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Canada and the United States: A Comparison of their Philosophical Bases

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Prepared for Professor John Hall

Abstract: Americans and Canadians seem similar in many ways; however, their dissimilar historical experiences have shaped very different attitudes and philosophies that underpin their institutions. Canadians promote equality and collective responsibility under a restrained, parliamentary state, whilst the Americans stress self-reliance, individualism and freedom. Canadians embraced the hierarchical structure of the British and French Empires and Americans revolted against all ties to it. What appear to be minor distinctions between the two countries and cultures are actually fundamental philosophies rooted in the past.

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religion, tradition.

Though similar in many ways, Canada and the United States of America exhibit different philosophical bases. This inquiry seeks to establish that indeed there are philosophical differences between the two countries which are evident in current economic and social behaviors and which may be attributed to the distinctly different historical contexts.

Anecdotally, we are led to believe that Americans are rugged individualists who seek open space, opportunity, the right to carry a weapon and freedom from government interference and taxation. In contrast, Canadians are seen as polite, passive, over-taxed peace-keepers who support and enjoy free medical care and say “eh” at the end of most sentences. While we might dismiss these stereotypes as wild misrepresentations, empirical evidence and examination of the historical context may expose the underpinnings of the two distinctly different cultures and philosophies that perpetuate such stereotypes.

Political sociologist, Seymour Lipset (1986), author of *Historical Traditions and National Characteristics: A Comparative Analysis of Canada and the United States*, portends that Canadian and American philosophical differences and potentially the bases for the Canadian and American philosophical stereotype, became more distinct after the two countries responded very differently to oppressive French Monarchical and British rule in the pre American revolution time period. In order to understand the similarities and differences between

Canadian and United States' philosophical bases and behavior, James Angresano, an Evolutionary Institutional Economics scholar, recommends we first consider historical context: for this purpose, the period leading up to the 1770s.

Angresano and his Comparative Approach.

Angresano (1996, 2-3) teaches us that to understand the economy and nature of a country (its philosophies, institutions, political and social hierarchies), we must consider its historical context. For example, he indicates that if a country has had a history of monopolized political power (or dictatorship) as did the Soviet Union under Leonid Brezhnev 1964–82 (Encyclopedia Britannica), it may exhibit a stagnant economy, whereas strong, state leadership may play an important role in redistribution of wealth, through social insurance and welfare that promotes equality and social stability, as is the case in Sweden and Norway. Of no less significance was the dominance of the Church in the feudal economy, specifically the Catholic Church, which stifled freedom through its tight-fisted land ownership, restrictions and obligations and kept the economies of Europe stagnant and “backward”¹. Although the United States and Canada were settled in a similar time period in history, the populations that settled their early colonies were dissimilar in nationality, governing ideology and religious affiliation.

Canada and the United States in Historical Perspective.

Sigmund Diamond's (1961, 5) account of the French settlement of Quebec, Canada, *An Experiment in "Feudalism": French Canada in the Seventeenth Century*, establishes that the French occupied the Canadian territory in 1627. It was a settlement of four thousand people and was known as the New France settlements of Quebec, Canada. In 1607, merely a few years earlier, the United States was settled by the British at Jamestown, Virginia. It is worthwhile to compare the two colonies due to the similar reasons for which the colonists immigrated and the very different cultures, religions and philosophies they brought with them.

Sigmund Diamond (1961, 4) claims that the Quebec and Jamestown colonies were established by commercial charters for the purpose of financial opportunity but within a few years, found themselves unable to attend the demands of investors, merchants and patron governments. Additionally, the commercial entities were unable to maintain the flow of supplies and labor necessary to maintain business and a functional, working society. The responsibility for the new settlement of Quebec fell on the French government, just as the responsibility for the Virginian settlement fell on the English government.

Diamond (1961, 5) remarks, that the task that fell upon the French government, under the rule of Louis XIV, was considerable. King Louis XIV,

maintained a feudal system in France and it was natural to bring law and order to the colony through the implementation of the principles and institutions of the mother land. Diamond (1965, 6) notes that the French, feudal bureaucracy was rigid and disciplined like an organization, not a society. Quebec was a wilderness society in need of order but Diamond (1961, 6) claims that King Louis XIV didn't send his finest men to the colony, instead he resettled only men he considered of mediocre social position, for he thought it was important that they not have ambitiousness lest they forget their status of civil servant to the state and Monarchy.

Diamond (1961, 7-10) describes the Quebec village system as one of a feudal arrangement, where most men were tied to the land, answerable to their master and distant, French Monarch (with who there was allowed no competition for authority). Diamond (1961, 9-10) elaborates that this society had "a special system of land tenure, an elaborate code of law, an established church, royal patronage..." and all economic activity was regulated by the government. With a desire to establish and grow the colony's insufficient labor population (necessary to tend the land), married couples were financially rewarded for having more than ten children, parents of unwed (of-age) offspring were fined until their children married and unwed males were banned from hunting, fishing and trading with the Indians. Eventually the French government recognized the shortage of women as a

contributing factor to a slow population increase and relocated more than one thousand “demoiselles” or unmarried French women to the colony.

Social discipline was maintained by the Roman Catholic (state supported) Church, writes Diamond (1961, 12) and the Church was also awarded power to abolish any Protestant unorthodoxy. All immigrants were pre-screened to ensure their loyalty and affiliation to the Catholic Church. Typical of a feudal society, writes Diamond (1961, 14), the Church owned more than one third of all land grants by 1750 and to maintain authority and control, the Church’s ecclesiastical disciplining extended to the establishment of schools with the goal of teaching the “inferiors”, (the children of the land laborers), how to make themselves useful.

Resistance was to be expected, says Diamond (1961, 30) and the fur trade was the vehicle. Complaints about the limitations of opportunity imposed by feudal domination were launched repeatedly by the young men of the French colony and the rebellious act of fur trade was embraced and reveled in. Diamond (1961, 30) notes that the young men’s desertion of the colony not only depleted the labor force but also enticed others to follow which drew criticism from the Church. It was, the Church insisted, “libertinism...[which] gives them a distaste for labour...” and eventually, it was claimed, they would be good for nothing. Not oblivious to the wealth the fur trade offered, offers Diamond (1961, 31), the leading aristocracy began receiving “cuts” in fur trading profits. Furthermore, when merchant rights

were awarded to nobility, the land fell fallow and fewer men spent time at home altogether. Adding to the disarray, disobedience to the Crown frustrated the French government and Diamond (1961, 34) writes, similar to past feudal uprisings, disenfranchised French Canadians either moved to the interiors of Canada to settle “free” land or were given concessions to secure their labor and loyalty. Unlike the Americans however, the Canadian struggle never gathered the kind of steam that led to a Revolution, instead, loyalists of the North for the most part, accepted the status quo, embracing the British after their conquest of the territory in the seven years war (1756–63) (encyclopedia Britannica). Lipset (1986, 126) quotes O’Toole (1982, 184-185) as saying that it was the Church’s “condemnation of mass democracy, egalitarianism, republicanism and revolution as the work of the devil” that led the Canadians to reject participation in the revolution and he insists (1986, 198) that it was due to the Canadians’ refusal to join the American colonies in revolt against the British Empire, that their conservative, loyalist values locked in place and became embedded, durable, institutional philosophies.

The first permanent colony in the United States, according to the Gale Encyclopedia, was established at Jamestown, Virginia. Escape from religious persecution was not the motivation of the colonial settlement, but rather the opportunity to become financially better off. Strictly Anglican (Protestant), the Virginians adhered to the Church’s rules pertaining to morality, faith and other

functional, institutional rules. For example, the protestant Church promoted order through good record keeping, education and legal procedures. Shortly after the settlement of Jamestown, the Calverts arrived and established Maryland. As Catholic outcasts of England and not well received in the largely Anglican colony, Calverts were responsible for establishing The Religious Tolerance Act of 1649. In Calvert's wake, William Penn and fellow persecuted English Quakers settled what is now known as Pennsylvania in 1681. (Gale Encyclopedia). The influx of immigrants and the multitude of religious perspectives is claimed to be the impetus for the first Great Awakening which emphasized the personal relationship with God and self-determined destiny or free will—an individualistic base that would pervade the American system.

Some historians believe that the Stamp Act of 1765-66 (Gale Encyclopedia), the Act that required an official stamp on all transactions and also required that all fees be paid in “rare coin”, may have set the Revolutionary wheels in motion. The tea tax that spurred the Boston Tea Party and several other “intolerable” Acts added fuel to the fire.

Historian, Thad W. Tate (1960, 323) writes in his article, *The Coming of the Revolution in Virginia: Britain's Challenge to Virginia's Ruling Class, 1763-1776*, that diary entries from the Revolution era protested Great Britain's attempts to “tax her [Virginia] out of the constitutional road”. He listed the fifteen allegations that

the Americans held the British Empire guilty of, which included; unpopular policies, legislative restrictions, infringements on the individual rights and threats to liberty by armed force. Though Tate (1960, 324) argues that Virginia was a particularly loyal (to England) State and not as heavily burdened as other states, Planters had experienced indebtedness to British merchants and clashes with speculators among other intolerances and they had grown weary of it. Tate (1960, 333) suggests that Virginians were more upset with the merchants who pressed for the removal of Virginian colonial currency issue than the passage of the Currency Act of 1759 that demanded its end, however, it was debt owed to the Merchants that riled the Virginian colonists. Tate (1960, 337) writes that things were reported to be getting much worse in Virginia by 1774. The tobacco companies were more in debt and credit was severely restricted. Hostility towards the Merchants superseded all other concerns except those that pertained to land grants to British investors. Tate (1960, 338) notes that Virginians were relatively unconcerned with much of England's Colonial activity, including issues regarding land rights and parceling, however in 1774 the Crown demanded that land be sold at quadruple the prices charged in the past (catering to the wealthy speculators) and their attitude shifted. Up until this time, Tate (1960, 341, 343) suggests, no local disputes, not even the consideration of "establishing an Anglican episcopate" (because it was not proposed by England, but by Virginians themselves) were ever

intolerable enough to have contributed to the desire for a revolution. The Virginian rebelliousness began to percolate out of displeasure for the ever increasing taxation by the British Empire, which began in 1764 with the Sugar Act, Stamp Act and Townshend Act---it was taxation with representation they protested (History.org). Later, it was because a Scotsman, by the name of John Murray, Fourth Earl of Dunmore (at first liked by the Virginians), stripped the colony of its legislature and declared martial law as violence broke out over the confiscation of the entire colony's gunpowder store. Murray, needless to say, was concerned at the growing discontent in the colony and believed the gunpowder might be used to overthrow the British authority (Ohio History Central). Not surprisingly, Tate (1960, 343) claims that Virginians probably believed they had considerable individual freedoms until the appointment of Earl of Dunmore and only became concerned when the colonial self government appeared to be put in danger by the British. The tea dumping event at Boston and the consequent action of King George III fueled the rumblings of anti-British authority and in 1775 the American Revolution changed what would become a nation (History.com).

Similarities and Differences Currently

French Canadians, writes Lipset (1986, 126) no longer adhere to the puritanical values of the Jansens, and the Catholic Church has moved away from anti-industrial values to a socialist ideology. Americans on the other hand, he writes, attend church more regularly than Canadians and “adhere to fundamentalist and moralistic beliefs” more firmly than the Canadians. Lipset (1986, 126) notes that the Catholic Church in the United States has taken a protestant-like position that emphasizes individual morality and accommodates the American way of life (to the grief of the Vatican) whereas the Catholic Church of Canada has posed no such problems.

Lipset (1986, 128) cites historical obligations and rights of *community* in Canada and the individualistic tendency of the United States as the cause of differing legal systems between the two countries. He suggests Canada stresses control and protection, (law and order based on the European model) with less emphasis on protection of the individual, while the United States stresses “Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” where the rights of the individual are paramount as well as subject to “due process”.

Freedom of speech is a constitutional *right* demanded by Americans but Lipset (1986, 128-129) indicates it is not a protected constitutional right in Canada and if Canadians protest with physical social action (considered free speech by

mainstream America) they will likely be met with military control. However, Canadians are more apt to follow traditional, formal channels for change making and tend to protest rarely. Americans on the other hand, often use “extralegal” means of protest and according to Lipset (1986, 130), decisions made by American leadership are often being questioned by the people.

Data suggests that Canadians commit fewer violent crimes (murder, robbery and rape) writes Lipset (1986, 129) and they tend to exhibit a greater respect for the law, faith in the police and are supportive of increased gun control legislation. He adds that in the United States, gun ownership is seen as a constitutional “right” and Lipset (1986, 130) suggests that it may represent the more egalitarian nature of the American system.

Lipset (1986, 130-131) asserts that corruption is more prevalent in the American experience because there is a larger emphasis on success and achievement and citizens are more likely to employ means that deviate from conventional norms. Canadians, he claims, emphasize achievement for all and nurture the collective spirit.

Economic activity for the two countries compared here, involves considering the “relationship between values and structure” writes Lipset (1986, 131), and lacking a feudal past, the United States, has the “purest example of a bourgeois society” (Engels quote). Lipset (1986, 132) quotes Hardin’s (1974, 102-105)

observation that as a result of a suppressed history of feudalism, Canadians are less entrepreneurial, less innovative and less aggressive than the Americans. Lipset (1986, 132-133) notes that Canadians are less inclined to encourage founding businesses through investment than their American counterparts and are more likely to invest in the U.S.A. Canadians, confirming their aversion to risk, are claimed by Lipset (1986, 133) to be less likely to use a credit card (as of the date of Lipset's publication) than American counterparts.

Canadians are more likely to support state intervention than Americans, writes Lipset (1986, 134-135) and while Canadians are less likely to volunteer (than Americans), Lipset suggests that this is in keeping with the notion that Canadians are more apt to rely on the state. Canadians have continued to support universal medical care and a guaranteed minimum income (Arnold and Barnes, 1979, 32). Americans in contrast, writes Lipset (1986, 135), prefer limited government intervention and are less likely to support welfare programs. Lipset, quotes Robert Kudrle and Theodore Marmor's (1981, 112) observation that Canada redistributes income to the elderly in particular, the family and the unemployed as well as the healthcare system, all of which are aggressively funded programs.

At the time of Lipset's publication (1986, 139), University attendance (in 1979) was at 36 percent in Canada and 55 percent in the U.S.A. The United

Nations Development Report (2013) shows that the United States has a University attendance rate of 94.8 percent compared to Canada's 60 percent, however, newly released data places Canada well ahead of the USA on its pisa assessment score (NCES.ed.gov). However, Lipset (1986, 139) claims that (in the 1980s), Canadian managers were less trained than in almost any other developed country in the world, except Britain (quoted. McMillan, 1978,45).

Lipset (1986, 141) found that most Americans favor freedom over equality (72 percent), while only 64 percent of English Canadians and 57 percent of French Canadians favored freedom over equality and Canadians were more likely to tolerate minorities and unpopular people as neighbors than Americans.

Equality measurements must consider gender and it is apparent from the U.N.D.P. (2013) that women have more equality in Canada than in the United States. The inequality index for Canada is eighteenth in the world ranking with an index of 0.119 (the Netherlands being in the number one position) compared to the United States, which falls at forty-second place in the world ranking with an index of 0.256. Canadian women hold 28 percent of seats in parliament compared to only seventeen percent in the U.S.A. (UNDP 2013, 156).

In conclusion, this inquiry has enlightened us regarding the idiosyncrasies and philosophical foundations of Canada and the United States by considering their historical contexts. While demographics and upward and downward mobility as

well as economic development is very similar in each country, according to Lipset (1986, 114), the systems that control the populations are very different and it is due, he claims, to the very fact that one country adhered to the Monarchy while the other rejected it. It appears, as claimed by Seymour Lipset, that the revolution may be the event that extracted and made evident, the very nature of what makes a Canadian a non risk-taking, loyal Canadian and an American an individualist.

Footnote

1. Peter Kilby (1962, 303-310) notes that “Relative to existing levels of technique and capital accumulation, the ratio of resource input to volume of product is very high in underdeveloped [*backward*] economies....The causes being [internal and external] impediments... inadequate transportation facilities [and] narrow markets, et cetera “.

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