



Yankee

To people from the South of the United States, Yankee may mean a Northerner. To people from other countries, Yankee means an American. But, properly used, Yankee has a more specific meaning: It refers to people who live in New England.

The New England Yankee has a distinct character, shaped in part by the history and geography of the region. New England was settled in the 1600s by Puritans from England. The Puritans were a religious group who objected to the rituals of the Church of England. The Puritans wanted to "purify" the religion, making it stricter and simpler. They were also very strict about the way people lived. For example, when a sea captain back from a three-year voyage kissed his wife on their doorstep, he was publicly punished.

The land was even harsher than the people. Its soil was thin and poor for farming. And before any land could be farmed, large stones had to be cleared away. The stones were used for walls, many of which still exist.

What, then, is the Yankee character? Yankees are known for being honest but shrewd; realistic and to-the-point; practical rather than romantic; untalkative, thrifty, principled, and independent.

Many stories illustrate the realistic and untalkative Yankee nature. In one story a tourist asks a Maine fisherman whether the fisherman has lived in the same village all his life. "Not yet," the fisherman replies. In another story a tourist who has lost his way in Vermont stops a couple to ask for directions. "I want to go to Bennington," he says. "We've no objections," one of the New Englanders replies.

Calvin Coolidge, the thirtieth President of the United States, was a Yankee. Once he and a friend took a ride from Boston to a town 30 miles inland. "It's cooler here," Coolidge said as they returned to Boston. These were the only words he spoke during the entire trip. (When Coolidge was president, Americans called him "Silent Cal.")

Yankee thrift is well expressed by a New England saying: Eat it up, wear it out, make it do, do without.

Frederick Tudor, a Bostonian, is an example of the business shrewdness of the Yankees. As a young man, Tudor heard someone say jokingly that, if ice were a crop, New England would be wealthy. Tudor remembered this joke and, years later, figured out how to break up ice and ship it south. Tudor became a very rich man.

The Yankee character may partly explain the special role that New England has played in United States history. In the eighteenth century, the American Revolution began in New England. Yankees were among the strongest supporters of independence. In the nineteenth century, many New Englanders said slavery did not fit with their beliefs and principles. New England Yankees led the movement to end slavery in America.

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