



A Comparative View of Diversity in the United States and Canada

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As immigration continues to rise, Canada and the United States are faced with the challenge of maintaining national cohesion while creating inclusive societies that allow people of all groups to fully participate in the social, economic and political spheres of their societies.¹ In this article, readers will learn about some of the ways that the United States and Canada have responded to the challenges and opportunities of diversity.

Diversity issues can be examined within multiple contexts. This paper looks at political, legal, and historical contexts, with the purpose of providing a template for identifying issues that might frame further comparative analysis of diversity in Canada and the United States.

When carrying out a comparative analysis of diversity, it is important to note specific terms and language used. For example, while “multicultural education” is used in Canada and the United States to describe efforts to address diversity, other terms are also used.² In Canada, the term “anti-racism” is used, in some ways in opposition to “multicultural education,” to convey a stronger statement on culture as well as methods and perspectives for reducing racism and promoting tolerance. This term is rarely used in the United States where terms like “diversity” and “inclusion”

are more often used as synonyms for multicultural education.

Political Context

That political context can influence public policy on diversity is evident by the divergent responses of Canada and the United States to linguistic diversity within their borders. While there were Native American languages as well as a variety of European languages spoken during the early settlement of colonies in North America, English eventually became the dominant language in modern day Canada and the United States. However, Canada, unlike the United States, developed an official language education policy that includes self-contained, withdrawal, transitional, and mainstream programs that enable students to maintain their mother tongue.³ Canada also has an official bilingual policy that requires all official docu-

ments to be made available in both English and French. The United States has a very different official response to language diversity. Many U.S. politicians fiercely defend speaking English as a marker of an individual’s commitment to the United States and the legitimacy of his or her residence in the country.⁴

On the surface it would appear that there are stark differences between language policies in the United States and Canada. A close analysis, however, reveals a more complex picture. Students could investigate the extent to which what is happening on the ground in the United States reveals a much more accepting climate for language diversity than statements by politicians suggest. After all, economic as well as political power can influence a nation’s response to language diversity. Students could look at the ways in which economic factors are driving businesses in California, the southwest part of the United States, and Florida to print signs and provide brochures in Spanish, as well as to hire bilingual staff. Students could also research the extent to which businesses in Hawaii are providing services in Asian languages.

When the political context of language policies is implicit, its connection to larger societal issues such as economic realities remain unexamined. Examining both the political context and economic dimensions of language policies can deepen students' understanding of all aspects of the issue.

Legal Context

The Japanese internment in the United States and Canada is an example of the extent to which laws exist within a sociopolitical context. Students can learn how two nations that pride themselves on being nations of laws, failed to protect the rights of individuals within their borders.

After the Japanese government bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, both the U.S. and Canadian governments interned people of Japanese descent.⁵ Even before this, however, Japanese people living in the U.S. and Canada faced discrimination and did not have the full protection of the law.⁶ For many years Japanese immigrants were legally prevented from becoming citizens in both countries. There were also tight restrictions on Japanese immigration. In 1907, the Canadian government limited the number of Japanese immigrants to 400 people a year. The United States used measures such as the Gentleman's Agreement—an informal agreement between the U.S. and the empire of Japan—to restrict Japanese immigration. In addition, the California Alien Land Law restricted the rights of Japanese to own and lease land. Students can use key concepts such as *prejudice* and *discrimination* to reflect on the following generalization: *When sanctioned by law, prejudice can lead to increasing levels of discrimination.*

Leading up to the internment, people of Japanese descent living in British Columbia (where most Japanese living in Canada were based) and the western United States experienced increasing levels of discrimination.⁷ Initially, these residents were under surveillance; later, their respective governments required

them to surrender cameras, radios, binoculars, and other items that were labeled contraband. Finally, fear, economic gain, and prejudice, led both North American countries to force Japanese into internment camps. Eight internment camps were erected in British Columbia. Sixteen internment camps were established in the United States.

The historical experience of people of Japanese descent in North America offers a good opportunity for students to study the gap between the law as an ideal and the law in daily practice. One way to explore this is for students to examine how individuals from marginalized groups as well as those from mainstream groups describe their experiences with the law and with representatives of the legal system.

Historical Context

Canada and the United States share commonalities with respect to the history of people of African descent in North America. During the American Revolutionary War, many Africans who were enslaved in the United States escaped to Canada in search of freedom. Between 1783 and 1785, Black Loyalists (slaves who fought on the side of the British in exchange for freedom) established communities in Nova Scotia where some of their descendants remain today.⁸ Once in Canada, some Africans left and established communities in Sierra Leone on the west coast of Africa. The story of enslaved Africans who fought with the British is a unique angle on the issue of freedom and the Revolutionary War. The story of these individuals and their experiences, however, are generally not addressed in U.S. or Canadian textbooks.

At the end of the Revolutionary War, George Washington (still a general at the time and not yet president) demanded that enslaved Africans who had joined forces with the British be returned to their owners. Instead, Sir Guy Carleton, the British commander in chief, agreed to pay for their freedom and allow

the former slaves to stay in Canada.⁹ Other enslaved Africans had joined Washington's Revolutionary Army and fought against the British in hope of earning their freedom. The economic advantages of the slave system, coupled with a newly formed and fragile union that supported slavery, allowed such a system to continue in the United States for nearly 100 more years. Students can use key concepts such as *change*, *cooperation*, and *conflict* to reflect on generalizations about the legacy of slavery and the ways in which the past is implicated in the present.¹⁰

As educators review their curriculum, they should consider the extent to which students are encouraged to reflect on intergroup conflicts and tensions in their nation's history and in contemporary society. Questions such as, Were groups that are currently experiencing conflict in the U.S. and Canada always involved in conflict? Were groups that are now part of the mainstream in the U.S. and Canada always part of the mainstream? The answers to these and similar questions can give students a more complex view of intergroup interactions and provide teachers with a direction for considering curriculum revision.

Conclusion

The issues covered in this article can serve as a departure point for engaging students in discussions on multicultural issues in the U.S. and Canada. The examination of such issues in multicultural nation-states benefits from a comparative approach that allows diverse perspectives to be raised and examined. Using a comparative approach for examining multicultural issues within the political, legal, and historical contexts can reveal important intersections, parallels, and connections between the United States and other nations. 🌐

Notes

1. James A. Banks, *Diversity and Citizenship Education: Global Perspectives* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass 2007).

2. Multicultural education is defined in the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, 2nd edition [James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks (Jossey-Bass, 2004)] as “a field of study designed to increase educational equity for all students that incorporates for this purpose, content concepts, principles, theories and paradigms from history, the social and behavioral science, and particularly from ethnic studies and women’s studies.”
3. M. Ashworth, “Projecting the Past into the Future. A Look at ESL for Children in Canada,” in *Beyond Multicultural Education: International Perspectives*, ed. K.A. Moodley (Calgary: Detselig, 1992), 114-131).
4. Robert D. King, “Should English Be the Law?” *The Atlantic Online* (1997), www.theatlantic.com/issues/97apr/english.htm.
5. R. Daniels, *Concentration Camps, North America: Japanese in the United States and Canada during World War II* (Malabar, Fla.: R.E. Krieger 1981).
6. Gary Y. Okihiro, *The Columbia Guide to Asian American History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).
7. Ibid.; Anna Cecile Scantland, *Study of Historical Injustice to Japanese Canadians* (Vancouver, B. C.: Parallel Publishers Ltd., 1986).
8. John T. Grant, “Black Immigrants into Nova Scotia, 1776–1815,” *Journal of Negro History* 58, no. 3 (1973): 253-270.
9. “Remembering Black Loyalists: Black Communities in Nova Scotia,” Nova Scotia Museum, 2001, <http://museum.gov.ns.ca/blackloyalists/who.htm>.
10. Dominic Casciani, “The Legacy of Slavery,” BBC News (March 20, 2007), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6456765.stm.

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DIGITAL VAULTS from page 300

Although the Digital Vaults is not a search engine, you do have the ability to search the site. In the “Search” section you can look for documents by keyword or by the tags associated with each document. When the search results appear, they do so as thumbnail images.

In the “Create” section, you and your students can make your own poster or make a movie. To make a poster, you can use the documents placed in your collect tray or documents provided in several different categories. Categories include the Civil War, Civil Rights, Presidents, and more. The process is easy—you can select a document and drop it onto the poster screen, change background colors, alter the size, rotate the image, and add text or clip art to enhance your creation. Upon completion, you can save your poster, print it out, or e-mail it to a friend.

Teaching Suggestion

Assign your students to create a poster using the Digital Vaults site about whatever topic you chose, and ask them to e-mail their completed poster to you.

Creating a movie is similar to creating a poster. Using the same drag-and-drop technology, you and your students can begin by selecting a starting point from the list of topics, then work your way through the list of additions to the movie maker, adding the background layers of sound and color and an opening title. Finally, you and your students can use the tools to make the images you selected come alive, such as adding a zoom or a pan to the image to create movement on the screen, or adding a caption to the bottom of every image to help tell the story. When finished, you simply need to press “play” to view your masterpiece—then save it or e-mail it to a friend.

Teaching Suggestion

Instruct students to make a movie

using the Digital Vaults about whatever topic you chose, and e-mail it to a classmate. Direct students to take on the role of a film critic and assign them to write a one-page critique of their classmate’s film. You may choose to develop a rubric or set of evaluation criteria with students for this activity prior to the writing exercise.

We hope you and your students enjoy this new online experience and that you will return frequently to discover new resources and activities that enable you to further teach with documents. 🌐

SUZANNE ISAACS is the Digital Projects Coordinator for the National Archives Experience, and **LEE ANN POTTER** is the Director of Education and Volunteer Programs at the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C. Potter serves as the editor for “Teaching with Documents,” a regular department of Social Education. You can reproduce the images that accompany this article in any quantity.

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