

The second part of a four-part gazetteer of the basic geopolitical vocabulary of the English language, dealing with the facts, fancies, fallacies, ambiguities and subtle implications in such words. For convenience of presentation the material is not in strict alphabetical order.

**BRIT** is possibly unique. It is a word that existed for a number of centuries with one meaning, died out, then recently came back to life with an entirely different meaning. In form, therefore, it is one on-going word, but in function it is two distinct words widely separated in time and reference, so that it might be best to think here of a *Brit*<sup>1</sup> and *Brit*<sup>2</sup>.

*Brit*<sup>1</sup> dates from Anglo-Saxon times. To the Angles, Saxons and Scots the Brits or Brets were the ancient Welsh – the Britons of what are now Wales, Cornwall and Strathclyde. By the end of the Middle Ages there were, officially, no Brits left (although 'Brett' is still a common surname), and the *Oxford English Dictionary* noted in 1888 that all later uses of the word were 'only historical'. In effect, therefore, the word was as dead as *wight* and *rood*, and later dictionaries have either followed the *OED* in its observations, or ignored the word entirely.

Something, however, happened in the 1970s to cause new dictionaries and new editions of old dictionaries to put a new *Brit* in their columns. Without any reference to ancient times, for example, the *Longman New Universal Dictionary* (1982) defines its *Brit* as 'a British person – informal', while the 1983 revision of *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary* sees it as a colloquial shortening of 'British' used to mean 'a Briton' (in the modern sense however of a U.K. citizen and not in any ancient Celtic sense).

Just how this *Brit*<sup>2</sup> came into being is unclear. It may have developed as a spoken version of the common abbreviation *Brit.*, used in books to denote 'Britain' or 'British', or perhaps some individual or group with surprising influence started

# An ABC of World English

## BRIT TO CREOLE

TOM McARTHUR

using it on the analogy 'as Scot is to Scottish, so Brit should be to British'. It has proved to be a convenient and concise monosyllable: 'Briton' has a more formal and official ring, while 'Brit' can be easy, curt, almost



This banner was waved in Minneapolis in the U.S.A., but could equally well have been carried in Ireland itself, where 'Brit' has been in wide use for many years.

flippant and occasionally funny or facetious, as in:

- 'Glitz Brits blitz New York New York is bursting at the seams with Britons eager to take a taste of the city's smorgasbord of social, sexual and career opportunities.' (Sharon Churcher, *The Sunday Times*, 20 May 84)
- 'That chap President Mitterrand really is too much, failing to nod in agreement every time Mrs Thatcher speaks. It's easy to see he's not a Brit.' (Pendennis, *The Observer*, 25 March 84)
- 'Instant Brit Zola Budd, of South Africa, trots barefoot into the Olympic Games with a stir but without a storm.' (*TIME*, 18 June 84)
- "'The Brits shaped the West as we know it today,'" said Edward Taylor, whose family now owns the old Butch Cassidy ranch.' (Tad Bartimus, 'Scions of Britain in the American West', in the *International Herald Tribune*, 13/14 Oct 84)

There is a darker side, however, to *Brit*<sup>2</sup>. Beyond the United Kingdom, it can have pejorative overtones not unlike 'Yank', 'Polack' and 'Canuck'. Allan Fotheringham, for example, reporting for the *Montreal Gazette* on electioneering in British Columbia in September 1982, notes that 'Premier Bennett has resorted to an emergency measure: Flog the Brits.' This measure was part of a government tussle with the trade union movement, many of whose leaders had 'Brit accents'. Fotheringham con-

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sidered that 'middle-class pedants' were disguising their dislike for the union movement 'by pretending it's all the fault of the Brits', adding that the premier of the province 'would sooner die than be caught on TV talking about "niggers" or "kikes" or "wops" or "chinks".' He argued, however, that the premier knew he could 'win votes by bashing Brits', now that Canada was a multi-ethnic society. 'It's the last insult left,' Fotheringham concluded. 'It means we are now all equal, all minorities.'

**BRIT-** has been making some headway in recent years as a combining form of 'British', not unlike the *Am-* in 'Amoco' and the *Ameri-* in 'Ameritech'. Current examples include *Britoil* ('British Oil') and *Britax*, whose form echoes Kleenex, Pentax, Radox and other commercial usages that end in the classical -x.

**BRITAIN** is an ancient word. It was first recorded by the Greeks of the 4th century B.C. as the name of the Celts who lived in western Europe's largest off-shore island. The Romans turned the Greek *Pretanoi* into *Britanni*, for whose home they then coined the feminine name *Britannia*. The Celts themselves appear to have made no clear distinction between the people and the place, and the meaning of the original word evidently referred to painting the body.

When the Angles and Saxons invaded the island in the 5th century A.D. they did not associate themselves with Britannia or her inhabitants, who were as alien to them as the Algonquins and Iroquois to the first European settlers of North America. The large piece of the island that they acquired they called 'Engla-land', and left the rest to look after itself.

'After the Old English period,' as James Murray puts it in the *OED*, 'Britain' was used only as a historical term, until about the time of Henry

VIII and Edward VI [the early 16th century], when it came again into practical politics in connexion with the efforts to unite England and Scotland.' Even when a sort of unity came in 1603, with the union of the crowns, the word 'Britain' did not mean much in emotional terms to peoples who preferred to call themselves English, Scots or Welsh. It took another 200 years and the development of an empire beyond the home archipelago before the citizens of the shakily 'United Kingdom' saw any virtue at all in being 'British'.

With the parliamentary union of 1707, official efforts were made to replace the old emotive names 'England' and 'Scotland' with 'South Britain' and 'North Britain' respectively, within the framework of an overall 'Great Britain'. Later still, an attempt was made to turn an unco-operative Ireland into 'West Britain'. Apart from the continuing official use of Great Britain, these attempts were conspicuous failures, out of which however the three current uses of the word have developed.

Firstly, there is the unemotional geographical and historical use of 'Britain' to name the whole island (about which there is no dispute). Secondly, there is the use of the term as a legal umbrella which makes it easier for the Scots and the Welsh to live in England's shadow within a unitary state. Thus, Scots can be both Scottish and British, but never English. For the English, the dominant group, how the Welsh, Scots and Irish have seen their incorporation into a unitary state at any particular time has never been of central importance, and by and large it is among them that the third use has emerged: 'Britain' as a blurred synonym of 'England', as in the following examples:

- 'His bulky figure swathed in a black overcoat, Winston Churchill slumped despondently on the Opposition benches. For four decades, since he

had joined the Commons, his voice had given utterance in that hall to Britain's imperial dream, just as, for the past decade, it had been the goad of England's conscience, the catalyst of her courage.' (Collins & Lapierre, *Freedom at Midnight*, Collins, 1975)

- 'As the century progressed it became increasingly apparent that Britain could not afford to lose her Indian empire to another European power. . . . By the late nineteenth century such a thing was regarded as intolerable in Britain. It was not only that many Englishmen now regarded England's prosperity as being bound up with that of India; England's prestige too was now heavily committed. . . . India affected British policy in a number of areas, the Ottoman Empire, Persia, Afghanistan, Tibet. . . . In many of these areas Britain was brought into direct conflict with Russia.' (M.E. Chamberlain, *Britain and India*, David & Charles, 1974)

There has been a strong tendency over the last century for the rest of the world — aware of the political realities — to follow the third conception, especially in languages other than English, where 'England' is unreflectingly used as the name for the political entity associated with the historical island of 'Britain'.

**BRITANNIA** as a female figure with a shield dates from Roman times, but was largely forgotten and irrelevant until revived in 1665 by Charles II, who put her on a coin in order to symbolize the new and fragile unity of Scotland and England.

As a word, 'Britannia' has powerful historical-imperial overtones, and is linked with the sentimental vision of a God-favoured island. Shakespeare in *Richard II* (1595) called England a 'scepter'd isle', 'the envy of less happier lands', while much later, in 1735, William Somerville addressed the same thought with: 'Hail, happy Britain! highly favoured isle, and Heaven's peculiar care!' The supreme panegyric, however, came

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 Being British won't

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in 1740 from the pen of the anglicized Scottish poet James Thomson, who wrote:

'When Britain first, at heaven's command,  
 Arose from out the azure main.  
 This was the charter of the land,  
 And guardian angels sung this strain:  
 "Rule Britannia, rule the waves;  
 Britons never will be slaves."'

The patriotic and unifying force of this image still echoes at the end of the 20th century. 'Britannia' names a royal yacht and a commercial airline, as well as a variety of commercial enterprises. Britannia International Investment Management Limited is a Channel Islands company that uses the helmeted female figure as a symbol of financial solidity, but with unconscious irony displays alongside her in an ad a hand just managing to hold the pound sterling above the rising waves. The headline was 'Save Your Pound' – by investing in the currencies of the less happier lands.

**BRITANNIC** conveys a sense of formalized power and glory that is now archaic. British passports, however, still contain the statement that 'Her Britannic Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs requests and requires in the Name of Her Majesty all those whom it may concern to allow the bearer to pass freely without let or hindrance, and to afford the bearer such assistance and protection as may be necessary.' Such ringing words enshrine the Victorian assumption that a British subject could go anywhere in the world secure in the knowledge that a gunboat or a grenadier was never far away.

**BRITISH** is a tripartite term. Its first use is now confined to history books, where it refers to the pre- and non-Anglo-Saxon cultures of the

island called Britain. From the 16th century onward it became a catch-all term for the peoples of the slowly uniting kingdoms of England and Scotland, expanding at various times in various ways to include all or some of the inhabitants of Ireland (with or without their approval). Finally, at



A curiously inaccurate and insensitive drawing of 'Great Britain' that appeared in *The Guardian* newspaper of 25th October 1984, that leaves out most of Scotland (which ought to be included) and includes Ireland (which ought to be left out).

the height of empire, it was extended to take in various 'possessions' around the world, such as 'British India' and 'British Honduras', slowly becoming a cover term for such fragments of the old imperium as Hong Kong and St. Helena.

The significance of 'British' today seems to relate to four inter-related matters: identification with a particular nation-state, legal nationality, social attitudes, and a distinctive culture (as in the following quotations):

- 'Like all large countries, the United Kingdom in the late 20th century was

divided into many different groups. The British are not, strictly speaking, a single nation, and when a Frenchman or a German speaks of the British as "the English", he offends three million Welsh and six million Scots.' (Neil Grant, *Hamlyn Children's History of Britain*, 1977)

- 'The British Nationality Act, which came into force last year, created five categories of British citizens, only one of which has the automatic and permanent right to live in the country. There are 57 million of these British citizens, and all but two million of them are white. Excluded from the right to settle are Hong Kong's largely non-white population of 2.5 million and about 1.5 million "overseas citizens" – Indians, Malaysians and others – who had become United Kingdom citizens when their homelands gained independence.' (James A. Markham, 'Third World's Poor Slip Into Europe', *International Herald Tribune*, 10 July 84)
- 'A British government official who often travels abroad observes, "In a country lacking sharp ethnic divisions for many years – except in Northern Ireland – social class has been a constant collision point. People love to hammer away at it." Class divisions remain embedded in British life today, even though some changes are taking place, and even though some Britons think class exists largely in the eye of the overseas beholder who has watched too much "Upstairs, Downstairs" on television.' (David K. Willis, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 19–25 May 1984)
- 'The immaculate timing of the great royal events – whether the trooping of the colour, Lord Mountbatten's funeral, or a royal wedding – reminded the British that they could still do something better than anyone else. While foreigners mocked Britain's declining standards and industry they conceded that they could not compete with British ceremonial. As the *Boston Globe* put it after the royal wedding: "The Royal Family of England pulls off ceremonies the way the army of Israel pulls off commando raids".' (Anthony Sampson, *The Changing Anatomy of Britain*, 1982)

# The Superior, Inferior and Barbarous Britains

The Romans saw Britannia in terms of what they controlled and did not control. Their colony of *Britannia romana* lay south of the wall that the Emperor Hadrian completed in 128 A.D., and was divided by the Emperor Severus (d. 211) into two provinces: *Britannia superior* ('Upper Britain'), the part nearest to Rome with its capital Londinium (London), and *Britannia inferior* ('Lower Britain') beyond it, with its capital at Eboracum (York). Beyond that lay *Britannia barbara*, consisting of an indeterminate border area and then the mountains of Caledonia.

These primal divisions live on in the north/south

psycho-geography of the British peoples: a self-assured 'home' area around London; a robust but less prestigious north of England; a prickly Lowland Scotland, watchful for slights, and an uneasy different ethnic and linguistic focus in the West Highlands and the Hebrides (part of the supposedly twilit 'Celtic fringe' that also takes in Man, Wales and Cornwall). Beyond these to the north are the half-Scandinavian island groups of Orkney and Shetland, and to the west the Hibernia that was never invaded by Rome – Ireland, that no Britain, whether superior, inferior or barbarous, has yet learned to live with.

The obligation of the central government, which allows its machine to flood the Gaelic minority with English-language matter and assumptions, is surely to provide some positive Gaelic support. (Derick Thomson, in *Gaidhlig ann an Albainn: Gaelic in Scotland*, Gairm, 1976)

Only on the pathetically few occasions when a bit of Scots gets an airing [at the Edinburgh Festival] do the wails of protest rise up from the London critics . . . Such an attitude would be laughable if it were not so insufferably arrogant.' (Harry D. Watson, Edinburgh, in a letter to *The Guardian*, 18 August 84)

The Irish government is continually vulnerable to the accusation, . . . that it is fraternising with the enemy when it talks to Britain about joint security. There is always poison in the cup when the British and the Irish drink a love potion. (Editorial, *The Guardian*, 14 August 84)

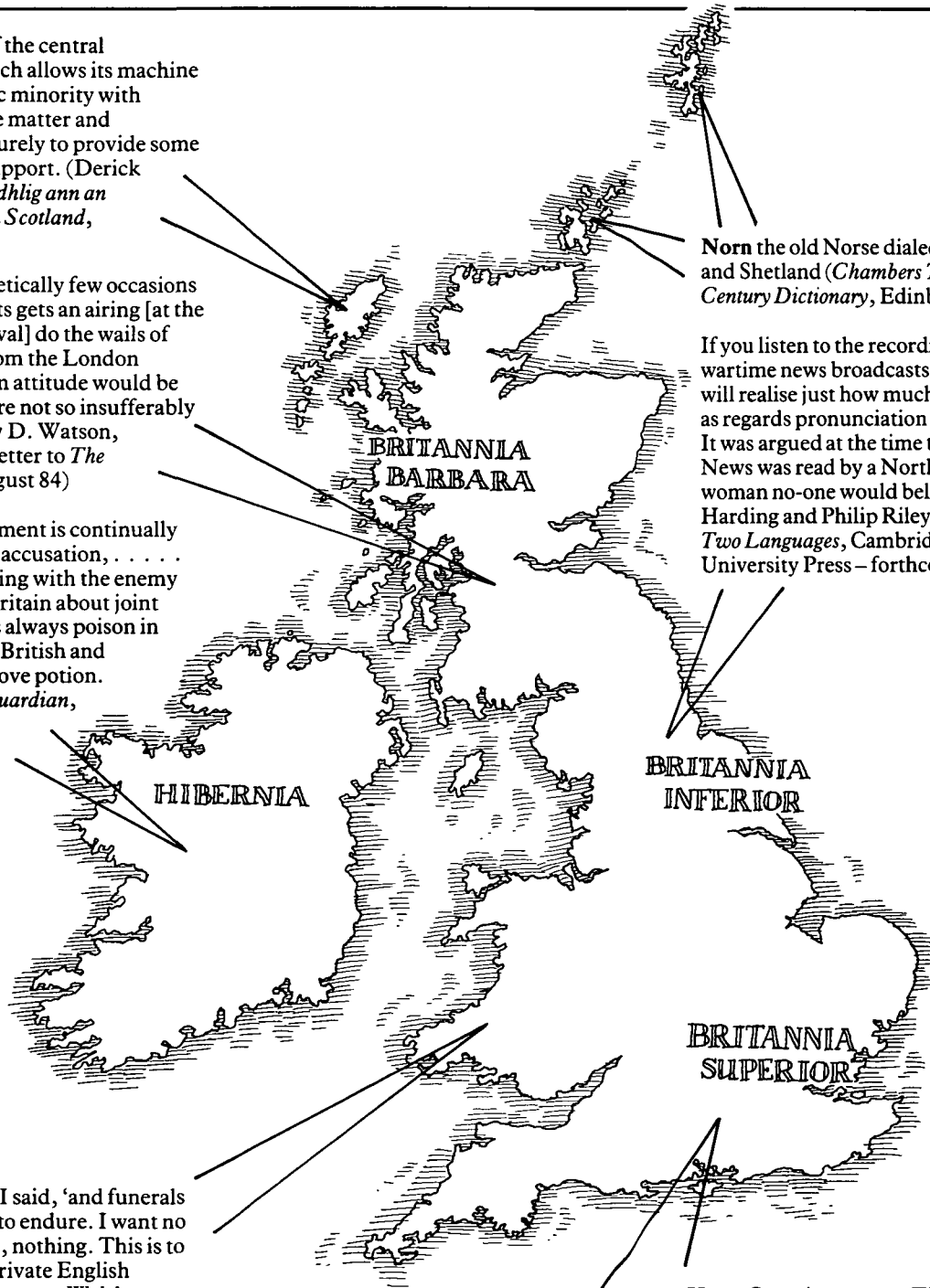
'But she's dead,' I said, 'and funerals are for the living to endure. I want no music, no hymns, nothing. This is to be a short plain private English funeral, and I'll have no Welsh circuses here,' (Susan Howatch, *The Wheel of Fortune*, 1984)

Ascot, Henley, Sunningdale, Glyndebourne and Wimbledon. The names are a roll call of the major sporting and cultural events in the summer calendar of the rich. They are all part of the regional identity of the

Norn the old Norse dialect of Orkney and Shetland (*Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, Edinburgh, 1983)

If you listen to the recordings of BBC wartime news broadcasts now, you will realise just how much has changed as regards pronunciation for example. It was argued at the time that if the News was read by a Northerner or a woman no-one would believe it. (Edith Harding and Philip Riley, *One Family, Two Languages*, Cambridge University Press – forthcoming)

Home Counties. . . . The image of the Home Counties is primarily a social one. The Home Counties are not just a place. They are a way of life. (Chris Hammett, 'Life in the Cocktail Belt', in *The Geographical Magazine*, October 1984)



**BRITISH-** as a hyphenated form appears to be making inroads on the traditional use of *Anglo-* in phrases like 'Anglo-American relations'. Compare, for example, the more traditional usage of *The Times* of London and *The Guardian* with the newer – and more accurate – usage in *The Observer* of London and the *International Herald Tribune* of Paris:

- 'British officials in Peking and Hong-kong are understood to be pleased with the latest developments in the Anglo-Chinese talks on the future of Hong-kong.' (David Bonavia, *The Times*, 23 Jan 84)
- 'Despite the East-West political chill, Anglo-Soviet economic and commercial ties are flourishing.' (*The Guardian*, 26 May 84)
- 'I am trying to say something which is not easily heard above the clamour of praise for the present spate of British-Indian fictions.' (Salman Rushdie, *The Observer*, 1 April 84)
- 'A crisis in British-Nigerian relations was brewing even before the attempt to abduct Umaru Dikko in London on July 5.' (Colin Legum, *IHT*, 27 July 84)

**BRITISHER** is an increasingly rare term, usually labelled in British dictionaries 'chiefly American', but described in the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* as 'disclaimed by U.S. writers'. The full-size *OED*, however, suggests that the word arose during the American War of Independence (1776–83), when the opposing forces were the Americans against the British (and not the English, as such). 'Britisher', therefore, presumably arose as a handy – possibly pejorative – term for any individual who was a subject of the British king. Be that as it may, however, both Webster's *Third* and *New Collegiate* dictionaries in the 60s and 70s of this century define *Britisher* as 'a native or subject of Great Britain, especially an Englishman'.

**BRITON**, like *Brit*, is a historically schizophrenic term, as demonstrated in two recent attempts at defining it:

- '1 a member of any of the peoples inhabiting Britain before the Anglo-Saxon invasions 2 a native, inhabitant, or subject of Britain' (*Longman New Universal Dictionary*, 1982)
- 'one of the Brythonic inhabitants of Britain before the coming of the English, or one of their present representatives the Welsh: a native or



*Union Jack* is the title of a monthly newspaper published in California (PO Box 1823, La Mesa, CA 92041), covering events in the U.K., royalty, and the 'doings' of such U.S. organizations as the American British Cab Society, the British Isles Genealogical Research Association, the Daughters of the British Empire in San Diego, and HOBOS (Home of Britons Overseas).

citizen of Great Britain or of any of the associated states: a Breton (*rare*)' (*Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, 1983)

Currently 'Briton' is doing rather well as a catch-all for British nationals: it avoids the cumbersome and often inappropriate use of 'Englishman/Englishwoman', is sexually and ethnically neutral, and answers the need for a countable noun from 'British' more neatly than *Britisher* and more formally than *Brit*. It appears to be increasingly acceptable internationally, especially to journalists:

- 'Britons tend to stand back from their European neighbors. The channel is one barrier; language and national traits also figure in. Many Britons feel more rapport with their American cousins.' (David K. Willis, *Christian Science Monitor*, 9–15 June 84)
- 'The latest opinion polls show increasing numbers of Britons unhappy over the violence of the miners' strike...' (*TIME*, 10 September 84)
- 'The popular press has long had the reputation of presenting black Britons as a problem rather than as people who have problems.' (Charles Donington, *The Guardian*, 6 Aug 84)

In spite of this success among journalists, however, the word is not (yet?) commonly used when people label themselves. In answer to a query about nationality, the average Briton is much more likely to say 'I'm British' (or even 'I'm English/Scots, etc.') than to answer, 'I'm a Briton'.

**CANADA** is a word whose etymology the *OED* sidestepped, calling it simply (in 1888) 'the name of a British possession or "dominion" in N. America, used attrib. in the names of various commercial products, animals, and plants, as Canada agaric, goose, stag, etc.' To this, however, the *Shorter OED* in 1932 added succinctly: 'Origin unknown'.

And yet the origin is not unknown. It is tied to the Breton explorer Jacques Cartier, who visited the region of the St. Lawrence river in the early 16th century. He recorded that, when asked the name of the region, a local 'Indian' waved an arm and said *kanata*, which may have been the name of a nearby Iroquois village. Nations acquire their names haphazardly, and in this instance a limited local word in due course extended its reference from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the Great Lakes to the Arctic Circle.

An adequate discussion of 'Canada' nowadays, however, must accommodate at least three factors in roughly equal measure: the tug of war between Britain and France in exploring this vast land from the 16th century onward, the relation between this dominion and the great republic to its south, and a perennial awareness of climate and the pressure of the wilderness. French Canadians still call their defeat in 1759 'The Conquest', Canadians by and large are ambivalent about their links with the United States, and just as Australians have to live with their 'Outback', so Canadians never entire-

ly forget their 'Great White North' as they develop the friendlier strip that runs along the U.S. border. Something of this essence of Canadianness is caught in the following quotations:

- 'Fraser highlanders, howling the clan battle cry, slashed the fleeing French with claymores as Canadiens covered the escape. Montcalm was hit three times... The battle on the Plains of Abraham [at Quebec] lasted but fifteen minutes. Four years later it resulted in a single statement written in a treaty by Louis XV: "His most Christian Majesty cedes and guarantees to his Britannick Majesty, in full right, Canada".' (June Callwood, *Portrait of Canada*, 1981)
- 'And so it is with us, Sam. We are cooler than you, as our people learned when your southerners invaded Upper Canada. Hot weather and passion, gunfights and race riots go together. Your mythic encounters seem to have taken place at high noon, the sun beating down on a dusty Arizona street. I find it difficult to contemplate a similar gunfight in Moose Jaw in the winter, the bitter rivals struggling vainly to shed two pairs of mitts and reach under several layers of parka for weapons so cold that that slightest touch of flesh on steel would take the skin off their thumbs.' (Pierre Berton, *Why We Act Like Canadians*, 1982)

On 27 August 84, the Canadian writer Mordecai Richler described the Canadian election campaign in *TIME* magazine. In his article he referred twice to Canada as 'North

America's attic', where the action reverberates from the U.S. below and much treasure is stored. *TIME*'s sub-editors headlined the piece 'Reverberations in America's Attic', no doubt for economy of space, but by leaving out that single significant word 'North' they said it all.

**CANADIAN**, like 'American', 'Australian' and 'British', is a word with layers of history inside it. The first Canadians so-called were the Micmac, Mohawk and other indigenous peoples ('John was not a pure blooded micmac. His father... was a Canadian belonging to some of the tribes along the St. Lawrence - an 1872 citation in the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, 1982).

The first people of European origin to take on the name were *les Canadiens*, the French settlers along the same St. Lawrence. Later, when the colonies of Lower Canada (effectively Quebec) and Upper Canada (effectively Ontario) came into being in the wake of the American Revolution, the existence of two uneasy linguistic-cultural blocs was assured: the 'French' and the 'English' Canadians (among whom, since the label is linguistic and not national, are included 'Scots Canadians', 'Irish Canadians' and any others of the Canadian mosaic who have opted to use English).

**CAN-** is the monosyllable that stands for Canada. In 'Can-Am car races', Canada and America are racing against each other, while 'Can Lit' is Canadian Literature and 'Canagrex' stands for Canadian Agricultural Exports. As with the *-Am* in 'Can-Am', the first can also be last: 'Alcan' is Aluminum Canada and 'Statscan' means Statistics Canada.

**CARIBBEAN** originally meant 'relating to the Carib Indians', and has had some odd cousins in English. The Caribs were aggressive and had a propensity for eating people. When Columbus first heard of them, he recorded the name as *Canibales*, whence the word 'cannibal'. When Shakespeare needed a half-human monster in his play *The Tempest*, he took *canibal* and turned it into Caliban.

Nowadays, in addition to referring to the sea, 'Caribbean' is virtually a synonym of 'West Indian'. In British English the tendency is to stress the word as **CarIBBEan**, while in American English **CaRIBBEan** is common. Some current usages are:

- 'He presented a 10-part radio documentary on the history of Jamaican popular music, and last October visited Cuba to participate in a conference of Latin American and Caribbean artists.' (Michael Zwerin, 'Linton Kwesi Johnson Weds Poetry to Reggae', *IHT*, 28/29 April 84)

## Dear Sam – We're *not* Americans

In 1982, the Toronto publishers McClelland and Stewart brought out a slim volume by Pierre Berton entitled *Why We Act Like Canadians*. It was cast in the form of letters to an American friend called Sam, and opened with a missive for the 17 April 1982:

'Dear Sam: Today is Constitution Day in Canada! That doesn't mean much to you, I know - I doubt if it will make your front pages - but it's a big thing for us. After centuries we've cut our last ties with Europe and we're officially independent; our Queen says so. In fact she's up there on Parliament Hill, saying it now with a very English accent. But then we're used to English accents in this country - to a babel of accents: English, French, Scottish, Irish, Ukrainian, Italian, and many, many others - symbolizing those fierce ethnic and regional loyalties that hold us together as a distinctive people even as they tear us apart. A typical

Canadian contradiction.'

In the *Montreal Gazette* of the day before, however - presumably by some other typical Canadian contradiction - James Stewart reviewed Berton's book, starting with:

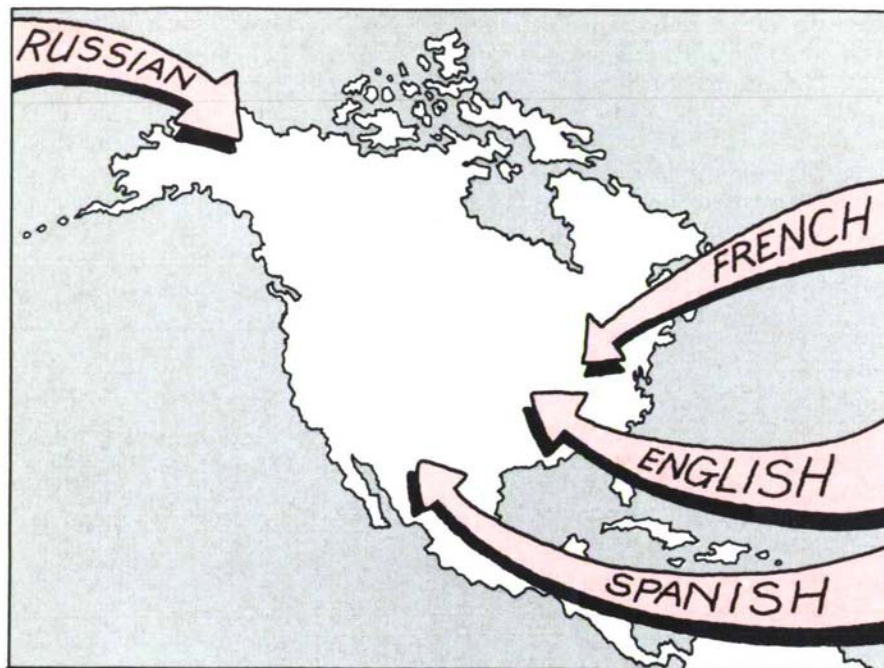
'Americans call it liberty, Canadians call it freedom. They cherish the individual; we venerate institutional authority. They carry guns; we call the cops. These slick-magazine stereotypes are not unadulterated garbage. They contain at least some low-calorie truth. And to give the prolific Pierre Berton credit, he presents them with style and originality, drawing on his own broad experience of Canadian history, geography and character.'

Both writer and reviewer appear to have the same obsessive concern: the relationship of Canadians to Americans. Stewart calls the device of letters to Sam 'a bit silly, especially

since Sam never answers any of the letters. That silence in itself is powerfully symbolic, though Berton probably did not intend it to be, of the massive indifference of Americans to their self-important, identity-seeking northern neighbors.'

Stewart adds: 'The book, short as it is, often palls on a reader because of its relentless measuring of self and country against the Americans, as though Canadians have no existence except in relation to the United States.'

This disturbs Stewart, as it probably disturbed Berton, but such negative self-definition is by no means uncommon in the English-using world. Canadians who plead that they are 'not Americans' are close cousins of generations of Scots and Welsh who have insisted that they were 'not English', and of New Zealanders who say yet again that they are 'not Australians'.



Many people think of North America as an English-speaking monolith. Canada's official bilingual policy, however, reflects historical reality, particularly as regards the rivalries of the European powers that colonized the continent from 1500 onward. The map shows how *four* European languages have competed in North America. The Russian factor has long gone, but *le fait français* stubbornly survives in Canada, and the status of Spanish remains an unsettled and unsettling issue in the United States.

- 'The St. Lucia government and Taiwan's Tatung Company are to set up a US\$2.2-million electronic plant in St. Lucia. Tatung (Caribbean) will manufacture electronic goods, including TV sets and VTRs, as well as household appliances.' (Lisa Nelson, *South: The Third World Magazine*, May 84)
- '... the minority elderly – black or white – feel the need to meet their own people where they can relate to each other, speak their own language, eat their own food, reminisce about their past... This is as true for the Jews, Poles, Ukrainians [sic] as it is for the Afro-Caribbeans, Asians, Cypriots, Chinese.' (Letter to *The Guardian*, 19 May 84)
- 'After consultation with Washington, Edward Seaga, the Jamaican Prime Minister, is soon to unveil a scheme to revamp Caricom, the Community of Commonwealth Caribbean Countries.' (*The Observer*, 6 Nov 83)

**CREOLE** has a history as complex as the colonies in which the word grew up. In 1882 W.W. Skeat derived it through French from Spanish, stating that *criollo* was 'a negro corruption' of *criadillo*, a diminutive of *criado*, 'one educated, instructed or brought up; hence, a child of European blood'. In 1888, James Murray translated *criado* as 'bred, brought up, reared, domestic', and

drew no ethnic conclusions from it.

Present-day etymologists such as C.T. Onions and Philip Gove have taken the story one stage further to the Portuguese *crioulo*, variously described as a 'negro born in Brazil, home-born slave, formerly of animals reared at home' (Onions, 1966) and 'slave born in his master's house; Negro born in the colonies; white person born in the colonies' (Gove's *Webster's Third*, also 1966). In 1971, David Decamp completed the confusion with: 'The term *creole* (from Portuguese *crioulo*, via Spanish and French) originally meant a white man of European descent born and raised in a tropical or semi-tropical colony.'

The generally agreed ultimate source is the Latin *creare*, 'to create or beget'. Spanish typically has a variety of words in *cri-*, relating to growing, breeding, rearing, nurturing, wet-nursing, fostering, serving, raising, cultivating, and educating. The general area of reference of 'creole' is probably therefore two-fold: to plants, animals and people that are locally bred and developed, and to people brought up and/or employed within a household or group. In those 'tropical and semi-tropical colonies' with all their ambivalences, it need not be a surprise that confusion arose between 'creole whites' (locally born and bred Europeans) and 'creole

negroes' (locally born and bred Africans).

In recent decades, however, the emphasis in the worldwide use of 'creole' has shifted from the identification of creole people to the description of the language they use, especially those forms of European languages like English, French and Spanish that have been influenced by African and other usages. Some examples of this newer use of 'creole' are:

- 'A "pidgin language" can be defined as a lingua franca which has developed through the use of a mixed and greatly simplified form of speech based on two or more different languages... A "creole language" has usually developed out of a pidgin but is capable of use in all everyday situations by a speech community for whom it is the mother tongue.' (Roger T. Bell, 'Pidgin Languages', in *New Society*, 29 Sept 66)
- 'The low status of pidgins and creoles (popularly regarded as corruptions of the standard rather than as "real" languages) derives from the low social and ethnic status of its non-white speakers, as contrasted with the largely European speakers of the corresponding standard language.' (Fernando Peñalosa, *Introduction to the Sociology of Language*, 1981)
- 'Overrun by the Spanish, French, English, Portuguese, and Dutch, the islands... retain the linguistic flavor of each marauder together with that of the native inhabitants (where they still remain) and the descendants of West African slaves brought by Europeans to work the plantations of the islands and coasts. The linguistic milieu that draws our greatest interest, however, is that of English in all its variation and chameleon guises. These varieties stretch from "Caribbean Standard" to the contact developments known variously as "creoles", "patois", and "broken talk".' (David L. Lawton, 'English in the Caribbean', in *English as a World Language*, 1982)
- 'Many creoles exist throughout the world; some present world languages which are widely used in both commerce and scholarship were once creoles.' (Patricia C. Nichols, 'Creoles in the USA', in *Language in the USA*, 1981)

Some observers, looking afresh at English in the light of their creole-colonial studies, suggest that it went through its own creole stage after the Norman Conquest (1066), when Old English with its complex morphology vanished and Chaucer's hybrid language emerged in the 14th century, a blend of the tongues of master and serf.