



**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
SPRING CONVOCATION**

History

Our early history shows one dramatic difference between Canadians and Americans. Many U.S. attitudes are conditioned by its revolutionary experience, a violent breakaway from the British crown. In contrast Canadian Francophones and Anglophones, who were the dominant groups until after the Second World War, both have a counterrevolutionary heritage.

Francophone society was based on a rejection of the ideals of the French Revolution. Whereas post revolutionary France became a secular, increasingly urban society, French Canada remained a church-dominated, predominantly rural society. French Canadian society changed rapidly in the decades after the Second World War, but the cultural heritage of this background remained.

The small original Anglophone population was augmented by the influx of refugees from the American Revolution—United Empire Loyalists to us, and ‘Tories’ to Americans. Rejecting the ideals of the American Revolution by fleeing to Canada, they were true counter-revolutionaries who gave a distinctive character to Anglophone society, particularly in what is now Ontario.

Unlike the United States, Canada had no war of independence. Instead, our independence evolved over two centuries. This highly-civilized process does not provide the same dramatic material as does the American Revolution but does provide one reason why our identity is low-key, while the U.S. identity is much more "up front".

Many of the 19th century European immigrants who transformed the U.S. were fleeing political persecution or genuine famine. In contrast, most post Second World War Canadian immigrants were fleeing neither persecution nor extreme economic deprivation. Of course, we have opened our doors to refugees, but because of the different economic and political conditions, attitudes of the typical immigrant to Canada in the last 60 years have differed from those of the typical immigrant to the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Heroes and Myths

Canadians have no strong military tradition. During the War of 1812, Americans twice invaded Canada and were repelled mainly by British not Canadian troops. Instead of welcoming the American troops as liberators as the American expected, the French Canadian population stuck solidly behind their British rulers. Although many Canadians fought willingly in two world wars, our typical international role has been one of peacekeeper not warrior. As a result, many Canadians worry about the change that is being effected as we become heavily involved in the war in Afghanistan. Unlike the United States and many European countries, we have never fought a bloody civil war. No general has ever been prime minister of Canada, in dramatic contrast to the United States.

Canadians are neither great myth-makers nor myth-believers. We neither generate great outpourings of pro-Canadian propaganda nor believe much of the propaganda that we do

generate. Anyone who has had serious dealings with Americans, no matter how much they respect them, has noted the difficulties inherent in dealing with people who believe deeply in their own national mythology. Let me give you one of the many possible examples.

The view of the US as the world's main bastion of freedom brought over by the waves of 19th century European immigrants has survived into modern times in spite of the many 20th century dictators the US has helped to install and support—the Shah of Iran, Suharto in Indonesia, Batista in Cuba, Somoza in Nicaragua, Pinochet in Chile, and Mobutu in Congo/Zaire to mention just a few.

Geography

Strong geographical forces also shaped North America

