

Franco-Americans



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Fall 2003

Franco Americans

I. Description of Culture

A. History

- French exploration and colonization of North America began after Christopher Columbus's 1492 voyage
- In 1534 Jacques Cartier was the first European to discover the St. Lawrence River (located in present day Quebec)
- In 1608 Samuel de Champlain colonized Quebec
- In 1704 the Treaty of Utrecht forced France to give up Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and the Hudson Bay Territory to England
- During the "Grand Derangement" of 1755, the British deported 8,000 Acadians (French Canadians from the Maritime Provinces of Canada)
 - Acadians were not told where they were going or given time to gather, or even inform, their families-many families were separated
 - Many were sent on ships to various British colonies
 - Many ended up in Louisiana ("Cajuns"-a corruption of the word Acadians)
- Most voluntary French Canadian immigration to the US began in the 1800's
- In 1841, the Webster-Ashburton Treaty split the St. John River Valley; this new boundary put additional Acadians within U.S. borders
- The big boom in immigration occurred between the years 1880-1900
 - Migration of French Canadians increased during times of economic distress
- During the 1920's immigration was reduced by the US government
- Many French Canadians did not intend to permanently immigrate to New England, but were planning on improving their economic standing and returning to Canada
 - This thinking is credited with being one reason for early rejection of assimilation
- Many traditional French Canadians held on to the beliefs of *La Survivance* in the 1900's. This was a movement to preserve French Canadian culture and not assimilate
- During the same time as *La Survivance*, naturalization committees actively encouraged assimilation

B. Demographics

- As of 2000, the U.S. population consisted of:
 - **9,794,218** people of French ancestry.
 - **2,211,688** people of French Canadian ancestry.

- As of 2000, Maine's population consisted of:
 - **110,344** people of French Canadian ancestry, which accounts for **8.7%** of Maine's population.
 - **181,663** people of French ancestry, which accounts for **14.2%** of Maine's population.
 - **Note:** It is important to list both French and French Canadian ancestry because some Franco-Americans might list their ancestry as French instead of French Canadian.
- Large concentrations of Franco-Americans still reside along river ways where textile mills and factories were originally established.
 - These include areas such as Lewiston-Auburn, Caribou, Bangor, Augusta, and Biddeford.

C. Religion

- Roman Catholicism was at the heart of early Franco-American life (and culture)
 - Most activities centered around the local parishes
 - The curé (parish priest) played a significant role in the lives of his parishioners
- A large number of Franco-Americans are currently members of the Roman Catholic Faith and derive many of their values and beliefs from its teachings
- The religion is headed by Pope John Paul II (appointed by the College of Cardinals)
 - Regions are divided into Dioceses, which are each headed by bishops (named by the Pope)
 - Dioceses are further divided into parishes, which are headed by priests
- Roman Catholics believe in the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)
- Although the Pope is traditionally believed to be infallible, many younger Catholics feel like they can still be good Catholics while disregarding some of the Church's teachings (i.e. abortion, premarital sex, birth control, and divorce)
- The seven sacraments of Roman Catholicism include:
 - Baptism (performed in infancy for cleansing of original sin)
 - Confirmation
 - Eucharist (Holy Communion)
 - Penance
 - Anointing of the Sick
 - Holy Orders
 - Marriage
- Important religious texts include:
 - The Bible (includes books from the Greek Old Testament-the Apocrypha)
 - Canon Law (contains rules and regulations of the Catholic Church)
 - The Catechism (book of Catholic Church beliefs and doctrines)

D. Education

- Franco-American parochial schools began around 1870
 - Run by religious teaching orders: usually staffed by nuns
 - Combined lessons of values with traditional subjects
 - Emphasized Catholic faith, French language, and French-Canadian culture
 - By 1912 schools shifted to include ½ day of instruction in English
 - Today parochial schools operate in English, but many include instruction in French as a foreign language
- Many Franco-Americans also attend public schools (assimilation has increased throughout the last century)

E. Traditional Food

- Breakfast: pancakes (or crêpes), salt pork spread on bread and toast, coffee or tea, and fried eggs
- Lunch and Dinner: soup (usu. Cabbage, pea, or barley), pork, potatoes, bread and butter with maple syrup and cream or molasses, and fresh berries, fruit (usu. apples or peaches), and vegetables (in season or canned)
- Desserts: sugar pie, raisin pie, cake
- Beverages: milk and water
- Beef, chicken, and veal were rarely eaten
- Spices and Seasonings: sugar, maple syrup, molasses, cloves, salt, pepper, salt pork
- Holiday Specialties:
 - Christmas: cretons (pork terrine), ragoût, roast beef, pork-and-spice pies (tourtière), fritters, raisin and sugar pies, and bûche de Noël (cake shaped like a Yule log)
 - Easter: similar to Christmas with the addition of deep-fried eggs

F. Traditional Holidays and Celebrations

- Christmas
 - Honors the birth of Christ
 - Celebrated by Catholic Franco-Americans with a midnight mass followed by a family feast and celebration that lasts into the early morning hours
- New Year's Day
 - Holy Day of Obligation with a mass and celebration with family
- February 2: Candlemas
 - Honors Mary's journey to the temple in Jerusalem to be purified and to present her son (Jesus) to God
 - Special candles are lit during mass
 - Following mass, candles are brought home and lit to protect the home and the people within it
- February 29: Leap Year
 - Traditional custom allows unmarried women to propose marriage to men during a leap year, or to ask men for a date on the 29th

- Lent
 - Period of 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter (usu. includes dietary and/or social restrictions)
- Easter
 - Celebrates Christ's resurrection
 - Includes mass and family meals (often with foods that were restricted during Lent-i.e. ham)
- Maple-Sugaring Time
 - Often celebrations in early spring during the time that sap is gathered and maple syrup is produced (sugaring off)
- April Fool's Day (Poisson d'avril)
 - Celebrated by playing pranks on friends and family, perhaps sticking paper fish (poisson) to people's backs
- Note: This is an incomplete list of the many holidays and celebrations in which Franco-Americans participate. Also, Franco-Americans who are not Catholic probably will not identify with this primarily Roman-Catholic classification of holidays.

II. Family/Relationships/Values/Roles

A. Family

- Family is highly valued
- In traditional Franco-American culture, families are the center of social life
 - Family rituals often include:
 - Parish activities
 - Church attendance
 - Large weddings, baptisms, and wakes
 - Gatherings with extended family after mass
 - Holiday celebrations with family instead and friends

B. Values

- Self reliance is emphasized over achievement.
- Expressions of anger, arrogance, and pride may be strongly discouraged by parents, teachers, and clergy.
- Loyalty to family and religion
- Honesty
- Hard work
- Self-Control
- Respect for authority and institutions

C. Traditional Family Roles

- Father (Husband)
 - Authority figure
 - Protector
 - Ultimate decision maker
 - Although a wife has a considerable power to influence her husband's decisions as long as she does so without openly challenging his authority
 - Breadwinner

- Mother (Wife)
 - Caretaker of home and children (though the number of women working outside the home has increased throughout the 20th and into the 21st century)
 - Mediator between husband and children
 - Keeper of finances
 - Resident Saint
 - Mothers are often put on a pedestal and are not subject to criticism from their families
- Children
 - Traditionally responsible for care of younger siblings/household chores
 - Expected to respect elders
 - Seen not heard
- Elders
 - Enjoy a higher status than in the dominant culture
 - Mémères (grandmothers) are at the center of kinship networks
 - Females have higher status than males

D. Relationships

- Love is often expressed through togetherness rather than verbally
- Early marriage and childbirth is common
- Divorce is not sanctioned by the Catholic Church, but parallels the national average
- Children are valued
 - Boys are favored
- Cross-gender parent/child relationships are closer than same gender relationships
- Generally fathers are more likely to be seen by children as managers and mothers as friends
- Parents use punishment more than positive reinforcement
- Siblings offer each other friendship and mutual aid
- Humor is seen as an effective way to deal with difficult issues and uncomfortable topics of conversation

III. Communication

A. Language

- Franco-Americans traditionally value their language as an important part of their religious worship and their culture
- Canadian French (a dialect of French) is the traditional language of Franco-Americans
- Within Canadian French, there are also regional differences
 - Franco-American speech is most like Quebecois
 - One exception is in the St. John Valley where Acadian French has had an obvious influence

- The majority of Franco-Americans can speak English
 - Some speak English as a 2nd language
 - Some speak French as a 2nd language
 - Some only speak English
 - Some only speak French
- Franco-American language has often been a source of discrimination

B. Gestures

- Neither French Canadians, nor Franco-Americans use typically French gestures
- Franco-Americans who are Catholic may use the sign of the cross
 - Made by bringing the hand in a line from forehead to breast, then shoulder to shoulder
 - Customary before saying prayers or to ward off negative happenings

C. Conversation

- Customary to intersperse French and English words and phrases
- When speaking English, many Franco-Americans exhibit an accent
- Even Franco-Americans who appear fluent in English may be misunderstood by (or misunderstand) English-speaking people

IV. Work/Play and Leisure

A. Work

- Traditional employment included farming, forestry, manufacturing (textile mills, machine shops), construction, and work in brickyards
- Although some hold similar jobs today, Franco-Americans are currently represented in all types of employment

B. Play/Leisure

- Researching Franco-American genealogy is popular
- Hockey
- Holiday celebrations
- Cultural fairs and festivals
 - Festival de Joie
 - La Kermesse
- Franco-American fraternal societies, social and service clubs

V. Discrimination

- Discrimination became prevalent during the Industrial age when immigration boomed
- Possible reasons for discrimination were the Franco-Americans' sudden increase in number and their strong allegiance to their own language, religion, and culture
- Franco-Americans were called the "Chinese Coolies" of New England

- In the early 1900's the Ku Klux Klan (numbering 150,141 in Maine in 1925) targeted Franco-Americans and other Catholic groups
- Discrimination against Franco-Americans always increased during tough economic times (e.g. around the time of the Great Depression) when job competition was high
 - Because they did not belong to unions early on, they worked for less pay (and often harder) than their union counterparts, making them more appealing to many employers
 - Later they were discriminated against for joining unions
- In school, Franco-Americans are made to speak "real" French, not their French Canadian dialect
- Franco-Americans are subject to "dumb" Frenchmen jokes
- The designation "frog" is an ethnic slur used in reference to Franco-Americans

VI. Health/Wellness

- History of self-help or seeking advice from family or priest
- Seeking help for family therapy or mental health needs is done as a last resort
 - Seen as a defeat and a threat to pride
- Limited sex education
- LDL receptor gene mutation
 - Causes hypercholesterolemia, leading to premature (and often fatal) cardiac events
 - Affects descendants of 3,500 people who came to Quebec from the Loire River Valley in central France in the 1600's
 - Must be treated with drugs
 - Untreated, the risk of heart disease is close to 95% before age 65 (higher combined with drinking and smoking)
 - Some die suddenly in their 30s and 40s without ever knowing about their defect
- Traditional Franco-American diet is high in fat and cholesterol, carbohydrates, and sugar

VII. Challenges to Healthcare

- Language barriers
 - Franco-Americans may have trouble expressing themselves in English
 - Providers may misunderstand (or be misunderstood by) Franco-Americans who speak English as a second language
 - Older Franco-Americans with memory or other cognitive deficits will commonly revert back to French if that was their first language (R. Black, personal communication, Dec. 11, 2003)
- Self-reliance
 - Help-seeking often takes place as a last resort

- Due to assimilation, many Franco-Americans may be hard to identify
- Many Franco-Americans have had a limited sex education due to conservative Catholic beliefs
- Reluctance to share details of private matters with outsiders (health professionals)
- Reluctance to spend money on intangibles (like therapy)
- Taboo areas for discussion
 - Incest
 - Homosexuality
 - Leaving the Catholic Church
 - Speaking ill of the dead
- Credentials create distance

VIII. Suggestions for Healthcare Providers

- Use *appropriate* humor to address sensitive issues that would otherwise cause discomfort
 - Helps to put things in perspective
 - **Note:** Always use extreme caution when using humor in a health care setting as there can be a fine line between appropriate and offensive
- Be aware of the traditional role of the father (or husband) as the authority figure and decision maker
 - Remember that mothers (or wives) can also have considerable power to influence decisions
- Use appropriate self-disclosure to connect with clients
- Be aware that many Franco-Americans speak English as a second language
 - Don't assume that they understand you or that you understand them
 - Use a translator when necessary
- Use caution when dealing with taboo subjects
- Be aware and respectful of traditional (usu. Catholic) values
- Use a collaborative approach to appeal to the Franco-American value of self-reliance
 - Encourage Franco-Americans to be active participants in intervention processes such as setting goals, choosing and implementing interventions, and modifying treatment plans when necessary
- If appropriate, recommend having cholesterol checked early in life
- Don't assume clients are knowledgeable about sex or reproduction
- Don't assume that Franco-Americans are Catholic or that they hold traditional values

* Please be advised that much of the information in this outline will apply only to Franco-Americans who hold traditional values and beliefs. There is great diversity within today's Franco-American population and we do not claim to have captured all of the nuances in these few pages.

* The term "traditional" is used throughout this document to refer to customs/beliefs/practices that have historical significance for the Franco American culture, but that may or may not be relevant for Franco Americans of today.

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