

## The English and the French...and the Americans

In 1763, England was Europe's only democracy. Well, it wasn't a democracy as you and I know it. Women could not vote or own property. Members of minorities were openly discriminated against. Catholics in England itself could not occupy government positions or teach at universities. Catholics had to worship in secret to avoid being persecuted by the Anglican dominated English Government. In a word, the English attitude towards France and Catholicism in Europe was simple. They hated them. In North America, circumstances, e.g. Thirteen Colonies asking for greater independence, etc. dictated the English take a more conciliatory approach to the French of Quebec through the 1760s and 70s. Yet, if the political situation were simpler—the Americans weren't threatening to rebel—arguably England would've taken the opportunity to expel the Canadiens (French inhabitants) of Quebec just like they had the Acadians in 1755.

Acadia came under England's control in 1704. In 1704, the English threatened to expel the Acadians from what became known as Nova Scotia. The only thing stopping the English was the fact they were still at war with France. They could not fight *and* purge Nova Scotia of the French. So the English waited until Queen Anne's War ended in 1713 to deal with Acadia's French population. The English immediately recognized problems if the French were expelled: firstly, English settlers (and especially English soldiers) needed to be fed; if England expelled all the French farmers there would not be enough food for the new English colony; secondly, the Micmac First Nation was an ally of the Acadians; the continued French presence helped reduce the number of Indian raids on English settlements; thirdly, if the French were expelled they would just end up moving north and strengthening Fort Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island; and lastly, in the first few years too few English settlers moved to Nova Scotia. The English needed the French—at least in the short term—if the colony was going to survive.

The first step the English took was requiring the Acadians swear an oath of allegiance to King George I. The Acadians had no problem swearing never to fight against the English; however, the oath also required the Acadians renounce any connection they had to the pope or France's King Louis XIV. The French were Catholics. They could not renounce their connection to the pope and remain Catholics. So they refused to swear this. Also, the Acadians were proud of their French identity. They could not reasonably be expected to reject that identity by rejecting their king. Therefore, the English let the matter rest until 1730. In 1730, the English developed a new *unconditional* oath not requiring the French to renounce either the French king or Pope. The new oath contained four important provisions:

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- 1). The Acadians would never be forced to serve in the army of the English king.
- 2). The Catholic Church would be tolerated in Acadia and be allowed to function.
- 3). The Acadians would never have to fight France or the Micmac
- 4). The Acadians had to agree never to fight the English.

The Acadians swore this oath and became known as the so-called “neutral French” thereafter. However, by 1749 it became increasingly apparent that war between France and Great Britain’s Thirteen Colonies was fast approaching. The English returned to the idea of expelling the French from Acadia. What had changed from 1713 to 1750? By 1750 Nova Scotia’s English speaking population was large enough to sustain itself; it no longer needed the French. So, despite the fact the French never broke their oath, the English decided to solve the French problem once and for all—they began expelling the Acadians in 1755. The expulsion process was resisted by the French; it was also time-consuming and expensive. Eventually the Acadians were resettled in France, Louisiana, Antilles, and prison camps in England. In 1764, the French-Indian War was over and the ban on Acadians lifted. Three-thousand Acadians returned to settle in what eventually became known as New Brunswick. New Brunswick continues to have Canada’s second largest French speaking population.

Back in 1760 the British planned to assimilate the French. (The word “assimilate” basically means to “make others like ourselves”.) The English introduced a military style government to maintain law and order until the assimilation of the French could be attempted. General James Murray was the colony’s first British governor. Murray developed a profound respect for the hard-working and law-abiding French. By contrast he did not like the outspoken English minority of Quebec. These English settlers moved to Quebec for one reason and one reason only—to take over and exploit the colony’s economy. They believed that since Britain had defeated France in war that the colony was by rights theirs. Governor Murray believed that despite the British victory on the Plains of Abraham that Quebec was and would remain in to the foreseeable future French in character. Therefore, he placed controls on the outspoken English minority and he ensured that British soldiers were on the best behavior. Military rule ended with the signing of the *Treaty of Paris* (1763) ending the Seven Years’ War in Europe. Quebec was given a limited form of representative government; however, the governor remained the most powerful authority in the colony.

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In 1759, Britain suddenly came in to the possession of 65,000 French speaking Catholics. Initially, the British wanted to expel the Canadiens like they had the Acadians. In fact, in 1763 the British Government gave the French a year and a half to decide on whether or not they wanted to become British subjects, leave voluntarily, or be expelled (like the Acadians). Approximately 2,000 Canadiens (also known as “habitants”) left Quebec for France and/or Louisiana. The majority remained in Quebec; therefore, Britain had to decide on which one of the following policies to follow with respect to the remaining French.

They had four options: firstly, they could attempt to assimilate the French (but that would take a great deal of time and would more than likely fail); secondly, the British could change nothing and just maintain the *status-quo* (this solved nothing because English settlers to the area would want to occupy a position of privilege); thirdly, the British could expel or deport the French (would be expensive and from an economic standpoint self-defeating); or fourthly, England could reach a compromise with the French. Ultimately the English decided to pursue the fourth policy. Britain did not compromise with the French because they were worried about democracy or human rights or some other such thing. On the contrary, compared to situation in Acadia (1755) the situation in Quebec (1763) was far more complicated. In particular, England did not have the resources to both expel the Canadiens *and* keep the Thirteen Colonies in line. If the Thirteen Colonies weren't threatening revolution then there's no reason to think England would have treated the Canadiens any different than the Acadians.

In 1763, compromise was the only real course Britain could follow if it hoped to continue controlling the French colony. To that end England granted the Canadiens religious freedom, the freedom to speak and be educated in French, the right to property, and a guarantee that the French could continue practicing their unique form of civil law. (The English authorities insisted that when it came to criminal law though the colony would use Britain's.) When these compromises were initially made in 1763 it was thought they were temporary measures; that is, when the situation in the Thirteen Colonies improved Britain could revisit the idea of either expelling the Canadiens or assimilating them. The irony is that the situation with the Thirteen Colonies never did improve. In fact, it only got worse: the American Revolution began in 1776 and ended with the Thirteen Colonies gaining their independence from Britain in 1783. From 1783 onward the Americans threatened Quebec with invasion; therefore, England was never in a position to expel or assimilate the Canadiens. Therefore, England continued to pass laws guaranteeing the rights of the French which ultimately guaranteed that when Canada became a nation in 1867 it would be a bi-cultural country.