


MICHAËLLE JEAN: OUR GOVERNOR GENERAL

Introduction

Focus

Michaëlle Jean was sworn in as Canada's 27th Governor General on September 27, 2005. While she has faced some tough political criticism for some of her views, she has also been praised for bringing warmth, purpose, and style to her job as the Queen's representative.

 Sections marked with this symbol indicate content suitable for younger viewers.

Does Canada need a governor general? After all, the governor general is officially the Queen's representative in Canada. The position exists because Canada was once a colony of Britain. While we continue to have close ties with Britain, Canada has long been an independent nation. The Canadian prime minister and his or her government set policy and see that important legislation makes its way through the House of Commons and the Senate. If the Office of the Governor General was abolished, would Canada not be sending a strong message that the country has "come of age"?

Perhaps the question is not whether or not we need a governor general. Perhaps the question should be: What is the proper role for the Canadian governor general in the 21st century? Certainly the role is largely symbolic. Among other duties, the governor general welcomes foreign dignitaries to the country and represents Canada at important events around the world. In many ways, the governor general is the public face of Canada. Should the role be more substantive and less symbolic?

Or should we embrace the fact that it is largely symbolic but recognize that this does not make the role unimportant?

If we accept that the governor general is the public face of Canada, then former prime minister Paul Martin wanted to make an important point about Canada when he chose to appoint Michaëlle Jean to the position in 2005. Jean is a young black woman who was born in Haiti and moved to Quebec when still a girl. She is fluent in a number of languages and has spent most of her career as a journalist. She is married to documentary filmmaker Jean-Daniel Lafond and has a young daughter. So the new "face" of Canada is an immigrant, a visible minority woman, and a working mother.

For many people, Jean's appointment demonstrates that the Office of the Governor General is not an outdated institution that needs to be abolished. Her appointment, they would argue, shows that the institution is growing and evolving with time. Perhaps it is not the institution itself but the governor general as a person who sets the tone and tenor of the position.

To Consider

1. What qualities do you believe a person in the role of governor general should have? Do you believe Jean possesses such qualities? Explain.
2. If the governor general is the "face" of Canada, do you believe that Jean's appointment was a good choice? Why?
3. Would you be interested in serving as governor general at some point? Explain.

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Video Review

Respond to the following questions while viewing the video.

Did you know . . .

Michaëlle Jean is the third woman to be appointed Governor General. She is also the second visible minority person to become Governor General. Who was the first?

Did you know . . .

The full title for our Governor General is Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Chancellor and Principal Companion of the Order of Canada, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Military Merit, Chancellor and Commander of the Order of Merit of the Police Forces, Governor General and Commander-in-Chief in and over Canada.

1. Why did the appointment of Michaëlle Jean as Governor General surprise some people?

2. In what ways does Michaëlle Jean represent the story of Canada?

3. Who was the previous Governor General? _____

4. What citizenship did Jean renounce when she accepted the position of Governor General? _____

5. What is the motto on Jean's personal coat of arms?

6. Where did the new Governor General go for her first official visit with Canadian children? Why?

7. Why did the Governor General visit Montreal to honour Marie Joseph Angélique?

8. Where was Michaëlle Jean born? _____

9. Describe the Governor General's visit to the land of her birth.

10. What has Michaëlle Jean found difficult about her new job?

11. How does Michaëlle Jean hope to keep in touch with Canadians?

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Her Excellency

Did you know . . .

The governor general is appointed by the British monarch on the advice of the prime minister rather than elected by Canadian citizens. Governors general used to be from Britain but now come from Canada and generally serve for five years.

Not surprisingly, Michaëlle Jean is an accomplished woman who has achieved a great deal in her professional life. What might be surprising is that her great achievements followed a poor, and, at times brutal, beginning.

Her Early Years

Jean was born into poverty and violence in the troubled nation of Haiti in 1957. Her mother studied chemistry and nursing. Her father was a philosopher and a literature professor who headed an elite Protestant school. Jean's parents chose to educate her at home because they were opponents of Haitian dictator François "Papa Doc" Duvalier's government and did not want her to have to swear allegiance to him in school. When she was 10, her father was arrested and tortured for his political views. When he was released, the family fled Haiti for Canada.

Soon after the move, Jean's father abandoned the family, leaving Jean's mother to raise Michaëlle and her sister alone in Montreal. For years, the family lived in a small basement apartment that had only one and a half rooms. Jean's mother held a number of jobs, including working at a psychiatric hospital, to provide for her two daughters. The family moved frequently, as Jean's mother searched for a better place to raise her daughters. Eventually, her mother saved enough money to buy a small house for them.

Her Student Years

Jean proved to be gifted at languages and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Italian and Hispanic languages and literature from the University of Montreal. (Jean is fluent in English, French, Spanish,

Italian, and Haitian Creole. She can also read Portuguese.) She completed her Master of Arts in comparative literature in 1986.

During her years as a student, Jean worked at a number of shelters for battered women. Her concern with domestic violence drove her to help establish a network of shelters for women and children across Quebec and Canada. She was also involved in aid organizations for immigrant women and families, and later worked at Employment and Immigration Canada.

Her Career

Before becoming Governor General, Jean worked for 18 years as a journalist. She joined Radio-Canada in 1988, working as a reporter and host of news and public affairs programs. In 1999, she began to host *The Passionate Eye* and *Rough Cuts* on the English-language network. These two shows broadcast the best Canadian and foreign documentary films. In 2001, Jean became the anchor of two of Radio-Canada's news broadcasts. And in 2004, her own show, called simply *Michaëlle*, began on both French-language public television networks.

In the 1990s, Jean also participated in a number of documentary films produced by her husband, filmmaker Jean-Daniel Lafond. These documentaries were critically acclaimed and earned a number of awards.

Awards and Honours

Jean has won numerous awards and honours for her professional achievements. The following list highlights some of the most notable.

- Human Rights League of Canada's 1989 Media Award for her report on the struggle of an immigrant woman in Québec
- Prix Mireille-Lanctôt for her report on spousal violence
- Prix Anik for best information reporting in Canada for her investigation of the power of money in Haitian society
- Amnesty International Canada Journalism Award
- Galaxi Award for best information host
- 2001 Gemini Award for best interview
- Jean was made a citizen of honour by the City of Montreal in recognition of her accomplishments in communications.

Her Personal Life

Michaëlle Jean is married to filmmaker Jean-Daniel Lafond. Their daughter, Marie-Éden, is seven years old, and was adopted from Haiti. Michaëlle Jean's family also includes Lafond's two daughters from a previous marriage and his two grandchildren.

Jean's mother has Alzheimer's. Jean looked after her mother at home for many years until her mother had to move into an institution to receive specialized care. Jean recently renewed contact with her father, after a 30-year separation. Although her father had been a violent man, striking her mother when Jean was a child, Jean now says that she believes his violence was the result of his own torture in Haiti.

Analysis

1. After reading the biographical information about Michaëlle Jean, determine what aspects of her life and experience might help her most in her role as Governor General.

2. On the basis of what you now know about her, is Michaëlle Jean a good choice as Governor General?

Extension

Shortly after her appointment was announced, some people stated that Jean was a "separatist sympathizer." This means that in Quebec, she and her husband socialized with, and shared common concerns with, those who would like to see Quebec separate from Canada. Conduct further research on this issue and prepare a short report for the class that explores whether or not Jean should be considered a separatist and whether or not this would affect her ability to do the job of the Governor General.

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Haiti

Did you know . . .
Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere. In 2002, the life expectancy for adults was 49.4 years.

A number of people have called Michaëlle Jean's appointment to the position of Governor General a "Cinderella story." That is because as a young girl she had a difficult life but she ended up with a prestigious job, a happy marriage, and a beautiful daughter of her own. Whether or not you think Jean's life resembles the classic fairy tale, there is no doubt she was born to a troubled country that remains one of the poorest countries in the world.

The Duvalier Regime

When Michaëlle Jean was a child, the government of Haiti was run by François "Papa Doc" Duvalier. Duvalier was a corrupt and ruthless leader who rooted out anyone who opposed his ideas, policies, or actions. He built a private militia and used it to torture and sometimes kill his opponents. In 1964, he changed the constitution of Haiti, making himself president for life.

When Duvalier died in 1971, his son, Jean-Claude ("Baby Doc"), took over. Baby Doc continued with the corrupt practices established by his father. A 1986 revolt forced him out of the country, and for six years a variety of military governments ruled the nation.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide

In 1990, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a Catholic priest, was elected president based on a radical agenda of social and political change. It looked like Haitians were finally going to have a chance to restore peace and rebuild the nation. But within a few months, a military coup occurred and Aristide was forced out of office.

In an attempt to restore democracy and order the United States sent 20 000 soldiers to Haiti in 1994. However, critics argue that the United States wasn't all that concerned about Haiti, because it took over three years to try to have Aristide reinstated. Finally, Aristide did return to the country in 1994, and won re-election in 2000.

When he was re-elected he adopted a mainstream agenda with which his past supporters were unhappy. He was accused of backtracking on past promises, and opposition to Aristide grew among Haiti's intellectual and business communities. Physical confrontations between Aristide's supporters and opponents increased, and human rights violations came to the attention of the international community. International development money was withdrawn from the country, and in 2004 Aristide was effectively forced to leave Haiti due to pressure from the international community. He currently lives in South Africa. Aristide still insists he is Haiti's legitimate leader.

A Fragile Democracy

In June 2004 the United Nations established a peacekeeping mission to try to stop the violence and bring some measure of security to Haiti. The UN force is made up of almost 9 000 soldiers and police officers from 41 countries. Haiti is still a violent country, but the troop presence has helped to reduce the level of violence and restore order to the nation.

In February 2006, Haiti held its first presidential elections in six years. René Préval, who was president from 1996 to 2001, was declared the winner. The election, however, was marred by fraud.

Boxes of marked ballots were found in garbage dumps, and an unusually large number of blank ballots were cast.

The Canadian Connection

Canada is involved with Haiti in a number of ways. Approximately 100 members of the UN peacekeeping force in Haiti are Canadian police officers and retired RCMP officers. One Canadian officer has been killed in the line of duty. In February 2005, Canadian police officers contributing to the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti were awarded a UN Peacekeeping Medal for their efforts in Haiti.

CIDA, the Canadian International Development Agency (www.acdi-cida.gc.ca), funds a number of development projects in Haiti that are designed to help reconstruction in the nation.

These projects include:

- \$7.7-million to help Haiti's public institutions and civil-society organizations improve their governance and become more effective. This three-year project will involve about 250 Canadians, particularly members of the Haitian community.
- \$5-million to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to strengthen the rule of law and the judicial system. This project will also

strengthen the correctional administration to reduce security incidents, increase respect for the rights of detainees, improve detention conditions, and support re-entry into the community.

- \$19-million to support projects to improve the quality and accessibility of education and health care for poor communities, and to improve administration of these services
- \$1.4-million to supply clean drinking water, protect the environment, and make it easier to access health care

With the appointment of Michaëlle Jean to the position of Governor General of Canada, our links to one of the poorest nations in the world are stronger than ever. When Jean visited Haiti for the first time as Canada's Governor General in May 2006, she was aware that it was a momentous occasion. Her first words to journalists as she stepped from the plane were: "When I was appointed, I knew what it meant to people here. When they saw one of them—now a Canadian—becoming Governor General of that country, it was: 'Oh, there's hope'" (Ingrid Peritz, "Radiant Jean brings ray of hope to Haiti: One-time refugee returns on red carpet at swearing-in of president." *The Globe and Mail*, May 15, 2006).

Discussion

1. In what ways would Michaëlle Jean's position as Governor General of Canada offer hope to Haitians?
2. What evidence is there that Canada is trying to help Haiti in a number of different ways?

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What Does the Governor General Do?

Canada is both a parliamentary democracy and a constitutional monarchy. This means that we have both a head of state and a head of government. The Queen of England is Canada's head of state, but she is represented in Canada by the governor general. However, it should be noted that real political power rests with the prime minister of Canada, who is the head of government.

While in office, the governor general has a number of roles and responsibilities. As you read the following information, consider which of these roles and responsibilities are most important in building national unity.

Representing the Crown in Canada

- Ensures that Canada always has a prime minister
- Signs bills passed by the House of Commons and the Senate (this is called giving "Royal Assent")
- Reads the Speech from the Throne in Parliament, opens and ends sessions of Parliament, and dissolves Parliament for an election
- Presides over the swearing-in of the prime minister, the chief justice of Canada and cabinet ministers

Reflection

Draw a Venn diagram to represent the four themes that encompass a governor general's work.

Representing Canadians and Promoting Our Sovereignty

- Travels to foreign countries building bridges of friendship and understanding between nations
- Welcomes world leaders, ambassadors, and others who represent their countries in Canada

Celebrating Excellence

- Helps Canada pay tribute to outstanding people by awarding a variety of orders, decorations, and medals

Bringing Canadians Together

- Promotes national identity and unity by encouraging Canadians to be proud of their country
- Participates in national ceremonies such as Canada Day and Remembrance Day

Sometimes disagreements occur between the governor general and the prime minister. In 1926, Governor General Lord Byng refused Prime Minister Mackenzie King's request to dissolve Parliament. In times of minority governments such as the present, the position can have increased importance.

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In Her Own Words

Before you read the material below, create a two-column organizer in your notes. In one column, write the heading “My Canada” and list the words and images that you believe define Canada. In the other column, write the heading “Michaëlle Jean’s Canada.” As you read the excerpts from her speech, list the words and images that define Canada for the new Governor General.

On Tuesday, September 27, 2005, Michaëlle Jean became Canada’s 27th Governor General. During her installation—the day she officially began her new job—Jean gave a passionate speech that outlined her commitment to uniting the “two solitudes” of Canada. Historically, the term *two solitudes* has been used in reference to the separate worlds of English- and French-speaking Canadians. The fact that Jean wants to eliminate those solitudes sends a signal that she has a unique and modern vision for Canada.

Monsieur le Premier ministre, Prime Minister,

Let me begin by speaking about hope . . . Hope has been a beacon for me since childhood and into my adult years. It is embodied in this country with its unlimited possibilities—this country that we sometimes take for granted. My own story begins as a young child in another country, one “draped in barbed wire from head to toe,” in the powerful words of the Haitian poet in exile, René Depestre, who is also my uncle. The story of that little girl, who watched her parents, her family, and her friends grappling with the horrors of a ruthless dictatorship, who became the woman standing before you today, is a lesson in learning to be free.

I know how precious that freedom is, I know what a legacy it is for every child, for every citizen of this country. I, whose ancestors were slaves, who

was born into a civilization long reduced to whispers and cries of pain, know something about its price, and I know too what a treasure it is for us all.

Every Canadian woman, every Canadian man prizes that freedom and would defy anyone who tried to take it away—of that I have no doubt.

From Signal Hill to Vancouver Island, from Baffin Land to Thetford Mines, the freedom that is ours unites us all. Freedom has marked our history and our territory, it has marked our summer breezes and our howling winter winds. It has helped create the spirit of adventure that I love above all in this country, this country where each and every one of us is able to participate fully in the ongoing task of building it.

More than four centuries ago that spirit of adventure drove women and men to cross the ocean and discover a new world elsewhere. That spirit also led the First Nations to pass on to those new settlers the essence of this generous land. And it encourages people from all over the world to share in our prospects or to take refuge here and make a fresh start, safe from tyranny and violence. It inspires our artists, our scientists, our peacekeepers, and our institutions as they work to spread our know-how and our message of hope. Today, we are the sum of those adventures. . . .

Let me add that my appointment to the position of Governor General of Canada is proof of that. We are en-

Further Research

The current Governor General has a personal Web site titled "Citizen Voices." This site features a Governor General's blog, hosts forums for all Canadians, and has special chat rooms. To stay connected to the Governor General, visit www.citizenvoices.gg.ca.

couraged to believe that everything is possible in this country, and my own adventure represents for me and for others a spark of hope that I want kept alive for the greatest number.

. . . The time of the "two solitudes" that for too long described the character of this country is past. The narrow notion of "every person for himself" does not belong in today's world, which demands that we learn to see beyond our wounds, beyond our differences for the good of all. Quite the contrary: we must eliminate the spectre of all the solitudes and promote solidarity among all the citizens who make up the Canada of today. As well, we must make good use of our prosperity and our influence wherever the hope that we represent offers the world an extra measure of harmony.

And that is how I am determined that the position I occupy as of today will be more than ever a place where citizens' words will be heard, where the values of respect, tolerance, and sharing that are so essential to me and to all Canadians, will prevail. Those values, which are paramount for me, are linked inextricably with the Canada I love. Along with my husband, Jean-Daniel Lafond, I hope to rally our creative forces around those values that unite us all and that are universal in scope.

There is an observation by Montesquieu, a philosopher of the Enlightenment, that has a particular resonance for me, and I would like to share it with you. It states that, "The duty of the citizen becomes a crime if it makes him forget the duty of the man." To this, I would of course add "the duty of the woman," because we want recognition as full-fledged citizens in our own right. That statement inspires me and comforts me, for me it is a rampart against the barbarism that afflicts so many in this

world. And it reminds me how fortunate we are to be citizens of a country that's not afraid to tear down walls of prejudice, one whose generosity is its finest attribute in the concert of nations. As Governor General I shall place special emphasis on the generosity that Canadians have shown throughout our history, from our veterans and our Canadian Forces, who have often sacrificed so much, to the many volunteers in humanitarian actions, who often work in the shadows in the name of a peaceful ideal of freedom and justice.

Most of all, I want our young people to be our standard-bearers. I want them to dip into the enormous treasure trove that is Canada. I am the mother of a little girl whose story opened my eyes to certain very harsh realities that we must not ignore. My daughter, Marie-Éden, has changed my life. She has taught me that while all children are born equal, they don't all have the same opportunities to flourish. This is as true for children here as it is for children in the Third World.

. . . Nothing in today's society is more disgraceful than the marginalization of some young people who are driven to isolation and despair. We must not tolerate such disparities. After all, our young people are helping to redefine the great family we all belong to, in a world that is less and less impermeable, more and more open. They are the promise of our future and we have a duty to encourage them to join us in this reinvention of the world. We must communicate to them the spirit of adventure that our ancestors, regardless of their origins, have passed on to us. We must give our young people the power and, even more, the desire to realize their full potential. I shall do everything I can to see to that and I invite each and every one of you to help me in this vital task.

I am eagerly looking forward to meeting my fellow Canadians very soon. I am convinced that Canada will continue to accomplish great things if we work together for a better quality of life—for our own population and for all humanity. Our country is vast and it is blessed with a wealth of colours and the varied music of its tongues and accents. Many have not had the good fortune of measuring its full extent. I know how privileged I am. And knowing it makes me impatient and eager to meet you and to begin the dialogue that I consider to be the founding principle of this country.

I already have some sense of the wisdom of the First Nations; of the legendary hospitality and humour of people in the Atlantic provinces; of the flourishing culture and the generosity of spirit of Quebecers, of the resilience of francophones outside Quebec; of the impressive economic vitality of Ontario; of the sense of honour of residents of the West where, I'm told, it is still possible to conclude a business deal with a handshake; and of the spectacular geogra-

phy of British Columbia. I have a sense of some of this country's splendours, but there is still so much for me to discover at your side. I look forward to visiting you in your communities, your towns, your villages, your homes, and to listen as you talk about your faith in this land of freedom which is an inexhaustible source of renewal.

Every level of government, every community in this country, every body that oversees its development, the institutions that represent the best of it, the women and men who are at the core of its very existence—all have a responsibility to kindle in us the spirit of adventure with which I undertake today, with pride and determination, to assume the office of Governor General of Canada. I hope with all my heart that together, we can call upon the vigour of our shared history to realize our dearest and most ambitious wish: to make a better world.

Thank you.

Source: www.gg.ca/media/doc.asp?lang=e&DocID=4574

Analysis

1. Review the organizer you created. How does your description of Canada compare with that of Michaëlle Jean's? If your description is similar, why do you think that might be? If it is dissimilar, try to analyze why this is the case. In what ways is your life experience different from that of Jean's?
2. What does this speech tell you about Jean's view of children and youth? Do you generally agree or disagree with these views? Explain.
3. What does Jean hope to be able accomplish through her role as Governor General?

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Issues for Debate

Further Research

To learn more about other governors general, consider a visit to the CBC Digital Archives at www.cbc.ca/archives and view the audio-visual file "Jeanne Sauvé, a Woman of Firsts" and a single clip entitled "A Chinese Canadian Governor General."

Further Research

Useful sites include the Governor General's site at www.gg.ca and CBC News at www.cbc.ca.

Do we actually need a governor general in Canada?

Canadians are somewhat divided on this issue. What do you think? Consider the following points and then go on to prepare for a debate on the topic.

Some arguments in support of the position of governor general:

- It is an important part of Canadian history.
- The governor general is an important symbol of what it means to be Canadian, both at home and internationally.
- The governor general is free from politics and can represent all Canadians more easily than a political prime minister.
- The Office of the Governor General fulfills a number of important roles.

Some arguments critical of the position of governor general:

- Canada is not a colony and no longer needs the approval of Britain for any domestic or international issues so we should dissolve our relationship with the monarchy.
- It is largely a symbolic position so the money could be spent better elsewhere.
- It can be confusing for new Canadians and foreigners.
- The Office of the Governor General is not important to the functioning of the nation.

Your Task

Your class will be divided into small "buzz groups" and each group will be assigned to argue one of the positions. Within your group, generate as many additional arguments as you can based on what you've learned in this *News in Review* story. Then debate the issue in class.

Research Organizer

Additional Arguments in Favour of the GG	Additional Arguments Opposed to the GG	My Thoughts