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## National demons don't go away when you close your eyes

When I was growing up, most of what I heard about native people was negative: they were alcoholics, the government favoured them over the rest of Canada, they were lazy, pampered, etc. All stereotypes that painted a group of people with a single brush, and didn't tell the full story. Not even close.

But over the past couple of years, my view—and that of many, if not most, Canadians—of native peoples has changed dramatically. Although I still have problems with the Oka warriors themselves, the events in Oka helped opened my eyes to the injustices natives in Canada have faced in the past—and continue to face today. Oka was a jolt, a wake-up call to the country to recognize that it had to change the way it dealt with its first peoples.

Since then, native issues have taken on a new importance in the constitutional agenda. There is consensus that native self-government must be part of any new deal; Assembly Chief Ovide Mercredi is a more prominent figure than most premiers; and, along with the provinces, natives are now equal members at the bargaining table.

There is still a long, *long* way to go, but there is a new attitude in Canada that native issues are no longer minor irritants that can be dealt with or not, at our leisure. Canada has changed, and, more importantly, was able to change.

The point is, had we a strong national identity like our American neighbours, this change of heart likely wouldn't have taken place. It's because we haven't carved our national features in stone that we're able to change our attitudes. That's not the case in the U.S. of A.

In that country, many people seem obsessed with what I would call a national mythology. There is a belief, deep in the American psyche, that *any* individual, with hard work and determination, can be successful, regardless of the circumstances. This attitude is reflected in its culture.

In a land where "anyone can grow-up to be president", and where Dirty Harry and Rocky are heroes, poverty and failure is considered inevitable at best—immoral at worst.

But what happens if you're a black American and, as Bob Dylan wrote, the "pump don't work because the vandals stole the handle"?

In Canada, our government has become the "pump". In recognizing the importance of helping people break the cycle of poverty, we have afforded everyone certain basic rights. Welfare, free health insurance, UIC, etc. may be abused by some, but they make sure everyone starts out with a minimum of dignity. It's our social safety net.

And when something like Oka happens, we have proved ourselves flexible enough to change our attitudes.

Most Americans have no room in their conception of America for the kind of safety net we have here. American blacks still face many ceilings and obstacles imposed by American society, and they have sent many, many wake up calls to their countrymen. Yet the attitude that the problem lies exclusively with blacks themselves, rather than with society, stubbornly persists.

The riots that followed the acquittal of the Los Angeles police officers accused of using excessive force in arresting Rodney King is another wake-up call to America. Whether or not the officers were guilty is besides the point, just as it was irrelevant in Oka whether or not the warriors were fighting for their smuggling and gambling profits, or for their land.

What matters is that there is something seriously wrong in American society, just as there was something seriously wrong in Canada. The U.S. must deal with its guilt and responsibilities, as Canadians are trying to do.

Unless Americans take concrete steps to address afro-american grievances, the country may well tear itself apart from the inside.

THE MELTING  
POT IS BOILING  
OVER



## Crow bad for your health

I'm the kind of guy who can eat just about anything that comes on a plate, but I must confess there's one dish I have never developed the stomach for.

Raw crow.

I hate it when I have to eat crow—admit I'm wrong about something, I mean. But it happens. And when it happens, I reckon the best way to do it is to take a deep breath, close your eyes, pinch the nostrils shut . . . and swallow. So here goes:

I agree with Brian Mulroney.

Wow! That tastes awful.

It's true though. I do agree with the Walking Mandible—about one thing anyway.

Tobacco.

A few weeks ago, a young lad from Kingston, Ontario, wrote the PM urging higher taxes on tobacco products. He got a letter back on Prime Ministerial stationery that said, in part, "we don't like smoking either and we hope to tax it out of existence someday."

The signature at the bottom of the letter read: "Brian Mulroney".

And that's what I agree with Brian Mulroney about: that the world would be a better place without the tiresome, noxious and expensive junkie tradition we refer to as smoking.

I speak not as some pink-lunged pounce who wouldn't dream of sully his lips with a ciggie. My lungs have processed more smoke than Dofasco's Number Three Smelter. For more than a quarter of a century I inhaled pretty much anything that would fit in my mouth and burn slowly. I know all about smoking.

And I also don't speak as an enemy of the tobacco farmer, although I think what they do for a living is anti-social, immoral and flat-out wrong.

I know I'll get letters and phone calls from tobacco farmers telling me how hard they work and how tobacco put their kids through college, but ladies and gentlemen, let's be blunt about this: you are dealing in death.

Tobacco is a drug. More addictive than heroin, according to the US Surgeon General. Deadlier

than alcohol, according to any family doctor you care to ask.

There are exactly *no* health benefits from smoking. All the habit will get you is broke, and, eventually, dead.

En route you can expect to experience the pleasures of heart disease, emphysema, and cancers of the lung, throat, tongue and mouth.

Americans fork out \$52 billion in medical costs per annum trying to repair the damage smokers do to themselves. And it's not enough. Smoking kills 430,000 Americans each year.

If that number is too big to visualize, try this: 1,100 Americans die from smoking *every day*.

Here in Canada, the numbers are slightly less grim. We seem to be smartening up, thanks largely to the governments tax on tobacco. Only three years ago, Canadians were heavier smokers per capita than Americans. But since 1989, Canadian smokers have declined by nearly 25

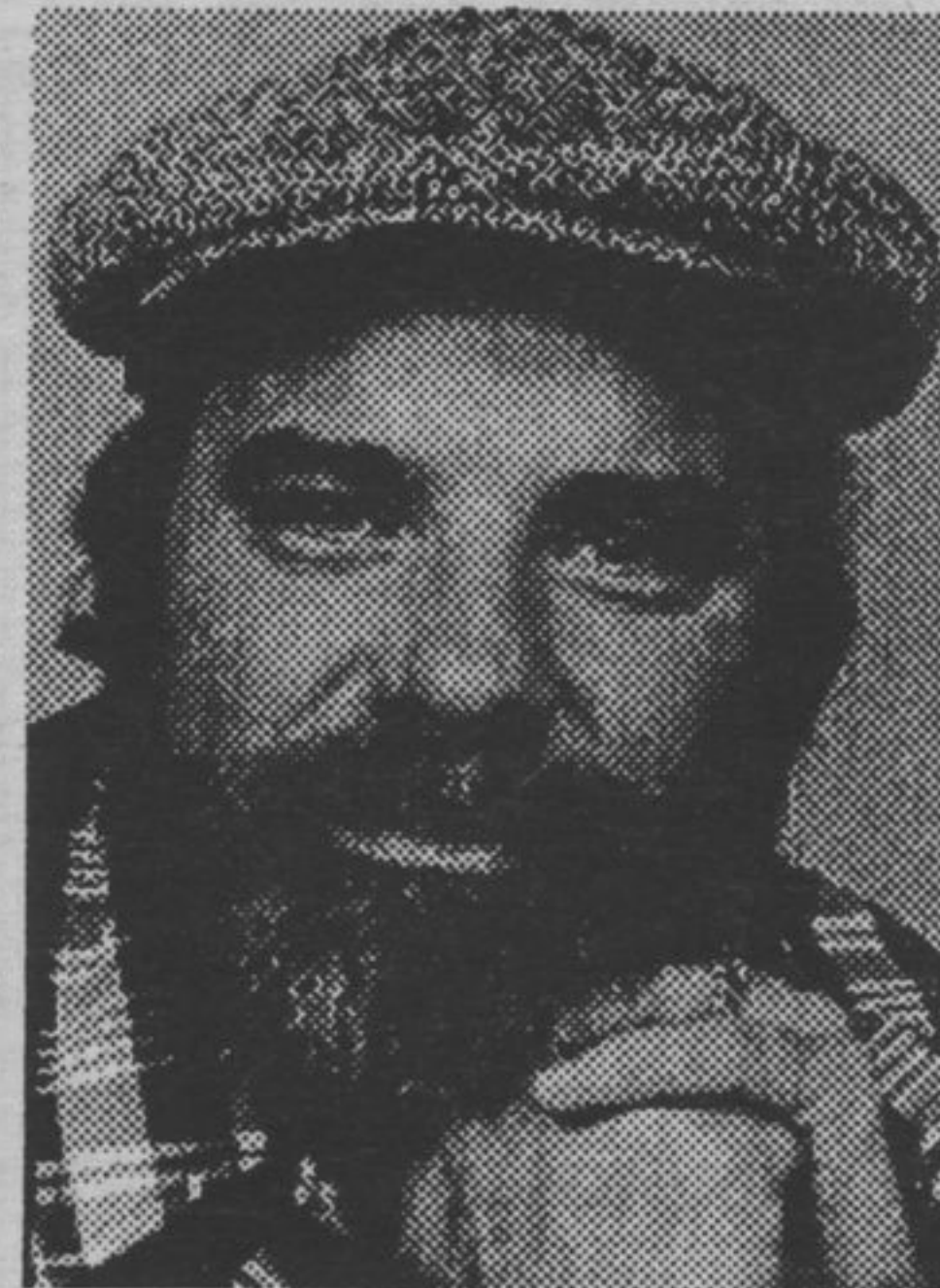
per cent.

Which is why I was . . . (boy, it still tastes bad) almost proud of the PM when he said he'd like to "tax tobacco products out of existence."

Almost . . . until I read the follow up news story a few days later. *Mulroney aid issues apology*, the headline read. The story says that a prime ministerial aid had apologized for putting Brian Mulroney's name on the letter that was sent to the boy in Kingston.

It's pretty obvious what happened. Tobacco farmers were outraged about the letter and protested. Mulroney realized the tobacco lobby was more valuable to him than some schoolkid in Kingston. Therefore, a few days later a staff flunky falls on his sword to preserve what's left of boss's reputation.

Ah, *that's* more like the Brian Mulroney I know. Anyone care for the rest of this crow sandwich?



Arthur Black