

Change (and I'm not talking Loonies and Toonies)

Two weeks ago today, history was made in the United States.

Now, I don't really want to discuss politics too heavily in this blog, since...well, it's more of a travel/experiential blog, really, and politics are best left to be discussed bitterly in political blogs, but the whole experience of this election from the perspective of another country is something worth noting.

I'm still surprised by the number of people I meet here (young people, especially) who are interested in, possibly almost obsessed with, American politics. I visited my roommate's hometown last weekend, and while we were at dinner with a bunch of her friends, one of them got all excited when she found out I was from the States (she even whipped out her copy of "The Audacity of Hope" to share with me). I'd like to think that we're all ambassadors; obviously you can't judge a whole country based on one person, or on media coverage – you need to meet individuals from countries and hear what they have to say. So in a way, I'd like to think that I'm an ambassador for Americans, especially in time where our country's political decisions haven't exactly been stellar, diplomatic, or world-forward. I listen to what Canadians have to say: I explain what I think about American politics and how it works, and I hope that we're both learning and maybe changing our opinions about one another.

And when they ask me if I voted, I tell them that I did; I voted for Obama and I voted absentee in the comfort of my residence room. I had my friend sign as my witness and then I mailed it home. I'd like to think that my vote was counted and there wasn't any funny business at the polls, and since Virginia somehow magically became a blue state for the first time in 40-ish years, I'm pretty sure it was.

In the last few weeks prior to election night, there was at least one article in The Star each day about something dumb Sarah Palin had done or said (one of my friends jokingly speculated that this is because Canadians secretly like to think that Americans are dumb, and when someone actually proves it, it makes them happy) and at least one or two about other aspects of the election.

And when it came down to election day, I was pleasantly surprised by a lot of things. I knew that the election coverage was going to be playing on the common room TV, but I was surprised when I came home from class Tuesday night to see a huge crowd gathered around the widescreen in the common room, their gazes fixed on CCN, watching as results came in. Unfortunately, I had to work on a typography project, so I didn't join them, but I reloaded NBC4's website over and over again until, suddenly, Barack Obama had 273 electoral votes. I ran and hijacked my roommate's TV, and ended up getting to hear a bit of McCain's defeat speech (I ended up watching Obama's victory speech the next day, and it was awesome). After that, every so often, I could hear people freaking out all over the dorm. I live on the seventh floor, directly above the front entrance, and I could hear people outside by the front door shouting to others, "OBAMA WON!!!" It was

madness, but it felt nice to know that people here, though they had no say in the election, were so excited for what had been accomplished at home.

So, yes we did, America. We did something that has given our image a huge boost around the globe. One of my roommate's friends commented, "I feel like I can actually like the United States again, now that there's a president I support," and as an obligatory afterthought, because I must have been giving him a look, "...sorry."

And I'd like to add a warning to those conservatives out there who are disappointed by the results: I kept seeing posts and opinions all over the internet whining that if Obama won, they would be moving to Canada. Think again—I heard on CP24 that 85% of Canadians polled would've voted for Obama if they could have. And you're complaining because Obama is too "socialist"? Remember—in Canada, they have socialized health care, and many, many, many OTHER government-funded social programs. I guess what I want to say here is, Republicans, or those who did not support Obama, be thankful for what you've got. And, don't get me wrong here, Canada is an awesome place; I don't mean to imply that there's something wrong with politics here, but if that's the reason you want to leave, just think twice before packing your bags.