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(Liberal)**  
Nov. 18, 1948 to June 21, 1957  
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June 21, 1957 to April 22, 1963  
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April 22, 1963 to April 30, 1968  
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**Rt. Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau  
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April 20, 1968 to June 4, 1979  
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June 4, 1979 to Mar. 3, 1980  
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June 30, 1984 to Sept. 17, 1984  
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Sept. 17, 1984 to June 23, 1991  
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**Rt. Hon. Stephen Joseph Harper  
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Feb. 6, 2006 to ---  
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North America After Treaty of Utrecht - 1713

# Chapter 1

## One of the Best Countries on Earth

### **Against Formidable Odds**

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Why study the history of Canada? For seven consecutive years in the 1990s, the United Nations Human Development Program proclaimed the vast nation that sits atop the North American continent to be the best country on earth, according to an index that includes quality of life, income, and education. By 2005, the UN ranked Canada fourth in the world. Yet in spite of this powerful and compelling evidence of the country's global stature, misconceptions continue to skew our sense of the Canadian past. These suggest that Canadian history is boring, placid, and of little import; that it is devoid of the grand or heroic elements that generally capture the attention of people both inside and outside the nation. Moreover, a persistent and misleading assumption implies that Canada's history, while occasionally distinctive, is essentially a pale reflection of the more intriguing and lively saga of the nation to its immediate south: the United States. The Americans, the idea has it, are the scriptwriters of the most powerful and captivating national story on earth.<sup>1</sup> Their essentially passive neighbors, while occasionally worthy of some note, have essentially trod a national trail that was clearly blazed by others.

Neither point holds merit. The history of the second largest nation on earth is neither sleep inducing nor inconsequential. Its history is



Vancouver, British Columbia, the site of the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Source: Associated Press / Bayne Stanley

unique, despite the fact that it shares patterns with other nations that have been formed by waves of immigrants that transformed a territory originally inhabited by Aboriginal peoples. Readers acquainted with the histories of countries such as Australia, Mexico, Argentina, and India, to name but a few, will certainly recognize much that is familiar. Perhaps most important, Americans will no doubt discover evocative themes as they explore Canada's story. At the same time—and this is the particular challenge of coming to grips with the history of the neighbor of a country that exercises such enormous power in the modern world—Canada's history is not an extension of the American saga.

To many non-Canadian observers, images of and references to the country are often portrayed in a stereotypical fashion. For Americans in the northern states, the country is the source of bothersome, chilly blasts of air in any season. To legions of college students, it is the exporter of decent and relatively affordable beer, a point that is underscored with advertised images of the purity of Canadian beverages, superimposed on a pristine landscape. The land of the rugged Mountie is another popular perception of Canada; strikingly, for a country that fashions itself as one of the most amicable nations on earth, the country uses the elite Royal Canadian Mounted Police as one of its most recognizable symbols. In a world rife with violence, Canada is unique in embracing a symbol of law enforcement as an image of self-portrayal. People around the globe might also think of the country as a hockey devotee's paradise, a place where the fast-paced and rough-and-tumble sport is treated simultaneously with a reverence and fanaticism that is matched only by soccer fans in Latin America and Europe.

It is entertaining to draw out the colorful stereotypes that seem to capture the essence of the country, and certainly Canadians, with genuine self-deprecating humor, are often the first to point out their idiosyncrasies. Yet below the surface of these playful and superficial images, the country is an immensely complex place where in the recent past, voters in Quebec cast ballots in two referendums to decide whether they would retain or fundamentally alter their relationship with the other provinces. The immensely successful 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver provided an opportunity for the country to showcase its stature as a global model of well-being and civility; at the same time, numerous critics noted a glaring regional

disparity in the design of publicity and coverage for the event. The paradox of modern Canada is intriguing. Deemed a superior and thus successful model of a modern state by the United Nations, the country simultaneously struggles under a crippling—some would argue fatal—burden of regional, cultural, and ethnic diversity. The bitter irony that one of the planet's most successful nations in the first decade of the twenty-first century grapples with the persistent threat of dismantlement gives us a stark vantage point. While the factors that help to explain this striking contradiction are varied and of course open to debate, collectively they provide a suitable road map for beginning our exploration into Canada's past (see "The Vancouver Winter Olympics and the Press" in the Documents section).

Canadian history should be appreciated by non-Canadians for two essential reasons. As is the case with all other historical studies, it is an important exercise to undergo in order to make sense of the country's present. It also offers, particularly to Americans, some intriguing themes that lend themselves to comparative analysis. At the turn of the last century, Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier shrewdly observed that "Canada is the most unlikely of regions for nation building." Even after adding another one hundred years, the observation seems particularly insightful. In many ways, the people who put their shoulder to the wheel of national development have beaten some long odds. Canada's history, even after peeling away nationalistic overtones, is fundamentally a tale of survival.

The overarching geography of the territory that Canadians inhabit accounts for one of the most dynamic survival themes. Indeed, one of the most enduring quips about the country's landmass is that it has too much geography. The immensely varied environment, with the sweeping Canadian Shield of Precambrian rock, the over one million streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes, the seemingly endless terrain of the prairies and the frozen reaches of the North, the awe-inspiring succession of mountain ranges in the West, all combined to create obstacles to exploration, settlement, transportation, and communication. In addition, the varied and dramatic climate, ranging from the temperate weather of southern Ontario and the lower Pacific coastal region of British Columbia to the ice-choked barrens of the Arctic, has given first Aboriginal peoples, and then European and Asian immigrants, particular challenges. Throughout Canadian history, day-to-day existence in an often harsh environment has consumed the

energies of millions of the country's inhabitants. The geography and environment of the country shaped and continue to dictate the rhythm of life for people as varied as farmers who cope with short growing seasons, engineers who blast into the igneous rock of the Shield to extract marketable minerals, and college students who use tunnels in winter to avoid numbing temperatures and howling winds as they pass from lectures to labs. People the world around have to come to grips with the geography and environment of the region they inhabit; what makes Canada's saga particularly problematic is that its citizens have attempted to master such a large swath of the world's terrain.

Another powerful theme of persistence falls under the category of political struggles between imperial powers as the age of revolution in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries created modern nations. These contests shaped Canada's early history as the French and English engaged in a protracted struggle for mastery of the New World. Canada became an arena for contesting empires; it also was used periodically as a bargaining chip by agenda-driven negotiators in Europe as a means of sorting out the spoils of wars. The French imperial authority fell dramatically to the wayside in the late eighteenth century, and the British North American empire partially unraveled as the American rebellion became a successful revolution. Pursuing a political evolution in the context of the British Empire, Canadians confronted the challenge of juggling the interests of Britain and the United States. As American power surged continentally in the nineteenth century and then internationally in the following century, Canadians negotiated the tricky currents of a sometimes tempestuous relationship between their former imperial master and their neighbor. As the country sought and then achieved sovereignty in a piecemeal fashion, it attempted to ward off the encroachment of what many Canadians considered to be corrosive American economic, social, and cultural influences. Even in the early twenty-first century, magazines and Web sites regularly publish poll results that illuminate their deeply ambivalent feelings about their neighbor. Many Canadians are open to closer contact with Americans, but just as many fear that the ties between the two nations will lead inexorably to Canada's demise as an independent nation. Thus, the politically based survival game, while much altered in definition and scope over the centuries, continues to be a central national consideration.

Survival issues can also be clustered under the category of economic themes. A land that was first sought by Europeans for its seemingly inexhaustible fishing stocks and furs, it soon presented enticing possibilities for lumbering and agricultural development. The concentration on the gathering, extracting, and cultivating of staple resources is one of the most persistent economic dynamics in all of Canadian history. After the initial age of exploration and settlement, it expanded to encompass other raw materials such as minerals, petroleum, and natural gas. The staples approach to understanding Canadian history, while still of value, does not fully explain the complexity of economic themes in Canada's past. The realities of mercantilism, enforced by French and British imperial masters alike, gave way as the British embraced the capitalist model in the nineteenth century. The Western world's grinding passage through the traumatic stages of capital development, with merchants and then industrialists creating transnational economies, meant that Canadians would go through similar phases. By the twentieth century, accelerated by its participation in two global wars, Canada took its place as one of the world's leading economic powers. Even as it entered the postindustrial era late in the century, Canada would be on the cutting edge of technological innovations and changes. Yet with its dramatically skewed trading patterns, first with Britain and then with the United States, Canada would be forever positioned precariously as an extension of a foreign economic giant. Thus, from their entanglements with French mercantilists in the seventeenth century to their current economic intermeshing with the United States and Mexico under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Canadians have attempted to retain control over their economic fate.

Finally, the survival idea has played out in the often overlapping arenas of ethnicity, race, religion, and culture. The triangular contest involving Amerindians, French, and British was at root a struggle for survival. As the British imperial forces emerged triumphant in the late eighteenth century, the battleground with the two other groups shifted to the occupation of certain spaces and a sometimes violent resistance to assimilation. The traditional jockeying for power between francophones and anglophones, so much a catalyst for historical forces from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, became over time a less satisfactory model for understanding

Canada's past.<sup>2</sup> As the country increasingly became an amalgam of ethnic and racial groups, the struggle of various peoples to maintain their cultural integrity often became acute. Despite the efforts of many of its architects, Canada has failed to become an assimilationist nation. Superimposed on the issues mentioned above have been an all-encompassing American culture. Significantly, as Canadians diligently sought to articulate a national identity, the fear of American absorption has provided a bonding agent for the country's disparate cultural and ethnic groups.

On another level, the study of Canadian history is tremendously useful for its comparative value. As historian Robin Winks observed, "The reason Americans should study Canadian history is to learn more about themselves, about how they differ from and how they are similar to others."<sup>3</sup> Winks's observation suggests that in order truly to know ourselves, it is imperative to understand other peoples. The historical record in North America points to great similarities and dissimilarities in the histories of the closely linked neighbors. Whether the focus falls on political systems, economies, foreign relationships, societies, or cultural groupings, the implicit or overt comparison of the historical paths taken by the two countries often proves of great worth.

In another vein, Canadians typically know much more about the American past and present than do Americans about their northern neighbor. With the vast majority of its population living close to the border and with thoroughly intertwined trading, defense, and communication systems, Canada is bombarded with information about the United States. The two peoples share a continent, and over centuries they have developed millions of ties that bind. Canadians have often viewed this as both a blessing and a curse. The former suggests that if Americans take an interest in Canada, then they will appreciate the country's distinctions and unique contributions to world history. The latter, conversely, might lead Americans to believe that Canadians should be absorbed into a grand continental enterprise defined according to American standards. Therefore, the consciousness raising of Americans to climb out of their ignorance of Canada is often heralded as a noble, if not problematic, effort. As a consequence, Canadianists in the United States tend to display missionary zeal in flogging their informational wares. Yet the ambiguity in Canada remains palpable. As Canadians often remark

when they find out that Americans are studying some aspect of their history or culture, they feel conflicted. A sense of being pleased is offset by a nagging fear that something bad will come of it, such as closer continental integration.

Canada is not “America North.” Its history must be approached on its own terms to understand how and why it is very much a distinct nation. Before we set on a course of charting the historical development of a peoples down through the centuries, it will be instructive to explore several subjects to provide a contextual platform: the country’s geography, its current political systems, economic configuration, society, and culture.

## **An Overwhelming Landscape: The Geography of Canada**

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Historians have long known that although geography might not be entirely deterministic in setting the course of events in a nation’s development, it profoundly shapes history. Modern geography takes into account both the study of landforms and the interaction of people with their environment. These geographical dynamics have been so thoroughly intertwined in Canada’s history that it is appropriate to begin with a brief discussion of the country’s basic geographical features and regions.

The Canada of the imagination—bold, rugged, varied, and vast—closely matches the country’s physical geography. Covering over 3.8 million square miles, it is the second largest country on earth behind the Russian Federation. Spanning six time zones, it comprises about seven percent of the world’s land mass. It is roughly the size of the European continent and occupies almost half of North America. Bordered by three oceans—the Pacific to its west, Arctic to its north, and Atlantic to its east—it has a total coastline of 146,000 miles. About eight percent of its territory is water, giving the country about nine percent of the world’s freshwater supply. To its south and northwest, it shares the world’s longest international boundary (5,335 miles) with its only land neighbor, the United States. The country’s vastness and its position in the continent’s northern reaches simultaneously present beneficial elements, such as bountiful resources

## One Loyalist's Perspective

*The Loyalists who arrived in British North America were extremely diverse; they came from all the American colonies, and they represented virtually every class and ethnic group in America. The reasons for loyalty to the Crown also varied dramatically, as did perspectives of a Loyalist ideal and the most suitable course of action to take in the interest of improving the lives of the thousands who migrated to the northern colonies of the British empire. Among many Loyalists who arrived in Nova Scotia, the argument was advanced to create a separate colony that would reflect the ideals of loyalism. Some, like Massachusetts-born and Harvard-educated Edward Winslow, who served in the British forces during the Revolutionary War, believed that a new loyalist colony of New Brunswick would become a model of enlightened governance in North America. An excerpt of his extensive correspondence follows.*



I'll introduce another argument in favour of dividing this province [Nova Scotia], which (if not of equal weight with others) is of some consequence. You will I think enter into the spirit of it. A large proportion of the old inhabitants of this country are natives of New-England, or descendants from New Englanders, they, from their situation, never experienced any of the inconveniences which resulted from the violence of political animosity, they remained quiet during all the persecutions in the other provinces—they retained a natural (perhaps laudable) affection for their country. The rebel party were more industrious, and their doctrines and principles were more

greedily adopted, than those of the other side, by degrees the Nova-Scotians became firmly persuaded of the justice of their cause. Of this complexion are the public officers, generally. On our side the principal people are men who have served in a military line—irritable from a series of mortifications—scarcely cooled from the ardor of resentment—jealous to an extreme, some of ‘em illiberally so. Either of these kinds of men may form useful societies among themselves—but they can’t be mixed—separate them, and this very difference of opinion will increase the emulation and contribute to the general good; together—wrangles and contests would be unavoidable.

Lord Sydney’s declaration quoted in your letter, “That he will make Nova-Scotia the envy of the American States,” has excited a kind of general gratitude, I cannot describe it. Other ministers and Great men have by their patronage of new settlers, relieved individuals from distress, and rendered services to their country, but it is a Godlike task that Lord Sydney has undertaken. Such an event as the present, never happened before—perhaps never will happen again. There are assembled here an immense multitude (not of dissolute vagrants such as commonly make the first efforts to settle new countries,) but gentlemen of educations—Farmers, formerly independent—& reputable mechanics, who by the fortune of war have been deprived of their property. They are as firmly attached to the British constitution as if they never had made a sacrifice. Here they stand with their wives and their children looking up for protection, and requesting such regulations as are necessary to the weal of society. To save these from distress, to soothe and comfort them by extending indulgencies which at the same time are essentially beneficial to the country at large, is truly a noble duty. By Heaven we will be the envy of the American States.

## About the Author

Scott W. See is Libra Professor of History at the University of Maine. He is the author of *Riots in New Brunswick: Orange Nativism and Social Violence in the 1840s* (1993), as well as numerous articles and book chapters on aspects of Canadian history.