

Why Canadians Are Different from Americans

Canadians and Americans may look alike, talk somewhat alike and act alike in many ways, but the two are very different cultures. Find author Bill Allin at <http://billallin.com>

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Canadians are generally indistinguishable from Americans, and the surest way of telling the two apart is to make the observation to a Canadian.

- Richard Staines

As recently as the 1970s, many Canadians could name almost no differences between Canadians and Americans. Except one that stands out. They knew they were Canadians, not Americans.

That is a credit to nationalist pride, pride in one's homeland. But what else?

Canada is the only country in the world that knows how to live without an identity.

- [Marshall McLuhan](#) (Canadian who worked for many years in the USA)

[Canada and Canadians have clear identities among people elsewhere in the world, even if they are not clear about their own identity at home. They are too close to see what the identity is.]

Canada and the United States of America have very different histories. That, more than anything of importance today, has made Canadians distinctly different from Americans.

A few centuries ago, Britain was the mightiest nation in the world. At one time it controlled fully one-quarter of the land mass of the planet. English merchants viewed North America as a massive natural resource with the potential to provide massive wealth to the home country and those who controlled its economy. So did the French.

The Seven Years' War settled their difference of opinion. While England and France were driving themselves into poverty through

long periods of war with each other, English General James Wolfe (a major general in North America, while still only a colonel in England) defeated French General Montcalm (a real general and leader of New France), at what is now Quebec City. North America was then English, for the most part.

France had nothing left to give to New France, so defeat at Quebec was mostly a damage to its pride. England had nothing left to give to New England. But a thriving economy among English merchants in the New World became an attractive and lucrative resource for the impoverished homeland. This thrilled the English merchants in England, but greatly troubled the English merchants in the New World.

The two groups of English settled their differences with the War of Independence (aka Revolutionary War), which established the United States of America, in 1776, out of 13 existing English colonies.

There were now, in effect, two English empires, one centred in Washington, the other in London. As the London based empire faded, the one based in Washington took over as the most powerful nation on the planet. Set their respective histories of the period side by side to see how similar the attitudes and styles of economy and approach to the wealth to be gained through war by the senior merchant class to see how the USA became the British Empire, Part 2.

The separation and succession of empires was not without precedent. The ancient Greeks, who could not unite in Greece due to what amounted to tribal conflicts, formed the Roman Empire, which later morphed into the Byzantine Empire, which in turn lasted for another 1000 years while Rome and Europe entered the Dark Ages. Both the Roman and the Byzantine Empires were essentially Greek empires.

The northern part of England's New World colonies, what much later became Canada, bolstered by what had been New France and the English Loyalists who migrated from the USA north into territory still held by the British, gained its own identity. It did so partly because it had to survive on its own, with little assistance from the

motherland.

While the USA had much of its legal system formed with the help of formerly Scottish immigrants, its political, economic and religious systems remained basically copies of the English ancestors. The English in the USA held control. They gained that control through war.

Canada gained its foundation, its legal system, its ethical system and its work force from the Scots and the Irish who came under the umbrella term "British." Canada's first Prime Minister was Sir John A. Macdonald, who brought his Scottish accent with him when he immigrated from Scotland with his family, as a child.

As some American comedians like to put it, Canada, unlike the USA model, gained its own independence from Britain by asking nicely. This suited the Canadians because they were tired of war. Canada settled its differences with the native Indians through a series of treaties (which the Indians upheld, while the Canadian government kept nary a single promised, but that's another story).

Canada settled most of its differences with its French speaking citizens by giving the Province of Quebec the legal system (which is different from that in any other Canadian province) it wanted and control of most of its own destiny. Some Quebeckers (known as Québécois) have still not recovered from the shame they felt from the loss by Montcalm, and still demand independence for Quebec from the rest of Canada, but most Quebec Francophones prefer to remain with the larger and wealthier Canada. They don't want to fight.

That still does not quite explain the major differences between Canadians and Americans today.

Canada is not the British Empire, Part 3. It is not a melting pot, as the USA claims to be. Instead of trying to assimilate immigrants from almost every other culture on the planet that have come to make their homes in Canada, it has encouraged immigrants to retain the best of their home cultures and add them to the greater Canadian culture, making the whole greater than the sum of its parts. Canada is officially multicultural. It is still officially bilingual, retaining the two founding languages, English and French.

There is one more major influence on Canada today that even most Canadians do not recognize. It's an influence that the USA never had, or at least never recognized because it insisted on integrating and assimilating every cultural group in the nation. Canada had (and still has) the Acadians.

While relatively small in number in Canada today, the Acadians must have had a huge influence on what Canada became out of its somewhat confusing past. I won't go into the history of Acadians in Canada (and Cajuns subsequently in the USA), because it is too extensive, though fascinating.

You can learn more about the Acadians [here](#).

Ask 100 Canadians what they take pride in about their country and the way it is known to the world (or ask 1000 people of other countries their opinions about Canada). Then look at the values of the original Acadians, the values that guided their lives, their social structure, their culture, who were in what became Canada when it was taken over by the British, and you will find shocking similarities. Canadian values today are essentially Acadian values, the two match up that closely.

The Acadians of Canada, although a colony of New France, were not really a significant part of New France, which was centred in Quebec, the part that was at least a bit supported by France before Wolfe and Montcalm. The Acadians were originally French, but not from the part of France that held the power in Paris. They were mostly farmers sent from northeastern provinces of France to populate New France. Almost immediately the Acadians were left on their own to fend for themselves with very little support financially or militarily (for defence).

The Acadians settled, survived, and thrived, again and again despite many efforts to get rid of them or to assimilate them. Ask 100 Acadians from Canada today what they are proud of about their Acadian heritage and culture and the answers will be very similar to what you got when you asked the other 100 Canadians a couple of paragraphs back.

All Canadians today know about the Acadians and their storied history. Few know how much they influenced the culture of Canada today.

Today's Acadians seem blissfully unaware of the remarkable similarity of the values by which they live their

lives to the core values of the nation their ancestors came to 400 years ago.

How typically Canadian.

If you want to know what makes Canadians different from Americans today, read some history of Acadians in Canada. Canada adopted Acadian values. Canadians today proudly think of them as clearly Canadian values.

Here are a few more quotes about differences between Canadians and Americans:

A Canadian is sort of like an American, but without the gun.

- Anonymous

[Recent studies show that Canadians own more guns per capita than Americans, but have only a tiny fraction of the US murder rate.]

Canada has never been a melting-pot; more like a tossed salad.

- Arnold Edinborough

Canada is probably the most free country in the world where a man still has room to breathe, to spread out, to move forward, to move out, an open country with an open frontier. Canada has created harmony and cooperation among ethnic groups, and it must take this experience to the world because there is yet to be such an example of harmony and cooperation among ethnic groups.

- Valentyn Moroz

Canadians have been so busy explaining to the Americans that we aren't British, and to the British that we aren't Americans that we haven't had time to become Canadians.

- Helen Gordon McPherson

I am a Canadian, free to speak without fear, free to worship in my own way, free to stand for what I think right, free to oppose what I believe wrong, or free to choose those who shall govern my country. This heritage of freedom I pledge to uphold for myself and all mankind.

- former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, From the Canadian Bill of Rights, July 1, 1960

In a world darkened by ethnic conflicts that tear nations apart, Canada stands as a model of how people of different cultures can live and work together in peace, prosperity, and mutual respect.

- former US President Bill Clinton

The Canadian is not an American - at least, not entirely, not yet.

Alistair Horne

You look at the history [of Canada] -- the aboriginal people welcomed the first settlers here with open arms, fed us and took care of us ... that continues today, we welcome people from all nations to come in and share.

- Peter Stoffer

Bill Allin is the author of ***Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems***, a guidebook for solving social problems that plague cities and countries around the world today. It's a simple and effective plan that will work.

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