

Canada at 150: Celebrating its liberal values and achievements

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Americans crossing the far western Canadian-American border pass by the Peace Arch. The inscriptions read: “Children of a Common Mother,” “Brethren Dwelling Together in Unity,” and, referring to the open gates in the arch, “May These Gates Never Close.” We have indeed lived in unity and our border has always been open, with the exception that we now must show our passports.

Even though the Canadians chose to stay with Mother England longer than we did, they still joined us in embracing the liberal political philosophy of the European Enlightenment. With his principles of the separation of powers and religious freedom, English philosopher John Locke was essential to our founding thinkers.

Thomas Jefferson drew on Locke when he declared that all human beings have inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but with one exception: he substituted Locke’s property with happiness.

Even though only propertied males could vote, Jefferson’s preference for happiness and the general welfare was significant for early America’s commitment to the common man. Unfortunately, America’s slaves and women had to wait for the promise inherent in the Declaration of Independence and classical liberalism.

The American and French Revolutions were fought for the promotion of liberal principles, which include inalienable rights, religious freedom, free markets, and free trade. Canada’s ruling Liberal Party, as well as our own Democrats, also stand for equal opportunity, which does not mean the guarantee of equal outcomes.

With this principle liberal governments provide funds for public education and health care. The government will pay for your education, but it will not guarantee a job or income, except for a minimum wage.

Citizens who suffer unnecessary illness will not be able to exercise their basic freedoms and support their families. So liberal governments around the world have provided universal health care.

With its patchwork system of government and private insurance, the U.S. spends twice as much on health care while covering fewer people and suffering poorer health results. For example,

Canadians in general live 2.5 years longer than Americans, and those suffering from cystic fibrosis survive on average 10 more years.

Canada has committed itself to liberal values more consistently than the U.S., and the results have been impressive. In terms of social and economic mobility Canada now ranks among some European countries in terms of “getting ahead.”

One study found that 50 percent of Americans will remain in the lowest 20th percentile, while only 20 percent of Canadians and Danes will remain at the bottom. The titles of recent essays sum it up: “Poor at 20; Poor for Life” and “The American Dream has moved North.”

The libertarian Cato Institute, an unabashed promoter of the American Way, has ranked the Canada sixth on its Human Freedom Index while the U.S. finds itself 23rd behind Poland.

In terms of economic freedom, the conservative Heritage Foundation ranks Canada 7th with the U.S. 17th. And Reporters Without Borders awards Canada 18th place for press freedom with the U.S. at a distant 41st.

The Economist has been the mouthpiece for English liberalism since 1842, and a recent article on Canada has a provocative title: “The Last Liberals.”

As the U.S. and Europe start to tighten immigration, Canada still maintains its liberal immigration policies. Newly elected Canadian Prime Justin Trudeau has personally greeted Syrian refugees at the airport offering them winter coats and food.

Canadians pay higher taxes. But they, just like the Europeans, get a very good return on their investment. And contrary to GOP ideology, higher taxes do not kill economic growth. In the last quarter Canada’s economy grew 3.7 percent while the U. S. was at an anemic 1.4 percent.

A steady revenue stream allows Canada to run an annual deficit of 2.7 percent of GDP. Our annual deficit has now climbed to 3.5 percent of GDP, after Obama had brought it down from over 10 percent to 3.2 percent, so it is Trump’s debt now.

Canada’s proper balance of taxes and spending means Canada’s total national debt is much lower than ours: 32.5 percent of GDP versus the U.S. at over 100 percent.

As most Canadians celebrate 150 years of progress, there are some who are not joining the party. Leah Gazan is a member of the Wood Mountain Lakota nation and the famous Sioux chief Sitting Bull is in her family lineage.

Her mother overcame a childhood of abuse in orphanages and convents and rose to become one of the first psychiatric nurses in Saskatchewan.

Gazan swears that, “until the Canadian government stops violating fundamental indigenous human rights, I have nothing to celebrate.”