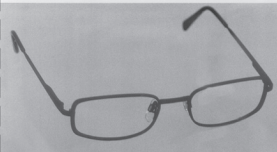


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'Canada's Next Great Prime Minister' would be its first



PATRICK
ROSS

As of 18 March, 2007, Joseph Lavoie has some big shoes to fill. Winner of CBC's *The Next Great Prime Minister* reality program—think of it as a political *Canadian Idol*, only with Brian Mulroney instead of Ben—Lavoie has certainly assumed some very lofty expectations. This show is somewhat of a paradox, however, because the sad truth is that if Lavoie meets these expectations, he won't be Canada's next great Prime Minister—he'll be Canada's *first* great Prime Minister.

To accept any of Canada's prime ministers as great, one would have to redefine the criteria for greatness. While many people would define greatness differently, a safe description of a great leader is that of an individual who had a vision for what he or she wanted and saw it through to fruition. While many of Canada's past PMs may have flirted with greatness on account of their accomplishments, rarely has any one of them offered Canadians an inspiring vision—and even when they have, they've seldom accomplished it.

This claim will seem like utter blasphemy to more generous observers. These people will likely propose the same predictable candidates that always get hauled out in such debates: John A MacDonald, Wilfred Laurier, Lester B Pearson, Pierre Trudeau, John

Diefenbaker. Of all our past PMs, these five are the ones who offered Canadians an ambitious vision. Unfortunately, all five of them fell well short of actually realizing their visions. Of course, none of these individuals failed completely. MacDonald imagined a Canada spanning from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific—he accomplished this. Laurier and Diefenbaker both envisioned a more tolerant Canada.

Aside from the exception of the short-lived dream that was Trudeaumania, Canadian politicians tend to be met with an almost pathological indifference.

While Canada's past treatment of various minorities has been far from perfect, Diefenbaker's Bill of Rights has helped ensure legal equality for all Canadians. Pearson envisaged Canada as an international leader, particularly within the United Nations. For his part, Pierre Trudeau enshrined the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as law.

But of these men were entirely successful. MacDonald hoped to build Canada as a united British state. Instead, Canada has constantly dealt with challenges to its unity—particularly between English and French Canada. Laurier's belief in Canadian dominance of the 20th century never came to pass. Pearson's agenda for Canada as

an international leader has ultimately been undermined by an ineffective UN. Diefenbaker never saw his vision of Northern development fully accomplished. Trudeau's promise of a just society was diluted by a continually questionable human rights record.

Unfortunately for Lavoie, the distinction of "Canada's next great Prime Minister" bears the marks of being judged by Mulroney, John Turner, Kim Campbell and Joe Clark. To describe any of these individuals as having been great prime ministers would be a stretch, to say the least. Two of them were not even elected as PMs.

But this motley crew is far from alone in that regard. Sadly, most of our political leaders simply fail to inspire us. Aside from the exception of the short-lived dream that was Trudeaumania, Canadian politicians tend to be met with an almost pathological indifference. So while some Canadians compare the current Stephen Harper versus Stéphane Dion faceoff as the second-coming of the Diefenbaker versus Pearson showdown, many Canadians will likely be more enthralled with a plethora of disturbingly pointless celebrity scandals.

In a sense, this renders Canada itself a bit of a paradox. The world has consistently recognized Canada as one of the world's best societies. Yet, whatever greatness Canada has accomplished, it has done so largely without the benefit of great leadership. In this light, perhaps more credit is due to the hard work and dedication of the Canadians who have made this country what it is than to the leaders who all too often claim credit for the accomplishments of the people they sought to lead.

Anonymity Wikipedia's fatal flaw



COLIN
KEIGHER

"Jordan was interviewed on behalf of Wikipedia by New Yorker magazine in July 2006 in an article on the website. But in last month's edition of the same publication, he was revealed not to be a professor with two PhDs, but rather a 24-year old college dropout from Kentucky."

It's brought together laymen and academics alike, and, in theory anyway, will eventually document everything and anything that can be documented. However, Wikipedia suffers the same problem that the rest of the Internet experiences, which is that there's no way to verify its users' identities. Since it's "the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit," a user can choose to edit anonymously—only revealing their computer's Internet address—or they can choose to register a pseudonym.

Such was the case of one Ryan "Essjay" Jordan, who registered an account on Wikipedia in 2005. Jordan claimed he had four degrees—including two doctorates—and a professorship at a private university. Over time, Jordan used these claimed credentials to win over arguments in the various discussion pages, eventually becoming an administrator and a member of Wikipedia's arbitration board.

Jordan was interviewed on behalf of Wikipedia by the *New Yorker* magazine in July 2006 in an article on the website. But in last month's edition of the same publication, he was revealed not to be a professor

with two PhDs, but rather a 24-year old college dropout from Kentucky. This came to light in part due to his getting hired by Wikia—a for-profit Wikipedia spin-off—and his attempt at wiping the slate clean after editing his own profile on the website revealed his full identity.

Jordan said that he lied to protect himself in his role as administrator, and that he had afterward apologized to Wikipedia owner and co-founder Jimmy Wales. Wales initially accepted the apology and didn't pursue any disciplinary action, but due to heavy pressure from various editors, "Essjay" was eventually removed.

What makes this case so damning to Wikipedia's reputation isn't the fact that Jordan climbed up the ranks of the site's editing hierarchy, but the fact that he used his falsified degrees to further his credibility. Because of his bogus credentials, he was a dream candidate to further push the legitimacy of the encyclopedia—but with the revelation of his true identity, all he's done is make the collaboration less credible.

This isn't to say that what's written on Wikipedia by any anonymous user

is without foundation. The website's policy dictates that everything must be sourced, but it's harder to tell if the writers themselves had the credentials to back up their claims.

Nobody needs to have a degree to write an article on something as complex as Hylopetes—a type of squirrel—or as something as common as toothpaste, as provided either is properly sourced, it will be deemed factual.

However, if one is going to claim that they have certain credentials and if the website is going to advance someone based on that, the credentials themselves should certainly be backed up.

On the horizon is a new online encyclopedia called "Citizendium." While the website makes claims of its larger competitor not being neutral on issues such as government and religion, it does require that any individual registering provides their real name and verification of their credentials. With this, Wikipedia may want to take a page from this expert-written spinoff (started by Wikipedia co-founder Larry Sanger) to further prevent such an issue from occurring again.