

**Mount Allison University**

**The Cultural Clashes Within Canada:  
Quebec, and The United States**

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By

F. Norman Robitza

Over the past few decades, Canada has faced the assimilation of its culture by the United States of America. This Americanization of the Great White North has caused Canadians to lose touch with their past and identity. The nation has also seen greater difficulties arise between the French and English in Quebec. The two issues have a very interesting contrast. The Canadian government has done a great deal to hold down the French language and culture in the country but when the American's try to force their culture on Canada, little is done to stop them. Canada must decide which of these two problems are more important and deal with it before it is too late to solve either one.

The Americanization of Canada became apparent in the years following the Second World War. The new bonds formed between the United States and Canada during the war caused a great deal of American capital to enter Canada. American companies established a great deal of manufacturing facilities in central Canada. The Americans also purchased a number of products from Canada, especially important minerals that were disappearing in their own country.<sup>1</sup> American spending in Canada would increase when Mexico, Canada, and the United States signed the North American Free Trade Agreement in the 1990's.

As all this extra money rushed into Canada, people became more willing to purchase major items. Icemen and coal merchants lost their business as electric

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<sup>1</sup>Francis, R. Douglas; Jones, Richard; & Smith, Donald B.; Destinies: Canadian History Since Confederation (Harcourt Brace & Company, Toronto, 1996) p. 325

refrigerators and ranges modernized Canadian kitchens. Gas and oil heat also hurt the coal industry as these new, cleaner and more efficient fuel sources became available. The new money also increased automobile sales. Canadians began to purchase “sleek American Fords and Chevies.”<sup>2</sup>

The major cultural clash came through entertainment. Radio, books, magazines, newspapers, and eventually, television and music recordings would help to Americanize Canada. Radio broadcasters began to rebroadcast American programs since cuts to their budgets caused it to be difficult to produce their own shows. Laws soon came into effect to make sure that Canadian performers would have a fair chance to receive equal coverage. “First came quotas for Canadian content on both radio and television, and the creation of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) to enforce them.”<sup>3</sup> These quotas had little effect on anything other than radio and recorded music. Little effort was put into halting the Americans culture being pushed onto Canadians. Also, little was done to stop Canadian culture to be claimed by the Americans.

Canadian culture also filtered south to America. Hockey, for example, was claimed by the United States as the National Hockey League became popular. In

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid p. 326

<sup>3</sup>Thompson, John Herd; *Canada's Quest for Cultural Sovereignty: Protection, Promotion, and Popular Culture*; Readings in Canadian History: Post Confederation (Harcourt Brace & Company Canada Ltd., Toronto 1998) p. 447

February 1991, the *Globe and Mail* published an interview with a young Mexican on his views on the North American Free Trade Agreement. This young person told the reporter, "Canada is so lacking in its own culture that it had to steal hockey and the Stanley Cup from the U. S. to have something to call its own!"<sup>4</sup> This is an example of how much of Canada's culture has been stolen by the Americans. We can also look to several famous Canadians who live in the United States and have received their fame as Americans. People like Alex Trebeck, Michael J. Fox, Jim Carrey, Celine Dion and Shania Twain are all Canadians that have earned fame and fortune in America. The same goes for the majority of the National Hockey League players. Most of the people who play hockey for the League throughout Canada and the United States were born North of the 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel. Something as sacred to the Canadian Nation as the image of Royal Canadian Mounted Police has been purchased by the Walt Disney Corporation, this deal has however recently expired. Our nation is dissolving into the 51<sup>st</sup> American state and we are helping this process by not having enough unity within our own borders to stop the Americans' takeover.

The problems in Canada seem to have reached an all-time high with the conflict between the nation and Quebec. With threats of the nation being destroyed because of Quebec separating, Canada's future is hanging in the balance. To understand the problems in Quebec, we must look at some of the things that have happened in the Quebec that have caused the most recent problems between the French and English in

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid p. 451

the province.

Many parts of the nation prospered from the economical changes after America began to spend more money in Canada. However, in Quebec, and other regions like the Atlantic Provinces, times were tough. In the province of Quebec, “unilingual anglophones enjoyed income levels twice those of unilingual francophones and one-third higher than those of bilingual francophones.”<sup>5</sup> This is not an uncommon trend in the province. The English-speaking citizens always seem to come out ahead of the French. A great deal of this economic prosperity came from the growing connection with the Americans to the south. The United States poured a great deal of capital into Canada and this money helped to push Canada further into the World stage.

Problems with French Canadians have faced this country for a very long time. However, in the past few decades the nation has been threatened with its own annihilation. The threat of Quebec separatism arose in the 1960's. This coincided with the hippie protests of the war in Vietnam. The French believed that Quebec was oppressed much like the blacks in the United States. The country was held prisoner in 1970 by the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ). This group that had been in operation since 1963 was “dedicated to the establishment of an independent, socialist Quebec.”<sup>6</sup> The “October Crisis” was the peek of this terrorist organizations actions.

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<sup>5</sup>Francis; Jones; & Smith; Destinies p. 324

<sup>6</sup>Ibid p. 404

“Members of the group kidnaped James Richard Cross, a British trade representative in Montreal, and, five days later, Pierre Laporte, a Quebec cabinet minister.”<sup>7</sup> Laporte was soon found strangled and left in the trunk of his car. The Canadian government stepped in and invoked the War Measures Act allowing the police to take more than 500 people into custody on suspicion that they were sympathetic to the FLQ.

Quebec’s fears of oppression became a political problem when the new Parti Québécois (PQ) took up the issue and made Quebec’s freedom their goal. In May 1980, the PQ held a referendum in which it asked the people of Quebec to give it the right to negotiate a form of independence with Canada. The PQ lost the referendum, 60% to 40%. The party was re-elected but decided to temporarily put aside the question of independence. This caused a great deal of problems in the party and soon many people including leader, René Lévesque. In 1994, the party regained control and another referendum on independence was held on October 30, 1995. The separatists were narrowly defeated.

The issue of separation from the national union is not new to our neighbors to the south. The United States faced a Civil War in the 1860's over the destruction of their nation as the Southern states seceded from the rest of the nation. The American Civil War was one of the most deadly conflicts in history with the extremely high casualties. With more and more influence from American culture could Canada be in

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid p. 404

store for a re-enactment of the 1860's battle in the United States? As Canada enters into the new millennium, it would be in its best interest to solve the problems with Quebec and save the nation from self-destruction over a "civil war of words" in time to save the nation from becoming the 51<sup>st</sup> state of the American Union.

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