

Canada's Ties with the  
United States:

A Cultural Perspective

# What is "culture"?

- All the characteristics of a way of life.
- Language, religion, values, behaviours, education, clothing, food, the arts and entertainment, the media.
- Narrow meaning is what happens in arts, entertainment, media.

- Because of the huge dominating influence of the US immediately to the south, the study of Canada's culture is important.

- Why?

- Because culture is what makes a country unique.

- Is there such a thing as a distinct Canadian culture?

- Made complicated by the sheer size of Canada.
- Many Canadians feel closer to US than they do to Canadians in other parts of the country.
- "An east-west country on a north-south continent."

- Major physical features and the pattern of economic flows is north-south, but the border (and the narrow band of Canada's main population) runs east-west.
- Strong cultural ties have emerged between certain parts of Canada and regions of the US.
- See map in text, Figure 27-1, page 404.

# Is Canadian culture American?

- Most Canadians live very close to border.
- Travel between the two countries is common.
- Friends and relatives in US.
- Stores in Canada are often parts of American chains.

- Many goods we buy are American.
- Cable and satellite TV is heavily American.
- Movies are largely American.
- Magazines are mainly American.
- Fast food.
- Sports teams.
- ???

# Is Canada's Culture Unique?

- Subtle differences, much stemming from respective constitutions.
- Constitution: basic law of a country, states fundamental principles by which the country operates.
- US: people have right to "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness".

- Canada: "Peace, Order and Good Government".

Difference:

- American: Rights of the individual.
- Canadian: Role of the individual as a member of larger society.
- How does this manifest itself?
- Examples: Gun control and health care.

- Much stronger gun control in Canada. And getting stronger. Very strict.
- Canadians own only 1.5% of all the guns Americans own.
- Some US states allow individuals to carry concealed handguns whenever they want with no licences required.
- Reflects American approach that rights of individual greater than society's.

- Medical care in Canada largely covered by national taxes. Principle of universal access.
- In US health care is private responsibility.
- About 30% of Americans have none. May not get treatment.
- Canada: Group responsibility.
- US: Individual responsibility.

- Government funded health care started in Canada 50 years ago.
- It remains very important to Canadians.

# The Arts: Is Canada Different?

*Yes:*

- Authors.
- Visual artists.
- TV and radio in wide range of languages.
- Music and performers of music.
- Film and TV industry.
- Magazines, newspapers, etc.

# The Arts: Is Canada Different?

*No:*

- While we have outstanding artists, etc., most Canadians don't know about them, or often don't care about them.
- American "culture" is more broadly and deeply "consumed".

# Is there hope for Canadian culture?

## *TV:*

- Most of it is American; exception is CBC (very versatile broadcaster).
- Canada best at children's shows, public affairs, sports.
- Weakest at dramatic shows.

## *Radio:*

- Canadian stations sound like American ones.
- Why?
- Stations buy pre-packaged formats from American radio companies.
- Exception is *CBC* - commercial-free, Canadian focussed, government funded.
- Eg., *CBC* northern service has programming in First Nations languages

## *Movies:*

- Few Canadian movies get wide distribution.
- Most movie theatres in Canada belong to American companies.
- Make most money from big name US films with continent wide advertising.
- Many US movies and TV shows made here but only because it is cheaper.

## *Pop Music:*

- Many Canadians have become international stars in popular music.
- Many others very successful across Canada, including First Nations.
- Why?
- Talent but also federal government rules requiring 35% of all music played to be Canadian.

- "Canadian music" is defined by the nationality of the performer, composer, producer.
- US disagrees with Canadian approach to subsidizing culture.
- They see culture as a business and want a bigger piece of Canadian market.
- Many countries like Canada see American culture as a threat to their own culture.

- And they feel, as most Canadians do, that culture is a crucial part of their national identity.
- Eg., France banned English (American especially) words; Iran satellite dishes.
- English Canada's culture most threatened because it is similar to US.
- Perhaps US/Americans see culture as mainly a business because their own culture has never been threatened.

- Dispute continues today, despite the rules set out in the NAFTA.
- US is trying to get more access to Canadian markets by having "spilt-run" magazines.
- Canadian magazine producers believe if the Canadian market is flooded with US magazines, it will kill smaller Canadian magazines.

- Federal government has sided with Canadian magazines but the US has threatened retaliatory tariffs on Canadian exports to US markets unless it can have its way.
- This despite most experts in foreign trade saying that Canada has very right to do this given the rules of the NAFTA, which the US signed.

# US & Canada: Two Views.

## *Continentalists:*

- Cultures of Canada and the US are so similar that we should stop worrying about protecting the differences in Canadian culture and work together for the good of both.

## *Nationalists:*

- We can have a better future by keeping Canada as independent from the US as possible, especially in the area of culture.
- Our future as a sovereign nation depends on a distinct culture.
- Canadian culture *is* real, and worthy of protection.

End.