HAS THE COUNTRY REALLY CHANGED ALL THAT MUCH IN THE PAST 50 YEARS?

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Writing this essay required me to reflect on the 50 years that I have been living in Canada, 1967-2017. What surprised me most, when I thought about it, was how little Canada has really changed culturally during that period.

This reaction may seem to be surprising given the changes that have occurred, particularly in the ways that we communicate with one another. However, in the larger picture, which as a historian, should be the way that I approach the topic, not nearly as much is different now than it was then. Although they may be powered by electricity rather than leaded gasoline, the cars we drive today are conceptually the same as the ones that we drove to and from Expo half a century ago. We may no longer care whether it is rude or not for a woman to smoke while driving or walking (as a question asked in a 1967 Gallup Poll) but we have not yet created a Canada where people of any gender or identification can live without bias or restriction.

What I am most struck by in the period under review is the tremendous amount of immigration that has occurred, much of it from areas that hitherto were minimally represented, if at all, within Canada's borders. Increased immigration, whatever its circumstances, whether from Asia, the islands of the Pacific, Africa, Eastern Europe, and central and southern America, has filled Canada with an abundance of new cultures and languages. However, the day-to-day lives of Canadians have not been changed nearly as dramatically by these new populations as some might have expected. There have been, and likely always will be, ethnic enclaves, pocket communities, and spaces that facilitate access to "foreign" traditions within our towns and cities. Chinese restaurants and laundries populated nearly every town in the Canadian West long before a Tim Hortons was planted in those

places; just as there were always delicatessens specializing in various Eastern European meats and groceries, and Catholic services offered in Spanish or Italian in our various cities. While there are, as a whole, an increased number of ethnically focused eateries, traditional garment makers, and non-Christian spaces of worship across Canada, this can be explained by the overall increase in Canada's population since 1967 rather than a significant change to Canada's cultural diversity.

With the possible exception of our food culture, in fact, there is an argument to be made that Canada has been more influential on these groups than they have been on Canada. That notable cultural touchstone, "Hockey Night in Canada" (HNIC) being broadcast in Punjabi as it has been on and off since 2008, is just one example of this. While it is certainly not the only example of an immigrant culture taking a serious interest in a stereotypically unifying cultural activity (of which there may be none more stereotypical than hockey), it nonetheless is notable. Conversely, the introduction of these communities and their interests in other sports, whether it be soccer, team handball , cricket or kabbadi, have not been felt on a cultural level in Canada as a whole. With the exception of a handful of female soccer players, Canada has not produced a world-class player in a sport that would be considered to be one brought to this country from outside its dominant traditions. And while HNIC is not the cultural touchstone today that it was in 1967, the difficult to pinpoint "Canadian" culture has nevertheless proven to be robust enough not just to survive introduction of outside forces, but to be the foundation upon which those groups can build shared interests within our communities.

It is also notable that we have become increasingly aware of the United States and their politics, especially in the more recent past. More importantly, it has become clearer that while in previous ages, the culture and success of the U.S.A has been quite enticing to Canadians, this is seemingly no longer the case. It is now clear that the fruit which the U.S. offers so readily has a bitter and poisonous underpinning of racism, violence and unfettered consumption. While these dangers are not exclusively American — or, in fact, totally absent from Canada — apart from such influences, it is a very real change in Canadian culture to reject them. The shift away from our largest outside influencer is important, especially as it has not been paralleled by a corresponding growth in other cultural influences.

Interestingly, and more importantly, the one area of the country in which there has been a significant change has been in Indigenous relations. This is a largely internal shift in approach, however, rather than one that has been brought about by increased cultural diversity from outside. The most important shift, which has come in terms of the attitudes of the two "core" ethnic groups — Western European and the Indigenous — is significant because the majority of Canadians still do not realize how much impact Indigenous people have had on our history, but also how significant their efforts have been in the cultural changes which have gone on in this past half century. For example, the way that Canadians have been forced to examine the historical impacts of the characters and events of our past is perhaps the biggest change in Canada culturally. We, as Canadians, no longer view John A. Macdonald, Louis Riel, Nellie McClung, and many other figures through the same Anglo-centric lens as we did less than a generation ago. Instead, we are

seeing these people, the actions that they took, and the events in which they were major players, from a new perspective.

It is also notable that, as a government, Canada has finally attempted to start to reconcile some of the longstanding problems that have been created in the past. It has often been easier, however, for Canada as an entity to apologize for the negative actions that it took upon outsiders than to confront those much more ingrained in our past. Canada has since 1967 made apologies for the internment of Japanese people during World War II, for the denial of access to Canada for the people on the *Komagata Maru* in 1914, and the *St. Louis* in 1939. These apologies to "outsiders" such as the Japanese, Sikhs and European Jews do not internally change us. Apologies to Indigenous people on the other hand have been so difficult because they came close to striking at the foundations of our society. It is not that any of these apologies to outsiders were insincere, it is just that they did not significantly alter the day-to-day life in Canada. Once we as Canadians began to come to terms with the actions that were taken against Canada's Indigenous people, we were changed. Official apologies for Residential Schools (June 11, 2008) and the Sixties Scoop (Manitoba government, June 17, 2015) have been more challenging for many Canadians to accept, as it has led to a shift in the relationship between Indigenous Canadians and "white" Canadians.

The pace of the dissemination of information in Canada has led the country to believe that it has changed a great deal. Turning on the screens in our homes or, increasingly, in our pockets allows us to instantly find the perspectives that agree and disagree with our own. This gives us the feeling that Canada is changing faster than we can process, but we are most likely simply matching the pace of the rest of the world.

However, this speeding of the dissemination of information has not really resulted in any real change or any greater cultural acceptance. The dramatic changes in the ways in which we communicate and disseminate information through the Internet and social media have provided Canadians of all perspectives an opportunity to not just voice their opinions, but to make it easier to find similar voices.

50 years ago, the only way people of similar interest could communicate was to congregate, through public messaging that would have unknown impacts, or through one-to-one interaction using technology like the telephone. Now, we can communicate, plan and express ourselves — for good or for ill — instantly, in a wide range of public or private formats. It is, as a result, just as easy to find someone who shares our fears and prejudices and reinforces them as it is to find someone who will help us fight prejudice, or change our opinions. Unfortunately, if we are not careful, as it proves easier and easier to communicate, we may find ourselves so insulated in our opinions that in future years we may be unable to continue the positive steps we have taken in the last 50.