

Keynote Speech by Senator Vivienne Poy

Transforming Toronto University College, University of Toronto

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Good morning students:

The Toronto that you know today has not always been a cosmopolis. This morning, I am going to explore with you how the city has been transformed since the end of the 2nd World War. I know that for many of you that is like prehistory because many of your parents weren't even born yet.

When the 2nd WW ended, three quarters of the Toronto population was of British origin. Now bring yourselves back in time - the City Streets Department used horses until 1946, and there were privately owned horses pulling delivery wagons.

It was only after the WW2 that the construction of the subway began. Can you imagine this city without its subways? The first subway, along Yonge Street, was completed in 1954. The next in 1963, and there were several long stretches that opened in the 1970s and 1980s.

When we moved to Toronto from Montreal in July, 1967, Toronto was a very boring city. Montreal was then the economic heart of Canada - it had style and joie de vivre.

Why did we leave? Remember the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ) that was established in 1963? By the late 1960s, there were bombings all over Montreal. In October, 1970, the British Trade Commissioner, James Cross, was kidnapped, and the Quebec Minister of Labour, Pierre Laporte, was murdered. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau imposed the War Measures Act.

My husband passed his Fellowship in the Royal College of Surgeons (FRCS) exam in Plastic and Reconstructive surgery in the McGill programme in the summer of 1967, and was offered a staff position at the Scarborough General Hospital. We felt it was time for us to move, even though he was also offered a junior staff position at McGill.

We were glad that we were in Toronto when the War Measures Act was invoked. There were soldiers all over the streets of Montreal.

By the end of the 1960s, many of the head offices of large Canadian corporations had also moved from Montreal to Toronto. Montreal's loss was Toronto's gain.

The Toronto we encountered in 1967 was known as "Toronto the good." It was widely known as a dry city, with many restrictions on the sale of alcohol. Even though I don't drink alcohol, this is often used as an indicator of a city's vitality.

Here's an interesting bit of trivia. West Toronto – or the West Toronto Junction as it is known - voted in 1904 to outlaw the selling of alcohol within its borders, and, even though

it was annexed to Toronto in 1909, that part of Toronto stayed dry until the late 1990s, so restaurants there couldn't even serve alcohol! And if I remember correctly, when we first moved here, no bars could serve alcohol after 9 p.m. on Sundays.

A lot of the difference between Montreal and Toronto had to do with the British Protestant reserve and their emphasis on hard work, soberness, and religious observance.

In 1906, Lord's Day legislation was passed in response to lobbying from the Lord's Day Alliance, and these laws prohibited sport, entertainment, and almost all commerce on Sundays, although it permitted provincial governments to make exceptions. These blue laws, as they were known, remained in effect until 1986.

Provinces and cities diverged in how blatantly they enforced the blue laws. Torontonians -being of good Protestant stock - were most diligent in their enforcement. At one point, they even banned tobogganing in High Park, and prohibited street cars from running on Sunday. Visitors here were amazed by the deserted streets on the Lord's Day.

Oriental, as we were then called, were berated for working too hard, and not obeying the Sunday ban on work. Our present Mayor, Rob Ford, made a similar comment about Orientals' work ethics.

Change came to Toronto in the late 1960s, partly because of the events in Quebec, and partly because of the introduction of a new immigration points system in 1967, when Toronto became the city of choice for immigrants from all over the world. That is the Toronto you are most familiar with today.

The transformation of Toronto is a huge topic, a large part of which can be attributed to the immigrants who choose to live here. I will only focus on a few neighbourhoods this morning, and these are occupied by the major ethnic groups in our city.

But first, I'd like to talk about Yorkville, which, at present, is one of the choicest and most expensive locations in the city. That was not always the case.

The Village of Yorkville was originally founded in 1830 by the entrepreneur Joseph Bloor. It was a suburb of Toronto with Victorian-style homes, quiet residential streets, and picturesque gardens. It was annexed by the City of Toronto in 1883. And after WW 2, it emerged as a working-class neighbourhood of narrow streets lined with rundown row houses.

In the 1960s, Yorkville was Toronto's bohemian cultural centre. It was also known as "the music mecca of Canada", being home to some of Canada's most noted musical talents, including Joni Mitchell and Gordon Lightfoot. Yorkville was brimming with budding artists such as Margaret Atwood who used to do readings at the Bohemian Embassy.

The hippie movement flourished there. In August, 1968, a "hippie hepatitis" epidemic was supposed to have broken out in Yorkville and vaccine stations were set up along its sidewalks. To city politicians, Yorkville was "a festering sore in the middle of the city" and they called for its "eradication".

With its coffeehouses, clubs, hippies with long hair, draft dodgers etc., Yorkville helped to erode the image of "Toronto the Good." That was the start of social and cultural

movements and sit-ins in Toronto. In May 1967, there was a “love-in” at Queen’s Park of more than 4,000 people, followed by ‘sit-ins’ in Yorkville that led to clashes with the police and many arrests. In fact, the images of the Occupy protests on television bring me back to the spirit of Yorkville in the 1960s.

Soon after we moved to Toronto, there was always a paddy wagon parked at the corner of Hazelton and Yorkville on the weekends, and a 10 p.m. curfew was enforced for those under 18. As a young mother and newcomer to Toronto, I had no desire to walk in Yorkville the way we all do now.

City planners, responding to public sentiment that the Yorkville ‘scene’ was too out of hand, and, pressured by local police, allowed a Yorkville real estate commercial consortium to redevelop parts of the district. Close by, at Bloor and Avenue Rd., now known as “millionaire mile”, art galleries and high end boutiques began popping up. In fact, I remember the Colonade as being the place for businesses to locate, and for people to have their residences above. I was recently told by an American friend that the brand new concept was deemed so successful that it was copied by other cities in the U.S.

By the 1970s, bohemian Yorkville was gone, and gentrification had begun. The area became such a sought after location for specialty shopping that I opened my own fashion boutique there in the early 1980s.

In a way, Yorkville’s transformation was typical of many downtown neighbourhoods in Toronto, and in other cities. Whenever artists, art galleries, and cultural movements come together in an area, attracting visitors and new residents, real estate speculators see potential. Eventually, the area is gentrified, and becomes unaffordable to the young and artistic individuals who helped create it.

Besides Yorkville, what comes to mind immediately when one thinks of Toronto? We can’t talk about the transformation of Toronto without looking at the “ethnic” neighbourhoods of the city. These represent the influx of immigrants who have enabled Toronto to change from “Toronto the Good” to an exciting city that is diverse in its population, its cultures and its foods.

The largest group of immigrants to Toronto immediately after WW 2 were the Italians, who came in droves after 1951, when immigration restrictions were lifted. These immigrants settled in the St. Clair Ave. W. area which, before the War, was built and occupied by British working class immigrants. The area was known as “Little Britain.” With the influx of Italian immigrants, the landscape changed, and St Clair W. became “Little Italy.” There are Italian names on the billboards, Italian restaurants and Italian influence in the architecture.

By 1961, over 30,000 Italian immigrants had settled in Toronto. Between 1951 and 1981, Toronto’s population doubled, but the number of Italians in the city increased tenfold. So by the 1970s, about 1 in 10 Torontonians was Italian Canadian, and those of British-origin made up just over half of the population.

When the immigration points system, based on education and skills, was introduced in 1967, many of the poor labouring classes from Italy were excluded, and their influx became a

trickle. On the other hand, immigrants from Asia started to dominate, and many chose to settle in Toronto.

“Little Italy” is similar to neighbourhoods settled by other waves of immigrants that followed. These newcomers lived, and had their businesses, in the same vicinity, due to their similarity in language, tradition, religion and culture, creating what the Press calls “ethnic enclaves.”

Whenever there is a recession, large groups of immigrants always end up being blamed for taking jobs away from those who came before. And, when a particular ethnic group becomes a significant proportion of the total population, we see a racial backlash. This doesn't only happen in Toronto - it can happen anywhere. An example was in the late 1950s when Italian immigrants began to outnumber their British counterparts in some neighbourhoods, and the pre-war Italophobia resurfaced.

If only Torontonians could have looked into the future, they would have known that immigrants, including themselves, are the ones who have made Toronto such a vibrant and interesting city.

The next location we are going to focus on is Toronto's Chinatowns. I'm sure you all know that the Chinese community in Toronto is very strong and influential, but do you know that Toronto has one of the largest ethnic Chinese populations outside of Asia?

The history of the Chinese in Canada is very long and rather complicated. It's not the topic I want to go into today, but I will give you a little bit of background. In the middle of the 19th century, the Chinese came to British North America when gold was discovered in the Fraser valley, settling in the Colony of British Columbia, many worked in forestry and road building. In the 1870s, thousands of labourers were brought to B.C. to build the CPR, linking B.C. to the rest of Canada. At its completion in 1885, many of them had no work and no money to return to China, so they drifted towards eastern Canada, and some settled in Toronto.

Having said that, the first Chinese actually came to Toronto in 1878 before the CPR was completed. He opened a laundry at #9 Adelaide St. E. Three years later, there were only 10 Chinese residents in Toronto - all of them came from the U.S. They were later joined by those who came eastward from B.C. By 1900, Toronto had 200 Chinese residents and 95 businesses scattered all over the city.

The original establishment of Toronto's Chinatowns had more to do with the politics in China than conditions in Canada. In 1910, 2 Chinatowns emerged in Toronto. Merchants who supported The Chinese Empire Reform Association, (CERA) gathered around the Association office, in the area around Queen St. E. and George St. Chinese merchants who supported Dr. Sun Yat-sen and the revolution to overthrow the Ch'ing dynasty gathered around the Chee Kung Tong Lodge, on York St., between Queen St. W. and Richmond St. W.

After the fall of the Ch'ing dynasty, the Chinese Empire Reform Assoc. became defunct, and Chinese merchants moved out of the Queen's St. E. area. At the same time, the York St. Chinatown grew as the Jewish community in that area moved out, and the Chinese moved in. By 1911, there were about 1,000 Chinese residents in Toronto. Chinese businesses

and residents gradually expanded to Queen's St E. and Dundas St W., which became known as the "Old Chinatown." In 1941, Toronto's Chinatown had a population of more than 2,000 and became the 3rd largest Chinatown in Canada until the 1950s.

The building of Nathan Philip's Square and City Hall reduced the old Chinatown to one third its original size. With the city planner's vision of "urban renewal", threats of redevelopments and the rise of land prices, the "Save Chinatown Committee" was formed, and City Council endorsed the idea of keeping Chinatown in its original location. However, as the ethnic Chinese population changed with new immigration and the new influx from Hong Kong and Mainland China, the "Old Chinatown" just about lost its identity and usefulness by 2010.

Whenever anyone asks me about Chinatown, I always ask "which one?" After the 1960s, there was a Chinatown in the central district - S.E. Spadina, and in the 1970s, another one in the eastern district -Broadview Ave. & Gerrard St. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, another one was established in Scarborough. When Hong Kongers became the largest group of immigrants coming to Canada in the late 1980s, Chinese businesses sprung up everywhere in greater Toronto.

Since 1998, and until recently, mainland China had been the largest source country for immigration to Canada, and many of these new immigrants also chose to settle in Toronto.

Unlike in the old days, few of the new arrivals actually live in Chinatowns now. Ethnic Chinese, like everyone else, have homes everywhere in Greater Toronto, especially in the suburbs. Chinatowns are mainly where traditional Chinese businesses are concentrated, and I am sure many of you are familiar with the restaurants and shops in these areas.

According to the Chinese Canadian National Council, there are now at least six Chinatowns in Metro Toronto, and sometimes it is difficult to know where they begin and where they end.

Another area of the city of Toronto I would like to mention this morning is "Little India" on Gerrard Street E. between Coxwell Ave. and Greenwood Ave, which is a more recent phenomenon than Toronto's Chinatowns. The reason I would like to talk about this is because immigrants from South Asia are becoming the largest visible minority group in Toronto, and in Canada. The community is prosperous, very active in business and in the Canadian political arena.

Most South Asians still come from India, although the term includes immigrants from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Originally, the area of "Little India" was a working-class Anglophone neighbourhood, but as its residents dispersed in the late 1960s, and shops were boarded up, Indian immigrants took the opportunity to take over the inexpensive central commercial space. At the time, South Asian immigration consisted primarily of ethnic Punjabis and Indians coming to Canada via European countries.

One can almost say that "Bollywood" created "Little India" here in Toronto, because films always bring the Indian Diaspora community together. In 1972, Gian Naaz, an immigrant from India, rented the defunct 750-seat Eastwood Theatre on Gerrard Street E. to

show 35mm films in Hindi and other South Asian dialects, because he wanted a place close to downtown where Indians could meet socially, and the women could wear saris. He was so successful that he bought the theatre in 1974 for \$10,000 and named it Naaz Theatre.

Naaz Theatre had long line-ups, particularly on the weekends, because south Asians came from as far as Montreal, despite the fact that the neighbourhood at the time was still made up of English, Irish, and Scottish families, with a post war influx of Italians and Greeks, and a very small South Asian population.

Despite the fact that immigrants bring diversity, entrepreneurship, a necessary labour force, and most importantly, since the establishment of the points system, a brain gain to Canada, we often see overt racism, particularly in neighbourhoods where there is large concentration of certain ethnic minorities. I believe it's the fear of the numbers of new immigrants, and fear of the unfamiliar.

With the change in the make-up of the population came ethnic and racial tension, which manifested itself in the establishment in the 1960s of a local chapter of the National Rights Party, a white supremacist group based in Georgia, USA, distributing hate literature. Despite the post-master's ban on distribution of these materials, the Ku-Klux Klan also opened an office on Dundas East, sending out recruitment and white supremacist propaganda. In reaction to all this, the "Riverdale Action Against Racism" was formed. Eventually, the KKK left.

However, in 1977, it was reported in *Toronto Life* magazine that an Indian anti-racist group in Toronto east end created a 24-hour emergency hotline for those who encountered racist attacks. In the 1980s, one continues to hear complaints from the South Asian populations regarding police prejudice.

The Naaz' building, besides the theatre, also had 8 commercial units. By the 1980s, Little India was firmly established. In 1982, the City of Toronto approved the Gerrard Indian Bazaar Business Improvement Area. Despite the opening of many businesses, in 2009, there was a vacancy rate of more than 12%, even though the south Asian population in the Greater Toronto area had increased. "Little India" is a downtown commercial area which is far from where many south Asians actually choose to live.

Part of the opposition to neighbourhoods such as Little India, Chinatowns, or Little Italy stemmed from the fact that the actual buildings looked different from the traditional Victorian buildings built by the British in Toronto. In all Toronto's ethnic communities, a fundamental part of the transformation has been in changing the look of the city to reflect cultural preferences. I mention these communities to illustrate what's happened in the past with these main groups in our city. Of course, similar situations still exist with new groups of immigrants settling here.

In the 21st century, diversity in Toronto is celebrated as a strength. Over the last decade, local ethnic BIA's have helped to bolster the strength and resilience of these communities, and our diversity has become a tourist attraction to visitors from around the world. In a way, our BIAs are a way of creating dialogue, and connecting people from different cultures.

Recently, a Japanese friend sent me a DVD of a TV series on Ontario, shown in Japan, which he recorded. It was an introduction to our province to the Japanese. Our ethnic

neighbourhoods in Toronto were a prominent feature of this programme. This is how foreigners see us with our very distinct characteristics.

Beyond the buildings, the stores and restaurants, there is another, more subtle change that has taken place in the City of Toronto - the influence of our immigrants throughout Greater Toronto. Walking down our streets, we see citizens from every corner of the globe, and we have restaurants serving foods from all over the world. We have become a city that is so cosmopolitan that the very idea of separate and bounded ethnic neighbourhoods seems out of place. All you have to do is to look at the faces of our children in our schools.

Toronto is recognized as the most multicultural city in the world. Over half of all visible minorities in Canada live in Ontario, and most of them in the Greater Toronto area - the majority being south Asians, Chinese and Blacks. In the social, business and political arenas, our diverse population is celebrated as a contributor to the prosperity of our city. I have attended many public functions over the years, and I am amazed how far our ethnic minorities have integrated into the Toronto community.

As Torontonians, we share a philosophy, and a way of life, that is quite rare among cities in the world, and I am proud to be a part of this transformative city where so many languages and cultures co-exist. However, what is missing is political leadership because it is an important indicator towards inclusion in a diverse society. Our visible minority elected officials in the three levels of government in the GTA is only 11% where we make up close to 50% of the population. Besides political representation, in order for us to progress as a civil society, we must constantly adapt and learn from each other, so that we can continue to be proud that we are unique in the world.

Over the last three decades, Greater Toronto has also undergone a revolution in the form of suburbanization, and these suburbs are as multicultural as Toronto. This trend is reflected in the fact that the majority of both Brampton and Markham residents are now visible minorities. In Brampton it's the South Asians, and in Markham, it's the Chinese Canadians.

Because of Canada's low birthrate, immigration is necessary to fill our labour force. Our points system has made it possible for the majority of immigrants to come from Asia, and Toronto happens to be one of the cities of choice for immigrants to settle. Having said that, Toronto is experiencing a drop of new settlers as is the province of Ontario, even though the total number is still the highest. Many recent immigrants are choosing to settle in the prairie provinces because of the Provincial Nominee Program.

From a slow rather dull city, we have become a city often compared to New York and London. A large part of the comparison is because of the creativity and energy that our ethnic communities bring to the city. Toronto's diversity of neighbourhoods, our protection of our heritage, is what makes this city great. It's a city that I am very proud of.

One question remains - how will Greater Toronto adjust as the visible minorities become the majority? What will our city look like in 2031? According to Statistics Canada, Toronto's visible minority population, which stood at 43% in 2006, is expected to rise to 63% by 2031.

Will Statistics Canada still use the term “ethnic enclaves” when visible minorities become the majority, as they already have in Brampton and in Markham? Will we still have ethnic neighbourhoods? Will there be conflicts between communities?

With the increase in mixed marriages in your generation, future generations will no longer identify Canadians as being “white”, but rather “exotic” looking, like our grandchildren. Or as the comedian Russell Peters puts it, we’ll all be “beige.” Will we still be considered nice, and polite? That was the one thing my uncle noted about Canadians when he visited Toronto many years ago.

These are the questions I’d like you to reflect on as we go into the Questions and Answer period.