OTHER COLONIES:
WHY CANADA DID NOT JOIN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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When thirteen of Britain's colonies rebelled against British rule in 1775 and 1776, there were as many as twenty-three British colonies in North America, seventeen of them on the mainland. In the south of the continent, there was east and west Florida, which Britain had gained from the Spanish at the end of the French and Indian War. British islands off North America included Bermuda, the Bahamas, and Jamaica. We think of there being only one country north of the United States today. What is now Canada was really a set of at least four colonies during the American Revolution: St. Jean's, or Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Quebec, not to be confused with the city of the same name within the colony of Quebec. What I want to talk about today are reasons why Quebec and Nova Scotia, in what is now Canada, did not join the thirteen mainland colonies farther south in the American Revolution.

I will start with Nova Scotia, which had formerly been the French colony of Acadia. It was populated by a relatively prosperous farming and fishing people called the Acadians who were predominantly Catholic and French-

speaking. Britain had taken over Acadia from the French before the French and Indian War, but during that war, the British feared that the French-speaking Acadians would side with the French, and ordered them to swear allegiance to the British king. Thousands of Acadians refused to do so, and in the years between 1755 and 1762, the British deported between 6,000 and 10,000 Acadians from what became Nova Scotia. The deportation of non-loyalist Acadians was one reason why Nova Scotia did not take the side of the thirteen colonies who rebelled against Britain in 1775 and 1776. Imagine if the Acadians had remained in Nova Scotia. During the American Revolution, they might have eagerly embraced the anti-British cause, especially after the alliance between the United States and France. In fact, some of the Acadians, or Cajuns, who had resettled in Spanish-held Louisiana, joined in military operations against the British colony of West Florida. The anti-British Acadians had been deported from Nova Scotia, and were no longer there to lend support to the American cause.

A second reason Nova Scotia remained loyalist is that many of the British settlers who replaced the Acadians were not from New England, and did not share the same perspective of the people there. Many of them did not share the Congregationalist religion that was predominant farther south, and some

even lacked a tradition of self-governance. Many of them owed a debt of gratitude to Britain for taking Acadia away from the French and giving it to such as them. They also furnished supplies to the British forces at Boston, for which the British paid generously.

A third reason Nova Scotia remained loyalist is that many of the loyalists who were forced to evacuate the thirteen colonies farther south settled in Nova Scotia. For example, when Boston fell to the patriots in the spring of 1776, hundreds of loyalists were taken on British ships to Halifax, and many of them remained in Nova Scotia, reinforcing the loyalism of the colony.

A fourth reason Nova Scotia did not join the rebellious colonies was the powerful British naval base at Halifax, which discouraged rebellion. The base also contributed to the economic vitality of the people of Nova Scotia, creating a demand for its farm and fishery products.

But what about Quebec? Much more than the city of that name, the colony stretched from Nova Scotia westward to the Great Lakes, embracing both sides of the important St. Lawrence River. Of all the colonies in what is now Canada, it was the largest and most populous.

For more than a century and a half before 1763, when it was taken over by the British at the conclusion of the French and Indian War, Quebec had been

French. During that time, France had fought a long series of wars with Britain. In all those wars, French Quebec had fought with its mother country against the hated British. Why, then, when the Americans to the south fought the British for their freedom between 1775 and 1783, did the people of Quebec not join them, especially after France became an ally of the United States?

First of all, the British in 1774 passed the Quebec Act. The Quebec Act granted French-speaking Catholics in Quebec, which were the overwhelming majority of people there, the ability to practice their religion without interference from the mother country. It allowed the Catholic Church to collect tithes. It allowed large landowners to retain their traditional authority over the peasants. To be sure, Britain did demand allegiance to King George III, and to the governor he appointed, but Britain allowed that governor to appoint officials in Canada who were of the old aristocratic class. Feeling able to exercise some of their traditional authority, French church officials and large landowners were not eager to upset a system that preserved their power. The Quebec Act allowed traditional French civil law to continue. People in Quebec did not experience much difference in the way they had always lived. They could continue to practice their traditional religion and speak their traditional language. In their minds, there was no good reason to rebel.

The Quebec Act also extended the boundaries of Quebec southward to the Ohio River and westward to the Mississippi River. By vastly expanding Quebec, the British cancelled claims of many of the American colonies farther south, including Virginia and some of the New England colonies, to that territory. If the people of Quebec had joined the Americans, and the Americans had won the war, that part of Quebec might have been given back to Virginia and the New England colonies that claimed it. The people of Quebec were not eager to join a cause that might mean the loss of territory. Probably more than any other single factor, the Quebec Act reassured the French in Canada that Britain was a friend, not an enemy. The thirteen colonies, on the other hand, regarded the Quebec Act as one of the Intolerable Acts, because it deprived them of extensive land, antagonized Protestants in New England, just south of the Catholic territory, and extended the domain of regions without any tradition of self-government or their own legislatures.

Secondly, the Americans had invaded Quebec in 1775, taking Montreal temporarily, and attacking the city of Quebec, but they ultimately failed in the liberation campaign. While the Americans, under Benedict Arnold and Richard Montgomery, were successful at times, they ultimately suffered defeat. Montgomery was killed, and Arnold was wounded. As British reinforcements

arrived to support the British garrison, the outnumbered American invaders withdrew back to New England and New York. If Montgomery and Arnold had been victorious at Quebec, as well as Montreal, and defeated the British military forces there, the people of the Quebec colony might have been more eager to support the other American colonies farther south.

Thirdly, the French Catholics in what is now Canada were not eager to join the United States because so many of the leading American patriots, especially at the beginning of the war for independence, were from staunchly Protestant New England. The enmity between Calvinists in Massachusetts and Catholics farther north made the French in Quebec suspicious of joining a cause that might threaten their religion, or even disestablish it. They were used to a connection between their religion and their government, and they were not eager to become like America farther South, where Protestantism prevailed. New Englanders had also fought in many of the wars between Britain and France in North America, and remembered the New Englanders as enemies rather than friends.

A fourth reason the people of Quebec did not join the Americans in their struggle for freedom and independence was that they did not share the same heritage of representative government. Colonies farther south were used to

having their own elected assemblies, which would pass laws concerning the colony and its local affairs. Britain had allowed her colonies, before 1763, a great measure of self-government, but France before 1763 had not allowed her colonies the same right to elect assemblies that were responsible to the people. When Parliament began passing laws to tax and regulate the Americans, who were not used to so much interference, they rejected the authority of Parliament to tax and legislate for them, because they had no representatives in Parliament. They had representatives they elected to the colonial assemblies. Not so in Quebec. Without a tradition of self-government, the French-speaking inhabitants saw the authority of Parliament and the King as no more odious than the authority of the French king.

A fifth reason the people of Quebec did not join the American rebels farther south is that in the years between 1763, when France lost control of all that territory, and 1776, when the United States declared independence, the French people there had lost much of their connection with France. To be sure, they still largely spoke the same language, and they were still Catholic, but they were not as loyal to the French king, who seemed to them more remote than ever. Most French-speaking people in what is now Canada had never been to France, and they were not eager to follow France even after France joined the

United States in the war against Britain. They had become accustomed to a British rule as long as it did not interfere too much with their traditions.

Quebec thus had five reasons to remain loyalist: the generous Quebec Act, the failure of the Americans to take Quebec city militarily, Quebec opposition to New England, the absence of a tradition of self-government, and the erosion of loyalty to France.

In 1775, the Continental Congress invited Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Newfoundland to send delegates to join the American cause and make the movement truly a continental one, but they did not respond. In fact, they sent foodstuffs to the British forces surrounded in Boston, and Congress responded by banning exports to them. In 1776, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania and Charles Carroll of Carrollton in Maryland led a delegation from the Continental Congress to Quebec to solicit its support, but Quebec refused to join the American cause. The Continental Congress was not so continental after all. By the time of the Declaration of Independence in July, the colonies of what is now Canada had demonstrated that they would support Britain rather than the United States in the ongoing war.

We see that there were many reasons why Nova Scotia and Quebec, the mainland British colonies of what is now Canada, did not join the thirteen

colonies farther south in rebellion. The reasons help give us a more complete picture of the American Revolution. Canadian independence from Britain took a different track from our own.

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