

## QUEBEC ACT OF 1774:

Dr. Virgil Benoit of the University of North Dakota and Director of Initiatives in French-Midwest [www.frenchmidwest.org](http://www.frenchmidwest.org) is an acknowledged expert on the French-Canadian experience, and below is a recent comment on the Quebec Act.

From: Dick Bernard <[dickbernard@msn.com](mailto:dickbernard@msn.com)>

Subject: French-Canadians, English and the American Revolution

Date: November 27, 2010 9:06:49 AM CST

An unexpected and late addition to this book.

Dr. Virgil Benoit teaches French at the University of North Dakota (UND), and is director of Initiatives in French Midwest at UND [www.frenchmidwest.org](http://www.frenchmidwest.org)

>>> Dick Bernard <[dickbernard@msn.com](mailto:dickbernard@msn.com)> 11/22/2010 3:29 PM >>>

Is there a simple reason why the French did not support the Americans when, in the Revolutionary War period, the fledgling U.S. was interested in throwing the English out of power in Quebec? I know nothing is simple, but perhaps there is a general answer. Some friends are interested.

From: "Virgil Benoit" <[VirgilBenoit@und.edu](mailto:VirgilBenoit@und.edu)>

Date: November 22, 2010 4:49:04 PM CST

To: "Dick Bernard" <[dickbernard@msn.com](mailto:dickbernard@msn.com)>

Subject: Re: Quick question with (maybe) an easy answer

Hi Dick,  
The Quebec Act of 1774 is often cited as the event which encouraged French-Canadians to not revolt against the British in Canada in 1776. The Q Act gave F-Cs the freedom to practice their religion, customs and language. The Q Act was a first in British governance towards its colonies. But the British were only a small minority in Quebec at the time. Maybe they felt they had to do it that way. They also knew they could lose the other thirteen colonies in North America and have no foothold in the New World. The French-C. also had no support from France by 1776. They also were afraid of being swallowed up by the neighboring anglo-saxon protestant culture, ie the new United States. As it were the Quebec Act gave them more protection as a defeated people than the unknown relationship with a nation-to-be. With the defeat of 1760 the French-C society lost its upper class. Its leaders with political contacts went either back to France or had been lowered in status to common folk as far as political or social influence was concerned. The one class that rose quickly to exert influence in Quebec at this time was the clergy, which, turned out to act very conciliatory toward the British. They interpreted the new situation stemming from the Quebec Act as one that guaranteed protection. They felt that as a conquered people the French-Canadians should be careful and appreciate that they had religious freedom as well as privileges to use French and customs as before the conquest in 1760. Over time, the clergy tied the privileges of religion and language together, saying that to keep French was also to be true to the catholic faith. These two "freedoms" became the clergy's motto for keeping French-Canadians together, so to speak. The clergy fought migration to urban areas, such as Quebec City and Montreal which were very British and protestant up until WWI. In short, the surrender of New France by France led to the seemingly paradoxical situation you are asking about. But the French of the former New France did not side with the Americans. It happened as you see because the common people of the former New France saw little hope, and their choice not to fight again was reinforced by the clergy. The common folk had fought the British invasion of 1760, but were in the end greatly outnumbered on the battle fields. They lost and along with the defeat, strategy (contacts with the homeland) and courage were also lost. It would take the French Canadians until the 1970s to work their way back to a Quebec society that could be called contemporary to its counterparts in the world. Bravo. They did it. There was the Revolution of 1836 against British dominance in Quebec. It was stopped. There was the war's act of Trudeau against Quebec in about 1968. It did not last. In all the rest of time and in all other arenas of civilized society the Quebec people have worked through parliament to regain equity with those who invaded and took their country away in 1760. Final observation, invading armies can make war, but they can't kill culture. It will surface and come back. In Quebec, not only has culture survived wars between gigantic superpowers and brutal scrimmages on the home front, but a rich government has been put into place and the country is dynamic today. Best to you. Virgil