

So where should we look for these anchoring national values? What makes Canadian values and identity distinctive is our particular history as a political community. We are British North America, a colonial fragment that remained loyal to the Crown, but which secured "responsible government" first among all the colonies of the crown, and which went on to create a transcontinental nation state, divided into five regions and two language groups. We have reason to be proud of our loyalty to British institutions, proud of our peaceful achievement of national independence and proud, above all, that we have made a transcontinental union of regions and languages cohere for over a hundred years, in the middle of a world whose ethnic and religious groups too often believe that each nation deserves its own state. We have proved that two nations can share a single state; that two languages can share a single political community; and that regions with powerful political traditions can work together to sustain a common fabric of citizenship for all Canadians. In the last forty years, we have also pioneered a hugely significant attempt to reconcile that common fabric of citizenship with full self-government for aboriginal peoples.

This tradition gives a significantly different inflection to our democratic values. Thus in the famous words of the British North America Act, our first constitution, we define the purpose of our political union as "peace, order and good government," in explicit contrast to the Jeffersonian vision of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." All political traditions, including those to the south of us, have to balance liberty and order, free enterprise and government action. We balance with the belief that freedom without order risks violence and liberty without government action risks injustice and inequality. These commitments, first articulated in the BNA Act, remain anchored in our Charter. There are deep historical reasons why we have chosen to give this weighting to our primary political values. A heterogeneous population, without common myths of origin, thinly spread across 5,000 miles of inhospitable terrain, has good reason to believe that what holds political community together is honest, responsive, decentralized and democratic government. A country with a relatively small domestic market has learned that it cannot leave the creation of a common infrastructure to the market alone: government