republican territory as “Jesusland” owes to reports from exit polls that votes for Bush were based on a “moral [read Christian] values” platform, in particular, opposition to same-sex marriage, abortion, and stem cell research.

However popular and amusing as political satire, the Jesusland map, at the same time, produces a mythical construction of nationhood(s); ignoring political, social, and cultural divisions and realities within its redrawn borders. Canada “is not a monolithic bloc of opinion” but, rather, a fractious state of regional ideological disparity with conservative parties dominant in Alberta and parts of British Columbia, Ontario, and the Atlantic provinces, while in Quebec the question of sovereignty still looms large.2 Nor are the red and blue states of the United States politically homogenous. As (even) Wikipedia acknowledges:

Critics of the Jesusland map, and of the concept of the red state vs. blue state divide in general, have pointed out that the actual electoral map is