

The story behind the speech

On June 5, 1973, Gordon Sinclair sat up in bed in Toronto and turned on his TV set. The United States had just pulled out of the Vietnamese War which had ended in a stalemate - a war fought daily on TV, over the radio and in the press. The aftermath of that war resulted in a world-wide sell-off of American investments, prices tumbled, the United States economy was in trouble. The war had also divided the American people, and at home and abroad it seemed everyone was lambasting the United States.

He turned on his radio, twisted the dial and turned it off. He picked up the morning paper. In print, he saw in headlines what he had found on TV and radio - the Americans were taking a verbal beating from nations around the world. Disgusted with what he saw and heard, he was outraged!

At 10:30, on his arrival at CFRB to prepare his two pre-noon broadcasts, he strode into his office and "dashed-off" two pages in 20 minutes for LET'S BE PERSONAL at 11:45 am, and then turned to writing his 11:50 newscast that was to follow. At 12:01 pm, the script for LET'S BE PERSONAL was dropped on the desk of his secretary who scanned the pages for a suitable heading and then wrote "Americans"" across the top and filed it away. The phones were already ringing.

Gordon Sinclair could not have written a book that could have had a greater impact in the world than his two-page script for THE AMERICANS. A book should have been written on the events that followed. But, no one at CFRB, including Sinclair himself, could have envisioned the reaction of the people of the United States - from presidents - state governors - Congress - the Senate - all media including TV, radio, newspapers, magazines - and from the "ordinary" American on the street. Nor, could have the Canadian government - stunned by the response to what has come to be regarded as one of Canada's greatest public relations feats in the history of our relations with the United States of America.

But, how did Sinclair's tribute to Americans reach them? It had been swept across the United States at the speed of a prairie fire by American radio stations - first, a station in Buffalo called and asked to be fed a tape copy of the broadcast with permission to use - both freely given. Nearby American stations obtained copies from Buffalo or called direct. By the time it reached the Washington, DC area, a station had superimposed Sinc's broadcast over an instrumental version of BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER, and was repeating it at fixed times several times-a-day.

Congressmen and Senators heard it. It was read several times into the Congressional Record. Assuming that it was on a phono (33 1/3 rpm), Americans started a search for a copy. CFRB was contacted. To satisfy the demand, CFRB started to make arrangements with AVCO, an American record company, to manufacture and distribute it as a "single".

As they were finalizing a contract that would see all royalties which would normally be due Gordon Sinclair be paid (at his request) to the American Red Cross. Word was received that an unauthorized record, using Sinclair's script but read by another broadcaster, was already flooding the US market.

(Subsequently, on learning that this broadcaster had agreed to turn over his royalties to the Red Cross, no legal action was taken).

Sinclair's recording of his own work (to which Avco had added a stirring rendition of THE BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC) did finally reach record stores, and sold hundreds of thousands of copies, but the potential numbers were depressed by the sale of the infringing record. Other record producers and performers (including Tex Ritter) obtained legal permission to make their own versions. In Ritter's case, because of the first-person style of the script, Tex preceded his performance with a proper credit to Sinclair as the author. The American Red Cross received millions of dollars in royalties, and Gordon Sinclair was present at a special ceremony acknowledging his donation.

Advertisers using print media contacted CFRB for permission to publish the text in a non-commercial manner; industrial plants asked for the right to print the script in leaflet form to handout to their employees.

Gordon Sinclair received invitations to attend and be honoured at many functions in the United States which, by number and due to family health problems at the time, he had to decline. However, CFRB newscaster Charles Doering, was flown to Washington to give a public reading of THE AMERICANS to the 28th National Convention of the United States Air Force Association, held September 18, 1974 at the Sheraton Park Hotel. His presentation was performed with the on-stage backing of the U.S. Air Force

Concert Band, joined by the 100-voice Singing Sergeants in a special arrangement of The Battle Hymn of the Republic.

8 years after the first broadcast of THE AMERICANS, U.S. President Ronald Reagan made his first official visit to Canada. At the welcoming ceremonies on Parliament Hill, the new President praised "the Canadian journalist who wrote that (tribute)" to the United States when it needed a friend. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau had Sinclair flown to Ottawa to be his guest at the reception that evening.

Sinc had a long and pleasant conversation with Mr. Reagan. The President told him that he had a copy of the record of THE AMERICANS at his California ranch home when he was governor of the state, and played it from time to time when things looked gloomy.

On the evening of May 15th, 1984, following a regular day's broadcasting, Gordon Sinclair suffered a heart attack. He died on May 17th. As the word of his illness spread throughout the United States, calls inquiring about his condition had been received from as far away as Texas. The editorial in the Sarasota Herald-Tribune of May 28th was typical of the reaction of the United States news media - A GOOD FRIEND PASSES ON.

U.S. President Ronald Reagan: "I know I speak for all Americans in saying the radio editorial Gordon wrote in 1973 praising the accomplishments of the United States was a wonderful inspiration. It was not only critics abroad who forgot this nation's many great achievements, but even critics here at home. Gordon Sinclair reminded us to take pride in our nation's fundamental values."

Former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau: "Gordon Sinclair's death ends one of the longest and most remarkable careers in Canadian Journalism. His wit, irreverence, bluntness and off-beat views have been part of the media landscape for so long that many Canadians had come to believe he would always be there."

Following a private family service, two thousand people from all walks of life filled Nathan Phillips Square in front of Toronto's City Hall for a public service of remembrance organized by Mayor Art Eggleton.

Dignitaries joining him on the platform were Ontario Lieutenant-Governor, John Black Aird; the Premier of Ontario, William Davis; and Metro Chairman Paul Godfrey. Tens of thousands more joined them through CFRB's live broadcast of the service which began symbolically at 11:45 - the regular time of Sinc's daily broadcast of LET'S BE PERSONAL.

As Ontario Premier William Davis said of him "The name GORDON SINCLAIR could become the classic definition of a full life."

The text of the message:

The United States dollar took another pounding on German, French, and British exchanges this morning, hitting the lowest point ever known in West Germany. It has declined there by 41% since 1971, and this Canadian thinks it is time to speak up for the Americans as the most generous, and possibly the least-appreciated, people in all the earth.

As long as sixty years ago, when I first started to read newspapers, I read of floods on the Yellow River and the Yangtze. Well who rushed in with men and money to help? The Americans did, that's who.

They have helped control floods on the Nile, the Amazon, the Ganges, and the Niger. Today, the rich bottom land of the Mississippi is under water and no foreign land has sent a dollar to help. Germany, Japan, and, to a lesser extent, Britain and Italy, were lifted out of the debris of war by the Americans who poured in billions of dollars and forgave other billions in debts. None of those countries is today paying even the interest on its remaining debts to the United States.

When the franc was in danger of collapsing in 1956, it was the Americans who propped it up, and their reward was to be insulted and swindled on the streets of Paris. And I was there -- I saw that. When distant cities are hit by earthquake, it is the United States that hurries into help, Managua, Nicaragua, is one of the most recent examples.

So far this spring, fifty-nine American communities have been flattened by tornadoes. Nobody has helped.

The Marshall Plan, the Truman Policy, all pumped billions upon billions of dollars into discouraged countries. And now, newspapers in those countries are writing about the decadent, war-mongering Americans.

Now, I'd like to see one of those countries that is gloating over the erosion of the United States dollar build its own airplanes.

Come on now, you, let's hear it! Does any other country in the world have a plane to equal the Boeing Jumbo Jet, the Lockheed Tristar, or the Douglas 10? If so, why don't they fly them? Why do all international lines except Russia fly American planes? Why does no other land on earth even consider putting a man or a woman on the moon?

You talk about Japanese technocracy and you get radios. You talk about German technocracy and you get automobiles. You talk about American technocracy and you find men on the moon, not once, but several times, and, safely home again. You talk about scandals and the Americans put theirs right in the store window for everyone to look at. Even the draft dodgers are not pursued and hounded. They're right here on our streets in Toronto. Most of them, unless they're breaking Canadian laws, are getting American dollars from Ma and Pa at home to spend up here.

When the Americans get out of this bind -- as they will -- who could blame them if they said "the hell with the rest of the world." Let somebody else buy the Israel bonds. Let somebody else build or repair foreign dams, or design foreign buildings that won't shake apart in earthquakes." When the railways of France, and Germany, and India were breaking down through age, it was the Americans who rebuilt them. When the Pennsylvania Railroad and the New York Central went broke, nobody loaned them an old caboosie.

Both of 'em are still broke.

I can name to you 5,000 times when the Americans raced to the help of other people in trouble. Can you name to me even one time when someone else raced to the Americans in trouble? I don't think there was outside help even during the San Francisco earthquake.

Our neighbors have faced it alone, and I am one Canadian who is damned tired of hearing them kicked around. They'll come out of this thing with their flag high. And when they do, they're entitled to thumb their noses at the lands that are gloating over their present troubles. I hope Canada is not one of these.

But there are many smug, self-righteous Canadians.

And finally, the American Red Cross was told at its 48th Annual meeting in New Orleans this morning that it was broke.

This year's disasters -- with the year less than half-over -- has taken it all. And nobody, but nobody, has helped.