

Pax Americana, which began as a series of twelve historical plaques, hung at random public sites around downtown Toronto in March and April of 2025. The aluminium signs, anonymous in authorship and clearly not authentic—despite their weathered brown hues and this-must-be-official-history fonts—calmly reported on dire events and outcomes set in a near future of fevered imagining: invasion and occupation, the imperial elephant stomping about the room. Our superpower neighbour come calling, bristling with violence. Cherished truths and sustained illusions about a best friend lying dead in the melting snow.

Were the plaques grim augury? Steampunk cosplay? Ironic commentary on the anxieties of Canadians that late winter and early spring? They weren't saying. Being guerilla art, they weren't even necessarily there. The plaques were further environmental clutter, no different from a look-at-me store sign or a flag draped over a balcony. Unless, that is, you happened to—or wanted to—see them. Pass by one day, iPhone to face and earbuds in, and register nothing. Pass by another day, and be incensed and impassioned by what you've read, compelled to, if not take bold action, then formulate bold thoughts.

Like those anxieties of Yanqui overthrow—real but also somehow unreal, earnest but not quite examined.

Like, perhaps, the actual historical plaques that dot our cities, towns, and countryside, commemorating events that apparently 'happened' on such-and-such a spot, once upon a time. Vivid and vague, all at once. Filling absent spaces with presences, or the other way around. Tales that could be tall but usually are small—this is Canada, remember—told, shyly, slyly, by the winner.

Nationalism, alongside its PR branch patriotism, is nearly always torqued: sincere in its biases and reactive in its thinking, equal parts vigilant and lazy, celebratory and censorious. It's never sure what the fuss is about—unless the fuss is of its making. It doubts all narratives, except its own. Then there is the emotion, loads of it, feelings liberated from sense and scale to just be their sloppy, authentic selves. More anthems and op-eds. More posts on Instagram.

Now that the initial fever has passed and the first plaques have vanished from the city streets, it's good to look at Dara Vador's mischievous project so far, and in the calm of summer. She is posing crisp, coherent questions while not, I am guessing, expecting answers in kind. There is still plenty to be outraged over and anxious about—past, present, future, it's such a blur—and who knows how much of it is true, how much of it happened or is happening or will happen; and equally, it's so hard to hold onto a thought long enough to make sense of either it, or of you, frankly—the one so frazzled and undone, thinking that careening, fleeing thought. Did you read what Trump posted last night? Catch the morning lies out of the White House? Hear about this afternoon's revised tariff threat? Foresee in dreams the 49th parallel being freshly breached?

Crazy times, right. Here in *Pax Americana*.

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