

## What a difference 50 years make

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Anniversaries such as Canada Day are a good time to take stock of long-term changes in the lifestyles, attitudes and values that characterize our society. Incremental changes can seem matter of fact as they unfold in daily life, but their cumulative effects can be remarkable.

In 1960, Canada was a different place and Canadians were a different people. To begin with, there were fewer of us (17.8 million) compared with today's 34 million and we didn't live as long. Hedonism was a cigarette and a martini after work. Doctors had only recently stopped endorsing cigarette brands, and the average Canadian consumed about a fifth of the wine they consume today (the old guard preferred the hard stuff, despite the protestations of their livers).

When those cigarettes and martinis caught up with us, we couldn't turn to national health insurance. Medicare remained the dream of a minority of social democrats, not yet the cornerstone of Canada's version of the welfare state.

Speaking of the state, ours did not yet have much national swagger. In 1960, we had no national flag and no national anthem. (The Ensign and *God Save the Queen* served as surrogates.) French Canadians were second-class citizens and Quebec was a solitude on the brink of a "quiet revolution."

In 1960, the revolution in Canadian families had yet to dawn. Later in the decade, Pierre Trudeau, then justice minister, would liberalize laws on divorce and homosexuality, but 50 years ago divorce was difficult to obtain and extremely rare. From the 1960s to the 1990s, divorce rates increased more than fivefold. Homosexuality was illegal and could earn you a prison sentence - never mind spousal rights, marriage, or elected office.

Even intact "traditional" families (heterosexual couples with kids) looked and felt different, with Dad being much more often the unquestioned head of the household and sharing less domestic labour. Common-law arrangements were rare, and mixed unions were scandalous. Today, the former are, well, common and the latter are relatively rare but growing rapidly, especially among the young.

Part of the reason for this increased intermarriage is that our diverse young people are always bumping into each other in our multicultural cities. Canada is much more urban today than in 1960; a third of us now call one of our three largest cities home.

In 2010, we are far less sexist than we were in 1960 - and indeed, if anything, today we are more worried about our young men than our young women. Women outnumber men in universities by a ratio of 60/40 and this is true even in faculties of law and medicine, male bastions in the 1960s. Men continue to wield disproportionate quantities of wealth and corporate power, and women are underrepresented in elected office. Will time correct these imbalances or will interventions in the name of fairness - help for boys in schools, help for women in the boardroom - be required? I'll let you know in 50 years.

More than 15 per cent of us were immigrants in 1960, but most had come from Britain and other European countries. Not only had multiculturalism not yet been born, but our immigration policies remained explicitly racist: Only in 1962 was race officially eliminated as a criterion for admission, to be replaced in 1967 by the meritocratic points system. Today, one in five of us is foreign-born and the top source countries are in Asia. We are less racist partly because diversity is a pervasive fact of life, especially in our cities. "Minority identities"- ethnocultural, linguistic, and sexual - are everywhere, and the interweaving of various forms of identity, both demographic and psychographic, has blurred if not erased the line between "mainstream" and everything else.

Aboriginal peoples obtained the right to vote in 1960, but remained in many cases invisible victims of cultural genocide, with thousands of children still being "scooped" from their families and communities and placed in residential schools that sought to "take the Indian out of the child." The intergenerational devastation these schools wrought has been spoken of painfully in recent months as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has gone about its work. Our federal government apologized to former students two year ago.

Much has changed. But what remains the same? In 1960, the Conservatives were in power in Canada, and America elected a dashing young Democratic president. (Incidentally, in 1962, 79 per cent of eligible voters turned out to reduce John Diefenbaker's Conservatives to a minority; in 2008, only 58.8 per cent of Canadians returned Stephen Harper's minority government to office. Young idealists these days join or start up non-governmental organizations; few join political parties and few bother to vote.)

Now, as then, we have a Queen (actually, the same Queen, currently attending Canada Day celebrations in Ottawa), but we now have our own flag and anthem. Our Queen remains a reminder of our heritage - one that many Canadians continue to value, as the crowds that have greeted Her Majesty attest. Our glamorous, foreign-born Governor-General represents contemporary Canada - as her own popularity among Canadians shows.

We are no longer a colony of Great Britain, nor are we a colony of the United States. Indeed, over the past half-century, we have, as individuals and as a society, become more and more ourselves. As we kids used to joke about our currency, dimes have changed. And I would say, mostly for the better.

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