

Culture and history shape approaches to foreign policy

Single source but different channels

By Louis Balthazar

There are few examples in the world of two countries as closely linked by historical experience, geography and culture as the United States and Canada.

Of course, these two countries are still quite separate. Relations between them are often strained and their foreign policies diverge in many respects. However, in comparison with the other members of the international community, their similarities are much more striking than their differences. Two hundred years of history since the American Revolution have not dissolved the ties that formed between those who set out from the British Isles on a unique experiment in liberalism in North America. The fact that most of them chose to set up a new nation and to break all ties with the Crown while others preferred to remain loyal to Great Britain has had no profound effect on the community of ideology that had developed during the colonial period.

Actually, as few historians today would dispute, the American Revolution did not take place in the name of ideology. Remaining loyal to the Empire and refusing to take part in the republican adventure in no way meant a repudiation of the set of values that had guided the development of a new society in North America.

The British colonists and their descendants had psychologically turned their backs on Europe. Puritans or not, they espoused religious values that they did not think it possible to put into practice in the Old World. They had chosen to experience liberal individualism to the full. They believed in work, frugal living and the ad-

vancement of economic enterprise. They placed great value on their individual rights and felt that they were ready for self-government. In short, they had rejected European aristocratic values and set up a society where liberalism would be able to develop unfettered, in an almost pure state. The American Revolution sought to set the seal on this new experiment once and for all by breaking ties with Europe and bringing the colonies independence. Some colonists did not consider that necessary.

For these settlers, who were later called Loyalists or Tories, it seemed quite possible to continue the liberal experiment in the American way and yet remain within the British Empire. They were not unduly fond of submission to the Crown. However, for all sorts of practical reasons — because they shared the interests of the governors, because they took part in the administration or because the type of business in which they were involved benefited from imperial policies — they were opposed to the revolutionary undertaking.

Exodus to the north

The success of the Revolution put them in the wrong and, as happens after any revolution, they were made to feel that they had been odious "collaborators" and that there was no place for them in the United States of America. Their departure, and the break with this society of which they had been a part, was especially painful and inevitably aroused a certain amount of hostility towards the new political entity that was to develop without them.

Fortunately for these outcasts, however, they were to be able to try their luck elsewhere in America, since Britain had just conquered other territories — those of the former French Empire.

American Revolution was not in the name of ideology

Professor Balthazar is co-editor of International Perspectives. The views expressed in this article are purely his own, however, and are not intended to reflect the policy of the Department or to state an editorial position for this magazine.